Young People from a Public Care Background and their Pathways to Education

Final report from the Swedish part of the YIPPEE project

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Chapter 1: Background and introduction

The context
What you are now holding in your hands is the Swedish report from the research project Young People from a Public Care Background: Pathways to Education in Europe (YIPPEE).¹ The project emanates from the knowledge that young men and women from a public care background are among the most economically and socially excluded groups in European nations, yet the pathways by which they might overcome their childhood disadvantages through further and higher education have been, until now, virtually unknown (Eurydice 2005; Jackson 2007).

The work was funded by the European Commission (EC) as part of its Seventh Framework Programme (Socioeconomic Societies and Humanities), and the specific activity area of youth and social exclusion, where the aim was to achieve, through research, a ‘comprehensive and integrated approach and provide policy recommendations to dealing effectively with the social exclusion of young people in terms of causes, processes, changes and prospects’ (EU 2007).

The study involves collaboration between research partners in five European countries:

• Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, United Kingdom who also coordinated the project
• Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus, Denmark
• Institute for Social Policy and Labour, Budapest, Hungary
• Research Institute on Quality of Life, University of Girona, Spain
• Department of Social Work and Department of Education, University of Gothenburg, Sweden²

¹ This report is an adapted version of Höjer, Johansson & Hill (2010) A Long and Winding Road, published at the YIPPEE website: http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippee/
² Except for the three authors of the report some others have been involved in the work; Rachel Hadodo has conducted the screening interviews as well as the interviews with the nominated adults. Anja Johansson has transcribed all interviews and Birgitta Stangertz has scrutinised the final text.
The project and its aims
The overall aim of the project was to investigate the educational pathways of young men and women from a public care background in five EU countries, and to examine how more of these young people can be retained in education after the end of compulsory education.

The field of interest to the YIPPEE-project has not been the focus of any extensive research in Sweden. Neither was the field clearly defined prior to the project. In Sweden the research fields of child welfare as well as foster care/residential care and education in relation to marginalised groups are well developed as well as defined. However, the YIPPEE-project joined together the fields in a way that has not previously been done. The combination of research on education and on child welfare narrows the field, and also represents a new focus on educational achievements for children and young people in care. Education has not been in focus within the field of social work, and placements in care have not been highlighted within the educational field. The ambition of joining the fields and creating a new area of interest, with all the difficulties implicated, was a great challenge for the team and the project as a whole.

This report and its aims
This report is of a national investigation, in Sweden, of the educational plans and pathways of 18-21 year-olds from a public care background. The aim of the study was to identify and track the progress of such a group of young people who, at the age of 16, had some evidence of “educational promise”, through having completed compulsory school. These young people were drawn from different local authority areas of Sweden. The intention was to: identify the conditions within the care and education system that facilitated or inhibited entry to, and continuation in, post-compulsory education; explore the ways in which young people construct educational identities and pursue educational trajectories in terms of class, gender, race, ethnicity and citizenship status; and to gather perspectives on such constructions from carers and professionals nominated by young people as having made a difference to their educational life. In the Swedish case the educational trajectories in terms of gender, ethnicity and citizenship status will not be discussed specifically as women are overrepresented and as there are only few with a different ethnicity and/or citizenship than Swedish.
The fieldwork for the Swedish study took place between March 2008 and June 2010 and drew on a wide range of sources, detailed in chapter four. This national report will be synthesised with those from YIPPEE partners and available as a comparative consolidated report, together with earlier reports from the YIPPEE project from the website http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippee/.

<table>
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<th>List of vocabulary used and its Swedish translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Compulsory school</td>
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<td>Secondary school</td>
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Report structure and reading suggestions
This report is quite extensive both in content and number of pages. Chapter two deals, very briefly, with sketching a base line of knowledge of the issues dealt with in the report. Both European and Swedish research is summarised and a more extensive literature review can be found at the YIPPEE website. In chapter three theoretical frames for the study are briefly described and discussed. It sets off from social theories trying to understand contemporary society and what demands and possibilities it brings, especially for the group focussed in the report. Further it discusses the concepts of risk and marginalisation. How society’s efforts to compensate for shortcomings in the original family is another theoretical frame as well as the concept of resilience. Chapter four gives a methodological background and discusses both ethical issues as well as how the sampling and data gathering was conducted. Here we are remembered that several methods were used, for different research questions and directed towards several empirical sources. Chapter five can be read separately as it deals with statistical analysis only. It also serves as a point of reference for the following chapters as it gives the broad picture of how young people in and from care are doing in statistical terms. In chapter six we will hear some voices of managers within the local social services describing the policies in the field of placement in care in relation to education and also expressing opinions and summarising experiences. Chapter seven presents some results from interviewing adults, who have influenced or supported educational initiatives, nominated by the young persons interviewed. Chapters eight and nine are dedicated the experiences
of the these young persons. In chapter eight we will get close to their life histories, covering both the family of origin, the placement in care, the daily life in foster care or in a residential home and, most important, at school. The chapter concludes with the young people thinking and hoping for their future. In the following and ninth chapter we analyse barriers and facilitators for further education. Chapter ten pulls the results together and the finishing chapter, eleven, gives recommendations for action in order to improve the educational situation of young persons with experience of being in society’s care.
Chapter 2: What was known before we started

European research

In the five countries participating in the project there is increasing concern about what happens to young people when they move out of public care. Stein and Munro’s (2008) international review of research and practice in young people’s transitions from care to adulthood analyses secondary data and research findings across 16 countries (including all those in the YIPPEE project except Denmark). In summary, the authors find that transitions from care to adulthood are shaped by a set of complex processes, different in each country, but with many common features. In all countries care leavers are at higher risk than others of social exclusion. Legislation to support transitions, which exists in eight of the countries, offers some degree of protection but is not enough in itself and may sometimes conflict with young people’s rights to autonomy and self-determination. There are wide variations in the balance between the responsibilities of individuals, the family and the state, in the extent of financial, practical and personal support provided by public bodies, how much preparation is offered through skills training and education and how much weight is given to service users’ views, if they are consulted at all. Transitions to adulthood from care tend to be ‘accelerated and compressed’ compared with those of young people living with their families, and while some care leavers are able to cope, the risk of social exclusion for the less resilient is very high.

In Denmark, Espersen (2004) found, through interviews with 16 social workers, that young people in care needed further support after they turn 18 mainly regarding school, education and work. They are regarded as being vulnerable in the transition to adult life. Those who were considered to be the most vulnerable were not part of any leaving care programmes. As many other studies also indicate, support is especially important for people in care due to their troubled backgrounds. If they are to overcome their disadvantages and get qualifications beyond compulsory school it is very important that they receive advice and support. This is also in line with the young people’s view: that a supportive person that believes in them can be crucial for them completing an education (Andersen et al. 2005).

Del Valle et al.’s (2008a) study assessed the incidence of problems related to marginalization and social exclusion among those who had lived in residential care as children
in Spain. Nearly 15 per cent of respondents had serious problems (drug dependence, delinquency, etc.),

25 per cent received help from the social services and the rest managed independently to a greater or lesser extent. The researchers discuss the significance of these data, especially the relationship between the final result and the initial and process variables. They found the following indicators of social maladjustment in their sample: a total of 9.4 per cent had severe dependence on substances, and 7.8 per cent were sporadic users. More women (10.3 per cent) than men (8.3 per cent) were affected by problems of drug addiction. In relation to problems with the law, 10.4 per cent of the sample reported these, and they were more common among men (14.4 per cent) than women (5.1 per cent). With the aim of obtaining a more comprehensive picture, the study constructed a measure of general social integration, under five categories:

- Social marginalization: presence of serious problems of drug-addiction, prostitution or delinquency.
- Social welfare recipient: absence of serious problems, but largely dependent on help from social services to maintain this situation.
- Intermediate adjustment: cases in which the participant had passed from a situation of dependence on social welfare to a more independent one, but with some instability.
- Good adjustment: cases where there was financial independence and good social integration in general, but minor problems in some of the indicators (health, family relationships, etc.).
- Excellent adjustment: Full independence and stability in employment and residence and a positive situation in all the indicators selected (del Valle et al. 2008a).

The variable most strongly associated with subsequent social problems was the number of changes of institution a child undergoes. When the stay is long but in the same institution, the results visibly improve. That the correlation between length of stay and the results in terms of social integration is null is a significant result. Despite the widely-held view that lengthy stays in residential care are damaging to children, the data show that it
is not the time spent in institutions that leads to negative results, but rather instability and lack of response to problem behaviour. In the opinion of the residential workers, serious problems, such as theft, violence or running away, affected less than 15 per cent of the sample. Thus, the sample studied here was not an especially difficult one to work with, probably because it is from the 1990s (del Valle et al. 2008a). Comparing the prison data, a greater proportion of the ex-residents, 4.38 per cent, have been in prison than the young population as a whole: 0.23 per cent. In both groups the rate is higher for men than for women (Barriocanal et al. 2006). There are no comparable figures for England, but surveys of the prison population show that half of all offenders imprisoned in youth prisons have come from care, as well us around a quarter of adult offenders.

This study showed that the ex-residents of institutional out-of-home-placesments who could be located had, in general, a positive degree of social integration. Both the young people interviewed and their family members, as a group, evaluate the process of the stay positively. They mention that work within the residential institution was a particularly positive experience, but that other aspects were less positive or actually negative (Barriocanal et al 2006).

Cameron et al. (2007) found that around a quarter of care leavers and over half of the comparison sample of young people with difficulties in their lives 'did not feel well most of the time, while 39 percent of care leavers and 45 percent of the comparison group reported themselves to be depressed at the time of interview or in the past. This confirmed findings of Cheung and Buchanan (1997) on the association between being in care and having depression.

Care leavers in England often have financial difficulties as adults. Cameron et al. (2007) found that 85 percent of study care leavers defined themselves as 'struggling' with or 'just managing' their finances. Those in employment, who were also likely to be in education, were just as likely to be in difficulties as those who were not; and the comparison group of disadvantaged young people were equally likely to be in financial difficulties. Jackson et al. (2005:24) reported highly variable practice by local authorities in funding students' attendance at university, with some improvements in students' reports of help over the three years of the study following implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
Three categories of care leavers
Stein (2005) developed three categories of care leavers on the basis of reviews of earlier studies of care leavers. These categories are useful to consider in the light of the evidence presented in this review about a number of aspects of young people’s lives when they become adults after having been in care as children. They are also useful to consider in the context of what the study might expect to find in educational pathways among this group after compulsory education finishes.

Stein argued that care leavers’ experiences show differentiation between those who are moving on, show a determination to overcome past problems, to cope with adversities and adult roles, such as being a parent, or attend further or higher education, hold tenancies and enjoy reasonable health. On the basis of evidence in this review, they are likely to continue to have financial difficulties and to access support services as and when needs arise. This group are easiest to help and foster resilience in. Given what we know about the importance of having someone to rely on and befriend, it is possible that those who stay in placements for longer, and have more stable placements, such as in Spain and Sweden, will be more likely to be in those group.

The second group Stein termed ‘survivors’ of their care experience. This group are probably more prevalent in England, where there is a tendency to discharge young people earlier from care. Given this, and the extent of placement instability, it is likely that English young people are less likely to emerge from the education system with qualifications than their European peers. The survivor group also perceived themselves as ‘tough’ and independent although in practice they were often quite dependent on help from formal and informal sources. Professional support, such as mentoring or having a key worker/personal adviser, was said to have made a positive difference to this group.

More effective systems of support should be able to improve the resilience of the second group of care leavers, to the point where they can more readily access further and higher education. In Cameron et al.’s (2007) study, about one quarter of care leavers, and one fifth of the comparison group described themselves as not having enough support with everyday life and about half of each group said they felt OK asking other people for help. Asked whom they might turn to for support, care leavers either said there was no one, or, among those that did mention someone, identified one or both parents as someone they could go to. This division between those having and those not having
someone to turn to in times of difficulty, and the findings on (not) enough support, tie into the idea of Stein’s groupings of care leavers with different characteristics, and of a champion being important for strengthening resilience in independent adulthood.

The third group were categorized as ‘victims’. They were most likely to have had a combination of difficult and damaging experiences in their birth families, continuing through their care career, and into early adulthood. They were unlikely to have or be able to access professional or personal support. This group had least resilience. Those young people who leave care very early, with little or no support and had the most disrupted placements were likely to be in this group. Around one third of Cameron et al.’s (2007) sample said they preferred to sort out their own problems, which may be an indication of the size of this group, although further research is needed here. First hand accounts gathered by the WMTD (What Makes the Difference) team (2008) in England made clear that there is still a very large gap between the government’s view of how the business of transition to adulthood should be conducted and what actually goes on in local authority areas. Many of the young people interviewed in this project had left care at 16, some of them against advice, others because this was simply the expectation. What seemed to happen was that the system closed up behind them, so that if things went wrong, as they often did, the young person had no chance to go back as young people with stable families sometimes do.

Educational background of parents, foster parents and staff at residential homes
There is a large body of educational research in England, dating back to 1948, which shows that the interest and commitment of parents, as well as their own educational level, are key determinants of children’s academic attainment. It seems highly probable that these are also important factors in the school performance of children in care. Jackson and Sachdev (2001) make this point strongly, as does McParlin (1996).

Searching for an explanation as to why it seems young people from care are so unlikely, at present, to enter further and higher education, one possibility, alongside the socio-economic disadvantages of this group, is that their caregivers’ education is relevant. In this section, we address the educational background of the caregivers – in this context referring to foster carers and staff at residential homes.

There are three main factors to be considered here. First, is there a coherent knowledge base of discipline that governs the field of looking after children in care? Second,
what level of qualifications is expected among staff and carers, and to what extent is this achieved in the partner countries? Third, what, if any obstacles are known, that affect the caregivers in putting their knowledge into practice with young people?

**A coherent knowledge base?**

In three of the five countries, social pedagogy is seen as the main knowledge base for working with children in care. These are Denmark, Hungary and Spain. Social pedagogy refers to working with children with an educational, goal-oriented and holistic focus. It is sometimes called ‘education in the broadest sense of the term’ (Petrie et al. 2006). Social pedagogues work with groups in a range of settings, and often use practical and creative activities as well as reflection on practice to guide their work. They work with a rights based perspective and use the resources of colleagues to a great extent. Social pedagogy, and its variants, are prevalent in many European countries and can be found in work with young people and adults in a wide range of settings, including residential care and foster care support services. Some foster carers are also pedagogues in some countries (Petrie et al. 2006; Petrie 2007). In England and Sweden, social work and/or social care has provided the knowledge base for residential care and foster care. But social work has tended to be more focused on case work with individuals and families and less on group work. In a study of foster care that included England and Sweden, social pedagogy was not recognised as important in these two countries (Petrie 2007).

**Qualifications and their coverage**

Overall, both residential care workers and foster carers have low levels of qualification (Petrie et al. 2006; Petrie 2007). In the UK, Sinclair (2005) found that the profile of foster carers generally was married women in their 40s or 50s who had not obtained any educational qualifications and were very home-centred, with limited outside activities and few intellectual or cultural interests. Among the small minority of young people from care who succeed in accessing university education it is noticeable that their foster carers tend to be better educated than the norm. Over a third of those who cared for participants in the By Degrees study had studied at tertiary level themselves (Jackson et al. 2005). In a Swedish study of foster carers Höjer (2001) found that more than half had only compulsory education. About 20 per cent had graduated from secondary school, and 29 per cent had some kind of college or university education. Danish foster carers are more likely than most to have a degree level qualification, and about one quarter have a social pedagogy or related qualification (Petrie 2007).
Nearly all Danish residential workers with children have a degree level qualification in social pedagogy (Boddy et al. 2006). Spanish residential workers in the public sector are also expected to hold a three year social pedagogy qualification (called social educator), but only a minority of residential homes are in the public sector and practice in the private not for profit sector is thought to be variable (Casas p.c.). In the Petrie et al. (2006) study, English residential workers were likely to have no or no relevant qualification (36 per cent) or the expected NVQ level 3 (36 per cent). Only 20 percent held a degree level qualification and where this was the case it was likely to be in a range of subjects.

Sallnäs (2000) found that the educational background among staff in Swedish residential homes for young people and children varied considerably. In general, the level of education was low. Only about 25 per cent of staff were qualified social workers or psychologists and one-third of the homes did not have a member of staff with any kind of college or university degree. Publicly run homes tended to have a somewhat higher level of education among staff than private units (ibid.).

**Obstacles**

In both Sweden and England governments have advised on the need for better-educated caregivers (SOU 2005; DfES 2007) yet difficulties remain in achieving the coverage of qualified staff and a knowledge base specifically aimed at group living away from birth families. It may be significant that in both countries, the ideology is that families offer the best environment for young people in care, and the relationship between qualifications and family based parenting is ambivalent. Foster carers may think they are offering an ‘ordinary’ family life for which training is not necessary. Spain has achieved the introduction of the social educator programme since 1991, and after a transition period, all public sector workers are trained. It may be significant that the training was run from within a university at a time when lifelong learning was becoming an important way of securing quality of employment (Cameron and Moss 2007).

Overall, we know that better outcomes for young people in residential care are associated with characteristics of staff (Petrie et al. 2006). In particular, Danish young people were more likely to be in education both before and after compulsory school leaving ages, and were less likely to have a criminal record or be pregnant (if female) than English young people in similar living situation. It would seem likely that staff and carer characteristics would also promote participation in further and higher education, and
one might expect to find that countries with higher proportions of better qualified staff were more encouraging of post compulsory education than where the reverse was the case.

Factors influencing post-compulsory educational attainment and participation
This section draws on data from studies of factors that are known to have an impact on accessing post-compulsory education, not only explicitly on children in care or after care, but also other disadvantaged or minority groups accessing higher education. ‘School’ is not only teaching different school subjects. School is also supposed to give young people possibilities to grow successfully to adulthood and develop a sense of belonging to society during their school years. Schools include and exclude groups and individuals in different processes. Many important experiences of all kinds occur in and outside of the classroom and at other places at school.

Gender, class and ethnicity
There are more boys than girls in the care systems. For example, in England the figures are 56 percent boys to 44 percent girls (DfES 2007). However, girls in most European countries do better in school exams and in accessing higher education. In Sweden girls have higher marks in all subjects except physical education (Swedish National Agency of Education 2008). In Swedish language, one of the core subjects in the Swedish school, necessary for accessing post-compulsory education, 23 percent of the girls got the highest mark but only 8 percent of the boys. The girls did better even in mathematics; 13 percent with the highest marks to 11 percent of the boys, a quite new condition in the Swedish school system (Swedish National Agency of Education 2008). The pattern is similar in England, where 73 percent of boys and 82 percent of girls achieve at least one GCSE at the top grade of A*. This difference in educational attainment continues into university, with 43 percent of women and 38 percent of men attending higher education. However, analyses by gender of in-depth data on care leavers’ educational participation and achievement are very limited (Berridge 2007). Cameron et al. (2007) did not include consideration of any differences by gender of academic achievements or aspirations. Jackson et al. (2005) were unable to identify any significant gender differences in achievement among their research participants, although among young people who had succeeded in accessing higher education from care, women were heavily over-represented, rising to 70 per cent of the third of the three successive groups of entrants.
Within more general debates about gender and schooling, girls tend to be positioned as achieving well while boys are seen as ‘at risk’ (Archer et al. 2007). A study of girls and boys from working class backgrounds found distinct and varied gender differences in ways of expressing their views of schooling (Archer et al. 2007). Girls tended to either hide their disengagement in the educational process through tactics such as pretending to work, or to ‘speak out’, and find the idealised version of girls’ behaviour in school as quite constraining. It was not accepted for girls to be ‘loud’, but for boys this behaviour was a more accepted part of being masculine. Believing in self-expression brought female students into conflict with teachers (ibid.: 556). Some young women were keen to describe themselves as ‘good underneath’, and their self-assessments were at odds with those of their teachers, reflecting, argued Archer et al., a complex relationship between self, and other facets of identity such as social class, gender and race. Many of the young women studied expressed a desire to change their approach to education, with aspirations of higher education as part of a move away from their working class identities. Archer et al. (2007: 565) argue that ‘for urban working class girls, trying to ‘change’ and achieve ‘success’ is a difficult and costly endeavour’ as their identities and social positioning are often perceived as unacceptable within the dominant educational discourses.

Researchers in Denmark have described the new girl (Schultz Jørgensen 1990). She is forward, critical and creative, with a good sense of humour (Frimodt-Møller and Ingerslev, 1993). She is, so far, found in just a few empirical studies, as a new phenomenon we don’t know much about from an intersectional perspective. There are studies pointing out working class girls as protesting and confronting boys and school authority (Öhrn 1990; Skeggs 1991). Öhrn argues (1990) that when teachers talk about individual students they describe working class girls in negative terms, as disturbing and not paying attention, more often than any other group.

Studying mature male students on access to study courses in further and higher education, Burke (2007) showed that these students, whose memories of schooling were often about being bullied or bullying, or being lazy about their studies, were faced with a complex identity struggle. In the terminology of neo-liberalism, the men accepted their individual responsibility to create their futures, and were struggling with the disciplined self necessary to realize their educational desires. Under neo-liberalism, those individuals who ‘fail’ to overcome their flaws are seen as undeserving of higher education access,
and the problem of exclusion is relocated at the individual level rather than looking beyond to unequal social relations and cultural misrecognitions’ (Burke 2007:419). The men in the study were able to access some privileged discourses, such as masculinity, but not others, as they came from groups in society defined as socially excluded. Burke (2007: 422) concluded that ‘student identities are discursively made and remade, connected to complex social and personal histories, micro-processes and auto/biographical identities’.

Trondman (1995) discusses in a Swedish study what will happen with the young working class men he defines as the future losers. They live in small communities where factories and workshop have disappeared. They still strive for the kind of life their fathers lived, as workers in their old neighbourhood with a focus on a good social life and family, but the economic reality is that this may not be possible for them.

There have been very few studies in Sweden about vocational education in upper secondary school, despite the fact that more than fifty percent of Swedish youth participate in vocational programmes. Upper secondary school is free of charge and it is voluntary, but close to everyone stays in some sort of schooling till their nineteenth year. There are at least two reasons for that. First: there is a rather extensive unemployment rate among the young. Second: it is hard to get a position of any kind without a leaving certificate from upper secondary school. The students in all programmes are supposed to take basic courses at the same level in the core subjects and study for three years. Hill (1989) found that this was an advantage for some, but was seen as a constraint by those who had a primary desire to start working as soon as possible, earn money and be independent. They would rather prefer the old model for vocational education, when you studied for two years with focus on a vocational branch and professional skills. Sweden has a long tradition for children with working class backgrounds to drop core subjects as soon as possible, which was possible in the former vocational education, but the aim of many school reforms is to prevent this from happening.

The ethnic profile of children in care shows a complex picture (Chand 2008). National data for 2007 in England shows that young people from a minority ethnic background in care were disproportionately represented compared to the population as a whole. Seventy eight percent of young people in care were ‘white’ compared to 93 percent in the general population (DfES 2007). Of the ethnic groups represented among children in
care, eight percent were Black or Black British, eight percent were of ‘mixed’ ethnic origin, three percent were of Asian and two percent ‘other’. In recent years, England has seen a large increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers, of which 3,300 were recorded as being ‘looked after’ in 2007 (DfES 2007). The ethnic categories assigned to this group show that they are largely coming from ‘new’ or ‘other’ destinations: 16 percent are categorised as ‘white other’, 22 percent are ‘Asian other’, and 31 percent are ‘African other’. A further 21 percent are ‘other other’. Although still small, the unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in the care system have the potential to challenge our understanding of ethnicity and educational attainment when in care.

In Hungary the situation of Roma children in education is well researched, concerning segregated Roma classes or the social determinants of educational attainment of Roma children and youth (Csongor 1991; Forray and Hegedűs 1990; 1998; Radó 1997; Réger 1995; Kertesi 2005).

English analyses of educational attainment for young people in care from minority ethnic backgrounds shows that they are doing better than those from white working class backgrounds, who still constitute the majority of children in care (WMTD 2007). Jackson et al. (2005: 39-40) reported that a third of their sample had entered the UK as unaccompanied asylum seekers under the age of 16 and had stayed in care. This group had usually achieved high levels of education in the face of considerable difficulties. They attributed their success to their own efforts, inspired by strong messages from their families of origin about the crucial importance of educational success in enabling them to overcome their disadvantaged situation.

A very extensive Swedish study showed that children of immigrants from surrounding Nordic countries move on to upper secondary school and university to a lesser extent than children with a Swedish background. Children with parents from other countries tended to obtain more education than children of native-born Swedes, if their social background is taken into account (Eriksson 1993 p 212) Children from minority ethnic backgrounds are very often working class children. There were differences between varying minority groups. A child with a father from Greece had according to the study a chance of 1,71 to 1 to go on to the most prestigious programmes in upper secondary school. The figures for other ethnic groups were 1,53 for a child with a father from Poland and 1,16 for a child with roots in Turkey. Those figures apply to children born in
Sweden but with a father born abroad. If the child was between 1 and 6 years old when they came to Sweden their chances are reduced by about 25 per cent (Eriksson 1993 p 214).

A clear tendency in Sweden is that a relatively large group of children from ethnic minorities drop out of upper secondary school while another relatively large group is doing well in school and at university (Hill 1996). Children from minority ethnic backgrounds often explain, in Sweden as well as in England, that they feel a strong desire from their parents that they should take advantage of the opportunity for education they obtained as a result of their parents’ emigration (Hill 1996).

Many of the accounts in Hill’s (1996) study have much in common with the experiences of school given by care leavers in Cameron et al. (2007), suggesting that many young people from a public care background bring with them from school (and potentially to higher education) a predominantly urban working class set of sensibilities about education.

From what we know of the educational paths of care leavers, there is likely to be some overlap between the class and ethnic background of, for example, Burke’s male students mentioned earlier, and those who come from a public care background. One might expect, therefore, that qualitative interviews with care leavers about their educational memories and post-compulsory educational paths would reveal similar complex relations with the dominant discourses of educational participation.

**Swedish research**

Good school results are more than ever stressed as the key to a good life. An early break in the chain of education may spoil future prospects. A recent report from the Swedish Board of Health and Welfare (Swedish Board of Health and Welfare, 2010) shows that the marks from the ninth and last year in compulsory school have decisive significance for children’s readiness to go on to higher education. 20 to 30 percent of children with low marks or incomplete compulsory education leave school before upper secondary education compared to less than one percent of children with marks above the average. This concerns especially so-called disadvantaged children and among them are children raised by public childcare. They are, as a group, known to leave compulsory school with far lower marks than other children. Even as adults they have lower qualifications and
an increased risk for unemployment and poverty. It is rather new in the ongoing discussion that this group of “children in care” is particularly noticed.

One conclusion in the above mentioned report is that if we want to improve future prospects for children in care, society has to give them very strong support during their schooldays. It is also important to give priority to research and development of educational models. The most vital issue of the YIPPEE-project is at the moment right at the centre of Swedish discussions on education.

In a recent Swedish article, the authors emphasise the contrasting outcomes between young people placed for behavioural problems, and those placed for other reasons. The sample consisted of 70 per cent of all 13 to 16 year olds who entered out-of-home care in 1991 (n=700). For the first group the researchers found very high rates of premature death, prison sentences, mental health problems, teenage parenthood, self-support problems and low educational attainment at age 25 (Vinnerljung and Sallnäs 2008). The second group were more successful in achieving social integration.

Vinnerljung et al. (2007) found elevated risks for teenage parenthood among former child welfare clients. The study population consisted of the entire Swedish born population born 1972 – 1983, still alive and residing in Sweden at age 20. Cohort youths (n = 49 582) who had received registered in-home (being assigned a “contact family”) or out of home care (foster or residential) before the age of majority [18] were divided into mutually exclusive subgroups by type of intervention, age at the start of first registered intervention and by time spent in out-of-home care before their 18th birthday.

Of all teenage parents in the cohorts, almost one in five (18 per cent) is a former child welfare client. Among youth who received interventions first during their teens, 16 -19 per cent of the girls gave birth to a child before age 20, compared to 2.9 per cent in the majority population. For boys figures varied between 5.0 and 5.6 per cent, compared to 0.7 per cent among majority population peers. Young people who receive interventions during their teens are six to nine times more likely to become parents under the age of 20 compared with general population peers. For cohort members whose interventions started before age 13, and for youth who had been in long-term foster care, roughly 10 per cent of the girls and 2-4 per cent of the boys had become teenage parents. However, the great majority of cohort members with a teenage mother or father did not become teenage parents themselves. The authors conclude: ‘Youth who become child welfare
clients in adolescence should be regarded as a high-risk group for teenage parenthood, regardless if they receive in-home or out-of home care. The concern is also valid for those who enter child welfare services in younger years and/or spend a large part of their childhood in long-term foster care, albeit to a lesser degree” (p 111). This conclusion is of value to the project, as teenage pregnancies are likely to have a detrimental impact on possibilities for further studies (Vinnerljung et al. 2007).

Vinnerljung (2007) also reported that Swedish data on the situation for young people formerly placed in out-of-home care show that this group are disadvantaged in respect of their health, especially mental health. Former Swedish child welfare clients were four to five times more likely than peers in the general population to have been hospitalised for suicide attempts. They were five to eight times more likely to have been hospitalised for serious psychiatric disorders in their teens, four to six times in young adulthood. High excess risks were also found for psychoses and depression. Individuals who had been in long-term foster care tended to have the worst outcomes. The authors conclude that long-term foster care before adolescence constitutes the strongest and the longest-lasting child welfare intervention in Sweden. The parents of children placed in long-term foster care had the highest figures of all sub-groups for alcohol abuse, narcotics abuse or psychiatric disorders. The aim of placing their children in long-term care was to compensate for the negative effects of care-deficits and neglect in the home of the family of origin. Evidently, the compensating and rehabilitating effects of out-of-home care have not been adequate. According to the results of this study, former child welfare clients should be considered a high-risk group for suicide attempts and severe psychiatric morbidity (Vinnerljung et al. 2006).

The researchers referred to above also found elevated risks for unnatural death among former child welfare clients. The risk ratio for an unnatural death was two-fold for men, compared with peers in the general population (RR =1.99 and 2.15). Male suicides were also more frequent than in the general population (RR= 2.31 and 2.76). Thus, this study shows that former foster children, and young people with adverse home backgrounds, are more likely to die from unnatural causes than their peers in the general population (Vinnerljung and Ribe 2001).
Gaps in research

Educational achievements of children and young people placed in care have, until recently, received little or no attention in Sweden. In an article from 1998 (Vinnerljung 1998), the author calls attention to the absence of Swedish research directed towards foster children and their educational attainments. Unlike the situation in other countries, such as the US and the UK, Swedish researchers have paid very little attention to education and children and young people placed in care. Simultaneously, the author concludes that this lack of interest is hard to explain, as child welfare legislation for decades has been highlighting the importance of foster children’s educational attainments (ibid.). In his article, the author suggests possible explanations of schooling difficulties for foster children. One explanation is the difference in attitudes towards adopted children and foster children. Parents who adopt know that adoption is a life-long commitment. They will also expect the same level of educational attainments from adopted children as they would from biological children. Another plausible explanation is also connected to expectations. Social workers and foster carers tend to focus more on deficits and problems of foster children, than on “normality” and high accomplishments (ibid.). According to results from a study in progress (Life After Care) this is still an explanation given by some of the social services managers being interviewed.

Swedish research in this area is fragmentary, and cannot be said to present a foundation for any coherent perceptions. However, from what little research has been done, results can be said to point to a deteriorating situation for foster children. Due to an increased level of education among the general population, young people with low education may find themselves to be in a difficult situation. This is a matter of importance. Young people with low educational attainments will face severe problems on the labour market, and are at risk of facing unemployment, or only being able to find temporary jobs (Vinnerljung 1998).
Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

Late modernity and risk

Many social scientists describe the contemporary society in terms of late-, or post-, modernity (or second-, or new, or reflexive) (see e.g. Giddens 1991, Beck 1992). In contrast to the modern society, late modernity can be understood using some key concepts; *de-traditionalisation, globalisation, reflexivity, individualisation* and *risk*. To what degree the late modern society has replaced the modern is an issue for both theoretical debate and empirical studies. However, what seems to be clear is that while a young person a hundred years ago saw few possibilities of choosing other pathways in life than their parents or closest network, young people today live with constant situations of choices. The possibilities are almost infinite, at least a strong discourse tells us so. The welfare state, as well as demands from the production sphere, has opened up education for much broader groups than before and media as well as Internet shows us a multitude of lifestyles, tastes, cultures and social belongings to choose from. Education has become the key factor in shaping your own future instead of trotting in the footpaths of the earlier generations. This de-traditionalisation creates possibilities, social mobility and individual freedom but also insecurity and rootlessness. First and foremost it demands people to have a reflexive attitude towards all aspects of life. A reflexive attitude is crucial both when it comes to the numerous choices and in relation to how the individual perceives herself, her social life and the world. Giddens (1991) calls this a reflexive identity project where the notion that you can choose your body, your sexuality, your profession and your life is strong. But – notion is one thing, reality another. Between these there is often a huge gap, which it its turn creates conflicts, disappointments and feelings of insufficiency. And subsequently the individual is to blame for failures and shortcomings, not structural injustices or inequalities.

Another central concept for understanding life in contemporary western society is *risk*. Beck (1992) sketches a world where old scientific certainties have been replaced by uncertainty and risk. We constantly calculate risk. Risks that are systematically produced a part of the new modernity and have to be faced and dealt with individually. But risk is not equally distributed, according to Beck, but “(...) risks seem to strengthen, not abolish, the class society. Poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks. By con-
trast, the wealthy (in income, power or education) can purchase safety and freedom from risk.” (Beck 1992: 35, original emphasis)

Furlong and Cartmel (2007) sets out to investigate both continuities and changes regarding young people in late modern societies. They draw on a wide range of studies from around the world and argues that the transition from childhood to adult life is prolonged and diversified as well as saturated with the idea of choice but, at the same time, the outcomes in terms of education, profession, lifestyle, family etc are still highly dependent on the factor of class and gender; It is mainly youths with highly educated parents that are found in our universities; girls end up in the caring and public sector to a higher degree than their male peers etc. A “new” kind of vulnerability has also been introduced as a result of the removal of state support for young persons in getting their income, housing, adult education etc. This affects young people from a already vulnerable background more than others. “Independence is limited by structures of opportunity” (p 141)

Youth and transitions

Nowadays it is quite common for young people to take one or two “gap-years” before they move on to further and higher education. During this period they work and/or travel. Some young people’s transitions can be characterised as yo-yo transitions, as described by Walther (2006). In such yo-yo transitions young people fluctuate between periods of independence, where they move out of the parental home for work and/or education, and dependence, where they move back to the parental home. However, although this can be said to be an existing pattern in Sweden, we have no statistics to show the prevalence of such transitions. Being able to have a phase in life where young people can try independent living, try different types of jobs, start an education – and find this was not what they wanted and still have the opportunity to return to the parents is of importance. Knowing that you have a back-up from parents, that you are allowed to fail when you take your first step as a young adult, has an impact on what project you dare to start. Walther (2006) states that one of the characteristics of democracy is the opportunity to make individual choices. For young people without a back-up from parents, or other significant adults, it may not be possible to make these yo-yo transitions. This is often the case for young people who have been placed in foster/residential care (Höjer & Sjöblom 2009).
Welfare regimes
Along with other Nordic countries (i.e. Denmark, Norway and Finland), Sweden can be defined as an institutional welfare state with general, and not selective, means-tested benefits. The Social Democratic Party dominated the political scene for many decades (the last four years Sweden has had a coalition of conservative and liberal parties in government). The policy of the Social Democratic party was well in concordance with the system of the institutional welfare state (Bäck-Wiklund 2003). Hinnfors (1991) classifies this system as “generous institutionalism”, and describes it as “A system, which includes all public contributions with high standards, directed towards the whole population. It offers service and aims at security outside the market based on economic and social needs” (Hinnfors 1991, p 17).

Generally, people have confidence in state interventions, and expect the state to provide institutionalised solutions for example care for children and the elderly. Characteristic of Sweden, as well as the other Nordic welfare states, is a social policy explicitly designed to maximise women’s economic independence, which makes their system very different from liberal welfare regimes (Esping-Andersson 1999).

The history of the Swedish welfare state goes back to the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1930s, the Social Democratic party used the “good home” where everyone was treated equally, and had a fair share of all resources, a metaphor for the kind of society they wanted to create. The shaping of the “People’s home” strategy influenced reforms in all major political areas: education, housing, working life and social security. The long-term goal was to tear down barriers and eradicate conditions that shaped class-related inequality (Salonen 2001, p 144, 145).

In Sweden, the core components of the welfare state were not put in place until the 1960’s and 1970’s. Social expenditure of the state increased at the beginning of the 1980’s, and has been fairly stable since then, representing about one third of the annual GDP. The Swedish welfare regime implies a high degree of state intervention, based on high taxes and public expenditure. Generally, there is a public legitimacy for such a high level of social expenditure. Swedish citizens have confidence in state interventions, and expect the state to provide institutionalised solutions, for example care for children and
the elderly. According to a number of surveys, there is more public support for universal than for targeted programmes (Salonen 2001).

The accent on universal benefits and services of the social democratic welfare regime creates a homogenous population in terms of the distribution of social resources (Esping-Andersen 1999). Such a welfare system has a great impact on the organisation of family life and the level of dependency and independency of family members. The Swedish welfare state with its extensive system of support to individuals and families has made it possible for both men and women to find a balance between their professional and their family life. In the majority of families with children, both fathers and mothers are gainfully employed. This is also valid for most single parents (Bäck-Wiklund 2003).

Moreover, as Salonen (2002) indicates, the principal of universal rights of security and service is more or less guaranteed in childhood and old age. For the period where people are supposed to be part of the labour force, it is performance related (ibid.). This means that citizens who, for various reasons, are excluded from the labour market also are excluded from the general benefits of the institutional welfare state, and will have to apply for means-tested benefits.

Children have remained relatively invisible in the Swedish welfare model and in the welfare discourse. This means that childhood as a conception is not regarded as a phase in life with its own social dynamics. Subsequently, children, and also young people, are conceptualised more as dependent members of the family rather than young citizens and social actors (Björk Eydal & Satka 2006). As a consequence, children and young people can be seen as included in the welfare model only by being members of a family, not as independent actors in their own right.

Another shortcoming of the Swedish welfare state, mentioned by for example Lundström and Sallnäs (2003) is that the social child welfare never has become a part of the general social politics. There are several traits to be found in today's child welfare that do not differ significantly from a hundred years ago.

Resilience
Another concept relating to the young people involved in the YIPPEE project is resilience. Rutter (1999) defines resilience as a capacity to overcome difficult life experiences. That is to say, a good psycho-social functioning in spite of the existence of risk and ability to normal functioning in spite of abnormal conditions (Helmen Borge 2005). According to
Stein (2005), recent empirical research has focused on three main areas of resilience: the attributes of children and young people themselves; their family relationships; and the characteristics of their wider social environments. For young people from very disadvantaged family backgrounds, the capacity of resilience was connected to a trusting relationship to a member of family or other significant person, positive school experiences and being given the opportunity of a “turning point” to change a negative life course (Rutter 1998). Furthermore, Rutter (ibid) states that vulnerable young people, with difficult life experiences, such as living in dysfunctional families, neglect and abuse, specifically need to feel that they are in control of their lives. Being in control enhances the ability of resilience.

Placement in society’s care
About three percent of children born during the 1970’s and the 1980’s were at some time before their 18th birthday placed in foster care or residential care (Lundström & Vinnerljung 2001, Franzén & Vinnerljung 2006). About 22 700 Swedish children and young people were placed in care at some time during 2008 (Swedish Board of Health and Welfare 2009). Over the last decades, about 75 percent of all children and young people in out-of-home care have been placed in foster families. Foster care has been the preferred alternative as opposed to residential care, the familial context is supposed to give a child or a young person the best possibilities. This notion of the advantage of a familial context is also prevalent in residential care, which is often provided in small-scale, family-like residential homes: 73 percent of residential care units in Sweden hold placements for nine children/young people or less (Hessle & Vinnerljung 2000, Sallnäs 2000). Care in residential homes is supposed only to be given as a measure in emergencyplacements, and to those children and young people who have severe behavioural difficulties, and/or neurological problems, such as diagnoses like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). There has been a radical increase of private residential homes for children over the last ten years: today 90 percent are private (Swedish Board of Health and Welfare 2009a). Youth justice is included in Swedish child welfare, and therefore criminal and drug abusing youth make up a substantial part of children in care. For several decades special residential care has been used for this group. These homes for special supervision have facilities for incarcerating youth. There are 30 residential units of this kind, and since 1994 they have been monitored by a national gov-
ernment agency. Thus, these special homes cannot be private. Local authorities apply for placements and are obliged to pay for the care.

Sweden has 290 municipalities (in the text we also refer to these municipalities as local authorities). An important characteristic factor of Sweden is that many of the municipalities have few inhabitants; in 2005 76 municipalities had less than 25,000 and 31 had less than 12,500 inhabitants. Of these, 39 had less than seven inhabitants per square km (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, 2010). As Sweden is a large country, with many small municipalities, children or teenagers subjected to public care are frequently placed in another municipality or city district than where they used to live with their family of origin. Sweden obeys to the principle of local self-governing. Thus each local authority (municipality or city district) creates its own system for organising and carrying out the tasks given. In many municipalities the local social services are divided into administrative bodies dealing with children and families, teenagers (sometimes included in the former), economical support and adults respectively. One of the main reasons for this division is the legal framework that directs different groups or situations. The borderline between teenage (or child/family) can vary; in many cases it is set to achieving the age of 18 – the formal age of majority. Other municipalities have created “transition groups” handling for example the group of young adults aged 18-25.

What may complicate the situation for young people placed in care is that the foster family or institution quite frequently is not situated in the local authority that pays for the placement. Even though the “principle of closeness” rules, the definition of closeness varies; in some cases being defined as a radius of 100 km which sometimes can include 20 to 30 municipalities. A young person leaving care often prefers to stay close to a former foster family, friends and school to going back to the placing municipality. As a result, municipalities with many foster families and/or institutions will end up carrying costs for individuals considered not to be their responsibility, as they were brought to the municipality due to a placement in care. This especially applies to some smaller municipalities outside the bigger cities. Financial matters are also a source of conflict between placing and receiving local authorities; who, for example, is paying for extra support needed in school?

Most local authorities have a strong commitment to reduce the number and length of placements. The reasons are manifold; institutional care has been under heavy criticism.
for showing poor or even negative results (Andreassen 2003), the financial situation of the public sector, and especially the municipalities, is under pressure to cut costs and a trend towards dealing with problems on a local basis is prevailing. It should also be mentioned that another trend is towards “working the child back home”, i.e. putting in effort to rejoin the biological family instead of offering a substitute one. Even though this is the prevailing idea, the effects of the work are harder to observe.

Sweden has a family services orientation rather than a child protection orientation, and there is a high level of legitimacy for state intervention (Andersson 1999). Sweden does not have a specific “Children’s Act”. The work performed by the Social services is regulated by the Social Services Act, which is a “frame law” and regulates different areas of social support on a voluntary basis, and the Care of Young People Act which regulates taking children and young people into care without the parents’ or children’s consent. The Law of Secure Institutional Treatment is a part of the Criminal Code. This law regulates on what grounds young offenders may be incarcerated in homes for “special supervision”.

The Social Services Act regulates the responsibilities of the social welfare committees and the access to social support for citizens. Placements in care following this law are voluntary. According to the Social Services Act, the social welfare committees are obliged to

- Ensure a safe up-bringing for children and young people
- Through close cooperation with parents promote a favourable development for children and young people, physically and socially
- Pay special attention to children and young people at risk
- Prevent abuse of alcohol and narcotics of all kinds
- Through close cooperation with parents provide support and protection to children and young people at risk. In cases where it is necessary, provide out-of-home care.

The Care of Young People Act regulates the placing of children and young people into care without the parents or children’s consent. In such cases, assessments are presented for the social welfare committee, and then forwarded to the County Administrative Court, which makes the formal decision of a placement in care.

In the Swedish child welfare system there is no permanency planning. Usually there are no time limits to placements. Children stay in care as long as this is deemed as the
best alternative. Adoption without the parents’ consent does not exist, and children in care are not “free for adoption”, as they are in some other countries, for example in the United States, and in the United Kingdom. Biological parents still have custody of their children, even though children are in care (Andersson 1999b, Hessle & Vinnerljung 2000).

The law explicitly emphasises the importance of maintained contact between children/young people in care and their biological network – parents and relatives. The general discourse in child welfare gives predominance to a family oriented perspective, out-of-home placements are supposed to serve as a temporary solution, and the purpose of a placement is reunification with the birth family. However, for young people over 18 years of age, the median time in care was over 4 years (Swedish Board of Health and Welfare 2009), and according to Höjer (2001), 24 percent of placements in foster care had lasted more then 10 years. Thus, a substantial proportion of placements in out-of-home care cannot be designated as “temporary”. Obviously, there is a contradiction concerning the intention displayed in the legislation, and the actual social practice.

If a child/young person is placed in out-of-home care – voluntary or mandatory - due to care deficits or other difficulties connected to the situation in the birth home, the placement should formally end at the age of 18. Youth justice is included in Swedish child welfare, and in cases where young persons are in care on a mandatory care order due to his or her own behaviour, the placement should end at the age of 21 (Norström & Tunved 2004). Even though the law stipulates an age limit of 18 (or 21), young people often stay in care until they have completed their upper secondary school education, which usually happens when they are about 19 years old. Few young people under the age of 18 move from care to independent living. When young people under 18 leave care, they are likely to return to their parents, or enter a new placement (Swedish Board of Health and Welfare 2009). Sweden does not have any laws or regulations that specifically regulate the phase of leaving care for children who stay in care until they are 18-21 years old. There are no specialised leaving care schemes as in the UK (Biehal et al 1995). Swedish social workers work with young care leavers on an individual base. Due to the lack of regulations and jointly elaborated strategies for the work with this group, the

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3 Couples (and single persons) who want to adopt turn to international adoptions.
support and help young care leavers get from the social services can be of a diversified character, dependent on local social services policies.

Register studies performed at the National Board of Health and Welfare, have had an impact on the Swedish debate, and aroused an increased awareness of the detrimental effect of low educational achievements for a vulnerable group such as young people formerly placed in care. One article of certain importance was Vinnerljung et al. (2005). This article showed that, compared with majority population peers with low educated mothers, children who experienced interventions before adolescence, or had been in long-term stable foster care, had a two- to threefold elevated relative risk of entering adult life with only a compulsory education. Youths who experienced intervention during adolescence had approximately a fourfold risk of having only basic education at the time of follow-up. Majority population peers with low educated mothers were between two and six times more likely to have a post-secondary degree when compared with former child welfare clients. Young adults who had been in stable long-term foster care (> 5 years) had twice the risk of having only basic education. Compared with this subgroup, non-child welfare peers with less-educated mothers were three times more likely to have a post-secondary education. Educational outcomes for children in very long-term care are equivalent to those for children from families so vulnerable that the children had to be placed in out-of-home care for a short spell before adolescence. Young people who experienced short-term interventions during their teens had an odds ratio of 13.4 of only having a basic education. The authors conclude that it is important to keep in mind that severe behaviour-related school problems are a contributing factor to the majority of interventions in this group. Nevertheless, the results of the study show that child welfare interventions towards this group had little effect on school attainments. Stability of placement seems to be a positive factor. Results for long-term placed children who received stable foster-family care were better than for long-term care children who had been through repeated moves (Vinnerljung et al. 2005).

Continuous register studies have been performed, and recently results were published in a report from the National Board of Health and Welfare. One chapter in this report was dedicated to *marks, education, and risks for a problematic development for children*.

A short summary of the results: there are strong connections between socioeconomic background and marks given to children in secondary school. Low or inadequate marks
were 5-6 times more frequent among children of “blue collar workers” compared with children whose parents were from the upper middle class. Furthermore, the report concluded that the educational career of children is decided at an early stage. Fewer than one percent of children with marks above mean values don’t proceed to upper secondary school, while the corresponding figure is 20-30 percent for those with low or inadequate marks. Inadequate educational attainment and low marks from grade 9 (last grade of comprehensive secondary school) increases the risk for a problematic adult life. The prevalence of serious criminality among young adults is 8-10 times higher for individuals with low marks compared to those with high marks or marks above average. Low educational attainment was the strongest risk factor for future social problems, whereas satisfactory educational attainment was the strongest protective factor.

Children who grow up in care, or in families that repeatedly receive economic benefits from social services, leave secondary school with significantly lower marks than other children. The researchers who have performed this report conclude that long-term foster care does not seem to have a compensating effect on educational achievements of children and young people.
Chapter 4: Data sources and methods used in collecting and analysing the data

Together with the literature review (Höjer et al, 2008), the statistical analysis and the manager-study forms the first stage of the YIPPEE project where the aim was to “identify what is known about young people from a public care background and their participation in post-compulsory education” (project plan).

The second stage constitutes of screening interviews, two rounds of interviews with 33 young persons with experience from public care as well as interviews with adults nominated by these young person. In this chapter accounts will be given for ethical considerations, sampling, interviewing and analysing the data from all these sources.

Ethical considerations
The European Commission’s ethical review committee has reviewed and approved the project’s ethical procedures. Despite this it was decided to apply for yet another ethical approval from the Regional Board of Ethics of Research (EPN). One of the reasons for this decision was a request from some local authorities approached to present an approval before accessing any lists or personal data of young persons from a public care background.

The first application (June 2008) was not approved, mainly due to some lack of clarity regarding the area of obtaining an informed consent from each individual. The application was amplified and changed, and gained approval in October 2008. This had as an effect that the procedure of accessing the lists from each local authority, and starting the screening interviews, was delayed by approximately two months.

Some additional ethical considerations need to be mentioned; For the statistical analysis the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW) conducted all the data merges and no names or identifiable data was sent to the research team. Regarding the screening interviews, in—depth interviews and adult interviews all informants were informed of the ethical framework used (Swedish research Council). All names have been altered in the text as well as facts that may identify the person.
Data and methods for the statistical analysis
The aims of the statistical study were to seek knowledge on:

a) the educational attainment of children placed in care compared to the majority population and b) the degree of educational attainment in higher/further education, in comparison with the majority population. Three databases have been used:

**Gothenburg Educational Longitudinal Database (GOLD)**
GOLD includes all individuals born 1972-1992, who lived in Sweden at 16 years of age (N=2 184 866). This database contains for example data on parents’ education, family structure and all information of the educational situation of the individual (all forms of schools, grades, programmes at university, exams, study financing etc.). There are some limitations; data after the completion of compulsory school are missing for the cohorts born 1988–1992.

In all analyses, the population consisting of children and young people placed in care is compared to the population of their peers not placed in care.

**The database on education (UGU)**
The database on education (UGU) contains data on nine cohorts of children of which eight will be used. The UGU database is part of Gothenburg Educational Longitudinal Database (GOLD). UGU is constituted from a 10 percent representative sample, made every fifth year. Each cohort is constituted of approx. 10 000 individuals. The database contains information of mainly two types:

- Administrative data such as school, class, size of class, choices made concerning courses and grades, etc. The two latter are of special interest for the project.

- Questionnaire data where, for example, information such as approach to education, leisure activities and plans for the future will be used.

**Data from the National Board of Health and Welfare**
Statistics on measures taken by the social services for children and young persons have since 1994 been published by the National Board of Health and Welfare. Previously these statistics were published by Statistics Sweden. The statistics contain data on all young persons placed in care, including legal framework, time in care, age at first placement, number of placements and placement form (foster home or institution).
decided to include persons born 1973 and later in the sample. We identified the variables we wanted to include in our analyses, and asked for special permission from the National Board of Health and Welfare to use these data. Gaining access to these data proved to be a very protracted process, which is why we could not present our findings at an earlier stage in the project.

When our application was approved, and we had access to the data, these were sent to the Department of Education at University of Gothenburg, where data from all the three datasets have been compared and analysed.

**Methods used in combining the datasets**
Data from the National Board of Health and Welfare made it possible to identify those individuals who had been placed in care. Variables such as number of placements, length of placements, age at first placement, type of placement etc. were combined with data from GOLD and from UGU.

In GOLD, school marks of all individuals are percentile equalized. This procedure makes it possible to compare cohorts with different systems of grading students. The mean value for each cohort is 50.

**Swedish system of giving marks to students**

The compulsory 9-year school system was gradually introduced in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s. Until 1994, marks were given using a norm related 5 graded scale, where 1 is the lowest, and 5 the highest value. The system also included a proportional distribution of marks; 1 should be given to 7 percent, 2 to 24 percent, 3 to 38 percent 4 to 24 percent and 5 to 7 percent of the students. In 1994 a new curriculum was introduced. The formerly norm related marks were replaced with a criterion referenced system, using three levels: G = Passed, VG = Well passed and MVG = Very well passed.

The change of system has consequences for the comparison of marks for those leaving compulsory school after nine years, as for those leaving upper secondary school.

- **Compulsory school**: Individuals born 1981 or earlier generally received norm-related marks, although there are some exceptions. Individuals born 1982 and later, generally received criteria related marks.

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4 The information under the headlines “Swedish system of giving marks to students” and “Percentile equalizing of marks” is taken from Svensson & Nielsen 2008. See also Svensson (1971)
- **Upper secondary school**: When the curriculum was changed in 1994, all courses became three-year courses (formerly vocational courses could be only two-year courses), and were denominated as “programmes”. Those who left upper secondary school in 1995, or earlier, received norm referenced marks. A majority of those who left upper secondary school in 1996 also received norm-related marks. Individuals who left upper secondary school after 1997 or later all received criteria-related marks. This indicates that cohort from 1977 or earlier have norm-related marks, and cohort 1978 and later have criteria related marks.

**Percentile equalisation of marks**

**Compulsory school**

To make it possible to compare different cohorts, marks have been transformed into “percentile points”. Two types of transformations have been performed. One where percentiles are grouped together after school-leaving year, i.e. all students leaving compulsory school in one year constitute the base. The other transformation is based on categories of marks, which means that all individuals are divided into two groups – one with norm-related marks, and one with criteria related marks.

The school leaving mark for grade 9 (last grade of compulsory school) for those with norm referenced marks constitutes of the mean value of all marks in all subjects (in most cases 16 subjects). Due to certain special courses, the maximum value of norm-related marks can exceed 5. Therefore, marks are adjusted to vary between 2 and 6, instead of 1–5. This explains why the maximum school leaving mark may exceed 5 in some cases.

A transformation of the grouping of each school-leaving year implies an order of precedence for all individuals who left compulsory school in the same year. Furthermore, this also implies that the approximate normal distribution of norm referenced marks is made “rectangular”. Since the total amount of students in one grade usually is 100 000, about 1 000 students should end up in each percentile. However, this is not always the case, as more then 1 000 students may have identical marks. This is why some school-leaving marks may be extended over several percentile values.

The school-leaving marks given at 9th grade will be used for applying to upper secondary school. In this process, the criteria related marks (G, VG, MVG) are given certain specific values called *merit-value*; $G = 10, VG = 15, MVG = 20$. Since marks are given in 16 subjects, the sum of school-leaving marks can vary between 160 (G in all subjects) and
320 (MVG in all subjects). However, if a specific student lacks marks in certain subjects, the merit-value may fall below 160. Thus, the actual variation may be between 10 and 320.

In all, merit-values exist for 602 208 students, which is 98 percent of all individuals who left compulsory school 1998 or later.

Both norm referenced and criterion referenced marks have been transformed and distributed in a rectangular way. This procedure makes it possible to compare students from different systems.

**Upper secondary school**
Those who followed the previous curriculum (Lgy 70) were divided into special courses in upper secondary school. Of these courses, five were three-year courses: Languages (Humanities), Social Science, Economics, Science and Technical studies. All these five courses qualified for application to college/university. In addition to these courses, there were a number of two-year courses, which predominately were vocational, and did not qualify for college/university. All courses gave norm-referenced marks.

Those who followed the curriculum of 1994 all attended three-year courses, and had criterion referenced marks. In applications to college/university, marks are transformed according to a different system compared to compulsory school. In this system, marks are given a specific value; IG (not passed) = 0, G = 10, VG = 15 and MVG = 20. A comparative figure is then created, where courses are weighted according to their dimension. The maximum value is 20.

All in all, there are criterion referenced marks with this comparative value for 600 413 students, varying between 0 and 20.

**Analyses with data from GOLD**
Regression analyses have been made, using percentile equvialised marks for school leaving certificates from compulsory school as the dependent variable. Independent variables in the regression analyses are:

- **Parents’ educational background.**

- **Length of placement.** This variable consists of 9 categories: 1-30 days, 3-6 months, 7 months – 1 year, 1-2 years, 2-3 years, 3-4 years, 4-5 years, 5-10 years and over 10 years.
• **Number of placements.** This variable consists of 11 categories. The last category signifies more than 11 placements. The first group constitutes the comparing group, and is defined as 0. This is important, as 0 will be the point of reference in the following charts.

• **Age at first placement.** The following categories for age are used: 0-6, 7-11, 12–15, 16–19, more than 19 years.

**Analyses with data from UGU**
Analyses are made using the same procedures as with the data from GOLD. The curves in the charts displayed in chapter 5 show a more uneven pattern, as the sample in UGU is much smaller than in GOLD. In the UGU analyses, controls are made for parent’s educational background, and results from cognitive tests performed by students.

**Manager interviews**
The manager interviews were performed with a sample of managers from the same local authorities from which the young people participating in the in-depth interviews were chosen. Therefore, please note that the explanation of the overall sample is the same in both manager interviews and in-depth interviews.

Sweden is divided into 21 regions (i.e. 18 county councils, two regions and one local municipality with county council responsibility) and one of the regions was selected as the area of study. The criterion for selection of this region is practical as well as a judgement of the region as representative for the whole country. The region of Västra Götaland is the largest in Sweden with approximately 1.5 million inhabitants. It is comprised of 49 local authorities, where Gothenburg has by far the largest population (494 000 in 2007) and can be viewed as the centre of the region. In Västra Götaland, there is a great variety of local authorities – small rural local authorities, small towns, industrial towns and towns who are administrative centres in the region. Thus, Västra Götaland can be said to be representative for Sweden, with its numerous variations of municipalities. The city of Gothenburg was, until April 2010, divided into 21 “city districts” with responsibility for social services, education etc.

From the local authorities the team initially reviewed data on the number of placements\(^5\) from each municipality, disqualified the municipalities (or city districts) with

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\(^5\) Data obtained from the Social unit of the county administrative board (Länsstyrelsen) in Västra Götaland.
fewer than ten placements of young persons under the age of 20 in one year (2007), and finally made a strategic sample of local municipalities.

In each area, access to the local authority manager(s) with, what we identify as, knowledge of the area of young people with a public care background was negotiated with a two-fold aim:

- to prepare a report on the local options, services and constraints for young people from public care backgrounds
- to facilitate access to young people in the targeted group for in depth interviewing.

In the participating local authorities eight managers were interviewed, using a questionnaire. Six were responsible for the entire child-and-family social service unit in the chosen local authority. Two were managers of the foster care unit, thus they were in charge of all foster care placements in the chosen local authority.

We have not collected any quantitative data in these interviews, as we did not expect the managers to have such information. This assumption proved to be correct – when asked what statistical information the managers had of how many young people left care, how many who had succeeded in their exams etc., all of them answered that they did not know. All interviews have been transcribed and analysed using the NVIVO 8 software program.

**Interviews with youths**

A young person in Sweden normally leaves care when he/she reaches the age of 18 or when he/she finishes upper secondary school – this is usually at the age of 19. After leaving care, after the age of 18, the extended responsibility from society ceases. At that point the young person is considered as “anyone” and has to apply for support (economic, practical etc.) through the same channels and with the same assessment as anyone else, independently of background. However, most local authorities embrace a policy where young people can stay in care, without interruption, until they have finished upper secondary school even if they are 19 or more – but this is not mandatory, and some local authorities have been known to finish the placement when the young person is 18 years old. In 2008, there was an amendment to the law, as mentioned earlier, in which it is stated that local authorities should follow up a young person when the
placement ends – and this amendment hopefully will mean that all local authorities let young people stay in care until they have finished school, and also give them adequate support after leaving care. Registers are kept only a certain time after closing a case (for example when leaving care) and only a representative sample is kept for statistical reasons. This means that it is impossible to say who was placed in care more than five years ago using registers. The files do not exist at the local authority.

As mentioned above Sweden obeys to the principle of local self-governing and each local authority (municipality or city district) creates its’ own system for organising and carrying out the tasks given. This, too, affects the possibility of accessing data. In some local authorities the staff turnover is also very high.

**Sampling**

Four criteria for entering the sample population are set up from the project:

1. Now being 19 to 21 years old
2. Having spent at least one year in care
3. Being placed at the age of 16
4. Showing educational promise

The Swedish team has modified the criteria slightly from those above: The age span will be 18-21 due to practical reasons discussed with the local authority managers.

The criteria of showing educational promise was difficult to apply to the Swedish context. Initially a decision was taken to define it as “having a pass in the three key subjects from secondary school (at age 16)”. After being informed that in one of the lists from the local authority (see below) only about one fourth of the young persons fitting the three first criteria also fitted the fourth (educational promise) it was decided not to include this criterion at the stage of screening.

The screening questionnaire has several questions aiming at investigating educational promise both in the matter of grades in the three key subjects and in retrospect asking if the young person has continued his/her education after secondary school or is planning to do so. This indicates that the selection can be made at a later stage when selecting interviewees after the completed screening.

Within the Swedish welfare ideology all young persons are considered to have educational promises, in as far as everyone is encouraged and expected to continue to study, at least until upper secondary school. The official discourse has avoided involving talent,
and instead focuses on background, social conditions and motivation (from parents, environment, teachers and others). Even colleges and universities are thought to attract young persons that are not highly motivated or inclined to more skilled education. This picture is not unambiguous. Lately a debate has risen concerning elite classes, more focus on knowledge etc.

The managers in the participating local authorities were asked to survey their records, and/or ask the social workers to make a list of suitable young persons fitting the criteria for participating in the interviews. All the young people on that list were approached via surface mail asking for their consent to be contacted by researchers. The letters were sent out by the local authorities and contained a letter of information about the project and a request for consent to participate in a screening interview conducted by phone. The letter indicated four possibilities to answer: using the attached answering form and a pre-paid envelop, sending an e-mail, phoning or using text messages.

In October 2008, 173 letters was sent out to the local authorities. T-town, K-town and G-5 did not join the project until 2009, and consequently were not part of this first mailing. A reminder was sent out, again via the local authority, in December. In January 2009 the team assessed the outcome of this first round of sent out letters, asking young people to participate in the study. We found that only 28 had given us permission to contact them. Out of these 19 fitted the criteria and agreed to participate in a face-to-face interview. This fact forced the team to both evaluate the method used and to search other ways of getting in contact with the research population. A request for assistance to find interviewees was sent to the municipality of T-town (January), K-town (April), and the City district of G-5 (March). After being presented with the total number of names of the respective lists and establishing the fact that it contained fewer names than expected, the research team decided instead to form five “clusters” of the local authorities. B-town and M-town are closely situated, and can be said to form a regional unit. All city parts of Gothenburg are now considered as one united local authority. This gives us the following local authorities:

1. B-town/M-town
2. Gothenburg
3. K-town
4. S-town
5. T-town
We also approached an organisation in Gothenburg that provides local authorities with foster families and residential homes, here named as X-agency, and asked them to help us. We were also approached by a social worker from a small village, A-town, north of Gothenburg, who had heard of the project. She knew of a girl who she thought would like to participate. We had two referrals from the organisation, and one from A-town. These three young people met all the criteria needed. A total of 53 positive answers were obtained by 2009-08-03. See table below:

Table 4:1 Display of send outs, and answers received. Figures in brackets indicate performed in-depth interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local authority</th>
<th>Inhabitants</th>
<th>Ongoing placements 2007</th>
<th>New placements 2007</th>
<th>Sample pop. = nr of letters sent</th>
<th>Positive answers 2009-08-03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M-town</td>
<td>34 000</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>?*</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-town</td>
<td>50 000</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35 x 2</td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-town</td>
<td>101 000</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>13 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-town</td>
<td>54 000</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>52 x 2</td>
<td>9 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-1</td>
<td>26 000</td>
<td>Estimated 20</td>
<td>Estimated 12</td>
<td>45 x 2</td>
<td>210 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-2</td>
<td>25 000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>44 x 2</td>
<td>8 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-3</td>
<td>29 000</td>
<td>Estimated 50</td>
<td>Estimated 28</td>
<td>25 x 2</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-4</td>
<td>31 000</td>
<td>Estimated 26</td>
<td>Estimated 15</td>
<td>13 x 2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-town</td>
<td>84 000</td>
<td></td>
<td>118</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-town</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred in other ways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>333 + 214</td>
<td>53 (33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in the table, 333 letters were sent out to young people in the first “wave”, and after that, 214 reminders. All together 547 letters were sent out.

Of the 333 young people first approached, 47 agreed to do the screening interview (the five respondents referred from, and from other contacts, cannot be counted, as they

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6 Figures regarding municipalities from National Board of Health and Welfare: Barn och unga – insatser 2007. Concerning City parts the figure is based on a manual search in the files of Länsstyrelsen i Västra Götaland, the state body that supervises the local authority. The total number for 2007 are 1325 and 564 respectively.

7 Number of names on the list put together by the local manager. Fitting the criteria of now being 18-21, having spent one year in care and having been in care at the age of 16. No evaluation of “educational promise”.

8 Numbers in brackets showing the number of interviews conducted. The drop out is due to the young persons changing their minds on participation or not being able to contact.

9 No figures reported for 2007.

10 One of these obtained from other channels.
were approached using personal/other contacts). This gives an answering rate of 14 percent of the send-outs.

Of the 53 young people, 33 finally agreed to do an in-depth interview (others agreed, but did not show up when the interview was due). There are several ways of explaining the low answering rate:

- Problems in the relation to researchers - the field of practice
- Internal problems within the social service offices contacted
- Lack of registers/incorrect addresses
- Timing
- Young people:
  - not defining themselves as part of the population
  - having too much to do
  - unwillingness to be associated with the social services
  - current social/mental problems, being in jail, drugs etc.
  - unwillingness to “tear up old wounds” or painful memories
  - disappointment with their educational situation

However – the suggestions above are merely suggestions. We can only conclude that this group of young people is not easy to reach. One of the young persons approached sent us the following message: “Hi, my name is XX. You keep sending me letters about a study on youths from residential care. I’ve been in such care because of my parents actions, not mine. That’s something I’ve got over and that is not a part of me now. So please stop doing that.”

All in all, we performed 53 screening interviews and 33 in-depth interviews in the first round of interviewing. The screening interviews were performed over the phone, using the questionnaire. Notes were taken, the results were fed into the SPSS system, and later analysed. We have made analyses both of the data of all 53 young people interviewed, and also specifically of the 33 young people, whom we interviewed in-depth. In this report only the later will be presented.

**First round in depth interviews with youths**

The project plan states that 35 interviews should be conducted. Seven persons per each local authority that fit the criteria were to be selected. However, the total number/the constitution of the research population is not, other than in one or two local authorities, expected to exceed the number of interviews required. In some cases it was foreseen that the number instead would be less than seven.
The grounds for selection, if the number in any local authority exceeds seven, are firstly *showing educational promise*. For the second step of selection the following parameters were planned to be used in a way that creates a broad sample, i.e. shows as many characteristics as possible: gender, age, placement form, time in placement. In the Swedish case, due to the low number of young people willing to participate, no selection has been done except for the matter of educational promise.

The final sampling was planned be done approximately three weeks after sending the information letter. It was not possible to conduct the sampling at the same time due to a) the relative short time span available and b) the fact that the local authorities did not send the letters at the same time.11

In order to reach more young people, the team decided in May 2009, to use a new definition of educational promise for the in-depth interviews: instead of having passed all three subjects in ninth grade the new definition included having passed at least one subject and showing interest in further education. This can be shown either by presently (at the age of 18-21) studying or planning to study in the near future. By extending the criteria, we found two more young people eligible for in-depth interviews.

All in all, we have performed in-depth interviews with 33 young people – 9 young men and 24 young women. All interviews, except one, were conducted face-to-face. The interviewee decided where he/she wanted the interview to take place; thus, some interviews were performed in the young persons’ own apartments, some were performed in their foster homes or at the residential unit, and some at the department of social work. One interview was even performed in a park. One of the interviewees wanted to participate, but did not want to meet any of us. Accordingly, this interview was performed over the MSN12.

As the young people often lived outside of Gothenburg, the interviews involved a lot of travelling. However, we consider it as a privilege having had the opportunity to talk to all these young people, and listen to their life stories.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using the NVIVO software program.

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11 The difference between the first and the last local authority to distribute the letters is approximately one month.
12 A Internet based instant messaging service
The interviews with the young persons fitting the criteria take a life history approach; in the Swedish part of the project this means that the aim was to obtain long and rich narratives of what the interviewee wanted to tell us. The interview basically consisted of three parts: the present, the past and the future. How the young person constructed their life history was the focus, not giving distinct answers to ready formulated questions. However, some topics have been indicated to try to get information on for example family, education and health. As a summary of the interview and a way of identifying turning points, a time line was be used at the end of the interview.

With this approach great importance was given to time, setting and competence of the interviewer. The interview sometimes lasted up to three hours. A calm and undisturbed setting where the informant can feel relaxed was crucial and so was the interviewers skill to create a free ambience and an open and encouraging listening.

After all team members had conducted a couple of interviews, the interview method was evaluated. We found that many of the young people have problems “getting started” and develop their experiences concerning the first broad question (present situation). Additionally, we found that some of the young people used the interview situation as a more therapeutic session, which might have provided us with more information than needed on extremely sensitive subjects. Bearing in mind that the young people targeted in this study have extraordinary experience of traumatic events in their lives, questions arise over the method used. It was decided to conduct the interviews in a semi-structured way when it was judged appropriate by the interviewer, and decided from case to case.

**Second round interviews with youths**

According to the research design of the project, a follow-up interview was to be performed approximately one year after the first interview. Due to our difficulties in accessing young people, some of our second-round interviews had to be performed with less space between the first and the second interview. In March and April 2010, we interviewed 26 of the 33 young people, which imply that we were unable to reach seven of those who were interviewed in the first round.

All interviews in the second round were made over the phone, and were recorded as well as transcribed and analysed. A summary was written for all interviews, focusing on the most important issues, such as education, family and futures plans.
We made great efforts to reach all the young people. Nevertheless, although we even managed to talk to some of them on the phone and planned for interviews, they later did not answer, or made themselves unavailable. We also sent letters to some, whom we could not reach over the phone, asking them to contact us – which no one did. It is hard for us to know why these young people did not want to talk to us again. It may be because their lives had not turned out the way they had wanted to, or the reason might be that they simply did not want to share their experiences with us one more time. As these young people’s stories still are vivid in our minds, we very much would have wanted to find out what had happened since last time. However, whatever the reason may be – we have to accept that they chose not to talk to us.

**Interviews with nominated adults**

At the end of each in-depth interview the young persons were asked to think about one adult that had been important for them in relation to support for further education. 25 of the 33 young people appointed a nominated adult, whom we could contact for an interview. The nominated adults were:

- 3 biological mothers
- 13 foster parents (12 foster mothers and 1 foster father)
- 6 teachers (4 from compulsory school and 2 from high school)
- 1 counselor
- 2 residential home staff

All interviews with nominated adults were made over the phone, and took approximately 20-45 minutes. The interviews were conducted during a period of three months. It was not always easy to get hold of the informants; sometimes it was more of a detective work to get in touch with them. Some of the young persons had previously informed the nominated adult of the interview, but the majority had not had any previous information. The reactions and responses to the request to participate were only positive and no one refused. Some of the informants were very touched by the recognition of being the nominated adult and were moved to tears. Very few of them had been part of the young person’s whole life, so they only had answers to a few questions, which made it difficult to obtain the whole picture about the young person. For example, one nominated adult knew the young person for two years from the age of 17-19 and had very little knowledge about her experiences at compulsory school or about the present time. It was difficult for some of the nominated adults to give detailed answers about the past
and/or compulsory school, which implies that the answers we received differed in depth and details and somehow made it difficult to compare and analyse the material. Anyhow, all interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using the NVIVO software program.
Chapter 5: Statistics – results and analysis

In this chapter the results from the secondary analysis of available, but never jointly analysed, data will be presented. The databases and the methods used are thoroughly described in the previous chapter. As mentioned the aims of the analysis of national statistics was to seek knowledge on:

- the educational attainment of children placed in care compared to the majority population.
- the degree of educational attainment in higher/further education, in comparison with the majority population.

Background variables
The total sample of individuals not placed in care (NPL) in the GOLD dataset are 2 108 745 individuals. The total sample of individuals placed in care (PL) are 76 121. There are 51 percent males and 49 percent females in both categories. The lower sample (N) in table 1 can be explained by lack of data for parents born 1987 or later.

Socioeconomic distribution of sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic groups</th>
<th>Not placed in care N=1 619 432</th>
<th>Placed in care n= 57 809</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOC I</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC II</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC III</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that more children and young people from socioeconomic group III have been placed in care – which is consistent with both national and international research (Social rapport 2006, 2010, Vinnerljung et al 2005).

Number of placements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dataset</th>
<th>1 placement</th>
<th>2 placements</th>
<th>3 placements</th>
<th>4 or more placements</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GOLD</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGU</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5:2 shows that a majority of children and young people present in the two datasets have been placed only once. However, one quarter in the GOLD dataset, and 18 percent in the UGU dataset have been placed four times or more. The difference in figures can be explained by the smaller sample for the UGU data.

Parents’ educational background

Table 5:3. Percentage of parent’s educational background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational background of parents</th>
<th>Not placed in care n=2 108 745</th>
<th>Placed in care n=76 121</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only compulsory school</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school – 2 or 3 years vocational</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school theoretical + less than 2 years of college/university</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university more than 4 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:3 shows that parents’ of non-placed children have a higher level of education. However, almost 16 percent of parents of children placed in care have a college/university education, and 42 percent have an upper secondary school (vocational) education.

Migration

In 2004, about 15 percent of the population in Sweden has another background than Swedish. The concept “foreign background” can be interpreted in several different ways. The coding in the GOLD project is slightly different from the coding suggested by Statistics Sweden (Gustafsson & Nielsen 2008). The category of “immigrant” used here includes a child, or young person born in another country with both parents born in another country, or a child born in Sweden with both parents born in another country.

Table 5:4. Percentage of ethnic background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Not placed in care n=2 108 745</th>
<th>Placed in care n=76 121</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:4 shows that 25 percent of children and young people placed in care have a non-Swedish background, compared to 13 percent for the group not placed in care. Evidence from research shows that this disproportionate figure is connected to socioeconomic factors – people of non-Swedish background are more exposed to unemployment, which implies a general lower standard of living; poor housing, dependency on social benefits
etc. (Social Rapport 2006). Of those placed in foster care 22 percent have an immigrant background compared to 28 of all young persons placed in residential care.

**Compulsory school**

Table 5:5. Percentage of individuals completing compulsory school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School leaving Certificate</th>
<th>Not placed in care</th>
<th>Placed in care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=2 108 745</td>
<td>n=76 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to table 5:5, 14 percent of children placed in care did not complete compulsory school – which implies dropping out before the end of 9th grade. The reasons for dropping out are many; moving abroad, having attended special education etc. The corresponding figure for children with no experience of being placed in care is three percent. Additionally five percent of those who had been placed in care completed compulsory school but were lacking marks in all subjects.

When it comes to mean value of marks from compulsory school, children who have been placed in care have significantly lower marks than their peers without experience of a placement in care. For cohorts 1988–1997 the marking system was 1 to 5 (see page 3-5) (where the figure 1 shows poor performance, but indicates presence of students at lessons. Students who were not present would receive no figure). For all cohorts the mean value for NPL was 3.33, and for PL 2.66. For cohorts 1998–2007, the marking system was different, with different “points” for different subjects. For cohorts 1998–2007, the mean value for NPL was 205.83, and the corresponding figure for PL was 133.74. A clearer picture of mean values of marks is given in the table below, where figures are shown for all cohorts.13

Table 5:6. Mean value of percentile equalized marks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile equalized marks</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>Stdv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not placed in care</td>
<td>2136259</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>59299</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2195558</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in several other tables young people with experiences of a placement in care have substantially lower marks than their peers when leaving compulsory school.

---

13 NB! The marks are percentile equalised – and mean value for each cohort is set to 50.
To give a picture of the difference between children with no experience of being placed in care, and those who have been placed in foster care or residential care, we chose results of marks in Swedish, English and Mathematics for the year 2007:

Table 5.7. Percentage of marks in Swedish, English and mathematics for individuals leaving compulsory school in 2007 (NB! Those placed in care are in this table included in the majority population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Not passed</th>
<th>Passed</th>
<th>Passed with distinction</th>
<th>Passed with high distinction</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Majority pop</td>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>Majority pop</td>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>Majority pop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistics clearly shows that children with experience of being placed in care do not perform well at school. Their marks are lower than those of the majority population, and a substantial number do not pass in the core subjects; Swedish, English and Mathematics. Recent Swedish research gives evidence of the significance of school performances at compulsory school. For those students who had marks above mean value from compulsory school, only 0.5 percent did not finish upper secondary school. For those with low marks, 26 percent did not finish upper secondary school. Low marks at compulsory school are connected to future social problems, such as criminality, even when socioeconomic factors are considered (Social Rapport 2010). Thus, the figures above highlight the importance of addressing the problem of poor school performance for children and young people placed in care.

Tables that show marks in Swedish, English and Mathematics for all cohorts – not placed in care and placed in care – are displayed in Appendix 1. These tables clearly show the difference in educational achievements between pupils who are placed in care and their peers without care experience. Additionally, these tables also display the difference in type of courses, where a much higher proportioned of pupils placed in care take general (easier) courses in Mathematics and English.
Mean value of marks in relation to specific variables

Table 5.8. Mean value of marks in relation to educational background of parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ educational background</th>
<th>Mark percentile, mean value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not placed in care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory school</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school – 2 or 3 years vocational</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school theoretical</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university 2-3 years</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university 4 years or more</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:8 shows that marks when leaving compulsory school is connected to the educational background of parents – this goes both for young people not placed in care, and for those placed in care. However, there are great differences between the two groups. In the two latter categories – college/university 2-3 years and 4 years or more - the mean value of marks for NPL is 60.0, respectively 70.7. Corresponding figures for PL are 32.6 and 38.2. Parents’ educational background does not seem to have had any tangible compensating effects for young people with care experiences. Apparently, the adverse circumstances faced by this group have such a strong impact on their school performances, that highly educated parents cannot really constitute a positive factor. (See appendix for the same table with N and standard deviation).

Age at first placement is one variable used in the analyses. Table 5:9 below shows the impact of age at first placement on mean value of marks.

Table 5.9. Mean value of marks in relation to age at first placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at first placement</th>
<th>Mark percentile - mean value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals not placed in care (Point of reference)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table indicates that those who were placed at an early age also perform better at school – although their marks are 20 points below the mean of 50 (point of reference). Marks deteriorate by age of placement, with the lowest marks for those individuals who were placed between the age of 16 and 19. (This is also depicted in the third regression chart below.)

There is a slight difference between those placed in foster care and in residential care. The mean value for the percentile equalized mark for those placed in foster care is 26.7, whereas the corresponding figure for those placed in residential care is 24.2. (See appendix for the same table with N and standard deviation.)

**Specific results from regression analyses of marks at compulsory school**
Analyses for the datasets cannot present results, which can explain why children and young people placed in care do not perform well at school. However, it is possible to look at certain variables, and locate any changes they might imply. Results presented below show marks at school in relation to **age at first placement**.

Regression analyses have been performed to find out what variables have an effect on educational performances of children and young people. After trying several variables, such as gender, ethnicity etc., *Educational background of parents* was found to be the variable which had the most significant effect, albeit the variation is not great. Therefore, the only variable checked for in the GOLD material is *Educational background of parents*. This variable is also used in the UGU material, together with another variable; results from the cognitive tests performed by the students at 6th form, when they were 13 years old.

In the charts presented below, the figure 0 represents children and young people *placed 1-30 days*. Thus, this group is the point of reference in the charts. It is important to bear in mind that school performances of this group already are much lower than those of the majority population.
Graph 5.10. Changes in percentile equalized marks from compulsory school in relation to length of placement

This graph shows how the lowest marks are received by those placed 1–5 years. After 5 years there are slight improvements, until the same status is received as for the group placed 1-30 days. It is hard to find explanations to this chart – but figures clearly show that a placement in care has not been successful in compensating for earlier educational disadvantages. On the contrary – school performances deteriorate, even after 2-3 years in care. We would here like to point out that the graph shows a relation between marks and length of placement. It does not say anything about what is the cause and what is the effect. To analyse this further it is necessary to perform more advanced data analyses, and extensive qualitative research.

Graph 5.11. Changes of percentile equalized marks from compulsory school in relation to number of placements.
This graph shows how marks from compulsory school are clearly related to number of placements. The higher the number of placements – the lower is the marks.

Graph 5:12. Changes of percentile equalized marks from compulsory school in relation to age at first placement

Graph 5:12 shows how marks are related to age at first placement. Those who are placed before they are seven years old perform better at school. There is a noteworthy dip for those who are placed after they are 16 years old. Interpretations of figures in this chart could be that those who enter care in their late childhood or during adolescence have encountered problems at school prior to the placement in care.

**Upper secondary school**
Data for upper secondary school are available for cohorts 1972–1987. The difference between individuals not placed in care (NPL) and placed in care (PL) is not great when it comes to application to, and acceptance at, upper secondary school; 98 percent of NPL applied for upper secondary school, and 97 percent were accepted. For the sample of PL, 93 percent applied and 91 percent were accepted. There are greater differences when it comes to choice of programme at upper secondary school.
Table 5:13. Percentage of acceptance at upper secondary school programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programmes</th>
<th>Not placed in care</th>
<th>Placed in care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Theoretical programmes – science (physics, chemistry, technique etc.)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Theoretical programmes – social science and languages</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Vocational programmes, technical</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Vocational programmes, social science (ass. nurse, child minder etc.)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  International Baccalaureate(^{14})</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Individual programme (those with too low marks for other programme)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Not possible to categorise</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5:14. Proportion of young persons not placed in care and placed in care per upper secondary school programme (numbers referring to number in table 5:13)

Table 5:13 and figure 5:14 gives evidence of a noteworthy difference in choices of programmes for young people with experience of being placed in care and their peers without such an experience. Very few, only 7 percent of PL choose technical theoretical programmes, whereas one fifth of NPL make this choice. There is also a difference between theoretical programmes focusing on social science and languages – 27 percent of NPL and 14 percent of PL. However, the most striking result is the difference between those who are accepted at the individual programme – 4 of NPL and 20 of PL. This programme was originally intended for those (few) students who did not pass in the core subjects, and thus could not be accepted at the other programmes. Gradually, this programme now includes a substantial number of students. The increase of students in this programme indicates severe problems in the secondary and upper secondary school systems. There are limited possibilities to proceed to further education for students at the individual programme. If they want to move on to further and higher studies, they will

\(^{14}\) International Baccalaureate is an international school with teaching in English.
have to turn to adult education. The fact that roughly one fifth of young people with experiences of a placement in care spend their three years at upper secondary school at the individual programme is one of the explanatory factors for the few students from this group at college and university.

**School leaving from upper secondary school**

Table 5:15. Percentage of those leaving upper secondary school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School leaving from upper secondary school</th>
<th>Not placed in care</th>
<th>Placed in care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=1 619 432</td>
<td>n=57 809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:15 shows that only about 40 percent of PL leave upper secondary school. 18 percent of NPL do not leave upper secondary school, which is bad enough, but the figure for PL is alarmingly high – 60 percent do not leave upper secondary school, they have dropped out before completing their three years.

Bearing in mind the table above – showing choices of programmes - it could be of interest to take a closer look at the percentage of those who leave each of the programmes:

Table 5:16. Percentage of those leaving upper secondary school from each programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programmes</th>
<th>Not placed in care</th>
<th>Placed in care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=1 321 017</td>
<td>n=22 809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical programmes – science</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical programmes – social science,</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>languages, arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational programmes, technical</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational programmes, social science</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(assistant nurse, child minder etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Baccalaureate</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual programme (for those with too low</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marks for any other programme)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not possible to categorise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

5This figure only indicates the number who left school after (at least) three complete years, not their marks in any subject

17 *The individual programme* is a supplementary year for those who do not obtain a pass in Swedish, English or Mathematics in the nine-year compulsory school, which is required to be accepted for upper secondary education. This supplementary programme was originally meant for a small number of pupils, but is today the third largest programme with a miscellaneous selection of courses for those who can't or don't want to study in an upper secondary national programme.
It is not quite straightforward to interpret and compare table 5:13 and table 5:15, as N is different in the two tables. 1 538 365 NPL and 48 851 PL were accepted at upper secondary school (table 13) and 1 341 017 NPL and 22 809 PL left upper secondary school. As the latest cohort consists of individuals born in 1987, these should by now have completed their upper secondary school. The tables 5:13, 5:15 and 5:16 give evidence of a substantial amount of young people with experiences of being placed in care dropping out from upper secondary school. Results from comparing the datasets also show that PL do not perform as well as NPL when it comes to marks.

Table 5:17. Mean value of marks for individuals who entered upper secondary school in 2006 (Max=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programmes</th>
<th>Not placed in care</th>
<th>Placed in care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical programmes – science</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical programmes – social science, languages</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational programmes, technical</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational programmes, social science (assistant nurse, child minder etc.)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual programme (for those with too low marks for any other programme)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:16 shows, in concordance with results from other tables, that young people placed in care do not perform as well as their peers, in any of the programmes.

To summarise; young people who have been placed in foster and/or residential care predominantly choose vocational programmes. As much as one fifth of PL start upper secondary school in the individual programme, and 60 percent leave upper secondary school before three years. Furthermore, their marks are lower than those of the majority population. Altogether, these results indicate a negative situation for future access to higher and further education for this group of young people.

**College and university**

In these results, cohorts 1972–1974 are partly missing, as the procedure for applying for tertiary education changed in 1993.

When looking at these results, it is of importance to remember that in Sweden it is quite common to start college and university one or more years after having finished upper secondary school. Many young people choose to have one or more gap years,
where they travel and/or work. There are also quite a few people who apply for university and college after having worked several years. Such late entrances are more frequent at social sciences and pedagogic programmes than at technical programmes.

Table 5:18. Percentage of those who were registered at college and/or university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registered</th>
<th>Not placed in care</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Placed in care</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N= 954 651</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>N=50 351</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=664 781</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>N=7 458</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=1 619 432</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>N=57 809</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:18 shows that 13 percent of PL also was registered at college and/or university.

Table 5:19, as shown below; display how many (of those who applied) were accepted at college and/or university.

Table 5:19: Percentage of those who were accepted at college and/or university of those who applied at VHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accepted</th>
<th>Not placed in care</th>
<th>Placed in care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=631 813</td>
<td>n=7 530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that 40 percent of PL was not accepted, whereas the corresponding figure for NPL is 27 percent. Thus, of those who applied for college and/or university studies, a smaller proportion of those who had been placed in care were accepted, compared to the majority population. Consequently, 60 percent of 7 530 individuals with experiences of being placed in care were accepted at college and/or university for cohorts 1975–1986.

The results from statistics also depict a situation where individuals placed in care apply for college and/or university later in life than their peers. However, the difference is not great. For cohorts 1972–1984, the mean difference between NPL and PL concerning time of application to college and/or university is 2.6 terms (mean value for each cohort varied between 4 to 1 term).

Due to variations in the frequency of collecting formal exams, it is complicated to show figures for the actual exams – a substantial amount of people never formally demand their exam documents from college or university. Therefore, we have chosen to show figures for credits received/taken. Table 20 below shows percentage of those who have produced any type of credits from college and/or university.
Table 5:20. Percentage of received credits from college and/or university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Produced credits</th>
<th>Not placed in care N=1619432</th>
<th>Placed in care N=57809</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:20 shows that a significantly smaller proportion of PL, 12 percent, has produced any credits at college and/or university. The corresponding figure for NPL is 39 percent.

The following figure (5:21) summarises some of the data presented above. The first bar shows the percentage of young persons leaving compulsory school, the second the percentage doing so with some kind of qualification. The third indicates the lower number of young persons placed in care entering upper secondary school, compared to their peers. The fourth, were a significant drop, and difference, can be noted, concerns the proportion leaving upper secondary education with qualifications. The two last bars show the proportion registered and completing college or university studies, with some kind of qualification (credits taken).

Figure 5.21. Summary of tables 5:5, 5:15, 5:17 and 5:21 and other data accounted for in the text

Figure 5:21 clearly shows the differences between young persons placed in care (left bars) and their peers. The difference is visible at all stages of the educational life. The most dramatic difference, however, is the number of young persons leaving upper secondary school. This pattern continues to the figures concerning registration and completing university studies respectively.
Analyses made using the UGU material

Cognitive tests
The UGU sample contains cognitive tests made by students from the 6th form – when they are 13 years old. These tests contain one verbal and two non-verbal tests. The verbal tests is called “Opposite terms”, and consists of a choice of words indicating a contradiction to a given “key-word”. The first non-verbal test is called “Iron-sheet folding”, and consists of sketches of a how a piece of “iron” is folded, followed by suggestions of results of the folding process. The second non-verbal is a completion of sequences of numbers (Svensson 2008). Table 5:22 shows mean values of all the results from these tests for NPL and PL.

Table 5:22. Results of cognitive tests
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results of cognitive tests</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not placed in care</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table indicates that children with experience of being placed in care not only have lower marks than their peers, they also perform less well in the cognitive tests. (The same table but with both N and standard deviation can be found in the appendix.) The cognitive test consists of different parts. A breakdown of the total result will be given in table 5:24 and 5:25.

Table 5:23. Mean value of marks and of cognitive tests in relations to educational background of parents
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent’s educational background</th>
<th>Mark percentile Not placed in care</th>
<th>Cognitive tests NPL</th>
<th>Mark percentile Placed in care</th>
<th>Cognitive tests PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory school</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school – 2 or 3 years vocational</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school theoretical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university 2-3 years</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university 4 years or more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results both for marks and cognitive tests are also related to parents’ educational background. As do results from other tables – this table shows poorer results for children with a care background, and both marks and results from cognitive tests are related to parents’ educational background. However, this table also shows that the difference between the group NPL and PL is not as great when it comes to results from cognitive tests, as the difference for marks, a result which indicates that children placed in care has a cognitive capacity which, especially for those with highly educated parents, is not related to their marks in the same way as it is for those who are not placed in care. (For table 5:23 completed with N – see appendix.)

Effect size
An effect size can be measured of the strength of the relationship between the variables. The reporting of effect sizes aims at facilitating the interpretation of the substantive, as opposed to the statistical, significance of a research result. The size of the effect is often calculated as a statistical scale, Cohen’s d. The effect size is than calculated as a difference in mean values between the group “treated” and the group “not treated”, divided with a weighted mean value for the standard deviation of the groups. If Cohen’s d is less than 0.2 the effect is considered insignificant, if 0.2-0.5 small, if 0.5-0.8 moderate and if 0.8 or more it is considered large (Cohen 1977).

The calculations in tables 5:24 and 5:25 are comparisons between the mean values for the two groups (placed in care and not placed in care), the parents’ educational background and the total. The educational background is divided into six categories in table 5:24 and in three categories in table 5:25.

| Table 5:24. Cohen’s d between not placed and placed split by educational background of the parents |
|---------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                 | gr_percentile | Opposites | Sheet folding | Number series | Sum result   | test            |
| No informaton                  | 0,42           | 0,52     | 0,35           | 0,63           | 0,55          |
| Compulsory school              | 0,70           | 0,41     | 0,48           | 0,58           | 0,61          |
| Upper secondary, 2-3 years,   | 0,75           | 0,26     | 0,29           | 0,45           | 0,43          |
| vocational                     |                |          |                |                |               |
| Upper secondary, 3 years,      | 0,71           | 0,19     | 0,25           | 0,40           | 0,37          |
| academic                       |                |          |                |                |               |
| College/university, 2-3 years  | 1,03           | 0,35     | 0,26           | 0,48           | 0,45          |
| College/University >= 4 years  | 1,24           | 0,37     | 0,19           | 0,67           | 0,49          |
| Total                          | 0,94           | 0,44     | 0,41           | 0,62           | 0,61          |
A first interpretation gives at hand that the difference between the marks (first column) is bigger than the difference between test results (last column). The effect of being placed in care is bigger when it comes to marks than cognitive test results: 0.94 compared to 0.61. Another tentative analysis points at the differences as bigger when the parents have a higher education. A possible interpretation can be that the effect of disrupted education becomes bigger when you have parents with higher education. A third issue to point out concerns the different tests; the biggest difference can be seen for numbers series. A further analysis is needed to be able to discuss these issues thoroughly, something that will be addressed later in this chapter.

**Results from the UGU questionnaire**

The UGU material also contains results from a questionnaire, answered by the students. The questionnaire contains answers for specific cohorts. Timing and organisation of answering the questionnaire varies. Below follows a presentation of the cohorts, and in what grade the questionnaires have been answered:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohorts:</th>
<th>6th form compulsory school</th>
<th>1st form upper secondary school</th>
<th>Young people not attending upper secondary school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td></td>
<td>1st form upper secondary school</td>
<td>Young people not attending upper secondary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>6th form compulsory school</td>
<td>1st form upper secondary school</td>
<td>Young people not attending upper secondary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>6th form compulsory school</td>
<td>3rd form upper secondary school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>6th form compulsory school</td>
<td>3rd form upper secondary school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>9th form compulsory school</td>
<td>3rd form upper secondary school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>6th form compulsory school</td>
<td>9th form compulsory school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Help with homework**

One of the questions in the questionnaire concerns to what extent the students have received help with their homework at home. We have chosen this variable, because help
with homework may indicate the level of support and commitment from carers/parents concerning the educational achievement of children and young people. The alternatives differ in the questionnaires, which has to be considered when results are interpreted. It is also hard to value how children and young people perceived the questions, and their motivation to answer. Still, the results give an indication of the level of support received concerning homework.

Table 5:27. Percentage of those who received help at home with homework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Received help with homework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not placed</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:27 shows a difference between NPL and PL. 69 percent of NPL state that they did receive help at home when doing homework. Corresponding figure for PL is 54 percent. (A more elaborated table 5:27 can be found in the appendix.)

Table 5:28. Received help with homework in relation to age at first placement, percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at first placement</th>
<th>Received help with homework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-11</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 or older</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28 shows that 62 percent of those who were placed when they were 0-6 years old received help with homework, whereas the corresponding figure for those placed when they were 12-15 is 46 percent. The percentage is slightly higher for those who were placed when they were 16 or older. Apparently, placements at a young age indicate more support with homework. (For a more detailed table – see appendix.)

However, help with homework does not seem to be connected to better marks. For those who were placed in care and not received help with homework, the mean value of percentile equalized marks was 26, and for those who received help with homework, the corresponding figure was 26 (See table in appendix). This figure may indicate that those children and young people placed in care who received help with their homework, had had previous difficulties to achieve at school, and therefore needed more help. Of those
who are placed in care, more girls (60 percent) than boys (49 percent) receive help with their homework.

Let us here remind the reader that the sample consists of young persons placed in care at any time of the childhood or teenage years. We do not know if they are placed in care while answering the question or if the answer refers to an earlier experience, in the original family, or from the foster home/residential home.

Table 29. Percentage of those receive help with homework in relation to parents’ educational background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents' educational background</th>
<th>Not placed in care N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Placed in care N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory school</td>
<td>2 596</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school – 2 or 3 years vocational</td>
<td>5 132</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school theoretical</td>
<td>2 337</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university 2-3 years</td>
<td>3 234</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university 4 years or more</td>
<td>1 560</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 29 clearly shows that children and young people not placed in care receive more help with homework than those who are placed in care. It is noteworthy that the difference in relation to parents’ educational background is not great between the two groups.

**Time spent doing homework**

A dichotomy variable was constructed where 0 equals less than 30 minutes of homework per day and 1 equals more than 30 minutes of homework per day.

Table 5:30. The difference in time spent on doing homework between not placed in care and placed in care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More than 30 minutes per day N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not placed in care</td>
<td>11 009</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11 308</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:30 displays a difference between those who are placed and not placed in care. The latter group spends more time doing homework – 50 percent of NPL spend more than 30 minutes per day, whereas the corresponding figure for PL is 39 percent. The time children and young people spend doing homework is clearly related to their educa-
tional attainments, which is shown in table 31. Data on reported time dedicated to homework refers to the situation during year six while the marks are from year nine.

Table 5:31. Mean value of percentile equalized marks in relation to time spent doing homework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>30 minutes or more per day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean value of marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not placed in care</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those who are/have been/will be placed in care the mean value of marks is 31 for those who spend more than 30 minutes per day doing homework. The corresponding mark for NPL spending 30 minutes or more per day is 52. Girls who are/have been/will be placed in care spend more time doing homework than boys; 46 percent spend 30 minutes or more doing homework every day, whereas the corresponding figure for boys in the same situation is 33 percent. However, the causality needs to be addressed more thoroughly. Being placed in care most often means growing up, prior to the placement, in a family facing serious problems. The situation of the family of origin seldom gives opportunities for supporting the children in educational achievements. What can be noted is that the efforts of society to compensate for a difficult childhood do not seem to compensate for the lack of support during times outside public care.

**Special educational support**

Specialised pedagogic support can be “adjusted pace of studies”, “specialised teaching group” or other forms of specialised pedagogy. We have access to information of specialised pedagogic support for forms 3 up to 9. The variable is split in two – received or not received any kind of specialised support.

Table 5:32. Received special educational support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Received support</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not placed in care</td>
<td>8 337</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8 854</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68 percent of those who have been placed in care received some kind of pedagogic support at school. The corresponding figure for those not placed in care is 38 percent. There
is a gender difference: 73 percent of boys and 62 percent of girls placed in care have received some kind of pedagogic support. (see Giota and Lundborg, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of placement</th>
<th>Did not receive support</th>
<th>Did receive support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 246</td>
<td>N = 517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 30 days</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 3 months</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 6 months</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months – 1 year</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 -10 years</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support received is corresponding to length of placement, with the highest proportion of support noted for those who have been placed 4-5 years (80 percent). It is difficult to interpret the results from this table, but the difference between the categories is noteworthy.

Another question of interest is in what way this received support has affected the marks given to children and young people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did not receive support</th>
<th>Did receive support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean value of marks</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not placed in care</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>13 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>13 419</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to table 5:34, the affect of the received support is apparently not great for children and young people placed in care, as the mean value of marks for those who received support is 32.7 for those not placed in care, but only 18.1 for those placed in care. However, one possible interpretation of the figures is that those who received support had such great difficulties that they could not perform better, even with support. In any case, the table clearly shows the difference between those placed and not placed in care.

**Summary and discussion**

As in other Swedish research (Vinnerljung et al 2005, Social rapport 2010), the educational achievements of children and young people placed in care is poorer compared to peers not placed in care. There are in this statistical analysis some serious indicators
that the situation of children and teenagers at the risk of being placed in care, actually being in care or having left a placement is far from the educational situations of their peers without this experience. Even though society steps in and takes over responsibility for the upbringing of a young person, the different supporting systems of society seem to face difficulties in compensating for earlier shortcomings. This chapter gives a very brief snapshot of a problematic situation, some of the issues addressed here are analysed in a qualitative way in the following chapters but the analysis also gives at hand a need to elaborate the analysis of the statistical data further, to look closer at the different cohorts, to try to identify educational pathways etc. And, of course to, hopefully, be able to contribute to the knowledge in the area in order to improve the situation of this group. Both in order to improve the quality of life for this particular group but also to improve the welfare and education of children over all.
Chapter 6: Local policies – views from managers

In the text below, local policies will be described using the statements from interviews with the eight managers. We will also use some data from the 111 telephone interviews with managers conducted within another research project (Livet efter vården headed by Ingrid Höjer).

As mentioned before, Sweden has a high level of independence in the 290 municipalities. Social services and schools may be differently organised in each municipality. As long as the local social services follow the Social Services Act, they can organise child welfare in a way that is considered the best for the specific municipality.

Numbers of young people in care in local areas
According to Swedish statistics, 22 700 children and young people were placed in care at some time during 2008. The table below displays the amount of children and young people placed in care in the participating local authorities (National Board of Health and Welfare 2009).

Table 6: Children and young people placed in care in participating local authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Placed in care 0 – 20 years of age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M-town</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-town</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-town</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-town</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All city districts in Gothenburg (21)</td>
<td>1268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-town</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2008, 2 766 asylum seekers were received in the region of Västra Götaland. 42 percent of these were children and young people between 0 and 17 years of age. We do not have any access to data of how many were received at each local authority. More data of the participating local authorities are presented in chapter 4.

Numbers of young people from public care in education
There is no available information on how many young people who move on to further education from each local authority. No such data is collected in any of the local authorities in Sweden. The only available data is collected via Statistics Sweden, and the National Board of Health and Welfare.
Support from social services after care

There are no systematised programmes for young people leaving care. Any support given after young people have left care would be dependent on the interest and commitment of the individual social worker, and/or purchased from private agencies.

The situation can also be complicated, due to the organisation of social services. When young people leave care, they will often leave the “child and families” unit. If they need any kind of support, they would have to apply to another unit, working with adults. Thus, they would meet other social workers, with no previous knowledge of their situation, and with no special interest in young people leaving care and their needs. In the local authority where manager A works, they have acknowledged this as a problem, and started a specific unit, young adults, for this group and all clients between the ages of 18 and 25, in order to give them the best support possible.

Young people who leave residential care are thought to have a more problematic background, and less access to support than young people leaving foster care. Manager F gave several examples of young men with a background from residential care, who have not managed to finish secondary school, due to severe problems with criminality and drug abuse.

Manager C, as well as manager H, stated that at their units they will try to support any young person leaving care over the first months of independent living. For example, they will try to help them with housing issues, finding somewhere to live, paying the first months rent, etc. Other than that, young people leaving care would be considered as “any other citizen”, and would have to apply for individual support, if needed. Several local authorities seem to purchase after care from private agencies. In the local authority where manager H works, this is often the case.

Manager E declared that support after care should not be perceived as a separate measure. She emphasised that care and after-care should be an integrated process. In the local authority where manager E works, they have just started an “after care program”. They have five apartments, where five young persons can find their first accommodation, with some support connected. At the time of the interview, two young persons were already staying in these apartments, both formerly placed in residential care.

One problem with support after care is the turnover of staff in social services. Even though they may have good intentions of ending the placement in an organised and
planned way, this may be difficult if there have been 10 different social workers involved in the placement over the previous years.

We have looked into the turnover of staff during the first years of a placement in care. Some of the changes of social workers in a specific case are due to organisational issues – different social workers for emergency placements, or for treatment placements. But during a placement in care there will be numerous changes of social workers. (Manager A)

Manager F stated that turnover of staff is a difficulty they have to handle in her organisation. In the foster care units there is hardly any turnover at all, and as a consequence they may delegate the task of ending the placement to the foster care social worker, who has a continued relationship with the young person.

In some cases it is possible to prolong a placement in foster care if the young person has special needs. There are managers who could give examples of young people remaining in foster care until they are over 20 years old. For those young people leaving residential care, there are several possibilities of using specific leaving care programmes, either from the residential unit where the young person has stayed, or from private agencies. Manager H declared that they prioritise such solutions, and so far have had clearance from politicians in the elected social welfare committee to do so, even if this also means quite high costs for the support given.

Financial issues
When the placement in foster/residential care ends, the young person will have to earn his/her own living. If he/she cannot do so, due to unemployment or other reasons, he/she will have to apply for means tested social benefits. Having to move from the foster/residential home prematurely, before issues such as housing and employment have been settled, can be very difficult for the young person.

When asked about the possibility of prolonging a placement after the age of 18 (or after finishing upper secondary school) one of the foster care managers stated that he often would have wanted the young person to stay longer in the foster family – but his unit is not in charge of the placement decisions. Such decisions are made by the social workers at the child and family social service unit, and not by the foster care unit. Apparently, this can be an issue for conflicting opinions between social workers and foster care workers. The existence of such conflicts was also an issue in Höjer & Sjöblom (2009).
Support is only given until upper secondary school is completed. To move on to college/university young people formerly placed in care will have to take study loans, like “anyone else”.

In cases where the young person moves back to their biological families, social services presupposes that the parents will provide adequate support, and the young person will not be considered in need of support from social workers. Keeping in mind that a majority of parents with children in care have a very difficult life situation (Hessle 1988, Höjer 2007), there is an evident risk that the young person returning to his/her birth family will be left without any support, as the parents may lack supportive capacities.

Support from foster carers
Continued support from foster carers is generally supposed to be performed on an entirely voluntary basis. This was also the case in the study by Höjer & Sjöblom (2009). Manager C stated that financial support could be given to foster carers in particular cases, where the young person formerly placed in care has some kind of special needs. In such cases foster carers could be appointed as “contact persons”, and still receive some financial support, and also some supervision. In other cases, social services seem to assume that foster carers will continue to support the young person, without economic or pedagogic support.

Young people leaving care and education
Until recently, there has been little focus on young people in care and education. However, attention to educational attainments has gradually increased over the last couple of years. In Social Rapport 2010 (National Board of Health and Welfare 2010) good educational attainment is highlighted as one of the major supportive factors for young people placed in care.

The 111 managers were asked about the priority of education for young people leaving care at their specific local authority. Some results from these interviews are displayed below:

• Ten of the managers (nine percent) stated that they had specific programmes to support education for young people in care or leaving care in their municipality.
• 20 local authorities (18 percent) used private agencies that provided programmes for educational support to young people.
Four local authorities had specific programmes for supporting education for young people leaving care. Five local authorities had a specific policy document for after care for young people placed in foster care or institutional care.

Managers were also asked to what extent they prioritise education for young people leaving care. Their answers are displayed in table 6:2:

Table 6.2 How do social services prioritise education for young people leaving care in your local authority?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very high priority</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather high priority</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither high nor low priority</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather low priority</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the table, about 83 percent gave high or rather high priority to education for young people leaving care. However, just stating that education is important does not entail any specific responsibilities or any action. Therefore, managers were asked to give personal comments to this question. Their answers have been categorised, and are displayed in table 6:3:

Table 6.3 Comments to: How do social services prioritise education for young people leaving care in your local authority?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved situation – recently more focus on education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School is important – with action</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School is important – without action</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint responsibility school – social services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools should be responsible!</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little interest in this issue</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on problems and emotional well-being of YP – little focus on education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic contact with schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal is completed secondary school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal is completed upper secondary school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPLC want to work, not study</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
74 out of 111 managers commented on the question of how they prioritize education for young people leaving care. The categorisation of these answers was quite complicated. Categories 2 and 3 have had to include a lot of rather vague comments. Comments that implied any kind of action, such as specific programmes or specific focus on education in the regular 6-monthly performed evaluations of placements, were categorised as “School is important - with action”. More general and unspecific comments, which implied no actual practical commitment of any kind, were categorised “School is important - without action”. The latter is also the category where the majority of the answers - 23 answers (20 percent) - can be found. 8 managers (11 percent) stated that the situation has improved over the recent years. In their answers they identified the Integrated Children’s System (BBIC) as the reason for this improvement. 7 managers emphasised the importance of cooperation with schools, whereas 3 stated that education of children and young people in care is the responsibility of schools only. 7 do not think education is a prioritised issue. 4 mentioned the fact that social workers generally focus more on the social problems and the well-being of the young people, than on education. 3 shared completed secondary school, and 3 completed upper secondary school as the goal for young people leaving care. 2 had had experience of a problematic contact with school in their local authority, and 2 stated that young people leaving care prioritise finding a job instead of moving on to further education.

There is a general understanding among the managers that there has been a change in society, which affects young people. The demands from employers have increased; it is very hard to find work without having finished upper secondary school. Previously, young people could find less qualified jobs, or start as apprentices, but finding such unqualified jobs has now become increasingly difficult. Therefore it is more important to support young people, and help them to complete upper secondary school.

Manager B referred to concern about young people (all young people, not those placed in care) dropping out of upper secondary school. In the city district where he works, this has been a debated issue among politicians and social service staff. Measures were taken to try to enhance the achievements of this group, to make them finish upper secondary school. However – those young people who were placed in out-of-home care in another local authority were excluded from these measures. As they did not live within the authority of their “home” local authority anymore, nobody seemed to include them in the
suggested special programmes. There is an evident risk that the schools in the local authorities where young people are placed may have a similar approach. School authorities are likely to think that young people placed by other local authorities and living in foster homes, or residential units in their local authority should be the concern of the "placing" local authority. Thus, young people leaving care are at risk of being left in a kind of "limbo", where no attention is given to their educational achievements, from either of the local authorities involved.

**Financial support for further education**

In the face-to-face interviews, we asked the 8 managers if they thought young care leavers could be entitled to economic support for further education – i.e. colleges and/or universities. None of the managers considered this as a likely possibility. Manager E expressed a view that social services would only be prepared to support young people up to a certain "appropriate" level; young people who apply for support to attend Folk High Schools, and/or Adult education to complete their grades from upper secondary level would be considered eligible for such support. However, if they apply for support for college/university studies, this would probably be perceived as a "presumptuous" request. All managers stated that it would be almost impossible to give presumptuous for any kind of university studies. Vocational studies seem to be accepted, it is possible to give economic support for vocational education after upper secondary school.

**Social workers focus on emotional well-being**

According to statements from several of the managers, social work with children and families is primarily focused on psychosocial issues. The care plans, according to the legislation, have to be written at every placement in out-of-home-care are primarily focused on the emotional well-being of the placed child. The well-being of the child is perceived as dependent on positive relations to parents and carers, and social workers in child welfare would be concentrated on improving – or interrupting, when needed – such relations. Consequently, they would have little focus on education, and the child’s school performances would not be the first priority. The most important thing is considered to be the emotional well-being of the child. According to the managers, school achievements have so far been the second priority.

Manager B stated that he had an eye-opening experience at a conference where educational achievements of children and young people in care were discussed. This confer-
ence made him more aware of educational issues, and he has tried to implement a change of attitude at his unit. Manager E mentioned the Swedish research where large cohorts of young people in care have been compared to peers without care experiences. This research has presented a lot of very negative outcomes for former welfare clients, one of which is educational achievements (Vinnerljung et al 2005b). She stated that social workers would need to enhance their awareness of the impact of education on placed children’s and young persons lives and future possibilities.

Cooperation with schools
Some managers described a quite elaborated initial contact with schools when children are placed in foster care. Manager C and F stated that they always notify the local school before a placement, and that they try to have regular meetings with the school, the foster carers, and if possible, the biological parents.

The managers displayed a notion that children in out-of-home placements would be stigmatised at school. This stigmatisation could include both perception of children as “difficult”, as well as low expectations of educational achievements. Several managers also mentioned children and young people with various diagnoses – dyslexia, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), etc. Quite a lot of children and young people in out-of-home placements have such diagnosis, which also makes it hard for them to achieve in school, irrespective of whether the diagnosis are considered as a stigma or as a factual dysfunction.

Tug-of-war between local authorities
Some managers described difficulties concerning which local authority should be responsible for the cost for extra support given in school to children with special needs. Manager B stated that the local authority who has placed a child in another local authority can sometimes be very reluctant to take any responsibility for paying for extra educational support for the child. On the other hand, the receiving local authority, in many cases also a rural local authority with limited resources, is just as reluctant, and claims that they are not interested in paying for children from other local authorities, placed in care in their local authority. Thus, the child may be left with no extra support, while this tug-of-war goes on.
Knowledge of former child welfare clients moving on to further education
There is no systematised knowledge of how many of the young people formerly placed in care move on to further education. Some of the managers know of the odd young man or woman who has been able to enter college or university, but this information is solely anecdotal.

Policies
Not one of the eight managers could identify a specific policy document for children and young people in care and their education (in the interviews with the 111 managers, only five local authorities had a specific policy document for young people leaving care). However, the eight managers could mention the existence of certain policies in their local authority. For example, manager C stated that in his local authority, their goal is for young people placed in care to finish upper secondary school before they leave care. At this local authority they also try to find out how each young person placed in care visualise their future, concerning education and work. According to manager C, they do not want young people leaving care to just take any kind of work, but to carefully consider other options, such as further education – which also should include vocational education.

The issue of out-of-home placements and education is not – or very seldom - discussed at the meetings of the politically elected social-welfare committees.

The Integrated Children’s System (BBIC) is mentioned as a possible way of looking at every aspect of the child’s life, which also implies looking at educational matters. However, manager E stated that in her view BBIC is focused on child protection, and thus may miss out on educational issues.

With the same right as anyone...
When the placement is ended, the former child welfare clients are regarded as “anyone” – i.e. with the same rights and obligations as any other citizens. In some of the interviews with the 8 managers, they stated that they considered these young people to have, if not equal, at least similar options for support as their peers. However, manager B was aware of the extra level of vulnerability for young people formerly placed in care.

If you have stayed long in a certain local authority, you are entitled to economic support from the social services, but this is a complicated situation for young care leavers. Applying for economic support will make them more vulnerable.
By this statement, manager B suggested that applying for economic support would have a detrimental effect on the self-image of the young person – as being less successful, and also make them dependent on economic help from social services.

**Barriers and facilitators for education for young people in care**
Results presented below are both from the face-to-face interviews with the eight managers, and from telephone interviews with the 111 managers.

**Facilitators for education**
Manager C works in a part of town where there is a high concentration of immigrants and a high level of unemployment and social problems. He is of the opinion that young people formerly placed in care have better opportunities than other young persons with a similar background, at least compared to the young people from this rather deprived neighbourhood where manager C works. According to manager C, young people leaving care have access to more support than other young persons from this part of town.

Additionally, Manager C mentioned a good leaving care process for young persons in residential care as a facilitator. Some of the residential units in his local authority seem to have a well functioning system for preparing young persons when they leave care; housing, education and economic support is discussed with the young men and women. In such cases, there are also better chances for them to at least consider the possibility of further education. In the interviews with the 111 managers, we also asked for their opinion on possible facilitators for education.

Talent is an obvious facilitator for young people placed in care. If a young boy or girl is very talented, this may serve as an incentive for foster carers and social workers to focus on educational achievements for this specific individual. A family background with educated parents is also mentioned as a facilitator, although few children and young people placed in care have parents with an academic background.

In the telephone interviews, the 111 managers were asked about the possibilities of young people to move on to further education. Results from their comments are presented in the table below.
Table 6:4 Managers’ comments on what possibilities young people leaving care have to move on to further education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited possibilities</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from foster carers and residential homes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from social services</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More access to individually shaped solutions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education, special programme at upper secondary school, folk high schools</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent on individual factors</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to “ordinary” jobs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same possibilities as anyone</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One fourth of the managers concluded that this group of young people have limited possibilities to move on to further education. In their comments they mentioned barriers such as lack of motivation, lack of support etc.

Eleven managers (ten percent) stated that adequate support from foster carers and residential homes would facilitate access to further education for young people leaving care, six of these managers were of the opinion that foster carers provided better support for young people leaving care than residential homes. 22 managers (20 percent) defined support from social services as an important facilitator, and 10 managers (nine percent) identified adult education and Folk high schools as vital factors for access to further education. Eleven managers (ten percent) referred to individual prerequisites, and six stated that young people leaving care generally prefer work to education. 15 managers (14 percent) state that young people leaving care have the same opportunities as “anyone”. If they want to, they can use the same resources as all other young people, there is nothing to stop them from moving on the further education if they wish to do so.

**Barriers for education**

One barrier for access to further education may be lack of a supporting social network. Several managers mentioned this as one of the disadvantages for young people leaving care. Their peers, without experiences of having been placed in care, may receive all kinds of support from their family, not only from parents, but also from aunts and un-
cles, grandparents, and friends. Young people leaving care may very well be on their own, or with access only to a small and/or dysfunctional social network.

The tug-of-war between schools, and also between schools and social services or between local authorities, is also a barrier for young people in care. Several managers mentioned this as a difficult situation.

Who will support a child coming into care? The headmasters in the local schools don’t want to spend money on other children than “their own”. Their budget is only planned for the children in their municipality. The placing municipality is very reluctant to pay for the child; they consider it to be a school matter only (manager B)

Previous bad experiences of school may have given the young person a poor self-image. Young people in care may have been excluded, treated badly and/or perceived themselves as unwanted at school. They may have severe gaps in their knowledge base, gaps which have not been acknowledged, and which make them loose interest in school. They may also have different types of neuropsychiatric diagnosis, for example ADHD, which have not been attended to. Lack of support, together with the factors mentioned above, may make children and young people placed in care feel alienated from school, and thus they will have little incentives to move on to further education.

Table 6:5 below displays the 111 manager’s comments on barriers for further education of young people leaving care.

Table 6:5 Managers’ comments on barriers for further education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social problems, lack of motivation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate previous schooling</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate support from family and network</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate support from foster carers and residential staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuropsychiatric diagnosis</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate support from social services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual problems and limitations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same barriers as for all other YP</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No answer | 1

80
A majority of the comments focus on the difficult background of young people placed in care, with lacking support both from parents, network, and schools. In many cases the young people have also experienced abuse and neglect in their birth families. The managers also concluded that school issues have not been highly prioritised by social services. As previously mentioned, social services tend to focus more on social problems and/or emotional problems than on educational achievements of children and young people in care.

A placement in care is supposed to compensate for previous difficult experiences and care deficits in the birth families, but apparently neither a placement in foster care, nor in residential care, seem to have succeeded in compensating for an inadequate schooling. Several managers mentioned the presumed low level of education of foster carers as a barrier, and residential units are accused of having far too little focus on education. Thus, lacking experience of, and focus on, educational achievements, in birth families as well as in foster families and residential homes is a defined barrier for further education.

Low expectations of educational achievements are also one of the barriers. Several managers comment on the fact that children and young persons in care often are not expected to perform well at school, which possibly could work as an additional barrier for further education.

**Summary and discussion**

**Factors related to the educational system**

Rather limited knowledge of factors related to the educational system as such has been acquired through the managers’ interviews. The statements of the managers can often be characterised as comments of schools in general, and their failure to support children with special needs and social problems. Exclusion of children with learning difficulties is perceived as a problem, which could make children and young people alienated and less interested in education. The need of early interventions in school is emphasised. There is also a general perception of a need of cooperation between school and social services.

More specifically, the tug-of-war between schools and social services described in the previous text, is identified as a tangible problem for children and young people in care. Which authority that should be responsible for extra support to children and young people in care seems to be a frequently unresolved question. Such disagreements may
prevent children and young people from receiving adequate support in school, and thus also diminish their potential of enhancing their educational achievements while placed in care.

**Basic economical needs**
Economic support is generally given to young people placed in care until they have completed their upper secondary school exams. Economic support for further education is not possible to receive, except in very extreme cases. Former child welfare clients will have to apply for study loans as a majority of other young people will have to do if they want to move on to college and/or university. A few local authorities have some kind of systematised support for help with housing issues, and other practical support young people leaving care might need.

**Factors related to families and social environment**
A dysfunctional family network is one of the acknowledged factors for barriers to further education for young people leaving care. Most managers were aware of previous difficult experiences in the birth families of young people, and the detrimental effect of such difficult experiences on children and young people placed in care. Young people may have experienced problems with parents’ drug/alcohol abuse, neglect and/or mental disorders. Additionally, several managers mentioned that parents themselves may have had very limited experience of education, and thus lack possibilities to support their children.

**Guidance and counseling received**
Social services have an evident mandate to provide children and young people in care with all the best possible support. According to the managers, this is also their serious intention. However, social workers are traditionally more focused on solving social problems and focusing on the emotional well being of the child, rather than on school performances. Several managers give evidence of this situation, and mentioned this as an explanation of the little interest social workers often take in placed children’s educational achievements.

A placement in foster care or residential care is supposed to compensate for previous difficulties. Thus, foster carers and residential staff would be expected to help children and young people placed in care to improve their educational achievements. Nevertheless, this is not always the case. There seem to be insufficient efforts directed towards
support in educational matters. Neither foster carers, nor residential staff, are always aware of the importance of support in educational matters.

According to the managers, this situation is now about to change, as increasing attention is being directed towards school performances and educational achievements of children and young people placed in care. Some of the managers stated that this is due to the recently implemented Integrated Children’s System (BBIC), others mentioned the bleak results of Swedish research on outcomes of out-of-home placements, which have made them reconsider methods and procedures concerning out-of-home placements in general.

To sum up; the managers in general display an awareness of the importance of education for children and young people placed in care. However, various barriers and difficulties make access to further education problematic. Despite good intentions, social services have so far not been able to compensate children and young people placed in care for previous educational shortcomings and difficulties. Better policies and more focus on educational matters are needed for this group.
Chapter 7: Views from interviews with nominated adults

As mentioned earlier in the text, the policy for those in care is that the social service office will support you until you have finished upper secondary school. When you come of age at 18, you are supposed to take full responsibility, and earn your own living. If you are in care, have turned 18 and are not attending upper secondary school, then the social service office has no obligation to support you. You are on your own, no matter if you have been placed or not. So for the young people in this study who did not continue to upper secondary school their placement ended when they turned 18, with no plans for after care. They were on their own and had to make it like everyone else. This was also the case for the ones who later on finished upper secondary school; the majority were 19 years old. The foster family has at this stage no formal responsibility or obligation towards the young people, but many feel that they have a moral and an emotional attachment to the young people, because they had been part of their lives. Not all foster carers are that committed, which may leave many young people in a vulnerable position, with little access to support. Thus, the young person is dependent on the foster families “good will” because usually few of them return to their biological family. That is also depending on if the parent is still alive and if they have had contact during the placement; otherwise they are all alone with no social network to support them. For those young people placed in residential care, access to support after care, if it exists at all, is usually limited to six months.

The nominated adults who were foster carers stated that there is no support, nor any resources or alternative solutions for young people who want to study at a higher level. This is a barrier for young people, who may hesitate to take the step and apply for college/university, even though they may have the competence to do so. The (foster care) nominated adults found this to be a major constraint on young people who have been in public care, because many of them are not ready to make it on their own at that time. There is a reason for them being placed and they sometimes need more guidance, more time to learn social skills and develop a good self-awareness.

After S left upper secondary school, I had to make a lot of effort – I had to scream - to convince social services that she needed to stay until the end of the year. When the year ended, she had nowhere
to go. Nowhere to go! And we only have 4 placements (of foster children) in our contract with social services, so we had to find another solution. She went to stay with our daughter, who lives quite close to us. And the same thing happened with F. But with F it was different, she has stayed with us for such a long time, so we decided to change our contract to 3 placements, and we told her she can stay at home as long as she wants to. But – no, they will not pay, absolutely not. It’s really very unusual for them to pay after foster children have left upper secondary school. Perhaps to the end of the month, then the placement is ended. (foster mother)

All nominated adults highlighted the importance of having a social network that can support young people after a placement is ended, because many of these young persons still need time to develop social skills and self-esteem. The majority of the foster parents interviewed as nominated adults, stated that they will always be part of the young people’s lives and their relationship is like that of a biological parent and a child. Some of them said that they did not ask for help from the agencies for after care, they arranged everything on their own in relation to housing, education or job seeking for the young person. Others stated that they asked for help when the placement was over, but received no support at all from the social services. They were told by the social worker that the young person had to look for a student apartment and seek study loans by themselves if they could not stay in the foster family. The young people who did apply for housing, schoolbooks, and financial support, or to prolong the placement, were denied. So, basically the situation was similar for those foster carers who asked for support and for those who did not ask; they had to arrange everything by themselves. None of the foster families had left the young person alone, they tried to arrange for them in different ways. Some of the young people were able to stay with the foster family; others moved to apartments with the support of the foster family or moved to live with boyfriends/girlfriends.

Well, for example, she wanted to study at the local Adult Education. She studied for one term, then she had to move, because she couldn’t cope with the social services. She lived in a flat paid for by the social services, and they kept controlling her – they had a lot of conditions for her to be allowed to stay in the flat, she felt so restrained she had to move – and then she could not study at the Adult Education anymore, as she moved to another city. They presented her with all kinds of purely bureaucratic demands and conditions, and there was also a tug-of-war
between the local authorities. It was like forcing your way through a jungle! No one tried to facilitate for her, there was no flexibility and no recognition of her specifically vulnerable situation (Foster mother).

The majority of all the nominated adults interviewed gave accounts of negative experiences of the social services during the placement of the young people. However, some foster carers mentioned that the relationship with the social worker/s had been positive. In such cases, social workers really tried their best to support and encourage the young person, as well as the foster family. These social workers were genuinely interested in the young people, and acknowledged them in their process of transition to independence. Other foster carers had few positive experiences of social workers, due to lack of support and understanding during the placement, but also due to withdrawal of all support once the placement was ended.

Only two mentioned that the young person received any support for after care from the social service office. For one of the young persons, there was a plan when she was moving out to an apartment of her own and she received some support for housing. Other than that she made it on her own and was not in any further need of help. The other young person was in a residential home and she received help in the process of moving out from this home. One specific appointed person supported her with educational planning, job coaching and helped her in the contact with authorities.

All of the nominated adults mentioned that what they perceive as being the most important issue for the local authority is to stay within the budget limits; that is to say the placement should not be too costly. The budget limits – set by the local social service board – force local authorities to be very restrictive with their resources. For the nominated adults who were foster carers, this meant that they always had to struggle to motivate the social worker whenever there was any need for specific support for the young person. The amount of support the young person received was thus dependent on the attitude of the individual social worker and his/her commitment, but also on the foster carer’s capacity to “fight” for the rights of the young person placed in their care.

Furthermore, some nominated adults also pointed out that there is a general conception that young people placed in foster/residential care do not have the capacity to be high achievers. These low expectations or aspirations may be conveyed to the young
person, and consequently make them less interested in aspiring for high achievements.

Young people in residential care are often not only perceived as criminals and drug abusers, but also as being less intelligent than their peers. To my knowledge, this is a common perception. But those young people I have met at residential homes are just as talented, and have the same learning capacities as other children. I have worked both at municipality secondary schools and at on-site-schools at residential homes, and from my experience young people at the residential homes are often more talented than the average pupil at “ordinary” schools (nominated adult, teacher at a residential home).

Another factor, which can play a major part in the young people’s lives, is the relationship to the social worker. Those social workers who are genuinely interested in the young people’s development and are encouraging them to perform well at school, will also constitute a positive reinforcement for the young people, according to the statements of the nominated adults. A major facilitator for better educational achievements of young people in care is a strong cooperation between the school, the foster family and the local authority. The Nominated adults point out the importance of a good dialogue between all these stakeholders. Working together with the young person in focus is a good strategy. The encouragement should come from everyone around the young person; school, local authorities and foster families. Additionally, some of the foster carers also stated that the quality of foster care needs to be enhanced. Foster carers should be able to support young people, emotionally, socially and educationally, to enable them to have a chance of a good life.

On the other hand- the same foster carers also emphasised the importance of an explicit assignment from the local authorities. Foster carers should know about the needs of each young person placed in care, and what is expected of them as foster carers. As it is now, foster carers stated that there is little focus on the specific needs of each young person. There was a common understanding among the foster carers being interviewed that as long as young people placed in care stay out of criminality and drugs, social workers are satisfied. Specific needs, such as educational support, are not often an issue for social workers, according to the nominated adults who were foster carers.

Some of the factors that the nominated adults mentioned as barriers for young people placed in care, were the lack of early support, understanding and an explicit assignment.
from the local authorities. Many of the nominated adults stated that if only the young people had received proper support at an early stage in compulsory school, their lives would have been easier. According to the nominated adults, the young people did not always receive proper attention at school. Often the focus was more on their behavior rather than their educational attainment. They were sometimes treated differently from other pupils, which was yet another barrier to overcome. The nominated adults who were foster carers suggested an explicit plan for each young person placed in foster care, where education should be a priority alongside their well being. Something that stood out very clearly throughout the interviews was the fact that, according to the nominated adults, the young persons did not want to be treated differently from their peers. The majority of the nominated adults mentioned that it was important for young people placed in care to feel normal, and not to be separated from classmates and be put in a special group.

Young people placed in care have basically the same educational opportunities to higher education as other young people, according to many of the nominated adults. If they have had the opportunity to get good grades in compulsory school then there are no limitations, the pathways to higher education are the same.

Some of the foster parents, interviewed as nominated adults, say that they tried to involve the birth parents in the young persons’ live during the placement. The experience they have of the contact with the birth parents, usually the mother, was not very positive. It was meant to be supportive for the children but it was often more of a constraint, and having contact with their birth parent could add to the young persons’ feeling of failure. None of these parents were described as being supportive or really present in their children’s lives. It was more of an obligation for the young person rather than a need or longing for contact and relationship with the birth parent.

However, there are also other accounts of contact with birth parents. All three birth mothers who were nominated adults mentioned that they had followed the children through the placements, and taken an active interest in their doings. One of the mothers became sick and was in hospital, which interrupted her relationship with her child during that time.
Chapter 8: Youth interviews

Basic facts, lives now
In this chapter we present the results of in-depth interviews with the 33 young persons. Where suitable some information from the second interview is included. The sampling and methods used both in interviewing and analysing is described in chapter 4. Initially a brief overview is given of the life situation at the time of the interview followed by six themes (family of origin, placement, educational life, diagnoses, leisure time and hopes for the future) central for the understanding of the experiences of the group as well as hopes and aspirations for the future.

Age and gender
Among the young people interviewed there is a great preponderance of female participants; 24 girls and nine boys were interviewed. The median age was 19 years old. As shown in the table, three participants were over 22.

Table 8:1 Age of interviewed young people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnicity and citizenship
25 of the 33 young people were born in Sweden, and eight in another country. 19 young people had mothers who were born in Sweden, while 14 had mothers born in another country. Correspondingly, 18 fathers were born in Sweden and 14 in another country. One participant had no information on her fathers’ country of birth.

29 young people were Swedish citizens, two were citizens of another EU country, and two had permanent right to remain in Sweden, although they were not Swedish citizens.
**Children**
Only two young persons, both female, had children at the time of the screening interview. One mother was 21 years old, and her child was three months at the time of the interview. The other mother was 20, with a child of eight months.

**With whom/how did they live?**
Seven young people lived on their own, in their own apartment. One lived with a friend. 12 lived with a partner – boy/girlfriend, husband/wife. Eight were still living with their foster families. Two stayed with professionals/paid carers, and three lived with their birth family, or with members of the extended family. One was coded as “other” arrangements.

**Main activity during the day**
Eleven young people were engaged in full time education, and four in part time education. Eight were employed, and two were occupied with training or apprenticeship. Two were unemployed, and two were on sick leave. The two mothers were both on parental leave, as their children were still very young. Two young people were engaged in other activities, not applicable to categories used.

**Health problems**
28 (85 percent) had no health problems. Two had a physical disability, two had some kind of mental problems, and one had “other” kind of problems.

**Employment and financial situation**
As we could see earlier eight of the young persons were employed at the time of the screening interview. Two defined themselves as unemployed and looking for work.

In 2009 when the interviews were conducted the economic crisis had hit both Sweden as well as a huge part of the world. Even before that the youth unemployment rate was high compared to many European countries. In times of difficulties persons under the age of 25, together with other vulnerable groups, seem to lose their jobs first and have the most difficult situation (National Board of Health and Welfare 2010).

The Swedish welfare system is based on the so called work principle, meaning that in order to be fully eligible for receiving support you have to be a part of (or ex part of) the work force. For many young adults this becomes a problem.

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18 The figures include young persons studying but reporting a wish to work if it was possible. Thus comparisons are hard to make and the figures seems high.
As will be discussed later, many interviewees worry about their financial situation both in a general way and in a more daily and practical way. The general worry is about uncertainty if they will get a steady job and how things will turn out in the future. The daily worry circles around how they will meet their financial needs right now or in a near future. Many of the interviewed young persons have not yet entered the labour force but they all relate to doing it. The considerations, that some have, of whether to carry on at university or not, is influenced by a reluctance about borrowing money.

Being able to get a driver’s licence is yet another step into adulthood where some of the interviewees are facing difficulties. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

The young persons that were working at the time of the first interview were almost all employed within low skilled occupations such as telephone sales, shop assistants, construction work, cleaning, serving etc. The two exceptions are one man having quite recently started his own (small scale) business in farming and a girl employed as a preschool teacher. Most of the employed young men and women had a time-limited contract.

About one third has experience of doing extra work at weekends or holidays cleaning, serving at a café or restaurant, transportation, working in a warehouse or taking care of elderly people in institutions etc.

Like many other young people the ones in the study want to become financially independent. They feel it is important for them to get job experience and earn their own money. The ones who are working have tried different jobs and are in jobs with low wages. Few of the ones who are working now say that they will never go back to school for further education. They know and talk about the importance of further education and a degree and know that without it, it is difficult to get a good job and have a bright future. The nominated adults describe the young persons as strong-minded and hard working young adults so if they set their mind to something they will do it. The majority of the nominated adults say that the young persons have a positive attitude towards school and education, and they think that many of those who are working now will later on aim for further education, with or without support.

**Housing**

In Sweden, especially for young adults without a strong attachment to the work life, housing is often a problem. Even though a substantial part of the flats are rented the
queues are often long and a regular income is obligatory. To buy a flat is expensive and not something the young persons interviewed consider a possibility. Among Swedes aged 20 – 25 approximately 30 percent still lives at home with their parents. More young men do so than young women (35 percent of the men, 24 percent of the women). Young men with a foreign background or from the working class show the highest figures (44 percent and 43 percent respectively) while young women from a working class background show the lowest proportion. (figures for 2007, Swedish National Board of Youth Affairs 2009)

Of the 33 young persons interviewed, seven live on their own, in their own apartment. One lives with a friend. 12 live with a partner. Most of them either have their own or shared tenancy with a partner. Eight are still living with their foster families. Two stay with professionals/paid carers, and three live with their birth family, or with members of the extended family. One is coded as “other” arrangements. Of the seven living on their own six are girls and of the living with a partner all are girls. The eight young persons still living with the foster family were all 18 or 19 years old.

Compared to the whole youth population the number that still live with their (foster- or birth) family is the same, about one third. But on this issue we have to take into consideration that the population studied is significantly younger. Bearing in mind the sampling for the present study being “educational promise”, this means that the sample shows a higher degree of enrolment in upper secondary school and further education than the whole population of young persons placed in care. It is reasonable to say that we see a group that has left home earlier than their peers in the same situation.

As pointed out in chapter 1 in reference to Walther (2006) there is an increasing mismatch between “normal” young persons biographies and the institutional structures. The transition from youth to adulthood is, for young people in general, less linear than before and this raises some interesting questions in relation to the present study where the institutional structures are even more important, and, as we will see later in this report, mismatched.

Health
28 out of 33 (85 percent) young persons interviewed report no health problems. Two have a physical disability, two have some kind of mental problem, and one has “other” kinds of problems.
Partner/family of their own choice
Studying a group of young persons inevitably means that the experiences, wishes and ambitions related to entering into adulthood in terms of sexual relations, cohabitation and eventually forming some kind of family show a great variation. Some of our informants still live at home or with their (birth- or) foster family and are about to finish upper secondary while others have been working or studying at university for some time. They can be described as not yet having taken the first steps of transition to adulthood, even if it is something that occupies their minds a lot. And, of course, is a source of worry.

Own parenthood
At the time of the interview two young women (Beata and Isolde) quite recently had babies and were on parental leave. Another girl (Indra) was expecting and so was one boy (Anders). Another boy was expecting a child at the time of the second interview (Hasse). The new parents, or parents to be, were all living together with the other parent at the time. None of them describe the pregnancy as an "accident".

Being a parent of course has a great impact on your future plans in relation to, among other things, further education. Hasse (SE0501) tells that before the pregnancy he was planning to maybe change work or even go back to school but now he has to stay in the same job, even though it means being away from home and family for three nights a week. He and his girlfriend are also thinking about buying a house, which means he needs to work and have a steady income.

Relations to friends
Just like young people not placed in public care, the 33 young persons interviewed show a great variety when it comes to relations to friends. Some have many friends of long-standing while some are very lonely and do not have any friends at all. What might make this group differ from non-placed young persons in at least three aspects; bullying, repeated moving/breaking up and moving in with a friend’s family. The issue of bullying will be thoroughly discussed later in this chapter. Some of the 33 reported repeated replacements and relocations (also developed later in this chapter) that obviously affect peer relations greatly. Changing school and location inevitably means losing contact with friends, from school or other contexts, especially when you’re a child or in your early teens. Two of the young persons also report that they, either when taken from
their original home and family or when a foster placement broke down, were placed in the family of a friend and that family officially became a foster family.

**Contact with the criminal justice system**

Only one of the interviewed young persons reported a substantial criminal activity. John (SE0801) has spent most of his life in foster homes and residential care. He has been involved with a criminal gang and has several convictions for blackmail, assault and robbery. Apart from him, one girl and one boy have convictions (one each) for damaging property.
Julia's life history (SE0701)

Julia was born in 1987 in Asia. Her mother was 17 when Julia was born and four years later she and Julia move, with a Swedish man, to Sweden. Julia gets a sibling but the parents separate shortly after his birth. Julia’s mother meets a new man who is mentally instable. When Julia is 10 her mother abruptly leaves both children and the partner and returns to Asia. Julia is placed with her brother’s father who is a travelling salesman and single. He is often away from home and Julia becomes like a mother for her brother.

Julia liked school but had little support from her foster father. Her social worker visited regularly but Julia was afraid to speak out and feared being sent back if she did. She took the media programme at upper secondary, did not study very hard but passed all subjects. She got a lot of new friends and engaged in dancing and martial arts in her spare time. During her last year in upper secondary Julia’s foster father married a woman at the same age as Julia from Julia’s home country. Julia and her new “mother” did not get along at all and Julia left her foster father as soon as she had finished school.

Everything caught up with her when she broke with her foster family, had to live on her own and did not know what to do. She started partying and abusing drugs but managed to take almost a whole two-year course in sales and marketing. Some of her friends supported her and advised her to seek help, which Julia did.

At the first interview Julia tells us about a dream of becoming a social worker. She hesitates as she has a job cleaning and does not want to become a “poor student”. She still takes a great responsibility for her younger brother. She wants to do some training but is too tired when she comes home from work.

At the second interview, a year later, Julia has given up her social worker dream. She has a permanent cleaning job and her future plans now include moving to the countryside and having children.
The family of origin
In this subchapter we will present part of the young peoples own histories as told us. We have chosen to use six themes where related issues will be thoroughly discussed and “family of origin” seems to be a logical starting point. It will, in the same chapter be followed by placement(s), educational life, diagnoses, life outside school and, finally, hopes and aspirations.

siblings
29 of the interviewees have siblings; from one to seven of them. At least 13 of the young persons interviewed also have half siblings; either born in one of the parent’s previous relationships or in a later one, after the parents separated. For some of them a sibling is the most important person in their life, for others they’ve hardly met. It is worth mentioning that a number of informants have been forced, due to severe drug abuse or mental illness in the family of origin, to take responsibility and act like a parent for younger siblings. Having a close relationship to one or more siblings is something that many of the young persons point out as very important for them, but some grieve at having lost contact completely due, for example, to being separated into different foster homes.

The family of origin – structure and influence
Only six of the 33 interviewed young persons reported having contact with both their birth parents. Another 15 keep contact only with their birth mother and two only with the birth father. Nine do not have any contact at all with their birth family. The reasons for not having contact are manifold; some parents are dead (at least two mothers and one father), several fathers were not living with the mother when our informants were born or left the relationship early, and some of the young persons immigrated with other relatives and have lost touch with their birth family in their home countries.

It is also worth mentioning that some parents have severe problems with drug abuse and/or mental illnesses and three informants describe the relation as one sided – they support their mothers. Even though the picture is dark it is worth mentioning that the majority describes a good relationship to at least one of their birth parent.

The most common pattern in those young person’s stories about their birth families and early childhood is dysfunctional everyday life with young mothers with low education, most of them with a mental disorder and/or addicted to alcohol, medicines or other
drugs. 18 out of the 33 we interviewed had to take care of themselves before and after school: do the cooking, tidy up, and take on responsibility for sisters and brothers. And their mother! They always had to hurry home after school to make sure that the situation was under control and they could never invite friends to play in their homes. Simone’s mother was mentally ill but managed to hide it from most people. For Simone it meant that she had to become a parent in the family.

Sometimes she (the mother) was completely different, afraid of people and ... But she showed quite another side of herself when someone came by. Then she was easy-going and jolly. But she was really very scared, she didn’t dare to go shopping. I had to take care of that. (SE0110)

The mothers were often very young. Seven of them were between 15 and 20 years old when they gave birth to their first child and they had very little education. The fathers were absent in many cases, not mentioned at all or infrequently referred to during the interviews. In some other cases the birth father never had an active role in the life of the child, in other he could be found in the background or be more or less present during early childhood but not later on.

Kalle tells us how he feels about his father who suddenly left the family when Kalle and his siblings were small. After that, they haven’t met even though Kalle lived with his paternal grandparents. The father said he needed time to think and sort out his life.

*Have you tried to get in touch with him?*
Yes.
*What happened then?*
No ... he just says that it is too hard to him and that he feels that he needs more time ... and everything. And then he hangs up.
*What do you feel then?*
No ... I kind of lost my interest (laughing), I ...
*You have tried too many times.*
Yes. And it’s the same every time, and I really think, it is 12 years now, maybe more.
*Yes, that’s quite a time.*
So one thinks that he has got the time he needs. (SE0705)
A few of the young persons have had a god relation to a stepfather, often the father of siblings. More common is that several men had more or less destructive relations to the mothers and was seen as burdens and threats from the children’s point of view.

Camilla lived with her drug abusing mother and her new, also abusing, stepfather.

But one day I came home in the middle of a police raid. They had found a lot of stuff and were taking my mother and stepfather to ... the police station ... and my social ... sort of ... person, came to pick me up. (SE1001)

One of the fathers was single and fitted in the same pattern as the abusing mothers, unreliable and demanding. Three fathers were described as extremely controlling and aggressive and at the same time uninterested in their children, supervising at a distance.

Two single mothers were well educated and seemed to manage parenthood very well, but somehow lost control when their children became teenagers. Their girls were successful during the major part of compulsory school but dropped out at the end and got stuck in alcohol and drug abuse for some years. One of them is now studying at the university and the other plans to do the same in a year or two. She has gradually gathered all the competence she needs to apply for admission. Both see high education as a matter of course with their mothers as models.

Most of the young people describe themselves as being different. Besides being part of a dysfunctional family they were very often poor. Maybe they could hide how things were at home but it is hard to hide poverty. It shows in how you are dressed, what activities you can engage in and how modern and expensive your belongings are. The young persons told us a lot about bad experiences from poverty and lack of regularity in income. And even though the families had very little money, what they got was more often spent on alcohol or drugs than on food or clothes for the children. Not to have a car or to be able to leave home for holidays are some other markers for financial scarcity.

Many of the families depended upon the social services for their living. And even if the social workers could see the need for financial support they may have missed the children’s exposed position. Not having an “ordinary” family with caring and functional parents and a proper home becomes a burden and something that makes for example Simone feel different. That affected great parts of her early life and identity.
I have never belonged to a family. My mother wasn’t like that, as you say “family”. I took care of myself as well as I could. I wasn’t like doing it super but ... (SE0110)

The mothers were, when they really had to, good at showing themselves as caring and responsible, and the children helped, as most children do, to protect the only family they know of. It was hard for them to know what standard procedure was, as in their classmate’s homes, and what was out of the ordinary.

She was, for example, on her way somewhere and I was shut in ... in some wardrobe somewhere and had to stand there. M (older sister) was already gone by then. So I became claustrophobic, already as a child when I got phobia about elevators. I still don’t like that kind of spaces; they give me sort of panic. (SE1504)

Stories of frightening quarrels between parents, including stepparents, of violence, both psychological and physical, of sexual abuse and serious neglect also occurred in the material. If it went as far as physical violence it was probably the father who was the violent one but some young persons have felt physically and mentally threatened by both their parents. There is one case in the material of sexual violence towards a child. Samantha was sexually abused by her stepfather:

Then it got worse because I was sexually abused when I was ... 12 at the first time. I started to feel really bad then and began to cut myself and a lot more ... got a lot of trouble in school. I went there and kicked up a row and they sent me home, you know, so ... I shirked school a lot, did I. And I told nobody until I was 12 years old. (SE0407)

The young person’s health problems was something they said seriously had influence on their possibilities of education. They often experienced that their health did not get necessary attention since their home situation was so chaotic. Some young persons have showed their anxiety and bad mental and social health by cutting themselves. Others have been addicted to alcohol and other drugs, which sometimes have led to hard strains of different kinds to their bodies. Health problems with medication have sometimes led to dependency, sometimes unnoticed. As said before, children are god at hiding their problems in order to keep the family together.
We had remarkably many references to the feeling of being powerless against mental illness and drug abuse and to have a far too heavy responsibility for a child to manage. What they expressed most clearly was the frustration of not being seen or heard. They had tried hard to intervene in decisions about themselves and their brothers and sisters and were left with a sense of betrayal; invisible and without influence.

In some families the fact that the mother was mentally or, in a few cases physically, ill did put their children in an exposed and vulnerable position. The children have often taken the responsibility in the family, for themselves but also for their siblings and the mother, who needed lots of care and attention. This responsibility did greatly affect the child’s school life. They were worried about what was going on at home while away, they had difficulties in doing homework at evenings and getting support for doing it, they had to leave and pick up smaller siblings at school or day care, they could not bring friends home or be with them as much as they wanted because of all work and responsibility. It is obvious that their parents were not able to provide any support for the education. Some of the young persons have also experienced parents in prison or the death of one or two of their parents.

Some of the children lived, for god and for worse, in extended families with grandparents, aunts and uncles, half-brother and half-sisters. This family could be of great support but also be vague and confusing. When parents have died, became ill or had other problems some of the interviewees have been taken care of by relatives, for longer or shorter time, formally decided, so called kinship placement, or informally. For most of these young persons, the relatives are perceived as a positive context providing the young ones much support when in difficulties, but for some others the experience has been the opposite. Anders was introduced to narcotics by his uncle.

They used to shake hands in a strange way, I didn’t understand what it was, but then I peeked at what they move between their hands. And he let me have a small taste and, as it were, he didn’t care about how old I was. That was kind of stupid.

Yes. How old were you then, when you got to taste?

The first time I tried amphetamine I was about 14 I think. It was nasty. But then it felt nice for a while. So when I was 16 I started to use a needle and things.

But it was your uncle, who introduced you,

Yes, it was. (SE0404)
As a matter of fact most of the families were quite big. Only four of our interviewees had no brothers or sisters at all. The rest had often three or more siblings, some of them living with their mothers, others with their fathers in new families or with relatives. Sometimes all of them were placed in care together or, more often, in different foster homes. There were all kinds of solutions and the young persons we talked to often did not like the decisions the authorities had made.

**Vulnerability and exposure; feelings from within and without**

During the analyse process we coded the recorded and transcribed interviews in different ways. One way was to search for the young person’s feelings. We tried to listen and read “behind” the words and get clues from intonation, sighs, giggles, pauses and the context, to what they had felt at the related moment. The code we used the most was in Swedish *utsatthet*. Literary the word means to be or to feel put out, but in the texts it holds a lot of nuances. We had used the code “utsatthet” 230 times. In fact that was the most common code we used for marking a feeling in the interview transcriptions. We needed to get deeper into the expression and made new codings of that specific code. We found close to a hundred new nodes of which “the parents problems”, “the feeling of not being seen or listened to”, “problems with the foster families”, “moving a lot, rootlessness”, “physical violence”, “a feeling of being an outsider”, “too much responsibility” were the most used sources for the feeling of vulnerability and exposure.

**Vulnerability**

The biggest part of the interviews was about relations to the young person’s birth families and early childhood and the main expression in those could be translated to vulnerability. It could be an expression for a feeling of having ones living space threatened, of feeling frail and delicate in a violent surrounding. In that case vulnerability describes a feeling from within the child, often mixed with some guilt and shame.

**Exposure**

We also found utsatthet expressed as exposure, a feeling of standing alone without shelter and without opportunities to have an influence on what was going on. That is more of a feeling of “being left without”, and it sometimes raises some aggressiveness towards those who could have helped.
**Childhood life**

Together with the feeling of vulnerability and exposure in relation to the family of origin described above, there is a strong feeling of lack of support from the surrounding society. The young persons tell us how they experienced rejection or misunderstandings when seeking help. They often isolated themselves in silence because they didn’t trust that the adults around them would react in a respectful and correct way. They often perceived the societal support system as threatening and autocratic and ultimately felt completely lacking control over their own life situation. The uncertainty was hard to carry. Today they view their childhood and steps, or lack of steps, taken, in a redeeming light but they stress the fact that no child should ever have to experience what they did. They stress that it must be possible to develop help and support so that children in vulnerable or exposed positions feel seen, respected and participate in the decisions taken.

As an example, Julia came from a country in Asia to Sweden when she was four years old, together with her mother and a Swedish man, who was to be her stepfather. Julia got a brother within a year but the marriage did not last much longer. Julia and her mother lived by themselves for a short period, and then Julia’s mother remarried to a man with a mental disorder. Their family life became more and more chaotic. When Julia was 10 her mother returned to her home country, due to problems with her husband’s illness, without previous notice. Julia was placed with the first husband, the father of her brother, for the next eight years, and she disliked it all the time. He was a travelling salesman and left his six-year-old son and his home for Julia to take care of for days at a time. She had responsibility for everything in the household and she had to keep it a secret. He never really cared about her. When she moved out at 18 they lost almost all contact. Julia was not asked if she wanted to live with the man and even if she had a lot of complaints during the years to come, she never gave the show away. Social welfare carried out inspections of the placement twice a year and Julia never dared to tell them about the situation she and her brother were in. She thought that if she complained she would be sent back to her mother and her little brother would be left alone with his non-caring father. Now, as an adult, she knows that there could have been better alternatives for them both than to have to manage life without the support of a grown up. But whom could she trust?

Jesper describes his life as a long misery. When his mother met a new partner Jesper was in primary school. The new partner abused drugs, was mentally ill and battered both the mother and her children.
Do you remember what kind of connection you had with the social services during this mixed-up situation? Did you have a special social worker as your contact person?

Yes, I had. It started when we lived in H, I ran away from home when I was about 8 or 9 years old because he battered my mother a lot and made her use drugs. That was a hell of a sight, like. A lot of scary things happened, like

But what did the social services do?

Nothing.

Didn’t they know that …

Oh yes, they knew. So I guess they did nothing and then they placed me at a residential home. (SE0804)

Jesper is extremely disappointed that no one paid attention to the horrid situation he and his brother lived in. When the social services finally acted, after two years of very limited home based teaching in a home characterised by chaos and fear for his and his mother’s life, the children were in residential care. You cannot avoid noticing the bitterness Jesper feels in relation to the social services.

I mean, yes, you can say that they ruined my life totally. They dug my grave, they really did. But I did not fall into it! (SE0804)

In spite of his bitterness Jesper tells about his efforts to transform every meeting with the social services into something positive.

But you have the feeling that every time you come to a meeting you are so damned psyched up, because they … You always want to give them a varied and god image, see! That is to say, you want to be able to summarize yourself so that they know who they are talking to, so that you … (SE0804)

Samantha nourishes a wish that somebody would have attended to the situation she had and taken the parental responsibility the mother was not capable of taking.

If I had been able to live a normal life, like most Swedes probably do, but I don’t know what a normal life is like, I just know my own, you see. But I think it may have been much better then be-
cause I may have had more help from the very beginning, from home, like, and from school, if I had a parent who could get hold of and talk to school. When one is 13-14 years old one can’t go to school and say: I need help by this time, you have to help, it’s your responsibility, see! I really think that it would have been better.

*And your mother would have done that if she had been healthy?*

Mm, but she wasn’t. (SE0407)

Life was more than anything else unstable. As their parents (mothers) had low education and other difficulties to get their lives together, the families often had to change house or location or country many times. That meant new neighbourhoods, new preschools or schools and often other bad experiences of being out of place, not fitting in. The children very seldom knew why they had to move and some of them still find it difficult to attach to new friends. They became loners and several describe heavy experiences of bullying. But some of them, strangely to say, do not blame their classmates much or have especially hard feelings against them. They felt deviant and gave their friends the right to treat them accordingly. Some of the children had the same experience of rootlessness later on as foster children. They moved between foster homes and schools and never had the opportunity to be firmly established anywhere. Just a few stayed in the same place with their birth family or foster family.

Most young persons come from financially vulnerable families. None of them describes the same vulnerability during their placement in care. Many worry about how their future financial situation will be. Not getting a work after finishing upper secondary school is an anxiety shared by many and may lead to a reluctance towards borrowing money for further and higher education. In this sense the group studied differs from their peers not being placed in public care. The latter can probably to a much higher extent rely on support from the family, both in financial and practical ways, for further studies. As young adults many of the young person’s find themselves in an awkward situation; they are 18 or 19 years old and discharged from public care, but they are not old enough to receive adult support for further studies. The young persons describe the support systems as complicated and they have difficulties in finding persons to help them navigate in the support landscape. This also creates, or reinforces, the feeling of exposure.
The place of the family

Many of the young persons are still in contact with their birth parents but only eight of them meet or talk to their fathers. 22 have contact with their mothers and nine have no contact at all, in some cases due to the parent’s death. In many cases it is the young person who maintains contact with the parent and it has often the nature of care and help, as the parent is unwell or drug addicted. Just a few of the young persons have a feeling of support from their birth parents but sometimes they have very tight ties to their brothers and sisters. The siblings feel responsibility and take care of one another.

When it comes to foster parents the bonds are very strong between five of the young persons and their foster families. One of the foster fathers has not been formally responsible for a young woman for several years but they still talk to each other every day. For those young people it is quite natural to celebrate Christmas and birthdays together. They look forward to a joint future. Another 16 have contact, of varying quality, sometimes close and frequently, sometimes very seldom. Five of our interviewees have no contact at all with their foster families and none of the young persons with experiences from residential homes has kept in touch with someone from the staff there.

Parents’ background and social situation

The table below shows figures from the collected statistics, described earlier, and gives an overview of the socioeconomic status of parents whose children have been in care, compared to parents with no children in care. Figures from this table can be said to be consistent with the accounts from the interviews with the young people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic group</th>
<th>Not placed in care N=1 619 432</th>
<th>Placed in care N= 57 809</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOC I</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC II</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC III</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8:3 below gives an overview of what information the young people have given us in the interviews. When reading the table, one has to be aware of the fact that this information is given in the interviews, sometimes as added information to another question, therefore the information may not always be precise. In many cases, the young

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19 Definitions of “socioeconomic groups” have slightly varied over the decades. Basically, the following definitions are used: Group 1: All professional employees and entrepreneurs with a university degree. Group 2: Other employees and entrepreneurs. Group 3: Manual workers, unqualified employees.
people have stated that they do not know anything about their parents’ education, and sometimes have no information of their current profession. This is an extensive table, but still we think it provides useful and important information.

Table 8:3 Parents’ education and profession (BM= Birth mother, BF= Birth father, NI= No information, USS=Upper secondary school. “No support" = an explicit statement of no educational support)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BM education</th>
<th>BM profession</th>
<th>BF Education</th>
<th>BF profession</th>
<th>Support from parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational upper sec.</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Sec. school</td>
<td>Unskilled worker</td>
<td>No support. Discouraging attitude towards ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>Home-help service</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfinished voc. upper sec.</td>
<td>On permanent sick leave</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Doesn’t work. Deals drugs</td>
<td>Yes, great support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Catering assistant</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Welder, guard</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voc. upper sec.</td>
<td>Home-help service</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Support from mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voc. upper sec.</td>
<td>Assistant nurse</td>
<td>Sec. school</td>
<td>Criminal activities</td>
<td>Yes, support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Disablement pension</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Assistant nurse</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Welder</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sec. school</td>
<td>Cleaner. Now on permanent sick-leave</td>
<td>Sec. school</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sec. school</td>
<td>Shop assistant, now on permanent sick-leave</td>
<td>Sec. school</td>
<td>Sales-man, now on disablement pension</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Has never worked</td>
<td>Special school for mentally retarded</td>
<td>Sheltered employment</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Disablement pension, lives in nursing home due to alcohol abuse</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Disablement pension, lives in nursing home due to alcohol abuse</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Assistant nurse</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Car painter</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USS</td>
<td>Printer, computer business</td>
<td>Sec. school</td>
<td>Sheltered employment</td>
<td>Yes, support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USS</td>
<td>Assistant nurse</td>
<td>Voc. upper sec.</td>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sec. school</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Assistant at school</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Assistant nurse</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Yes, strong support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USS</td>
<td>Permanent sick-leave</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Permanent sick-leave</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sec. school</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>NI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The general picture is that of parents with low level of education. If they are employed, jobs are usually unqualified. In many cases parents are on sick-leave, permanently or temporary, or out of work. Four of the young people have reported support from parents. Two of these parents have university education, and two have exams from upper secondary school, which shows that the educational level of birth parents is connected to their attitude towards school in general, and also to their ability to encourage their children to achieve well at school. Two young persons told us about very discouraging attitudes from their birth parents. One of them said that she was always told how useless she was, that she never would accomplish anything at school, which she perceived as very difficult and painful at the time. (At the second interview she had started adult education, and was very happy to find she could be an achieving student). The other told us of a generally negative attitude towards education in her family of origin – education was seen as a waste of time.
Emelie’s life history (SE0802)

Emelie was born in 1990 as an only child. Her parents separated after a couple of years. The father had drug problems. Her mother had a qualified job and encouraged Emelie at school. Emelie was bullied at school from the age of 10 and placed in special schools. She describes herself as early developed and provocative and with relatively good self-confidence even though she was treated badly. She had a stormy teenage period with a lot of conflicts both at home and at school. Emelie’s mother was depressed and could not continue to work and died when Emelie was 15 and about to start her last year of secondary school. By this time Emelie’s father had a new family and two small children but he lived in an institution for drug abusers. Emelie was placed in foster care with a single woman and they developed a strong and positive relationship. Even though Emelie did not pass all compulsory subjects at secondary school she was accepted at an upper secondary school where she studied the hotel and restaurant programme.

She liked her new little family and did very well at upper secondary school and explains it by being seen and encouraged both by her mother, at school and by her foster mother. "They have believed in me, they certainly have". She is interested in acting and went to acting classes in her spare time during upper secondary.

She finished upper secondary in June 2009 with good grades and spent the following autumn working extra in a restaurant. She applied for other jobs but did not get one. In January 2010 she started a part time course in drama at university to see how she gets on at university. She likes it a lot. She continues to apply for work. Even though the placement has formally ended Emelie still lives with her foster mother and feels that she can continue to do so for a while. She wants an independent life but is in no hurry, she says, and she worries a lot about supporting herself financially. She has a boyfriend and goes to acting classes when she can afford it. She plans to continue at university but hesitates as she wants to work for a while first.
The placement(s)
After given an insight in the experiences of living in the families of origin, i.e. before being placed in society’s care, we will now approach how the young persons interviewed perceived being placed and living away from home – in foster care or in a residential home.

Placement history
The majority of the young people (20, which equals 64 percent) entered care between 11 and 15 years of age. The most frequent type of placement was non-kinship foster care; 18 young persons (56 percent). Four had been placed in residential care, and seven had experience of being placed both in foster care and residential care.

Table 8:4 Age at first placement in care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most young people (13) had only been placed in care once. Six had experienced two placements, seven three to four placements, and four young persons more than five placements. The national statistics from the cohorts 1967 – 1992 (n=2,108,745) show a different picture, where 43 percent were placed once, 20 percent twice, 12 percent three times, and 25 percent four times or more.

Table 8:5 Number of placements in care (all types of care)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of placements</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>3-4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No data</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A majority (25 young persons) left the last placement when they were 18 or 19 years old. 12 were still placed in care at the time of the first interview. Eight young people were still in foster care at the time of the interview.

**Placements and types of placement**

13 young persons have been placed just once. Ten were placed in a non-kinship foster family, one was at a residential home, two were placed with relatives; one of them with the grandparents, the other with his aunt and her family. It was their first and only placement. Most of the young persons have experiences from different placements. 15 have lived in two, three or four homes. Five of the young persons have been placed in foster families or residential homes five to eight times.

Some of the foster parents, interviewed as nominated adults, say that they had to build up a relation with the young persons from scratch when they were placed with them. Very often those young persons had not had the opportunity to be just a kid and learn how to trust an adult. The foster parents had to help them learn basic things like how to adjust to routines and build up a self-esteem.

**Relations to (former) foster family**

27 of the 33 informants have been placed at least partially in foster care, some of them with relatives. Out of these 27 young persons 21 report a good or very good contact with at least one of the foster parents. Sometimes this person is not from the most recent placement. Six young persons reported having no contact at all with any former foster carer. Eight of the informants still live in the foster home as they are still studying at upper secondary school.

The majority of the foster parents interviewed (11 out of 13) describes their relationship to the young person as very good. They are regularly in contact with them and they support them whenever they are in need of help. Many say that the young man or woman is part of the family; the young one is a family member and will stay so for the rest of their lives. They are their real family now and are involved in the young persons daily life and they do the kind of things that other parents do with their biological children.

One boy has had custody transferred from his biological mother to the foster family where he has spent 13 years of his life. Several others see their long-term foster family as their “real family” and have either no contact with the birth family or feel enriched by having two families that support them in different ways.
Three young persons in our sample have no contact with the birth family or the foster family (SE0110, SE0409, SE0701). Let us have a closer look at these young persons who at first glance lack support from adults in their lives.

Sandra’s parents are both dead, she has a history of drug abuse, both in the birth family, some foster homes (relatives) and of her own, and a series of less successful placements. Despite all this she managed to finish compulsory school and tried starting at upper secondary. In 2006 she met a man over the Internet and moved in with him 500 km away from where she spent the first 19 years of her life. At the second interview she describes herself as lonely: sitting alone without anything to do in a remote house. She wants to finish her upper secondary studies but sees many hindrances to doing it.

Elvira and her family immigrated to Sweden from the Balkans when Elvira was 13 years old. She spent a couple of years in one foster home and residential care. She initiated the placements herself because she did not get along with her parents. She never liked the foster family. For the last two years she has had a boyfriend that her parents cannot accept because he is from another Balkan country. She says that her boyfriend is her great support in life. She has no immediate plans to continue to study even though she recently finished the individual programme giving her the option of continuing to upper secondary level at, for example, folk high school. She dreams of becoming a social worker. One of the things that hinders her is her reluctance to get into debt.

Julia came to Sweden when she was four together with her mother and the mother’s new Swedish husband. After two upsetting separations and two more children the mother moved back to her home country and left Julia with her stepfather. He formally became foster carer. Julia had a hard time with him but was afraid of complaining for fear of being sent to her mother. After some time the stepfather remarried. His new wife was same age as Julia and his relationship with Julia ended. Julia does not know if her mother is alive and has no contact with the foster/step father. Julia has been drug free for a year. She dreams of becoming a social worker but hesitates to borrow money to go to university.

The same three girls could not name any adult that was important to them in relation to support for further studies.
Relations to (former) carers
No young persons in our study report keeping in touch with or receiving support from staff at former residential care units.

Child or teenager when placed in care
19 of the young persons we interviewed were 14 years or older when they were taken into care for the first time. Three were younger than six years and the rest, 15, were between six and 13 years old. Since children in Sweden are six years when they start school all but three had started school when they were placed in care and, in almost every case, had to break up for a new school. In the material we can establish the fact that the young persons have had adverse and harsh childhoods. The nominated adults very much confirmed what the young people told us. Not all of the nominated adults had detailed information about the birth families and the upbringing of the young persons, but many pointed out that our interviewees had gone through very hard times. This is the main reason for them being placed in care for longer or shorter time. But the experiences of vulnerability and exposure do not end when placed in foster- or residential care; the experiences live on within the young persons when it comes to feelings of marginalisation and being different. The problems within the family of origin remain in many cases, despite support from the social services, which brings a continued feeling of vulnerability and exposure. Being placed has for some of the young people meant a normalisation in terms of being compensated for the shortcomings during childhood. This foremost goes for the young people being placed when relatively young. For others the exposure and vulnerability remains in spite of the placement. Even if they do not experience social problems, ill health or deaths in the foster family or at residential care, some young persons describe having their integrity violated, unjust treatment or, what is most common, once again, being ignored or not being seen. Jessica tells.

If I was crying in my bed at night they yelled up through the stairs: “shut up, you are awakening the other girl”. (SE0109)

Even though the aim of the placement is to stop a destructive development and compensate the child for shortcomings in the family of origin, this is not always the case. Instead the child feels that the lack of attention and respect continues.

Foster carers/residential care workers educational qualifications and views on education
Few foster carers have an education beyond upper secondary school and the picture we got from the interviews of the part they had taken in supporting school work and a posi-
tive attitude towards education is divided. The nominated adults were chosen by the young people as someone who had supported their education and they all had a positive outlook on education. 13 of the nominated adults were foster carers (12 foster mothers and one foster father. Just a few of these nominated adults took university studies for granted. They knew that the young persons were without financial support other than study loans and that they had to pay rents and provide for themselves in other ways in the near future. Higher education, meaning beyond upper secondary school, is not what most of the nominated adults found necessary. However, they were aware of the fact that education of some sort is getting more and more important for young people, as the unemployment among the young is rising.

What do you think about school and educational programmes?

Yes in our opinion we see it as ... how to put it ... a matter of course may be a strong expression, but we see it as ... yes, it is a matter of course. One has to move further. One really has to. And especially those children have to break their family traditions; they shall take their A-levels and get themselves god jobs.

Okay.

And that is why we provide them with unqualified summer jobs, they rake leaves, clean up, do the dishes and such. And then we explain that that kind of jobs are what they get if they have no education. "You have to study or else you are never going to have another job. And you will have to live on social allowances and have a meaningless trainee job somewhere". (SE1504’s nominated adult)

Several accounts from the interviews concerning educational support from residential staff reveal a rather indifferent attitude. 11 interviewees have experience of being placed at a residential home, but only two appointed staff from residential homes as nominated adults.

One of our interviewees, John, was very upset when he told us of the attitude towards education at the private residential home where he was placed seven years, all through his adolescence.
How did you like Forest Hill (residential home)

It was a bloody awful shitty place.

What made it so awful?

Everything about school went down the drain; I missed a whole year there, 6th grade.

How come?

They didn’t want me to go to the school in the village, they wanted to start a school on site – and they did, but it took a whole year to get it started.

So you didn’t go to school for a year? But what did your case worker say – didn’t she react in any way? Did she accept this?

Yes, she did. (SE0801)

Another girl, who had done fairly well at school before she started using drugs and were placed at a residential home, told us how she, without any notice, were moved from one residential home to another, 500 km away, just before the final test for the spring term at upper secondary school. No one seemed to have paid any attention at all to the fact that she did not get any marks from this term. Two years later, when the first interview was performed, she was still trying to compensate, by attending adult education, for the disruption in her education that was caused by this changing of residential homes.

However, there are also other stories about education at residential homes. Jesper spent his three years of secondary school at a residential home, and to him school was the only positive factor in his life during this time. He was very unhappy at the residential home, but school, and the teachers there, was his haven, and he finished secondary school with a “pass” in all subjects.
Pekka's life history (SE0112)

Pekka was born in 1991 and his parents separated the same year. His mother had an ongoing alcohol abuse but manages to keep an unskilled job. Pekka spent his early childhood years with his mother. She was battered by her new partner and was in her turn battering Pekka. Pekka describes himself as “cheeky and angry” during this time.

When the staff at preschool discovered that Pekka had a broken arm, he was taken into care, placed with an aunt and saw a psychologist. He never understood why. After only a short time he was moved to a foster home where both foster parents worked in professions related to education and were very supportive. Pekka acquired three older siblings and describes the new family as an ideal, a family he could only dream of.

His early school years were turbulent, he started first grade in a small school for children with special needs while with the aunt. He repeated fourth grade and was then moved to an ordinary school. Pekka says that before the “normal” school and the “normal” peers he felt different and rowdy. Pekka was very active at secondary school (year 7-9), he became a peer helper and graduated with pass or high pass in all subjects. He led a “normal” teenage life, tried smoking and drinking but was happy when the foster parents reacted and showed that they care. He settled down very well with the new family and describes the foster parents as “the best possible”. He wishes that all foster children could have parents like them.

Pekka started upper secondary school and decided to take a programme that would help him to become a policeman or work with children and teenagers with special needs. He got good grades but was tired of studying in the end. In his spare time he sees friends, fixes a car, goes to the gym and spends a lot of time with the family. When he was 17 years custody was formally moved to the foster parents. He became their child. He says that it was not a big deal since he had felt like that for a long time. He sees his biological father sporadically and his mother very rarely.

At the second interview Pekka is about to finish upper secondary school, works extra as a “personal assistant”, lives in a cottage owned by his (foster) brother. He is happy with his life and plans to apply for university in a year or two.
Educational lives

Four young persons were still in upper secondary school at the time of the first interview. This is of course due to the age frame for the study; starting at the age of 18 which is an age when young men and women are "normally" doing the last year at upper secondary school. From those interviewed finishing compulsory school with basic qualifications seven had not (yet) continued their studies. We will have a closer look at this group later in this chapter. One young person was enrolled in the (compulsory) secondary school special programme for students who do not have enough qualifications for any of the programmes in the upper secondary school curricula. Three were studying at the local adult educational programme, to complete their qualifications – or compensate for the lack of such qualifications - from upper secondary school, and two were studying at university.

At the time of the follow up interviews six of these young persons had taken up their studies at a folk high school or in adult education. Another four had finished upper secondary school. At the time of the first interview two of the 33 young persons were studying at university. At the time of the second, about a year later, another five had entered university. Interestingly enough two of them are doing social work and two nursing. Six of the seven interviewees at university at the second interview are young women. Among the 33 young persons at the first interview more than half expressed a wish or ambition to study at university, at some stage in their life.

If we instead turn to the issue of degree acquired, it is possible to describe the sample in the following figure.

Figure 8:6 Number of young persons in relation to qualifications held. At first and second interview. (USS =upper secondary school)
At the time of the first interview 29 young persons had finished compulsory school with grades in at least Swedish, English and Maths (the basic requirements for applying for upper secondary education). 19 did it “on time”, i.e. at the age of 16 when most young people complete 9th grade. Of these 19 young men and women 12 had (also) finished upper secondary education with grades. The others were either still doing their upper secondary, working, being on parental leave etc. (one was still at struggling with compulsory school). Two young women were studying at university.

At interview two, another four had completed upper secondary and another five had started university. Six young persons were in other kinds of education (adult education or at folk high school) trying to obtain certificate from upper secondary school.

Even though only seven are studying at university many of the others have the ambition to get a higher degree later on in life. They know the importance of higher education but they postpone it in order to obtain work experience. Other obstacles that are mentioned in the young person’s path to higher education are learning disabilities, difficulties in concentrating and lack of support. The experience of the nominated adults interviewed is that there is not enough support from school for those who find it difficult to go beyond upper secondary school. In order for them to receive the needed support from the educational system or authorities they have to struggle hard, and there is no guarantee of receiving support. In such cases the obstacles have become too great to overcome which leaves them with no other choice than get a job and put aside their educational plans. The alternatives are few and there is a lack of flexibility for different solutions that enable higher education after upper secondary school according to some nominated adults.

Another factor, which can be a reason not to study beyond upper secondary school, is the financial aspect. Even though every person in Sweden can receive study loans from the Swedish study loan agency some see it as a burden instead of an opportunity. Some of the nominated adults mentioned that the young person, even though knowing the importance of a degree to finding a good job, wanted to earn their own money first rather than being stuck with study loans and not having any job experience.
Educational pathways
From the analysis in the previous section four different groups or pathways can be identified:

The first pathway we might call *early interruption*. In this small group we find three young persons; one man and two women, who have not (yet) managed to finish their compulsory education. They were all placed at the age of 15 and all three report having long periods (more than three months) of absence from school. Two of them have health problems. Two were born in another country than Sweden. (The inclusion of this group may be discussed and with other criteria for participation in the study this would have been left out.)

The second pathway, *detour or delayed*, is represented by seven young persons; four males and three females who have finished compulsory school with basic qualifications but, for different reasons, have not (yet) continued to upper secondary. Some of them are working, some are unemployed at yet some are on parental leave (see above). Most of the have been placed four or five times (a range from one to six) and five report long periods of absence from compulsory school. They were all born in Sweden and two of them were placed before starting school.

The third pathway, *coming back*, is characterised by having dropped out from upper secondary school (or never started) but later taken up their studies again at adult education or folk high school. In this group we find eight young persons: two males and six females. The number of placements is lower for this group; they have “only” been placed one, two or three times (mean: 2). Only one of these reports long periods of absence from compulsory school.

The fourth and last pathway we call the *straight way*. Here we find 15 young persons, two males and 13 females. They have all finished compulsory school and upper secondary without major interruptions, some are presently at university, others can apply. Eight of them were only placed once, the others two to four times. Two were placed before starting school and, quite surprisingly, seven, almost half the group had more than three months out of school. No one reports health problems. 13 out of the 24 girls in our sample can be found in this group. 12 were placed in foster care (not kinship).

The four pathways/groups can be summarised in the figure below.
Figure 8:7 Pathway/group in relation to gender, nr of placements, school absence, age at 1st placement and health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway</th>
<th>Nr</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Nr of placements</th>
<th>School absence over 3 months</th>
<th>Age at first placement</th>
<th>Health problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early interruption</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-8 (mean 3, median 1)</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-6 (mean 4, median 4)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0-16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming back</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1-3 (mean 2, median 2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10-16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight way</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1-4 (mean 2, median 1)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0-16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note that this is an analysis drawn from our relative small sample, put together using special criteria in order to study a group of so called educational promises. The conclusions above are not valid for the whole group of young people placed in care but only for the group studied.

There seems, in our sample, to be a connection between the number of placements and the possibilities and aspirations for further or higher education. The young persons on the straight way have mostly been placed in care only once while the delayed pathway is characterised by several placements and replacements. Drawing also on the stories told by the young persons it is reasonable to state that the chances of education increases if she or he can be spared painful separations, relocations and changes of schools.

While half of the young men can be found on the coming back- or straight line pathways, four fifths of the young women are found there. There seems to be a gender issue. The young women seem to do better in terms of education. In general girls in Sweden tend to apply for higher education to higher extent than boys at the same age. A report from the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education shows that 62 percent of the applicants for university studies for the autumn of 2010 are women (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2010).

Another issue that need to be addressed is the reported health problems and their influence on educational pathways. For the young persons in our sample having health problems seriously influences the possibilities of education. As we will see later in this report it seems to be a serious hindrance in achieving educational goal. This is extra obvious when the problems are not recognised or dealt with properly.
Educational in different forms of schools
According to the information collected from the screening interviews 29 young persons went to mainstream secondary school, one to an on-site school, and two went to both main stream and on-site school. One had another kind of secondary school experience. At the time of the second interview the young persons are 19-24 years and seven of them have started university studies; six are taking a programme leading to both academic and professional qualifications (social work, nursing, teaching and composing), one is trying to take a part time course to see if she likes it and if it suits her.

Even though a "straight line" is sketched above, the life histories of the young people interviewed do not always follow it. If you, for different reasons, are not able to complete compulsory school at the age of 16 (or 17 after repeating a year) the so-called individual programme offers a possibility to gain basic qualifications. All seven young persons failing to complete compulsory school attended the individual programme, some of them only for a short period when they took the qualification missing at the same time as they started a upper secondary programme, and some for a longer time just in order to gain the qualifications missing.

One girl tells the story of not having the qualifications for entering upper secondary, being enrolled formally at the individual programme, but after only a couple of weeks being transferred to a regular programme. Other young persons tell similar stories of "solutions" for the individual and not always following the formal pathways.

The possibilities offered by the Swedish educational system of “coming back” after a period of difficulties should not be underestimated; adult education (Komvux, Folk high schools) and vocational training has the function of building bridges for many of the young persons interviewed. The possibility of not always following the “straight line”, becoming a parent, work for a while etc., and then come back on the educational track is crucial in this sense. We also have to mention that many of the young persons combine part time work with part time studies in order to “do both”; have the security of an income and still strive to increase the educational achievements.

It must be noted that several changes have been made, and are planned, in the Swedish educational system during recent years; the possibility to enter adult education has been limited, the criteria for entering university have been changed in order to encourage young adults to go directly from upper secondary to university, and make it
more difficult to choose other pathways. Another major proposal is the division of upper secondary programmes into either giving qualifications to continue to university, or being vocational. This is a quite a dramatic change since the policy up to 2010 has been that all upper secondary programmes shall give basic qualifications for higher education. Instead of having passed in three basic subjects it will in the future be necessary to have passed these three and another nine (for academic programmes) or five (for vocational programmes) subjects. (Swedish National Agency for Education 2010b)

These changes of Swedish educational policy will probably make it even more difficult for young persons in an exposed and vulnerable situation, and not being properly compensated for this, both to access upper secondary education, to get a second chance through for example adult education and, in the end, reach higher or further education.

Girls are statistically overrepresented both in relation to good school achievements and application to university studies (and in reporting ill health or stress at school). 62 percent of the applicants for university studies in the autumn of 2010 were women, 38 percent men. Even though some areas, like economics and theology, show quite an even proportion of men and women, the gender division is strong in others; when it comes to nursing, social work or teaching the women are approximately 85 percent (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2010). These national statistics are similar to the results from the figures reported in chapter 5.

Absence from school
Almost half (15 out of 33 or 45 percent) of the young persons reported being out of compulsory school for more than three months. Six of them had an absence lasting for more than 12 months. The reasons for these long periods of absence vary. Two were absent due to sickness, six because of family problems, two on their own initiative, one on account of change of placement, and four for other reasons. One was an asylum seeker and had been absent from school due to this. Jesper describes a terrible home situation with both mental illness, drug abuse and violence, which made him unable to meet the demands from school. He was eight when his two-year absence started. He received home tutoring twice a week and spent almost all his time at home - at home in a highly dysfunctional home. When asked if any measures were taken to get him back to school Jesper replies “No”.

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In the Swedish Education Act, Chapter 3, section 1, it is stated that: "Children resident within the country are subject to compulsory schooling” and that "the obligation to attend compulsory school is linked to a right to receive education in the national school system for children and young persons” (our trans.). Given the high proportion of long periods of absence reported, without receiving, or just receiving a minimum of, compulsory education, it is in place to raise the question whether the law is actually followed.

**Number of schools attended**

Normally pupils change school once or twice during compulsory school but this of course depends on how school is organised in the community and of, for example, the family moving, separations etc.

The table below shows that quite a few of the young persons interviewed have experiences of frequent changing of schools. Nine have experienced a change of school four times, four have changed five times, and another four had changed school six times. Four young persons have experienced seven or eight changes of schools!

Table 8:8 Number of schools attended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of schools</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Jesper, who told us about an absence lasting for two years above, the changes have become many. He, quite ironically, says: “I think I’ve attended every school in G-town”.

The life history of Jesper is an odyssey through misery and abuse. He attended a number of different schools before he, at the age of 12, was placed in residential care for four years. He managed to get basic qualifications from compulsory school at the residential care and has made several tries starting upper secondary but of course he has great gaps in knowledge, still has a highly dysfunctional birth family. Society, through the social
services, has not been able to compensate him for the traumas of his life and the shortcomings of his family.

School experiences
In this section the main focus will be on experiences during compulsory schooling, i.e. the age of seven to 16. The table below shows satisfaction score with school achievements, relationship with other pupils and with teachers, and satisfaction with school in general. The 33 young persons interviewed had answered these questions. Results from the table shows that the relationship, both with pupils and with teachers were slightly more highly valued than satisfaction with school achievements.

Table 8:9 Satisfaction score (Range 1–10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfaction score school achievements</th>
<th>Satisfaction score relationship other pupils</th>
<th>Satisfaction score relationship with teachers</th>
<th>Satisfaction score school general</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5,9</td>
<td>7,3</td>
<td>6,8</td>
<td>6,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>1-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that, out of the eleven young persons reporting high scores (8-10) of satisfaction with teachers, all except one have, or have plans to, continue their education. This can be interpreted as supporting the hypothesis that if teachers succeed in creating or strengthening a learning identity this pays off in form of plans for further education. This is emphasised and developed in the interviews. A positive experience shared by many is having one or a couple of teachers or other school staff (such as after school recreation staff, nurse etc) to confide in and create a supportive relation to. The young persons are being seen, have someone to share their experiences from home or school with, and feel support and encouragement. The ones that have had a personal assistant (due to social or neuropsychiatric problems) or have attended a smaller group for different reasons generally describe the creation of a close relationship to an adult in that way, a relationship very important to the young person.

Then … I got, well, a very good assistant called Eve who helped me very much. And it was almost a personal relation between us, because we read everything in a separate room on the side,
and we practice a lot of role-plays and skip and things like that.
(SE1504)

The young persons interviewed also describe school as an important arena to get and be together with friends. Also in this sense school becomes an asylum or a safe haven, a place where they can be seen and get attention.

I felt at home at school, because they were great pals and a lot, I really was. So I liked that. (SE0407)

Indra, who suffered severe bullying during almost her entire schooldays, says that the friends at school counterweighted that suffering.

And I thought it was tough to go to school, even if I longed there, because I had so many friends too. And I longed for them, even if there was something mean there, I still had the friends. (SE0103)

Together with the experiences of being capable, that will be discussed later in this chapter another positive experience can be seen in the empirical material, namely to experience a sense of being seen. Several young persons describe a mentor (class teacher), an assistant, a teacher or someone else within school that, sometimes outside their ordinary responsibilities, saw her or him. Both Camilla and Indra emphasises the importance of that person having knowledge of their home situation.

I had Esther, my mentor. We had her from sixth to ninth grade and came to lot of meetings with the social services and everything. She knew everything about mum and things, so she was always this, she helped me with maths when I needed, and so on. She was always there. So a lot of things are thanks to her too. ‘Cos she said kind of that I’m, kind of, one of the strongest persons she’d seen. She would never have made it it through things like I ... So she was actually a massive support. (SE1001)

When I was at junior level I had a teacher that I became good friends with. She knew everything, how my family was put together, because she knew my mum from way back and other foster children she’s had. (SE0103)

Hasse received great support from the school nurse during a very turbulent time in his life.

It was when I lived here in G-town, I had the school nurse. I don’t know how it started but I came to talk to her, a little, like ... Then I think she started to understand that there was something in my life, that it wasn’t working, that dad was never at home and I had a lot of freedom. I was never at school, she was the only one that noticed. [...] So, at the end, when I needed to talk, I went to see
Another, this time a negative, pattern from analysing the interviews concern experiences of bullying and fear. Eight of the 33 interviewed young persons had experienced bullying and at least part of their school years have been characterised by physical and/or psychological violence and fear. They tell stories of how adults have not been able to handle the bullying or sometimes acted in the wrong way, either by ignoring the situation or, as in one case, moving the exposed girl to another school and letting the perpetrators stay.

Louise tells above how much she liked school even though the days were characterised by exposure and fear. For her the home was an even worse place to be and she was fortunate to have some very close friends at school who always stood at her side. Louise describes a very exposed and vulnerable situation in school. She does not say that she was bullied but she was definitely lonely and not treated well by peers. When asked if she had a best friend at school, she tells.

Well... there weren’t any friends at all, but I guess there were periods with some, and some ... Then you weren’t good enough and you became like 24th reserve and that’s the way it was. [...] But I’ve had a really hard time getting friends, I still have, kind of. (SE1002)

Fear of one or more teachers, threats and bullying from peers and general discomfort are related areas. Even though it can’t always be described as bullying some of the young persons describe a situation where they don’t feel safe and well treated. In the background a very unstable home situation, many moves between home and placements in foster home or institution have led to repeated changes of schools and a very uncertain situation.

When I started seventh grade, then ... It was like then I started to skip classes because you didn’t get any help. You didn’t get the
help you needed. And then I was like, I didn’t dare to read aloud because I thought “What if someone laughs at me?” So I didn’t give a damn about homework. I always made the Swedish homework, because they could help me at home, but the English I couldn’t get any help with. And since it was so hard and ... So I didn’t give a damn. (SE0407)

Summarising this sub section it is worth noticing, again, the skewness of the sample. The 33 young persons have been selected for the study because they are showing what was called educational promise. The results are not valid for the whole group of young people in public care. Bearing this in mind the importance of being seen by one, or more, adults at school is central in the young persons accounts. Generally they score satisfaction with teachers higher than satisfaction with school in general. We will later in this report discuss facilitators for higher education, and this is definitely one of the most important.

Support for school attendance/non attendance
The issue of receiving support at school or with homework is addressed in a quantified way in chapter five. In the interviews strikingly many young persons describe something positive when talking of compulsory school. For most of them the stories contain a feeling of being able, being smart or “everything coming easy to them”. Some describe a good memory and that they achieve at school because of that, others that one or two subjects really interest them and make them feel clever and capable. Many also describe hearing from their teachers that they are gifted and intelligent which helps creating a positive self-image and a positive attitude towards school. A great part of the young persons express such a positive attitude, at least during part of their compulsory schooling. This feeling must be characterised as one factor supporting school attendance and motivation.

The possibility of getting back on track or having a second chance after a period of absence for different reasons is taken as a grant for having talent. Strikingly many of the young persons describe such occasions when they, after sometimes a longer period of mental or physical absence, could get back on track and catch up when their life situation changed for the better. For this group of utsatta (exposed and vulnerable) young persons this possibility should not be underestimated. Without it many of them would probably not have continued their educational career the way the now are. Pekka, whose life history introduced this chapter tells:
So I could repeat one year, because I was a little bit behind. So I started, when I was eleven I started fourth grade. And since then it’s worked really well. The whole schooling has been... I caught up everything in, I don’t know, maybe half a year, I caught up with everything, I was among the best at maths and a lot of things. (SE0112)

Eva, whose mother was mentally ill, kept the children at home for half a year to have company. Eva missed almost all classes and failed all subjects the first term of ninth grade. When her mother seriously injured herself Eva was placed with her stepfather:

When I finished second term of ninth grade I had all high passes, in one term I caught it all up. Yes, that was an improvement. Well... it’s never been because of school that I’ve stayed at home, it isn’t that... (SE0108)

Indra has had a strong support from home, especially from her foster mother:

I always sat at the kitchen table doing my homework, but she was always around. She could cook at the same time as we did the homework, and if I needed help she always helped. She’s said that school is the most important. School comes first, and is most important, you always have to do a homework, then you can play. Some schoolwork first, then play. (SE0103)

Many young persons above mentioned the importance of being seen. The opposite is equally important, but in a negative sense; some mediate a feeling of *not being seen*. They might have a very difficult situation at home but feel that there is no adult in school who can listen to him or her and try to imagine how his or her life is. They might also describe having what can be understood as a unwanted or deviant behaviour used to show that the young person had a miserable situation or felt bad. Several young men and women describe their fighting, acting out or destructive behaviour as a “call for help” but they feel that nobody listens or sees him or her or the need for help. We see a very strong, sometimes desperate, wish to be seen and a corresponding disappointment when it does not happen.

But then it got worse since I was abused when I was ... 12 the first time. Then I started to feel really bad, I started cutting myself and a lot. I had lots of problems at school, I went and then I fought and then I was sent home, kind of... So... Skipped a lot of classes, I did. I didn’t tell anyone until I was 14. It’s school that has suffered
very much but I feel like, people should be able to see it anyway, you shouldn’t have to tell, but that’s not how it works... (SE0407)

I kind of cut my wrist to get help, not to kill myself but as a scream for help. Really. But there was no one who saw it. “Hello, help me!” and it was “Oh God, she doesn’t feel well”. But there were still no... The only thing they did was to test. I had to go to an old man who tested if I had ADHD, kind of. But I didn’t, I just felt very, very bad because I didn’t get any help. (SE0802)

In Emelie’s case school finally managed to hear her calls for help but responded quite awkwardly and tested her for a neuropsychiatric diagnosis. To get the “wrong” attention and not getting met and listened to intensified her feeling of hopelessness and loneliness. Categorising deviant behaviour, at school or at home, as an individual and neuropsychiatric problem is not uncommon in the Swedish discourse during the first decade of the 2000’s. This risks getting in the way of seeing problems at home or at school. Problems that are considerably harder to observe and, above all, to handle.

For yet some young persons their social situation at home completely dominate the image given to the surrounding context. School and schoolwork is almost forgotten when the home situation is so chaotic that the young person is being placed in care. By not connecting the home, the child and the school situation you risk not getting a correct picture and, of course, jeopardise the success of the steps taken. Asta tells that no one has paid any attention to her schooling even though she has been placed in care several times.

No, they’ve focused on, kind of, keeping me alive, so to say. (SE0201)

Even if school, as could be observed above, was seen as an asylum and was positive for the young person, some of them say that they have not been able to concentrate to that extent they wanted because of a problematic situation at home. Fia tells:

Because I don’t think it was because I didn’t want to study, it was only that there were such a bloody lot of things spinning in my life that made it impossible. (SE1102)

For some, a positive attitude towards school is related to the difficulties at home, and school becomes a positive counterweight, a part of their life where they could be seen and treated as “normal” pupils. For some, a positive attitude to school is related to a difficult social situation at home and compulsory school became a positive counter weight. A part of life where the young person could feel “normal” and attended to.
*How come that it turned, do you think?*

I think it’s because I got ... I had a real schooling, I could be with normal, attend a normal school, have normal classes and see normal friends. (SE0112)

It was great, it was great to be at school... Sometimes I didn’t want to go home, it was so fun. (SE0409)

In this section most experiences accounted for are from compulsory school. It is striking that most young persons interviewed who got on badly in compulsory school, did much better and felt more at home at upper secondary, if they continued their studies.

**Educational qualifications gained at 16 and post compulsory**

Five of the 33 young persons had no school leaving qualifications at the time of the screening interview. 22 of those 28 who had qualifications, had passed all the vital exams from secondary school. Four had a qualification from the individual programme (IV), and one from the local adult education. The pathways, based on a process rather than a snapshot, are described in the figure earlier in this chapter.

22 young people have completed upper secondary school but with varying qualifications and not always enough to provide entrance to university. The data collected is not enough to present any exact figures on qualifications gained from upper secondary school.

**Values about education and learning – influences**

Surprisingly many of the young persons interviewed describe themselves as good at school, smart, talented or in other positive terms. Their educational identity is strong and positive. During the interviews a number of engaged and positive stories have been told of experiences of being a capable and learning person. This will also be further developed in chapter 10 in relation to supportive factors.

Well, during my last years of compulsory school I never studied (laughter). It just flowed on and the teachers liked me. I’m well informed, kind of, and I’ve had a lot from my mum. Already when we were very young she started... We’ve talked a lot, like social studies have never been a problem. (SE1102)

Maths, I remember went fucking well. I was kind of top of my class. My maths teacher was really impressed. (SE0302)
Jessica has, during her entire school years, heard that she stands out in relation to her schoolmates when it comes to talent. She creates a self-image, and is given one by others, as different. This differentness also makes her a constant victim of bullying from the schoolmates. The talk by the teachers of her as special, surely in orders to encourage her, was, by the schoolmates, turned into bullying.

*And they kind of believed in you, that you can, or?*

Yes, and it doesn’t matter really, what teacher I’ve felt close to or that I felt cared, but it feel like a standing thing between all teachers I’ve ever had, and they’ve talked to my mum too, and told me that “Jessica is in front of everyone, she’s outstanding, she’s come further than all the other children”. (SE0109)

For some young persons the parent(s) become a hindrance in focusing on school.

It always came easy to me at school. I’ve never had any problems at school but mum was more like … She wanted to keep us at home, she wanted company. So it was more like “Oh, you’re a little warm today – maybe you should stay at home and …” (SE0108)

Even though the mother did not encourage her to go to school or do her home work, Eva managed to develop a strong learning identity.

I was a quick learner. ‘Cos mum … The ones that learn earlier they’ve had parents to teach them but mum has never been like that. I’ve never had any help with my schoolwork. I’ve always managed on my own. Well, yes. And when I was little, at compulsory school, when I had homework I always finished them really quickly, then I asked for more homework. It was always like that.

[…]

I’ve always liked school, thought it was fun and … I don’t know if it was in second grade but the teacher suggested that I should skip a grade ‘cos I was so far ahead of all the rest but … (SE0108)

Eva, who at the time of the second interview is half way through her university studies, explains one of her strong driving forces as a kind of revenge on her background. She does not want to become like her mother.

No, I don’t want to be like that. I will make it. I will find a good job. Maybe that’s always been there. Or maybe not when I was smaller, then it was more “I’ll show that I’m better”. (SE0108)

Beata, who is not doing as well as Eva when it comes to education, describes a similar driving force:
Just because I wanted to show my parents and everyone else that I can actually manage. I can finish school and ... I'm going to struggle as much as possible to show them that I can actually do it. (SE0104)

**Plans for continued education**
23 had, at the time of the screening interview, plans to continue in education. Eight planned for a university degree, two for a vocational programme, eight for local adult education and nine young persons had other plans. At the time of the second interview the numbers had changed slightly. Five that were expressing such ambitions at the first interview had changed their plans and answered no, mainly due to being in the process of creating a new family or getting established on the labour market. Three young persons who answered no the first time had changed to a yes (seven could not be reached).

If we take a closer look at the group of seven that are at university some traits can be found in looking at their background. All except one finished both compulsory and secondary school “in time”, i.e. at the age of 16 and 19 respectively, and they could all except one nominate an adult for the research team to interview. They were also all born in Sweden by a Swedish mother. The one that does not fit this pattern is Amita (SE1501), who managed against all odds and whose life is described in one of the short life histories.

**Being myself – being my diagnosis**
Since the 1990’s there has been an increasing trend in Sweden (and in other countries) to explain social problems, like small childrens unrest at school, as caused by individual traits and sometimes by using neuropsychiatric diagnoses like ADHD, Autism, Aspergers syndrome or burnout (Hallberg (ed) 2006). The trend has been, and is being, debated both in relation to epistemological issues as well as routes for action. Still, it is possible to say that dealing with neuropsychiatric diagnoses and vocabulary has become part of the everyday work at schools and within the child protection area. And, of course, a part of many young persons, and their families, lives.

Being categorised as having for example ADHD, irrespective of if it is a medical and formal diagnosis or not, has a great impact on how you perceive yourself, and how you are perceived by your surroundings. As an individual, or family, it can also give access to a variety of support, from medical to educational or social.
The number of pupils registered for special education has increased dramatically since the mid 1990’s and can be explained both by a lack of resources, a widened spectra as well as increased diagnosing of neuropsychiatric disorders and a new view on education where the demands for individual efforts and motivation are put higher. This development has not favoured the group of children with a difficult social situation. Even if it is possible to be enrolled in special education and stay integrated in your class, most of these pupils (about 80 percent) are placed in smaller groups and the aim of integration and giving an equal education to all young persons is being jeopardised. (Swedish National Agency of Education 2005)

Nine of the interviewed 33 young persons talk about, and relate to, diagnoses. Some of the diagnoses mentioned are dyscalculia or concentration difficulties but mainly ADHD and Aspergers syndrome. Some of them have been assessed by a child psychiatrist with the clear aim to see if they could be diagnosed. Some of these got the diagnosis, yet others refused assessment. Chanel (SE0102) describes how angry and frustrated she was that no one noticed that she “did not feel alright”. In the interview she tells how people around her tried to get her diagnosed with ADHD but she refused to see a doctor for such an examination/test.

The young persons that have, or have had, a diagnosis are forced to negotiate their identity. In this negotiation one of the positions means defining yourself as being “normal”, another having problems and not feeling alright but being seen for that and yet another being, and living, the diagnosis. Rita shows a reluctance to identify herself as a person having ADHD.

Well, I was diagnosed with ADHD when I was 15 but ... I'll re-do it because you say that about ... Say that the test consists of 23 parts, I did four part. Out of the whole thing. So I’ll do a new, it didn’t work that well at the child psychiatric clinic in M-town at that time... (SE0303)

Also John talks about the criteria for getting the diagnosis and his ambivalence towards it:

I met some criteria but not all. Since then there hasn’t been any problems at all actually. (SE0801)

After a couple of years he was tested again and the diagnosis removed. But, just as some other young men and women, John also acknowledges that being diagnosed is connected
to certain forms of support that you would not get otherwise. John could be transferred to a small specialised school and for both Louise and Fabian it meant that they could attend, and finish with qualifications equivalent to those from a stream line, upper secondary school.

The issue of advantages and increased support that comes from being diagnosed is yet something the young persons interviewed have to relate to and deal with. When we meet Louise she has just finished upper secondary school. She has attended a programme specially designed for pupils with Aspergers syndrome and was the first ever at that programme to manage to pass with the points/qualifications acquired in a “normal” programme. She was diagnosed with ADHD when she was five years old and Aspergers syndrome at 13. She medicated from the age of five until she was eleven when she refused to take any more pills. Since second grade she has had support in form of special classes or schools and specialised after school recreation centre activities. During the ten years since starting to receive the extra support she has had both good and bad experiences of it. Even though she thinks her ADHD is “fading away” during some passages of the interview she talks about herself as if being the diagnosis.

You can explain why you act like you do in some situations, ‘Cos sometimes it gets wrong even if I feel that I’ve come quite far with my, whatdumacallit, processing, my diagnoses, still things happen that I can’t be blamed for. And then, not to blame the diagnoses, but to give a, yes, there is something behind this, kind of. I don’t want to be mean, but I am, whatever it can be. (SE1002)

But I didn’t really get it then. Quite. That it was like that, but I can see it now... But it’s very much because of me kind of: Or, Yes, because of my diagnoses, kind of, but I feel ... Yes. Uhm. (SE1002)

She has felt and, lived, the disadvantages of having a diagnosis and being identified with it but has later come to view it as something that has helped her in achieving her goals:

*What has Asperger kind of meant for you?*

Well, in the beginning it was more like a label, like “idiot” on your forehead, kind of ... I’ve got ADHD as well, I got it when I was five, so then I felt that “God, give me some more diagnoses, come on!” But now I can see that it has helped me a lot, having these diagnoses. Otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to attend [the special upper secondary school]. And that ... I’m so awfully happy that I was accepted and could go there for three years. (SE1002)
Even if it can be hard in the beginning, I think most people are happy of actually getting the diagnosis, ‘cos it can help you so much in life, kind of. (SE1002)

Louise’s mother has been very active in getting Louise diagnosed:
She was really… “Oh, you have to take courses and bla bla bla to learn about the diagnoses”, because they didn’t have a clue. So she’s been really active and ran to meetings and, is a member of an awful lot of organisations and things. She’s really engaged in me, and so on. So it feels quite good. ‘Cos I think, if your parents are not understanding...

It must be harder...

Exactly. And dad he’s also, I mean, he doesn’t just sit at home. He goes to meetings too but mum is really like she’s really pushing the teachers to go to lectures and ... She brought brochures and stuff to ... (SE1002)

Louise describes that she, because of her difficulties, especially at school, has doubted in her possibilities of finishing school and getting a good job. Because of what she describes as the best thing that has happened in her life – completing upper secondary – she now plans for further studies and a job within the care sector. Most of all she wants to work with children in difficult situations.

But you wanted to start upper secondary or?

Yes, but of course you want that but I never thought I would. So it was like, I never could have imagined that it should work so... I kind of thought that “Yes, here I come and I’ll quit and nobody would want me and I would end up as a cleaner or something. It was kind of my dream, or I thought it was my future kind of. But ... I’ve never given up kind of. (SE1002).

One year after this interview, when contacted again, Louise tells that she, through a local training programme, was able to get a job as peer helper in a special school. She is happy with the job but has applied for adult education two times. Her applications were turned down due to her too high grades from upper secondary. She will need to complete her grades in order to continue into higher education.

Fabian tells a similar story to Louise’s. He is just about to finish last year of upper secondary when we meet and was diagnosed with Aspergers syndrome at the age of ten. Contrary to Louise, Fabian shows a great reluctance towards his diagnosis and doesn’t categorise himself as “being Asperger”.
It was like when I was around ten somewhere, so I went to a test where there was some stuff. And there was a psychologist, and he said … (..) So he made them put Aspergers syndrome on me, even if I didn’t meet the criteria, but it was still … But I would get the help I needed. So that it should mean that I have social difficulties, and couldn’t make it in groups … But I haven’t, I don’t have any difficulties like that … Or concentration difficulties... But I got, because I got help and things that I wouldn’t otherwise, and I think that was a very clever move to help me in my life. (SE1504) 

Fabian has, together with his foster family, used the diagnosis as a mean to get the support they felt he needed but Fabian has negotiated a position where he can watch the diagnosis from outside/above and use it when necessary for receiving extra support. When he talks about it during the interview this position becomes quite clear. During one period Fabian had a personal assistant at school.

But we took him anyway because if I took him my parents thought that it would be easier to apply for a school like the one I’ve got now. And that it’s easier to get support from [the municipality]. So that’s why we kept him, kind of. (SE1504)

He argues very pragmatically form "keeping the diagnosis as long at it serves him" but is as the same time doubtful “in principle” for taking advantage of the system.

But you still have your diagnosis or … ?

Yes I do, so that I can continue at school. And then it’s also ‘cos it’s, well it’s in case of… they recommend me to use it to get some extra stuff like, eh, even financial support, and some things. Sometimes I feel that I don’t really want it, because it feel like I’m using a system, so I’ve kind of been against it but …

What things could that be, except this school?

No, but when I for example should get a flat, things like that and everything, I get it paid by it, and grading of debts and … Even educational costs. And sure, it’s great to to get it like that but …. I still feel a bit reluctant, on principle, I hate when you use the systems and things like that, I really can’t take it. (SE1504)

Fabian does not identify with other young persons with the same diagnosis, as at his school, and feel that anyone could get it:

I’ve always thought I had Aspergers syndrome until I started there and thought that “shit, I’m not like them, I’m not like them in any way, I don’t have the problems the have”. […] I kind of started to think what kind of psychologist that had put this on me and I started to dig into psychology much more than before and
started to do some research on how it really works, how it gets to
... And I kind of discovered that there are like 30 criteria, and if
you've got three then you get the syndrome. But the thing is, I
checked these tests, how they work, and I can say that anyone
who does these tests will have least three of these things.
(SE1504)

Both Louise and Fabian share the experience of living a life highly influenced by having
been diagnosed. They have, as well as other young persons in this research, been forced
to negotiate a position in relation to the diagnosis and have made this negotiation and
positioning in different way, both between them and over time.
Life outside of school, work and home – leisure and friends

All young persons interviewed mention leisure time activities. Many report earlier activities that they have dropped, for various reasons, at the time of the interview. Among the most prominent reasons are being very busy with school, work or life at the moment being so turbulent that it is not possible to engage in leisure time activities, especially organised. Below a summary of activities they are involved in, either earlier in their lives or at present, is presented. Please note that the same person can appear in different groupings.

Creative activities – in this broad category both scrap booking, interior design, singing (two young persons), dancing, composing music and playing an instrument is included. Six of the 33 interviewees report such interests and activities. Five of these are girls. Social activities are reported by the same number (six). Mostly it revolves around seeing friends (four), eating together or visiting the family. All young persons in this category are girls. Four girls share an interest in animals. One is interested in sharks and reads books and watches films about these animals. For two the interest concerns horses and riding and for one cats are in the focus. Yet another four, all girls, express an interest in reading, especially autobiographies. Three boys talk of their interest in computers. For two of them it involves playing computer games and one composes computer game music. One of the gamers reports that playing during one period became a problem but that he now has “passed it”.

Four interviewees, both girls and boys, state a political interest. For two of them this is expressed in a more formalised way; one has been the chair of the pupils union and one is active in a political party. Three young persons (two girls, one boy) are interested in outdoor activities such as hunting, hiking, kayak paddling etc.

Two are in the process of taking their driving test. Many others want to do it but they either doubt their ability or, which is most common, cannot afford it.

Two of the young women have just become parents. They both attend a special mother-infant group a couple of days a week and are (of course) very busy with being a parent. One young person is involved in religious life, another mentions that she likes to travel (has been abroad once). One mentions baking and cooking and yet two others mention motor sports (girls) or fixing cars.
A couple of boys mention sports like playing football or floorball earlier but they have all stopped.

All interviewees report some kind of interest beside school/work or leisure time activity. Most of the passages in the interviews concern activities and interests in the past, fewer at present. The character of these activities is similar to that of a Swedish normal population in the same age group. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the activities constitute *learning situations* and highly enriches their life.

In the situation where the young persons find themselves at the time of the interviews it is (nevertheless) obvious that they face, or are in the middle of, extraordinary processes of reorientation; they are moving to their own flats, making decision on further education, leaving a family (often a foster family) and will gradually form their own, have to assume responsibility for their own provision and some move to a new area. Strikingly many are worried about their future financial situation. They hesitate to become indebted, fear unemployment and face an abundance of choices in this area.

**Support for activities**

Talking of support for leisure activities did not form a big part of the interviews with the young men and women. When they talk about support in this sense some mention that sharing an interest with someone, a friend, a (foster) parent or sibling, makes it easier to continue in that direction. School is also mentioned as an arena where interests were first awakened and then encouraged.

Some leisure activities demand practical and/or financial support. Living in a foster family, often in the countryside, means being dependent on adults for driving you to social or sporting activities. In families with many children this can present a problem. Living in an institution for shorter or longer periods of time often means that the young person is separated from both friends and social contexts such as leisure activities. The residential homes express an ambition to support the young men or women in creating or maintaining leisure activities but it is often difficult to offer individualised support for each young person’s interests and activities. Some activities cost a great deal; riding and playing ice hockey are among the most expensive.

The driver’s licence is for many Swedish young persons, especially if they live outside bigger cities, a symbol of independence, adulthood and agency. Getting a driver’s licence is a costly (and sometimes long) process in Sweden. The cost normally varies between
10 000 and 25 000 SEK (1 000 - 2 500 €). Parents, or other adults, with their own driver’s licence play an important role in this process, either as financiers and/or as private teachers with whom the young person can practise driving.

**Friends and friendship**

As mentioned previously the number of friends and the quality/depth of the relationship vary significantly. While some interviewees have been, and some still are, very lonely others have, or have had, many, and sometimes no good friends. Indra tells us how now, when she is older, has decided to stick to a few friends, getting rid of those that treated her badly.

> Because I know how you can feel when having people around you who make you feel bad, I’ve started to drop them. And I have the closest, I don’t need anyone else. Before I wanted as many as possible but it didn’t work, you only got hurt. (SE0103)

Having to leave home also means leaving friends, as for Beata. When asked if she had any friends where she now lives she answers:

> No, I haven’t. It kind of ... I lost them when I moved to the institution. (SE0104)

Elin tells a similar story but now connected to leaving the foster home and settling down on her own.

> Now it’s so damned stupid, ‘cos since I moved here I don’t know so many people, and then ... Since meeting my boyfriend after just living here for half a year, I know some people through him, so it’s a little there, kind of. (SE0302)

The young persons report one or more really important friends, describe them and the interviewee’s relationship to them in different ways. For some the friends are described in terms of a second family. In Eva’s case a normal one as opposed to her family of origin.

> Now, after moving here I’ve even got, well especially two great friends […] even if you don’t have it normal at home and that you kind of, you become part of something normal. I don’t know, not to say that it’s been an extraterrestrial family or something, but like, I mean, you can be part of, like normal routines and things, yeah. (SE0108)

Alma tells how she would do anything to defend her friends. She would stand up for them and fight for them if they were in trouble.
My friends were my family. [...] I could have given up everything for them. And I don’t think they saw my friendship as serious as I saw theirs b’cos they had their family, they had their life. (SE1502)

For Alma the friends were not her second family – they were her only family. The quote indicates sadness; she made them her family but she was not made part of theirs in the same way. They already had a family and did not need to substitute it with friends. Alma did. Others tend to see friends as “help egos”, someone who supports them and keeps them on the straight road.

But I have a fantastic friend called S that, good God, I don’t know what I’d have done if it wasn’t for him, when I broke down. And he says “Asta, you’ve been running away all your life, and if you flee now you will continue.” And it’s only like, yeah that’s how it is. No. No, I will stay here. He’s very good in that sense. (SE0201)

My best friend, H, she says ” I’m too tired to go to that class” and I just say” Not me either, let’s go and do something else.” Then she says, ” Yes, but actually we have to go, we weren’t there last week”, kind of. So we pep up each other, to go to classes, even if we don’t want to. (SE1001)

Yet others emphasise the importance of having someone to share mutual experiences with, someone who has gone through the same difficulties in life as the interviewee.

I have, well, my best friend M now, she’s almost in the same situation as me, well, her mother died of cancer. (SE0802)

We’ve gone through almost the same things, only that I did it through my mum then. (SE1001)

Sissel tells us about how she and her best friend decided together what programme to choose at upper secondary school. Whether it was a good decision from Sissel’s, and her foster mother’s, point of view remains to be seen.

We were there doing practical experience for one week in ninth grade, and we thought it looked great fun and they had their own cinema and everything so ... So we thought it seemed fun, it wasn’t that well thought-out. My foster mum said all the time that I should do social science. I was accepted too and ... language profile, ‘cos she wanted that, ”You’re good at that”. (SE1003)
**Barriers and facilitators to doing things outside school/work/family**

In Sweden in general there are many leisure time activities popular among most children and teenagers. Mostly it concerns things such as listening to music or watching TV. If you look at more organised activities the differences between groups are significant when it comes to frequency and type of activity. Children in financially vulnerable households participate less in organised activities. The same goes for children with single mothers, in a working class family and with parents born abroad. The differences are quite big; While 40 percent of the working class boys (0-18) do not participate in any organised leisure activity the figure for a middle class boy is 23 percent (Statistics Sweden 2009).

The young men and women in our study are among the most vulnerable in Sweden; their families of origin are, in various ways, not functional and cannot provide good conditions for growing up in. In most cases this is also true of their financial situation. The families of origin are often poor and marginalised. When moved to a foster home or into residential care the situation often improves in terms of conditions. Even though the social services, in connection with the placement, acknowledge the importance of leisure time activities, there are limitations as mentioned in this chapter. These limitations are extra visible when turning our focus towards the time of transition in which the young persons interviewed finds themselves.
Asta’s life history (SE0201)

During her early years Asta lived with her mother, four younger sisters and their father. When he and Asta’s mother broke up Asta and her youngest sister stayed with their mother and had to put up with a succession of destructive relations to men who assaulted their mother, both bodily and mentally. Asta loved school for the first eight years. She dreamed of being a zoologist or history teacher and came out well even though she was active and noisy beyond the teachers’ limits. She met her classmates bullying with aggressiveness and she started to hurt herself with safety pins and razor blades, as her mother had done before her. The teachers must have noticed, she said, but nobody tried to help her. In spite of the difficulties school was the place where she felt most safe and secure and still did well. But her problems at home increased and she turned to social services and applied for help to move to a family she had good relations to. She was turned down and her reaction was to hurt herself even more and to run away with a 16-year-old man.

After a series of upsetting episodes she was at last placed at a residential home where she got on well. She sees this as an important turning point. Asta was well met at school and received good help to catch up. She graduated from upper secondary school with very good grades. Yet she failed to be accepted for teacher education in the town she lived in. Since she had a nice apartment of her own it was a big step for her to give it up. But she did, and she moved to a smaller town where she is studying history and loves it. When we meet her for the second interview she is full of pride. She is the first in her family to study at university and she has proved to be good at it. But the most important new experience is that she can tell her new friends about how her life has been and meet esteem and admiration instead of pity. She can see now how strong she was and she relies on that strength when she looks forward. One part of it is a need for revenge. She gets very angry when she reflects on how little help and support she got from society and she is engaged in Internet communities for young people with problems of the kind she had. She is leading a good life and plans with self-confidence to complete her studies, to get a job somewhere and to get a boyfriend and a family of her own, within five years or so. Her plans and wishes are rather modest but carry conviction.
Chapter 9: Hopes and aspirations

After analysing what the young persons said in the interviews about their hopes and aspirations for the future, we were surprised by how moderate their desires were. Most of them, 20 out of 33, had left their foster families or residential homes. Three lived with their birth families. Ten were still living with their foster families or other professional carers but were about to leave soon. An apartment of their own was among the dreams for the future, an apartment they would pay for with their own income and not with financial support from the social services. Others prepared themselves to leave upper secondary school with as good marks as possible and some strived with complementary courses to complete compulsory school or to be accepted for further education at the university. To retain a trainee job or get a permanent position at work was among the wishes, as well as taking a driving test and get a license. A few needed help to restore their health and some seemed to have no explicit desires at all.

They all conveyed a picture of a very tough childhood characterized by dependence on sometimes, from their point of view, very unreliable adults. But some of them nevertheless seemed to be pretty self-confident and prepared to take charge of their own lives. Asta is very proud about her ability to study.

   It depends more than anything on my incredible strength, see! I have always had such mental strength, you know. I never accepted anything to stand in the way when I really wanted something, but always, through all the years, planned ... so to say ... to take my A-levels. Then I will find a good work and manage to do what nobody else in my family has succeeded to do, you know, nobody in my family has finished upper secondary school. Nobody has an academic degree or has attended the university. And I have had that as my goal ever since I was little, you see. So ... that's what I intend to do. (SE0201)

Asta is not the only example of that kind of attitude and experience. When we asked the social services to help us find interviewees for the study we especially, in accordance with the project application, asked for young persons with educational promises. That gave us more girls than boys and perhaps more target-oriented persons than average. We have had that in mind when we have analyzed our data.
Changes over the study period

When we talked to the young persons for the second interview a lot of them said that very little had changed in the meantime, especially hopes and aspirations. But when we analyzed the interviews we nevertheless found some progression.

In spring 2010 most of the young persons had their own apartment, though sometimes still paid by the social services, alone or together with a partner. That is over average compared to Swedish youth as a whole. In the same age group 45 percent of men with a foreign background and 43 percent of men with a working-class background, remains living with their parents until they are at least 25 years. The percentage for the whole age group, 20-25, is 35 percent (Swedish National Board for Youth affairs, 2010).

Eight of the young persons had completed their studies in upper secondary school at the time of the second interview, but some were still striving to finish supplementary courses. Alma had almost no grades at all at the first interview but was halfway at the second. She had some bad experiences though with indistinct and changing rules and a much heavier workload than she had expected.

But when I had finished biology A I got to know by my teacher that I did not really had to take that course because I already had taken natural science A and B and those courses counts as biology and chemistry. (SE1502)

Alma got a little delayed when she took five courses at the same time and dropped out of all but two. She got the advice to take one course at the time and said:

Yes, that is what I am going to do now when I have got the job ... I am planning to take just the grant part of the study loan and have my job at the side and take one or two subjects at the time ... because I really noticed that I bit off more than I could chew. (SE1502)

Sweden has a lot of ways to help people compensate for an early school failure but they are not always easy to find. When you are older than 18-19 and out of the ordinary school system as well as out of the social services care, you have to find out by yourself what alternatives you got. This is a problem for a lot of our interviewees. Alma really wants a work that requires an advanced university education but she is uncertain about how to get the right advises for her studies. Yet she is more and more identifying herself as a studying person.

I will have to talk to that "study and vocational guidance" -person and talk to them at “adult education” ... and simply hand in an
Some others were about to take a university degree when we talked to them in spring 2010 and had already started to apply for jobs in different professions. Two of the young people became trained social workers and three were on their way to become nurses.

Many of the young persons, even those who were studying, had at least part time jobs even though a few have found it very hard to get a job at all. According to the Swedish Public Employment Service, female unemployment in these young person’s age group rose by 16 percent during the first quarter of 2009, while male unemployment rose by 61 percent. The economic crisis in autumn 2008 initially affected the male-dominated manufacturing industry the most and unemployment increased much more for men than for women. Unemployment among young people with upper secondary education rose even more during summer 2009, when one of the largest age groups ever in Sweden finished upper secondary school while the labour market was still feeling the effects of recession. “These newly qualified young people stand ‘far back in the queue’ to the labour market, which is also likely to increase the duration of unemployment for this group” (Swedish National Board for Youth affairs, 2010).

So, it is not easy for young people to get into the labour market. Our interviewees often work with bits and pieces of odd jobs, but to an increasing degree permanent job. Nine of them say that they just work temporarily, but the plans they had earlier to continue their studies after a short period of working, are now more vague. They may or may not apply for a course later on. They mostly have a low income but manage to support themselves and that state of things is something they emphasize in the interviews. They are not as dependent as they were and the majority is most definite about where to find the driving force in their lives; they are themselves the prime movers.

Those few who needed help to restore their health were still waiting a year later. One wants to start a special rehab programme but has not found support to do so. Another is waiting for a surgical operation that will change her possibilities to live a normal life. But both are still hopefully waiting. Another couple of the young persons expressed no explicit desires at all when we asked them about their futures. They wanted a job, maybe, but did not know what they would like to work with. Or they wanted to study, maybe,
but had not decided what kind of course or programme to apply for. They had vague ideas about where to get help to find out if and when there were jobs and courses available. They just sat back and waited. The situation was, unfortunately, unchanged when we came back after a year.

**Hindrances of achieving plans, hopes and dreams**

Even if higher education is in a way mandatory, there is more than the young persons believe or disbelieve in their capability to study, to take into consideration before applying for a course. Many of the young persons were worried about having to take study loans. It is possible to get study loans, without security, from the state when they have been accepted for university studies. The “loan” is divided in two parts, one grant that is about one third of the whole sum and one part that you have to pay back later. A common pattern among Swedish students, especially those with middle-class parents, is to accept the grant but not the loan. The students work part time if they find jobs and often get support from their parents.

To summarize the rather varied hopes and aspirations the young people expressed in both interviews. Education had a very essential position in their thoughts about their present and their future. When they visualized themselves some years ahead, eight of them see themselves studying at the university at that time. Seven wanted to attend adult education or vocational training. Ten picture themselves doing their dream job. Six, mostly girls, want to start a family in the first place, but still have dreams of education and a good job later on.

We cannot know, of course, to what extent our questions about educational experiences and plans influenced the young people to focus more on education than they normally do. But we know from other sources that education is a big issue for all young people today.
Amita was born in 1986 as the second child; a sister was born a year earlier. Her mother was raised in Africa and moved to Sweden when she was 16 and had very little basic education and was dyslexic. Amita’s father, native-born Swedish, has nine-year compulsory school. Preschool was a positive place with many friends for the two sisters. When Amita was five years old her twin sisters were born. A short time after, the father left the family and Amita’s mother started to show mental disturbance.

Amita started school in 1993. She was quick to learn and liked it but was eager to compete, which stressed her. Her mother’s paranoia got worse and worse. Amita did not see friends after school because she had to go straight home, do her homework, have a meal and then stand by her wardrobe the rest of the evening. At the end of Amitas first school year her mother kept her children in the house all day behind drawn curtains. The neighbours sometimes heard screams and reported it. The children were dramatically taken into custody with police reinforcement. Amita and her oldest sister were placed together but lost contact with the twin sisters. They passed two foster homes and one residential home before Amita, at the age of 15, found a home with her best friend whose parents were approved as foster parents.

Despite the circumstances she got an excellent leaving certificate from compulsory school and entered upper secondary school. Both sisters did brilliantly in school. Amita completed her upper secondary education and during her last school year she moved with her boyfriend to a bigger city and worked as a waitress for a while, before she applied for university studies. She graduated as a trained social worker in the summer of 2010.

School in constantly present in Amita’s narrative as a solid base for her where she can be somebody else than at home, be “normal”. Amita describes herself as a talkative, spontaneous quicksilver who does what is expected from her and who is not aggressive, except when she beats the boys up for oppressing girls. She gets on the wrong side of, and is disliked by, some of the teachers, especially during her first school years. But as a counterweight she repeatedly meets people who give her care and love out of the ordinary.
Chapter 10: Barriers and facilitators

Looking closer at what factors, circumstances or relations that can be viewed as crucial in affecting the young persons educational hopes and plans either in a negative or positive way is central to the YIPPEE project. In this chapter we will try to systematize the most important findings from the interviews.

Supporting factors

When you’re down there at the bottom and grub around like, you need someone to lift you up again. (SE0802)

The codes Facilitates education, supporting factors, resistance/initiative, turning points and driving forces have been used to distinguish the young persons accounts of what has, according to themselves, contributed to a positive learning identity and a good life, in spite of having a difficult childhood. Below the narratives have been divided into, on the one hand own capacities and qualities the young persons say they have and have gained through childhood, and on the other hand external factors, i.e. factors and circumstances in the surrounding community/society, especially in relation to important persons in the young person’s life. The latter can also be divided into firstly family circumstances, and secondly societal circumstances. In the case of young persons in or from public care these factors are heavily intertwined as the family concept is in at least some senses overtaken by society, via a foster family or placement in residential home.

It is reasonable to conclude that factors facilitating education earlier, i.e. in compulsory and upper secondary school, also have an importance when discussing higher and further education. What has to be added, in accordance with findings from previous chapters, is how structural issues in relation to “the transitional phase” influence possibilities and motivation to continue studying.

This section focuses on supportive, or facilitating factors and not on hindrances. The latter have been thoroughly described and discussed in all previous chapters. It is beyond doubt that the attentive reader will have no problems in interpreting the facilitators in contradiction to their opposites, i.e. barriers.

Self-image/ identity positions

This first section focuses on internal factors. These can also be formulated as self image(s) and identity position(s). Many of the young persons interviewed speak about themselves as learning and capable persons. Mostly the learning identity is created in
relation to school. To categorise yourself as intelligent and capable is of course a great advantage in relation to further studies. Eva says:

I believe it has helped me a lot that everything comes easy to me, otherwise it would’ve been much worse. (SE0108)

Siri shares Eva’s experience of being seen and encouraged.

I had the best attendance. And like, we were four girls who went to France, we were the best four that went as trainees for a month. So I felt that I was successful all the time, ’cos I got something for it. (SE1503)

As Siri puts it, it is obvious that she has been seen in a positive and affirmative way. In interaction with people around her she gets to hear, and experience, that she is a good learner and integrates that description of herself as part of her identity. She manages to take a position where she constructs herself as successful, valued and capable. This position, when taken, tends to reward itself and thus becomes strengthened. To be able to construct a learning identity it is necessary to have been seen and encouraged during longer periods of life which is something both girls have experienced; Eva from her foster/stepfather who have supported her through a harsh childhood with a mentally ill mother who puts far too much responsibility on Eva, Siri both from teachers and a (second) foster family who as she puts it “gave her the will and the capability that she lacked before”.

Many of the young women, and young men, express their dreams and goals in very powerful ways. They have dreams and aspirations, they plan for the future, want and show a lot of drive in relation to continued studies. Eva, who is at university doing social work, answers the question “Have you always known what you wanted to do?”.

I’ve always had it set out for me, kind of. Like, now I’ll do this and then that. So, kind of, it hasn’t been any question about it. (SE0108)

Jessica, who has fought hard to enter into nursing at university, paints two pictures for herself, two alternatives she has to relate to; one picture contains a monotonous job in a grocery store, unpacking goods, the other a stimulating lifelong job.

And what do you get then, you get full time at a fucking shit place, at Lidl or something. It gives money but it doesn’t give any satisfaction working, it’s like slavery, you go like a robot. I think it’s extremely important that you work in something you like. You’ll work there, like, most part of your life. (SE0109)
Another distinct theme in the interviews is a strong and manifest determination not to end up where the parents or relatives are. The determination and force to break with a social heritance is strong and can be expressed in terms of both resistance, dissociation and revenge. Asta develops her thoughts on where her will to succeed comes from.

I guess it’s my own determination, I mean, hello, I don’t want to become, I’ve got an aunt who’s a junkie and alcoholic, I don’t want to be like her, I’ve got an uncle who’s an ex junkie, a granny who’s alcoholic and two other uncles who’re criminals and batterers and God knows what. I don’t want to become like them.

So it was a drive that you wanted something else?

Yes, I wanted to be successful where everyone in my family has failed, so to speak. It’s the same thing that everyone in my family has had kids when very young. If I’d gone in their path I’d had a little kid here now. But no, I shall have a career first. (SE0201)

Fia and Eva tell how they managed to turn severe problems at home during childhood into a strength they can benefit from for the rest of their lives. They have made it against all odds.

And I feel that even though I’ve taken a lot of trashing, it’s made me good, in some way. A survivor (in Swedish: dandelion-child). (SE1102)

Eva expresses a strong wish to make resistance against her social heritage. For her this heritage is symbolised by her mother who has never worked, has a severe drug problem and is mentally ill.

When I was little I decided that no, I shan’t, I will have a better life, and my kid shall have a better life. I’m not just lying at home on the sofa and … And then, my mother, she has no social network, she doesn’t have any friends, only her sister. And, like, no, I’ve always wanted a normal life, and that’s what I’m after. (SE0108)

Some of the young persons talk very engaged about their special interests and future plans. For Alma her interest in animal rights has become a life style, a part of her identity and her future career. In a very unstable and rickety life she finds an ontological security that points forward.

So yes, there is something that I’m really, really, really engaged in. There’s nothing I’ve ever engaged so much in as animal rights. And I’ve always said, when I was little, that I want a job where I
can shut down slaughterhouses, without doing anything criminal, and I've kind of laughed. But now I know, there is a profession where you can do it. Even if it's not easy-peasy to close a slaughterhouse but... (SE1502)

Another pattern is a strong will to use their own experiences to help others. This can be seen in the lines of higher education chosen by the interviewees, as discussed in other chapters. Emelie, who was severely bullied through compulsory school, wants to lecture and maybe study within the social area.

I'm also a very good speaker, considering that I've been through so awfully much in my life. And I'm not afraid to speak about it. I gladly speak about it. To help people through situations. (SE0802)

Samantha who was sexually abused and whose situation at the first interview was relatively locked, gets a smile on her face when she tells about her, her mother's and a friend's project. They want to start a support group for sexually abused girls and women drawing on their own experiences. The first step is to create a homepage which they have support from the local municipality in doing.

Matilda wants to use her experience as romani in voluntary work, preferably abroad. At the first interview she had made contact with an organisation in southern Africa and was looking forward to going to work with them for three months. At the second interview she has been home for a while and describes the experience as fantastic.

Even Eva emphasizes her experience and the wisdom she has gained from it. When asked if there are some advices she would like to give young persons in situations similar to her own, she says:

It might be that ... You're not different, like... If you If you really want something and struggle hard enough you'll succeed. I believe that. And like, it's nothing to be ashamed of, it's made me who I am. (SE0108)

Jessica has a similar approach to life; it has given her a strong selfimage and confidence, she is not ashamed but thinks that she has come further in her own development than her peers. When asked for two things that has been the most supporting in relation to further education she says:

Well, one is that I've got a healthy perspective that you only live once, and then you die. You can't go 'round and carry things within. You shouldn't avoid making a fool of yourself, you shouldn't avoid talking about what you feel and cry and be
troublesome just because someone else thinks so. You should fight to be yourself, and not be false to yourself or others. Only that view that you only live once. And then you make the best of it, kind of. There's no use just sitting around sulking. I've had my bad time, and I'm not going there again. (SE0109)

Eva, whose suggestion above is not to be ashamed, relates her good self-confidence to her insight.

But at the same time I think it's been an advantage for me that I've been so aware of everything all the time, that I've had insight that... This is not the way, and this is how it should be. (SE0108)

Yet another strategy for the young men and women we have met is to develop an ability to think positively, take one thing at a time and put things into perspective. Below we have three examples of such a strategy.

Well, the negative stuff I never remember, 'cos I never think about it. (SE0705)

I try to, like when there is a problem or a setback then I think like, well how can I solve this in the best way I think that; Yes, I've come this far, I'll be able to go further, like, well I try to think positively. (SE0108)

Uhm, I use to think that there's always someone who's worse off than me. (SE0701)

Jessica has conducted a drastic renaming and recategorisation of herself. When she moved home again from the foster family and wanted to start anew she chose to change both her first and last name.

I felt that this Ellen, it doesn’t represent me anymore. I’m not the same person. I’m not Ellen anymore, I’m Jessica. It feels a lot cleaner in my head. (SE0109)

Perhaps Jessica’s complete change of name, and in some senses identity, can be seen as an example of an advanced renegotiation of her identity position. She defined herself anew and created a new position, putting unwanted and unpleasant feelings and experiences behind her and chooses a new position from where the future looked different. At the same time she describes how she also, slowly, came to be someone else; a young woman with a greater social interest, more straightforward and more decisive.

**External factors – family and society**
The second part of this chapter concerns factors and circumstances placed in the external. Instead of thematising it into family and societal factors we choose to treat them as a
whole but divided into five sub headings; support from family of origin, from foster parents/residential homes, from school, friends and partners and finally from professional actors (except school), e.g. social workers.

**Support from the family of origin**

Some of the young persons give extensive stories on how the family of origin always has had a positive view on education and have encouraged them to study. This is most obvious in the three cases (SE0302, SE1003, SE1102) where the parents themselves have a higher education. Fia describes her situation, before a painful separation and her mother’s mental illness.

> Mum studied herself and dad studied. It was a part of our life that dad sat with his book and counted and mum read in bed and highlighted and like... It was nothing strange to study since they did it. I guess it’s harder if your dad is an engineer and never does anything except at work. But we had studying parents and then it was natural to do your homework. (SE1102)

Also relatives have been important as support with daily care, homework or other tasks. To have relatives close to you is described by some young persons as both a security and an asylum from a dysfunctional family and parents unable to see and support the child.

> When we were small we lived, or until I was maybe 11 or 12, granddad and grandma were neighbours. And they, like, they've always taken care of us, we could go there to eat and... (SE0108)

**Support from the foster family**

The foster parents are also mentioned as supporting schoolwork and continued educational plans. To have a strong relationship to foster parents even after finishing the formal placement is described as a great support for daring to apply for university and being independent. They know that there is someone who will catch them if they fall. Financial issues are of course an important part of the support. Lina brings up the great support she receives from her former foster family several times during the interview. Her foster father has lent her some money so that she could buy a small flat and she is sure they would support her financially in the future if necessary. The foster family has also been very supportive in relation to Lina’s previous schoolwork.

> If I’ve been skipping classes, they’ve put their foot down, this has to end! (SE0402)
Lina has a solid feeling that they will be there for her in the future just as they have been there for her in the past. This experience is shared by some others of the young persons interviewed.

They're always there when you need them, they are. (SE0402)

Some young persons look back and describe how the foster parents have always encouraged and nagged them to go to school, do their homework etc. They have also emphasised the importance of future studies in order to get a satisfying adult life. Alma talks especially of her foster mother.

Yes, she knows exactly what it's all about. And she helped me to get started exercising and helped me to get started studying. She had contact with my teachers to see that I went, and see that I stayed. Well, she simply got a hold of it. (SE1502)

Siri’s experience is similar to Alma’s.

Well they've been hard on me, but yet helpful, I might say. They've like help me to, what shall I say, their way of helping me has been to be hard, I think. And then I have to do it, because I haven’t got a choice. (SE1503)

The support reported from staff at residential home is scarcer in our interview. This of course can be explained by the low number of young persons placed in residential homes present in our material but also by pointing out the different characteristics of the relationships; while a foster parent in some cases becomes like a new parent, this is harder to obtain at a residential home, and is not reported in our material. However, Beata tells us about one person employed at the residential home where she spent three of her teenage years.

I talked a lot with her, I confided in her and so... It was a lot “No, I can’t be bothered, I’m to tired from them [other pupils/teenagers at the residential home]” and when I saw that I really wanted to continue to strive. And I got support from her too, and then I managed. (SE0104)

Supporting friends and partners

Friends and partners also play important roles as support when facing difficult situations. Asta’s life was falling to pieces and she was about to leave her foster home and drop out of school.

But I’ve got a great friend who’s called Steve that, good God, I don’t know what I’d have done without him. When I broke down
he said “Asta, You've ran away all your life, and if you run away now you'll continue that way.” And that's exactly it. No, I will stay here. He's very good in that sense. (SE0201)

To find love and a partner has for several meant a great support in life. Eva’s boyfriend was really important to her.

So each time something happened he always came and stood up for me and... So it was him that I had to support me. (SE0108)

John met his girlfriend a long time ago and they have been a couple for four years. They are now expecting a child.

She's the only reason that I'm doing all right now. 

Since you met her?

Mm. (SE0801)

As discussed above supporting relationships are needed in order to gain confidence and feel valued. It is also a basis for relatively stable identity positions, created in interaction with others. As seen in chapter four, several of the young women live with a male partner in shared flat. Whether this indicates a supportive and growing relationship is not possible to say as relationships, of course, can also be destructive and diminishing. Some of the stories told, however, like the ones above imply a intimate relationship to be of great importance.

Support at school

The stories of teachers and other school staff that seriously have managed to see the young person and his or her situation are many. The importance of these persons being able to do what a well functioning parent should have done has meant a lot. Some of these adults and professionals have also taken one step outside what is expected from them in their professional role, which is something the young persons appreciate and view as positive and supporting situations and relations in their life. There are many stories on this theme, below only a few will be presented.

Indra feels that she was seen and met in a respectful way. The teachers told the class about her family situation in an informative way but without making her feel different and awkward.

The teachers have been there and explained that “she lives in a family with a mum and dad and a brother and sister that takes care of her”. They've helped me to explain. But when it comes to
school stuff, education, I’ve not been treated in another way than all the rest. (SE0103)

Asta describes how she, when feeling bad and skipping school, was called by the teacher.
That was what she needed to get her spirits back.

I didn’t want to go. I felt bad, like. One of my teachers, the one I’ve got the best contact with, she called me one day and woke me up, “Hello, we’ve started now and you’re not here”. And just like “No”.
She just “You’ll get on the bus now” And I “Ok, it leaves in 10 minutes, I’ll be there”. (SE0201)

The stories on this theme are many; Julia has also been lucky in meeting a teacher who saw her and offered her special help and attention.

We had the best teacher in the world, he was so pedagogical, and he was so kind. He told everyone that “If there’s something you don’t understand, come and ask me.” I think every teacher should be like that. If he noticed that you didn’t get it he said “yes Julia you can come here and I’ll show you. He was the best teacher I’ve ever had, I think. (SE0701)

Siri’s story is similar to the other ones.

I’ve always had a lot of help at school. And I’m really grateful for that: Like teachers I meet even today and that remember me ‘cos I was who I was… They knew I wanted but couldn’t. (SE1503)

The important role of school and school staff cannot be underestimated when it comes to compensating young persons from a public care background for lack of attention and encouragement during childhood. Two of the girls above, Indra and Asta, were also bullied at school but still the positive feeling and support felt from the teachers seem to have acted as a counterweight to the bullying. Three of these girls live with a boyfriend and one is expecting a child at the time of the interview. None of them have started any academic studies but Asta hopes to become a teacher in the future.

Support from professionals (outside school)
Support from different public helping professions – employment officers, study advisors, contact persons, nurses at mother-infant groups and others – also have been important and sometimes crucial for our interviewees. Some of the young persons state that they have experienced support from a social worker they have had the possibility of knowing for a longer time. Lotta, who lives in a “supported flat”, describes her social worker as competent and engaged.
I like the one I've got now, I've had her for three years I think, yes, I've had her since I came here [...] We meet like once a week, and we talk, and ... She comes around to check my flat and such things. (SE0303)

Both Asta and Julia have seen a psychologist/therapist. Asta describes her contact with the therapist after the consultations are formally finished.

Like, I still call her sometimes and "What are you doing? Well school sucks." “Aha, what in school sucks?” she says. You know, she's about 50 years old and says "sucks". She's great fun, “Yeah, fucking teachers” “What the hell have they done now?” she asks. Then you sit and gabble for a while and "Do you want to come here?” “No, I just wanted to call.”(SE0201)

Julia was tipped by her friend that there was a psychologist at the Youth Centre (Ungdomsmottagning) that was free to consult just as you can see a social worker, a physician or a midwife. She describes her thoughts before she contacted them.

And it took a while before I realised that I needed that help, but they kept on telling me that I had the option. (SE0701)

**Supporting structures**

The excerpt below from the interview with Fia shows one of the major structural problems and hindrances that has been highlighted in the study; The placement formally ends when the young person turns 18, or finishes upper secondary school, but many, like most 18 or 19 year olds in Sweden, do not feel quite ready for total independence and responsibility. Fia tells how her placement ends in a couple of months and that she will appeal against that decision.

I don't think they'll say that an 18 year old is ready to leave home if they live in a normal family. I find that quite strange. (SE1102)

She continues, explaining why she wants to stay.

I've always had that thing that I don't want to get into new phases of life (laughter) I'm in the funk about it. Same thing when I started upper secondary. And now I'm a little in the funk about starting at university or high school. And when I move out and start university and everything at once, it can get a bit tough. (SE1102)

Fia gives words to an experience shared by many of the young persons interviewed. She does not feel ready to leave the safe haven of the foster family. She refers to the uncertainty of going from one phase of life into another and wants to have the foster family supporting her while taking these steps. Given a difficult childhood and the role of soci-
ety as compensating for it, it is clear that a prolonged support from society via the foster family is of great importance. Even though many foster families in our material, say they are, and in the future will, provide the support needed to the young persons to whom they have created strong bonds, it is of utmost importance that the structural framework facilitates this. Also it acknowledges the importance of further education and the support needed by the young men and women to achieve it. And a good life in general.

Finally, turning back to Amita, whose life history opens this chapter, she summarises one of the other core findings in this chapter. She emphasises the importance of never letting the category “foster child” (or child at risk, placed child etc.) stand in the way of seeing and treating the child as a unique child. A child with its own history, and experiences but also with their own aspirations and dreams for the future.

There is that comment that really hurts so bad ... still ... when we were standing at the top of the stairs, me and my sister and she, the social worker, was just about to leave, and then she said, and we were not supposed to hear that: “You can never expect them to be quite normal because they are, as a matter of fact, just foster children.” That stuck! So I suppose the big deal for me and my sister is to never accept to be categorised as foster children in that sense. One can be normal all right! (SE0501)

Resilience
Here, it is in its place to introduce the concept of resilience; the capability to manage even though the conditions are bad.

This study is about a very vulnerable and exposed group of children who, when older, tells their stories of poverty, negligence, abuse, maltreatment, insecurity etc. etc. They carry all signs of being at risk for having serious problems as adults. By choosing to interview a number of young persons that, in spite of their background, have “made it” and are showing educational promise, the study has set out to investigate factors and circumstances that supports this positive development.

The web of resilience themes is thoroughly discussed in the next chapter but let us here point out some threads needed to spin this resilient web; being able to create a positive and learning identity; having supporting persons and structures to support this, both practically and emotionally.
Chapter 11: Connecting and discussing

Young people, risk and the welfare state

Earlier in this report, we referred to the Swedish welfare model, which undoubtedly has a great impact on the situation of children and young people in the Swedish society. Although there have been changes and cut-backs in the Swedish welfare system over the last few years, there is still a prevailing trust in the welfare model, and the general access to resources for all Swedish citizens. However, when looking at welfare theory, children and young people are to a great extent neglected. “The idea of “a good childhood” was never an intrinsic part of the welfare state” (Qvortrup 2008, p 216). Additionally, children and young people are often conceptualised as dependent members of the family, and not as young citizens and social actors (Eydal & Satka 2006). The prolonged transition to adulthood also implies that markers of the transition such as leaving the family home, completing education and financial independence are happening later in life for all young people. This will make young people increasingly dependent on their parents. During this prolonged stage it is evident that young people face new risks and opportunities. However, the prolonged transition process has had different consequences for different groups of young people (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). The young people we have interviewed had either left a placement in care, or were on their way to do so. Their specific situation, where access to support from family may be unavailable or conditioned, places them in a vulnerable position where they may have to perform the transition to adulthood pretty much on their own. This do not only imply having to support themselves, but also to make important decisions about their future on their own, or at least without support from adults.

The fact that children and young people are not acknowledged in the welfare analysis, may lead to an individualisation of their problems (Qvortrup 2008), and also to an increased exposure to risk. According to Beck (1992), risks are not equally distributed in society, on the contrary – the concept of risks emphasises the class differences. People who lack economic and social resources will be more exposed to risks, whereas people with access to resources will be less exposed, as they can afford to have more “safety margins” in their life. The results from this study, in concordance with other research, show that a majority of the young people interviewed belong to the latter group, with comparably little access to financial and social resources.
**Themes from the interviews**

When listening to what the young people have told us in the interviews, we can identify some emerging themes – issues and experiences that have been vital for the lives of several of our interviewees.

**Dysfunctional families – lack of support**

Many of the young people tell us about their life as children and adolescents in dysfunctional families, where the most common pattern is young mothers with low education, mental health problems as well as drug and/or alcohol abuse. Their fathers are in many cases absent, also with problems of their own. Living with parents who have not been able to perform their parental task at a satisfactory level have had a great impact on the lives of the young people at many different levels, and it certainly has had a specific impact on their educational achievements.

One very tangible effect is lack of educational support from parents. Due to their own problems, mothers – and fathers when living in the family – have often been unable to provide the parental support, interest and encouragement that would have made it easier for their children to perform well at school. They have not attended school meetings, they have not been able to help with homework, and they have often themselves had bad experiences of school. In a few cases, parents (fathers) were explicitly negative towards school. To them, school was not important, just something you had to put up with while compulsory school lasted. According to the interviewed young people, such negative attitudes constituted a problem for them, and had a detrimental effect on their educational attainments.

Another issue connected to the situation at home was the question of **responsibility**. Usually, parents are expected to take responsibility for the well being of their children, that is a fact agreed upon both by children and by parents (Brannen et al 2000, Ribbens et al 2000). However, for many of our interviewees, parents’ bad health and/or drug/alcohol abuse had in many cases forced the young people to shoulder a heavy burden of responsibility, for younger siblings, but also for parents. Several young people told us about having no time for home-work, due to heavy work-loads at home. In some cases, parent’s mental problems had a very tangible negative effect on the young people’s school attendance. For example, one girl with a mentally ill mother told us that her
mother, when feeling bad, wanted her and her sister to stay at home to keep her company, instead of attending school. This girl had long periods of absence from school, due to this situation.

**Poverty – being different**

Poverty is an additional factor, which has an impact on the lives of children and young people. As many of them have lived with low educated, socially marginalised single mothers, they have also had to experience financial problems, and substantial lack of resourced in their families. Lack of resources may exclude children and young people, and make it difficult for them to participate in social activities. It may also affect their feeling of inclusion and exclusion within the school environment (Ridge 2007).

Furthermore, Ridge (2007) found that children are afraid of being perceived as different. This feeling of being different is something quite a few of our young people mentioned in the interviews. Birth parents’ difficulties was a problematic issue in itself, but in most cases such difficulties also implied lack of economic resources, as parents often were unemployed or on permanent sick leave. Our interviewees told us of various ways to hide their poverty. Some elaborated quite creative strategies to avoid the feeling of being different from their peers, for example pretending to be uninterested of taking part in sport activities, instead of revealing the fact that they could not pay for them.

Still, lack of economic resources was a factor, which made several of our interviewees feel excluded and insecure. Such feelings of exclusion could have a negative effect on school performances. Additionally, exclusion and feelings of being different due to lack of economic resources could also enhance the risk for young people being bullied at school. Several of the young people had experience of being bullied, some were exposed to quite severe bullying.

Poverty is a factor which needs to be taken into consideration when it comes to children and young people placed in care and educational achievements. Even though most of the interviewed young people referred to poverty before the actual placement took place, it is of importance to understand the consequences lack of resources might have on educational performances. Furthermore, a placement in care may not be a guarantee for access to equal resources. A recent Swedish study states that children and young people placed in care had less access to various material resources, compared to their peers. Lack of resources was more prevalent among children and young people placed in
residential care (Sallnäs et al 2010). Thus, feelings of exclusion and of being different may very well continue throughout the entire childhood for these young people.

**Lack of power – not being seen**
Another emerging theme of importance is the feeling of being out of control of their lives, being powerless and left to cope with difficult situations on their own. This feeling is connected to what seems to be an inability of social workers – and teachers – to perceive the actual situation of the child/young person, and evaluate the risks and the detrimental effect it may have on their lives. We have several examples of the young people telling us of how they have tried to describe their problems, without getting any real response or recognition, neither from social workers, nor from teachers. One of the interviewed young women told us how she several times tried to notify social services about her quite intolerable home situation with a mentally ill mother, without any action taken from social services. This seemed partly to be due to her mothers' capacity of keeping a nice façade towards social workers in spite of severe mental problems – but also of a reluctance to listen to children’s accounts and take them seriously. Additionally, other statements in the interviews could also be seen as examples of a lack of recognition of children’s and young people’s perspective.

The feeling of not having control of one’s life seems to be crucial for several of our interviewees. When they have had adequate support, which have made them capable of understanding what has happened to them, and also when they have been able to take actions themselves, and make relevant decisions, this has had a positive effect on their self-perception. This is in accordance with what Rutter (1998) state about the importance of being in control for young people with difficult life experiences.

**Disruptive lives**
Another theme in the lives of the young people is the high level of disruption in their lives. They have experienced frequent moves with their families, with equally frequent changes of schools, friends and social networks. Additionally, several had also experienced frequent changes of placements in care. 11 of our interviewed young people had experience of more than three placements in care, and four more than five placements. A change of school, or a move to a new place, does not necessarily imply negative consequences for children and young people. However, from the statements in the interviews we have understood that frequent changes could have a detrimental impact on school
attainments, as well as on social interactions with friends. It was hard for many of the young persons to establish good relations to teachers and peers, and frequent moves could make them feel rootless and “different”.

**Avoiding risks**

One tangible example of the effects of little access to resources for young people placed, or formerly placed in care, is the reluctance many of our interviewees showed when it came to applying for study loans. Several young people had a pronounced wish for moving on to further education, but did not dare to do so due to an explicit worry for not being able to finance their studies. As they had no family or social network that could support them financially, they would have to apply for a study loan – which most Swedish young people actually do to support themselves through studies at college or university. However, the interviewed young people often perceived taking a study loan as a great risk, and therefore hesitated to apply to college or university, even if they had the formal opportunity to do so. The same reluctance was also found in another study (Höjer and Sjöblom 2010). Generally, young people in Sweden do not pronounce similar reluctance towards study loans. Additionally, young people without care experiences, often have access to financial support from their parents (Hellevik 2005, Espvall and Dellgran 2006), therefore they do not have to rule out further education, due to financial worries. Walther (2006) states that being able to make choices is a token of democracy. As we see it, there is an evident risk that democracy is not applicable when it comes to young people leaving care, as they do not have access to the same opportunities of making choices as their peers.

This is a fact often overseen by authorities. In the interviews with the managers of the social services (both those made face-to-face as the telephone interviews), the managers often stated that young people formerly placed in care were “like anyone else” and had the same opportunities as “anyone”. A positive interpretation of this may be that the managers did not want to see the young people as “different”. Another interpretation is that there is a prevailing lack of awareness of the vulnerable situation for young people who have been placed in out-of-home care, and the impact less access to financial and social resources may have on their lives.
Negative perception of children and young people placed in care?
Information from research often emphasises the problems and difficulties young people placed in care may encounter, and also tends to focus on their vulnerability (Bakketeig, E and Backe-Hansen, 2008). This is in concordance with some of the accounts from interviews with managers. When asked about barriers and facilitators for this group, they often emphasised the barriers – problems connected to the “disruptive lives” of the young people, dysfunctional families, emotional problems etc. This is of course relevant, and without doubt important information. The lives of these young people have certainly been full of problematic issues. However, there is an evident risk of implementing a deterministic perspective, if social workers, teachers and other professionals focus on problems only. Thereby they may be missing out on their strengths and competences of this group. Through our interviews in the YIPPEE project, we have found the young persons to be resourceful, competent and determined to create a good future for themselves.

Aiming for a better life
One of the most important themes is the strong wish to accomplish, and create a good life, shown by a majority of our interviewees. Several compared themselves with their mothers and fathers, siblings and other relatives who had not succeeded due to various problems, and stated that their life was going to be different. They were determined to find ways to make this wish come through. Education was an important part of these life-plans. Several of the young people were close to completing an education, and others were about to start. We were impressed of the strength and determination shown by these young people. Their capacity of resilience, in spite of a difficult start in life, was at times quite astonishing.

An important factor for the capacity of showing resilience, was access to support and encouragement from at least one significant adult. Those young people who had someone who could give them good advice, who believed in their capacity and competence, had managed to organise their lives and were on their way to reach their goal of “a better life”.

Concluding comments
The general picture of the family and care lives of these young people shows troublesome lives: neglect, abuse, bullying, and exclusion. However, the stories these young people told us were also characterised by accounts of good relations to carers, friends
and family. These young people, in spite of extremely difficult life situations, have had the abilities and strengths to find and use possibilities for change and for a better life. This gives a clear message that this group, when given adequate support, can achieve well at school and thus improve their future prospects.
Chapter 12: Recommendations for action

When taking the decision to place young people in care, the state has taken on a great responsibility. The parents of these young people have not, for various reasons, been capable of providing adequate care. Instead, parental care should be provided by the state – through foster care and residential care. However, through the YIPPEE project, as well as from other studies on young people leaving care (see for example Vinnerljung et al. 2005a, 2005b, Stein 2006, Höjer & Sjöblom 2010), the state is not always successful in its’ task as in loco parentis. Former welfare clients, with little or no support from birth families, are often left without support, and the outcomes of placements in care are not encouraging. Evidently, the state needs to be more aware of what is required to perform better “parenting” of young people in care, as well as of those leaving care.

As accounted for in previous chapters, the young people participating in the interviews have often told us about their lives in dysfunctional families, where their parents have been unable to give them adequate support to promote their performances at school. Furthermore, the young people have also in many cases been in a position where they have been forced to take responsibility for their parents and their siblings, a task which could be a real burden for them. Consequently, they have not been able to perform well at school, as their educational attainments have not been their first priority. This places these young people in a very unfortunate and unfair position, compared to their peers. Undoubtedly, this is a position that they share with many children and young people who, although they have not been placed in care, still live in problematic families.

In this chapter we aim at suggesting some recommendations for action – to provide children and young people placed in care with adequate support and resources to perform well at school. Such support could be given in different ways, however, one prerequisite is that politicians and policy-makers are committed to address the need of educational support to children and young people from dysfunctional families, as they are the ones deciding on the financial allocations for pre-schools and schools. We do not embrace the idea of blaming and accusing parents, or the singling out of children and young people from dysfunctional families as a specifically difficult group. From our point of view, the best way to provide good support for this group is to make sure that all schools in the municipalities have a high educational quality and that teachers are well
educated and well supported, both by local employers and local politicians. However, from the result of the YIPPEE project, we have the opportunity to identify some specific factors which could improve educational attainments of children in care.

**Recognising the importance of education**

One of the very “basic” results of the project is to recognise the importance of education for young people in care. In Sweden, this question has recently been highlighted, following results from register studies which give evidence of poor educational outcomes for former welfare clients (Vinnerljung et al. 2005, Social Rapport 2010). Evidently, social workers, as well as foster carers and residential staff, need to be more focused on the educational attainments of children and young people in care. Each child or young person needs to have their individual educational situation evaluated and discussed with those professionals responsible for their placements. It is also of importance to give foster carers sufficient support and education, so they can be adequately informed of the importance of educational achievements, and of how they can help and promote children and young people placed in their care to perform well at school. The same support and education should also be given to residential staff. According to the young people’s statements, support from significant persons, such as foster carers, residential staff and social workers have been crucial for their educational performance. At the risk of simplifying a complex process, one might say that the interest and engagement from professionals and carers in this respect should be equal to that of a parent.

One tangible effect of an enhanced recognition of the importance of education, with evident implications for practice, is to always consider school and the educational situation when plans are made for changes in the placement. Careful plans of how to minimise any educational disruptions or delays should always be made when a child or a young person has to change placement. This should also be the case when a child or a young person returns to their birth parents.

Connected to this recognition of the importance of education is to embrace a positive view of the opportunities of young people in care. As discussed previously in the report, professionals often tend to focus on risks and problems connected to the lives of children and young people in out-of-home care. Such a focus is important – children and young people are taken into care due to risks and problems in their lives. However, as we see it, it is also important to recognise positive features, strengths and competences
of these young people. This goes for social workers, as well as teachers. According to the accounts from the young people, the perception of themselves as good learners and competent students have been gained through supportive teachers, foster carers, and in some cases social workers. Focusing on educational opportunities and strengths would help young people to gain a positive learning identity, which have proved to be of great significance for good educational achievements.

**Addressing the problem of poverty and lack of financial resources**

In this report we have described the young peoples accounts of lack of financial resources, and the implications of this. When listening to the young peoples statements, the picture is quite clear. Poverty and lack of financial resources had a detrimental effect on the young people’s situation at school. Lacking financial resources could make them feel different, and the risk of being excluded was evident. We are of the opinion that the impact of poverty needs to be recognised and considered by professionals; social workers and teachers. Such a recognition could have a positive impact on the self-perception of young people with experiences of being in care, prevent them from feeling excluded, and possibly also make them less exposed to bullying.

**Participation and agency**

In the interviews, young people mentioned the fact that they often felt powerless, and out of control of their own lives. Such feelings had negative effect on their well-being, and consequently also on their educational achievements. Therefore, our recommendation is to always be sure to listen to children and young people, and ensure their participation and inclusion in decision-making and planning. The young people are experts on their own situation, and have the right to be included. Furthermore, according to the accounts in the interviews, these young people have had to face difficult situations and take responsibility not only for themselves, but also for parents and siblings. They can be regarded as experienced and competent individuals, and promoting participation in decisions would surely provide better and more adequate planning.

**Procedures when leaving care**

Another important issue is connected to the procedure when young people leave care. As explained previously in the text, young people placed in out-of-home care usually leave care at 19, when they finish upper secondary school. In connection to what we said about the “state as parent”, having a fixed age for care leaving seems irrational. When
attending a conference, we had a question from the audience concerning what we perceived was the most adequate age to leave care. Such a question would never have been asked to a birth parent. Young people living with their parents are expected to leave home when they are ready to do so, not when they have reached the age of majority, or left upper secondary school. One of our recommendations is therefore to imply an individual care leaving, up to at least 23 years of age. A young person in care should be able to leave care at a time when he or she is capable to, not when reaching a certain age.

In Britain and in other countries, young people leaving care have access to specialised “leaving care” teams, where specialised social workers can support and advice them in the transition to adulthood. This may be a good way of supporting young people leaving care, but from our point of view such support can also be given without creating specialised teams. Many local authorities in Sweden are small, few children are placed in care, and the creation of specialised teams would be hard to organise. From our point of view it is a question of recognising the complicated process of leaving care for young people, in relation to the prolonged transition to adulthood, and increased dependency of parents for all young people. Access to a competent contact person, who could provide practical advice and help, as well as emotional encouragement, would be a way to compensate young care leavers for the want of parental support. Such support could also help them to find pathways to higher and further education.

**Access to Adult education**

Even though the educational situation for children and young people in care might be improved, there is still a risk that they will encounter disruptions and delays in their educational process. Therefore, the access to adult education is imperative for this group. For several of our interviewees, adult education has been of great importance. Without access to adult education, their chances of moving on to college or university would have been minimal. Therefore, maintaining, and improving, access to adult education for all young people is absolutely vital. Such access is one example of supporting structures that ought to characterise a democratic society.
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## Appendix

### Table 5:8 extended. Mean value of marks in relation to educational background of parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NPL</th>
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<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
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<td>2070</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compulsory school</td>
<td>303010</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15209</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary, 2-3 years, vocational</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25577</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary, 3 years, academic</td>
<td>348255</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6592</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>College/university, 2-3 years</td>
<td>490382</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7316</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/University &gt;= 4 years</td>
<td>244632</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2535</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>2136259</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>59299</td>
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### Table 5:9 extended. Mean value of marks in relation to age at first placement

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<th>Age at first placement</th>
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<td>Mean</td>
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<td>Not placed in care</td>
<td>2136259</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at first placement</strong></td>
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<td>Std. Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-6 years</td>
<td>18819</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-11 years</td>
<td>9599</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-15 years</td>
<td>14658</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19 years</td>
<td>15743</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;19 years</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>2195558</td>
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### Table 5:22 extended. Results of cognitive tests

<table>
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<th>Results of cognitive tests</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Stdv</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not placed in care</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>19078</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>19.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>19657</td>
<td>18.2</td>
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</table>
Table 5:23 extended. Results from the UGU-material: Mean value of marks and of cognitive tests in relations to educational background of parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent’s educational background</th>
<th>Mark percentile Not placed in care</th>
<th>Cognitive tests NPL</th>
<th>Mark percentile Placed in care</th>
<th>Cognitive tests PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean value</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean value</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>442</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compulsory school</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>3 744</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>3 334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school – 2 or 3 years vocational</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>7 146</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>6 419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school theoretical</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>3 217</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>2 885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university 2-3 years</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>4 460</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>3 996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/university 4 years or more</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>2 279</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>2 002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>21 217</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>19 078</td>
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Table 5:27 extended. Percentage of those who received help at home with homework.

<table>
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<th>Status</th>
<th>Did not receive help with homework N and percentage</th>
<th>Received help with homework N and percentage</th>
<th>Total N and percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not placed in care</td>
<td>6 769</td>
<td>15 194</td>
<td>21 963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in care</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7117</td>
<td>15 609</td>
<td>22 726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 5:28 extended. Received help with homework in relation to age at first placement, percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at first placement</th>
<th>Did not receive help with homework N and percentage</th>
<th>Received help with homework N and percentage</th>
<th>Total N and percentage</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-11</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 or older</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td></td>
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