

**Submission  
No 12**

**INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS  
WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR  
FAMILIES**

**Organisation:** Lifestyle Solutions

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# Lifestyle Solutions

supporting people

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The Director  
Social Issues Committee  
Legislative Council, Parliament House  
SYDNEY 2000  
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## **Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs**

Lifestyle Solutions is a national not-for-profit organisation providing flexible, innovative and person-centred solutions for people in the community who require support.

We do this by maintaining a solid focus on the effective implementation of a wide range of individualised programs to promote community integration and participation and ultimately, enhance the overall quality of life for the individuals we support, their families and carers.

Lifestyle Solutions' diverse range of support services include:

### **Disability Support:**

- Self-Managed and Individual Support Arrangements
- Family Governed Services
- Out of Home Care
- Day Program Centres
- Crisis Accommodation
- Housing and Support Services
- Attendant Care

### **Criminal Justice Program:**

- Onsite Support
- Intensive Support
- Drop-In Support

### **Foster Care**

### **Youth Education and Recreation:**

- Educational Programs for Schools
- Camps for Youth programs
- Leaving Care Programs
- Mentoring Programs
- Younger People in Residential Aged Care Program

## **Work Assist Program**

Lifestyle Solutions has long been committed to ensuring that the people we support, their families and carers are placed at the centre of any decision making that relates to their support needs. Our person centred approach means that our focus is less about traditional program-based models and more about being creative and flexible in how we provide support to an individual, ensuring they have maximum control and enjoyment in their lives.

Staff members of Lifestyle Solutions are able to provide quality support services to people in our community through the valued support and funding of several government departments. These funding bodies include:

- NSW Department of Community Services
- Ageing Disability and Home Care NSW
- QLD Department of Child Safety
- TAS Department of Health and Human Services
- NT Department of Ageing and Health
- VIC Department of Human Services
- WA Disability Services Commission

Lifestyle Solutions has experience across a number of states of Australia and provides programs funded by various departments which sees children in various programs including Out of Home Care, Criminal and Juvenile Justice, Leaving Statutory Care programs and Post School programs for people with disabilities.

Lifestyle Solutions provides the following comments related to children in various stages of transition.

### **The adequacy and accessibility of appropriate support for children and their families**

- Child protection requirements often result in significant disruption when children are removed from parental care.
- Whilst the majority of children can be removed with minimal disruption to their education and social needs, our experience is that this is often the beginning of disrupted education for children with complex needs who are removed from their familiar educational environment, teachers and others in the education system who know them well.
- Behavioral changes in children with complex needs escalate during this time often resulting in children being viewed as more complex than they were prior to removal.
- There appears to be no planning undertaken by Community Services with educational systems to appropriately manage removal of children with complex needs to ensure they can remain within their current educational environment.
- Apart from dislocation and disruption to the child in changing schools there will often be periods when the child will not attend school for significant periods.
- Lifestyle Solutions is supporting a 13 year old boy who was relinquished by his family and placed in emergency accommodation 30kms from his family home. He was unable to attend school for almost one year as the School Transport Service refused to transport him as he was out of area. There was a failure by government case managers to follow up to arrange appropriate enrolment elsewhere.
- Our experience with children in the Juvenile Justice (JJ) system again highlights the difficulty in arranging appropriate educational support for this cohort of children.
- Children in JJ already experience significant disruption to their lives especially if incarcerated. This is exacerbated by poor coordination between various systems which appear unable to coordinate transitions from detention centres, to accommodation which provides support let alone to an appropriate educational environment.

- Many children in this system are lost between the various systems as no one government agency accepts responsibility for these children and young people.
- Whilst the NSW Government has established Regional Coordination under the leadership of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, these have been unsuccessful in dealing with systemic issues as no one agency is accountable for children. Each agency has a part of the whole – it is not uncommon then to have a child who has multiple case managers and services but poor outcomes.
- As an example a young person leaving JJ detention may have a Juvenile Justice Officer, be homeless and referred to Community Services who may arrange emergency accommodation in a refuge, where workers will support the person. Depending on complexity the young person could also be engaged with mental health counsellors, alcohol and drug counsellors and a host of others tending to their bits of the whole with no possibility of enrolling in the education system as all other social problems preclude stability to engage in education.
- For children in the OOH system the transition from Community Services to ADHC support at eighteen years of age is not well coordinated. Despite agreements that planning should commence when the YP is 16 years of age, the experience of Lifestyle Solutions is that there is a lack of planning early enough to be meaningful for the YP turning eighteen years of age and often crises emerge as accommodation is not firmed up and hence transition to Post School Programs have not been well planned (if at all considered).
- Despite the government rhetoric of being child or person centred the outcomes for many children and young people belie this rhetoric.

### **Best practice approaches to ensure seamless and streamlined assistance during transitions**

- By definition, a child removed from its biological parents will have complex needs initially and support is required to ensure that the child protection system does not remove a child from an abusive environment to an abusive system. Most children removed from their families because of abuse will only require short term support as they move into foster and family care and can be nurtured within these environments.
- Whilst there have been significant reforms in NSW's child protection system, in recent years, children with complex needs do not have their needs understood let alone acted on in their interests.
- The NSW Public Sector salary rates for people working in various agencies concerned with assisting children (Juvenile Justice, Community Services, ADHC, Health) suggest people are employed who have significant skills. The salary for a Level 3 case manager in ADHC is over \$85,000.
- The system which has evolved as each area has become specialized (disability, youth work, mental health, child protection etc) has consequently seen a fragmentation of services to the whole child or young person. Departmental staffs, working with children are shielded from responsibility by the ever increasing complexity that young people present with and ultimately no one is responsible for the whole child or young person with complex needs.
- This bureaucracy results in managing interdepartmental conflict and avoidance of responsibility at an executive level (passing the buck) rather than supporting children and young people.
- Should Community Services evolve into solely a child protection agency, then best practice would suggest deleting all case managers in all other agencies supporting children and amalgamating them into one agency – A Children and Young Persons' Support Agency to deliver outcomes across the range of needs.
- This would require such an agency to commence planning when children are removed by Community Services, arrested by police or incarcerated at court, or identified with a disability or complex need in childhood or adolescence.

- The benefits of such an agency are self-evident. An example would see one person working with a child eligible for the Leaving Care Program focused on planning with the young person, rather than trying to interpret and understand the requirements of other agencies and the political issues pertinent to each agency.
- Such planning would by definition include the Educational authorities who would be required to commence consideration of how the homeless, mentally ill teenager can be engaged in ways other than formal school attendance.

**Any other related matters.**

- Indigenous children and young people are over represented in the many services focused on children and the issues raised above certainly pertain more so to achieving good outcomes for this vulnerable population.
- Whilst many people working in the children and young persons' sector are highly educated including tertiary studies, it is ironic that there is a lack of appreciation that education is essential to overcome the complexities that face many in the various systems designed to support children. Ultimately this comes down to the values driving systems to achieve good outcomes for children with complex needs.
- A centralized children's agency, values driven and outcomes focused is required for all children and young people with complex needs. There will be synergies and savings which ultimately should see good outcomes at no extra or even reduced cost to government.

Sincerely

**David Hogg**  
**Managing Director**