

Best Interests Assessment Summary Tool

In meeting with Chrissy and Ben at a local café (at Chrissy's request), the complexity of their situation became immediately apparent. Ben presented as a quiet, watchful child who maintained close physical proximity to his mother throughout our conversation. While initially reserved, he showed animation when discussing his recent science project and his friendship with the neighbour's dog. Chrissy demonstrated clear insight into their situation and strong protective instincts towards Ben, evidenced by her detailed understanding of his medical needs and her carefully considered, albeit constrained, safety strategies.

The Child: Development and Vulnerability

Ben sat with us during parts of the discussion, alternating between drawing and participating in conversation. Despite the challenges at home, he appeared well-groomed and his school uniform was clean and neat. When discussing school, his face lit up describing his best friend and their shared interest in science experiments. His mother quietly prompted him about his insulin timing during our meeting, demonstrating their well-coordinated management of his diabetes.

Ben Alias (10 years)

- Type 1 diabetes requiring regular medical management
- Attends school regularly - education appears to be a protective factor
- Clean, well-presented, appropriate clothing
- Shows age-appropriate social development at school
- Demonstrates resilience and ability to maintain friendships despite home situation
- Good diabetes management routine with mother
- Exposure to family violence
- At risk of emotional/psychological harm
- Rural isolation compounds vulnerability
- Limited access to support services due to location
- Shows hypervigilance and anxiety about father's moods
- Strong attachment to mother
- Good engagement with education
- Demonstrates intelligence and interest in learning

Pattern and History

While discussing Ben's daily routine, Chrissy revealed the intricate planning required to manage work, school, and medical appointments with limited transport options. Her voice steadied when talking about Ben's achievements at school, but trembled when touching on home life, particularly around football season. She showed remarkable insight into their situation, stating quietly, "I know it's not right, but I need to be smart about how we get out. One wrong move and we lose everything."

Constraints and Risks

- Ongoing family violence
- Geographic isolation
- Transport limitations
- Financial control
- Police relationships with perpetrator
- Complex systems abuse through police connections
- Limited access to services
- Outstanding legal issues
- Risk of homelessness if situation changes
- Mother's fear of system involvement
- Rural isolation

Strengths and Protection

- Mother's strong protective capacity
- Child attending school regularly
- Mother maintaining employment
- Good medical management of child's condition
- Mother's insight into situation
- Strategic thinking about safety
- Strong mother-child attachment
- School as protective factor
- Mother's engagement with social worker

- Clear future planning by mother

Beliefs and Relationships

The relationship between Chrissy and Ben appears close and nurturing. Their interactions showed clear attachment and understood routines around Ben's medical needs. When Ben briefly left to use the café bathroom, Chrissy expressed her determination to create long-term safety for them both, demonstrating both insight and protective capacity.

Constraints and Risks

- Father's relationships with local police
- Mother's fear of authority involvement
- Social isolation due to location
- Complex systems abuse
- Father's minimisation and blaming behaviours
- Mother's eroded confidence in systems response

Strengths and Protection

- Strong mother-child bond
- Mother's protective capacity
- School relationships
- Some professional support connections
- Mother's clear insight into situation
- Strategic approach to safety

Current Environment

Chrissy maintains employment and ensures Ben's school attendance despite significant barriers. Their rural location, while isolating, provides some buffer between school hours. Chrissy has developed subtle safety strategies, including careful management of Dave's football schedules and strategic planning around transport despite limited options.

Constraints and Risks

- Rural isolation
- Limited transport options

- Financial hardship
- Perpetrator's community connections
- Complex legal issues
- Limited escape options
- Barriers to service access

Strengths and Protection

- Maintained employment
- Regular school attendance
- Medical management maintained
- Some social connections through work/school
- Mother's strategic safety planning
- Distance from town provides some safety buffer

Safety and Action Statement

The family presents with significant complexity requiring careful consideration of intervention approaches. Chrissy's fear of system involvement is well-founded given the perpetrator's connections. Her strategic approach to planning demonstrates significant protective capacity despite limited options.

Current Outstanding Needs

1. Safety planning that accounts for rural context
2. Transport solutions
3. Legal support for outstanding matters
4. Financial counselling
5. Long-term exit planning
6. Support for Ben's ongoing medical management
7. Emotional support for both mother and child
8. Systems advocacy

Risk Assessment

Critical risk factors include:

- Geographic isolation

- Perpetrator's police connections
- Limited transport options
- Financial constraints
- Risk of systems abuse
- Barriers to service access

Required Actions

1. Immediate support needs:

- Safety planning within current constraints
- Transport solutions
- Legal advocacy
- Financial counselling

2. Medium-term support:

- Exit planning
- Systems advocacy
- Support service connection
- Medical management support

3. Long-term planning:

- High school transition planning
- Housing options
- Financial independence planning
- Legal protection strategies

The family requires carefully coordinated support that prioritises confidentiality and acknowledges the complexity of the perpetrator's systems connections. While immediate safety concerns exist, intervention must be balanced against risks of systems abuse and potential escalation. Chrissy demonstrates significant protective capacity and insight, providing foundation for careful, strategic support planning.