

Children in residential care and their educational achievement education essay



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We have just graduated in Social Policy and our first assigned project within the Ministry of Family and Social Solidarity is to propose and implement better methods of formation for children who are entrusted for residential care within Church Institutions which, in Malta, are the only organisations who offer residential care to children in problematic situations.

Since in the majority of cases children in residential care seem to fall back in their academic formation, we propose to study the possibility of providing free supplementary education to the children residing in child-care institutions. We think that such an endeavour will help them to enhance their academic formation and to relate, in a non institution environment, with people other than their teachers at school or care givers in the homes.

We have decided to embark upon a project which we termed LearnAid, to support these children in their educational formation and improve their academic learning and social skills. The aim of this endeavour is to help them surmount their traumatic experiences and, as much as possible, acquire the necessary qualities to keep up pace in their academic and social development with other children in the same age span, living with their families.

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that children enter into residential homes for various problematic reasons. Different children have different needs which result from the poor care experience undergone by each child. The setting of the residential homes should, therefore, as much as possible, offer a home atmosphere to these children, that is, a welcoming and warm environment.

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Youngsters living in the out-of-home care context should have the possibility to live in a healthy natural setting, which enables them to meet their individual needs. The environment must inspire a sense of belonging and help increase feelings of self-worth that all children need as part of their psychological development.

Children in residential care need more assistance to develop their own identity. At this point, the staff in residential homes should not limit the lives of these children just to the boundaries of the residential area, but actively support the residents to participate in activities outside the home.

Encouraging the residential children to interact with others outside the residential home is a process that enriches the child's intellectual development which is also part of their educational and formative process.

More about the matter

When young people are placed in care other than their parents' their whole lifestyle changes drastically. Even though residential homes help children at risk to live away from an unsafe home environment, leaving behind their own homes becomes a traumatic experience resulting in an increased difficulty for them to concentrate on particular and essential aspects of their lives, such as their education. There is a common agreement that children in residential care develop a tendency to perform poorly in their educational process.

A study carried out in the United Kingdom show consistent results that the educational attainment of children living in care is below that of the national average (Berridge, Brodie, Ayre, Barrett, Henderson & Wenman, 1997). This <https://assignbuster.com/children-in-residential-care-and-their-educational-achievement-education-essay/>

research states that the educational achievement of these children could be harmed by a combination of personal, familial, societal, and policy-related circumstances. It is believed that the children's family background and the environment during their early childhood could have very strong effects on their educational performance at school.

Alternatively, Bernard Gallagher et al. in their article ' Good Practice in the Education of Children in Residential Care', state that " children in residential care can have good educational outcomes" (p. 1133). They suggest " that these children can have good educational outcomes and identifies the processes by which this can be achieved. Thus, while not ignoring the problems that have surrounded, and continue to surround, this area, it is time - and is perhaps long overdue - to adopt a more positive view concerning the educational prospects of these children. As Lindsay and Foley (1999) have stated: ' there is a danger that we concentrate more effort on researching our failures in this area than in describing practice examples of how the problems can be and have been overcome' (p. 193, emphasis added)" (p. 1155-1156).

On the other hand, the expectations of the residential homes' carers should not be less with regard to the children's educational performance, than what one would expect of other children. Berridge et al, argue that several studies reveal that the majority of carers in residential homes have very low expectations when it comes to the children's educational performance and achievements. Residential child care staff should abolish the idea that once the young people in their care reach the age of sixteen years and over, they will automatically move on to find a job. Children in residential care should <https://assignbuster.com/children-in-residential-care-and-their-educational-achievement-education-essay/>

have the same opportunities as others and, obviously, encouraged, helped and assisted to attain them.

It is a well-known fact that when a child experiences a change in the residential home, a change in school placement also tends to follow. For example, in Malta, the 'Crèche' institute accepts children from birth up to the age of four. Once these children have reached the age of four, they have to change residence, most usually being either 'Angela House' in Guardamangia, or some other home run by the Church of Malta. Again, the same procedure takes place once the boys reach the age of nine, who have to be placed in another home for boys who are nine years old and over. These young persons, usually, either change placement to 'St Patrick's Home' in Sliema or 'San Ġużepp' in Ġamrun.

As a result, young persons do not only have to restart getting used to new rules, systems,

persons and customs each time that a placement change takes place at their residing facility but also, since they change also school, they have to adapt once more to new staff, new rules and new systems. Surely, this leaves strong negative effects on them.

Another factor is that there is a strong correlation between the young persons' self-esteem and educational attainments. Jackson (1987) stated that the poor results achieved at school only serve to reinforce the children's feelings of hopelessness of ever being able to learn. Children cannot understand that their low achievements are the result of a mixture of

circumstances, such as frequent placement changes and disadvantaged
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family backgrounds, with the result of underestimating their own potential, and thus, aiming for low educational attainments.

Research revealed that children who are living in residential care experience several changes at school (Borland et al., 1998; Lindsay, 1997a; Simpson, 1997). Several school changes start taking place immediately after the child is known to be living in residential care. Young persons are frequently subjected to bullying, stigma, stereotyping, and teacher low expectations for the simple fact of living in residential care (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997).

Therefore, the school experience of children living in an out of the home care atmosphere may encounter several obstacles that eventually serve to affect the young person's educational performance negatively. Once a child underestimates his/her academic abilities, the only way of drawing adults' attention is by misbehaving. Misbehaving in turn creates more negative attitudes towards the child which in turn affects the child's behaviour and performance. It becomes a vicious circle.

The United Kingdom's Social Exclusion Unit in its document "A Better Education for Children in Care: The Issues" states that "Children in care may need extra support in education. This can be because they have missed out on schooling or early years provision and need to catch up, or because they have specific support needs including special educational needs" (p. 14). It also argues that "lack of training and advice about what care is like and the reasons why children come into care mean that some teachers underestimate the academic potential of children in care" (p. 14).

This is the reason why we intend to propose such a project. We believe that children in care must have the same opportunities as other children reared in a normal family setting. This could only be achieved if the care givers and social workers have a clear understanding of the children's talents and abilities, setting aside their traumatic background, and, at a later stage, their roles and responsibilities in relation to pursuing further education.

Andrew Kendrick (1998) also argued that " children and young people who enter residential care, frequently have a background of instability and poor achievement in education". " The experience of residential care, however, can further compound these problems and a number of factors have been identified". Kendrick also believes that residential homes may provide a poor environment for encouraging children and young people in their educational process. In fact, Berridge and Brodie (1998) found that adolescent units continued to provide a poor educational environment, with a lack of books and newspapers.

Children may need to be looked after either for a short term or for a long term period. This may happen for a variety of reasons such as family crisis. When this happens, the ' Looked After Children' team (at APPOGG) makes sure that the children-in-cares' needs are being met, thus promoting their welfare. There are various needs that must be fulfilled. One of the topmost in the list of priorities is the child's educational achievement.

Children in care, in the United Kingdom, usually tend to " have poor experiences of education and very low educational attainment." Usually their educational achievement is lower next to the expected educational outcome

of someone who is much younger. Very few looked after children have a high level of educational outcome (Every child matters: change for children, 2007).

We believe that this issue is also present in Malta. Children who are in residential care already have a lot to deal with. “ Their lives are characterised by instability; they spend too much time out of school; they do not have sufficient help with their education if they fall behind; primary carers are not expected or equipped to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development; and they have unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs that impact on their education” (Every child matters: change for children, 2007). This may become worse since institution cared for children spend some time, sometimes even some days during the week with their parent or parents, and so the trauma can be renewed periodically. As a result, it is very probable that they find it hard to reach a high level of educational achievement.

Vision

Having said all this we aim to assist these children in attaining a better level of education and social esteem, and consequently help change the mentality of care givers, social workers and teachers to better appreciate children entrusted to their care. We believe that children in social residential care, given the right opportunities and assistance can achieve what any other child can in both spheres. We aim to do this over a period of five years selecting children from various age groups. By the end of the five year trial we intend to analyse the selected children’s progress in contrast to the ones

who do not receive assistance in the same period and report to the Ministry about the outcome so that relevant and adequate policies could be promulgated.

The Mission

We aim to:

Prepare children in residential care for a better integration in society by providing free supplementary education in academic subjects and social skills, in order to enhance and safeguard their path from childhood to adulthood.

Involve the residential staff in the children's homework and provide a supporting network for them.

It is important that there is at least one helper with every two children, who will help them during with their homework.

Train and make more aware the residential staff about the different skills that would be helpful in their work with children in residential care.

Internal and External Analysis

Child education in residential care includes extra lessons on specific learning subjects and on constant psychological support on individual basis. The service's aim is to stimulate children's self-confidence and self-esteem to improve their educational level.

To identify the barriers that affect children's education, it is required to analyse the internal and external environment vis-à-vis what children residential care could improve to enhance children education.

The efficacy of SWOT analysis is not restricted to profit-seeking organisations. SWOT analysis may be used in any decision-making conditions when an objective has been determined. Examples include: non-profit making as in our case the Church Residential care for children. In order to analyse the internal and external environment of children's education in residential care, the dimensions of the SWOT model analysis are very useful. The factors of the ' Internal Environment' will be examined by means of strengths and weaknesses while the aspects of the ' External Environment' are to be defined by means of opportunities, and threats.

The internal aspects are measured by pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses and analysing their effect on the children's residential care objectives, in this case the improvement of the educational level of children. What may stand for strengths with reference to one objective may be a weakness for another objective. The internal aspects may consist of all of the issues which affect the child's life within the residential home, such as environment, time structure, and homely atmosphere as well as personnel and the financial resources. The external aspects may include legislation and socio-cultural changes, as well as changes in the curriculum of the education department.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis is a useful strategy for ensuring a program's success. Internal Strengths and Weaknesses need to match with the external Opportunities and Threats. In our case, the SWOT analysis is:

Strengths:

The disposition of most residential care givers to accept help from voluntary workers.

The amount of voluntary workers which already help in such institutions whose energy and familiarity with the children could be channelled and directed within the project.

The limited amount of children in residential care.

The already available service of counsellors and psychologists which is even now helping the children to overcome their traumas and look forward with hope.

The support of both Government and Church already being given to such residential homes.

Weaknesses:

Lack of space in the residential home where the groups meet.

Lack of resources (books, whiteboards, etc.).

Lack of motivation from the care given children.

Personnel not trained enough to deal with children with various problems.

Lack of acceptance of the visiting teachers from the permanent staff at the residential home.

Opportunities:

Public consciousness of the needs of such children and their generosity to help.

The generous disposition of many young people, even education students and graduates, to help children in need and therefore a certain ease in assembling a group of teachers with a mind to assist these children on a voluntary level or social rate income.

The chance to help create a better welfare mentality.

The growing mentality of equal opportunities for all.

Threats:

Children's educational achievement can be hindered by their lack of concentration which, in turn, could be influenced by their difficult background and traumatic experiences.

Lack of teachers to provide free academic education.

Heavy dependence on teachers who are working on a voluntary basis.

Insufficient sense of belonging from both the permanent staff at the residential home and the children.

Lack of values such as self and family appreciation as a result of internal struggles within their original household

What are the Strategic Issues?

Residential care

How shall we overcome the disadvantages of being grown in a residential home?

How shall we make sure that the child plays a full part in the life of the care home and in the wider community?

How shall we ensure that the staff of residential homes is helping to meet the child's needs?

Education

At school

How shall we ensure that children obtain the best education they can?

How shall we make sure that the child is achieving his/her potential at school?

How shall we narrow down the educational standard gap between children living in residential care and children living in a natural family setting?

Influence of psychological trauma on educational development

How shall we find out if the transition of a child from one home to another affects the child's educational achievement?

How shall we ensure that the child's personal problems do not influence their concentration, and as a result their educational achievement?

How shall we make sure that the child's lack of received attention and love is dealt with so as to ensure educational achievement?

Co-operation between visiting teachers and residential home staff

How shall we make sure that children in residential homes be actively encouraged in all aspects of their education?

How shall we ensure that there is a collaborative support between visiting teachers and the staff at the residential home?

Social Development

How shall we make certain that each child has the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge he/she needs to move on and, where needed, to live more independently?

The Strategic Goals

In order to meet this issue, we came up with the idea of introducing a supplementary free education to children who are looked after in residential care. This will be possible if a number of teachers will be available to go to all residential homes in Malta. PSD (Personal, Social and Development) teachers will also be part of this service. They will see that children who are in care

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are taught about the necessary important social skills which would enhance their well being and to their whole integration in society. Teachers and PSD teachers may either work on a voluntary basis or paid a social rate which is established by the Government.

Professional people need to be engaged either on a voluntary basis or being paid at a social rate from the Government. The latter should also subsidize the use of psychologists and counsellors if the need arises.

We intend to work closely with the ' Looked After Children' team at APPOGG so as to be able to achieve our mission. Since this team works closely with the children who are in residential care, the ' Looked After Children' team would be useful in promoting this service.

Some Standards of Care

We propose to recommend some important standards of care. These standards of care will be built on and adapted from the Scottish ' National Care Standards: Care homes for children and young people'. We intend to prove that if such standards were followed, most probably, the educational achievement of children in residential care would be higher. The following table shows some Standards of Care that we intend to suggest and adapt.

The adaptation process will involve a close comparison between the running and organising of child residential care institutions in both countries taking into consideration the particular aspects of the Maltese situation, like for example, the closed environment, the small distances and the fact that residential homes in Malta are run by the Church by religious entities.

National Care Standards

SCOTLAND

How we propose to adapt this Standard

How we propose to implement this Standard

Learning

Good quality education will help you achieve your potential. You have a right to have your educational needs met and, where necessary, you should receive extra help to make sure this happens. Staff will help you get the best from your education and available resources. They will help you to manage your study time.

Since we know that staff at residential homes is limited and has to cater for all other needs of the children, it may be wise to supplement staff by visiting aides to assist the children in their academic and social learning

By issuing a call for teachers to offer voluntary assistance to children in residential care by helping them in their homework and study, and following closely with extra lessons, if necessary, to help them attain the level other children of the same age reach and contemporaneously encouraging them to appreciate their qualities and increase their efforts.

Standard 13 (1)

You know that the care home staff encourage and support you in school and homework activities. They work with the school or college so they know how
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to help to meet your learning needs. Books, newspapers, computers, and educational, artistic and other cultural materials are available in the care home.

Contact with the children's school or college is better left in the hands of the residential staff. On the other hand helping the children in a creative way is better left to voluntary teachers since they can afford better quality time with the children and since their only task is to assist them only in this particular area.

We intend to provide each residential home with books, newspapers, computers, and other educational material in order to improve the children-in-care's educational outcome. We plan to do so by finding sponsors and by discussing an agreement with the Government to provide the funds required.

Standard 13 (2)

You can be confident that staff know the importance of education and can help you to achieve your potential. They are knowledgeable about, and have a clear understanding of, relevant legislation relating to children and young people with special needs.

We assume that residential staff is well versed in both legislation relating to children and young people with special needs (and even if they are not, it does not fall under our responsibility to provide such formation), but visiting staff will need to be made aware of such legislation even though they deal with children at schools. It is the accepted norm in most schools that such matters are dealt with by the head and not by the teachers, so visiting staff

at the residential homes have to be informed in the understanding of said legislation/s.

The visiting staff at the residential homes are to receive due formation to have a clear idea of what the following legislations relating to children and young people with special needs state:

Chapter 285 Children and Young Persons (Care Order) Act

Chapter 9, Criminal Code, Subtitle VIII Of Infanticide and of the abandonment and exposure of children.

They will have to be made aware as well of the implications of the law and other legislation regarding for example Parental Authority (Chapter 16, Civil Code, Title IV)

Standard 13 (3)

Staff help you to attend school or college regularly, and work with teachers to deal with any problems.

Once again any communication about the children's behaviour and progress at school is to be made between the heads of said schools and the responsible residential staff at the homes only.

The staff at the residential homes should inform the visiting teachers about arising problems, such as misbehaviour or health troubles of the resident children at school or college. They know the children more and are in duty bound to be informed about the children's progress and behaviour at school.

Such information to the visiting staff is essential for them to cater in particular ways with different children according to their particular situations.

Standard 13 (4)

You have enough quiet space to work in and there are special quiet areas for you to study.

Finding an adequate area in which our proposed service will be carried out is the sole responsibility of the residential staff and the home's administrative body as it depends on the space available at the specific residential home.

This area is important since we believe that the children can concentrate more and therefore more attentive and receptive to what the teacher delivers. So Visiting teachers are to help the children themselves decorate and modify the space offered to create a better environment for study. They will also be responsible to keep the area not only clean and tidy but also free of noise and any other disturbing agents.

Standard 17 (2)

If you are leaving the care home to live more independently:

you can develop self-care skills, including cooking, managing money, managing a home and living with neighbours;

you have advice on what to do if there are financial problems;

you are encouraged to be a good neighbour and challenged about poor behaviour that affects your neighbours;

you have advice on how to access benefits, housing, health and other services; and

you are advised about forming and maintaining relationships.

Since this standard rounds up all the aspects of the young person's life the main task of preparing them to live an independent life still lies within the realm of the resident staff and home's administration. The visiting teachers can be of assistance in such matters, especially in areas which in schools and colleges correspond to PSD subject matter.

In order to integrate in-care-children in society, among the voluntary teachers PSD teachers will be included. These teachers will be responsible to help the children improve their:

Social skills such as assertiveness and time management

Budgeting skills

Relationships skills

And other necessary skills

Since children in residential care have to be prepared for independent living, they have to be made aware as well of ETC programmes.

PSD teachers will also explain to the children how they can access different social benefits in Malta, such as housing services.

Standard 13 (5)

Staff support you to take part in wider educational opportunities such as school trips and clubs, to get financial help and help with travel to events or matches.

MISMATCH.

Although this would be ideal, we believe that it will be difficult to be put into practice since visiting staff cannot afford to decrease their time in academic and social assistance. Such activities could be time consuming to both teachers and children to the detriment of the main scope of the project.

It would also be difficult to adapt this standard if there are very young children (5 years of age or younger) in the residential home. Staff would have to look after them and therefore it would be difficult to attend for such activities.

Planning Model Choice

The aim of our project is to provide a service which will cater for children who are cared for in a residential home. For our project we will be using the Processual Strategic Theory of Planning since even though our aim is to provide such a service, we do not know what the outcome will be; the end result of our proposed service is unknown. However, we believe that to plan effectively we have to think about what we want to reach, that is, planning a process to reach a specific aim without having any certainty about the outcome. We may have all the good intentions, put all our effort into it, plan a detailed process but yet, the result maybe a complete failure.

In focusing on our ideal future state, we should first define our ideal outcome that needs to be accomplished, specific to a programmatic situation and then select and implement conceptually driven actions. This will then hopefully lead to the achievement of that outcome. In our case, the desired outcome is the increment of educational attainment in children in residential homes.

We will also opt for such a perspective since it involves a plurality of organised bodies. In our service a number of entities will be involved. These entities include the Ministry for Family and Social Solidarity (since the project is commissioned by the Ministry, the support and backing, even financial, has to come through the Ministry as the appropriate channel), the Commissioner for Children (the backing of the Commissioner is necessary to promote, empower and strengthen the rights of these children), the Church through its Diocesan Commission for Children's Homes (all the homes that offer care for children on a residential basis are run by the Church or Church organisations), Appoġġi (Looked after Children (LAC)) (Appoġġi deals specifically with children and young people in traumatic or problematic experiences through referrals, the helpline and Supervised Access Visits and so can contribute not only by supporting but by offering concrete expertise), and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) (through which the project can be marketed among teachers and teachers can be reached; as much as the Commissioner for Children protects and promotes the rights of children so the MUT's concern is the rights of teachers).

We will be applying this perspective through six processual tasks that our visiting staff will apprehend:

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Acquire and maintain a thorough understanding of the functions of our organisation (LearnAid) with particular emphasis on its mission, values, goals and objectives.

Acquire and maintain an in-depth understanding of the organisational structure with particular attention given to the main organisational bodies involved in our project (interorganisational relationships, lines of communication, etc.).

Acquire an understanding of LearnAid's management system and practices.

Acquire an understanding and appreciation of LearnAid's culture, and importantly, how to relate to it.

Acquire and maintain an understanding of, and the skills needed to implement, the LearnAid's programming process.

Maintain a sensitivity and commitment to the use of feedback obtained and lessons learned in the implementation of the programming process in assessing our organisation's effectiveness.

On a parallel track we will also use a Systemic Approach in planning project. The focus of this approach is external in our case society in general. Through our service we aim to bring about an improvement in the educational achievement of children who live in a residential home. Logically it follows that we will also be contributing indirectly towards a better level of education in the country. The higher the educational level of the citizens in Malta, the better the human resources upon which both society and economy are built.

Obviously for the Systemic Approach to be effective, a set of rules, based on policies, has to be drafted and implemented for our service. Such rules will help all those involved in the project to be accountable, much more so, because of the pr