



**TRANSITIONING: FROM THE
PROTECTION TO INDEPENDENCE.
TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE
MODEL OF SUPPORT FOR YOUNG
PEOPLE LEAVING CARE**





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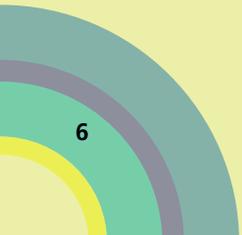
The seminar was divided into two stages. The first featured presentations by two expert researchers belonging to Oslo University College and UNICEF Argentina. The second consisted of a panel discussion with the public sector in which two young people from the E. Guide project were invited to take part. Both forums were intended to discuss synergistically the need to implement a comprehensive model of support for youngsters leaving the Argentine protection system.

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TRANSITIONING FROM THE PROTECTION SYSTEM TO INDEPENDENCE



Introduction

Young people, rights and independence

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Introduction: Young people, rights and independence

Ana Miranda

Youth Program, FLACSO Argentina

Institutions allow us to express ourselves as social beings and become actors in our own destinies. At the same time, we are able to contribute to other people's experiences and life stories. Indeed, what are we but a collection of shared experiences situated in a particular time and place?

Fate, contingency, action and time are not just core issues in the Social Sciences: they lie at the very heart of life, defining both its nature and its cycles. Just as it is hard to imagine people detached from the practices and customs of a particular historical period and social group, it is equally difficult to think about adolescence and youth in contemporary societies without reflecting at the same time on adulthood, old age and the life cycle as it is generally envisaged. How do social, economic and cultural changes influence the everyday lives of people of different ages and from different walks of life?

A few examples will suffice to remind us of recent structural and subjective changes affecting the different generations and age groups in Argentina. There are those who grew up when opposition to secular and free education was still fierce¹; others played a leading role in the libertarian social movements of the sixties and seventies; yet others came of age in the eighties, when Argentina was returned to democracy, or in the nineties, under the neoliberal economic policies of the "Washington consensus". And finally, there are those born between 1994 and 1997. These young people, now aged between 15 and 18, have never known a world without mobile phones and have lived all their lives under the protection of the Convention on the Rights of Children and Adolescents.

At the beginning of the 21st century, various processes are becoming apparent in which "paradoxically" significant progress in terms of individual rights has been accompanied by major social setbacks. On the one hand, the instability of capitalism has destabilized the labour market in the western world, creating greater social inequality and vulnerability. On the other hand, technological change, networking, new and more inclusive and pluralistic practices as well as the extension of children's and young people's rights have provided younger generations with new forms of identity and new possibilities for development.

¹ In Argentina, the movement known as "secular and free" developed in 1958 in response to changes in university bylaws that allowed privately run universities to give degrees.

Within this new scenario, research has consistently shown a destandardization of the life course among young people and greater diversity in the transition to adulthood. Findings suggest that, while a few decades ago the road to “adulthood” was socially structured in synchronized steps, today those same routes are open, uncoordinated, unstructured and individualized (Walter, 2006; Bendit, Hahn and Miranda [eds.], 2008).

Until the final decades of the twentieth century, the transition to adulthood consisted, firstly, of a transition from education to employment and, then, of leaving home, forming a stable partnership and becoming a parent. These were consecutive and coordinated stages within a “social stratification”. Young people who behaved differently were considered to be deviant, problematic, inadequate or misfits. Until the end of the 1990s, there were strong social strata requirements attached to clothing and physical appearance in general. For men, the social “label” of adulthood and adult behaviour followed a hegemonic model of “heterosexual male provider and father.”²

Several factors have reshaped our current social and cultural landscape, making it less clearly definable today. On the one hand, we find democratization processes, changes in the “nuclear family” and the effect of new rights and lifestyles, as well as technological changes and their impact on communication. On the other hand, there has been a destabilization of employment, together with economic instability, the consumer society and processes of individuation (Bauman, 2007): All this has played an important role in destructuring what was until a few years ago the “hegemonic adult” (Urresti, 2000).

Paradoxically, democratic and pluralistic trends can be seen as competing with other processes that make for less secure anchoring and personal development. This occurs within a context where personal ties and affections are of increasing importance, and where “duties” and ethics have become matters of personal choice. Youth studies suggest, moreover, that young people from all social strata are dependent on their families of origin until a much later age. A shortage of job opportunities and longer stays in the education system has led to an extended period of adolescence and a greater reliance on the resources of the family (especially financial resources). This in turn has led to greater numbers of young people living at home with their parents. This process, which Jan Storø calls “normative transition”³, has been widely documented and now forms part of the theoretical corpus of what may be called contemporary youth phenomena. (Morch, 1996; Bendit, 2005).

² In sociology, a label is a set of rules governing the interaction between people and their lifestyles.

³ See “Supporting young people leaving care” in this publication.

Transitioning in is more complex in Argentina and other Latin American countries, which have marked social inequalities typical of capitalist societies on the periphery. Indeed, it is a real challenge to understand the different ways young people transition to adulthood in an environment characterized by early school leaving, child labour, informal self-employment, early parenthood and the coexistence of multiple households within a single domestic unit.⁴ These problems exacerbate the already complex and diverse situations in which young people in general find themselves today. Sometimes, experiences come too early in life as when a school-age couple has a baby. In some cases, early paternity / maternity can be combined with school and consuming products aimed at young people, such as concerts, nights out, etc. In other cases, however, it is associated with deeply disturbing and socially destructive processes, such as lack of any sort of occupation and peer group exclusion (ECLAC-OIJ, 2004).

Young people today are growing up in societies which are ambivalent and bewildering. Some researchers place young people at the centre of social and economic development while others consider them to be a “problem” or a risk group. These contradictory views show that nowadays social inclusion and exclusion are complex processes requiring active policies and sustained social interventions (Bendit, Hahn and Miranda [eds.], 2008).

The right to increasing independence

Studies of youth transitions have argued that, in general terms, the move from education to employment has become a “process of labour market insertion” with young people taking increasingly longer to establish an independent home of their own. All this takes place in a more protective environment in which the relationship between young people and their parents or carers is more democratic. Studies have also emphasised the need for greater guidance, both in educational settings and when designing individualized transition plans for young people (Jacinto, 2010; Tedesco, 2012).

This approach provides a useful framework for thinking about young people living without parental care in public and private institutions and their transition from the child protection system to independent living. It is useful for reflecting on the challenging task of designing and implementing inclusive and pluralistic social policies. The focus of this publication is on understanding how autonomy, independence and self-reliance are constructed in complex and increasingly differentiated societies by young people who have already faced the challenge of growing up in institutions.

4 One of the most significant problems in the region is precisely access to housing, which has a large impact on youth empowerment processes, as many young people are forced to continue living at home with their parents, along with their own partners and children.

The working papers published here have been contributed by various stakeholders from what has been called “the virtuous triangle” of youth policy. This triangle includes state institutions, universities and the knowledge industry, and civil society organizations (Chisholm, 2008). The papers were part of a seminar organised by the Doncel Foundation, Oslo University College and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO Argentina), with the support of UNICEF.

The first two papers are by colleagues from Oslo University College who have extensive experience of working on issues related to young people transitioning from Norway’s child protection system. First, Jan Storø provides substantive inputs in terms of concepts and procedures, noting the need to “connect” with each young person’s individual history, their uniqueness and grasp on their own personal life, as well as their own sense of timing and readiness in the transition process.

Next, Ingeborg Helgeland presents findings from a major longitudinal study which has profound implications for social policies and programs. From empirical evidence, Helgeland proposes the importance of bonding, continuity, and respect in the processes of growth and transition, arguing that it is possible to “help young people with serious behavioural problems to take a positive direction of life.” The diverse contributions from Argentine researchers are also highly significant. Gimol Pinto, from UNICEF, discusses the existing legal framework designed to protect the rights of children and adolescents. Cecilia Tomé describes interventions in the province of Buenos Aires aimed at promoting self-reliance. Daniela Bravo discusses efforts to implement the “full stop – new life” programme in the province of Tucumán and the challenges it faces. From the Doncel Foundation, Maria Paz Palmieri reports on the experiences of two young people on their way to full independence, and Mariana Incarnato provides a set of substantive conclusions.

We hope that this publication will become the “foundation stone” of a new field of research and social intervention: processes for increasing independence among young people within the child protection system. This is little known field, but one that requires our urgent attention: promoting the rights of vulnerable youngsters. We hope the time is ripe to continue our journey of discovery.

Supporting young people leaving care

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Supporting young people leaving care

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When children and young people live in unsecure conditions, the state in many countries has the legal option to take them into care and let them grow up more safely in a foster home or an institution. There are different traditions for helping youngsters in these ways in different countries, for example in the question of what type of placement provided them – most usually a foster home or an institution. From research in many countries, we know that children and young people in care come from clearly disadvantaged backgrounds. The experience of being in public care – more or less disconnected from their family of origin – is also most likely a stressful experience. In addition the quality of care also varies considerably. Therefore, it can be quite challenging for children and young people to be in state care. Given these issues, it is vital that we question all aspects of the kinds of care offered to them. The topic for this text is the transition young people go through when they end their care careers and when they move further into independent life.

I will seek to explore this topic in three steps. First I will give some details about the Norwegian situation, then I will describe and discuss central issues of the transition, and finally I will touch upon an international perspective on leaving out of home care.

Child welfare in Norway

I will start by presenting some background information on the child welfare system in Norway.

Its modern history dates back to the first years after the ending of the Second World War in 1945. One of the elements of rebuilding the country after the German occupation was to build a modern welfare state. Taking care of children's welfare was an important part of this project (Storø 2008).

Because of limited space, I will just mention a few elements of the Child welfare system.

We had our first Child welfare act in 1954, and the current one since 1993. The 1954 legislation sought to bring the individual child/young person into the centre. The principle "in the best interest of the child" was introduced in the legislation, as a guiding principle for all decisions made by Child welfare. Development psychology

was introduced as the theoretical basis for understanding children.

In the 1993 legislation the legal rights of the children, and also of their parents were strengthened. Every person coming into contact with the system was allowed the right to be defined as an independent counterpart to the state Child welfare system. That included, for example, the right to complain on decisions in one's own case.

What we call the first line of Child welfare, the Child welfare services, are run by the local municipalities. There are about 450 of them, and since Norway is a small country, this means that some of them only have one employee, maybe even in a half position.

Other municipalities have larger child welfare services, and these are often much more professionalized than in the smaller places. This inequality of services throughout the country has been criticized by the UN committee of children's rights.

Child welfare services makes investigations in homes where bad conditions for children are reported, and if they find that the conditions are not good enough, they can either start working with the family by supporting the parents to give the child a better situation, or – in the more severe cases – they can place the child in a foster home or an institution.

The Norwegian state runs what we call the second line of Child welfare. That mainly involves activities for recruiting foster homes and operating care institutions as well as supervising the work of municipalities with cases.

In Norway more than 80% of children and young people in contact with Child welfare, live at home while they receive services.

And more than 80% of the children and young people removed from their homes are placed in a foster home.

The transition to adulthood

When a young person in a foster home or a child welfare institution reaches 18, he or she faces a major challenge - to prepare for, and, eventually, move through the transition to an independent life (Stein 2004, Storø 2012).

This challenge is comparable between countries. Even if support systems, legislation, economy (and many other areas) differs from country to country, the more personal challenges of the young person are quite similar (Pinkerton 2006, 2008). At some age they are expected to manage on their own. This implies moving to a living arrangement where the young person is responsible for himself/

herself, it means going to school or university or to work, and it means taking responsibility for one's own income. To assist young people in this transition, one needs to focus on the individual young person.

The transition is best understood in the plural form as multiple transitions, such as moving from being dependent to being independent, from being a pupil to a student or worker...or maybe unemployed, from being cared for to managing on one's own... and so on (Storø 2012).

Each individual can be said to construct his or her own personal biography of the transition.

One of the tasks for the social worker assisting the young person is to assess whether he or she is ready for independence. This assessment has a psychological and a practical side.

To be psychologically ready means to feel ready. If a young person carries with him or her unsolved conflicts from childhood and youth, this may prevent his or her ability to look forward (Land 1990, Levine 1990).

To be practically ready means to master some essential skills needed for the independent life.

Propp et. al (2003:260) distinguishes between tangible and intangible skills. Tangible skills "are easily measured, concrete skills including education, vocation, job searching, locating housing, and consumer skills such as budgeting" and intangible skills "include less concrete and definable items such as decision-making, planning, communication, self-esteem, and social skills".

Biehal et. al (1995) have identified three groups of skills: budgeting skills, negotiation skills and practical skills.

Ideally the assessment of readiness should be done together with the young person.

In fact all the work that social workers put into supporting young people through the transition needs to put the young person in the driver seat.

He or she is on the way towards full independence, and must be treated like someone who is in the process of taking full responsibility.

In Norway, the Child welfare act is meant to secure the transition of young people. However, at different periods this legislation has treated young people differently (Storø 2009).

From the 1950s through to the 1980s, young people were supported up to the age of 23 years. Then, in the nineties, the legislation was changed so that child welfare services were not allowed to give services after 18, though in some cases up till 20.

For the last 14 years the legislation again allows that support can be stretched to 23, and for the last three years child welfare services are obliged to give written justification when they *do not* give support in the transition for a young person.

This law was meant to secure support services for the young people in the transition, but young people, practitioners and researchers discuss whether this actually has happened.

When we focus on the transition, the question of legislation is vital. But other questions should also be addressed. It is important that the young person is connected to the process, and is willing to engage in the challenges of the transition, as I already have mentioned.

A user-participation perspective is therefore central in this area. I will be paradoxical to support a young person's transition if you don't have a good cooperation with him or her.

It is also of special importance that workers are trained to support in ways that improve the life chances of young people, and that workers, and their leaders, are willing to make a difference in these young people's lives.

In many countries research has been important to develop knowledge about the transition, and how to support the young people.

Different kinds of research can contribute in different ways (Stein and Munro 2008).

Within a national context, it has often been important to focus on the young people themselves, on their background for being in care, on their care experiences and on how they fare after they have left care.

Often, small qualitative studies have given important contributions. They often aim to give attention to how young people themselves describe their situation.

In my own study from 2005, "Walking over burning bridges" I found that the young people put considerable weight on whether or not they were supported, and especially the quality of the support.

One young woman said, when I interviewed her at 23, that “The support of my mother, I could do without, because it always ended up that I supported her more than she supported me” (Storø 2005). In this statement she focuses both on the quality of support, and also on the parents as possible supporters.

But also larger statistical studies can give us important knowledge. A major recent research from Norway shows that young adults with care histories have worse experiences than their peers with no care history (Clausen and Kristofersen 2008).

It is also extremely important to learn more about the life conditions for young people after they have left care.

Only 34 % of the young people who had left care had achieved higher education, compared to 80% in the average population.

When it came to the chances of being unemployed, the situation was almost exactly opposite. Young people with a care background were also far more likely to have low income and be dependent on social welfare benefits.

This picture can be identified in country after country. Comparative research can therefore give very valuable contributions to understand for example which experiences are global and which are local – that is: connected to cultural, economic and legislative conditions and traditions within a certain country (Munro and Stein 2008).

Therefore it would be interesting to see the results of such research from Argentina. Then we could begin to have some answers to what areas are similar and what areas differ from other countries.

Some research focuses on the way workers work with the young people, what they actually do. This research sometimes is preoccupied with establishing quality standards for effective work with the young people. I now am in the middle of conducting a study where I have interviewed 27 workers who work with young people in transition from care.

I have just started the analysis of the interviews, so at this point I can't draw distinct conclusions. But one preliminary finding is that these workers are very engaged in supporting the young people. They say they are lucky to work with them. But they are also realistic that they may not achieve as much as they want with individual youngsters.

Another interesting issue in this material is that my informants seem to have two

parallel orientations in their work; one is directed towards the young person, and within this orientation it is important to establish a relationship and work in partnership with the young person. The other orientation is directed towards understanding the systems that the young person comes in contact with. Within this orientation it is important to understand and to some degree master the powers influencing individual transition processes, and also to increase the young person's competence to master these systems. Here we are talking about the education system, the labour system, the system for social benefits and so on.

Let me now draw attention to how workers can support young people in the transition, more concretely. First I would like to state that I do intend to present a recipe for this work. The only general statement that I will come with is that the support should be tailored to the needs of each individual young person. And the needs are very different.

Last year I was invited to a dinner organized by 15 young people that I had worked with in their transition some years earlier. They were now in their late twenties or in their early thirties. I had a reminder of the differences in their needs when I spoke to the 32 year old man who was about to finish his PhD within business management, and a little later had a conversation with the 28 year old woman who proudly could tell me that she had not prostituted herself or taken drugs the last 20 months.

I mention this because it is vital that we see the individuals when we aim to support them. We need to discover that they have a wide range of experiences and situations, and we need to connect with their individual history and current situation to assist them through the transition. Therefore; to tune in on the person that is in front of you is the first professional choice you have to make, if you want to assist his or her transition to independent life.

But we also know something about what type of support most young people will benefit from. It is a mix of a personal, relationship-orientated type of support, and, on the other side, assistance to take part in society and be included in positive social networks (Storø 2012). This means that most young people leaving care need to have someone to talk to, and also they need to be assisted in their efforts to get a place to live, to get an education, to find work, and of course to have a reasonable economic situation in their daily lives.

In Norway these issues are well covered in some municipalities, and almost not addressed in others. This reveals a weakness in our system. Our national legislation does not intervene strongly enough in instructing local municipalities about how to give this kind of support.

If the young person lives in a foster home before moving into an independent life, it is often natural that the foster parents are responsible for the support. Staff of an institution can in some cases do the same, but this is sometimes made impossible because of the turnover in the institution: the day one young person or staff member leave the institution, another comes in.

In some countries, and also to some extent in Norway, child welfare services, or similar authorities, will appoint a support person for the individual young person. This can be a very good way to secure that he or she is supported. A support person can be available at all hours, he or she will know each young person well, and he or she can guide the young person through the more practical challenges of the system.

The most frequent types of support given by child welfare services in Norway are: prolonged stay in foster care (and to some extent in institutions), economic support (to go to school, get a place to live, furnish a place to live, and for leisure time activities), supported housing (for example financial support to live in a small flat and have a support-person to stop by regularly) (Kristofersen 2009).

It is also possible to work with young people in groups in the transition (Storø 2012), as Doncel does in Argentina. Projects working with groups often concentrate on a single, important topic. For example work, education or living arrangements.

The slogan “help to self-help” is used from time to time in Norway. It gives a good picture of what transition support is all about. All help and support that the young person receives, is meant to make him or her eventually to cope on their own. This aim is good for most young people, but even here we must individualise our approach. Some young people with a multi-problematic background will need support long after the transition.

This raises the question of how much support each young person needs. The simple answer is: enough. Enough to start an independent life on their own. A few years ago a young person said about her support person: “I like the idea that someone thinks about me”.

That is a modest wish, and it directs our attention towards how crucial it is that these young people are not left alone in society. For other young persons “enough” means that they must be supported over years and on several different areas.

The last decade we have seen new theory on how young people in large parts of the world go through the transition from being a young person to being an adult. One of these theories, named emerging adulthood, states that the way young

people between 18 and 25, or maybe even 28, live their lives has changed so radically that we can speak of a new life stage (Arnett 2004).

In many countries we can see that young people are stretching their youth-stage over many years. This new life-stage is the stage for *exploring identities*, for *instability*, for *a feeling of being in between*, for *self-focus* and for *possibilities*.

Young people can stretch their youth very much because their parents and society at large accept it, encourage it.....even pay for it. This stretched-out stage is possible because it is supported. I cannot tell if this theory also could describe the conditions for young people in Argentina. That question is worth a discussion, and maybe research. For Norway, it is my judgement that this theory has something to teach us. It gives good descriptions of how young people from the general population go through the transition. In my view, it gives a good description of what I would call normative transitions. That means transitions that most young people can recognize, and transitions that relates to dominating values and expectations for this group within a national context.

If so, we are obliged to ask: Is the transition for young people with a care background very different from the normative transitions? And what does this in that case imply when it comes to support?

The British researcher Mike Stein has an answer to this. He writes that young people with a care background go through the transition in a more compressed and accelerated way than their peers (Stein 2004, 2008). This conclusion rests on research from many countries in different parts of the world.

If we trust this statement, we should look at what can be done to give the young people from care a better transition to independent life.

To avoid the compression of an accelerated transition, we can offer the young person one resource that lies within the normative transition, and that is time.

Enough time to find out about one's self, and find a direction for independence.

Given time, the young person also should be spared from walking this distance alone. That leads us to the importance of support.

Transition awareness developing globally

Awareness of issues involved in these transitions from care to adulthood is developing in many countries worldwide.

The personal transition for each young person may consist of quite comparable issues, such as training skills for independence, taking responsibility for oneself, finding support in a social network, getting education and/or a job and getting a place to live and an income. For young people with a care experience, this transition is a period with challenges or many areas of life.

Only a few years ago many of them were left alone to handle the transition, and life after state support was terminated. An increasing number of scholars have during the last ten to fifteen years argued that more action has been necessary. And the situation is changing. Pinkerton (2011:2412) states that: "There is much more sustained and widespread attention [than earlier] being given to developing international understanding and action on the needs of young people leaving out of home care".

Pinkerton mentions South America as one of the regions where available material on leaving care appears to lack.

He states that there is "a pressing need to find the means to gather the information and understanding that undoubtedly does exist in those and other regions and countries so far not engaged" (Pinkerton 2011:2412).

Support in the transition is not something these young people can take for granted. If they do not have good family support, they are dependent upon what social workers, foster parents and staff from institutions provide to them. Therefore, developing understanding and actions are vital.

Both social workers and social policy makers should be encouraged in these efforts. Research within each national context can contribute to this.

And, as a next step, comparative research on several countries will be useful.

Through research it is possible to construct an international knowledge about this transition, and in this way contribute to the development of good national practice.

Child welfare initiatives for adolescents with serious behavioural problems – A longitudinal study

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Child welfare initiatives for adolescents with serious behavioural problems –A longitudinal study

Ingeborg Helgeland, College of Applied Sciences in Oslo and Akershus

Introduction

Youths with serious behaviour problems, as delinquency, dropping out of school, drug use and vagrancy, are an enormous challenge for society. In this lecture I will describe how the child welfare services in one county in Norway tried out methods to help a group of these youngsters into a new way of living. I will also describe the results of the follow up study of these youngsters. I have followed them over 25 years, through their transitions from care into adult life (Helgeland 2005, 2010, 2011).

The 85 white ethnic Norwegian youths in this study participated in child welfare initiatives in a project that was carried out from 1981 to 1985 in the county of Buskerud, which was selected as typical of the 19 counties in Norway.

The child welfare project was one of the programs in a national initiative entitled "Alternative to the imprisonment of youth", which was inaugurated by the proposition to raise the legal age from 14 years to 15 years for prosecution on charges of criminal conduct (Parliamentary Report nr.50 (1977-78: On criminal policy)). In part due to the results of this child welfare project, the minimum age for the incarceration of a minor was raised to 15 years of age in Norway in 1992.

The typical characteristics of the situation for the youngsters in this study were as follows: their problems were extensive and were sustained over time, including truancy and other problems at school, criminal behaviour, drug abuse and running out at nights. Most of them had experienced child abuse, 75 % coming from more or less disadvantaged families, with family conflicts, social problems, mental illness and alcohol problems.

The child welfare program

The program provided three types of services:

1. Counselling services for municipalities: The project counselled staff in the municipalities, suggesting ways to help adolescents for whom help at local level was seen as a realistic and preferable alternative. Fifteen of the adolescents, all evaluated as having the least extensive problems, received this type of help, most of them living at home with their family.

2. Reinforced local initiatives: The project either provided parents with supervision, to develop further the skills they needed for dealing with their troubled teenagers, and/or developed alternative school programs or job training. These adolescents lived at home with their parents.

3. New-start initiatives: For cases where neither of the above alternatives was considered appropriate, because of a prolonged need for 24-hour care, the project initiated three housing options. The goal was to provide the adolescents with a new start in life, through strengthened foster homes (one of the foster parent getting a full salary), drug-treatment collectives or traditional institutions for children and youth within psychiatry, school system and child welfare system staffed with extra social workers.

At that time Norway had not yet established closed institutions or so called prisons for children between 15 and 18 years old. Today two of these are established, based on a humanistic approach, each with room for four to six youngsters.

4. What was new at that time within the Buskerud project, was establishing a short-term institution for youth with serious behavioural problems, where the youth could live up to 6 weeks, for evaluating his or her situation, finding out which resources he or she had in the family and the neighbourhood, and together with the youth and his parents find a good solution for what to do with the situation. Foster parents were searched for, institutions and drug-treatment collectives were applied. The social workers in this institution tried to find out what the youths thought and meant about his or her situation, to try to negotiate about what was necessary to come into a positive path in life. This short term institution could have up to four youths at the same time there.

The follow up study

The adolescents were followed up at the age of 20 and 30, by means of interviews, surveys and official data (Helgeland 2007, 2010). We have now started up the fourth follow up, when the persons in the study have reached the age of 40-45 years. However, being in the process of gathering data, the results are not yet clear, except of the death rate. Therefore the results will not be described or discussed here.

The study is one of only a few long-term studies of adolescents with severe behavioural problems based on both quantitative and qualitative data and analyses. Its findings are therefore important compared with the findings of other more short-term studies.

The research questions:

-How have girls and boys with severe adjustment difficulties during their adolescence made the transitions and managed their lives as adults?

-Were there any courses of events that gave them a chance to develop positively?

-How do the women and men experience their lives and interactions with family and society?

The design of the study can be viewed as pre-experimental, with three measurements in time: T1 before the intervention (when the adolescents were aged approximately 14-15), and T2 and T3 after the intervention (when they were aged 20 and 30 respectively).

Data were collected from the following sources:

- *Qualitative/life history semi-structured interviews
(T1, T2, T3 and T4)

- *Official records about criminal offences
(T1, T2 and T3)

- *Data from social security documents (T1)

- *Survey data from the social security offices (T3)

- *Some interviews with social workers, police, foster parents, and biological parents
(T1 and T2)

There has been a methodological and analytical reflexive development through these years of study. For both the quantitative and qualitative approach: from a moreover descriptive analytical level to integrating a reflexive, discursive and narrative thinking. All over an inductive perspective has been carried through, from the «bottom – up» (Smith, 1990).

Some findings when the informants were around 30 years of age.

How were the project participants faring at the age of 30? In 1997-98, 15 years after the Buskerud child welfare project started, three-quarters of the female participants and about half the male participants were living lives traditionally viewed as satisfactory for 30-year-olds, i.e., 'ordinary' lives. Neither they nor their friends or family members were engaged in criminal activities or using drugs, and they owned or rented their own homes. They had enough money to pay for the necessities of life either through paid employment, social insurance (e.g., benefits for single parents), or economic aid from municipal social services. Their income, however, was far below average for people of their age.

Table 2 Life situations at age 30 for the entire group, by gender:

	Women	Men	Total
Dead	7% (2)	17 % (9)	13% (11)
Very poor	10% (3)	24 % (13)	19% (16)
“A foot in 7% (2) each camp”		15% (8)	12 % (10)
Good	23% (7)	11% (6)	15% (13)
Very good	53% (17)	33% (18)	41% (35)
Total	100% (31)	100% (54)	100% (85)

(N=85) Source: Interviews with members of the group (60), survey data, interviews with municipal social services, and registry data.

In this overview, ‘good’ and ‘very good’ means a life free of drug use and criminal behaviour. Coming into one of these categories does not mean a person is fortunate or happy all the time. Rather it means they have broken the negative patterns that led to their behavioural problems, ultimately creating lives free of such problems, having a social network of people living ‘ordinary’ lives.

Very good means the person is attending an educational institution or has a paid job. Good means the person is receiving social benefits, i.e., has a legal income despite not working. In all, more than half the 30-year-olds (56%) were categorized as having a good or very good life situation.

As person with “a foot in each camp” has friends and family members who live “ordinary” lives, but also has friends and family members who participate in drug use or have criminal associations. They could do well if they were living in a treatment collective that helped protect them from undesirable former associates, or if they had a partner with an “ordinary” life. When this was not the case, they had difficulties avoiding contact with former friends and associates involved in drugs.

Approximately 12 percent of the participants were in this category. These people had a common need for continuous support to maintain an adjusted, “ordinary” lifestyle.

Very poor means a person is completely integrated into drug-using and criminal environments. Participants in this category had served prison terms ranging from three to 12 years. Their lives were extremely affected by drug use and criminal activities. They had no permanent residence and had either never worked or only

held down short-term jobs. All had serious problems with drug abuse and almost all engaged in criminal activity for profit (car theft, burglary, theft, selling stolen goods, etc., as well as selling narcotics). 19 percent of the 30-year-olds fell into this category. Only three were women.

The remaining members of the group (13 percent), two women and nine men, were dead at the third wave of follow-up. The first death had occurred in 1985. Except for the death of one woman, all the deceased had been suffering from severe problems resulting from drug abuse, criminal behaviour and/or psychological difficulties before their deaths. However, at the fourth wave, from 2011 until now, as many as 21 persons had died. This represents nearly 25 % of the group of 85 persons. Of the eleven last deaths, ten were related to drug abuse and a marginal life situation.

I am interested in results indicating what kinds of initiatives may help young people with antisocial behaviour on to a positive track. Quantitative (Correlation analyses and logistic regression analyses) and qualitative analyses indicate following factors giving a chance to get into a positive tack in the transition to adulthood (Helgeland 2010):

- Girls in the project were more likely to do well than boys
- Parental alcohol and drug abuse, when controlled for gender, seems to be an important risk factor when it comes to an adult criminal carer.
- A central finding is also that the early onset of behavioural problems at school, when controlled for the variables gender and parental alcohol abuse, is highly predictive of the child's life situation in adulthood, in a negative way.
- Regarding types of child welfare initiative, the analyses shows that the reinforced foster homes and collectives for young drug abusers had an independent effect on the participants' life situations at age 30. These two initiatives, when controlled for home environments during adolescence, the onset of behavioural problems at school, parent's alcohol- or drug-problems, and gender, are shown to increase the likelihood of re-socialization.

What we also found was that finding a partner without drug problems, living "normal", gave a chance to coming on to a positive tack in life, especially for the men. And to be a mother, caring for a child, was a very positive aspect for the women. Another critical moment for the informants was being followed up after care.

However, the most interesting findings I think, indicate that a period of one to four years spent living in specially funded and resourced foster homes or treatment collectives seems to give young drug abusers and juvenile delinquents the chance to get onto a positive tack. Child welfare services traditionally view foster homes as

unable to cope with these difficult adolescents: foster parents will simply be unable to handle the long-term stress involved. The results of this study show another view. With careful guidance and support from child welfare services, foster parents can be able to give a new start to adolescents with serious behavioural problems. One key factor in the lifespan analyses appears to have been the provision of opportunities for the adolescents to form relationships with adults who were able to act as significant others for them in a family-like setting. In this respect the treatment collectives were similar to the reinforced foster homes.

However, how can we understand why foster homes and treatment collectives seem to have positive impact on the lives of these persons? What did the children, youths and the growing adults tell in the interviews? The organization of foster homes and treatment collectives are family-like, in contrast to traditional institutions, where the social workers are eight hours on job, and a huge amount of adults shift through the twenty-four hours. In foster homes and rehabilitation collectives for young drug abusers the adults more or less live together with the youths and share their daily activities. An important question is: what kind of qualities gives this "together-living"? The informants told in the interviews about:

- *adults who they experienced gave them care
- *who shared activities with them
- *who set limits for their drug use and vagabond-criminal activities
- * who talked and discussed with them (joint meaning making)
- *adults with whom they felt respected
- * adults who became their significant others through sharing the daily life
- * to be taken away from the peers using drugs

What was common for the two types of initiatives was a tendency to a better follow-up after care than the traditional institutions. My hypothesis is that a close relationship to the youngsters develops responsibility by the foster parents and the social workers when it comes to after care contact and follow-up.

Conclusion

This study shows that it is possible to help youths with serious behaviour problems on to a positive tack in life, by giving them possibilities for a new start in foster homes and treatment collectives. Continuity in the relation to few adults in small units, few but important rules as not using drugs, going to school or work, eating dinner together, and coming home in the evenings, besides feelings of being respected and worthy, - are some of the main things the informants point out.

Some thoughts on the legal right of adolescents in institutional care to training and preparation for discharge to independent living

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Some thoughts on the legal right of adolescents in institutional care to training and preparation for discharge to independent living

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This paper examines the legal conditions needed to provide adolescents with on-going support during their transition from care institutions to independent living. Transition training is often seen as an optional activity, a workshop that may or may not be held. However, adolescents have a right to this sort of preparation. This right is enshrined in a body of international law and in the Argentine National Constitution, as well as in local ordinances. This paper will outline the legal framework for developing public policies consistent with this right.

Let us begin by considering two essential issues. On the one hand, the progressive independence of adolescents as a specific age group is recognized within the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and other national and international tools for the protection of children, which recognize adolescents' specific abilities in the different areas of their lives. On the other hand, adolescents in institutional care are wards of the state. Unfortunately, when minors (teenagers) are not taken care of by their families, but by public or private institutions, the criteria of progressive independence is often ignored.

With regard to the independence, the Committee on the Rights of the Child - a body that both applies and interprets the Convention - is very clear about the ill-advisedness of terminating childhood abruptly. Instead, it advises guidance and support so that young person's gradual can grow towards autonomy and adulthood. In other words, it is not acceptable that a child, as provided for in Article I of the Convention, should become adult from one day to the next without some sort of preparation for adulthood. After extensive studies in different countries, the Committee has established that adolescents need guidance and support during this transitional period in their lives and progressive autonomy. Abrupt changes made overnight, so to speak, can only damage an adolescent's chances of a safe and healthy development into adulthood.

Clearly, the social response model based on the compulsive institutionalization previously favoured by Argentina's *Patronato law*⁵ is undergoing a crisis as a result of various legal and social policy issues. In the pre-CRC era, the institutionalizing of teenagers was often justified on the grounds that they were free to leave as soon as they reached adulthood. Even if teenagers had identifiable needs for treatment, guidance or help, the standard approach was to confine them within an institution and confinement could last much longer than was actually necessary.

Since the adoption of the CRC in 1989, however, international standards for institutional care have moved forward. The CRC used the term "placement" to refer to institutional care and "deprivation of liberty" to refer to the field of juvenile justice. Then, in 1991, the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of Freedom gave as an explicit definition of deprivation of liberty. "The deprivation of liberty means any form of detention or imprisonment or the placement of a person in a public or private custodial setting, from which this person is not permitted to leave at will, by order of any judicial, administrative or other public authority" (Rule 11 b). The 1991 guidelines enshrined a broad range of measures affecting both children and teenagers who have broken the law and those who are confined to institutional care against their will.

However, even this definition was complex, and more recently the (2009) United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children have shown a further evolution of concepts in this field. These guidelines state that institutional care, whether public or private, must always be differentiated from the field of juvenile justice.

The scope of institutional care confronts us with a wide range of issues, from problems related to early childhood care to support for adolescents transitioning from care institutions, each with its own specific characteristics depending on the age group involved. Adolescents, however, are of special interest in Argentina since they now account for nearly half of the population in institutional care nationwide.⁶

⁵ Translator's note: Jean Grugel and Nicola Piper explain the origins of Argentina's *Law of the Minor* ("*Ley del Patronato*") as follows: "The *Ley del Patronato* of 1919 was originally designed to address perceived law and order problems. (...) Under the *Ley del Patronato*, the family courts were empowered to take children into the custody of the state and order their indefinite detention ... a policy that meant, in effect, criminalizing poverty". Piper, N and Grugel, J (2007) *Critical Perspectives on Global Governance: Rights and Regulation in Governing Regimes*, London: Routledge. pp. 146-147

⁶ Survey on the situation of children and adolescents without parental care in Argentina, SENAF-UNICE, June 2012.

Here it is essential to note that while some teens today have only recently been institutionalised, others are long-term residents who have witnessed the transformation of their institutions from the inside. Indeed, they may well have been taken into care under the previous *Patronato law*, now repealed by Law 26,061 on Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, 2005.

From this population of adolescents, 28% leave their institutions at 18 because they have reached the age of majority, but only 8% leave with an individual independent living plan. The remaining 20% leave without any preparation whatsoever for adult life.⁷ Here I wish to emphasize that every adolescents has a right to “age out” with an individual living plan and not just an outside chance that everything will turn out for the best.

Let us review some of the articles of the Convention that should guide professional practice in relation to adolescents in institutional care. While the Convention does not establish definite age ranges, it does make the principle of gradually diminishing control a guide to interventions. Thus, Article 1 defines children as anyone under 18, unless people reach adulthood earlier in their own country’s legal system. It is then up to each country to pass legislation establishing the different ages in the text. For example, each country is supposed to establish a minimum working age (Convention No.138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and ILO).⁸ It is also supposed to define a minimum age of criminal responsibility in the juvenile justice system, and this should not be regressive.

Article 5 should be the ABC of all institutional practice. It is known as the article of “progressive independence for adolescents” and is very clear that it is the duty and function of adult caregivers (whether parents, guardians or responsible institutions) to provide appropriate guidance for the independent exercise of these rights by children and adolescents in accordance with their evolving capabilities. It cannot be emphasized enough that teenagers need guidance in order to exercise their rights. The goal is not merely to prepare adolescents for adulthood, but to give them clear and explicit guidelines in childhood and adolescence so that they grow into autonomous and independent adults. It is essential for professionals to understand that they have an obligation to enforce these rights.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Convention No 138 of the ILO states that the age set should not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, also that each member undertakes to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of children.

Article 12 of the Convention also states that children's views should always be taken into account by the adults responsible for them. When this is not possible, adults should explain why this approach has not been taken. No decisions can be made about children and adolescents without their participation. A procedure should be required to make their voices heard without the need to go to court.

Another important article is Article 25, which addresses the issue of mandatory periodic review of measures of hospital / institutional care for children and adolescents. States should ensure compliance with Article 25 in the widest possible sense. In the case of teenagers living in institutions, periodic reviews must include an independent living plan for each person so as to strengthen the adolescent's growing independence and prepare him or her for independent living. It should be emphasized that, from the time of admission to the institution, it is mandatory (not optional) to create an individualised plan setting out the steps needed to prepare the teenager for independent living. In turn, this relates to Article 29, which deals with the role of education in the life of the child or adolescent.

In Argentina, there are three laws that reinforce the Articles referred to above. Firstly, Law 26,061 for the Integral Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, contains measures for protection and guidance, and emphasizes the need to ensure the protection and participation of children and adolescents in all measures concerning them. Secondly, National Education Law 26,206 emphasizes the need for adolescents to finish their schooling. Secondary education is guaranteed and mandatory, and therefore schools are obliged to promote and protect child rights. This is also the ideal stage at which to teach young people respect for human rights before launching them into independent adulthood.

Finally, Law 26,390 on the Prohibition of Child Labor and Protection of Adolescent Work highlights the difficult balance between preparing young people for independent adult living, on the one hand, and the need to improve working conditions for those aged 16 to 18 years, on the other. In this respect, controls must also be implemented in alternative care institutions. We must be on the lookout for hidden forms of child labour and exploitation, sometimes disguised as job placements in workshops or offices, or internships that are really forms of exploitation.

These three standards provide an important scaffolding to justify enforcing the right to preparatory support. The recent National Law 26,579, which sets the age of majority at 18 years, has shortened the time available for support. In the past, this could last for up to three years, but this is no longer possible. In contrast, support in other countries is often extended well into adulthood.

Preparation for independent living can be conceived along the lines of the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Guidelines 131 and 136 establish the duty of the institutions for children who lack family-based care or cannot return to their families of origin. The function of these institutions is to accompany and prepare these children from the moment of admission, with a plan devised by professionals. Again, the emphasis is on the need to differentiate between preparation for trades and covert forms of unprotected child or adolescent work. There is an urgent need for national legislation incorporating these criteria. Once again, I would like to emphasize the desirability of drawing up an individual plan for each adolescent. It usually happens that the authorities responsible for the care of foster teens have no tools to prepare them for young adulthood and independent living. The authorities are now obliged to produce programs and plans for institutional care which can be applied in practice, and it is important for planners to have these instruments.

While on the subject of the public authorities, we must not forget the role of the public prosecutor as a representative of adolescents without parental care. If the Public Administration applies measures and the Judiciary guarantees their legality, one of the prosecutor's functions is to act as young people's legal representative. It is therefore vital that representation of adolescents in institutional care is oriented towards furthering compliance and enforcement whenever an adolescent's right to support during the ageing-out process is infringed.

In fulfilling this right, all levels must be involved, including government authorities and school directorates, as well as carers (institutions and families). One of the biggest challenges is to enable foster families to carry out this role. Foster parents are generally unaware of this issue.

In settings other than foster homes, no-one doubts the need to provide education and other forms of practical help during the transition period. In these settings, new discussions and initiatives are needed. Significantly, many provinces in Argentina are now conducting institutional reforms which include developing systems of monitoring and independent oversight in order to guarantee adolescents' rights to guidance and support.

The challenge, then, is to move forward in recognizing that the obligation to provide guidance and support during transitioning is no longer voluntary; adolescents have a fully enforceable right to support and preparation prior to being discharged from institutions. This is an obligation for the implementing agencies and enforceable by all stakeholders in the system. But for this to occur, greater coordination is required between different sectors of government and society.

The protection of children and adolescents in the province of Buenos Aires

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The protection of children and adolescents in the province of Buenos Aires

Cecilia Tome

Director of the System for Promoting and Protecting the Rights of the Child, a program under the Secretariat of Children and Adolescents in the province of Buenos Aires

I would like to start by mentioning how the province of Buenos Aires is currently breaking new ground in measures relating to children. In the past, the Secretariat for Children and Adolescents belonged to the Ministry of Development. On December 12, 2011, however, it became an autonomous organization, reporting directly to the office of the Cabinet of Ministers. This change has involved a review of all programs and projects related to public policy for children. To promote greater self-reliance among young people, we have created children's support centres in all 20 regions of the province and all the provincial municipalities are involved, whether or not they are members of the System for Promoting and Protecting the Rights of the Child. In this way, we try to unify various concepts and criteria.

Self-reliance, and also the period prior to self-reliance - progressive independence - are concepts that we try to work on with social workers, NGOs and institutions. What other speakers have noted is also a reality in our province: many institutions that house young people have difficulty seeing their wards as protagonists of their own lives. Teenagers are 'subjects of law' i.e. they have the capacity to realize rights and juridical duties - and it is they who must decide which workshop they want to take, what they enjoy doing, what they want to study, etc. This is a debate that is taking place behind closed doors, both in official circles and between the Secretariat and those NGOs that have signed agreements with the administration.

Today I would like to talk about the Juan Carlos Márquez Home in the City of La Plata, which houses young male adolescents, aged 15 to 18 years. This home depends directly on the Promotion and Protection programme and is unique in that, when a young man enters the home, the first priority of the institution's technical team is promote his self-reliance. How is this idea applied in practice? Obviously through a team of professionals belonging to the institution. In the first instance, the team creates small groups (this institution houses a maximum of 15 adolescents) where each young man will decide which workshop he wants to enter and which courses he wants to take.

In the province of Buenos Aires, an agreement was signed between the Secretariat for Children and Adolescents and the Department of Schools. The latter has a vocational training centre which is delivering courses to young people from the age

of 16. The opportunities available in the system allow adolescents to plan what their lives will be like after they are discharged from their respective institutions. We have not forgotten that teenagers are exceptional in terms of rights. Both at the provincial and national level, agencies that promote and protect children's rights must continue working to restore those rights that were violated when the teenager was forced to enter an institution.

Under the current arrangement, teenagers or young people begin working with a technical team and with an operator. They have the opportunity to go to a professional/vocational training college in order to meet the teachers and read the course outlines. There are also agreements with various trades unions – for example, bakers', waiters', confectioners', hairdressers' unions - which organise all kinds of workshops outside the care home.

This work outside the home is important because without it young people will not develop strategies of self-reliance. In my case, I try to convey this message to all institutions working with young people. If adolescents do not know how to get along outside the institution, we are unwittingly replicating a model that we wanted to get rid of – the old Patronato. I do not know if I should say this, but these young people remain in contact with the operator even when they are over 18 and no longer legally entitled to be in the promotion and protection system.

One positive thing is that, since 2009, 30 young people have developed enough self-reliance to leave care and are still receiving support. Only five returned to their families - but this was because they were only 15 years old and the situation that had given rise to a violation of their rights was resolved while they were in the institution. The 30 adolescents who left with an independent living plan continue to return to the institution to talk about their achievements and problems. The operator also supports them outside the institution.

Another point to consider is that the institution's technical team monitors this independent living plan together with the adolescent, whose continuing independence comes before all else. This means providing tools for different purposes: from choosing the right clothes for a job interview or to writing a CV or functioning successfully at a job interview. The team always respects what the young person wants to convey when faced with a situation that makes them feel insecure and a member of the team accompanies them to interviews, enrolment sessions or courses.

The Secretariat has a limited number of scholarships, known as Liniers neighbourhood scholarships. These are one-off measures and quite modest but they help youngsters learn to handle their own money. The scholarships have two

purposes: to prevent young people entering institutions and to encourage them to leave institutions. These scholarships reinforce the links between the local services that provide them and the institution.

It is very common for confusion to arise in technical working sessions with operators. For example, when a child enters the care home, who should monitor the child's welfare – the home or the local services? We like to think that the local services develop this strategy, but on a day to day basis it is the institution which has to carry out the necessary actions. Similarly, the promotion and protection services should assist the institution and other stakeholders in developing a system of co-responsibility. So, as I said earlier, people living in a public care home can go to professional training centres run by the Department of Schools. We also work with CPAs, which are centres for treating addictions. The Márquez Home is working on addictions with the Reencuentro Hospital, which is very close to the home. We must mention the support grants, which depend directly on the Attorney General of the Supreme Court. To obtain one of these grants, each adolescent must agree to complete a training course. An adolescent may be awarded an extra grant depending on his or her independent living plan.

The reality is that we are working hard on a support program for the whole of the province of Buenos Aires, not only for the Márquez Home. It is often complicated to break the bond between an operator and an adolescent, but it is necessary if the latter is to successfully overcome new situations. That is why the technical team of this particular home is committed to giving young people the tools to leave. Similarly, the operator also plays an important role once they have left care.

Finally, I would like to repeat that youngsters who are not ready to age out at 18 can always stay in the care home a bit longer. Leaving is not the only goal. The core of this project is to provide support and foster independence and self-reliance, the building blocks of any strategy for working with adolescents.

Full stop – new life: management experience and new challenges

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Full stop – new life: management experience and new challenges

Daniela Bravo

Lawyer and Director of Children, Youth and Family, Province of Tucumán

Here I am going to talk about a scheme called “Full stop, new life” which is being implemented in the province of Tucumán. This is the first project of its type in the province and, consequently, it is difficult to evaluate the host institutions, especially in terms of work and of the treatment young people have received. Those at the forefront of the project have felt the need to establish criteria for minimum standards of care to ensure the functioning of these institutions. We were interested in addressing the problem of leaving care among teenagers who had so far received no support from teams outside of their institutions.

The initiative to set up a mechanism to monitor adolescents leaving care was taken together with Tucumán’s Provincial Directorate of Youth and Adults, which could no longer continue providing protection and support singlehanded. However, other players were also invited to participate. The Directorate of Children considers that it is no longer legally responsible for young people in its care once they turn 18. Our strategy was to involve the Directorate of Youth and also a civil society organization. We are trying to approach the problem in a holistic manner, as this scheme is challenging for both state and private institutions. The latter, by agreement, provide accommodation. For us, this was an opportunity to monitor what was happening inside these institutions.

“Full stop, new life” began with just 15 young people, aged between 17 and 23 years. In order to qualify for the scheme, they could not have families, or at least their families could not be a viable alternative. The young people chosen had no psychiatric disorders that we knew of. This was because our team was not yet trained to work with psychiatric patients. As this was a pilot project, we decided to exclude the most complex cases. Only after building an experienced team could we begin a broader-based enrolment.

At that time, we were paying attention to those young people who expressed an interest or a desire to have a more independent lifestyle. Where they consumed illegal substances, we expected them to have worked through this problem with a pre-treatment, whether or not they continued the treatment over time. Another requirement was that they should recently have started work, or at least be about to do so.

There were three main foci for our project: stronger institutions; the protagonism and independence of the young person; and finally, positive social representation and the building of a network of social and labour inclusion. Accordingly, our team was initially made up of a psychologist, a social worker, an occupational therapist, a lawyer, four tutors and two workshop leaders. Doncel helped to coach the team. The team had two months to undergo training and understand the pace and style of interaction of the group it was going to work with. Even so, organisational issues appeared once the initiative had been launched. For example, how the project would liaise with the different institutions.

In recent years, state institutions that house young people have made significant progress in terms of access to education and health. However, as the name of the project suggests, their mission is not complete until they have helped those in their care to move on to a new life. If we need to repeat this, it is because there are still practitioners who do not see children and adolescents as subjects of law with clearly defined rights. These young people are not involved in decisions about their own lives. Certainly, nobody within their institutions had so far worked to help them move gradually towards greater independence. The institutional approach was focused on access to rights and aspects of educational policy, but never on the adolescent as a key player and active participant.

At first, the programme's novelty was also an obstacle. As mentioned earlier, our idea is to encourage those young people who are interested and motivated to live more independently. To begin with, however, relations between our team as outsiders and the institution's team were strained. The institution felt it was being observed and its work questioned.

Another difficulty was that as soon as the young people were 18 years old, their institutions were anxious for them to leave. This urgency was out of step with the adolescents' own development. This was one of the reasons for designing "Full stop, new life" as a framework for strengthening institutions and simultaneously empowering young people.

Of course, the two teams must work together. The goal is the smooth functioning of the process itself. The priority is not for young people to leave care, but to ensure that the process is as helpful as possible so as to ensure greater levels of autonomy. Today we are making progress towards this goal. We have successfully made our vision a part of institutional practice. Institutions now accept that from the moment children and youngsters are admitted, they need to be focused on the outside world. The institution must accompany them in the process of leaving care instead of worrying only about covering certain needs.

When the moment comes, the teenager often has no desire to leave the institution. In fact, there is much fear and uncertainty attached to transitioning. Difficulties have to be coped with almost daily. For example, young people who have never been to the supermarket or bought a loaf of bread because their institutions never included shopping in their training may suddenly face this experience for the first time with dread. In fact, institutions cater for the 'average' teenager and pay little attention to each adolescent's unique needs.

This present scheme is intended to allow young people to develop at their own pace and not force them to leave the institution before they are ready. When they do leave, it should be because they have already created an environment for themselves outside the institution – one in which they can thrive without feeling lonely.

After the first assessment, the organization of the project was changed slightly. One problem we had was that young people refused to participate in workshops. The workshop leaders on our team had no chance to bond with them. On inquiry, we found that the workshops offered within the institutions were less related to these youngsters' interests than to the institution's resources. Although we talked about workshops, the young people refused categorically to take part in them or in any group activities where they had to express or commit themselves or stick their necks out in any way. The workshop mode was therefore changed.

We have also included support from a trained psychotherapist where the tutor's support is not enough. In more complex cases, it has been necessary to include specialised staff to support and facilitate the young person's adaptation to the outside world.

Currently, the project rests on three legs. The interdisciplinary team acts as a go-between with the outside world, connecting young people to labour and social networks. The team of tutors and companions provide a permanent presence; they help to draw up individual action plans and collect information on the young people's expectations through one-to-one conversations. Finally, the creative thinking and action workshop regulates and monitors young people's experiences with other parts of the project, including their expectations and impressions, for example, of a new psychologist, or worker social or support team that they may see as an intrusion. It is essential in this workshop to listen to what the young people have to say.

Currently, there are thirteen young people in the "Full stop, new life" project. Two are in the process of admission and two have already graduated from it. The latter both have jobs and live alone. They have gone through many stages successfully and can now lead independent lives with much less support from the

public authorities. In both cases, an important factor has been the presence of a male and a female companion who have helped these youngsters to stand on their own two feet outside the institution.

We have also had two cases where a young person has “dropped out”, as we say within the project. The youngsters have had to return to their institutions because they still find life on the outside too difficult – although returning to an institution is no easy matter. We are constantly assessing the training and preparation we give. Gradually, we are changing the way institutions look at things so that young people can start to deal with their fears and uncertainties while they are still in a more protected environment. In this way, when they come to take the plunge, those fears will not impede their ability to live independently.



TRANSITIONING FROM THE PROTECTION SYSTEM TO INDEPENDENCE

Participation of young people from the Exit Guide in the seminar "Youth and Rights"

María Paz Palmieri
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E Guide, or Exit Guide, is an Internet portal (www.guiaegreso.com.ar) that resulted grew out of a proposal by the Civil Association Doncel for creating support tools for young people moving along the path from institutional living to independence. A distinctive feature of this initiative is that these tools were developed by other young people who have been through similar experiences. During 2010, we worked with a group of young people in developing a website with advice and contacts as well as group members’ own stories. Towards the end of the year, activities were organized to publicise the website in care homes and through radio and television programmes.

This is how the young people who created E Guide introduce themselves on their website: “We aim to offer you guidance, information and help through our various experiences. We hope this will help you and you won’t feel alone at this important time in your life. Just as you’re treading at the moment on wobbly-looking paving stones on a path you don’t yet know, at some time we too have trod a similar path ...” The aim of these young people is to build a bridge between themselves and their peers by offering information and their own experiences as an anchor point.

During the discussion time, the seminar “Youth and Rights” (held last 29 March, 2012), was attended by two young members of the project. In addition to information and experiences, they brought with them their proposals for improving the transition process, aimed at those who are part of government teams and specialized social organizations in the field.

Yamila Carras and Cristian Guarasci were invited to the seminar to represent the E. Guide group. After hearing the presentations at the two workshops, both Yamila and Cristian took part in the ensuing discussion. They had not prepared a speech or a formal presentation, but they were invited to listen and comment. Their suggestions and interventions can be summarized as follows:

- The importance of support in the care home and while transitioning.
- The importance of preparing for transitioning and participating in areas of transition support.
- The need to expose unequal treatment of young people by the relevant institutional bodies.
- The proposal of a centre for former residents of care institutions.

Cristian was the first to speak. He pointed out that when leaving care “there are kids who do very well and others that do very poorly; it is important to continue to accompany them, not kick them out into the void”. During the conversation, the void Cristian mentioned took on other names, such as the lack of a family network or a lack of tools and job opportunities, and difficulties in obtaining housing. “My family, even when I lived in the home, took no responsibility for me. They came to visit me. That was very painful”, said Yamila. Both youngsters said support in getting through this stage was essential. Yamila suggested this should start in the home before young people were discharged from care: “I had a lot of problems after I left. I moved three weeks ago, I spend my life moving. I know I am strong enough to be OK, but there are always ups and downs so it is important to have some support”.

Yamila said her participation in the work programme was vital: “I didn’t know what a CV is, how to go to an interview, nobody had explained this. Doncel gave me a lot of support, not just in terms of work ...” Later, she mentioned other ways in which young people feel supported once they have left their institutions: “It was important to participate in the E Guide and I know that my story can help others. Telling it made me feel much stronger. It helped me to see myself in the videos and listen to my teammates”.

Yamila, who has two young daughters, also spoke about her ups and downs, not only in relation to young people with better opportunities, but within the protection system itself. She said that although there were people who had helped her in the care home, “it was not a good experience (...) the psychologist was very rude; all of us girls did our best to get him thrown out”. Yamila had to go to law to be allowed to keep her younger daughter. About the court system, she said: “The court assigns you a lawyer. The one I was assigned didn’t do much. I had to look for a private one...” Later, thanks to friends and fellow E Guide team members, she came to realize that other homes provided better support and are better places to live. “I think things would have been different for me if I’d had the type of support available in other homes. I would have felt stronger, more stable and more confident about my decisions. Anyway, the point is to stop this happening to other kids”. Her words are tinged with resignation: she needs to leave those experiences behind and hopes that others will have better opportunities than she did.

The comments and suggestions of these two E Guide representatives corroborated once again, the guidelines and the conclusions that have been discussed in the lectures. I refer in particular to the importance of support during the transition towards independence. This has been mentioned from different perspectives by all the different speakers.

In the conclusions of her study, Ingeborg Helgeland spoke about the role of people who share young people's daily lives with them, listening and setting clear limits in an atmosphere of dignity and respect as a basis for "giving a positive direction to their lives". Jan Storø rightly stated that during that time, "the young person also should be spared from walking this distance alone. That leads us to the importance of support". In other words, they need to be accompanied by real flesh-and-blood people. The Norwegian researcher spoke of "foster parents and social workers"; the young people of the E-Guide, in turn, mentioned "operators, social workers, psychologists and friends".

Despite the geographical distance and cultural differences, it is clear that, in both Norway and Argentina, support for young people cannot be limited to mere administrative support or government programs. It must be embodied in a person who offers stability, and who is there during a young person's successes and failures as they strive for greater independence – someone who will "keep you on your feet".

Finally, in reviewing Gimol Pinto's paper, we saw that this expert highlighted two key factors for working with adolescents towards gradual independence: the enforcement of rights, and the participation of children and young people in decision-making. It is in this sense that we understand the proposal for alternative housing – housing with certain particular features for young people leaving care: the "half-way house". Government directors, experts and civil society should understand that these young people are claiming their rights and not simply listen to and applaud them, but uphold and support their proposal.

Conclusions:
A comprehensive model for
accompanying young care-
leavers' transition to adult life.
Scope and implications

Mariana Incarnato
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Conclusions: A comprehensive model for accompanying young care-leavers' transition to adult life. Scope and implications

Mariana Incarnato

Executive Director
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Eight years ago we started working at Doncel on a jobs programme for young people between 17 and 21 years of age, living in institutions. The purpose of this program was to prepare them through job training, placement and employment to live an independent life. Over the years more than 500 young people have taken part in this scheme. However, we have found that once these adolescents leave the institutions they are living in, it is difficult for them to maintain the educational or occupational skills they have developed. We have also found that the protection and resources (both human and financial) they are provided with in institutions are withdrawn far too abruptly. These findings have led us to establish more comprehensive and long-term objectives and to create the Doncel Civil Association, whose mission is to help young institutionalized Argentinians in the process of transition from protection towards independence and adulthood.

A brief look at some data from the latest report published by UNICEF and the National Office for Children, Youth and Family: Situation of children and adolescents without parental care in Argentina (2012) will suffice to give an overview of the plight of young people leaving out-of-home-care in our country. In Argentina, 28% of young people in institutions leave care at 18 – a process known as “ageing out”. These youngsters are treated in the report as a single category, which includes those who leave with an individual independent living plan (8%) - although it is not clear how effective and sustainable such plans are without professional follow up - and those who do not (the remaining 20%).

These data raise an important question: should age be the sole criterion for discharge from an institution? Is leaving care a category comparable to that of family reunification or adoption? Are we not “fudging” on the issue by resorting to terms like “coming of age” and “ageing out”? Other categories, such as “family reunification” and “adoption”, all include third persons, i.e., there are “others” to help with the transition process. Young people “ageing out”, however, are simply thrown into a void with no third persons to accompany them on what often turns out to be a lonely, silent path.

I should stress the discourse roles of the terms mentioned above because they show significant differences in terms of priorities. Even today, transitioning is not treated as one of our main concerns; it is our task, then, to mark out the playing field for those transitioning in Argentina.

Just as at some moment in the past we stopped calling children “minors”, we should start to replace “coming of age” as a category for discharge with something different. Let us forget for a while about legal age, which in any case is a confusing category and varies depending upon the type of activity.

Returning to the data in the report, 7% reportedly “abandoned the program”. Who could these people be? Those who used to be called “runaway children and youths”? These new categories continue to be ill-defined and uninformative, telling us nothing about the paths followed by children and young people once they have left institutional care. There is no need to dwell any further on this issue, except to stress that these terms are suggestive of just how fuzzy the boundaries of transitioning really are and the work that remains to be done in this area.

Another finding of this UNICEF report – this time qualitative rather than quantitative - is the “great difficulty” teams from protection agencies have in promoting youth transitioning (2012: p. 42). What are these “great difficulties” due to? My own hypothesis is that difficulties arise partly because teams know that circumstances are not yet right for accompanying young people transitioning out of care and partly because the old paradigm survives according to which life inside is better than life outside the institution.

In this report, one of the most interesting ideas and a key proposal for change is: “To generate professional supervision in each province and in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, to accompany the technical teams who work in institutions accommodating children or adolescents.” The message is crystal clear: we cannot start to accompany young people on their path to independence without first training our work teams properly.

Let us return now to our experience at Doncel. In 2009 we began to broaden the scope of our work, widening the focus from job training, placement and employment to considering the transition to independence and adulthood as a whole. Since then, I have become convinced that a comprehensive approach must include both the young person’s subjective commitment to the process and access to opportunities.

The subjective element is mentioned by both Storø and Helgeland, - that is, what leaving care and transitioning mean for different individuals living in an institution without parental care. This is a first step towards devising a comprehensive approach. Every adolescent has a different anchor point. As we cannot know what this will be in advance, we can only accompany individuals in their process of self discovery. This process will draw both on their own experiences and on what was given to them by significant others.

Another significant aspect of these adolescents' subjective experience is time. There are many things they become aware of only after being outside the protection system for a while. In what Lacan called the *après-coup* – or re-signification of past experiences -many adolescents say: "When I was in the home I was not aware of this or did not give importance to that". Even some of the youngsters involved in the E-Guide experienced this - although long after being leaving their institutions. This shows why we must respect the natural pace of transition.

Several studies show that transition takes place in three stages: the preparatory stage, the moment of leaving care and the subsequent two years following departure.⁹ During these three stages, these adolescents learn (or do not learn) to cope with many uncertainties about the outside world. This is when we can also see what tools they have to respond to social demands and what kind of support they will need now or later.

A second step towards devising a comprehensive approach would be to provide access to opportunities, namely the necessary social and economic resources. In this sense, we consider that access to basic services (health, education and housing) is an inalienable right regardless of age. But this access also forms the substrate for the processes mentioned earlier, specifically the development of subjectivity. People without jobs or homes or without enough to eat live in a constant state of emergency: they cannot afford the time to resolve personal or developmental issues and problems may persist for years.

In adolescence, this is no small matter. It shapes later personality and behaviour because it is precisely during adolescence that issues of identity and belonging and the individual's style of social bonding are resolved. In short, we cannot help young people leaving care without a comprehensive and integral approach to transition. Accordingly, we must, as Gimol Pinto says, begin to

⁹ See Stein, Mike (2004): "What Works for Young People Leaving Care?", in Mike Stein and Emily R. Munro (eds.) (2008): *Young People's Transition from Care to Adulthood. International Research and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

accompany each young person from the very first day he or she enters the child protection system. We need to include young people in a consensus process about what is to be done and help them to choose suitable life goals.

Here I would stress Daniela Bravo's statement that the aim is not to get adolescents out of the institution but to help them achieve the highest possible levels of independence. This distinction is very important because many professionals still confuse being discharged from care with the ability to stand on one's own two feet. In short, a comprehensive, three-stage approach together with properly trained teams is essential for developing a sustainable model that will allow institutional staff and social workers to successfully accompany young care leavers' transition to independent living.

Finally, I would like to say that I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this congress made up of academics, representatives of UNICEF and civil society organizations. We now have an opportunity and, above all, a duty to devise a model that goes beyond initiatives from the private sector or from social organizations, guaranteeing transferable procedures for accompanying not just many but all young people without parental care in Argentina in their transition to adult life.

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