

Pathways to Education in Hungary with Public Care Background

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Abstract:

Hungarian child-protection system cares for 21,000 children and young adults. In the case of the children who were removed from their own family it is obvious that the professional bodies and the communities take the parental responsibilities, which means that all the governmental and the official agencies in the institutional child-care and the workers of the foster-care network must work on improving the lives of the children in state care. In Hungary it is not known exactly how the needs of the recipient determine the types of service they can receive. We do not have any information relating what principles prevail in the planning and provision of care and services, and additionally what are the effects of the structural transformation of the system starting 2013. In this study, we present the Hungarian child protection system and briefly also the education system, then we show the opinions of the decision-makers, the child protection professionals and the social workers in the public care system who were interviewed for Young People: Pathways to Education in Europe (YIPPEE) international research project – funded from the European Union's Seventh Framework Program. We deal with the young adults' educational career and with their aspirations for the future. We investigate those factors that can possibly determine the further and higher education career of young people with public care background and we have tried to identify possible supporting and inhibiting factors.

Keywords: Child Protection; Educational Carrier after Compulsory School; Supporting and Inhibitory Factors.

Introduction

Hungarian child-protection system cares for 21,000 children and young adults. In case of the children who were removed from their own family it is evident that the professional bodies and communities (educators, child welfare supervisors, foster parents) take the parental responsibilities (*corporate parenting*), which means that all the governmental and official agencies in the institutional child protection care and the workers of the foster care network must work on improving the lives of the children in care state (Jackson, 2007). There are two central trends which influence the way we view children and young people in care and schooling. The first is the *compensatory thinking*, which means an educational approach addressing the “problems” and troubled backgrounds of the children and youngsters in care. The second is the *comprehensive thinking*, referring to a unification of the social education and special educational provisions. The comprehensive thinking means that we focus on the children and young adults from troubled backgrounds instead of focusing on the resources which play a major role in the children and young adults’ future (Bryderup, 2008). In Hungary it is not known exactly how the needs of the recipient determine the types of service they can receive. At the present moment we do not have any information regarding what principles prevail in the planning and provision of care and services, additionally, which are the effects of the structural transformation of the system from 2013 onwards. It is essential that the children’s individual needs define what kind of services and support are needed and how these services and helping mechanism can give adequate answers to children’s problems (Trocmé, 1999; UNICEF, 1997; RÁCZ, 2012). The regional way of operating is predictably overtaken by the

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less established professional principles; the planning, the provision of the services and the support of the educational carrier have an *ad hoc* nature; in the child protection system there is no conscious planning and the quasi-professionalism is typical (RÁCZ, 2012).

This article presents the major Hungarian experiences in the qualitative research phase of international YIPPEE research, based on the published national reports (RÁCZ, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & RÁCZ, 2011). ‘Young People from a Public Care Background: Pathways to Education in Europe’ international research was realized by the 7th Research Project of the EU – ‘Young People and Social Discrimination’ – give an overall picture of the possible helping and hindering factors that can influence the choice of a higher education career of young people with child care background between the ages of 19 and 21. The research was carried out in Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Sweden and Great Britain in 2007-2010 and it was divided into several parts. First of all, we carried out a literature review and analyzed the published statistical data in this field. Secondly, we interviewed the decision makers and the child care professionals. Then, we made a questionnaire survey with young people between the ages of 19 and 21 who spent at least a year in child care and who were still in care at the age of 16. On the basis of these results, we carried out series of interviews with 35 young people and with a key figure in each student’s life. Young people who participated in the Hungarian survey were all in after-care support, and came from 4 counties of Hungary (Regional Child-protection Agencies).

In this article, we start by briefly presenting the Hungarian child-protection system and education system, then we show the opinions of decision-makers, child-protection professionals and social workers who were interviewed for YIPPEE international research. In the end, we deal with the interviewed young adults’ educational career and with the aspirations they have for their future. We wish to investigate those factors that can possibly determine the further and higher education career of young people with a public care background and we have tried to identify possible supporting and inhibitory factors. We will conclude this paper with commentaries and conclusions regarding the theme that was studied.

A Short Guide to the Child Protection and Education System

During the transition years, after 1989, practically all policies related to education, protection and support of children and young people have been changed and modernized. *The Act 31 of 1997 on the protection of children and guardianship* (Child Protection Act) was accepted by the Hungarian Parliament in April 1997. This Act is based on the Hungarian Constitution, which gives the general framework for the protection of children, youth and families. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was accepted in New York on 20th of November 1989, specifies the wider framework of our Constitution. It is setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children (RÁCZ, Hodosán & Korintus, 2009).

The Child Protection Act owes its existence essentially to the social and historical event of the end of the former regime. Its legal historical significance is that it is the first complete and independent legal regulation of the Hungarian child-protection system. Its significance in terms of child-protection history is that it enriches, transforms and structures the protection of children by adding new institutions (Domszky, 1999).

Children’s rights and interests are priorities; therefore the aim is to bring up children in their own families, as much as possible. The Act is the relevant piece of legislation for all services for children, such as childcare, respite care, residential care, and foster care. The two main objectives in relation to children in public care are 1) to help children to get back to their own families as soon as possible and 2) if this is not possible, support their integration into society, and assist them achieve an independent life (RÁCZ, Hodosán & Korintus, 2009).

The Hungarian child-protection system includes *child welfare services* (child welfare, childcare and respite care) and *long term care* for children and adolescents in children’s homes and foster families. TEGYESZ, the Regional Child Protection Agencies coordinate child protection actions, support people working within the system and provide the caretakers for children. Before the termination of the short- or long-term care, *after-care support*

(consultation and personal advice in everyday matters) is granted to children or young people for minimum of one year, provided that they request it. Upon the request of the young adult, *after-care provision* (in residential home or in foster care plus consultation) is granted if s/he cannot support herself (himself), or is in full-time education, or is waiting for admittance to a social welfare institution. Since 2010 January 1st, young people can apply for after-care provision up to the age of 21 if they work or are seeking work, or up to the age of 24 if they study, and until the age of 25 if they take part in full-time post-secondary education. Financial support is available towards buying a home when they leave the system. Since Hungarian young people, in general, leave their families to start an independent life at 25 and a half, the age of becoming independent is roughly the same for the two groups (Rácz, Hodosán & Korintus, 2009).

In Hungary, the educational system is not part of the child-protection system. The primary rules on the obligation to study are laid down in the Act No. LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education. The Act No. CXC of 2011 on National Public Education entered into force on the 1st of September, but most of the measures are delayed and will be introduced gradually. From September 2012, the compulsory school age is of 16 years, instead of 18 years.² The legislature justified this change by saying that it was not necessary to keep those students in school who did not wish to study in the framework of educational institutions. Lowering the compulsory school age greatly increases the social exclusion risk of young people who are disadvantaged or have been raised in the child-protection system.

The number of looked after children and young adults reaches in the last years to around 21 thousand. 17 thousand children under 18 years and 4 thousand older than 18 lived in long term care. 9% of the looked after children was 0-3 years old. 26% was 4-10 years old. 46% was 11-17 years old and 19% is older than 18 years old. The low level of education of people raised in the child-protection system predicts their social exclusion. In 2009, a total of 9,674 children living in specialized care attended primary school, primary school for mentally disabled children and primary school for workers. The majority (3,584) of children placed in foster families attending primary school were in the normal age range of their group, while the corresponding figure for those living in children's homes was reversed, the majority being over-age (2,546) (Child protection statistics Guide, 2009).

We have very few information about the educational pathways of young people in care and their participation in the higher education – this is a field that should be improved in the future since, given the present circumstances, we do not have any insight into the further studies of students within the child-protection system, at higher educational levels. The biggest obstacle proved to be the national educational statistics, which contain very few data about students in the child-protection system and that statistical data collection concerning child protection is not detailed enough, in the case of school career (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010).

In the scholastic year 2008-2009, the majority attended vocational schools (2,745), and a far smaller number went to secondary school (832). The lowest number was of those attending vocational education courses outside school (78) (Child protection statistics Guide, 2009). In the scholastic year in question, 164 children went to high school, 327 went to vocational secondary school, 1,662 attended a vocational school, and 45 attended an NTR course. Children placed in foster care are more likely to continue their studies in schools which offer better educational and labor market opportunities, than their counterparts living in children's homes. However, the number of students in vocational schools was also relatively high (1,083 during the scholastic year 2008-2009), but they valued more vocational secondary school that offered a diploma and a profession than high schools focusing on general knowledge and a leaving diploma. This typically arises from the fact that higher education is hardly a perspective for foster families, as opposed to learning a profession followed by entering the labor market, and might have financial causes (Child protection statistics Guide, 2009). Comparing to the basic population, there is a larger emphasis on vocational secondary schools

² Until the new regulations come into force, the relative provisions of the Act No. LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education apply, their repeal is carried out gradually. The rule on the compulsory school age [§ 45 Article (3)] is in effect from 1 September 2012, with the transitional provisions that lower the compulsory school age first for those who are in eighth or lower grade during the 2011-2012 school year [§ 97 Article (1)].

and proportionally half of those who choose to study in vocational training school grow up without a family (Educational Statistical Guide 2008/2009).

Based on “Ifjúság 2008” data, we can establish that acquisition of a secondary school leaving-certificate does not provide protection against unemployment. In the young age group of the general population (15-29 years), the majority of the unemployed are graduates of primary school (35% unemployed), while 29% of vocational school graduates and 28% of secondary school graduates are unemployed. Unemployment among university graduates is 8%. (Szabó & Bauer, 2009, pp. 27)

Table 1: Number and Proportion of Students in Compulsory Education in Hungary (School year 2008/2009³)

Type of school	In Hungary altogether		Those who are in the public child-care	
	N	%	N	%
Elementary school (Általános iskola)	790722	54.9	9674	70.7
Secondary school (Gimnázium)	247777	17.2	422	3
Vocational secondary school (Szakközépiskola)	271351	19	832	6
Vocational training school (Szakiskola)	128848	8.9	2745	20.3
Total	1438698	100	13673	100

Source: *Educational Statistical Guide 2008/2009⁴*, *Child Protection Statistical Guide 2009*

Students with a public-care background are characterized by lower qualifications and poorer performance at school than the general population of their age groups. There is evidence showing that only a small number of those in public-care who engage in further studies had good results at secondary school or vocational secondary school that could pave the way to higher education. Children in public care who are under 18 of age are more likely to study in vocational schools than their counterparts living in their families, and three times more likely to have multiple disadvantages in life, according to the National Competence Study. Some of these might be due to years of living in unsettled, deprived families not recognizing the values of education. Thus, many children in public-care have already accumulated shortcomings during primary school (Gyarmati, Csák & Rácz, 2009). A typical problem is the lack of motivation of children in public-care. It has been stated, many times, that those living in foster-care are more motivated, since personalized education and attention is more effective, and since foster parents also provide a stronger role model. It has also been pointed out that many children prefer work over study, in order to start a self-sufficient life, become independent, and escape from the public care system as soon as possible. However, childcare agencies are not required to collect information about the educational careers of children and young people in care, so more detailed information is not available. According to the estimations about 6% of those rose in public care study at higher education, whereas the same figure is 21% for the general population (Rácz, Hodosán & Korintus, 2009).

³ As the educational data, from both 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 scholastical years are available, but data collection is not coordinated in the child-protection, so we take into consideration the last published year.

⁴ The number of students who study in higher education is 381 033. There is no available information regarding those who live in the child protection system.

Educational career support and inhibiting factors in educational career after compulsory schooling

Research design and methodology

The overall aim of the YIPPEE project is to investigate educational pathways after the end of the compulsory schooling among young men and women who have been in public-care in European countries as children, and to consider how their opportunities to access further and higher education might be improved.

Specific objectives are to:

- Map current knowledge about educational participation among this group,
- Track and evaluate the educational plans and pathways of a sample of young people aged 19-21,
- Identify the conditions within care and education systems that facilitate or act as obstacles to continuing in post-compulsory education,
- Explore young people's constructions of educational identity and their trajectories in terms of social class, gender, ethnicity and care responsibilities, both young men and women, and also explore those of the careers and staff offering services designed to support them.

In Hungary we hardly have any information about those young people who live in child protection system. Overall, there have been only a limited number of researches related to children and young adults in public-care or leaving the public-care since 1990. Research focusing on their education after the age of 18, motivation to study or participation in higher education was basically non-existent.

The research done since the transition years, mostly deals with the working and the structural transformation of the child protection system. It would be high time now to analyze the situations, the problems, and the possibilities of those children and young adults coming from the public care system to begin autonomous lives, focusing especially on the continued education, and labor market- and social integration. The importance of studying and further education is acknowledged by the existence of after-care homes, where young people can stay between the ages of 18 and 25, if they study or work. The YIPPEE research is the first endeavor to study the motivations, opportunities and educational pathways of this group.

The aim of the research was to identify and track the progress of 19-21 years old with a public care background who were still in care at the age of 16 and gave some evidence of 'educational promise' by either having passed the secondary school final exams (the certificate being the criteria for entering higher education) or taking one of the alternative pathways through the education system to pursue studies, and showed the motivation to continue in further or higher education (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011).

Under the YIPPEE international project in Hungary, we used several qualitative methods to value the further education opportunities existing for young people raised within the child-protection system, which paths do they take within the educational system and which are their characteristics in this field.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of Regional Child-Protection Agencies (TEGYESZ) in the four selected counties. The selection of the four TEGYESZ agencies was based upon the country's territorial and developmental characteristics, and the number of young people being raised within the child-protection system. In the sample were included one county from the western region (Vas County), one from the country's northern region (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén), one from the eastern region (Hajdú-Bihar), with the capital also included in the sample as the fourth area. In terms of economic development, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County is located in a disadvantaged part of the country; Vas County comprises more affluent areas, while Budapest is considered to be a region with the best attributes in all aspects. The number of those raised within the child-protection system is the highest in the capital, while Vas County shows one of the lowest figures in the country. We asked how they see the chances of those raised in the child protection-system in further education, and what circumstances make it more difficult or easier for these young people to follow further education.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 35 young people raised within the child-protection system (they were in the system at the age of 16, and at the beginning of the research they were

between 19 and 21 years of age) who had some chance of a promising academic career⁵. These young people were contacted one year after the in-depth interview, when a shorter interview took place. We examined how life turned out for them, and to what degree they were to implement the plans they had told us about during the first interview. The second interview with these young people (a follow-up, one year later) – was conducted by telephone, given that, in this case, a shorter and more structured conversation was necessary.

The main questions that were pursued in the in-depth interviews: How they think about their present (education, work, family life, housing, health, hobby, obligations)? How they evaluate their childhood and their educational carrier? How they think about their future (three to ten years time from now on)? How much it depends on the young adult and how much is outside his/her control? After a year we asked how the plans were fulfilled. An adult of their choice was also interviewed – to gain a better insight into their lives, academic careers, and motivations. We analyzed how they think about young people's educational carrier and life in the child-protection system.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using the Nvivo qualitative data analysis package.

The verbatim transcriptions of 35 in-depth interviews of young people were imported into the Nvivo software, and given codes (tree nodes) developed by the international research team. A total of 24 tree nodes were used, which consist of sub-codes for 7 larger themes (education, employment, future, health, housing, leisure time, and social relations, followed the structure of the interview guide). After trial-coding a few interviews, researchers reviewed interviews coded by others, and discussed the individual codes, so that each sub-code refers to the same theme, no matter who coded a given interview.

During the analysis, researchers divided the themes among themselves, and worked independently with the coded interviews. We worked with interviews in two phases, when writing up topics/chapters. First, snippets for a given topic code were collected, with the help of Nvivo. Reading these excerpts (which sometimes constitute hundreds of pages of material), we were able to obtain a comprehensive picture of the important elements in a topic, and of their characteristic and recurrent patterns. In the second step, we examined the topic for each interviewee, and collected all the characteristic details (which were later used when a quote was needed for illustration). Thus, in the second step, we could examine a topic in the context of the young person's life. For topics where this was relevant, the second interview was also examined, and the changes summarized (Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011).

Main results of the research

In the following part of the article we deal with the interviewed young adults' educational career and with their future perspectives. We investigate those factors that can possibly determine young adults' education career, young adults who were brought up in public care and we try to identify possible supporting and inhibitory factors based on our findings.

The perspectives of the child-care professionals

Child-care professionals and foster-parents try to support young people raised within the child-protection system in their further studies. The support system has several levels. Apart from the immediate support of studies, i.e. helping with homework, financial support, the provision of an emotional background and motivation also appear. On a critical note, however, we should say that, child-care professionals do not regard higher-level qualifications as a reachable goal for this target group, so they instead tend to encourage them to obtain a secondary-school leaving-certificate and a profession. They try to protect the young people from failure, even those whose school performances show that they should, evidently, be heading towards getting a degree. In some cases, this approach entails the professionals disregarding personal achievements and merits and, thus, not providing encouragement and an emotionally-supportive background. (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011)

⁵ “*Educational promise*” was only defined as a determination to study, or a plan for further study, and we did not impose criteria on the level of studies.

Based on our research results, we can establish two groups of factors influencing further study after the youth has reached the age signifying the end of compulsory schooling: “*endogenous*” and “*exogenous*” factors. The first group of factors contains so-called endogenous factors, that can be grouped into the following 3 subgroups: 1) will, perseverance, individual commitment, a strong feeling of wanting to break out, 2) regarding knowledge as value, good school performance, balanced school career, talent, special field of interest, 3) desire to establish a secure future, taking responsibility for personal actions and decisions, assessment of the labour market position, the realization of childhood dreams and desires, future-oriented approach. The other group contains the so-called exogenous factors that can also be grouped into three subgroups, as it follows: 1) stable place of care, emotional support, motivation from child-care professionals, supportive person in the immediate environment (sibling, child-care professional, foster-parent), 2) good school-atmosphere, good relationship with fellow students, support of studies, nurturing of talent, monitoring of school career, child-care professionals' help in career planning, 3) provision of financial support (Rácz, 2009; Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010, Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011).

Obstacles/barriers and facilitators/opportunities which may prevent young people in care from participating in further and higher education are present in five levels: 1) level of the individual, 2) level of the family, 3) level of education, 4) level of child care/welfare, and 5) level of public politics (decision-making) (Casas – Montserrat, 2009). The following table (Table 2) shows the Hungarian barriers and facilitators to study beyond compulsory schooling.

Table 2: *Barriers and facilitators in studying beyond compulsory schooling in Hungary*

Different levels	Obstacles/barriers which may prevent young people in care from participating in further and higher education	Facilitators/opportunities which may help young people in care to increase the participation in further and higher education
<i>Individual level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accumulate disadvantages • Not motivated • Difficulties in choosing an occupation and in orienting themselves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental problems • Difficulty in formulating longer term plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic view of their future • High expectations
<i>Family level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not value education • Income from illegal (not taxed) work more desirable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paying more individual attention to children (i.e. foster families) • Inspiring environment at home • Show good personal example
<i>School level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot provide good experiences • Not prepared to deal/work with children in care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following and motivating throughout school career • Dedicated person to help the child • Focusing on developing children's basic competences and practical education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering psycho-social support • Positive discrimination within school
<i>Child protection / welfare system level:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most children are not taken into care until around age 12-14 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering psycho-social support • Financial support • Providing successful role models
<i>Policy level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two different laws and two different ministries • Need of a holistic approach • No child and youth policy • Not enough early interventions (prevention programs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear policies for financial help and practical support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that pathway plans exist and are acted upon

Source: Rácz, Csák & Korintus (2010), p. 167

Young people's experiences, future perspectives

A holistic approach was undertaken into the research questions, locating the young people's educational experience within the overall context of their lives, in and out of care. The areas covered were young people's lives at the time of first and second interviews, their current concerns, educational engagement and attainments, social relationships and informal learning and leisure activities. Exploration of their past experiences which means their life in the birth families and ongoing relations with relatives, childhood events, care careers and educational lives during the compulsory school years.

At the time of the first interview, all the 35 young people were studying (this is due to the selection method – see above – as we selected those who were educationally promising). One-third of the young people were attending higher-education institutions. As for the others, 12 had already obtained a secondary-school leaving-certificate but, instead of continuing their studies, were attending some kind of professional course. Six were trying to obtain a secondary-school leaving-certificate, and five were attending vocational training school. Apart from studying, many were also working, five regularly (and one holding a full-time job alongside attending a university correspondence course), although, during the interview, others also talked about taking up student jobs during the summer or on an occasional basis. (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011)

As each youngster was in the system – received after-care provision – most of them lived in some form of accommodation provided by the child protection system: continue to use after-care provision at foster-parents; utilizing after-care places provided within the institutional care; living in residential care circumstances together with other youngsters with child-protection system backgrounds or live in after-care homes.

Young adults primarily have external (not from the care system) relationships, and they really try keeping it that way. Relationships with those being brought up within the child welfare system are much better described as “camaraderie” rather than friendship. The most common place for friendship formation is school. Many of the interviewees recounted negative experiences from both school and the community of children; as a result of these, they developed a particular defense mechanism – hiding their pasts, their family backgrounds, and the living conditions in which they were raised. Due to their child protection system background, or their Romani ethnic origin, many of them have faced discrimination, primarily those living in institutional care (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011; Rácz, 2012).

In most cases, they faced complexes, long-term problems in the family, including ill-treatment and negligence, originating from alcoholism. Financial problems were mentioned in almost all of the narratives, but only very rarely these were the only problems a family had. It is also clear, from the interviews, that the young adults spent long years in unsettled conditions, being hurt physically and mentally, and lacking parental love and care. Typically, the biological parents were lower-educated people: many didn't even manage to complete the 8 grades of primary-school, and they were most of the times unemployed and inactive people (living on disability pensions) among them. The interviewees specify that there is usually no contact with the natural parents, or only a very eclectic one (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011).

The majority of interviewees made positive statements about child-care professionals working within the institutional care system. Those who were raised by foster-parents tended to have a close relationship with the foster-family and said that the foster-parents did not differentiate between them and their own children and that it was easy to fit into the family. Several young people mentioned as a positive attribute that, during their time spent within the child welfare and after-care provision systems, they got to know a professional whose personality, lifestyle and general views served as a good example and to whom they could turn with their troubles. A negative characteristic is the fact that some youngsters brought up in institutional care are skeptical about trusting child protection professionals and that, as young adults, they might be treated as partners (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011; Rácz, 2012).

We saw that the child-protection professionals' attitude towards education was considered to be supportive and, by giving priority to studies, the foster family and the children's home confirmed the youngsters that a good academic performance is a condition for moving forward. Support provided in the child protection system can be grouped in basically three categories: 1)

assistance related to academic career (homework assistance, mentoring, tutoring), 2) covering study-related additional costs (school supplies, accommodation, travel expenses, costs of participation in school events) and 3) emotional support (counseling, motivation, career counseling and assistance). Between the two forms of child care – institutional care and foster care – support is emphasized differently; children's homes tend to have more opportunities to financially support studies, while emotional support from foster parents is much stronger (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010).

The most dominant argument in encouraging the studies is that through studying they can be better than their birth-families. They deem that further studies offer the chance to break away from their past, and ensure better, more financially-stable lives than their parents led. The strong feeling of wanting to break out and consciously separate from the past has been an important motivational force in their lives. They mostly associate positive characteristics (appreciation, respect, has a high-prestige job and a good salary) with the image of an educated person. Short-range plans related to studies are organized around three alternatives: 1) to continue studies after a year; this concerns schools that the young adults have already begun, 2) to start further studies after finishing the current studies, 3) to find a job, after finishing the current studies. In the case of those youngsters who are attending a higher-education institution, the short-range plans also include scholarship-applications to study abroad, finding a job, and the further development of language-skills. It is a general plan among young adults that they intend to use after-care provision after a year, as well. Those who continue their studies may have after-care provision until the age of 24/25. They regard this as a very important time period in the preparation for a self-sufficient life and establishing their financial situation (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011).

Conclusion

We have very few information about the educational pathways of young people in care and their participation in the higher education. Our results show that most of those raised in child-protection would like to learn some kind of profession, a major motivating factor and a priority is to be able to get, as soon as possible, an independent life; educators and foster parents predictably also consider this to be important, and often they consider a secondary certificate as realistically achievable by these young people. Young adults, as they tend to consider learning, and obtaining suitable, competitive qualifications as important, most often highlighted personal ambition, perseverance, and willpower as helping them in their studies. However, in the young adults view, a supportive background is essential. The young people highlighted their financial situations as the most inhibitor factor, many of them having to contribute to financing their studies – which strains their savings and makes starting an independent life more difficult. There is also a problem because, usually, there is no named, responsible person in the child's life who would help him or her, and child-care institutions have no strategic plans to follow up and motivate the child in their studies. In the lives of these children, there are no appointed persons who are responsible for their school careers, from their admittance until they leave the system forever. A consequence of this is that these children have no real prospects for the future, and they experience difficulties in the course of career-planning and future orientation. TEGYESZ staff and key persons also report that if a young adult would like to obtain higher education – based on previous school performance, individual ability and motivation – the care provider and the local TEGYESZ agency try to provide every material and moral support (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011).

Continuation of studies after the age of compulsory education is largely determined by whether the children at risk receive all the necessary assistance from child-care to overcome their disadvantages and compensate for failures at school, and whether children who are taken out from their families have access, within the child-care system, to the support necessary to help them deal with the separation from their families and their familiar environment, and live down the traumas they have experienced. Professionals should support qualifications that are suited to the individual's ideas and skills, and the foreseeable labour market demands. It might be useful to set higher expectations (e.g. vocational secondary school and secondary certificate, instead of vocational

school), because experience has shown that aiming to a higher level of education, one reaches further in the educational system. (Rácz, Csák & Korintus, 2010; Korintus, Csák & Rácz, 2011) “*Social workers and professionals tend to focus on the risks and problems in the lives of children and young people in out-of-home care. It is important to recognize the positive features, strengths and competences of these young people and their at times astonishing capacity for resilience.*” (Jackson et al., 2011, p. 96).

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