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# **Residential Care Facilities for Children and Youth at Risk: Self-Reported Findings from Children and Parents**

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# Abstract

## Background

Out-of-home care settings for children and youth are an essential component of welfare service systems in developed countries, including Israel. In recent decades, there has been growing recognition of the importance and benefits of partnership with recipients of social services in decision-making and policy-making processes. In this context, the right of children and youth to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives reflects a value-based, professional, and practical approach and is anchored in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In practice, this means listening to their needs and preferences and taking them into account in designing services and solutions.

As part of this approach and of an initiative carried out in residential care facilities over the past three years to develop a computerized system for assessment, intervention planning, and outcome measurement, questionnaires were developed for completion by children and their parents as an integral part of the system.

## Objectives

1. To develop a dedicated tool for assessing the quality of all the services that children receive in residential care facilities (the intervention) and their outcomes, through self-reports by the children and their parents.
2. To assess children's needs across seven life domains (behavioral, emotional-mental, social, family, educational-academic-vocational, physical-health, and exposure to harm outside the family); to monitor the services and intervention methods that children receive in residential care facilities; to assess their quality; and to examine the extent to which the desired outcomes are achieved.

## Method

The project included five stages:

- Development of measurement tools for children and their parents by a multidisciplinary, multilevel team composed of professionals from headquarters, the districts, and the field, as well as an expert by experience

- Integration of the measurement tools into the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs' computerized forms system
- Content pretesting by the program steering committee
- Distribution of the computerized measurement tools to children and their parents with the assistance of residential care facility directors, collection of the data from the tools, and analysis of the data
- Production of lessons learned and initial conclusions regarding the quality and effectiveness of the intervention from the perspectives of children and parents

## Findings

### Background characteristics:

The characteristics of the children who completed the questionnaires are similar to those of the overall population of children in residential care facilities. Therefore, despite the relatively low questionnaire response rates, the findings may be extrapolated to the overall population of children in residential care.

### Needs:

According to children and parents, children's main needs are in the emotional domain and the educational-academic domain.

### Outputs (services and intervention methods):

Most children and parents reported that children received the services they needed in six life domains: educational-academic, social, family, behavioral, physical-health, and emotional. It was also found that staff are involved in and assist children with their social relationships, help improve their relationships with their families, help improve their behavior, ensure appropriate physical conditions in the residential care facility, attend to their emotional needs, and develop an individualized intervention plan for each resident together with the resident and their parents.

### **Relationships between children and residential care staff:**

61.9% of the children reported that residential care staff almost always or always care about them and listen to them; 80.5% of the children reported that residential care staff always or usually treat them well.

### **Relationships between parents and residential care staff:**

A total of 90.1% of parents reported that staff treat both them and their child with respect and sensitivity, and 73.8% were satisfied with residential care staff conduct and with their contact with staff.

### **Outcomes:**

A total of 71.0% of the children reported that they feel good about their lives in residential care. Most children (78.2%) and parents (85.0%) reported that children's lives had improved during the year preceding completion of the questionnaire. In addition, compared with the previous measurement, conducted around the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War, an improvement was found in children's emotional condition (their mood in the recent period) and in their sense that members of the residential care staff listen to them.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

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### **Children participation:**

Efforts to promote children's participation in decisions affecting their lives in residential care are evident. It is recommended to continue deepening their participation in the development, understanding, and implementation of individualized intervention plans, and to expand their opportunities for choice and influence in daily life.

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### **Parent participation:**

Partnership with parents was found to exist, including updates regarding children's emotional and behavioral condition. It is recommended to continue strengthening parents' involvement in decision-making processes and in the children's situation through continuous, proactive, and systematic contact.

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**Emotional and mental health support:**

Given the significant emotional difficulties often experienced by adolescents referred to out-of-home care settings, the emotional-mental domain was identified as a central locus of difficulty. Therefore, it is recommended to strengthen the scope, availability, and continuity of emotional and therapeutic services in residential care facilities.

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**Enrichment and leisure activities:**

The findings point to the importance of enrichment and leisure activities in supporting children's social and emotional development. It is recommended to expand the range of activities beyond what is currently available and to encourage active participation in them.

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**Measurement and evaluation system:**

It is recommended to continue efforts to develop and implement an ongoing measurement system based on reports from children, parents, and professionals, for the purpose of continuously examining the quality of the intervention and its outcomes. In this context, it is recommended to instill among children and their parents the importance of self-report tools in order to increase questionnaire response rates.

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