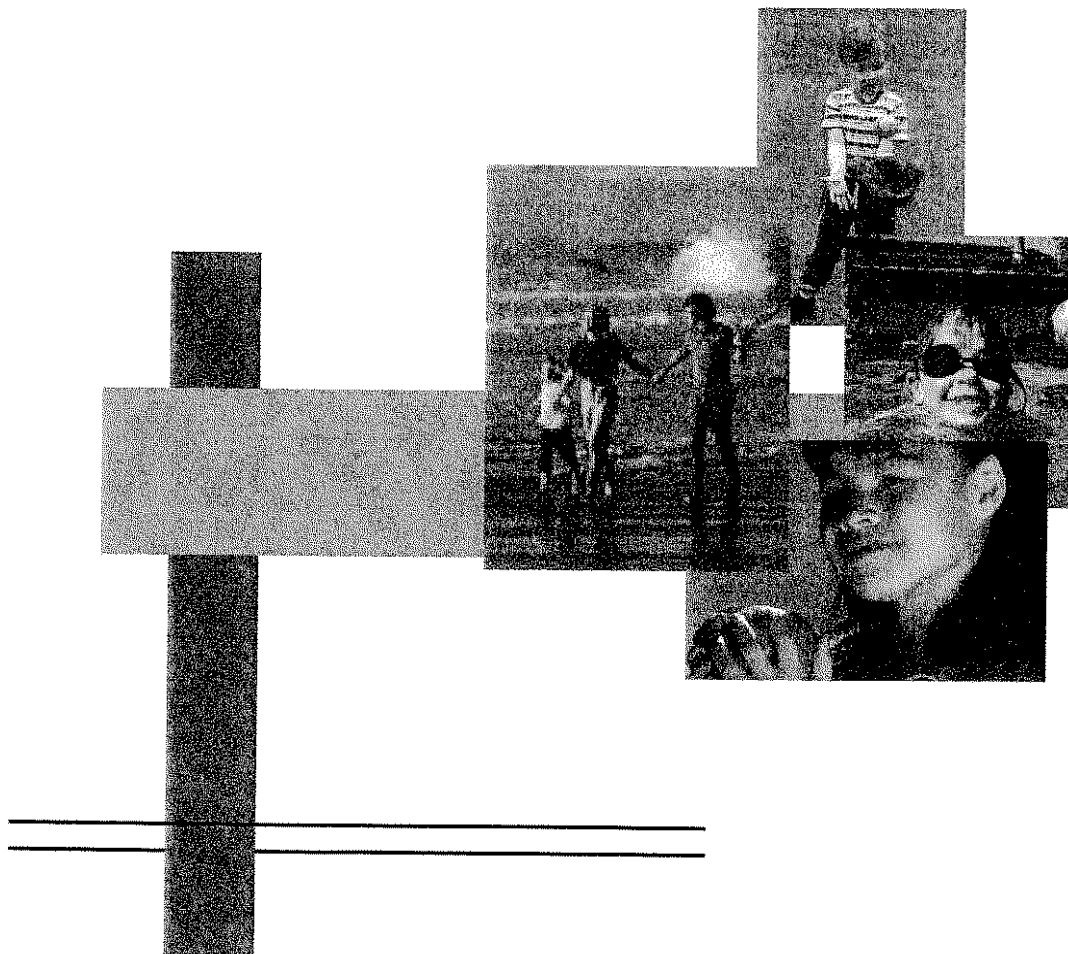


Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care:
Wesley Dalmar Child and Family Care



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wesley Mission first began providing substitute care to children and young people in 1893. Formerly known as the Central Methodist Mission, Wesley Mission provided care from sites in Woolloomooloo, Croydon and Carlingford. It is estimated that between 8 – 10,000 children and young people were cared for during these years.

In recognition of the changing face of child and family services, Wesley Mission established Wesley Dalmar. Wesley Dalmar subsequently became the child, youth and family services arm of Wesley Mission.

Over time, industry and legislative changes have seen Wesley Dalmar change significantly. These changes have not only impacted upon the type of services provided but also upon the organisational infrastructure needed to be developed to support these services. Wesley Dalmar now provides an integrated range of support services that aims to:

- Providing services that prevent family breakdown
- Providing services that support the family during breakdown
- Providing services that support children and young people when it is no longer safe for them to remain with their family of origin

Wesley Dalmar were keen to produce a submission to this inquiry and place great significance upon both developing strategies to support ex-residents and refining and improving current practice for children, young people and families. We believe it is critical for life stories to be acknowledged and for us as an agency to learn from these and use this learning to improve professional practice. We actively work to improve our professional practice by undertaking the following in respect to carers, volunteers and staff:

- Developing sound industry networks
- Attending and making formal presentations to industry conferences
- Undertaking regular clinical case-based and management supervision
- Developing and monitoring risk assessment processes
- Providing in-house and external training opportunities
- Creating feedback loops for all activity areas that are reviewed and inform future practice

With five children or young people entering the care system every day in NSW, Wesley Dalmar is aware that the system is in danger of overload. Difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled, experienced staff and carers are real issues that threaten every care provider in our industry.

Many organisations have responded to these issues and the high risk nature of this type of care provision by exiting the industry. Wesley Dalmar, however, is keen to maintain our commitment to the needs of children and young people who depend upon alternative care. We believe it is essential that the sector provides a variety of care choices for these young people. To do this, however, as an organisation, we need to maintain a commitment to the ongoing sustainability of our work. We are working to achieve this by:

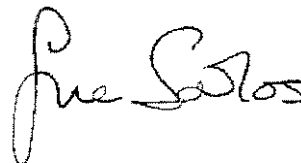
- Continuing to refine and improve our infrastructure – this enables us to effectively manage the high risks of providing out-of-home care in this current climate
- Strong focus on planning to assist in the management of change in these turbulent times
- Implement and monitor sound fiscal management strategies
- Actively participate in and inform industry accreditation processes
- Regularly monitor client and carer feedback mechanisms and seek to improve them
- Use client feedback to inform and change agency practice
- Continuing to improve our professional practice with an emphasis on tailoring service options to meet individual needs
- Increasing time spent in creating solutions for the needs of carers, young people and
- Finding new ways to retain skilled, experienced staff and carers, thereby creating consistency for children and young people in care

Of equal importance is the emphasis placed by Wesley Dalmar on our early intervention, preventative services that we continue to nurture and develop. The organisation strength is characterised by our capacity to provide services at both ends of the service continuum.

Further information about Wesley Dalmar's Out of Home Care services can be obtained by contacting State Manager Out-of-Home Care Services, Sue Sarlos on (02) 9804 7255.



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1. WESLEY DALMAR'S EXPERIENCE

Historical Context of Out of home Care in Dalmar and NSW

European settlement of Australia began in the late 18th century as a penal colony. As time passed and the colony grew, the welfare of the citizens of NSW, and especially its children began to be of concern to the rising middle classes. The NSW State Archives state that:

From the earliest days of the colony, there was concern for the large numbers of neglected and destitute children. These children, without any form of parental control or support, were seen to endanger the moral condition of the colony.¹

There was no state legislation for the protection or care of children and orphanages such as the Protestant Orphan School (1802), the Male Orphan School (1818) and the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children (1852) were established by charitable organisations.

The report of the Charities Commission of 1873–74, led the authorities in the move from large barrack like institutions to the boarding out of destitute children in the families of suitable foster carers, or cottage homes with no more than 50 children.²

It was not until 1881, however, when the State Children's Relief Board was established, to among other things, remove children from charitable institutions, admit them to wardship, restore them to parents or guardians, and approve adoptions³, that government took a more direct role in the care and welfare of children.

In the late 1880's an Order known as the Sisters of the People worked amongst the poor and needy in the Woolloomooloo area and uncovered much child poverty neglect and abuse. Additionally the Dorcas Society at the William Street Methodist Church had been involved in work for the children of the poor since the late 1860's. When these two organisations encountered financial problems they approached the leader of the Central Mission's Ladies Sectional Committee.

Following these developments, and under the auspice of the Methodist Ladies Committee the Home for Waifs and Strays, located in Woolloomooloo, was opened in 1893 with children over sighted by a Matron. The Home, its operation and management, was developed to provide an alternative home environment for neglected and orphaned children. The home was provided by Ebenezer Vickery free of charge, initially for six months and extending to seven years. Early benefactors, such as Ebenezer Vickery, established a pattern of philanthropy that supported Dalmar through these early years and continues to the present day. Although the Children's Home was recognised as a part of the Methodist Mission's caring services, the finances relating to the care of children was totally separate from the rest of the Mission's work. The total management of the Home financial and otherwise remained in the hands of the Ladies Committee until 1948.

At the time it was generally accepted by society that parents who were unable to care for their children were lacking in moral fibre thus justifying the rescue of children from the

situation. The impacts of the social, political and economic environment of the times were not taken into account as factors in the families' desperate circumstances.⁴ Historically, the colony was undergoing a depression, the trade union movement flourished at this time and marches were organised to highlight the plight of the unemployed and disadvantaged in society.

Two significant issues may well have influenced the establishment of the Home for Waifs and Strays in 1893:

1. *The Demographics of Sydney*: Up to 1890 Australia was in a boom period, with the majority of the population under the age of 40 years. This was followed by a major depression in the 1890s with an increase in unemployment and significant growth in 'slum' areas around inner Sydney, including an outbreak of the bubonic plague in The Rocks. The increasing wealth of the pre 1890s provided the opportunity for a more philanthropic attitude to the less fortunate in the community. When combined with the Christian commitment of the Methodist Ladies Auxiliary Committee and other like-minded members of the Church, the possibility of the expansion of the Church's work into the care of neglected and orphaned children became a reality.

2. *The NSW Commission into Charitable Institutions*: The NSW Government commissioned a series of reports (1873-74) on charitable institutions which resulted in two recommendations that impacted on the operation of the Home. One recommendation of the report was the 'boarding out' of children rather than their institutionalisation⁵. The Home concentrated its efforts on apprenticing older children to suitable employers or adopting out the younger ones to suitable families. The other recommendation was the use of 'community bonding', favoured as part of the cottage home concept⁶, something the Home strove to achieve by keeping resident numbers to a maximum of fourteen children.

The Ladies Committee established a Management Committee of both Methodist and non-Methodist women, meeting weekly to govern the Home. The Management Committee was actively involved in the day to day care of the children by:

- ensuring the provision of adequate clothing and food;
- the seeking of apprenticeships for the older children;
- the screening of suitable adoptive families; and
- the recruitment and employment of the Matron, and later, other personnel.

The Management Committee reported directly to the Ladies Committee, who continued to meet regularly and devoted their energies to fundraising and the encouragement of benefactors. This role continued for the Management Committee until the mid 1940s, when the management of Dalmar was transferred to the direct control of the Central Methodist Mission.

In 1896, due to financial difficulties, the Central Methodist Mission was able to obtain a small government grant to pay for the wages of the Matron and medicines for the children, the first government grant for the Home. Grants ceased in 1903 at the request of the Mission.



The Home at Woolloomooloo was unable to cope with increasing demands for assistance, nor was the location considered to be conducive to the welfare of children. The Ladies Committee began looking for an alternative site to accommodate infants and provide room for the children to play. In 1900 a suitable property of four acres was located and purchased in Croydon, in those days a farming community removed from the unsavoury influences of the inner city life.

The childrens' home at Croydon was called 'Dalmar'. The number of residents increased to approximately fifty children, including infants. Due to financial constraints, the difficulties of attracting sufficient staff and the increasing demands for assistance, Dalmar was not able to implement the intended cottage environment with up to 10 children to a cottage.

During the twenty years at Croydon, adoption was the favoured option for long term care of the children in Dalmar's care. During World War I, Dalmar found an increasing need to provide periods of respite for families who were finding it difficult to support their children, resulting in a decrease in the number of adoptions.

*"There was no formal, legal, adoption fully backed by law at the time, but the home had its own procedures and its own forms and tried to achieve the best result for all."*⁷

Children were placed with an adoptive family for a six month trial period and by 1923 Dalmar had assisted 400 children. If difficulties arose during or after the trial period children were taken back to Dalmar. There were instances of children being overworked by their adoptive families and these children were immediately taken back⁸.

"A. W Green, Boarding Out Officer of the State Children's Relief Board praised the scheme highly in 1914"

The NSW State government passed The Child Welfare Act in 1923, which consolidated four earlier Acts, abolishing the State Children's Relief Board and transferring its powers to the Minister for Public Instruction⁹.

In 1923 Dalmar Children's Homes purchased 37 acres at Carlingford and constructed an administration building, hospital, kindergarten and cottages. The acreage also provided a dairy and vegetable garden, which the children worked alongside Dalmar personnel. Eventually, chickens were included on the farm. These activities provided much needed fresh vegetables, eggs and milk. Donations of fruit were provided by local orchardists, especially oranges as the Hills district was known for its orange orchards. Each cottage had a house mother and housed between ten to twelve children. Each child had chores to do around the farm, including cleaning, cooking, farming and milking the cows.

As previously, all school aged children attended the local state school. Basic training was provided to assist the children to take on apprenticeships, girls mainly as domestic workers, seamstress or nurse and boys as farm assistants or carpenter.

The Dalmar complex continued to be managed by a Matron who reported directly to the Management Committee and Ladies Auxiliary Committee. A local doctor visited weekly to ensure the health of the children.

After 1945, the management structure changed, coming directly under the control of the Central Methodist Mission, with fundraising still conducted by the Ladies Auxiliary Committee. A decision was made to appoint a married male Superintendent for Dalmar to allow for the anticipated changes such as tighter financial management and the proposal to bring orphaned British children to Dalmar¹⁰.

The management structure changed from a local committee of women to a regional structure managed by businessmen with a stronger emphasis on financial management and a lessening of the focus on the understanding of appropriate child rearing practices for disadvantaged children¹¹:

After World War II, Dalmar experienced some difficulty in attracting staff with interest and experience in child care¹², mainly due to the following factors:

- Abundance of well paid job opportunities in the community after the war;
- The community's move to a more materialist outlook of life;
- Low wages for the jobs offered by Dalmar; and
- The need for self sacrifice— limited free time.

Prior to this time formal training was not required and staff learnt on the job. During this period regular training for staff was instituted initially through the Child Welfare Agency, and then the development of in-house training¹³.

In 1950 fourteen British migrant children from the National Children's Home arrived at Dalmar. This was the only group to arrive due to the rapidly improved economic conditions in England. In 1955 the Department of Overseas Missions began housing small numbers of Aboriginal children with Dalmar. Dalmar housed family groups of children in an attempt to minimise further family dislocation. The induction or assimilation of new children into the Home, was usually provided by the Cottage Mother as her time permitted¹⁴.

Schooling gained greater focus during this period with Dalmar children remaining in school longer than previously – some gaining their Intermediate Certificate. Two of the girls from this period became trained nurses.

In 1956 the Social Welfare Division of the Department of Labour was incorporated to form the Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare, providing material support in emergencies and for special purposes¹⁵.

The 1960s saw a change in the type of referrals being received and accepted at Dalmar. Initially, this change was driven by the changes occurring outside of and independent to Dalmar and the Mission – a time of great social and cultural change. Referrals were now being received as a result of court decisions and from government agencies rather than from local congregations. As a result fewer children than in the past were likely to be orphans, with increasing numbers of children from broken homes and single parents. In 1967 only 4 of the 130 children in care were orphans.

With community changes came changes to government and community expectations regarding the care of children. This influenced the recruitment of personnel within Dalmar resulting in the development of innovative services that were more reflective of



philosophical changes to service provision. Combined with increased demand for assistance, a number of other facilities were opened or expanded, including:

- Gateway Cottage opened in 1962 to provide crisis accommodation for children. Children coming into care were more likely to have suffered emotional and physical abuse or neglect.
- The Bernard-Smith Home was opened at Pymble in 1960 to provide similar services as the Carlingford site, but on a smaller scale.
- The Wesley James Hostel was opened at Burwood in 1972 to provide accommodation for up to 10 working boys.
- The Dalmar Pre-school (kindergarten), established at Carlingford in 1927, continued to operate, initially for Dalmar children and later as a community pre-school.
- The Carlingford site was also expanded as a result of increasing demand – in the early 60s Dalmar was turning away 50 requests for assistance per week.

This new era and the significant changes within the community and the care of young children saw¹⁶:

- External developments impacting on the Mission
- The employment of social workers and trained personnel to further develop a professional service
- Ongoing training of personnel and continued membership of the Matrons and Superintendent's Association.

The employment of social workers resulted in¹⁷:

- The development of a new intake procedure that reduced the numbers of applications being turned away with no assistance, from 50 per week to 10;
- The development of case plans for each child;
- Greater focus on maintaining families and family restoration, by focussing on the cause of family breakdown and addressing the causes;
- A more concerted effort to place children in foster care or adoption rather than entering or remaining in residential care. This aspect was initially managed by the Child Care Division of Life Line, established in 1965;
- Reduction in the duration of stays at Dalmar – by 1972 50% were returned to their birth families

Financial constraints remained an ongoing issue for Dalmar, with Commonwealth government only providing the child endowment for each child, which represented 9% of the cost of caring for a child in 1960. No other state government funding was available at this time. Government assistance eventually increased but by 1969 only represented less than 50% of Dalmar's income¹⁸.



After the 70s change within Dalmar occurred at a rapid rate, originally driven by government policy and funding as well as changes within the child care industry and further developed with the expertise of General Managers, Directors and other Mission staff. Dalmar enhanced its professional service with the recruitment of a psychologist as Director of Dalmar in 1984. The 1980s continued the transition of services across the industry from simply rescuing children in need to empowering the family to change¹⁹.

The focus of service provision moved towards a more holistic approach that included services such as family therapy, family counselling, group work, early intervention strategies and preventative care. Services were provided through Family Centres in partnership with the local Uniting Churches in Castle Hill, Quakers Hill and Penrith.



Out Of Home Care At Wesley Dalmar: TODAY

Today, Wesley Dalmar Child & Family Care manages three foster care programs, providing care for 130 children and young people at any one time. All referrals for assistance are received from the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS), after courts have determined the need for out of home care. The foster care programs are staffed by professionally trained and supported caseworkers. At present we are unable to meet this demand for places in our programs.

Wesley Dalmar also provides a residential program, Gateway Cottage, a program with professionally trained and supported youth workers and care staff. The Cottage, is currently a short term crisis cottage accommodation for children between the ages of 8 and 15 years within a therapeutic environment. The service is staffed at all times by two youth workers.

Across all of Wesley Dalmar's Our of Home Care programs, there is close liaison with DoCS with regard to individual case plans. Foster carers are carefully recruited, trained and supervised.

Wherever possible Wesley Dalmar works with the child or young person in maintaining family links through supervised access visits with family members and endeavours to provide stable long-term placements for those children whose case plan is long term. Birth families contribute to the foster care training programs.

Wesley Dalmar has instigated picnic/fun days for foster families and foster children to provide the foster child with the opportunity to meet with other foster children. We also recognise the impact fostering has on the foster family, not only the parents but the children as well, by providing special events that acknowledge the efforts of all parties in the foster care program.

The Wesley Dalmar Out of Home Care Program is guided by:

- The NSW Out of Home Care Standards,
- NSW 1998 Children and Young Persons (Child Protection) Act; and
- The 1974 Ombudsman Act.

Wesley Dalmar Child and Family Care, as part of Wesley Mission, is committed to the provision of quality services. This is reflected in:

- Policies and procedures, which have been developed in consultation with key stakeholders, such as the NSW Ombudsman's Office, The Office of the Children's Guardian, staff and service users.
- Regular reviews of protocols for service delivery against current research materials to ensure best practice.
- Provision of training in administrative and professional areas, delivered both internally and externally
- The development of a regular staff supervision process which complements the Wesley Mission Personal Review and Development Program
- Compulsory Child Protection training for all Wesley Dalmar personnel, delivered in house.



- The development of Privacy and Child Protection Statements for industry group to ensure compliance with the legislation.
- The commitment of Wesley Dalmar to maintaining external certification to International Standards of Operation (ISO) 9000.

It has been estimated that Dalmar has assisted between 8,000 to 10,000 children and young people in the course of its history. A historical database is currently being compiled in order to ensure that personal records are easily located.

Staff Training

Wesley Dalmar provides yearly employee appraisals (Personal Review and Development Program) contributing to identifying ongoing training needs, regular formal supervision and a program operational plan. Additional quarterly key training is provided such as:

- How to engage difficult (challenging) families and children into the programme in a way that encourages involvement and responsibility;
- Identifying domestic violence;
- Programmes that redress developmental lag due to insufficient stimulation;
- Assisting children who have experienced trauma in their previous country- migrant children;
- Cultural issues;
- Involvement of volunteers in the programme;
- Strategic planning for the project;
- Communication that promotes responsibility;
- Working with families around stress management;
- Planning practical sessions eg cooking with a difference; and
- Working with Adolescent parents through supported playgroups.

The After Care Program

Wesley Dalmar established its After Care Program three to four years ago. In the last 18 months 35 clients have contacted Dalmar to see their case files. Of these 35 clients, 13 have alleged abuse or unduly harsh treatment during their time with Dalmar. The perception of these experiences varies – some seeing it as common to parenting practices at the time, others seeing it as unacceptable and harmful to their long-term development. Positive stories are heard as often as negative ones, and often they are mixed. Adults we see later in life have usually come to terms with their experiences, while those in their 20s and 30s are still working on it. Support is offered to anyone who wants to see their file by:

- Listening and affirming their experiences in care and afterwards;
- Ensuring counselling with a counsellor of their choice has been provided;
- Advocating on their behalf for family support services;
- Providing advice to see a solicitor for those seeking compensation;
- Linking them to ARC (Aftercare Resource Centre – a DoCS funded service);
- Providing initial membership to CLAN (Care Leavers of Australia Network);
- Support of the Dalmar Old Boys and Girls network; and
- Assistance with finding other family members.



The following quote from an After Care client sums up the demonstrated resilience of many Dalmar's past clients.

'I do remember the terrible times but I turned it around and made it positive.'

We acknowledge the pain and honour the resilience of Dalmar's past clients, and use our shared experience to inform current service practice.

2. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Wesley Dalmar understands that the purpose of out of home care is to provide the child or young person with an alternative family home, where they are able to feel cared for and safe; providing the child or young person with the opportunities to become a fully functioning individual within their society, able to financially support themselves and form long term relationships.

Successful Placements: Issues and Considerations

The recommendations provided below have been based on the experience of Wesley Dalmar in the administration of out of home care programs. The recommendations focus on the enhancement of the experience of the child or young person in care and on leaving care.

In this vein a number of risk factors arise when placing a child or young person in care:

- The experiences of the child or young person prior to entering care will impact significantly on the success of the assistance provided, including mental health of the parent, level of poverty, degree of employment/unemployment of either or both parents, level of violence in the family, use of drugs and alcohol, and the family's coping skills or resilience;
- The quality and level of contact available between the child or young person and their birth family during their time in care; and
- The availability of a suitable foster family.

Wesley Dalmar is concerned:

- × That through their experiences a significant percentage of care leavers face issues stemming from attachment disorder.
- × By recent research²⁰, which shows that one in three young women leaving care, become parents soon after leaving wardship.
- × At the high number of children currently in care whose parents were in the care system.
- × At the poor employment records of care leavers.
- × At the number of care leavers who are in penal institutions.

Our experience has shown that children or young people benefit the most if:

- ✓ Respite and support options are available to families at risk of having the children removed – this frequently prevents the breakdown of the family;
- ✓ The removal from their birth family is planned and the child or young person has participated in the development of the move to foster care;
- ✓ 75% of the time spent in care is with one family – this provides a sense of security and consistency in education for the child or young person and allows attachment to be experienced;

- ✓ Children in care are able to have regular contact with their birth family – this promotes a sense of identity and attachment to their immediate and extended family;
- ✓ Children in care have the ability/opportunity to develop a mentor-like relationship with a significant adult – this fosters positive role modelling and assists the child or young person to develop resilience and community connectedness;
- ✓ Children in care have access to counselling and other support services to assist in resolving various emotional issues, such as anger and abandonment and low self esteem;
- ✓ Assistance to establish themselves after court orders expire – many young people are ill equipped to manage on their own the issues of employment, accommodation, finances and social relationships at 18 years of age . Research²¹ has found that “young people leaving care include a high proportion of early school leavers”

The Impact of Public, Social and Legal Policy on Out Of Home Care Programs

Unintended consequences of the NSW child protection legislation which amended the 1974 Ombudsman’s Act has:

- Increased foster carer turnover, as allegations, no matter how small, impact on the carer’s career and social networks, placing additional strains and stresses on the individuals and their families.
- Made it difficult to recruit carers.
- Increased the number of moves for the child in care, causing greater levels of instability for the child or young person.

Systemic factors include:

- The interrelationship of increasing casual jobs, unemployment and the phenomenon of the working poor on the development of family resilience and community connectedness.
- Sources of poverty, such as affordable housing and inadequate income support. The level of poverty impacts on the ability of the family to obtain adequate levels of housing, often resulting in frequent moves and a disruption to school and social networks.
- Lack of access to information and education regarding basic parenting skills, nutritional information, avoiding domestic violence and other supports for families at risk.
- Lack of understanding in the wider community in the recognition of child protection and the needs of children and young people.

Recommendations

Based on the above considerations Wesley Dalmar and Wesley Mission Sydney propose the following:

Enhanced Preventative Care Opportunities

- ✓ A whole of government approach to support families at risk, with stronger policies that focus on preventative care.
- ✓ Increase the provision of family support services for high need families.
- ✓ Government funding for the provision of respite (short term) care to prevent children or young people entering long term care, in conjunction with intensive levels of assistance, including counselling and other support services to assist families develop coping strategies (resilience).
- ✓ Support for life skills programs developed and monitored to prepare young people in care for independent living.
- ✓ Establishment of focussed programs to assist Care Leavers through counselling and after care services.
- ✓ The establishment of an independent support agency for Care Leavers, which will assist them in finding their birth families where this is wanted and provide other support services to meet their deficits.

Enhancing Outcomes through After Care

- ✓ Development of family supports that can continue beyond the care placement, for example, adopt an aunty/uncle;
- ✓ Recognition of identity needs – facilitating and supporting contact with birth families.
- ✓ An Out of Home Care Agency to provide continued counselling, information and financial support for care leavers, to the age of 25 years, allowing for remedial education and tertiary training and to establish themselves in relation to accommodation and employment. This would place the care leaver on a more equal footing with children living with their natural families where they continue to receive parental assistance well into their 20s.
- ✓ Preferential access for Care Leavers to Independent Living Program houses that can provide flexible supports.
- ✓ Preferential access to higher education institutions.

Attracting and Maintaining Foster Carers

- ✓ National enquiry into the viability of foster care and alternatives to meet the needs of children at risk.
- ✓ Review the current levels of financial remuneration for foster carers, including the consideration of foster care as paid employment for children and young people with high needs.
- ✓ Expansion of the Commonwealth's National Agenda for Early Childhood to provide a platform for intervention services for children at risk.

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