



SAVING BABY FAITH



She was born with drug addiction, but Faith is now a chubby, cheeky toddler

RUTH LAMPERD

BABY Faith had the odds stacked against her. Born to a drug-addicted mum, she suffered the jitters and dangers of withdrawal. Her first month of life was spent kicking a habit.

Now, aged one, Faith has done more than catch up with her peers. Some of them, she's waved as she's passed. And she does it with a cheeky smile.

Faith bursts on all fours around her parents' living room floor.

This baby whose story the *Sunday Herald Sun* told one year ago — her dramatic entry to the world on the living room floor eight weeks too early, her feeble wails across the Sunshine Hospital's Special Care Nursery as her body craved her mother's drugs — may not have thrived.

Her mother, Margaret, was then on antipsychotics, antidepressants and a daily dose of methadone that might have killed an average woman. The methadone was to treat her heroin addiction from the past.

The chaos that often accompanies methadone babies can alone be enough to make their future uncertain. Family stress from money problems. Links to the drug world. Unstable family life. And that's not even touching on the medical complications.

But Faith's doting mum and dad have come through strong. There's now a little sister — born one month, one week and one day after Faith's first birthday — who has further glued the family together.

Victoria came home from hospital last week. Doctors induced her delivery early, but in her four weeks in the special care unit, she barely suffered from withdrawal. She didn't need morphine to settle her, as her big sister did.

Sunshine Hospital neonatologist Thao Lu loves success stories. Faith is one.

"Lots of children born to drug-addicted mothers can be very unsettled, crying excessively or throwing tantrums.

They can be very challenging," Dr Lu says. "But (Faith) is a really beautiful, very calm, well-mannered child. It's so rewarding to see."

Little sister Victoria was a planned baby, and Margaret had reduced her dose of methadone before getting pregnant. She came off antipsychotics and antidepressants completely.

At the time Faith was born, Margaret didn't have a car. She spent an hour every day making her way to her baby in hospital, walking or catching public transport.

She was stressed from meetings with watchful child protection officers. She had unresolved criminal proceedings clouding her future.

But a local car dealer gave her a reliable vehicle to help her get by — an example for his eight-year-old son that it was better to give than receive. The kindness of strangers has floored Margaret and her partner.

The criminal matters are sorted. Margaret is healthier than ever. There are no child protection concerns.

Readers touched by Faith's story donated bags of newborn clothes and cuddly toys, hoping the support would give her a better chance at life.

When Faith turned one, presents arrived to show that people still remembered.

Margaret spent much of the first part of her adult life in jail. While most had given up on her, her grandmother didn't. It was one of her dying wishes that Margaret would clean up her life and stay out of trouble.

"I'm a different person. Without the prescription drugs, I feel more now, my memory is better. And I will never go back to jail," she said.

Her grandmother knew she could do it. Margaret reckons she'd be smiling now.

(The *Sunday Herald Sun* has protected the family's identity by changing their names.)





Faith (left) comes face to face with her little sister, Victoria. Born seven weeks early (top) to a drug-addicted mum, the one-year-old is thriving thanks to her doting parents.



Sunday Herald Sun

Having Faith pays off

B **ABY** Faith faced more than just a health battle when the *Sunday Herald Sun* reported on her withdrawal from methadone last year.

When she went home from the Sunshine Hospital after a harrowing four weeks in the Special Care Nursery, there were still challenges ahead.

Her determined mother had more things to fight — financial hardship, a drug-taking and criminal past, the interest of child protection officers and a public house in a street that no mother would want to raise their child in.

Everyone was hopeful that things would work out well. But there were doubters.

One year on, our visit to the newer, brighter family home revealed life looks good.

Little Faith is hitting her milestones perfectly, her mum and dad are doting parents, a new

sister has just come home from hospital and they are overwhelmed by the generosity of strangers.

We can all learn from this continuing story.

Mothers with patchy pasts can change. Organisations must rally to support.

Medical expertise should be applauded.

And the world should remember it pays to show faith in people who, statistically, might be more likely to fall.

Faith's is only one example of hundreds born in Victoria each year to drug-addicted mothers. Not all the stories turn out so well.

But Faith's parents needed help to iron out the crinkles. People trusted that they'd make every bit of help count.

That trust was well placed.

A bubbly healthy girl is all the proof we need.