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**Do supported transitions from Foster Care
achieve better outcomes for young people?**

**An evaluation of young people's perspectives and
experiences of Dingwall Trust's Launch Care
to Independence Service**

**A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the
Master of Social Work (Applied)**

Massey University, Albany Campus

Davinia Abbott

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Abstract

Readiness to live independently vs. the age a young person is forced to do so (“Ageing out of care”) is a much debated issue within the research on foster care leavers and as a response programmes designed to facilitate a young person’s transition from care began emerging internationally during the 1990s under an umbrella of transition from care (TFC) schemes. In New Zealand a TFC initiative was established, by the Statutory Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, in Auckland in 2004 and delivered by the non-government agencies Dingwall Trust and Youth Horizons which developed pilot TFC schemes. This research aims to evaluate the continued need and effectiveness of Dingwall Trust’s scheme, Launch Care to Independence (CTI) Service, through the shared opinions and experiences of young people who were placed in foster care and transitioned on to independent living through engagement with this programme. This study explores the challenges faced by youth who have left care within a New Zealand cultural context.

Seven young people agreed to take part in this study and participated in a semi-structured interview process with a qualitative research design. An analysis of the interview data found that a young person’s journey in foster care did impact their transition to independent living both in positive and negative ways. The assistance provided through the Launch CTI Service was perceived as necessary, relevant and young person focussed. The outcomes achieved through their engagement with the programme were generally good in areas of accommodation, continued education aspirations and living skills; however other areas such as employment and leaving school educational attainment revealed poorer outcomes for the majority of the group. The findings suggested that consistent, innovative and participatory relationships between young people and their Social Worker are most likely to develop a pathway in which positive outcomes can be achieved by the young person. This paper also illustrated the vulnerability of young people during their foster care experiences and the integral role of informal social networks in the provision of long-term support for young people transitioning to independent living.

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List of abbreviations and definitions

CYPF Act	Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act, 1989
CYFS	The Department of Child, Youth and Family Services
HNZ	Housing New Zealand
IYB	Independent Youth Benefit
Launch CTI	Launch Care to Independence
PA	Personal Advisor employed by Launch Care to Independence Service
TFC	Transition from Care
SENZ	SENZ Training and Employment Centre

Within this study there are a few key terms and concepts that are commonly referred to within the literature:

Children and Young Persons:

For the purposes of this research the terms *children* and *young people* will refer to the interpretation outlined in Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act, 1989 (CYPF Act):

“child means a boy or girl under the age of 14 years.

young person means a boy or girl of or over the age of 14 years but under 17 years; but does not include any person who is or has been married or in a civil union” (s2).

The continuum of out of kin care:

Throughout this research various terms will be used which describe a young person’s change in living situation from living with their biological parents or families. ‘Out of kin’ care is essentially a general term to describe substitute providers of care for children or young persons who, for a variety of reasons, have been deemed unable to live with their biological families for a period of time. Mann-Feder (2007) describes ‘in care’ as a range of options along a continuum; “from the most normative and individualized at one end (adoptive family) to foster care, group home care, or residential placement at the other extreme” (p.1). Mann-Feder (2007) explains that “Children can have long-term placement in any of these options or move along the continuum through the course of a placement

career” (p.1). A young person’s ‘in care’ or ‘through care’ experience therefore relate to their time spent with substitute providers of care.

Care and Protection

This project sits within the peripheral of the social worker field of practice known as ‘care and protection’ and in New Zealand the statutory agency Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS) stands at the forefront of this sector. The mandate of Care and Protection Practice within CYFS is “to keep children and young people safe and free from harm, from abuse and neglect and to promote their well being by working with other agencies, the community and their family” (CYF Practice Centre, 2006). When a child or young person is not safe at home other ‘care’ options are therefore explored with the family, their extended family members and other agencies within their community.

Custody

CYPF Act 1989 interprets the term custody as “the right to possession and care of a child or young person” (s2). Biological parents have automatic rights to custody of their child however a child or young person may come into the custody of the Chief Executive of the department when care and protection concerns exist (defined by S14 of the CYPF Act, 1989) and there are no alternative appropriate family/whanau to care for the child or young person. This action is subject to court approval and family/whanau consultation prior to such action prescribed by the CYPF Act, 1989.

Independent Youth Benefit (IYB)

Is defined by Work and Income New Zealand as the “provision of income support for people aged 16 or 17 years who are currently unemployed but actively seeking work, training for work, at school, or sick, injured or disabled, where it is inappropriate for them to obtain financial support from their parents” (Ministry of Social Development, 2008).

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