

## Case Study – Thorne

'At the start I was going there because I wanted to try something new, but at the same time I'm like, it's just another court program, what's this going to do for me? Either which way I'll probably still get locked up. This is the final straw. Even if I get an average pass in this place, I wouldn't serve too much time. Everyone in my family was sitting there thinking, "Well that was your last straw, you'll probably serve now".'

'The final court case was around my 18th birthday. So I was sitting there and it was just after my 18th birthday and all my mates were like, "This is going to be the last birthday you're going to have outside for a little while".'

Robbery, theft, unlawful assault, driving unlicensed, driving unregistered, possession of a prohibited weapon, threat to kill, assault with deadly weapon... Thorne's list of charges reads like those of a seasoned criminal. Now, at 19, Thorne is turning his life around thanks in part to the Connections UnitingCare program Clean Slate.



Thorne always had a complicated family life with his four siblings, his mother, his father and stepfathers. He and his family lived in various country towns, moving around to get a fresh start and leaving again when the past caught up with them.

From a young age, Thorne rebelled against authority and developed a hatred for the police after some traumatic events when they were living in regional Victoria.

*'We went and picked up rocks and we threw them through an old building's window and we all bolted and me and my mate bolted one way and we just happened to be where the cops were looking and we got busted. We got warnings.'*

*'But three years later, someone jumped our fence into our dog yard and kicked the dog in the head so the dog bit him and the cops slaughtered the animals, two dogs, on the premises just for protecting their keep.'*

## Case Study – Thorne (cont'd)

*'I would say slaughtered because if you saw the photos, they're a bit graphic, there's blood everywhere, there's holes in walls from shotgun shells. Not a pretty thing to see. You come home from out with your family and there's blood and shotgun shells all through your back yard. So I've never liked police since then.'*

Thorne's family moved to Cranbourne when he was 14, and generally he has enjoyed living in the area. He attended a few schools after several expulsions for fights, mostly driven by the gang mentality of different groups from suburbs in the region.

*'There were two morning buses five minutes apart from each other. If I caught one bus, I got away with copping no shit. If I caught a different one, everyone picked on me because I had just moved down. In the end I got into a fight with a kid, the kid pulled a knife and I took the knife off the kid. The principal walked around the corner seeing me holding a knife in my hand and head-butting another kid, so it looked like I was the attacker. So I got expelled for that. I did my best to fight it. In the end we just gave up.'*

After more trouble at school with girls, accusations and run-ins with the police, Thorne gave up on school at 15 and began working a few different jobs. Trouble and fights continued to plague his life. Thorne's youth worker encouraged him to take action to turn his life around, and that day after a session he noticed a flyer in the Cranbourne Youth Information Centre.

*'Something I always used to say to my friends, "You've always got to have connections to help get you through the day if you know things," and I saw the brochure that said Connections and I thought that was a sign.'*

*'So I called Connections, I called Jerry and signed up to the Clean Slate program and here I am now. I've had a few different things along the way, slight hiccups, but no charges, no court cases, no nothing like that.'*

When he started Clean Slate, Thorne was the oldest and the largest person in the room and he brought a larger than life attitude with him. Thorne objected to everything that program coordinator Jerry or anyone else said, yet continued with the program. The life lessons from a guest speaker, who'd been to jail and addicted to heroin, really hit home for Thorne.

*'Basically everything I said, he shot down. He goes, "You're out there with the boys, you feel alright, you'll run up and stab someone or hit someone. When you're sitting there in a fix, where are your boys then? Outside drinking piss. Yeah exactly,*

*they'd be outside and you're stuck on the inside".'*

*'I sat there and I thought, "Yeah, you do it for the boys, they're like a family to you". He goes, "You'll know soon enough, if you say no to doing one thing for the boys that they'll all disappear". I thought yeah whatever, they're not like that, they're like family. He said to try it.'*

The next day, Thorne tested the theory with his crew. They group ran into a guy that they didn't like, so his friends started handing out the poles and the bats and went over to bash him but Thorne decided he didn't want to have anything to do with it. In that instant, the boys turned on him and he knew the guest speaker was right.

*'From there on in I did my best to absorb as much as I could from the program. I turned my life around. I've had a small hiccup here and there. If it was something that I didn't like and I'll get into a fight ... I'll say take it outside but a straight up fist fight, one on one. Once the fight's over, it's over.'*

The program allowed Thorne to learn a range of strategies to deal with potentially violent situations, and even though at the time the advice didn't make sense straight away, when he applied this thinking to real life it worked.

*'You go away and something happens or something is about to happen, or you're about to get a knife put in your hand and you're going to go and stab someone and you're like, "Oh shit, we talked about that in the program. What's going to happen? I'm going to stab this kid. Then what's going to happen?" That makes you think.'*

*'But then hearing about something in the program and you're out there and you're getting ready and something just clicks over. You sit down and you go, "Do I want to do it? Do I not?".'*

Thorne is now working with Clean Slate as a peer facilitator, and is encouraging younger participants and people he meets on the street to make smarter decisions and choose a life without violence. Thorne shared his strategies with one of the boys in the program who was getting into fights over people looking at his girlfriend. Thorne recommended he learn to accept others' jealousy as a compliment and limit his alcohol intake to avoid getting into trouble or dangerous environments. Just a week later, the boy employed these tactics and left a pub when he sensed trouble brewing – the next day, he found out four people were stabbed in a fight at that venue moments after he and his girlfriend left.

# Case Study – Thorne (cont'd)

Through Clean Slate and various other programs, Thorne has changed the way he thinks and responds to hostile situations.

*'When I was 16 years old I had absolutely no problem grabbing a pole out and giving someone a good smack in the head. I didn't think fractured skull, brain damage, blood clots. Not now...'*

*'If I had the same head on me now that I did back then, I wouldn't be in half the shit. You wouldn't actually know me right now. I'm a lot smarter than I was back then.'*

Clean Slate has improved Thorne's ability to deal with conflict and given him the opportunity to consider a future outside of the jail cell destiny that was closing in on him. Thorne is focusing

on serving his good behaviour bonds, cleaning up his record and clocking up learner hours to get his license. He hopes to find a job as a bartender, or pursue studies and a career as a security guard.

*'I honestly don't know where I'll be. I'm improving slowly, I'm not improving rapidly. One week I take three steps forward and another week I can take two steps back.'*

*'I'm heading where I want to go. I'm starting to manage things a bit better. I'm spending my time wisely, I don't say I've got to get this done the night beforehand, when it comes up it gets done. I haven't got people nagging at me. No problems, no drama. Simple. Easy.'*

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## What is Connections UnitingCare Clean Slate?

Clean Slate is a diversionary program for offenders aged between 13-18 years.

Young people are referred to Clean Slate from the Department of Human Services Youth Justice System, legal representatives, the Children's courts and other Youth Justice Programs. The aim of the referrals is to educate young people with a view to empowering them to be able to make informed decisions in preventing them from reoffending.

A young person's case can be adjourned before the Children's Court while they participate in The Clean Slate Program. The Magistrate takes into account their progress within the program when he/she determines the consequence for their offence.

Young people can begin the program on a voluntary basis prior to appearing in court and this may appear more favorable during sentencing.

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## How does Clean Slate work?

» Clean Slate is currently delivered on a one on one personal support basis. These sessions are based on cognitive-behavioural work aiming at changing attitudes to criminality.

» The individual sessions challenge the young people's behaviour by:

- Examining the offence and offending behaviour,
- the circumstances surrounding the offence,

- what strategies could be utilised to stop re-occurrence of this behaviour,
- exploring victim empathy and
- looking at the wider reaching effects of offending behaviour.

» Clean Slate will also work to help the young person identify any other assistance they may require in helping them move forward in their lives and make appropriate referrals.

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**Connections UnitingCare is a community organisation with a long and proud history of supporting marginalised and disadvantaged people.**

We offer a range of services across a continuum of care from preschool and childcare through to counselling and in-home support. We provide innovative and early intervention programs that support children, young people and their families giving them a better chance in life now and in the future.

For more information visit [www.connections.org.au](http://www.connections.org.au)