

For a kid in need, Stewart House brought new life to the table

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By Liam Carroll

April 26, 2022



Ty Bellingham, Bathers' Thai cuisine savant

Shortly after he was born, Ty Bellingham's parents split up. His father went on to find love with a new woman and start a new family. And while his dad continued to do everything that he could for his first son, Ty's allegiance was always to his mum. A loving mother, she was however prone to alcohol addiction and toxic relationships with abusive men, ensuring a turbulent upbringing for Ty.

Then, in the early 1980s, one day at the 5th primary school of his life, the principal asked Ty if he'd like to spend a fortnight at Stewart House in Curl Curl. As Ty explains, "When you live in housing commission, you don't go on holiday. Here I was with the principal asking if I'd like to go on a holiday and with people my own age. Of course! It was always hard to leave mum if I were going to my dad's, but this was something else entirely. Curl Curl? The Northern Beaches? I felt like I was traveling across the globe. I couldn't wait!"

What Ty likely didn't know was Stewart House's reason for existence was not to serve as a holiday destination, but to ensure kids from all across the state who face circumstances beyond their control which put them at a disadvantage from their peers are able to enjoy home-style accommodation, well-balanced meals, laundry services, transport and excursions, receive screening, treatments and referrals for their eyes, ears and teeth, all while developing self-care, conflict resolution and social skills. In a nutshell, Stewart House exists for kids in need to best equip them medically, physically and mentally for a successful return home, and on track for a great life ahead.

“It was a highlight of my childhood. Here was a place where people cared about me. People I'd never met. They just came into my life, supported me, were kind to me, gave me a sense of structure and security and a break from my concerns and worries, because home was a worry.”

Ty's first visit to Stewart House was extremely beneficial, but as he progressed into his teens and the situation at home with his mum deteriorated, there was a risk his life could have gone downhill. But, when he needed it most, Stewart House was there again to provide a reprieve, to allow a fortnight of breathing space under expert care. One moment in particular on that second visit transformed Ty's life forever.

“I remember staring into the mirror and realising that I'm my own man, this is my life. Regardless what's going on around me or with my family, I don't have to apologise for anyone. I am free to be my own man.”

Ty went on to carve out an incredible career in kitchens around the world, and is today a global authority on Thai cuisine, and head chef at Bathers' Betel Leaf restaurant in Balmoral. He's also passionate in giving back to those less fortunate, training refugees and asylum seekers to get the qualifications and experience needed to enter a fulfilling career in hospitality.

Stewart House continues to occupy a treasured place in Ty's life. “I regularly go down to Curl Curl, walk the dogs, and always look up to Stewart House. There's just something magic about the place. The impact it's had on my life, I can't begin to measure.”

Donate to Stewart House to support the life-changing work they do for kids in need from all around NSW. Visit www.stewarthouse.org.au or call **(02) 9938 3100**