



No child forced to live on the street



**INDEPENDENT
LIVING**

ABOUT RETRAK

Across the world, there are hundreds of thousands of children living on the streets. Every day they suffer hunger, poverty, abuse and violence.

Retrak is a charity which reaches out to these vulnerable children to provide them with the food, medicine, clothing, hygiene and shelter which they desperately need. Beyond this, Retrak works hard to tackle the reasons why children end up on the streets- this means helping families to heal rifts, enabling children to complete their education or gain a vocational

qualification and providing children and parents with the means to earn a sustainable income.

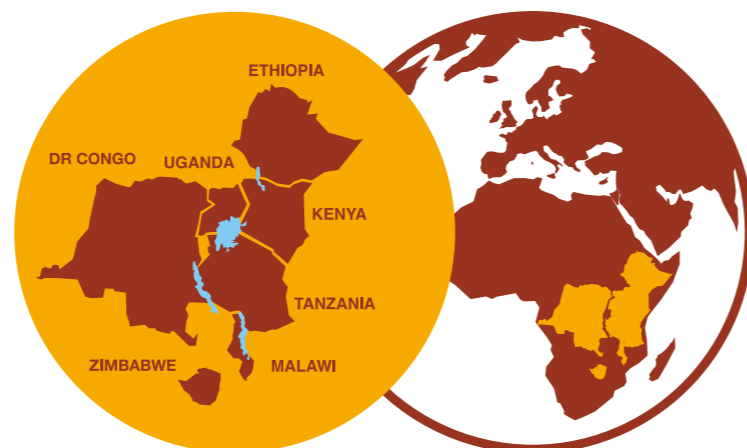
This long-term approach helps to make sure that children never have to go back to living on the street, and it works; to date more than three-quarters of the children helped by Retrak have remained at home with their families.



WHERE WE WORK

Retrak has programmes where there are thousands of street children with nowhere to turn for help

We work in the countries shown here:



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Executive Summary

Multiple factors such as poverty, violence and neglect continue to push children outside family care around the world. Although different interventions such as family reintegration or foster care aim to return children to safe family environments, they are not always feasible for older children. In such instances independent living may be considered as a form of alternative care which allows children to gradually gain autonomy making reintegration into their communities possible. This literature review explores current international and selected national policy on independent living arrangements and examines the evidence of good practice from existing independent living programmes for care leavers in order to assess how both of the above can be applied to street-connected children. The review adopted a systematic approach in order to explore relevant literature. The approach was subsequently complimented by the snowball sampling approach. Additional sources recommended by other researchers and obtained from relevant websites were also consulted.

The international and national policy on the topic of independent living is not very specific. The UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children¹ recognise independent living as a formal alternative care option for children separated from family care. However, the Guidelines do not further elaborate on what independent living consists of and more focus is needed around policy concerning this subject to guide the practitioners involved in independent living initiatives.

The majority of research regarding independent living programmes concerns youth aging out of foster or, to a smaller extent, institutional care. However, many similarities can be found between the needs of care leavers and street children. Both face similar issues, which can detrimentally affect their transition into adulthood, such as behavioural problems, substance abuse and social exclusion. For this reason it is possible to identify elements of independent living programmes which are applicable to both groups.

The literature concerning care leavers emphasizes the role of positive relationships formed with committed and trusted adults who act as mentors and support young people in their transition to independent life. They help young people in establishing their own support network, try to re-connect them with their communities and provide advice on different aspects of young peoples' lives. Where possible, maintaining contact with young people's biological families and communities of origin should

be encouraged. If such option is not available, an effort should be made in assigning young people with a trained mentor.

Another need identified in this literature review is assistance around education and employment. Low educational attainment and lack of training is an issue for many care leavers and very often affects their chances of finding employment. The difficulty of establishing themselves in a job market in turn impacts the ability to sustain economic stability and independence. Young people should receive assistance with accessing appropriate education and training, obtaining practical skills and finding employment. All of the above are necessary for the young person to build self-confidence and obtain the necessary skills needed to prevent future economic and social deprivations.

Housing is another issue with which young people leaving care need support with. Without the possibility to return to their families' they are under risk of becoming homeless if they are not economically stable. Efforts should be made to help young people in establishing themselves in housing by providing them with appropriate accommodation and assisting with rent.

As the literature revealed, communities' attitudes are not overall positive towards care leavers just as they are not positive towards children connected with the streets. Both groups are very often socially excluded by their communities due to their status or displaying inappropriate behaviour. Social exclusion can result in repercussions from poverty to declining wellbeing. Therefore, this issue needs to be addressed by working closely with community members. Communities need to be mobilised to assume responsibility for young people and to change their attitudes towards them.

The majority of consulted sources explore independent living programmes aimed at care leavers in the context of developed countries. Therefore, there is a need for further research into independent living as an alternative care option for young people living on the streets for an extensive amount of time. This research ought to focus on the needs of young people in such circumstances and how to address them. A dialogue should be established between organisations who offer independent living initiatives in order to share and improve their practice. In addition, the main area which requires attention is longitudinal studies which focus on follow-up of former participants of independent living programmes. Such research would provide an insight into the effectiveness of independent living initiatives and help assess their impact on young peoples' lives.

¹ UN General Assembly, UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children, A/RES/64/142, II. B.29.c(v), 2010. Retrieved from: http://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative_care_Guidelines-English.pdf

1 Introduction

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child² the best place for children to develop their full potential is found when children live in a safe family environment. It is widely agreed that the family "offers the greatest protection, provision and the emotional support to the child"³. Not every child, however, has an opportunity to grow up in an ideal family environment. There are different factors forcing children to live outside their families - poverty, violence, family breakdown and neglect⁴ to name but a few. As a result, such children are particularly vulnerable to experiencing multiple deprivations impacting their long-term physical and psychological development. Many of these children become homeless, either by choice or force, and end up living on the street.⁵

Over the past two decades Retrak has been striving to enable children living on the streets to return to safe homes in their families and communities through family reintegration and alternative care programmes with their model of work grounded in attachment theory.⁶ Retrak emphasizes the importance of forming positive relationships between children and trusted adults. Building secure attachments enables children and young people to develop and reach their full potential as well as providing them with a basis to build future relationships.⁷ Creating, or re-creating a family environment where a child can form bonds with committed adults is fundamental to a child's development.

Unfortunately, reintegration or family-based care, such as foster care, is not always possible, especially for young people who have been living independently on the streets for an extended period of time. The UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children recognises supervised independent living arrangements to be another alternative for children in these circumstances.⁸ Retrak has been offering this alternative to beneficiaries participating in the independent living programmes has been increasing and in recent years there has been a growing interest and need to expand and improve this initiative.

Retrak's independent living programmes often provide young people with vocational and business training which lasts around 9 months depending on the format and context. Upon completion of the training, graduates are helped to find employment. Children may also be assigned a community mentor who supports them through the programme and with whom the child can build a positive and trusting relationship. This element of the programme builds on attachment theory, initially developed by John Bowlby⁹, which is the foundational theory underlying Retrak's model for helping children to return to safe families and communities.¹⁰ It is extremely important for Retrak to enable children to build positive attachments with a care-giver figure who enables them to feel secure and valued, and which will in turn help them build positive relationships in the future.¹¹

Community mentors also provide a link into the local community, providing orientation and connections. This is especially important if a child is not living in their original or family's community.

The independent living programme offered by Retrak is constantly developing based on experiences of what works and what does not. This paper seeks to inform Retrak's existing independent living programme by reviewing literature on the topic, with the aim of developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for this kind of intervention.

It should be noted that UNICEF, WHO & UNFPA define "young people" as those between 10-24 years of age and 'youth' as people between the ages of 15-24.¹² This paper will use both terms interchangeably when referring to persons receiving independent living support since the two age ranges overlap. It is also worth recognising that the definition of the term 'youth' varies in different societies across the world, the African Youth Charter for instance, extends the age range of this demographic up to 35 years of age.¹³

² UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations General Assembly, Preamble, 1989. Retrieved from: http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf

³ Cantwell, N & Holzschelter, A (2008) 'Article 20: Children deprived of their family environment', in A Allen, J Vande Lanotte, E Verhellen, F Ang, E Berghmans & M Verheyde (Eds), A Commentary on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, p10

⁴ Wakia, J (2010) Why children are on the streets? Manchester, Retrak (internal document)

⁵ Montgomery, P, Donkoh, C & Underhill, K (2006) Independent living programs for young people leaving the care system: The state of the evidence', Children and Youth Services Review 28, pp1435-1448; Avery, R J & Freundlich, M (2006) 'Transitioning from congregate care: preparation and outcomes', Journal of Child and Family Studies 15, pp507-518; Stein, M(2008)

⁶ 'Transitions from care to adulthood: Messages from research for policy and practice', in: M Stein & E Murno (Eds), Young people's transitions from care to adulthood, London: Jessica Kingsley; Barth, R P, Greeson, J K P, Zlotnik, S R & Chintapalli, L K (2009) 'Evidence-Based Practice for Youth in Supervised Out-of-Home Care: A Framework for Development, Definition, and Evaluation', Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 6(2), pp147-175

⁷ Retrak (2011), Retrak's model: journeying together,

Manchester, Retrak

⁸ ibid.

⁹ UN General Assembly op cit.

¹⁰ Bowlby, J (1969) Attachment, New York, Basic Books

¹¹ Retrak (2011) op cit

¹² ibid.

¹³ UNDESA, n.d. Definition of Youth, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [Online], Available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf> [Accessed: 2nd June 2015]

¹⁴ African Union, African Youth Charter, 2006. Retrieved from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/AfricanYouthCharter.PDF>



1.1 Scope of this literature review

A substantial amount of research concerning independent living is based on the experiences of care leavers entering programmes that assist them during their transition from care into independence and adulthood. Youth leaving care, as well as other young people who have grown up outside of their own family care, face varied challenges affecting this transition. These groups are very likely to experience multiple deprivations, from lack of social and life skills, poverty, stigma and discrimination and social exclusion. For some young people this can have a significant negative impact, even to the point of suicide, when compared to their peers who have had the opportunity of growing up in stable family homes.¹⁴ Independent living programmes offered to care leavers aim to provide them with the necessary support and skills they lack, which in turn helps them gain autonomy, self-confidence and agency, and to be able to live in a community with a minimal risk of being socially excluded. Care leavers are of a similar age to older children on the streets eligible for independent living programmes. The majority of the former group leaves care on average at 16-17 years of age¹⁵, whilst children enrolled in Retrak's independent living programmes are between 15-17 years. Both groups share common experiences around their challenges and deprivations, such as being disconnected from supportive adults, struggling to secure housing, facing economical problems, lacking life-skills and education, battling health issues (including mental health), abusing drugs and alcohol and being socially excluded.¹⁶ Taking these factors into consideration, a similar net of support can be offered to both of these groups in order to help them transition into adulthood and live independently within communities. Using the literature on care leavers participating in independent living programmes, this literature review aims to answer the question: What is the documented and promising good practice around independent living as an alternative care option which can be applied to street children?

The paper is structured as follows: the first section outlines the methodology and approach used; the next section looks at the findings and explores policy on alternative care arrangements as well as needs of and support offered to care leavers covering such aspects as relationships, education, housing and social inclusion. In the discussion, the findings regarding care leavers are applied to street children and in the conclusion recommendations for future research, practice and policy are presented.

¹⁴ Montgomery, P et al. (2006) op cit ¹⁵ Stein, M (2006) 'Young people aging out of care: The poverty of theory', Children and Youth Services Review 28, pp426-427

¹⁵ Stein, M (2006) 'Young people aging out of care: The poverty of theory', Children and Youth Services Review 28, pp426-427

¹⁶ ibid.; Thomas de Benitez, S (2007) State of the World's Street Children: Violence, London, Consortium for Street Children; Avery, R J & Freundlich, M (2006) op cit



2 Methodology

Initial searches for literature on independent living specific to street children did not yield any concrete results. Therefore other groups were taken into consideration. Care leavers participating in independent living programmes were the most comparable with street children due to their age and circumstances, as explained in the previous section.

2.1 Search methods and terms

In the initial stages of this review a systematic approach was used in order to find the most suitable literature. The following inclusion criteria were established in order to address the research question:

- Primary research focusing on independent living arrangements for children and young people and their integration into society;
- Written in English language only;
- Published between 2004-2014;
- Articles from peer reviewed journals.

The Web of Science online database was the primary search engine chosen due to its credibility. The database provides access to high quality, curated, multidisciplinary content together with complete bibliographic data, author abstracts and cited references. In addition, it has strong journal coverage in the relevant field of social sciences (approximately 1,800 journals) and is intended for academic researchers as well as development and research professionals.

The following keywords/terms were identified and searched for:

- "independent living" AND "programmes" OR "youth" – the first term yielded the majority of results which concerned independent living options for elderly and disabled (both physically and mentally) people, which was not relevant to this literature review, however, in combination with the other two terms the search results yielded articles with a focus on foster care leavers transitioning into independent living;
- "alternative care" AND "children";
- "children" AND "outside family care" OR "separated" OR "community (re)integration" – changing the keyword from "integration" to "reintegration" uncovered publications on former child soldiers and formerly abducted youth and their needs concerning reintegration within their societies;
- "(foster) care leavers" OR "aging out of (foster) care";
- "transition*" AND "adulthood".

The search of the same keywords was later expanded to include another, more specialist electronic database: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA). ASSIA, which covers health, social services, psychology, sociology, race relations and education (among other disciplines), provides a comprehensive source of social science information for practical and academic professionals. The database focuses on the practical problems of society covering areas of sociology and psychology. The website used to explore ASSIA allowed for a

¹⁷ CASP (2013) CASP Checklist, Critical Appraisal Skills Programme [Online]. Available: <http://www.casp-uk.net/#/casp-tools-checklists/c18f8> [Accessed: 3rd June 2015]

simultaneous search in other related databases: ProQuest Social Science Journals and Social Services Abstracts. All of the above databases were used in order to compliment the initial search and verify if searched terms yielded similar results which would indicate that the search strategy is well focused.

Relevant policy related to the topic of independent living was recommended by researchers working around the topic of alternative care and further explored by the author. In addition to the systematic approach, selected references from some of the articles were consulted adopting the snowball sampling approach and thus complimenting literature from the initial search. The snowball sampling approach also pointed to a few secondary research publications relevant to the topic of this literature review which were included in the final selection of the material. Articles found through websites and mailing lists of different organisations working on child related issues were also consulted (i.e. Better Care Network, Child Protection in Crisis Network).

In total, 17 articles based on the outlined inclusion criteria were selected: 10 selected using the aforementioned databases and 7 using the snowball sampling approach. In addition, sources recommended by other researchers and obtained from relevant websites were consulted.

2.2 Analysis

After selecting relevant literature to the research question, brief summaries documenting their focus and main findings were produced. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was selected as the tool to be used for critical appraisal of the selected qualitative literature. CASP is a set of eight critical appraisal tools designed to be used when reading research.¹⁷ These include tools for systematic reviews and qualitative studies, among others, which were examined in this literature review. This tool helped to validate qualitative studies by considering a number of criteria concerning methodology, data collection and analysis, results and applicability. Subsequently, key themes across the examined literature were developed and are presented in section 3.3: Needs of youth transitioning into adulthood.

2.3 Limitations

It should be noted that the main purpose of the review was to inform and help develop existing Retrak independent living programmes and is not intended to be a rigorous critical review of the literature. Moreover, the lack of research studies, especially longitudinal studies, and limited specific policy directly concerning independent living in general, and children who have lived on the streets in particular, should also be taken into account.

3 Findings

3.1 Conceptualisation

The concept of independent living is greatly underexplored in literature concerning children connected with the streets. The conceptualisation of the term "independent living" itself varies, there is no standardised approach towards independent living programmes and their goal is not clearly defined. However, a vast amount of literature concerning this topic refers to youth aging out of foster care or institutional care, and the different independent living programmes offered to those young people. This literature predominantly concerns young persons aged 18 years and over in high or middle income countries (mainly the United States of America and European countries) who, albeit lawfully regarded as adults, are in great need of support during their transition into independence due to the fact that their institutionalisation may have led to them suffering multiple deprivations that hinder this process.

Retrak, on the other hand, sees the concept of independent living from a slightly different perspective. Although the organisation promotes reintegrating children into family environments, sometimes reintegration or foster care are not in the best interests of the child, usually due to their older age, the extensive length of time they have spent living on the streets and the agency the child expresses in making choices for their own future. Independent living programmes offered by Retrak are targeted at older children between 15 and 17 years of age and serve as an alternative option to reintegration and foster care. Age is not, however, the only determining factor when deciding on a child's suitability for independent living. Retrak also takes into consideration their family situation, their skills and experience, their education attainment and their personal preferences.

This difference in conceptualising independent living is not unusual. According to Montgomery et al., "the content, setting, and delivery of independent living programmes are contingent on legal and political contexts, causing programs to vary across different countries and local authorities".¹⁸ However, regardless of the content of these programmes, they all share a common aim: to equip youth with the skills and support they have not acquired growing up in their biological home environments or in care, and to decrease the chances of them being socially excluded. Independent living programmes focus their activities on addressing the deprivations affecting their beneficiaries, such as behavioural problems, substance abuse and social exclusion. For this reason, it is possible to apply the examples of good practice demonstrated by various independent living programmes to the situation of street children moving towards independent living.

3.2 Policy

As previously mentioned, the UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children¹⁹ consider supervised independent living arrangements to be one of the formal alternative care options for children separated from family care. However the UN Guidelines do not further elaborate on what independent living consists of. Literature concerning alternative care is rather tentative in defining the concept. One suggested definition states that independent living arrangements can be generally described as "settings where children and young persons, accommodated in the community and living alone or in a small group, are encouraged and

enabled to acquire the necessary competencies for autonomy in society through appropriate contact with, and access to support workers".²⁰ Some of the literature distinguishes between supervised and supported arrangements: whereby the former involves the child living in a regularly supervised arrangement where professionals provide the supervision and the latter being a child living without daily supervision with a goal of living as an independent adult with more irregular support.²¹ However, according to Cantwell et al. on the implementation of the UN Guidelines, categories of alternative care cannot be seen as absolute, since a "variety of recognised care settings that exist in practice do not always correspond perfectly to generic descriptions".²² Therefore it is likely that although independent living programmes may fit within the existing policy, some variation in response to different groups of children and contexts is to be expected.

Since the UN Guidelines do not specify what independent living programmes should entail, it is necessary to refer to the general guidelines for alternative care when designing independent living interventions. The conceptual framework for Family for Every Child provides a comprehensive list of components of quality alternative care, which may be taken into consideration when designing an independent living programme.²³ This framework is based on key international legislation, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child²⁴ and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.²⁵ The framework includes: providing children and their carers with a full package of support, ensuring children have a committed carer and trying to reintegrate them into their families and communities (see figure 1 for full details).

In addition, the UN Guidelines also emphasise the importance of follow up activities for children transitioning from care.²⁶ The section on support for aftercare (§131-§135) stresses that children leaving care should be encouraged to plan their aftercare life and that the support from their mentors should not cease on graduating from a care programme.

The national child and alternative care policies in the countries where Retrak is directly operating independent living programmes do not always provide guidance. The current alternative care guidelines in Ethiopia do not specifically mention or define independent living for children under 18 years of age at all. The National Alternative Child Care Guidelines set the minimum standards on implementation of alternative child care services.²⁷ However, according to UNICEF, "the Guideline does not effectively respond to the growing demand for comprehensive guiding standards and tools to ensure quality and standards of alternative care services. As a 'guideline' it lacks the legal authority to serve as a regulation with force of law to ensure adherence to the guideline and accountability of care givers".²⁸

The Ugandan Children's Act is more helpful, stating that "where a child is unable to return to his or her parents or to go to foster parents or has no parent, nor a foster parent, he or she shall be encouraged and assisted by the approved home and the probation and social welfare officer to become independent and self-reliant".²⁹ The Act, however, does not further elaborate on this option of alternative care. Equally independent living is not mentioned in the Uganda Alternative Care Framework.³⁰

Fig 1: Components of quality alternative care

- Efforts should be made to maintain regular contact with communities and families of origin, except in cases where it is not in children's best interests, and to reintegrate children or provide them with alternative permanent homes, such as adoptive families.
- A consistent and committed carer, able to create a protective, loving and understanding environment which fosters the development of children. Carers in the formal system, such as those working in residential care facilities or in foster care, must be carefully selected and provided with on-going training and, ideally, training in areas such as parenting skills should also be offered to informal kinship carers.
- A full package of support for carers and the children in their care, which ensures that children and carers have adequate financial support, accommodation, health care and psycho-social support, and that children are able to attend school and have some leisure time. As with all children, the rights of children in alternative care to survival and development, health, education and play must be respected.
- Proper child protection measures, with an opportunity for children to report concerns regarding abuse, neglect and exploitation, some monitoring of carers and the children in their care, and adequate responses to allegations of misconduct.
- For children in formal care and for those deemed to be at risk within families, there is a need for careful care planning and regular review of decisions about children's placements (see Section 4 for more discussion on these issues).
- Promote stability in care arrangements to minimise disruptions and enhance a sense of belonging.
- Proper support to children leaving care to return to families or live independently as adults must be provided.
- Efforts must be made to keep siblings together wherever possible, providing it is in children's best interests.
- Efforts to listen to children, and to take their views into consideration, in both decisions about their own care, and wider efforts to ensure that care is of high quality.
- A recognition and response to the diverse needs of children, acknowledging in particular the different needs of girls and boys, and of older and younger children, and the needs of children with disabilities or living with HIV.

(Delap, E. (2013) Towards a Family for Every Child: A conceptual Framework)

Although Retrak does not run independent living programmes in other countries where it works, it is involved in similar initiatives through partners. The policies of these countries are therefore also a useful reference. Kenya's Alternative Care Guidelines outline independent living and supported independent living as options for young people transitioning into adulthood. The guidelines list out categories of children eligible for such interventions and considerations, as well as indicate which services should be contacted for arranging assistance and support.³¹

In Malawi "there is no broadly implemented policy for children; instead national responses are still guided by the National Policy on Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (2003), the National Support Policy (2012) and the Malawi Social Cash Transfer Programme (from 2006). Such gaps in policy instruments pose a challenge to the implementation of the alternative care system".³²

It is clear that alternative care guidelines regarding independent living arrangements differ depending on a country, or in some cases, are non-existent. From among Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Malawi, detailed guidelines on independent living only exist in Kenya. The policy in the remaining three is not specific. However, the overall principles in the UN and national guidelines and legislation do provide a foundation for the existence of independent living programmes which need to be considered when thinking about their programme set-up, even if they offer little to guide programme design.

¹⁸ Montgomery, P et al.(2006) op cit
¹⁹ UN General Assembly (2009) op cit
²⁰ NGO Working Group on Children without Parental Care in Geneva (2013) Identifying Basic Characteristics of Formal Alternative Care Settings for Children, Discussion Paper, March 2013, p16, Retrieved from: http://www.ice-inter.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Formal_care_settings_characteristics_March_2013_final.pdf

²¹ Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (2014) Guidelines for Kinship Care, Foster Care and Supported Independent Living in Liberia, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Government of Liberia, Retrieved from: http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_final_8_2014.pdf
²² Cantwell, N, Davidson, J, Easley, S, Milligan, I & Quinn, N, (2012) Moving Forward: Implementing the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, Glasgow: Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland,

²³ Delap, E (2013) Towards a Family for Every Child: A conceptual framework, Family for Every Child [Online], Available at: <http://www.familyforeverychild.org/report/towards-a-family-for-every-child-a-conceptual-framework/>, [Accessed: 2nd April 2015]
²⁴ UN General Assembly (1989) op cit.
²⁵ UN General Assembly (2010) op cit.

²⁶ *ibid.*, section VII(e)
²⁷ Ministry of Women Affairs (2009) Alternative Childcare Guidelines on Community-Based Childcare, Reunification and Reintegration Program, Foster Care, Adoption and Institutional Care Service, Ministry of Woman Affairs, Addis Ababa, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Retrieved from <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/5359.pdf>

²⁸ UNICEF (2013) Alternative Childcare, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, Ethiopia Country Office, Thematic Briefing Note, p2
²⁹ Laws of Uganda, Chapter 59. The Children Act, section 58(4), 2000. Retrieved from: [https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl-nat.nsf/a24d1cf3344e99934125673e00508142/738fcd-999d6976a8c125767e004c5fa6/\\$FILE/THE%20CHILDREN%20ACT.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl-nat.nsf/a24d1cf3344e99934125673e00508142/738fcd-999d6976a8c125767e004c5fa6/$FILE/THE%20CHILDREN%20ACT.pdf)

³⁰ Alternative Care Uganda, n.d. The Alternative Care Framework [Online], Available: <http://www.alternative-care-uganda.org/alternative-care-framework.html> [Accessed: 3rd June 2015]
³¹ UNICEF & Government of Kenya Guidelines for Alternative Family Care of Children in Kenya, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20for%20the%20Alternative%20Family%20Care%20of%20Children%20in%20Kenya.pdf>
³² SOS Children's Villages International (2013) A Snapshot of Alternative Care Arrangements in Malawi, Innsbruck, SOS Children's Villages International, p4. Retrieved from: <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/0fa0e001-c9a8-4f91-8fc0-6c7d9f0d25d/MALAWI-FINAL-to-upload.pdf>

3.3 Young people's needs in independent living

It is important to reiterate that young people who did not have a chance to grow up in stable family environments experience a range of different deprivations around their psychosocial health and standard of living and these all have an impact on a young person transitioning into adulthood. Such young people are more likely to experience a lack of life skills, poorer education and health outcomes, unemployment and economic hardship, homelessness, substance abuse and addictions, criminal justice involvement and incarceration, violence and abuse, teenage pregnancy, social exclusion, mental health problems and even suicide, compared to their peers.³³ Those deprivations stem from a lack of adequate skills, and therefore an inability to address their own needs due to both their past experiences which led them to leave their family or whilst in care. The majority of care leavers, along with the majority of street children, have suffered broken relationships at some point in their lives which ended up in them leaving family care. They have encountered loss, insufficient support, violations of trust and/or neglect or abuse at some point in their lives which resulted in them entering care arrangements. In addition they are making both the physical and emotional transition into life as an adult, at the same point as the transition from care into the community life. This process is challenging for many adolescents, even within a secure environment, but is much more difficult for these care leavers due to their adverse childhood experiences and experiences in care.³⁴

Literature examining care leavers focuses on different aspects of their lives after leaving care and the areas of support they need, in order to make the transition and live in a community. These aspects can be grouped into the following themes, and are further explored below:

- Supportive relationships, social networks & social capital;
- Education and employment;
- Living arrangements;
- Social inclusion.

3.3.1 Supportive relationships, social networks and social capital

The formation of positive relationships with adults is an emerging theme in the literature on independent living. It is argued that young people are "in need of consistent, supporting relationships with adults who can adopt a non-punitive approach and normalise the expression of feelings".³⁵ Attachment theory explains that a child's care-giver or attachment figure has a crucial role in managing a child's anxiety and, by responding to their needs, helping them in forming a secure attachment. This, in turn, provides a child with an ability to form positive relationships with others in the future.³⁶ An examination of existing

literature on attachment theory points out that the quality of a child's attachment has been found to predict changes in many areas, including social, psychological, behavioural, and cognitive areas.³⁷ If the care-giver does not respond to the child's needs appropriately and it is not possible for the child to form a quality attachment with them, it has, among other impacts, adverse effects upon the child's ability to manage relationships and their own emotions in the future. Attachment is also important for older children, since teenage years pose a challenge for formation of attachment. During those years, young people separate from their original attachment figures (usually their parents) and seek new attachments among their peers.³⁸ Even during this period inner working models developed in childhood can be changed by experiences of new secure attachments.³⁹ According to Child Fund, a leading children's charity, youth is also a "critical period of transition to adulthood that can lay foundations to success or reinforce the generational cycle of poverty".⁴⁰

Care-leavers will often have experienced several, and at times multiple, disruptions in their care-giver relationships. Some studies argue that young people who have grown up in care are at risk of losing or weakening family and community ties due to the severe instability experienced during their time in the care system and that care leavers' lives are negatively affected by instability and placement disruption,⁴¹ which also affects their ability to form positive attachments.

3.3.2 The significance of social capital

Care leavers have experienced at least one and often a string of broken relationships at some point in their lives which often impacts their ability to form trusting and positive relationships with other people. According to developmental psychology literature, the role of the family in supporting young people's transition into adulthood and independence is critical.⁴² Care leavers, upon leaving their placements to move out on their own, are often missing this important resource. They also experience difficulties in trusting others and forming relationships.⁴³ Care leavers often struggle to ask for support whilst transitioning into adulthood and do not feel they have a support network when leaving care.⁴⁴ Such a support network is a crucial part of social capital which could aid young people in their transition. Consequently, many youth who age out of care have no connections to a committed adult in their lives who would provide them with social support and therefore, they experience social capital deficits.⁴⁵ Social capital can be defined as "networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups".⁴⁶ Various studies have demonstrated that consistent professionals have a crucial role in supporting care leavers and meeting their emotional and practical needs during their transition into adulthood.⁴⁷ One study⁴⁸ reports that care leavers focused on the importance of personal connections after leaving care. Some stated that they asked the staff at their group homes for help after they left, which suggests that professionals and mentors are not only a valuable point of contact after leaving care, but also, in some instances, the only trusted connection for care leavers who can be very self-reliant and reluctant to ask for support. Given the near absence of other social connections a trusted care/social worker or a committed mentor can

³³ Montgomery, P et al. (2006) op cit.; Stein, M (2006) op cit.; Barn, R (2009) 'Care leavers and social capital: understanding and negotiating racial and ethnic identity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33(5), pp832-850

³⁴ Barn (2009) op cit.; Avery, R.J & Freundlich, M (2006) op cit.
³⁵ Mann-Feder, V.R & White, T (2003) 'Facilitating the Transition from Placement to Independent Living: Reflections from a Program of Research', *International Journal of Child & Family Welfare* 6(4), pp196-204, p202

³⁶ Ainsworth, M (1979) 'Infant-mother attachment', *American Psychologist* 34, pp932-937

³⁷ Mennen, F.E & O'Keefe, M (2005) 'Informed decisions in child welfare: The use of attachment theory', *Children and Youth Services Review* 27, pp577-593

³⁸ Perry, A (2010) *Teenagers and attachment*, London, Worth

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Child Fund International (2015) *Ages 15 to 24. Youth*, Child Fund International [Online], Available: <https://www.childfund.org/about-us/How-We-Work/Ages-15-to-24/> [Accessed: 08th June 2014]

⁴¹ Stein, M (2006) op cit.; Barn, R (2009) op cit.

⁴² Unrau, Y A, Seita, J R & Putney, K S (2008) 'Former foster youth remember multiple placement moves: A journey of loss and hope', *Children and Youth Services Review* 30, pp1256-1266

⁴³ Mann-Feder, V R & White, T (2003) op cit.

⁴⁴ Avery, R J (2010) 'An examination of theory and promising practice for achieving permanency for teens before they age out of foster care', *Children and Youth Services Review* 32, pp399-408, p401

⁴⁵ Whiting, E & Harper, R (2003) *Young people and Social Capital*, Office for National Statistics, s.l., p1 ⁴⁷ Hiles, D, Moss, D, Thome, L, Wright, J & Dallos, R (2014) 'So what am I? - Multiple perspectives on young people's experience of leaving care', *Children and Youth Services Review* 41, pp1-15

⁴⁶ Avery, R.J & Freundlich, M (2006) op cit.

be an important attachment figure; but it is essential that they focus on facilitating connections between care leavers and communities which can sustain young people once professional support is phased out in the near absence of other social connections.

Since attachment is transferred from original care-givers onto peer groups during teenage years there is often anxiety accompanying this separation.⁴⁹ In the case of young people in care a trusted youth worker or mentor who is relatively close to their age group could provide a significant support in this transition. Such workers or mentors are key in "reducing to a minimum not just the usual barriers between adult and young person but also those that arise because of the power and authority built into that role".⁵⁰

3.3.3 Education and employment

According to one study, "education is a leading indicator of successful youth development and adult self-sufficiency in the general population".⁵¹ The literature argues that youth leaving care experience to a greater extent learning difficulties and poorer academic achievement than their peers,⁵² although a direct correlation between being in care and poor educational outcomes should be avoided.⁵³ Possible educational deficits result from previous childhood experience of abuse, neglect and abandonment,⁵⁴ which has been impacting children throughout their time in care. It has been pointed out that a lack of educational attainment and training opportunities deters adolescents' transition into adulthood.⁵⁵ Low academic achievement may result in problems in obtaining employment, which is a crucial factor in securing housing and sustaining economic stability and independence. One study⁵⁶ reports that foster care youth both anticipate and experience economic struggles. Participants in the study highlighted their transition into adulthood was abrupt and they felt that the support around life skills (such as mock job interviews) they received was insufficient in terms of securing employment.⁵⁷

3.3.4 Living arrangements

Housing instability is another factor that hinders care leavers' transition into adulthood.⁵⁸ Many former foster care youth expresses concern about their housing arrangements and the possibility of them becoming homeless.⁵⁹ A study⁶⁰ of young people leaving congregate care (such as group homes) in New York argue that 40% of foster care leavers who leave home for the first time in their teens may need to re-enter care after trying to live independently. Amongst the general population, another study from Australia revealed that around 30% of young people between the ages of 20 and 34 had left their parents' home and returned at some point to again live with their parents.⁶¹ In contrast to the general population, care leavers are usually not able to return to their previous homes after aging out of care, which increases their risk of becoming homeless if they are unable to arrange for and maintain their housing. Housing instability subsequently develops as the result of the lack of a

'safety net', such as a parental home, where a young person's stay can be extended or where a young person can return to in case of difficulties. When looking at other factors contributing to housing instability, it has been pointed out that the lack of housing opportunities available for care leavers, such as affordable rent prices and support in maintaining housing, "impacts the ability to serve emancipating (foster) youth".⁶² Leaving home is an abrupt change in the life of care leavers, whereas children growing up in parental homes are able to more gradually transition to live independently and have a secure base to return to in case of crisis.

3.3.5 Social inclusion

The literature on foster care leavers strongly suggests they carry a greater risk of being marginalised and socially excluded from participation in social, economic, political and cultural systems within their communities.⁶³ Social exclusion "involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities. It affects both the quality of life of the individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole."⁶⁴ Social exclusion can lead to multiple negative social outcomes, such as poverty, lower levels of health and education and declining wellbeing.⁶⁵ It can also lead to violence on the part of young people, as this can provide them with a means to have a voice and to gain control over their own lives.⁶⁶

Social exclusion can be a result of stigma, especially when a young person lives in a small community where their status as a care leaver is known. In a study with care leavers, they reported difficulty in obtaining housing due to the 'bad reputation' they attained by allegedly displaying anti-social behaviour whilst they were in care.⁶⁷ In order to address the issue of social exclusion the study presents a "community development model of support based on a partnership between professional welfare workers and mainstream community networks [which is] likely to promote the social inclusion of care leavers in the local community".⁶⁸

This support obtained from a community can help address key needs such as social and family relationships, education, employment, housing and independent living skills, among others.⁶⁹ This model includes a mentoring programme where selected mentors support care leavers in developing independent living skills and re-establishing links with the general community. It would appear essential to address all of the above needs highlighted by the above model when tackling social exclusion, since they are interconnected and deficits in one area are likely to lead to shortages in the others, causing care leavers to be multiply deprived and very prone to be socially excluded.

Although social exclusion appears to be an overarching theme in the literature on care leavers, the majority of examined literature does not focus on this. Only a few of the papers consulted referred specifically to social exclusion, the rest either did not acknowledge it, or mention it in terms of marginalisation.



⁴⁹ Perry, A (2010) Teenagers and attachment, London, Worth
⁵⁰ Davies, B (2010) 'What do we mean by youth work?', in J.R. Batsleer & J. Davies (eds) What is youth work?, Exeter, Learning Matters, p3

⁵¹ Pecora, P J, Williams, J, Kessler, R C, Hiripi, E, O'Brien, K, Emerson & J Torres, D (2006). 'Assessing the educational achievements of adults who were formerly placed in family foster care', Child and Family Social Work 11, p228
⁵² Jones, J & Gragg, J (2012) 'Transitional foster youth's perceptions of preparation to act as self-advocates: A phenomenological study', The Family Journal: Counselling and Therapy for Couples and Families 20(4), pp411-418
⁵³ Michell, D (2012) 'A suddenly desirable demographic? Care leavers in higher education', Developing Practice 33, pp45-58

⁵⁴ Goddard, J (2000) 'The education of looked after children', Child and Family Social Work 5, pp79-86
⁵⁵ Avery, R.J (2010) op cit.
⁵⁶ Dewar, L.A & Goodman, D (2014) Best Practices in Transitioning Youth Out of Care. Successful Transitions, Success as Adults, Child Welfare Institute, Children's Aid Society of Toronto, p4
⁵⁷ Cunningham, M & Diversi, M (2012) 'Aging out: Youths' perspectives on foster care and the transition to independence', Qualitative Social Work 12(5), pp587-602

⁵⁸ ibid.
⁵⁹ Dewar, L.A & Goodman, D (2014) op cit.
⁶⁰ Cunningham, M & Diversi, M (2012) op cit.
⁶¹ Avery, R.J & Freundlich, M op cit., p510
⁶² Australian Social Trends (2009) 'Home and Away: The Living Arrangements of Young People', Available [Online]: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsl/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features50June+2009#endnote2> [Accessed: 21st August 2015]

⁶³ Mann-Feder, V R & White, T (2004) op cit.
⁶⁴ Levitas, R, Pantazis, C, Fahmy, E, Gordon, D, Lloyd, E & Patsios, D, (2007) The Multi-dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion, Department of Sociology and School for Social Policy Townsend Centre for the International Study of Poverty and Bristol Institute for Public Affairs University of Bristol, p9

⁶⁵ Berzin- Cosner, S & Taylor, S.A (2009) 'Preparing Foster Youth for Independent Living: Collaboration Between County Independent Living Programs and Community-Based Youth-Servicing Agencies, Journal of Public Child Welfare 3(3), p269
⁶⁶ Stein, M (2006) op cit.66GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services (2015) Social exclusion. The impact of exclusion [Online], Available:<http://www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/social-exclusion/the-impact-of-exclusion#violence> [Accessed 13th April 2015]
⁶⁷ Mendes, P (2011) 'Towards a community development support model of young people transitioning from state-out-of-care: A case study of St. Luke's Anglicare in Victoria, Australia', Practice Social Work in Action 23(2), pp69-81
⁶⁸ ibid., p79
⁶⁹ ibid., p79

4 Discussion

4.1 Conceptualisation and policy

The literature concerning independent living for young people is indefinite, and policy concerning independent living as an alternative care option is limited. This includes in the UN guidelines and on a national level in the examples looked at in Africa. Although in Kenya the guidelines do outline the eligibility and components of independent living programmes, more commonly country guidelines merely mention independent living as an option. There is a need for alternative care and other child-related policies to more clearly define the content of independent living programmes and the eligibility of participants. To push the development of this policy, practitioners need to clearly define the goals and objectives of their independent living programmes, ensuring that young people's aspirations are central in order to help them thrive long-term. Many organisations already provide support in this area, but do not document their practice. Building the evidence of what is currently being implemented would bring attention to children, especially those formerly connected to the streets, who choose independent living as a suitable alternative care arrangement.

For Retrak, there is a need to develop SOPs which would improve understanding of what independent living programmes involve and how good practice principles can be applied, and therefore ensure the consistent delivery of quality independent living programmes across Retrak's countries of operation. The SOPs and monitoring of their implementation and results could then also provide a basis for advocacy work. Retrak has membership of various national-level working groups and international networks which could then provide an opportunity to educate key stakeholders and push for a change in policy and practice.

4.2 Supportive relationships, social networks and social capital

It is clear that re-building or maintaining a relationship with family and community of origin is a key component of quality alternative care. Strengthening these links is necessary for successful social reintegration and to mitigate the risk of social exclusion.

There is a need for strong support for youth leaving care, especially to aid in the formation of trusting relationships with committed adults. The inclusion of mentors as part of an independent living programme is another way to provide positive attachment figures, help build relationships with others and provide that trusted person who a young person can ask for support when necessary. Practice based on attachment theory shows that, young people, like younger children, benefit from a 'secure base' to provide them with a safe haven and enable them to explore and become confident in the world around them.⁷⁰ The same principle can be applied to mentors who aid young people in their transition into adulthood. Mentors can be professionals, friends or volunteers. They should be carefully selected, trained and supervised in order to ensure an adequate level of care.⁷¹ Key to any mentor training should be an understanding of attachment theory and child development and how these apply to young people. This

understanding will help to reinforce the importance of building longer term trusting relationships and help young people to feel safe and confident through regular check-ins, rather than be only crisis-driven.⁷²

The discipline of Youth Work often emphasises the importance of trust and power in building relationships with young people. Young people, like all children, want the security of a caring adult, but as they are transitioning into adulthood it is important that they also feel in control and are enabled to make their own decisions.

It is also vital that a young person develops healthy attachments that are not only formed between them and paid professionals in case the staff member resigns or moves away. Voluntary mentors could breach the gap between young people and their communities by helping their mentees to build further connections with other people.

There is an absence of comprehensive tools specifically designed to equip mentors to work appropriately with young people to aid their transition. However, tools like PACE and the Outcome Stars, which have been developed for work in different circumstances, may also be appropriate in this area of work.⁷³ PACE, which stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy, is a tool developed by Hughes to aid children who suffered trauma and loss around their attachment with their original care-givers.⁷⁴ It is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe.⁷⁵ Through PACE children learn to trust and rely on adults again. PACE helps adults in reducing the level of conflict, defensiveness and withdrawal that affects the lives of troubled children, as well as seeing the strengths and positive aspects underneath more negative and challenging behaviour which such children display.⁷⁶

The Outcome Star is an evidence-based tool for supporting and measuring change. It both measures and supports progress for young people towards self-reliance and other goals. Amongst the different versions of the Stars, the Young Person's Star is specifically developed for young people moving to independence. It is suitable for young care leavers and other young people experiencing homelessness or transition. The tool is designed to be completed collaboratively by young people and their case workers. It consists of a number of scales based on an explicit model of change which creates coherence across the whole tool and a Star Chart onto which the child and case worker plot where the child or young person is on their journey. The attitudes and behaviour expected at each of the points on each scale are clearly defined in detailed scale descriptions.⁷⁷

Both tools could be potentially incorporated into working with young people who have formerly been living on the streets, and help mentors in providing them with comprehensive support. They could be used to inform service delivery, improve support to young people in independent living and measure the impact of such interventions. Externally, the Star could demonstrate the value of the service to funders.⁷⁸

Retrak's current provision of mentors to support young people entering independent living programmes reflects the clear need to help them uphold links with their original families and communities. A mentor should be supervised and supported (for instance, by being provided with the tools suggested above) to ensure they provide appropriate assistance to young people they work with and are able to deal with the challenges accompanying their relationship with the beneficiaries of the independent living programmes. The beneficiaries also must be consulted and followed-up which would help to establish if programmes are bringing desired effects helping young people in their transition to adulthood and independence. The same principle would apply to other organisations which are providing youth with such an alternative care option.

4.3 Education and employment

Alternative care principles state that children need to be able to attend school and their right to education must be upheld. In terms of care leavers who often have a low educational attainment, additional education support needs to be provided. Good practice would involve establishing care leavers' needs and aspirations and providing them with adequate options such as catch-up education.⁷⁹

The support around education and employment needs to be tailored depending on the context. In high income countries education support would concern helping young people getting into secondary or higher education and provide training around applying for jobs. In a lower income context, such as Africa where Retrak works, education is often delayed and is not free at secondary level. It is therefore more likely that skills-training would be appropriate for many young people to help them to secure livelihoods. For some of who have missed out on almost all education this may be more realistic to ensure that they at least have a reasonable level of functional literacy and numeracy. Where it is not possible for a young person to return to mainstream education, other alternatives ought to be explored. Through apprenticeships or vocational training, for example, young people are able to obtain practical, transferable skills relevant to the existing job market that can increase their chances of finding employment upon graduation. In some instances it would also be possible to continue education whilst working, allowing the child to gain work skills and employment, but still pursue further educational goals. According to the International Labour Organisation, "adolescent participation in work, as long as it does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with school, is generally regarded as positive (...). It also provides them with skills and experience and helps to prepare them to be productive members of society later in life".⁸⁰ After completing an apprenticeship or vocational training, assistance to find a suitable work placement should also be provided. Short-term work placements, internships or voluntary positions should also be encouraged, since care leavers often lack workplace experience and also do not have the social networks in place to help them access these types of placements. A mentor or case worker could potentially facilitate this. Depending on the context and young person's needs, other options, such as job skills, life skills and financial management training,⁸¹ as well as business training and/or income generating activities should also be available. In order to deliver the above, specialised staff who could deliver specific training should also be involved.

As with all economic strengthening activities it is important that market analyses are carried out to ensure that the focus of skills training are appropriate for the context. In addition such activities need to be closely monitored to minimise unintended child protection and child labour risks and ensure gender equity.⁸²

Whilst some sources suggest that the above interventions are successful in improving a variety of outcomes for care leavers, including employment and income,⁸³ their effectiveness is yet to be closer examined by longitudinal studies. Nevertheless, such interventions aim to equip young people with transferable skills which they can later use

in securing employment and establishing themselves in the job market. Retrak currently uses vocational and business skills training together with IGAs for young people participating in independent living programmes. Those initiatives could benefit from incorporating market analysis to determine the suitability of available training. In addition, a specific tool to assess young people's suitability for IGAs or other economic strengthening activities is needed. Retrak is beginning to incorporate the use of the Graduation Model into reintegration programmes in Ethiopia, the same principles and approaches could also be applied to independent living programmes.⁸⁴

Some research suggests that staff who specialise in economic strengthening are necessary within alternative care programmes.⁸⁵ However this needs to be carefully considered as introducing another staff member could possibly be difficult for young people who are struggling through a lot of change and transition. Certainly, any staff member providing economic strengthening support needs to be adequately trained and experienced, and develop good rapport and relationships with the young people they are working with.

Retrak is already organising follow-up interventions with the independent living youth to monitor their well-being and employment status. Additional feedback around the challenges and perspectives on the programme provided by beneficiaries would give an insight into the effectiveness of those initiatives and inform the programme design.

4.4 Living arrangements

Adequate accommodation is a significant issue for care leavers and an important element in alternative care. Scarcity and affordability of appropriate housing are the main problems around securing accommodation for young people.⁸⁶ In order to address those issues, financial support could be considered as an option in the short-term. However, it is advisable to explore other forms of assistance, such as shared accommodation with other care leavers. In addition, support around maintaining accommodation (dealing with landlords and contracts, paying rent and utility bills) may need to be provided for young people as many will not have experience in the necessary negotiation skills or confidence to do this on their own.

Unlike most young people, the majority of care leavers do not have the possibility to return to their parental home if they experience problems with their living arrangements. In the event of losing accommodation a measure needs to be in place to prevent them from becoming homeless, for instance, access to a place where they can temporarily stay as they arrange for alternative accommodation.

Retrak is currently helping young people establish them in accommodation in pairs for increased security and support, with rent subsidies phased out over time. However graduates of Retrak's independent living programmes would benefit from having an option of accessing shelter in case of experiencing problems around housing.

⁷⁰ Stein, M (2006) op cit.; Perry, A (2010) op cit.

⁷¹ Delap, E (2013) op cit.

⁷² Perry, A (2010) op cit.

⁷³ These two tools were already known to Retrak through previous work, they are appealing because of their basis on attachment theory and promotion of empowerment of young people which is in line with Retrak's values and model of work. There may be other tools available.

⁷⁴ DDP Network (2015) What is meant by PACE, DDP Network [Online], Available: <http://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/> [Accessed: 09th June 2015]

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Limited (2009-15) About the Star & Young Person's Star, Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Limited [Online], Available: <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/about-the-outcomes-star/> [Accessed: 09th June 2015]

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Berzin- Cosner, S & Taylor, S A op cit.

⁸⁰ ILO, n.d. What is child labour?, International Labour Organisation [Online], Available: <http://www.ilo.org/pec/facts/lang-en/index.htm>, [Accessed: 09th June 2015]

⁸¹ Dewar, L A & Goodman, D (2014) op cit., p11

⁸² Chaffin, J, Rhoads, N & Carmichael, J (2013) Children and Economic Strengthening Programs. Maximizing the Benefit and Minimising Harm, CPC Livelihoods and Economic Strengthening Task Force, CPC Network, Retrieved from: http://www.cpcnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/FIELD_CPC_ES_Child_Protection_v16_WEB.pdf

⁸³ Montgomery, P et al., op cit.; Georgiades, S (2005) 'A Multi-Outcome Evaluation of an Independent Living Program', Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal 22(5-6), pp417-439

⁸⁴ Wichmann, H (forthcoming) Reintegration and economic strengthening in Ethiopia, Manchester, Retrak

⁸⁵ Chaffin, J, Rhoads, N & Carmichael, J (2013) op cit.

⁸⁶ Berzin- Cosner, S & Taylor, S A (2009) op cit.

4.5 Social inclusion

As stated earlier, social inclusion is a crucial issue for care leavers who may be stigmatised by the community due to a number of reasons, such as their status as a care leaver. Social exclusion has also been linked to a lack of educational attainment which hinders care leavers' chances of establishing themselves on the job market.⁸⁷ This issue can be partly addressed by looking into available education and skills training options as outlined previously. Exclusion from the community has also been attributed to young people displaying anti-social behaviour.⁸⁸ This can be addressed through community projects which involve social welfare professionals and local community networks.⁸⁹ It has been suggested that "a social inclusion model for care leavers would aim to promote participation in mainstream activities by linking care leavers with a range of professional and community supports. These supports would address key developmental needs in areas such as housing; education, employment and training; social and family relationships; self care; health; and financial support and independent living skills."⁹⁰ Furthermore, community education workshops could aid in changing attitudes towards care leavers and encourage the community members to assume responsibility for young people present in the community.

Many independent living interventions focus solely on individual support, in areas such as relationships, education, employment and living arrangements. Whilst such support can mitigate the risk of being socially excluded for an individual young person, community-level work is also crucial in including young people in general in social, economic, political and cultural systems within their communities. Retrak's current engagement in community initiatives aiming to prevent family separation, in Hossana, Ethiopia and in Blantyre and Lilongwe in Malawi, includes community education workshops and events which intend to change attitudes towards children connected with the streets and promote community child protection in order to improve child wellbeing and mitigate marginalisation.⁹¹ Such interventions, especially if they include a focus on young people as well as children, would aid in improving outcomes for former street children transitioning into independence and trying to reintegrate back into their community.

Retrak's current community work does not measure changes in exclusion, since it is only implicitly part of the goal. However, examples from other similar areas of work⁹² show that community education is an important part of facilitating young people's reintegration into communities. If community stigma and prejudice is not addressed then social exclusion of young people will follow, greatly increasing the chance of re-separation. A community model, such as the one proposed by Mendes, targets social exclusion by combining holistic and comprehensive assistance in the areas outlined above, together with a mentoring programme focused on "promoting social, recreational and leisure link with the general community beyond the supports provided by social welfare professionals".⁹³ The literature on former child soldiers who also experienced social exclusion gives an example of community sensitisation campaigns which promote acceptance and collective responsibility of community members towards the marginalised children.⁹⁴ Independent living programmes should include ways of identifying, monitoring and mitigating social exclusion among beneficiaries.⁹⁵ The focus should be put on building young people's resilience and helping them realise their self-worth by providing life-skills and psychosocial support.

⁸⁷ Jackson, S & Cameron, C (2012) 'Leaving care: Looking ahead and aiming higher', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, pp1107-1114

⁸⁸ Mendes, P (2011) op cit.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p71

⁹¹ Retrak (2014) Mid-term review of "Reintegration of street children and community-based child protection in SNNPR, Ethiopia", Manchester, Retrak

⁹² Mendes, P (2011) op cit.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p74

⁹⁴ Boothby, N, J Crawford and J Halperin (2006), 'Mozambique child soldier life outcome study: Lessons learned in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts', *Global Public Health* (1)1, pp87-107

⁹⁵ Measuring social exclusion focuses on collecting data from various dimensions of people's lives to establish if and to what extent they are socially excluded and if their situation changes over time, e.g. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2010) *Analysis and Measuring Social Inclusion in a Global*





5 Conclusion and recommendations

This review of literature on independent living practice has revealed a focus on several specific social groups, such as the disabled, the elderly and care leavers. Independent living in the context of children previously connected with the streets is largely unexplored although young people formerly connected to the streets are currently living in this alternative care option. The practice around independent living can most closely be informed by exploring the literature on care leavers who have participated in such arrangements.

The needs and experiences of care leavers show many similarities with young people connected to the streets. Therefore, this paper has sought to draw on examples of services provided to care leavers in order to apply the findings to the situation of street-connected children and highlight gaps in existing policy and practice around independent living. This revealed the following implications for policy and practice:

- **Conceptualisation & existing policy:** Alternative Care Guidelines need to be more specific in outlining the content and guidance around independent living initiatives. A clear goal needs to be defined and there should be a focus on empowering young people to realise their self-worth and to thrive as they move to independent living.
- **Supportive relationships, social networks & social capital:** Successful transition into adulthood is connected to successful reintegration into communities. Independent living programmes need to provide support for both these transitions. Maintaining contact with young people's biological families and communities of origin should be encouraged and maintained where possible. Where this is not possible, it would seem essential to assign young people a trained, committed mentor who can assist them in these transitions. Mentor support should be grounded in attachment theory and involve building a positive, trusting relationship with young people, providing links with their communities and advising them on different aspects of their lives.
- **Education, employment and living arrangements:** Young people should also receive assistance with accessing appropriate education and training, obtaining practical skills, finding employment and securing housing. All these components are necessary for the young person to build self-confidence and obtain the necessary skills needed to prevent future economic and social deprivations.
- **Social inclusion:** In order to mitigate the risk of social exclusion community work needs to focus on mobilising the community members to assume responsibility for young people and to change their attitudes towards socially excluded groups.
- **In general:** there is a need to identify when to use specialised staff to deal with individual challenges of young people, i.e. psycho social support and mentoring, skills training and other staff addressing young peoples' issues such as substance abuse.

5.1 Recommendations for Retrak's independent living programmes

- **Develop SOPs and monitoring tools:** Independent living SOPs should be developed to provide guidelines for consistent delivery of quality independent living programmes across Retrak's countries of operation. Monitoring of these programmes is essential. Beneficiaries should be encouraged to provide feedback to give an insight into impact and effectiveness in order to inform design. Monitoring of beneficiaries' well-being should continue to build upon Retrak's current work and should be analysed more closely in order to establish trends and insights into impact. The SOPs and monitoring of their implementation and results could then provide a basis for advocacy work.
- **Strengthen mentorship programme and increase training and support:** Mentor support for young people entering independent living programmes should be both continued and increased. In addition, mentors should encourage young people to uphold links with their original families and communities. A mentor should also be trained, supervised and supported to ensure they provide appropriate assistance to young people they work with and are able to deal with the challenges accompanying their relationship with the beneficiaries of the programme. The SOP could include a section on the selection, training and support of mentors for young people.
- **Provide emergency shelter:** The graduates of Retrak's independent living programmes would benefit from having an option of accessing an emergency shelter in case they experience problems around housing after leaving the programme.
- **Address exclusion through community-based work:** A focus should be placed on the aspect of social exclusion and working closely with communities to address stigma. SOPs for independent living programmes should highlight the need to recognise, monitor and address this issue closely. Activities could include community dialogues, education workshops or establishing a community model which would link young people with a range of professional and community supports. These supports would aim to respond to young people needs, such as employment or housing.

5.2 Recommendations for future research:

There is a need for more and contextualised research concerning children connected with the streets who can benefit from participating in independent living programmes. In particular research should verify if the needs of young people who transition into adulthood are sufficiently addressed. This could be through asking for their feedback during their participation in programmes, analysing exit interviews and monitoring follow-up activities. Organisations providing support to young people who are transitioning into adulthood should be encouraged to share their practice around independent living and engage with dialogue on the topic.

Above all, the scarcity of longitudinal research concerning experiences of youth who exits independent living programmes call for more focus around this area in order to evaluate the effectiveness of such initiatives. Longitudinal research with children on the streets in general is rare, although a current project by StreetInvest and the University of Dundee and the Brook World Poverty Institute at the University of Manchester is seeking to address this.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ StreetInvest (n.d.) Growing up on the streets. Research with and for young people on the streets, StreetInvest [Online]. Available at: <http://www.streetinvest.org/quotes> [Accessed: 19th October 2015]

6 Appendix 1:

Summary literature critiques

Avery, R J & Freundlich, M (2006) 'Transitioning from congregate care: preparation and outcomes', *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 15, pp507-518

This study looks at the experiences of youth in foster care, the effectiveness of efforts to prepare youth for life after foster care and post-discharge outcomes for youth, particularly when discharged to independent living.

Avery, R J (2010) 'An examination of theory and promising practice for achieving permanency for teens before they age out of foster care', *Children and Youth Services Review* 32, pp399-408

The paper examines the effectiveness of independent living programmes in preparing foster youth to live independently. It also looks at the need of kin/fictive kin support for achieving permanency.

Barn, R (2009) 'Care leavers and social capital: understanding and negotiating racial and ethnic identity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33(5), pp832-850 - This paper explores the sociological concept of social capital for foster care leavers in the context of ethnic and racial identity.

Berzin- Cosner, S & Taylor, S A (2009) 'Preparing Foster Youth for Independent Living: Collaboration Between County Independent Living Programs and Community-Based Youth-Servicing Agencies', *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 3(3), p254-274

An exploratory qualitative study of an independent living programme in an urban country. The study suggests that although the programme meets the needs of some youth effectively, challenges exist in the collaboration between the programme and other agencies.

Cunningham, M & Diversi, M (2012) 'Aging out: Youths' perspectives on foster care and the transition to independence', *Qualitative Social Work* 12(5), pp587-602

The study accounts for foster youth experiences after leaving formal care. The research has been conducted through semi-structured interviews and examines the challenges which former foster youth faces when transitioning into independence.

Dewar, L A & Goodman, D (2014) *Best Practices in Transitioning Youth Out of Care. Successful Transitions, Success as Adults*, Child Welfare Institute, Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

This literature review examines the practice literature and correlates the findings of what are the best practices for youth transitioning out of care which yield successful outcomes for them as adults. It recognizes the barriers impeding youth from achieving positive outcomes in their transition from care and identifies successful approaches/programmes which aid youth in their journey to adulthood.

Mann-Feder, V R & White, T (2003) 'Facilitating the Transition from Placement to Independent Living: Reflections from a Program of Research', *International Journal of Child & Family Welfare*, pp196-204

The article explores the experiences of young people aging out of care and making the transition into independence. It highlights difficulties the youth faces and gaps in the interventions and programmes they participate in.

Mendes, P (2011) 'Towards a community development support model of young people transitioning from state-out-of-care: A case study of St. Luke's Anglicare in Victoria, Australia', *Practice Social Work in Action* 23(2), pp69-81

This paper presents a community development support model based on a partnership between professional social welfare workers and local community networks. It argues that such model is most likely to enhance opportunities for social inclusion of care leavers.

Montgomery, P, Donkoh, C & Underhill, K (2006) 'Independent living programs for young people leaving the care system: The state of the evidence', *Children and Youth Services Review* 28, pp1435-1448

This study attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of independent living programmes suggesting that some of them may have protective effects for youth leaving the public care system

Stein, M (2006) 'Young people aging out of care: The poverty of theory', *Children and Youth Services Review* 28, pp422-434

This paper explores three perspectives that may contribute to a greater understanding of the main findings from empirical research: attachment theory, focal theory and resilience. Each perspective includes a discussion of the implications for practice in linking empirical and theoretical work.





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TO HELP STREET CHILDREN.**

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