
In Between: Preparing Foster Care Leavers in Israel for the Transition to Adulthood

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Background

Several thousand young adults who grew up in foster care currently live in Israel. These young adults face not only the regular challenges and barriers associated with the transition to adulthood, but also the long-term consequences of their earlier life experiences. However, little is known about how they experience the transition to adulthood or about ways to improve it from their perspective.

This study deepens the understanding of a topic that has received limited attention in Israel – specifically in the context of young people leaving foster care - and contributes to the development of a model for improving their preparation for adulthood. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 16 professionals in foster care services and 22 young adults who grew up in foster care.

Insights

1 The Challenge

- a. **A sudden, lonely, and challenging transition.** At a vulnerable stage characterized by instability and changes that have a decisive impact on the young adult's future, the support they receive declines sharply and they are forced to manage on their own.



You feel so supported when you are in care... and then suddenly you enter the world. For children who have already been through so much, it can be a real shock. Especially when you don't have familial or financial support – you are suddenly quite alone in many ways." [Young woman]

- b. **Systemic barriers**, such as limited human resources and structural gaps between foster care and community services, make it difficult for young people to exercise their rights and may negatively affect their personal well-being and their ability to achieve their goals.

2 The Response

Steps have been taken to advance the preparation for adulthood, including establishing procedures and creating the new role of "adolescent coordinator". This role is not yet an official position and its implementation varies between organizations. Adolescent coordinators focus primarily on concrete needs related to the end of placement, provide guidance to foster care social workers, and in some organizations also offer group support activities for adolescents.



The role of the adolescent coordinator represents the recognition that we are approaching a significant stage in the child's life. It represents change... also from the organization's perspective. It signals awareness of this turning point... the end of placement." [Professional]

3 The Opportunity

Young adults' perceptions of success and their needs during the transition stage offer an opportunity to focus on milestones and goals that are particularly meaningful to this population and to direct efforts toward maximizing opportunities for successful development. Interviews indicated that successful young adults are those who demonstrate emotional resilience, happiness and inner peace, meaningful relationships, a sense of capability, and functional ability.



A successful young person isn't necessarily someone who finished a degree or earns a lot of money. Success is measured in other ways – in the ability to believe in myself despite the difficulties, to persist even without total support, and to make the right choices despite what I experienced. A successful young person is someone who took what they went through and didn't let it stop them but instead turned pain into strength." [Young woman]

Conclusions

- The end of foster care should be viewed not as a finish line but as an opportunity to build continuity of care and a strong community support system. Successful transitions to adulthood require a gradual exit process, developmentally appropriate support, and strong supportive relationships.
- Emotional difficulties are among the most prominent challenges faced by young adults during the transition to adulthood. These young adults require ongoing support in this domain, including mental health interventions that address trauma and distress stemming from childhood experiences.
- Kinship foster care requires special preparation by foster care services, both because of the high proportion of adolescents in this type of placement and because of the unique challenges faced by these foster families and the limited professional expertise available to support them.



The role of the foster care social worker and of those who supervise them is to think about the future, not only about the past or the present... Our mission is to build strength for the day after placement ends." (Professional)