



# The Importance of Prioritizing Education of Children in Care



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- ▶ People who have been in out-of-home care as children are at high risk of social exclusion as adults.
  - ▶ Research suggests that this is closely linked to their low level of educational attainment.



# The low educational achievement of children and youth in out-of-home-care

- Children and youth in care are likely to suffer from significant educational gaps, compared with children growing up in their natural homes.
- Many leave the care system without a high school diploma, and even those who do attain one, typically perform below the general population.
- The aspirations their caregivers have for them are generally low and they lack educational guidance.
- Their starting point is well behind that of the general population and for many of them, integration into higher education remains an elusive dream.

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- In spite of the barriers encountered, however, some care leavers do succeed in the educational field and in transitioning to higher education.
  - Only a few studies have examined the factors related to their educational success.




# The aim of the study:

- To examine the factors relating to the educational success of alumni of out of home care, specifically - educational residential settings in Israel
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# Method

- Qualitative approach
  - Semi-structured in-depth interviews
  - 45 Care leavers from 3 different groups of origin: Israel, former Soviet Union and Ethiopia
  - Analysis was done according to the grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998)
  - Open coding to develop the main themes
  - Axial coding to reconstruct the data, make connections between themes
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# Main Findings

Two factors played a major role in the educational success of the care leavers and in their integration into higher education:


- The priority that was given to education by their families and care facilities (their social capital)
- Their personal assets, including ambition, future orientation, internal locus of control and independence (their identity capital)



# Three main narratives emerged from the interviews:

- Those who stayed at a residential care facility which failed to emphasize education, but due to their families that prioritized education, they succeeded to integrate into higher education (n=9)
- Those who came from families that prioritized education and their stay at the residential care facility became a tool to fulfill their educational aspirations (n=24)
- Those who came from families that did not emphasize education, but staying at a residential care facility promoting education allowed them progress in that field and to integrate into higher education (n=10)





## **Narrative 1:** the centrality of the family promoting education in the educational success of the care leavers


- These young people came from families that prioritized education and perceived education as a way to progress in life. This acted as a compensatory factor to the stay in a care facility which failed to promote education.

*"So I think first of all - it's home. What we got at home, even though I wasn't a good student, I knew that studying is something that is very important to my mother, that we will study... she passed it on to us that it is an important key to life."*




The young adults highlighted the little attention that their care facility gave to education:

*"It was more important for them to keep us on track than our academic success... but I think that's because there was such a diverse population, some had no parents, others were immigrants or had all kinds of economic problems, I don't know what, so, uh... you can't get the attention of everyone. You need some common ground, well... I will not say low, but the common denominator should be relevant to everyone, so... it was clear that education was some kind of a bonus."*




The care facilities failure to promote education make the care leavers aging out of the care facility with significant educational gaps:

*"When I finished high school, I had no high school diploma. By the way, I think almost all of us had no high school diploma. Like, maybe 10%, 15-20%, no more than that... but you see as I told you that the standard that they set was relatively low that nobody really gave it much attention."*



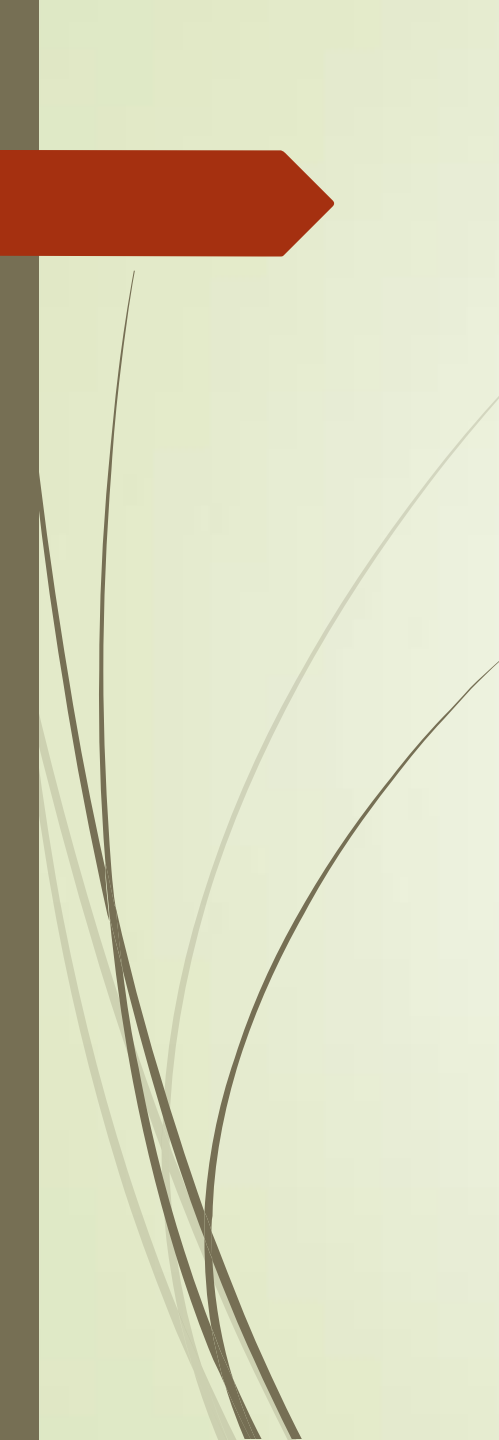
The involvement of birth families in the education of their children while in care, was sometimes the only thing that rescued them from educational failure:

- *"Till tenth grade I was fine, average. Then in tenth grade I do not know what happened to me, I freaked out, I decided not to go to school anymore and failed in 11 out of 12 subjects... The truth is that my mother saved the situation there... I really, really wanted to visit Poland, to a journey, so my mom told me you want to go to the journey to Poland, no problem, but you should not fail in eleventh grade... then I said - well okay, I really improved... so I have high school diploma like that: in tenth grade I have no grades, in eleventh grade I completed all tenth grade's subjects - it's amazing, really good grades, and in twelve grade I didn't care, so my grades were fine..."*




## **Narrative 2:** care facility as a vehicle for realizing the educational aspirations the young people brought from home

- ▶ Families instill in their children the notion that education is important. However, because families had to cope with various difficulties (e.g., poverty or the challenges of migration), they could not provide their children with tools or resources that are necessary to progress in the education field
- ▶ Getting into the care facility with a motivation to study, in addition to the resources they met there, enabled the young people to accomplish the educational aspirations derived from their families.




*“And I went to the care facility, my goal was to study, really, I was there to study and I can tell you that already in the first semester I had only two fails, that was an achievement for me. There were things that were hard for me... Huge gap... And the care facility really gave me support, as much tutoring as I wanted, every day they sit with you to do homework... So slowly-slowly I graduated with honors.”*



## The passive attitude of the residential care facilities in prioritizing education of children and young people in care

- ▶ While some care facilities had the necessary resources for educational progress, sometimes only the young people who had the initiative to ask for it, got the resources required to make their educational aspirations affordable

"The care facility gave me the recourses. The question is whether you use them or not... I was lucky, because I have used them (...) If someone would want something in the care facility, just say that you want, and you got it... Teenagers are not smart enough to say I want. I asked for what I need, and I got it".



Young people who didn't come with the importance of education from home, didn't get it in the care facility, and finished their term in care with no education:


“I think there were all kinds of children in the care facility (...) that fooled around the care facility and today they have no education and have no normal job and they have no horizon for progress. So I think that they look at this today and they say: I should have studied, and if I had someone in my life that was pressing me (...) So probably nobody brought the importance of it to them. And because they do not have the importance of it inside, in their head... that what I would do with this, and that if I will do this or that nonsense, how it will affect my future. They don't have it and then...sometimes people really...I saw some that stray in their way (...) I Came with it from home”.







**Narrative 3:** the centrality of the care facility promoting education in the educational success of the care leavers

- These young people came from families that didn't emphasize education.
- Staying at residential care facility promoting education allowed them to progress in that field, to perceive educational success and to make higher education a target they should strive for.



*"Well, I can tell you bluntly that what helped me most in integrating into higher education is the care facility... Here you had an opportunities (...) individual attention, all the classes you wanted to go, help in studying..., Here you have a library with teachers who come and teach and help you with homework, then it all together, you know, you're getting the help, you learn to believe in yourself and learn to know the strengths you have, so this what helped me most. There it started, in the care facility, there with all the staff and with all the process I went through, then I realized I do want to study... Because studying by itself is the key... and... This is a key to open a door... but yes I want to do something with my life(...) not to be another one like the parents who works at the factory and barely finish the month..."*

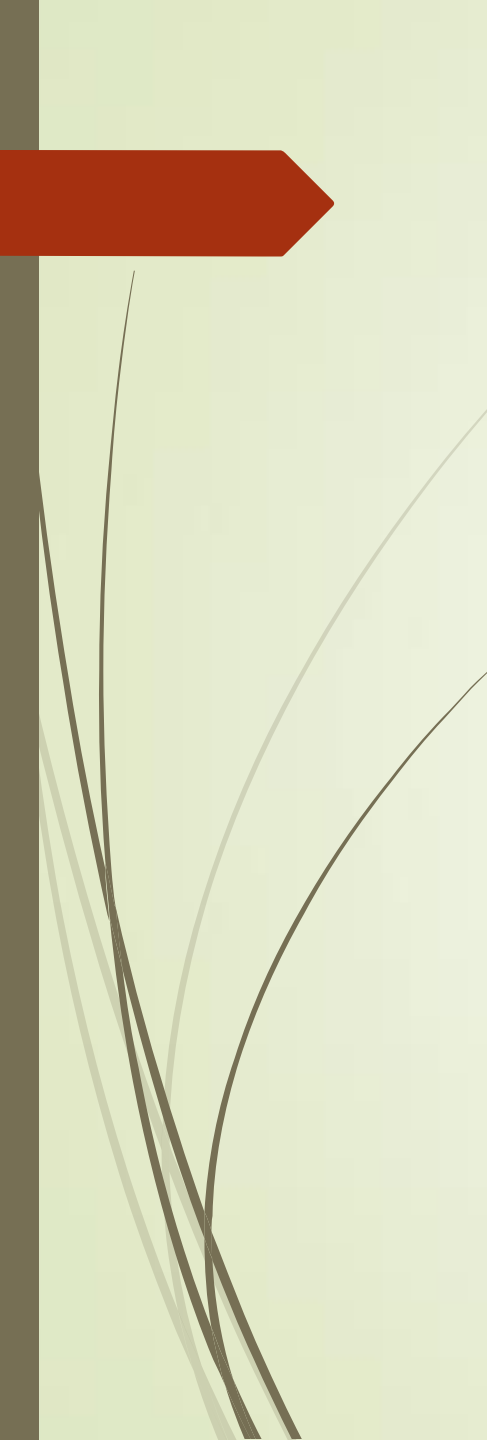




What do care leavers think could help them reach educational success and integrating into higher education?

The young adults stress the importance that the care system should:

- Adopt an attitude that has confidence in their own educational abilities
- Give priority to their education (emphasize its importance, promote their education, help them reach educational success)




"That's how you get out of the care facility. If they let you out of the residential care with confidence that you can succeed and you are capable and even if it is difficult for you, there are many ways to get help, and that you are a child of residential care does not mean you're a lost case (... ) So if this is the approach of the care facility, so that's how people will get out of there. But if the care facility treats its children as miserable people that they should take care of them, then they will be like that all their life"


"But it is very important not only to try to give a home substitute for these children, but also to give them a good springboard for a better life later. And the best way to do that, is especially through education"



# Conclusions



- The findings reveal three narratives confirming the major role of prioritizing education by families and care facilities in the educational success of the care leavers and in their integration into higher education.
- These findings are consistent with previous research that found an association between encouragement to pursue education from significant others (e.g., parents or staff in care) and positive educational outcomes (Jackson & Cameron, 2014; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Jackson et al., 2005).
- The study findings confirm Colman's (1988) conceptions of social capital, which emphasize the major role played by social networks-family and community- in the educational outcomes of young adults.

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- The study findings indicate the passive attitude of the residential care facilities in prioritizing education of children and youngsters in care.
  - This finding could provide an explanation for the low educational outcomes of care leavers compared to young people in the general population.
  - Furthermore, the findings could provide an explanation for the low educational outcomes of care leavers compared to young people from similar family background who grow up in their natural homes, as it was found in the study of Artsev, Benbenishty and Zeira (2013).


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- ▶ The passive attitude of care facilities towards promotion the education of children and youth in care, is consistent with previous researches.
  - ▶ Extensive research conducted in several European countries (YiPPEE project) indicates that the care leavers reported that most caregivers failed to give sufficient importance to their education, resulting in delays and gaps in their educational achievements.

Also professionals and caregivers in the care system interviewed for the study, indicated that the main obstacles which prevented young people from doing well at school and continuing in higher education, were placement with caregivers who gave little encouragement or support for educational achievement, low expectations or lack of interest in education by caregivers and lack of informed advice about routes to higher education (Jackson & Cameron, 2012).

- ▶ Further research in Spain indicates that the care system didn't promote properly the education field and that school was not prioritized (Montserrat, 2014; Montserrat, Casas & Malo, 2012).

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- The care leavers in the study stress the importance that the care system will adopt an attitude that has confidence in their educational abilities, will give priority to their education, and will help them achieve educational success. These suggestions were found in previous researches as well.
  - In the YiPPEE project there was broad agreement among the young adults that care system should give far greater emphasis to educational achievement and should provide more information on educational opportunities (Jackson & Cameron, 2012).
  - Similarly, in studies conducted with care leavers in Spain, the request was repeated, that the care system should not treat them as a hopeless case, but believe in their academic abilities. Another request was that the care system should help them study as parents expect their children to study (Montserrat, 2014)





The study results suggest that residential care facilities have the ability to help young people realize their education aspirations or revise it in order to bring to educational success. The care system should make great effort to prioritize education. This could be an important step in efforts to improve programs and services in care facilities in order to assist care population to reach positive outcomes and enable them to successfully integrate into society.

# Theoretical debates about child maltreatment

- I started the study with broad conceptual framework included the resilience approach, the identity capital model and the social capital model. Through the process of the study, I abandoned the resilience approach. I would like to frame the discussion on this issue
- **Resilience approach** provides a framework for understanding the success of young care leavers in integrating in higher education, despite their being a vulnerable population.

“resilience” including a positive adjustment when there is significant distress (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000).

- **The identity capital model** of Cote’s (1997) explains positive adaptation of individuals based on their resources.
- **The social capital model** explains positive adaptation of individuals based on the resources available to them through their membership in an established social network (Bourdieu, 1986)

“Compressed networks” (many and strong connections) help members progress in society.

Networks spread across groups provide more opportunities for progress.

Colman’s (1988) conceptions emphasise the major role of the social networks- family and community- in the educational outcomes of young people



Thank you for your attention  
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