



Care Leavers from Out-of-Home Care in Israel: Challenges and Opportunities for Change

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Care Leavers from Out-of-Home Care in Israel: Challenges and Opportunities for Change

Background

Each year, thousands of young adults leave out-of-home care. Their transition to adulthood is abrupt and accelerated, often taking place without a stable support network. These young adults must make decisions in key areas of life, frequently without family support or continuous, tailored guidance.

The study examined how adolescents in out-of-home care are prepared for the transition to adulthood, as well as the guidance and support available to them after leaving care. It also sought to identify barriers and gaps and to offer insights and directions for action to improve preparation for this transition. The study drew on a review of both academic and grey literature, semi-structured in-depth interviews with 13 professionals, and consultations with a lived-experience advisory group of young adult care leavers.

Findings

1 Abrupt transition to adulthood without continuity of support

Care leavers experience an abrupt transition from a protective and supportive setting to a reality in which support is far more limited. Many have no one to turn to when they need help.

“Leaving itself feels exposed, unprotected, as though the ground has been pulled out from under your feet”. [Young woman, 26]

2 Lack of family support compounds risks

The absence of family support exacerbates the difficulties associated with the transition to adulthood and reduces young adults' ability to rely on informal support networks. Young adults often experience this stage in terms of loneliness and having to assume adult responsibilities prematurely.

“There were so many nights when I cried because I had no family and no mother to call...” [Young woman, 30]

3 Available but inaccessible: Services for young adults

Numerous services and programs are available to young adults leaving out-of-home care. However, access to the benefits and services to which they are entitled is hindered by fragmented information across systems, heavy bureaucratic burdens, insufficient guidance and assistance, and inherent distrust in the system.

“ There are endless bureaucratic hurdles to overcome in order to exercise one's rights”. [Professional]

4 Care settings focus on practical rather than psychological preparation

The findings indicate a tendency to focus on instrumental activities directly related to the transition, while devoting less attention to interventions addressing emotional, social, and identity-related aspects.

5 The care-leaver coordinator as an organizing mechanism in preparing for the transition to adulthood

Transition programs and support after leaving care are currently led primarily by care-leaver coordinators, whose role is to ensure continuity between the end of the placement and life in the community. In most settings, this is a relatively new role that is still being developed and consolidated.

Insights from the lived-experience advisory group

- Loss of support system upon leaving care
- A need for ongoing guidance and for a stable, available, and committed point of contact
- A need for practical preparation for independent living
- Difficulty accessing benefits and services and navigating bureaucracy
- Loneliness and the absence of a supportive social network after leaving care
- A need to develop alumni communities of care leavers to share experiences and information, provide mutual support, and promote youth-led initiatives.

Summary

The study points to systemic barriers in preparing care leavers for the transition to adulthood and to a shortage of tailored services. This transition often takes place without continued support, without coordination among systems, and without sufficient attention to the distinct needs of young adults from diverse groups.

Contemporary perspectives emphasize the need for a gradual, multidimensional, and individually tailored transition.

Action Items

1.

Strengthen organizational capacity to prepare young adults for the transition to adulthood

- Provide financial support to NGOs that help young adults leaving out-of-home care
- Strengthen dedicated training for staff in out-of-home care
- Integrate needs-assessment tools into practice
- Develop structured contents for preparation programs and life-skills toolkits
- Establish an accessible platform containing information about all rights and services
- Map needs and services as a basis for prioritizing the Shashua Family Foundation's areas of investment
- Strengthen young adults' participation in the design and monitoring of services
- Develop mechanisms for young adult participation
- Strengthen family-focused interventions

2.

Promote evaluation-informed practice and ongoing evaluation

This includes promoting research and data-informed practice, including monitoring care leavers' outcomes over time, and developing a national dataset.

3.

Promote policy change

This includes developing policies to support young adults after age 18 and strengthening collaboration between government and civil society organizations.