

**“The pendant has been  
a life-saver”:**

## **An Evaluation of the WanderSearch Programme in Aotearoa New Zealand**

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## Executive Summary

At the request of LandSAR the Donald Beasley Institute conducted an evaluation of the WanderSearch programme in four regions of Te Wai Pounamu (South Island) of Aotearoa New Zealand. Prior to the evaluation a literature search was conducted to explore the use of electronic monitoring systems currently available internationally. The full report includes the findings of the literature review.

A qualitative approach was taken for the evaluation. There were two steps to collecting information about WanderSearch for the evaluation.

The first step involved interviewing the co-ordinators from the four regions to gain an understanding of how the system operated in their region. A broad overview of each of the regional services was gained from the interviews with the co-ordinators. Although there were many similarities, there were also differences in the way that each received referrals; the equipment they had available; and whether or not co-ordinators received a report when a search had been conducted. While two of the co-ordinators were in paid positions, it was also clear that some regions relied on having available volunteers to manage the WanderSearch programme.

The co-ordinators' responses were used to develop questions for the second set of interviews with carers of people using WanderSearch. A total of eight interviews, representing nine users of WanderSearch were conducted, seven being adults with dementia or cognitive impairment and two were children with neuro-disabilities. Two themes captured the content of the interviews.

Leading people into the WanderSearch programme was a sense of "Constant Concern". This theme illustrated the stress they were under worrying about their family member coming to harm or getting lost when they wandered<sup>1</sup>. Carers of older adults tended to accept that the person they cared for had a need to wander and generally allowed a period of time before they would become concerned. In contrast parents of younger children would become concerned immediately they noticed that the child had disappeared. More commonly with the children, a number of strategies, such as fences and locks on doors were being used to prevent them leaving home. Carers of older adults were not consistently using other strategies, although some chose to accompany their spouse on walks, or tried diverting their attention to other activities. Most significantly, this theme highlighted a level of hypervigilance that was affecting the carers health and/or the functioning of the family unit.

<sup>1</sup> Consistent with the wider literature the terms wander/wandering and track/tracking are used in this document. We recognise that these terms do not fully acknowledge the range of reasons why people might walk or go missing, nor the processes involved in locating the person.

Once they began using WanderSearch there was an almost immediate shift to having “Peace of Mind”. This second theme indicated the importance to the carer of knowing that the person they cared for could be found if they became lost. They learnt about WanderSearch in a variety of ways, including direct referrals and internet searches. Supporting their peace of mind was the excellent service they received through the co-ordinators, volunteers, LandSAR and the Police. While some of the people who were wearing the pendants or watches had contributed to the decision about them using WanderSearch, most carers believed that this was a decision that was ultimately up to the carer. That aside, it did also require tacit agreement of the person who wore the pendant, with some taking their pendants off when they chose to do so. Keeping pendants or watches on people was a challenge for some, with people using a range of strategies unique to the person. A major advantage of WanderSearch pendants was the relatively low cost and upkeep. Carers accepted any costs that were involved, such as payment for battery changes in regions where that applied.

Drawing together the findings of a literature review and the interviews the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Written guidelines for consent to use WanderSearch to ensure legal standards are applied.
2. Working with the health and disability sector to ensure that the benefits of and referral process to WanderSearch are visible on their database and known about in relevant services.
3. Consider the addition of a GPS system for those families that it might suit.
4. Continuous product improvement, especially with regard to encouraging people to wear the devices.
5. Ongoing development of assessment processes to fully realise the goals of the Safer Walking Framework.
6. Development of availability of pendants and alternatives at a national level to promote equity.
7. Recruitment strategies that will continue to meet the ongoing need for volunteer involvement in both co-ordination and maintenance of the programmes in regions.

