

FACTORS AFFECTING EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL PLANS OF FOSTER CARE CHARGES

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Abstract. *The objective of a foster care is to ensure that a child who is deprived of the adequate care from the biological family lives in the adequate environment. People who deal with Foster care responsibilities are bound to ensure a proper care to a child as well as prepare this child to future life, including vocational one. Thus, essential are educational and vocational plans of charges since they affect the process of gaining the autonomy by a youngster. The three actions: firstly, analysing the literature, secondly, doing researches in bialski powiat, thirdly, conducting a narrative questionnaire with an educator who simultaneously holds the responsibility for teaching charges autonomy, these three are supposed to identify factors that affect educational and vocational plans that foster care charges have. Factors that play significant role are as follows: a kind of foster care (family-run children houses versus educational care centres), the influence exerted by a subject and people who are supposed to support the process of gaining autonomy (foster care provider, tutor, pedagogue, educator responsible for teaching autonomy), personal characteristics (for example low self-esteem, lack of willingness and motivation to learn, lack of skills) and environmental factors (impact of dysfunctional family environment, peer environment, local environment).*

Keywords: *educational plans, foster care, vocational plans.*

Introduction

At present, Poland faces a widespread tendency of superiority of the concept of care over children which is based on the philosophy of support and strengthening of natural family competencies as a basic and most appropriate educational-care environment. It was assumed that within the new system, care over children deprived of proper care on the side of their natural families ought to constitute an element of a wider support system for the families in their local environment (Basiaga, 2015, 59). Persons who realize tasks in the scope of foster care are obliged not only to ensure proper care to a child, but also to prepare them for future family, vocational and social life (Gajewska, 2006), thus the process of gaining autonomy by the charges of orphanages is targeted at equipping them in such skills, which will ensure their future functioning in an autonomous adult life

(Gumienny, 2005). Educational and vocational plans of the charges are therefore of significance here, since they are consistent with the process of each young person striving to become autonomous.

Becoming autonomous is perceived as actions of a long-term nature the purpose of which is to prepare a given person to commence autonomous life and integrate with their social environment. K. Głębińska and M. Gościńiewicz underline that „as a long-term process it should commence at the time of placement of a child in a given care facility rather than at the time of their departure from it” (Głębińska & Gościńiewicz, 2014, 57). The process of becoming autonomous commences thus prior to reaching adulthood by a person who becomes autonomous and, depending on the particular living situation of a young person, it may last several years, no longer however than until reaching the age of 25 by that particular person. Actions concerning gaining autonomy by charges of foster care have increasingly been the topic of discussions and researches (Giermanowska & Raław-Markowska, 2007; Kaczmarek, 2007; Głębińska & Gościńiewicz, 2014; Golczyńska-Grondas, 2015; both by theoreticians and personnel of care institutions or non-government organizations (Robinson Cruzoe Foundation, 2007) as well as state authorities (Report by the Supreme Chamber of Control, 2014). The conducted tests and their interpretation contained within the presented article present factors which shape educational and vocational plans of the charges of foster care within the process of gaining autonomy.

The subject of research included factors shaping educational and vocational plans of foster care charges. The aim of the research was to compare the implementation of educational needs in educational care centres situated in different environments and to verify whether the entities and persons who are supposed to support the process of gaining autonomy by the charges (i.e. Autonomy guardians, tutors, pedagogues etc.), environmental factors (impact of dysfunctional family environment, peer environment, local environment), personality traits (i.e. low self-esteem, lack of will and motivation to learn, lack of skills, lack of interests), type of foster care, decide about educational-vocational plans of the charges of educational-care facilities.

B. Kołaczek indicates factors which differentiate educational aspirations of a human being, among others, the level of education, place of residence, economic status of their family. Furthermore, the author noted that such aspirations may be conditioned externally (i.e. social-economic situation) or internally (i.e. intellectual capacity of a person, their family situation) (Kołaczek, 2004, 26-27). On the other hand, M. J. Dyrda discusses personality factors (skills, intelligence, interests) as well as social factors (impact of school environment, family, peer and further environment, i.e. of the church) (Dyrda, 2009, 155).

Gaining autonomy by the charges of foster care

Gaining autonomy by the charges of foster care constitutes an important element of the entire educational-care process where a young person leaves the facility or a foster family and commences an autonomous life. Preparing the charges to an adult life begins from the moment of arriving to the facility. It is reflected in daily activities performed autonomously by the charges, in solving various problems which concern them and in presenting and realizing the right behaviours in their social functioning. Any person leaving foster care having reached adulthood is entitled to assistance towards gaining autonomy. Types of the granted assistance, level of financial amount are related to fulfilment of specific conditions concerning the process of gaining autonomy.

Detailed principles concerning the process of becoming autonomous among adult charges leaving foster family, family foster home, educational-care facility or regional care-therapeutic facility are regulated by the Act of 9 June 2011 on family support and foster care system.

Persons who gained autonomy in accordance with art. 140 sec. 1 of the Act from 9 June 2011 on family support and foster care system obtain assistance for:

- continuing education,
- gaining autonomy,
- settling-in.

The level of aid which may be obtained by these persons in the scope of individual types of benefits is not identical and depends on the type of foster care and the time for which the person who became autonomous spent in such care.

Assistance for continuing education, no less than 500 PLN per month, is granted to an autonomous person should they decided to continue their education: At school; in the teacher training centre; at university; at courses - should their completion be compliant with the individual autonomy gaining programme as well as at the workplace whilst vocational apprenticeship. In accordance with the cited act, assistance for continuing education is granted for the duration of education, no longer however than until completing by the autonomous person the age of 25.

Assistance in gaining autonomy is paid on a one-time basis or in instalments, no later however than until completion by the person gaining autonomy the age of 26. In a situation when a given charge who gained autonomy obtains assistance for continuing education, then such aid is paid after completion of collecting aid for continuation of education. The amount of obtained benefits depends on the duration of stay under foster care and evolves around the level from 1,650 PLN in case a given charge remained under foster care within the time range of one to two years - to the amount of 6,600 PLN if they remained under foster care for more than three years.

Whilst, assistance in settling-in is paid on a single-time basis, no later than until completion by the person gaining autonomy the age of 26, in the amount of no less than 1,500 PLN and in case of a person who has obtained a certificate of moderate or significant level of disability, in the amount no less than 3,000 PLN. The assistance for settling-in may be granted also in kind.

Submission of an appropriate application as well as being in possession of an approved Individual Autonomy Programme which prepares a given person for gaining autonomy along with an autonomy guardian for at least a month prior to reaching adulthood by the person who gained autonomy is a significant condition for granting financial aid for continuing education and settling-in.

Individual Autonomy Programme ought to specify „the scope of cooperation of the person who gained autonomy and their autonomy guardian, the manner of obtaining education or vocational qualifications by such person, assistance in gaining the relevant living conditions and in undertaking employment by such person”. Individual Autonomy Programme contains an obligation of the charge as to the realization of its stages as well as forming the basis for granting benefits towards becoming autonomous.

An autonomous charge, in order to obtain the benefits, is obliged to also indicate at least one year prior to gaining adulthood a person who will perform the function of autonomy guardian, including his or her written consent for this. Autonomy guardian „should be a person whom a given charge trusts, accepts as well as understands. The autonomous charge must be sure that the indicated guardian is interested in their future plans and their choice of path of life, as well as giving them a feeling of safety” (Matejek, 2017, 62). The role of autonomy guardian may be performed by „a person who creates foster family, conducts family foster home, coordinates family foster care, a social employee of the poviast family assistance centre, a person who remain in educational-care facility or regional care-therapeutic facility, educator or psychologist or another person indicated by the autonomous person and accepted by the poviast head of family support centre of the appropriate poviast for bearing expenditure for the financing of assistance for continuing education and settling-in” (Act on family support and social assistance system).

The process of gaining autonomy ought to lead towards the integration of a charge with their social environment, their preparation for autonomous life and performance of various social roles. Preparation for autonomous life is an action which comprises the entire educational-care process undertaken by persons who perform care over a child. Charges must learn how to decide about their future, undertake autonomous decisions and bear their consequences. Charges of educational-care facilities have especially difficult path ahead of them due to the insufficient number of the functioning autonomy groups and autonomy flats available there (Robinson Cruzoe Foundation, 2007).

Methodology

The material for the hereby article was obtained pursuant to the analysis of available literature, quantitative-qualitative tests, including survey tests carried out in the area of Bialski powiat. Conducting the researches was planned within the project *Education, balancing educational and developmental deficiencies of the charges of family-run children's houses and educational centers (the example of bialski district)* realized by Department of Pedagogy at Higher State School in Biała Podlaska.

Within the Bialski powiat, situated in the eastern part of the Lublin Voivodeship, there are at present three functioning facilities of institutional character. *Educational-care Facility in Komarno*, launched in 1997 which is a socialization facility with 30 spots. The facility ensures a 24/7 care and guardianship to children who are entirely or partially deprived of parental care, for whom no family foster care was found. It employs 14 tutors. At present, the facility houses 25 charges.

Another facility is *Educational-care Facility in Szachy*. It has been in place since 2003. An autonomous house facility resembles a family living pattern to the inhabitants of this facility. The facility in Szachy is designated for children above the age of 10. It has 14 spots at its disposal. It employs 5 tutors. At present, 10 charges live within it.

The last of the three facilities is *Educational-care Facility in Janów Podlaski*. It commenced its operations in 2010. This facility was launched on the basis of the former border guardhouse, its building was adjusted to the binding residential standards for its 12 charges. 5 tutors work with these children. There are 10 charges living in this facility. All facilities are located in rural areas.

Survey research was carried out in the third quarter of 2017 within the area of the Bialski powiat. Within these studies, a survey was carried out which encompassed 25 charges of educational-care facilities at the age above 10 years. The applied researching method was a survey including both open and closed questions. Moreover, 10 questionnaires were made among the selected tutors of the three educational care institutions. Interviewed people were both men and women.

Whilst, in the framework of qualitative research, narrative interviews were applied with many years' tutor of one of the tested facilities who at the same time was an autonomy guardian. This tutor has over 20 years of experience in the profession of carer-tutor. During the work, she attended various trainings concerning, among others: tasks and roles of autonomy guardian, diagnoses of self-defeating behaviours, supervision meetings, coaching, cooperation with family assistants and many others. What is of significance - tutor at a facility fulfils a certain role thus, he or she must be adequately prepared for it. The

interviewed tutor was appointed an autonomy guardian several times and her true interest in charges' affairs may be safely compared to Janusz Korczak, a trustworthy guardian, for whom children well-being came always first (Kotarbiński, 1986). Narrative interview was realized in June of 2018.

Results

The analyses of determinants of educational-vocational plans commenced with a verification of an impact on realization of such plans of human factors, thus: autonomy guardians, tutors, pedagogues, facility headmasters, employees of the Poviats Family Assistance Centres and others.

As indicated by T. Polkowski, an autonomy guardian is often a tutor in an orphanage or an employee of the Poviats Family Assistance Centre, less frequently a person who is an authentic „mentor” of a young person, who would be emotionally connected to them (Polkowski, 2015, 5). The tutor who attended narrative interview, having been an autonomy guardian on multiple occasions, does not agree with such a statement. She is of the opinion that one can become such a guardian only when „we are an important person for a given child and in case there are emotional bonds between us and that child”. „A guardian ought to be an authority for the charge if they wish to have any impact on the decisions undertaken by that charge. They may thus influence a child's decisions both with respect to education and the choice of profession”.

The following have been noted as the basic tasks of a guardian: „Assistance in establishing an individual autonomy programme, opinionating applications for financial support, cooperating with the school (pedagogue, tutor) and cooperation with employees of the Poviats Family Assistance Centre”. She also points out the significant issue related to the distance from the place of child's stay at the time of gaining autonomy, since if we wish to have any impact at all, we need to be in a permanent contact with our charge”.

Some charges do not want to remain in the facility while gaining autonomy, in which case, in accordance with the binding provisions of the law, the Poviats Family Assistance Centre ought to ensure a sheltered housing or public housing. Unfortunately, within the Bialski poviat only two sheltered housings are in place, one in the town of Bohukały and another one in Żabka, designated mainly for the charges of family facilities operating in these two towns. Apart from this, these housings are unattractive for the youth who is in the process of gaining autonomy, since they are located in poorly accessible rural areas, with the only possible access being one's own car.

Another problem that arises is the maintenance of such a flat with the funds granted to the charges gaining autonomy by the Poviats Family Assistance Centre. M. Teodorczyk cites some statements of autonomous charges of foster care

concerning the issue of insufficient benefits in his publication in the following way: „It is impossible to get by with 500 PLN a month...”, „Poviat Family Assistance Centre is completely uninterested in the charges who are in the process of gaining autonomy..”, „It was extremely difficult to find a room for such an amount of money that I could afford to spend before finding a job..” (Teodorczyk, 2015, 21-22). The only solution in such a situation seems to remain in the educational-care facility for as long as one can, under the condition of course that a given charge continues his or her education. The facility ensures food, accommodation, clothing and all other necessary means for one's daily functioning and school education, prolonging through this the period of „troubleless childhood”. Charges do not need to worry about their daily living conditions and thus, they may focus i.e. on their own educational path. Educational-vocational plans of the charges within the research educational-care facilities were verified within the survey research. Data have been placed in figure 1.

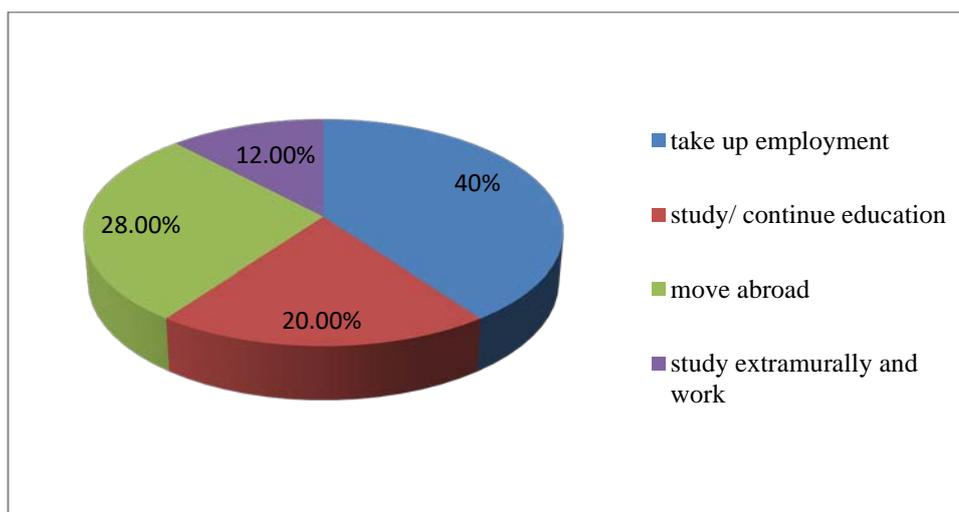


Figure 1 Educational-vocational plans of foster care charges

All persons who declare further education wish to remain in the facility, but it is indeed a small percentage of the charges (20 %). Vast majority of charges wish to depart from the facility as fast as possible, out of which every fifth person wishes to commence work and become autonomous. Unfortunately a large group of the youth does not see any opportunities in the future in our country and plans to travel abroad (28 %) stating that: „The remuneration is too low”, „there is no social support”, „there is no attachment to anything or anyone in this country on their side”, „they would like to live on a high material level” which is impossible in Poland due to lack of adequate education”.

Conversations regarding the indicated plans are mainly conducted with tutors at the facility (40 % of charges). Unfortunately, as many as 48 % of charges are not interested in the opinion of their tutors, pedagogues, autonomy guardians or other persons regarding their realized educational-vocational path. Similar results were obtained in the tests carried out in three educational-care facilities in Podkarpacie by Waldemar Basak (Basak, 2012). He notes also that „upon the choice of individual path of education, the tested charges of orphanages were not left to themselves only” (Basak, 2012). Tutors of the tested facilities confirm that discussions on the topic of educational path and vocational plans most frequently are initiated by the tutors, with each charge, even if they do not wish for such discussions to take place.

With regards to the impact of environmental factors, the importance of peer and family environment on making educational-vocational decisions was analysed. The hereby studies indicate that it is rather insignificant, since approx. 8 % of charges state that the opinions of their peers have an impact on their decisions, while even smaller percentage of them (4 %) declared any impact of family environment.

As noted by previously cited M. J. Dyrda (2009), the factors which determine educational-vocational intentions may also be the personality determinants, thus skills, interests, passions etc. Child's skills often correlated with environmental factors, thus in case of children whose early experiences were not rich and diverse (and such is the case in case of children remaining under foster care - author's annotation) cognitive abilities often do not develop (Deutsch Smith, 2011). According to the authors' researches, half of the survey participants submitted problems with learning history or a foreign language which constitutes a confirmation of the fact that their memory was most likely never trained.

Negative view of oneself and of others, low self-esteem are often combined with difficulties in finding oneself in a school environment (Mickiewicz, 2015), which does not favour either effective learning or developing interests. Interests expressed by the charges of foster care have been shown on figure 2.

Data visible on the figure suggest that every second charge of educational-care facility has no interests and every third is interested in sport, in case of boys it is mainly football while in case of girls - volleyball, whilst only 12 % of research participants train a given sport discipline in a sport club. Only one charge (4 %) indicated artistic interests (musical and plastic) and confirmed attending choir and drawing classes. Only one charge who attends vocational school noted being passionate about fixing broken household appliances, which is related to the specificity of his future profession. One charge is interested in cooking which is also linked to her education and vocational plans.

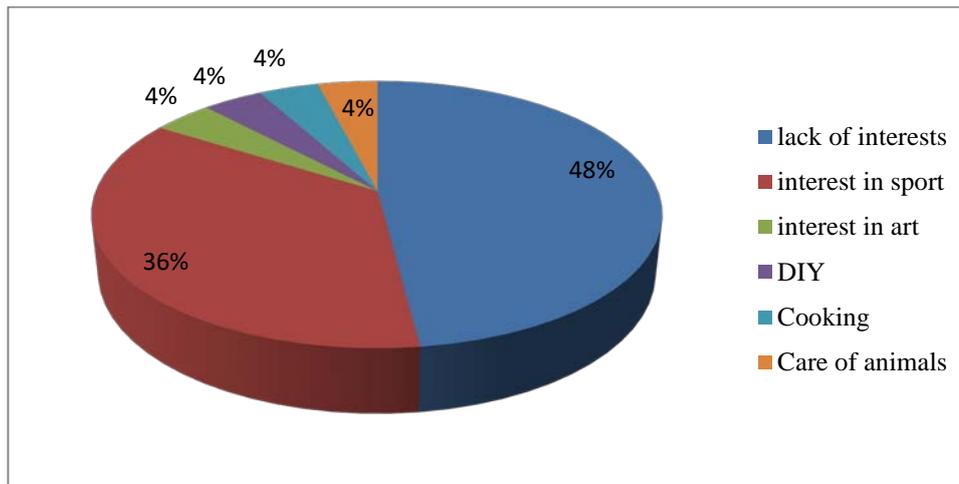


Figure 2 *Interests of charges of foster care*

The last analysed factor was the type of foster care. The authors, for the purpose of comparison, will cite researches carried out by M. Ruszkowska (2013) carried out also in the area of the Bialski powiat within the foster care. According to the above research, 55 % of charges from foster families (children at the age of 10-13) cannot specify their educational-vocational plans, which is related to their age. 25 % of them plan to complete third degree education, 20 % completes vocational schools and wishes to become autonomous as fast as possible. Thus, foster family seems a more beneficial solutions at least in terms of the number of persons completing higher education, since in case of the institutional care, a shorter educational path and becoming autonomous are selected twice as often. It is worth stating that within institutional care, apart from the 24/7 care over children, tutors strive to „prepare the charges for their future social life, applying different types of didactic methods, that is: methods of personal impact, didactic discussions, case scenarios of situations and behaviours”, while at the same time not ignoring the issue of the choice of educational and vocational path. Unfortunately, it often happens that the youth in educational-care facilities is mainly guided by their will to depart from their place of stay in the fastest possible way.

Conclusions

The material obtained through research allows for the formulation of some conclusions:

- 1) Vast majority of charges wish to depart from the facility as fast as possible, out of which every fifth person wishes to commence work and become autonomous.

- 2) The location of the institutions in the rural area hinders an access to the activities that develop interests of the teenagers.
- 3) Children and adolescents indicate most often the sport interest, however, only every third of them works on their development.
- 4) In case of family-run children's houses and educational care centers personal factors eg. a lack of motivation to learning, getting reluctant quickly, a fear of failure and a lack of faith in one's talents, occur very often and only the right attitude of the tutors and care providers can change them.

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