



Resource landscapes for young people leaving residential alcohol and

Opportunities and limits: exploring staff care for young people in residential alcohol and other drug services

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Overview

This paper explores relationships between young people and residential alcohol and other drug (AOD) service staff, with a focus on care. Care is an important feature of what AOD staff do, and staff care for young people during critical moments in their lives, such as entering AOD services, is important and can shape young people's understandings of genuinely recognise young people and their needs. At the same time, working in these settings comes with challenges and ethical dilemmas. Workers have to balance the pressures of their professional duties, and these need to be navigated within the context of their work. For this paper, we look at how care practices are integrated in relationships between workers and young people to create opportunities, but also how care might be constrained in the context staff work within.

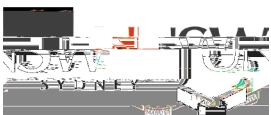
How we did the research

This study investigates the experiences of 38 young people aged 16-24 who recently left or were in residential AOD services in NSW, Victoria and the ACT. Interviews were conducted while young people were in services, six months, and 12 months later. Most participants were recruited from rehabs, as well as supported accommodation, detox units and day programs. The interviews explored AOD use, life events, relationships, feedback for services, and future plans.

Here, we focused on how young people talked about their relationships with residential AOD workers. We analysed these findings into broad themes.

What did we find: Opportunities and limits to care

Young people described positive relationships with workers when workers tailored care to their needs, v



maintain a sense of connection to the service (and return to services if they needed) and feeling of belonging and that they had shared their journey .

It's just, yeah, it's nice to have people who have seen my journey and stuff be supportive and, and all of that. So, it's really nice. (Aimee, Interview 3)

Limits to care

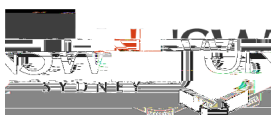
Providing care individually and communally

Within residential AOD services, relations between residents also affected their relationships with staff. For example, if a residential service was full, young people might feel that they received less attention from workers. Young people discussed conflict with peers that could make them feel less cared for by workers.

I had some good relationships [with rehab staff] and stuff, and, yeah, most of them were quite good. And, yeah, but like I guess, on the other hand, no-one really did anything when I was getting, when I was struggling with my roommate. I mean they moved me rooms. Like they, I got moved like to another room but it was still happening; all of the stuff with her. (Bridget, Interview 3)

Co-producing care in structured environments

Because of the highly structured nature of many of the residential services, tensions arose when young people felt workers imposed care rather than tailor



Recommendations: What does the research tell us we need to do

- x Equip staff to have clear conversations with young people about how their needs can be met within the context of the residential service, including communicating the boundaries of staff relationships.
- x Encourage communicative and supportive interactions between staff and young people as part of everyday practice .
- x Ensure workers within residential settings continually assess young people s needs and tailor the goals if needed.
- x Prepare young people to transition away from residential services, including the options maintaining engagement in the long term.
- x Assist young people in building up their care networks outside of the service, including external workers, friends and family.

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For the full paper:

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For more information about this project, please visit <https://www.unsw.edu.au/artdesignarchitecture/our-schools/socialsciences/ourresearch/engagement/impact/ourprojects/resources/landscapesyoungpeople-leaving-residential-drug-alcohol-services>

