

**PERCEPTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE ASSISTED IN PLACEMENT  
SHELTERS ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The main effect of transformations that occurred in post-communism in all areas of public interest for assisted youth of protection institutions reaching the critical age of 18 - when they have to leave the system - is the lack of any subsequent social support, and practically, their rejection by the society that had protected them until then. What is still lacking today is the existence of a coherent, planned, implemented and managed policy at the central level to ensure: on the one hand, the continued support of young adults after the end of the period of protection for adequate social inclusion, by monitoring professional integration and providing housing, housekeeping, revenue management, etc.; on the other hand, planning for the future discharge of the assistants, which could possibly lead to changes in the structure of the objectives of the programs carried out in the institutions, in the direction of developing independent living and anticipating and realizing openness to the outside community. The present paper aims to emphasize the perception of young assisted persons in the placement shelters in Romania regarding the existence of independent life skills development activities, which are provided partly by the governmental institutions, partly through the efforts of foundations and non-governmental organizations carries out work in the field of child protection, offering some quantitative and qualitative benchmarks on this issue.

**Keywords:** support, assistance, change, life skills, social integration

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In Romania, as in most countries, social assistance for the child and the family began as a service for the placement of orphaned or maltreated children or who, for another reason, could not live with their parents or the extended family. The logical action was to develop preventive strategies to avoid the need for family protection.

In the last two decades of the communist regime, Romania has experienced a real explosion of abandonment, generated by the aggressive “pronatalist” policy triggered in 1966, which resulted in the birth of a large number of unwanted children and the increase in the maternal mortality rate due to empirical abortions.

Starting with 1993, working exclusively on child and family protection in Romania, I contributed to the implementation of the social assistance system in maternity wards, with support in preventing the abandonment and institutionalization of children, then in running and implementation of collateral programs - mother-to-child couple shelter, adoption and parenting. However, the phenomenon of institutionalization, taken over after a period of strict limitations and coordination, continued to exert its influence for a long time, changing the mentality and the way of providing protection to children in this situation, taking place with difficulty and at a pace quite slow.

The main effect of transformations that occurred in post-communism in all areas of public interest for assisted youth of protection institutions reaching the critical age of 18 - when they have to leave „the system” - is the lack of any subsequent social support, and practically, their rejection by the community. They have a strong sense of social exclusion; their attempts at integration are almost invariably unsuccessful. It is undoubtedly one of the causes of the increase of crime in this category of young adults; many of them with no stable residence and clear survival possibilities - are exposed to prostitution, delinquency, abuse of hallucinogenic substances, etc. - phenomena that primarily affect the homeless category, commonly referred to as "street children" and which mostly come from all the assisted minors of children's homes.

The research project therefore wishes to respond to the objectives proposed in the National Strategy<sup>1</sup>, to improve the living conditions of beneficiaries in the institutional environment. Priority objectives have been established to improve the situation of children in the special protection system, to accelerate the development of community services, to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all children in our society in the exercise of children's rights. The novelty is the promotion of the participatory and approach from several areas of the child's problem in Romania, facilitating respect for the child's best interests in all fields.

Assessing the development of independent life skills has a formative, forward-looking character, not only to determine the stage of development, but also to provide information to the young participants in the sample in a constructive manner by which they are informed about the results

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<sup>1</sup>*Strategia Națională pentru Protecția și Promovarea Drepturilor Copilului* ([http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Transparenta/2014/2014-02-03\\_Anexa1\\_HG\\_Strategie\\_protectia\\_copilului.pdf](http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Transparenta/2014/2014-02-03_Anexa1_HG_Strategie_protectia_copilului.pdf)), accesat la data de 14.10.2017.

obtained and what can be done to improve the living environment and the services provided by the protection unit.

Thus, I have proposed that, by assessing the development of the independent life skills of young people protected in the social protection system, I shall not limit myself only to the reporting of educational actions or to the results obtained as a set of values, more or less absolute, but to reach - as I'm mentioning here Prof. Constantin Cucos" a sufficiently systematic description to be able to perceive links between different elements and, if necessary, to act on some of them to modify others"<sup>2</sup>

In this way the evaluation becomes participatory. Using self-assessment and reflection methods on the process of acquiring various elements of independent living skills, I have tried to help young people evaluate their own progress in learning and acquiring specific skills. Involvement of young people in the process is all the more necessary as formal and non-formal methods generate atypical learning and acquisition contexts, which require both the explanation of the steps involved in presenting the objectives and the final meetings at which the interrogation operation is made.

Starting from the legislation in force on improving the independent living skills of the young people in the placement shelters, respectively Order no. 48 of March 30, 2004, the Minimum Mandatory Standards for the Service for the Development of Independent Living Skills, Official Gazette no. 352 of April 22, 2004, it was necessary to create a methodological guide for the implementation of these standards.

One of the most used being the Methodological Guide for the Development of Independent Living Skills – was created by the World Learning Organization, within the Childnet 2004 Program.<sup>3</sup>

Skills are specific to certain age groups - at younger ages we expect simple, concrete skills, at higher ages we expect complex skills with higher abstraction. However, adolescents do not learn the skills in chronological order. It is possible that young people older (15-17 years) may have missed a skill that their fellow students have taught at a younger age. This is all the more possible since some young people have experienced multiple placements and successive interruptions in education, with clear influences on affectivity, attachment and development.

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<sup>2</sup> Cucos, C. (1996). *Pedagogie*, Editura Polirom, Iași.

<sup>3</sup> *Ghidul metodologic pentru dezvoltarea deprinderilor de viață independentă* – creat de Organizația World Learning, în cadrul Programului Childnet 2004, Autori: Prof.Dr.Sociolog Sorin Mitulescu, Psih. Dan Parvu, As.social Daniel Chirila, Psih. Ovidiu Ionescu, consultant World Learning.

Referring to the age group of 15-18 years, we find that it presents a more particular issue. Adolescence is the moment of assuming individual responsibilities. This may give rise to claims, certain conditions of dissatisfaction, suspicion and uncertainty over their future. They may have gaps in knowing their own personality. These young people encounter difficulties when they are in a position to relate to a person they perceive as an authority. Such fears can be overcome if encouraged to communicate with adults on their needs and interests. Young people may be detained to discuss themselves and to analyze their problems within a group. Lack of habit and a self-assessment exercise can generate verbal resistance. It is difficult for them to make decisions about their personal and professional future, which causes emotional states with a negative charge and requires clarification of the criteria of appreciation / self-assessment.

The practice of social assistance for the child requires knowledge of the process of developing it from the state of helpless infant to that of the independent adult, because in order to judge whether any of the emotional, social or personality aspects is abnormal, it is necessary to compare them with normal limits for that age group.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research objectives**

Starting from the observations made in the group of young people, I have outlined and tried to achieve through this research the following objectives:

- Assessing the independent life skills of assisted young people;
- Assessing the needs of young beneficiaries of the protection system;
- Identification of existing independent living skills and their development / consolidation, in order to gain social and community autonomy and integration;
- Identify the appropriate behaviours that lead to the desired skill acquisition;
- Creating a plan of activities specific to each assisted person;
- Creation of a customized personalized intervention plan - applicable to each outgoing person to leave the shelter.

### **2.2. Hypotheses**

- Identifying independent living skills in assisted children / youth and developing real and applicable Personalized Intervention Plans will lead to the development of independent life skills necessary for good adaptation and integration into society.

- By focusing on developing the independent life skills of children and young people protected in protection institutions, they will provide them with a wide range of possibilities in terms of social integration, labour market insertion, diminishing stigmatization in the existing public mentality, by increasing self-esteem and minimizing the number of delinquents among them.

### **2.3. Methods of research**

The questionnaire used to measure the perception of assisted children / youth in placement shelters in relation to the existence of independent life skills development activities in social assistance services is an adaptation of the Skills and Interest Questionnaire, in conjunction with the Inventory of Assessing Skills Independent Life: Life Skills Inventory DSHS 10-267 (12/2000).

The Life Skills Inventory DSHS 10-267 was developed in 2000 by the Department of Social and Health Service of the State of Washington in the United States of America. This inventory will be used to identify and evaluate existing independent living skills and what needs to be acquired by the subjects. It is generally applied to subjects aged 15-16 years, in the present research being adapted and applied to a wider age group, ie 14-20 years.

The inventory contains categories of independent living skills such as: Money Management, Food Management, Personal Image and Personal Hygiene, Health, Home Hygiene, Housing, Transport, Educational Planning, Job Search, Emergency and Safety Special Services, Community Guidance, Interpersonal Relationships, Legal Competencies and Prevention of Pregnancy / Parental Competencies. Quotation is generally based on the number of skills possessed, so for each category of skills there are 4 levels of skill development, ie: base level, intermediate level, advanced level and exceptional level.

The personalized intervention plan is a planning and coordination tool, a part of the plan of services provided, according to the legislation in force, to the child and the assisted young person. This is a permanent work tool for one or more members of the multidisciplinary team that coordinates their interventions to achieve the goals set out in the child care plan and family (where applicable - if the family has been identified and cooperates) .

### **2.4. Working process**

The questionnaire was applied to a sample of 30 young people protected in the state protection system - the "Sf. Nicolae " Placement Shelter, Bucharest, sector 1, for a period of 6 months (January-June 2017), those having 14 and 20 years of age, mentioning that: 16 young people

benefited from protection only within state institutions<sup>4</sup>, 10 young people were protected for 7 years in a private system (family type house) and then admitted to the state center (following the dissolution of the private care shelter), and 4 young people were protected in foster care families from the small ages (2 -3 years) until adolescence (14-15 years), admitted at the age of adolescence (15, 16) in the state shelter.

The goal of developing life skills is to use them spontaneously in real-life situations so as to release from a programme of protection, the young person should have independent living skills in a natural way and be able to reflect on their behaviour and learn implicitly from these reflections. Assessment methods and tools required adaptation to the contexts and objectives of learning and acquiring skills, modifying both formal and non-formal learning, so as to allow the measurement of the stage of development of independent living skills.

Systematic observation of sample survey behaviour, case analysis, reflexive journal, project, portfolios, role play are some of the methods used to record progress in assessment and training contexts.

For an effective evaluation of the sample of young people, we have taken into account essential elements such as the context in which the evaluation will take place (both within and outside the placement shelter), the activities used (taking into account the preferences, expectations, their previous experience, etc.), their planning in order to achieve the proposed objectives, ensuring the time spent on reflection on the data provided by them (under the confidentiality label) and, last but not least, the data processing and the recording of the research results.

With 6 months of research, meetings with children / youth took place once a week for group activities and once every two weeks for individual activities, the materials and activities proposed to the subjects were tailored to the needs and level of development of each.

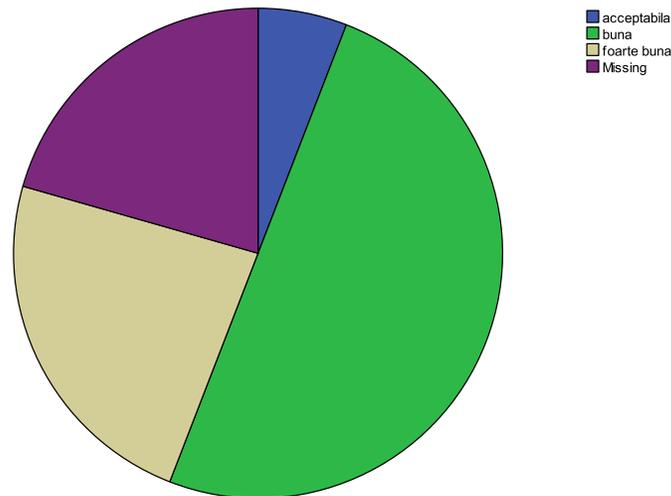
## **2.5. Interpretation of data**

The appreciation of the young people regarding the care provided in the current (state) to the private shelter (ie the family of maternity care) from the point of view of the care staff is as follows: 5.9% consider it acceptable, 50.1% consider care as good and 23.5% appreciate the care given as very good; 20.5% refusing to respond to this point (Fig.1)

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<sup>4</sup> Swings(romanian –Leagan) shelters, Pre-school children's homes, School children's homes, Special assistance shelters - the title of the protection shelters until 2004, when they changed into Social Services Complexes and where children and young people aged between 3 and 20 years were joined, those aged less than 3 years are only assisted in substitute families - maternal assistance, as a result of changing legislation on child protection.

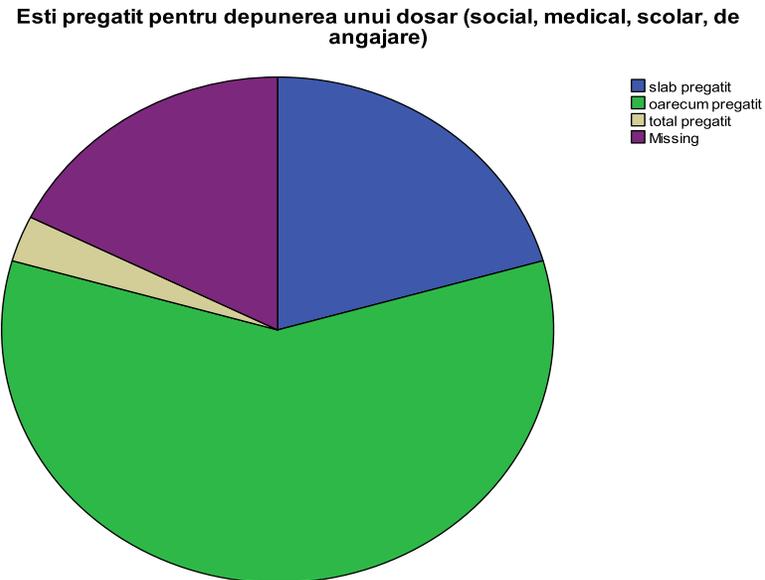
**Cum apreciati ingrijirea acordata in centrul actual (de stat) fata de cel privat (familia de asistenta maternală) din punct de vedere - personalul de ingrijire**



**Fig 1. Care of young people in the current protection center compared to the previous measure**

It is found that half of the sample of subjects to whom the questionnaire was applied finds appropriate care compared to the previous protection measure, referring in particular to the provision of material goods, diversified food, openness to society by allowing foundations, associations or individuals (to go to theatre, film, festivities, church, etc.) to engage in stimulating children by different activities outside of the protection shelter, thus giving them a greater diversity of actions compared to what have experienced in the private shelter, respectively in the family of maternity care.

Preparing for independent life also involves actions such as the preparation, commissioning, and deletion of a personal dossier in community institutions with which the young person will come into contact with community integration. Thus, more than half of the 58.8% of young people consider themselves to be somewhat prepared (partly informed), 20.6% admit they are poorly trained, and only 2.9% are considered prepared for this. (Fig.2)

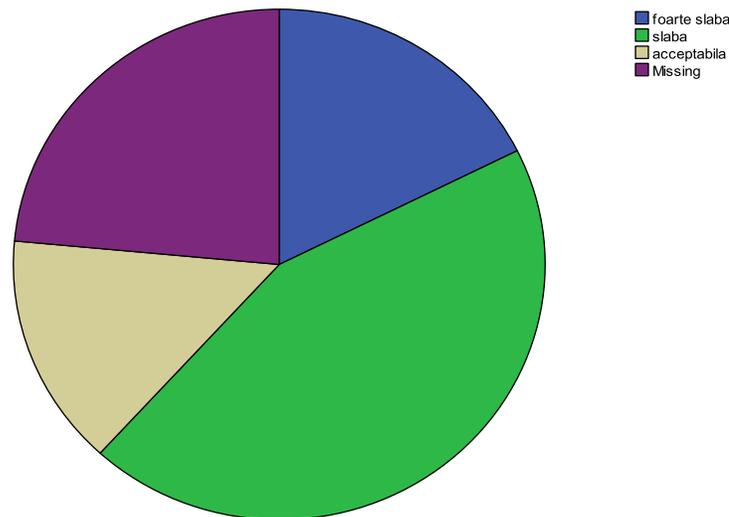


**Fig 2. Preparation for the preparation and presentation of a file (social, medical, school, employment)**

The very low percentage of young people who are genuinely prepared to identify and work is largely due to the postponement of their preparation by concrete information and examples through which they could be trained in the preparation of a social file, all necessary documents through visits to the institutions concerned and the simulation of obtaining an act, but also due to the lack of action to raise their interest in undertaking individual steps - young people being accustomed to the social worker, educator, etc., to obtain on behalf of all of them involving the submission of a case before an institution or firm.

With regard to the application of sanctions or penalties, referring here to the way staff engage in restricting time for doing themes, the rigor of returning to the center (from consent), sanctioning indiscipline (child beaten, damage to property, etc.), young people consider 23.1% as very weak in the present (state) protection center, compared to the private one (ie the substitute family), 57.7% weak, and 19.2% acceptable. (Fig.3).

Cum apreciati ingrijirea acordata in centrul actual (de stat) fata de cel privat (familia de asistenta maternală) din punct de vedere - pedepse/sanctiuni

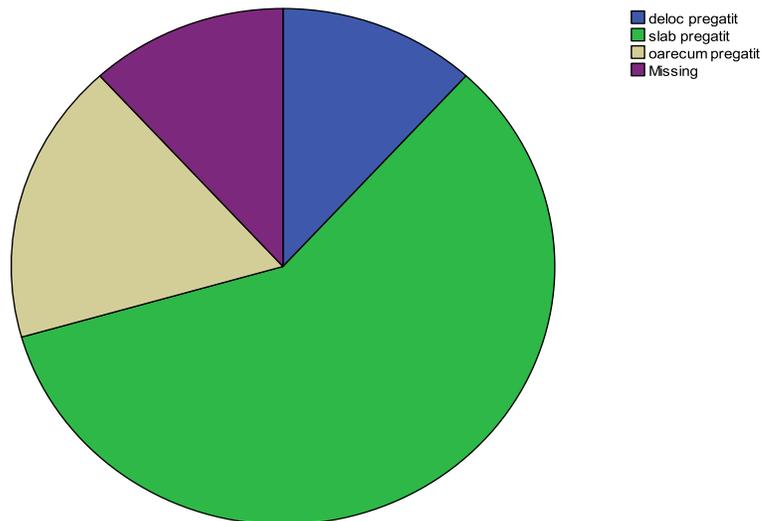


**Fig. 3: Aspects related to the care provided in the current (state) center of care in relation to the private one (the family of maternal assistance) in terms of punishments, respectively sanctions**

From the youngsters' accounts and the percentages obtained, it is clear that in the private shelters for the protection of children and young people and in the families of maternal assistance, the application of sanctions and limits regarding the observance of generally accepted behaviours in a family environment is more. This was also recognized by young people who later committed a crime in a state shelter, saying they had "more freedom" and "the staff does not care anyway."

Regarding the training of young people in placement shelters to support a job interview, 11.8% of the sample questioned were not prepared at all, 58.8% were poorly trained and 17.6% said they were somewhat prepared, and 11.8% did not respond. (Fig.4)

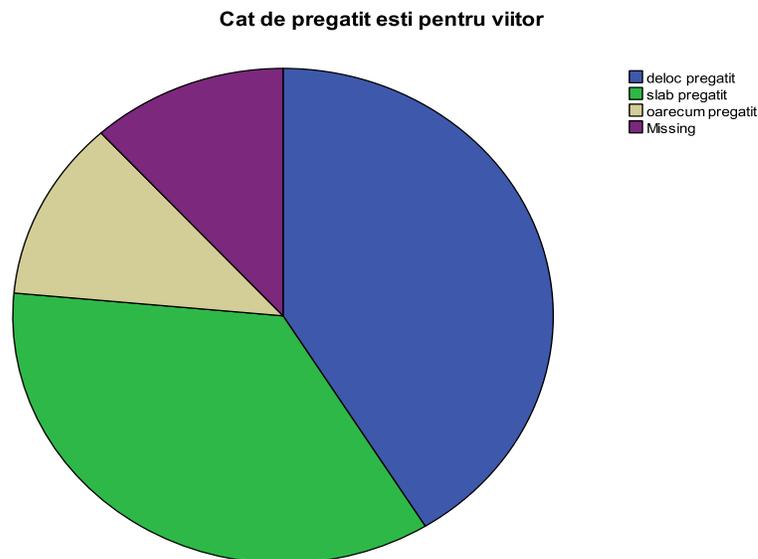
Esti pregatit pentru prezentarea la un interviu pentru angajare



**Fig. 4: The situation of young people on training to support an interview for employment**

These data, however, are easily checked on the ground by the poor insertion of young people from protection shelters or by the instability shown in maintaining a job for a longer period of time (on average after about 2 months they opt to identify a new job). Most young people opt for occasional services, starting from "good paid" services, but not considering the poor professional training or schooling they have.

As far as the preparation of young people for Community integration is concerned, 41.2% declare they are not trained, 35.3% poorly trained and 11.8% somewhat trained, and 11.8% have not responded. (Fig. 5)



**Fig. 5: Preparing young people for community integration**

The percentages obtained as a result of applying the questionnaires to find out about the degree of training of young people about social, community or even family (extended family) integration after leaving the placement shelter shows a worrying situation regarding their future.

Dumitrana M. (1998) mentions in his work - *The Institutionalized Child*, the following aspect related to the relationship between the children of the beneficiaries of the protection shelters and the special environment of life, inherent in the conditions of institutionalization: "It is obvious that the living environment has its mark on the behaviour and the mental structure of children and young people raised in institutions. A feature of the living environment in placement shelters is its inadequacy and the promotion of disjunctive features with the social environment. Children often experience cognitive, confounding dissonance."<sup>5</sup>

Not being sufficiently informed or receiving distorted, untrustworthy information, it is very difficult for them to credit certain data, to give meaning and to make decisions by virtue of certain beliefs and certainties. The question is, "Do these children have another mental structure? Another kind of thinking? Rather, it is about the special (institutional) culture in which they have matured and where they live until the protection measure is revoked. Their behaviours are patterns appropriated through institutional socialization, but become dis-adaptive ways in living conditions in an open environment. "

<sup>5</sup> Dumitrana, M. (1998), *Copilul instituționalizat*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București.

Their behaviour is explained by the fact that they lack some very early experiences. Because of this, their life skills are different from other people. It cannot be said that they "have no skills" but only have skills that do not satisfy the demands of independent life.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS IN WORKING WITH INSTITUTIONALIZED YOUNG PEOPLE**

1. *Young people who ask or do not even need help.* Even though they are often manipulative, they do not mean they are not in pain or even in danger. It is unjustifiable to be aggressive or indifferent. It takes a lot of patience. The reason for requesting help may be underestimated.

2. *It is unrealistic to expect from the beneficiaries some behaviour.* This does not mean that they are to be seen as "sick", but only to take into account that each of them has gone through events and difficult times, precisely in their most vulnerable moments: in childhood. It takes time for the effects of institutionalization to be exhausted, and for this it takes patience and the sustained effort of the professionals and a support network. When discharging from the shelter, it is necessary for the young person to be provided with access to support services (psychological and social counselling, medical care, etc.)

3. *Regardless of the information available in the social file, checks and evaluations, in a first phase it cannot be understood only the "surface" situation.* There is a need for ongoing collaboration between institutions, educators, social workers, psychologists and even family members (whether they are members of the extended family, carers, or other people to whom the child / grown person has developed attachment relationships) to provide support appropriate in situations where the young person will be exposed at the exit of the shelter. Regardless of what he claims (many young people claim that they "no longer need a home", "well done", "I will do very well alone", etc.) when leaving the shelter, the impact with the real world with which has not been fully tangential, will be strong enough to be determined, sooner or later, to ask for support.

4. *A professional mistake to be avoided is to treat adolescents and young people as children.* Even if they seem to ask this at times and even behave childishly in certain situations, children / young people assisted in placement shelters mature much earlier than children raised in families by not having a permanent attachment person surely (as is the case with family members), the situations they go through are often explained by the people around them (be they within the shelter or outside people - from school, from the street, in other circumstances), and the fear of abandonment and insecurity arise in the face of the multiple losses suffered by countless transfers from one shelter to another (some children are traversing a sinuous route, benefiting from three to eight assists in different shelters depending on context and personal history ). So

for these young people, playing a child role (good or rebellious) is a way of adapting to the situation, a common role for many people who lead a normal life. The mature role is learned, and aggression or ignorance does not contribute to shaping and assuming a healthy and beneficial role.

5. *Young people's contact with reality is relatively weak, and their vision of the world seems distorted, being easily influenced by the thinking and choices they make.* They often try and manage an adaptation and adaptation to the environment without anyone imposing it. It depends on the people assigned to work with them, if the maturing of young people and the transition to an independent life will be done in leaps, or adapted and progressive, as the power of assimilation and adaptation to the new everyday demands.

6. *The needs of young people are often different from those they express.* Often workers in the social welfare system are assaulted by young people with material demands. These seem somewhat justifiable because few of them can boast a material or financial accumulation (although at discharge from the shelter, young people may be in possession of the amount of money representing the state allowance accumulated over the whole period of assistance in the protection system, is immediately spent by them, invariably, on worthless things and gifts for former colleagues in the shelter). There is a need for the specialists to work with young people, to have the ability to guide young people, to understand that they need something other than what they display and often claim. Often, money and clothes urgently called for help disappear immediately, being exchanged for other goods, made "gift" or sold - a phenomenon that happens precisely because they have not had personal belongings all the time they have been assisted in the shelter which "to put up price" and to invest affectively (for example, a child in the family can keep for a long time a certain thing, just as his own, precisely because he was given by a person of great importance to him). In this respect it is necessary to discuss the issue of each young person in all aspects and over several time intervals. This can happen best and in an organized way, during team meetings that have to meet, among other things, this role. Continuous adaptation to reality must also be reflected in the Personalized Intervention Plan (PIP) and be one of the real aims contained in this document and a working tool for both the young person concerned and the case manager.

7. *Undoubtedly, longitudinal studies are needed on the long-term evolution of former beneficiaries of protection shelters.* Often the professionals in the field consider a case solved and possibly even a good practice model, which in time without proper support can turn into a failure. Monitoring of young people is required for at least 6 months - it would be advisable to have a period of 2 years, as dependence on the protection system can not be "cured" in such a short time. There may be slippages in their conduct, through the less inspired choices they can

make and the entourage they tend to have, given their low self-esteem and complexities of inferiority developed over time.

8. *Very few young people plan and carry out their activity in time and in detail* (for example, doing the themes, further training, etc.). The real problem is the lack of recognition of the real needs of the child, adolescent and young person, including freedom - the ability to make their own choices. To eat well or less well, to learn well or not, to dress properly or not, wake up and go to bed at the regular time, relations in the protection institutions revolve around this kind of thing. It is important for adolescents and young people to be autonomous as early as possible. They need to feel loved and confident in space, to progressively gain a certain "freedom of movement". They can be encouraged to have their own personal, relationship experience, and the specialist can be content to assist and be "at the younger's reach". The space and the time when they can behave freely, the attendance of other young people like him / her, the autonomy in terms of the pace of his / her needs, it educates respect for one's own person and others. If this principle is upheld, planning, organizing, and making the time and the end of life in order will become a skill by itself.

9. *Self-esteem, rules* - Interdependence between people is normal from an affective, intellectual or spiritual point of view, but interdependence expressed through threats and forms of blackmail destroys the trust in the authority that represents and replaces the parents, but especially the self-confidence. Educating a young man is equal to helping him become autonomous. It is not pedagogical to impose on the children the wishes and rules of workers (educators, instructors, case reporters, etc.) without any moral value. Ideally it would be for the child and then the teenager and the young person to have only a framework of rules indispensable to personal safety and then learning by experimenting when they try to break them are indispensable and that the rules are set for a purpose. It is, however, necessary to forbid what is dangerous, but with respect to the developing adult.

10. *Physical development* - When the child grew up and reached adolescence, it must be left to train his body. Regarding the movement and the hunger, the beneficiary "self-regulates". By letting him experience himself, he will gradually and progressively learn to be careful and meticulous in coordinating these things. Otherwise, when suddenly put - in a situation of "self-help", he can not be prepared for difficult experiences inherent in everyday life from "outside the center", to which he has not had limited and selective access (there will of course be situations in which the beneficiary will ruin the various objects held for use, or there will be periods in which he will care less about his appearance and his own space).

The interdictions heard during the assisting period (for some young people this is in fact their entire existence), are often the basis of some neurotic personalities. Raised in the institution, the

child (today's today) is enticing and enlivening, desire, pleasure and pain, emotions and feelings. It can become passive and shy, meaning "good" or "good child," and then, as a teenager, these barriers break or he "breaks", the revolt being directed to himself or to others. At the basis of this "condition", there is the need for a part of the personnel working in the care institutions, to have good results, ie "good children" and "good", while the behaviour of the fellow, beneficiary of the protection system, adjust and adapt to the new status, often in a violent way, with aggressive, even antisocial behavioural manifestations, trying to contradict all the things and lessons learned by then, offered in a limiting and non-conforming environment with a constantly changing reality.

11. *The School* - The importance given to school success is exaggerated. The school is a privileged place to meet the bulk of the institution with the "others", to socialize and integrate into its group of interests and concerns, but the street, the media and the internet are modern mediators of "knowledge". When a child / student has a school failure, it is a sign that something else does not actually work. Character, intelligence, and social insertion are essential to life, often more important than the scores obtained, but these elements must be traced and matched to the continually changing motherhood, in order to emphasize the importance of a form of schooling, as far as the skill, skills and genetic support of the young person are concerned (effective targeting to institutions that are attractive for young people, depending on the intelligence coefficient, native attitudes towards art or sport etc.), as well as the use of non-punitive measures in case of failures and skidding).

Enrolment of all the steps of the development of the person in the relevant documents, respectively in the Personalized Intervention Plan, taking into account the opinions of the specialists (psychologist, physician, educator, etc.), as well as the reference staff for each assisted person (the persons participating daily child / grooming and who can report significant changes in the behavior, habits, and preferences of the individual) can help to find the most effective methods and procedures in each case so as not to lose sight of "the best interest of the child "(Law no.272/2004).

12. *Laws and rules* - Informing young people about the laws in force on child protection, citizens' rights and obligations, the Labor Code, etc., is essential for every assisted young person, giving him the opportunity to portray an image of the roles that every citizen "plays" in this society. The gradual information, specific to each activity in which the participant is included, will open to him real perspectives on the way society is conceived, emphasize the importance of complying with legislation, taking into account the fact that the domains are overcome, and the non-observance of a legislative sequence causes imbalances in the whole system , with which the youngster can come in contact or may need at some point.

13. *Anxiety* - Adolescents typically have a degree of anxiety. Giving them confidence, giving them the sense of security and understanding of their concerns, understanding the role of people / professionals in their lives, understanding the surrounding reality and, last but not least, understanding and accepting their own people - as the main resources and factors of change, young people will more easily overcome the sequences of their lives in which they feel unintelligible, unacceptable, rejected by people and society, stigmatized for various reasons (real or perceived as real by them).

Understanding their vision of the world, they can be given opportunities to perceive things and situations around them, without personal implications and opinions, but only a different vision in order to accept the surrounding reality.

14. *Claimability* - Naturally, young beneficiaries receiving protection in institutions (be it state or private) show distrust, suspicion and caution. Permanent feeling of fear is explained by the succession of losses suffered by them throughout their lives (most of them being institutionalized from birth), by the fact that they have been abandoned in reality with admission to a shelter (state or private) or in a substitute family (maternal assistance), then losing the real or symbolic abandonment, whenever a person disappears from their lives (eg changing the reference person, moving from one institution to another through transfer or due to the abolition of that shelter, the departure of a colleague - especially in the event of adoption, or even more dramatically - to his own adoption, which for various reasons was not completed, and the child / young person was "returned" to the institution of protection, etc.). In each of these situations, the bully carries a special burden of "self-esteem", permanent fear of rejection and abandonment, developing in time a particular "testing of adult limits" to show that "it is the same everyone else before him. "

Careful attention should be given to approaching the young person, highlighting and enhancing self-esteem, respecting the human being in front of us, continuously assuring the supportive role we play, no matter how many times we need to take it at the end of an action or area of concern for the concerned person.

15. *Duration of support* - A large number of young beneficiaries of the protection system are requesting or waiting for support for an indefinite period. Most often, it is an unconscious reaction that enters into a profoundly human tendency - to take responsibility for the moment of sufficient "development". It is necessary to work with young people to raise awareness of the time limit and the unavoidable situation of leaving the system. Graduation, limits and steps in the Personalized Intervention Plan (PIP) are important milestones in this respect.

16. *Accountability* - Dependence on the child protection system and the "bridging" of the responsibility of others are common situations of life and mentality of the children / young

people raised in the placement shelters, all the more so as they have spent a longer period of assistance, by transferring successively from one shelter to another, as legislation in the field has imposed over time.

Replies like, "If something bad happens to me, you (specialists in the field) are to blame!" In other words: "If I do as you say and go wrong, it is your responsibility to take care of me and solve the situation!". The role he interprets is "a dependent person," and most of them young people complain about an ambiguous situation of non-action vis-à-vis any action they should take to resolve or overcome an unforeseen situation which might arise.

It is symbolic - both informative and practical - initially accompanying the younger person to make a request (example: obtaining identity documents, a medical certificate, etc.), the specialists working directly with young people will gradually induce their sensation of independence and autonomy, which, unfortunately, was not allowed during the years of assistance in a system of protection (the legislation on child protection has undergone numerous modifications, additions and additions<sup>6</sup>, its application leading to multiple organizational reorganisations and institutionally), to make them act on their own, to have the initiative, to take action, and to easily overcome a failure or a challenge, no matter what area of life.

17. *Identifying and accepting a job* - Assisted young people in placement shelters constantly "feel" that a large amount of money is needed to ensure an independent life. It is a way of saying in other words that "they are not in a position to take care of themselves" or that "they are not yet ready to do so". It seems natural to stay under "system protection" until they are able to earn enough money to assume their autonomy. This conception turns into an opportunity to look for a service indefinitely and to leave it when the closing date of the protection system approaches. It is thus cultivated and perpetuated the idea that "all problems can be solved with money". Assisted young people feel entitled to remain dependent on the protection system because they "have no money". This mentality only does to create an imbalance in their expectations, the qualifications they have and the job they are looking for. It takes a lot of understanding, patience

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<sup>6</sup> Amended legislation on child protection:

- Law no. 3/1970 on the regime of the protection of certain categories of minors; Text published in M.Of. of Romania - in force from 12 May 1970 to 11 June 1997, being repealed and replaced by Emergency Ordinance 26/1997;

- Law no. 292 of 20 December 2011 Law on Social Assistance, Issuer: THE PARLIAMENT OF ROMANIA PUBLISHED IN: OFFICIAL MONITORING NO. 905 of December 20, 2011;

- Law no. 257/2013 for amending and completing the Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of child rights; Text published in M.Of. of Romania, effective from October 3, 2013;

- Law 272/2004 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child, republished in the Official Gazette, Part I no. 159 of 5 March 2014;

- Law no. 272/2004 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child - Republished and Updated 2016.

and firmness to prepare young people for "detachment" from the protection system, and also for professionalism to make it possible.

The acceptance and assumption by young people of this transition from a way of life (in which their involvement in the care, maintenance, quantification of their own and community resources is limited) to another (in which it is necessary to assume new roles on their own person) is often difficult, precisely because of the education they have received for years, in which other people around them were invested with "responsibility" and "paid" to meet them. In order to change the mentality, it is necessary to inform correctly the personnel coming in contact with the young people, to underline a supportive legislative framework in this respect and to implement with responsibility all the working procedures designed and developed over the years, together with the many legislative changes.

18. *The mirage of going abroad* - Departing "beyond" seems to solve all the problems. "There" can make money very quickly and easily. In addition, the conception that "it could go away from everything and everything" is considered to be a kind of "new start", "a new chance". It takes a lot of tact, because the perception of young people about "success stories", often presented in the media, which certainly have a "positive" influence on their decisions, and can significantly reduce the work of specialists in the field - young people cannot report in the real time that some people have made "fortune" and lead a "Western" life, often being disillusioned with what they find "there" where they are convinced that they "will realize their dream."

It is appropriate to provide good and thorough information on the phenomenon of "trafficking in human beings", labour legislation, the reality of living and working conditions "outside the country". There will certainly not be moralistic and brutal approaches, but concrete examples, pertinent information, exact figures, and actual hazards must be considered.

It is necessary that people working directly with the beneficiaries periodically update their knowledge (the role of training and exchange of experience is important) in order to provide young people with high-quality social services, provided that their motivation is low and related to a "image" "distorted of reality".

19. *The role of the professionals in the opinion of the beneficiaries* - When assisted young people talk about "what workers have done in the system of protection, for their growth and development," they often come to minimize their failure to acknowledge their contribution, their involvement, and the work themselves. Often, nursing staff is totally assimilated by one person - the State - who "does not meet the expectations of the beneficiaries" - or does not act as a "good substitute parent". For the most part, they are right. No professional, no matter how well-qualified, can totally replace a good family, nor can it be perfect. It can be "good enough" for the

given conditions, as are the parents. For example, a parent imposes rules, limits and loves, but a professional cannot be asked to "love" the beneficiaries. It should not become a deterrent or decrease in involvement in education and the increase of skills and abilities of assisted children / young people. You only need to be aware of this trend, and with the maturity of the young person and the acceptance of independence, it will recognize the value of those who helped him become a good adult. However, most of the "merit" of maturing and accepting an independent life rests with the young person (former) beneficiary of the child protection system.

20. *Pregnancy as a symptom* - Looking at the situation from the point of view of "system dependence", there is also the emergence of an "undesirable" task, especially in assisted teenagers in placement shelters, creating a "continuity" of providing social services for the youngsters concerned, and assisting in a specialized shelter (maternal shelter). It is, in a way, one of the dual symbolic meanings - the need to cling to the "protection system" at all costs, although this posture may be associated with the "need for independence" by assuming the role of a parent "in control" on his own life and implicitly on "a new life", coming totally out of the "incriminated" system. In this way the adolescent beneficiary invests her own child as "her independence statement" in front of the professionals, the parents (where they exist and visit the child at the orphanage), the concubine, the entourage, etc. To change the status of "assisted person" with "mother" seems to be an evolution and a step towards independence. The young woman who get pregnant, needs "someone" to offer her love. A child - at least virtually - carries the unconditional "promise of love" and eventually the "repair" of the past, which was denied to the mother. Through proper care of the child she takes care of herself, and she shows her past, how she should be cared for. The mechanism is similar in situations such as the death of a close relative or previous child, etc.

Another explanation would be that the mother (or potential mother) need only "something" of herself, such as a child, "not to share" with anybody. It sometimes happens that she does not care about the "fate" of the father of the child, or to ask her if she will contribute something to child care and care. For example, coordinating the "St. Nicolae" Shelter for mother and child, sector 1, Bucharest, I mentioned the situation in which four minor mothers (aged between 15 and 17), assisted in a placement shelter within the ray of the same sector, remain at the same time pregnant, and want to let them evolve, just for the reason of "being one like the other" (a sort of fashion or the way of learning, knowing the kind of mentality to prove that "I can", enforced in the shelters of "placement") "to have something of theirs only" and to "win the status of mother" (as is apparent from their statements). Paradoxically, they have shown after childbirth that they are responsible mothers, taking full part of their "parenting role", constantly informing

themselves of the child's development and growth while taking care of their own person (as they had not before pregnancy in the shelter where they received assistance).<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the following year, when their children reached the age of one year, minor mothers expressed their willingness to resume their studies, a school they all had added when they were still pregnant (due to the existence of the second chance program, implemented in some community schools, they could be enrolled - according to old age they could not continue the initial school program - and they had the chance to complete the gymnasium cycle, having the possibility to follow specialization courses and, implicitly, to have a qualification to allows them to earn their living at the age of 18 and discharge from their maternal shelter). It should be noted that these four minor mothers, although diagnosed with "a liminal intent by proper non-stimulation" (IQ with values ranging from 78 to 90), due to prolonged institutionalization, did not have diagnoses to prevent them from taking the role of parent or to put the life of a baby / child in danger. At the same time, we noticed the repetition of the same "phenomenon" when one of the mothers expressed their willingness to go to school, then the other three minor mothers asked for school reintegration, possibly due to additional motivation by offering special scholarships social). The outline of their personality has been accomplished by assuming a new "pupil" status and by continually encouraging and supporting support staff in the maternal shelter.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Skills represent such learned behaviours that Sean Covey (1998), a well-known psychologist, said that "they are constantly accompanying man, and can be a great help, but also a greater handicap: some can propel him forward, assuring the success of his actions, others they can pull it down to complete failure."<sup>8</sup> From another perspective, some skills are doing something related to objects, others are good at dealing with people; some have a specific character (palpable skills), others are more abstract.

The skills for independent life are those technical and psychosocial skills, mastered to automatism, which allow the individual to lead a normal existence, without depending on the assistance of the society and the opportunities offered by the society. The phrase "independent life" should not create the impression that it is the life of a lonely individual who leads an

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<sup>7</sup>Once the pregnancy has arisen, future minor mothers are admitted in the last trimester of pregnancy in a maternity shelter (for pregnant women and mother-to-child couples) as prescribed by the law and standards for residential care (Romanian Law 272/2004, Order 101 / 2004 On the functioning of the maternity shelters and Order 21/2004 On the functioning of the residential centers), and it is not possible to continue the protection in a residential shelter.

<sup>8</sup>Sean Covey(1998), *Cele 7 deprinderi ale adolescenților eficienți* , Ed. Simon & Schuster, New York, USA;

existence outside of society without rules to be respected, but on the contrary, independent life is the daily life in modern society, along with our fellow men.

Independent life can be acquired in several degrees depending on the biological and psychological potential of children and young people. For young people with disabilities, of course, there will be limited independence (with designated support staff to accompany them). Performance, in the development of life skills, involves the accumulation of the knowledge needed to assert the behaviours on the basis of which the attitude changes, the relationship of the four dimensions in the design of each activity.

The methods used in the process of developing independent life skills must allow for information acquisition, behaviour and attitude formation as well as performance. A diverse range of methods and processes is needed:

- teamwork, individual work, group discussions, games, workshops, role play, direct training, simulation, investigation, case study, socio-educational animation, various thematic projects, origami or other activities, - public speaking, theatre - staging, improvisations, stories, debates, etc.

The most demanding tool for assessing progress made by young people, a tool that permanently diversifies assessment methods and which provide the system with continuous information, remains the real life.

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