

# PREPARATION FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES  
INTERNATIONAL

BIEFING PAPER 2



I MATTER

MAY 2010

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## EDITORIAL



# IMPRINT

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Young people are the best advocates for their rights. They know the circumstances they have to deal with and the challenges they face. Young people ageing out of care know very well what challenges lie ahead when leaving the care system and starting a life as an independent young adult; and they know that all too often they lack the support and the services they need to succeed.

That is why young people ageing out of care have been involved in the "I Matter" Campaign since the beginning, helping us to advocate for exactly those services that they most need. This second briefing paper focuses for the most part on the involvement of young people in the "I Matter" Campaign.

In one article of this paper, Almandina Guma, from SOS Children's Villages Albania, reflects on what she has learned by involving young people in the national campaign. She explains how she came to understand that youth participation is a process of mutual learning between the adults and the young people involved in a project, and she underscored the need to leave enough space for the youth's ideas, encouraging their enthusiasm.

Young people can be incredibly organized and efficient when they feel passionate about a subject, and an important way of involving young people in any project is through youth networks. Child rights advocate Emmanuel Sherwin explains the function of youth in care networks and their positive and negative impacts. In the "I Matter" Campaign, we recently created an International Youth Council to involve young

people in the international activities of the campaign. They are a driving force of the campaign, not only contributing to the planning and running of the campaign, but helping to push the campaign forward with their motivation to bring about real change.

When I met young people at a conference on leaving care in Lithuania, they told me that leaving care is not the "cherry on top of the cake", but an integral part of the care system. Being with them and hearing their stories, experiences and wishes for the future reminded me of how important it is that leaving care is considered as a final and vital step in the entire care process, not just a simple add-on to the care phase.

Fortunately, SOS Children's Villages and other organisations do offer quality services that meet the needs of young people. Nevertheless, all of us -governments, local authorities, civil society and carers- need to do much more to help young people leaving care reach their potential and have the future they deserve. The more we listen to these young people, the better our support will be.

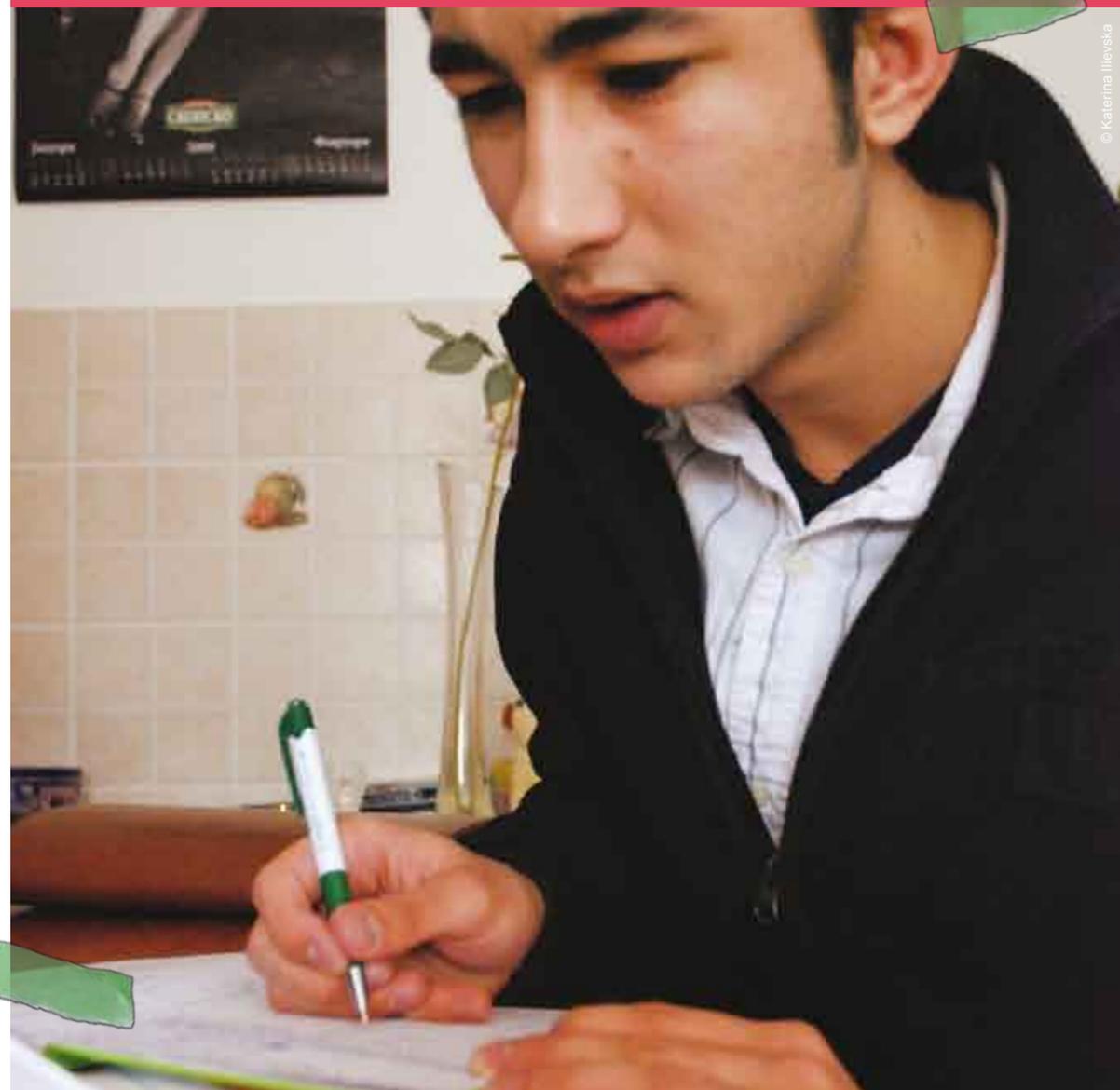
**RICHARD PICHLER**  
**SECRETARY-GENERAL**  
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**INTERNATIONAL**

## MOVING ON FROM CARE STAYING IN EDUCATION NEW FINDINGS FROM THE YIPPEE PROJECT<sup>1</sup>

Sonia Jackson



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There has been a steep rise in youth unemployment in all EU countries over the last year. The experience of previous recessions is that unemployment hits young people first and they are the last to get back to work when things improve. Longitudinal research has shown that, of all the identifiable groups in society, young people who have been in state care are the most likely to experience poor outcomes in adult life. The incidence of homelessness, teenage pregnancy, health problems, depression, drug and alcohol misuse, domestic violence and criminality is much higher among those with a background in care. Care leavers, with at best basic education, no family back up and poor social networks are at extremely high risk of long-term unemployment and social exclusion.

How can young people who have been in state care as children be encouraged and enabled to stay at school or college beyond the age of compulsory schooling and progress to higher levels of education? This is becoming the normal expectation for young people growing up in their own families. Across the EU in 2007, 82% of 15-19 year olds and a quarter of 20-29 year olds were in education.

### RECOGNISING THE PROBLEM

The first stage in tackling a social problem is always to raise awareness that it exists, secondly, to find out the facts, and then to put remedial measures in place. We find that this process is only just beginning in most European countries. However in England detailed annual statistics have been published on the

education of children in care since 2002, comparing them with the general population. These show a wide gap in attainment: at 19 only nine per cent are in any form of higher education, compared with 45 % in the population as a whole. The YIPPEE project aims to establish a baseline of participation in further and higher education, as a step towards improvement. We found that in most of our five partner countries there is no publicly available data on the attainment or participation of children in or leaving care, reflecting the lack of attention to education by child protection agencies and local government bodies responsible for their well-being.

### EMERGING FINDINGS

The YIPPEE research team has conducted national surveys in which a sample of leaving care managers and those with similar responsibilities were interviewed. There were welcome signs that some were beginning to prioritise investment in education in preference to pushing young people into low-paid unskilled jobs, which in any case are increasingly unavailable.

How did they account for the poor educational attainment of children in care? First there are structural features, notably the organizational division between care and education services. When responsibility is located within the social welfare service, social work concerns take precedence over promoting and safeguarding educational progress. England is the only country of the project to bring the two services together, combining responsibility for schools and so-

cial care. A major reform initiative called ‘Care Matters’ was launched in 2007 and appears to be having some effect in raising attainment and opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, schools seldom recognise pupils in foster or residential care as in need of additional support and enhanced learning opportunities. In England every school is obliged by law to appoint a ‘designated teacher’ with special responsibility to promote educational progress and advocate for pupils in out-of-home care.

A third structural factor is the legal framework, especially concerning the transition from care to independence. Explicit legislation is needed to oblige local authorities or child protection agencies to support young people over 18, financially and practically. England has the most highly developed after-care service, backed by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, mandating support up to age 24 for those in full-time education. Every English local authority has a dedicated leaving care team, although there are significant variations in the level of service they provide.

### BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO WIDER PARTICIPATION

Children in care often feel very little control over their own lives. Placement moves are arranged at short notice and without concern for the educational implications. Irregular school attendance, especially in the early years when basic skills are established, means that they may have serious gaps in their learning and are not ready to move on to higher levels at the expected age. The extent to which care providers prioritise education in everyday living is another problem in many countries.

The attitudes of social workers and teachers are highly significant. Many, though not all, have low expectations and aspirations for children in care, sometimes shared by the children themselves. On the other hand, many young people fully understand the importance of education and are frustrated by the obstacles they have to overcome.

This must be our aim for young people who have been in state care no less than for all young people. But the YIPPEE research shows that it will not be achieved without a much stronger focus on enabling them to achieve educational success in line with others of their age. Good intentions and good practice at an individual level have to be backed by legislation, clear government policies and incentives and resources for social workers and carers.



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#### MANAGERS MOSTLY HAD CLEAR VIEWS ABOUT THE CONDITIONS THAT MIGHT MAKE BETTER EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS POSSIBLE:

- Placement stability
- Early intervention to tackle literacy and numeracy problems
- Reliable and predictable financial support for continuing in education
- An educationally stimulating care environment
- Encouragement and emotional support from a consistent adult
- Outreach programmes from higher education institutions, with university students acting as mentors to individual children in care and, above all
- Raising aspirations and expectations from the time when children first enter the care system

#### THE EUROPEAN PACT FOR YOUTH STATED IN 2005:

Integrating young people into society and working life can only be achieved if they are properly equipped with knowledge, skills and competence through high quality education and training.

*Sonia Jackson is Professor of Education and Social Care at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education University of London*

**For full details of partner countries and research team members see YIPPEE website <http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippe/>.**

<sup>1</sup>YIPPEE stands for: Young People from a Public Care background: Pathways to education in Europe. This research project brings together 5 EU countries: Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

<sup>2</sup>Care Matters Ministerial Stocktake 2009, Department for Children, Schools and Families, England



# LEAVING CARE IS NOT THE CHERRY ON TOP OF THE CAKE

**“LEAVING CARE IS NOT THE CHERRY ON THE TOP OF THE CAKE, BUT ONE OF THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL CARE SYSTEM”:** THIS IS THE MESSAGE DELIVERED BY YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CARE EXPERIENCE AT THE END OF A CONFERENCE IN VILNIUS IN OCTOBER 2009.

## Who were the young people?

A total of 16 young people who have personal experience of alternative care met in Vilnius, Lithuania, upon the invitation of the Council of Europe and SOS Children’s Villages International. They ranged in age from 15 to 22 and were from twelve member states of the Council of Europe (Albania, Azerbaijan, France, Latvia and Ireland, among others). The participants were selected on the basis of an open call for participation, which was disseminated to a wide range of European children through NGOs focusing on young people, governmental authorities and intergovernmental bodies.

## Why did these young people meet?

The youth workshop took place immediately before a European conference organised by the Council of Baltic Sea States and the Lithuanian government, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, SOS Children’s Villages International and UNICEF. The conference “Keeping the door open - Support to young people leaving care” in Vilnius aimed to find ways of improving the services provided for young people



ageing out of alternative care. It was attended by government officials, academics, NGO representatives and carers.

The objective of the youth workshop was to support young people with care experience when preparing inputs for the conference. At the end of three days of work, the workshop participants put together presentations on three of the four themes of the conference: education, employment and housing. The presentations were then delivered at the conference.

## What did the young people do?

The young people’s work was based on two documents:

- Council of Europe Recommendation (2005)<sup>5</sup> on the rights of children living in residential institutions

1

## HOUSING

- Minimum standards for housing should be respected
- The gap between law and practice should be filled
- More funds are needed for social housing

2

## EMPLOYMENT

- Young people leaving care should not be discriminated against because of their care history
- The State as “substitute parent” should provide adequate training for looking for a job (e.g. interview skills, how to write a cover letter)
- Potential employers should be encouraged, or even subsidised, to give jobs to young people leaving care
- Caregivers should be encouraging and supportive in order to build the self-confidence of the young person

## YOUNG PEOPLE’S MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING LEAVING CARE

3

## EDUCATION

- Young people leaving care need better financial support to finance their studies
- Housing support is needed for young people while they are studying
- Young people leaving care should not be discriminated against because of their care background

- Quality4Children Standards for Out-of-Home Child Care in Europe, developed by the International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO), SOS Children’s Villages International and the International Organisation for Child Care Professionals (FICE).

The participants also looked at various human rights instruments and used their own experience and knowledge of the care system to prepare their inputs for the conference. Video messages were also prepared and presented to follow the key note speech of the young people in the opening session.

The video messages were the call for change by each participant. One of the participants from the United Kingdom reminded the audience that: “A person leaving care is not just another file. The UN Convention for the Rights of the Child is not just another document. It must be brought to life. It must work for every child!”

## THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF THE "I MATTER" CAMPAIGN MEETS IN BERLIN

Véronique Lerch



Young people with care experience have been involved in the "I Matter" Campaign since its initiation, both in national campaigns and on the international steering committee. As international activities really begin to kick off, the time was ripe to take youth participation to the next level. Thus, the International Youth Council was created with the aim of involving young people more in the campaign's international activities. It consists of two young people from each of the participating 14 countries of Europe and Central Asia and it will accompany the campaign until the end.

This past March, the Youth Council came together for the first time, at a SOS Children's Villages, vocational training centre in Berlin. The 23 young participants, ranging in age from 15 to 26, each with care experience, met to discuss how they envision their involvement and to share their experiences with the campaign up until now.

Over the course of one week, the young people discussed, shared, and worked hard, learning a lot from each other. By the end of their time together they defined three teams: communications, events, and policy. Each team is tasked with the development of an action plan defining concrete next steps. They also prepared a statement on how they see their role in the campaign and what they want to achieve, highlighting their commitment to improving the situation for young people leaving care and promising to motivate other young people to join them.

*"We stand for future opportunities for youngsters who leave care to be able to develop their capacities, accomplish their goals, realize their dreams, be independent, and be contributing members of society. Our purpose is to ensure that youngsters who leave care have the same opportunities as other youngsters who grow up with their families of origin in society. We all come from different, alternative care backgrounds, and consequently we know what and how to change the situation of youngsters leaving care. We want to create a coalition/union of youngsters and international non-governmental organisations in order to lobby local governments and other organizations to improve the approach to care quality and leaving care services. In addition, we want to motivate more youngsters to join our campaign so that they are bet-*

*ter informed about their rights and possibilities and to ensure they participate in decision-making about their futures."*

Over the next months, members of the Youth Council will be involved in the organization of an international conference on quality care, which will be organised by SOS Children's Villages in April 2011 in Prague. Additionally, in June 2010 they will take part in the steering group of the campaign and present their action plans, and in July they will run a workshop on "I Matter" at an IFCO (International Foster Care Organisation) conference in the United Kingdom.

By all accounts, the meeting was a great success. Not only did the young people come up with concrete steps for their participation, but they showed tremendous motivation and passion for the campaign. One participant, Maria from Russia, said *"Despite the fact that we are all from different countries and speak different languages, we share the same desire to help kids like me. Although it seems very complicated, even impossible, we have already taken the most important step, we took part in this project!"*

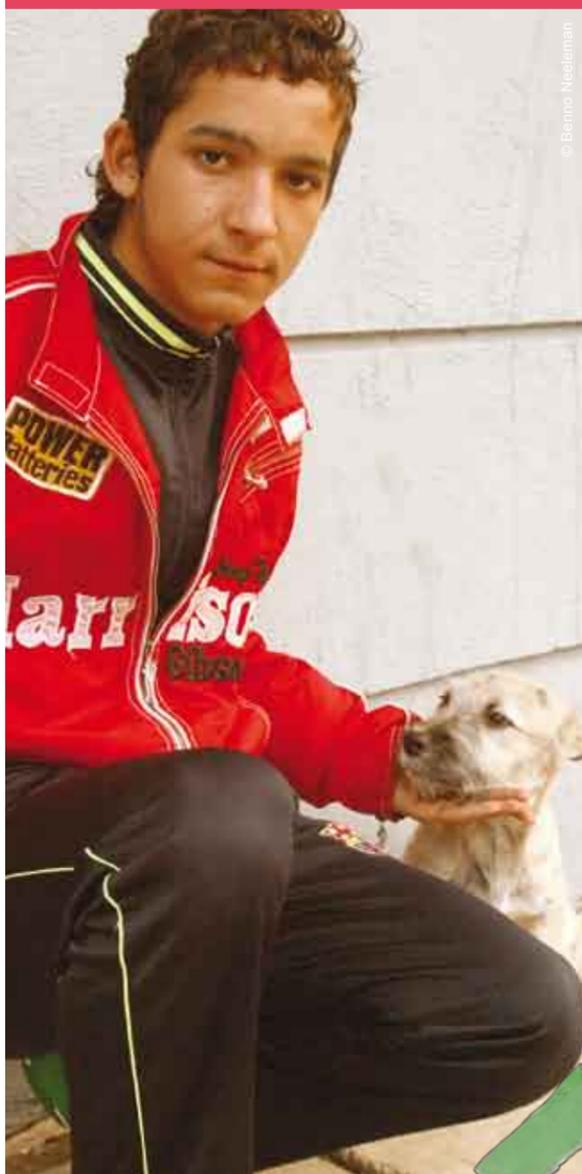
The meeting in Berlin, just helped to confirm how vital a role the Youth Council has in the international campaign, and indeed how much of a difference these 23 young people will make in the lives of so many of their peers. As Coralie, one member of the Council, put it, *"With our actions, we have the opportunity to change the conditions of leaving care in different countries. We are ambitious and this is a good thing!"*

*Véronique Lerch is the project manager of the "I matter" campaign, a campaign about improving leaving care conditions in Europe and Central Asia. She works for the Programme Development Unit of SOS Children's Villages International.*



## YOUTH PARTICIPATION: A STEP BY STEP PROCESS

Almandina Guma



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### THIS ARTICLE CONSISTS OF MY PERSONAL REFLECTIONS REGARDING YOUTH PARTICIPATION WITHIN THE “I MATTER” CAMPAIGN IN ALBANIA.

At first my feelings were quite ambiguous when considering youth participation within the project. I thought this was very challenging considering the poor “culture of involvement” of children and young people and the authoritarian parenting style in Albania. It was even more challenging as the children would be coming from different forms of care and were--at least I thought--less empowered to speak out on their own behalf. How could we mobilize young people who have to age out of care at 15 and were focusing on ways to survive?

At first there were only four youngsters involved. Yet now, from one meeting to another, the number is increasing. Youth continue to join the group and others leave I still consider that the process of youth participation is new in Albania, but so far this is what I’ve learned:

- Youth participation is a process of **mutual learning** that starts with careful planning and structuring, by understanding that probably at the very beginning there will be only passive involvement of youngsters. The main emphasis at the beginning should be on providing information to the participants, creating warmth and acceptance and involving them in the planning of the project.

- One of the keys to success is to create the **necessary conditions for children and youth to come up with their own ideas** for activities. It is important to identify youngsters’ concerns, their strengths and also the skills and information they need so they can get involved with the project. Plan training sessions and stimulate group dynamics, carry out sessions on human rights education, public speaking, etc. Adopt youth-friendly approaches; consult available youth-friendly materials, youth-friendly manuals, and exchange ideas and information with various organizations that have this focus.
- **Be open** on what you might learn and take off the “adult hat”. It is a matter of changing our own attitudes as well. Sometimes as an “adult” we think we know it all and which activities would fit and be suitable for the project. The youngsters might open new ways of thinking, new perspectives on issues or on activities that can be done. This was actually the moment that surprised me the most as they were full of ideas, motivation and energy and opened up different ways of thinking. So **keep some space in your planning for their activities**.
- Take into consideration that young people leaving care might have specific problems. Sometimes due to social stigma, they tend to isolate themselves or not to speak about their problems.
- Within the project, you should set **realistic goals** concerning youth participation. Clarify expectations and then it’s possible to design realistic activities in term of energy, time, and availability.

**Peer exchange** should be encouraged. In Albania other youth from local organizations provided some training to the youngsters in our project, and organized some visits with them. Between peers, youngsters open up more easily; they keep touch, communicate, and exchange information on different opportunities.

- Once their enthusiasm has been stirred, guidance and structure is needed. There is a need for careful planning, so that while keeping motivation high we don’t forget that after all they are children, living a new experience. They are not always on the same level in their approach to responsibility as adults are.
- Don’t panic and don’t be de-motivated: Some of the youngsters might leave the group or leave and then join again. It is important to stop and reflect with them, invite them again and let them go if they wish to.

In my opinion, youth participation is a matter of being true and natural. Once trust is gained, it will turn into a mutual and true appreciation of each other. It is also a process of attachment and a matter of a constant will to help and support.

Expected outcomes are to have a youth group empowered, equipped with skills, able to speak about their issues, confident about sharing and carrying out activities and - hopefully - able to support each other.

*Almandina Guma, Advocacy Officer,  
SOS Children’s Villages Albania*



© Robert Fleischanderl

## WHAT IS A YOUTH IN CARE NETWORK?

Emmanuel Sherwin



### WHAT IS A YOUTH IN CARE NETWORK?

Formal youth in care networks have been around in Europe and America for nearly a quarter of a century. Often they are funded through projects such as the Irish Association of Young People in Care, which was created through the involvement of young people from care from the Irish Social Services Inspectorate. Another example is the Pan-European project Quality4Children<sup>1</sup> which generated a youth in care network hub as one of its project outcomes – Power4Youth<sup>2</sup>. The latter is an ad-hoc network linked closely to its parent programme, Quality4Children. It is often difficult for young people and staff associated with such projects to continue the network after the successful completion of the project, due to a lack of clear strategic aims and vision.

### WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF A YOUTH IN CARE NETWORK?

Perhaps the most relevant function is to support and counsel young people in care or leaving care. True engagement with young people on their terms about the stress of the care process and other life traumas are often unachieved by regular pedagogical or social work supervision due to a lack of contact time with the individual. Youth in care networks are often made up of people with significant experience with trauma and are good at referral or dealing with it.

Support and counselling can often be offered through peer support from young people with similar care experiences. Regardless of the number of siblings and other young people placed at the same time, often the care process is a lonely experience for each child. The mutual support and guidance offered by peers can be invaluable to young people ageing out of care. It provides a first line of support from young people who understand what others may have gone through and a place to go when there are few other social networks available. Examples of this type of network can be found in Ukraine, Japan or Norway. They are often youth-led initiatives without much formal structure or funding. In this regard, they can be seen as a vital initial product offer by service providers when delivering after care support.

Like most NGOs as they mature and evolve, networks begin to become involved in lobbying and ad-

vocacy. Some networks follow this trend or make it as their main goal. They build this function into their funding bids and daily activities. It is a very healthy way to represent the views of young people in care. However it is very important to truly consult their constituents before heading to government!

As an off-shoot of advocating for rights, networks engage very actively in children's human rights training for young people and their service providers. In my experience, the children's rights movements in certain countries have been initiated by youth in care networks. Have a look at 'A National Voice UK' for a good example.

Finally, these networks offer some youth developmental opportunities. This could be; as members of their board of directors, facilitators in consultations, participants in their strategic planning, internships and work experience placements.

### POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS

**It is important to mention both the positive and negative aspects of such networks.**

1. There are two sides to the opportunities offered by a network in that they are something new and different to most young people. The average young person doesn't sit in a room with strangers talking about their feelings or life experiences, nor do they wish to participate in national consultations about their lives.
2. Networks, when formalised, require important human and financial resources. It is often difficult to find and sustain funding.
3. The potential of 'unearthing' unresolved personal issues in an atmosphere of peers who are not trained to deal with trauma can have lasting negative effects on both the peer and the young person who was hoping to find relief through counselling.
4. Crucially, the networks might be seen as critical of service provision and therefore it may be less desirable for foster parents or pedagogues to send their children off to one of their events and for states to wish to fund them!

**However, the positive aspects of the networks far outweigh the negatives.**

1. They have offered real developmental opportunities to young people that would normally have been marginalised and under-exposed to the democratic system that surrounds them.
2. They are very like a workers' union and can be truly representative of the views of young people in care and with the experience of care.
3. When drafting new laws or engaging in legislative reforms for social care, they provide an "instant" focus group for consultation.
4. The proof of all this is the engagement of youth in care networks worldwide in drafting, commenting and supporting the adoption of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children<sup>3</sup>.

The list of wonderful opportunities, peer to peer support and time to talk are often pivotal in changing the lives of the young people with care experience. The networks have a lasting impact on the development and review in laws pertaining to alternative care provision. And fundamentally, they offer another stepping stone for young people aging out of care, another arm to hold onto and somewhere to call for advice long after the case workers have finished their task.

PLEASE SEE THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES FOR ENGLISH SPEAKING YOUTH IN CARE NETWORKS AROUND THE GLOBE:  
<http://www.create.org.au/>  
<http://www.fbcyicn.ca/>  
<http://www.anationalvoice.org/>  
<http://www.iaypic.ie/>

*Emmanuel Sherwin is a child rights advocate, working specifically in the field of children in alternative care.*

<sup>1</sup><http://www.quality4children.info/> Together, SOS Children's Villages, IFCO and FICE, developed a set of quality standards for out-of-home child and youth care in Europe in order to improve the care situation for hundreds of thousands of concerned young people.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.power4youth.eu/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.crin.org/bcn/initiatives.asp>

## GOOD PRACTICE FROM AUSTRIA

Roswitha Laminger-Purgstaller

### GUIDING YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

For young people, the road to independent living and self-reliance is a difficult one. Negotiating this stage of life, which is all about finding your own lifestyle, setting goals, creating your own living space and doing so while already living in a flat on your own – requires young people to make giant developmental leaps. The young women and men in the “semi-independent living programme” in Graz, Austria, are aged between 16 and 21. They have grown up in SOS families, youth facilities or their families of origin. They live on their own in a rented apartment in the city of Graz. A social pedagogue (personal carer) supports the young people as a stable partner. Since these young people have often already experienced relationships breaking down, it is essential that their personal carer provides stability, continuity and reliability. The personal care has to be reliable but also challenging when it is necessary to discover boundaries and supportive when it comes to discovering, awakening and developing young people’s own abilities. The young person works with their personal carer and social worker to develop individual goals that are geared to his or her particular situation and which, once achieved, will ensure an independent life. Helping the young person to build and maintain a social network is crucial in this regard, which is why it is essential that the young people feel comfortable in their own apartment, are able to furnish it to their taste and feel at home there. This positive sense of feeling at home also enables them to establish contact with neighbours and to integrate into the area they are living in and draw on its infrastructure.

Structuring day-to-day life is another major challenge. Just learning what it takes to become self-reliant and putting this theoretical knowledge into practice is exciting: cooking, doing your own laundry, personal hygiene, shopping, managing your finances, paying bills, pursuing hobbies, visiting friends – and alongside of these thrilling new experiences, developing an idea of what profession you want to train for or which school you would like to attend.

Some young people have a clear idea of what profession they would like to train for and are lucky enough to find an apprenticeship. Others want to do their A-levels and go to high school, while still others need support to discover their skills and talents and work out how they might be able to use them in their professional life. Ready to help them with this, with tremendous empathy and skill, are the staff of two job projects. SOS-JOBFIT helps young people with disabilities find a job in the primary or secondary labour markets and continues to support them for the first three months after they find a job. Another project called J.O.B. was set up because experience showed that some young people need low-threshold and differentiated jobs in order to be able to join the labour market. For up to one year, J.O.B. enables young people to gain work experience in a storehouse (processing charitable donations, clearing out...) and in a shop in Graz city centre (contact with customers, stocking storage racks,...), which replicates conditions in the real market. J.O.B.’s goal is to find apprenticeships for the young people involved in the project.

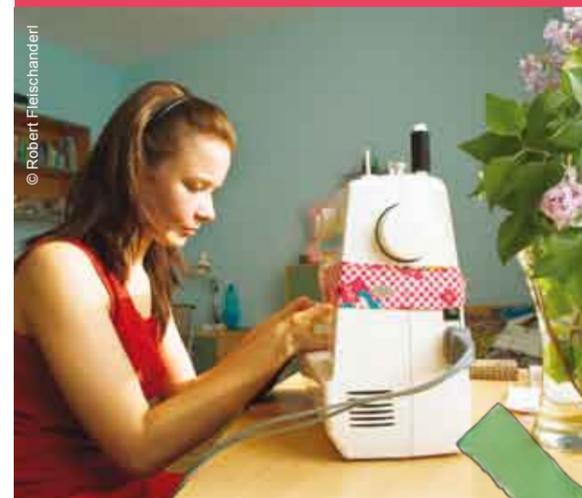
Young adults that attain independence and self-reliance and succeed, thanks to their own achievements and the support of their stable social network, in gaining a foothold in an independent life are very proud and happy about what they have achieved so far and feel confident about taking the next step.

*Roswitha Laminger-Purgstaller is Deputy regional executive of the region Styria and responsible for networking, advocacy and policy advice for SOS Children’s Villages Austria.*

<sup>1</sup>For more information, have a look at [www.sos-jobfit.at](http://www.sos-jobfit.at) (website in German)

## GOOD PRACTICE FROM POLAND

Vehicles for self-reliance



### “VEHICLES FOR SELF-RELIANCE”: A PROJECT FROM THE ROBINSON CRUSOE FOUNDATION

The Robinson Crusoe Foundation was set up in 2002 in Warsaw by educators and psychologists with many years of professional experience with youth from different backgrounds. For the last eight years we have created innovative and practical programs for achieving self-reliance for youth. These allow youth in care and leaving care to find constructive roles in their local communities and—through their own actions to counter the stigma that often results from living in an institution.

Since young people in alternative care struggle with the same feelings of abandonment as those who have been shipwrecked, we call them ‘Robinsons’ and encourage them to fight to become self-reliant. However,

due to a lack of relevant role models from significant adults in their lives, such as family, and due to difficult living conditions, these youth have weak competencies in many life skills. We teach Robinsons how to achieve economic, social and emotional self-reliance—how to break the vicious circle of helplessness, how to break barriers, how to fight for their place in society and the world.

We set up local centres all over Poland for youth aged 16-24 to achieve independence, called “Vehicles for Self-Reliance” (Wehikuly Usamodzielnienia). These centres offer a long-term program—for at least one year—where Robinsons meet on a regular basis and learn communication skills, practical knowledge such as personal finance, computers, entrepreneurship and savoir-vivre, and receive ongoing emotional support. We run five to seven Vehicles each year and there are approximately 100 Robinsons participating annually in the Foundation’s projects. The Vehicle’s meetings take place during the school year, once every two weeks. Each meeting lasts four hours and is facilitated by two staff members of the Foundation. A single Vehicle involves 12-20 participants. Additionally—several times a year—we organise workshops all over the country that allow Robinsons from different Vehicles to integrate safely and smoothly into society, to become motivated and to exchange their experience. We also help Robinsons find work or internships in the companies we cooperate with.

A very important aspect of our program is the idea of the individual contract between a ‘Robinson’ and the Foundation. Each young person develops her/his own project with the goal of helping others. This psychological factor encourages young people by developing generosity through giving something to others. This develops their self-esteem, as they perceive their own influence on their environment.

**If you want to know more about the work of the Robinson Crusoe Foundation, have a look at their website: <http://www.fundacjarobinson.org.pl/>**



## RESOURCES ON LEAVING CARE



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### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE – DISCOVER YOUR RIGHTS

In 2009, SOS Children's Village and the Council of Europe co-published a collection of stories and practical guidance about the rights of children and young people in care. One chapter of the booklet "Children and young people in care - Discover your rights" is specifically dedicated to the challenges posed by leaving care. The booklet is already available in English, Russian and Romanian. It will soon be available in Azeri, Czech, Bulgarian and French.

Get to know the booklet at:

<http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/Focus-areas/Child-rights/Advocacy-in-action/Pages/Children-and-young-people-in-care.aspx>

### SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES INTERNATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE LAUNCHED A PUBLICATION TO DISSEMINATE THE GUIDELINES FOR THE ALTER- NATIVE CARE OF CHILDREN

On November 20, 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a consensus resolution formally welcoming the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Many child rights NGOs, young people, UNICEF and academics were involved in the development of the Guidelines. SOS Children's Villages International and the International Social Service launched the publication "Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children: A United Nations Framework", with a Foreword by Yanghee Lee, Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Guidelines provide important advice, informed by the opinions of youth with care experience, on the preparation for leaving care and the need to continue support after care.

Click here to download the publication:

<http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/Focus-areas/Child-rights/Advocacy-in-action/Pages/Guidelines-for-the-Alternative-Care-of-Children.aspx>

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