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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

'An Exploration of Wellsprings Outreach Service – How are the women given continued support after leaving the residential service?'

Isabel Morrissey

CARL Research Project in collaboration with

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Name and year of course:	Masters in Social Work Year 2
Date completed:	25/04/2022

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- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
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Declaration of Originality

This is to declare that this dissertation titled **'An Exploration of Wellsprings Outreach Service – How are the women given continued support after leaving the residential service?'** submitted to the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of Master in Social Work is my own work.

Any work that is not my own has been acknowledged and referenced appropriately using APA style referencing. This dissertation has been submitted through TurnItIn prior to submission and I have reviewed the originality report and made any necessary edits in line with UCC Plagiarism Policy in the final document.

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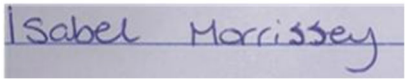
Signature: 

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Abstract

Wellsprings is a residential care and aftercare service for women aged 16 to 23. Wellsprings offer an outreach service to all of the women who have come through the residential service, it also takes direct referrals. No previous research has been completed on Wellsprings work before. This research aims to document the intensive and diverse range of supports offered by the outreach service. This dissertation was completed in conjunction with Wellsprings as part of the UCC Community-Academic Research Links initiative (CARL).

This research explores Wellsprings Outreach Service and how it supports the women through their transition out of the residential service and continues to provide a continuum of life long support after this. It looks at the relationships between the women in the service and Wellsprings staff. The research draws on aftercare in Ireland more generally, looking at the policies and challenges that care leavers face, as a way of shaping the research topic.

Primary research was carried out through three individual interviews with women engaged in the outreach service, and a focus group was held with three long-term members of Wellsprings staff. The common themes highlighted in the findings that are discussed are; the transition out of the residential service, emotional support, practical support and the relationships between the women and staff. The research also looks at staff and service provision in Wellsprings and makes some final recommendations for Wellsprings going forward, and the aftercare service in Ireland more generally.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

This research project was undertaken in conjunction with Wellsprings and UCC as a CARL project. This chapter will first introduce the reader to the research project and provide a background to the research topic and Wellsprings, my collaborative research partner. It will then outline the research aims, objectives and research questions. It will discuss the rationale for this research and I will also give a brief outline of each subsequent chapter.

1.2 Research Title:

'An Exploration of Wellsprings Outreach Service – How are the women given continued support after leaving the residential service?'

1.3 Background to the Research:

This research will focus on exploring Wellsprings outreach service and how it supports the women who access the service. Wellsprings is "A voluntary organisation which provides care and aftercare services for young women" as stated on the organisation's website (2021). Wellsprings has a residential and outreach service. The residential service is based in Cork City and women aged 16 to 23 can live here. Wellsprings is a voluntary organisation which is predominantly funded by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) as a care and aftercare service (Wellsprings, 2021). "Wellsprings offers short to medium term residential placements for young women aged between 16-23 years, with the possibility of lifelong support through a dedicated outreach aftercare service" (Wellsprings, 2022). The outreach service is offered to all those who have moved on from the residential service and direct referrals can also be made. The outreach centre is based on the adjacent street across from the residential service (Wellsprings, 2021). There are currently 59 young women actively involved in the residential and outreach service (Wellsprings, 2022).

1.4 Research Aim:

This research aims to explore how Wellsprings provide a continuum of various types of support to women through their residential and life-long outreach service and how this is vital for these women.

1.5 Research Objectives:

- This research will provide a brief overview of aftercare policy in Ireland whilst looking at care leavers challenges and outcomes.
- This research will identify how the women in Wellsprings are supported through the outreach service.
- This research will look at the importance of relationships between the young women involved in the outreach service and the staff.

1.6 Research Questions:

Based on the overall aim and objectives of the research, three core questions have been identified which will be further explored during this CARL research project. These are:

1. How are the women in Wellsprings supported on their transition out of the residential service?
2. What are the types of support offered by Wellsprings outreach service?
3. What are the most effective ways for staff in Wellsprings outreach service to support the young women?

1.7 Rationale:

This research will be completed as part of CARL project with Wellsprings. There has been no previous research on the work that Wellsprings does, and this research therefore aims to document the types of support the outreach service provides, and why this is an essential service for many women. By exploring this through research it may help improve staff and service provision and will be a help to Wellsprings, as an organisation, as a way of acknowledging the undocumented work that they do. Documenting the need for the outreach service through this research could improve aftercare service provision as a whole, as it may identify the need for similar outreach services throughout Ireland.

Completing this research will not only benefit social work by adding to literature on aftercare services in Ireland, but it will also benefit my professional development as a social worker by improving my social research skills. This is an area of social work that I have been

interested in since completing my placement with the fostering department in Tusla. I queried what the aftercare service is like for those who reach the age of 18 whilst in the care of the State. By researching this topic it will give me a greater understanding of the aftercare service.

I had first heard about the CARL Project initiative during my undergraduate degree. Since starting the MSW, I knew that I wanted to apply to do a CARL project as I wanted my research to make a valuable impact on my local community. The research with Wellsprings, in particular, interested me as I felt I might be able to identify with the women in the service, being a young woman around the same age and in that stage of my life where I am transitioning into scary adulthood.

1.8 Chapter Outline:

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one provides background information to the research topic and partner organisation. The research aims, objectives and key research questions that informed this research are presented. It also discusses the rationale for the research and gives a full chapter overview of the dissertation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two will provide background information on Wellsprings outreach service, it will provide a comprehensive literature review relating to aftercare in Ireland, it will look at aftercare policy and analyse the literature regarding care leavers challenges and outcomes, to give insight to the background of the research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter three outlines the epistemological approach and theoretical perspective of the research. It will detail the research methods used to collect and analyse the qualitative data. It will also provide information on community based research and what this entails.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion – Women in Wellsprings Outreach Service

Chapter Four will outline and discuss the research findings collected through the semistructured interviews with three women in Wellsprings outreach service.

Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion – Staff in Wellsprings

Chapter Five will outline and discuss the research findings collected through the focus group with three members of Wellsprings staff.

Chapter Six

The final chapter will provide a number of concluding remarks to the research and set out recommendations based on the findings. I will then conclude with a reflective piece on how I found the whole experience of carrying out this research project.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction:

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the relevant literature relating to the research topic. It will give background information on Wellsprings outreach service. It will also give a comprehensive analysis of the literature surrounding aftercare and care leavers outcomes in Ireland, and internationally, whilst also looking at Irish policy, as a way of shaping the research. Wellsprings is a voluntary organisation which is now predominately funded by the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) as a residential care and aftercare service (Wellsprings, 2021). Wellsprings residential and outreach service are both forms of an aftercare service. The National Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care states that "Aftercare services are support services that build on and support the work that has already been undertaken" (Tusla, 2017). At the end of 2020, there were 2,943 young person's in receipt of aftercare services in Ireland (Charles, 2021).

2.2 Residential Care:

Tusla are committed to ensuring children and young people are supported to live at home with their families. However, when a child or young person's health, wellbeing, safety or development cannot be ensured at home they may need to be taken into the care of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla, 2022). Tusla protects and supports the child by placing them in appropriate accommodation, including foster care, relative foster care, residential care or with a person with a view to his adoption, as stated under Section 36 of the Child Care Act 1991 (Government of Ireland, 1991). When a child or young person is taken into care, a placement with relative foster carers or general foster carers is firstly looked at. However, this is not always possible and sometimes children or young people will be placed in residential services, this is the case for approximately one in twenty of the children and young people taken into care (Tusla, 2022). Research by Emond (2014) states that the 'family' unit, whether it be the child's own family or a foster family is viewed as the most effective method of bringing up a child in Ireland, and this is why these options are looked at prior to residential care. The majority of children in care in Ireland live in foster care or relative care placements, it is a relatively small fraction of children that will be accommodated in residential care. Residential care consists of small group homes or specialist units for young people with more complex needs (Carr, 2014). Of the approximately 6,000 children in care in Ireland, there are around

450 children in residential care (Power, 2022). Wellsprings residential unit is a care and aftercare service for young women aged 16 to 23, it offers places for up to 8 young women.

2.3 Aftercare Policy in Ireland:

The core policy in Ireland for aftercare services is The National Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care published by Tusla in 2017. Tusla are responsible and in charge of children's wellbeing and aftercare services for those children who turn 18 and leave their care (Tusla, 2021). Tusla have a responsibility to support young people in their transition to adulthood and helping them to achieve their full potential as adults (Tusla, 2017). Approximately 500 young people leave care every year on turning 18 (DCEDIY, 2022).

A child in care of the State is entitled to aftercare services once they reach the age of 18. To be eligible for the aftercare service the child has to have spent 12 months in care between the ages of 13 to 18 (Tusla, 2017). Preparation for leaving care should be a key component to all children in care's care plans. From the age of 16, the care plan should detail how it will support children for their transition to adulthood. If eligible for the aftercare service, a child will be allocated an aftercare worker "from the age of 17 years up to the age of 21 years and up to 23 years if in education/training" (Tusla, 2017, p. 16).

Once a child in the general population reaches the age of 18 they may have further financial and social support through their families (Hayes, 2013). For children in the care of the State this may not be the case, therefore aftercare services were created as a way of bridging this gap between childhood and adulthood for those in care. One of the most important requirements for young people leaving care is access to safe and stable accommodation (Mooney, 2016). Many children living with foster carers may continue to live with their carers after they turn 18 (Daly, 2012). "However young people who have been in residential care are likely to leave the house they were living in and move to an aftercare residential placement" (Daly, 2012, p. 5). There is a responsibility on the state to provide a range of supports for those in aftercare including financial, accommodation, training and education, and access to emotional support (EPIC, 2010). The aftercare service is a voluntary service, young people can decide themselves if they wish to engage with the service or not, they can re-engage with the service at any point up to the age of 21 (Tusla, 2017). Each young person has different needs and circumstances and therefore not all aftercare services should be the same. In the National

Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care (2017) it states that Tusla is committed to delivering an aftercare service that takes each young person's circumstances into account.

The history of residential institutions in Ireland is not a positive one. This is evident in the Ryan Report (2009) which investigated the historic abuse that occurred in state institutions and calls for improved aftercare services in Ireland. One of the recommendations of the Ryan Report was that aftercare provision for young care leavers should be strengthened. However, the literature shows that the legislation for aftercare services in Ireland nowadays is still weak (Carr, 2014; Mooney, 2016).

Section 45 of the Child Care Act 1991 states that "Where a child leaves the care of a health board, the board may" "assist him for so long as the board is satisfied as to his need for assistance and" "he has not attained the age of 21 years" or up to the age of 23 if in education (Government of Ireland, 1991). The use of the word "may" in the legislation has been criticized by many as it shows that there is a lack of congruence in aftercare services (Kelleher, Kelleher, & Corbett, 2000; EPIC, 2010). Another criticism of the legislation is that at the age of 21 or 23 people are still considered very young for their support to be cut. This is in contrast to other countries, such as England where young people are entitled to the support of a personal advisor up to the age of 25 (Stein, 2019). The average age in Europe in which young people leave their family home is 26, yet young people in care in Ireland are expected to leave at the young ages of 21 or 23 (Charles, 2021). Irish studies on care leavers in Ireland recommend that the aftercare service should be available to young people up to the age of 25 if needed (Kelleher, Kelleher, & Corbett, 2000). Becoming an adult is a difficult process that young people experience at different stages of their lives, not all young people will be independent adults by the age of 21 or 23. Wellsprings have acknowledged that many people are not able to be completely independent at these ages, especially care leavers who can face diverse challenges. Therefore, Wellsprings outreach service acts as a way to continue to provide assistance to those who need it even after they have aged out of the residential service.

2.4 Wellsprings Support:

Wellsprings residential unit was set up in 1995 by Sister Joan O'Leary, who identified a need for the service whilst working in the female surgical ward of the Mercy Hospital (Wellsprings, 2021). It was started as a voluntary organisation. The outreach service was developed at a later date in 2008 when funding was available; although the staff in Wellsprings

had been providing continued support for the women who had left the residential service before this. The outreach service currently has 59 clients (Wellsprings, 2021). In addition to the residential and outreach service ran by Wellsprings, they also offer community tenancy through their two community based apartments (Wellsprings, 2022).

2.5 Outreach Service:

The support offered by Wellsprings is not cut once the women leave the residential service. The women are given the option themselves to engage in the outreach service after they leave, some women may need a high amount of support while others may choose to not engage entirely. The outreach service is available to all those who have moved on from the residential service but they also take direct referrals (Wellsprings, 2021).

The outreach service was developed as it "became evident that the young women on discharge needed a level of support while living in the community" (Wellsprings, 2021). The outreach service provides a diverse range of supports to the women who access the service, including care planning, 24-hour crisis support phone and access to use of facilities in the outreach unit (Wellsprings, 2021). This level of support is something that is not offered by other aftercare providers in Ireland. The development of aftercare services in Ireland has been very inconsistent with the level of supports and facilities they offer (EPIC, 2010).

2.6 Homelessness Prevention:

Wellsprings residential and outreach unit act as a bridge for young women transitioning from care to independent adulthood. The women who require care from Wellsprings may be considered a vulnerable group as many of the young women have faced significant challenges in their lives, including childhood trauma and substance abuse (Wellsprings, 2021).

One of Wellsprings key focuses is 'homelessness prevention' (Wellsprings, 2021). "Some Irish studies have identified being in care, especially in residential care, as one potential pathway into homelessness" (Daly, 2012, p. 19). Wellsprings residential unit gives the young women living there a place to call home. The building itself is made to feel like a home, this was Sr. Joan O'Leary's dream for the home when it was being built in 1992 (Wellsprings, 2020) The outreach service continues to prevent these women from becoming homeless by

helping the women find housing after leaving the residential service, and further assisting the women in things like paying rent to ensure the women tenancy sustainment.

2.7 Care Leavers Challenges:

Care leavers in Ireland are considered one of the most vulnerable groups in society, research shows that they are over-represented in many disadvantaged sub-groups including the unemployed and homeless (Hayes, 2013). Research shows that in comparison to their peers in the general population, care leavers "suffer from much greater social exclusion, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and have higher mortality rates and incidence of mental health problems" (EPIC, 2010, p. 4). Irish research highlights that care leavers often end up as 'nobody's responsibility' (Kelleher, Kelleher, & Corbett, 2000, p. 1). The vast majority of care leavers will have experienced trauma before coming into care, this could be due to factors such as abuse, domestic violence in the home, or neglect (Kelleher, Kelleher, & Corbett, 2000). In addition to this, the care experience itself can be extremely traumatising. In a study of young people leaving care in Ireland in 2000, it found that 31% of children taken into care by the health board (now Tusla) had five or more placements and frequent changes in social workers (Kelleher, Kelleher, & Corbett, 2000). Although this study is now old, multiple placements and changes in social workers is still the case for many children in care in Ireland today. This instability threatens children and young people's sense of security and wellbeing, it may also cause them to have a lack of trust with social workers and care staff (Kelleher, Kelleher, & Corbett, 2000).

Small scale research in Ireland suggests that care leavers have poor levels of educational attainment and can experience difficulties in education, especially those who lived in residential care (Emond, 2014; Kelleher, Kelleher, & Corbett, 2000). This could be a significant factor in why the group are over represented in rates of unemployment and homelessness.

Few care leavers will have committed relationships with their parents, or other family members, this means they are lacking this supportive network (Kilkenny, 2012). The types of support provided by staff in Wellsprings, in both the residential unit and outreach service, is diverse and intensive. It ranges from educational, physical and mental health supports, financial, emotional, social and advocacy support. Studies show that these are all types of support that care leavers are in greater need of due to their unique circumstances (Daly, 2012).

For example, in an Irish study it showed that care leavers had high rates of mental health difficulties, such as depression and eating disorders, and the study stated that this may be due to their emotional trauma of being brought into the care system (Kelleher, Kelleher, & Corbett, 2000).

2.8 Lack of Irish Research:

There is a lack of research in Ireland surrounding aftercare and care leavers outcomes (Carr, 2014; Daly, 2012). The first and only national study of young people leaving care in Ireland was completed in 2000 by Focus Ireland (Kelleher, Kelleher, & Corbett, 2000). Academics have criticised the lack of research regarding the group and expressed disappointment that there still remains only one national study on young care leavers in Ireland (Mullan, 2018). Although there are limited sources on this topic published in recent years, it is evident in the existing research that for those in residential care, leaving care can be a challenging time due to major change in their lives which comes with huge pressure and responsibility (HSE, 2006). It is crucial that Ireland as a country invest more in this group of young people through services, such as Wellsprings, in order to support them, which can create improved outcomes for those leaving care. Studies have criticized that the Government of Ireland have failed care leavers as "the failure to adequately reform leaving and aftercare provision is reflective of wider social inequality and of a context in which young people in care are largely invisible from view" (Carr, 2014, p. 88).

2.9 International Literature:

Although there is not an abundance of Irish research published on aftercare and care leavers, it can help to look at international research to understand the key issues. Care leavers as a group will face more difficulties than other young people. They may have negative past experiences including poor parenting, abuse and social disadvantage, they then may have further negative experiences as a direct consequence of being in the care system (Stein, 2012). In the United States, it has been found that high staff turnover in residential care for young people can intensify feelings of neglect for the young people (Graham & Fulcher, 2017).

Studies show that the transition from leaving care itself can directly affect the health and well-being of care-leavers (Dixon, 2008). They may feel forced to leave care at young ages

before they are ready, which is not something young people living with their families usually experience (Stein, 2012). Specific groups of care leavers can face further challenges within the aftercare system if they are already part of disadvantaged societal groups, such as ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and people with disabilities (Stein, 2006). Care leavers who suffered with poor mental wellbeing were more likely to do worse in other areas such as the "ability to find and sustain housing, and participation in education, employment and training" (Dixon, 2008, p. 212).

2.10 Social Work Theory:

Wellsprings offers a safe home-like environment for young women where they feel supported and empowered to continue on to their adult lives. This transitional period from adolescence to adulthood can be extremely challenging for young people, this transition is made harder for those in care who may have faced significant challenges and trauma in their lives. Care leavers transition to adulthood is often "both accelerated and compressed" in comparison to their peers who have not been in the care of the State (Stein, 2006, p. 274). Once young people finish schooling it is the societal norm to either go on to further education or enter employment, and eventually leave their family home or the home they've been living in. This can be a very daunting time for young people. Specifically for care leavers, this is even more scary as they may not have the support of a family to help them if things do go wrong (Mooney, 2016). This transition period from childhood to adulthood can be a tumultuous time, aftercare services are given a window of time to try and support, empower and address the needs of this group during this time (Hayes, 2013).

I feel that an interesting lens to look at this research through is the use of Erikson's psychosocial theory of development (1963). In Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, he identified eight stages that coincide with eight stages of development in a person's life. "Each stage is associated with an inherent conflict or crisis that the individual must encounter and successfully resolve to proceed with development" (Sokol, 2009, p. 140).

This transitional period, as stated above, from adolescence to adulthood can be identified in Erikson's psychosocial stages of development as stage five and six (Erikson, 1998). Stage five is the adolescence period and is known as the identity vs confusion stage. Stage six is young adulthood and is known as the intimacy vs isolation period (Erikson, 1998). These can be stages

of confusion in a young person's life, if young people do not have a stable and supportive environment, such as care leavers, they may find it difficult to navigate through these stages. I feel by looking at this research through this lens it will help me to better understand the support Wellsprings provide to the young women during these difficult periods. I will look at how they are supported during times of transition, for example moving out of the residential centre and into society, and how they cope at these times.

2. 11 Conclusion:

This chapter examined the existing literature surrounding aftercare in Ireland, this included aftercare policy, whilst also looking at care leavers challenges and outcomes. It provided further background information on Wellsprings. It then looked at how social work theory, Erikson's psychosocial development theory, can be applied to the research topic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods used and discusses the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings that informed this study. It will look at community based research and what this entails as this research with Wellsprings is part of the

UCC Community Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative. Ethical considerations and limitations surrounding this research will also be discussed.

3.2 Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective:

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge that is adopted by the researcher, this guides ideas surrounding research topics, questions, methods, analysis and conclusions (Gringerri, Barusch , & Cambron, 2013). The epistemological approach that underpins this research is social constructionism, as the research is interested in how people make meaning of their experiences and the world around them. Social constructionism is built on the idea that all meaning in the world is made from human interaction and experiences with one another and the environment (Crotty, 1998). Meaning is not discovered, but socially constructed by human beings (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism implies that meaning in the world is produced by social interaction and therefore it is in a state of constant revision (Bryman A. , 2008). Social constructionism focusses on the use of language in the construction of people and events (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism means that there may be multiple representations by different people in the same specific context, for example in this research the staff and women in the outreach service have contrasting opinions. Social constructionism is the best reflected theory in the research questions as the research is concerned with the young women's experiences of aftercare services.

Social constructionism is a commonly used epistemology for gaining qualitative data. It is therefore suitable for this research as the research methods are qualitative, through the use of interviews and a focus group, as a method to understand human experiences. "Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). I felt that qualitative research best reflects what my research questions are asking. I am most concerned with how people make meaning of their experiences through the use of words. My analysis of the data collected in this research is also a construction, the data cannot be regarded as definitive as it is a construction of a specific version of a social reality (Bryman A. , 2008). The findings of this research can change depending on if there were different factors, such as new participants.

The theoretical perspective refers to the lens through which this research will be examined through. Interpretivism is the theoretical perspective used in this research. The theory of knowledge (epistemology) for this research is based in social constructionism, as stated

above, this usually leads to a theoretical perspective of interpretivism. This is because interpretivism is closely linked to constructionism. Interpretivism ('hermeneutics') looks to understand meaning and discover how people interpret and understand their direct experiences, therefore it is very relevant to this research as it is based on human experiences and how people interpret them (Carey, 2012). Some common attributes of interpretivism in research are the concentration is placed on the individual and the aim of the research is to capture the individuals subjective meaning of the world. Interpretivism also places a strong focus on culture and understands that culture is created through social interaction and therefore can be continuously recreated. Interviews are often used to try and understand the social worlds of the research participants and participants responses to external stimuli can also be examined (e.g. symbols) (Carey, 2012).

3.3 Community Based Research:

This research is a CARL project, meaning it was completed in partnership with Wellsprings. Wellsprings helped me by identifying interviewees and focus group members. A CARL project is a type of community based research. Strand et. Al (2003, p. 3) define community based research as "a partnership of students, faculty and community members who collaboratively engage in research with the purpose of solving a pressing community problem or effecting social change". (Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker , Marullo, & Donohue, 2003). Community based research (CBR) can be hugely beneficial to the student researcher, academic staff, community partners, and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), as it is deemed highly productive, cost efficient and good value for money (Bates & Burns, 2012). This research benefits both myself, the researcher, and Wellsprings, the organisation.

3.4 Research Methods:

I undertook qualitative primary research, through the use of interviews and a focus group. These methods align with the constructionist approach "Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). Emotions, experiences and feelings can be explored more in depth from the participant's perspective, which can generate contextually rich and subjective data. The young women who access the outreach service were the most important

group to interview in trying to answer my research questions as they are the group with the direct experience. I individually interviewed three women. These interviews were semistructured, meaning I had an interview guide (**Appendix D**) but I was flexible and allowed the participants to develop on their ideas through open-ended questions (Wengraf, 2001).

In addition to this, three long-term Wellsprings staff were interviewed in a focus group setting, using a question guide (**Appendix E**) to gain an alternative perspective on the research questions. "A focus group is generally understood to be a group of 6-12 participants, with an interviewer or moderator, asking questions about a particular topic" (Alasuutari, Bickman, & Brannen, 2008, p. 358). As this focus group only had 3 participants, this is taken into consideration as a limitation of the research. Focus groups are an effective method for qualitative research as it allows the researcher to collect a lot of data within a short period of time (Becker, Bryman, & Ferguson, 2012). They are also generative as they use group interaction to generate data that wouldn't be accessible with other research methods (Morgan, 1998). I did not feel it was appropriate to use a focus group to interview the women in the outreach service as, for confidentiality purposes, some of the women may not want others knowing about their experiences.

I felt that having 6 participants in total was a manageable number for the scope and time period I had to complete my research. I had to use Microsoft Teams to complete the interviews and focus group due to the restrictions and health and safety concerns caused by Covid-19 at the time of the research. I felt that having to complete the interviews and focus group on Microsoft Teams was a limitation of the study as I would have preferred to meet people face to face and be able to witness non-verbal communication cues (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2017). I audio recorded the interviews and focus group using a mobile recording device. I then used UCC approved transcription software to transcribe my audio. The collected data was then analysed using thematic analysis of the transcriptions of the interviews and focus group. Thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis

(Bryman, 2012). "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun, 2006, p. 79).

Each participant was given an information sheet (**Appendices A and B**) informing them about the purpose of the interview and what the data will be used for. I gave this information sheet to the manager of Wellsprings to be used for the recruitment of participants. I ensured all participants understood the nature of the study and what the data will be used for. Once the

participants agreed to proceed, I asked them to sign the consent form (**Appendix C**) that was sent to them, take a picture and send it back to me by email. I discussed this with the participants prior to starting the interview and ensured they understood and signed the consent form before beginning the interview and starting the audio recording. Once the interview was concluded, I ensured that the participants knew that they could withdraw from the research at any time in the subsequent two weeks, and if they did, the information they shared would not be included in this research.

I set time and space at the end of the interviews and focus group to debrief with the participants. I switched off the recording device as the debriefing process was not recorded. I checked with the participants how they felt the interview/focus group went, how they felt after it and did they have any concerns. I was aware that if they spoke about something that might have upset them, they may need further support. For the women, I advised they speak to an outreach worker in Wellsprings if there was anything that upset them.

3.5 Ethical Issues:

Ethical issues that were raised by this research project stem from the participants being service users of the outreach service. The women in the outreach service have been identified as more suitable to interview than women in the residential service, as they have experienced the residential and the transition to outreach and were able to give better insight into the support they receive. However, I was sensitive and aware that when speaking to these women about their experiences, they may have had difficult and upsetting experiences and therefore, speaking about this can bring up past emotions. This was addressed by carefully formulating the interview questions and being conscious not to ask too sensitive or overly personal questions. As this research had ethical concerns, I had to receive ethical approval from UCC (**Appendix F**) prior to engaging in primary research.

Ethical issues with interviewing staff members in a focus group were them maybe having biased opinions on the service as they are employees of Wellsprings. I thought about completing individual interviews with Wellsprings staff but I felt that the focus group may help generate greater group discussion (Morgan, 1998). One potential negative of the focus group was group members opinions being influenced by other group members, I needed to take this into account when holding the group.

Another ethical concern I had is that as the interview participants are being chosen by the Wellsprings manager, are they representative of the wider group of women who have accessed the outreach service? They may be people who have had positive experiences in Wellsprings as people who have had negative experiences may not still be engaged in the service and therefore not open to be interviewed about their experience. I was aware that as it is not a random sample but instead, a selected small sample of interview participants, that the outcomes of the research may not be fully representative of the wider group of women who have accessed the outreach service.

3.6 Conclusion:

This chapter outlines the research epistemology, which is constructionism, and the theoretical perspective, which is interpretivism, these underpin this research. This project is a qualitative primary research project that will use semi-structured interviews and a focus group as the research methods, this has been explained above. The ethical concerns regarding this research project have also been discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion – Women in Wellsprings Outreach Service

4.1 Introduction:

This chapter will outline and discuss the findings of the interviews with the women engaged in Wellsprings outreach service, whilst drawing on the previous literature in Chapter Two to help form an understanding of the findings. The collected data was thematically analysed and will be discussed under the core themes that came through:

1. **Experiences in The Residential Service**
2. **Transition out of the Residential Service**
3. **Emotional Support**
4. **Practical Support**

5. Relationships with Staff

The interview questions were guided to answer the key research questions. I found that many of the same themes came up in the interviews with the women and the focus group with Wellsprings staff. I will discuss the findings of the focus group in Chapter Five. Direct quotations from the three women have been used in the analysis to give a sense of their lived experiences of Wellsprings residential and outreach service.

4.2 Experiences in the Residential Service:

I felt it was important to understand the women's background and experiences in the residential service. All the women interviewed stayed in the residential service in the past for varying amounts of time. Woman A commented:

> *"It was good for the most part, they taught me how to do things like washing up, washing my clothes, cooking, all the basic skills I needed to live on my own"* (A).

Woman B recalled it saying:

> *"Oh my god, it was amazing because when I first started there I was so vulnerable and I was kind of down, and they were really good to me and really helped me get my life back on track. They offered me a lot of help and gave me advice on where to go"* (B).

Woman C had an interesting perspective on her stay in the residential service:

> *"I hated it when I was in there and then missed it when I left, not straight away. You kind of miss the small things that you take for granted but then you don't miss the things you hated in there"* (C).

Discussion:

All of the women had different types of experiences in Wellsprings residential service, ranging from extremely positive to hating it. Donohue (2015) states that "Like many forms of care, residential care has its positives and negatives" (p. 5). These findings are indicative of the wider population of young people's residential care experiences. Research shows that residential care can be a positive setting for many young people and enable their development, however many young people can struggle in the setting which can lead to negative outcomes, such as poor

rates of educational attainment, unemployment, poverty and homelessness (Emond, 2014; Kilkenny, 2012).

4.3 Transition out of the Residential Service:

Based on the first research question, I will now look at the transition out of the residential service and the ways the women are supported by discussing the findings of the interviews. The three women were asked 'How were you supported on your transition out of the residential service?'.

Woman B was supported on her transition out of the service through being housed in community based accommodation owned by Wellsprings, as mentioned in Chapter 2:

> *"I had a key worker at the time, I actually stayed in a house that they had, so they were still involved with me there as well, they would come and visit and see how I was getting on. They made sure I was still supported when I was at my most vulnerable",*
>
> *"It was nice to know that I wasn't going to be completely cut off when I left there because I still had their support and I could still go to outreach when I needed a chat, it was a life-saver"* (B).

Woman A explained:

> *"They stayed with me for my first few nights. They came over to me and had chats with me and stuff, they helped me with my chores"* (A).

And Woman C stated:

> *"Everyone kind of stayed in touch. My key worker would check up on me here and there"* (C).

I queried how the women were transitioned from the residential service to the outreach service. Woman A explained:

> *"I knew about the service before I left the residential. Before I left I was always in outreach anyway having food, hanging out. I was used to it before I left, just chilling out there"* (A).

Woman C also spoke about this:

> *"I think they kind of transition you when you're in there when you come into outreach so you're familiar with it"* (C).

Discussion:

It's clear from the findings that all three women were well supported on their transition out of the residential service. It is evident that staff used very effective methods of transitioning the women from one service to the other, it is a gradual process that begins when they are living in the residential. It is not an immediate change that occurs when they leave the residential service, this gives the women stability and consistency. Drawing on the literature, "consistency, continuity and stability in placement promote positive coping strategies" for care leavers (Hayes, 2013, p. 144).

It is essential that these women are supported on their transition out of the residential service as this can be a very tumultuous time in a young person's life. As explained in chapter 2, this period in a young person's life where they are going from childhood to adulthood is extremely challenging. This is made even more challenging for women in Wellsprings, of whom many may be disconnected from their own families for support (Wellsprings, 2022).

4.4 Emotional Support:

The first research objective was to describe the types of support that are offered by Wellsprings. I will now discuss how the women are supported through the outreach service. I have broken these findings into two sections, emotional support and practical support.

One theme that was emphasised through all the interviews is the impact of having someone there to speak to for support. Woman A said:

> *"I just come in for chats and stuff, I can chat about how I'm feeling and if I need any extra supports"* (A).

Woman B, who has been engaged in the outreach service for over 20 years, explained:

> *"Now I come once a week, I talk to my key worker on the phone. So yeah, there's always contact there"*,

"I know that I can pick up the phone and say 'I need your help, I don't know what to do', I know they will be there to give me advice or they'll say 'look come down here (outreach) straight away'. It's good to have that like" (B).

Woman C described the importance of the texts and phone contact she receives:

"I still get texts every night saying good night",

"The fact that you can text them if you're stuck and they're not going to ignore you. The amount of times I've text them when I'm having a mental breakdown and they'll be like come in for a cup of tea and it's nice to have something there because you might not have family or you might not have anyone so it's a nice support" (C).

Discussion:

The findings show how important it is to all three women to have that emotional support through the outreach service, they all feel they can call, text, or come into the outreach at any time to talk to someone, and they know they will feel listened to. As stated in the literature, many care leavers may not have strong relationships with their families, so the outreach staff can become their support network (Kilkenny, 2012). From reviewing the women's accounts of positive emotional support they have received, it could be said that the outreach service is an example of a 'therapeutic needs-based model of care', as it is built on safe, supportive and healing relationships between the women and staff (Kilkenny, 2012, p. 45).

4.5 Practical Support:

The outreach service provides a wide range of practical supports to the women engaged in the service, these supports are very varied and are depending on the needs of the individual. One aspect that came up throughout the interviews was providing the women with food. Woman C referring to a now retired staff member described how:

"She used to always be cooking dinners in outreach for us which is amazing" (C).

Woman A said one of the reasons she visits the outreach centre is:

"They make food for me during the week when I come over" (A).

In an article about the History of Wellsprings (2020), as told by Sister Joan, the founder of the service, she believed that the most important thing to do when the women visit the outreach centre is to feed them, she stated 'Feed first and discuss later'.

Another form of practical support the women described getting from the outreach service was being helped with 'chores' in their own accommodation. Woman A discussed this:

> *"They help me with my everyday challenges and tasks",*
>
> *"They come over and help me do my chores sometimes"* (A).

Woman C also spoke about how the residential service prepared her with skills for living alone:

> *"They teach you a lot about independence, so like when you're in the residential you're paying rent, at the end you get a percentage of that back so you're saving which is brilliant. They teach you how to pay your bills, like most people don't know any of that, especially for people that don't have family, they're not going to learn it from anyone else."* (C).

The women also spoke about how the staff help them with any appointments they may have, as mentioned by Woman A and B:

They help me with taking me to appointments" (A).
"She's been great in advising me and helping me with my appointment next week" (B).

Woman C spoke about getting support with her CV, forms and job applications in the outreach service:

> *"They'd support me with jobs, medical card forms, stuff that you wouldn't really know like. (Staff member) used to always send us reminders and stuff like this is going to be due now come in and we will renew it",*
>
> *"They helped me with job applications, things like they'd help me get my CV and they brought me down to somebody to sort out my CV. I wasn't sure what path I was going to go so they even got a job coach for me to sort that out",*
>
> *"They go that extra mile for people which is good"* (C).

Discussion:

The research findings show how the outreach offers a vast range of practical supports depending on the women's needs. In terms of education, studies show that care leavers can have low levels of educational attainment, which can "have a direct negative impact on their employment prospects" (Mullan, 2018, p. 74). Therefore, it is extremely positive that Wellsprings outreach service provide such intensive supports with helping women gain employment, through CV support, helping with job applications, and even getting job coaches for women.

Learning how to do household tasks is one of the key skills learnt in the residential service as previously mentioned by Woman A. However due to their vulnerability some of the women might find transitioning out of the service and living independently and having to do household tasks difficult, as is common in care leavers (Mullan, 2018). Support with tenancy sustainment is offered by the outreach service, this could be many things including help with everyday household tasks and chores as stated by Woman A, (Wellsprings, 2021).

4.6 Relationships with Staff:

The third research objective was to describe the importance of relationships between the women involved in the outreach service and the staff. This will be examined through the feedback I received from the participants during interviews. I will also discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 5 as part of the findings of the focus group with Wellsprings staff.

I asked what the women's relationships were with staff were like, Woman C commented:

> *"Better now, obviously everyone has their ups and downs. You can be very stressed and give out to them and they give out to you, that's just the way it is. It's not very strict, it's kind of like they're your aunt or extended family at this stage like"* (C).

Woman A responded with something similar:

> *"The relationships are grand, perfect to the point where we can actually slag each other off and no one would bat an eyelid"* (B).

Woman B agreed that the relationships felt like family relationships:

> *"They're like friends, like family really"* (B).

It is evident in the literature that children in care and care leavers can have high rates of mental health problems (Mooney, 2016). Majority of the women spoke about the importance of the outreach service support and having relationships with staff when they were struggling with their own mental health. Woman B commented:

> *"My key worker knows me better than I know myself, she knew when I hit rock bottom like. She knew by looking at me how I was feeling"*,
>
> *"When I lost my father and stuff, they were there for me like to get through it"* (B).

Woman B also spoke about how this support was essential for her during the Covid lockdowns:

> *"I knew if I was feeling really down or depressed, there was a couple of times, I knew I could phone and there would be a bit of support there from my key worker. Just to know that is really good"* (B).

Woman C also spoke about the importance of the service for her mental health during Covid times:

> *"You had to come in at time slots over Covid. You had to book a time whereas before you could just stroll in. I still did that a few times during Covid like if you had a mental breakdown and just strolled in and unless they really couldn't see you, they would always try meet you"* (C).

Discussion:

The women all seemed to have long-term relationships with their key workers in outreach, and they also spoke about how they still had contact with other staff members in the residential service. The long-term staff in Wellsprings struck me as in the Irish and international literature many aftercare and residential services have a high staff turnover, which can have negative impacts including the young people having feelings of neglect (Graham & Fulcher, 2017). The Kelleher, Kelleher and Corbett (2000) study on care leavers in Ireland found that "stability of staff and staff contact can mean a great deal to young people in care" (p.111). This can be seen in the women's relationships with staff in outreach, they are long-term and feel like family or friends. The women had the consistency and stability of these relationships in times of crisis, like when they were struggling with their mental health or during Covid. It is clear from these findings that having positive relationships with staff is significantly better for the women's outcomes.

4.7 Conclusion:

This chapter outlines the findings from the interviews with three women engaged in Wellsprings outreach service. It did this through the use of direct quotations to highlight the women's lived experiences. It discussed the findings under five core themes that were identified in the thematic analysis.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion – Wellsprings Staff

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter presents the findings of the focus group with three members of Wellsprings staff using direct quotations. All of the focus group participants were long-term Wellsprings staff, who worked predominantly in the residential service but still supported women in the outreach service. I found that many of the same themes came up in the interviews with women in the outreach service and the focus group, I will now discuss these themes from the staff perspective, while also discussing additional themes that came up. The themes are:

1. **Transition out of the Residential Service**
2. **Emotional Support**
3. **Practical Support**
4. **Relationships with Women in the Outreach Service**
5. **Staff and Service Provision**

I started off the focus group by asking what roles each participant had in Wellsprings. Participant A and C are social care leaders and Participant B is a manager.

5.2 Transition out of the Residential Service:

Each participant had significant knowledge on how the women are supported on their transition out of the residential service as they all worked predominantly in the residential service. I asked the question: 'How are the women living in Wellsprings supported whilst moving out of the residential service?', Participant C explained:

> *"I suppose the planning for that starts before they move in",*
>
> *"we're working with social workers, aftercare workers or foster carers, or whoever the placement is coming from, you try and plan and agree that with all parties before they come in where they're going to move onto and how can we prepare them for that"* (C).

Participant A agreed and described the process further:

> *"A lot of the time you have people who are leaving and transitioning out and they're hesitant about it and when they are here we would also get them to spend some time in outreach so they can start building that relationship up and the outreach staff work in here so that they are familiar with staff and then it almost naturally occurs"*,
>
> *"And as well we would organise that instead of having a movie night here we'll have movie nights over there (outreach) or they might go over for lunch , it's a lot of informal stuff"* (A).

Discussion:

It can be observed that the participants comments mirrored a lot of what the women said in the interviews regarding how they were transitioned out of the residential service and introduced to the outreach service. Drawing again on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, this stage in a young person's life, transitioning to adulthood can be very tumultuous (Maree, 2021). Kilkenny (2015) explains "it is a time when young people make important decisions about their lives including their future education, career and living arrangements" (p. i). Wellsprings have

enabled this transition to be as seamless as possible for the women in the service which gives them stability during these stages of development.

5.3 Emotional Support:

The staff spoke about the importance of being there for the women and providing that emotional support. Participant A discussed this:

> *"I'm just thinking of someone who came to the door earlier, I would see it as lifelong and I think it's more than just about the staff here",*
>
> *"The service is definitely a supportive one, and for a lot of the young women it's a fall back if they need it in times of crisis they will access the service"* (A).

Participant B talked about the impact Wellsprings has:

> *"Each young person that walks in the door has their own set of needs and their own abilities to form a connection or relationship. Some find it easier than others, depending on their profile and their experiences in life, but if you can achieve that connection it's very powerful",*
>
> *"And what our purpose and function is, is really around creating a safe homely space for them where they can make a connection",*
>
> *"If there are difficulties in their family like we really try to repair that or include their families in their lives as they're here (residential) for a certain length of time and yeah they make connections and they may very much stay on for support from the outreach but their family is their family"* (B).

Participant C repeated what the women said about the importance of having a chat:

> *"Even like a chat, like with certain young people every day they get a phone call"* (C).

The participants spoke about how they support the women in outreach through the 24/7 support. Participant C commented:

> *"Outreach is the 9 to 5 Monday to Friday but the service is 24/7, 7 days a week, so we would take responsibility after 5 o'clock then and Saturday and Sunday, and for the*

most part then we actually have relationships with these people already as a lot of them will have come through here (residential) so we'd be aware of them" (C).

Participant B also described this support:

"The crisis on call is 24/7 here (residential), like the outreach staff are there for the 10 hours. We support the outreach girls every night, there are girls that are rang every night of the week so staff here would be very involved" (B).

Discussion:

The focus group responses show the staff's commitment to providing emotional support for women in the service. There is constant support there through the 24/7 crisis on call which is available to all women in the service. Having this emotional support is vital for the women in the outreach service as in many cases they may not have this support through families, as stated in the literature (Mullan, 2018). In the absence of a family support network, the outreach service may act as that network for vulnerable young people. It must be noted that "not every young person is going to struggle leaving residential care and experience poor outcomes" (Kilkenny, 2012, p. 72). Many young people are extremely resilient, but it is good for care leavers to know that there is emotional support available to them, should they need it, as highlighted by the outreach support.

5.4 Practical Support:

The practical support offered by the outreach service is wide ranging. Participant B commented on what the outreach service provides:

"It's a very holistic service, it's depending on their needs but it's across health, mental health, GP health, hospital visits, anything like that, and their daily routine including education, shopping",

"Tenancy sustainment is huge as well and that's something we're trying to get more funding for because it's going into the young person's apartment and literally doing it with them or else they could be piled high with bags of rubbish, so the outreach staff would do a lot of hands on work",

"Form filling, there's loads" (B).

Participant C also spoke about this support:

> *"Maintaining their accommodation, it takes a huge amount of work depending on the person and their needs. It could be a very simple thing that takes a couple of hours intervention every day for someone to maintain keeping an apartment and not be evicted. It could be helping the person keep the place reasonable, helping to do the laundry.."* (C).

Participant A explained how the service caters to each individual:

> *"It could be around housing, it could be education, relationships, finding employment. But it's very much from what they are looking for as opposed to us driving it"* (A).

Discussion:

The findings show that the practical support offered by the outreach service is extensive, it is difficult to list exactly what the service offers as it is dependent on each individual's needs and situation. One of Wellsprings core objectives is homelessness prevention, and this can be seen in the work of the outreach service (Wellsprings, 2021). All of the participants spoke about tenancy sustainment as a huge support offered by the outreach service, this included many things. This support could prevent these women getting evicted from their accommodation. I found this particularly striking as Mullan (2018) found that research in Ireland shows that a "background of state care is still a key predictor of youth homelessness" (p. 22).

5.5 Relationships with the Women in the Outreach Service:

I wanted to understand the nature of the relationships between staff and the women in the service from the staff perspective as well as the women. Participant C described their relationships:

> *"There's depth, it's familiar, they're long lasting, lIt's a continuum, like it's aftercare, they're going from being a teenager to into their twenties"* (C).

Participant B explained how they try to maintain relationships with all the women who come through the service:

> *"I mean technically the onus is on the young person to make a connection, but if someone left here (residential) and we thought they are really vulnerable and they try to cut themselves off, we do try and pursue. If somebody doesn't want to that's fine but we will give it every shot*" (B).

Participant A spoke about how they check in with women in the outreach service:

> *"There's a check in every so often, they can always come back to the service and ask to be put back on the client list. There's probably women in outreach in their 40's, maybe heading for their 50's, and another recurring theme is we're working with their children now"* (A).

Unsurprisingly, the staff also brought up how essential the outreach support and relationships were during Covid. Participant B commented:

> *"It's knowing they can always ring back because the people in Wellsprings know my story and they know me, so I mightn't be able to talk to anybody else about what's happened to me but I can ring back and it will be ok and I won't be judged. And that came out a lot during Covid, girls that we haven't heard from for years we had ringing up and it affecting their mental health"* (B).

Discussion:

As previously stated in chapter 4, positive and consistent relationships between staff and care leavers leads to better outcomes for young people (Donohue, 2015). The consistency of the relationships between Wellsprings staff and the women in the service is evident through what the participants have said. The women feel they can come back to the service at any stage as that relationship still exists. This was particularly apparent during Covid when women who hadn't engaged in the service in years were ringing back looking for support as they were struggling. The service is open-ended and anyone coming back to the service is welcomed back with open arms and no judgement. This really signifies how the outreach support is life-long.

5.6 Staff and Service Provision:

The focus group participants were all long-term staff, participant A was in Wellsprings nearly 20 years, B was nearly 19 years and C was nearly 16 years. It was important to understand what sustained them as a member of staff in continuing to deliver their service for a long period of time. Participant A answered:

> *"I think the support and the supervision and the accessibility of the management team throughout the years really, I think good management has really held on to core staff",*
>
> *"I think you can feck up here and it be ok and, particularly for new staff coming in, that's a new experience. I think people are very much guided"* (A).

Participant B agreed with A:

> *"For me it's really what you (A) said, the staff and being happy to come in here and do what you can to support the young people because it feels like everyone is in it together. It's very supportive, it's always been like that and I always felt really fortunate to work here"* (B).

I also asked the group 'Is there anything that undermines your capacity to deliver the service? to which Participant C answered:

> *"It's always resources, resources is everything. Like you could put a huge amount of resources into one person, so it's about coming back and saying what are the resources we have and how much can we do and how many young people are here",*
>
> *"In relation to outreach, they're extremely busy, they have been for a long time because as the service has developed and evolved and it's more targeted and effective, but it takes resources and energy and it takes patience and dedication. Resources is everything, like resources is obviously staff, it's financial and it's physical"* (C).

I asked what the future of the service looked like and were there any changes that could be made, in their opinion. Participant B commented:

> *"Becoming more visible because the wider community don't know the intensity of the work so we are trying to raise the profile of the work",*

"There are developments happening in outreach, we are putting an outreach coordinator in place so I think the structure will become better there as well and more supportive, and the roles for the staff will become more clearly defined"

"To become a bit more specific on what we can offer because you risk burnout really" (B).

Discussion:

In contrast to the staff's experience in Wellsprings, many residential services in Ireland experience high staff turnover, mainly due to burnout (Donohue, 2015). Therefore I felt it was important to understand what has allowed them to continue to deliver this intensive service for so many years. The findings report that the staff in Wellsprings receive excellent support and supervision in the workplace. In a report by Donohue (2015) which looked at residential care workers views it found that "to improve turnover rates, staff in residential care need to feel more supported by higher professionals. Staff need to be listened to and have their views taken into account" (p. 44), it is clear from the participants' comments that this is the case in Wellsprings.

5.7 Conclusion:

This chapter outlines the findings from the focus group with three members of Wellsprings staff, through the use of direct quotations. It discussed the findings under five core themes that were identified in the thematic analysis, four of the themes were also discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction:

This final chapter will give an overall conclusion of the research findings based on the research aims, objectives and key questions. I will make a number of recommendations based on the findings of the literature review and the thematic analysis of the interviews and focus group. The chapter will conclude with a reflection on the process of undertaking this CARL project with UCC and Wellsprings.

6.2 Concluding Comments:

To refer back to the title of the research 'How are the women given continued support after leaving the residential service? it is fair to say that through the literature review and primary research, I now have a significant understanding on how the women in the service are continued to be supported through Wellsprings outreach service. They are supported on their transition out of the residential service, it is a seamless transition that caters to each individual's needs. The women are supported emotionally and practically through the outreach service and it is very much based on their relationships with staff.

Chapters 5 and 6 give a comprehensive review on the types of support offered by the service, and why this support is vital for the women. I felt it was important to understand the research through both the staff and women's perspectives, as although many of the themes that came through were similar, both perspectives identified different key messages to take away. The main objectives of this research were; to describe the types of support offered by Wellsprings, to identify how the women are supported on their transition out of the residential service through the outreach, and to describe the relationships between the women in the service and staff. I feel that through the thematic analysis of the interviews and focus group, these objectives have been distinctively addressed.

Through the overall findings, the following conclusions have been drawn under the three core research questions:

Q.1. How are the women in Wellsprings supported on their transition out of the residential service?

It is evident through the responses that Wellsprings has had, and continues to have, a profound impact on the women in the service, through both the residential and outreach. The women's descriptions of their lived experiences of both services were overall extremely positive. All of the women had different experiences in the service and looked for support for alternative reasons. However, they each had commonalities, including skills they learnt through Wellsprings, advice they were given and support they received. They all spoke about how they were supported on their transition out of the residential service, and how this was vital for them. The two services are seamlessly integrated, the women are introduced to the outreach whilst living in the residential so they become familiar with the service and staff. It is not an abrupt

transition for the women. It is vital for them that they don't feel like their support is being cut off when leaving residential care, as this is the case for many young people in aftercare in Ireland when they reach the age of 21 or 23 as shown by the literature.

Q.2. What are the types of support offered by Wellsprings outreach service?

The findings show that the women's most important needs from the service are extremely varied. For many of the women it is about having emotional support there at all times, whereas for other women the practical supports are the most vital. The practical supports offered by Wellsprings include, but are not limited to, help with tenancy sustainment, form filling, CV and job skills, accompaniment to appointments, and getting food from the service. Although I did not set out to explicitly ask about the impact of Covid on the service, it was a factor that was difficult to ignore having just been through two years of restrictions and having to complete the research online. All of the women described how essential the outreach support was to them during Covid in times they felt lonely or vulnerable, they knew they could receive emotional support through consistent telephone contact.

3. What are the most effective ways for staff in Wellsprings outreach service to support the young women?

The findings show that the most effective ways for staff to support the women in the outreach service is through maintaining relationships with the women. All of the women spoke about having long-term relationships with key workers that were almost family-like, they were trusting and real relationships and the women knew they could depend on their key worker and come to them in times of crisis. This mirrored what the staff said in the focus group. The relationships the staff have made are life-long, they are honest with the women and care for them which can be seen through their responses. Staff in aftercare services need to be supported in their work in order to prevent burnout. All of the staff were long-term and praised the supervision and management they receive in Wellsprings. The staff also noted that there is a need for extra resources to improve the service going forward. They are also in the process of trying to become more specific on what they offer, and see where they can work with other services, to prevent staff burnout as they are currently providing an all-round care service depending on the needs of the women, which can be time-consuming and taxing for staff.

6.3 Recommendations:

From analysing the primary research findings and reviewing the relevant literature, I will be making the following recommendations, these recommendations are for Wellsprings and also wider aftercare service provision in Ireland in general:

- As noted by Wellsprings staff, Wellsprings require additional funding and resources to keep improving the service, and staff retention. The additional funding could create extra staff positions in the service, allowing the staff to have more time and resources for everyone they work with.
- It is recommended that Wellsprings work more in collaboration with other relevant services, such as health and mental health services, housing services and other community supports, to provide a circle network of care for the women in their service. This will also benefit Wellsprings by decreasing the amount of work held by one service.
- Care leavers are a vulnerable group, they may require further support after they transition out of the aftercare service. Wellsprings outreach service is a unique and bespoke service, not all residential aftercare services in Ireland offer the same level of support. It is recommended that the State should support all care leavers by providing lifelong outreach services similar to Wellsprings outreach.
- Based on the literature and need for Wellsprings outreach service, it is evident that young people in Ireland are not fully dependent by the age of 21 or 23, when aftercare services are cut off. It is recommended that aftercare supports should be available to young people up until the age of 25 at least.
- As this research project was a minor dissertation, it was only able to focus on one aspect of Wellsprings within the research, this was the outreach service. However, through completing this research it is evident that there are many aspects of the service that could be further researched. For example, it could be looking solely at the residential service and how, for many women, this may be one of the first places they have felt safe. As there has been no previous research on Wellsprings prior to this project, there

are many other research questions that could be asked based on the service and its impact.

6.4 Reflection:

I will now use the Seidel model of reflection (Seidel & Blythe, 1996) to reflect on my experience of completing this dissertation, this "involves the learner in looking backward, looking inward, looking outward and looking forward" (Dempsey, Halton, & Murphy, 2001, p. 633).

Looking Back

Since completing primary research during my undergraduate degree and thoroughly enjoying it, I knew this is something I wanted to engage in again if I was given the opportunity. On

hearing about the CARL projects and how you can make an actual impact with your research this is something that really caught my attention as it would allow me to do further primary research whilst also working with an organisation and helping them. The Wellsprings research interested me the most as it is an area I had some knowledge in after doing a placement with Tusla. I also felt that I could relate to the women in the service being of around the same age.

On reflection I would have started my completing my research earlier as it has been difficult trying to balance dissertation work along with other assignments in the past four months.

Looking In

The process of starting the research began with trying to come up with the research title and questions. There was so much scope for areas that could be researched. We agreed on focusing on the outreach service and I was amazed to hear the level of undocumented work that they do day to day. I was given the opportunity to visit Wellsprings last summer and this helped me really get a sense of the organisation, it was bright, homely, and everyone I met was extremely friendly, especially Ben the dog!

Looking Out

Completing the interviews with the women was really enjoyable and thought-provoking, I was extremely grateful with each of them for allowing me to hear about their personal experiences. I was slightly intimidated before holding the focus group as it was something I had no previous experience in, however I was welcomed by all staff who each gave such great insight of the service from their years of knowledge and experience. I would like the opportunity to hold a group again in the future as it was a very engaging experience. I liked observing how the questions generated conversation between the staff members. I have learnt that research can inform all social work practice. If I identify an issue in my future practice, research can be used to shed light on issues or disadvantaged groups.

The research questions were one of the most difficult aspects of the research to finalise. I kept finding myself asking new and different questions and not answering the original ones we had. Therefore going forward I feel it is essential to set the research questions early on and stick to these to research them in-depth.

If I was to design my research differently I would get more research participants, as the sample was so small it cannot be representative of all the women who have used Wellsprings services.

Looking Forward

Overall, completing this dissertation has been a long and difficult process, yet it has also been thought-provoking and exciting to see this piece of work come to life! I felt it was key that I was interested in the research topic and therefore never became bored about what I was doing. It has taught me valuables social research skills. I was also able to develop my social work skills including interviewing and group work.

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Appendix A

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Information Sheet – Women in Outreach

Thank you for considering participating in this research project. The purpose of this document is to explain to you what the work is about and what your participation would involve, to enable you to make an informed choice.

The purpose of this study is to examine the type of support provided by Wellspring's outreach service for the young women who move on from the residential service. I hope to do this by getting insight from both women in the service, and Wellspring's staff. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview with a student researcher. This interview will be audio recorded and is expected to take 20-30 minutes to complete.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so, you can refuse to answer specific questions, or decide to withdraw from the interview. Once the interview has been concluded, you can choose to withdraw at any time in the subsequent two weeks.

All of the information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous, and will be available only to the researcher, Isabel Morrissey and my supervisor, Pearl Doyle. Once the interview is completed, the recording will immediately be transferred to a safe UCC data storage platform and wiped from the recording device. The interview will then be transcribed by the researcher, and all identifying information will be removed. Once this is done, the recording will also be deleted and only the anonymized transcript will remain. This will be stored on Microsoft OneDrive under my UCC log in details on an encrypted laptop. The data will be stored for 13 months.

The information you provide may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations. It will also be used as part of the research report that I am required to complete as part of my studies on the Masters of Social Work in UCC.

We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from participating in this study. We do not intend to cause any distress to participants. If some of the topics broached in the interview are of a sensitive and personal nature, you can choose to not answer the questions or bring the interview to an end at any time. At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. Should you experience distress arising from the interview, it may be helpful to speak with an outreach worker in Wellsprings about how you are feeling. The contact details for support services provided below may be of assistance.

Visit the HSE website: https://www2.hse.ie/services/mental-health/services-search/ to find supports and services or call 1800 111 888 for more information.

This study has obtained ethical approval from the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any queries about this research, my contact details are stated below, also with contact details for my research supervisor:

Isabel Morrissey:
117436544@umail.ucc.ie

Pearl Doyle (supervisor):
pearl.doyle@ucc.ie

If you agree to take part in this study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Appendix B

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Information Sheet - Staff

Thank you for considering participating in this research project. The purpose of this document is to explain to you what the work is about and what your participation would involve, to enable you to make an informed choice.

The purpose of this study is to examine the type of support provided by Wellspring's outreach service for the young women who move on from the residential service. I hope to do this by getting insight from both women in the service, and Wellspring's staff. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in a focus group with a student researcher. This focus group will be audio recorded and is expected to take 30-40 minutes to complete.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so, you can refuse to answer specific questions, or decide to withdraw from the interview. Once the focus group has been concluded, you can choose to withdraw at any time in the subsequent two weeks.

All of the information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous, and will be available only to the researcher, Isabel Morrissey and research supervisor, Pearl Doyle. Once the focus group is completed, the recording will immediately be transferred to a safe UCC data storage platform and wiped from the recording device. The focus group will then be transcribed by the researcher, and all identifying information will be removed. Once this is done, the recording will also be deleted and only the anonymized transcript will remain. This will be stored on Microsoft OneDrive under my UCC log in details on an encrypted laptop. The data will be stored for 13 months.

The information you provide may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations. It will also be used as part of the research report that I am required to complete as part of my studies on the Masters of Social Work in UCC.

We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from participating in this study. We do not intend to cause any distress to participants. If some of the topics broached in the interview are of a sensitive and personal nature, you can choose to not answer the questions or bring the interview to an end at any time. At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. Should you experience distress arising from the interview, the contact details for support services provided below may be of assistance.

Visit the HSE website: https://www2.hse.ie/services/mental-health/services-search/ to find supports and services or call 1800 111 888 for more information.

This study has obtained ethical approval from the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any queries about this research, my contact details are stated below, also with contact details for my research supervisor:

Isabel Morrissey:
117436544@umail.ucc.ie

Pearl Doyle (supervisor):

pearl.doyle@ucc.ie

If you agree to take part in this study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Appendix C

Consent Form

I……agree to participate in Isabel Morrissey's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Isabel to be audio-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview (e.g. my name / location won't be used) may be quoted in presentations and publications (e.g. article, book chapter, student thesis, social media publicity of the study's findings, etc.), if I give permission below (please tick one box):

I agree to participate in this study ☐

I do not agree to participate in this study ☐

Signed: …… Date: ……..

PRINT NAME: ……

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Interviews with Women engaged with the Outreach Service:

1. Did you stay in Wellsprings residential service in the past? If so, would you briefly describe your experience whilst living in Wellsprings?
2. What age did you leave the residential service at?
3. How were you supported on your transition out of the service?
4. When did you look for support from Wellsprings outreach service after leaving the residential service? Why was this?
5. How long have you been involved with the outreach service?
6. How often are you in contact with the outreach service?
7. What would you say are the most important aspects of the outreach service?
8. Have you received support from the outreach service? Could you give an example of 2 things Wellsprings has helped you with?
9. Do you get on with staff in the outreach service?
10. Do you/have you visit/visited the outreach centre, and if so for what reason(s)?
11. Are you still involved with the service? If no, why not?
12. What is the most important thing you got from Wellsprings?
13. Are there any changes that could be made to outreach service, in your opinion?

Appendix E

Focus Group Interview Guide

Focus Group Questions for Wellsprings Staff:

1. Can you briefly describe your role in Wellsprings? Do you work with Wellsprings outreach service or residential service?
2. How long have you worked with Wellsprings?
3. What kind of impact does the work you do have for the young women you work with? Can you give an example of this?
4. How are women supported in the outreach service?
5. Are young women living in Wellsprings supported whilst moving out of the residential service?
6. How are the young women introduced to the outreach service?
7. What are some of the most common challenges that women in the outreach service face?
8. What ages are the young women who access the outreach service? Is there a cut-off point for the support offered by the outreach service, e.g. up to a certain age..
9. What words would you use to describe the relationship you have with women accessing the outreach service?
10. How have these relationships been built?
11. What would you say are the most important aspects of the outreach service?
12. For the women who do visit the outreach service, what services are available to them?
13. What sustains you as a member of Wellsprings staff in continuing to deliver this service?
14. Is there anything that undermines your capacity to deliver the service?
15. In your opinion what does the future of the outreach service look like? Are there any changes that could be made to the service?

Appendix F

Proof of Ethical Approval:

MSW Research Ethics Committee

School of Applied Social Studies

Applicant:

Isabel Morrissey, MSW2, 2021/2022

Committee Date:

26th January 2022

Tutor(s):

Pearl Doyle

Reference:

2021-9

Dear Isabel

Thank you for your resubmission to the MSW research ethics committee.

The committee has granted approval for your study. You do not need to reply to this letter.

We wish you the best of luck with your study. If you have questions, please contact your MSW tutor.

Best wishes,

Dr Kenneth Burns

On behalf of the MSW Research Ethics Committee