

**RESEARCH ON LIFE SITUATION OF
CHILDREN LIVING IN WARSAW
RESIDENTIAL CARE INSTITUTIONS
- CHILDREN'S VIEW PERSPECTIVE -**



Nobody's Children Foundation

2011

Authors:

„Chi Kwadrat” – Students' Scientific Circle of Market Research.

In cooperation with:

Nobody's Children Foundation research team.

The research was conducted in the framework of Mario project, financed by The OAK Foundation.



Copyright © 2011 Nobody's Children Foundation

Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje

03-926 Warsaw, 59 Walecznych Street

Poland

+48 (22) 616 02 68; fdn@fdn.pl; www.fdn.pl

Table of content

1. Introduction 4

2. Objective of the research..... 5

3. Research method 5

4. Summary 7

5. Living conditions..... 8

6. Access to medical care service and education 10

 6.1 Access to medical care service..... 10

 6.2 Access to education..... 10

7. Moving 13

8. Happiness and safety 15

9. Child participation in decision making process 19

10. Future plans 22

11. Conclusions 24

1. Introduction

This research was conducted in the framework of Mario project. In 2009, the project – funded by the Oak Foundation – started to better protect children on the move through the reinforcement of the capacities of national, regional and European authorities, decision and policy makers.

The project Mario implements activities at both national and transnational level. It targets professionals who come across cases of abuse, exploitation and/ or trafficking of children in Europe or who can bring about positive changes in the lives of those children. It focuses on children coming from Central and South Eastern Europe (C/SEE) and who are at risk or are victims of abuse, exploitation and/ or trafficking. Partners decided to join forces to better protect these children through enhanced cooperation, interaction and professional exchange.

The project Mario, through its network of partners in the region offers a unique expertise to the service of national and European authorities to address child protection concerns. The ultimate goal of the project is to ensure the long standing provision of adequate services that meet the needs and wants of children at risk in Europe, at each stage of their migration path.

Geographic coverage at national level: Albania, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Poland and at transnational level: Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Greece, Macedonia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

More information about the project at: www.marioproject.org.

2. Objective of the research

The aim of the research was to learn about life situation of children placed in residential care institutions in Warsaw from children's view perspective. Children were asked to express their views about their living conditions, access to medical care and education as well as the fact of being "on the move" because of changing their places of residence. Moreover, they were asked whether they feel happy and safe, if they can participate in decision making process and what are their plans for the future.

The results of the research will serve as a reference point for Nobody's Children Foundation to formulate an appropriate educational offer and provide support to children, along with a training module for caregivers from residential care institutions during the second phase of Mario project in 2012-2014.

3. Research method

The research was conducted in November and December 2011 among children at risk from 4 residential care institutions in Warsaw. The researchers conducted 20 individual in-depth interviews with 11 girls and 9 boys, age 13-16. Since 2011, according to an Act on supporting family and providing residential care, children are placed in residential care institutions according to their place of provenance. Therefore, all respondents came from Warsaw and its surroundings. Few foreign children were at the institutions at the moment of conducting the research. Moreover, these few foreign children didn't speak Polish nor English. Institutions could not ensure an interpreter, which made it impossible to conduct interviews (majority of foreign unaccompanied children in Poland come from Romania, Bulgaria or Chechnya). The research was conducted by six sociology students from Warsaw University, who are active at Student's Scientific Circle *Chi Kwadrat*. Nobody's Children Foundation ensured their proper preparation prior to conducting the research, by providing them with a training on psychological aspects of such interviews.

Scheme 1. Information about the respondents.

Nr of interview	Child age	F/M	Place of residence
1	15	M	children's home
2	16	F	children's home
3	13	M	children's home
4	13	F	children's home
5	14	M	children's home
6	14	F	children's home
7	13	F	children's home
8	13	M	children's home
9	13	M	children's home
10	14	F	children's home
11	14	F	emergency social service
12	15	M	children's home
13	14	F	children's home
14	12	M	children's home
15	15	M	children's home
16	15	F	emergency social service
17	15	M	children's home
18	14	F	children's home
19	13	F	emergency social service
20	13	F	emergency social service

4. Summary

Children placed in residential care institutions represent a specific group of youngsters at risk of compulsory movement in terms of changing their place of residence, and in consequence their entire social environment: school, acquaintances and friends. Such circumstances are not conducive to making them feel safe and hamper establishment of long-term and stable relationships. Moreover, as it results from the conducted interviews, child participation is not ensured in decision making process. Children are not aware of important choices taken for them by adults, although these choices will influence their future.

Our minor respondents expressed a wide range of opinions about the residential care institutions. Some of them are satisfied with their living conditions and social care, which they receive. Others feel disappointed. Their views may vary depending on children's age, their family situation back home, or the reason for which they had been placed in residential care, as well as on the type of the institution (children's home or emergency social service).

All interviewed children attend school, but majority of them encounters learning difficulties, which are due not only to lack of well-developed skills, but most of all to insufficient motivation and inappropriate studying conditions.

Most of the children are in good relationships with their peers, while relationships with their caregivers vary. Some children established good and close relations with adults, others keep distance. Home-sickness was explicit in all conversations. When asked about their idea of happiness, children talked mainly about family, relatives or close friends.

5. Living conditions

Great majority of the respondents live in double, triple or quadruple rooms. Few of them have single rooms. Their capacity to decide about whom they will share their room with, is very limited. Places are assigned, as they liberate and children are not consulted on their future roommates. Special consideration is taken for siblings – if placed in the same residential care institution they are generally accommodated together. There can be significant age difference. It did happen, that a five year old kid shared a room with a fourteen year old teenager.

Most children like their roommates, and actually prefer to share a room with somebody else, rather than to stay alone. They say, this way they don't get bored – they can talk at any time of the day or night, play together and also tidy up together. Some children though, would prefer to live alone. If possible, caregivers try to move them to single rooms.

R: I wanted to move, because I prefer to live on my own. I like silence, especially at night.

B: And when you wanted to be alone, where did you use to go?

R: I agreed on that with my caregiver (interview nr 13).

All rooms have the same standard. There is a desk, a chair and a bed for each child (bunk-beds are common). Some children complain about frequent moves from one room to another, which makes it difficult for them to decorate their place as they wish. Once they are placed in institution, their room is ready. Changes are difficult to introduce, since they depend on caregiver's agreement and financial capacities of each institution, which usually are quite limited. Some children recall situations, when they were allowed to paint walls in their rooms. But this happened only when general renovation of the building was taking place, not at an individual request of a child.

Although children have little impact on decorating their living space (choosing the color of the walls, curtains or furniture), they can arrange interiors according to their needs, by hanging posters or pictures, or upon their caregiver's agreement, they can rearrange their rooms. Such moments make them happy, because they enjoy organizing their own rooms, as they like.

I like rearranging our room, we do it every month, it's cool (interview nr 16).

This is our fortress. It doesn't matter whether we hang posters or paint something on the lockers (interview nr 4).

Research on children's views.

Each child perceives differently his or her stay in the residential care institution, but some regularity can be noted among all responds. Younger children (primary school students) view institutions as a friendly place. Some of them go back home for weekends to their families. During the school week they stay at the institutions, where they have better living conditions. One of the interviewed boys said, that he is not short of anything at the institution. He appreciates the provision with various equipment and household goods.

We have TV, computer, microwave, toaster, we are fine, the kitchen is big and we can have breakfast, lunch and dinner there, all together (interview nr 8).

Children have access to computers and to a common room with a big TV. Several respondents have their own TVs and computers in their rooms, but not as a rule.

Some children criticize their institutions. One of the girls complained about her living conditions – she has to do laundry by hand, because the washing machine is broken.

Children placed at the emergency social service are more negative about their living conditions. Majority of them were not able to indicate their favorite place in the institution. They said, that they feel over-controlled and that their contact with the external world is limited. They cannot go outside the premises, which makes it impossible for them to meet other friends, since they are always in the institution. One of the girls said, she does not feel good in this place:

This is like detention. I wouldn't wish anybody to be placed here. Even if we have permits to go outside, it's like a prison (interview nr 16).

6. Access to medical care service and education

6.1 Access to medical care service

In bigger residential care institutions nurses work turns. In case a child feels sick, he or she can turn to a caregiver and be accompanied to the doctor. Children said, that sometimes they go on their own to health centers or clinics. Some of them go to the doctor with their parents or grandparents. This is allowed if the adult's parental rights are not limited. Children undergo all compulsory medical examination and get necessary vaccination. Some institutions provide even private medical care for children.

Medical care is very good. If I have a toothache I don't go to any health center or dentist, we have good private clinics (interview 4).

Respondents mentioned, that some caregivers suspect them of pretending to be sick. One of the girls recalls, that one of the caregivers belittled her sprained ankle. She was taken to hospital, only once she couldn't walk any more.

6.2 Access to education

All respondents were primary or secondary school students. Children from residential care institutions go to nearby schools, while classes at the emergency social service are organized on the premises.

All interviewed children encounter learning difficulties. Seven out of twenty respondents repeated a school year. Even children who manage to be promoted to the next class, very often have to resit final exams from several subjects in order to improve their grades. One of the girls had as much as 7 "F" grades by the end of the last semester. To our surprise, children who have only one "F" grade do not consider it as a learning difficulty:

Well, yes, I have one „F" grade in maths, but in general I don't have studying difficulties (interview nr 4).

Children justify their low grades with lack of appropriate studying conditions, constant arguments between their parents back home or explain it as the consequence of skipping school. Some of them didn't go to school for a few months in a row and hid at their friends' homes. One of the girls failed to be promoted from 4th to 5th grade, because she had a very difficult situation at home – her parents kept arguing. In consequence, she changed her

place of living and school every three months and she didn't manage to catch up with the school programme.

Most of the children do not trust their own intellectual capacities. Their future plans are not ambitious. They just care to get promoted to the next class. They think, that they cannot receive better grades and do better at school.

During an interview, one of the boys brightened up while asked about the school. He admitted, that he enjoys going to school, although he doesn't really like studying. He just cares to pass to the next class and says, that he has no chances of getting good grades anyway. However, he remembers each high grade which he has received and was very eager to talk about it.

Some of the children admitted, that their behavior at school is not the best one: they do disturb during classes, quarrel with teachers or skip school. Children placed in emergency social services are particularly reculant. Some were charged with criminal offenses.

From the conducted interviews, the researchers could conclude that social workers and caregivers make their best to support children in their learning difficulties. Well defined time is reserved for doing homework. Moreover, volunteers help children with different subjects. This help was often mentioned by children. However, they drew attention to the fact, that this support is not always effective – sometimes children have an impression, that they did understand the subject, but then they still receive low grades. Such situation can be also due to the fact, that they cannot concentrate during class time. One of the girls, who has problems with maths, attends extracurricular lessons at school, but she does not find it effective. She thinks, that classes are overcrowded and she cannot concentrate on studying.

Children often talked about their difficulties in learning foreign languages. Only some of them follow after-school language classes (which due to the current educational system in Poland, seem to be necessary for every child). Lack of such possibility can be considered as discriminating factor for their future.

I cannot learn it, they do help me, but still, I don't understand it, it's too difficult for me (interview nr 16).

School problems may be of complex reasons. First of all, these children are often on the move from one place to another. They also change schools and need time to adapt to a new social environment. One of the boys had to change school four times – every time he moved. Another boy says, that he cannot concentrate on studying, because he misses his previous classmates and his teacher, on whom he could always rely. In a new place he hasn't received such support from peers nor adults. Another reason causing their problems

Research on children's views.

at school is lack of sufficient support from parents or relatives. Parents do not express enough interest in their children's education – one of the girls started to skip school because her father stopped paying attention to her.

Children from residential care institutions cannot choose profile of the class that they would like to attend. Usually they are placed in classes with general profile or simply where free places are left. Sometimes they end up in classes, which are considered as the worst ones at school. One of the girls said:

Classes have different profiles, but I couldn't choose the one I wanted, because I was placed at children's home on 29th August, so I had to sign up to the class with the lowest number of pupils that was an inclusive class (Interview nr 4).

Children have little to say when it comes to choosing their school, since their caregivers do not allow them to go to schools located far away from their residential care institution. However, only some respondents care about making such choice themselves. Most of the children do not attach importance to it.

R: First, I was supposed to go to (x) school, but I told them that I don't want to go there ... so now I'm here, at the school I wanted.

B: And who did you tell that you don't want to go to that other school?

R: Well, my caregivers. They even advised me on other schools (Interview nr 6).

Some children take part in after-school activities. Besides extracurricular lessons, they can participate in various free time activities. Boys like to do sports, while girls usually choose drawing, dancing but also for example horse riding. There are children though, who don't feel like participating in any after-school activities and prefer to stay on the premises of the institution and spend their free time for example watching TV.

7. Moving

Individual histories of all interviewed children have something in common. When a family encounters difficulties, child care is initially entrusted to one of the parents or another family member. In case of divorce, parents share the time they spend with the child. In case of families with numerous children, some of them may be entrusted to their grandparent's. Other children move several times with their families, in search of better living conditions.

If all the above does not bring satisfactory solutions, children end up in an emergency social service. It's a "transitory" place, where children wait for the results of the family court hearing – whether they will go back home, or be placed in children's home. They can stay in the emergency social service up to six months (although it did happen, that children stayed there longer). Very often the child is not informed until the last moment about the fact of moving to the emergency social service – both in cases of the family court's interventions as well as parents' decision. None of our respondents recalled having conversation with his/her parents about this.

Children from emergency social service, if further care is needed, are then placed in children's homes. Normally they should stay in the first children's home they were moved to, but it may happen that they will have to move again. Siblings may also be placed in different residential care institutions, although normally they should be placed together. Some children during their stay at children's home go back to their families for a period of time.

At some point I went back home and lived there for three years, then I got to know, that there is some problem again. So I was placed in a children's home, but I could go back to my home for a period of time. Then, I found out that I have to be in this new children's home. During the first year I could still go back home. But now my mom has no parental rights any more (interview nr 8).

Children say, that they don't like to move. Even if they were removed from a pathological family, they want to go back, and they idealize their life back home. They do not like to change their social environment, school or friends.

A new backyard, new place, other friends and neighbors ... it's so strange to keep moving from one place to another ... it's so strange ... (interview nr 2).

R: I think that all this moving is worst then an „F“ grade at the end of the school year.

B: You mean it's tiring?

Research on children's views.

R: Very tiring. I have to pack again, take with me just some of my things, some I have to throw away, because they are old etc. ... and generally, a new place ... but when I will move back to my father's place, it will not be a new one, I had already lived there before (interview nr 9).

Our respondents were placed in residential care institutions for different reasons. Some of them had been removed from pathological families, where their parents or relatives did not provide them with appropriate care and did not fulfill their parental duties. Many children blame themselves for having been placed at children's home and they understand it as the consequence of skipping classes and not attending school regularly.

Well, I did exaggerate with skipping school, but most of my mates here did exaggerate as well. That's why they placed me here, but it's cool at my grandma's home (interview nr 14).

The family court decided to place me here, because I was skipping school and behaved badly. My father is an alcoholic and he just didn't care about me (interview nr 16).

Some other children were placed in residential care institutions, because living conditions at their family home are very poor. Apartments of the families with numerous kids (up to 6-8 children) are too small to fit all, thus some children stay with parents and some move to the institutions. In such cases, they stay at children's home from Monday to Friday, and then they go back home at weekends.

Children's attitude towards their living situation is usually very rational and down to earth. They say, that it is better for them this way. They miss home, but they also feel good at children's home – very few children said that they feel very bad in this new place. They almost seem to have a grown-up's attitude towards the entire situation – however, it's not evident, whether this is the result of their own after-thoughts or they repeat what they had heard from adults.

I don't know where I would rather be. For me it's good here and there ... I just know that back home there are no good living conditions. If I returned home I would surely quit school and do as my sister did (interview nr 6).

Two of the interviewed children could have been placed in foster families. However, grandmother of one of the boys did not give her consent. When asked about these circumstances, he said, that he was very young at the time, so he agreed with what his grandmother said. The second boy could have been placed in an Italian foster family, but he didn't want to move abroad. He said that he had to negotiate it for a long time with his caregiver, but finally he managed to stay at children's home.

8. Happiness and safety

While almost all respondents placed at children's home declare that they feel happy there (although their situation back home is almost always very difficult, they miss their parents and families), all children placed at emergency social services agree, that they do not feel good in this institutions. They complain about aggressive way of communication among children and ban on going outside the premises. One of the interviewed boys moved to children's home from the emergency care service, and he recalls:

Here (children's home) it's OK. At the emergency service it was much worse, there were bars in the windows, all was closed, I couldn't go out and people were not very nice with me. It's not nice over there, being closed 24hours a day in one place - it's enough not to like such place (interview nr 15).

Sometimes children decide to escape for a few days from residential care institutions, mostly because they feel isolated and they want to visit their old friends.

It was not easy for them to talk about the feeling of happiness. Good memories are difficult to recall. It's hard to say, whether this is due to the fact, that they have few good memories from their past or they just prefer not to share them with the others. Their good memories go back to summer camps with their peers, or family holidays. None of the respondents mentioned good memories linked with their residential care institutions.

It was also difficult for them to describe a happy person. Some of them said, that they just don't know happy people, or they don't care whether somebody is happy or not. If they did describe this feeling, they talked about somebody who lives at home and has a family.

A happy person is the one who lives with his family at home. Nobody manipulates them, nobody tells them what to do, nobody forbids them everything, nobody takes away from them all this childhood (interview nr 18).

Even if children brought as an example somebody reach and famous, they always added that family is a prerequisite for happiness.

R: Well, I don't know, I don't know a happy person, but I could name thousands of singers or football players.

B: And how do you imagine football player's life?

R: Well, he has a family, money and his dreams (interview nr 8).

Children from residential care institution say, that a happy person is the one who has a family. Everyday standard for a majority of other children – spending time with their

Research on children's views.

parents and family – is something very special for children placed in residential care institutions.

The most important persons for them are usually members of their families (everybody mentioned somebody from their family – if not parents, these were siblings or grandparents). Even children of these parents, who took themselves the decision of placing their child in a residential care institution, say that parents and family are the most important persons for them. They justify it in very simple words:

R: Mother is the most important person for everybody.

B: Why?

R: Well, obviously because she gave birth to me, she brought me up and I love her (interview nr 11).

R: Mother – because everybody has just one (interview nr 14).

Children define happiness also as having a group of friends, having their dreams come true, overcoming their problems and being successful, which they understand in terms of having a well-paid job. Some children consider themselves happy. They feel that way at school. One of the girls feels happy thanks to her social environment, and the people she knows. She escaped from her family home, and she says to be happy at children's home. It needs to be underlined though, that she is one of the very few children, who decided themselves to move to a residential care institution. Back home she was unhappy, and here she has had good experiences.

Most children are ashamed to admit at school that they live at children's home. They hide this fact, or do not tell about it to everybody, but to a few trusted friends. One of the girls decided not to talk too openly about this, after she had had an unpleasant experience with her peers at previous school.

They started saying that I'm such and such, they called me bad words, as if they had already decided how I am, what's my character, although they didn't even know me yet (interview nr 4).

Almost all interviewed children said, that they enjoy company of their friends both from children's home and from school. Few respondents had negative or ambivalent attitude towards their peers. They can meet their school friends in the afternoon (they can go together to the cinema, for a walk or ice-skating etc.). However, children who repeated the same class (sometimes more than once), encounter some difficulties in establishing good relationship at school due to growing age difference with their classmates.

Research on children's views.

Most of the children talked well about their mates from children's home. They compare themselves to one big family and treat all the others as siblings. They know how to laugh together, how to talk openly, but also they have their squabbles. Their common difficult experience may constitute a uniting factor.

Many children move here (children's home) from the emergency social service. I came from there, my family came from there, my friends, we all come from there (interview nr 8).

Here it's like at a summer camp, only that everybody is in much closer relationship (interview nr 7).

Some children were less enthusiastic:

R: Well, obviously I stick with my group, but I don't have very close friends.

B: And do you know some cool people here?

R: Well, that depends on their mood each day (interview nr 13).

Children from the emergency social service expressed much more negative approach towards their peers. They live in a particular situation, as they also attend school on the premises. They encounter difficulties in establishing good relationships. They do not accept each other and do not treat each other well – screaming and teasing is common. Some of them don't have good friends and they don't even like their roommates - they would rather live alone in a single room.

Children's relationship with their caregivers vary, but in general they are not very intimate. It may be a self-defense reaction developed by children as a consequence of frequent moves from one place to another and changing social environment. Children say little about their caregivers, but have a positive opinion about them. Most children call them – "aunt" or "uncle", since it's a customary expression at children's homes.

My aunt is important for me, I can trust her, she has always helped me a lot and I turn to her in difficult situations (interview nr 12).

In difficult situations children turn to their caregivers, asking them for help if they don't feel good or fall sick. Some children couldn't indicate a concrete situation in which they had received a support from their caregivers. Many children said, that they have their favorite caregivers at children's home. Some trust more their psychologists, because they know how to keep secrets. Caregivers can "give away" their secrets and "cause trouble". One of the girls said, that although she has good relationship with her caregivers, she does not trust them, saying that they do not always keep secrets confined to them.

Research on children's views.

Some negative statements about caregivers were also heard. Sometimes children think that they do not show enough interest in them or do not respect their rights. They complained, that when their caregivers want to keep order, they threaten them, that they will call or refer everything to their director. Children say also, that many things depend on the caregiver's current mood.

B: And when they have a bad day, what happens?

R: Then they let off steam and yell for no reason (interview nr 6).

Negative opinions prevail at the emergency social services. Children do not feel sufficiently supported by their caregivers. They complain, that they are not treated with respect:

They yell at me for example, that I haven't done something, while it has to be done (interview nr 20).

One of the girls affirmed, that she receives no support at the emergency social service and she can count only on herself.

This place is sick. People get at you for nothing, because everybody wants to be the best one. There is no support from others, you have to count only on yourself, nobody else will help you (interview nr 16).

It shall be taken under consideration though, that children placed in the emergency social services had experienced very difficult life situations, which then influence their mood and understanding of the reality.

It was difficult for our respondents to talk about their fears. Some of them are worried about their relatives, for example about an ill grandmother or they are afraid that they will lose their parents. Others fear their own families. Children, who are waiting for the family court's decision are afraid about the final judgment – two of the interviewed children wouldn't like to stay at children's home and one girl would prefer not to go back to her family.

9. Child participation in the decision making process

Some of our respondents were surprised at the question about child participation. They didn't quite understand the concept and they had difficulties in answering. Helplessness and resignation were noted in their attitude. It seems that some of these children are not aware of their rights.

B: Would you like to be asked about your opinion?

R: Well, maybe I would sometimes, but it is as it is.

B: In what kind of situations would you like to tell adults what you think?

R: (long silence). Uffa.. well.. hmm.. it means..? I don't know (interview nr 13).

B: Did anybody asked you where would you like to stay?

R: Well, no.

B: And would you like to be asked?

R: No. It wouldn't change anything anyway, so ... (interview nr 5).

For some respondents, the concept of child participation is so abstract, that they cannot associate it with every life situations. However, once we asked them to think about concrete situations from their lives, they said that in many cases their opinion was not taken into consideration.

One of the girls talked openly, that her rights are not respected at children's home. Other respondents mostly mentioned their duties, than rights. All children agreed that they would really like to be consulted about the decision of placing them in a residential care institution. Majority of these children, until almost the very last moment, were unaware of such decision:

(...) I didn't even know that I'm going to move. I got to know it a day before (interview nr 8).

Some children understood what is going on by chance, when they saw their things packed up or they were told by somebody. They couldn't discuss about it nor protest.

I was going with my sister's boyfriend to a shop and he told me about it. After school I used to go to a common room run by "Association of Children's Friends – TPD". When I came back home I notice a suitcase. I opened it and saw my things packed. So I asked my father what is it? And he replied, that it was his stuff. Then I said, well yeah of course ... (interview nr 6).

R: I got to know about it at school. It was some guardian, some guy, I don't remember who.

Research on children's views.

B: You didn't know anything before?

R: No, I got to know about it only then. Oh my God! It was terrible! I thought we were going to our teacher and there I met this guardian (interview nr 8).

Although children have not clear ideas about the concept of child participation, they would like to be consulted before being moved to children's home. Other ways, they feel frustrated and helpless.

Maybe it's not a decision, that adults can ask children's opinion on it, but it's simply terrible. I can understand to be moved to children's home, if there are good reasons: for example parents died or they drink so much alcohol that ... but these days most of the children are just moved like that ... The worst thing is that it's impossible to fight, because how? Shall we write to somebody abroad for help ...? There is nothing to do about it, it's like that and so it will be (interview nr 17).

In some cases though, children asked themselves to be moved to children's home. A 13 years old girl run away from home, where she was victim of physical abuse by her alcoholic parents. At the family court she was asked where would she prefer to live, and she chose a residential care institution. A similar case was described by a boy, who didn't want to live with his previous foster family. He underlined, that it was his own decision and he undertook all necessary steps to reach his goal: *I submitted an application* (interview nr 17).

However, the above cases are rare. Usually, children are informed one day before the agreed date, that they have to move to children's home. Moreover, the majority of children don't even know who had taken this decision (parents/relatives or the court).

They also cannot decide when they can visit their families or relatives. Such decision is taken by the family court or by the children's home director. Some children complain, that neither the court nor the director consult them:

Well, talking about contacts with my family, I would like to have something to say about it. I would like to be able to say, that I want to see them and just go there, without having to wait for the court's decision. I would like to see them when I want (interview nr 10).

Some children think, that adults make themselves nothing of their needs and do not take them seriously. They complain about having rules, which they cannot discuss. One of the girls, when asked about a situation in which she would like to have a bigger influence on her life, said:

At the beginning I was told that pets are allowed at children's home, then I heard the opposite. Well, they should agree first and then tell us (...) at home I always used to have a pet, we could cuddle together, and here I cannot have one (...). I would definitely take good care of my pet (interview nr 7).

Research on children's views.

Strict timetable is another thing, that children complain about. Some children have to wake up, come back from school and do their homework during precise hours. Their timetable cannot be modified. A day from life of one of the boys is scheduled as following:

I get up at 6.30 a.m., I take shower and have breakfast. School starts at 8.00 a.m. and I come back to children's home after 8 or 7 lessons. After school, I'm tired and I take a nap. From 4.00 p.m. until 7.00 p.m. all children do their homework. Dinner is at 7.00 p.m. and then we have free time until 10.00 p.m., and during the weekend days until midnight. After that we have to be in beds (interview nr 1).

What bothers children the most, is that even if they manage to do their homework earlier, they still have to stay in their rooms and cannot do other things.

R: I wish I had more time for myself.

B: And is it possible, that if you do your homework earlier, you can do something else?

R: Well, yes, I can do my homework faster, but it's no use. I still have to stay in my room between 4.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. (interview nr 5).

The above is true, but only in some children's homes with particular rules, therefore it does not concerns all children. Some of our respondents said, that they can schedule their day. They are more free to go outside and choose when to do homework:

I enjoy everything. I like that we are not constrained to do anything, for example we can eat when we want. I don't have ifs nor buts. I enjoy staying at children's home, we have enough freedom. I can invite my friends, they can even sleep over at my place or I can also go and sleep over at their places (interview nr 12).

Children who moved to children's home from the emergency social service tend to compare the two institutions. They all consider children's home as a much better place, although all objected to some aspects of their life over there. Sometimes, it is difficult for them to accept any rules and regulation set at children's home, since at their families or relatives nobody used to control what they were doing and they were free to do whatever they wanted.

Some children express their frustration and anger, which can be a result of a feeling of lack of influence on their own lives:

It just couldn't be worse ... we yet miss bars in the windows, nothing is possible here. We used to have another director, she did understand children (...). The new one always gives us the fault (interview nr 18).

10. Future plans

Although child participation is limited, they are convinced that their future depends mainly on themselves.

My future depends only on my own and my decisions (interview nr 7).

Once I turn 18 years old I will decide about everything myself. Until that age I am supervised by anybody that may be, but then I will become self-dependent, I will get a job, well probably I will even start working earlier, to ensure myself a better future (interview nr 9).

Some children say, that their future depends more on their family and caregivers from children's home. They may see some adults as a way to reach their goals.

My future depends on whether my grandmother will make over her apartment to me ... (interview nr 1).

Other respondents give a careful consideration to what will bring them benefits once they attain majority. Some feel responsible for their family back home and they think about them in their future plans:

(...) Well, there is also my family. I will have to help them somehow (interview nr 14).

Majority of the interviewed children have already thought about their future profession, which is one of the most important thing for them. Some have already plans:

I'm into computer games, I've filled up all my three scratch-pads with ideas on various games and I'm about to finish the fourth one (...). I would like to become a game tester, somebody who writes the reviews, checks the games etc. (interview nr 9).

Some children knew what to do in order to reach their goals. Despite learning difficulties at school, they are aware that hard work is needed.

If you want to become a businessman, you need to study English, computer science and you also have to pass all the exams at school, graduate and finish University (interview nr 1).

I'm better at sports, so I try to have good grades in PE, because if you want to become a football player you have to be better at PE and don't have any other F grades (interview nr 14).

Some other children haven't thought yet about their future plans. They tend not to think about it, or they rather don't think at all about what the future will bring:

R: I haven't thought about my future profession yet.

B: And what do you think you will be doing in 10 years' time?

R: Probably I will be at another home, a better one. Maybe I'll set up my family, I don't know.

Research on children's views.

B: And what job would you like to have?

R: I don't know yet (interview nr 5).

Great majority of children, when asked to imagine their private adult life, said that family is the most important for them. Getting married and having children is for them a determinant of a normal adult life. Girls in particular underlined, that they will bring up their children and keep the house.

I will get up early and go to work. If I have children, I will have to take care of them in the morning, bring them to school and then go to work myself. After work I don't know ... I will take care of my children (interview nr 5).

Getting up in the morning, waking up children, preparing breakfast, bringing children to kindergarten, then to school, driving them somewhere else, taking our dog for a walk, actually many dogs, an entire pack of dogs and puppies ... then going to work, coming back in the afternoon, picking up children from school, preparing a dinner, giving a kiss to my husband to show him that I'm happy that he came back safe and sound from work, serving dinner, giving bath to children and before kissing them goodnight, reading them a fairy-tale (interview nr 2).

Some children plan to set up family later on. They prefer to concentrate first on other aspects of their life, mainly work and money. They would like to have a family, but later on, in a more appropriate time. Ensuring good living conditions to their family is very important for them:

I'm not planning to set up family yet. Once I have a full-time job and I can ensure them good living condition, then yes (interview nr 15).

11. Conclusions

Lack or limited possibilities to express their views and consequent marginalization of their needs, seems to be one of the most harming issues for children from the residential care institutions. Key decisions regarding children's lives are often taken without prior consultation with them, or even without their knowledge. Some children are placed in residential care institutions unexpectedly, which demonstrates, that child participation is not ensured. This may be one of the reasons, why our respondents were surprised by the question about their participation in everyday life decisions.

Interviews with children placed in children's homes and at emergency social service show how differently they perceive the two institutions. Children placed temporarily at emergency social service are less likely to accept their situation and consequently are more inclined to undertake various risky behaviors, such as for example escaping from the institutions.

It shall be noticed, that frequent moves and changes in their social environment, cause problems in establishing long term and stable relationships with peers and adults. Because of that, children from residential care institutions often lack intimate friends and close caregivers, to whom they could easily turn in all circumstances. In consequence, they are convinced that their future depends only on them. One of the most important aspects for their successful future is good education, which remains a great concern, since all respondents from residential care institutions encounter serious learning difficulties, due to complex reasons, which shall be promptly addressed.