

Best Interests Assessment: Verity Fakename

During my initial visit, I met with Verity and her two children in their transitional housing unit. Despite obvious challenges, Verity welcomed me warmly and was open about her struggles. Throughout our conversation, she maintained eye contact and showed genuine concern for her children's wellbeing, repeatedly expressing her desire to "do better for them." While the house was cluttered and disorganised, I observed both children were clean, well-fed, and comfortable approaching their mother for attention and reassurance. Verity's strength in maintaining basic care despite significant adversity was evident, and her willingness to engage with services suggests potential for positive change with appropriate support.

The Child: Development and Vulnerability

During the visit, Emily approached me several times with a bright smile, showing me her favourite toy - a somewhat worn but clearly loved stuffed elephant. Despite her autism diagnosis, she demonstrated warmth and curiosity in her interactions. Brett remained more reserved, watching from the doorway of his room, but eventually joined us when Emily began playing, showing protective behaviours toward his sister despite their sometimes difficult relationship.

Emily Fakename (3 years)

- Diagnosed with autism
- Behind on health checks and immunisations
- Not attending childcare/early learning
- Vulnerable to sibling violence
- Development appears delayed (requires formal assessment)
- Limited social interaction outside family
- Clean and appears fed adequately
- Has basic needs met (own bed, clothing)
- Limited access to developmental resources (no books, toys)
- Shows warmth and friendliness in interactions

- Strong attachment to mother evidenced by secure base behaviour
- Demonstrates curiosity and engagement with new people
- Happy to share and show toys

Brett Fakenname (6 years)

- Irregular school attendance
- Suspected ADHD and behavioural disorders (unassessed)
- Displays violent behaviour towards sister
- Impacted by family violence history
- Clean and appears fed adequately
- Has basic needs met (own bed, clothing)
- Limited access to educational resources
- At risk of developmental/educational delays due to attendance
- Shows capacity for empathy, particularly with sister when calm
- Engages well with education when attending
- Protective of family members
- Demonstrates intelligence and curiosity when feeling secure

Pattern and History

As Verity shared her story, her resilience became apparent. Despite experiencing significant family violence, she has maintained housing, kept her children fed and clean, and continues to attempt school engagement for Brett. When discussing the father's pending release, she showed insight into the risks, stating, "I know we need to be ready and have a plan. The kids come first."

Constraints and Risks

- History of family violence (father)
- Father pending prison release - ongoing risk

- Intimidation by father's associates
- Housing instability (transitional accommodation)
- Social isolation
- Limited family support
- Financial hardship
- Mother's apparent depression
- Chaotic home environment
- Children's developmental/behavioural needs unaddressed
- Limited engagement with services

Strengths and Protection

- Mother demonstrates protective capacity by maintaining separation from abusive partner
- Shows insight into safety needs
- Actively seeks to maintain children's routines despite challenges
- No substance abuse issues
- Children appear clean and fed
- Children have own beds
- Mother trying to manage despite circumstances
- Some family support (maternal grandmother)
- Previous engagement with child protection indicates willingness to accept help
- No current immediate safety concerns
- Mother providing basic care despite challenges

Beliefs and Relationships

While speaking with Verity, her love for her children was evident in her voice and manner. Despite her evident exhaustion, she brightened when describing Emily's recent

progress with speech and Brett's interest in drawing. The children's grandmother visits when able, providing some respite and maintaining an important family connection.

Constraints and Risks

- Isolated from support networks
- Limited positive role models
- Disrupted attachment due to trauma
- Mother's emotional availability may be impacted by depression
- Sibling relationship complicated by violence

Strengths and Protection

- Maternal grandmother provides occasional support
- Mother appears bonded with children
- Children appear attached to mother
- Mother recognises she is struggling (insight)

Current Environment

While the house was cluttered during my visit, I observed evidence of Verity's attempts to create child-friendly spaces. Brett's room had a reading corner with cushions (though lacking books), and Emily's favourite toys were easily accessible. Verity expressed shame about the house's condition but explained she prioritises feeding and caring for the children over housework when her energy is limited - showing insight into prioritising essential care tasks.

Constraints and Risks

- Unstable housing situation
- Disorganised home environment
- Financial stress
- Mother's untreated mental health

- Children's special needs not being addressed
- Limited access to resources
- Social isolation
- Ongoing safety concerns re: father's release

Strengths and Protection

- Basic needs being met
- No current substance abuse
- Safe from immediate harm
- Mother accepting of support
- Public housing provides some stability
- Access to Centrelink income

Safety and Action Statement

Throughout the visit, it became clear that while Verity and her children face significant challenges, their strong family bond and Verity's commitment to improvement provide a foundation for positive change. When discussing potential supports, Verity became animated about the possibility of getting Brett's behavioural needs assessed, saying "I've always known he's struggling with something. I just want to understand how to help him better."

Current Outstanding Needs

1. Children's developmental/behavioural assessments and interventions
2. Mother's mental health support
3. Home environment organisation
4. Housing stability
5. Safety planning for father's release
6. Educational/early intervention engagement

7. Social support development
8. Financial counselling/support

Risk Assessment

While there are no immediate safety concerns, multiple risk factors create vulnerability:

- Father's pending release and ongoing intimidation
- Mother's mental health
- Children's unmet developmental needs
- Housing instability
- Social isolation

Required Actions

1. Urgent referrals for:

- Children's developmental assessments
- Mother's mental health assessment
- Early intervention services for Emily
- Behavioural support for Brett

2. Support needed for:

- Housing stability
- Safety planning
- School engagement
- Parenting support
- Home organisation
- Financial counselling

3. Development of support networks:

- Strengthen grandmother involvement

- Connect with community services
- Link with parent groups

The family demonstrates significant potential for positive change with appropriate support. Verity's openness to engagement, commitment to her children's wellbeing, and existing capacity to provide basic care provide a strong foundation for intervention. While multiple complex needs exist, Verity's insight into these challenges and willingness to accept help suggest good potential for improvement with intensive support.