

# ***Participation of young people in strengthening leaving and after care practice at Wesley Dalmar***

Presented by:

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**Wesley Dalmar Out of Home Care Penrith**

## ***About Wesley Dalmar Out of Home Care***

- Wesley Dalmar has been caring for children and families since 1893.
- Children's homes phased out in 1980's to focus service provision on foster care, preventative and early intervention strategies for families and young people.
- NOW - 5 Out of Home Care offices - Castle Hill, Central Coast, Lewisham, Bidwill and Penrith.
- Carlingford - Executive Services, After Care.

## ***Why was this project created?***

- Opportunity to determine if aftercare and leaving care policy and practice is complementary to young people's experiences, expectations and predictions.
- Examine young people's perceptions of aftercare and their predictions of how this time will be for them.
- Increase worker's understanding about young people's perceptions of leaving care and how to work best with them at this time.

## ***Methodology***

- Focussed on the opinions of the young people.
- Small focus group at Dalmar Penrith.
- Survey distributed to the Dalmar Out of Home Care Caseworkers.
- Dalmar Penrith and Central Coast completed these with young people in person and over the phone. A dinner for teenagers was held at Dalmar Castle Hill.
- Short survey sent to all caseworkers.

## ***Demographics of Participants***

***Gender***  
***Demographics of Participants***  
***Age Range***  
***Demographics of Participants***  
***Supervising Dalmar Office***

<b>Penrith</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Castle Hill</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Central Coast</b>	<b>2</b>

***Demographics of Participants***  
***In Care vs. After Care***  
***The Questions...***

- Young people were asked questions about:
  - Their experiences in out of home care.
  - Predictive outcomes when they leave care.
  - What leaving/after care means to them.
  - Their feelings towards DoCS and Dalmar.
  - After care services.
  - What would make their time of leaving care more positive.

***Results...***

***...how did the young people respond?***  
***Positive aspects of***  
***out of home care***

- Good relationship with carer/part of a family/happy home (5 responses)
- Can feel safe and happy (3 responses)
- Being able to stay with brother and sister (2 responses)
- Caseworker/Dalmar activities (2 responses)



- Moving out of carer's home 4
- Studying 3
- Re-establish contact with birth family 2
- Living with foster carers 1
- Looking after own child 1

### ***Leaving Care & After Care***

- *What do you think the terms 'leaving care' and 'after care' mean?*
  - Choice and freedom from "the system" 9
  - Being treated like an adult 6
  - Increased responsibility 5
  - Uncertainty 3
  - Don't Know 1

### ***Feelings about leaving care***

- *What sort of feelings do you think you will have when you leave care?*
  - Excited and happy about the future 10
  - Uncertain about the future 4
  - Stressed out 4
  - Supported and cared for 3
  - Alone 3

### ***Feelings about leaving care***

- **Other comments:**
  - *"I will be able to live my life the way that I want to and know that I don't have someone to tell me what to do all the time."*
  - *"Big part of my life will be gone."*
  - *"I had a couple of months of crazy because of new freedom, but settled down."*
  - *"In a magic world I would have a car, house and stability...but this is not reality".*
  - *"Hard not having people telling me what to do."*

### ***Leaving Care Plans***

- *What should be part of a leaving care plan?*
  - Assistance with housing 7
  - Don't know/unsure 6
  - Money for future 4
  - Establishment items 4
  - Assistance with birth family contact 2
  - Help finding work/study 2

- Access to files/help reading 2

## ***Leaving Care Plans***

- Help finding birth family
- Help paying for counselling
- Driver's licence
- Health stuff
- Pregnancy related assistance eg. Buying baby clothes and other things

## ***Leaving Care Plans***

***“Help with things parents would normally pay for”***

### ***After Care Services***

- ***Have you heard of any after care services?***  
Yes 3 No 12
- ***Do you know what after care services do?***  
Yes 2 No 13

### ***Social Support***

- ***Who do you think you will need help from when you leave foster care?***
  - Most common response:
    - Wesley Dalmar Caseworker and Foster carers.
  - Many questioned whether DoCS would be available to help.
  - One person listed herself.

*“Would have to rely on myself in case others were not there for me.”*

### ***Social Support***

- ***What are some helpful things your caseworker at Dalmar could do?***
  - Have lots of contact and visits 8

- Teach some independent living skills 8
- Listen to me 8
- Advocate on my behalf with DoCS 7
- Help find housing, employment, etc 6
- Continue to supervise access visits 4

### ***Social Support***

- ***Unhelpful things your caseworker at Dalmar could do:***
  - Forget about me and not have any contact
  - Not let me try things on my own
  - Stay too involved with personal affairs
  - Continue to supervise access after age 18

### ***Independent Living Skills***

- ***What are some 'living skills' that will be important if you decide to live independently?***
  - How to manage money 7
  - Cooking 4
  - How to find rental housing 3
  - How to find employment 3
  - Cleaning 3
  - Safety, Sewing, Hospitality, Hygiene, Shopping

### ***Positive Experiences – Young People***

- ***How do you think leaving care could be made a more positive experience for young people?***
- Being able to have a say in making decisions
- Having a detailed leaving care plan developed well in advance
  
- Being given information about what is happening
- Being able to speak with another young person that has left foster care
  
- Being listened to
- Having my birth family involved

### ***Positive Experiences – Dalmar Caseworkers***

- ***As workers, how do you think we can make leaving care a more positive experience for the young people we work with?***

- Provide them with information regarding accessing services and their rights.
- Be aware of the skills required as workers.
- Allow as much involvement as young person will give.
- Investing resources in this area, with specific properly trained staff.

### ***Others Project's Findings***

- **Create Foundation “In Their Own Words” Experiences of ACT children and young people in care (June 2004):**
  - Money as biggest problem – struggling financially and difficulties budgeting.
  - Other concerns – how to pay rent, how to shop and how to furnish a unit.
  - *Help for young people preparing to leave care is inadequate and young people do not have clear ideas about what is involved in living independently.*

### ***Others Project's Findings***

- **Cashmore & Paxman (1996). *Wards leaving care: a longitudinal study*. Sydney: DOCS.**
  - What did young people need?
    - Stable affordable accommodation.
    - Education & Employment.
    - Pregnancy/family support.
    - Financial support.
  - *“...gradual process that provides them the same opportunities for extended support as young people in general.”*

### ***After Care Brochure***

#### ***What does Dalmar do well?***

- Policy that every young person over the age of 15 has an after care plan.
- Involve young people in planning and provide them with skills, knowledge and resources.
- Practice in accordance with Children & Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998.
- Referrals to After Care Services and CLAN.
- Support carers to maintain connections with young people after age or 18 or when they leave care.
- Provide for a lengthy supported transition.

#### ***What does Dalmar do well?***

- Maintenance of After Care Database and file reading service.
- Development of a living skills assessment tool currently underway.
- Participation in ACWA Leaving Care Working Party (LCWP).
- Promotes on-going training for workers.

## ***Future Recommendations***

- Develop a tool to assist young people leaving care.
- LCWP continue to promote leaving care and after care issues.
- Promote participation of young people in after care planning.
- Increase worker awareness and skills.
- Ensure after care policies and services are part of every OHC organisation.
- After care database and file reviewing.
- Promote collaboration between NGO's, DoCS and after care services.

## ***Conclusions***

- Wesley Dalmar currently has high-quality leaving and after care policies and procedures as seen through the congruence between feedback from young people and Wesley Dalmar procedures.
- These are complementary to young people's experiences, expectations and predictions.
- Workers should continue to expand their knowledge in relation to after/leaving care.
- Workers should continue to liaise with the young people to ensure they are involved in and aware of the services and options available when leaving care.

***“I can see where I'm going”***

***DG, age 17***

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***Thank you!***