

# Young adults leaving residential care institutions: social patterns, policy and practice in South Tyrol

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Young people who have received long term residential care often have serious difficulties in taking steps toward autonomous living, and they indeed take these steps earlier in life than do youth living in mainstream families even though insufficient preparation proves to be detrimental to their future possibilities. This thesis project, rooted in the region of South Tyrol in Upper Italy, is occupied with the passage from residential care to autonomous living. Its focus is the attempt to describe „typical“ orientation patterns of young people living in residential care institutions toward autonomy, which are, at the same time, life determining „effects“ of public education on clients of this particular social service. Through this study, this work should illuminate some facts pertaining to the general debate about the effects of social work and quality management issues in social services but it should as well inspire a debate about specific social policy issues which frame the pathways of leaving care for the young adults additionally – as will be shown - in a disadvantageous way. Firstly empirical data were collected through leading group discussions with youth groups in residential care and the data-analysis will be done by using the Documentary Method, established by Ralf Bohnsack. The advantage in using this method is that it not only allows for the explicitly expressed contents, which represent the reflexive body of knowledge a youth has acquired, but also for the reconstruction of a young person's implicit or „atheoretical“ knowledge underlying and orienting habitualized social action. Secondly some follow up interviews after the passage to autonomous living should illuminate how ‚leaving care‘ has worked out by a detailed view on specific cases. At the conference this work in progress will be presented by focussing on critical issues in policy and practice around youth leaving care in the region of South Tyrol in Upper Italy. It might be a relevant topic in the section „Standing up to complexity – specific and universal issues in social work“, because the view from different actors and knowledge scopes (also implicit) reveals disadvantages which are easily overseen. It might also relate to the section: ‚Social diversity: Promoting human rights and the role of research‘ because children in care are pretty much a ‚forgotten‘ population group, and research can make them ‚seen‘ (which is one aim of the thesis project) or in the section: ‚Research in social work as participative learning process‘, because the thesis project was developed from practice with youth in care and is driven by the search for a better understanding of their voices, their life experiences. The expression of their life experiences is restricted by stigmatization, which is an obstacle to their ‚participation‘.