

# MIFGASH

JOURNAL OF  
SOCIAL-EDUCATIONAL WORK

Special Issue

## **Transition to Adulthood of Youth in Care: Research, International Perspective, and Policy**

Assessment of life skills and the needs of adolescents on the verge  
of leaving care

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Evaluation of the "Gesher" (Bridge) program for youth in transition from care

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Public policy

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**Transition to Adulthood of Youth in Care:  
Research, International Perspective, and Policy**

Guest-Editors

**Dr. Anat Zeira and Prof. Rami Benbenishty**

**No. 28 ♦ December 2008**

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# ABSTRACTS

## **Assessment of life skills and the needs of adolescents on the verge of leaving care**

Rami Benbenishty, *Ph.D.*, *Louis and Gaby Weisfeld School of Social Work, Bar Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel*

Anat Zeira, *Ph.D.*, *School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mt Scopus, Jerusalem, Israel*

The present study examines the life skills and needs of adolescents in (educational) youth villages, (welfare) residential treatment and family foster care in the final two years of their stay. The study further examines the extent to which they can expect family support once they leave.

The sample included 178 youth in foster care, 291 in residential care and 1257 in youth villages. Structured questionnaires were completed by staff working with the adolescent in care.

The findings indicate that adolescents in youth villages may expect more familial support when they leave compared to youth in other types of placements, whereas the families of youths in residential care place much more negative pressures upon them. Workers identified several areas in which adolescents lack life skills, such as education and the ability to complete a meaningful (compulsory) military service. Many needs were identified and they were especially evident in the areas of future education and employment. Overall, life skills of adolescents in youth villages were assessed more favorably than youth in other types of placement and they had fewer needs.

The authors suggest that the implications of their findings show an evident need to engage in individual assessment and plans for youth while they are still in care. Further, they discuss the importance of developing programs to prepare youth while in care, as well as services for care leavers in the transition period.

**Key words:** care leavers, needs, life skills, foster care, residential care, youth villages.



## **The status of alumni of educational residential care settings in Israel**

Anat Zeira, *Ph.D., School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mt Scopus, Jerusalem, Israel*

Rami Benbenishty, *Ph.D, Louis and Gaby Weisfeld School of Social Work, Bar Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel*

This study describes alumni of educational residential care settings (youth villages) in Israel. It examines their current perception of their stay in the setting, their transition to independent living and their functioning in different life domains (e.g., education, military service, income, work, and health). A two-stage non-proportional probability strata sample combined with quota sampling yielded a national representative sample of 500 young adults. The sample includes 50 young persons who are alumni of NA'ALE (a special program for young-immigrants from the Former Soviet Union).

Most of the alumni present positive outcomes, with full matriculation, complete army service, steady income and housing arrangements, and they are in good physical and mental health. Nonetheless, 5–10% of the alumni demonstrate outcomes that are not as good.

Our findings indicate that alumni of Ethiopian origin seem to be doing worse than alumni of the other cultural groups. Yet, compared with young Ethiopians in the general Israeli population, their functioning is much better. Within immigrants from former USSR, NA'ALE alumni presented difficulties in their transition from the youth village mainly with regard to concrete instrumental needs.

The findings have clear implications on policy in the area of preparing youth for independent living as well as the need to continue providing support to some of the alumni after they have aged out of care. In addition, more effort should be placed on identifying the characteristics of the disadvantaged sub-groups in order to better prepare and support them in their transition from care.

**Key Words:** transition to adulthood, youth villages, educational residential settings, alumni of care.



## Evaluation of the "Gesher" (Bridge) program for youth in transition from care

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The transition of youth, who have spent a large portion of their lives in out-of-home-care into independent adult life, is particularly challenging. The paper presents an evaluation study of an experimental program "Gesher" (Bridge), designed to support Israeli youth (18–21) who leave care and do not have a familial support structure. The program provides a range of responses to their various needs: housing, vocational training, employment, counseling and life skills. The summative and formative evaluation of this project is presented.

The research explored the participants' current status and changes over time in multiple areas such as employment, education, military and civil service and personal relationships. Progress in the program was assessed from the perspectives of both participants and their counselors.

The study employed multiple data-gathering methods: open-ended and semi structured interviews with policy makers, observations, face to face and phone semi-structured interviews with participants and structured questionnaires completed by staff on each of the participants in the program. The paper is based on data collected in three periods in time ( $n_1=77$ ,  $n_2=75$ ,  $n_3=21$ ) from youth participants and their counselors.

The main findings include:

- ◆ A significant difference was found between the youth's evaluation of their life skills and that of their counselors, with the assessment of the youth being considerably higher in every aspect.
- ◆ The counselor's assessment showed that the program contributed to the participants. The contribution was more pronounced for those who stayed in the program longer.
- ◆ The most considerable progress was in the areas of the ability to cope with independent living, optimism, belief in their future, and interpersonal relationships. Less progress was noted in the area of education.
- ◆ Youth had very positive assessments of the program and their counselors.

The paper presents recommendations for improvement and expansion of this experimental program.

**Key words:** independent living program, evaluation, Israel.

## **Developing frameworks to support care leavers' transitions to adulthood: Messages from England and Norway**

Emily R. Munro, *BSocSc., Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University, England*

The purpose of this paper is to present the background to the development of services to care leavers in their transition to adulthood, and to discuss aspects of cross national comparisons, globalization and international policy exchange. First, it provides a brief overview of research on transitions from public care to adulthood and the challenges young people face. It then goes on to outline how legislation and policies to better support care leavers have evolved and developed in Norway and England.

The paper indicates key messages for countries that are currently debating further developing legislation, systems and processes to promote care leavers' well-being. However, the discussion emphasizes that these messages need to be interpreted with caution. While there is considerable value in cross-national exchange and learning lessons from the successes and failures of other countries there are also considerable challenges arising from comparative exploration of social problems.

**Key Words:** care leavers, cross national studies, services to at-risk youth.

## **An evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave care in the U.S.A.**

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While most young people in the United States continue to live at home or are able to rely on their family of origin to support them well into their twenties, youth in out-of-home placements typically "age out" of care at eighteen, and are thus "on their own" at a relatively early stage in the transition to adulthood. This paper reports on selected findings from the *Midwest Study*. Based on interviews with the youth themselves, the study follows the progress of a representative sample of foster youth in the participating states through age 21. The youth had all reached the age of 17 while placed in out-of-home care due to abuse or neglect, and had been in care for at least one year prior to their seventeenth birthday.

The paper details the findings of the first wave of the study. Interviews were conducted with 732 youth who were 17 years old and still under the jurisdiction of the state child welfare system. Findings describe the status of the youngsters before they were placed and in different domains while in-care. In addition, it reports on their perceptions about different aspects of care as well their personal relationships with the social workers and their families. In some areas the foster care sample is compared with a normative national group of youth.

The findings indicate that most youngsters have no family support. It seems that instability of care had consequences on their school performance. In addition, many had received mental health services and experienced direct involvement with the juvenile justice system. The paper discusses the effectiveness of existing services to support the youth after they age out of care and suggest that when developing services and policy, stakeholders will take into account not only the difficulties the youth experience but also their strengths and optimism.

**Key Words:** transition to adulthood, youth in foster care, services to care leavers.