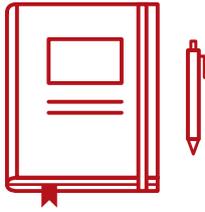


DISCUSSION PAPER

Transitional Support: The experiences and challenges facing youth transitioning out of state care in the Western Cape



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01

Introduction

The Children's Act of South Africa (1983) calls on Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs) to offer *transitional support* to youth leaving care as noted in the following section: Section 191(3)(e) states that in addition to residential care programmes, a Child and Youth Care Centre may also offer programmes either for children in their care or children living at home that include "transitional programmes to assist children leaving the facility after they reach the age of 18".

Mamelani has been active in this area of work for several years, providing 'transitional support' and responding to what was identified as a severe lack of options for young people exiting state care at age 18.¹ We have worked closely with The Homestead, whose focus is providing support to youth who were previously living on the street. This group is particularly vulnerable and marginalised, with poor family connections and therefore limited family support, coupled with the negative impacts of long-term state care.

In 2012, Mamelani began an assessment of the content and focus of our transitional support programme. The aim was to consolidate our existing practice as well as to discover and implement new ways of ensuring more participants in our programme make a successful transition out of care. What became clear from this process was that a new approach to working with this target group was essential to ensure long-term, sustainable change in their lives – a move away from one-size-fits-all interventions to a more individualised, integrated and process-driven approach.

We have chosen to document and share this information gathering exercise to see how our approach might be applicable to other CYCCs in the child and youth care sector and to begin to gather data on young people leaving care, beyond the group that we have worked with to date.

We are happy to present the findings in this report and to share our organisational insights with practitioners and organisations who work with young people, with CYCCs, as well as with Government and researchers. We hope that this sharing of information will generate conversations that take us all forward as we work to better equip young people to deal with the realities they face in the adult world beyond care.

We are happy to present the findings of this report and to share our organisational insights with practitioners who work with young people, with CYCCs and organisations, as well as with Government and researchers.



Anecdotal reports from the sector highlighted pressures placed on Designated Social Workers (DSWs) as a result of high caseloads. In light of this, DSWs struggle to provide adequate support to these families, and many of the issues the families face, persist. This leads to many children becoming long-term residents of CYCCs (beyond two years).

RATIONALE

Currently, there are approximately 13,250 children living in 354 registered child and youth care centres (CYCCs) across South Africa², as well as an unknown number of children living in unregistered centres³. The majority of these children are placed in such facilities as a result of abuse, neglect or abandonment⁴. According to the Children's Act, placement is intended to be temporary (for up to two years), in which time both the children and their families are meant to be offered therapeutic and psychosocial support towards overcoming their difficulties.

Once placed in care, these Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs) are responsible for the care, protection and development of the child. Designated Social workers (DSW) from the Department of Social Development (DSD) and other child protection organisations (DCPOs) are responsible for working with the families in the communities where these children have come from, to assist them in overcoming the challenges they were facing and might still face, so that their children may return to them.

Anecdotal reports from the sector highlighted pressures placed on DSWs as a result of high caseloads. In light of this, DSWs struggle to provide adequate support to these families, and many of the issues the families face, persist. This leads to many children becoming long-term residents of CYCCs (beyond two years).⁵ If they cannot return to a stable family, these young people remain in care until they are too old to continue receiving state support. Their abrupt exit from "the system" like their transition to adulthood is often immediate. They, and the facilities working to promote their development, are generally forced to begin their transition into adulthood without adequate resources and support. They thus face immense challenges and risks.

International research outside South Africa indicates that of all the identifiable vulnerable groups in society, young people who have been in care are the most likely to experience poor outcomes in adult life.

Youth approaching transitioning out of care are faced with the challenges of becoming 'instant' adults.⁶ Leaving care may mean that the young person will lose positive relationships (with staff and other residents), will lose access to activities and support, and will also lose a certain standard and expectation of living. Many young people are simply not ready or adequately prepared for this transition and the associated anxiety can have a severely negative impact on behaviour. This unsettling time can induce memories of previous trauma, separations and transitions, and the young person may revert to old negative behaviours.⁷ For these reasons, well planned and managed preparation for leaving care⁸, as well as on-going support after care are required to ensure a smooth transition into adult life.

International research outside South Africa indicates that of all the identifiable vulnerable groups in society, young people who have been in care are the most likely to experience poor outcomes in adult life. The area of work and documented study regarding youth leaving care is still a developing field in South Africa and, as a result, very limited research has been published to date.⁹



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Documenting youth leaving care is still a developing field in S.A.

Limited published research on the subject.

Mamelani conducted this information gathering exercise to examine the support structures, obstacles, and factors of risk and resilience confronting young people who are transitioning out of the care system in the Western Cape, South Africa



An online survey was set up and sent out to all registered CYCCs, as well as unregistered CYCCs that Mamelani was aware of. The survey was also sent to selected youth development organisations providing services to this target group (such as post-18 residential homes).



In addition, a series of focus groups were facilitated for staff from CYCCs, children and youth both in care, and those who had already left care in the last 3 years, as well as partner organisations working with this target group.

METHODOLOGY

Mamelani conducted this information gathering exercise to examine the support structures, obstacles, and factors of risk and resilience confronting young people who are transitioning out of the care system in the Western Cape, South Africa. The exercise attempted to gather information on how young people feel as they transition out of care. It also explores what can be done to better prepare them as well as investigating how well they have coped since leaving care.

Two separate processes were undertaken to gather this information. Data was gathered both qualitatively and quantitatively between September 2012 and February 2013. An online survey was set up and sent out to all registered CYCCs, as well as unregistered CYCCs that Mamelani was aware of. The survey was also sent to selected youth development organisations providing services to this target group (such as post-18 residential homes). The purpose of the survey was to gather quantitative data.¹⁰ Of the 46 CYCCs contacted, 7 could not complete the survey as they only care for younger children, and were therefore excluded from the sample. Of the remaining 39 CYCCs who work with this target group, 34 completed the survey. This means that the survey data represents responses from 87% of the CYCCs that provide care to this group in the Western Cape.

In addition, a series of focus groups were facilitated for staff from CYCCs, children and youth both in care, and those who had already left care in the last 3 years, as well as partner organisations working with this target group. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather qualitative data. A total of 11 CYCCs and 5 partner organisations working with this target group participated in focus groups, as well as a total of 39 youth both in care and post care, male and female, between the ages of 17 and 25. The focus groups and interviews were transcribed and the data was coded and analysed according to emerging themes.¹¹

It is our hope that this will stimulate debate and engagement that will enable care providers to develop a unified strategy in order to cope with, and overcome, the challenges that the sector faces.

An Advisory Group¹² was established made up of key stakeholders including the Department of Social Development (Children and Families and Youth Development), the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW) and the Children's Institute to support the process and give input. A practice work group was also established, made up of child and youth care practitioners to discuss the practice issues coming out of the process.¹³

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The broad themes arising from the focus groups are based on perceptions and experiences of the participants as well as discussions within the Practitioners Working Group. We acknowledge that it is difficult to undertake a complete analysis of the present situation facing the overall sector. This is largely because there is an acute shortage of baseline data and other research data regarding this target group in the South African context. It is important to note, also, as with many surveys, that the data is based on self reported information, which has not been verified.

Given the above, and within the time and financial constraints, it proved difficult to comprehensively unpack all the questions posed. We have noted in the report some of the questions that remain unanswered. Additionally, the poor tracking of youth who have already left care, made it difficult to establish contact with a large number of youth from this group, resulting in a small sample participating in the process.¹⁴ Despite these limitations some common themes emerged and an analysis is provided in this report in order to deepen awareness within the sector to shed light on the obstacles and challenges faced, and bring a focus onto the potential ways forward. It is our hope that this will stimulate debate and engagement that will enable care providers¹⁵ to develop a unified strategy in order to cope with, and overcome, the challenges that the sector faces.

02

Understanding the South African Context

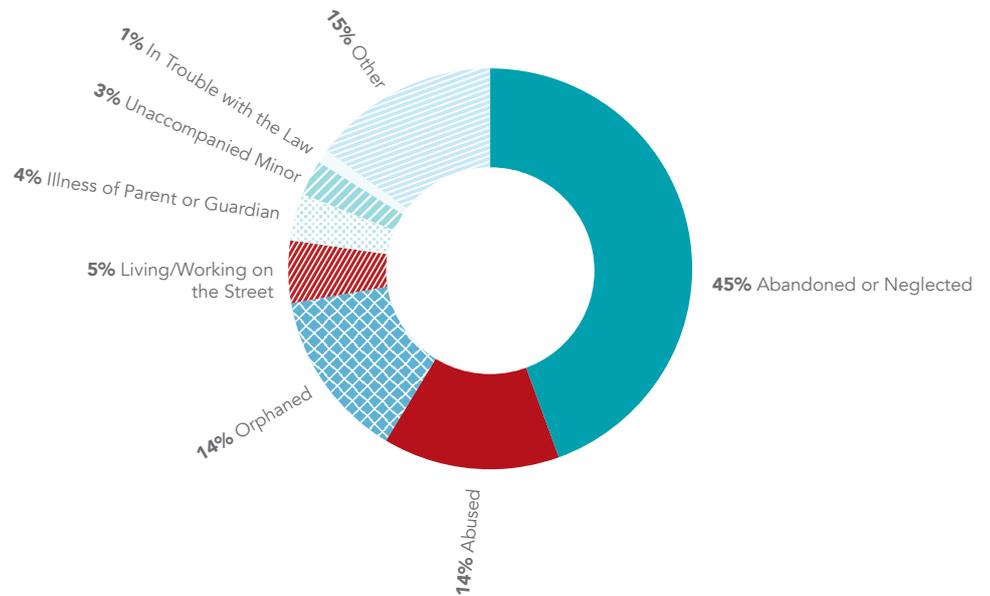
The structural implications of the Apartheid system has effectively continued even after the previous government's policies have been removed from the statute books. This has perpetuated a social environment characterised by violence, intergenerational unemployment and trauma, low quality education and the breakup of the extended family support system.

In order to understand the challenges facing youth once they have left the CYCC, we need to start at the beginning of their journey to describe the context into which the 'child in care' is born, to assist us in identifying the risk associated with children in care. It is, in part, these risk factors that the CYCC has to overcome to ensure an adolescent's successful transition into adult life.

Every society assumes a responsibility for rearing the next generation. Historically, this has been a task carried out within the family. In South Africa, poor children who enter care do so as a result of weakened or completely broken-down institutions, community and family bonds. South Africa's Apartheid and post-colonial history has placed its institutions and these traditional bonds under tremendous pressure. The structural implications of the Apartheid system has effectively continued even after the previous government's policies have been removed from the statute books. This has perpetuated a social environment characterised by violence, intergenerational unemployment and trauma, low quality education and the breakup of the extended family support system.¹⁶

Close to half of children (45%) are admitted to registered child and youth care centres because of abandonment or neglect

Main reason for admission of child to registered child and youth care centres, 2010.

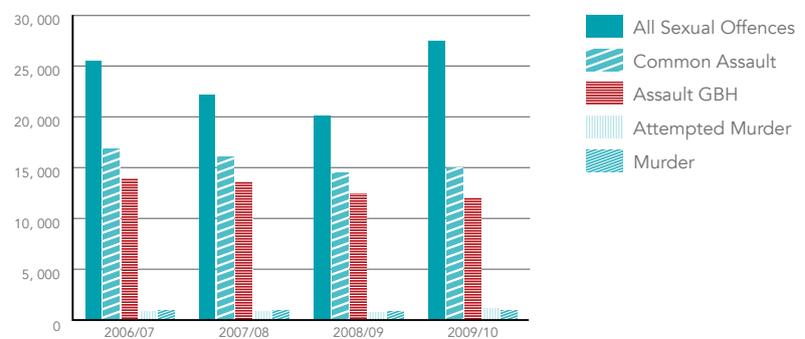


Source: Department of Social Development, UNICEF (2010). Baseline Study on Registered Child and Youth Care Centres

Violence against children is pervasive in South Africa

Over 56,500 children were reported to be victims of violent crime in 2009/10, yet many more crimes remain unreported. People closest to them perpetrate the majority of cases of child sexual and physical abuse.

Reported crimes against children by crime category, 2006/07–2009/10



Source: South African Police Service (2010). Crime Situation in South Africa.

The impact of these unresolved issues from South Africa's past has been combined with slow national economic growth and persistently high levels of unemployment. This means that many children entering care have been born into families where experiences of poverty¹⁷, neglect and abuse are common and the cycle is an extremely difficult one to break. Many young people grow up without fathers or have fathers whose attention is divided between multiple family units, resulting in limited access to resources. These children typically feel disconnected from the economy, from the land and from their families. They have a broken sense of identity and little, if any, feeling of belonging. A section of our youth feel that there is no point in even going to school, and, influenced by factors such as high levels of youth unemployment and peer pressure, such individuals may seek power, affirmation and belonging in negative social spaces such as gangs. There are physical, economic, social and structural obstacles continually preventing them from aspiring and achieving.¹⁸

The collapse of the family structure as a means for socialisation in South Africa is a double burden for the provision of care as it creates a high demand for care while at the same time, the lack of family involvement, makes the transition into independent living difficult.

International research echoed by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) on the effect fathers have on their children's development suggests that the presence of a father can contribute to cognitive development, intellectual functioning and school achievement. Children growing up without fathers are more likely to experience emotional disturbances and depression. Girls who grow up with their fathers are more likely to have higher self-esteem, lower levels of risky sexual behaviour, and fewer difficulties in forming and maintaining romantic relationships later in life. They have less likelihood of having an early pregnancy, bearing children outside marriage, marrying early, or getting divorced. Boys growing up in absent father households are more likely to display 'hyper masculine' behaviour, including aggression.

SAIRR 201:4 *First Steps to Healing the South African Family*.

The collapse of the family structure as a means for socialisation in South Africa is a double burden for the provision of care as it creates a high demand for care while at the same time, the lack of family involvement, makes the transition into independent living difficult. These young people have no means of emotional and financial support from an extended family network at a time when developmentally, this support is most needed.

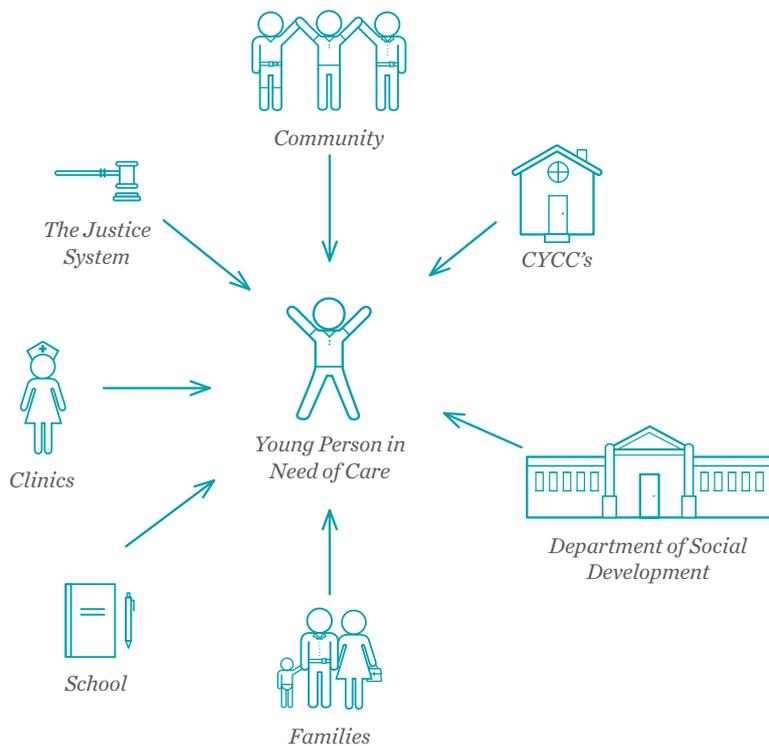
03

Summary of Findings

PUTTING THE PARTS TOGETHER – THE IMPORTANCE OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

The analysis below assumes that provision of care for children and youth is undertaken by a range of providers who may act independently of each other but are part of one system of care. Considering all the aspects of ‘child and youth care’ as part of one integrated system, allows us to understand the interplay and relationship between these providers, as well as assisting us in identifying potential leverage points and challenges experienced. First of all, we attempt to identify and understand where the blockages and stressors exist in the system, and what the potential knock on effect of these could be, and what the outcomes of this will be.

Supporting children in need of care – the different pieces of the puzzle:



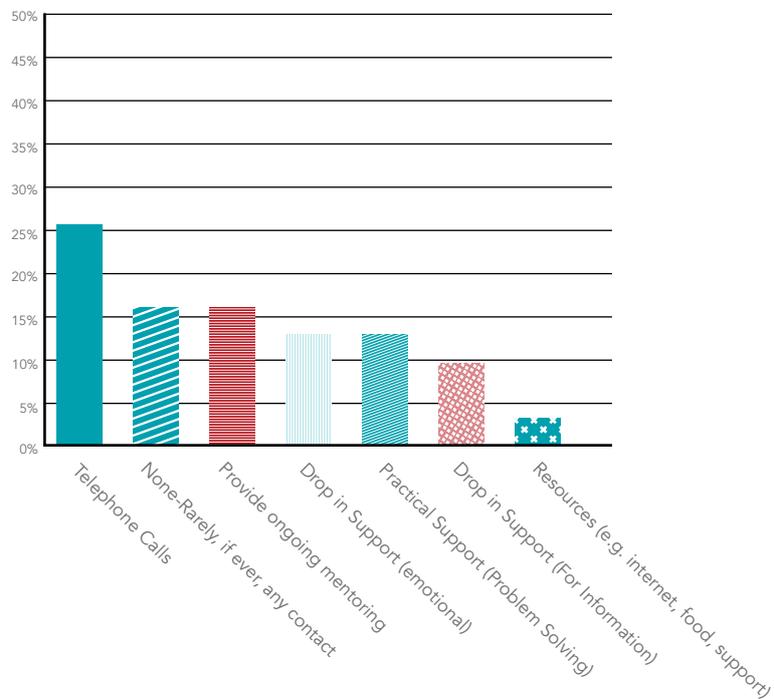
Only then can we begin to correctly respond with what needs to shift in order for changes in the whole system to take effect. This process helps to define areas of best practice and highlight the specific services and approaches currently being implemented by organisations, as well as the obstacles currently being experienced. In this way, we hope to share ideas about how to effectively nurture the successful transition of young people out of state care and into responsible adulthood.

The research process was a rich and detailed one. The findings from the survey and the focus groups are integrated below:

KEY FINDINGS - DATA REGARDING YOUTH LEAVING CARE IN THE WESTERN CAPE:

34 of 39 CYCCs providing care for children and youth up to age 18 responded to the survey. The CYCCs reported that in the last 5 years, a total of 320 young people have left their care at age 18. CYCCs reported that they are still in contact with almost 50% of this group. The responses regarding type of contact is shown below.

Where there is contact, the most common type of interaction/ support is:



11 of the organisations did not answer this question

The poor turnout of youth who had left care for the focus groups highlights a gap in the survey. While the type of contact was reported on, we still cannot answer the question regarding how often the CYCCs were in contact with youth, as well as who initiated the contact...

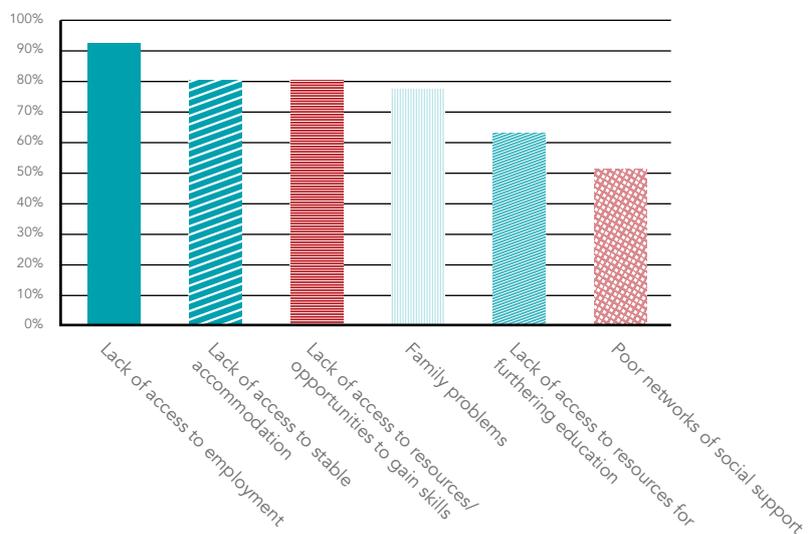
Reflection point – this question was posed to ascertain what type of contact was most common between CYCCs and youth who had left care. The poor turnout of youth who had left care for the focus groups highlights a gap in the survey. While the type of contact was reported on, we still cannot answer the question regarding how often the CYCCs were in contact with youth, as well as who initiated the contact – was it the youth themselves who made contact with the CYCCs by telephone, or was it the CYCC who initiated contact with the youth? Understanding the nature of this contact better could help us to understand what support is required post care, as well as shed light on how to improve tracking for this group.

Regarding the role that young people play in the creation of their independent living / reunification plans, 62% of CYCCs stated that youth were highly involved; 21% said youth were partially involved; 15% said they do not create these plans and less than 2% did not know the answer to this question. The focus groups affirmed the need for high levels of engagement:

“They have to be very involved in the planning. I cannot go to the child and say this is my plan for you. They won’t do it. We have those discussions about ‘what do you think you want to do’ and then we need to see if it makes sense or if its realistic. The plan needs to come from the child” (CYCC focus group)

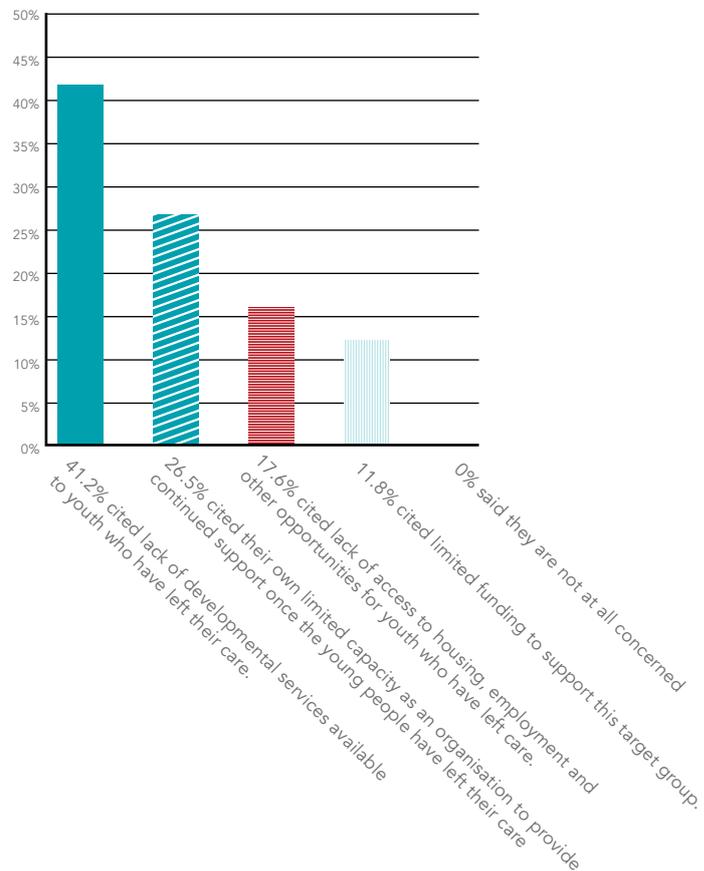
The survey highlighted that young people leaving care in the Western Cape face similar challenges to youth leaving care as identified in other countries – namely, lack of access to employment, to stable accommodation, to resources and to opportunities which would allow them to gain skills and further their education. Additionally, these individuals have poor networks of social support and on-going family problems, as seen in the results below.

Challenges these young people face once they have left the child and youth care centres



The survey also pointed to the concern CYCCs have for the youth leaving their care at 18, with 91% of the CYCCs reporting high levels of concern.

CYCCs cited the following underlying causes for this concern:



It would be interesting to further unpack and better understand what contributed to some of the challenges experienced by young people post care.

🔍 Reflection point - Although these responses point us to what CYCCs perceived to be the biggest issues, there are questions regarding the basis on which these answers were given. For example, it would be interesting to explore what people mean by 'developmental services' and what services are in fact available or not available. It would be interesting to further unpack and better understand what contributed to some of the challenges experienced by young people post care.

Summary of Findings

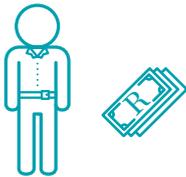
CYCCs and youth organisations reported being aware of the following programmes in the Western Cape that provide support for young people after leaving the CYCC. Organisations shown in blue represent those organisations that are actively working in partnership with CYCCs.

Advice offices	Psycho social support	Support with accessing accomodation	Educational support	Mentoring	Skills Training	Job Placement
Career Planet	Acvv	Beth Uriel	Best Centre	Mankind Project	Cape College	Mamelani Projects
Child Welfare	Badisa	Communicare	Beth Uriel	Hearts Of Men	Cwd Jobstart	U-Turn
Department Of Social Development	Cape Town Drug Centre	Don Bosco	City Mission	I Am Somebody	Don Bosco	Cwd Jobstart
Helderberg Advies Kantoor	Child Welfare	Ethels Place	Lady Joan Pettigrew Bursary Fund	Sa-Yes	False Bay	Dreamworker
Hope House	Educo Africa	Fountain Of Hope	Mamelani Projects		Fountain Of Hope	Livemag
Lifeline	Famsa	Mamelani (If In The Community)	Northlink		Learn To Earn	
Litha Labantu	Forest Riding Club		School Of Hope		Mamelani Projects	
Lovelife	Hesketh King		Shiloh		Mes	
Mamelani Projects	Hope House		St Francis		Northlink	
Mosaic	K9				Pride Of Table Mountain	
Nonceba Family Counselling	Lifeline				Salesians	
Sanca	Mamelani Projects				Sky Chefs	
Umtha Welanga	Matrix				Zenzele	
	Mosaic				Cape College	
	Nonceba Family Counselling					
	Rape Crisis					
	Sanca					
	Sinethemba Drop In Centre					
	Umtha Welanga					
	University Of Stellenbosch (Psychology Department)					
	Victory Outreach					

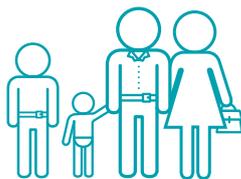
KEY FINDINGS FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS:

- What children and youth bring with them into care - the impact of emotional neglect and abuse and the resulting developmental needs.
- What children and youth find in the system of care - A sector that is under-resourced and challenged to adequately meet the physical and emotional needs that children enter care with, along with difficulties regarding family engagement and reunification, making it difficult to prepare youth to leave care. This, coupled with the types of facilities that either make it easier or more difficult to facilitate developmentally appropriate programmes impacting on Independent Living Programmes preparing for life beyond care.
- What this means for youth transitioning out of care - while some young people felt prepared to leave care, most did not. Even with preparation, majority of the young people felt that the transition from the care setting to the reality of life beyond care was wrought with challenges and fears, pointing strongly to the need for increased support for moving through the transition.

Factors contributing to underlying difficulties in the care system



Shortage of Resources



Issues Regarding Family Engagement and Reunification



Inappropriate Facilities for Fostering Independence

WHAT DO CHILDREN AND YOUTH BRING WITH THEM INTO CARE?

The harshness of the socio-economic environment for children who enter care means that a child comes into the system already burdened by the knock-on effects of neglect and abuse. He/she presents psychological, emotional and learning difficulties and therefore struggles to form positive, long-lasting relationships. The child, who enters care at a moment of crisis and dislocation in their lives, is both wounded and vulnerable. If not adequately addressed, these needs will determine recurring patterns of behaviour that can become set in the identity of the adult.

WHAT DO CHILDREN AND YOUTH FIND IN THE SYSTEM OF CARE?

The child moves into a care system in which provision is uneven and leaves the system, with both successful and unsuccessful attempts at transitioning into independent living being carefully noted. The challenge of any analysis is to separate causes from effects and to attempt to uncover what the underlying drivers are of the uneven performance of the sector. There seem to be three factors which are contributing to the underlying difficulties:

- Shortage of Resources
- Issues regarding Family Engagement and Reunification
- Inappropriate Facilities for fostering independence.

“...Some of our children, even at 18, because of their delayed abilities, are just not emotionally ready. Even if they are 18, no matter how much you try to prepare them, they sometimes are just not there yet.”

1. SHORTAGE OF RESOURCES

Human and financial resources for provision of care were reported in the focus groups to be in short supply, which creates difficulty in meeting the physical and emotional needs of children and youth in the system. The present global economic recession has also placed enormous pressure on financial resources for the development and welfare sector. This understandably creates a climate of insecurity throughout the sector.

“Funding doesn’t allow us to make the child as independent as possible and the hours in the day are not enough to actually do that. The children are so busy at school and they come late from school, they must do homework and the afternoon programmes” (CYCC focus group)

Several of the CYCCs in the focus group stated that a lack of funding directly impacts on the type of programmes the facility is able to run, as well as limiting staff capacity and retention, placing extra pressure on the facility’s stability. However, even in this under-resourced context, CYCCs are expected to provide therapeutic and developmental interventions to stabilise the child, reconnect the child with their family and eventually prepare them to become self-reliant as they disengage from the facility. To reach this goal, intensive developmental programmes are necessary in addition to the individualised therapeutic work that is required. Understandably however, this is a difficult challenge given time constraints, and the complexity of the issues faced by these children.

“...As soon as they are 20 or 21 and not in school, their focus is different... the programme needs to be different. If the 20 year old’s are in a separate facility, maybe that could work, but its hard to keep children in different life stages in the same programme - its not healthy for them or for the younger kids” (CYCC focus group)

The focus groups affirmed that individualised programmes are needed which require high levels of engagement from young people if young people are to become skilled and competent to cope on their own once they leave care at 18. For example, dedication and commitment are required to work through their Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and to facilitate Independent Living Programmes (ILPs). Developmental programmes need to cater for children from different backgrounds, from different countries, and some with educational and developmental delays, which require more input to work appropriately with these needs. Likewise, children with health conditions and mental health requirements call for specialised support. CYCCs also acknowledged that different interventions are needed for children of different ages and at different stages of development, which is sometimes difficult and awkward to manage in one facility, especially if it is under-resourced.

While the child receives support, grows and develops in the care system, the family does not receive equal support and intervention.

“I think that the bigger challenge is also that some of those boys who are 18 have nowhere to go to...they don’t have family to go to and that is frightening” (CYCC focus group)

“In the reunification programme you involving parents – trying to get them on the same page as the young person, because you are working with the children giving them life skills, all kinds of skills, but then the circumstances stay the same because the parents haven’t gone through any programme” (CYCC focus group)

“...family preservation is not the children’s home’s responsibility but it becomes our responsibility” (CYCC focus group)

“When they have to go back to mommy and daddy who is still abusing the alcohol and the drugs and is still living in poverty and not working – its difficult for that child. Its really difficult. What future does that child see for themselves – because yes, I came out all positive and I’m empowered and all those things, but the situation at home is hopeless” (CYCC focus group)

2. ISSUES REGARDING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND REUNIFICATION

A central challenge faced in the provision of services in the sector is the engagement of families in the lives of their children during the period of care, and the eventual reintegration of young people back into the family unit, if it exists. The focus groups highlighted a key difficulty in achieving this due to the low levels of family involvement (emotional and practical) and the high case load carried by designated social workers performing child protection services.¹⁹ Underlying this seems to be an inherent weakness: when a child is placed at a CYCC it is seen as if responsibility is ‘taken away’ from the family to be ‘returned’ at a later undefined date through the intervention of a designated social worker. As the care-taker role is taken away from the family and placed with the State or NGO’s, links with the family may become weaker (emotionally and geographically) and this, combined with a critical shortage of social workers makes family reunification more difficult. Anecdotal reports from the sector overwhelmingly describe the pressures and large case loads that designated social workers carry. Staff turnover was reported to be high, with social workers changing during the child’s time in care. For the above reasons, poor relationships between children and the external social worker designated to their case were noted. Legally family reunification work is the responsibility of the designated social worker, but in reality, CYCCs describe how little time these social workers have, and how they then are forced to attend to the time consuming, complex and cost intensive task of family reunification²⁰. CYCCs also commented on challenges faced with doing this work as it is time consuming, and therefore difficult to do within the time constraints faced by child and youth care workers, especially if the issues faced by the family are long-standing and severe. While the child receives support, grows and develops in the care system, the family does not receive equal support and intervention. In many cases the family remains unable to change their circumstances, forcing the child to remain in care. All this makes reintegration into their community of origin more difficult for youth who leave care at 18.

 **Reflection point** - Typically, these children are sent home to their families over weekends and during school holidays. Given the challenges highlighted by CYCCs regarding family reunification work, some questions can be posed: Is the difficulty with reunifying children because of gaps in family reunification programmes? Because of the severity of issues faced by families? Or because of some other blockages in the system? What are the underlying reasons for the challenges in this area? Also, The Children’s Act is not clear on who is responsible for family reunification. It is referred to in the norms and standards for child protection services. This section of the regulations gives the most details regarding what should be provided as part of family reunification services and states that they can be provided by ‘any service provider who has the appropriate training’. There is not enough clarity regarding what is meant by ‘appropriate training’. In the norms and standards it also speaks of a multidisciplinary and intersectoral



The Children’s Act is not clear on who is responsible for family reunification.

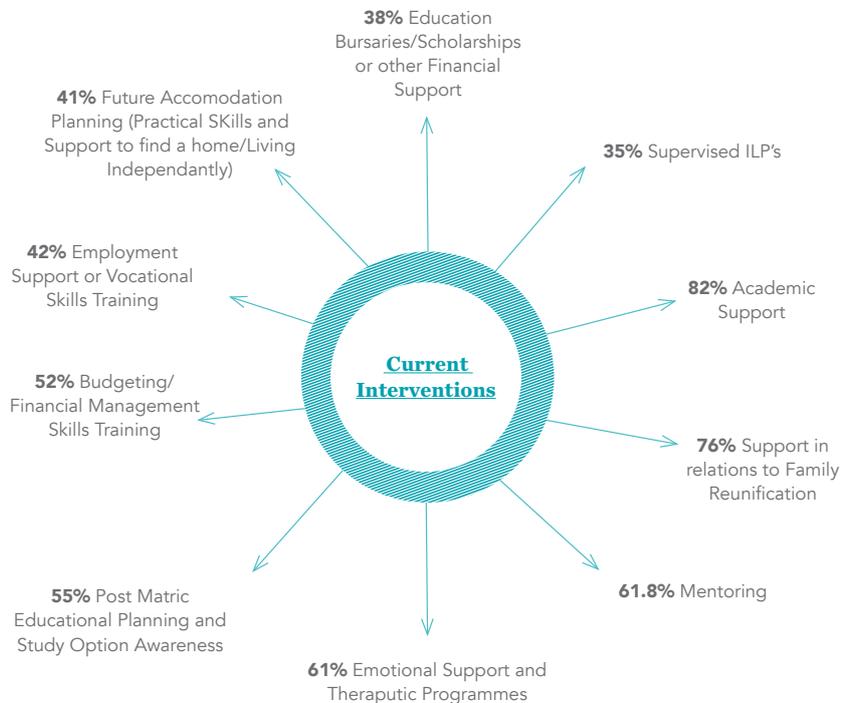
approach, which from the focus groups, does not seem to be happening. Better understanding where the responsibility for family reunification lies, as well as the underlying causes of the challenges in this area, could help us to better provide these services.

3. INAPPROPRIATE FACILITIES FOR FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE

CYCCs are responsible for ensuring the youth leaves care with the knowledge and emotional capacity to live independently and interdependently²¹. However, the nature of daily life within a residential care institution often seems to undermine this much desired goal. Institutionalised living through the centralised provision of services such as food, accommodation and schooling leads to the creation of a context where everything is ‘done for’ the youth rather than ‘done with’ them.

This in turn leads to dependency and a lack of opportunities to learn responsibility. One possible solution to this problem lies in a move towards experiential learning and through Independent Living Programmes (ILPs) that function in the context of cottage-style accommodation. The youth in the focus groups welcomed this suggestion as they would prefer to be more involved in the managing of their own lives.

The survey found that CYCCs are providing the following interventions with regard to independant living and community/family reunification for youth before they leave care :



Although the focus groups describe the importance of ILPs, only 35% of CYCCs provide supervised spaces where independent living skills can be practised.

“When you keep the child from everything the child will want to taste what you are keeping away from them. Most adults keep kids away from their mistakes, they should tell us and tell us the results but not keep us and close us inside because when I come out I will want to do something worse than they did” (youth focus group)

“We try and give the older kids a little bit more responsibility. For example, they have to put in lunches for all the kids. Or over weekend, they assist with lunch and supper and cleaning up, we try and give them more responsibility, because, when they go home they are going to need to do that... but when it comes to cooking big meals, cooking a big pot of food, they aren’t part of that – they don’t wash their own clothes, they basically have to clean their room – all the little things” (CYCC focus group)

“Because of the cottage system, they make their own food, they cook their own meals. This is where they learn the independent living skills” (CYCC focus group)

“It’s difficult for us because we have a hostel set up with a central laundry, with a contracted caterer, cleaning company and laundry - so we can’t have the children in the kitchen” (CYCC focus group)

“You see that is why I feel that the Independent Living is so important because once the child is finished school the child can stay on with you, with support, with people where the child can feel safe, with people that understand the child, and the child can slowly start working or studying and will leave the house when they are really feeling ready for it” (CYCC focus group)

It was noted that a different skill set and different programmes are required for working with small children and young adults. Child and youth care workers (CYCWs) need to have a mix of these skills and be able to shift between roles. Within ILPs, young people need a supervised, safe environment to practise these skills, the space to be able to take risks and learn from mistakes – and thereby begin to move towards assuming more responsibility for their lives. When working with young adults, the care worker needs to be able to push the young person out of their comfort zone, as opposed to providing the care and protection so needed when working with younger children. CYCCs acknowledged the importance of finding alternative ways of overcoming the difficulties regarding inadequate or inappropriate facilities by providing other ways for children / youth to learn and practise responsibility. However, they also pointed to how the shortage of resources makes this shift in programme focus difficult.

🔍 Reflection point - The shortage of resources impacts on the ability to learn these essential skills, for example, it is cheaper to have a cook who prepares meals for all the children, than to have a small group of older children purchase their own groceries and prepare their own meals. Even though a centralised system is cheaper and less time intensive, and therefore often chosen by CYCCs that are under-resourced, the outcomes for older youth are poorer as they are not given the opportunity to learn these independent living skills. The shortage of resources also limits the amount of staff available to facilitate these types of programmes. A full time staff member may be required to focus specifically on this group, to supervise experiential learning spaces, both within the home, as well as within the community. More information needs to be gathered regarding the different ways to facilitate ILPs in different contexts.

As seen in the example above, youth need a space to learn relevant life skills in preparation for the real world. Cottage-style facilities and alternatively designed or supervised spaces for ILPs are essential to move young people from dependence to independence.

CYCCs in the focus groups shared:

“They have plans in place - exciting plans - “I cant wait for the day I go out of here” - but they always come back because the reality of what they experience out there, is more scary than they realized. They feel prepared, they know what their plans are, their families are prepared, all their ducks are in a row, but as soon as they step into that reality - it is very overwhelming for them”.

“The mentor programme, that does prepare the kids somewhat for leaving, but its not enough for the reality they are going to face at home”.

“...Some of our children, even at 18, because of their delayed abilities, are just not emotionally ready. Even if they are 18, no matter how much you try to prepare them, they sometimes are just not there yet.” (CYCC focus group)

Youth still in care shared:

“It’s not easy to stay at the childrens’ home, there are rules, and you tell yourself you don’t want to stay there, you want to leave.... at 18 you should have more freedom than you did at 16, you should have a little bit more independence” (youth in care focus group)

“There came a time where they chased the children away, the girls that said they do not want to be there and today they are doing drugs, they are pregnant and they knew the girls were not ready to leave” (youth in care focus groups)

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THIS ON YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCE OF TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE?

Experiences: Youth preparing to leave care

Young people still living in care found it difficult to think about life after care. When they do, they experience a range of emotions including excitement, anxiety and uncertainty. They feel uncertain about who will support them once they have left. They are specifically concerned about whether the people they will live with will be able to support them emotionally (motivate them) and practically (continue to pay for their educational needs). They have said that what helps them deal with the uncertainty is if someone helps them to prepare and have a plan in place for their transition. Some youth reported knowing of young people who had made a success of their lives post care, citing those who are working and completing their studies. Others reported an absence of such role models, citing stories of care leavers who experience unplanned pregnancies, negative intimate relationships and are forced back to a life on the street.

Additionally, different genders seem to respond differently to the challenges of transition. CYCCs that cater for both genders in their facilities remarked that boys find the transition more emotionally challenging, whereas girls appear more excited and eager to leave. This is possibly due to girls being more emotionally mature at 18 than boys, rather than an indicator of either gender being more prepared to leave. Overall, young people did not seem emotionally ready to leave care at 18.

Experiences: Youth who have already left care

Young people expressed confusion around why they needed to leave care at 18, and many spoke of their exit from care experienced as one of rejection and abandonment from the care facilities or the care workers themselves. Some young people assumed that CYCCs had a choice about when young people exited care. They spoke of the stark difference and extreme challenges between their perceptions of what life beyond care would be like, and the realities they then faced.

“I didn’t feel like I was prepared but I knew what was going to happen outside. I knew that things were going to have to change. Because when you get bigger everything has to change, and now you are on your own, stand on your own feet, face what’s outside. But for me it was also different because I didn’t go home. I was in town. So it was different for me from where I come from and where I am. Ja, it was hard” (Interview with youth post care)

Youth Post Care Shared:

“Ja because you don’t know where your life is heading to you know. What to expect. You use to going to school coming back. You got a place to stay. You got people who care for you. [When you leave] You kind of back to square one right before you came into the house” (Interview with youth post care)

“A lot of people who leave the childrens’ home they will either take the easy way out, take drugs you know... sleeping with guys so that they have accommodation and they think they so clever, but then they fall pregnant, what then? And then they throw you out of the house and then not only do you not have a roof over your head, but you have a child” (youth post care focus group)

“Most of them have babies, they do not have support to stay in school, making wrong choices, no one was there to guide them” (youth post care focus group)

They expressed concern about the emotional and practical support they have available to them after they have left care. When asked how they would like to be supported, they expressed a desire for mentors and adults who meet them where they are at and who have knowledge about the things they are trying to achieve in their lives (such as information about the career path they want to follow). They also commented on the quality of that support – that one-on-one support was important; that adults should not be supporting them ‘just because it’s their job’ but that they wanted to feel a real connection with these people.

Their stories showed that they found it extremely difficult, even frightening, to form and choose positive relationships, at times feeling that people will use and take advantage of them. Some of them expressed a sense of inferiority as they came out of children’s homes and found belonging to peer groups and their community at large, a difficult space to navigate. They struggled to meet their financial needs, and spoke about the importance of having somewhere safe to live.

The survey showed that almost 60% of CYCCs felt young people were “surviving” after care. The description given for “surviving” was “making relatively positive choices; having a small amount of healthy relationships and limited access to networks of support and resources”.

This was echoed in the focus group that was attended by partner organisations providing services to these young people. These organisations felt that in most cases young people did not have the skills to cope on their own when they left care. The discussion highlighted the need for increased support services for youth who have left care. These organisations provide a range of services including developmental programmes, mentoring and post-18 residential care.

CURRENT INTERVENTIONS TO PREPARE YOUTH FOR THE TRANSITION

Many of the CYCCs attending the focus groups reported that although they see the importance of these programmes, they are often not prioritised as CYCCs are forced to attend to more pressing daily needs of the children. Where Independent Living Programmes come on CYCCs priority list is often affected by resources, both human and financial. CYCCs reported needing to fundraise specifically for these programmes, over and above their other work. The research process allowed CYCCs, organisations and young people to share ideas of what could contribute to successful transitioning. Participants identified a number of *Key Principles* that should underpin the preparation for transitioning out of care.

Key Principles of preparation to transition out of care



Entry is the Beginning



Active Participation



Planning and Management



Individualised Approach

- **Entry is the beginning:** Participants identified that the preparation for exiting should begin soon after the point of entry into the system
- **Active Participation** is needed to involve youth in the preparation phase
- Careful **planning and management** of the transition
- **Individualised approaches** are required for young people with different needs and at different developmental stages.

The focus groups also highlighted activities and programmes, which are being implemented and do positively assist the youth at this transition point in their lives. These programmes seem to suggest that the *Key Components* of this transition are:

- Committed, suitable and well trained **mentors/adult supports** who are able to see the youth through the period of transition
- **'In house' experiential learning** activities, which allow the youth to gain independent living skills through 'learning by doing', such as the cottage living and the 'Mayor' system²²
- **Psycho-social support** programmes offered by NGO's
- **On-going emotional and practical support** both in preparing for the transition, and continued support once living post-care (including accommodation, financial support and mentoring post care)
- **Consistent family and community engagement** through activities, visits and home stay weekends.

If all children/youth in the system need support with successful transitioning out of care and the bottlenecks make it difficult to achieve this, how do we as providers go forward into the future?

In addition, a clear set of *Necessary Outcomes* for successful transitioning were also identified. These are based on the assumption that the nature of the support or preparation is largely dependent on the individual who will require a mix of the following:

- Positive peer and mentor support
- Career planning
- Vocational and life skills
- Adequate, appropriate and affordable accommodation post care
- Employment support (work readiness, internships and work placement)
- Financial independence and management skills
- Physical health and safety
- Family support
- Community acceptance
- The need for care, love and motivation
- Experience of Independent Living for example cottage system
- Personal mastery: self-confidence, self-esteem, a healthy sense of belonging

If we combine the principles, components and necessary outcomes, we begin to signpost a clear direction forward in supporting youth to successfully transition from care.

CREATING ROOM TO BREATHE

If all children/youth in the system need support with successful transitioning out of care and the bottlenecks make it difficult to achieve this, how do we as providers go forward into the future? The information gathering exercise provided stakeholders with some insights regarding what could contribute to making transformative shifts in providing transitional support:

It is also key that CYCCs find ways to make the programmes an integral part of life in care. For this to happen, it is important that an enabling environment in which the ethos of ILPs is part of the way the CYCC is organised.

- It highlighted the need for preparation for transitioning out of care to begin soon after the child enters the system and to continue throughout his/her stay into an after care phase. However, this is not what is presently happening with preparation often beginning shortly before the youth has to leave the CYCC. ILPs need to include all or many of the ingredients of success identified above. It is key that programmes are a balance between intellectual and cognitive skills (independent living skills) and inner emotional work (identity, resilience and healthy relationships). If the ILPs are to be successful, they also need to be delivered in a way whereby lessons learned from them can be practised in the CYCC giving the participant a chance to test their own capacities for self-reliance. ILPs should be seen, not only as helpful in cash-strapped conditions, but as a crucial part of provision. They provide additional cognitive and emotional support to youth who face the double burden of blockages in the system and the added anxiety and challenges of leaving care.
- It is also key that CYCCs find ways to make the programmes an integral part of life in care. For this to happen, it is important that an enabling environment in which the ethos of ILPs is part of the way the CYCC is organised. This could require a strengthening of developmental practice to provide 'in house' real time learning opportunities for youth to exercise independent living skills. This will allow for a continuum of support on a day-to-day basis, as well as connect to holistic and on-going programmes from outside agencies.
- In this regard, stronger partnerships, thinking creatively, finding new ways of dealing with staff shortages and allowing for more involvement of youth in managing CYCCs and playing more active roles in ILPs will be important. This will require new and different relationships between stakeholders in the system. Because change is a process, and an uneven one, it will be necessary to create spaces to encourage engagement, reflection and involvement to support this change.

04

The Applicability of Mamelani's Approach

What is important to note is that we have shifted away from being programme-driven to being process-driven, based on providing participants with life spaces for learning and developing the necessary skills for coping beyond care.

MAMELANI'S APPROACH TO WORKING WITH YOUTH LEAVING CARE

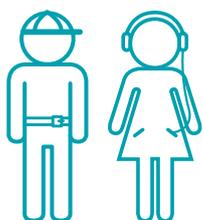
Mamelani's new programme (created out of our development process) is going to be tested for the first time as a full 3 year programme. What is important to note is that we have shifted away from being *programme-driven* to being *process-driven*, based on providing participants with life spaces for learning and developing the necessary skills for coping beyond care. Emphasis has been placed within the programme on the concept of '*interdependence*'. As opposed to the concept of independence, where someone is able to meet all their own needs and is no longer dependent on others, *interdependence* refers to healthy relationships and networks of support that enable people to meet their various needs in different ways. This suggests that people are able to rely on others, without becoming dependent. It also suggests that when taking resources from a system, one also has something of value to offer. This idea underlies our new programme design and is in response to our experience of working in the South African context.

THE COMPONENTS OF MAMELANI'S PROGRAMME THAT ARE ALIGNED WITH THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

- **The need for developmental and therapeutic support**

Mamelani chooses to support youth leaving care by focusing on three vital areas of self-development. It is our belief that these three areas are the necessary building blocks in assisting these young people to successfully transition from care to young adulthood.

Vital Areas of Self-Development



Identity



Relationships



Resilience

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is created in collaboration with each young person, to set goals for their journey upon exiting care. The facilitator walks alongside the young person as they work towards their self-defined goals.

Identity: We understand that identity is formed by experience, and recognise that negative experiences – such as marginalisation, trauma and familial neglect – have a significant impact on identity. Although some aspects of identity are fixed, important shifts can take place that allow a young person to build or restore a more preferable sense of self. We facilitate new opportunities and experiential learning that support the development of this emerging, preferred identity.

Relationships: Relationships contribute significantly to a young person's development, influencing their sense of self-worth and belonging. Mamelani's programme facilitates opportunities for participants to incrementally build and strengthen healthy relationships and networks of support as the core foundation of healthy interdependent living.

Resilience: Growing evidence shows that resilience entails far more than internal capacities that allow one to overcome difficulty and cope with life's challenges. We believe that resilience depends on access to structural resources, relationships and key networks of support, as well as individual capacities. We therefore support young people as they develop a healthy interdependence in addition to strengthening their inner resources.

- **Youth Centred**

The programme focuses on these areas of development which dynamically nurture, prompt and encourage movement towards positive and sustainable shifts on the journey towards adulthood. The young people are placed at the centre of the process allowing for the programme design to be driven by individual and collective development needs. Placing participants at the centre of the process challenges facilitators to remain actively present, intentional and creative and to work in a way that opens up opportunities and spaces for reflection and learning as the needs arise.

- **Having access to a collaborative mentor relationship**

Mamelani believes that critical to this process is a relationship of accompaniment between facilitator and participant. The one-on-one work is the space where the relationship between the young person and the facilitator is negotiated, developed and strengthened. An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is created in collaboration with each young person, to set goals for their journey upon exiting care. The facilitator walks alongside the young person as they work towards their self-defined goals.

It is imperative that the person is able to experiment with newly gained skills and ideas in a real life space. When mistakes are made (and they will be) the individual is allowed to learn from these setbacks and keep moving forward. Affirmation, support, authentic mentor relationship and celebrating each significant victory along the journey are central to creating positive change.

- **Providing on-going support (a continuum of care)**

Mamelani works with young people for 18 months before they leave care, and provides on-going support once the young person has left care for up to 2 years. The survey showed that 40% of CYCCs felt that After Care for up to 2 years was essential before youth are able to adequately cope on their own.

- **The vital need for experiential learning**

From Mamelani's perspective, change should be seen as a process of phases that an individual moves through. The process is on-going and builds on previous formative experiences. It draws directly on when changes are introduced into the life of a young person through different experiences, positive and negative. Transitioning from care is a big change in a young person's life. This is the time when a child is transitioning into a young adult and negotiating and finding their authentic space in the world. It is a period of intense emotional and physical challenges, which also provides unique opportunities for the young adult to rediscover and redefine who they are. Because this is a period in which the youth is constantly working out how they relate to the world, they have to be engaged in a way which allows them to knowingly build mastery and independence.

Each experience can be seen as a moment in time, and is used as a learning opportunity. If supported with information and opportunities to develop new skills, the individual is able to build a sense of mastery and self-determination. By taking responsibility for his/her decisions and actions, the individual achieves a very real and tangible sense of ownership and responsibility. It is imperative that the person is able to experiment with newly gained skills and ideas in a real life space. When mistakes are made (and they will be) the individual is allowed to learn from these setbacks and keep moving forward. Affirmation, support, authentic mentor relationship and celebrating each significant victory along the journey are central to creating positive change.

- **Access to material support after care**

The sad reality is that many participants return to extended families or communities who cannot meet their basic needs, support their educational needs or at times, even provide them with accommodation. We therefore support young people in meeting these needs for the duration of their participation in the programme. As the programme goes forward, youth are encouraged to identify ways in which they can begin to meet their own needs, so that they become steadily self-reliant. While some needs are covered within the scope of programme, not every need is covered. If young people do not manage the resources allocated to them, this is used as a learning opportunity in itself. Resource allocation and the accompanying reflection can be an exciting learning space where youth move from an identity of dependency to one of healthy interdependence, where they are resourceful and proactive about finding ways to meet their needs.

Strengthening existing relationships supports this process. For Mamelani the issue is not whether or not resources should be allocated, but how they are allocated, and the impact this has on identity, relationships and resilience. Our approach emphasises responsibility and resourcefulness. Young people are encouraged to earn and take care of the resources that they access. They are encouraged to build networks of support and learn how to access resources elsewhere. This nurtures an identity of self-reliance, with young people believing that they can do things for themselves, with the support of their network and local resources.

- **On-going reflection**

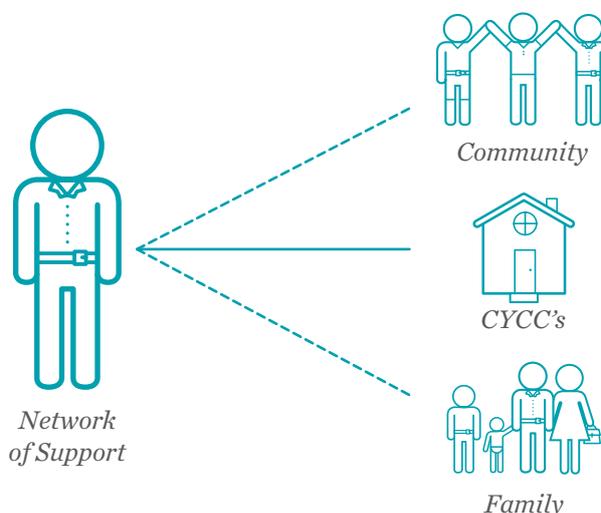
Effective monitoring and evaluation systems that assess each youth's progress throughout the process are a vital part of the programme. Tools must be used that are not time-consuming, but still effectively capture the growth in the individuals and the impact of the intervention. Mamelani uses narrative tools as part of the on-going assessment as a basic way of assessing personal development needs and progress in young people. As part of the Individual Development Plan (IDP) process, an Independent Living Skills Assessment addresses practical needs and growth required for coping beyond care. Our work is underpinned and positively reinforced by reflective practice. Revisiting our practice regularly allows us to be creative and adapt to the changing context. Through this on-going evaluation we identify new resources we can tap into and are better able to anticipate and proactively respond to future challenges and milestones.

Our work is underpinned and positively reinforced by reflective practice. Revisiting our practice regularly allows us to be creative and adapt to the changing context.

In order to track the process, our programme facilitators write reflective reports of each group session. The comprehensive impact of these sessions is reflected on a quarterly basis. A quarterly evaluation session with the youth furthers reflection on their individual progress and allows facilitators to gather and consider key lessons along the journey. In order to develop this area of work, and to strengthen ILPs, organisations are strongly urged to make space for on-going reflection, so that best practice for specific youth in these programmes can be fine-tuned and further developed.

Reflection point: The South African context poses unique challenges for youth leaving institutionalised care.

Case study: A young Xhosa male leaves the CYCC in Cape Town at 18. He is expected to be an adult, but because of his poor network of support and poor connection to family, he has not been able to return to the Eastern Cape (his family's traditional home that is more than 1000 km away) and perform an important traditional ritual that would make him 'a man'. Because of this perceived lack, he is still treated as a child within his community, but expected by society to go and work, earn a living and behave like a responsible adult. Without adequate support, he remains unable to go through this important rites of passage. This impacts profoundly on his sense of self and ability to take the necessary steps forward in his journey through adult life. The above example exposes just one aspect of what needs to be taken into consideration for ILPs in South Africa. ILPs need to be both youth focused and culturally appropriate – working with the young people where they are at, and with what is important to them, in order to assist them on their journey into adulthood.



05

Implications of Findings

Where shortages are most intense, morale, productivity and involvement are likely to be low and day-to-day existence for all involved in the system becomes about survival and not about producing independent, self-reliant young people.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHILD AND YOUTH CARE SECTOR

The more intense the shortage of resources, the more pronounced the impact on the child in care and their ability to overcome the risk factors they enter with and accumulate while in the care system. The quality of the child / youth's experience in this system may determine their ability to transition and successfully navigate life beyond care.

The shortage of resources compounds this situation, limiting therapeutic and educational interventions and preventing the child from overcoming developmental challenges, and in the end making a successful transition out of care unlikely, particularly for children who need additional developmental or educational support.

The shortage of resources and staff can also lead to an absence of security and emotional stability, undermining the system's ability to meet critical youth development needs, potentially resulting in poor relationships between CYCW and young people. This in turn has a knock-on effect of further undermining the ability to provide adequate transitional support. Where shortages are most intense, morale, productivity and involvement are likely to be low and day-to-day existence for all involved in the system becomes about survival and not about producing independent, self-reliant young people. The shortage of resources and staff also makes collaboration between stakeholders less likely, as organisations are functioning in survival mode, negatively impacting on their ability to collaborate and facilitate transition in a holistic manner. Over time the existing shortages may become normalised by the ability of any given CYCC to 'cope' with the existing situation and entrench patterns of behaviour, a case of 'We do it this way because it's the way things have always been done'.

The focus groups highlighted that young people engage more readily with programmes and support that is specifically youth focused and collaborative. This approach enables young people to become part of decision-making processes, and gives them a platform to exert influence, as well as the space to make mistakes and reflect on lessons learned.

Availability of additional human and financial resources would obviously make a huge difference. However, given donor fatigue and the economic downturn, this seems unlikely to happen in the short and medium term. Other options to introduce change into the system might need to be explored through people-centred and much more cost-effective ways of operating. This would hopefully increase youth involvement and opportunities for learning the necessary skills, while growing the required emotional maturity in the time available. This option offers the challenge of demanding higher levels of co-operation and support from all role players than presently exists and will require reorganise the way different parts of the system of care relate to each other.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

The focus groups highlighted that young people engage more readily with programmes and support that is specifically youth focused and collaborative. This approach enables young people to become part of decision-making processes, and gives them a platform to exert influence, as well as the space to make mistakes and reflect on lessons learned. Young people need to positively experience a continuum of care, continuing once they have left the facility, one which provides on-going practical and emotional support. A positive adult relationship was identified as being a crucial, key to motivate and support the young person on their journey.

The focus group discussions seem to suggest that ILPs are a successful format for supporting youth in achieving some of the above outcomes. This would imply an increase in existing capacity of CYCCs to ensure that all youth transitioning out of care are able to attend an effective ILP. It would be helpful in this regard to further evaluate existing provision and identify proven best practice methods, which ensure that programmes meet the challenges of context, culture, process and individual needs. This will dramatically assist with the expansion and strengthening of ILPs.

06

Recommendations

...how do we create the necessary shifts in a system that is under severe stress? Part of the dialogue will need to be a re-examination of the assumptions and practices that currently underpin the present system of care

At the moment there is no coherent, articulated and shared understanding between role players regarding how best to prepare young people for transition out of care. It is absolutely vital that targeted support is provided to implement and strengthen the core competencies and elements of ILPs into the fabric of CYCCs. In addition, we need to increase the number of ILPs and after care programmes available to youth leaving care. Currently, ILPs are not mentioned in the Children's Act.

So, how do we create the necessary shifts in a system that is under severe stress? Part of the dialogue will need to be a re-examination of the assumptions and practices that currently underpin the present system of care. Ways to assist and support practitioners needs to be found to remove obstacles and strengthen the practice necessary for truly developmental interventions. If we can address this challenge, this would assist CYCCs to cater for all developmental stages and individual needs in one care home or in one comprehensive programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CHILD AND YOUTH CARE SECTOR

CYCCs need to be supported to ensure that the management and culture of facilities provide the youth with 'real time' learning opportunities, which will enable youth to learn responsibility and practice independent living skills. One way to do this would be to expand the reach of existing ILPs which may require changes in the way CYCCs are organised.

It is important to involve children and youth more actively in the co-management of their own facilities through tasks including cleaning, preparation of food and buddy systems for academic support.

It is important to involve children and youth more actively in the co-management of their own facilities through tasks including cleaning, preparation of food and buddy systems for academic support. Instead of having 'everything done for them', in this inclusive mode, children and youth would be provided with an experiential learning opportunity to take responsibility for co-managing their lives and thus prepare for transitioning out of care. The sharing of management with youth creates the space for youth to learn responsibility and the consequences of good and bad choices. Involving youth in co-management and organisation of a CYCC may also assist in dealing with the tension between centralised provision of services and the need for youth to learn first-hand how to self-manage and become independent. The CYCCs are challenged to ensure that the way they are organised allows for reflection and developing on-going learning experiences within these programmes.

It would also ease the burden on existing staff enabling them to tackle other tasks. The staff shortage could also be eased by re-energising and strengthening existing volunteer involvement, introducing a fresh wave of support mechanisms to support staff. We understand all too well that childcare work is physically and emotionally demanding, and CYCW could benefit massively from additional support to cope with the stresses of work and to excel within their core roles. The focus group discussions suggest that the 'carers' also need support to enable them to effectively care for youth, support, not in the sense of task supervision, but much-needed emotional and psychological support.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

ILPs are a crucial support mechanism for youth to transition successfully out of care. However success is predicated on the programmes finding the right mix of process, components and outcomes. This is in addition to the CYCC reinforcing learning's through creating an enabling environment where youth can rehearse for the realities of adult life. It should go without saying that after care support is also key to an individual's successful transition.

Young people are faced with multiple challenges and without support they are unable to identify and access the external resources that are around them.

Community Mapping



Given the disconnection from their community of origin, intentional work should be facilitated to address the reality into which youth will return to after leaving care. The young people in care are not exposed to some of these realities while in care, and the return to community is therefore made more difficult. Programmes need to intentionally expose young people to other realities through experiential activities outside of the CYCC.

Young people are faced with multiple challenges and without support they are unable to identify and access the external resources that are around them. Support networks for young people are key to their survival. More intentional community mapping could help to connect young people, empowering them to broaden their support networks and improve their ability to identify and access the resources around them. Time spent visiting clinics, churches, sports clubs and other local resources is invaluable in assisting youth to integrate more smoothly when they return.

Young people, who are fortunate to find work after care, are often not able to cope with the unexpected stresses of adapting to a work environment. Without support, if and when they lose their job, they struggle to bounce back. Young people may not feel equipped to enter the world of work. Support is required to introduce young people to the reality of work, to provide mentors who walk alongside them as they grapple with their work experience and motivate them to overcome their difficulties and maintain their jobs. This process could be facilitated through tailored internships and building sustained relationships with host companies.

Given that educational outcomes impact strongly on young people's success, CYCCs should have more access to information on alternative schools, bridging courses and night schools. The Department of Social Development, through its Youth Development Programme, should provide support for on-going educational needs of this group once they have left care.

07

Conclusion

We do strongly believe that systemic change is possible and that the experience of transitioning young people out of care into a functional place in the adult world (where they can stand proud and self-sufficient on their own two feet) is not just wishful thinking.

From our discussions, it is evident that the ways particular institutions prepare young people to cope with the challenges surrounding their transitioning out of their care depends largely on their ability to access necessary resources to provide ILPS. In some cases partnerships have been developed with external organisations to assist in this regard. Both CYCCs and these partner organisations spoke of the contextual challenges facing young people when they return to their communities.

Preparing youth for transitioning out of care is further hampered by the centralised form of organising care in CYCCs. This effectively prevents youth from having experiential opportunities in taking responsibility for their daily activities in the CYCC and learning independent living skills as a rehearsal for adult life. A system which functions in perpetual "survival mode" seems to create youth who approach their lives with a similar philosophy.

We do strongly believe that systemic change is possible and that the experience of transitioning young people out of care into a functional place in the adult world (where they can stand proud and self-sufficient on their own two feet) is not just wishful thinking. We have identified some of the deepest challenges and seek to implement working strategies with others that are nothing less than revolutionary changes for the better.

08

A Future Different from the Past

Together we can begin to grow a methodology of best practice and tailored approaches for young people.

10 STEPS WE CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW TO CREATE A FUTURE DIFFERENT FROM THE PAST

1.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION: Create a space where interested and committed organisations who have already engaged in the research process can meet to learn together. Together we can begin to grow a methodology of best practice and tailored approaches for young people. Such a group would continue the dialogue started by focus groups and practitioner and advisory work groups. This group could connect to existing forums such as the NACCW regional forums; the NACCW biennial conference, National Alliance for Street Children (NASC), the Western Cape Street Children's Forum (WCSCF) and the CYC journal to share best practice and broaden the debate. This would unite committed stakeholders to close the gap in existing services. It is hoped that in this space, organisations will get the support they themselves need to reflect on the challenges faced and develop strong working partnerships for the future.

2.

IMPROVE TRACKING: Develop a set of tools and resources for tracking what happens to youth when, and after, they leave care. This is critical because it will enable evidence-based practice to develop within the care system. The Department of Social Development needs to play a key role in this.

We urgently need to conduct a national study of numbers and outcomes, a database of youth who have left care, as well as current interventions available.

3.

CREATE PEER-SUPPORT NETWORKS: Once accurate tracking is improved, spaces can be created where youth who have already left care can form collective alumni. These past “graduates” of the process can play a vital mentor role for those youth preparing themselves, as well as providing peer support for each other.

4.

PROVIDE APPROPRIATE TARGETED SUPPORT: Set up a system to support CYCWs (child and youth care workers) either at the local level of facilities or in specific geographical areas. This should include organised learning events to strengthen practice for working with this target group, to provide much-needed debriefing and care for the caregivers themselves.

5.

STRATEGISE TOGETHER: We urgently need to conduct a national study of numbers and outcomes, a database of youth who have left care, as well as current interventions available. A specific work group to assess and continually re-evaluate best practice for ILPs would be an important part of this.

6.

STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT YOUTH PRACTICE: Set up a task team with the Department of Social Development, universities and researchers to re-examine the training provided for child and youth care workers (CYCWs) for working with this target group. This process should include an assessment of the types of transitional programmes currently available. It should also document a better understanding of the specific skill sets required by CYCWs and mentors who work with youth at this transitional stage. An additional team should focus on better understanding what interventions (in the multi-layered South African context) are needed to address specific issues including work readiness and issues related to gender and sexuality.



Assessment



Documentation

7.

STRENGTHEN THE YOUTH SECTOR: A stronger Youth Development sector is needed, made up of committed organisations that are prepared to advocate, create awareness, build capacity and connect with the children’s sector. This will dramatically help to forge a stronger overall provision of continued services as they transition from childhood through adolescence to young adulthood.

8.

BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN YOUTH AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES: An essential challenge lies in networking and connecting with potential employers to establish relevant and accessible employment opportunities for youth at risk. Connections should be made between the private sector and specialist NGOs to assist with job creation for youth at risk. This could take the form of tailor-made learnerships, internships, job-shadowing, and apprenticeships and ultimately jobs.

9.

ADVOCATE RELENTLESSLY FOR ADEQUATE RESOURCES: Truly committed advocacy is essential in order to operationalise the Children’s Act in the spirit it was created. Resources must be made available to provide “transitional support” and a dedicated fund should be created to provide realistic and relevant support for care leavers. Increased collaboration between the Department of Social Development specifically between Children and Families and Youth Development must be prioritised. This will serve to close the gap between the services provided to children and services provided to youth. This could ensure that youth do not fall through the cracks when they turn 18. It is vital for the child and youth care sector to quantify and understand what is meant by “after care” services in the Children’s Act, particularly with regard to what this means for ILPs.

10.

INVOLVE OTHERS: Effective, sustainable change needs to happen from the inside out. CYCCs should be specific about what volunteer support would assist with dealing with these challenges – and in this way effectively involve others in dealing with these challenges.

Truly committed advocacy is essential in order to operationalise the Children’s Act in the spirit it was created. Resources must be made available to provide “transitional support” and a dedicated fund should be created to provide realistic and relevant support for care leavers.

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Partner organisations working with this target group: Beth Uriel, Boys and Girls Town, Fountain of Hope (Baphumelele), Salesians Insitute (Don Bosco), SA-Yes, and Mamelani Projects.

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Endnotes

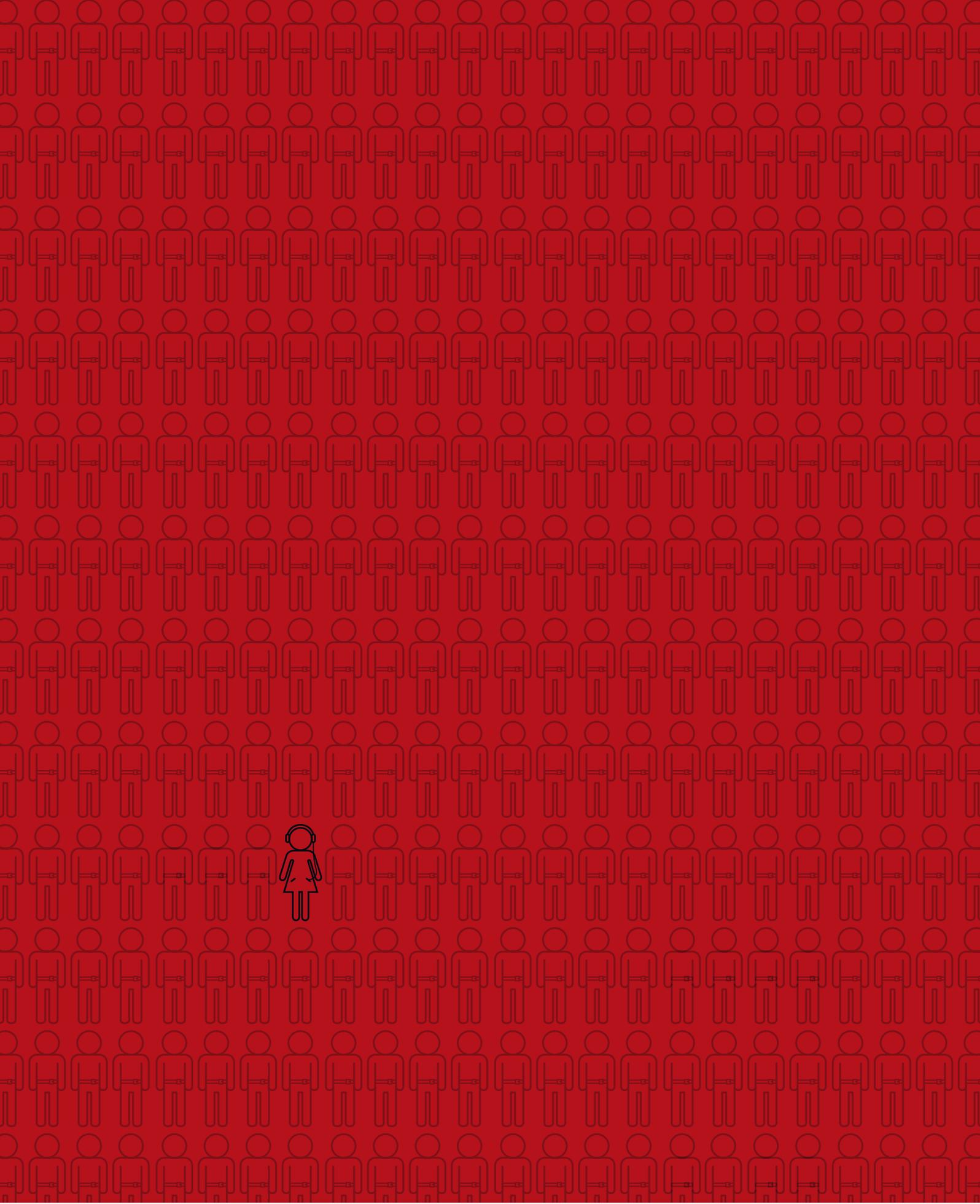
1. Section 176 of the Children's Act allows young adults to stay in care until 21 if they are in education or training. Although this allowance for extension orders is in the act, for different reasons, it is not always feasible for CYCCs make use of this.
2. Department of Social Development; UNICEF. (2010). Baseline Study on Registered Child and Youth Care Centres. UNICEF International.
3. Meintjes, H., Moses, S., Berry, L., & Mapane, R. (2007). 'Home truths: The phenomenon of residential care for children in a time of AIDS'. Children's Institute, University of Cape Town and the Centre for the Study of AIDS, University of Pretoria. Cape Town: The Children's Institute.
4. Department of Social Development; UNICEF. (2010). Baseline Study on Registered Child and Youth Care Centres. UNICEF International.
5. According to legislation, residential care is supposed to be a temporary, therapeutic intervention. If return to family is not a possibility, the DSW is meant to explore options for adoption or foster care placement. In reality, however, this does not always happen, with many cases of young people remaining in care until 18. CYCCs reported that it is common for young people to stay far beyond the 2 year placement.
6. Stein, M. (2006). Research review: 'Young people leaving care'. Child and Family Social Work, 11 p273-279.
7. Pinkerton, J. (2011). 'Constructing a global understanding of the social ecology of leaving out of home care'. Children and Youth Services Review, 33(12), pp2412-2416.
8. Van Breda, A. D., Marx, P., & Kader, K. (2012). 'Journey into independent living: A grounded theory'. Johannesburg, RSA: University of Johannesburg and Girls & Boys Town South Africa.
9. IBID
10. The surveys were completed online and via telephone, depending on individual preference. The data was collected around key issues relating to how many youth have left care at 18 in the last 5 years; how many young people CYCCs are still in contact with; nature of this contact; how young people are prepared for leaving; how they cope beyond care; support provided once they have left care; common challenges faced; current support

structures available for care leavers and partner organisations working with CYCCs to support these young people.

11. 3 Focus groups were attended by staff (social workers and child care workers) from 11 CYCCs and 1 CYCC was interviewed; 2 focus groups were attended by 29 youth still in care; 2 focus groups were attended by 10 youth who have left care; 3 youth who had left care were interviewed; representatives from 5 organisations providing support to this target group also attended a focus group. Each focus group took between 90 and 120 minutes. The average focus group size was between 8 and 10 participants and the meetings lasted between 90-130 minutes. The focus groups and interviews were transcribed, the data was analysed and broad themes were developed out of the data.
12. This group was set up as part of the research and convened 3 times during the process to provide guidance, and ensure that the research was informed by legislation and child and youth care practice more broadly.
13. This group was set up as part of the research and convened three times during the process.
14. Only 1 CYCC was successful in calling on young people who had already left their care to participate. All other CYCCs found it difficult to call on young people who had left care, either because they no longer had contact with them, or because the young people were writing exams or were working and could not make the allocated time. Mamelani set times for 3 different focus groups for youth who had left care, at different times of day to try and accommodate this, but still the turnout was poor. Contact numbers for 3 young people who were working, and could not make the allocated focus group times were given, but the researcher was unable to make contact with them. Mamelani and Fountain of Hope, given their direct access to youth who had left care, made connections with the remainder of the youth who came to these focus groups (predominantly from 2 CYCCs).
15. Providers include Government, Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCC) and organisations.
16. First Steps to Healing the South African Family. South African Institute of Race Relations (2011)
17. The majority of South African children and adolescents are still living in poverty (Meintjes & Hall 2008).
18. Mamelani Founding document – Youth Leaving Care Programme.
19. Social workers in a study by Naidoo & Kasiram (2006) report that caseloads in South Africa are generally in excess of 120 cases (compared with a maximum of about 12 in the UK), leading to high levels of stress and frustration among professionals. Lombard (2005a) argues that the vast majority of these extremely high caseloads consist of statutory work (Statutory work is

the work related to fulfilling government legislation. For example the work related to the Child Care Act includes: the removal of children, children's court appearances, case reports, placement of children in homes, foster-care or after-care etc.), for which there is an ever-increasing demand. [Naidoo, S & Kasiram, M (2006) 'Experiences of South African social workers in the United Kingdom', *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 2006:42(2) p117-126]

20. It is important to note the depth of work that is required for family reunification in this context. In order to make family reunification work possible, time intensive and comprehensive interventions are needed and could include, but are not limited to: home visits, connecting family members to therapeutic services for domestic abuse and substance dependence issues; connecting family members to state services including clinics and hospitals; connecting family members to welfare services to access welfare grants, facilitate family counselling sessions as well as assisting family members to generate income or access regular work. The complexity of family reunification needs to be taken into account when unpacking and addressing these issues. Cost intensive. Abusive parent with substance abuse problems, need to confirm parent is attending programme, and that there is a positive impact – before child is returned.
21. As opposed to the concept of independence, where someone is able to meet all their own needs and is no longer dependent on others, interdependence refers to healthy relationships and networks of support that enable people to meet their various needs in different ways.
22. 1 CYCC mentioned that they build leadership and responsibility into their programme by having young people elected as 'mayors' who now have added responsibilities.



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