



Moving from Dependence to Independence: a study of the experiences of 18 care leavers in a leaving care and after care support service in rural Victoria by Philip Mendes

- **Leaving care and disadvantage**
- **Victorian policy and legislation**
- **St Lukes's Anglicare LCACSS program, and introduction of employment and mentoring programs.**

- **Methodology: interviews with 18 young people involved in St Lukes's program**
- **Qualitative, exploratory design**
- **In-depth, semi-structured interviews**



- **Demographics and out of home care experience**
- **The 18 young people interviewed for this study ranged in age from 18 to 22 years. Nine were female and nine were male. Three were of indigenous background. Five of them were already parents, and two had already lost their own children into state out of home care.**

- **Transitioning from out of home care**
- **The young people's experiences of leaving care varied from good to poor.**
- **Most of the interviewees described St Luke's as playing a positive role in assisting them during the leaving care process.**

- **Housing**
- **Most of the young people reported that they had been successful in attaining secure and stable accommodation.**
- **A minority experienced some housing problems.**

- **Education, Training and Employment**
- **Educational outcomes were generally poor. Only three of the young people had completed the Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Education**
- **However, Most of the young people were currently involved in either part-time paid employment or work experience. One young person was working full-time.**

- **15 of the 18 young people were currently participating in, or had recently participated in, the St Luke's employment support program. A number of the young people stated that the St Luke's program had contributed significantly to positive educational and/or employment outcomes.**



- **The independent living skills of the young people varied from good to poor. Most were reasonably adept at shopping, cooking, cleaning and washing. Others believed they did not have sufficient skills to live independently.**
- **Budgeting and bill payment tended to be problematic**

- **Attaining a driving licence was also a major challenge. Only four had attained their probationary licence, and two of them had managed to lose it due to accidents.**



- **The health of the young people varied. Some reported having good physical and emotional health. But eight of them had a significant physical or intellectual disability. 15 of the young people reported experiencing mild to significant anxiety and/or depression either now or in the recent past which they attributed to their adverse childhood experiences. Nevertheless, a number in this group said they were currently coping okay, and felt they had access to good personal or professional supports. Five of the young people also reported significant substance abuse which tended to be a response to stress or emotional pain.**

- **Most of the young people receive support from social networks consisting of friends, partners, family and former carers. However, a number of the young people felt let down by friends and partners who had proved untrustworthy, and consequently experienced some loneliness and social isolation.**

- **11 of the 18 young people were currently in, or had recently participated in, the mentoring program. Some of the positive outcomes cited included assisting with self-confidence and maturation, social and communication skills, providing good advice, and just having fun. However, a couple of the mentoring relationships had not worked as well.**

- **The young people expressed varied views about the particular advantages and disadvantages of leaving care in regional or rural settings. Most named transport as a major deficit, arguing that the buses were irregular and inadequate. Social isolation and loneliness was also identified as a problem particularly for those living in remote settings. Another difficulty was the stigma associated with being a care leaver in a small community**

- **The findings of this study confirm that care leavers are not a homogenous group. Some were ready to leave care at 18 years of age to live independently with only minimal support. Others, particularly those with significant physical and/or intellectual disabilities, have found it more difficult to cope with independent living.**

- **The leaving care and after care support service introduced by St Luke's has made a significant difference to the lives of many of these young people via providing a safety net of community-based supports. Equally, the feedback from the young people suggests that there are a number of continuing service gaps which need to be addressed by more specialized assistance.**

- **Overall, this study suggests the importance of providing a broad structure of community-based supports for care leavers that attempts at least in part to replicate the usual supports that most young people in the community take for granted as they undertake the long transition from dependence to independent living.**