

PREPARATION FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
INTERNATIONAL

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IMPRINT

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EDITORIAL

Today we face the situation that five million young people under the age of 25 cannot find a job. Many of them will miss opportunities because they lack the right qualifications or experience. Others will be forced to accept precarious positions in the labour market or short-term contracts that offer few opportunities to advance on the career ladder, even if they are well-qualified.

In addition, certain young people face specific problems in accessing and remaining in the labour market – these include early school leavers, individuals that are not well qualified or lack skills, young people with migrant backgrounds and those from ethnic minorities. Often several different factors, including low levels of education, poverty and social exclusion, mean that their options are extremely limited. We need to make sure that all Europeans have access to the same opportunities, particularly those who are most disadvantaged.

We cannot afford to ignore the problems faced by young Europeans; not least because Europe is facing the dual challenge of an ageing population, with an increasing number of pensioners, and a shrinking workforce. Recent forecasts have predicted that the European workforce will shrink significantly from as early as 2012. Moreover, to compete in the global market, Europe needs to generate more innovative products and services that are of a higher quality. The demand for well qualified labour is projected to rise by almost 16 million, and demand for those with medium-level qualifications by more than 3.5 million. This represents an important employment opportunity for young people and we need to make sure that they are able to take full advantage.

The big question we need to ask ourselves is what actions governments should take to improve the job prospects for young people. There is already a common commitment among employment ministers from across the European Union (EU) Member States showing that urgent action is required. Now we need to see innovative initiatives and tangible results.

On 15 September 2010, the European Commission launched “Youth on the Move”, a new flagship initiative aimed at helping young people to gain the knowledge, skills and experience they need to make their first job a reality. As part of the EU’s new Europe 2020 strategy, “Youth on the Move” sets out 28 key actions aimed at making education and training more relevant to young people’s needs and encouraging more of them to take advantage of EU grants to study or train in another country. This will increase young people’s employability and access to the labour market.

One key project will be the new EU job mobility scheme “Your first EURES Job”, which will provide advice, job search and financial support to young job-seekers who want to work abroad and to companies – particularly small and medium-sized enterprises. Another is the “European Vacancy Monitor”, which will allow young people and employment advisers to see where there are vacancies across Europe and which skills are needed.

European education and training systems, as well as labour market conditions, vary significantly across the different EU Member States. This means that each EU Member State will have to shape its policies on the ground to ensure that they take into account different starting points and needs. We will need the active involvement of all stakeholders across the whole of Europe to come together so that we can work together to successfully address the employment and social challenges faced by young people to give them a brighter future.

I commend SOS Children’s Villages International for the work they are doing to make this a reality and offer my full support to our joint goal – that in the end, every young person should be able to say: I Matter!

László Andor
European Commissioner for Employment,
Social Affairs and Inclusion

NEW EU FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH POLICIES: CHANGE FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES?

Kélig Puyet

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On 19th May 2011, the Council of the European Union adopted a resolution on youth employment. This resolution, approved by the 27 EU Ministers responsible for youth, is the result of a “structured dialogue process”, within the framework of the EU Youth Strategy. During this process, young people from across Europe met regularly with decision-makers at European Youth Conferences to discuss priorities, objectives and policy recommendations.

While statistics on youth employment show continuous growth in Europe, expectations are high that Member States work on the implementation of these recommendations. Moreover, to ensure that future policy measures have an impact on all young people, an additional challenge will be create a framework to ensure that the situation of young people with fewer opportunities is included in future policies and actions.



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In the past decade, social inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities has never clearly been addressed in EU youth participation and youth employment policies. In the new 2010-2018 EU Strategy for Youth, reference to youth with fewer opportunities is missing in section dealing with employment; however, the goals of this strategy are meant to be overarching and interconnected, which could lead to greater impact on young people from a disadvantage background.

Another EU Strategy “Europe 2020”, adopted in June 2010, also targets the employment of young people. It sets out a vision of Europe’s social market economy for the 21st century and contains five EU headline targets and seven European Flagship Initiatives. In September 2010, the European Commission launched the “Youth on the Move” Flagship Initiative. By helping to ensure that young people have the right skills for the jobs of tomorrow, the initiative should help Member States to reach the headline target for 75% employment over the next ten years. Again, it is unclear in this strategy, whether specific actions be taken to ensure that young people with fewer opportunities are among the 75% employed.

The question that now remains is whether, within this new framework, the EU can provide more and equal opportunities in the labour market. One of the answers is the “structured dialogue”, which is part of the EU Youth Strategy. The first cycle of this dialogue focused on youth employment. Its aim was to build a foundation at national level, setting up measures regarding the forthcoming national implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy and its flagship initiatives.

The recent council resolution marks an end to the first cycle on youth employment, and highlights the importance of involving young people with fewer opportunities. However, this should apply also beyond consultation processes. Indeed, the outcomes of the structured dialogue on youth employment could constitute a good basis for concrete improvement of the situation of young person with fewer opportunities; but to become reality all groups of young people, including young people leaving care, they must be equally involved in the process leading to the implementation of all future measures.

Kélig Puyet is the Representative to the European Union of SOS Children’s Villages



FROM CARE2WORK

Linda Briheim-Crookall

Young people leaving care have significantly poorer outcomes than their peers in relation to education, training and employment. There is evidence that many care leavers obtain low-skilled jobs or are dependent on benefits. Through the national employability initiative *From Care2Work* we are working towards narrowing the gap between care leavers and their peers, by creating opportunities and raising aspirations.

Managed by the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), *From Care2Work* works in partnership with local authorities, private and third sector employers in England. We identify existing good practice and facilitate relationships between ‘corporate parents’ and employers, in order to offer a breadth of opportunities to young people leaving care.

From an initial target of 9 pilot local authorities, 150 mapped their provision and developed work plans.

These plans identified how they will further shape the employability opportunities they offer to care leavers. Many looked at how the local authority, as an employer, can offer high-quality work experience and employment opportunities, demonstrating that authorities are striving to take their role as ‘Corporate Parent’ seriously.

A number of national employers also committed to build partnerships with local authorities to pilot opportunities for care leavers. We encourage employers to contribute to **raising** the aspirations of the next generation leaving care by increasing the profile of young people leaving care within their organisation, creating opportunities and ensuring a quality experience. *From Care2Work* ensured that a supportive relationship between a young person, their leaving care service and the employer, was established so that the opportunities offered meet the needs of individual young people.

TO SUPPORT FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS WE HAVE:

- **Designed a ‘national register’ of employers**, showcasing the opportunities available to care leavers in a local authority area or region.
- **Rolled out the *From Care2Work* Quality Mark** which assesses the quality of the opportunities that employers and local authorities offer to young people. The framework was developed by young people and we have developed a package to train young people to undertake assessment visits. Who better to judge the quality of an opportunity than young people? Additionally, they also learn skills and gain work experience as part of the process. In January 2011, nine local authorities and three employers were awarded the From Care2Work Quality Mark at the first Driving Quality Learning Lunch.

From Care2Work
**QUALITY
MARK** ✓



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Through the *From Care2Work* team, local knowledge informs both regional and national activity and vice versa. For the first time, across 150 local authorities, we have been able to collectively influence national government and across local authorities in England.

At the end of phase 1 of the project (2009 - 2011), we identified that a total of 34 national employers offered 294 opportunities to care leavers in various parts of England. Local authorities engaged over 400 local and national companies offering 4609 employability opportunities, including 1096 work experience placements and 356 apprenticeships. A project evaluation report, published in March 2011, highlighted areas of practice that showed effective outcomes for young people leaving care, as well as the project outcomes.

From Care2Work has been successful in securing further grant funding from the Department for Education (DFE) for phase 2 of the project, which will run from April 2011 to March 2013. The project will continue to support local authorities and employers to work in partnership to build the employability of care leavers. This fits well with the requirements for increased career planning, employability activities and work experience outlined in the new DFE statutory guidance for local authorities about how they should be supporting transitions to adulthood for care leavers. Phase 2 will be an opportunity to build on the firm foundations established in many authorities and to create even more employability opportunities for young people in and from care across England.

Linda Briheim-Crookall is Senior Policy Manager working as part of From Care2Work in National Care Advisory Service

IT PAYS TO INVEST IN AFTER-CARE

Anna-Liisa Koisti-Auer

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The number of children and young people living in care in Finland has been rising in recent years. In 2008, there were over 16,000 children and youths living in care in Finland; a number that has been increasing yearly by 2% for children and 5% for youth. Similarly, in 2008 the total number of children and young people who received from the child welfare social system was 67,000, up almost 8% from the previous year. The number of young people in foster care over the age of 16 has increased more than other age group.

The growing number of children in care and the amount of youth unemployment has stirred fear over the risk of young people facing homelessness. A new governmental programme for the wellbeing of children, young people and families emphasizes measures to prevent youth homelessness. The aim is to motivate young people who are at risk to get an education, and to strengthen their life management skills, as well as to increase child and youth participation in general.

WELL-MANAGED AFTER-CARE HELPS YOUTHS TO COPE WITH ADULTHOOD

In Finland, a child is eligible for care up until the age of 18. Subsequently, each municipality is responsible for coordinating the young person's after-care, based on his or her individual needs, until the age of 21. The purpose of after-care is to support young people as they become adults and take on the responsibilities of adulthood. Every young person has the right to after-care and the municipality has the responsibility to provide it.

The after-care services a young person receives are based on a plan drawn up with the recipient. The plan details the support required by the young person, as well as services that are available. Such services may include various types of social or health care services, such as financial aid, scholarships, housing and occupational assistance, or even therapy.

MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FORCED TO BECOME INDEPENDENT TOO EARLY

Experience and research alike have shown that children coming out of care are forced to become independent too early and without the support they need. In his 2009 doctoral thesis, *"From care into the world, experiences of life in residential care and coping with adulthood"*, Reinikainen details the process of becoming independent from residential care. The majority of the study's participants became independent under the age of 18, and subsequently had no higher education. They also had a higher unemployment rate and a weaker financial situation in comparison with the rest of the population.



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For the majority of participants in Reinikainen's study, the care facility did not represent a home, stability or continuity, rather it was simply a "place to live", making the will to become independent very strong. On the other hand, many young people wished that the care-givers had tried harder to prevent them from leaving; that someone would have cared and understood that they were too young and unprepared to live independently.

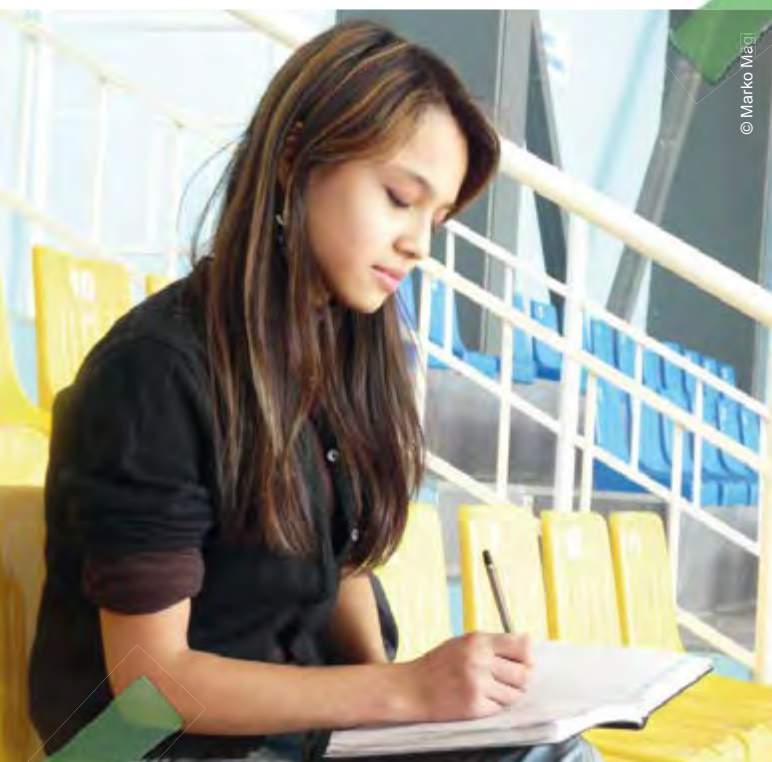
Had this study been carried out on children in foster care, the results may have been quite different. In comparison to children in foster care, experience shows that more often children from residential care become independent at an earlier age. This raises the question whether children are forced to become independent from this type of care earlier due to its high costs in comparison to fostering.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING YOUTHS AS THEY BECOME INDEPENDENT

SOS Children's Villages Finland, in its nearly 50 years of work, has placed special importance on the education and support of young adults living in SOS families and youth programmes. After reaching the age of consent, a young person can continue living in an SOS family if needed. Additionally, young people can receive after-care financed by SOS Children's Villages until the age of 25, which gives every young person the financial security to receive higher education. If necessary and required, young people can receive other kinds of support from SOS Children's Villages, such as guidance on day to day issues and the opportunity of after-care accommodation.



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- Give youth enough information about what it means to become independent;
- Support young people to find an occupation, without rigid plans or expectations; and
- Help young people welcome the idea of becoming independent.

THE COST OF AFTER-CARE IS SMALL COMPARED WITH THE COST OF CARE

The costs of systematic and well-managed after-care services are relatively small in comparison to the overall costs of care. This is not to mention how significant effective after-care can be for a young person when dealing with the challenges of becoming an adult.

It is worrying that in Finland, many municipalities have cut back funds for after-care, or made decisions to automatically transfer all young people above the age of 18 to their own municipal after-care services – regardless of what kind of after-care the facility can provide for them. This kind of transfer policy often overlooks the individual needs of each young person, and in the worst case scenario it may even involve relocating a young person from a familiar environment to a municipality where he or she has no friends, family, or support network. In some cases the only after-care available is housing and financial aid, which are rarely enough to support a young person entering adulthood.

SOS Children's Villages Finland advocates quality care, which includes well-managed and effective after-care services. Our organisation, for its part, aims to insure that the alternative care standards outlined in Quality4Children are followed. In doing so, after-care is automatically planned and implemented carefully, cooperation is ensured whenever necessary, youth participation is supported, and continuing support is secured.

Anna-Liisa Koisti-Auer is the Child Protection Manager of SOS Children's Villages Finland

Research carried out by SOS Children's Villages Finland shows that during this transitional phase, the support of young adults is meaningful and worthwhile in many different aspects. The study "Tracking Footprints" (Jahnukainen & Hyytiäinen 2009), which traced adults who had grown up in an SOS family, shows that the participants' level of education was extremely good. Over 90 per cent completed secondary education and over 70 per cent graduated from higher education. The occupational situation of those involved in the study largely reflected the situation in the rest of the population and the majority was satisfied with both their work and situation in general.

Despite the good results, our organisation has much to develop in the way of aftercare. For the participants of the "Tracking Footprints" study, in order to support young people in becoming independent, it is most helpful to:

- Teach young people basic everyday skills, such as cooking or how to manage finances;
- Take youths' opinions into account and strengthen their general participation;

YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN, KID

Andro Dadiani

The harsh reality that you face at the age of 18 can be even harsher if you grew up in state care in Georgia. You need to find somewhere to live, a way to feed yourself, to get clothes, and stay clean and warm. What options do you have? If you have parents, who for one reason or another could not or were not allowed to take care of you, you could try to turn to them. If that is not an option, you could try to stay with the organisation that provided care for you until you turned 18, and you might just stay there if it's an institution (an "orphanage" as they still call them), but it would be different if you were cared for in a small group home or foster family. You are basically on your own – this is the reality for children leaving care in this country.

This doesn't mean that there are no exceptions. There are; but unfortunately, they are very few. Exceptions almost always depend on the young person's relationship with the care staff or social workers, etc. This type of assistance means that there is very little chance that the children leaving care will successfully lead an independent life. It's all down to chance again: how involved the social worker assigned to your case is, how much time and resources a carer has to help you to find a job, somewhere to live, and so on.

Preparing children in care for independent living is normally limited to enrolling them on a vocational training course, or preparing them for the state exams in the case of those that want to pursue higher education. And this is hardly ever the case for children living in residential care.

The truth is that even if you manage to find a job for them, since they don't receive counselling or supervision, they normally end up resigning or losing their jobs. Plus, it is hard, if not impossible, to find a job that pays enough for you to rent a place to live in and have money left over for the rest, such as food, clothes, basic essentials, and travel.

Georgia has been reforming its childcare system for over twelve years now, supporting the reintegration of children into their biological families, preventing them from being separated in the first place, and transferring children into family-based care services. The aim is to provide better care for children however, without more substantial changes to the approaches and services that prepare children for independent living, these changes will not necessarily result in care leavers living a successful independent life.

Duty bearers do not really tend to follow up on children that have left care to see how they have managed. No one really knows how many of the young people that have left care system have been gainfully employed, or have ended up in some kind of trouble. When asked why they do not follow up on the progress of those that have left care, duty bearers answer that they do not follow up on other 18 year olds, so why should they treat those young people differently? But they are different: different in that they do not have a support network, they do not have anyone to guide them or anyone to listen to.



The few attempts to place the issue higher up on the government's agenda have not resulted in a change in policy or even in temporary solutions to tackle the problem. Approximately 50 children leave care every year. In course of our work, we have come across children that have been placed in the state care system and later discovered that their parents were brought up in childcare institutions as well. It is time to break this cycle by changing aspects of the care system that will provide some assurance that the young people have a chance.

Andro Dadiani is Director of EveryChild Georgia



YOUNG VOICES

My name is Teona Mamukishvili, I'm 23 years old and I am from Georgia. I'd like to tell you about leaving care in Georgia and about the problems faced by young people in my country.

I came to SOS Children's Villages Georgia in 1996. I grew up in an SOS family and now I am participating in a semi-independent living programme. I graduated from the Tbilisi State University in July, 2010. By profession, I am a psychologist and a social worker. Now I work as a social worker for Save the Children Georgia, but finding a job was very difficult and this is why I wanted to write an article about this topic.

As all people with care experience know, leaving care is the most difficult process of the care system. This is a period when you have to build your own life, make decisions independently, find housing, find a job, care for utilities, become a fully integrated member of society and fulfill civic duties; and you have to do all of this by yourself. This is a great responsibility for any person, and while I think it's rewarding to direct your life yourself, sometimes it's difficult and you need support. Especially when you are in the care system and you have to leave alternative care and make a "start" in your independent life.

Now I'll tell you how it happens in my country and what kind of difficulties young people leaving care face and how they need help. There are several models of care in Georgia which end care after the age of 18 (except the organization of SOS Children's Villages Georgia). Currently, there are not any governmental or non-governmental supporting programs for young people ageing out of care, except the programme through SOS Children's Villages Georgia. In my country, young people leaving care face immediate and urgent challenges in meeting their basic needs, primarily in education, employment and housing.

First, I would like to discuss employment because, in my opinion, it's the basic resource for living independently. Unemployment is a widespread problem in the country, but it's more difficult for care leavers. Statistics on youth unemployment in Georgia are not easily available; however, my experience is that finding a job is more difficult for young people with care experience. Young people with care experience often do not have the opportunity to study in the best schools or colleges. Inadequate financial support limits their school choices and means that they can't find housing while going to school. Limited access to quality education then limits these young people as applicants for jobs. In my country, if you are from any care system, and you haven't graduated from a private school, don't have a diploma from good university, and don't have a strong CV, then you can't get a job, have a problem to find accommodation and you are without emotional support. Consequently, education, employment and housing are connected with each other in a way that must be brought to the attention of the government for the future of their country. In addition to the government, there must be non-governmental support for young people leaving care.

This is something I believe in so strongly, in February 2011, I co-created a youth-led association called "Young Partners" together with 4 young people from SOS Children's Villages Georgia. This association aims to ensure the social inclusion of young people leaving care by supporting them to receive an education and find employment. There are 46 members in the association, and most are from SOS Children's Villages Georgia. For now, the association is trying to find the financial support for a place where the members of the association could meet, discuss and plan activities. We are trying to involve more youngsters in the *I Matter* campaign from both SOS Children's Villages and other care systems. We want to improve our difficult situation ourselves. And we believe we can change something. We believe that we are the future of our country and we have to be supported.

Teona Mamukishvili is a member of the I Matter International Youth Council and a founder of the Georgian association Young Partners.

I MATTER CAMPAIGN

SOS Children's Villages is running the *I Matter* campaign to improve leaving care conditions in Europe and Central Asia. The campaign is currently being conducted in 21 countries. The vision of the campaign is for young people in all types of alternative care to be properly prepared for leaving care and to access after care support.

The *I Matter* campaign started in 2009 and will run until 2013. It has three main objectives:

More information shall be available on leaving care

Awareness and knowledge are crucial when bringing about change. Conferences, roundtables, seminars and other events are being organised. Briefing papers and other leaflets are published regularly.

Young people shall be the advocates of their rights

The *I Matter* campaign counts with the participation

of young people with care experience. Therefore, they are involved in the shaping of legislation and practice on alternative care and in debates that concern them. The campaign is strengthened by the International Youth Council, which consists of around 30 young people from across the participating countries.

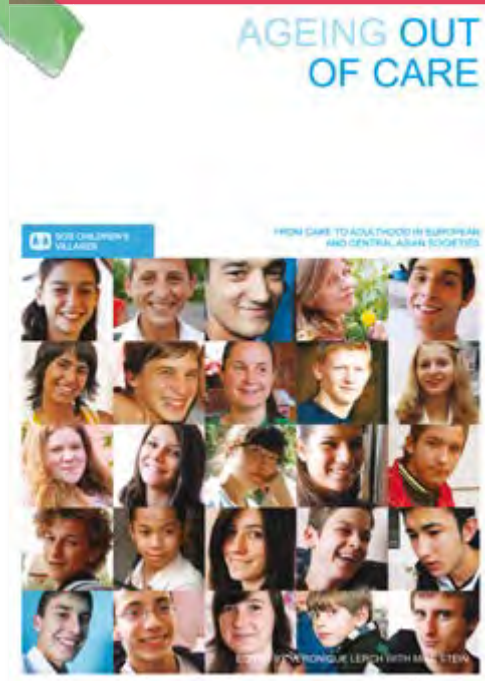
Legislation and practice on leaving care shall be improved

As a result of this campaign, the perspectives of young people ageing out of care will be improved thanks to changes in national legislation and international standards on leaving care.

For more information please see:

www.sos-childrensvillages.org/Focus-areas/Child-rights/Child-rights-issues/Pages/default.aspx

AGEING OUT OF CARE AN I MATTER PUBLICATION



Information on care leavers and their situations is very limited. In an effort to close this informational gap and provide a foundation for decision makers, SOS Children's Villages has put together an unprecedented review of the circumstances under which young people leave alternative care in Europe and Central Asia. The report is the main publication of the *I Matter* campaign, and highlights personal, social, legal, and administrative challenges facing care leavers. It also identifies weaknesses in legislation and practice, and provides targeted recommendations.

Unsurprisingly, the study reveals that in the countries under review, the process of preparation to leave care and the subsequent transition into adulthood is chronically flawed. Recurring themes emerge across national boundaries, such as difficulties to find housing, gaps in coverage, risk of abuse, and emotional hardships of young people. These

findings highlight the importance of deinstitutionalization efforts, national standards, and the dissemination of good practice.

Deficiencies and recommendations are discussed in the country chapters on Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, the Russian Federation, and Uzbekistan. In addition, there is a chapter on recent debates regarding access to benefits for care leavers in France.

Specifically, each country chapter provides information on the target population, the child protection and care system, the legal and policy framework, practices related to leaving care and after care, the main violations of the rights of care leavers, official data sources, existing research on the target group, and key recommendations. In addition, the chapters relate common experiences of care leavers. The young authors, themselves participants in the *I Matter* campaign, based these accounts on the true, often disturbing, stories of their peers.

The study is rounded out with a forward by Eriton Axha, member of the *I Matter* international steering group and of the Youth Council; a forward by Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights; and a conclusion by Mike Stein, social policy researcher at the University of York.

To download the study, see:

www.sos-childrensvillages.org/Focus-areas/Child-rights/Child-rights-issues/Pages/Ageing-out-of-care-international-analysis.aspx

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