



TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH AH, A FORMER CHILD IN CARE

- INTERVIEWER** Do you want to just start by giving us an overview of when – your life and when you first came into care.
- AH** Ah, well, I was first put into care when I was 11 months old. Was back and forth from my family growing up. But, from 2009, were placed into the custody of the government and weren't allowed to get out until we hit the age of 18. My first memory of welfare was going to this lady's house I would get in her van and drive to her brother's house and when we'd get there, we'd get dinner on the way because she – there was never any food in the fridges whenever we went to her brother's house. She'd be always like takeaway. It was always takeaway - breakfast, lunch, dinner - and so as soon as we'd get to her brother's house she'd take us downstairs to the basement/granny flat thing and lock us inside. Just put me and my sister straight into the room and lock us in and we went to sleep. We were only there for a night because the next morning I – the little granny flat/basement thing that we were in it was full of spiders and cockroaches and I had a big phobia of those so I couldn't stand it. So I went to school the next morning. I was asking my carer how am I getting to school, you know, Well, you're not going to school. Why not, you know, I'm 13 years old, I'm meant to be going to school, you know. Well, she had no way to get me to school because she had all these kids to look after. I begged them to take me to school. I started crying to them and everything because I just didn't want to be there and my little sister was crying to me because she had no way to go to school and this woman just said, yeah, you can get in the car and had to go. I had to leave my little sister behind but I spent the rest of the day organising for my little sister to get kidnapped from this carer's place because I was going to run away because I didn't want to be there. And I didn't – I didn't know that we could go to welfare and tell them that something is going on. They never told us that if there's anything wrong with your carers or anything, you know, it was take us to this woman's house. We were told to sit in the room while the adults talked and I peeped through the door and had a look what they're doing and all they would do is sign papers, talk for maybe not even 10 minutes and then not even say goodbye. They would just leave, you know.
- INTERVIEWER** Did anyone explain to you why you were taken into care in the first place, do you remember that?
- AH** No one explained to us. We asked a lot. A lot. And we were told that we don't know what's going on.
- INTERVIEWER** How many placements do you think you've had?
- AH** I'd say well over 40. Well over 50.
- INTERVIEWER** And can you talk to me about the different types of placements?
- AH** I've had foster carers. That's where you go to a house and it's a family so you live with a family and I don't know.
- INTERVIEWER** What about residential care?
- AH** Yeah residential care...and that's like living in a share house you know. You walk in and you are sharing with all these other young kids that live in there as well but you've also got two workers that are on and they change shifts so you know two will be there at 8 o'clock until two from 8-2 and then at 2 o'clock you will have the other two new staff members that come on. You see in residential care houses you would have the two carers, those two carers that are on that morning. You know there are certain rules you know and so you can ask them at 3 o'clock can I use the car to go out to go to the movies or go see my friends and like that you



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know. Even just to go to the library and those carers would be like yep, yep we will write a note in the book you know so then when the next people come on they can see that blah blah blah when the next people come on they would say no. There were different rules for different carers. It wasn't like there was different rules it's just that the carers were assholes and did whatever they wanted you know they played by their rules and how they wanted you know.

INTERVIEWER And what were the actual facilities like in those residential care houses – what were the houses like?

AH Some of the residential care houses were nice but one of the residential care houses wasn't very nice. It looked like a mental hospital to be honest yeah it actually was a mental hospital to be honest so that was horrible locked in. You couldn't even go to the toilet without asking. You couldn't even open your own door without asking the carers. Some of the residential care houses were placed real remote way out past Humpty Doo and you were told that you couldn't get into Casuarina, not unless you walked or found your own way. I don't know why but yeah.

INTERVIEWER And did you feel like what did DCF do to help you find, help you get stability in your life?

AH To be honest even I sit down and I think like even my schooling, I, you know my behaviour and the way I acted was a real big cry out for help you know and the only, it was my mother, my mate's mother that ended up helping me. No one within the Department. But I remember arriving at school all the time and for a point not going to school at all and welfare did nothing about it. You know not even the...I don't know what the officers at school are, but you know the people that are, that go to your house if you're not attending school? Well I know there's people like that if you are living at home with your parents if you're not going to school your parents would get in trouble. So how come if someone in welfare isn't going to school how come they don't get in trouble? Because I haven't been to school for 4 years and I feel let down, I feel really let down. Like yeah I understand that I was misbehaving at school and everything but not really. I only misbehaved when, I don't know. As I said everything I did I think about it and I was taken from my family. and I knew that I don't know there was no discipline, there was no just nothing. No-one actually cares about you emotionally. You're a case file, you're just a number. I felt like I wasn't a person in welfare. There's no way to really put it to be honest because, I don't know, they've got these rules and these you know legislations and everything but they've only got to live by it when they're working, we've got to live by their rules until we leave care or leave the house we're at. I don't know. I remember being told continuous by many different carers that they don't get paid enough to look after you and stuff like that and I'm like well shouldn't you be doing this job because you want to help us kids you know?

INTERVIEWER And you changed placements so many times. What kind of warning did you get or how often were you told about the reasons why you needed to move placements?

AH Oh never. Never told. If I was going to school and if I was at school and I'd come back from school or if I was out somewhere and I'd come home, my stuff would already be packed and I'd just be like oh am I moving? And they're like yep. Such and such is on their way to come and pick you up you know, just hang tight. Or the other times I would go to the house and I'm told that I can't stay there anymore and I'm like, 'Alright, where's all my stuff?' And then I call up welfare and they tell me.

INTERVIEWER What about your case managers at DCF? Can you tell us a bit about them and



what they did for you? Did you, how many case workers did you think you had?

AH

I've had more than 12. More than 12 case managers, family support workers. And honestly they did nothing. I got scabies one time from my old carer's house. She never.. when I moved into their house I was sleeping in there for 2 weeks. And you know, I didn't think. I was always back and forth from their house you know so I only just slept in that bed. I wasn't really there during the day, you know, so I didn't really care about making the bed or anything and I actually thought that the carer would do that. And it turns out when I, the girl, when these things started popping up on my skin, the girl was telling me, you know that the carer hasn't washed those sheets since the girl that lived here before you moved out. And it turned out that girl had scabies and due to that I started getting them. And I showed my case managers and my family support workers and they just said it was pimples and not to worry about it. So I'm like yeah whatever then. Alright. But then it started getting everywhere, all over my body. Because it just started in my fingers but then it started going everywhere. My whole body was getting so irritated. And so I ended up going to my mates' house and asking her mother. You know, I was like, you know, welfare says it pimples but I don't think it is you know. And she's like, nah that's scabies. We've got to take you to the doctors and then get some cream.

INTERVIEWER

So did you feel like they didn't look after your medical needs?

AH

They didn't look after anything. I didn't go to the dentist for...I've only been to the dentist when I was put on welfare once and that's the whole, that's a whole 6 years I've been in care I've been to the dentist once. I gave my family support worker a \$1,000 voucher that I was given from Medicare because I was like 14 at the time, I had no idea how to do any of that stuff you know and I was on welfare and I thought well you know, they'll sort it. So I gave them the cheque and nothing ever happened with it.

INTERVIEWER

What about your, when it came time for you to leave care were you involved in making a leaving care plan?

AH

Yes, yes before I left care and everything I ended up falling pregnant and I actually had a good case manager at the time and she was actually a warm case manager. She was the best one I had. She was awesome and she wanted me to organise my payment and everything I got involved with the Foundation and they were telling me everything I was entitled to.

Yeah so they were telling me everything I was entitled to and everything I can put in my leaving care plan. So I organised a leaving care plan just so when I turn 18 and everything I would be alright.

INTERVIEWER

What about your care plans when you were younger in care? Were you ever involved in developing those?

AH

No, no I had no idea about my care plan or anything for that matter.

I was never involved with any case plans to be honest when I was younger. I was aware that apparently some of the... Whenever I asked about it, you know, they said that they've already had one and then I'd be like "*Well how come I wasn't involved in it?*" And they're like "*Oh well, we couldn't contact you or reach you.*" And I was like "*Bull crap. I never received any calls from you guys blah blah blah.*" Yeah that's basically it to be honest. They're just full of crap, just lying, they never called me to try and involve me in any of them. They just, they just do whatever they think is best for you. Whatever they think. Not asking you what you



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think or trying to talk to you to narrow it down or anything like that.

INTERVIEWER And what did they do to help maintain contact with your family, with your parents and your siblings?

AH Well we weren't allowed contact with our parents or siblings unless it was an access or anything like that. We had access once every two weeks and then once they got more people or whatever we had access with Mum one week and access with Dad the following week. But I don't know...Some of the case managers, I remember having one case manager for our accesses she had no idea what she was doing to be honest. She didn't know if she had to pick up the kids for the access, she didn't know if my carers were the ones that had to go pick up all the kids and take them to the access. She asked my carer if she could do that and my carer was like "*No, that's your job. I will drop her off at the access but you've got to go pick up all the other kids.*" And she was like "*oh well then access isn't on today because I don't know what I'm doing*". Alright then.

INTERVIEWER Were you often in the same placement as your siblings?

AH No, no you don't have many carers that are willing to take on siblings.

When we was very first placed into care in 2009 they tried putting us together. They tried, they put two of my sisters together, me and my little sister together, then my two younger sisters and brother they were together. But over time we all ended up being in separate places.

INTERVIEWER Did you ever self-place while you were in care?

AH Yeah, I self-placed at my mate's mum's house.

INTERVIEWER Why did you do that?

AH Mostly because, like, that was my mate's, that was my mate's house and I just wanted to be with my mate and her mum. Actually, well, as I said, her mother helped me cure my scabies and whatnot. She bought me clothes, she bought me food. I felt welcomed at her house and like yeah, I self-placed because she was actually, she was like another mother figure to me to be honest. If I was doing something wrong she wasn't fake or acted like she um...She cared, you know. Like if I mucked up she'd get up me, you know. If I mucked up at a carer's house or something, you see, because when you ran you get put into a placement, you know how I said Welfare stands with the person with these pieces of paper you know. So that piece of paper it's probably like five or six pages long and it's columned and its basic information about that child. So you've got information about why they're in care, how long they're going to be in care for, what their behaviour's like, what accounts of abuse have they been put through. So basically everything personal about my life, all these strangers find out within that 10-15 minutes, and that's when they truly decide if they really want to take you on or not. Because when they read that bit of information they judge you by that and it's not nice.

INTERVIEWER And is that what would make you want to leave and go to your friend's mum's house?

AH Yeah that would make me wanna leave because they think that, they're scared, you know? Because in the behavioural column bit, I must have, I never got to read, we're not allowed to read it, only they are, so gawd knows what's in that column. But for my behaviour, I don't know, something must have been in there that intimidated the carers because if I ever did anything wrong they were too scared to get me up and they never did.

INTERVIEWER Do you think that's why some of the placements broke down?



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Yeah. Well, no not really, because I never just mucked up, you know, if I liked the place I, you see like you treat me with respect I'll treat you with respect, you know, it goes both ways. I only mucked up when I was being treated unfairly, you know?

INTERVIEWER Mmm. And when you'd self-place how long would you do that for?

AH For, well for as long as I, for as long as I wanted to be honest. I self-placed for six months once and I had Welfare coming into my mate's house trying to tell, trying to bribe me to go back to um, to go to a placement. It was like "*Oh I'll buy, I'll buy you clothes, we'll do some food shopping you know blah blah blah*". I was like "*No it's alright. I don't wanna go back to your stupid residential care houses*". You see because like it's unfair in those houses. They wanted to take your phone off you..

INTERVIEWER Do you want to tell me a bit about how many schools you attended while you were in care?

AH So two, so there's only two schools you didn't attend?

INTERVIEWER Well they're the schools I haven't attended. So every other school I've been to.

INTERVIEWER And why did you attend so many schools? What was the problem with school?

AH Because every time you moved placement, every time you moved placement you've got to move schools. I don't know. The carer could be too lazy to drive you to that school, you know. It might be too far for them even though they get paid for us, you know, they can put fuel in their stupid car. That would literally be the only reason; because the carers are too lazy to take you out there.

INTERVIEWER Did you go to Court for any of your care orders or any child protection matters?

AH No. We were, um, to be honest, we were meant to be seeing... Like when we first got put into welfare I remember them telling us that we have a solicitor or a lawyer of some sort. And if, she was meant to be speaking to us, you know, because whenever there was a Court hearing to see how us kids were going in welfare she was the lady telling them what we wanted, if we wanted to go home and stuff. But you know what? I never met that lady once, I never met her. Whatever she was saying in Court to do with my rights about what we wanted, that was just her. She never spoke to any of us. I never met that lady once. I don't know who my lawyer was, solicitor, whoever the hell she is. We got nothing and...

INTERVIEWER Did you ever go to Court?

AH No, never went to Court, nothing.

INTERVIEWER And so did anyone ever explain to you what type of order you were under?

AH No, no. All we were told is that "*Your mum and dad are incapable of looking after you*" so we are in the care of the Government until they learn how to become better parents.



Every time we asked them what was going on and why we were in welfare, that was our answer because... yeah. As I got older and I learnt a bit more about my parents and their mental health and stuff like that, I could kind of guess the reasons to why we were put in welfare. But at the end of the day the reasons why we were put in welfare is, I figured it out.. I still don't know to this day legally why we were put in care, you know?