



When you wish upon a Starlight...

Evaluation of Starlight's WISHGRANTING PROGRAM

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100% of families would recommend Starlight's Wishgranting program

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BACKGROUND

Wishgranting was established as Starlight's first program in 1988. Since then Starlight has granted over 9000 unique Wishes to seriously ill children and young people across Australia. The Starlight Wishgranting program remains committed to improving the psychosocial well-being of Wish recipients through engagement in choosing, receiving and reflecting on their Starlight Wish experience.

Children and young people are typically referred to the program by health professionals. Eligibility is based on the impact of the condition on the child or young person, rather than a specific health condition. Starlight Wish recipients are typically aged between 4 and 21 years when their Wish is granted.

Every Starlight Wish is tailored to the needs of the child or young person and aims to be inclusive of the Wish recipients' family. Wishes often include a holiday, an experience (e.g. zoo keeper for the day, swimming with dolphins), meeting a celebrity, or special items (e.g. laptop, cubby house or spa).



AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- Obtain comprehensive feedback directly from Starlight Wish recipients.
- Review Starlight Wishgranting processes and outcomes and to address any issues that may have arisen.
- Identify the program's strengths and weaknesses.
- Improve Starlight's understanding of the impact of Wishgranting.

WHAT WAS INVOLVED?

- Starlight commenced formally evaluating the Wishgranting program in 2010.
- Telephone interviews were conducted by Starlight's Research and Evaluation team who are independent of the Starlight Wishgranting program.
- Families were contacted six weeks after their Wish experience during 2010 and 2011.
- Due to the consistency of responses from 2012, every fourth Wish family has been invited to participate in the evaluation.



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Average Starlight Wish recipient and family satisfaction rating is 9.8 out of 10

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Participating families were asked to provide ratings, as well as open comments to a series of questions addressing:

- Quality of service received from Starlight.
- Process in choosing their Starlight Wish.
- Wish experience, including the impact of the Starlight Wish on the Wish recipient and their family.
- Recommendations for improving the program.

Who received a Starlight Wish?

- Mean age of a Starlight Wish recipient was 13 years (from 1 to 21 years)
- 55% were male and 45% female

The most common conditions of Starlight Wish recipients:

- 26% diseases of the nervous system e.g. cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy
- 24% cancer
- 15% congenital disorder e.g. spina bifida, cystic fibrosis

Most Popular Starlight Wishes:

- 38% wished to travel e.g. Gold Coast
- 33% wished for a special item
- 16% wished for an experience
- 13% wished to meet a celebrity

Starlight team members assisted families in the following ways:

- Assistance with Wish choice
- Planning and organisation
- Advocating on behalf of the Wish recipient
- Ongoing general support
- Staying in contact
- Supplying embellishments
- Affirmative communication



What we learned

The overall Starlight Wish experience was rated 9.8 out of 10 by recipients and their families.

- 100% of families would recommend the Starlight Wishgranting program to others.
- 97% of interviewees were satisfied with the time taken in granting their Starlight Wish.
- Wish families were very satisfied with the quality of the program.
- Almost all interviewees indicated their satisfaction with the frequency, method (e.g. phone, text, email), depth, and style of communication (e.g. warm, friendly, bubbly) provided by Starlight.
- Families identified seven key benefits of receiving a Starlight Wish.



IMPACTS OF A STARLIGHT WISH

Suggested by the Starlight Wish recipients and their families

Overall families identified seven impacts of receiving a Starlight Wish:

- 1. Subjective well-being:** an improvement in positive emotions, confidence, self-esteem, and feeling valued.

"He doesn't have to hold back from what life has to offer – it's given him the confidence to think about what he can do – not what he can't."

- 2. Family cohesion:** spending quality, positive family time together leading to improved communication and interaction amongst family members as well as renewed appreciation of family members.

"As parents we are more relaxed and as a family we have a better relationship. As his parents we have a better understanding of what he likes ... because he can't speak ..."

- 3. Social connectedness:** expansion of Wish recipients' and families' social connections and networks.

"Socially it has been great for her ... not only can she have her friends over to enjoy it too but it is her own little [cubby house] ... that she can spend time in."

- 4. Perceived improvement in Wish recipients' health status:** Improvement in the physical health of a number of Wish recipients.

"... She goes to physio once a week and before her trampoline she couldn't jump on a mat and now she can jump 7, 8 times, it's amazing ..."

- 5. New experiences:** new ways of seeing, experiencing and understanding the world.

"He's much more relaxed and is thinking of a career in tourism which he probably wouldn't have thought of doing before."

- 6. Reflection and memories:** a reflection on one's life journey so far, with an increased focus on the positives.

"He reflects on his experience a lot. He tells other kids about his Wish. ...when he has down days or he is feeling low I ask him to think back on the lovely holiday he had – it brings back joy to him ..."

- 7. Respite and recreation:** relief and personal enjoyment experienced in having a break from daily stressors.

"For myself, it was a time away from here – from the doctors and the hospitals – being able to relax and not think about anything ..."

The impact of a Starlight Wish varied depending on the type of Wish granted (e.g. recipients of a travel Wish were more likely to recall an increase in family cohesion during and following the granting of their Starlight Wish).

HOW DID WE USE THE EVALUATION?

As a result of the ongoing evaluation of the Wishgranting program Starlight continually responds to feedback from our Wish recipients and their families. Some innovations that we have made include: providing families with commonly asked questions about a Starlight Wish experience; 24 hour support for families; improved training opportunities for Starlight team members; and, providing itineraries earlier for families.



RESEARCH AND EVALUATION AT STARLIGHT

Starlight is committed to research and evaluation so that we can ensure our programs are making a significant difference to the lives of seriously ill children, young people and their families.

If you would like to learn more about our work please email us at impact@starlight.org.au