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Lost in Transition? The mitigating role of social capital in negotiating life after care of youth from Romania and England

By

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of

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In the

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Lost in Transition? The mitigating role of social capital in negotiating life after care of youth from Romania and England

Abstract

Most young people today can enjoy an extended stay under parental care unlike young adults who age out of residential, foster care or other alternative care systems ("care leavers"). Care leavers are expected to look after themselves in matters such as securing employment, and housing without necessarily being in possession of a durable supportive social network system. Increasingly, many significant worldwide studies concerning care leavers show the importance of relationship-based practice, and the pivotal role of networking to enhance interpersonal skills and emotional maturity. These ingredients are viewed to contribute to more positive outcomes at adulthood. However, relatively few studies have solely focused on the utilization of social capital and social networks to negotiate independent living. It is this gap that the present study addresses. The dearth of knowledge of the care leavers' own safety net and how they negotiate independent living has driven this research. Qualitative in approach, this empirical research used interviews and vignettes on a sample composed of 58 participants (31 care leavers from Romania and 17 from England ranging from 17 to 29 years of age together with five professionals from each country). Aimed at understanding strategies used to negotiate independent living through the lenses of social capital and social networks, this empirical study subsequently provides key indicators to improve leaving care policy and practice. According to young people's and professionals' testimonies, elements of social capital such as trust, encouragement, reciprocity, and access to information contributed to boosting levels of confidence that further lead to optimization of resources such as employment prospects. A close relationship between social networks/social capital and the participants' outcomes, including individual (enhanced resilience, positive identity formation) and attained socio-economic status has been identified here. This comparative study between Romania and England, chosen for their different welfare systems and wider social contexts, illustrates that social capital and social networks have acted as a main channel to socio-professional integration among the young adults. The findings suggest the essence of having established a strong foundation of support prior to leaving care. Nevertheless, as social capital is in its infancy in this domain, more empirical evidence is necessary to deepen an understanding of the

concept's mitigating role in youth well-being and outcomes. This includes whether established capital prior to leaving care can contribute to positive experiences specifically during the early periods of transition. Another aspect to explore is whether fellow colleagues could represent an effective strategy in service provision during the preparatory stages to independence.

Key words: care leavers, social capital/social networks, transition to adulthood, agency, and outcomes

Introduction

I would like to share how this research has come to be a doctoral dissertation. Having grown up in an orphanage in a small city in Romania, I observed children under the care of the state to experience neglect, discrimination and resentment by the public, making them one of the groups most vulnerable in society. Their rights and needs are overlooked. These children have a hard time developing social networks, integrating into society, receiving good quality education, and acquiring the necessary skills valuable for their future careers to secure their well-being. This hinders their chances for socio-professional integration as they leave care. Although I speak from personal experience, research supports such statements.

First, what were the odds that a social orphan would be able to pursue higher education on a scholarship? I had an opportunity that very few of my peers did; I received a scholarship to study in the United States. Here I must go back and recognize the fact that although I was a good student, it was not until I met a couple from the U.S. that life took a whole different route for me. Apart from my personal drive and capacity, getting hold of 'the right networks' appears to have had an influencing if not determinant role in how my life path developed. It is through social capital obtained from specific networks (access to information, exposure to various choices, encouragement, belief in my capacity to succeed) that ultimately led to the acquisition of human capital (i.e. higher education) and ecomomic capital (accessing better-paid jobs). I do not say that availability of support, social capital, per se can influence positive outcomes but it goes hand in hand, as McMahon and Curtin (2012)

argued, with an individual's capacity to use that information, and utilize advice to make constructive decisions that build up to attainment of higher education.

Going back to Romania after two years, I witnessed many of my peers struggling on the streets, some without Identity Cards, others sleeping in ran-down buildings, and being subject to various forms of exploitation. Many had left the country to run away from the discrimination they experienced growing up. At that time, there were very few in higher education, or with good professional jobs (administrative positions). Among those peers I met, one way they coped with adversity and drastic changes was through grouping. For example, when I met one of them, he/she connected me with at least three others. Young people from care unlike their counterparts with families have less time to prepare for independent living, explore opportunties, or consider long-term achievements. From my experience, youth in care are the group with a less established foundation of security that could help them negotiate independent living. Travelling in other countries made me aware that the transition issue of youth leaving care is not found only in Romania but also in the United States, Germany and UK. It seems Broad's (1998) argument, on the vitality of informal networks (including fellow care peers) as one of the "essentials" to negotiate transition is applicable not just concerning youth leaving care, maybe even more now with the reported fewer employment opportunities for today's youth (p. 52).

Most young people today experience an extended transition phase living in the parents' household throughout and after studies in part due to an insecure labor market (Rugg and Quilgars, 2015). Whether out of choice or not extended transition occurs in nations of different economic and political structures, including Romania in Central Eastern Europe and England a western developed country (Stein, 2005).

Reliable and durable supportive systems are a mechanism upon which, more than ever before, outcomes at adulthood appear to be dependent, leading to what is debated within youth discourses as fragmented trajectories to socio-professional integration (Furlong, 2009). Young people who graduate from care with limited predictable support system (residential and foster care type settings) are prone to 'accelerated' transition. Usage of words such as 'sudden'; 'adulthood occurs over night'; 'stripped of any support'; 'ad-hoc and inconsistent support'; 'expelled'; 'left'; 'abrupt' within leaving care-related literature internationally paint a clear picture of the harsh experiences youth generally undergo at the time of transitioning out of the care system. Furthermore they have to start "everything from scratch: home, family…" because once out, services often stop completely (Innocenti Research Centre, 2001, p. 1; Courtney, 2001; Stein, 2005; Dixon et al., 2006; Anghel, 2011; Berzin, Singer and Hockanson, 2014). This population aside from experiencing accelerated transition, they additionally shift to an environment without a 'safety net' (Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2006; Helve and Bynner, 2007; Atkinson, 2008; Avery and Freundlich, 2009).

England is used as a comparative element to Romania in the present qualitative study on care leavers' life experiences to allow assessment of risk factors as well as potential solutions in detecting progress without ignoring socio-cultural contexts (Esping-Andersen et al., 2002; Pinkerton, 2006). Understanding navigation through life after care remains under-studied especially considering that available research tends to not go beyond the age of 24 to depict how care leavers fare over time (Hook and Courtney, 2011). Additionally, it is important to look at how these young people actually meet their needs, and how some succeed more than others (Stein, 2005; Kendrick, Steckley and Lerpiniere, 2008; Anghel, 2011). The question

comes to: what are the strategies used to negotiate independent living? There is a need to explore what works for young people in different stages of their lives, and to assess strengths that accompany youth in their transition from care. The lack of attention given to social capital/social networks within leaving care research provides an opportunity for expanding knowledge concerning the youth at this stage. Investigation on how care leavers negotiate life after care primarily through the lenses of social networks/social capital depicts this empirical study' key contribution in the area. No research has been yet located to look holistically at types of resources, informal networks (i.e. friends, siblings, teachers, family) or formal ones (professionals within and/or outside the care system), used as the main means of social integration among youth with a care background. Even related research concerning improvement of outcomes via addressing emotional needs of these populations is formalized (mentorship type practice in service provision) relying less on the encouragement of young people's opportunities to 'naturally' form their networks (Rees and Pithouse, 2015). This empirical research bridges the knowledge gap within the context of youth leaving care while highlighting networking as an important strategy in negotiating life after care. While the research simultaneously reveals levels of agency, it takes into account to some respect the impact acquired social capital (from one's set of networks) has been found to have in enhancing resilience and a sense of identity among the youth participants. Multivaried roles of social capital and social networks have been illustrated in this research, from enhancing resilience to diminishing forms of stigma seemingly reported by the young people, especially in Romania. In this research social networks are viewed as sources of social capital. Through networking, emotional maturity and problem solving skills were enhanced along with their ability to trust other individuals (Bottrell, 2009). In this research accentuation is on positive networks that have shown to have such

effects. As a result, the research provides key indicators for successful outcomes to independent living and providing policy and practice guidance within the child welfare system.

Social capital requires investment in social relationships to result in acquisition of resources such as information and knowledge, as well as providing a sense of connectedness, and security (Portes, 1998; Lin, 2005; Gibbons and Foster, 2014). Scholastic understanding of social capital comes from a quantitative approach mainly using large-scale studies. Within the context of youth, the scope here is not simply to associate the concept with possible effects on outcomes and well-being including resilience, but additionally to investigate its meaning, and the purpose it can hold in the ever-changing lives of individuals in this study. A qualitative perspective in studying social capital shows a different dimension worth elaborating for a more comprehensive view, the theory being 'tented' from a more participatory approach to understanding its role in post-care life. Social capital in this research is built upon three theoretical perspectives. From Putnam's perspective, participation/civic engagement is another natural form of developing social capital. Due to being raised in care such populations do not necessarily fall under the paradigm of normative patterns of localising and utilizing social capital. High activity in local affairs becomes the main means of developing resources, network community therefore substituting the missing capital in the primary living environment (i.e. care) (Coleman, 1988; Putnam and Helliwell, 2004; Erbstein, 2013). Another focus lies on Bourdieu's (1986; 1998) perception of adjusting behavior to increase the likelihood of accessing resources (including social networks), 'knowing how to behave**.'** This qualitative research, however, gives higher emphasis to Coleman's (1988) social capital perspective for direct evidence of impact on individual performance/outcome

specifically concerning youth. The interplaying role of social networks/social capital in managing life after care is visible on both levels, intangible and tangible outcomes. Intangible outcomes refer to emotional maturity, greater level of confidence, and development of interpersonal skills upon which inner state is measured. For a majority of participants, it was the achieved intangible side that enabled them to get up the hierarchy ladder of attainment. Such a finding suggests a close link between intangible outcome and social capital. Qualitative exploration of social capital and social networks as one of the key strategies to negotiating post-care life made possible to explain how such concepts can hold a mitigating role in the lives of these young people. Because of such an approach a clear linkage with identity and resilience have been identified. Wider aspects such as stigma and social distancing have additionally come across as factors with which young people needed to consider in their negotiation process to independent living.

Outline of Thesis

To encompass rich accounts of post-care life experiences professionals and young adults of quite a wide age range, from 17 to 29 years of age, have been targeted to take part in this study. In total 58 participants have been recruited, out of which five professionals are from Romania and five from England, with 31 young adults from Romania and 17 from England. In this research, Stein's (2012) typology of outcomes identified with young adults from care such as 'Strugglers', 'Survivors' and 'Moving on' is applied. To begin with, the 'literature review' is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses the issue of transition to adulthood, a stage of life that today is viewed as contributing to the increased polarisation between the haves and have-nots (Schoon, 2007). The chapter explains how the dependence on

financial and emotional support usually from family puts groups like care leavers under great pressure when of age to look after themselves (Duncalf, 2013; Gibbons and Foster, 2014). Chapter 2 plays a central part in setting the context for the research. Focusing on the works of Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu, it analyzes theoretical background of social capital, and the important ways these different theoretical perspectives intercept in relation to youth leaving care. In the domain of youth in care, increasingly there is a greater emphasis at the policy level to invest in emotional needs. However, such a shift is more visible in England than in Romania. The third chapter emphasizes the differences of measures taken in Romania and England to respond to these young people's needs at this stage of life. This chapter is important because it lays out the influential role the care system can have in forming social relationships.

Chapter 4 elucidates the methodology section, the heart of the research through which theoretical understanding, and conceptualization lay out the structure and foundation of the research (O'Leary, 2014). The chapter discusses the methods used to reach the target groups (professionals and young adults) from Romania and England and the process of data analysis. Qualitative in approach to capture life events after care, this research additionally used vignettes to gather data although this method is rarely present in sociology (Hughes and Huby, 2004; Barter and Reynold, 2004; Blodgett et al., 2011; O'Dell et al., 2012).

Chapter 5, the first empirical chapter, concerns unequal distribution of services and differences of treatment as experienced by the young adults transitioning from care on the basis of young adults' ability to comply with the set rules. Dedication to emotional type of support has been given because young adults

and professionals from Romania and England viewed it as fundamental in the ability to cope with life's major changes that follow with aging out of care. The sixth chapter presents social capital/social networks as a critical portal to socio-professional integration. Under this umbrella lies an important development: more positive perceptions of youth result from increased contact between them and the general public. It is in such a manner that trust was built; relationships were created, allowing networks to crossover beyond borders of stigma. The research question ('What are the strategies used by young adults to negotiate life after care?') is strengthened in chapter 7 because it brings together the social capital and social networks' impact on youth outcomes linked to Stein's categorization of 'Strugglers', 'Survivors' or 'Moving on'. By giving particular attention to intangible outcomes, judged on the aspect of inner growth/advancement, it enabled further to identify a close link between social capital and outcomes. Chapter 8, the final chapter, of this research regards discussion and conclusions of key points of the overall work. Evidence on the roles social networks and social capital played in the process of achieving a form of stability among these young adults provides good indicators for policy development. Having achieved this inner growth, social barriers did not necessarily determine their lives 'cuz I believe where there are no opportunities, I create them' (London, CL 25 Undergraduate); or 'I keep on going for a better tomorrow' (Romania, CL 19, informal employment). An opportunity for establishing a sense of security (either speaking of an inner or outward sense) from their networks is an important indicator in what assisted youth to negotiate life after care. Networks provided youth with what the welfare system could not; namely higher engagement in social matters (either personally concerning them or their surroundings), possibilities for negotiation and problem-solving skills, that further added to increased emotional maturity, considered essential to step forward into the adult role (Philips, 2010). Increased

individual undertakings as a result of their own built supportive systems, the network's (outside of care) capacity to increase opportunities for socio-professional integration as well as optimization of resources show this research's distinctive contribution in related leaving care discourses.

Chapter 1

Making sense of 'transition to adulthood' - the support-dependent characteristic of transition

This chapter sets out to reveal the close connection between understandings of the transition phase and availability of social capital. In this chapter there is not an argument against transition as a new phase within the life course, rather an assessment of its support-dependent characteristic that appears to have received little attention. The support-dependent feature in this study refers to social network as a specific factor upon which young adults appear to rely during the transition to adulthood. According to Furlong (2009) unavailability of support is one of the factors that leads to fragmented trajectories to adult outcomes. This dependency may correspond to the current arguments on the need to analyze this phase of life from an interdependence approach (Snow and Mann-Feder, 2013). Means of resources, both economic and social, play a vital role in preparing young people for making sense of this transition, and in developing the capacity to 'negotiate multiple subsequent transitions (decision making, changing locations, marriage, housing, employment)', maintains Diemer (2014, p. 160). This may partially explain the intensified experiences of those departing care (foster homes, or children's homes) who are consistently reported to have poor support and poor access to social networks during this phase. This sub-group population of young adults experience additionally transition out of a support system, not just transition to adulthood as it is common for their non-care counterparts.

The accessing of relevant literature about the transition to adulthood of those youth with a care background from Romania and England in conjunction with finding material on social capital, support and social networks required much work. It involved a two-way process, namely through networking with various contributors in the field and by accessing relevant online databases. Networking took the form of attending both international and local conferences (England and Romania), and participating in training and workshop activities. The online databases that were accessed for this research were Academia.edu, Researchgate, EBSCOHost, Sage Journals Online, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink and Wiley Online Library, Google Scholar. Additionally, I subscribed to Google Scholar. As a result, I received alerts automatically about new books and journal articles related to my selected words and phrases: 'leaving care', 'youth leaving care Romania', and 'social capital and youth'. My language use was mostly in English, and at times I searched also in Romanian. Key words such as 'youth leaving care England'; 'youth leaving care Romania'; 'youth at disadvantage and support'; 'youth and social capital' aided access to a wide range of books and journal articles. I went as far back as 1980s, and with social capital as early as Hanifan's work 1916, to deepen my understanding in the area. Access to the international literature enabled me to review issues surrounding outcomes of the youth including the transition processes to independence, not to forget mentioning strategies proposed within policy and research to improve post-care experiences. After reviewing relevant literature, I observed the close connection between the lack of support and poor outcomes at adulthood. This helped in framing my research questions. In addition, qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questions are frequently applied to collect data from populations considered at disadvantage. However vignettes appeared to be used to a lesser extent in prior related literature. The use of vignettes in this study helped to identify

decision-making processes, choices and capacities of individuals. Finally, certain pieces of literature influenced my approach to studying the participants, specifically young people, as active agents in their lives. Investigating strategies used to negotiate post-care life events, this empirical study exhibits agency use among young adults with a care background.

The first section, 1.1., addresses how the lack of a support system impacts the experience of transitioning from care as well as transitioning to adulthood. From a theoretical standpoint, transition within the context of youth with a care background is characterized by much of the literature in England as *compressed* and *abrupt* (Breda, Kader and Marx, 2012). There appears to be a certain understanding of the pressure put on these youth when preparing to leave care. In contrast, the Romanian policy and practice shows less recognition on the difficulties youth face at this time. The system as a corporate parent acts as a main provider of support; however, its services usually end once youth become of age, with no chances to return to social services in times of need. One of the structural assumptions underlying this 'cut off'' is that the youth have acquired the skills necessary for independent living. Within a set limited time they are supposed to internalize skills learned progressively as one grows up (e.g. Duncalf, 2013). However the main argument of this section centers on additional factors that contribute to the complexity of socio-professional integration, lack of emotional support, and establishment of networks by the time of aging out of care. The next section (1.1.1.) captures key expectations of the youth formerly in care in the transition process to adulthood. Research recognizes the challenges surrounding transition to adulthood in relation to availability of emotional and financial support from family. Whereas for some privileged youth such support means opportunity for exploration and identity formation as posited by Helve and

Bynner (2007), for other social classes it is a survival mechanism. In Romania, for example, many young people aside from having no choice but to depend on parents are involved in the black market, or - a newer trend - choose to go back to school since there are no job vacancies (Lincaru and Ciuca, 2014). Prolonged dependence on parents exposes the support-dependent feature inherent in this new phase of life (Montgomery, 2011). If young adults overall present a vulnerable group with the main form of security remaining immediate ties (family), then it shows the importance of studying the role social networks can have among one of the society's most vulnerable groups (Furlong, 2009; Simmons, Russell and Thomson, 2013; Eurofound, 2015).

1. 1. Transition to adulthood as it applies to young people with a care background

There is an extensive body of literature, especially in the West, that captures the transition to adulthood accompanied with outcomes of care leavers. As a result of limited research about youth emancipating in Romania, the research being presented here is based on the recent works of the Romanian scholars, notably Dima and Anghel, as well as on related research conducted in England, e.g. Stein, Broad.

What is known generally is that youth with families have at least a cushion of security because parents offer some type of support until a form of independence has been achieved (Jones, 2011; Snow and Mann-Feder, 2013). If given a succinct statistical view, the average age of leaving parental home varies throughout Europe, from 25 years of age to 34. In Romania generally is at the age of 25+ for women and

29.7+ for men (Ghimis and Mogos, 2009). Based on the most recent data available from Eurostat (2016), 59.2% of young adults aged 18-34 were living with parents in Romania and 34.3% of the same age cohort were in a similar situation in the UK. Perez and Romo (2011) pointed out the benefits children/youth with families have: knowing that help is there when needed, having a place to come back to, being afforded to make mistakes, support being given often extending "past young adulthood" (p. 239). Post-care independence similarly relies on available resources. Avery and Freundlich (2009) argue that to pressure young adults with a care background to self-sustain once out without a 'safety net' is unrealistic. Coyle and Pinkerton (2012) proposed 'supported transitions' underscoring the interdependence characteristic in this transition phase.

Once youth ('care leavers') age out of orphanages, foster care or other alternative state care systems, ready or not, provision of services is often stopped (Innocenti Research Centre, 2001; Stein, 2005; Dixon et al., 2006). Young people in Romania and England still exit care at the age of 18, with some at 16 as reported in England despite extended support measures in place up to the age of 25. Having Eextended support up to the age of 25 (Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010), or 26 according to the Romanian Law, 272/2004/art. 51, both systems show awareness of the current issues today's youth face in gaining independence. However, such extended support is conditional in these countries on the youth continuing education/training (Atkinson, 2008; Wade and Dixon, 2006; Dima, 2015). More detailed focus on the cited Laws will be given in Chapters 3 and 5 to unravel the gap between theory and practice within social services when touching on service delivery across the youth clusters. Generally with limited support after care accompanied by overwhelming evidence on abrupt transition to adulthood, young adults with a care

background have to pay the price by learning from their own mistakes (Tweddle, 2007; Atkinson, 2008; Dima and Skehill, 2011; Berzin, Singer and Hockanson, 2014). Whereas support from family and relatives can smooth the pathway to adulthood, young adults that live on an independent basis and rely solely on their own resources are prone to social exclusion (EU Report, 2012). In a time of great youth unemployment, employment access based on connections, and delayed employment through higher education (at least a Bachelor's degree) young people who graduate from care find themselves at a significant disadvantage (Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012). In contrast to many non-care peers, they cannot afford to negotiate whether or not, or when, to enter employment.

Empirical research (e.g. Dima and Anghel, 2008; Kendrick, Steckley and Lerpiniere, 2008; Pecora et al., 2009; Wiseman, 2008; Anghel, 2011; Goodkind, Schelbe and Shook, 2011; Jackson and Cameron, 2012) along with Stein's conclusion on the leaving care situation analysis in 16 countries (including Romania) provide a clear picture of care leavers' common challenges experienced in society despite differences in the provision of services and leaving care processes within countries. Once youth have left care, they are often forgotten and neglected by the local responsible bodies. For those who may receive some kind of assistance, the provision of services is reported to be very limited, ad-hoc and inconsistent (Goodkind, Schelbe and Shook, 2011; Stein, 2012). However, in an attempt to provide more depth, and looking closely at the experiences of youth leaving care, there are a few clear differences. In England and in several other countries for quite some time, the unrealistic expectations of youth to cope with sudden change of emancipating from care successfully has been highly acknowledged. There is the recognition that transition phase is a process that demands emotional/advice type of support parallel

to learning practical independent living skills (Barn, 2009; Driscoll, 2013; Coyle and Pinkerton, 2012; Stein, 2013; Sanders and Munford, 2014). In assessing related research in Romania, young adults by the age of 18 are expected to have achieved higher levels of maturity, have a clear direction in their lives, and show that they are ready to take on adulthood (Anghel and Dima, 2008; Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010; Anghel, 2011; Dima and Bucuta, 2015). Moreover from the Romanian context, care leavers' graduation has been identified to be linked to two major factors based on Anghel, Herczog and Dima's research in 2013. The first regards total reliance on 'the state'. In this case, the authors suggest that youth have little experience with independence, and have limited knowledge of laws and how to access local resources. The second factor has to do with informal relationships developed with the professional staff. Access to benefits/resources and decisions on who leaves at 18 is selective. This is a clear indication that professionals can shape the application of policies. Such diference of supported transition strengthen Furlong's (2009) point on fragemented trajectories to independence. Similarly, chapter 8 on outcomes will show how in accordance with one's networks accessed, experiences varied in the process to leaving and after care.

Other research maintains that with the lack of a solid supportive social system during and after care, as well as limited knowledge of the responsibilities assumed at adulthood, young people formerly in care are considered one of the most disadvantaged social groups in society (Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2006; Gibbons and Foster, 2014). Youth under the state care also experience identity issues derived from lack of contact with family and community, and the impact of discrimination (Broad, 2008). The sudden loss of a secure base as well as friends, and changes that come with leaving care (e.g. living environment, life-style, relationships, behavior and

identity) are transformations that occur all at once. These factors are found to have negative effects on their ability to develop coping strategies and decision-making processes that could otherwise increase their chances for networking and the ability to anticipate leaving care as a positive change (Popescu, 2003; Jackson and Cameron, 2009; Dima and Skehill, 2011). Without a safety net these young adults have to deal on their own with the pressure of living independently. Casey et al. (2010) argue that lack of social and practical learning skills not only negatively affect the young people but also the society at large. The authors explained that young people become dependent on the social security and welfare systems, remain unemployed and that large amounts of money are needed to develop services in learning essential survival skills that could have been taught while in the care system. Casey and colleagues (2010) argued that until these young adults have an understanding of what it takes to be responsible and productive, they will not be able to handle properly the issues that may arise as life progresses, nor will they have the motivation and determination to look after themselves on day-to-day basis. Likewise, Stein and Verweijen-Slamnescu (2012) stressed that learning and valuing skills necessitates time.

However, within the Romanian context life in care focuses on material needs, "never left to experience what it means to succeed, how it is to do something by yourself" (Dima and Skehill, 2011, p. 2536). Major debates within policy and practice concerning youth preparing to age out of care surround the issues of emotional support and active engagement (negotiating and having a chance to express opinions) of young people in everyday life. International literature suggests that given the absence of attention to the emotional side of needs along with youth lack of engagement in their lives, the long historic trail of poor outcomes is likely to continue (Gardner, 2008; White and Green, 2010; McMahon and Curits, 2012; Gibbons and

Foster, 2014). This population is in need of emotional support in England because coming into care is associated with emotional and/or physical negative experiences whereas in Romania with poverty largely related to lacking basic human needs, and neglect (e.g., Biehal et al., 1995; Broad, 2008; Stein and Munro, 2008; Dima, 2010; Manole, 2010). The greater focus on attaining material needs through practical learning skills without an effort to internalize them has been argued to have little effect on the youth's ability to make use of such resources (Gibbons and Foster, 2014). Aside from emotional fulfillment, participation in daily social activities is associated with instilling confidence, a sense of responsibility, increased resilience, and self-esteem. These characteristics are further believed to contribute to a higher level of personal agency in one's life (Gilligan, 1999; 2008; Sala-Roca et al., 2012). Such arguments have been more recently supported by a new strand of research that encourage mentorship relationships within child welfare policy and practice to fulfill socio-emotional needs of youth preparing to age out of care (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010; Ahrens, 2011; Hollingworth, 2012; Holt and Kirwan, 2012; Singer, Berzin and Hokanson, 2013; Gibbons and Foster, 2014; Pinkerton and Rooney, 2014). Marsh and Peel (1999) stressed that better relationships between service giver and receiver were associated with better outcomes among youth under care. Social support is perceived to be not only a protective mechanism against challenges, or an enhancer of well-being, but also as a solution to problems of social integration and positive adaptation among vulnerable groups (Samuels and Pryce, 2007; Brennan, 2008; Jones, 2011; Gibbons and Foster, 2014; Smyth, Shannon and Dolan, 2015). Despite increased literature on the value of social relationships as one of the key elements to influencing positively the lives of disadvantaged groups of society, there is still a lack of interest in social networks and social capital within leaving care related research. With the current study, it is clarified whether lack of a foundation of

a strong social network predisposes youth formerly in care to more challenged pathways to adulthood. In addition, young people's stories, ability to handle the pressure of socio-professional integration reflect the impact as much as the functioning of the system. These young people's post-care experiences further emphasizes the importance of having social capital within one's primary living environment consistent with Coleman's evidence in 1988.

The consequences of leaving care are often drastic. Statistically, care leavers face a higher level of unemployment, housing instability, depression, homelessness, earlier death, and are more vulnerable to abuse and illicit actions than many other groups their age (e.g. Courtney et al., 2001; Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2006; Kidd and Davidson, 2007; Stein, 2005, 2008; Anghel and Dima, 2008; Atkinson, 2008; Kendrick, Steckley and Lerpiniere, 2008; Dima and Skehill, 2011; Goodkind, Schelbe and Shook, 2011; Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013; Hatos and Dejeu, 2013). This group is not merely challenged in the transition to adulthood; but what becomes clear is that it takes them longer to achieve a form of social and financial self-sufficiency. Yet this challenged early stage may make sense if compared to their counterparts who may 'space out' to prepare emotionally and psychosocially (Anghel, 2011; Stein, 2012). A majority of young adults leaving care do not enjoy a stable living environment either that being after or before aging out of care. Under the care of local authorities, they experience frequent placements and changes within the system (one such example is new staff turnover) leading to inconsistent access to education and irregular family/social contacts (Barn, 2009; Breda, Kader and Marx, 2012). As a consequence, this sub-group population is typically more excluded from outside leisure activities and engagement with peers (Singer, Berzin and Hokanson, 2013). Despite a general trend of poor outcomes found amongst care leavers, it is important to shift the focus

on this population's agency in responding to the new life changes, strategies used to survive and even surpass expectations in either career, education, housing, or relationships. Even more to acknowledge the varied outcomes of these populations being done so via inclusion of the 'missing middle', or as termed by Stein the 'Survivors.' It is rather clearly documented that there are individuals who succeed and do well for themselves. There are individuals who manage somehow to survive, meet fundamental needs to some extent in this study characterized as the 'missing middle'. This research took a step further in understanding how they do it, with social capital and social networks as contributing factors in the process of attaining better outcomes.

Among youth with a care background factors were identified as making social integration challenging which includes unwillingness to comply with rules, limited understanding of the social order, and being unrealistic about what independent living entails. In their path to adulthood, these individuals need to adopt and adapt to new cultural settings, life-style, expectations, behaviors (psychological), leaving behind what is familiar to them (Anghel and Dima, 2008; Anghel, 2011). Other scholars liken such drastic environmental changes to immigrants who too often start from zero, while needing to access support, and information in order to understand local standards of living (Jackson and Cameron, 2012). Moreover in Romania, based on Anghel and Dima's study (2008), both the general public and professionals working in the field hold the perception that children in care live a "too easy life," and are thus unable to cope with life challenges. Care is seen to have created a passive and resentful attitude toward youth growing up in the system. It may further reflect unfamiliarity with the long-term effects of the dependency environment (reflected in the challenges youth encounter at adulthood) (Anghel and Dima, 2008). Wider

populations' beliefs about the young adults coupled with generally unrealistic expectations of the outside world by those aging out of care undoubtedly influence these young adults' post-care socio-professional integration processes (Popescu, 2003). However, Butiu (2011) found that this group is more mature in certain respects (such as commitment, decision-making, self-initiatives) than the larger population due to past experiences. These above-named characteristics have not been taken into account by the general public. For example, Butiu stated that employers prefer to hire candidates based on what they consider predictable behavior, eg., to follow orders without opposition, have a clear sense of responsibility, be emotionally mature, and committed (Butiu, 2011). Negative beliefs of youth in care persist and are largely accountable to relate with the level of stigma existent in the Romanian society. Anghel and Dima (2008) highlighted that stigma is a threat to care leavers' "survival and integration in the community" (p. 171). In concordance with the view from Romania, Broad (2008), an English researcher, asserted that negative outcomes in adult life are mediated by stigmatisation as well as by isolation, and past traumatic experiences. If these young adults' post-care life experiences are determined in part to exhibited behaviors accompanied with presence of stigma, then social networks and acquisition of social capital can act in ameliorating such effects on the young people. On one side through networking with the larger populations stigma can be decreased and on the other side it is through networking that the young people become 'realistic' of the expectations set out at this stage of their lives.

1.1.1. Summarizing the expectations for young adults

As it has been seen from previous session not much dwelling has been done on risks as experienced by the young people. In part it is because this is a well-documented area with experiences found to be similar acorss countries (Rees and Pithouse, 2015). It is important, however, to point out that literature on care leavers to a great extent has neglected the aspect of young people's active engagement or strategies used in the process to independent living. Extant literature on care alumni addresses to some extent their active participation in major life changes, with little association made within research of this social group's ability to adapt, or to explain why some succeed more than others (Jones, 2011; Lee and Berrick, 2012). Since increasingly research acknowledges the importance of support in the transition phase, especially for disadvantaged groups, then it is essential to have a sharp focus empirically on whether social networks could represent a form of security after care. Two examples of studies carried out in Romania are given to show the limited scope of understanding the ability of care leavers to negotiate life after care. Research undertaken by Dima and Skehill (2011) in Romania, "Making sense of leaving care: the contribution of Bridges model of transition to understanding the psycho-social process," comprised a sample of 34 young people aged 20-25 with two to four years independent living experience. Although there were no preparatory stages before leaving care, with more than 60% of participants in severe poverty, as declared in the in-depth semi-structured interviews, some managed to have work with contracts, stable housing and some others received social welfare. Anghel (2011) also found that regardless of their disadvantages of lacking family support and connections, and little to no purposeful preparation and planning before leaving care, the Romanian studied group (28 respondents, aged 17 to 24) did "better than expected" (p. 2529).

Some were able to continue their education, all were healthy, many of them had temporary accommodation, and over half of the participants worked, although not all under legal terms. Yet similar to the already existent exhaustive evidence on the challenges youth face once out, the researchers only went as far as acknowledging those who fared well. For example, Anghel (2011) did address that "what made the difference were the learning opportunities provided by people who offered them support" (p. 2530). Other benefits listed by Anghel included increased motivation and self-confidence, as well as a sense of responsibility, and problem solving alongside interdependent living skills. It would have been beneficial to explain to a greater extent how being surrounded by a set of social networks might play a role in doing 'better than expected'. A study carried out by Campean, Constantin and Mihalache (2010) specifically addressed the need to increase emotional support in conjunction with the practical type for youth in care to have higher level of motivation and better results at school. Unfortunately this view has not been followed up since. In none of the above articles was there a connection made to social networks and social capital.

Despite emphasis on the common practice of accessing resources like state benefits in accordance with one's 'connections' in Romania (see section 3.2., Post-communism consequences and radical changes) even leaving care experiences related to the relationships developed with the 'state' (e.g. Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010; Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013) networks have been largely neglected in analyzing post-care outcomes in research by both Anghel and Dima. Within international literature, including that from the UK, focus on the possible effects social networks can have on young adults from adverse backgrounds remains limited in scope. Available research largely identified social networks as one of the primary sources to contribute to resilience (Gilligan, 2008; Dearden, 2004; Pinkerton

and Dolan, 2007; Pinkerton and Rooney, 2014). While social networks have only been suggested to have such an effect in prior research, in this study it is shown directly the impact and utilization of such concepts. In this manner it was possible to discover care leavers' strategies used to negotiate adulthood, which for majority was through acquisition of social capital and social networks. Since this population appears to have a different approach to life events, knowing how to behave in accordance with the larger society's expectations was achieved through their networks and established capital. Adjusting behavior in accordance with the wider society's expectations have been pointed out similarly in Stanton-Salazar and Spina's work (2005), as being critical in their process to independent living. Furthermore, prior literature made the association between social networks and increased understanding of social norms (Clayden and Stein, 2005; Heilbrun, Lee and Cottle, 2005; Gilligan, 2008; McGrath et al., 2012). Specifically, Gilligan (1999) emphasized that participation in leisure activities (also found in Bynner's work, 2005) and, investment in interests early in the lives of youth enhance resilience, play a critical role in empowerment, self-esteem, and contributes to expansion of social networks, which could only benefit this population. Social networks have been acknowledged also to play a key role in diversifying outcomes among care leavers (Stein, 2012; Gibbons and Foster, 2014).

Based on accumulated international literature over the years, Stein (2012) identified that care leavers fall under one of the three categories: 'Moving on', 'Survivors', or 'Strugglers'. Stein characterized 'Strugglers' a stage of great instability still being held back by past experiences. 'Survivors' in between, still maintaining a more dependent status on agencies, yet the youth are showing efforts to progress in social and professional lives. The 'Moving on' represents those who fare very well,

and show high levels of resilience and confidence. In further explaining the outcome categories, the author associated encouragement from carers, more placement stability along with developed social skills with the 'Moving on' group. Others who have experienced frequent movements were likely to deal with higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems, as a result, argued Stein, making it more difficult to cope with challenges presented to them at the age of leaving care. Stein (2012) stated that school, participation in leisure activities lead to development of new contacts that further act as turning points. According to Stein "… young people have often been able to turn their negative experiences at home, or in care, into opportunities, with the help of others" (2012, p. 169). Aside from enhancing resilience, opportunities for social interactions have been considered to contribute to learning of competencies and "development of emotional maturity" (Stein, 2012, p. 169). Although three varied outcomes have just been identified, there is a continuous focus on two opposed extremes of studying youth who transitioned from care within leaving care related research (e.g. Pinkerton and Rooney, 2014). The 'Moving on' group, and those that do very poorly ('Strugglers'), usually occupy a distinctly larger amount of research leaving out in Stein's terms the 'Survivors' about which little is known to this day. Furthermore, a majority of research looks for the most part at the age range between 18 to 25 years, limiting understanding thus on the variability there is in later outcomes of this group (Duncalf, 2010). As youth has been found to struggle mostly during the early stage of transition, it becomes the more important to have an empirical understanding on the possible shifts that can occur within Stein's hierarchy of outcomes, 'Strugglers', 'Survivors' and 'Moving on' stage. Even when looking to understand why some succeed more than others within this group cluster, it is still little known what has contributed to their ability to succeed 'against all the odds' (Samuels and Pryce, 2007).

Concluding points

Montgomery (2011) discussed how social intrinsic barriers force various youth clusters to become more socially mature earlier than 18. Those who grow up in more affluent societies with strong opportunity structures in contrast to youth in countries without comprehensive social policies, in which commonly the privileged ones thrive, are likely to come into contact with the type of individuals that can optimize young adults' chances for self-sufficiency (F. del Valle et al., 2007). Whether or not various classes of individuals can afford this phase of transition to adulthood, or as introduced by Arnett (2000) 'emerging adulthood' young adults are subject to its predisposed risks such as housing instability, unemployment. Arnett along with other theoretical contributors (e.g. Bynner, 2005) have shown the difference between societal groups: young adults who experiment and use this time to flourish and others who due to family weak ties with poor social capital deal with disadvantage. In this chapter, it has been discussed of the support-dependent feature of transition that upon its availability youth experiences vary at this stage. While recognising the varied pathways and the degree to which the stage of transition is made use of from a cultural perspective, what stands out for those with a care background is that the transition phase in which the view of living in 'more affluent societies' does not apply. Whether care leavers are from Romania or England, as shown in the section above (also see Chapter 6), these young people's life events after care are characterized as rough, compressed and highly subjected to risks (homelessness, sexual/labor exploitation to name a few). Young people leaving care largely fall under the *fast-track transition* where independence is expected to happen at a time when their peers still enjoy home-stay, which for among other reasons is to save money for later commitments (Adley and Kina, 2014). This specific sub-group population of youth experience: 1) transition from a main institutional means of social security (child

protection services), and 2) undergo transition to adulthood characteristic of today's youth lifecourse development. As evidenced by comparative cross-cultural research, these youth continue to be ill-equipped for this new stage of life as a result of lacking adequate training, parallel to poor information, advice and guidance type of support. Such elements as guidance, and access to information represent forms of social capital. Care leavers ready or not come to a stage when they must take initiatives, and share their thoughts/ideas with a capacity representative of their peers (confidence, ability to transfer knowledge into material means of resources). Thus in order for care leavers to learn to become resourceful, it is critical to equip them with necessary assets those being both intangible (being confident, resilient, knowing how to behave, able to communicate, negotiate, how to handle various situations, and to navigate social relationships), and tangible (practical skills, awareness of administrative procedures among others).

In a time of uncertain futures, du Bois-Reymond (2015) stated that "social capital (networks) becomes ever more important" (p. 50). According to Mitchell and Syed (2015), 'emerging adulthood' often marks an individual's first opportunity to make his/her own life shaping decisions thus characterizing this as the age of possibilities. Nonetheless, the degree to which today's young women and men can shape their trajectories to employment is largely dependent on numerous factors including possibilities for active engagement in social affairs in a community. This type of participation can provide opportunities to strengthen (bonding social capital) and/or develop networks outside of one's own social circle (bridging capital) (Berzin, Singer and Hockanson, 2014).

Chapter 2

Social capital a response to combating youth adversity?

In the previous chapter the support-dependent characteristic of transition has been identified, as influential in experiencing either 'fast-track' or 'gradual' transition to adulthood. Social relations are viewed to act as a fundamental instrument to accessing resources through which one can further benefit from information, guidance, and understanding of expectations and responsibilities attached to adulthood (Gibbons and Foster, 2014; Greeson et al., 2014; Knipprath and De Rick, 2015). Looking at youth coming from care, international literature suggests a lack of a dependable network among the critical factors resulting in poor outcomes; however, this is rarely framed in terms of social capital (Anghel and Dima, 2008; Broad, 2008; Avery and Freundlich, 2009; Barn, 2009; Hook and Courteny, 2011; Coyle and Pinkerton, 2012; Stein, 2012; Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013; Dima and Bucuta, 2015). This chapter reviews relevant literature on social capital that, for the researcher, offers the key to answering the research question. Social networks/social capital in this study are looked at from a positive perspective, as a tool mediating life events to which young adults as social actors can respond to best meet their needs (Oppenheim, 1992). According to Pichler and Wallace (2007), social capital reflects people's activity in society, their use of resources, and how and why their network is influenced by culture and social norms.

As this chapter shall convey, social capital stems from the basic need for human contact. Social capital, either given (family) or created (community

participation), lies in inner and external resourcefulness (Graham, 2006). Putnam (2004, 2002) in his work emphasized the importance of community participation as another natural form of developing social capital. With limited family contact, care leavers fit into the category of individuals whose only means to local integration may be via networking with community members. It is because of this particular position that this current work is centered around Putnam, Coleman and from the European context Bourdieu's theoretical works on social capital. The focus is on how social capital with specific emphasis on building trust, reciprocity, accessing knowledge, receiving encouragement and advice applies to care leavers with the challenges they face (Coleman, 1988; Dearden, 2004; White and Green, 2010; Ahrens, 2011; Snow and Mann-Feder, 2013).

The first section (2.1.) provides an overview of key theorists for the purposes of deepening the understanding of social capital: how the theory has been developed, used, and the contexts in which the concept has been applied that now found its way to relate to youth formerly in care in this research. Its sub-section (2.1.1.) elaborates on the different perspectives, i.e. Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu, in theorizing social capital for they are viewed to intersect when applied within the context of negotiating post care life events of young adults from Romania and England. Throughout this research, including the current chapter, it is recognized that each theoretical perspective fits in different yet interlinked settings. For example, Bourdieu's (1986) focus lies on unequal capital based on class. In this stance, care leavers must learn to adapt to the behavior of the dominant classes in order to increase resources or (as much addressed in the findings chapters) to ease the pathways to socio-professional integration. As already mentioned above, coming from Putnam's perspective, through participation in local social affairs, care leavers can create a strong foundation of

social networks which further access countless benefits (information, knowledge); therefore, the community substitutes the missing capital from *home* (Lewando-Hundt et al., 1997; Coleman, 1998; Hollingworth, 2012). From Coleman's view, it is through increased shared interests, encouragement in one's endeavours that social capital takes life. Care leavers can experience that from friends that have 'become life family'. Sub-section (2.1.2.) captures the dynamics of measuring social capital identified to be via notions like trust, reciprocity, sense of support, and acceptance embedded in the human interactions (Lin, 2000). Moreover, a distinction will be made between various roles social networks play, including types of networks. Within social capital literature type of networks such as strong or informal sources (usually peer networks, family members, other trusted adults) are associated with bonding capital and weak or formal ties (professionals, aquintances) with bridging capital (Putnam, 2000; 2002; Putnam and Helliwell, 2004). The section further reveals how support derived from (usually informal) social networks may hold the key to facilitating major life changes across social groups (Cobb, 1976; Brissette, Scheier and Carver, 2002).

The second major section (2.2.) of the chapter addresses recent shifts towards relationship-building practice within the child protection system this being more visible in England than in Romania. Whether it is in relation to resilience, agency or genetic makeup, social networks as sources of social capital are being recognized among a few central factors of any analytical view toward enhancing positive outcomes of young adults regardless of background (Casey et al., 2010; Meltzer, et al., 2016). Within the context of leaving care, increased peer learning or mentoring type of relationships are considered to impact the manner in which youth respond to social changes (Clayden and Stein, 2005; Graham, 2006; Greeson and Bowen, 2008; Blakeslee, 2012; McMahon et al., 2013; Sanders and Munford, 2014; Greeson et al.,

2015). Either speaking of the introduction of case workers in Romania as set forward in the present law 272/2004, art. 51, or of personal advisors as found in England, such strategies considers individual needs (Coyle and Pinkerton, 2012). The last sub-section of this chapter (2.2.1.) focuses on the limited analysis of social capital concerning youth in transition not the least to mention of youth in difficulty like care leavers. Understanding of youth pathways to independence specifically on how social capital is used to obtain a job, get information, and find housing, remains largely unknown; or, in the case of youth who experience adversity, whether positive networks motivate them to keep going. Having social capital analyzed from various social contexts the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the concept. The empirical chapters, presented in 5, 6 and 7, look specifically at the young people's initiatives in selecting their networks (subsequently demonstrating personal agency) and utilizing such entities with the purpose of benefiting themselves as individuals embarking on a new set of multilayered responsibilities that come with independent living (Heath, 2009). Social capital as a concept in modern day policy development concerning youth socio-professional integration is recognized by few to signify a long-term solution towards sustainable social and economic development (Heilbrun, Lee and Cottle, 2005; Bottrell, 2009; Helve and Bynner, 2007).

2.1. Theoretical background on social capital surrounding the works of Coleman, Putnam and Bourdieu

The contemporary theorists of social capital reviewed here are Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu. Although Putnam and Coleman articulate briefly its possible negative effects, they both theorized social capital from a positive perspective; its

influence on social outcomes (individual and public), well-being and health (Morrow, 1999; Cattell, 2001; Ferguson, 2006; Jonsson, Hammarstrom and Gustafsson, 2014). In contrast, Bourdieu (1986) focused on inequality of social capital existent within society due to class stratification, gender and race. For clarity purposes, one's social capital is a result of his/her social networks, the type of relationship (close and weak ties) as well as the role they have within that group or institutional network, the social bonds people have with family (ties), and their neighbours, including work colleagues (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1995; Putnam and Helliwell, 2004; Bassani, 2007). Social networks (mostly referring to members outside of the family unit) are primarily associated with enhancing trust, reciprocity, and resilience, characteristics upon which social capital is generated (Raffo and Reeves, 2000; Cattell, 2001; Borgatti et al., 2009; White and Green, 2010). It is based on these features that social capital can have the capacity to exert external and internal positive effects.

Social capital as a concept originated in the United States with its introduction by L. Judson Hanifan in 1916. His main concern was based on the observation he made in West Virginia of people leaving community social life in favour of family isolation. He observed how political debates and collective activities (i.e. collecting apples) declined and thought that this could be remedied by building stronger networks among citizens. His definition of social capital is very simple and clear. Hanifan makes a point that his use of social capital does not refer to capital generally associated with real estate, cold cash, or personal property but as an act of social interaction. "(…) rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit. . . . The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself. . . . If he comes into contact

with his neighbour, and they with other neighbours, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community" (p. 130). It is from this view of sympathy and good will that the later generations of theorists followed in the footsteps of Hanifan although worth remembering Bourdieu as an exception. Although the concept was much neglected for many years, contemporary researchers brought it back to light. Today the concept is valued as a solution to increasing social cohesion (Putnam), as well as revealing its impact on subjective well-being (Putnam, Coleman), and in affecting outcomes (Coleman). From a less positive angle, Bourdieu, yet considered realistic, argued its fruitfulness to be conditioned by geographical location, gender, ethnicity, and class (Bourdieu, 1986; Fabiansson, 2015).

2.1.1. The varied perspectives of theorizing social capital: Coleman, Putnam and Bourdieu

Coleman (1988) in his work, 'Social capital in the creation of human capital,' applied the concept, described its forms, and how it comes into existence. Coleman contended that the development, effect and fruitfulness of social capital depends upon a person's environment, geographical location, social norms, social networks, and interpersonal trust, which only helps to exacerbate the disparities in the well-being of young people. If actions are shaped by all these factors, then is not only the individual affected but also the economy. Social capital falls under three categories upon which its development depends: 1) obligation and expectations, 2) information channels, and 3) social norms. In this construct, there is a great emphasis on family

based social capital and organisational social capital, entities that appear to play the main role in advancing capital to other individuals. Within this context, children acquire social capital through their parents, and parents' friends as well as other relatives (Hill and Yeung, 1999). Organisations are considered to be the bodies that allow social capital to develop in a community (e.g. voluntary organisations for young people, non-governmental agencies, local centers) or to substitute for missing capital at home. The recognition of intrinsic social factors having an impact on the individual, including mobilisation of social capital, does not differ much from theoretical understandings of transition to adulthood. In the previous chapter it has been discussed how various factors influence the formation and development of individuals, with Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe (2003), and Heinz's (2009) emphasis on how social networks have the power to influence people's biographies.

In developing the theory of social capital, Coleman (1988) looked at how concrete personal relations and networks can generate trust, expectations and obligations (and I emphasize) along with creation of behavioral norms. Social capital as a source for action embedded in human interactions is defined by functions in that social capital is not a single entity rather a variety of entities consisting at some level of social structures and facilitating the action of individuals within that structure (Coleman, 1988). Social capital in the work of Coleman was conceptualized within an educational context, with the main aim to understand whether or not there is a correlation between student performance (high-school dropouts) and indicators of social capital. The theorist did identify the participants' inability to focus and tendency for underperformance of those with self-disclosed absence of parental bonds, a time to share interests, and increased likelihood of dropping out of school. It is worth pointing out that Coleman was first to utilize social capital concepts in youth

studies and empirically depicted its influence on educational outcomes. The analysis of the random sample, 4000 participants, looked at parental status, education, race, income, number of siblings within the family, and residential movement(s). Most importantly it looked at the degree of presence at home of parents, frequency of discussions with the child on personal matters, teenagers' grades, and mothers' expectations of child's educational attainment as a measure of social capital at home. The findings reveal that participants from private, public and Catholic schools whose parents had low expectations, were less present at home, and less involved in the child's affairs, were more likely to drop out of high school. The results compared among the schools showed that the Catholic school had the smallest percentage of dropouts 3.4% compared to 14.4% in public schools and 11.9% in other private schools. He noted that youth who attended the Catholic school obtained social capital from the strong and close relationships with friends and community members that made up for limited social capital within the family unit. Coleman concluded that even when there was high human capital (parents' knowledge, education) present within the families, the children could not make use of it due to lack of social capital. Coleman emphasized that young people who remained in school had strong positive relationships with their parents and/or with their community. Such differences found among adolescents supports Coleman's thesis regarding the direct effect social capital can have on educational outcomes.

Another contemporary theorist, Putnam, maintains that social capital can be easily measured on the basis of family relations, as well as community, neighbourhood, and religious ties. Putnam's approach to social capital lies within an organizational framework concentrating specifically on civil society and civic engagement. In his work, Bowling alone: America's declining social capital (1993)

Putnam views civic engagement as key to the formation of social capital, and its associated characteristics of reciprocity, and trust in which individuals' actions are coordinated and organized for mutual benefit. In Bowling Alone, he reveals the power of social connectedness and active civic engagement in providing a safer community as well as a sense of belonging and identity. Although the term is not fully defined by Putnam here, social capital's direct use with concrete examples (e.g. survey data of the Roper Organisation national samples; General Social Survey 1993) suggests the necessity and power of social connectedness for individual and public good. Putnam was concerned with social change, increased alienation of individuals from one another, and its ramifications i.e. loss of a sense of community, unequal distribution of resources, endangerment of collective actions for the good of a whole community which is vital for the maintainance of a cohesive society. To strengthen his point Putnam compared social capital's possible effects in shaping individuals' lives to human and economic type of capital. Putnam made direct reference to Hanifan, using social capital from the same perspective. From a positive angle in theorizing social capital, Putnam in his work asserted that the well-being of society members depends on the existence of social capital measured by the level of trust, reciprocity, and shared experiences/knowledge from which members' actions are influenced in responding to community needs. Putnam views civic engagement through which social capital is developed as main means to reduce this discrepancy of resource distribution among society members. Although not as directly formulated as Bourdieu, the theorist acknowledges that access to resources depend on the social capital acquired from one's set of networks.

In the article entitled "The social context of well-being," Putnam and Helliwell (2004) linked social capital with subjective well-being. Through the use of a survey

comprising a sample of 8000 people in the USA, Canada and "the world," Putnam and Helliwell (2004) found that civic engagement and social networks (strong and weak: marriage, family, family relatives, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, work/school colleagues) had a positive impact on happiness and life satisfaction as well as on the physical health of individuals. Those with strong social relations were less likely to experience depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem. Based on this evidence, Putnam and Helliwell (2004) affirmed that there is clearly a close link between social capital and subjective well-being. Social capital serves to explicate the effects social networks have on individuals. Its resourcefulness is inherent in external effects such as possibilities for accessing employment and internal referring to accomplished self-worth on individuals involved (Field, 2003; Billett, 2011). Putnam and Helliwell (2004) stated that, "Social networks can be a powerful asset, both for individuals and for communities" (p. 1443). To distinguish the relationships that exist between society members, such as weak and strong social ties and thus explain the varied capital individuals offer, Putnam posited two types of capital, bonding and bridging capital. According to his definition, bonding capital refers to networking with individuals who have particular traits in common (race, gender, religion, age, education, geographical location and so on). Bridging capital, on the other hand, links individuals across classes with individuals outside of one's own circle. Despite his emphasis on civic engagement to increase social cohesion, the theorist does not say how on this basis there is likelihood for perpetuation of unequal distribution of social capital. In Putnam's view, participation in various social organized activities accumulates more capital, which suggests that individuals who do not participate are left out. If individuals with established financial means are more likely to participate then Bourdieu's theoretical perspective we will find is reflective of the reality many society members experience. This may be the case in post communist countries. In

Romania, for example, civic engagement is not culturally embedded so that the local systems function around such principles. In such societies young adults on the verge of embarking upon a whole new stage of life have fewer opportunities to extend social relatonships with a variety of members in contrast to their peers of the western world (Alexiu, Lazar and Baciu, 2011). Nonetheless if social capital can divide society members, so can it be used to moblize resources across a range of social classes for increased social cohesion.

The third theorist of social capital, offering value in this study is Bourdieu (1986). For him, social relations represent a form of security both short and long term. Mutual recognition and acknowledgement are embedded in the interactional strategies between society members. However, Bourdieu makes a clear distinction between informal and institutional roles underpinning the capacity to produce transferable means into material goods. To have effect, however, informal relationships -- that being friendships and kinship type relationships -- are durable when created over time, and lead to subjective obligations in which feelings of gratitude, respect, and recognition are shared and guaranteed. Institutional support, on the contrary, is in the form of the *right* to access knowledge, and information to benefit one individual. Bourdieu concluded that both types of network organisms "respond to the bonds created that enact actions" (p. 53). Bourdieu viewed class as the driving force of unequal distribution of social capital. From a European context, Bourdieu's theory appears to be more realistic in accounting for social factors like gender, race and class to determine how resources are distributed across classes (Fabiansson, 2015). The theorist looked at social inequalities, and how in poorer neighbourhoods social capital is missing, impeding individual progress. As a result, Bourdieu's theory has been given greater academic validation within youth, ethnic

and gender research (Bassani, 2007; Barn, 2009; Bottrell, 2009). Further assessing on Bourdieu's work, unequal distribution of capital distinguishes those with well-paid jobs from those with low employability prospects in accordance with the type of information accessed from one's networks. It is Bourdieu who cited a distinction of social capital based on class. He saw that knowledge essential to accessing well-paid jobs, for example, is kept within a certain class of people therefore producing and reproducing unequal distribution of capital (Holland, Reynolds and Weller, 2007). Bourdieu's perspective infers that it does not suffice to just have social capital, but one needs rich capital (i.e. one's set of networks in ownership of vast knowledge, skills and educational background) from which individuals' chances for upward mobility are enhanced. This was found to be the case for the few young adults participants who pursued a PhD program in England, or who accessed faster employment opportunities regardless of the age of exiting care as found in Romania (please see chapter 7). Such assets of accomplishment as education support Bourdieu' work on cultural capital. In his definition he suggests that an individual formation and ownership of cultural capital are dependent on one's living environment, the family brought up in. Individuals with great ownership of cultural capital, a few examples including aside from education, intellect, knowledge, style of speech and dress that reflect aspects of upper class, are more likely to access resources. Such accumulated personal assets are considered to play a high role in the social mobility across society members in a class-based society. What is missing here is that cultural capital can be developed by the individual's active selection of networks along with accumulated life events that can add to its enrichment (e.g., way of addressing oneself to others).

In an attempt to summarize the use of social capital by the three named theorists, the concept is regarded as a force that can dictate the types of jobs, information and knowledge accessed that further influence the level of economic and human capital acquisition. If it is compared with the other forms of capital, human and economic, social capital deals with the intangible side in which individuals are affected emotionally, socially and behaviorally. It is therefore from this perspective that Coleman asserted that social capital can have essentially equal or even greater influence than human/economic capital. Who we interact with can shape our choices, and identities, thus who we associate with results in either an advantage or disadvantage toward upward social mobility (Sherman et al., 2002; Borgatti et al., 2009; Gibbons and Foster, 2014). Social capital stands as a means of mobilising and materialising resources (into human and economic capital) through encouragement, trust, information and knowledge (detailed in chapters 6 and 7). The functioning of social capital within a given social structure allows actors to use it in their best interests, thus resulting in different outcomes for themselves (Coleman, 1988). Social capital as a result of social intercourse among agents is an asset toward achieving self-sufficiency, economic independence and stability (Putnam and Helliwell, 2004).

The core of social capital is investment in social relations through which 'individuals engage in interactions and networking in order to produce profit' (Lin, 1999, p. 31; Lin, 2005). In his work, Lin discussed that social capital fulfills two main purposes: instrumental benefit as well as expressive. Instrumental is to develop new opportunities, new job, enter a better school as opposed to expressive where is based on maintaining the existent resources. Finally, Lin (2005) clearly expressed that development of such resources lie on the understanding, sympathy and willingness of members to help one another. According to various scholars who have contributed to

the discussion, social capital is produced through social networks (Erickson, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam and Helliwell, 2004; Lin, 2005; Borgatti et al., 2009). In turn, social capital facilitates action that could cost and/or benefit individuals. For example, the act of channeling information may be considered useful for some while not so for others, stressed Coleman (1988). Social capital is a complex term to understand. One example is drawn from Coleman who depicted its limitations: in that quality of information and knowledge relies on one's type of networks (poor versus rich, effective versus ineffective) (Bottrell, 2009). Another issue comes to light in regards to differences between formal and informal types of networks. Informal networks may fulifll emotional needs, with advice, sympathy and encouragement in contrast to formal networks. Yet formal networks can possess knowledge in optimizing opportunities for employment. As it can be seen from this analysis, within this theoretical framework, social capital is viewed as a resource for individuals (Erbstein, 2013).

In further connecting social networks within the context of social capital, informal and formal social networks are essential components of social capital produced when individuals interact for mutual benefit (Raffo and Reeves, 2000; Cattell, 2001). They provide a sense of belonging, identity, perception of control, self-worth, confidence and trust (Heilbrun, Lee and Cottle, 2005; Barn, 2009). Yet, bonding capital (informal networks) is seen to offer minimal opportunities for upward social mobility due largely to its homogeneous group (White and Green, 2010). Informal networks within social capital research fulfil primarily emotional needs; whereas, formal set of networks (bridging capital) are related to increased opportunities for accessing resources like employment and housing (Granovetter, 1983; Field, 2003). Although bonding capital may not allow further mobility and

optimisation of opportunity, it does often secure the needs (food, shelter, encouragement) of individuals as shall be seen to be the case for care alumni in Chapter 6. Bonding and bridging capital nonetheless are contextual in that western societies are more likely to have bridging capital activated relative to bonding capital when compared with newly joined European Union member states (EU Report, 2012). This is relevant if touching on the findings that emerged in the research data where bonding capital was more present across the sample from Romania, whereas in England, bridging capital was almost equally activated to bonding in accessing resources among the studied youth. This may be due in part to the structural nature of institutions and civic organisations holding a rather weak mandate in Romania in responding to social domestic issues. However, for the two youth clusters, at large bonding capital (informal ties) served both as a vehicle to employment and housing security (tangible), and of providing emotional support, encouragement, advice, and access to information (intangible type of resources).

Family is acknowledged as the primary source from which other sources are developed. In short, a family's education and status determine their children's places in society. From this view, children's networks develop and expand as a result of their parents' gained resources. This raises the question of the degree to which social capital is comprehensively understood and captured within the sphere of studying individuals. One such example can be consideration of children/youth as active members in society, who influence their living environments with a capacity to select and/or negotiate social relations (Harpham, 2002; Fabiansson, 2015). This gap detected in social capital and youth studies specifically is addressed at greater length in the section below. The following section holds to the meaning behind social capital,

that of support from which depth of existent capital can be measured among members.

2.1.2. Measuring social capital through the lenses of support/social networks

Social capital is measured on the basis of received/perceived support and on the level of trust that exists among society members (Hawkins and Maurer, 2010). Social support is derived from various types of networks as already specified earlier, formal and/or informal ties (bridging and/or bonding capital). Most often informal sources such as parents, other trusted adults, and peers, with whom most people are comfortable, play a greater role (Cattell, 2001). Different types of support as identified by Cutrona in her review (1996), can be divided under four main characteristics: "concrete", "emotional support", "advice", and "self esteem." "Concrete" implies simply a time when someone offers to help another person, for instance, in babysitting. The category of "emotional support" involves being understood, listened to or simply having someone there. It has a deeper meaning when discussing on the level of receiving 'emotional support' in times of difficulty. The "advice" type of support provides a sense of reassurance. In this category individuals reveal care through their presence in offering advice to others usually that being for emotional comfort. Knowing that there is someone to talk to in times of need is conceived to empower individuals. The fourth category, "self esteem," is the sense of self worth one receives from another person(s). All these types of support are interconnected and thus play a critical role in shaping one's development and overall health. Nonetheless, the benefit of these types of support is based on the quality of support, closeness of the relationship, reciprocity and its durability. Such

types of support had been thoroughly analyzed previously in the work of Cobb 'Social support as a moderator of life stress' in 1967. Cobb argued that social support under the category of *information/advice* is the core of the concept because this type of support encourages independent behavior as opposed to provision of services, which are likely to increase dependency amongst individuals. Similarly, Coleman asserted that 'Information is important in providing a basis for action' (p. 104). Cobb (1967) described social support as a mechanism that protects one in times of major life transitions against depression, stress, confusion and loss, a moderator and facilitator in coping and adaptation. Moreover, according to Cobb (1967), the importance of social support enables one to feel loved, respected, esteemed and valued, and provides a sense of belonging and response to others' needs and responsibilities. The author further argued that the possibility of relationship allows one to discuss or share problems, which helps in finding solutions. According to his view, a simple interaction with other people distracts one from his/her own problems while giving some appreciation to what is good already in his/her life.

The network capacity to fulfil emotional needs, advice and support mirrors the present policy implications (adoption of mentor, networking types of practice in delivering service within the child welfare system) and concerns about how to improve the outcomes of youth leaving care (Burgess and Natalier, 2012; Berzin, Singer and Hokanson, 2014). Finally investment on this side of social needs for these young individuals is currently believed to increase interdependent behavior (Atkinson, 2008; Berzin, Singer and Hokanson, 2014; Dima and Pinkerton, 2016). Social networks provide different types of support that are further utilized and adapted in accordance with one's position and situation in society (Erickson, 1984). In chapter 5, I discuss the *rushing phase* youth undergo during the preparatory stage

of leaving care, explaining that in such situations care leavers cannot think nor can afford to make use of acquired capital in the sense of optimising opportunities, in employment, housing or educational/training prospects and instead tend toward fulfilling basic needs (temporary housing, food, clothing supplies). This will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3. of this chapter. For increased understanding of the possible influence social capital can have on young people, tangible and intangible support is looked at in this research project. A particular emphasis is given to the intangible side of support in the form of information/advice. Exchange of knowledge, encouragement, advice and guidance have been mainly associated with enabling individuals to cope with changes (Greeson et al., 2014; Smyth, Shannon and Dolan, 2015).

2.2. The need for investment in social relationships within the child welfare system concerning looked-after youth

Social capital, according to Bottrell (2009), has become a very popular concept to use in the fields of youth studies, life course and child development and research within social policy and social work (Hawkins and Maurer, 2010). Within the studies of care leavers and other vulnerable groups a shift has occurred toward emotional/advice type of support in response to deficiencies in policy implementation (physical versus emotional needs). The absence of such type of support has been associated to the persistence of general unsuccessful outcomes of youth leaving care (Wade and Dixon, 2006; Adley and Kina, 2014). This shift is a turn towards relationship-based practice (Gardner, 2008; Noble-Carr et al., 2014; Rutman and Hubberstay, 2016). A new strand of research has introduced related concepts to

social capital such as mentorship, peer networks, or 'key workers' as critical in personalising individual needs related to leaving care (Clayden and Stein, 2005; Holt and Kirwan, 2012; Snow and Mann-Feder, 2013). This work appears to aim towards factors that may contribute to better outcomes rather than on the negative aspects of youth transitioning from care (Rutter, 2012; Rees and Pithouse, 2015). 'Better' here addresses shifting from, let us say, working at a cinema to becoming a social worker as a result of returning to education, from the black market to contractual employment, or from shared housing to renting his/her own place. Specifically, Snow and Mann-Feder (2013) reviewed international initiatives on peer-centered approach in service provision for young people in the preparation for leaving care in England, United States, Australia and Canada. Although it is acknowledged that there are risks of grouping, and assimilating 'bad' behaviors, the authors clearly support positive networks and the possibility for community participation to increase the bridging of networks from various backgrounds. In England community participation appears to be part of the culture (only see chapter 6) where some of the young participants themselves were part of training and volunteering programs to inform and support younger generations. In Romania, despite recognition in research (for example in Dima and Anghel) as well as by professionals of the young adults' high tendency to connect with their fellow colleagues, this method of peer learning is not considered. In part this is due to negative connotation and secondly being an unexplored area. In Romania youth leaving care are perceived to do poorly, and have little to teach since they too come from care. So, the idea of 'grouping' is viewed as stagnating for those from care who are starting a new stage of life (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010; Manole, 2010). In regards to mentoring relationships, it must be made clear that there is high emphasis on 'natural mentoring' to have a positive effect on individual outcomes due to young people's ability to naturally *select with whom to*

bond, which results in more effective relationships through which promote 'healthy behaviours' (Rees and Pithouse, 2015, p. 46). Resilience and self-esteem with such ties have been shown to be more long-lasting. Theron and Engelbrecht (2012) claimed that the existence of "caring bonds with young people is an attempt to meet young people's welfare development and scholastic needs and to maximize youth pro-social development" (p. 267). Other benefits were associated with creating independent behavior; competence, increased ability to make use of resources, enhanced levels of resilience and confidence. These represent personal traits that are considered highly valuable at a stage of dealing with major life adjustments (Brissette, Scheier and Carver, 2002; Dearden, 2004; McMahon and Curtin, 2012; Rutter, 2012; Stein, 2012; Noble-Carr et al., 2014; Gibbons and Foster, 2014). Varied works on attachment, and resilience along with social-ecology theories represent the emotional side of needs. These theories when used to understand later life outcomes have changed how we look at children in care, both from a collective and an individual needs-approach (Rees and Pithouse, 2015). The new string of research on social relations' mediating role on adolescents and young adults has further contributed to higher emphasis on individual characteristics, while recognising diversity within this cohort of youth (Broad, 2008; Kirton, 2009; McGrath et al., 2012). Further change is visible in the current laws and policies in both countries, Romania (Law 272/2004) and England (Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010), in the presence of case managers in Romania and personal advisors introduced in England specifically to deal with youth in transition from care. Due to increased evidence on the importance of mentorship relationships, Romania like other EU countries has responded by looking at individual cases, thus adjusting service provision concerning youth in transition. By law (272/2004), a case manager or a professional specifically dealing with this stage of transition should be assigned to

young people for increased socio-professional integration, thus personalising attention to the individual. Yet, in practice, much is left to the young person's ability to make it on his/her own (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010; Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013). In England also investment in (bridging) social capital, and development of inter-personal skills reached policy level as reflected in the introduction of a personal advisor during a young person's pathway plan (Broad, 2008; Coyle and Pinkerton, 2012; Stein, 2012). Relevant leaving care research argues that extended assistance until the age of 21 or 25 can develop or strengthen supporting networks, hence at departure youth leave with more confidence (Anghel and Dima, 2008; Berzin, Singer and Hokanson, 2014; Dima, 2015). The so-called philosophy of 'one size fits all' is disappearing at policy level concerning the welfare of children under the care of the state (Greeson and Bowen, 2008, p. 1186). As Tweddle (2007) argued, people from care are different and so too are their needs. Even when looking at young people's outcomes once out of care, the heterogeneity of this sub-group population cannot be overlooked. Driscoll (2013), in her study in England, pointed out the varied outcomes found in this cluster of young adults, ranging from being in higher education to being unemployed. Like the rest of the population, they have their own story, come into and leave care at different ages and have different experiences during and after care. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the support given is best suited to the child's individual needs (Tweddle, 2007; Atkinson, 2008).

The following qualitative study carried out by Ahrens and colleagues (2008) looked at youth who left care up to the age of 25 in the United States. This extended time frame beyond the age of 21, as usually found in related studies, goes into Stein's typology of outcomes. Ahrens et al. (2008) sought to evaluate supportive quality of

mentoring relationships for these young adults (a sample size composed of 23, ages 18 to 25) and provided evidence of better outcomes. Ahrens and colleagues used qualitative methods for this study, specifically one-to-one interviewing strategy. This approach was applied to extend the understanding of how important relationships with non-parental adults can be for young people formerly in the public care system. This technique allowed the authors to identify characteristics of a relationship that may enhance positive adult outcomes. Specific characteristics the participants looked for in adults with whom to develop a relationship were based on the adults' ability to show consistency, trustworthiness, authenticity, respect and empathy. The respondents with positive networks were found to have higher levels of resilience, drive, were more outgoing and had higher aspirations for stable employment. The respondents also reported more connection with people and a higher level of trust in relationships. In contrast, those who did not manage to develop quality relationships were found more likely to deal with homelessness, and confusion about their life and future. They lacked motivation to obtain a job or continue school, and presented themselves as challenging in communicating, and displaying offending behavior. Similarly to Ahrens et al. (2008), associated features of positive versus negative relationships among youth formerly in care were identified also in conducting this research. Ahrens and colleagues concluded that non-related adults present an important source of support for youth formerly in care on many levels (emotional, tangible/instrumental, guidance). The authors' (2008) emphasis on the critical role mentoring may have in positive adult outcomes has been supported also by other researchers who have extensive knowledge in this area (e.g., Collins, 2001; Munson and McMillen, 2009; Spencer et al., 2004; Ahrens, 2011; Noble-Carr et al., 2014; Ashtiani and Feliciano, 2015). Evidence gathered suggests that mentors, who act as a replacement for parental figures in the transition planning, may act as a trigger to

inspire self-confidence further reducing negative interpersonal impacts of the transition out of care (Broad, 2008; Sala-Roca et al., 2012). One particular concern that arose in analyzing related articles is the consistent suggestion of assisting young people in care, or in this case, after care who are in different phases of their lives. Indirectly, such an approach seems to encourage the periodic presence of adult role models. These young people need consistency in availability of support. Because of its absence, it has been shown to result in disrupted childhoods, broken relationships, difficulty in forming relationships once out (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010; Holt and Kirwan, 2012). The gaps that constantly emerge in the sources of support afforded to these specific sub-group populations include the question of permanency and youth's realistic understanding of a healthy, reliable supportive system. Even when declared by the young people, close relationships with family are often times found to have rather turbulent, uncertain and conflict relationship-experiences (Singer, Berzin and Hokanson, 2013). As Putnam suggested of positive social interactions, the necessity 'to trust' thus enabling them to better be engaged in social relationships.

Broad's research in England on evaluating the effects of youth being supported during and after discharge from the system found positive outcomes in terms of employability, practical and living skills, relationships, resilience, and ability to make rational decisions (Broad, 2008). The author makes reference to all possible networks in the young people's lives such as professionals, agencies, family as well as friends. Although in his work there is much emphasis on the need for networking in populations preparing to leave care, the link in which networks can or cannot act in response to these young people, or from a more participatory approach young people's ability to connect and to fulfil their needs and interests is missing. Stein,

from a resilience approach (2005, 2012), included material on the possible influencing role social networks can have in shaping people's biographies. However, in the book *Young people leaving care* (2012), reference was made to immediate ties like family aside from professionals in the sector of child protection with no efforts done to reinforce the need for networking as highlighted by Popescu (2003) for the purposes of increasing socio-professional integration once out of the system. Moreover, social capital does not appear to play a central role in Stein's work, the concept only being mentioned in a direct reference to Pinkerton's socio-ecological approach to finding a solution to improvement of the leaving care experience (2011). Rees and Pithouse (2015) articulated that a "resilience based-approach to foster care would focus on maximising the likelihood of better emotional and social outcomes for looked-after youth *by building a protective network around them"* (p. 48-49). In further identifying gaps in relation to social capital accessability and utilization within this cohort of young adults, Rutman and Hubberstey (2016) empirically demonstrated informal networks (including peer networks) playing a vital role in these populations' outcomes. Although concerned with filling the knowledge gap within leaving care related research on how young people access and experience informal support once aged out, there was no mention of the social capital that can be extracted from one's networks including ties outside the inner circle of networks. Similarly, Dima and Pinkerton (2016) in their most recent publication supported the vital role fellow colleagues can have in the transition process. Much material exists on what social networks can do for these young people. In current research, focus is on how such populations can be helped, the meaning of social networks in the context of enhancing resilience, and well-being with a limited focus on social capital as a means for survival (Goodkind, Schelbe and Shook, 2011; Kendrick, Steckley and Lerpiniere, 2008; Kidd and Davidson, 2007; Oppenheim, 1992; Perez and Romo, 2011). There is a

need for further exploration on how networks work, how are they being utilized among young adults from care, the social capital that is generated from one's set of networks with the youth's capacity to make use of acquired capital. These are important aspects that this research aimed to address for comprehensive understanding not only at the level of identifying key strategies to negotiate adulthood but also to expanding theoretical knowledge on such concepts like social capital among youth considered at disadvantage.

The tendency is to portray a rather passive role by these young people, instead of analyzing care leavers' influence in the formation of networks, as they engage in selecting bonds with individuals that may best meet their needs. There is a need to know how these young adults allow these networks to have a positive turn in their lives (return to school, stay in the job), the extent to which networks may affect perceptions of lived experiences transitioning as much as after care**.** The approach of disregarding these young people's active engagement in social intercourse and the role such individuals hold within that network limits comprehensive theoretical understanding of social capital in contemporary times (Bassani, 2007).

Shifting specifically towards social capital, various scholars argue that its theoretical understanding in youth studies is analyzed mainly from well-being, resilience and educational outcome approaches (Bassani, 2007; Holland, Reynolds and Weller, 2007). Moreover, youth populations are typically not acknowledged as active agents in their lives, who initiate, control and negotiate how and what type of networks to develop (Morrow, 1999; Collins, 2001; McGrath et al., 2012; Stein, 2013; Sharp, 2014). Often overlooked, is the child's incentive of becoming independent of parents, as mantained by Bassani (2007). For example, as a child or young person

grows and his/her place in society changes, so do social networks; social support no longer comes only from family but also from friends and community (Lin, 2001; Harpham, 2002; Bottrell, 2009; McMahon and Curtin, 2012). Bourdieu's view in particular looked at social capital beyond family ties. Along the same line of argument, Portes (1998) asserted that sources of social capital are attributed to networks outside of the family usually where individuals actively engage for one of two purposes: to gain or provide access to resources without necessarily expecting immediate return.

2.2.1. The influencing role of social capital/social networks as applied within youth studies in the context of children transitioning from care

Development of other forms of capital such as human capital and physical capital cannot occur if one has no social capital acquired via social relations through which interpersonal skills can be developed (Collins, 2001; Bassani, 2007; Singer, Berzin and Hokanson, 2013). Bourdieu (1998) maintains that some resources can only be accessed through social capital, through well-established, strong social relationships. Touching briefly on the frequent movements youth experience while in care, established networks are indeed something these groups typically do not enjoy. Coleman specified (1988) that social capital can be as productive as human capital/physical capital, and without which certain needs could not be met, yet it may be functional to some while useless or harmful to others. For example, Coleman in his work (1988) showed social capital's impact on educational outcomes among adolescents. The theorist asserted that an enclosed community, or a family unit whose expectations of the child are minimal stifles his/her possibility for upward

mobility. Enclosed community here is used to designate the grouping of individuals with shared similar social concerns. This links well with the situation of those in care, who are surrounded by individuals with limited expectations on school performance or on life achievements, as has been discussed in Chapter (1). Although different in context, there is a correlation between those from care with also limited social capital within their primary living environment and generally poor school performance. Low expectation or lack of support in educational attainment by care providers is one of the common trends experienced by youth across countries as evidenced by numerous empirical research studies including from Romania (e.g. Anghel and Dima, 2008; Dima, 2010; Anghel, 2011; Jackson and Cameron, 2012; Gibbons and Foster, 2014). The YiPPEE research carried out by Jackson and Cameron (2012) sought to identify indicators for under-achievement in higher education of youth leaving care in five countries (England, Spain, Denmark, Sweden and Hungary). The authors found that aside from the impact of multiple placements and more isolated living environments, there was low support for higher educational attainment amongst professionals working within this particular group. Foster parents' views were conflicted between encouragement in furthering education and pressure toward financial independence. There was a stronger inclination towards encouraging acquisition of rapid, low vocational education, which was considered to guarantee immediate employment. At the time of the study, only two participants out of 170 within the 18 to 24-age range had a Bachelor level qualification (England and Spain) with 45 attending or enrolled in Bachelor level courses (10 in Denmark, 12 in England, 11 in Hungary, 7 in Sweden, and 5 in Spain). This direct evidence indicates the importance of social capital in the formation of human and physical capital (Bassani, 2007). Theoretically, professionals, as adult figures with first contact in the lives of young people in care, represent one of the main sources of capital (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010). Chapter 5 of

this study discusses how youth in care by law (in Romania until the age of 26 and in England up to the age of 25) can continue higher education yet not much use of this is made (see chapter 5). Instrumental support appears to not suffice with bettering the outcomes of youth (leaving care). Other sources of capital have been identified as coming from peers and care-associated networks. Ruth Emond's (2003) work is relevant here in relation to residential care and similarly, in the formation of associations like Care Leavers Association among others commonly found in England. There are important dynamics to explore here in on-going research.

Aside from grounded work on theoretical aspects of resilience, sociological contributions to understanding successful transitions to adulthood have focused on bridging the association between social capital/social networks and overall well-being of young people (Gilligan, 1999, 2008; Bottrell, 2009; Ungar, 2012). Although there is a dearth of literature concerning vulnerable groups and the role social capital may have in their well-being, available research asserts that social capital has a positive impact on young people in transition (Collins, 2001; Ferguson, 2006; Broad, 2009; White and Green, 2010; Perez and Romo, 2011). It is important to review what has been examined thus far and how this progression has allowed research to evolve within the context of social capital/social networks and young people in difficulty. In the article 'Dealing with disadvantage: resilience and the social capital of young people's networks', Bottrell (2009) analyzed how peer networks provided the girls (a total of 15) in a poor neighbourhood in Sydney with support and resources to deal with disadvantage. Although their parents on social benefits were found to be inactive in the young girls' lives, the author found that peer networks afforded this group a sense of belonging, connectedness, and helped their interpersonal skills (socialize and manage problems). Moreover, Bottrell mantains that networks channel

the flow of information and assistance, acting as a backbone to navigating young peoples' life transitions, and challenges. As friends, every day experiences are shared; therefore, emotional maturity and problem solving skills are enhanced along with ability to trust individuals outside of their network (Bottrell, 2009). Perez and Romo stressed (2011), "social networks as resources for sustainability" should be viewed as a form of social capital (p. 240). In the article 'Couch surfing of Latino foster care alumni: reliance on peers as social capital,' Perez and Romo addressed the importance of social networks, specifically peer relations, as a crucial form of social capital for youth aging out of the care system. The authors found that the Latino foster care alumni interviewed (a total of 32 participants with a majority between the ages of 18-22 from the southwestern USA) relied heavily on friends. These peer networks were used as a resource for survival and escape from homelessness. Within available literature of social networks among wider youth samples or of those from care like the above study, the analysis stems from a positive perspective. However, such analysis remain limited in scope especially in relation to care leavers, in that social networks generally are associated with boosting resilience amongst vulnerable social groups, enhancing overall well-being in terms of relationships, self-image, and decision-making in life. Moreover, it has been suggested that networks equip individuals considered to be at a disadvantage with coping strategies that help them stand against adversity and every day challenges of life (Oppenheim, 1992; Kidd and Davidson, 2007; Pinkerton and Dolan, 2007; Kendrick, Steckley and Lerpiniere, 2008; Goodkind, Schelbe and Shook, 2011; Perez and Romo, 2011; Holt and Kirwan, 2012; McGrath et al., 2012). From this viewpoint, resilience continues to be emphasized as among key ingredients to equipping vulnerable young groups against stresses. It is pivotal that perhaps social networks begin to be linked with increased resilience at a higher degree than carrying an indirect association with resilience. Gilligan (1999)

and Cotterell (2007) along with a study carried out in England by Hollingworth (2012) did affirm that through leisure, interests and activities resilience is enhanced with opportunities for young people to expand their social network and its benefits remaining largely unexplored. Possibilities for relationships, close contact with peers, family or caregivers, workplace and/or school setting are recognized to contribute positively to youth's experiences and overall development (Gilligan, 1999, 2008; Atkinson, 2008; Holt and Kirwan, 2012).

Barn's (2009) work on care leavers in England, emphasized that due to a lack of, or limited family contact, and loss of social ties when leaving care, most of the studied group (169) were unable to integrate into the new community as a result of uncertainty and their lack of knowledge in how to accomplish this. Singer, Berzin and Hokanson (2013) revealed the irregularities of social networks and support in studying 20 young people between the ages of 18 and 21. The youth were part of two community programs that served them in the transition from or after the foster care system. Although 58% of the interviewees were enrolled in college and 16% still in high-school, the rest either having a qualification equivalent to a high-school diploma or less, the findings depicted inconsistency in the level of support and perception of the strength of social relations (formal/informal). Informal relations were found to provide young adults with emotional and advice type of support whereas staff or the community (the church, school) offered appraisal along with instrumental support. Many of the young had significant people in their lives (e.g. such as teachers, caseworkers, foster parents, peers) but were not in touch with such people at the time of the study. The quality and variety of networks of the young people in foster care have been compared to the general population. Finally, Singer, Berzin and Hokanson (2013) concluded that young people like their counterparts appeared to

rely and feel comfortable with informal type of networks.

Concluding points

For care leavers it is highly influential on their lives when a contact ends. In the previous chapter, the drastic changes youth undergo having to live by a new set of expectations once out of the system was discussed. Attachments to non-parental adults or to peers may facilitate not only better outcomes at adulthood, but also make it easier to accept social norms and expectations that come at this phase of life (Graham, 2006; Ashtiani and Feliciano, 2015). Networks/social capital, according to the literature, for vulnerable groups can lead toward the fulfillment of emotional maturity, and acquisition of interpersonal skills, that then are further believed to make a difference in accessing jobs and housing stability. In this chapter an attempt has been made to point out the possible ways the three different theoretical perspectives of social capital (Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu) can intercept when applying the concept within the context of youth with care experience. Specifically this regards accessing resources and how social networks and social capital can act as central ingredients to negotiating life after care (Cutrona et al., 2000; White and Green, 2010).

In this present study, social networks which offer core features such as trust, reciprocity, acceptance, and understanding generate social capital from which mobilisation of resources is activated among individuals (Hawkins and Maurer, 2010). Research covered here on young adults identified the role of networks to be vital in learning how to handle unexpected life events, deal with major life changes as well as understand the 'social order of things' as set out in society. It seems that

within the framework of studying social capital or social networks, analysis are grounded in the aspect of emotional, advice or appraisal type of support, and less on its effect on individual outcomes (Adley and Kina, 2014). In line with the aim of the overall thesis, reviewing literature on social capital provides an opportunity to detect whether there may be a close correlation between presence of high social capital, in which encouragement, shared knowledge, and advice are central in one's primary living environment, and individual performance (professionally, in education, or employment). In addition, it is worth noting that informal networks as evidenced here, appear to hold a multi-layered role in the life of individuals. They show characteristics such as empathy, understanding and acceptance, as well as providing guidance, encouragement, advice, information and knowledge even as far as providing instrumental support in accessing resources like housing, employment, education (Sala-Roca et al., 2012; Greeson et al., 2014). It is not to say that weak forms of ties or bridging capital do not hold an important role in how resources are accessed or mobilized, rather that such ties indicate having a less active role. As a final note, the research reviewed here, hand in hand with theoretical work of Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu, links closely with the impact social capital can have in individuals' lives, with those (e.g. care leavers) lacking it being likely to face difficulties in adulthood.

In the next chapter, experiences under the care system are discussed for they represent an important excerpt from the young people's lives. Relevant literatue indicate that the welfare system can act as one of the key forms of acquiring social capital. Drawing from the findings of this study, it is via the welfare system that the young people from England mostly were engaged in voluntary activities, panel discussion, conferences, along with other social related activities (detailed in Chapter

5). As the empirical chapter 5 will reveal, the system can influence types of networks accessed. While this is not directly linked within available research to networks/social capital concerning children at disadvantage, Cutrona and others (2000) bluntly argued that "low levels of social support leave people vulnerable to distress and depression in the wake of negative life events and chronic strains" (p. 1089). Within the context of youth leaving care, social networks are important not necessarily only in satisfying material needs (though they may be) but on the side of personal inner advancement that can lead to materialising resources. Lewando-Hundt and colleagues (1997) elucidated that the interaction of an individual with the surrounding environment brings lasting changes. This means the individual assesses and gives meaning to the benefits certain behaviors can have over the long and short-term, with external resources reinforcing controlled bounded areas of social expansion. This leads to Chapter 3, which shows that the experiences under the care system hinder young people's opportunities to network with other members of society. The level of capital acquired while in care appears to have an effect on the youth's ability to negotiate life after care.

Chapter 3

Welfare changes within the child protection sector: youth post-care outcomes in Romania and England

In the previous chapter there has been discussion of Bourdieu's (1986) view of unequal distribution of capital as one being class based and the second depending, as addressed previously by Grannovetter (1973), on whom one knows. The chapter put forward the important ways Putnam's, Coleman's and Bourdieu's perspectives of social capital link when explored in the social context of youth negotiating life after care. Social capital use however can depend largely on the country one comes from. Issues regarding a population's overall earnings, sense of social security, and access to social welfare add to the complexity of understanding youth from care and their chances to integrate once aged out (Manole, 2010). For vulnerable groups, this has various implications. One is the likelihood of accessing a homogenous network (based on similar background, educational level, and shared concerns), which usually limits access to resources and knowledge that provide little chance to move beyond their vulnerable state (Lin, 2005). The social and economic state of populations reveals the unlikelihood of individuals to participate in building community cohesion where trust and tolerance is increased (Putnam, 2000; Putnam and Helliwell, 2004). This may correlate to the persistence of prejudice held against certain groups of society like children/youth coming from care as well as their limited chances, especially in Romania, to interact with individuals outside of their social entourage (for more details see chapter 6).

The reform of the child welfare system is aimed at responding to current social needs of young adults in the transition period. Extended support under the state (which parallels the reality of their counterparts from non-care backgrounds who generally tend to take the route to independence well after mid 20s) is viewed to contribute to more successful transition to independent living (Stein, 2012). However, in contrast to their peers with families, as already elaborated in chapter 1, youth from care leave the system relatively much earlier. Extended stay reflective of their peers' reality, up to the age of 26 (Romania) or 25 years (England), is conditional in both countries upon continuing education. Whether from Romania or England, this current chapter will reveal how such groups still hold a vulnerable status in society, despite the fact that the state as a 'corporate parent' is responsible for providing the assistance their families could not (Marsh and Peel, 1999). Romania has shown progress in its ability to respond to current social issues (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010). Law 272/2004, Art. 51 was enacted to provide assistance to youth preparing to leave care. This law was in force in the country even before the new classified youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs) became a standard across Europe.

Chapter three is made up of three major sections. Section 3.1. provides a short glimpse into the characteristics of the communist welfare system. This part helps understand the phenomena of child institutionalization in Romania that changed the course of the country's history for years to come not only as a European Union member but also as a nation in responding to its domestic issues (Jacoby, Lataianu and Lataianu, 2009). This leads to the next section, 3.3. where the consequences with the end of the communist regime became apperent in social policy, employment, health and education spheres. The issue surrounds the continuous challenge of

transferring into practice the current policies and programs, which are well established on paper for fulfilling the rights of the child and providing protection from poverty and socio-economic vulnerability (Radulescu, 2011). Evidence suggests the country's need to increase the capacity of public services for social assistance concerning children and families, as well as create programs that focus more on prevention than on intervention (Deacon, 2000; Stanculescu and Marin, 2011). In section 3.3., the history of the child protection, and its evolution (from institutionalization to family type care settings in Romania) since 1989 are discussed. Although progress is revealed in accordance with the European community standards, little is known of those who come of age to graduate from care. The 3.3.1. sub-section touches on issues concerning youth leaving care. Although measures have been in place to respond to this population's needs, policies permissive in nature, a characteristic of post communist countries as argued by Stein (2006), leave the choice to the local authorities to respond or not concerning youth preparing to leave care (Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013). Lack of enforcement mechanisms to ensure the implementation of social policies, along with lack of input (financial and strategic support) by the government impede the social sectors' (e.g., health care, education system, social protection and social security) capacity to exert policy practice in a manner consistent with the public need (Stanculescu and Grigoras, 2009). It is argued that continuous neglect of social sectors to the present day is rooted in cultural and historical legacy of child institutionalization in countries like Romania (Kovacks, 2009). As this chapter reveals, mismanagement of resources, and stigma attached to children from care accompanied by a higher poverty rate in the country compared to England, yet the state still holding a solution to dealing with child-rearing difficulties, represent a few of the main elements that shape young people and their integration process into society. This, in turn, can make integration into society more challenging.

In contrast to England, the challenges youth face when seeking a job, housing and/or establishing a self-sustaining living environment are less acknowledged in Romania.

3.1. Characteristics of the social welfare system of the communist regime

Preda (2000) uses Deacon's description of the social policy in former communist countries with the welfare system being characterized by a "strong state paternalism exerted through the communist party" and the work place (p. 3). Common features of communist social policies used in Romania included stable jobs for the majority of the population, good salaries for the working class, free health services, state-funded pension systems and "a very generous housing policy." This created the ideology of a "safety net" that the government is responsible for, providing jobs and securing adequate living standards for the general population (Harwin and Barron, 2007, p. 157). As far as policy design is concerned, with the absence of particular family support policies, the social system of the communist Romanian government was rather a mechanism of social control than a premise for a welfare state. With a centralized economic and social system, the state had control over resources like the market, employment, fuel, food, and prices. Under great external debt, population growth was one of the solutions to increased productivity in industrial and agricultural areas. Therefore, children were viewed as an economic asset. For a period of 25 years, the communist party developed a system that undermined parental responsibilities, destroyed interpersonal ties, family and kinship relations, encouraged dependency on the state and neglected family support policies while critical objectives were achieved to control and navigate people's lives (Preda, 2000; Dickens and Groza, 2004; Batculescu and Tofan, 2013). The oppression

of the communist regime, with specific application of the child institutionalization legacy where the state acted as a guarantor has borne a new concept of family and child-rearing practices as will be seen in the next paragraph. Child abandonment became a cultural practice in the country, reflecting thus the impact Ceausescu's policies have had on Romanian people's mentality towards finding solutions to common problems (Stativa et al., 2005; Popescu, 2009). Laws and policies aimed at protecting children from harm instead jeopardized the role of families for years to come (Zamfir et al., 2011).

Child abandonment is not new nor is it a practice prevalent only in Romania (Shaw and Frost, 2013). According to Shaw and Frost, societies regardless of geographical location have historically tried various strategies to cope with children who cannot be looked after by their biological families. The authors made a distinction between Western developed nations and developing countries in how care is provided; large scale instituionalisation of children versus smaller numbers placed in residential type care, and second such activities being state run (both features highly descriptive of Romania) as opposed to provision through Non Government Organizations as in England (Broad, 1998; Shaw and Frost, 2013). However, what is unique is how during a specific time in Romanian history this phenomenon has changed the course of child-parent relationships and the socio-economic dynamics in the country. Under Ceausescu's dictatorship, in order to safeguard his pronatalist policies, and to increase the population to 30 million, contraception and abortion were outlawed (Decree 770/1966). As early as 1967, there began a sudden rise in child abandonment (Rus et al., 2013). This phenomenon was not common in the country until this period, although it continued up to 1994 (Lataianu, 2003; Cojocaru, 2008). Law 3/1970 played an influential role in the fate of

the children in that it legalized and promoted child institutionalization. Law 3/1970 presented the family unit as a potential risk environment for children and stipulated the admission into state-run institutions as one of a series of opportunities for proper development (Lataianu, 2003; Stativa et al., 2005; Cojocaru, 2008; Rus et al., 2013). Both political bodies and medical physicians participated in justifying those policies, and by 1990 about 85% of children were found to be institutionalized based on physicians' recommendations (Lataianu, 2003).

Child abandonment evolved from merely being the only means of controlling the high fertility rate to collective reactions to certain problems. It was publicly acceptable for mothers to abandon a child in a hospital on the basis of poverty. Institutionalization was an escape not only from responsibility but also the dismemberment of parent-child relations reflected in statements such as 'The government wanted them, so the government should raise them' (Stativa et al., 2005, p. 15). Although hospitals were the main platform for child admissions into an institution and were intended to provide temporary care, children's departure from hospitals lasted from a few months to four to five years (Lataianu, 2003). The delayed implementation of child protection measures as well as supra-populated institutions led to child maltreatment in medical wards and child institutions (Stativa et al., 2005; Zamfir, 2006; Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013). By 1989, at the end of the Communist Regime, some 250 large institutions were active with more than 100 000 children institutionalized. Among these institutional settings, many children were held without exposure to sun, lacked physical stimulation, and were undernourished and overcrowded in military warehouses (Lataianu, 2003; Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013). First reported by UNICEF in 1990, such information generated great responses nationally and internationally, with some acting by 'rescuing' children through

adoption, while others brought in aid and donations (Stativa et al., 2005). In 1990-91, more than 10 000 children were adopted internationally with about 2450 children adopted by American families alone (Dickens and Groza, 2004).

3.2. Post-communism consequences and radical changes

With the fall of communism in 1989, Romania suffered economic hardship, accompanied by massive political and social changes. The abrupt shift from a centralized system to a free market economy appeared to challenge the expectations for the country's recovery and development on economic, political and social levels consistent with the European Community. The "number of families living in poverty increased" resulting in the persistence of abandoned children (into the institutions) (Wells, 2009, p. 92). The most affected groups as a result of sudden radical changes were lower working class and large families, single parents and minority groups (Roth, 1999; Poupard, 2006; Roberts, 2009). Political influence during the early stages of transition left its mark on the welfare system today in that both of the first two parties (Social Democratic Party and National Liberal Party) used a 'quick fix' approach to coping with the gaps left by the communist regime in the areas of health, education, child protection and social security. One such example of a 'quick fix' approach is the early introduction of privatization. There was a great need for the government to open new job opportunities in order to expand the capacity of health and educational institutions to function well. Privatisation of nationalized activities (educational and health care institutions), which started in the 1980s in the rest of Western countries, resulted in total neglect of state institutions (Preda, 2000), which further caused the present day struggles of social care systems to carry their

responsibilities as they are authorized to do (Roberts, 2009). Privatisation of social sectors resulted in capitalist legacy ideologies such as opportunities for choice, competition, and quality service of customers as well as efficiency in service delivery. It meant, however, removal of subsidies on many goods and services for the people (Pinder, 1998). Moreover, some argue the change to a free market occurred too early, resulting in large-scale job losses, and deregulation of state services placing the public sector at a disadvantage (Deacon, 2000). Likewise, the government's expenditure on health decreased as of 1997. The introduction of the Health Insurance Law passed at the end of 1997 has raised other problems for families and individuals in order to benefit from public health care services. Hence, uninsured, as the unemployment rate has increased since 1998 by 20% according to the National Commission Statistics, the law excluded the population that seemed to be at greatest risk of social exclusion (Deacon, Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007; Stănculescu and Grigoraş, 2009). The aftermath of the shift from a central to a free market economy resulted in the loss of the *safety net* for the population, and in the formation of a new class known as 'the underclass' (Preda, 2000; Zamfir, 2006). Unlike Murray's (1990) description of 'the underclass', which focused more on behavior, there appears to be an indigenous understanding of the concept referred to as "the uneducated, marginalized, and impoverished in constant need of social assistance" (Preda, 2000, p. 15). People were still waiting, blaming, and expecting the government to secure their standard of living (Preda, 2000; Kovacks, 2009; Zamfir, 2006). Class discrepancies and unequal access to quality resources became increasingly obvious in the Romanian society.

The early 1990s can be viewed as a stepping-stone for change not only at the institutional level, but also among Romanian citizens in what was to come in terms of their new roles in society. The first phase involved the complete reliance on the state

to secure their well-being and the second moved towards greater direct reliance on friends and self with the third phase showing the growth of participation in community through volunteering. However, civic engagement does have a different meaning in that, at the heart of participation, is access to resources that would benefit them and their family. Civic engagement in western literature is understood to pair access to resources and community building. It was a slow move towards increased individual undertakings. Even so, activities occurring within the inner-circle of connections contributed to unequal, accumulated capital across populations. Transformational characteristics (shortage of salaries, tax increases, the decline of a generous social system) with an inclination towards governments' subsidiary role in social activities were implemented to invoke independent behavior and community responsibility while protecting the capitalist free market economy at all costs, stressed Pinder (1998). For Romania, without yet an established market, it resulted in people getting all they could from whatever sources accessible and, not claiming benefits, increasing the rate of participation in the black market. It could be argued that a binary effect occurred in the sense that first "the system did not create enough incentives for people to be honest and declare their income for taxation" (Aidukaite, 2009, p. 28). Second, Preda (2000) stressed that without the introduction of intervention strategies as well as 'training and preparation programs for the unemployed to acquire the skills necessary for current employment expectations' (p. 22) the system did not encourage self-initiatives, 'independent behaviour, and active community involvement on behalf of their own needs and those of others' (p. 14). The Romanian city councils have been unsuccessful in deterring the barrier of mistrust among citizens, and especially that of public and political authorities well established during Communism. This mistrust is maintained by frequent changes in policies, poor allocation of funds to social institutions accompanied with the dearth of knowledge of

new initiatives developed within the central government (Badescu, Sum and Uslaner, 2004). Due to the lack of trust in the state accompanied by inadequate pay, a vicious cycle (state's lack of funding for social programs - higher level of shadow economy - no tax collection) has been created impeding the country's chances of progress (Marin and Serban, 2008). Esping-Andersen and colleagues (2002) argue that to increase social trust is essential to mitigating poverty and demonstrating the generosity of welfare states.

Pinder (1998) highlighted that the social and economic differences between the Eastern Bloc and the West have been underestimated, neglecting particularly the social aspect of the region that according to the author has a great impact not only on reflecting but also on conditioning the legacy of economic development process. Today, European countries face disparate levels of development in that post communist countries still hold a far weaker economy than the Western developed European countries. Romania has been in flux at all administrative levels, where changes have been caused either by external pressure, or internal impending elections, or by the government's frequent change of interests leading to the polarisation of the social welfare system (Roberts, 2009). Social welfare in Romania, its performance, outcomes and processes, is rather characterized by drastic social reforms within a condensed time, caught up in a period when the European Union was already undergoing great transformations within legislative and administrative areas (Robila, 2012). While Western developed countries had time to form their own model in accordance with national priorities while considering the issues within the state with minimal international impact, this is not necessarily the case for Romania. Other scholars argue that development of the welfare system in the new member states goes beyond the internal borders' capacity. For example, since the beginning of

the post-communist period, the formation of legislation and policies in Romania have been greatly influenced in all spheres by external actors including the International Monetary Fund, European Union, World Bank, and inter-governmental organisations like UNICEF (Lataianu, 2003; Anghel, 2011). To put things into perspective, a year after Romania's accession as a member of the European Union (in January 2007), the financial crisis of 2008 hit, giving the country again fewer chances to solidify its current policies and administrative changes of governmental bodies. Romania's difficulty in reaching European standards on all three fronts, economic, social and political, places the country still in a struggling state in dealing with transition. Welfare performance measured by various social indicators like minimum wage earnings, life satisfaction, social benefits expenditures, poverty, and unemployment levels rank Romania as one of the poorest country in the European Union. Below, a short synopsis is given to reflect, the current state of Romania.

A family member in formal work who earns on average 150 – 190Euros per month (Government Decision 871/2013) does not earn enough to cover basic monthly needs. Eurostat 2013 showed that 48.7% of children under the age of 18 were at risk of social exclusion and 320 000 were living in extreme poverty at the end of 2011 in Romania (Rezultatele analizei documentare: sectorul incluziune sociala si combaterea saraciei, 2013). Stanculescu and Marin (2011) stressed that single-parent households, usually Romanian women (88%), and large families with children who benefit from child allowances, disclosed a high level of reliance on acquaintances, neighbours, family or friends' help to cope with material, monetary and service (i.e. babysitting) deficiencies. Moreover, as a result of the minimum wage, individuals showed high activity in the black labor market to make ends meet for the entire family, asserted Marin and Serban (2008). These groups are most likely to place their

children under the care of the state according to research concerning family poverty (Stanculescu and Marin, 2011; Giraldi, 2014). Addressing corruption and weak institutional infrastructure, Rat (2010) as well as Stanculescu and Marin, (2011) disclosed that in Romania services are accessed based on the connections one has, leading to the conclusion that only a segment of the population makes real use of the local resources. Such evidence links to the issue of unequal distribution of capital, in which resources are distributed among certain classes of people (Bourdieu, 1986; 1998; Fukuyama, 1996). Connection-based resource access may infer exclusion of individuals who do not benefit from a broader circle of networks, or who are higher up the social ladder, but are representative of social groups with the highest needs. There has been a considerable rise in the unemployment rate registered as high as 58.5% in 2012. In 2012 Romania had 42% of the total employed population living under the poverty line, and 40.3% of the total population was at risk of poverty and social exclusion (Rezultatele analizei documentare: sectorul incluziune sociala si combaterea saraciei, 2013). The 2014 Eurostat release of EU 28 states, 46.7% of youth were unemployed in Romania. According to Trestieni (2015), more than 40% of youth between the ages of 15 and 34 were active in the informal sector.

Rare attempts have been made to make sense of the direction the new emergent welfare states might take. Central Eastern European (CEE) countries are still considered to be in their transition phase; yet previous scholars tried to fit 'the new emergent welfares states' into one of the Esping-Andersen's three theoretical welfare regimes (conservative, liberal, social democrat) known to be in western developed countries (Pinkerton, 2006). Only lately has there been acknowledgement that the post communist countries' welfare models are yet to be identified or 'have their own model' (Aidukaite, 2009). The most accurate view on the policy of the

welfare state is to recognize that due to its varied external influences clashing with domestic and cultural powers, CEE countries maintain an uncertain system characterized by constant change. According to Aidukaite (2009) indicators in terms of minimum wage and social protection expenditure, material deprivation, high shadow economy, low spending on social protection, a higher level of income inequality and poverty are characteristics of CEE welfare state countries. What sets the country apart from its European community is a weak social policy framework, a high rate of shadow economy accompanied by corruption, alongside weak institutional capital where civil society in combination with local/private entities still holds a weak mandate in the country. Despite reports of greater synergy between state agencies and NGOs, partnership between the two enitities is still in its infancy by comparison to more economically developed countries (UNCRC Annual Report, 2009; Campean, Constatnin and Mihalache, 2011).

3.3. The Europeanization of Child Protection: the shift from institutionalization to foster home type care settings

Romania was one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, adopting national Law no. 18/1991 (Roth, 1999). In 1995, the EU accepted the country as a future candidate despite increased controversy and international pressure to handle its domestic issue of child abandonment before its accession to the EU. Early social policy changes in child welfare can be characterized as ad hoc and inconsistent. In the first phase of change from 1990 to 1996, the EU and international instruments like the UNCRC had minimal influence on Romania (Greenwell, 2003). In Romania, in the sphere of child

protection institutions, no major changes were achieved except improving the life conditions of institutionalized children, which did not have real effects until the early 2000s (Frazer and Marlier, 2007; Kovacks, 2009). Of remarkable note, Law 3/1970 (that promoted child institutionalization) was not banned until the year 1997, and the Emergency Ordinance number 26 was passed focusing on regulating the protection of children who were either temporarily or permanently at risk of abandonment and other forms of neglect. In Romanian legislation, EO 26 introduced the idea of family-type childcare alternatives.

Such visible changes must be seen as a result of political interests. It has been since the second election of the presidential candidate, in 1997, Emil Constantinescu of the National Liberal Party that real change occurred. The new government prioritized the protection of children in its political agenda, and further efforts were introduced to delegate authority from central to local levels, particularly in the Child Protection Sector (Poupard, 2006; Deacon, Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007; Jacoby, Lataianu and Lataianu, 2009). Moreover, Constantinescu's primary goal for the country was to become a member of the EU with recognition of civic organisations' skills including knowledge of western democratic principles for the country's preparation for EU membership (Frazer and Marlier, 2007). The role of NGOs as aid providers changed from 1997 such entities being viewed more "as policy partners" according to Cojocaru (2008, p. 367).

Romania has shown to respond to one of its major domestic issues, children in institutions, with the adoption of Law 272/2004 (Bainham, 2009). This Law 'Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child,' mirroring the UNCRC, entered into force in January 2005. It holds the principle of *the best interests of the child*

central with family being considered the ideal place for children's healthy growth and development. It is the first law that clearly defined the roles of duty bearers so that child rights are respected as set forth in the law. The Law 272/2004 requires development of service plans that prevent child-parent separation and individual care plans that ensure care and support based on individual cases (Stativa et al., 2005; Poupard, 2006). When necessary, public security services should take all appropriate measures to provide families that do not have the means to ensure fundamental needs with services and assistance (housing, clothing, nutrition, education). This Art. 45 would further allow parents to provide a living environment consistent with the child's evolving capacities. Family type alternative care systems (foster homes) are highly encouraged for children under the age of two thus aiming at complying with the article 60 (1) of Law 272/2004 that prohibits children under the age of 2 being left in a residential care setting. This particular fragment of the reformation of the system in Romania resembles closely that of the English in the mid 20th century, when establishments for children under the age of 2 and a half were to be in foster homes and small scale institutions based upon the principle of better fulfilling emotional needs (Packman, 1981). To strengthen this initiative, Government Decision No. 633/2007 clarified the need to open placement centres that would not exceed a capacity of 200 children while via Government Decision 732/2007-2008 mandated closure of old type institutions. The most recent data reveals that Romania is set to shut down all institutional type care settings by 2022 (HHC Romania, 2015). According to Art. 119 (1) of Law 272/2004, families who take a child in care receive a monthly allowance equivalent to 150 Euros (Poupard, 2006).

With a particular aim toward reducing old type institutions, the process of integrating youth into a family environment 'became more like a competition' among

the local authorities throughout the country (Rus et al., 2013). As a result children were found to be reintegrated with parents/legal guardians sooner than they should have been (HHC, Romania, 2015). The consequence of this process has resulted in many children continuing to be exposed to emotional and physical abuse, maltreatment, labor exploitation as well as threats (be sent back) in their new homes. Although, over the years, training and counselling programs have been introduced for foster parents to prevent such experiences, these training programs were on such a limited scale that they could not meet the demand of the high number of children being placed in foster homes (Cojocaru, 2008; Jacoby, Lataianu and Lataianu, 2009; Rus et al., 2013). Therefore, it is not just about admission but re-admission into care. About 20% of children were re-admitted into care from foster families in 2012. Possible factors contributing to such an outcome may be not only failed relationships, but also inadequate support and pay. During the same year, more than a 1000 foster parents resigned (Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013).

Gaps in policy implementation 'on the ground,' as others term it, appear to be a feature in the social welfare of children. Romania exhibits a rather sizable gap between policy development and implementation. Despite radical social policy changes in the area of child protection that appear to have replaced the old system, one traditional feature remains constantly neglected - that is the provision of services to families in need, which has contributed little on the national scale to prevention of family dissolution (Greenwell, 2003; Children Action Foundation Report, 2005; Bainham, 2009; Robila, 2012; Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013; Batculescu and Tofan, 2013). Based on more recent findings, almost 1000 children below the age of two were found to still live in institutions, maternal wards continuing to be the main substitute form for child protection until a better alternative care setting can be found

(Stativa et al., 2005; Cojocaru, 2008; Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013). A total of 63000 were reported to be under the care of the state in 2013, with 40 000 children reported living in family type homes, placement centres (public and private) or in foster care and 23000 in private and state residential facilities (Stativa et al., 2005; Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010; World Vision, 2011). Children within the age range 10-18 are reported to occupy the most places in private and public institutions (Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013). Resources for families are completely ignored once the child has entered under the care of the state on a 'temporary' or permanent basis. The state takes over full responsibility for the child. The choice to either improve the life of children within the family unit (e.g. kinship care) or in state care (including foster family) is still an active debate, with the state usually being preferred over family or family relatives, which undermines current commitment to family integrity, sense of identity, and the best interests of the child as set forth in the Romanian Law 272/2004 (Stativa et al., 2005; Bainham, 2009; Lansford et al., 2010).

In the sections above, it has been shown that the poverty rate among the Romanian population presents difficulties for families in fulfilling basic needs for their children. With no alternative choices, many families view the child care units like a "dormitory" where children benefit from services and provisions that are otherwise inaccessible to them (UNCRC Country Report, 2009). According to the UNCRC Report "Children would not have been there if there were an adequate and consistent support system developed for families" (p. 18). The ideology of guaranteed schooling, health benefits, clothing, shelter and food in institutions generated amongst the general public is still alive - a mentality that overlooks the lack of emotional and psychological support for children in care, and the consequences that come with it when aging out of care.

Touching again on the subject of the persisting historical legacy of child institutionalization, other scholars argue that the EU Membership was the motivator and pressure factor for social change. Even so social domestic issues still remain largely neglected with public sector and social related welfare still holding a weak mandate in the country (Lansford et al., 2010; Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013; Radulescu, 2011). Leon (2011) posits that cultural practices make the domestic transformation challenging. The weak mandate of social sectors, government lack of input, ineffective policy implementation, and failure to establish child-parent centred legislation for family sustainability indicate that lack of progress is not confined so much to poverty as it may be rooted in the cultural practices toward certain groups of society (Ennew, 2005; Stativa et al., 2005; Deacon, Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007; Manole, 2010; Stanculescu and Marin, 2011; Batculescu and Tofan, 2013). Historically social issues have not been given equal weight as that given to economic or political issues. There is no strong political will and legitimacy to handle matters of poverty present in the families where children lack basic needs (clothing, food, health insurance) unless such issues are brought out at the national level (Harwin and Barron, 2007; Stanculescu and Grigoras, 2009; Wells, 2009; Stanculescu and Marin, 2011; Axford, 2012).

3.3.1. Romania's progress in care-leaving policy and practice

In England serious concern about the outcomes of children leaving care started as early as 1980s; whereas, in Romania the reverse happened, with the neglect of this social issue lasting for more than 10 years after 1989 (Anghel, 2011; Stein, 2012). Leaving care policy and practice, well established before 1989 has been

forgotten within Child Protection as the focus has been on improving the life conditions of young institutionalized children (Anghel and Dima, 2008). During the communist regime, the leaving care process was straightforward. Youth received free vocational training to guarantee employment in the industrial area; accommodation was in factory-owned blocks and food was provided in canteens. Future prospects were pre-set with preparation usually for the army, police academy, industrial factories and agriculture. Due to the major shifts in legislative and administrative levels after 1989 leading to a disorganized system, children were left to be "governed by the rule of chance" (Dima and Skehill, 2011, p. 370). At the age of 18, youth of the state were considered adults with discharge from the system being seen as the end of the state's responsibility. Yet in England the adoption of the Children Act 1989 specifically addressed the need to prepare youth for leaving care with the aim to diminish the vulnerable state of these young populations as documented by various research at the time (Biehal et al., 1995; Broad, 1998; Kirton, 2009). This was an issue recognized at the national level in England. In Romania such services were almost non-existent except for some voluntary private initiatives of NGOs. That left care leavers little chance to develop practical and independent living skills. In 1997, the government created a policy for young people to stay in state care until the age of 26 if continuing education. The Emergency Order 26/1997 established at the time of discharge at the age of 18 provided youth with a stipend of 150 Dollars – the only known policy addressed to this particular group (Dima and Skehill, 2011). However, the age of 18 was set for young people to leave care, and as they were considered to be able to look after themselves, many institutions have not taken the policy seriously, instead they encouraged care leavers to depart at 18 (Dima and Skehill, 2011, p. 3533). A similar issue has also been found in England where although through the Childrens Act 2000 there was emphasis on extended support from 16 to

18, some youth still exit care at the age of 16 as the findings chapters will reveal (e.g. Chapter 5; Broad, 2008; Stein, 2012). It was only under the pressure to enter the EU community that the Romanian government gave higher priority of outcomes of youth departing care during the early 2000s, and for the first time since 1989 considered it a serious social issue. According to Anghel (2011), central to the policy development concerning children exiting care are such concepts as individualized leaving care planning, community participation and 'community-integrated preparation for independent living' (p. 2527).

The two laws of particular relevance to care leavers are Prevention and Eradication of Social Exclusion, Law 116 of 2002, and 272/2004. In the Law 116/2002, care leavers are a priority group: with provision of financial assistance, access to health care and secure employment for at least two years at any point between the ages of 16 and 35 years of age. When compared to England, this is a more extended age of support eligibility for care leavers. Although this may appear to be a rather generous law, its application still remains questionable because Law 116/2002 was/is not well known to local authorities. Therefore, generally youth are not informed. Discharge from care varies from 18 to 26 depending on whether youth continue their education, or request two more years (after the 18th birthday) for extended state support for learning independent living skills as allowed by Law 272/2004, Art. 51. Passed in 2004, it is the first childcare law to provide accommodation and employment to youth after discharge from the system. In the same period, Government Decision 1007/2005 assured inclusive legislation by emphasizing the need to increase support to governmental agencies in the development of houses for youth preparing to leave institutional care. Developing Independent Living Skills in partnership with American USAID/ChildNet in 2005,

National Strategy for Social Inclusion of Young People Leaving Care System and Inter-ministerial Group for Young People Leaving Care through Government Decision 669/2006 programs were also created to assist this sub-group population.

However, these laws are embedded within the larger child protection or social exclusion legislation framework, and although permissive in nature, are weakened by local authorities' varied commitment to implementing them (Lansford et al., 2010). For example, of the 41 counties throughout the nation, only a few have incorporated case managers who are designated for youth integration as set forward in Law 272/2004 (Cojocaru, 2008). Inconsistency of support in the transition period for youth in care is manifested though the relationships youth have with the 'state' (Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013). Where young adults were found to have formed informal relationships with the staff, they were favoured over the others as to type of resources to access and when to leave care. From an historical and cultural point of view in Romania, it can be argued that youth in care are 'normalized,' thus not looked at these individuals as a population in need, which may explain the high level of neglect at policy level in prioritising the needs of youth in difficulty such as care leavers (Chipea, Marc and Osvat, 2014). Considering the country's history related to children in care as one of the major domestic social issues before EU membership, it would have been expected for Romania to give priorty in the political agenda at a much greater rate than England which has comparatively lower number of children in non-parental care settings (Shaw and Foster, 2013).

Although the current legislation and programs recognize the need for housing, employability and the development of independent living skills at this stage, in practice many such provisions are either not implemented yet or there is a 'lack of

evidence on how those services work' (Anghel and Dima, 2008, p. 159; Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010). With no evaluation methods of services in place, it is not clear what has been accomplished in terms of quality of provision of services. The effects on the young people and the approaches used to assist transitioning youth, how and through what means they are helped, remain unknown. In Anghel's qualitative study (2011), 85% of the total number of participants (28) did not feel they had received adequate preparation for leaving care. Anghel and Dima (2008) asserted that neglect in following up on initiatives at a national level on top of poor implementation are due partially to poor organisational structure of governmental agencies along with prejudices against youth coming from care held by professionals within the child care settings. In Romania, professional staff were found to do only the minimum of what is expected for youth from institutions (Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013). The effect of such treatment on the young people can be reflected in the group's diminished motivation in furthering education instead of getting a job and having money (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010). Although education is granted to children coming from care up to the age of 26, only a very small percentage continues higher education (Save the Children, 2010). Furthermore, the pressured responsibilities of professionals accompanied with lack of resources may increase resentment toward the young (Anghel and Dima, 2008; Dima, 2010). The material goods children in care are guaranteed, which professionals themselves may struggle to secure for their own children, may also heighten resentment towards this particular group. A more concrete example can be drawn from Batculescu and Tofan's (2013) case study. Professionals in a placement center from Iasi caring for 250 children/youth from 7 to 25 years of age, expressed uncertainty about what exactly was asked of them and the demands of the work in fulfilling more than one role: such as being friends, parents, teachers, and consultants. These findings on the multi-

varied roles professionals carry in the Child Protection System are consistent with current concerns within social work practice. Finally, Batculescu and Tofan concluded that professionals tend to be uninformed about the changes occurring at the central level, findings consistent with Anghel's and Dima's previous research. Anghel (2011) had identified lack of preparation and training for staff to deliver assistance in accordance with the needs of young adults aging out of care; the absence of partnership with local professionals in implementing current laws, and change within the child welfare system as causing the system to remain in 'neutral' (p. 2531).

As far as leaving care policy and practice is concerned after 2006, this particular group has ceased again to be a priority in legislative reform (Anghel, Herczog and Dima, 2013; Chipea, Marc and Osvat, 2014). It must be acknowledged, however, that the country of Romania has shown legislative progress concerning youth leaving care (Law 272/2004, Art. 51) (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010). As Bainham (2009) argued, it is not the policies that Romania is lacking, as he even praised the country for having some of the best in the European Union rather, it is the follow up on implementation processes and procedures bringing into realization their objectives across the country. Indeed, if looking at the Law 272/2004, Art. 51, the country prioritized youth in care to continue higher education up to the age of 26 much earlier than did England or any other EU western developed country. The law was enacted before NEETs became to be one of the major social issues hitting Europe.

3.3.2. Identifying gaps in policy implementation in Romania and England

In this current sub-section, it is discussed at length the gaps identified between policy and practice within the child welfare system concerning youth preparing to leave care. These gaps correspond to the youth's likelihood for self-reliance including higher dependence on their networks that will be discussed in the next two chapters (6 and 7). It is expected of the governmental authorities, that is the system, to underpin development of skills, a supportive system in which resilience is enhanced and involvement of youth in activities that enable creation of social networks by the time youth leave care (Samuels and Pryce, 2007; Sala-Roca et al., 2012).

In reviewing the Romanian Law 272/2004[1], specifically Section I, Art. 51 the child benefits from social services on two occasions:

Paragraph one)

"at the young person's request, if the young person continues a form of education on a full time basis, special support is provided in accordance with the law that will not exceed the age of 26."

Analyzing carefully the Law 272/2004, (Art. 51) there are two sides of it that are worth commenting upon:

a) the law pertaining to young people in care does not specify whether or not under the budget youth in care must be denied continuing education; rather it indicates that it must be on full-time basis;

[1] Law 272/2004 on the *Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights* came into effect 21 June, 2004 in Official Monitor No. 159 from 5 March 2014 Available from: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Legislatie/L272-2004-R.pdf

b) clearly states that support be given to fulfill a form of education until the age of 26.

This may infer that once he/she has a BA the state is not obliged to support the child for an MA completion, which of course is not generally done with very few exceptions (already discussed in the section above). On both of these points it can be seen that much is left to the interpretation of local authorities (Anghel, 2011). Without any form of prejudice, professionals should ensure the means for youth transitioning from care to develop their capabilities, preserving similar high aspirations in education, and employment achievements as one "would for their own children" (Winterburn, 2015, p. 15).

The second paragraph:

> "the young person that does not continue education and does not have the possibility of reuniting with his/her family, being confronted with the risk of social exclusion, benefits, at his/her request, for a period of two years, of protection with the main aim of facilitating social integration."

In none of the above sections is there a mention that a young person can refuse only three jobs, yet on this account many children in Romania had their support terminated. The yearly number in Romania who are known to exit care totals around 5000 (according to the National Statistics Report, 2013) whereas in England that number is 10 000 (Winterburn, 2015), which requires a high response to seeking solutions that establish social competency and independence among youth when they reach adulthood.

The Romanian Law is not as specific as it is the English, to support these youth emotionally, with regard to guidance in accordance with the child's needs. Even within Romanian literature, little focus is given on the aspect of equipping children emotionally, although it is acknowledged that they carry an emotional burden, which is viewed as an additional factor to the challenges of making it into adulthood successfully (Anghel, 2011; Dima, 2011; Boaja and Ciurlau, 2012; Chipea, Marc and Osvat, 2014). However, in general, the Law does stipulate in Section III – aspects concerning the health and well-being of the child, Art. 44 (para 1)

> "The child has the right to benefit from a standard of living enabling physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."

If looking at Part III of the Children Act 1989, under which the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010[2] were created, direct responsibilities of the social services departments are clearly defined:

> "Where a child is being looked after by the local authority it shall be the duty of the local authority (*I underline*) to advise, assist and befriend with a view to promoting his welfare when he ceases to be looked after by them (section 21(1))."

The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010[2] specifically state that personal advisers are to "provide advice (including practical advice) and support." In terms of accommodation Section 9, para 1

[2]The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 came into effect on 1st April, 2011 Children and Young Persons, England 2020 No. 2571 Available from: https://www.gardencourtchambers.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Care-Leavers-England-Regulations-2010.pdf

> "The responsible authority must provide assistance in order to meet the relevant child's needs in relation to education, training or employment as provided for in the pathway plan."

'Suitable accommodation' is viewed as "the responsible authorities have, so far as reasonably practicable, taken into account the relevant child's—
(i) wishes and feelings, and
(ii) education, training or employment needs." (para 2)

Finally in terms of pathway plans the child's views and feelings must be heard, be informed, involving the child in the process so that the "relevant child" understands "the rights and responsibilities in relation to the accommodation" (The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, page 9).

In relation to current debates, especially in England, about discontinuity (its effects on child development) and the use of specialized leaving care services, strengthening networks prior to leaving care may still hold an ideal far from reality. For example, the state as a corporate parent inhibited young people as 'social actors' to actively take part in their on-going changing environment (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994; Rogers, 2006; Who Cares Trust, 2016). Within policy research the concern over the existent clash between what works and what does not remains a contentious topic. Some solutions are turned to the importance of social relationships as elaborated in the literature review chapter 2. Wade (1997) emphasized that 'continuity in support from key adult figures in their lives, including carers and social workers, is likely to have an influential bearing on positive outcomes' (p. 49).

3.3.2.1. A closer look at the different strategies developed to respond to youth undergoing transition in Romania and England

	Romania	England
Preparation for leaving care	Preparatory stages occur after the 18th birthday for two years when usually at least vocational or high school is completed (Law 272/2004).	The ages of 16 and 17 remain the standard phase for starting preparations for independent living (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations revized 2015)
Extended support	There was no policy descripancy located in the country as noticed in England. In Romania the two extended years of support apply to all youth regardless of the type of care settings experienced.	Staying Put that came into effect in 2014 has raised major debates for the policy, which extends support up to the age of 21, applies only to youth from foster homes (Rees and Pithouse, 2015). Staying Close Policy has been created in 2016 for children in residential care with similar arrangement to those under Staying Put. Still in early stages of implementation, Staying Close is being *tested* for its effectiveness on the young people (Stevenson, 2016).
Legal age limits and conditions of support	According to the Law 272/2004, Art. 51 extended stay until the age of 26 is conditional upon continuing higher education	The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 allows young adults to stay under the support of the local authorities up to the age of 25 if continuing and/or returning to some form of higher

		education/training. What differs from Romania, is the flexibility of youth to return to education by the time one turns 25 years of age.

In Romania and England education is viewed as a platform for increased socio-professional integration of these young adults. Yet in both countries as discussed in Chapter 1, the majority still exit at the age of 18, and in England there are cases where children leave as early as 16. One cause it appears to be related to care leavers still being unaware of the current laws, while among the rest, the knowledge varying among the young adults under the local authorities.

Concluding points

This last chapter of the literature review has encompassed a wide range of topics that started with the pre-modernization of welfare in order to give depth and understanding to the topic at hand. The shift from a centralized system to a free market economy has proved challenging for Romania. This is in part as a result of neglecting the social aspects of the country, today still lagging behind other EU member states economically and socially. As a result of neglected public institutions and loss of jobs, the black market continues to be one of the surviving strategies for supplementing or, in the case of many unemployed young people, of responding to their needs (Balan, 2012). Another factor that emerged is that whereas for young people living abroad is an answer for many families, the state remains the means of escaping poverty and securing the needs of the child, which is not too different from twenty years ago. The discussion further gives an indication of the chances of young

people formerly in care connecting with members outside the care system. Although the main focus is on youth at the stage of leaving the care system, having a grasp of the functioning of the system, as well as the country's overall state economically and socially, brings to light the general challenges of young adults in finding employment. Furthermore, revealing the high percentage of prolonged stay at home of youth populations was meant to provide a sense of the unrealistic expectations of the care leavers experience en route to adulthood. Unfortunately, the general public continues to be unaware of the challenges such young adults need to overcome without a dependable supportive system. One reason for such a result may be the missing activity within local authorities and civic organisations to initiate campaigns/programmes as found in England (see chapter 5) that could inform the general public of the varied realities these young individuals have to face.

Material deficiency, and low pay are features considered to limit ability to initiate participation in local social affairs because people are concerned primarily with fulfilling their own needs (Hollingworth, 2012). For minority groups considered disadvantaged, like youth formerly in care, the public level of awareness and knowledge can shape such experiences as the routes to employment, housing security, and integration into society. For example, the level of awareness of youth exiting the care system, available resources and responses towards this population's needs in England shows increased chances to integrate, further diminishing this lengthened challenged transition found to be experienced by youth from Romania (more detailed accounts found in chapter 7). As it has been made apparent, their transition additionally is affected by poor preparation at practical, emotional and psychosocial levels to manage post care life events (Munro, Stein and Ward, 2005; Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010).

Literature here, in conclusion, leads to the pivotal role the state as an institution can play in mobilising resources while influencing individual behaviors in which existent policies fall in the hands of those working in it. Finally, local authorities have been shown to have the capacity to shape how policies are implemented along with allocation of resources in which youth under care are selected relative to behavior and communication skills. It appears that social capital and social networks could play a major role in dictating the transition period from care, not the least of which influencing outcomes after care. The following chapter reveals the methodology involved and thereby considered suitable in finding out the strategies used to negotiate post-care life in relation to social capital and social networks. The final chapters (5, 6 and 7) containing raw data depict the significance of these factors in the lives of the youth participants.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Exiting the care system for those in care is an unavoidable stage of the process that comes with certain challenges, such as unemployment, as may be the case with non-care peers. Many researchers concerning youth leaving care make direct and indirect reference to lack of support as being a critical factor leading to challenged transition pathways and poor outcomes. Stein (2012) in his typology of outcomes ('Strugglers', 'Moving On' and 'Survivors') made a link between positive networks and better outcomes. A similar association was made within research in Romania (e.g. Dima, 2010; Anghel, 2011). What remains unexplained is why a more positive social entourage could have such an effect on the young people. Analysis of achieving socio-professional integration once out of the system through social capital/social networks approach is still missing (Lee and Berrick, 2012; McMahon and Curtin, 2012). Within this framework, the present research contributes to bridging the knowledge gap. It gives a particular focus to social networks as a significant factor influencing post-care negotiation of life including the networks' capacity to generate social capital (McMahon and Curtin, 2012). In the literature review, specifically in chapter 2, research identified young people as either falling in the category of outcomes 'Moving on' or 'Strugglers.' However, the dearth of empirical understanding of how youth negotiate life after care leads to the research question:

What are the strategies used by young adults to negotiate life after care?

This research will report common experiences cross-nationally (e.g. early stages of transition as 'rough' found across the youth samples) despite comparative research showing that these two countries, Romania and England, are different in policy and practice, with different resources and ideologies (Courtney, 2008; Stein, 2008; Jackson and Cameron, 2012). The intention of the comparative element (that is England and Romania) is to give more insight, and to see if on a larger scale there are strong patterns among care leavers and if so, the close linkage there may be in their stories cross culturally. Pinkerton (2006), from a globalization approach, acknowledges challenges in the transition process of these youth as an endemic issue worldwide. The author further expressed concerns on limited comparative studies on youth leaving care noting that the world is more connected through the Internet than ever before. In his view, comparative analysis presents foremost possibilities to inform policy and practice in identifying solutions within the child welfare system that may best assist youth leaving care. It is through comparative evidence that Romania has adopted foster care alternatives in the Child Protection System to assimilate care for example to that of a family. Romania presents a unique case taking into account its history of child institutionalization. Therefore, the youth possibilities to network outside of care and how such ties are utilized may have a different flavor than for those in England where activity of civic engagement is higher. In this study, the comparative element depicts the role and type of social capital present (bridging capital and bonding) in both Romania and England. This chapter discusses the use of qualitiatve methodology in approach to capture the manner in which social capital had been utilized among care leavers to negotiate independent living.

How resources such as social networks may mitigate life experiences after care is crucial in expanding knowledge, finding indicators that may work best for

more positive outcomes at adulthood. The network approach has become a new way of investigating social phenomena, posits Cotterell (2007). Social networks allow identification and analysis of influences on behaviors, distribution of resources, and of opportunities leading to explanation of varied outcomes in youth clusters of today. Earlier work often maintains that emotional/advice type of support, fulfilled through social networks, encourages inter-dependence, fosters confidence, resilience, and a sense of self-worth. All these ingredients are viewed as contributing to successfully making sense of major life changes (Goodkind, Schelbe and Shook, 2011; McGrath et al., 2012; McMahon and Curtin, 2012; Singer, Berzin and Hokanson, 2013). Conversely, the absence of resources and knowledge that come with being in contact with various networks can influence negatively the process of integrating successfully into the society (Barn, 2009). This leads to the following subquestions:

How is social capital utilized among youth formerly in care? To what extent do care leavers demonstrate agency?

By investigating how social networks/social capital might play in the management of life after care, the current research looks at individual cases to reveal agency in realizing goals. The core characteristics of social capital as identified by Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam include trust, reciprocity, solidarity, connectedness and belonging. Around such notions, young adults must demonstrate a capacity to negotiate social relationships either in the form of weak or strong ties (bridging and bonding capital). Putnam's forms of social capital (bridging and bonding) are employed in the analysis of the research from the viewpoint that intangible support is likely to encourage independent behavior (Cobb, 1976; Whiting and Harper, 2003; Gibbons and Foster, 2014). Studying social capital utilization among youth discharged from the child protection system from Romania and England, the study presents

individual experiences when exploring personal (e.g. reach a higher state of emotional maturity, confidence) and professional life domains (such as employment, housing, and education).

In this empirical study, young adults with a care background and professional staff are perceived as valuable contributors for assessing the effectiveness of policies in place to benefit disadvantaged groups. It is through participants' experiences that gaps within policies can be identified (i.e. encourage emotional/advice type of support and possibilities for early networking). Care alumni have a unique inside perspective that is critical to the understanding of youth leaving care worlds. Professionals included in this study are considered to provide meaningful insight from a different position. Although it was expected that the views would differ between the two samples, generally this was not the case as the empirical chapters will show. The objective of this study is to contribute to the growing body of research on improving leaving care policy and practice, specifically to encourage early introduction of social networking that can lead to acquisition of social capital as well as focus on fulfilling emotional and guidance type of support.

4.1. Participants: youth formerly in care

The study sample is composed of 58 participants, 48 are young adults formerly in care, 31 from Romania and 17 from England. There are 10 professionals, five from each country, who either worked or were still working directly with young people. 'Care leavers' means those that have left care, including children's homes and foster homes. It does not include those that have been in and out, from family to care, unless

they were in care for at least a year at the time of graduation. The goal of reaching a higher number of participants was to better chances for variation within the group. It must be noted that pseudonyms have been used for the sake of privacy. For a more graphic look on the key, essential demographic data on the participants, see Appendices I and II.

The sample consists of a nearly balanced female-male ratio of participants. Of the 48 participants, 27 are male and 21 females. The Romanian sample (31) is formed of 10 participants from the county of Vaslui, 14 from Sibiu, and 7 young adults from Bucharest. The three areas represent three different regions of the country. Bucharest is included for the obvious reason that it is the capital city, which usually has a more developed institutional framework and wider range of agencies in place to assist vulenerable groups (e.g. Hope and Homes for Children, Save the Children to name two). Sibiu is in the Transilvania area, and it is known for being a well developed area economically and socially. Vaslui however, is considered the poorest county in Romania with a high rate of child-parent separation. From England (17), a majority (9) of participants come from London; 5 come from the area of Kent (Faversham (1), Maidstone (3), and Medway (1)). Beyond these areas, there are 3 participants from Northern England, due to high interest from care leavers in taking part, whom I did not wish to exclude them because of their locations. Heterogeneity of the youth sample sets is exhibited with respect to the different care settings young people come from, age, status (employed, unemployed, in higher education), and sources of support (state or NGO). In Romania, there are individuals from SOS Children's Villages (7), and foster homes (8, out of which 5 were also placed in Placement Centers), with 16 in Placement Centers and Flats type care experience while under the Child Protection System. In England more than half come from foster

homes (12), and 2 of the young adults were placed in both foster homes and children's homes, with 3 from children's homes, and one from kinship care. Although not requested on the basic demographic form, 5 young adults from Romania declared to be Roma while in England 5 as African background.

At the time of interview the youth participants ranged from 17 to 29 years of age. In the age cluster, 17-24, there are 69% (9 in England and 24 in Romania) of young adults with the remaining youth 31% (8 from England; 7 from Romania) within the age category 25-29. The range of the participants was early to-mid 20s with exceptions of four, two of 17 years of age from Romania and England, 27 and 28 years of age in England, with one of 29 in Romania. Inclusion of a greater age range, beyond 24, as well as inclusion of professionals, gave the opportunity to get a glimpse of both the new and old systems in Romania and England. For example, the younger adults were exposed to more placements than the previous generation in Romania. In contrast to previous research mostly limited to relatively short time after care, inclusion of a wide age range helped identify how youth outcomes progressed over time.

In regard to social status including level of education and employment clear differences are shown although it is worth reemphasizing the small size samples of this cohort of youth in this study. In Romania, out of 31 participants, only 6 passed the high school final exam, the Baccalaureate, with 5 of those 6 completing some form of higher education. In England there is a somewhat different story. There were 3 young adults in apprenticeship programs, and 6 in higher education (Undergraduate, MA and PhD). Except for two whose cases reopened, all returned to education on an independent basis. Of the 17 participants in England, 14 were employed (3 part-time

and in HE education) versus 24 (of 31) in Romania. That equals a total of 37 young adults in employment, with only 9 unemployed. In England, 3 were counted as unemployed. In Romania, 6 were registered as unemployed, although 4 from Vaslui and 1 from Sibiu were actively engaged in informal employment.

Finally accessing those who were receiving/or had received at some sort of support enabled me to see how this specific group fared in comparison with the rest that held an 'independent status.' As continuous recipients of support from the local authority it was possible to analyze whether or not social support is a factor in the variation of outcomes of 'Strugglers', 'Survivors' and Moving on' as framed by Stein (2012). In Romania, only 35% (11) of participants declared to receive or had received some support in the transition period or after care whereas in England 70%.

4.2. Participants: Professionals

The professionals were included in my sample not only to create an opportunity for "triangulation," but also to gain a different viewpoint on the experiences transitioning from care. The views of the two samples were expected to differ on service provision in preparation for leaving care, as well as on issues surrounding young people's chances for socio-professional integration. Additionally, professionals as another target group helped avoid the potential risk of gathering data that could be mostly subjective. Professionals held a different status within the system, that of service provision. The professional participants comprised of 3 females from Romania and 2 from England; 2 males from Romania and 3 from England. The sample of professionals in England and Romania consist of diverse

groups as well. For example, one professional from London has a care background and has been involved with the service for the last 15 years. Whereas in England most of the professionals were NGO based, professionals in Romania were mostly working for the state, except for one located in Sibiu. Years of work experience in the Child Protection System varied from over a year to 25 years. On a daily basis, the professionals were in face-to-face contact with care leavers, dealing with whatever problems care leavers had (e.g. someone to talk to in times of confusion) in planning the transition pathways to independent living, such as employment, housing, and/or training, and consultation. All professionals from England worked with young people during the transition period, either as a youth worker or, personal advisor etc. as opposed to Romania where only two professionals were assigned for this specific role. The other three professionals, one as a director of a placement center, another as psychologist with the third in charge of foster homes were familiar with the young people's lives mostly as a result of personal relationships developed.

4.3. Recruitment Process

The 'snowballing technique' was used in the recruitment process in Romania (Bucharest, Vaslui and Sibiu), and in England (London and Kent area). This technique was selected for two main reasons: 1) this is a hard-to-reach and locate population partially due to high geographical mobility found among youth formerly in care as previously highlighted by various works in Romania and England (Anghel, 2008; Dima, 2010; Jackson et al., 2012; Stein, 2012), and 2) snowballing provided, relative to a hand-picked sample by agencies/professionals, for example, a heterogeneous

sample within the proposed group of study (Kidd and Davidson, 2007; Boaja and Ciurlau, 2012).

The research fieldwork in both countries lasted a bit over 6 months. The 58 participants were mostly gathered through other care leavers and professionals in England and Romania. My previous contacts as a care leaver, having visited personally local authorities, and having made connections with other youth via social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter, indeed ensured heterogeneity of the group though no claims are made regarding the representativeness of the sample.

The first part of the research fieldwork started in England and took nearly 6 months to complete (November, 2014 to April of 2015). As a starting point, I searched online for various agencies that work with youth out of care. In total 10 local agencies, NGOs and local authorities, from the areas of Kent and London were selected and contacted by phone, email and/or personal visits. In England, having no connection to local authorities and NGOs made early stages of fieldwork difficult. It is not solely due to care leavers being a hard to reach population but also because of my independent basis approach in carrying out the study. I avoided the use of agencies as the primary channel to reaching young adults first because respondents may have felt pressured to take part, and secondly to avoid the potential bias in selection. According to Kendrick, Steckley and Lerpiniere (2008), agencies can hinder the development of a research project by putting forward only those people with certain characteristics (i.e. homogeneity, positivity towards the agency). Because there was no formal introduction of my research by a staff member, four NGOs denied my access completely. Even though NGOs and local authorities were used mainly to get

into contact with professionals, it was also through them that I would have had access to other young adults.

However, with persistence and frequent calls, the other agencies (NGOs, including a homeless shelter and local authorities) responded. In cases in which young people received formal support after the age of 18, I avoided intermediary introductions for I believed it was more important that I directly introduce the research to them (a similar approach used by Jackson et al., 2012). Posting on network sites aided the research. After three weeks, three care alumni approached me directly from the announcement placed on Facebook and Twitter, a new account that I opened just to reach more respondents. While participating in an Opening Day event at a homeless shelter, I met a person who knew someone working with young mothers. That person not only provided contact with the young mother formerly in care but also with a foster parent. She was the first professional to be interviewed. As a side point, the young people accessed from England, having maintained contacts with various agencies including profesionals even after care, may imply to be more 'networked' than is typical for such population. Finally, it is worth noting that networking had a tremendous effect on my ability to conduct the research. This is intensified when comparing fieldwork experiences between England and Romania.

In Romania, only two months (May-July, 2015) was needed to complete the fieldwork, including three different regions of the country. State-run institutions have a higher activity level than NGOs, making it easier to locate potential participants. Personal visits were made to various institutions, where those still in care provided referrals to their friends/colleagues who recently left care as well as employees from institutions such as cooks, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and gatekeepers. It

also helped that I started to get in touch with people I knew from Sibiu, and Vaslui. In the county of Vaslui the people I talked to further made it possible to reach other young adults through an integration centre. There, I interviewed one professional, and was given the liberty to directly pick individuals and talk to them about my research. Moreover, I knew some other care leavers completely independently who got me in contact with others. In Sibiu, I had maintained contact over the years with youth from SOS Children's Villages, whom I got to know through a social project long before commencing my PhD. I also visited an NGO in which one of the young people that I arranged to meet was volunteering. While there, I happened to meet another young person with care experience, from a placement centre, who ended up putting me in touch with others. They informed me of a local NGO that works specifically with young people to integrate into society, from which I was also able to reach a professional and youth who were benefiting from its accommodation and training programs. The local NGO was supporting early care leavers in knowing how to address in an interview, and how to communicate.

4.3.1. Reflective points upon the 'unique' fieldwork experiences in Romania

Before moving forward to the next section on procedures used in carrying out the research, I would like to reveal the distinctive experiences of conducting fieldwork in Romania. The time span to complete my research fieldwork in Romania may have been shorter than in England; however, the process of conducting research was more challenging. There was a tendency toward fear and suspicion, which made it very difficult to get people to open up, especially in interviews. 'With surveys it is easier for it does not require detailed information or explanation' (male, professional

Bucharest). Among the young adults there was a tendency to just 'Forget all about it' (male, 30 employed, Bucharest); or of feeling used 'This is what people like you do, use us for your reports' (male, 25, employed Bucharest). On these grounds, two young men from Bucharest refused to participate. Another aspect worth addressing is that the Romanian youth (aside from reluctance and suspicion) at the beginning reacted in such a manner, 'There is no point to do this, no change will happen', or often 'I do not want to waste my time; what for?' I would then explain that although it does not have a direct positive impact on you, it may help younger generations, and how through these types of research projects the Romanian system had changed, from orphanages to foster families for provision of care to children in need. This particular statement generated a more positive response and worked even with professionals in Romania. With the Romanians, I had to reassure them of their anonymity constantly by referring back to the demographic basic data form, indicating there were no boxes to fill in the name of the agency, the placement centre or even the town; it was based on county (Judet; see an example in the Appendices I and II). The scepticism of the professionals about participation may reflect their lack of trust in authorities or in individuals outside of 'their close networks.' For young care leavers in Romnania, however, it reflects a feeling of powerlessness, that their voices would not make a difference. This was contrary to what the England group expressed. Finally, the professionals' low expectations as to the level of participation of youth in this research was noteworthy ('youth unlikely to participate if not given money' or 'many do not want to talk about their past, just want to forget about it and move on'). To some extent, the professionals were right, but I found that once youth understood the research aim, they were open to participation.

4.3.1.1. Participants' reflections on taking part in the study

At the end of the interview some from England and Romania shared what it felt like to take part, without being asked: 'Wow that was good – I have not thought about my experiences in a while – it was therapeutic, yeah' (male, 21 employed London). My interviews allowed them to reflect on their lives, appreciating what they have and realizing how much they have overcome and achieved. 'Looking back now, I went through a lot' (male, 21 unemployed, Vaslui/Romania),' 'Now I realize how much I achieved despite my difficulties (female, 22 employed/student London). Some of the young people in Romania felt a sense of empowerment, expressed by offering in writing the use of their names, if that was what I wanted. Some others dictated word by word what to write, while others felt comfortable enough to make jokes. A few professionals showed appreciation of the research 'Sounds like great research! Not many look beyond 21, this is heartwarming ' (male, professional NGO, London). Such shared feedback along with reactions, gave me the sense that the use of vignetts and interviews worked well. Furthermore, care leavers responded fully to the questions, meaning that they themselves mentioned friends, the role they played, type of help received, reasons to go to university, or return to education without being prompted. The interview process occurred in a rather "smooth-flowing sequence" (Davies, 2007, p. 109). Since the participants gave more details than asked, this may mean that direct connection to the topic on their life experiences, helped them become involved with the project at a higher level. As a final reflective point, these young people also represent a population whose voices are not necessarily heard. In the process of the interview, including the vignettes, it was captivating to see some elements of reworking identities. They acknowledged the qualities they possess, how people appreciated them on these grounds, that 'I am like everyone else,

and like the rest I can achieve anything I set my mind to.' A sense of pride was growing among them, although this was more so with the group from England. In Romania many of them realized that they are 'good people', with a 'strong character' or with the 'ability to look at the bright side of things and keep going'. Seeing this developing before my eyes, influenced me as the researcher, viewing the target groups (young adults mainly) as a population highly engaged with their living environment, with great drive to reach stability socially (e.g. as expressed have a family of their own) and professionally.

4.4. Procedures in conducting the research and collecting data

This study followed the classic sociological qualitative framework, in that it studied a social phenomenon from a particular social context. It focused on social capital and social networks as key strategies to negotiating independent living among youth formerly in care as well as of youth in the transition process from the local authority (Burgess and Natalier, 2012). Initially, there were other methods considered suitable for achieving the objective of this research. Ethnography was considered. Such a method would have allowed seeing in real time how care leavers manage now and the role of social networks in their lives (Silverman, 2013). Yet, this proved not feasible for the participants who were fully independent, with their own work schedules. Another complicating aspect was the large number of participants spread over several cities. Alternatively, mixed methods including interviews and surveys in a questionnaire format were also taken into account. Measuring social capital in terms of the level of trust, reciprocity, shared information/knowledge along with the strength of social networks by using Likert scale (1 to 5) could have

benefited the project. However, this would have limited comprehensive accounts of participants' experiences. Any social phenomenon under study must be acknowledged as a complex endeavour, which cannot be captured just in numbers, at least not when the aim is to have in-depth understanding of what may hinder or enhance successful outcomes. It would not have been possible to go into great depth on the role social networks/social capital may have in the pathways to independent living, and detect specific patterns that may emerge in the process (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998; Silverman, 2013; Schelbe et al., 2014). 'Understanding youth is always well served through biographical perspectives', stressed Roberts (2009, p. 12). A qualitative approach in studying young adults had been selected, with the aim to stay in line with the study's analysis by giving participants a sense of engagement (e.g. Bryman, 2012) and to give voice to the young adults. Earlier, it was discussed how participants appreciated sharing detailed information very likely as a result of feeling in control of their own story. Dima and Skehill (2011) who used mixed methods in studying young adults in Romania underlined that the "qualitative component of the research was driven by the belief that, if we want to understand care leaving and make a difference in care leavers' life, it is their voice that should be heard first" (p. 2533).

Interviews as the most common form of gathering data may be linked with the ability to capture a minority group's status in society, coping strategies, and thought processes along with choices that may influence one's achievements (Briggs, 1986). It is a method geared to evoke comprehensive accounts of life after care experiences. This qualitative methodology recognizes not just the vulnerability this social group holds in society but also points out the agency, experiences, autonomy and capabilities of the targeted group (Barter and Reynold, 2004; Ward, Calers and

Matsaganis, 2006; Rutter, 2012; Rees and Pithouse, 2015). Interviews are frequently used for research concerning vulnerable groups so as to give a voice to the 'voiceless' in policy, legislation and in practice (Noble-Carr, et al., 2014; Schelbe et al., 2014). In contrast to prior research, where focus concentrates either on youth exceeding all expectations or on those so called 'Strugglers', here I aimed also at locating the 'missing middle', or in Stein's idenitification, the 'Survivors' of which little is known (Duncalf, 2010; Roberts, 2011; Roberts and MacDonald, 2013; Woodman, 2013). It it worth pointing out that the 'missing middle' in youth studies are not 'Survivors' as in Stein's sense (Roberts, 2011). However in this research, 'missing middle' represents the 'Survivors'. The quote below reflects well on the need to study young adults from a broader context in order to gather a deeper understanding of their journeys (Stein, 2012).

> "Young people's 'voices' are increasingly incorporated into policy processes, but it is often the perspectives of those deemed resilient according to policy definitions – successful, high achieving and entrepreneurial – who are invited to inform decisions and act as role models for their 'hard to reach' peers" (Bottrell and Armstrong, 2012, p. 248).

When speaking of those with a care background, interviews move beyond descriptive accounts of experiences of youth's navigation of life after care (Stein, 2005; Anghel and Dima, 2008). Although there is the debate that interviews "get at what people say, however sincerely, rather than what they do" (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 15), the participants' stories in this study, concerning the choices and actions made, especifically via vignettes, shed more light on the processes involved in shifting from one status to another. I showed clear interest in finding out how jobs were

accessed, a place to 'crash' and eventually coming to rent their own -- basically how they were able 'to work their way up', where this occurred.

Various methods of gathering data were viewed to stimulate and keep participants interested, and to confirm and/or test findings against one another for stronger results (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998; Krueger and Casey, 2000; Giddens, 2007). My decision to have the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, with scenarios, conducted in a conversational manner was to minimize tension and/or intimidation that could have come with being interviewed. Focusing on particiapants' freely expressed opinions and experiences in their own words was considered critical to achieving the objective of the research (Davies, 2007; Singer, Berzin and Hokanson, 2013). In the semi-structured interviews, participants were only guided if no new information came out to avoid incorporating repeated statements (King, 2004; Kidd and Davidson, 2007). Some questions evolved based on the participant's strong emphasis, such as identity. Because young people had a tendency to speak in general terms, avoiding yes/no questions was critical. Even when I started - 'What did you do once you graduated from Uni?' or 'once you left care?' participants responded: 'Well I moved, found a job and now I am here' (female 24, employed); or 'Went into military' (male 21, employed). Therefore, my approach changed to more direct and practical questions: 'What was it like for you when you got out?' 'What did you do?' 'Who are those 'people' you keep on mentioning?' 'So, why was she the only person with whom you shared that you are from care?' Finally, it was necessary for me at times to share some of my personal experiences, which indeed encouraged them to tell their stories. Open-ended questions allowed participants the flexibility to touch on matters important to them (identity, confidence, empowerment, maturity, gender issues, housing, lack of

support, discrimination). This was an essential strategy to obtain insight into life after care experiences from one of the "hardest populations to study" (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 1212). Building a rapport with participants, and systematic careful selection of instruments for gathering data was set to have individuals open up with more ease. As a researcher, I "want people to tell their story" (Davies, 2007, p. 37).

In retrospect, however, use of interviews in this research presented a few drawbacks requiring lengthy, meticulous work to extract the best information from the data gathered. Inconsistency in the information given by the interviewees was one of the disadvantages. The interview provided a reliability check of their examples of events when information seemed contradictory. A specific example can be drawn from a couple in Bucharest who were living in a shed with almost no roof, a bed tilted on one side: 'We are doing okay I say' (with a smile on his face). There was also a high tendency to deviate from the main topic being discussed. This required more work on the part of the researcher, to carefully guide the conversation back 'on track'. For a few in England and Romania, interview duration exceeded two hours. Another problem was the omitting of key information. Often, I had to pick key words/phrases essential to getting full answers to the research question. For example, in order to obtain further details about 'close friends'; 'social networks'; 'circle of friends'; 'I did it', I had to use such connecting phrases as 'Going back to your first job…'; 'You mentioned earlier'; 'I noticed that you repeated much about your close friends…'; 'Tell me more how you got the first job', or in other cases was needed to ask practical questions like, 'How did you find this place to live?' As Miller and Dingwall (1997) stressed, the performance of a respondent rests on the interviewer's ability to identify clearly the topic to be talked about and what information counted as relevant.

The use of vignettes was considered advantageous as participants felt less intimidated when given a sense of control in how the information is given, while maintaining the privacy of their own life experiences (Kendrick, Steckley and Lerpiniere, 2008). O'Dell and others (2012), referencing MacAuley (1996), support the idea that this technique provides an 'insider' perspective on foster care. Viewed as a participatory technique, 'scenarios' (aka vignettes) place participants within a certain contextual and situational framework, from which coping strategies are revealed (Blodgett et al., 2011; O'Dell et al., 2012). Yet inclusion of such a technique expanded into much more. Increased interaction through the use of such a tool may have to do with the sense of engagement, empowerment, recognition of the participants' knowledge and experience where the researcher was in the position of learning and understanding from their side (Blodgett et al., 2011). With scenarios, it was possible to detect how youth selected certain people for sharing personal information. It was via vignettes that they were more specific 'with my close friends I speak about personal stuff;' 'only to my closest friend I would ask for money;' while until then it was more general 'I have good people around,' from which further topics developed such as the meaning of close friends. Through scenarios, the researcher had a subtle way of identifying the activity level of social networks/social capital in their lives in light of the concept's core characteristics, trust, sense of connectedness, and reciprocity (Payne, 2012).

A key factor of successful qualitative research can relate additionally to common characteristics shared by the researcher with the researched, referring to age, gender, background, and social status (Davies, 2007; Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Bryman, 2012). The respondents' openness to participate may have to do with the fact that we had similar experiences (as I too experienced care), and that we were

nearly the same age, so there was a level of connectedness. For example, when I asked my interviewees about their sense of being out in the world, quite a few started the response with 'you know' 'you probably been through the same stuff.' One person in particular told me that, 'You are lucky, except for my partner no one knows about my personal issues. I am a very private person. If you were someone else, I would not be discussing this kind of stuff with you right now' (male, 28 employed). Another advantage has to do with the relevance of the topic presented which was of the interviewees' interest. Using knowledge acquired from the literature review to develop questions and vignettes, my own personal experience relevant to the participants encouraged them to openly discuss their life events while in- and after care. Holding this advantage also allowed me to reflect back and clarify what the respondents had said (Kidd and Davidson, 2007). As with any research 'bringing in an insider perspective' can have its drawbacks. The fact that I experienced care meant that it could have been easy to impose my own views on their perceived life experiences in care or transitioning from care. Another disadvantage might have to do with how this shaped interactions. Care leavers shared more emotions in the course of the interview. The risk here was to not allow the interview to turn into a therapeutic session.

4.4.1. Data Collection

The three forms that needed to be signed by each participant included participation information sheet, basic demographic sheet and an agreement form. These documents were provided at the meeting point although five upon their request received copies of the forms prior to our meeting. Face to face contact

assured that the participants who agreed to move forward felt at ease, clearly understood what the research entailed, and that any further questions were answered. There were a few respondents (five: two from England, and three from Romania) who asked for clarification specifically on the words 'support' and 'social networks' to which I replied that 'support' is based on what they think that is. 'So you mean my friends, family if they helped me with money, and stuff like that?' 'Well, to have people to help me when needed?' For clarification purposes I responded: 'Yes, I mean the friends and people you know, whether you were helped with money, sleeping over, food, simply having someone to talk to, get advice, find out about a job for example.' Once such terms were made clear to the participants, I referred to the agreement document that stated clearly guaranteed anonymity as well as that participation is voluntary in this research.

The participants' basic demographic data included, age, gender, level of education, employment status (e.g. full time/part time employed, unemployed), type of placement, number of placements experienced, age of entering and leaving care. It further indicated whether or not young people were in contact with family expressed by 'yes' 'sometimes' or 'no' to gauge frequency of contact, along with past and current city of residence to have a sense of their geographical mobility. Afterwards, the young adults were asked questions related to post care experiences, focusing on three main subject areas: 1) leaving care, 2) social networks/social capital, and 3) present time – outcomes (employment, housing, managing living expenses, life after care in general). Questions addressed to professionals covered a wider range of topics. The professionals were asked about possible barriers to socio-professional integration and programs available to prepare youth for independent living. They were further asked to share their experiences in working with this group in institutional specific

settings, and measures considered from their point of view to increase positive outcomes at adulthood. Another topic covered was the possible impact, positive or negative, networks can have on young adults. Appendix III, page 289, provides the specific guiding questions addressed to the young adults and professionals.

Participants were interviewed at locations and times in accordance with their wishes so as to provide a sense of control and instill feelings of confidence and relaxation. It is known that the location for interviews may enhance or inhibit a positive mood (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). The interviews took place in informal settings. For the English group, coffee shops were used with a few exceptions. The young mother preferred to have the interview at home while four chose office settings. Most participants from Romania were interviewed in the park, over a coffee or tea. However, four of them chose to be interviewed at their own places. The professionals, however, all preferred an office to hold the interview. My dress code varied according to the type of interview. For example, I dressed more formally with the professionals whereas with a young care leaver I dressed casually so that no sort of power-relationship was suggested, directly or indirectly (McDowell, 1997).

After setting up my digital recorder, and a notebook with the guiding questions, I began carrying conversations with the young participants about current situations, and occupations. The starting process of the interviews with the professionals was more straightforward, usually after exchanging information on what we do professionally. Once the conversations with the youth were flowing, I gradually introduced the interview questions. In a majority of cases, I started the interview with one of the two questions: 'What was it like when you left care?' or 'For how long have you been out of care?' As these questions were more open-ended in

nature, the participants tended to touch upon key areas of the research interest: on employment, housing, education, networking, participation, the meaning of support and encouragement. I then elaborated on the above key aspects of life. Once I was more familiar with their personal stories, I prompted the vignettes in accordance with each participant's focused topic. For example, the young people communicated on the importance of 'having someone there for you,' or 'running out of money to buy food.' Examples of scenarios included both positive and negative situations, as I did not want to insinuate that this particular group is expected to deal only with challenges. One positive scenario was to '*Imagine you applied for a job that you really wanted, but previously you applied for another one. You like the first one, but it pays little while the other that pays more, is further away from home (walk like 30 minutes let's say). What would you do?'* A negative example was in connection to, '*Imagine you are in desperate need of 20Pounds. What would you do?* 'It is funny you say that, because just last week a friend asked me for about 20Pounds to buy some food' (23 female, student part-time employed London). Another good example of how my technique worked is with a foster carer. Speaking a lot about placements, I suggested a case scenario in which a young person under her care aged 18 wanted to continue education. She replied that actually 'it is up to me to decide,' that the 'child has no say in this.' It is worth pointing out that vignettes were used less with professionals as the questions were more technical in nature. They did not touch on personal sensitive matters as much as did the young adults. To tease out more information, I continued with more questions. I always made sure that I addressed the guiding questions written on my notebook. If the questions were not understood, or needed more depth, vignettes made that possible. Vignettes stimulated discussion, the participants turning to their own lived experiences. For detailed accounts of the vignettes, please see attached under Appendix IV, page 291.

4.5. Data Analysis

Raw data including field notes, interview questions, responses and scenarios were digitally recorded and transcribed to Word documents. After the initial transcribing of data, the Romanian interviews were translated into English by the researcher. The interviews were looked at individually. As part of the process of resolving data into its constituent components to reveal characteristics, and patterns, the interviews were taken apart and rearranged to put relevant information together. The data were broken into chunks of information to detect patterns that further allowed color-coding the data (Seale, 1999). The technique of colour coding highlighted the frequency of such concepts as 'trust'; 'mature'; 'know how to behave'; 'confidence'; 'small things'; 'I did it'; 'prove them wrong'; 'knowing that support is there'; 'involving', and looked at the contexts in which they had been used. Coding contributed to the identification of key themes, while considering changes of phrases, language use, similarities and differences (Egdell and McQuaid, 2016). Because the nature of gathering data was conversational, the information was scattered (the responses combined present and past experiences). Therefore, it was necessary to reorganize the information based on the subject question that appeared to be answered at individual interviews. Then followed cross-comparison of interview sets to see any emerging patterns (professionals and young people, young people from Romania and England, and comparing samples altogether cross nationally) (Silverman, 2013).

Thematic analysis involved such processes as sorting data based on emergent themes, description of patterns across the gathered qualitative data, and interpretation to give significance to data analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Braun

and Clarke, 2006). The methodology is inductive in approach since the data acquired from the participant responses dictated the analysis. This bears similarity to grounded theory. For example, the theme 'involving care leavers,' highly cross-matched across the professional and youth samples from both nations. This information revealed wider issues existent within the system that appear to overlook the paramount role of fulfilling emotional/ advice type of support, in addition to exclusion of youth in taking part in matters concerning their lives (Southwell and Fraser, 2010). Failure to involve care leavers in itself has further led to institutional constraints specifically possibilities for youth to form and/or maintain social relations (Ridge and Millar, 2000; Sala-Roca et al., 2012; Gibbons and Foster, 2014).

One of the benefits of the qualitative approach was the ability to identify possible relationships between themes that were found when comparing data as well as examine differences among individuals. This avoided the exclusion of results that could have defined critical areas for further research (John and Johnson, 2000). For example, for the Romanian group, development of social capital was often through early engagement in household work for the locals; whereas for the English sample, it was through more formal channels, such as the volunteer sector or organized activities through social services. Yet for both groups, early engagement with the community improved the acquisition of capital as well as a sense of belonging and self-worth. The theoretical framework surrounding young people's pathways to independence in relation to social capital could only be captured and understood through a thematic analysis approach. Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that thematic analysis 'might be a particularly useful method when investigating an area with participants whose views on the topic are not known' (p. 78). As in other research with a similar goal, to *give voice* to the young people in care, participants' quotes and

stories throughout chapters 5, 6, and 7 were the basis of contextualising and understanding the use of social capital and management of life after care. Finally, relating findings back to the relevant literature was critical to highlighting the study's contributions (Tuckett, 2005; Bryman, 2008; Noble-Carr et al., 2014). Data collection acquired through different instruments (vignettes, semi-structured and open-ended questions) allowed the possibility of triangulation, a method used within qualitative research studies to give weight to the gathered data (Bryman, 1998; Anghel, 2010). Bryman (1998 in quoting Webb, 1996) "Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced. The most persuasive evidence comes through a triangulation of measurement processes" (p. 3).

In regard to the analysis of data, there was no use of software systems such as NVIVO; instead, manual analysis was done. There is an argument that manual analysis may not fully cover the results (Webb, 1999). This applies to large data sets, which was not the case here with a total number of 58 participants. Other concerns frequently raised regard time and speed (Lewando-Hundt et al., 1997; Webb, 1999; John and Johnson, 2000). These concerns were undeniable since structuring data, exploring patterns, and disclosing relationships between/within categories required meticulous work. In this respect, it took much longer than would have happened otherwise. However, with computer-based analysis, there was the fear of omitting data that I personally believed to be relevant to my research question. With manual analysis, I felt more in control and connected to keeping alive the data critical to providing insight into key elements. This empirical research was not set to capture volume but depth and richness of the data, and its 'mechanisation' would have hindered such accomplishment (John and Johnson, 2000). Richards and Richards

(1994) affirmed that "the task of theory discovery remains for the human researchers; the questions are theirs, the combinations of categories specified by them" (p. 170). It requires interpretation and theoretical perspectives that cannot be detected otherwise (Webb, 1999).

4.5.1. Limitations

This research did not consider ethnicity or gender as primary social factors for analyzing data. I was aware that the discussions could have developed around those factors as to how youth anticipated the process of transition to adulthood along with the types of networks accessed. However, time 'comes into play' as well. With only two hours at our disposal, it would have become difficult to cover gender, and ethnicity at the length that they deserve, particularly without diluting serious attention on the chosen aspects of my research. Finally, the objective of this research was at stake since the interviews already covered so many variables. The aim of this research was to give an overall coherent conceptualization of social capital utilization and its interplaying role in the life of youth after care. Instead I gave them the liberty to talk on matters that appeared importat to them. It has been further considered that such factors like gender are far more complex than this research could encompass. In addition, the relatively small sample of a total of 58 participants is not fully representative of young people with a care background or of professionals who participated in this research. The small number and qualitative approach, cannot offer a clear definition and explanation of youth outcomes in Romania or England. Social capital, which is contextual, was one among other factors to be examined when attempting to understand what contributes to different outcomes in young adults.

Finally, the present study investigated only two laws from Romania and England specifically designed for youth in preparation for leaving. Staying Put and Staying Close in England have been mentioned to show the country's continuous interest in contrast to Romania in developing strateiges to assist youth at this stage. However, no detailed analysis has been done on the above named policies. Resilience and identity represent two different yet connecting concepts. In this research it has been illustrated how achieved sense of identity can contribute to increased resilience. Furthermore, the empirical data showcased more specifically a close onnection of social networks and social capital with resilience. However, such concepts are contextual and complex; therefore, analysis need to be given at a greater scale.

4.6. Ethics concerning this research proposal

The relationship of the researcher with the respondents was designed to be collaborative based on interactive communication. The approach to communication was informal to empower the target groups. It aimed at constructing a relationship in which the participants gained a sense that their voices are heard. The research project ethics were based on the Economic and Social Research Council principles, and required approval by the Ethics Committee of University of Kent. A cover letter explained the study, which assured confidentiality and anonymity of respondents. The participants were informed about existent research on care leavers as well as on how this proposed research project might be beneficial. They were told that the interview questions and vignettes capture personal experiences from the first day of leaving care to present date. There was the possibility of discomfort or distress, especially for those who have had very rough experiences. Some respondents were

still going through difficulties and hence did not want to share past experiences or felt ashamed of the situation they were in when interviewed. My solution to these challenges then was to: 1) assure anonymity and confidentiality of information; 2) acknowledge that participation is voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any point, or simply refuse to respond to any of the questions; 3) suggest a convenient place that would allow them to be comfortable: coffee shops, parks, malls usually left for them to choose; 4) communicate with patience and interest, and inform them that we can stop and reschedule another meeting – thus creating a greater level of trust; 5) assure participants that the local agency, through which I was able to reach some of them, was not involved in the research or being provided any of the information received. The emotional state of the participants was strongly considered, by allowing them to stop, or change the subject when sensitive matters were triggered during the interview (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). In the above sub-section, 4.3., there is detailed information on the strategies used to minimize distress or discomfort of participants (dress code, communication style) including explanation on specific instruments used for gathering data like vignettes. In some instances I respected young people's wish to not record some of the life stories shared. On this ground, the unrecorded data was not included in this research.

Concluding points

Use of a qualitative approach as a methodological base in capturing young people's pathways to independence in relation to social capital/social networks was considered to contribute to solidifying an empirical understanding of youth post-care experiences (Ridge, and Millar, 2000). In responding to the scarcity of sociological studies on social capital/social network utilization among vulnerable young

populations immediately after care, this study contributes to bridging the gap in this domain. As White (2009) stated, "To be scientific is to accept that the practice of asking questions builds on previous research or answers other questions and is therefore capable of contributing to an accumulation of what we call knowledge" (p. 265). Vignettes along with interviews under the form semi-structured questions have previously contributed to conceptualizing social capital in youth transitioning from dependent to independent status (Roberts, 2011; Ungar, 2012). The use of vignettes as an experiential tool has proven to be effective in reaching deep into young people's lives. As shall be seen in the next three chapters, practical questions relevant to their life experiences have encouraged care leaver participation at a level of providing multidimensional insight into their lives, including: the role of social ties/social networks in their lives, the process of getting from one stage to another, and past experiences that contributed to revealing aspects of service delivery in the welfare system.

Chapter 5

Child Protection System and unequal provision of services to looked-after youth

This chapter is important in relation to the research question for the experiences revealed while under the care particularly in accessing resources made a substantial difference in the young people' navigation after or transitioning from care. It features the types of networks they were exposed to while under the local authority as well as the basis in which they were offered opportunities for continuing education/training. In line with the wider literature, youth in care as well as those at the stage of preparing to leave care were found to experience differences of treatment within the welfare system. According to respondents in this study, accessing information, making use of the available resources as well as who benefits from lengthened stay beyond the age of 18 or 21 were a few examples shared by the young people. This first empirical chapter discloses the functioning of the Child Protection System in terms of service delivery. Young people referred in their interviews and vignettes as 'I was lucky that I had a good social worker'; 'I was lucky; my social worker really cared about the children. She is the one that told me early on to know my rights.' For the young population in England, it meant that care and opportunities were distributed based on social workers in charge of their cases. For the Romanian group, there was much inconsistency and unpredictability not in terms of provision of services only but of support, engagement in their lives either in accessing further education or in employment integration. To be more precise, 80% of the total group realized the difference it had made or would have made being in close contact with

someone in the system making it possible to receive extended support, being aware of programs they were entitled to, or be encouraged to pursue higher education. Only some in England had staff speaking on their behalf (3), which reflects a similar relational effect that had been located previously by Simon (2008).

The content of the chapter is set first to look at various aspects when speaking of differences of treatment concerning education, continuing or returning to education as stipulated in the current laws, Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, and the Romanian Law 272/2004 art. 51. An association has been found between made-available resources and exhibition of behaviors of the young adults. It is further analyzed the 'rushing' pace in which transition has been found to occur for this population. The second section, 5.2., *Assisting youth through emotional/advice type of support*, illustrates the pivotal role of emotional support under the form of encouragement, understanding and respect as strongly expressed amongst young people and professionals in this study. Consistent with prior studies as well as policy initiatives covered in the literature review such support was viewed as assisting young people to successfully transition to adulthood (Wade and Dixon, 2006; Atkinson, 2008; Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010; Pinkerton, 2011; Stein, 2012; Chipea, Marc and Osvat, 2014; Gibbons and Foster, 2014; Greeson et al., 2014; Egdell and McQuaid, 2016). Much of this chapter will be dedicated to the theme 'knowing how to behave' that emerged as important among the respondents, although to a greater extent in Romania. Based on one 'knowing how to behave' the type of information and resources varied across the youth samples while under the care or preparing to depart care. In this context, unequal distribution of capital experienced by the young people links with Bourdieu's theoretical perspective. By showcasing past experiences, this chapter shows how care leavers are exposed to

disadvantage early in in their lives (inconsistency, lack of social capital in line with Coleman's work, that is lack of interest in the child's welfare, low expectations on educational achievements) making them dependent on their networks at a higher level than their peers for socio-professional integration. The functioning of the system has proven to impair young people's ability to network, and be aware of local resources, a similar point addressed previously by Gibbons and Foster (2014). In this instance, child protection as a structural force instead of generating capital appears to have contributed to its limitation. According to Snow and Mann-Feder (2013) "Child and youth care practitioners have this brokerage role through creating opportunities for young people to have exposure to diverse networks" (p. 86-87).

5.1. Differences in treatment: access to/denial of continuing education

According to Jackson and Cameron (2012), educational support is one of the duties of professionals and foster caregivers. Yet the reality for the youth respondents shows that their expectations, desires and future plans do not correlate largely with professionals' sense of a child's plan. According to young people's testimonies, 'a care leaver hears "you are going to be a hairdresser at best." So how encouraging is that?' There was a common perception that 'we are stigmatized' and 'they think you are stupid' with constant use of phrases such as 'they do not want us to do well'; 'our needs are overlooked in the system and then they wonder why we fail'. Consistently, care leavers' limited reliable and strong social capital is exhibited via early encouragement of vocational type of education believed to access immediate employment, which has been linked to affect post-care life attainment (Anghel and Dima, 2008; Jackson and Cameron, 2012; Berzin, Singer and Hokanson, 2014; Sanders

and Munford, 2014). Looking specifically at Romania, it becomes apparent from the young adults' biographies that some of the professionals present barriers to youth educational attainment. Low expectations of academic achievement appear to have influenced professionals' acts of delivering services.

> *'Nobody thought I can do this. When I told them that I passed my Bacalaureat, they all acted surprized. Oh just to see their faces when I told them that I am going to go to College… But hey, I motivated myself to prove them wrong. Actually that is not true, to prove to myself and to prove them wrong. And I did it'* (male 26, informal employment Vaslui).

Making a broader reference to lack of encouragement, specifically touching on being denied further education, the following quote reveals how care leavers can be deterred from pursuing interests that could actually benefit them in the long-term. The young woman below wished to go to university, and was sure that she would make it 'as I was one of the best in my class.' She did not have other plans but was looking 'forward to going to university'. Right after finishing high school, however, things have changed. For this participant after high school the support under the state was terminated.

> *'I had the chance to be at a good Uni, but how could they allow a kid from an institution be smarter than them, be more educated? So I was kicked out right after I took my Baccalaureate with a grade over 8'* (female 22, informal employment Vaslui).

As a result, for quite a few years she struggled to come to terms with the idea that she could not go to university, which affected her ability to look for work, and she succumbed to depression. The only place she could go was to see her mother abroad.

She stayed there for a while, but decided to return to the country to be closer to her sister. Unable to find contractual employment, she is actively engaged in the black market. Although experiences may differ within a cultural context when looking at both Romania and England, unequal distribution of services was prevalent across respondents. Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 provide flexibility to return to education; however, in practice different rules apply. The English group reveals similar experiences but differing in terms of the information given to the young adults.

> *'Today I am not in a really good mood. I was about to quit the apprenticeship I was accepted to. I really want to be a chef, and doing this apprenticeship is what I need. But you see, things turned around today. They decided to no longer support me, so how am I supposed to do this? I mean on my own I cannot cover my expenses and stuff. This thing is just staying in my way from doing what I want. I do not get it, in my file it said they will support me until I am 21, and now it all changed. Cuz in a way you are like my parents, and if you cannot guarantee me support why did you take care of me in the first place'* (male 19, unemployed London).

Additionally, the quote further suggests that this group experiences inconsistent support. While some were denied or discouraged from pursuing their interests, others considered themselves 'lucky'. There are exceptional cases that were found both in Romania and England. In Romania two individuals received support far beyond their degree level or age.

> *'I did university for the second time because the first time I entered with taxes, I did not finish it, so I had a break of 2 years and then I returned. The system kept me, an exception, because I was a good kid, and they saw potential and that it is worth*

investing in me. In those two years I worked in the black market found on the net and I gathered enough money then' (male 25, employed Bucharest).

Looking at the English sample, there are two returnees to education: one from London and the other from Maidstone. The latter was granted support for an apprenticeship, a program from which the previous person was denied support in London. Both of them were granted full support, which is in accordance with the current Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 that allows return education/training up to the age of 25.

'My social worker and my caseworker told me about the youth worker apprenticeship, that I could do that. I was so nervous on the day of the interview, I did not eat all day. But I got in and now I can't wait to start the program' (male 21, apprenticeship Maidstone).

For a 25-year-old student, in the second year of university, her return to education was made possible via the social services:

'Now we can do it up to the age of 25. So they will support me financially until I finish my degree. So I went back to college and took extra courses for maths and English. The social services took me back in. Afterwards I decided to go to university (female 25, employed/student London).

There are cases of the 'good social worker' who indeed helped and believed in the children and appear to have had a positive effect on them. Consistent with evidence on networks/social capital provided in the earlier chapters, positive

relationships built on trust, and support derived from such networks meant a sense of security. In such cases the child benefitted from emotional and material support.

> *'I never had any problems. I can say that I had a really good social worker. We still keep in touch today. She was there for me; she was the kind of person that really cared about children, going the extra mile, you know? She helped me a lot. And to be honest I do not know where I would be now if it was not for her'* (male 28, employed Northern England).

In Romania, if it was not one of the internal staff, there was sometimes a teacher who saw potential and gave him/her a vision of what he/she could do in the future. This vision of the future appears to have stuck with many of the participants, influencing their actions, and over time constructively building their efforts to reach that goal (see also France, Bottrell and Huddon, 2013).

> *'I had some good people in my life. I was really getting along with my teacher. She encouraged me to be a good kid, to not get into trouble. She believed in me saying that I could go to university; I could do so much with my life. That really stuck with me'* (male 26, employed Bucharest).

However, the 'cut off' of support altogether either in relation to extended stay, in some cases leaving care earlier than 18 years of age, or for continuing education, has been largely associated with behavior. When the groups were asked, 'Why is it that you believe support ended, I mean all of a sudden? Why do you think they did not let you continue? Around 70% of these young adults reported unequal treatment to be attributed to behaviors exhibited while in care. One particular young woman reflected well the stories of others.

'If you have a big mouth, then you become a target; they will get rid of you. They wait for you to turn 18, and you are out' (female 22, informal employment Vaslui).

Four young adults from England who were also denied further support declared similar experiences.

'I am a strong headed person, so I always spoke my mind. But that was seen as a troubled kid, difficult to be handled…' (male 28, employed Northern England).

It can be further interpreted that such perceptions or 'labeling' further constructed a certain identity in young people attached to being a person under the state care. 'I was not listening, so they labeled me as a bad kid' (female, 22 employed/student London). According to Ludusan (2007) such types of behaviors make it hard for professionals to develop a parental role with them. Yet, how professionals respond to such behaviors affect the youth's 'social life' (p. 401). Whether in care or in the process of transitioning, young people access resources based on their behavior. The consequences are numerous where the young person is likely subjected to 'rough' after-care experiences: prolonged state of homelessness, vulnerability to exploitation, subject to mental illness among others.

Professionals also painted a clear picture when covering the topic of young people who exit the care system. They, like the young people, made reference to behavior. Regularly the following phrases were used, 'of giving up easily on the young people' illustrated via low level of commitment, 'easily lose interest in helping the child'; 'if he does not listen, they create resentment'; 'push the child away.' Such

behaviors depict professionals' attitudes towards work, as well as their relationship with a child.

One professional in Romania who formerly worked in the child protection system, and is currently a supervisor for children leaving care at a local NGO in the county of Sibiu, illustrates the attitudes generally held by professionals regarding a certain type of youth.

> *'And there is this aspect of work ethics. Why should you support this young man who steals, speaks vulgarly, who beats, why? He does not deserve it. The specialists in Romania are not capable yet of making a difference between personal and professional. If a young person comes and speaks to a professional with an aggressive language, professionals take it personally, and take it as a personal offence, very deeply, does not go over it and starts to treat that young person differently'* (female, professional Sibiu).

In London, the following quote depicts quite a similar view to Romania when it comes to professionals' response to young people's outspoken behaviors.

> *'There have been in local authorities and placement officers where a young person misbehaves, reject the social workers take such behaviors personally, and begin to resent the child, shut the child down. Without looking at the child needs, and what causes certain behaviors, they would say fine, the hostel is for you, you are old enough to make decisions so off you go. As professionals you are not supposed to go along side the negativity, instead see what the problem is and show them that actually we are on your side. They rely on the adults to see them, to really see them, to tell them we see you, we see what is going on and what can we do to help you'* (male, professional London).

From a social capital perspective specifically on accessing resources young adults in the Child Protection System, both in Romania and England, experience at first hand the effect institutional structures combined with its operationalisation have on their lives. Here, it may be inferred then that professionals within the system have the capacity to shape the manner in which services are delivered to individuals under their care. Additionally, support is 'optional' based on the relationship the child has with the state, which affirms Dima's (Dima, 2013) argument, that appears to be applicable not only in Romania but also in England. The evidence above may further show hidden forms of conditionality surrounding provision of support offered to the young populations. Slight differences do emerge in that whereas in England unequal distribution of services seemingly came across to be related to the 'system,' in Romania emphasis was more culturally based. In England there was a higher inclination towards offering support based on rights while in Romania the young person was more regarded as deserving, remembering that the 'child was always listening' 'hard working' (male, professional Bucharest). The professionals' role, as part of their paid responsibility, is meant to be different: in responding to the needs of the child and maintaining a line between professional responsibility and personal influences. To clarify, accessing its resources appear to be highly dependent upon one's elicited actions and behaviors. Bourdieu spoke clearly in his social capital theory on the need for society members to exhibit behaviors similar to the mid-upper class to expand their set of accessible resources. As Ungar's (2012) statement clearly explains "the ability to navigate to resources is based on the preference of those in power" (p. 23). As the example below will show, some of the young people came to understand the necessity of adapting behavior acceptable to those 'in power.' This may represent a strategy learned to cope with challenges as well as to use for developing their own set of networks once out. For care alumni in Romania 'knowing

how to behave' has become extremely important, only so realizing that they can make use of the system's resources. The young man in the following quote, for example, had two more months left at the time of the interview. He was in the position where he had nowhere to go, needed to look for employment, and was aware that he needed support from the system for the time being 'at least at the beginning.'

> *'I am sure if I mind my own business, quarrel with no one, I will stay here longer. They will let me stay here with no problem until I can find something'* (male 21, employed Vaslui).

Differences of treatment in various opportunities afforded to some young people may have also to do with the child's ability to 'play smart' manifested in their way of communicating and approaching issues concerning their needs. Professionals from England touched on this topic phrasing that: 'They are smarter now; they have learned the game' (male, professional Maidstone). They 'see what happens with their colleagues', and 'learned to play smart' (male, manager social worker London).

Further elaborating on the 'knowing how to behave' theme while under the care of the state, from England and Romania, it emerged that youth had to fight for their needs. Those usually involved the possibility to go out, having access to internet and buying things like shoes and clothing. Whilst in care, other characteristics were mentioned such as 'to act silly to the extreme' to get attention, or not understanding the purposes behind decisions taken on their behalf. As a result, many had manifested aggressive reactions, shouting at or arguing with professionals. Nevertheless, at the age of leaving care, young adults started to understand that such behaviors are not accepted nor needed in the wider society. Feeling more in control of their lives 'now

out of the system,' the youth participants indicated that they understood that 'mingling' with others, mostly outside the system, adjustment of behaviors could be learned. Much focus was on showing responsibility, and ability to interact. Furthermore, the youth from Romania focused on showing behavioral adjustment in accordance with the wider society measured by discipline, having good values (a family, hard worker and being sincere, respectful and friendly) and politeness. In England quite a few discussed about 'knowing how to approach a situation from an adult position' (male 24, employed London).

5.1.1. Professionals shape the application of policies

The evidence provided thus far illustrates uneven and inconsistent access to the system's resources. It further depicted the ability of authorities to shape the application of laws/policies, a similar point already brought up by Chipea, Marc, and Osvat in Romania (2014). Within the literature, scholars appear to hold to this perspective, that the system does not prioritize the creation of positive relationships between personnel and children within the social services due to its bureaucratic nature of functioning, 'more time for filling in papers and reporting progress' (Graham, 2006; Coyle and Pinkerton, 2012). However, the professionals and youth who took part in this research suggest that it is both. For example, according to some professional interviewees the system's priorities are set to guard administrative procedures at a higher level than encouraging rapport building between the recipient of welfare state and the professional working in delivering that service. Looking at the experiences shared by professionals that focused more on the overall infrastructure and functioning of the system.

'There is a timeline. The social workers must, and I hear them, that they must finish this and that, and do their paper work, run out of time, and legally they are required to fulfil those tasks. They have to make sure legally that everything is covered. So the relationship aspect between the worker and the young person can be very distant and poor. That ability to receive emotional support and such is weakened' (female, professional London).

Others stated that it is not so much the bureaucratic functioning and 'box ticking' nature of the system as much as it is the professionals' level of commitment to provide the best care for children. One professional also from London adheres to the belief that quality of service is missing. Like many professionals from Romania, it is believed the professionals' dedication and commitment affect the way services are provided. Nonetheless, there is no easy way of gauging actual commitment - yet perception of it being lacking is important.

'The truth is that many carers and care professionals are in for the money, and I think this should be a vocation. But they should know why they chose this profession and be given training to understand what it involves, and so they can adopt the values of social work and make sure you stay true to those values' (male, manager social worker London).

Touching on the topic of payment, professionals in the system financially may be doing well. However, those working directly with young people do share similar feelings: namely that they often miss out in connecting with their social workers. One foster carer from England reflects the situation of other professionals found similarly in Romania.

'The financial support we have is good, but they have not offered me any assistance, someone else to assist me and I think it is because I am a strong person. But sometimes, you do need someone else to give you a hand. I have friends, and I rely on them. But they are not close enough; I would like to have someone local to pop-in, to talk over a coffee or something. They do not help you with that. They expect a lot from you. But I do have a regular social worker, my case-worker, but I see her very rarely. I ask other foster carers, and they do not even know who their social worker is' (female, foster carer Herne Bay).

Interestingly, youth participants' perspectives of the system overall displayed a rather balanced thought process. They gave a sense of understanding toward professionals having 'much on their plate,' or 'having a very demanding job.' What appeared to bother the young participants was the attitude, the way of communicating with them. It is a point that builds up to what has been declared earlier by professionals on the ability to influence the quality of care.

'I know that there isn't much they can do, it is the system, but I wish that they communicated with us differently. Listen this is not fair what is going on but we have no other choice. Instead they treated me like I was a fool. This is a good place for you. I am in the system; I am living it. I am not that stupid. If I as a child in care knew that a hostel is an inappropriate place for me, how could you as a professional did not see that?' (female 23, employed/student London).

A young man from SOS Villages in Sibiu/Romania provides a fair look at professionals involved in the system.

'The thing is you have some good people, but many you know forget they came to work for children. It is normal to come to work for you, but you have a responsibility toward a

child. Every job has its own responsibilities, and you have for a child, true the hardest responsibility' (male 22, employed Sibiu).

However, there were also young people who were still angry at the system, and who felt used, this being prevalent across individuals growing up in the Placement Centers (Romania) or foster families (England). Additionally, both Romanian and English youth articulated a feeling of being neglected. Over 50% of youth in Romania felt at the end rather abandoned. A young woman from Vaslui, the poorest county in Romania expressed:

'You know what I did not understand is the staff not helping a little, just a little the children in child protection, at least to prepare them. You know you have everything, hot water, food and then go to nothing, missing all that' (female 22, informal employment Vaslui).

One young person from England showed confusion regarding the selection of her foster families. She seemed particularly upset being placed with many other children in one family but not together with her sister. She further emphasized on the need to have had emotional needs dealt with as a result of past experiences in her own family.

'And they used to say that I needed a lot of emotional support. But then I do not understand why they put me in homes where there were six/seven other children. I would rather be with my sister. Lots of time there was chaos everywhere. I did enjoy being with other children, but from a psychological side of things in my files it does say that I should either be place with older children or no other children and that just did not happen' (female 27, PhD student Oxford).

5.1.2. The *rushing up* process to which young people must adapt

Aside from unequal distribution of services, and professionals' ability to shape policies, another connected issue has to do with this population's preparation for socio-professional integration practices. The way the programs are set up give a sense of *rushing up* the process and not necessarily looking at children's interests, overall state of mind and emotional being as stipulated in leaving-care related laws, of which will be discussed in the following section. In contrast to non-care peers, youth in care fairly early in their lives are implicitly told that the time to leave is approaching, emphasized in the shifting of responsibilities from school to pathway plans based on practical learning skills. The issue is heightened when the skills to be learned are surged in a short span of time (Hollingworth, 2011). In Romania after the 18th birthday, two years were generally offered to prepare while in England it has been found that similar preparatory procedures started before the age of 18.

Based on professionals' declarations, there is no time to internalize knowledge or competencies within usually a 2 year-span. The professional here spoke of how the local NGO in Sibiu is offering services, similar to what those in a family receive, for the early care leavers to increase chances for socio-professional integration.

> *'They do not have the chance for the development of abilities that are usually learned in the family. I mean practical stuff from opening a bank account, to protecting one's intimacy, sexual relationships, social relations in general to getting a job, networking and knowing how to behave in a public spaces or with friends. A child from a family does not have to think of that; he is at a stage to now expand his/her horizons, and figure*

things out. Here we provide them with instruments, information and guidance so that they can move further on their own (female, professional Sibiu).

The pace in which preparatory stages are set out contradicts thus professionals' views 'in time to be taught' or as Stein put it (2012) "such skills need time to be effective" (p. 59). The *rushing up* process (one way being exhibited through difference of treatment between individual youth members) identified from the data gathered suggest furthermore gaps in implementing the laws reviewed in this research that specifically address consideration of the child's well-being, as well as provision of guidance (see 5.2.1. section). Here may come the subject not necessarily on the length of time available to prepare youth but the quality of service offerred at this time. It seems these young adults are mostly taught to deal with immediate concerns. Rushing in Romania was projected on the aspect of cutting off opportunities. It is not the problem of moving early to transition to adulthood like in England, but simply terminating their support altogether once reaching the age of 18 for many young people. Even those in SOS Villages, before finishing their high school were encouraged to work summer terms and in the 12th grade have a part-time job, a new policy 'to help those in care integrate, and learn responsibilities that come with being an adult' (female 21, SOS employed Sibiu). Quite a few of them viewed this as a factor that distracted them from focusing on school. A female respondent from SOS who worked at a local bar shared,

'My generation had to start work as soon as we finished 11th grade during the summer vacation. And you continued for the rest of your last highschool year. For me it was too much, so I did not even finish highschool. I could not focus entirely on school, with bills, working and the rest… My colleagues today have their Banquet (a graduation event). I

should have had my Bacalaureat this year. There is no way of going back. It is too late for me' (female 19, SOS employed Sibiu).

The 'rushing' perspective is clearly illustrated in the example below to which many young people related in Romania.

'Exactly with one day before getting out of the system exactly then I found work, I was hired in the same day. I cannot say that it was a threat, a kind of threat. They told me that if I do not find work it is over, will be kicked out. Nothing will be paid for. So, I had no choice, I looked, looked in the newspapers, I found one, had the interview and with my CV in my hand just leaving been told that I am hired right on the spot. And I took whatever I found, I was desperate' (male 22, employed Sibiu).

As a result, his first job was at a pizzeria, where the salary was low and inconsistent, as well as poor working conditions with long working hours. He did mention the difficulty of having to 'stick with it' as the job meant the only proof that he was employed. Only after several of months was he able to change to the one he has now (with a large international company in manufacturing), one that he really likes and where he hopes for a promotion.

In England, the rushing up aspect did look different, in that transition phase occurred earlier in their lives, at 16-17 years of age (Stein, 2012). Youth seemed to be more affected in terms of experiencing homelessness, and school disruption at this young age. What added to the feeling of stress was also the location for the majority of them (10) who were placed in hostels or 'Bed and Breakfast,' during their preparatory stage in England. Furthermore, often the distance from their college resulted for some in giving up education.

'I have been struggling with higher skills because I moved out at 16 and I was in college already but because I moved far away from it I dropped out. I tried again, but then, I hung out with the wrong crowd, so I dropped out again. I was not serious, preferred to smoke, drink and do other things. And only then did I realize that I do not want to live like that. I had to get out, and I did' (female 25, employed London).

5.2. Assisting the youth through emotional/advice type of support

'Much attention is given to material needs, and too little on the importance of counselling with the youth. Support, emotional support, somehow to be taught to accept the fact that they experienced a form of abandonment, but that does not infringe upon their identity at all nor on their potential in life. This is what they do not know' (female professional, Sibiu/Romania).

From an institutional perspective (referring to a placement center) one young man shares his opinion on the effect the system can have on individuals growing up in care.

'The system generates and maintains a bad mentality, not working at the psyche and emotional state of children. It is important for the children's character formation, strong psyche, not be impulsive, won't integrate ever, not to be held back. I want to do something constructive with my time. They auto-stigmatize themselves and society encourages that. There is a needed for specialized staff on board for the long term to hold common ideas, generate positive experiences, both personal and intimate' (male 26, employed Bucharest).

In cross-analyzing the two nations, the significance of emotional support can be summarized as follows: encouragement, time to talk (about their problems); being heard, noticed, attention paid to what they say and to their needs, being given a sense of understanding and involving the young adults in matters concerning their lives. This highlights the issue of trust that was absent for the most part for the young people in their interaction with the welfare system (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010). This lack resulted in missing a sense of a reliable supportive system. Another implication relates to what being looked-after means (many being selective in forming their networks in terms of whom to trust, see chapter 6). In Romania, professionals expressed that the problem is in the lack of emotional/advice type of support as well as the support after care. Professionals' statements are reflected in young people seeking mentoring types of relationships, guidance when in interaction with various individuals. Since many of the participants spoke about 'support,' I was interested in finding out what exactly they meant when using it.

Researcher: *What exactly do you mean by support?*

Participant 1: *'There is no need to worry about food and shelter because you get that anyway, this is something they are supposed to guarantee. What we do not have is someone to guide us, to show us the way, to support us, encourage us. Yeah, this is what we really need' (female 23, employed Sibiu).*

Although views differ when looked at cross-nationally, in essence it appears to return to the argument that material support is an empty value without intangible type of support.

Participant 2: '*There are care leavers going to university, but how many of them actually go into postgraduate study? Because when not having the support there…. Even if you have a social worker that you can ring up and tell them I am having issues with housing, I do not have a job, what are the benefits am I entitled to? Anything like that, but they automatically think financially, they do not realize how important the other kind of support is*' (female 27, PhD student Oxford).

Touching on support presented an opportunity to gain an even deeper understanding of the concept and the context within which it was used. As a result, I was also interested in knowing what it means to them having that support.

Researcher: *Why is support important?*

Participant: '*To be able to take the right path, the kind of support not that it gives all on a plate, but guides you, shows you the things you can do, it is good there, not good here*' *(female 25, informal employment Vaslui).*

The young female participant echoes not only the needs of those formerly in care, but also what generally other care alumni are looking for and what they believed to have made a difference in their ability to make it on their own. Such features of support as guidance, awareness of the child's interest in order to guide him/her in the 'right path' do represent forms of social capital of which youth appear at large to miss while under the care. According to Stott (2012),

> "While skills training classes can provide them with knowledge competencies, many youth in care continue to lack the emotional, rational and social competencies to be able to act upon that knowledge" (p. 218).

The expectations young people had from the system are comparable to Sinclair et al's model (2005), which primarily focused on basic rights. In a summary format of Sinclair's and colleagues model, being heard, and involved in matters concerning their lives, feeling respected, receiving guidance, ability to access their files, were too the most pronounced rights expressed by the participants in this research. Yet those rights are clearly set forth in the current laws in Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, and Romania (Law 272/20040).

Looking deeper into the pre-required means to support care alumni for better outcomes at adulthood, a cultural difference resonates with the professional group from Romania. In the early stages of the interview, four professionals out of five had a tendency to blame the youth for their poor outcomes, usually starting off with this same phrase 'They simply just do not want to. They have no motivation whatsoever.' 'It is also their fault. Here they are given everything; they have everything, yet it is still not enough.' (Here referred to material needs, food, shelter, schooling, well dressed, 'the state guarantees them all that'). 'They are immature, do not go to school, do not care' (female, professional Vaslui). Another professional stated that 'They have no motivation. You have though some exceptions' (female, professional Bucharest); 'Important is for you to want, in order for me to help you' (female, professional Vaslui). Evidently professionals were aware of youth's deficiencies in achieving later stability that has been prevalent for years now even beyond the walls of the local authorities, yet it did not lead to service improvements (Campean, Constantin and

Mihalache, 2010). It is indeed a whole different perspective from the ones in England who kept addressing that children need more support from the state, not just material but emotional, guidance, understanding, and respect for children's views.

> *'We are here for them, and as they come in the center the rules and expectations are explained clearly. We want these kids to succeed, have a job, find a place to live, so we have here various programs to help them achieve that. I mean look around you cannot say that they are missing anything. All they have to do is want, be motivated to want something with their lives. Yet, the majority of them still fall between the cracks. Others they pity themselves, and then you have some others with no motivation. This center offers the best it can to help them integrate. You know if they really wanted to, they could do it. But they just do not want to'* (male, professional Bucharest).

It was not until the deepening of the discussion that professional interviewees demonstrated a rather similar position to those professionals in England, acknowledging that on the other side 'the way they are brought up has built in them a specific type of behavior that you see in many of the young people from care' (female, professional, Vaslui). A professional in one of the vignettes declared

> *'I remember when I worked there… At the placement center they were all mixed, children with disabilities (that varied in degree), children with no disabilities older and much younger. Programs that took place there, the regulations were the same for everyone; there was no distinction of age, needs or interests to put it that way'* (female, professional Bucharest).

The professional's view further indicates that support and guidance must be in accordance with a child's needs and age. Involving individuals, understanding

benefits of programs, education, training, exposure to various resources need to be internalized in individuals because actions and choices are shielded in accordance to their perceived benefits and knowledge, especially for groups whose opportunities presented are sketchy. Internalising benefits may dictate the level of motivation, likely to decrease the self-thought of 'being all on my own' that many times impairs one from higher achievement, commonly found with vulnerable groups like care leavers (Taylor, Baranowski and Sallis, 1994).

This involvement of youth is not concerning in the process to their pathway plan, necessarily, the right to participate in decision-making concerning their lives as stipulated in the UNCRC, art. 3 and 13, (included in the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and Romanian Law 272/2004), but simply the engagement in simple daily activities that contribute to the overall development and learning of a child.

> *'It is a human right to make their own decision, yes? It is a great distinction when you guide a child on what a semi-independent living is, prepare them, guide and advise 'there will be less staff, you are going to handle weekly money, etc. rather than being told what to do: now you are 18, and you should stay here, and off now'* (male, professional London).

In this quote he made specific reference to provision of guidance and advice as part of negotiating transition processes. The professional specifically turned to the Children Act of 1989 to strengthen his point in how far away the implementation of the law can be from its original aim in practice. The evidence relates to wider issues than daily activities addressed just previously.

'The Child Act 1989, clearly states that the reviewing officer should hear from the young person, since that time (accentuated on): what is your view, what do you want.... But there was something missing in translation' (male, professional London).

The following professional from Romania touches on the importance of being informed on what is to happen. Moreover, according to his view not involving the child on being asked what to do, and negotiating change with the child, incapacitates him/her to think, analyze, and have a sense of self.

'Announce in time on what is about to happen – part of the negotiation, of being prepared, allowing him to react, think, analyze, reflect. This is something that every child needs, not just those in the system' (male, professional Bucharest).

From the evidence gathered, there is an aim towards equipping individuals with the assets (inner and practical) that 'each young person needs to thrive' in order to evolve and sustain one-self, more the concept 'don't just give a man fish, teach a man to fish and you fed him a lifetime'. Further connecting the dots, professionals and young adults' responses highly cross-matched on the grounds of improving the transition processes, which was not expected at such a level considering the varied experiences in nature, professionals bringing much 'objectivity' into the matter whereas young adults were speaking from a personal perspective. '*Involving them*', emotional support '*so they can move on with their lives'*; *consistency in what is said and done; belief in them'*; '*not give up on the young so easily*' were five main notions recognized by all participants as extremely important in young people's ability to negotiate transition. While for the youth lack of such type of support meant, feeling ignored, confused, and misunderstood, resulting in lack of confidence. Professionals

addressed that missing emotional/advice type of support caused inability to make sense of their new stage, 'unrealistic expectations,' low self-esteem, and lack of self-confidence. Finally, based on data gathered, professionals are aware of the importance of fulfilling both emotional as well as material needs, encouraging the child in his/her endeavours, providing a living environment consistent with the child's evolving capacities and last but not least offering guidance and giving attention to the child's feelings and needs. Yet the following section reveals how in practice much of these acknowledged elements remain neglected in providing welfare to children in Romania and England.

5.2.1. Intervening factors contributing to the *slow progress* of better care practices in Romania and England

Geographical locations, pre-associated characteristics of children in care among professionals, the missing variety of options in education and employment spheres gave an impression of perpetuating forms of prejudice. Focussing specifically on geographical location, it has received very little attention as a hidden form of prejudice exhibited via segregated locations for services delivering care for children of the state. For example, in Romania childcare institutions, including centers for preparatory stages to independent living, were found to be located at the margins of the city (Sibiu), and in a 'ghetto area' (occupied mostly by Roma ethnic groups in Vaslui) or in poor neighbourhoods (Bucharest). Likewise, in England (although manifested differently) the majority of youth experienced as early as 15 (1) and 16 years of age placements in hostels, and Bed and Breakfast facilities (10 of the English sample) also typically located in poorer areas. Both groups as a result were exposed

to a deviant lifestyle such as drug-use (higher degree located among the English group), violence, thievery, and other disruptive behaviors.

Exposure to drugs, violent behaviors, and criminal activities do not represent the appropriate type of accommodation for any person not just those in care. To pin point back to relevant material from Chapter 2, these young individuals have been exposed to certain types of networks that did not necessarily benefit them once out of the system. One example from England reveals how the environment influenced care leavers' direction in life.

> *'As a child from care you are more likely to get involved in risky behaviors. You get more exposed to drugs and alcohol, since I was in a hostel. Throughout my life I have been influenced by my peers, those in care and those in the hostel. I dropped out of school like three times. For example, when I was in a hostel I witnessed people taking heroin on a regular basis, you know?'* (female 26, employed/student London).

Previous studies suggest that outcomes in key transitional life phases are dependent on such factors as quality of placement experiences, level of involvement in decision making processes, and the relationships young people have with various social actors (Wade, 1997; Biehal et al., 1995; Stein and Verweijen-Slamnescu, 2012; Breda, Kader and Marx, 2012). Geographical location (in Romania of local authorities, and in England youth still placed in Hostels) has been found to hinder opportunities for youth to bond with individuals outside of a circle of people themselves in struggle. Previously, Cutrona and colleagues (2000) positioned how geogpraphical location can determine the type of networks accessed.

Youth tended to be encouraged toward a certain path to employment and educational achievement. Limited to the lower levels (e.g. in Romanian vocational schools, in England apprenticeships) this is what a care leaver from Bucharest calls 'the left-overs for youth in care.' Encouragement/interest in a child's endeavours to pursue higher attainment represent characterisitcs of social capital as measured by Coleman in his work. Conversely, the absence of encouragement/interest reveal limited social capital available in the young people's lives. Concerning 'worst jobs,' it is worth acknowledging that there is no definitive evidence for this but the perception is quite widespread and thus considered important in its own right.

> *'It is bad because only difficult, hard jobs with small salaries are being looked at taking into consideration that there are better options. Others do not have this chance that I had. They are discouraged. On official channels I would not have found out about this European Program. A friend of a friend whom I call mother informed me. That is how I found out. The worst jobs are sought for us. They are the lowest training programs and no interest in higher-level options, better ones. To those from the center, all that is leftover is given us'* (male 26, employed Bucharest).

In England, it was purely on expectations professionals had for them judged based on the recommendations received from their social workers, with an apprenticeship usually viewed to guarantee immediate employment. Yet the Romanian youth interviewees shared more drastic cases. One example can be taken from a young man from Romania. Let's call him Mike. When interviewed he had almost a year of post care experience. Mike, who took his Bacalaureat and already had a diploma as a qualified chef, was required to leave the center for integration after two months because he refused the three jobs offered to him. The offers made were

much lower than his qualifications, to which he felt insulted as he had 'worked very hard to get here'. Instead he was directed towards a job in an infirmary, one that entailed mostly cleaning, assisting the nurse, and maintaining hygiene in the hospital.

> *'It was disappointing that the center for integration wanted me to work in an infirmary despite me having all those qualifications, I passed my Bacalaureat, I have a qualification in cooking, as a chef, and I did not want that. What about work as a cook, what I like and am qualified to do? I did not want to take such a low job having behind me so much, so I decided to leave. You can deny only three job offers, so?'* (male 26, informal employment Vaslui).

Professionals from Romania and England displayed much concern about discrimination in the interview and vignettes. They concentrated specifically on its impact in impairing this population's school and socio-professional integration once out.

> *'I believe that those children have great potential. They can do all they want, it is just professionals also come and work with their own image of these children. And I think it affects how they work with the young people. We are here for them, and we should not forget to guide them well to reach their potential'* (male, manager Social Worker London).

Another form of prejudice is indicated through overlooking young people's abilities and qualifications. An interesting view expressed by one professional in Romania is on positive discrimination in obtaining a job or receiving treatment at school because he/she is from care. It is a view shared by youth formerly in care from Romania and England.

'Many times a job is given not because he is good, or is qualified but because he comes from care, giving a child a low sense of self, etc.' (female, professional Sibiu).

This is an attitude that generally youth despise:

'I want my work to be appreciated for what it is and not my background to get in the way.' But you see people put your background first, where you come from?' (male 25, PhD student Bucharest).

Positive discrimination however is not being expressed only in the work arena. While the following quote substantiates the point being made, the young mother expressed how her background intervened in provision of basic learning at school.

'If we make trouble at school, they let us be. But we never learn this way' (young mother 19, unemployed Faversham).

While the general public may show understanding in this manner, recognising that they have been through a lot, from the view of care leavers, it represents another form of singling them out. This conflict may disclose the sensitivity and the complexity that resides in understanding the role of the state in the face of society from the children's point of view.

Concluding points

In concluding this chapter, the coexisting nexus between the inner and external forces is revealed. It has been illustrated that the unequal distribution of

services found amongst children with a care background, changed completely the course of their lives for quite a few. As it was found here, service delivery differed from one social worker to another within the same local authority. Social services should be uniform across each country and not differ so greatly from local authority to another. The laws presented from both countries recognize the core elements needed to improve outcomes at adulthood for children in care, where the state as the corporate parent is responsible to deliver quality care better than the previous family as a unit could offer (Marsh and Peel, 1999). Others (e.g., Ungar, 2013) argue that living circumstances and life long experiences shape young people as individuals, their behaviors, choices and decision making processes, leading to certain sets of outcomes once one reaches adulthood.

Assessing further the data provided, consequently, youth had few chances to exercize agency in their lives, have 'a say' or be part of events relating to their lives growing up. Agency appears to be encapsulated within institutional boundaries, which can be seen as part of a wider more structural concept of bounded agency (Emond, 2003; Evans, 2002). In the case of young participants in this study, it was not until after care, as the following chapters shall reveal, that agency in personal life was highly exercized. Procedures, bureaucratic in nature of functioning, lack of flexibility, time restraints, interrupted and financially-based assessments and constant changes within the system may also represent overall institutional barriers to allowing youth to take part at a higher level in 'normative activities' (Stott, 2012, p. 219). Finally, direct evidence illustrated the professionals' capacity to, in Stein's words (2009), 'make quality happen'. Anghel (2011) asserts that professionals as 'transition guides' for youth preparing to depart from care should be made aware of the critical role supportive approaches play in young people's ability to take on their new status. The

Child Protection System as an institution, nonetheless, is an intermediary mechanism that should facilitate the processes to independence. For this group, Gibbons and Foster (2014) maintain that the combination of social and emotional skills is anticipated to work in terms of youth's ability to stand against adversity, to negotiate adulthood, to 'raise aspiration, and improve motivation' (p. 250).

Having established the extent to which such services were utilized in benefitting the child layered with the functioning of the system, it leads to the vital role networking can have for these youth. As the following chapter reveals, substitution of the missing capital through one's own developed networks can set out a sense of security when aging out of care. Opportunities to develop networks before departing from care present possible factors critical to influencing better outcomes in housing and employment (Brennan, 2008; Ahrens, 2011; Action for Children Report, 2014). In the up coming chapters the influence of social networks/social capital is explored on enhancing emotional maturity and problem solving skills, and on increasing trust in other individuals. Such is achieved, however, in part due to young people's capacity to utilize social capital in ways that were perceived to help them advance either speaking personally or professionally.

Chapter 6

Unfolding social capital's mitigating role in the life of young adults

Little exploration has been undertaken on social networks role and utilization within vulnerable groups of society (Oppenheim, 1992; Raffo and Reeves, 2000; Pinkerton and Dolan, 2007; Greeson and Bowen, 2008; Singer, Berzin and Hokanson, 2013; Ashtiani and Feliciano, 2015; Van Audenhove and Vander Laenen, 2015). There is no study in place to reveal the extent to which young adults with a care background make use of social capital as one of the key strategies to handling the pressure of living independently. Social capital conceptualized within this framework of transition to independent living after care is measured on the basis of its core features such as trust, reciprocity, the degree to which youth's members of networks 'kept their word', and closeness of relationships. Types of social capital such as bridging and bonding are often seen as weak and strong social networks that respectively fulfill a specific set of roles (Erickson, 1984; McGrath et al., 2012). For care alumni, bonding capital or strong/informal ties was the main route to socio-professional integration, the main means to entering the world with more confidence and ability to stand against its adverse challenges posed as a result of their background. Among the English participants networks were found to be more diverse (involving more bridging capital) in comparison to the sample from Romania.

In this research using theoretical understanding of social capital from Putnam's (1993; 2002), Bourdieu (1986; 1989) and Coleman's (1988) perspectives, utilizing the concept is complicated. Further complications relate to: it must be taken

into account the networks involved, e.g. how is a friend defined? in which lies such characteristics as reciprocity, trust. However, to make clear the manner in which the concept is used, the research through young people's biographies defined 'close friends' or individuals that came to be 'like family' based on whom the youth turned to in a series of circumstances. As an example, for a majority of adults formerly in care, informal ties (some previously formal) comprised of teachers, advisors, nurses, school peers their age, social workers, co-workers but also colleagues formerly in care who were considered 'like family.' The first section (6.1.) of this chapter assesses the meanings these varied types of relationships carried and looks at identifying for which purposes either bonding or bridging social capital have been used in the lives of the young adults. The second section (6.2.) discusses the mediating role social networks and social capital can have in accessing resources, such as information and knowledge as well as in relation to employment and housing. Within this section is captured another key strategy youth used such as distancing from fellow colleagues in order to network with others or 'to move on' from that 'care identity.' The last section of the chapter (6.3.) entitled *Bonding capital as a foundation to coping with early stages of independent living*, makes a distinction between negative and positive social networks. Negative networks limited these youths' life prospects. However, positive networks (those that helped build up trust, accomplish his/her dreams and/or needs, aspire to 'do better than them,' encourage the young person, seek his/her best interests) have come to increase confidence that further led to higher initiatives (or agency use as often referred to in this research) in changing their own reality. This effect of positive social bonds leads to the third section where the role of networks has extended beyond fulfilling emotional needs, and the exchange of reciprocal help. The role of networks acted as a platform of security, especially during the early stages of transition from care.

6.1. Bridging or bonding capital? Selective networks for the purposes of mitigating life after care

The connection between social networks and their importance in generating social capital is clear in this research. Care leavers' support consisted of emotional/advice and material type of support that came from a variety of sources including friends, fellow colleagues, professionals (teachers, nurses) and minimally from family, and distant family members. At a first glance, these networks may appear to represent bridging type of capital. However, they are informal type of networks or bonding capital with which the young people felt most comfortable in seeking advice, housing support. Only a few from England and Romania mentioned being in contact with family with even less declaring supportive relationships with birth parents (one in Romania and two in England). Those in contact with family, (58.3%, England 11, Romania 17) were not necessarily happier, more driven. Instead, they experienced confusion with a sense of being used, being expected to financially contribute to family needs. However, some stated refusal to stay in contact with parents (20.8%), while the other group with 3 of the youth from England and 4 from Romania knew nothing of their family. Finally, a lack of connections with family growing up seems to make them feel estranged from one another.

> *'I feel more connected to my friends, more comfortable with them than with my family, I can be myself with them but not with my family'* (male 21, apprenticeship Maidstone).

Both groups (Romania 28 and England 10) display an inclination towards bonding capital, but this is of no surprise as strong ties usually play a distinctive role in fulfilling emotional needs aside from provision of instrumental support. A

difference emerged however between the two countries. To be more specific, the networks the participants were surrounded with were not necessarily more resourceful, in knowledge, with information, cultural and/or identity capital to name a few (Cote, 1996). Judging from the respondents' testimonies, the Romanian groups were more likely (57%) than the English participants (34%) to be confined to a certain types of network (homogenous networks) with similar norms and values, educational status, standard of living, rather needy, and generally held low aspirations for educational/employment attainment. This resulted in limited chances for the young adults to reach higher up the social ladder. Within social capital literature there is emphasis on the importance of being in possession of a diverse network (a shift towards bridging capital aquisition) for increased chances to access resources that immediate ties do not perhaps have (Portes, 1998; Field, 2005; Hawkins and Maurer, 2010). For example, Boushel (1994) posits that, 'Interconnectedness with a rich social network provides potential confidante role models, opportunities to develop social skills, and intellectual and social stimulation' (p. 233).

One such example can be referred to from England where a participant's network presented the young person with other opportunities and life choices. First, it was with the professionals' assistance that he left the Hostel (where there was drinking, smoking), and was now living in a 'proper apartment of my own.' In light of Boushel's point, both professionals, social worker and J., the youth worker, in the case of the young man here, helped him aspire higher, to be like them or even better. The professionals involved in the young man's life had had a positive impact on him since leaving the hostel.

'My social worker and J. are the only two role models for me. They' ve basically been with me for the last three years. If I can be like J. or my social worker or even better than them (smiles), I can help someone be better than I am because I have been in care, in the army, I have done factory work, I have done two weeks of work experience at Buckingham Palace, I have been to Iceland, France. So I think that if I can help them early enough to become better than I am, to be more balanced than I am' (male 21, apprenticeship Maidstone).

To give meaning to his aspiration, the people responsible for him represent a turning point, as he remembered, 'I used to take drugs, smoke weed.' The way the professionals treated him really made a positive difference in his life.

'They made it easy to get along together, made it easy to know and trust them. They are very reliable. Every time I asked for something they would do it and keep their word' (male 21, apprenticeship Maidstone).

If given a closer look at the data, a few cases emerged from Romania and more so in England where the set of networks consisted, additionally, of professionals such as teachers, foster parents, nurses or case/social workers. Professionals too became 'like family.' In the example below the relationship with the social worker continued after care, her supportive role going beyond the borders of the care system. There is a noticeable shift within the hierarchy of networks where weak ties became strong ties. Within social capital framework, bridging capital turned into bonding capital, in which instance that network acts as a vehicle to fulflilling emotional and instrumental needs.

'When I had health problems in my final year, my social worker made it possible for me to have appointment in …. , and now I am friends with the nurse from there. Even though she is not my social worker anymore, she still checks up on me to see that I am okay. She still asks how I am doing, she says if I am down to let her know and we can go for a coffee. And it is the same with the nurse. They are like family for me. We can talk about anything' (female 27, PhD student Oxford).

Such networks of different classes and backgrounds depict in Putnam's view bridging capital. In depicting differences between the two samples, the English group had a more diverse network than the one from Romania. Almost half of the total number of participants (17) in England indicated bridging capital to play an additional role in their lives in terms of advancing personally and professionally while in and after care. This was not necessarily the case for the youth in Romania. The higher level of bridging type of capital found in England may have to do with youth having been earlier and more frequently exposed to various social activities, awareness raising, volunteering and participation in panel discussion as opposed to the group from Romania. Such a difference between the two clusters may also clarify the higher reliance on one another found in the Romanian group, a topic that will be talked about later in the chapter.

'I have one friend that I really trust. She is not from here. Although she is my age, Janet is very mature. I can just simply talk to her. When dealing with personal stuff, you know I am still thinking of my past, or I am upset with my life, she calms me down. She says, Do not worry, I know you are suffering, but I am here with you. She opened my eyes and changed my preconceptions on life that I used to have. She taught me to always consider other people's positions and perspectives (male 21, employed Vaslui).

The distinction between close relationships, like family, friends and others is based on the amount of mutual trust, the ability to talk openly about personal lived experiences as similarly defined in related prior work (Demir and Weitekamp, 2007). Young adults appeared to look for genuine response to their needs. For the participants here, genuine care was considered through 'simple things' like calling, their friends themselves offering to help, and initiating talks.

> *'When I was looking for a job they were sending me links to jobs 'you can apply for this and for that'. And that is nice because you see that they are thinking of you. Even small things like that'* (female 23, employed London).

Shared experiences did not count as much as did the level to which he/she was entrusted with personal stories of others making them aware that, 'I am not the only one having problems' or 'going through shit.' Others compared themselves to their friends' experiences in turn giving them a sense of strength.

> *'Before sharing with them about my background, to me it was like it is my past, it is what made me the person I am today. It was during that time that I realized it was not okay, and that I had overcome a lot. By talking through problems and understanding other people, you know they would tell me their things that they had to overcome, you begin to accept it is horrendous but you actually made it through. My friends from Uni already shared their stuff but their problems (they cannot compare, but to them those problems were big)'* (female 27, PhD student Oxford).

'Problems cannot be compared' refers to her own personal experiences. Being separated from her sister, frequent placements, and abuse all accumulated in just a

few years of her life, did not appear to have been commonly experienced by her university peers.

Moreover, care leavers sought bonding with individuals of similar character (e.g. friendly, funny, etc.). Development of relationships based on similar characteristics (exhibition of bonding capital) was equally important for quite a few for they felt connected with their networks, which further encouraged them to share experiences.

> *'I trust my friend Lucy, with her I can actually really share stuff, more than I do with other people. She is kind of like me, more wild and fun. Once I gave her some advice and she listened, put them in practice. We understand each other well'* (female 21, employed Sibiu).

Acceptance 'for who I am,' reciprocity, and trust gave a higher feeling of shared intimacy, knowing that 'they are there for you' played additional major roles in networking. More than half of the sample tended to make friends with people that made them feel connected and gave the young people a sense of belonging.

> *'So my friends really made me feel like I was part of something and still do although we are apart. When I think of them, they did not care where I am from, so that was really important. I miss them so much. Everyone is in different places, now. But we keep in touch, we have like a group on WhatsApp – most of us are like talking everyday'* (female 23, employed London).

Referring back to the earlier emphasis on shared experiences, onother type of network that appears to be highly active in the young adults' lives, involves other

youth from a care background. Much was accentuated within the Romanian group (except for three out of 31) of keeping together giving them a sense of belonging, identity (see similar ground covered in Holland, Reynolds and Weller, 2007), and security. Connecting with fellow colleagues influenced one another when reflecting on how far they had come and what had been achieved. It meant learning from each other and providing mutual support when needed.

> *'It was like a family, you quarreled but remained together, now it is not like this anymore. And with friends it is still not the same cuz you are different from all. At least there we were all in a same bowl. We from SOS still keep in touch with one another, the majority of us still do. Let's not forget where we come from. I am doing well, but I still remember my fellow colleagues'* (female 19, employed Sibiu).

From the young people's points of view in England, of the few that either while in care or after, came into contact with other care leavers, this contributed to the feeling of identity. This was usually through more formal means like volunteering, or training activities with younger generations, meeting other fostered children made them realize that 'there are others like me;' that 'I am not alone dealing with difficulty.'

> *'My carer had us participate in various groups, like having us meet other care leavers so that we have a sense of identity, to help us see that there are more like us, and there are people who understand you. Cuz when you are in foster care, you think that no one understands you, that you are alone. But there are a lot of people who understand you; it is just different journeys but the same feelings. We got to meet so many people and have so many friends that were going through the same things as us, you know?'* (male 25, employed London).

The stress here is more on the sense of identity, what it means being in and coming from care, what comes with it was viewed as a status. Based on their views, identity was defined based on where one lives, 'what we do'; 'who we know'; 'the choices we make'; 'the place we hold in society'; 'what we can or cannot do'. A similar point was brought up in Sanders and Munford's (2014) research with care leavers in New Zealand, where the interaction with the primary living environment was suggested to determine opportunities available as well as where they fit in society. It is their identity as 'care leavers' that either disadvantaged them or less frequently held an advantage in the process to obtaining a job, housing, and/or further education. Their background gave them a place in society as much as it did in accessing resources (including social networks) influencing finally the type of relationships they were able to develop.

6.1.1. Care leavers distinguishing between negative and positive networks

In respect of 'who we know' there were, however, those networks including non-care leavers that compounded uncertainty, social distancing and distrust among the young adults. 'I thought he is my friend, but I was the only one giving and when I did not have, he was gone' (female 23, employed Bucharest). 'I fear that people will disappear at a moment when I need them the most (male 25, PhD student Bucharest)'; 'Many of my friends said they are there for me if I need anything. When the time came everyone turned their backs on me. I was completely on my own' (male 22, employed/student London). These participants generally spoke of their networks' inability or unwillingness to keep their word through which genuine friendship was seen.

'Cuz with these friends, they say they help you and when time comes they turn their backs on you. I had those that turned their back on me and…. Nowadays it is hard to find a true friend' (female 22, employed Sibiu).

For some of the participants, creation of relationships related 'to the fact that I am from care.' In some instances, they shared the difficulty to form a friendship because he/she was from care (Romania and England). Moreover, consistent mention of what would have been like having a good family depicts their awareness that a family cannot easily abandon a promise for the moral pressure and commitment aside from the love towards the child.

'It makes me be a bit more independent, it shows me what the world is like without having my parents, it woke me up. It made me a lot more mature than I was, it opened my eyes, and how to best use my resources, how to buy stuff that are not expensive but equally good. I am halfway ready for the world now, and I will be ready for the world' (male 17, homeless Medway).

From the perspective of 'what comes with care', for quite a few youth formerly in care (predominantly in the Romanian group) this meant being taken advantage of by those considered friends. Because risks were found to be higher, especially in the early stages of leaving care, many times quite a few of the young people formerly in care relied on networks already developed while in care. The young person below from Romania is one good example of those trapped in such networks. He has known and worked for people in the community for many years. One day, however, a family seeing his skills offered a job in Spain for their firm. Because he had only a provisional Identity Card, he could not leave the country. For over three months he appealed to

everyone he knew to help him with an ID. Despite long-term relationships, and trust he believed had been built, no one was 'risking' to help him.

> *'I' ve known some of the people for years. There are even some of them whose children left the country and barely talk to one another. They say that I am like one of their kids and I can feel that. They invite me over for warm meals, I talk things, laugh together, and we respect one another. It is just now I want to leave the country. It is time for me to make my own life. But of all the people I know and asked, no one is helping me. So now I am stuck here'* (male 26, informal employment Vaslui).

Additionally, a cross-reference can be made to geographical areas where in Romania local authorities have been found to be located in poor neighbourhoods or like in England where youth experienced inappropriate accommodations. Accessing resources including knowledge, and information alongside perceived opportunities in the community can highly depend on the type of networks one has, stressed Coleman (1988). One professional from London specifically addressed how these young people are exposed to certain types of individuals.

> *'They tend to live in a bubble, their life experiences exposed to certain geographical areas, so their peer groups are very similar, and they do not have much exposure to the bigger world'* (male, professional London).

This negative side of social capital with its unequal distribution of goods (individual and geographical) indicates that this group studied here benefited from a rather limited capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Fukuyama, 1996; Field, 2005). In assessing acquisition of capital, a few of the English and Romanian samples had to first reach a certain upward mobility educationally and/or professionally, for others it required a

move to more economically developed cities in order to access different types of networks (bridging capital) with richer sources of capital (high level of knowledge, strong educational background).

> *'I was surrounded by those who did not want to do anything so for a while I dropped out and went back in. I was very much influenced by my social circle. When you see so much negativity around you, you try to keep your eyes above it otherwise you fall into it. I did not want to live this life anymore. I always wanted to go to university but got lost in the way. So I went back to college and took extra courses for maths and English. Afterwards I decided to go to university. I decided to change, and so did my networks'* (female 25, London student).

The extent to which young people from both nations, utilized social capital remained mainly in fulfilling fundamental needs. Shelter, food, simple chatting, emotional and advice type support, (needs typically given to their peers from family) illustrate limited use of social capital especially during the early periods of transition. It is due to lack of '*simple things'* that their networks have been used for small favours. This could be seen to have impaired youth's making use of full capacity of resources inherent within social networks. By disclosing the impact limited capital can have on the young people's lives, this section reinforced conversely the vitality of individuals to be exposed to a set of networks inclined to bring about positive change.

6.1.1.1. Care leavers' aim in bonding with 'the right network'

Care leavers together with professionals make a clear distinction between positive and negative networks in this research. Based on over 75% of young people's biographies, it was not enough to just 'know people' but to have a social entourage that contributes positively, to better self-perspectives, to encourage aspiration for higher (as supported most recently by Meltzer et al., 2016), and to be aware of one's qualities.

> *'Discouragements, you keep on hearing from people, you are not going to make it, that is discouragement. But if you let them talk and listen to you as true friends, you will understand that it is not possible, you can do it. And I want to prove them that I can do it without any help'* (male 21, employed Vaslui).

On account of this issue, the respondents did not look to have a large circle of friends, rather few good ones that were able to understand the meaning of friendship.

> *'I have few but very good friends because they understand well what friendship means, shared past, shared experiences, reciprocity, when there's trouble at work get advice, you have someone to talk to, when you need money is there, with emotional support and with money when needed'* (male 26, employed Bucharest).

Both examples, including the one below, explain that it is not about having many friends around, but having the right few: the ones that equip you with what is needed to move up the ladder, to do better. Positive networks are perceived from the point of view of the young participants in contributing to their growth and learning.

'There is a difference. You must have the right support. There is no point in having people that offer you nothing, you must have people that help you, guide and teach you, that support you in your life to be able to start your own life' (male 24, employed Medway).

To give a deeper meaning to the youth awareness on what entails a positive network, two young adults shared similar features of such a type of relationship. Below one of them shows not only what care leavers are looking for but also their ability to understand what is normal in positive, constructive social networks.

'Friendship is not based on just giving; you know to create dependence on you. You help so that they can move on, on their own feet. To teach him that there is a limit, there are responsibilities and that I have my own life' (male 25, employed Sibiu).

From the point of view of a young woman in Romania, where many like herself are known to be most vulnerable, according to her 'many young women disappeared', she clarifies the meaning of positive networks in one's life.

'I had positive people around, and open, that help you and this thing is very important. Imagine if I were alone who knows where I would have ended up, or the person I may have become or work for prostitution, there are so many cases do you understand? But now that I had good people who trusted me, who believed in me, and simply be there for you and are aware when you are child and that not all children have everything, and it is very important that they encourage you. This raises you up a lot' (female 23, employed Sibiu).

Another young man touched on the aspect on how knowledge is based on the networks one has, how the 'right network' can optimize one's thinking. Thus the quality of relationships along with the types of networks from the youth's perspective enables acquisition of knowledge, development of ideas, as well as the role to ease off the 'burden of stress'.

> *'Alone you cannot do anything, you need good people around, to help you, to guide you, to talk to someone and laugh, to learn from them. I am aware that apart from family, friends could be a good source of help, to reduce my burden of stress, what I am going through now, to get over it'* (male 21, homeless Bucharest).

The findings in this section lead to the complexity of understanding bonding capital. Bonding capital should offer, based on the young people's perspectives, the assets needed for them to progress in life. Bringing forward such a distinction in the quality of social capital, this research contributes in a key important way in the utilization of social capital among youth with a care background. Positive networks from which much could be learned involved also individuals older than themselves. Several respondents spoke of seeking more mature people viewed to fit their level of thinking, which indicates a feature similar to informal mentoring. Young people felt they could relate better to older individuals. Furthermore, attachment to older people may reveal their need for a parental figure in their lives as adult role models because certain issues 'can only be discussed with an adult'. Nevertheless, bonding with individuals with more knowledge, usually older in age people fitting the criterion may be looked at as another mechanism to respond to transition and integration demands. Furthermore, networking with people of different working professions, and level of knowledge shows elements of bridging capital.

'I have friends, but not my age, older than me with about 10-15 years. We keep in touch, when I need advice they help me, with all sorts of stuff. From them I have something to learn' (male 21, employed Sibiu).

Another care leaver from England shared her feelings on what was to come with moving again to a new place. Being surrounded with people her age, appeared to be one of her concerns as she saw it as a disadvantage. For this young mother, peers at the same maturity level meant stagnation from growing as she now 'has a responsibility.'

'They want to move me to this house where there are other young parents; it is basically like a Hostel, and the people are younger than me. It is nothing wrong to be with young people but I do not want to live with young people my age because they are immature, so it is easy for me to act like them. With older people I can learn, and be more mature' (young mother 19, unemployed Faversham).

It appears that the youth participants learned that availability of social networks (the local authorities also representing a networks system) alone does not necessarily correspond to expansion of opportunities. Instead it is the specific set of networks that indicate in the eyes of the participants to contribute to increased advancement at personal and professional levels. The young person from London below expressed specifically his perspective on knowing the 'right people.'

'Knowledge is built through and with people. Every one has contact through which they can get things done. Cuz nowadays is not what you know, I have seen it, and if you are smart enough to know the right people, everything is possible. Qualifications alone will

not take you from point A to Z, you must go through the whole alphabet, but with connections you can get there easier and faster' (male 20, unemployed London).

This is a point raised also by young people from Romania, who shared the significance of social networks especially in accessing jobs. It is a similar perspective to Woolcock and Narayan (2000) who boldly asserted 'it is not what you know, it is who you know' further touching on the importance of knowing people in 'high places' to access resources (p. 3).

6.1.1.2. 'Self-distancing' as another strategy used to integrate and network among youth with a care background

One of the key findings from the present study was social distancing as a coping mechanism used after care. Kolar, Erickson and Stewart (2012) found the same coping mechanism among street involved youth. However, social distancing has a double meaning here. Considering their disrupted childhoods as well as the mediating role of stigma in their lives, it is of no surprise they distanced themselves from the wider population exhibited via high self-reliance, and selectiveness of whom to trust. Secondly, it is indeed their background that caused quite a few of both the Romanian (10 in total) and English (8) participants to distance themselves from fellow colleagues. At this point, it is worth pointing out that there is a difference within the Romanian group in the types of social networks formed. For example, young adults from SOS in particular distanced themselves from fellow SOS care leavers to enable them to create their own lives by knowing other people. However, only some of the youth with experience in Placement centers in Bucharest and Vaslui

did so. Expansion of networks beyond borders 'of the care system' elicits bridging networking, a form of capital viewed in the eyes of the young people as increasing their chances for socio-professional integration.

The choice to distance themselves from the state completely was seen as a positive thing from the perspective of the professionals in Romania as well. Getting out of the 'care networks' was believed to help youth integrate faster, move on, and they were able to do so if their 'identity' was kept quiet.

> *'Some manage to detach from their own group and do so quietly, and those that do it keep it a secret, do not even tell they had been in a Placement Centre, and integrate in a totally different group'* (female, professional Sibiu).

Similar to shared stories in Dima's previous study (2009), quite a few care leavers stated that they transcended 'of that group identity,' that they were able to grow and relinquish the 'attitude' that everyone is against you,' including self-pity. According to others' views this was due to their 'built-in character' with growing up in care, waiting for others to provide for security, complaining yet taking no action to change their status, or having the tendency 'to depend on you entirely once you decide to help them' as specifically stated by a young care leaver (male, 23 employed Sibiu).

The following example makes a clear connection on how the system can incapacitate their ability to think and be actively engaged in matters concerning their lives. Additionally, it is on this ground that some participants, mostly in Romania, decided to distance themselves from their fellow colleagues. For the Romanian group

knowing how to assimilate with the rest of the population was very significant with only four in England touching on the same topic as being important so that 'people see you as one of them'. On the other hand, it reveals institutional aspects that appear to contribute to poor social/cultural capital, therefore affecting their ability to expand their networks as well as to manage life once out.

> *'You know you are used to being yelled at, being beaten, all the time being pushed around and your nerves tested to the limit. The system gives you everything so you expect even once you are out that all should be given to you. Because of that you do not know how to ask for things, you took that violence from the system with you. Nobody sits down with you to teach you how to communicate, how to ask nicely for things and stuff like that'* (female 25, unemployed Valsui).

One young man from England addressed the issue of knowing how to dress and speak in order to be integrated. He further touched on how such aspects can determine possibilities for employment as well as for networking. The young person shared his strategy to learn from his surrounding environment.

> *'I think it is sad that one single barrier can stop someone from developing. I learn by watching other people, how they behave, speak, dress. I decided to take the good from every person I meet, and what I see around. Take the elements that I perceive to be good and analyze it, and the things I researched and try to match together. I look only for the things that help me achieve this successful man have a family and a good life'* (male 22, student/employed London).

It is often argued that youth formerly in care specifically from an institutional setting have a different way of communicating, and behaving, a phenomenon. Chipea, Marc and Osvat (2014) call a "group behaviour" (p. 126).

> *'We live in a group, and there is a certain type of behavior, and when you get out you must take another behavior, a way of being. To be polite, respectful, once you show that you know how to behave and talk you gain people's trust'* (male 25, employed Sibiu).

Those with an institutional background were very often aware of what was setting them apart from the rest of the population. Yet, young people's emphasis on adapting to the larger society's expectations came from varied backgrounds, foster homes, SOS Children's Villages not just from those with institutional backgrounds. Such attitudes had to do first with reaching other social ties and secondly mingling with the general population. It is worth noting that young participants seem to have associated assimilation along with an achieved higher rate of interpersonal skills with higher access to social capital.

> *'I left my friends from the orphanage aside, this was an advantage. And I embraced the other new ones. A whole new lifestyle. But at the beginning it was hard; it is like you would speak with an alien language. You understand? I did this to escape everything from the past, to create a new life'* (male 24, employed Bucharest).

If this presents another barrier to increased chances for social integration, then it links back with social distancing from one another. Similar to Sanders and Munford's view (2014), the living environment in care has not contributed to positive

identity development, rather the youth having to reconstruct a new self in order to benefit from society's available opportunities for young adults their age.

6.2. The role of social networks in enhancing positive characteristics among youth formerly in care

Care alumni recognized the varied roles social networks can fulfill in their lives. It was declared by more than half of the total number of participants that they have friends just to hang out with, laugh and talk 'over stuff related to work', exchange knowledge but not get personal with (work and/or colleagues from social services, NGOs, university/school). Quite a few care leavers from England benefited from acquiring knowledge and skills from weak ties, otherwise known as bridging capital. Then there are close friends/family with whom youth had a different approach that included sharing of stories, exchange of information, hanging out, and feeling comfortable to 'know that they are there.' Furthermore, young adults viewed social relations as beneficial for personal and professional advancement. Through networks, young adults became aware of the qualities and strengths they possess. It is this kind of support (positive networks) that appears to have empowered them, given them a sense of integrity, self-esteem and self-confidence that occupied a significant part in achieving their goals. Social networks were detected to have two interwoven effects, intangible and tangible as shall be seen also at greater length in chapter 7. On the intangible side friends, along with acquaintances, exposed them to think and explore things that were not considered before, and influenced their approach to issues as well as solutions. It is through interactions with varied social ties that they got to know themselves better. Development in the area of self-

perception may further reveal contribution in identity building among youth formerly in care.

> *'The people I know told me that you are a respectful person, you know when to joke, you give us a sense of trust, give us hope, know when to talk and we do not care where you are from.* (male 19, informal employment Vaslui).

Knowing qualities and receiving compliments, emerged as one of the important themes in both groups to enhancing self-esteem. Awareness of such characteristics as being respectful or friendly gave the confidence to reach higher, to take control and initiate positive change in their lives to the best of their abilities.

> *'My qualities, self-confidence I know come from the outside. Somebody showed them to me, that I own such through people, and the good and the bad. I believe in change and I have been like that, to learn from everything there is around you, to learn from things. I lived past traumatic experiences but we learn from them. Many say that everything comes from within, but you see that external forces too can destroy you like the system'* (male 26, employed Bucharest).

Emphasis on abilities or talents informs decision-making. Social networks gave a clear vision to follow if still uncertain or in a time of discovering oneself. Because of their disrupted childhoods, and rushed pathway to independent living, care leavers' qualities and interests were often not discovered, thus illustrating young people's lack of awareness of self, and the skills that they possess. A professional from London spoke of how those from outside the system can point that out for them, hence helping the young individuals know more about themselves.

> *'Sometimes with the young people you see, it is difficult for them to see what they have the potential to do, but some other people from outside can look and say: you've got these skills, did you know you are really good at this? Have you thought of doing this or that, going there, you are really good at this or… you could improve at this'* (female, professional London).

Moreover, social networks enabled them to realize the qualities obtained from being in care. However, only very few (5 in England and only 3 in Romania) appear to have reached this state of seeing the benefits of their background in personal and professional life. They are the few that represent the 'Moving on' group that will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7. These young people viewed care to have matured them, made them aware of social issues, and gave the ability to adapt to various social situations, and in regards to entering employment, as experienced in the functioning of the welfare system, the importance of education among others.

> *'I am very good at following opinions, something I learned with my experience, negotiate outreach work. Through university due to my experience I was invited to lectures and this is how my networks spread and developed. This really helped my career. Being in care means I have the experience and knowledge that many people don't have'* (female 26, employed London).

This has also contributed to the move from feeling self-pity and being seen as an incapable individual to one with experience and with an 'ability to relate to various people and social classes,' to genuinely help others. Others touched on the skill of knowing how to listen, and having the capacity to communicate and put things into perspective with an attitude of seeking solutions rather than dwelling on the issues.

'Being in care gave me this ability to relate to any person, to adjust to their level. Because I am from care I have more sympathy towards people's needs. You know what I mean? I have my friends here at work, and they like the loyalty and the fact that I jump right in to help when they need it. My boss appreciates my hard work. So I think coming from care has its own advantages and disadvantages. I do not think I would have struggled so much in my life; it was a long road for me to get here' (female 29, employed Vaslui).

The fact that many of the participants also in turn helped their friends who needed advice and guidance, helped with money, a sleep over, people feeling more comfortable 'to open up' to them and discuss personal issues, validated their qualities, experiences, and opinions leading to higher self-image, and confidence. The evidence may indicate also strong material on care experience as a resource. Finally, it shows the reciprocity inherent in social relationships to which youth formerly in care contributed in forming, influencing the type of relationship between them as social actors.

'I would say, I rather helped them with jobs, acquaintances, way of thinking, what motivates them, optimism, how mature they are. I attracted people with similar experiences and they always came to me for advice me already having lived the experiences that I did. So I was able to help them out' (male 25, employed Bucharest).

Opportunities to reciprocate meant increased confidence in the capacity to be resourceful in the face of adversity. From the gathered narratives, confidence appears to be very important in taking on new responsibilities, and showing initiatives, mentioned by each respondent. Being encouraged regarding their potential and what can be gained from it is what contributed to care leavers increased pursuit of their

goals (pursue PhD, become a competitive Chef). However, many views hold that advice, emotional type of support especially enhanced those characteristics critical to making the transition successful.

> *'I think it is essential to have people that do better in your life, it makes you do better, achieve higher, it gives you individual responsibility, it helps you develop your character, your confidence'* (male 21, employed Medway).

Confidence, self-value, awareness of their qualities took roots with participation, simply being involved in activities that enabled them to interact with peers their age, and expand their social networks as supported also by various scholars (Samuels and Pryce, 2007; Gilligan, 2008; Gibbons and Foster, 2014; Fabbianson, 2015). Based on the respondents' declared experiences, participation in local social affairs, did more than expand social networks; it gave them a sense of direction in life. For example, in England quite a few participants' career paths resulted in working either in humanitarian and social domains, or finding employment based on their interests as also located in Romania. The link that came out in this research is that if they have more confidence, young people are more likely to try things on their own, have initiatives to 'move on'.

Another unique role social networks had in their lives relates to diminishing certain prejudices against them. This particular distinctive role, however, is applied only to the group from Romania because mainly they expressed discrimination in the context of affecting employability chances. Networks grew to vouch for them for through time people saw their abilities, that 'they are no different than any other' young person their age, by contrast with negative images of laziness they are

'committed, hard-working'. To continue on the matter, time and frequent encounters added to the increased chances of those with weak ties becoming familiar with the skills and personality traits young people have. In accordance with Putnam's theory on development of social capital, it is on this basis that trust was built and relationships were formed. The young person below from his experience in the black market in Romania, reveals specifically how social capital can be generated, by frequency of meetings, or as put by the participant 'in time'.

> *'Because through friends, in time, the world sees you differently. I was never in prison, always showed respect towards all. If help was needed I gave it, and this is how people see that you are responsible, and reliable. Through others it starts to see that this guy is a good guy, minds his own business, does this and that, is good at this or at that, then they tell others and so on'* (male 26, informal employment Vaslui).

There are additional advantages in connecting to the role of networks. For those whose employers valued their commitment, seriousness and the awareness that the young adults from care 'make honest money through work', this meant equal treatment and appreciation. On this dimension, stigma attached to coming from 'care', expressed widely by the general population dissipated. As if it was expected that they be treated differently as a result of their background, the young people significantly noticed when treated equally or where appreciated as indicated below by one of the participants:

> *'Although he knew I was from SOS, but this was not a problem. He saw that I want to learn, do something with myself. The owner of the first restaurant where I worked was super understanding, and he offered to help me in many ways, to teach me, to explain.*

He kind of got attached to me. Even now we keep in touch, talk on Facebook. I had to leave cuz the restaurant closed down' (male 21, employed Sibiu).

In contributing further to the analysis of this chapter, a parenthesis here is made upon looking at cultural differences of dealing with this critical stage of life towards independence from the perspective of social capital. There is a case of differences between the young adults' testimonies and those of professionals. Professionals generally focused more on the emotional side of needs, having a tough childhood, full of disappointments, and uncertainties. However, in Romania while recognising the need of emotional and advice type of support, they also highly spoke of the importance of social networks to offer the young people a start, to access a job. This probably may have to do with local cultural settings where it is known within the country that employment is easier accessed through connections. Likewise, social networks are important in England; however, they might not bear similar purpose. Professionals from England, focused much on the emotional need, that 'past experiences hold them back,' that 'they need to overcome past traumatic experiences in order to move on' or 'have the emotional side of themselves dealt with by the time they leave care.' What is clear from both samples is that social networks have a mediating role in dealing with major life changes, representing a channel through which integration into the wider society can be enhanced. However, the effectiveness of social networks is measured within the boundaries of social and cultural aspects. For young people from Romania (87%) their primary concern even before leaving the system was to think of 'what comes next'; 'how to go about from here'. The most common response tended to be to connect usually with those formerly in care. Yet the sample from England looked additionally at the aspect of obtaining help with housing, accessing jobs, or furthering educational training from friends and other related

social ties. The youth from Romania focused on the networks they had, and the people they knew whereas the English group had a higher interest in developing new relationships (bridging capital). As a result the capital acquired differed between the two samples. The youth from England benefitted from a higher level than the Romanian one of encouragement in pursuing their interests as well as of exposure to wider range of knowledge. Whether the circle of social networks represented bonding or bridging capital, the majority of youth displayed an inclination of looking at life through more positive lenses.

Their ability to pick on positive things, to see the positive side of things also contributes to or demonstrates resilience (Gilligan, 1999, 2008; Stein, 2005; Smith-Osborne, 2007). Here with resilience it is not necessarily simply the ability to 'bounce back' as commonly associated within relevant literature (e.g. Bottrell, 2009; Dolan, 2012) but also to see something 'as a learning experience' from any social situation.

> *'Because even the fights with staff have a good scope in life. You learn how to deal with issues, what to accept and not, you learn to accept criticism. It is an experience that will help me in the future'* (male 21, employed Vaslui).

Some participants and this has been found mainly in Romania used expressions/quotes (from the Bible or famous celebrities) as a guiding tool in their lives, learning and living by them. Relevant literature termed such ability as 'self-educating' (Chipea, March and Osvat, 2014). One example can be drawn from a young man, who learned from the Bible to reflect, think, adjust and communicate to people, to believe that 'with God everything is possible. There is a good place for everyone' (male 25, employed Bucharest). Another participant from England used Ghandi's

popular quote, 'Be the change you want to see in the world' (male 26, employed London). He is currently working for an NGO that focuses on educational inclusion of vulnerable groups.

6.3. Bonding capital as a foundation to coping with early stages of independent living

Based on the data gathered there were many cases (roughly 50% of the Romanian sample) where the participants found a job, or changed geographical location with the help of another care leaver - something that was not found amongst the youth in England that were interviewed. For the Romanian sample, support from fellow colleagues was critical when dealing with the new start, staying at their place for couple of weeks at a time and getting fed. Support extended as far as finding work and rent, and lending money to afford paying rent for the first few months.

> *'When I was on the street I was so down that I could not even start anything and I already felt tired. I even forgot that I know people who care for me, and would help me. But you know I had people who did tell me that 'you have been through a lot and you are strong. Many in your shoes would have chosen a wrong path. Then a colleague of mine also from the Placement Center helped me with a job and this course that I am taking in the infirmary. When he has a job, he always calls me too. To be honest with you I did not see myself as doing so well. To be honest, I do not know what I would have done without him. He's been always there for me, anytime of the day I needed him, he was there'* (male 19, informal employment Vaslui).

It is through them that the newcomers were able to access information, learn to be selective in living standards, analyze renting prices on the market, look for jobs, and find ways to dress in an interview.

> *'I had a friend …. who already left care a year ago. Now he has a job and told me that he will help me. He said he will take me under his wing. He left to … because he knows so many people there. So one of them must have some kind of job. I lke fixing things, so probably I will be a mechanic. I like hanging out with him because I learn so much, like he tells you how to dress when I go in town or how to talk to people I don't know... He gives me advice and stuff like that'* (male 21, employed Vaslui).

In Romania care leavers appear to be more united, get in contact with each other even before leaving care via social networks sites such as Facebook:

> *'I already keep in touch with some that have been in care. They are older than me. I found them on Facebook. We talk, see how they are doing cuz it helps what is like out there. when I get out it is good to have someone to rely on, I know they will help me. I have also my own friends, but I cannot count on only one opportunity and if it does not work I am stuck. What do I do then? No, we try the next...'* (male 21, employed Vaslui).

Reliance on one another was also present in England but to a lesser extent, less viewed as the main means for survival and escape from homelessness, or as a foundation to start independent living. In England only two out of 17 relied on their colleages for similar purposes named just above. Through the use of social website networks (mostly Facebook and Twitter), they reached other support groups. However, out of 17, only five have strong networks with other fellow colleagues from care.

'I keep in touch with one person from the children's home. He was the only one okay, nice, we trusted each other, and helped each other out. We maintain contact via Facebook about once a week or so' (female 25, employed London).

Unlike Romania, reconnecting is more formalized in England. Various programs initiate strategies to increase interaction within this circle: guidance for the ones still in care, giving the younger generations a sense of what is like out there from the point of view of an individual formerly in care. The example below depicts how it is related to awareness raising, volunteering activities and/or the offer of training to younger generations.

'This program … is on every Thursday evening for two hours. We also have other care leavers to come so they can ask questions: what is it like, so they get to talk to other care leavers. Last week we had one of the girls invited over for one of our sessions but the young people in our group did not care about the session all they wanted was to talk to her and ask her questions' (female, 25, professional, London).

The professional is the one that created what she called 'participatory and interactive activities for those in care.' According to her, those who participated viewed the program to be fruitful benefiting from information and knowledge from their colleagues now on their own. She expressed that the youth groups enjoyed having the opportunity to discuss openly with the guests about life after care, about tips to do well once out. The professional, formerly in care, who is currently working with the local authority in London explained further how this type of program can help to inform those still in care. Finally, she appears to understand how important it is for these individuals to be engaged, and to network as part of their preparation for leaving care.

'Obviously, it cannot prepare you really for what is coming, and how to live independently which is such a big thing. But I think it helps them prepare in a way they just have to think about things they were not even thinking about before. So for instance, one of the main things we focus on will be like a tenancy, and we talk about what makes a good or bad neighbourhood' (female 25, professional London).

But the higher reliance on one another found in Romania, may be explained in accordance with the evidence provided here, due to lack of community support and shortage of resources (consistently brought up in the Romanian research and most recently by Dima and Pinkerton, 2016). Professionals in Romania have also witnessed that the ones just embarking on this new path find their main connection to the outside world via other youth formerly in care. For many their colleagues represent a form of safety net that substitutes for the missing support from family, community or of that of the state.

'It is very difficult for them to get out of their own circle. They prefer to maintain such connections with those who share their childhood experiences. Those that had been in the same centre or go and develop networks with individuals that have similar experiences. And the society pushed them to do that, them being seen as the outcast, who do not fit with other groups and go to those that are also vulnerable. They do not have just a single social issue, because they are exploited and discriminated against; they are a diverse group, so there are youth of Roma ethnicity too. They have the tendency to get hired five or six in the same company just to be closer to one another (female, professional Sibiu).

Positive networks amongst youth in care with one another have been rarely looked at except for Emond (2003). Reliance on one another goes beyond identity or

meeting basic needs in this research. In Romania, it was found that care leavers and those still in care help each other to consolidate, empathize and to share failures and successes, some being encouraged to hear that their fellow colleagues managed well, and hence wanting to achieve as high too. It implicated emotional support, mutuality and seeking solutions, giving guidance in what to expect once out. Evidence indicates that information is critical for such groups especially during the early transition to independent living. A young woman from Vaslui with almost 13 years experience of life after care, who was discharged from the system at the age of 17 found out about the services she could access from her co-workers. This was not, however, until much later when she found a job.

> *'You know I was left to my own devices. I had no idea what to do now. At 17 what do you know? I was so scared, talked to nobody (pause). The only place I could go was with Emma. We were sleeping on the floor. She was prostituting, but she let nobody touch me. She took care of me, fed me, gave me a place to sleep. It was then that I found the man who would become the father of my children. He got me out of there. We found a job, and my colleagues told me that I can apply for social housing at the city council because I come from orphanage. I had no idea. So then they told me that I need a paper that shows that I come from the orphanage. And that is what I did. If it were not for these women, even today I would not have known that I can actually benefit from social housing'* (female 29, employed Vaslui).

Information about benefits and housing rights can be crucial in determining people's access to housing considering that many people from care lack a strong foundation of support systems. In some cases, the simple claiming of benefits to which a person is entitled can be sufficient to avoid becoming homeless. Hutson and Liddiard (1994) consider that advice can be a good second best to resources. Worth

pointing out at this stage is that these features of accessing information including experiencing a sense of reciprocity, and trust through their networks illustrate elements of social capital. Whether addressing bonding or bridging type of capital, these key elements were critical for the youth.

Speaking about the group from England, the reasons for a lesser reliance on fellow colleagues may include active engagement of the civic sector in social domestic issues in the country. Many of the youth interviewees were part of awareness raising, advocacy, and campaigns concerning youth leaving care. Such efforts resulted in the development of the policy Staying Put, 2014 and Staying Close 2016. Some of the young adults formerly in care benefited from both the state and private sector of resources such as employment, housing, guidance (two from England based on such support decided to return to education) aside from mentoring type of support. This group had the possibility to mingle with others of different social classes (as mentioned earlier on the higher bridging capital among the English than the Romanian sample) from which more rich capital was developed as opposed to the Romanian group that mostly enjoyed support from their peers or individuals (outside of care) whose resources were also limited. Consistent with Adhikari and Goldey's (2010) argument, where there is high activity within a group of disadvantage chances to improve one's situation are limited as "there are few resources to draw from that network" (p. 185). The qualities and skills of those care leavers from England have been observed by a larger diverse audience, which is not the case for the Romanian group at this point.

'During my internship there I formed a relationship with the director of the program. And she happened to be at the interview. Because I do not have a financial cushion I

could not volunteer because the internship was already on unpaid basis. Luckily, they accepted and so I stayed and got hired. I told them I am a care leaver and although I would love to I cannot afford it' (male 26, employed Northern England).

Having communicated openly about his situation, it was decided to offer him a full time position within the agency. He spoke of how the director and colleagues enjoyed having him as part of the team. The young man pointed out how his background offered him the knowledge and skills that benefited the NGO's aim, in improving education for those in need.

Social capital as a channel for activating, optimising and mobilising resources can be critical for personal advancement and activity in society, asserted Bassani (2007). The power of networks and of social capital acquisition is perceived here to have a close link with the ability to influence the allocation of resources, and how one accesses them.

Concluding points

In concluding this chapter, major themes such as the existence of bridging and bonding capital, and the role social networks can play for young people, but also the participants influence in forming social relations depict key factors meaningful for youth in negotiating life after care as well as in shaping outcomes. Care alumni overall could be considered to have a diverse set of networks. Exposure to different classes of people with members outside of the system, as was mostly the case with the sample from England, illustrate bridging capital, which generally has led to gaining access to varied sources of capital that later in life added to their increased self-confidence,

socialisation and communication skills, although this varied based on the networks accessed. If looking in detail at the youth cohort from Romania, their networks represented rather an enclosed circle of friends (homogenous networks) that appear, for example, to have slowed down the process of fulfilling higher employment opportunities.

The phenomenon of social capital/social networks is getting to know the positive qualities one owns, and receiving feedback and compliments that were not only found to boost self-worth, and esteem but also encouraged to take initiatives. The data gathered leads further to the concept of a mitigating role in identity construction (e.g. more self-respect, selection of more positive friendships) and enhancement of resilience. Social networks gave them what the system failed to do: 'keep their word'; 'really hear them'; not 'give up' on them, which may explain the positive impact on young people even if received later in life. Networks have validated their skills, qualities and knowledge, engaged them in decision-making, and broadened their perspectives of themselves that contributed to optimization of opportunities. Specifically, positive networks encouraged development of behaviors that are appreciated with expectations set for this age, to increased socialization and access to resources. Sala-Roca and others (2012) affirm that 'through socialisation, children learn about the attitudes, values, skills and behaviors acceptable for their sociocultural context' (p. 1015). These positive aspects have (in the depth of it) scarcely been mentioned in the theory of social capital in explaining why it is important and more and more seen as the problem-solving factor today (Portes, 1998; Billett, 2011). These identified associational characteristics, inward (confidence, acquisition of skills, interpersonal skills, resources etc.) and outward effects, e.g. geographic mobility, job security are elaborated upon in chapter 7. It is in

chapter 7 that young people's individual characteristics are shown to match within one of Stein's typology of outcomes, 'Strugglers', 'Survivors' or 'Moving on' stage. Looking at this from a different angle, the mitigating role of social capital and social networks at the stage of transition leads to what is known as inter-dependency (Singer, Berzin and Hokanson, 2013). Young people displayed ability to mobilize elements of social capital such as information, guidance, learned expectations and responsibilities attached to adulthood into tangible resources.

Chapter 7

Presentation of outcomes: *intangible* and *tangible* characteristics of outcomes among of care leavers

The participants associated transition to independence with reaching established housing, employment, and relationship commitments (forming a family was highly emphasized among the group from Romania). Despite experienced early challenges to transition, young people showed efforts in bettering their social circumstances. They pursued active strategies such as moving from one city to another to reach better living standards, changed jobs for better treatment and benefits, and quite a few returned (only in England) to some type of training/education to increase employment prospects. In the previous chapter, the mitigating role of social capital in the lives of young adults formerly in care was set out on two levels; the inward and outward effects, also known as intangible and tangible. Most prior research emphasizes tangible achievements (that is employment, education, housing, financial stability). This could reflect the general population's state rather than that of those from care, where parental support including emotional is least likely to be guaranteed, as elaborated upon in chapter 2. Youth participants, for example sought to fill in this gap, in which its effect was to the point that if one did not reach a sense of self-esteem, emotional maturity, a sense of pride, confidence, awareness of his/her own qualities (features upon which inner state is judged in this research) it was difficult to bring to realization the goals of attaining established employment, and housing stability. As pointed out already, accessed social capital and type of social networks varied among participants from England and Romania. It is on

this ground that differences in outcomes emerged across the youth samples from Romania and England. Whereas some were 'stuck' in isolated living environments ('Strugglers'), the greatest number in this study represent the 'Survivors' or the 'missing middle', with a few exceeding expectations against all the odds (PhD Masters degrees, accessed jobs based on their interests), the 'Moving on' group. The 'missing middle' in youth studies has to do with how youth are often studied as making either 'fast track' or 'slow track' transitions (Jones, 2002). This dualism approach to studying young adults indirectly excludes a group from the middle: they do not represent NEETs, nor high achieving, with these two groups attracting the most attention in youth studies (Roberts, 2011). When applying the 'missing middle' to leaving care research, the 'Survivors' category of young adults similarly occupy the smallest amount of research in contrast to the 'Strugglers' and 'Moving On'. Although the 'missing middle' and 'Survivors' come from different frameworks, there are similarities. In youth studies, 'fast-track' is associated with negative experiences of transition processes, similar although diferent in context, so youth formerly in care known as the 'Strugglers'. The present study avoids looking only on two different ends of outcomes ('Strugglers ' versus 'Moving on' groups) so the group from the middle, the 'Survivors', plays equally a key role in understanding at a deeper level the process of negotiating life after care.

This chapter consists of three major sections: with the first (7.1.) on fostering emotional, advice type of support. It is worth pointing out that initially intangible outcomes were not originally a major focus of attention; yet this aspect emerged as highly important within the data. The change produced within individuals (inner state) as a result of being in contact with various networks shows a direct link between intangible outcomes and social capital. Specifically, emotional/advice type of

support from positive strong/informal social networks (trusted adults, peers their age) came across as a strong variable leading to empowerment, to fostering interdependent behavior, and to nurturing individual features such as resilience, self-esteem, and confidence (see also Schofield, Larsson and Ward, 2016). For these groups, social networks held a key role in the healthy resolution of a number of difficult situations that care leavers encountered. The second section (7.2.) on outcomes as progressive in nature, reveals the facilitating role of social networks/social capital in negotiating the process of going from 'Survivors' to 'Moving On' state or from 'Strugglers' to 'Survivors'. In alignment with Courtney's view (2008), measurement of outcomes within the typology of Stein (2012) 'Strugglers', 'Moving On' and 'Survivors,' acknowledges such stages to be a process that changes over time. The aspect of looking additionally at individuals with post care life experience of up to almost 13 years reinforces that outcomes are progressive in nature. In the third section of the chapter (7.3.), concrete outcomes are explored, i.e., education, employment, and housing. However, *outcome* as a concept remains controversial in policy and practice. Opinions differ on what an outcome is, how it changes, and what indicators define an outcome. In this research, I identify outcomes under two segments; to include reaching a state of emotional, psychological equilibrium (that is intangible) as well as tangible outcomes such as housing, economic stability, and educational attainment (including those that have returned to education as stressed in Stein's work, and by Duncalf (2010). Even the tangible characteristic of outcome often has a subjective dimention, based on feelings of attained stability.

7.1. *Intangible outcome:* fostering the emotional/advice type of support for better outcomes after care?

Social capital was viewed as a catalyst to bonding, social integration and optimisation of opportunities. Young adults viewed social relations as beneficial for personal and professional advancement. The role of bonding capital/strong ties appears to have a dual function in the lives of these youth: as providing emotional/advice type of support that led to increased resilience, self-esteem with the second role as key channels to having a sense of security through accessing (temporary) housing, and employment. This section first touches on the effect missing emotional support has been found to have on young people's actions. This is followed by material on the facilitating role social networks held in nurturing resilience, confidence, in incorporating higher levels of agency use in their personal lives.

Below are two different cases, from Romania and England that present good examples of the impact disturbed pasts, or 'emotional baggage' can have on youth – an area that has been broadly covered on the emotional theme within both countries (see Chapter 3). Both are part of the 'Survivors' category where they, although still experiencing instability, work on bettering their current situations either in obtaining employment or continuing education. First the young man from Romania depicts how his emotional state affected his motivation and ability to do something productive with his life that could lead to a more secure standard of living.

> *'I was down so badly that every time I tried to pull myself up, I could not. I was just simply not in the mood any longer. My self-confidence that I can try something or the*

other, anything, but all seemed so challenging, I would start something then quit. Once I got out, I fell apart, I had a breakdown, felt that there is no option left for me, have nobody to help me. And while I was in depression I just simply forgot that there are people I know who actually care about me, and want to help me. There were moments while on the streets, and did not know who I am' (male 19, informal employment, Vaslui).

The story below is one that elucidates many others' stories, usually of those who returned to education in England, of their inability to keep up with their commitments as a result of emotional weight on their shoulders.

'I was overwhelmed and when you're down there is no motivation. So I quit school. I was at the university in my second year, but dealing with so many emotions from my past I just could not do it any longer ' (female 25, employed London).

Another care leaver from England furthermore elicits concerns shared by many other young people from both countries, and that have been seen as a barrier to their ability to 'move on', 'to make something with their lives.' It is a perspective found also among professionals as referenced in the previous chapter.

'I think one part of it is the mindset of the young person. A lot of young people have the mindset that because they have been in care, they live in this whole kind of banished world, are damaged and with problems, and it is not necessarily that. Yes you have been through a lot of stuff, and you have come out at that end: What are you gonna do with that? Are you gonna be successful with it and own your feelings or are you going down the path that everyone expects you to go down, which is pretty much nothing?' (female 25, employed/student London).

In this quote, the care leaver relates her strength to encouraging a path towards self-motivation, which according to her view, many young people need to take in order to do well. How we perceive ourselves can be largely based on external forces that embedded certain images of selves influencing hence behaviors and actions taken.

> *'Because they have this mindset - I am a child in care and I am damaged you know, I cannot make it. The other part of that is society also believes that!'* (female 25, employed/student London).

To change that perspective of self, networks have played, as shown so far, a large part in young people's lives, boosting confidence, resilience, and producing positive self-image. The young people made a direct reference to people who have become close to them, 'like family' described within literature as bonding capital. It is these sorts of social networks that empowered them to recognize themselves as resourceful individuals in possession of great skills, knowledge as well as qualities.

> *'It really matters who you know. It is really through people that you get to know yourself, the good things that you possess, so you build up your confidence. That is really important in everything you do whether looking for a job or talking to people'* (male 21, unemployed London).

Both groups from Romania and England shared the imperative role social networks played in their lives in terms of having a better sense of identity (McMahon and Curtin, 2012; Furlong, 2013). Looking at networks from a higher perspective

than 'simply being there for you,' they also maximized the young people's horizons of thinking, therefore bridging to better options of acquiring human capital.

> *'Now I am also taking courses for professional masseur and if I take three modules, this course is also valid internationally, I am qualified to do that as well. I can have supplementary income, that flexibility. I had all kinds of friends that told me that I have good hands, that I should pursue this that I am good at this'* (male 26, employed Bucharest).

Another respondent from Vaslui was made aware of babysitting by a friend that was actually also in care.

> *'AJ is the one that came up with this idea. I think it is great. So I applied. With this job you know you can work outside the country, especially if you speak English or Italian. I want to go to Italy, so I need to learn the language'* (female 22, informal employment Vaslui).

In England we find similar cases. For example, one of Sabrina's friends saw an announcement at Oxford and although Sabrina did not think she could do it, or is not worth it 'cuz I will not get in anyway' her friend encouraged her. In this case such a relationship might directly reveal the inherent social capital that exists in social networks. Without her friends' encouragement and the information on the position available at Oxford, based on her accentuation on how it happened to get there, the respondent would not have even given a try.

> *'I found this course they have for a whole year at Oxford. I think you should apply. You have the experience and knowledge. Why don't you go ahead? Unfortunately today is the*

deadline. After about a month, I heard back from them calling me for an interview. Who in the world would have thought that I' d make it? And here I am now doing my PhD' (female 27, PhD student Oxford).

For care leavers, networks/social capital had more of an internal meaning leading them to 'feed' the positive part of themselves. That gave roots to go further to the point of reaching concrete results. The two following quotes support this argument to equip them with skills, and inner self to do well.

'Having support is important but most of it is the willpower. Being self-driven. I have seen a lot of charities and different organisations are recognising this now, giving support, and mentoring programs for care leavers because they realized how important that is. I am participating for a mentorship program at …… They asked me if I wanted to take part. I said yes I am willing to do that' (female 26, student/employed London).

Young adults from both countries spoke of their present status, felt more mature, had learned what matters in life and how to deal with various situations, from waiting for things to happen to now 'finally can themselves decide what is best'; 'make their own lives.' They showed how resources (i.e. networks) helped them internalize meaning, self-drive and motivation to which respondents reacted as a catalyst to independence.

'Where I grew up it was not well developed, educational with good morals, social, and here I knew how to make a new beginning by making the change first with me, so that I in turn can change things around me. From my experience, friends helped me be at this level, get to this level. Friends helped me find a place to work, to manage on my own, and to think by myself, to know how to choose people, how to form my own circle, and

involve in various activities, be responsible, have confidence in myself' (male 24, employed Sibiu).

Moving on to the next viewed factor of inner advancement/growth, personal choice may be dictated by resilience as argued also by Daining and DePanfilis (2007). Resilience, and I highlight, developed in time is shown at its best in the changes witnessed of an individual, the shift in behavioral patterns from pessimistic to optimistic attitude towards life events.

'I did not used to be like this, I was very pessimistic. Very. I used to tell my self always what if, what if this happens what will it be…. But now I know that whatever is to happen happens. Life gives on one side, life takes on the other side. You look at the bright side with optimism and everything is fine. This change within me is because of my job too, I got to know pretty cool people, and especially that I am also a sociable person too, and joyful… they understood me' (female 23, employed Sibiu).

Resilience in the context used below can be looked at as a defensive mechanism against negativity, depression, and mental breakdown**.** It can further be seen the close association between gained social capital and resilience. This trend to self-consult and/or self-educate, the capacity to weigh on experiences and reflect found amongst many care leavers cross nationally helped them cope with adversity. According to Cote (1996), Warin (2010), and Lee and Berrick (2012) these developed characteristics illustrate ownership of identity capital. Considered a sub-category of social capital, it can act as a linkage between social capital and the possible influence on increased resilience, capacity to self-reflect further leading to selection of life events to achieve positive change.

'Live in the present, not in the past. So we do not stagnate, to avoid going through the same problem twice. I still saw a chance there that there is a way out, but sometimes I thought I will never get out. But you see, we all have some kind of experiences that wake us up, and makes us realize that things does not happen as we wish. And even if we cannot find a job, we need to keep on hoping. See what can be done today to have a better tomorrow' (male 19, informal employment Vaslui).

Finally, in relation to social networks instilling hope, inner determination by bringing to surface qualities they possess, contributed to higher level of confidence and self-worth. Young adults have reached to the level of confidence, in which, with pride, they took on independence although this being present mostly among the group under the 'Moving on' category. Knowing that their friends 'are there' was enough, as a majority of them preferred to rely on themselves. Similar to young people from this research, Gilligan and Arnau-Sabates (2014) stressed that a perception of support can act as protective armour against distress of a physical, psychological or social nature. As a side point, the tendency for self-reliance arguably may stem from the longing to be in charge of their own lives. Looking at self-reliance, or independence, from a different perspective, some of the young people (two in Romania and 7 in England) took the meaning to the extreme, an outcome that will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

'I have people and friends around that I can talk about anything. They value and appreciate the work I do. For example at my job or my friends enjoy hanging out with me. And being able to care for my self, not wait around for my parents to give me money for this or that, you know what I mean? If I want something I can get it my self. Having this confidence that you yourself can achieve or have, I think it is critical' (female 22, employed Bucharest).

Additionally knowing that 'they are there for you' has a connotation of security and comfort. It appears that such thoughts gave them the drive to focus on doing the best they can to achieve social and financial stability.

> *'Knowing that your friends help you is probably the most wonderful thing in the world. Equally I know that if I need help I can go to him and he would put me up and so his parents. For as long as I need it his parents would jump in. That is the security knowing that if something may go wrong you will not end up on the street that there is someone who has your back although it may not be the best time of your life. The comfort is that someone is there for you generally'* (male 28, employed Northern England).

Evidence gathered suggests that if care alumni had developed such abilities as to analyze, reflect, and think long-term, they then had the confidence to aim higher. They also came to be aware that in order to learn and progress one must take initiatives. This results in what is considered within transition phase discourses as *interdependency* (e.g., Antle et al., 2009; Berzin, Rhodes and Curtis, 2011). With youth exhibiting personal agency in their lives, support became supplementary and not necessarily the main mechanism for survival.

> *'I believe that if there is not an opportunity you create one for yourself. In my first year I created the first project in the community and this is how I learned time management leadership'* (female 26, student/employed London).

At its most basic, agency can constitute simple actions like asking someone for help, or even assurance when uncertain, as Theron and Engelbrecht (2012) also supported. This resulted in making better use of resources, by enabling that person to be more informed, and thus knowledgeable to orient him/herself in directions

believed to work best. Personal agency use discloses how various resources have been accessed (tangible and intangible), to maintain or develop a manageable livelihood in connection with the social relations young people have. The choice with whom to associate is in itself agency, to which young people purposefully have decided to 'stick' with, aware of its possible influences on their lives.

> *'Having friends, people around made my life easier. If I need something I know to whom I can go. I ask around too - is it good what I do, how I do it? If I do not know I ask 'come on show me, tell me, explain and they do. Until now I did not know how to be a waiter, but from colleagues I learned, from people around I learned'* (male 19, informal employment Sibiu).

Further exploring on the theme, there were young adults who gave credit to themselves as well by emphasizing how their decisions dominated their life path, with each young participant talking about the paramount aspect of 'getting on'. As implied by professionals and put forward by young people at the end 'it is left to us to take it or leave it.' Within this framework much focus had been given to young adults whose positive networks had an instrumental role in their path to independence. The very few young adults who admitted to being surrounded by networks with similar needs to their own sometimes expressed feelings of being held back (Romania). Those who have become aware of inconsistent presence of positive social networks (England and Romania) owed success to themselves. It was a strong will accompanied with determination that led to achieving one's goal, either on short or long term.

'I think it has to do with my situation, of being in prison and I also read about care leavers, being in the same situation and I got sick living that life. So I thought to myself I have experience what I need now is academic knowledge. Things did not really change until I changed' (female 26, student/employed London).

This young man from Romania clearly puts forward how he figured out what was best for him. Fear of homelessness, supplemented by the desire to do something with his life, set his ability to realize that education would bring a better future as well as lengthen his security under the state support.

'The need. It is also the desire to do something with my life, to be a respected individual not for my past but for what I did, for experience. Alongside that I thought of this strategy as a way of preventing being in the street, so I went to University. And when I finished University in the summer, I thought I have nothing, nowhere to go. So I thought that the only option is to go for an MA. And that is what I did. I alone realized what I can do' (male 25, PhD student Bucharest).

A scenario was given to a young man about to embark on his new path after a month in Romania. At the time of the interview he was still preparing for transitioning to employment. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, such scenarios helped to have a sense of the young people's level of agency, the involvement of social ties, of the actions taken in response to finding employment or to coping with other social difficulties that they may encounter at this stage.

Case scenario: *Imagine that you just tried for a job but did not get it...* Without waiting to hear the rest, Gary jumped right in to respond:

Participant: '*I would try somewhere else. I would keep trying. I would go to my friend and talk to her. She installs hope in me, and shows me the different directions I can take, options and not to give up. She encourages me. You will make it, just keep trying. So I know that I cannot be refused forever*' (male 21, employed Vaslui).

This section looked specifically at possible influences of social capital in the lives of youth transitioning from care to independent living. Within this context social networks/social capital was associated with the ability to talk over one's interests, access information, exchange knowledge, and build trust. Relationships created upon encouragement and empowerment further led to a higher use of agency to do better than 'just surviving' for some. The vital role of social capital on the level of individual well-being has been explored. However, its effects in the process of attaining a level of employment, and housing security are comparatively important. The following section first presents challenges faced during the early periods of transition, partially having to do with lacking of established capital at the time of departing from care.

7.2. Outcomes as progressive in nature

Before engaging in accessing housing and entering employment, the issue of early stages to independence first will be discussed when exiting the care system either from foster homes, residential care or SOS alternative care settings. This perspective may shed light on the understanding of outcomes as progressive while underpinning the implications that limited support can have for youth after care. Questions of uncertainty and concerns (e.g. 'Where do I go? 'What is next for me?') governed young people's lives after care. To provide a succinct deeper understanding,

the transition phase in itself was not seen so much of a problem as it was the feeling of being unacknowledged, unprepared, and rushed out without sufficient information, or the tools needed to step over with more confidence. From the perspective of the young people, that was a major issue that for some made the transition phase very challenging, experiencing prolonged unemployment (e.g. in Romania, five still active in the black market) and frequent housing mobility. Finally, the challenges encountered by those groups after care especially during the early phases of transition appeared to be in relation to lacking a strong supportive system or better put, the 'right network.'

This topic presents another opportunity for exploring the complexity inherent in systematic barriers to achieving a state of self-sufficiency for today's youth. For children of the state, stigma was found to accumulate to the challenged stage especially when starting off on their own. As it has been previously discussed, their background as care leavers at times dictated chances for developing networks and what type of networks were likely to access. Another of the implications of stigma on young people was discouragement from making use of rights like others do who need state support. Because of the stereotype attached to children in care, they frequently refused help, or had a tough time admitting the need of extra assistance. Assessing on their declarations of independence, this was sometimes taken to the extreme. Whereas in Romania the premise was on simply refusing help even in the worst cases (on the street), in England five cases were discovered in which young people either got away from social benefits earlier than they were ready (3) or (2) refusing completely to claim them, both groups holding 'to not fit the stereotype' dogma.

'At 18 living in a flat with a very good location, very nice upper-class, it was good. But if you don't have the job to afford paying for it, it is hard. Since I did not want to apply for social benefits because of the stigma that goes with it, I eventually had to move out' (male 24, employed London).

Except for one respondent, in Romania social benefits was not a topic touched upon at any point, as if such services for populations in need of extra help do not exist. Linking to self-reliance, although some still struggled with insecure employment and housing many preferred to manage life after care by themselves: 'I can do it on my own', or 'I do not need any help from anyone. I can take care of myself'; 'They expect that people like us would look for help, this way I can prove them otherwise.' These shared life choices inform us that there is a call to assimilate care leavers' needs with the general public also found in struggle and thus in need of state support. Otherwise children in care continue to be singled out as a population in 'extra need of help' or as phrased in the Romanian child welfare legislation as 'children with special needs.'

Early stages of independence for many respondents in this study were portrayed as rough, underpinned by forms of instability of both intangible and tangible levels; emotional, depression, feeling of loneliness, confused, and material, homelessness, weak employment prospects and high housing mobility. In addition, approximately half of the Romanian group was challenged to even meet basic needs, at times not eating for days. Aside from challenges they were exposed to in the early stage of transition to independent living, it took them longer to attain social and economic stability. This period of insecurity/instability lasted from a few months up to several years. Comparing the young people's shared stories after care to the wider

related literature, lived events resemble previous generations of more than two decades ago (Zamfir and Zamfir, 1997; Marsh and Peel, 1999; Biehal and Wade, 1999; Stein, 2006, 2012; Courtney, 2008; Simon, 2008; Barn 2009; Duncalf, 2010; Hook and Courtney, 2011; Okpych, 2012).

The following evidence presents an example of a young man I met in Medway. His experience mirrors the early stages of transition of over 80% of the cases (Romania and England), an experience of homelessness, and high dependency on networks mainly for the purposes of meeting fundamental needs. At the point of the research he fitted under the 'Strugglers' category. The professional who became aware of the young person's case as so happened was formerly in care, and decided to take the young person, whom I shall call Julian, 'under his wing.' Julian appeared to rely mostly on the professional and on one of his old friends from school. Julian was 17 when I interviewed him and was already under pressure to find employment.

> *'Unfortunately they screwed up my benefits, so at the moment I am surviving on what I can. I do not get any money. I get food off of people that I know like R (*professional*), and other people, they give me food and clothes, shoes. The electricity bills are paid by the council as part of my placement. I live with R in the supported accommodation, and the people I know help me get by. Having R and A (*school friend*) has been a lot better, and lifted the weight off my shoulders. For a week I wore the same clothes that were not washed at all. R helped me get clothes, helped me get food, he paid for my shopping. If I need advice or guidance for an interview, I know I can go to R'* (male 17, homeless Medway).

The last time I spoke to him (less than a year ago), which was possible only through the help of his friend, Julian had to leave the supporting accommodation once

he turned 18. Now he was living with his friend who had given him a couple of months. However, Julian was happy to share with me that he entered an apprenticeship as a mechanic and that afterwards employment is guaranteed.

Of the many youth interviewed and doing well now, if I had met them two years ago more than half would have been in the 'Strugglers' or 'Survivors' stage. Their level of resilience, confidence, and determination would have been down with much uncertainty in their lives in terms of housing, education and employment. Because participants constantly compared present situations to their past, it was easier for me as the researcher to obtain a clearer picture of their pathway to establish a better status materially and psychosocially. With this I take the opportunity to extend upon and thus depict concretely how outcomes are progressive in time. Two examples will be presented here, one from Romania and the other from England, those two being the most recent events that occurred not far from finishing my fieldwork research.

When I met Steven, he had one month left to finish his MA in Bucharest. He was discharged from the system three months before his graduation. About to finish, like any other care leaver without a sense of security, he feared homelessness, and felt there was no one to turn to. At the time he acted desperately not knowing 'what will come out of my life,' disappointed that the work and dedication given to his MA degree was turning into nothing.

> *'All I ask is a job that I could hold on to so that I can manage, but not having this nor other stuff I risk being on the street. This thought haunts me everyday. I do not know what to do.'* (male 25, student Bucharest).

Despite sharing that he has a friend, who offered her place once he finishes, he did not see how this would help him or for how long this could last. Two months after our interview he was accepted into the PhD Program in Dance Choreography in the best university in Romania. His life completely changed.

> *'I have a friend that I got to know from the show I held for the dissertation. She liked the concept and we became friends this year. She told me many times that she is beside me, not to feel alone because she will support me. And in case I do not have anywhere to go, I can stay at her place until I can stand on my own feet. Together we applied for various universities to do my PhD'* (male 25, PhD student Bucharest).

Both the student and his professional friend have also looked at other Universities outside the country but decided to stay in Romania.

The second example pertains to Mariana located in London who was struggling and unhappy with work. She worked for 45 hours per week and at times even more, making it even harder to have time off for herself and deal with MA applications in Social Work. Every time she had to go for an interview, she lost days of her paid annual leave. She was rejected two times in a row with only the third time being successful in getting into the MA program in Social Work.

> *'I recently applied for a graduate scheme for social work and I got rejected. They said I was not good enough. I applied for Front Line and I got rejected at the assessment center for not having a very good interview, but the rest of it I did really well. I just put through another application at ….. University. I have this job at the moment I hate. But…'* (female 23, student/employed, London).

With tenacity and self-determination (additionally extending to the tendency to owe success to oneself discussed on page 16) she finally made it. Her course commenced in the fall of 2015.

Even with the few that still struggle to reach a state of stability, social and economic, all three (two from Romania and one from England, Medway) were determined to work on improving their current situations. One young man from Vaslui/Romania is taking a course in infirmary; another in Medway/England is doing an apprenticeship as a mechanic, both confident to find employment afterwards. A more succinct example can be given of a young man from Bucharest who is homeless and works on receiving support from an official in order to be in receipt of social benefits.

> *'I must be on social benefits. A lady is helping me, she felt sorry for me and she deals with this kind of stuff. She helped others like me before. I try little by little to advance. So I too have a start, wash myself, have new clothes; take a course because the way I am now, I am not ready for employment* (male 21, homeless Bucharest).

A foundation of a strong social network emerged to be critical in the lives of the young people, especially during the early stages of transition. Care leavers who took part in this study made clear how through acquired capital and social networks, one can establish a strong foundation from which to flourish beyond 'just surviving.'

> *'If you do not have a foundation, a home and environment which enables you to grow, you cannot then grow you are just surviving. When I was homeless and even when leaving care, you are just surviving, that is what you do. You cannot really think about*

College or University or other options, you're surviving' (male 28, employed Northern England).

Interestingly enough he highlighted how now he does not just 'survive' which is what generally care leavers do, but he 'lives.' He now pursues his interests and can afford to think, plan, explore options available at this time in employment, and has an idea what his future may look like and is currently thinking to open his own business.

'The difference is that in the past I would be thinking about tomorrow whereas now I am thinking where I want to be next year' (male 28, employed Northern England).

It seems that this particular group had to learn through 'real life experiences' having to face the consequences of lacking adequate preparation for living independently, equally missing a strong network-foundation from which to access information, advice and guidance (Anghel and Dima, 2008). Their intensified struggles during the early stages of independence could easily be a factor in having them give up or better put, give in. It is not only a question of poor outcomes but the struggles these populations undergo to achieve a form of stability or pursue their interests (Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2005; Lee and Berrick, 2012). Because of their status they seek immediate results, but the danger of such an approach, asserted Hutson and Liddiard (1994), is that short-term and practical solutions to the problem of survival when employment and welfare fail can obviously create problems in the long run, making it even harder to break away from that state in need of consistent support.

7.3. *Tangible outcomes*: care leavers aiming for stability through education/training and job-seeking

Social networks had a pivotal role in accessing resources such as reaching housing security, employment, as well as accessibility to continuing higher education (three from England and two from Romania). There are cases, found among the youth in England, where their friends contributed to informing them of jobs that suited their experience and qualifications (five). Similar cases had been found in Romania but to a lesser extent. In Romania, reliance on one other was a means of survival critical in the early stages to independence. Through their colleagues, a majority (18) accessed temporary accommodations, food, and clothing until they were able 'to stand on their own feet'. In both cases the impact of social networks in the integration process is twofold: 1) it has to do with socialisation, youth learned various tactics in how to approach issues, communicate, negotiate (as previously associated in Raffo and Reeves, 2000; Sala-Roca et al., 2012) and 'how to behave' that played a critical role in their ability to assimilate with the larger population at this level; 2) in regards to accessing resources, if not directly at least being informed about them. It is through active engagement in local affairs (for the Romanian group mainly involvement in carrying household chores for the community members whereas for the sample in England volunteering, taking part in panel discussions) that young adults interviewees accessed rather diverse social networks, made themselves known to the larger public. This resulted generally to increased tolerance, acceptance, respect, trust towards the youth members as Putnam and Helliwell's (2004) positioned when identifying social capital effects among society members that further contributed to better employment opportuntiies among the youth from England.

One striking observation is the similar experiences for both the English and the Romanian samples' level of interest in higher education attainment while under the care of the system. For instance access to higher education is guaranteed to children in care in both countries, yet rarely taken advantage of. Out of 31 participants in Romania, only 6 passed their Bacalaureat, the final high school exam in order to enter University. Making a further link, it so happened that at the time of the interview, all of those were older than 21 and hold BA and upper levels of education (MA, PhD). Another correlation is that they lived under the old system, and none of them experienced more than two placements, from Placement Centers to flats (Vaslui, Bucharest). The rest of the young adults, either from SOS or foster homes (6 out of 9) in my sample, happened to have finished only high school, without any interest in passing their Bacalaureat except for one from SOS who is working on it for next year. Not passing the Bacalaureat also illustrates a trend found among youth their age in parental care, where disinterest in higher education is partially as a result of seeing those with university degrees struggle in finding employment utilizing their qualifications (Campean, Constantin and Mihalache, 2010). A similar trend is found in England, where a majority of youth (four out of five) under receipt of support were interested in apprenticeship programs. Those that returned to education, however, did so years later but not while under social services. This particular finding resonates with outcomes previously identified by Duncalf (2010).

Generally, their actions were directed towards achieving a sense of stability and in England this was through apprenticeship programs.

'Having an apprenticeship will secure a job for me. But first I need to get a place. That is enough for me. For now what I need to find is a job so that I can look after myself. I want

to be able to pay for my own rent, and stuff like that. I do not want to be dependent on others' (male 21, unemployed London).

A turn away from education towards the primary concern in securing employment found amongst youth generations has been observed as early as 1990s (Banks et al., 1992). Today we are dealing with a high rate of youth exclusion (not just of those from care, but generally) from the labor market taking into account the alarming percentage of the wider population of youth falling under the category of not in employment, education or training (NEET) (Artner, 2013), 38% according to Winterburn's (2015) Report. What this social category has in common with care alumni is generally low qualifications, poor social capital in the family, exposed largely to disruptive behaviors, or simply coming from families of low socio-economic status (Ortiz and Cummins, 2012; O'Reilly et al., 2015). Thus like other groups their age, it is of no surprise that care alumni have a tendency towards filling in the positions available, usually blue-collar jobs (mechanic, cleaner, cook, kitchen porter, working in the factory) just for security purposes. Additionally, many of the Romanian sample noted that with or without qualification, you 'end up at the same factory, doing the same thing I do.'

'School? What for? Now I am concentrated on finding work. What will education do for me? I must be able to look after myself, be on my own two feet. I know so many other people with university and still they have the same low jobs. So? Yeah, I just want to be on my own, and look after myself, have my own money' (female 23, employed Sibiu).

Yet all 6 falling in the category of independent status after care pursued education in England with only one participant in Romania, demonstrating a high

motivation towards fulfilling at least Undergraduate level. In England, of 6 from the group cohort who returned to education/training, only 2 made use of the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010. Via training (apprenticeship at the age of 21 in Medway) and education (Undergraduate, at 22 in London) their cases were reopened benefiting hence from support from the social services until their educational programs are finished. In Romania, once finished with care, care leavers just did whatever they could to find a job and settle down, and did not attempt other options, except for exhibiting a high preference for leaving the country, or even return to education (Boaja and Ciurlau, 2012; Sandu, Stoica and Umbres, 2014). Cultural perspective could be one of the intervening variables for the differences found between the two nations in this respect. Romanians were found to be more family oriented as opposed to career-focused which was highly present among the English group (Roberts, 2009).

> *'I just want to have a job and settle down, have my own family. There are days when I walk on the street and I see families together, happy, looking fulfilled. That is what I want. Have my own place, a job so that I can provide for my own family'* (male 21, employed Vaslui).

Making a deeper contrast to Romania, the group from England presented a stronger belief in higher education as a platform for breaking free of social barriers, and achieving better jobs. But in England there was a stronger support network (e.g. bonds created with individuals from NGOs, teachers, case workers, nurses, foster carers, classmates). This rarely exists in Romania, which leads to the argument that employment for these young people may be the only secured option (Dima, 2013). Youth in England were exposed to various programs, or campaigns organized by

either NGOs, governmental or educational institutions (even at national level). That in turn enabled them to not only network with various groups (possibilities for bridging capital) but also with others with a care background who could share their stories, provide advice, and encouragement. From the data gathered, within the English context, the voluntary sector as representative of the community can be considered to have substituted the capital these young adults were missing from their close social bonds or from the system (here revealing Coleman's perspective). In Romania, no official channels were located to be active in initiating programs that could familiarize the public with the young people's situations (successes and failures) once out of care. Another argument may be added to the increased rate of higher education among the English group, which probably is connected with the system being more flexible in nature with school programs (night and weekend courses).

> *'I work admin staff here at the local social services part-time. I was promoted to the admin staff and from January I work with the teenagers. I go to school as well at the university in journalism full-time. I just started in fact this year. In know at least I have this on my back and not be someone with no higher qualification whatsoever. People see that I have a university degree (pause) they will look at you differently'* (male 23, employed/student London).

Curious as to how he manages on such a small amount of money, I further asked the interviewee: How do you manage living expenses?

> *'I am on a loan, so I will pay to the university at the end. You get 1000 in two parts, from the university, student loan. I am under that. Also I live with my girlfriend and she pays for rent and other expenses. But I help too around the house; I do my part'* (male 23, employed/student London).

Monthly earnings on a part-time work basis in England can be enough to cover basic needs, therefore allowing individuals to attend college/university around the working schedule. However, in Romania people on full-time employment largely remain financially deprived, unable to secure monthly needs as previously argued by Boaja and Ciurlau (2012). In addition, loans are set up to invest in human capital alongside a stronger built-in institutional social capital (agencies that support care leavers, higher levels of advocacy), hence increasing the likelihood of pursuing education while having a job.

Others, like the example below from Romania, used educational means to escape homelessness.

> *'I was not ready to leave the system. I wanted to but then realized that there is nothing for me outside. Also I was immature, so having this chance with university I took it. And it helped. I travelled around, met new people. University years really changed me. I grew up more in those years. Afterwards, I did feel ready to leave though and that is what I did'* (male 25, employed Bucharest).

For others it was 'to prove them wrong' that motivated them to continue or return to higher education.

> *'No one ever told me what I needed to do to go to University because no one (foster carers, social workers, teachers) believed that I was clever enough to go to University. But I never gave up; kept on going. And now look at me? I am doing a PhD. I am very stubborn. It always made me more determined to prove them wrong'* (female 27, PhD student Oxford).

Not realizing until later the benefits that come with better qualification in the employment arena*, the connections they made and the learning skills they acquired while in education*. A few others, however (6 of the English group, and 3 Romanians), realized its power, education as the main means of social networking, a time to mature and explore interests.

7.3.1. Securing and advancing in employment

Having a job is more than taking on an adult role and hopefully obtaining economic stability. Employment is a core element of daily life where people acquire personal growth, the education and values needed to become socially knowledgeable and economically productive. Employment gives people identity and enables social participation (Hammer, 2003; Balan, 2012; Kovacheva, 2014).

James sees in this company an opportunity for development and professional advancement. This encourages and empowers him, and sees that he too can advance

Researcher: *Now that you have a job, what do you need to do to be promoted?*

James: *'To take the Bacalaureat. If I take it, it is 100% chance that I will be promoted. This year I cannot, but next year. Now two weeks ago the manager came over and asked me if I have the Bac cuz a new position is available for team leader. I am a good friend with him, we get along very well. This is my only regret. They needed a team leader. The thing is I cannot get higher up the ladder here without the Bac. There was another girl here doing exactly what I do now, but she was qualified as an engineer, and when a post*

got open she got the promotion as an engineer in less than two months' (male 22, employed Sibiu).

For those who had a fairly good job, it meant the power of choice and opportunities to pursue their interests. They looked for better job opportunities in order to reach other interests, and self-invest.

> *'With this job that I have, there is no time for other stuff, 3 shifts, no days off per week, it is hard to make time to do other stuff. With this new job, I could actually start studying for my driving license and even get it. So now I do the paperwork and with my salary, deposit plus paid holidays I should have around 17 mil. This would be enough to start my driving license I think'* (female 22, employed Sibiu).

Some of those interviewed managed to pursue their career interests, for example becoming a chef, a dance choreographer, with others having chosen to work in domains related to their experiences and/or to their studies (higher percentage present in England where the market is more developed and varied). Looking at employment as one of the outcome indicators, although a higher rate of unemployment was found in England, over time they also had better jobs than the Romanian group, a majority still in blue-collar jobs. The difference between the two groups may also reflect the local economy, and availability of specialized services in dealing with the dynamics of socially stratified outcomes and challenges for various groups of society, something that in Romania is still undergoing development (Danacica and Cirnu, 2012). As the data gathered depicts like England (London and the south-east region), the cities of Sibiu and Bucharest are viewed as offering more opportunities in Romania.

Similar to their counterparts of non-care experience, these few exceptions of young people (found mostly in England, 8) picked jobs based on personal interests. Until they reached to this stage however, in England they did declare 'rough' early stages and the work involved to 'get here.' This group with MA, managerial, project coordinator positions, PhD, chefs, wanted their work to have a greater purpose aiming for the fulfilment of both personal and economic desires. For these young people generally older than 23 (except for two in Romania, 21 years of age), it meant giving back to the community, making a difference, improving social welfare of children-in-need to increase their chances in life. Its significance rested on contributing in society, or guiding children and youth. Doing good, knowing that 'your work has a positive influence energizes one person.' It strengthens self-esteem, and gives a sense of empowerment, and a 'good sense of self'. Below, one young woman shared what it means to work in a domain related to her experiences.

> *'The experiences I had shaped the person I am now. Probably if I had not been in care, now I would have been stuck with a boring job (pride). I have passion in what I do, and fight for young people in care. What more could I want?'* (female 25, student/employed London).

Prodan (2013) addressed that 'occupational choices and interests of young people are influenced by the social, economic and political contexts' (p. 342). As a result of lack of diversity within the Romania labor market, choices for youth are limited. But this is an issue also raised in the English literature. White and Green (2010) discussed the shift of the labor market towards managerial, sales and customer service. According to their view options for employment are narrowed for youth at disadvantage. Another related issue holds to the aspect of structured agency

in which young people cannot exercize this to the extent of enjoying exploration of opportunities (Schoon, 2007; Nordlander, 2015). It must be noted that with a more restricted market in Eastern Europe, coupled with the high unemployment rate, a trend found across Europe, means prolonged stay under parental care. Such a change is not necessarly by choice (Kovacheva, 2001; Biggart and Kovacheva, 2006; Balint, 2013; Sandu, Stoica and Umbres, 2014). A similar situation can be found in England. The rise in home-stay in England is attributed more to a lack of well-paid jobs and affordable housing than to choice (Heath and Cleaver, 2003; Bynner, 2005; Rugg, 2015; Druta and Ronald, 2016). The Office of National Statistics (2016) reported that one in four young adults aged 20 to 34 were living at home in UK in 2015.

Referring to the diverse economy in England, as well as the role the third sector can hold in socio-cultural context, for a few of the young participants from England, NGOs acted as a portal for employment. Out of 9 respondents who volunteered/did internships, 6 found employment through, or were hired by, such entities. In Romania, none of the 4 that volunteered accessed employment via the voluntary sector.

> *'I was on income benefits, and then job seeking benefits and was the pressure to find a job. Having that difficulty I started to volunteer which they did not like that at all. They really discouraged me from doing that, but I did it anyway. It gave me confidence, and I got to learn how to deal with various social issues, understand people, and communicate. Then I volunteered where I work now, and someone from there told me that a position is open, so I applied and got it'* (female 25, employed London).

In Romania structural influences appear to be somewhat stronger limiting youth employment prospects as well as chances to enter the market.

7.3.1.1. Employment barriers

Limited labor markets and general inclination towards blue collar jobs that have been made apparent across the samples may not be the only factors illustrating forms of barriers in employment outcomes. Professionals from England and Romania that took part in this study addressed the issue of youth's unawareness of their skills. This lack of awareness was raised in the research carried out by Dima (2010) to be a barrier of this population's chances for employment in Romania. One specific example can be drawn from a young man in Romania who appears to have very substantial work experience. He did volunteer work for a few years, and cooked in the institution where he was raised alongside the personnel.

> *'I started cooking early, and here at the centre in the kitchen and used to cook in the institution… Everyone liked how I cooked and I got along so well with the ladies there. I love cooking. So my qualification is as a chef, and I want to find something in this area'* (male 26, informal employment Vaslui).

Yet he did not put that on his CV nor did he mention his work experiences, or his volunteering during the interview for the …. restaurant. As he was looked upon as inexperienced, he lost the job that he actually wanted.

> *'I prepared well for the interview, dressed nicely with my CV in my hand and went to the interview. When I got there she asked me if I have experience and I told her no, I just finished my course. Well we actually need only people with experience. They asked for at least two/three years experience, and if you do not have connections (pause) I applied for three different jobs but was refused even when I said 'give me a chance, and I will show you'* (male 26, informal employment Vaslui).

Taking from the interviewee on the need to 'have connections' fits well with the other young people's complaints in Romania in accessing jobs. Similar to Balan's (2012) findings, the participants here listed poor pay, irregular working hours and pay, high corruption with poor working conditions, including employment accessibility being highly based on social connections as barriers to employment. Such structuring and functioning of the labor market in Romania may encourage people to not go into employment on the one hand, (dependent behavior on the state), on the other hand push Romanians' high involvement in the shadow economy (Preda, 2000; Dickens and Groza, 2004). Reviewing the issue of youth in accessing employment, the informants' identities as care leavers reframed their life stage and outcomes at adulthood. One more point worth making in connection to transition to adulthood, either speaking of *emerging adulthood* or extended adulthood, it may have been expected that geographical location would have an impact on the type of experiences lived by the population studied here. But care leavers, coming either from Romania or England, struggled in their early stages after care regardless of geographical location, although England is known to be economically, and socially better resourced than Romania.

Unrealistic expectations from the side of employers were reported extensively in the labor market, which seems to be a common impediment factor to increased chances for employment among young generations in Romania (Balan, 2012; Dima, 2013). The young adults make reference to the fact that not only children in care have difficulty in finding employment but generally today's youth populations as well. One man from Sibiu, shares his experience in looking for employment right after finishing his studies.

> *'The only barrier is that the owner had higher expectations. For example I just finished my cooking course and he wanted me to have least two years experience and I wanted to work in my field. Now this is a barrier… and this remains an obstacle for many young people'* (male 21, employed Sibiu).

Other means through which some of the care leavers managed life after care in terms of covering living expenses as well as leisure time with friends included active engagement in the informal sector. Dima' s study (2013) has also touched on youth's involvement in the black market, however it is only mentioned as part of the findings section - a finding that remains as of yet largely unexplored within the Romanian literature in understanding the meaning of such activity for youth who aged out. Taking into account the widespread practice of informal employment throughout the country, this study found a small number of care alumni to do so. However, there is the possibility that more respondents were involved in such type of employment but were reluctant to report it. As a starting point, according to their declarations, 10 young people in total worked in the shadow economy. At the time of the study, 5 young people, four from Vaslui and one from Sibiu were actively engaged, all of whom expressed an inability to find jobs, pointing out that connections matter.

'It is really hard to find a job. If you have no connections here, no one looks at you. It is the way it is. It took me a along time to find a job. So for over a year I worked here and there, going to people's houses, shops, restaurants, doing whatever they needed. That is how I survived at the time, plus I was lucky with my partner. And now the one that I have is cleaning the streets. But it is honest money so I am not ashamed of doing this kind of work' (female 29, employed Vaslui).

While in the eyes of the West, officially at least, the practice of informal work is a form of the shadow economy that does not contribute to the state's economic development overall, for populations like single, poor families, young populations holding an independent status including youth formerly in care, this means an escape from poverty and homelessness (Preda, 2000; Stanculescu and Marin, 2011). Informal employment was viewed as a solution to survival leading to a state of independence similarly found by Stauber and Walther (2006). There was a sense of pride among youth that they could look after themselves, that networks increased and people were becoming more and more aware of their skills.

For a few other care leavers in Romania the solution was to work for international companies. These entities were viewed to be more likely to take into account experiences and qualifications while treating employees with more respect, providing fair pay and better working conditions. They do not necessarily hire for their connections, hence there are better hopes for promotion, and care leavers seemed to appreciate those positive aspects in employment (IKEA, KFC, SAMSUNG).

'I work for ….. Company. It is international which is what I wanted. The chances for cheating on your pay, or disrespecting you, you know yelling at you, and humiliating you are much lower. There are standards. You have a schedule, monthly pay that is always

respected, you come and do your work and that is it. You know?' (female 23, employed Sibiu).

But aside from the factors listed above as barriers to labor integration for youth generally, discrimination highly present within societies accumulated to generate employability challenges for the groups under study (Samuels and Pryce, 2008). Discrimination on the grounds of coming from care specifically and concerning entry into employment was touched upon mostly in Romania. Even the professionals have recognized the disadvantage these young people have, and how due to the missing support of family, this additionally puts them at a greater risk like labor exploitation.

'They present a target group in labor exploitation. Because they do not have anyone to ask about them or to stand up for them, people easily take advantage of these young people. Here is a clear example. An employer uses him for one to two months. The system on the other side believes that he is hired, integrated well, so decides to terminate his support. Usually this occurs after two or three months because the employers can have that trial period of up to three months, but the local authority does not take that into account, the child is let go. And this is how unfortunately so many of them end up on the street or unemployed' (male, professional Bucharest).

Concerning employment one finding stood out in the Romanian sample. Two professionals, via vignettes, explained the process in assisting the young adults in employment. It started off either 'Hi, we have a young person from the placement center….' or 'We are from the Placement Center in ….. and we have two young men interested in construction work.' In this study about 40% of youth lived through such experiences of labor exploitation. Considering the known level of predisposed risks to

vulnerability (e.g. labor exploitation), it is surprising that informing of their status was used as a strategy to integrate youth in employment. Among the youth interviewed it raised a great debate that developed into,

> *'How many people hire others on the basis that they come from a divorced family, or come from a poor family? How many people do you hear saying that? Never. This is confidential and private…'* (female 22, informal employment Vaslui).

Another barrier may have to do with the young people's ability to initiate change. For example, with the sample here, professionals and young adults from Romania spoke of self-victimisation, or as mentioned in the networks chapter (6) of self-pity. A similar point has been brought up in England by the young people themselves (see page 197). Behind such statements explanations were given for the past experiences. On the same note however, usually those in the 'Survivors' and 'Moving on' stage were arguing the need to not allow the past to hold them back.

7.3.2. Housing

Reaching secure housing is one of the key elements that establish the state of independence (Boyd and Norris, 1999; Bone and O'Reilly, 2010). Yet it is dependent upon an array of factors such as employment, but more recently on socio-economic status as a result of increased private renting equally to one's surrounding networks. This can dictate possibilities in selecting one type of housing from another (cheaper with fewer facilities, poorer quality) (Heath and Cleaver, 2003; Murie, 2009; Stone, Berrington and Falkingham, 2011; Clapham et al., 2014; Druta and Ronald, 2016). In

their analysis of housing pathways, Clapham et al. (2014) have identified shared-housing as typical arrangements for young populations under the age of 35, with one of the causes being increased monthly rent at the same time as declining rates of monthly earnings (Danziger and Ratner, 2010). Like their non-care counterparts, over 70% of the youth participants were living in private renting houses. However, for youth who cannot override the pressure of high-cost of living rent, it threatens their ability to self sustain materially, as argued by Desmond and Perkins (2015). Housing instability exhibited via renting is pictured additionally in terms of high mobility from one location to another (Rugg and Quilgars, 2015; Scholl, 2015; Coulter, van Ham and Findlay, 2016). Speaking of those with a care background, frequent housing mobility is heightened in the early period of leaving care, a finding that is based on various studies as an 'extremely common' trend for these young populations (Berzin, Rhodes and Curtis, 2011, p. 2120; Burgess and Natalier, 2012). Yet sleep-overs, as found to be practiced among the respondents, or 'couch surfing' as identified by Perez and Romo (2011), are considered a state of homelessness. If this is the case, then more than 60% of the participants experienced some form of homelessness. More than half of the English sample (11) declared to have experienced homelessness (four slept over with people they knew, three in Hostels, with the rest literally being on the street), and six young adults shared such experiences in Romania (only two slept over with people they knew for months straight). At the time of the interviews, two were homeless, with one from Romania sleeping on the street and the other from Medway sleeping from place to place. Separating out the details in exposing the differences between the two countries, in Romania few (6) accessed renting through the local authority for the first two years of the transition period. For those in England, accommodation mostly consisted of shared flats with other colleagues from care, as well as Hostels used primarily during the preparation for socio-professional

integration. Yet for the majority of the Romanian cohort, as pointed out earlier in the chapter, accessing housing was accomplished through other youth formerly in care. Only a few in England, three based on their declarations, were able to obtain housing security through their friends, although not at such a high rate as indicated in previous research (Simon, 2008). Interestingly for both groups, accessing housing through immediate ties has been more a practice/trend highly used during the early stages of having left care, usually, according to their narratives, after a few months moving on to finding their own place. But accessing housing through fellow colleagues may be an easier route to some sort of housing security than could have been otherwise done individually. Their colleagues presented a source of escaping homelessness along with other risks that come with this status. Again, grouping with one another which was often found in Romania may reflect the scarcity of resources for these young adults, therefore confirming previous literature that 'they are one their own' once out (Campean, Constatnin and Mihalache, 2010; Dima, 2010, 2013; Anghel 2011; Boaja and Ciurlau, 2012). Based on their declared experiences, for some it was a choice, but for many, grouping with others from care was a necessity.

> *'I am lucky cuz I have my family. Once I was out they took me in. But you see many of my friends don't even know their families. Where do they go afterwards? All they have is each other'* (male 21, informal employment Sibiu).

Another point of view from a care leaver in Vaslui, echoes well the status and risks of starting off independent living, finding a job, a place to live, and covering living expenses without that foundation of support to starting.

'I do not know where I would have been if it was not for Chris' help. When I got out, I did not know where to go, what to do. But he offered his place to stay, gave me food… it was a tough time for me. You need that someone to help you start, because otherwise it is impossible. Now, I have my own rental and work here and there to cover living expenses. But that is because he helped me' (male 19, informal employment Vaslui).

Care leavers like the general population in Romania (a subject covered in chapter 3 specifically by Stanculescu and Marin, 2011; Manole, 2010; and Balan, 2012) accessed resources based on connections, and resources varying in accordance to one's type of networks, this being more noticeable with the sample from England. To be more specific, participants in England with a richer capital or with more varied networks benefited from a higher range of opportunities in regards to the location of housing, type of jobs, and accessing education in contrast to their fellow colleagues who could only enjoy basic needs, food, advice, and 'having someone there to talk to'. Like their counterparts of both well-established family support (emotional and financial) and of the youth categorized as NEETs, the participants demanded extended support from 'family' in the process of achieving some form of independence, including housing stability.

From a broader point of view, young adults in this study reflect the general populations their age's standard of living, in private renting type accommodations mixed with individuals outside of the system (Druta and Ronald, 2016). Another distinction found was that in England sharing flats or houses appeared to be divided based on status: professionals and students. For example, those who were students were living with other students. On the other hand in Romania a few of the young people rented a room from a family who wished to make extra money. It seems that

frequent moves do not end with leaving care, because youth who exited care, similarly to the general population their age, change residence often, usually on a yearly basis (Scholl, 2015). In regards to the quality of renting accommodations, two cases from Romania stood out, although to them in comparison to the past, it meant progress. As discussed in my methodology section, some of them insisted on inviting me over to their places to which I agreed. One from Bucharest lived in a sort of shed with his wife, in one room having, bed, table, chair, sink where dishes were washed, clothes stored, and a stove upon which to cook. Yet when asked 'How is it going for you?' he replied with a smile,

> *'You know things do not look great right now, but we have our own place. You see we have a bed, a roof over our heads, and can manage living expenses. I mean it could be better, but for now this is okay'* (male 24, employed Bucharest).

Another young mother, although she had three children and husband, was also living in a single room, with a small hallway at the entrance where a washing machine was kept and a sink to wash dishes. All of them were sleeping in the same bed. She has been living there for five years, and no change.

> *'So, what do you think? It is not wow, but we like it. We have here our own private room. But now that we are four here, we must move and applied to the city council. So, we hope to get this new flat that would be spacious enough for the children as well'* (female 29, employed Vaslui).

The status of young people after care in the society also influences their survival strategies (e.g. relying on one another as a group from care specifically found

in Romania) parallel to living standards expectations. The situations in which some young adults found themselves appear in line with the statement held by Heath and Cleaver (2003) that young people like care leavers are not in the position to negotiate housing by quality, or location partially due to limited ownership of resources.

One of the professionals, like many other participants, pointed out below the difficulty of youth living on their own and making ends meet such as covering living expenses, and renting costs in Romania.

> *'It is a quite difficult situation. Let's say you earn 800 lei but rent is about half of that amount plus utilities that need to be covered, feed yourself... '* (male, professional Vaslui).

A young adult shared similar concern stating that a job alone is not enough to manage living expenses.

> *'The rents are high in comparison to our salary, and in general for others it is hard to manage, so imagine those from the care system'* (male 26, employed Bucharest).

But it must be remembered that the consequence of the high cost of housing is high occupancy with parents until later in their 20s or 30s (Cotterell, 2007; Courtney, 2008; Simon, 2008; Okpych, 2012). In England, Bone and O'Reilly (2010) discussed as well the price of rent skyrocketing in the last few decades, making it difficult for younger generations to self-sustain. Considering such difficulty mostly expressed within the clusters from Romania, it may explain the sidetrack inclination of the general population in the country to work in the black market while still having a full-

time paid job (Stanculescu and Marin, 2011). Yet the adults who participated in this research with contract type employment did not mention working on the side for more money. About 50% did, however, complain of making it through to the limit, and that having one another, collectively putting money together for food for example helped them deal with this concern.

The question of housing ownership has not come to be a major part in our discussions although a few mentioned (mostly in vignettes) the wish of having one in the future. Of all the interviewed participants, only two young adults from England shared with pride their housing conditions that appear to surpass the general standard of accommodation such as shared house, rent with just basic amenities (Murie, 2009). Jason, unlike the majority of care leavers, enjoys living alone in a flat in London.

> *'I live now in my own one bedroom flat. It is nice I love it. I love my own space'* (male 24, employed London).

Eric who is 28 years old lives with his partner. But they share a rather spacious, well maintained flat.

> *'I mean I have a nice flat with a balcony. I have a very nice view from my flat. We really like our place. It is a nice flat'* (male 28, employed Northern England).

Based on the findings gathered in this qualitative study, past experiences did not appear to be a variable in determining the outcome nor age of departing from care as much as did the support available during and after the transition period to

adulthood. Indeed, all 17 (11 from England and 6 from Romania) that experienced homelessness did not receive any form of support either informal or formal, and a few even at a later stage described to struggle (one 24, and 26 Romania, one 25, 18, England). When comparing by age there are youth who already by their early twenties did well (below the age of 24, four from Romania, ages 18, 19, 21, and 23, with well established jobs and two from England, one 22 and another 21).

Concluding points

This chapter disclosed detailed accounts on the role social networks/social capital have had in their lives, at personal and professional levels. In this study social networks, a combination of formal and informal ties (friends from care and non-care, professionals, colleagues) have contributed to solidifying sources of social capital into human and economic capital. On this account, outcomes were looked at from the intangible side, referring to it as inner state and from the tangible perspective. Care alumni in this research too appear to fall under Stein's (2012) typology of oucomes, either under 'Moving on', 'Survivors' or the 'Strugglers.' Although Dima and Bucuta in recent work (2015) in Romania applied Stein's categorisation of outcomes, they do not consider the cultural context. Applying Stein's typology of outcomes in the Romanian context helped identify a new sub-category within the 'Strugglers', self-victimisation. Self-victimization is a characteristic that appeared to hold them back from initiating change in their lives. Interestingly recent related research carried out by Schofield, Larsson and Ward (2016) also spoke of a sense of self-victimization among youth who have left care in the UK. Moreover, the identification of certain characteristics found to match with either 'Strugglers' Survivors' or 'Moving on' links directly with social capital.

What came out in this research was that individuals with positive networks presented as more optimistic, and were more determined, a rather 'can do' attitude, more so than found among the youth in the 'Strugglers' and 'Survivors' categories. In Romania individuals in the 'Moving on' stage generally became informed with 'a clearer idea of what it is like outside' from older siblings, or from older youth formerly in care. In the category of 'moving on', 9 participants from both countries (five from England and 4 from Romania) exceeded all expectations, MAs, good office jobs, PhDs. The 'Strugglers' about 30% of youth were caught up in an enclosed circle of people, relied heavily on other care leavers and on other individuals with similar experiences/needs – an indication of bonding capital with limited access to resources. In essence, it appears that access to networks with rich social capital that set out learning, and knowledge of opportunities are believed to increase chances for upward mobility. The youth that had reached the 'Survivors' (almost 60%) stage also known as the 'the missing middle' group in this study, were unsatisfied with their achievements, still figuring things out, and learning to explore resources available. They were still in the process of expanding networks, and dealing with frequent housing movements. In fact about 60% of the young people interviewed fit here under the group of the *missing middle*. Understanding the *missing middle* from a comparative perspective, in Romania it was more reliance on informal employment or on each other whereas in England dependence on social benefits or other entities like the voluntary sector. In both countries, none of them were doing exceedingly well, but had a job to pay the bills, rent, in retrospect managed to fulfill basic needs. These groups, 'Moving on' and 'Survivors' shared however a few characteristics: they both happen to be aware of their qualities; they for the most part have come to realize their background as an asset, less so for the 'Survivors', the skills and experience gained from it valuable to employment (communication and problem-

solving skills, public speaking, good awareness of society, what people want and what are their needs, relating to people of different classes and backgrounds, training experience). It was however the older participants (from 24 years of age) generally that have reached this state with a higher percentage located in England. In time such achieved development further validates the perspective that outcomes are progressive in nature. With the youth clusters in this study the shifts that occurred within this ladder of hierarchy of outcomes were upwards, from 'Strugglers' to 'Survivors' or to 'Moving on'. The participants here are the youth that early on in their pathway to independent living faced adverse challenges, but overall were able to bounce back. The majority of participants in this empirical study represent only a small percentage, often in research called the resilient group, or as the care leavers see themselves the 'lucky ones,' compared to the statistics of youth documented largely to have poor outcomes, on the likelihood to be involved in various crimes, deal with prison, with mental illness, alcohol and drug use, representation of 'Strugglers' (Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2005; Ahrens, 2011; Lee and Berrick, 2012; Rees and Pithouse, 2015; Winterburn, 2015).

In an effort to best present the findings with the aim of giving clarity into conceptualizing social capital in the world of youth with a care background, the environment these samples grew up in as well as the social entourage they were surrounded by, appears to have had a great impact on the development and formation of the individuals. As a result, personal agency, the degree to which independence belongs to the person in shaping his/her reality is contextual as local resources, type of networks (structural forces) accessed proved to be detrimental in optimisation of opportunities (Cotterell, 2007). Overall the young participants have shown a great level of agency in their lives although limited within boundaries of

contextual framework of social norms associated with adulthood. For example, achieving stable employment was confined by risks of discrimination and labor exploitation as found among the young adults from Romania. Personal agency use in their lives extended as far as choice of networks, ability to plan ahead, and personal drive to relocate to other cities with greater capital. Such initiatives appear to have influenced greatly not only the outcomes but the social networks pre-established in certain types of environments found extensively within the cohort in England (through education). By placing social capital and social networks among the major factors (others would include race, and gender) that can influence outcomes, it was possible to explain how some fare better than others. This could not be more clearly pictured than by having included a diverse cluster of youth that enabled to capture all three varied outcomes, 'Moving on', 'Survivors' and 'Strugglers'.

Chapter 8

Discussion and Conclusion

Driven from the scarcity there is within sociological studies in theoretical understanding of social capital utilization among vulnerable groups, the aim of this research was to gain an overall understanding of the mitigating role of social capital in the lives of youth after care. Investigating social capital in a former communist country like Romania among young adults as well as in England, a country considered well-developed economically, casts light on the use of social capital in different social situations. In this study, the bridging and bonding dichotomy is not assessed on differences and similarities, instead it is looked at in terms of the meaning it holds in the lives of the young people. From the evidence gathered, it has been witnessed that being in possession of strong social networks can be instrumental in their achieving independence with fewer risks. Over the years, concepts related to social capital such as mentoring, and peer learning have been promoted in service provision concerning youth looked-after at international level although to a lesser extent in Romania. What should be emphasized, based on the gathered evidence from my study, is the importance of creating social relationships outside the system while under the care of the local authorities. A strong foundation of social networks could represent a form of continuity in terms of enjoying some sort of social security that many youth appear to be missing when aged out of care. This could be a long-term strategy to respond to the 'known issue' of post-care risks like housing instability, labor exploitation and unemployment to name a few. At this point, no prior research has focused primarily on social networks and social capital specifically during the transition process to

independent living. In chapter 2, it was discussed at length that transition to adulthood depends on availability of emotional and financial support. Concerning youth leaving care, this study empirically had put forward how these young adults respond to the demands of managing life after care in relation to social networks and social capital.

This study found that social capital derived from care leavers' own networks played a critical role in status attainment. Here I specifically mean in terms of both 'inner state' as well as human capital acquisition. Exploring domains of social capital and social networks in Romania and England I found the capacity to nurture positive characteristics among the young adults. Namely, awareness of qualities, exchanges of information, having input validated through reciprocal support, being encouraged, lead to higher confidence level among youth formerly in care, that further served to increase individual undertakings. The research findings resonate with Dolan's (2012) view on how "support through reciprocal helping fosters" both "independence and acknowledgement of strong ties" (p. 358). The current data indicates that inner state needed to be pre-established in order to reach concrete results in life among the young adult participants. Above all, these gained benefits experienced by the young people explain why social capital is effective on individuals. Although capital in related literature, Coleman, Putnam and Bourdieu, is explored in terms of the means through wich it can be accessed and its impact on individuals, this research has explicitly depicted how the concept comes to have such of an influence in the lives of the young people. Being poorly equipped, young people through networking had to make up for their deficiencies in relation to the expectations set in the wider society for this age group of youth.

What strengthens further this study's contributions has to do with the inclusion of a rather wide range of age cohorts of young adults, from 17 to 29 years of age. On one hand, this enabled the researcher to capture individual transformations over time. To be more specific, those within the age bracket 23-29 generally showed higher level of resilience than the younger ones. On the other hand, outcomes emerged as progressive in time. As specified on page 221, if interviewed a few years ago, many would have fitted under the 'Strugglers' category and not as the majority now do under the 'Survivors' with quite a few in the 'Moving on' stage. This leads to another point, that this research located the 'missing middle' or 'Survivors' often missed out in leaving care related research. As a result this research does not discuss only two contrasted outcomes that being 'Strugglers' and 'Moving on'. Finally, investigating social capital and social networking as strategies used at this stage of life, it is obvious that this research is positioned from a more positive perspective concerning youth from care. The young people's willingness to do 'something with their lives' accompanied with utilization of social capital recognizes strengths as well as capacity to actively engage in their living environment. This has been strengthened by having reached youth from various type care of settings (e.g. SOS Children's villages, foster homes, kinship care, residential care and as termed in Romania placement centers). In economically well-developed countries studies on youth in or transition from care are commonly conducted in foster homes even if children's homes are still present, like in England. In Romania residential settings still play a major, not central, role in placing children, with kinship type of care being the least common.

Comparing experiences across the youth clusters as well as incorporating professionals' perspectives allowed for triangulation within the data sets.

Comparative analysis provided a better understanding of various possibilities of locating as well as utilizing social capital. For example, in Romania it was through early involvement in household work, from door to door, whereas in England it was more formalized, through panel discussions, and volunteering programs. However, utilization of social capital to ease the process towards achieving stability once aged out of care stood out at the forefront on many aspects of the young peoples' lives. The fact that in both countries post care experiences were improved as result of established social capital is a significant finding. It is such a finding that reinforces Esping-Andersen and co-authors' (2002) statement on how comparative analysis can help in finding solutions, in this case of youth who aged out of care, in what may work or not to establishing better life attainment. In this study, understanding the processes of young people pathways to succeed, or most importantly considering social capital and social networks as one of the factors that 'may assist young people during their journey from care to adulthood' presents important implications for policy development in the area of youth leaving care (Stein, 2012, p. 8).

To assess how the research questions have been answered, the chapter discusses the main topics such as social capital and social networks, and outcomes with key elements on the faults found in the functioning of the child welfare system concerning youth looked-after. From a social capital and social networks approach, these different topics interconnect in important ways. Fulfillment of emotional needs, even if received later, was considered vital in their path to independent living. The content on the mitigating role of social capital in negotiating life after care resulted in the analysis of both intangible and tangible outcomes. Such outcomes displayed important developed characteristics of youth including their capacity to turn intangible resources into meaningful means for establishing more secure standards of

living. Whereas for some it meant escape from homelessness or from the black market, for some others it translated into obtaining higher education. The section on the child welfare system (5.2.2.) depicted the degree to which such a structural force can act as an impediment not only to networking but also to enjoying secure forms of support during the transition period.

8.1. The extent to which the research question (including the sub-questions) has been answered

What are the strategies used by young adults to negotiate life after care?

The objective of this empirical study was to conceptualize the meanings and processes of life after care in relation to social networks/social capital. In answering the question, the research looked at individual cases to reveal the journey to securing a sustainable life through the utilization of such resources as social capital and social networks. Based on the findings obtained, networking with its generated capital was a key strategy used in negotiating life after care. By deconstructing social capital/social networks of care leavers at such depth, my study's contributions lie on four main arguments. First, networks were the main channel of socio-professional integration for the young populations, either coming from Romania or England. By learning of various tactics when interacting with the surrounding environment, how to behave, dress, and negotiate to name a few young adults accessed resources faster. According to Bourdieu (1998) it is entrenched in the human character to locate a person's position based on the behaviors displayed in certain circumstances. This implies the necessity of individuals to invest in development of interpersonal skills in

order to sustain and/or develop social relationships that can lead to increased options in the employment arena, or in Morrow's (1999) view to be accepted in society for that matter. In the case of care leavers, community substituted for the missing capital in the primary living environment (children's home, foster homes) through which young adults were enabled to explore network opportunities beyond the borders of care, especially in England. In this respect, similarity is shared with Coleman's research findings on adolescents who did not access social capital at home but from school. It is indeed through social networks that many young individuals were engaged on matters concerning their personal lives. Post-care social networks acted as a platform for young adults to exercize opportunities made available as a result of gained knowledge. Secondly, young people have shown the capacity to utilize social capital and social networks although limited in some respects surrounding fulfillment of basic needs: in Romania shelter, food, and in England associated with 'having someone to talk to'. The third argument regards how networks crossed over barriers such as stigma established as result of their background. Because individuals either from University, work colleagues, or employers saw care leavers' strengths and qualities such as commitment, and eagerness to learn, stigma decreased. Even more these social bonds became the main avenues for accessing resources, among others employment. For example, in England a young person's background was seen as a valuable asset within a specific branch of the employment arena. One such branch was within the third sector, with a focus on assisting vulnerable groups either in relation to education, rehabilitation, or reintegration programs to independent living. Employers in Romania, according to a very few young adults, praised them for honesty, hard work and commitment, on this basis finding jobs. How the system can act as a facilitator in forming social networks is another major argument. The local authorities have shown to affect the type of

resources accessed by the individual participants along with the type of networks developed (sharing similar needs); the child protection itself represents a network system. The final contribution relates to outcomes as progressive in which social capital and social networks assisted the young adults in the process from the 'Strugglers' to 'Survivors' stage for example. Based on the evidence gathered, 'Strugglers,' 'Moving on' and 'Survivors' typology of Stein's is a hierarchy ladder of development that youth former in care undergo once out of the system rather than categories youth fit in as outcomes.

Stein (2012) in his typology of outcomes identified [an] inner state (levels of resilience, self-worth, emotional maturity) to influence attainment measured in respect of education, employment and housing stability. In my study, such characteristics of inner state represent intangible outcomes for two reasons: firstly because such elements of achieved personal advancement determined care leavers' ability to produce real change in their lives, and secondly, there were youth who progressed over time (those found in the Strugglers category to come to the stage of becoming more resilient, accepting of their past, as I have depicted specifically in chapter 6). Such results infer that the three-[proposed] outcomes by Stein are not simply a matter of personal characteristics, but of developmental stages of the young people's trajectories to socio-economic stability. In time, many youth from Romania and England, through emotional support, encouragement, shared knowledge received from their set of networks, exhibited a capacity to overcome the sense of self-victimization and take more control in initiating change (e.g. returning to education, escaping the black market).

Various elements drawn from the three major theoretical perspectives of social capital, those of Coleman, Putnam and Bourdieu interlinked with one another

in important ways. Due to the dynamic nature of the topic at hand, this approach was seen as best to understand from a wider perspective the utilization and role of social capital among a group considered most vulnerable in society. In addition, it was equally important to pay attention to social-cultural dimensions. For example as noted in the empirical chapters (6 and 7), the Romanian group was less able to access the bridging type of capital. This may have to do with fewer chances to participate in community (including volunteering, and discussion panels as found with those from England) aside from the dearth of awareness raising campaigns concerning children of the state. A higher rate of reliance on fellow colleagues found in Romania in contrast to England depicts local cultural and social situations. Bonding capital was mainly used for emotional purposes, advice, and basic support needs, with very few in pursuit of higher education. As discussed in chapter 3, the minimum wage of around 200Euros, and the weak mandate of social institutions in parallel with high activity of the shadow economy in the country predisposes various populations to risks of social exclusion. The reliance on friends, and family is a common practice in Romania. It appears to play an integral role in fulfilling one's needs as available public resources are distributed 'based on connections'. In England with a greater number using bridging capital, young people benefited from the exchange of information, and negotiated not just getting access to better paying jobs based on their interests, but also access to higher education (including MA, PhD). Youth formerly in care from England were in possession of a more diverse set of networks composed of professionals from NGOs, employers (just like in Romania), teachers from school alongside school colleagues. Looking from a different angle, high activity of NGOs in such countries like England through which individuals acquired various resources could suggest that social capital is more institutionalized, a difference from the West

to East. However, whether coming from Romania or England, social networks played a pivotal role in socio-economic integration processes.

8.1.1. Networks as a foundation to 'start off' independent living

Support was critical during the early stages of transition. The young people appeared to rely on whatever networks they had to cope with this stage. As a majority left care without a safety net accompanied with a rather 'rushed pace' experience while under the system, they found themselves in a loop of uncertain paths. If looked at from a policy framework stand point, policies pertaining to children/youth from care are fairly rigid: extended support up to the age of 25 in England and in Romania to 26, is conditional in both countries upon continuing higher education. In contrast to Romania, England does have a more flexible policy in which the youth can return to local services if decided to continue a form of education or training. Alongside the fact that only two years are dedicated to prepare youth for independent living in Romania and England, many exited the care system before their 21st birthday. From these expressed experiences, it was evident that youth are taught to deal with immediate concerns. They do not have time to think of long-term options, which may explain the tendency towards seeking fast results. It may explain the high inclination to make use of capital for more basic fundamental needs, such as for food and shelter. Despite the fact that in England more diverse networks were found, during the early stages of transition the number that experienced homelessness (rough sleeping) was at a higher rate than in Romania. Those from Romania appear to have used peers formerly in care to escape such experiences. Interestingly enough, given time, those from England had higher chances for upward

mobility than was the case for the young adults from Romania. What is worth pointing out is that for both youth clusters, bridging capital otherwise known as weak social ties in many cases turned into bonding capital, informal ties. Having established similarities, for both youth cohorts, networks served emotional and instrumental support.

Yet by the same token, the intense vulnerability of care leavers is well documented, and they are a group recognized as being in need of (extra) assistance while in and after care. Within the Romanian literature, specifically in the works of Anghel and Dima, despite acknowledgement of care leavers as 'grouping with one another', little interest had been given to the role their friends could play after care. Anghel did enumerate a few advantages but this coverage remained limited in scope. Similarity is shared in England, although covered on more ground, where key contributors such as Broad, Stein, Whiting, Berzin discuss the essential role of the emotional, guidance and encouragement types of support for this specific youth category. The content remains within the context of enhancing resilience, emotional maturity along with increased self-worth. Despite social capital in related research being highly acknowledged as a product of social interaction, it remains largely neglected in leaving care discourses. The angle from which social networks and social capital were analyzed in relevant literature reviewed in the present study, depicted a passive role of the young adults. However, in order to understand social capital it is not enough to discuss its possible impacts on individuals. As Bassani argued we need to 'test' the theory from a less passive position from the young people. In my research, the youth participants are recognized as having an active role in negotiating the creation of resources. Having shown the young people's ability to utilize social capital, i.e. access information/knowledge, make use of suggestions and/or advice

given, which further illustrate possibilities for creating human capital, does reflect agency. This is a significant contribution for such findings go beyond what social networks can do for them, or 'the impact social networks have on them as individuals' (McGrath et al., 2012). We saw here the participants' active role in forming relationships via selection of individuals and some of them with the ability to make use of available resources that resulted in pursuing higher education, have less of a struggle during the early periods of transition, and/or to access jobs based on their interests. The individual decides how much use to make of the resources presented to him/her in this case participants having used social capital in the stage towards independence. Although a majority used social capital for fulfilling basic emotional needs, it does suggest that capital can be adjusted to fit individual needs.

8.1.2. Seeking to access the 'right network'

Social capital and social networks are concepts discussed in general terms with few attempts towards a specific reference to positive networks as undertaken in the present study. Whereas networks in general give a sense of belonging, and self-confidence, if it is not to assist the individual to escape a vulnerable state he/she then remains in a circumstance of disadvantage, i.e. homelessness, involvement in the shadow economy. These same networks may present barriers especially for individuals whose plans conflict with the networks' available resources, including with its expectations of that individual's achievements. Specifically, lacking the 'right connections' slowed down the pace of reaching to the 'Survivors' stage for many young people in this study. It is social networks that often differentiated the 'Strugglers' including its sub-category 'self-victimization' from those who managed to

get up the social ladder ('Survivors') or fairly quickly have a good start off since leaving care ('Moving on'). Moreover, individuals with positive ties (people who encouraged them, provided information, valued their interests and qualities) optimized their horizon of thinking into expanding their opportunities that being in continuing (PhD/MA in Romania and England) or returning to education (more prominent in England, and worth pointing out, well after leaving care), getting better jobs, or moving to more developed cities (to Sibiu and Bucharest, or to London and south-east region). In this research, accessing the 'right networks' enabled many to advance not only personally but also professionally. Although the care background acted as a major long-term impediment to achieving goals, care leavers through efforts of broadening the circle of networks reached individuals of higher classes with richer forms of capital. This particular finding confirms with Bourdieu's (1986) view who claimed that resources and knowledge remain within a specific circle of society members. In accordance with one's networks, the young people's experiences varied from labor exploitation (Romania) to optimization of opportunities. My sample, I found, selected people to bond with from whom they could learn, a mechanism developed for easier transition and integration, to make sense of the new world around them. In this view, it fits with Bourdieu's position in that networks are only effective for individuals when those in their networks are more resourceful and knowledgeable. At this level it further links with Putnam for through engagement in local social affairs youth had higher chances for bridging capital that in turn carried more knowledge than could be found within a close immediate network. However, in this research social capital derived from one's set of networks conveys complexity. For some of the young people, mostly from Romania, fellow colleagues were a foundation to start independent living; yet the same group was often considered to hold them back. Does this mean that as an individual's sense of achieving stability

changes, so do the needs for networks to match his/her interests, thereby distancing one from the prior set of networks? If this is the case, then it is not only about selection, localization and/or utilization of social capital but also the changes of networks over time.

With regard to distancing, young people particularly from Romania self-distanced from fellow colleagues to bond with 'the right network'. It was not necessarily to get away from 'that care identity' but to increase chances by networking with others to get the knowledge they thought would help them integrate once out of the care system. Making reference to the empirical chapters, my research shows that it was not necessarily the capital accrued from fellow colleagues that affected negatively their life choices; it was the lack of diverse networks. I do not mean in terms of bonding and bridging capital, but on diverse background experiences in terms of knowledge, educational achievements, professions of a set of networks that assisted a majority of youth in the negotiation process from the 'Strugglers' to 'Survivors' and 'Moving on' stage.

How is social capital utilized among youth formerly in care? To what extent do they demonstrate agency?

This research did not only look at the role social capital or social networks played for participants from the passive point of view in relation to resources. Since individual social capital can both support and constrict social upward mobility - as already made clear up to this point - it was equally important to concentrate on young adults' utilization of social capital, and their active engagement in selecting networks. The inclination of participants was to select relationships based on trust,

acceptance, and greater maturity. Often with the primary scope to bond with individuals that have 'something to bring to the table,' young adults exhibited agency. Through the use of vignettes it was revealed that the selection processes involved in networking that individuals purposefully engaged themselves in were like a mechanism developed to handle the pressure of living independently. Utilization of capital was manifested through their ability to take advice, information and knowledge received from their social networks to benefit themselves. If it weren't for their ability to pick out positive things, and select people that positively influenced them, all young people here would have risked becoming 'statistics' of poor outcomes. Although it was highly emphasized that with networks one reaches resources faster, a few communicated strongly on their own choices to return or continue higher education (MA or PhD). Even those in the 'Survivors' stage who did not necessarily excel at the time of the interview worked on improving their current situations (training programs in England, or to get out of the black market in the case of Romania). As a result, agency and networks are considered entwined in this study. More specifically, social capital enhanced personal agency use in one's life to constructively pursue a path to reach one's goal. Conversely, it is through agency that youth accessed various networks, thereby getting in contact with bridging type of capital. Nevertheless, for the groups that took part in this research, the exercize of agency depended mostly on available resources like social networks along with the knowledge accumulated from such agents. Agency can be measured on two interwoven levels: the first is on an individual level, empowered with increased confidence to do something more, to pursue other's suggestions seen in their benefits with the second to exercize opportunities in employment and/or education generally expanded as a result of networking. Finally, it should be noted that the use of agency was limited as a result of young people's lack of understanding of the processes

involved to move from care to independence or from 'Strugglers' to 'Survivors' or to 'Moving on' stage.

Moreover, when it comes to the capacity to turn negative experiences into learning life events, these participants in feeling more mature, knowing what 'life is about', being reflective of their lives do not only illustrate resilience but also forms of personal agency. From a social capital approach, it is what Cote (1996) defined as ownership of identity capital. My research has deepened this understanding by having social capital employed in the context of youth negotiating life after care (Cote, 1996; Warin, 2010). Social networks (based on trust), and genuine care (exhibited via 'small things') proved to be favourable for the individuals in the route to independence. So was agency to which looked-after young adults were bound in establishing successful integration, both socially and professionally. It must be made clear that in my study, social capital is not viewed as 'a cure all' solution (Portes, 1998, p. 2), rather as a key element to understanding the process of negotiating life after care subsequently depicting differences in youth's achievements. It is the direct link between type of networks and status attainment when looking at how social networks and social capital in this research established the degree to which youth could progress at these levels.

The present study captured the meanings and dynamics of lived experiences that help to respond to the reasons certain individuals "maintain positive functioning or return to normal behavior despite exposure to significant adversity" (Schoon, 2012, p. 148). As indicated in this research, structural influences or external forces can deny, limit or even delay one's success simply due to lack of tangible resources (e.g. housing, loans, information centers, employment, or as considered in this

research the care system as well as social networks). The results specifically in relation to the child welfare system depicted the unequal distribution of resources experienced by the young people. Whereas some were denied possibilities either for independent living preparation or continuing education, others were offered that support, even beyond the age requirement (Romania). Efforts in accordance with current laws in fulfilling emotional needs as well as taking into account young people's feelings during the preparation stages to leaving care are being considered by local authorities. However, the applicability of such strategies varied significantly from one local authority to another - a characteristic of the functioning of the system found in Romania and England.

According to my research findings, mechanically based assessments of youth in the pathways plans to independence play an additional stressor for the young people dealing with overlapped features of transition. Then comes the issue of being placed, as it was the case in England, in Hostels and Bed and Breakfast sort of accommodations that did not only limit opportunities for networking, but encouraged bonding with individuals who were struggling (e.g., taking drugs, dealing with alcoholism, abuse). In Romania, the local authorities that worked with the young people in the transition phase have been found to be placed in the margin of cities, and/or 'ghetto' areas. Thereby, the composition of the young people's networks was based on similar shared experiences, with limited life aspirations, as well as with low levels of education. In this respect networks instead presented limitations for many to get up the social ladder. In further revealing similarities, Romania and England share one policy in which lengthened support under the local authority is conditional upon furthering education. At another level, access to resources had to do with 'playing smart' as found in England or preference based on the relationships

developed with the staff in Romania, that identified 'differences of treatment' among the individual young adults.

I would like at this point to underline that in most of the available research (except for literature looking at resilience and educational achievements) living in and leaving care is associated with negative outcomes. Hence when these young adults go out in the world, they are automatically viewed as less competent individuals at many levels. This further disregards their full potential when they in fact require the same needs as the rest of the population to flourish as 'emerging' adults. The findings suggest that the singling out of care leavers as a needy population resulted in quite a few of them from Romania and England refusing support from authorities, to avoid fitting the 'stigma.' Without acknowledgement that there are other populations with similar needs to their own, this created an inward motivation "to prove them wrong", that "I can do it on my own." In some cases, more accentuated among the youth from England, this extended to denying help even from friends. Such acts could alone have added to the difficulties youth faced once out especially during the early stages of transition. However, self-reliance may be a response to the lack of continuity as well as experiences lived under the care system, as the results have shown, young people having learned that they can only rely on themselves.

Young people with a care background represent a larger segment of youth population undergoing risks of uncertain futures. In previous chapters reference has been made to the youth who are not in employment, education or training, known as NEET across Europe. Instability appears to be representative of today's generations with opportunities for choice restricted to a smaller circle of young adults (Schoon, 2007; Holland, Reynolds and Weller, 2007; Roberts, 2009). In this case, as elaborated

in prior chapters, transition to adulthood rests on its support-dependent feature, i.e. social relationships in paving a smoother pathway towards social and professional establishment. Unarguably class, gender and ethnicity continue to dominate analysis in explaining transition with social networks only suggested among the major factors contributing to segmented pathways to self-sufficiency. As revealed in the empirical chapters those with limited capital were either denied access to resources or were slowed down from achieving their goals (e.g. leaving to a more economic developed city). Structural influences like the care system and/or social networks surfaced as affecting youth's routes to self-sustainment. This is illustrated by the small percentage of young adults who, with persistence, have come to achieve better results, returned to education, or got the jobs they wanted that further led to increased forms of bridging capital. Social capital theorists such as Coleman, Putnam, and Bourdieu come from the perspective that an individual's achievement is beyond personal drive, in which external forces or structural influences may either constrain or harness success. To be more specific, individual achievements cannot be guaranteed on the basis of his/her own choices but the process is attributed to connections, as Putnam and Bourdieu supported. Structural forces are not the main focal point here, although they represent part of the process of understanding agency. In further elaborating on transition to adulthood, by the very nature of being in care, youth in this study have been subjected to a variety of forms of risks like homelessness, labor exploitation as was found particularly in Romania, and unemployment (England and Romania) especially during the early periods of transition. As shown in chapter 6, over 80% of participants started off in the 'Strugglers' stage. Yet, at the time of the interview the majority were classified under 'Survivors' or the 'missing middle' with some of them rising above expectations, in the 'Moving on' category. As a side note, such shifts within Stein's typology illustrate

outcome to be a process of attainment. The 'missing middle' group was still producing changes in their lives. Although experiencing instability in their lives (either low living standards, or unemployed), they exhibited resilience, returned to education/training to improve prospects for employment and finally at a higher extent extracted positive lessons from their networks. It is interesting that despite the widely known difficulty of finding a job, and that today Western and Eastern youth for the first time are experiencing something similar where higher education does not guarantee desired employment, those from England still continued to believe that such a qualification would get them higher up the social ladder. Indeed many had better jobs; however, the labor market from England cannot be compared to that from Romania. In Romania the black market is highly active to start a form of independence.

From the data gathered intangible outcomes were as important as tangible outcomes. On this ground, the research presents a unique analysis of outcomes. Like Coleman's study (1988) on teenagers' school dropouts, this study shows a high correlation between limited presence of social capital and poorer life choices. If there is no social capital, it is not possible to take advantage of human capital. For example, a majority of young people looked-after to this day do not make use of the laws and services in place that encourage educational attainment through lengthened support up to the age of 25 in England and in Romania to 26. Participants, both youth and professionals, directly associated young people's choice to leave earlier with a lack of support in pursuing higher education. Close to Putnam and Halliwell (2004)'s findings, prospective material well-being showed to have a modest impact on the individuals involved in this research. As already indicated throughout the research, the quality along with the depth of relationships emerged to have long lasting effects

(e.g. confidence, resilience, development of interpersonal skills). According to Wingert and colleagues (2005) provision of housing, and other material needs, are only short-term problem solving strategies while skills and connections represent long-term solutions. Evidence gathered suggests that provision of material needs alone does not contribute to increased autonomy or to stimulating one's capacity and sense of responsibility. These statements strengthen this research position on the necessity to pay equal attention to the emotional/advice type of support. However, at a higher rate in England than in Romania, solutions are sought to provide effective work through relationship-based practice and peer learning at policy and administrative levels. Such measures imply that social capital derived from social networks is interlinked with increased inter-dependent behavior. In such instances, social resources are not the primary means of securing one's well-being but act in cooperation with the individual's capacity to shape his/her reality.

8.1.3. Succinct reflective points on the results

Detailed accounts captured of the lived experiences in responding to the research question, and the participants' willingness to openly share their stories may be due to the fact that I too come from care. Our shared experience is very likely to have contributed to building a rapport and gaining their trust faster than would have been possible otherwise. This has been a plus for me, additionally, in that I felt I could ask the type of questions that perhaps for someone else 'from the outside' could have been difficult to address. However, one of the potential drawbacks of sharing 'insider perspectives' is emotional involvement with possible ramifications to showing preference of young adults' stories over the professionals.' Being aware of this risk

that could potentially weaken the aim of the research, it was essential to focus on understanding the experiences of the system through care leavers' as well as professionals' lenses. As specified in chapter four, inclusion of professionals was in part to diminish bias. Certainly, the care system specifically in Romania has changed since I left before the country's membership in the European Union. It is through the professionals' and young people's eyes that any social issue can be examined and solutions can be found. Here I make a broader reference to service delivery, the relationship between the service provider and the 'recipient' including experiences lived by the youth participants. Nevertheless, professionals who volunteered to take part in this study may represent the 'few professionals' that young people talked about as 'caring', 'who are in the system for the children.' This could be reflected in the high level of responses that overlapped across the two samples. Data gathered from the target groups, professionals and young adults formerly in care, present a rather optimistic look at life but this may have to do with the majority of the young populations being surrounded by more or less positive social networks. The sampling method such as the snowballing is likely to have had an influence especially if considering that a majority have kept in touch with at least one professional from the system, and in time shifting from formal to informal type of networks. Being informed by participants from Romania and England with first hand experience of the care system provided an opportunity to inform policy and practice within the leaving care framework. Having looked at youth in transition from care as well of those with post-care life experience, I acquired comprehensive understanding of the mitigating role of social capital and social networks in negotiating independent living.

8.2. The study limitations

Considering the samples as a whole as well as the qualitative approach, social capital may not show its multi faceted roles. First, conceptualization of social capital is limited to the youth looked after. Although at various points in the research wider contextual factors relevant to social capital in the two countries have been incorporated. Secondly, the young participants present a group reported to deal with limited social capital, which explains the high tendency for using social capital mainly to fulfill basic needs including emotional. Additionally, the concept has been used at a time when the young adults were found to deal with a great level of pressure on starting a new stage of life. Therefore, social capital utilization in this instance reflects the young people's situations, and it may hold a different meaning than might be the case for non-care peers. Yet looking from an advantageous position, it is the detection of differences of social capital utlilisation among various sub-group populations as highlighted by Harpham (2002) that contributes to ensuring theoretical development of social capital in accordance with social changes that concern youth today.

Another limitation has to do with the many variables involved, which means not all could be explored in great depth. For example, the notion of agency in the empirical study aimed at showing the close connection with social capital. It focused on depicting young adults as active agents in their lives. Having compared two countries alone is complex considering the essential aspect of including social and cultural understandings. Then again comes the issue of gender and minority groups who are part of the sample's composition. The issue of stigma has been raised highly among the young adults from Romania. Whereas in Romania stigma meant a barrier to employment and integrate in society, for the sample in England, based on the few

show shared such experiences, affected the type of networks accessed. As mentioned earlier, social capital is in its infancy in this domain. Therefore more evidence is necessary to solidify the concept's role and effect in the lives of young people either in or leaving care. The current research, limited within the context of youth who have graduated from care or were in their transition processes, has depicted that the concept could act among one of the effective strategies to best safeguard their well-being.

What I would have done differently if I were to undertake this research again:

Because there are so many variables involved targeted to finding the relationships between them, mixed methodology would have fitted the best: interviews and surveys in a questionnaire format. On race and gender, women (mostly in Romania) along with those from ethnic minority backgrounds, African in England and Roma in Romania, were more likely to fit into Stein's category of outcomes, namely the 'Strugglers.' For example, all five young adults of Roma ethnicity fell into this category, as did four out of five participants belonging to an African background in England. The young adults pertaining to some minority groups shared their experiences in employment. A young adult as an Apprentice stated that he was paid less in comparison to his fellow colleagues, at times not being paid for months. Another, employed on full-time basis, spoke of carrying out the lowest and 'dirtiest' work, cleaning, carrying goods, doing extra working hours, doing more than just one job for others. In Romania, it was the difficulty of accessing employment. Those identified as Roma explained how they were chased away, were called names, and were threatened when looking for work. According to a participant's statements,

he changed 15 jobs in one year, dealing with trash, cleaning, and sweeping around for various shops, and fast food companies. Not looking in depth at race or gender, for example, prevented examination of their possible influence on the formation and utilization of social capital. It may also have been possible to give higher attention to such social factors for optimization of social capital analysis. If their status as care leavers presented limitations in forming relationships, race in particular is very likely to have played, if not a major, an additional barrier in the path to socio-professional integration after care. This can be similar, although differently, for women, as mostly covered by the interviewees in Romania. Relationships can be formed around other principles, or as put by the female participants 'interests' such as for 'sex'; 'wanting something in exchange for their support'; 'to be exploited' making it even harder for women whom to trust. According to four young women in Romania, being female 'is tough.' Based on the gathered interviews, two of them lost their jobs because they did not cooperate when either co-workers or their boss 'hit on them'. The young women explained that even in the system girls are sexually abused. When they are out, it is even worse because 'they know no one will even look for a girl from the system if she is missing.' Finally, race and gender can determine to whom one affiliates in bonding as well as the type of networks accessed. These two social characteristics influence the availability of resources like NGOs whose targets represent minority groups or women. Surrounding such points, agency could have been explored to a fuller extent because the young people's level of agency use largely rested on the networks accessed. Self-distancing while shows a form of agency it was linked to broadening the set of networks with the purpose of 'moving on' from the care environment highly located among the youth from Romania. Furthermore, agency as a concept is complex frequently being accompanied by such terms citizenship, or the extent to which an individual exercizes his/her rights in any given society, being measured on the level

of active participation of agents in political, social and economic matters (Evans, 2002). Here agency was broadly looked at to portray care leavers as active individuals who influence their living environments, not the least carrying knowledge essential for understanding leaving care processes in connection to social capital with elements attributed to external factors as equally influencing the level of agency use among these young adults. These presented limitations of this research give room for further research. Forms of resilience and positive identity formation have been given attention when looked at the strategies used to negotiate post-care life in relation to social capital. Although not at great length, the research has identified how social networks hand in hand with social capital have contributed to fostering both higher levels of resilience and sense of identity. These features of the young adults have played among others key role in decision-making to reach a form of employment and housing stability. Perhaps future research could specifically look at the close linkage there may be between social capital and resilience.

8.3. Policy and practice implications and recommendations

Evidence of emotional need rested on the impact social networks and social capital acquisition had in producing generally positive outcomes among the young interviewees. At the same time, through the lenses of social capital utilization, the research tried not to neglect equally paying attention to young people's efforts to attain higher at both levels, personal and professional. However, the degree to which agency can be exercized in shaping one's reality is dependent on local resources, and type of networks as well as knowledge. Structural forces proved to be detrimental in the optimisation of opportunities. This could not be more clearly pictured but by

comparing the groups who did well, or very well, in contrast to the other ones that struggled greatly just 'getting by' even at a later stage of independent life. Exhibition of increased personal agency use in this study of young adults to shape their realities, I urge research to look more closely at young people's strengths not mainly at deficits. Without a form of capital in their possession from care accompanied with weak supportive systems, young people revealed higher dependency on their developed social networks after care. From a less positive stand this made them more vulnerable to being influenced by individuals who were not always in the relationship for the best interests of the young person.

Previous chapters reviewed the increased policy focus on the emotional side of needs: in England at a higher scale than in Romania this exhibited a shift towards mentoring practices in delivering service for youth in the preparation to leave care. The laws covered, namely Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 and the 272/2004 Law art. 51 in Romania, relate to this research on the aspect of providing emotional and guidance type of support. Opportunities for education, and training along with emotional provision of support are perceived to expand chances for socio-professional integration. Nonetheless, in neither of the covered laws is there reference on opportunities for networking or for acquisition of social capital. Here is where this study's contribution lies, on social capital and social networks as vectors of fulfilling such needs in the lives of the young people. The system is not directed for long-term support, but it can function around such principles as networking and social capital acquisition for youth to self-sustain when out. It must be made clear that the pressure is not aimed on the professionals to institutionalize possibilities for networking, instead on encouragement of youth to *naturally* form early their own relationships. Within the child protection framework, natural mentoring could serve

the purpose of providing a form of caring support for a lengthened period of time as specifically addressed by Thompson, Greeson and Brunsink (2015). In their review, the authors elaborated that because of the caring relationship in nature, the mentor has a substantial influence on the "socio-emotional, cognitive and identity development leading to improved well-being youth outcomes" (p. 41). This statement is not far from what this research has located in terms of the young people being influenced by their social networks that resulted in different experiences transitioning from care as well as of different outcomes. Similar to this study, it has been found that mentoring relationships were effective on the accounts of constant encouragement, reliability, trust, emotional and appraisal support. Such features infer how social capital is developed through such type of relationships. Although professionals have a duty to guide, and to take into account emotional needs, it must be considered that staff too need support to deliver such services, as specified by professionals in Romania and England. Yet quality of support provided to the young people does play a key role in guiding and setting expectations. Young people's understanding of the importance of higher education, for example, or of the training provided fell largely on the networks accessed. For the Romanian group education was no longer seen as a portal to better employment opportunities as it was found among the group from England. In Romania with less bridging capital, their networks including other related forms of contacts like professionals, largely focused on practical matters, to settle down with a job, house, and a family whereas in England with higher bridging capital (social ties outside of the care system) there was more focus on higher education. Nonetheless, young people's choices reflect the social and cultural aspects of each country. This research supports the construction of a strong foundation of support to (as spoken on the early periods of transition being highly challenging) have a secure base from where to start a new stage of life. Whereas for

some young adults support means exploration of opportunities, or for others like NEETs with families a secure base, for care leavers it holds a deeper meaning. From the evidence gathered, the role of guidance, awareness of qualities and strengths, involvement in planning and negotiating change, expansion of knowledge, represent features of intangible support that empowered many young people to cope with responsibilities assumed after care. If the problem lies in the difficulty to put into practice the current laws, specifically in meeting emotional needs, or mentoring roles by professionals, then activities that encourage bonding with peers their age or other trusted adults that particularly hold a positive influence on youth can be a strategy to ensuring a form of a 'safety net' for youth departing from care. As a final argument, related concepts to social capital are present in the laws overviewed here as well as in the literature advocating for mentorship type of practice. Emotional support in one form is exhibited through showing interest in a child's performance with mentorship type of relationships building among others a sense of trust between two members. This may imply that there is a need to reinforce such features of service delivery concerning youth in and preparing to leave care.

8.3.1. How can the local authorities respond to the needs of youth within the framework of social capital and social networks?

The young adults' past experiences helped explain the manner in which social capital and social networks have been used. It is this period of their lives that has been shown to influence the type of networks youth at large associated themselves with, and finally how these youth appeared to be exposed to social groups in more or less similar situations. In this respect, it acknowledges how the care system can have

a major influence in shaping individuals' outcomes, specifically in presenting barriers to fostering social integration through networking. Regardless of the type of care (residential or foster home) settings the possibilities for networking were hindered. Moreover, the frequent changes highlighted to occur within the child welfare system, in both England with Staying Put Policy (2014) and in Romania with the plan to shut down all institutional type care settings by 2022, illustrate that the systems are not stable. Yet it is expected of these youth to exhibit a balanced rational thought process, and respond well to pathway plans. In a scenario where the state or professionals are the primary sources of accessing/developing social capital, the inherent problem lies in the provision of support set within a time limit as well as in the quality of service provision. Similar to previous studies, these participants, both young adults and professionals, identified the following factors to be essential for a better transition: exposure to living practical skills, with the highest focus on relationship-building, on consistent and effective support networks, including access to adequate information on housing, employment and education opportunities. By the time one leaves care, he/she must have established sources of capital from which to anticipate adulthood with a more positive attitude. This possibility for what Putnam calls bridging capital, can only be a plus for youth after the care system. Local engagement is also viewed in the Romanian literature (e.g. Lascus, 2013) to diminish stereotypes held against certain groups of society. In Romania where stigma towards youth is strong, this can be critical in shaping after care experiences. In terms of policy implications, evidence indicates the necessity of early networking with more focus on emotional/advice type of support. As witnessed in this research, it can foster inter-dependence among young adults with a care background. Focusing particularly on the view of early networking, participants, both professionals and young people, suggested that in time, through "day-to-day social interaction" social capital is developed. Having compared the two

nations, England and Romania, not only technical (different systems) but also philosophical in justifying possible dominant factors influencing post-care outcomes, may inform good practice within the child welfare systems. Taking into account socio-cultural aspects a few recommendations for Romania concern chances for youth to participate in the community, to be part of awareness raising campaigns, and to encourage volunteering activities to expand opportunities for bridging capital. In Romania with children transitioning from care encouragement of activities locally appear to not be seen as potential channels for increased socio-professional integration. Since in Romania young people were susceptible to labor exploitation, many times by the individuals considered to be close, may imply the necessity of the young adults to understand what comes with being in care. It may further indicate more awareness raising of the reality outside the system parallel to provision of guidance type of support, i.e. the people one chooses to form bonds with. In other words opportunities for expansion of social networks become more formalized as it is the case in England. However, in England this is not just formalized but also institutionalized where professionals carry the responsibility to initiate social acivity programs that lead to possibilities of networking. In England, more can be done to encourage youth to develop their own set of networks. Either way, both formal and informal means of developing social networks and acquiring social capital can work in combination as found in this study. Finally, both countries should encourage early development of bonding along with bridging capital in the course of life under the care of social services. Looking from a different angle, currently geographical location of hostels, in poor neighbourhoods or at the margins of cities suggests contact with certain populations as well as that knowledge of care leavers' lived experiences, including post care life, remain contained within a population who can do little to assist these young adults for upward mobility in society.

Type of networks accessed while under the social services and the living environment presented here additional factors in explaining generally poor outcomes heightened during the early stages of transition. Young people were exposed to certain actions like school dropouts, drug and alcohol use, and abuse. To add to the list, the practice of frequent placements presented a barrier to fostering the creation of dependable supportive social relationships in the lives of these young people. Frequent placements within the care system (currently in Romania even within the Placement Centers) caused losses of social ties. This further deprives a child of knowledge within his/her community, which reduces chances of expanding resources. In order to diminish the prevalence of poor outcomes the state needs to consider individuals' social worlds more comprehensively (Sherman et al., 2002). Material on how the system functions with the revelation of a trend of uneven distribution of resources across the countries (see Chapter 5), clearly strengthens the view on the need to implement policies and practices that reinforce active involvement in community, relationship building so that sub-group populations like care leavers can benefit from a higher level of social capital to self-sustain once out.

By seeing common and different grounds on what matters to the young adults, strategies used in their path to socio-professional integration, may contribute in policy and practice development concerning youth leaving care processes. Key themes such as emotional/advice type of support, active presence of bonding and bridging type of capital, the relationship of the young person with the system can be taken to influence leaving care and post care experiences. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that the aspect of vulnerability is rather complex and it cannot only be positioned within the context of having weak social networks seemingly found among youth formerly in care. There is a need to explore at a deeper level peer learning but

from a more positive approach. To an extent, this study extended the understanding on how social networks and social capital can contribute to improved outcomes, which benefits greatly within policy and practice as much as in leaving care related research. However, further empirical evidence is needed to link social capital with other factors already identified here. Peer learning has been used as one of the mechanisms for better understanding of the outside world (in England though more formal means, e.g. training programs, whereas in Romania through self-initiatives). As social capital, bonding and bridging, remains limited explored in relation to youth leaving care, this research presents opportunities for further empirical studies. Pinkerton suggested that studies concerning youth leaving care are mostly qualitatively based; thereby, a mixed methods approach could provide deeper understanding of social capital in leaving care related research. In further outlining avenues for further research, large scale studies, quantitative in nature could investigate the 'hypothesis' developed here, that is the link between social capital and social networks and inner state (e.g. resilience, identity, confidence).

The essence of a strong foundation of support prior to leaving care is made obvious in this empirical comparative study. However, this is in terms of networking with community members that are likely to enhance positive characteristics such as resilience, self-confidence parallel to optimization of opportunities in employment and/or education. Young people at a young age (through geographical segregation) are being pre-exposed to certain social groups of society. Such a finding alone demonstrates an intrinsic barrier for the young people to progress socially and professionally. Unlike the resilience and attachment theories where the responsibilities fall more on the individuals' capacity to cope and/or overcome challenges, social capital recognizes external factors (e.g., social entourage, the

functioning of the welfare system, employment market) to have an equal impact on individual outcomes and well-being. Through acquisition of social capital from a more diverse set of networks, that being achieved in time, young people were largely able to negotiate their way to a more established livelihood. The results revealed that care leavers from England, having accessed a more heterogenous network, overall fared better than their peers from Romania. Yet, those from Romania with established contacts with fellow colleagues had fewer experiences of homelessness than their counterparts from England during the early stages to independence. In summary, social networks as vectors of fulfilling emotional/advice type of support respond to the present policy concerns in finding strategies to improve the outcomes of these young people (Burgess and Natalier, 2012; Berzin, Singer and Hokanson, 2014). It is worth pointing out that solutions turned to a type of relationship-based practice, where mentoring, 'a key worker', and peer learning are reframed within the borders of care. Whereas such strategies can increase social capital within the child's primary living environment, it is additionally paramount that the young person can engage in local social affairs to expand possibilities for networking. The study's key findings emphasize the importance of these young people's ability to mingle with members of the wider society.

The concept of social capital is an important tool for understanding the mobilisation of resources and the role various members hold in society argued Heilbrun, Lee and Cottle (2005). Social capital may become more pronounced in policy and practice, connected with acquisition of human capital as Bourdieu (1986) acknowledged that some sources could only be accessed through social capital. In further re-emphasizing the relationship between inner states and social capital, Eurofound (2015) reported that development of interpersonal skills and confidence

might play a vital role in producing motivated individuals to contribute to the development in a nation's economic social and political spheres. It can be argued that this statement is more valid now when youth, including NEETs, experience decreased self-confidence as a result of continued dependence on parents with current daunting experiences in entering employment (Roberts, 2009; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Lascus, 2013). This research identified that social capital can act as one of the key factors in shaping life experiences after care. As witnessed in this empirical research, young adults from care are more likely to face continuous and myriad challenges during the transition period. Yet, young people here strived to reach stability on all fronts. However, it is paramount to acknowledge that these specific groups represent a small percentage known within literature as the *resilient group* compared to the larger spectrum of statistics on youth's outcomes once exited the care system (drug users, homeless, mental illness, and so on). The benefits experienced by many participants through forming social relationships affirm that we live in a 'network-based' society. Where there were not opportunities many of these young people sought them, for through selection processes in networking and social capital acquisition they created for themselves 'a better tomorrow'.

Appendix I

Young Adults Participation Information Sheet:

Lost in Transition? The mitigating role of social capital in negotiating life after care of youth from Romania and England

Hello,

My name is Georgiana Trif, and as part of the PhD program in Social Policy at the University of Kent I am conducting the research project entitled above. At adulthood it is important to have a job, a place to live, and to have enough money to live on. These things give us a sense of security. But in order to obtain those, young adults may need to show a range of personal qualities and support from others, including ideally family and friends. The research study looks at the ways former youth in care manage to make it through on day-to-day basis and how social relations are part in their life.

This interview will be like a discussion between you and I on education, employment, housing, health, management of daily living expenses, and sources of support (social networks). Time needed is 45 to 90 minutes. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded. You are invited to take part in this research because you are considered the expert of your own experiences and to have those experiences told by you. It is only through your participation that life at adulthood for young adults with a care background can be understood.

You are assured of anonymity, and everything discussed will stay between us. Such information is strictly confidential and will be used for research purposes only. As a participant you may leave at any time or refuse to respond to any questions. Participation is voluntary! A summary of anonymized results will be offered to you if interested, and according to your preference a letter will be sent home, or electronically (email).

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask!

Thank you for your consideration, and I am looking forward to hearing back from you.

My best wishes,
Georgiana
For any further questions, you may reach me via Email: gt201@kent.ac.uk
Phone: 07413206066

This research project received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of University of Kent, Canterbury.

Consent Form:

Title of project: *Lost in Transition? The mitigating role of social capital in negotiating life after care of youth from Romania and England*

Name of investigator: Georgiana Trif
Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet dated… for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. *("It is not easy on your own, but with friends I made it through*." male, employed, 29 years old*)*. I give permission for the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses. ☐

4. I agree to take part in the above research project. ☐

Name of participant	Date	Signature
Lead researcher	Date	Signature

2. Demographic Basic Data Form – young adults participants

Your Full Name:	
Gender:	Male Female
Age:	
Status:	Employed Part-Time Employed Temporary Employed Unemployed Others-specify:
Level of Education:	
Family members:	
Do you keep in touch with any of them?	Yes Sometimes No
At what age did you enter care?	
At what age did you leave care?	
Years 'after-care' experience:	
Number of placements while in care:	
Place of Residence:	Past: Present:

Appendix II

Professionals Participation Information Sheet:

Lost in Transition? The mitigating role of social capital in negotiating life after care of youth from Romania and England

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Georgiana Trif, and as part of the PhD program in Social Policy at the University of Kent I am conducting the research project entitled above. Major life changes like transition to independent living requires major psycho-social adjustments, and not the least access to resources. Support or social relations can act as a fundamental instrument to accessing resources through which one can further benefit of information, guidance, expectations and responsibilities attached to adulthood. The research study looks at everyday life experiences linked with social networks (family, relatives, friends, colleagues, partners, acquaintances) - the role and significance social relations may have had in the path to independent living of young adults who exited the Child Protection System. The scope is to have your perspectives as a professional on the chances youth have to achieve social integration and recommendations for after-care programs, how work conditions may in turn impact the quality delivery of services.

You are invited to participate in this research because you represent the target group. You are considered the experts of your own profession; hence, only through your participation chances to social integration among care-leavers can be understood.

It involves interviews, scenarios and open-ended questions done in a conversational manner. Topics include on programs available to prepare young adults, your perceived challenges and barriers for youth social integration, experiences in working for the Child Protection Department. Time needed is 45 to 90 minutes. With your permission the interviews will be recorded.

You are assured of anonymity; the information provided is strictly confidential and will be used for research purposes accessed only by me, the researcher. You may withdraw at any time or refuse to respond to any questions. Participation is voluntary! A summary of anonymized results will be offered to you if interested.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask!

Thank you for your consideration, and I am looking forward to hearing back from you.

My best wishes,
Georgiana
For any further questions, you may reach me via Email: gt201@kent.ac.uk
Phone: 07413206066

This research project received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of University of Kent, Canterbury.

Consent Form:

Title of project: *Lost in Transition? The mitigating role of social capital in negotiating life after care of youth from Romania and England*

Name of investigator: Georgiana Trif
Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

5. I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet dated… for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

6. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐

7. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. *("It is not easy on your own, but with friends I made it through*." male, employed, 29 years old*)*. I give permission for the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses. ☐

8. I agree to take part in the above research project. ☐

Name of participant	Date	Signature
Lead researcher	Date	Signature

1. Demographic Basic Data Form – professional participants

Your full name:		
Age:		
Gender:	Male	Female
Qualification:		
Occupation:		
Years of work experience:		

Appendix III

Interview Guiding Questions: Young Adults

1) What was it like when you left care?
2) Was there anyone you could trun to for help, advice, some kind of support?
3) What are the common barriers you have faced for social integration?
4) Overall, how do you think you fare?
5) What do you think is the main impact coming from care at adulthood?
6) What were your expectations on leaving care?
7) When do you usually do on your spare time?
8) Since you left care, have you developed any new relationships, made new friends?
9) Do you have a person that is significant to you? Or do you think having someone to count on, makes a difference in your life?
10) What kind of support do you think is most useful for you?
11) What was your experience in getting a job?
12) How do you manage everyday, cover your living expenses, make sure you have food, clothes, pay for rent?
13) What is important for you to accomplish, and how do you plan doing that?

Appendix III - continuation

Interview Guiding Questions: Professionals

1) What do you think are the barriers for social integration at adulthood?
2) How do you think they fare at adulthood?
3) Do you keep in touch with any of the young adults who aged out of care?
4) What is the common age youth choose to leave?
5) From your experience, what is their social networks, the people they tend to hang-out with?
6) What kind of support do you think is most needed for these young people?
7) What is it like for you to work with this group?
8) What are the programs specifically designed for care leavers, currently in place?
9) What strategies do you use with young people when dealing with concerns, issues, preparing them for independent living?
10) What recommendations do you have for better outcomes?

Appendix IV

I. Vignettes: positive and negative scenarios given to young adults and the type of responses generated

Negative examples of vignettes 1:

Imagine you are in desperate need of 20Pounds. What would you do?

M: It is funny you say that, because just last week a friend asked me for about 20Pounds to buy some food. My friend from Uni is the first person I would go to. And I would do the same for her. If she needs something I am the first person she comes to, and if I need something I call her. It has been always like that (*reciprocity, trust, security, reliability*). When we were at school and someone stole her lunch, I gave her mine. She remembers that, we both do. I can call her like at four in the morning, and it is no problem. She is always there no matter what. It is important to just know that someone is there for me it makes me like…, it makes me feel safe. Knowing that someone is there to support you. Having her as a friend, I realized that blood doesn't mean family, family is people who are there for you. That's what I believe (female 23, student/part-time employed London).

2) *Put yourself in this situation. You are in need of money to pay for your rent. You were able to pay most of it, but still need let's say about 30 Pounds (in Romanian about 160 Lei).*

N: I would go to D. As a matter of fact just yesterday I asked him to give me about 400Lei to pay for this month. And he gave without hesitation. He knows I am a serious person and will give back. You see, when I got out of care, he was the only one that helped me. And when he finds work, he also calls me. It is really cool cuz you can rely on him. We help each other. Now I am taking a course in infirmary; it is D that

told me about it. So I went to …. and told her that I want to register. On February 12 I registered for the course. And we have been told to come on one Saturday and on the other not. I am really pleased and so are the ladies there. To be honest with you I did not expect to make it. And then for my last exam when I got 8, everybody was surprised. Even the ladies there told me that they did not expect that. That they are proud of me. You see doing this, I can have my own job. This course guarantees a place in the hospital right here … But of course is valid anywhere in the country. Ideally I would like to leave this town. Now I have to finish a portofio as a final project, then they give you a certificate. To be honest with you, I did not have anything else to do. So when I heard about the course, I was like why not give it a try. There was also a gentleman who encouraged me all the way during the course. There were times when I wanted to leave. But he told me, keep going, and that is what I did (male 21, informal employment Vaslui).

3) *Let's say something goes wrong and you don't even have money left for food…*

In the worst case scenario that I do not have any food, there are people I can go to. I can go to my carer's house, to my friends' house for food, I have friends that would lend me money, and that happened quite a few times. Especially in the beginning. You see when I got my first job, and get all excited and I would buy all these different things and then eventually I realized that rent was the most important bill that I first needed to pay. It is just about people teaching you around direct debit, rent, your phone bill, look at what is you need and what is you want. It is all about balancing out: what are you needs and wants, what you need to become who you want to be. I still keep in touch with my first carer. Now things turned around, I am the one looking after her. She installed the kind of morals and values that I needed to start thinking about in order to develop and grow, beneficial not on personal but also

professionally. It was little things like doing my bed, hygiene; you do not want to mess your outfit. She would send us to the shop to buy this and that, and I would come back with all brand names, and she would tell me, *You do not have to always buy all brand names, you mix them; you are on a budget*. So then I started to buy variety, combine with buying food. And making a plan around, saving is so important; it gives you a safety net. I do not do it yet, but I really must start. But I have left 300 a month, and I budget well in terms this much goes for food, but I need to save. To be fair it is not easy, but it is like you have to have a plan. You have to manage your money in the sense that I budge 20Pounds a week, so I come with about 300 spare money. I live now on my own one bedroom flat. It is nice I love it. I love my own space. It was a time when I gave a lot to my friends. I am the man to come to. I think it is because I always been supportive of my friends, since I left I have been very independent, so I do my own thing. So, a lot of my friends struggle especially before so I would buy food for them, supporting them with electric bills. For me that is part what kept me behind because I was helping so much my friends, cause I could not say 'no' I was just like, yeah, yeah, cause I wanted to please everyone. And it got to a point where I was in struggle and no one could help me. I thought that I need to stop doing that because it kind of puts me in a position of risk, you know? What I also realized is that the more you do, they become dependent on you. It is time that I invest more in myself, all the time I gave and gave (male 25, employed London).

Positive examples of scenarious:

1) *Let's say that you got accepted into the University Program you really worked hard for. How would you celebrate? Or what would you do in that case?*

C. Of course I would share with my friends, I do like to share with people I want to think positive of me when there are good things happening. I have been surrounded by some people who really believed in me. And if it was not for them, their encouragement, advice and belief in me I do not know if I would achieve so much. You see having good people around boosts your confidence. You want to achieve more, do something with your life. You see, at a very young age you are pressured to think about your future, and I do not think an average child needs to do that. I began to realise the family I am with is not there to me for long time. So I had to live with this pressure, what I am going to achieve, do once I finish this and that… Do you go to college, what are you going to do next, always what you are going to do next. You are under the pressure to think what you want, and make decisions how you get there. You are taught in a way to deal with immediate concerns, now and not have the time to expore what is out there. To be honest, it was not easy to get here. I had so many gaps in my school that I had to make more efforts than most people to at least catch up, imagine trying to be as good as them. Between the ages of 6 to 16 I went to 10 different schools, that means a move a year. But, I am realy resilient, I have my own capacity to deal with various issues because I started off pretty rough, so I am able to put things into context quite easily. If something goes wrong, I always look at the bright side. Other people tend to worry about things, but I do not, I look for solutions. Many times, my friends come to me for help, to ask for an advice, to talk to me about their personal problems. And I am happy to help. We help each other really. With some of them I have knwonw them since I was in my Undergraduate, and we kept in touch all these years. They just have been there. Have fun with them, to develop some

kind of identity, I felt like a normal teenager I was not like the child looked after by the state. We all had our own issues, and it was justified for all of us to be angry and be able to talk all about it, it was that emotional stability because I did not trust any one else but I trusted them (female 27, PhD student Oxford).

2) *Put yourself in this situation. You tried for a job but did not get it. However, someone you know offers to work for them. What do you do?*

A: Funny you should say that. A girl that I met while volunteering to promote a new line of Avon products, that is like two/three years ago told me about this new job at a store that is openining around my area. She is really cool; we really connect and get along very well. So when she said about this job, I was really happy cuz where I work there are three shifts, so I have no time to do other things. Here working in the store is only two shifts and better working conditions. She said we will be working together but she will be my boss. I do not mind that. So, I accepted the job and in a month I will start my work there. I already gave notice to this job here. I have been working there for more than a year now. I told her about my work, and the long hours. She told me that I should not accept this kind of treatment that - I deserve more. She knows the person who is opening the store in my area, and told her about me. So I was called for an interview, I did well and I was offered a job right away (female 21, employed Sibiu).

Type of scenarios addressed to professionals:

Case scenario 1 – England: *You have a girl for couple of years now. She is of age to leave high school. Let's say the girl that is with you decides to go to University. Can she stay with you beyond 18?*

E: Hmm, I think so. And it is up to me to decide really. That is how it works. It is sad really because the child has no say in this… so, if I say I do not have room for another child, then she would go to Assistance Lodging, and that's fine. It happens all the time. But some young people want that, they want to be independent, and it is not different to my daughter who is already preparing for Uni. And this may be the last time that she is home really, so there is not big difference here… If they want to have education, money is there for them. If there is special needs involved, education or a baby involved usually they are supported beyond 18 years of age. It depends on the social services… I just found out yesterday that in fact they can receive support until the age of 25 if continuing education, or training and such… when you spoke to the young person. What was that law again? (Researcher: the Leaving Care Regulations of 2010. There is also the Staying Put since 2014 where youth can stay up to the age of 21. Of course this is in negotiation with the foster parents as well). Pause …. I think I heard of this other one. I have been doing this for many years now, and none of the kids I had stayed beyond 18. Because I do not see much of my social worker, I know less about new policies, and what other benefits are out there for the young people. The center I am involved with, with young mothers, visiting homes, services are being cut down all the time. Minimizing the hours and the services we can provide. And we are being set to go out in the community to provide the services, but you do need a central point for all families to get to, to feel that they can develop relationships, before they can take your hand. Somewhere they can come and go, feel comfortable

and eventually open up with the issues that are dealing… a lot of cut backs, less employment… (foster carer, Herne Bay).

Case scenario 2 - Romania: *Let us say there is a young man wanting to work. How is he helped with this?*

It so happens that I have a lot of contacts here in town. I know people around, so usually when a young person comes I talk to the employer. For example, I recommended a young person to work at a pizza place. The employer is a friend of mine, so the young person was called for an interview right away. In the meantime I worked with the young person to go through the interview. We put the CV together. He has been working there for 2 months now and he is still with us. We want to make sure that the young person is settled before leaving from our Center. Although he finished only 9 classes, he is very determined to have a job, and wants to work. That is what we want for the young people, to show that they want something in an interview not go with the idea in mind that this and that is not possible. But the process is that we call different companies, shops, restaurants to inform of a young person looking for a job. It would go something like this: '*Hi, we have a young person from the placement center….' or 'We are from the Placement Center in ….. and we have two young men interested in construction work.* (Note: The professional gave an example on how the conversation begins over a phone. A professional usually speaks on behalf of the young person). We also go at the local job center to check on any available jobs. But we also have many of them who do not adapt. They take things personally when told to improve, or if something they did went wrong and then is being discussed about it. We have one young person who made some errors at work and as a result her probation period was not extended. Others just simply want to

leave, and get in contact with people who give them hopes. They themselves are desperate people, and in need, so they appeal to the young people for help. So, they work there a month, two, three, four months then they are not paid. They are taken advantage of, so this is how some of them end up on the street. Of course, majority of them get in contact with those who left already via Facebook and others. Like I have a case of a young person wanting to go to Bucharest because a fellow colleague promised to offer a job in a warehouse. I advised him to be careful and made a few call to check that all is not a scam. It all turned out to be true and valid information, and now the young person is in Bucharest, doing well (male professional, Vaslui).

Appendix V

Table of Sample: young adults Romania

Full name	Gender	Age	Status	Age entered care	Age left care
A. C. A. BUCHAREST Received support	Male	21	Unemployed Vocational school Homeless	Entered care at 6 months	20
P. O. C. BUCHAREST Received Support	Male	26	Employed University	Entered care at 3 weeks	26
G. A. M. BUCHAREST	Female	24	Employed High School No Bac	Entered care at 7	23
E. C. BUCHAREST	Male	25	PhD Student	Entered care at 3	24
P.A. BUCHAREST	Male	26	Employed University	Entered care as a baby	23
L. M. BUCHAREST	Female	24	Unemployed Vocational school – 10 classes	Entered care as a baby and for 8 years in foster home, then back to Placement center	18
E. C. BUCHAREST Receied support	Female	25	Employed University	At 15 and a half, centru de zi, placement center, flats	22 oficially ended, but continued support from state, with rent, in September fully independent
S. S. SIBIU Currently under support	Female	18	Employed High school, No Bac	Entered care as a baby	18
C. I. SIBIU	Male	24	Employed High School	Entered care at 10 yrs.	18

D. C. SIBIU Currently under support	Female	23	Employed Temporarily High School No Bac	Entered care as a baby	22
M. B. SIBIU	Female	20	Employed High School No Bac	Entered care at 9	19
E. L. SIBIU Currently under support NGO	Female	20	Employed High School No Bac	Entered care at 3	19
D. M. SIBIU	Female	19	Employed High School No Bac	Entered care at 7 months	19
G. A. SIBIU Currently under support	Male	22	Employed Temporarily High School No Bac	Entered care at 4	20
R. F. SIBIU	Male	21	Employed High School No Bac	Entered care at 2	20
S. E. SIBIU	Male	24	Employed High School No Bac	Entered care at 14	22
F. T. SIBIU	Male	25	Employed High-school No Bac	Entered care at 3	20
A. T. SIBIU	Male	23	Employed High School No Bac	Entered care at 10	21
A. M. SIBIU	Female	22	Employed High School No Bac	Entered care at 1	20
T. V. SIBIU	Male	25	Employed 10 classes	Entered care as a baby	19
V. E. SIBIU Currently under support	Female	21	Employed Vocational school	Entered care as a baby	18

L. R. VASLUI	Female	29	Employed, part-time High school – 10 classes	Entered care as a baby	17
L. D. VASLUI	Female	21	Unemployed/ Black market High School – 10 classes	Entered care at 3	17
D. I. VASLUI	Female	24	High School Unemployed/ Black market	Entered care at 7	18
S. V. VASLUI	Male	18	Vocational school Unemployed/ Black market	Entered care at 3	17
P. O. VASLUI Currently under support	Male	19	Center for Integration has not taken Bac - out	Entered care at 11 years	18
D. G. Currently under support VASLUI	Male	17	9 classes Unemployed/ Black market	Entered care at 7	16
G. C. VASLUI Currently under Support	Male	19	Highschool, University Center for Integration	Entered care at 7	Left at 18
M. W. VASLUI Received Support	Male	21	Center for Integration	Entered care at 12, he was adopted	18
T. B. VASLUI Received Support	Male	25	Unemployed, black market Colege	Entered care at 3	24
A. P. VASLUI	Male	17	Employed 10 classes – High School	Entered care at 8	16

Sample: young adults ENGLAND

Name	Gender	Age	Status	# of placements	Age entered care	Age exited care
G. P. LONDON	Male	22	University currently & part-time employed	2	13	18
J. N. Social Services Support LONDON	Male	21	NVQ 2 Employed	11	10	16
P. A. MAIDSTONE	Male	24	Employed GCSE, NVQ 2	24+	3	21
C. W. Homeless MAIDSTONE	Male	17	Unemployed College Btec	1	16	17
M. F. LONDON	Female	22	Employed University Got into MA Social Work for this coming fall	14	13	18
P. P. Social Services Support FAVERSHAM	Female	19	GCSE Level 1; Unemployed Mother	2	2	16
M. R. Social Services Support MEDWAY	Male	20	GCSE Currently apprenticeship	8	6	16
M. A. Social Services Support LONDON	Male	18	apprenticeship IT Level 2; English Level 1 & 2 Unemployed	1	15	17

M. C. NORTH OF ENGLAND	Male	26	BA Honors; Level 6	25+	5 and 1/2	18
J. C. NORTH OF ENGLAND	Female	23	Undergraduate Employed	8	13	16
N. A. LONDON	Female	25	Masters part-time Employed part-time	Around 25	12	16
C. H. NORTH OF ENGLAND	Male	28	Employed Masters	2	13ish	24
D. B. Social Services Support LONDON	Female	25	Part-time employed currently 2nd year BSc Degree	1	8	16 returned to education ages out at 26
J. K. LONDON	Male	25	Level 3 Employed	8	4	19
A. K. OXFORD	Female	27	PhD Oxford, The Welcome Trust Scholar	30ish	7	17
S. P. LONDON	Female	26	University Part-time Employed	3	8	23
F. W. LONDON	Female	25	Employed Social Services	1	11	18

Sample: Professionals ROMANIA

Full name	**Occupation**	**Gender**	**Type of Institution**
B. C. VASLUI	Professional, 29 yrs old, social worker, 1 yr and 4 months experience	Male	Center for Integration
M. M. VASLUI	Professional, 42 yrs old, social worker in foster homes, 18 yrs experience	Female	Foster Homes
A. A. SIBIU	Professional, 31 yrs old, social worker coordinator, 8 yrs experience	Female	NGO – works with youth who left care
R. I. BUCHAREST	Professional, 38 yrs old, psychologist, 12yrs experience	Female	Placement Center
D. B BUCHAREST	Professiona, 45 years old Director 10 years experience	Male	Placement Center

Sample: Professionals ENGLAND

Full name	**Occupation**	**Gender**	**Type of Institution**
R. T. LONDON	45 yrs old, registered manager (social worker), 24 yrs experience	Male	Local Services
I. C. LONDON	57 yrs old, Mentor local NGO, 12 yrs experience	Male	Local NGO
M. R. LONDON	37 yrs old, social worker coordinator, 15 yrs experience	Female Care alumni	NGO – works with youth who left care
E. G HERNE BAY	Foster Carer, 49 yrs old, 7yrs experience	Female	Local Services

E. N. MAIDSTONE	31 years old Personal advisor 10 years experience	Male	Local Services

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