



See Me, Listen to Me!
Children's Perspectives
Ms Mikela Gonzi

**"Li l-lehen tat-tfal jisimghuh...
mhux johduh for granted..."**

**"That they should listen to what
children have to say... they shouldn't
take us for granted..."**

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INTRODUCTION

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
(Article 12.1 *Convention on the rights of the child*. U.N. General Assembly, 1989)

The rationale of this study is directly related to the overall objective of the whole project; that of seeking to address the various concerns that youngsters with challenging behaviour present. In this section, the views of the youngsters themselves on this topic are being privileged.

1.1 Aims of the study

The aims of the study are three-fold.

- To find out what the children's understanding is about why and how they have ended up in a service designed for youngsters with challenging behaviour
- To elicit the children's experience of the service they are in.
- To gather the children's suggestions and ideas about what they feel would be helpful

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The methodology chosen for this study was a qualitative one where a total of 19 children were interviewed individually. The interviews were conducted by 8 interviewers who attended and participated in the discussion of the research design and the tools to be used in the study.

2.1 How the participants were selected

After discussing various options, a decision was taken, together with the Commissioner for Children, that to reach such children, interviews would be carried out with youngsters who are currently in services that are meant to address the needs of children with challenging behaviour. Such services are: Fejda, Suret il-Bniedem (Casa Spinelli and Casa Leopoldo), Young People's Unit (YPU), The Young Offenders' Unit of Rehabilitation Services (YOURS), and the special schools Mater Dei and St. Patrick's Craft Centre.¹

We felt that this was the best decision to take in spite of the fact that we were aware that a few of the children attending these services were not exhibiting very challenging behaviour but were put there because of the lack of vacancies in various other settings.

Unfortunately such a decision meant that the study would not research the perspectives of children with challenging behaviour who are not currently, or who have never been, in those specific services. Children with a disability who present a very challenging behaviour were also not included in the study.

Given that the aim of the study was that of listening to the children themselves, the children's perspectives were not triangulated with those of their professional workers' or with their parents' points of view.

The persons running the services were contacted and asked to provide the research team with the number of children who were currently using the service. It was clarified that by 'children' we meant all children under the age of 18. Given that most of the children with very challenging behaviour who are placed in a service are normally older, all children interviewed were 10 years of age or older.

Initially, the research team aimed to interview all of the children attending the 6 services. It resulted however, that due to the large

¹ Refer to the description of services on pgs.124-184.

number of service-users in YPU, St. Patrick's Craft Centre and Mater Dei, further selection had to be carried out. With regards to YPU – following discussion with the research group, the Commissioner for children and the Head of the service – it was decided that the best would be to focus on those children who were currently at YPU and those who were 'phasing out' and thus, still using the service. Children who were either on leave, or rarely go to YPU were not interviewed.

Of concern is that the students at Mater Dei and St. Patrick's Craft Centre are quite a large number². Moreover all students were out on vacation throughout the timeframe in which it was planned for the interviews to take place. The research team, together with the Commissioner for Children and the Assistant Director of Education for Special Educational Needs, agreed to send a letter to all parents. This described the scope of the study and asked those interested to participate to contact the research group.

2.2. The Participants

Of the 27 children who were originally contacted, four children did not wish to participate, 2 children could not be contacted, 1 child had moved out of the service by the time the interview was carried out and 1 child was listed in two of the services.

Throughout the course of the interviews, it emerged is that 2 out of the remaining 19 children did not seem to have challenging behaviour. These children indicated that they do not have challenging behaviour:

Huma hafna li m'ghandhomx b'zonn programm li qeghdin hawnhekk. Fis-sens li jien ma naranix li ghandi b'zonn programm [Claudine].

There are many here who don't need a programme. I mean, I don't see myself as needing a programme (Claudine).

Information about and from these 2 children has not been included in the demographics and in the analysis. An exception has been made in

² Refer to the statistical details and information provided on pgs. 78-93.

the section presenting the suggestions, in which their ideas and wishes have been included.

Table A features the 17 youngsters as they come from different settings.

Table A. The different settings from where the children were interviewed

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Fejda | 5 |
| Suret il-Bniedem – Males | 2 |
| Suret il-Bniedem – Females | 1 |
| YOURS | 1 |
| YPU | 5 |
| Mater Dei School | 2 |
| St. Patrick's Craft Centre | 1 |
| Total children selected for interview | 17 |

Of the 17 participants, 9 were males and 8 females. All of the respondents were Maltese, 2 of whom were adopted. With regards to the children's ages, 1 of the participants turned 18 by the time we interviewed him, 1 of the children was 17 years old, 2 were 16, 6 were 15, 1 was 14, 2 were 13, 2 were 11, one was 10 and one was going to be 10 soon after the interview.

With regards to the parents' status 6 of the participants had parents who were married and living together; 8 came from a family where the parents were separated and 1 came from a family where the parents were never married. Also, two of the participants' fathers were dead, and of the two widows, one is now cohabitating with a partner.

The parents' occupations have been listed in table B:

Table B. The parents' occupations

| Occupation | Mother's | Father's |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Police | 1 | |
| Cleaner | 2 | |
| Cashier | 1 | |
| Masonry, electrician | | 1 |
| Masonry | | 1 |
| Sprayer | | 1 |
| Electrician | | 1 |
| Public transport | | 1 |
| Barman | | 1 |
| Shipbuilding | | 2 |
| Handyman | | 1 |
| Cook | | 1 |
| Housewife | 10 | |
| Participant does not know | 1 | 1 |
| With government but did not specify | | 1 |
| First pilot interview & was not asked | 1 | 1 |
| Works but not specified | 1 | 1 |
| Parent dead | | 2 |
| Unemployed | | 1 |

Table B. The parents' occupations (continued)

Of the 17 participants: 13 are still at school; 2 have finished school but do not work; 1 is following a course to become a tile layer; and 1 wishes to begin a course at MCAST. Table 3 provides details about the care-giver/s whom the participants lived with prior to entering into the service.

Table C. The care-giver/s with whom the participants lived, prior to entering into the current service/s.

| Prior to entering current service, the participant/s lived with: | Number of participants |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Parents before coming to service | 4 |
| Mother only | 2 |
| Father only | 2 |
| Mother and partner | 1 |
| Grandmother together with mother, mother's partner and a sibling. | 1 |
| Aunt/uncle | 1 |
| Residential home (ranging from having been in 1 to 4 different homes) | 6 |

With regards to the participants' locality: 2 are from Valletta; 4 from Cottonera; 2 from Żejtun; and 1 from each of the following localities: Marsa, Żabbar, Mellicha, Qormi, Dingli, Rabat, Tarxien, and Żebbuġ. Table D below depicts the participants' duration in the service.

Table D. The participants' duration in the service

| Duration | Number of participants |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 2 weeks | 3 |
| 3 months | 3 |
| 6 months | 2 |
| 1 to 1½ years | 4 |
| 1½ to 2 years | 3 |
| 4 years on and off | 1 |
| Does not know but describes as a very long time. | 1 |

2.3 Formulating the interview questions

A set of questions were put together so as to elicit as much information as possible that could answer the research questions. These questions were

piloted by carrying out three pilot-interviews. They were also discussed with the participant following the interview. As a result the structure of the interview questions, their sequence, and some of the content was changed. The final interview questions were divided into:

- Part A** sought to elicit the demographic information of the participants. In this first section, questions were more factual and the children could answer them more easily. Research shows that one way to make a child feel confident that s/he can contribute successfully is to start off with easy questions that you know s/he will have the answer to (Arskey and Knight, 1999).⁴
- Part B** comprised 5 qualitative and open-ended questions.⁵

The first question asked the children for their experience of the services in which they currently are:

Question 1. What is your experience here at X? How would you describe your experience to a friend of yours?

Such a question helped the child get in touch with his/her inner feelings. Through the pilot interview it emerged that question 1, even though necessary, may be difficult to answer immediately. Thus, the research team agreed that if the respondent hesitates, is too brief in his/her answer, or shows that s/he does not know where to start from, the interviewers could use the following probes:

- a) **What would you tell him/her about how you spend your time here?**
- b) **What would you tell him/her about how you feel here?**
- c) **How do you get on with the other residents here at X?**
- d) **What do you like over here?**
- e) **What are the things that help you over here?**

⁴ Refer to Appendix 1: Interview Questions – Part A

⁵ Refer to Appendix 2: Interview Questions – Part B

- f) **What advice would you give your friend if she were to come here?**

The probes were agreed on so as to increase consistency throughout the interviews and thus increase the study's validity. The next question asked for the children's memories of their past, and again, through the probe questions, assisted the children to speak about this in a holistic way. It also helped to shed light on how they perceive their behaviour, on how they describe the sequence of events that led them to where they currently stand, on their awareness/explanation of why they are there and on their story.

Question 2: If you had to relate your life-story about the time since when you were very young until today, what are the experiences that you will surely include?

Probes:

- a) **If you had to describe the time you spent at school, how would you describe it? What would you say?**
- b) **What happened after you finished school? (depending on age)**
- c) **In what way would you mention or describe your family?**
- d) **What explanation would you give about how you've ended up here at X?**

The scope of the third question encouraged the participant to give ideas and feedback about the specific service they are currently in. This served to help them focus on what they already know and to come up with concrete and practical ideas based on their experience.

Question 3: If you had to say something to the authorities about this service, what would you tell them?

Such a question also served to prepare the participant for question 4, which is more abstract and requires the child to come up with more abstract ideas that may not necessarily be based on their own experience.

In fact in a research that studied children's perspectives on families, it was found that:

There were some differences between age groups: younger children seemed to express themselves in concrete terms while older children were more generalised in their use of language and drew on complex abstract notions... (Morrow, 1998)

Question 4: If you were in a powerful position where you could change things or create new services in Malta – that could be of support & help for yourself or for other young persons (who have been through experiences that are similar to yours) – what would you come up with? What ideas would you have?

Question 5: Would you like to add anything else?

Question 5 was the last invitation that was made to them to express their views on anything they wished to pinpoint.

2.4 Interviewing Process

Prior to conducting the interviews, the interviewers were briefed on the carrying out of the interview. Several points, ensuring consistency throughout the interviews were clarified. The research team agreed that all interviews would be tape recorded and transcribed.

Furthermore, each interviewer had to write a brief summary in which they described and discussed their experience and ideas throughout the interview. This was to be sent by email to the rest of the team. "It is important that at regular intervals throughout the study you take stock to see what worked well, what did not work and where there is scope for improvement" (Arskey and Knight, 1999).

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Before carrying out the interview, a few minutes were spent with the participant in which confidentiality was clarified and secured (Kvale, 1996) and in which it was made clear that they had the right not to participate, the right to choose not to answer any of the questions and

⁶ Refer to the consent form and agreement form in the Appendix

the right to stop the interview at any time⁶. The purpose of this was to safeguard the participants' privacy and welfare, and to give them a choice about whether to participate or not (Arskey and Knight, 1999). Prior permission was given to all participants to take part in the study by their parents or legal guardians. The aim and goals of the study and how this research is part of a general project was also explained to all persons involved.

Throughout the study, the identity of all the participants was separated from the information given so as to guarantee anonymity. Furthermore, error inoculation (Frankfort- Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992), where errors are deliberately introduced into individual records while leaving the aggregate data unchanged, was also minimally used in the report. Moreover a fictitious name was given to each participant in the written report. The names were eliminated in the theme '*Suggestions*' so as to avoid any possibility of the reader recognising the participant's identity by the comments made and connecting this with the fictitious name.

Another measure, aimed to protect the participants' identity, was that findings and discussions speak of the heterogeneous sample across-board in relation to challenging behaviour rather than analysing the specific settings one by one. Another reason for this approach was in order that specific settings would not be put under the spotlight. Rather, insights gained from the research would provide food for thought for all the services under study.

2.6 Method of Analysis

The process used for analysis was thematic, where firstly *vertical hermeneutics* was used in which the single cases were analysed, thus allowing the unfolding of manifest and latent views and ideas. Following this, the process of *horizontal hermeneutics* was carried out, where the sum of all interviews was analysed (Leithaeuser and Volmerg, 1998), as cited in Schorn, 2000. Moreover the process of blind reviewing was used, where the analyses was carried out by two persons separately. The themes that emerged were then compared. This process was chosen to increase the internal validity and reliability of the study (Silverman,2001).

Table E. The themes and sub-themes.

| | THEME | | SUB-THEMES |
|-----|---|---------------|--|
| 3.1 | Family, through the participant's eyes, characterised by losses. | 3.1.1 | Family, through the participant's eyes. |
| | | 3.1.2 | Family background strongly characterised by loss and longing. |
| 3.2 | Appraisal of services | 3.2.1 | The children's feelings about the service. |
| | | 3.2.2 | What they like most. |
| | | 3.2.3 | Tendency to compare the community/residential life to life at home. |
| | | 3.2.4 | Other residents – a negative effect? |
| | | 3.2.5 | The service perceived as stigmatising. |
| | | 3.2.6 | In the service you have to obey the rules. |
| | | 3.2.7 | Very little to do at the service. |
| | | 3.2.8 | Decisions take a long time to be taken – in particular with care orders. |
| 3.3 | The professional staff | 3.3.1 | Feelings towards the professional staff |
| | | 3.3.2 | Expressed need for significant relationships and attachment. |
| 3.4 | Understanding why they are in the service. | 3.4.1 | Perceived sequence: significant event leading to being at the service. |
| | | | a. Negative experiences at school. |
| | | | b. Bullying and displacement. |
| | | | c. Peer Pressure. |
| | | | d. Disobedience, impulsivity and harm to self/others. |
| | | | e. No longer fitting in the residential home. |
| | | | f. Family difficulties, abuse and death. |
| | | g. Unclarity. | |
| | | 3.4.2 | Need for clear goals and timeframe |
| | | 3.4.3 | Inappropriate behaviour is equated with being in the service. |

Table continues overleaf

| | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|
| 3.5 | School experience | 3.5.1 | The social and academic aspect. |
| | | 3.5.2 | Changing schools. |
| | | 3.5.3 | The family and the school |
| 3.6 | See me; Listen to me! | | / |
| 3.7 | Suggestions | | Refer to Table F. |

2.7 Conclusion

In the following chapter the various themes will be presented.

3. THEMES

In this chapter, the themes coming out of the interviews will be presented. The principal themes that emerged were seven, some of which are further divided into sub-themes. These have been presented in Table E above.

3.1 Theme 1

Family – through the participant’s eyes – characterised by losses.

Throughout the interviews, most children spontaneously spoke about their family. Most of the descriptions of their family and past experiences were expressed with a significant undertone of sadness and loss.

3.1.1. Family, through the participant’s eyes.

One person in particular hardly touches upon her family. When asked about her family all she said was: “Kollha ġlied... Problemi hu” [Helen]; “They are always quarreling Problems, you know” (Helen). One participant initially described her family as ideal and then went on to speak about the relationship she has with the different members of her family:

Familja ideali, għalija...Ma hija l-iktar li, hekk – mhux għax imorru tajjeb ħafna ta' – imma, per eżempju qiegħda hawnhekk jien, iċempel kuljum u hekk – ħafna...Mad-Daddy tajjeb, mhux ħazin, normali. U mal-Mummy, insomma. Imorru naqra ħazin, ġieli tajjeb, insomma, hekk... [Faye]

An ideal family, as I see it ... My best relations are with my brother, you know – not that we get on very well – but, for example, I'm here, he calls me on the phone everyday, and so – we get along pretty well ... I'm on good terms with Daddy, not bad, normal. And with Mummy, it depends. Our relation is rather bad, sometimes it's good. It depends, you know... (Faye)

Another young interviewee expresses different feelings about his own family. He describes his experience at home as turbulent and full of conflict. There is a negative and sad tone throughout the whole interview “Niġġieldu (sad)...Pause” [John] “We quarrel” (sad) ... Pause (John). On the other hand there is one specific and clear point when he feels happy and this is when he speaks of his visits to his mother. Another respondent who has no contact with her mother explained that she feels there was a change in the relationship with her father when she moved into the service she is in.

Ma tantx għandi relazzjoni tajba mal-familja. Il-papa insomma. Qabel konna naqblu ħafna jiġifieri – qabel ma ġejt hawn – imma nbidel iż-żmien. [Karen]

I'm not on good terms with my family. With my father I get along. Previously we were on very good terms, that is – before I came here – but it's not the same anymore now. (Karen)

Another participant emphasises very much that he gets on well with his siblings, but not so much with his mother:

Bħal ħuti: li dejjem konna *close*, dejjem ħabbejna lil xulxin, orrajt iġġielidna, imma dejjem imxejna ma' xulxin u hekk... u għadna bil-kuntatt - nisperaw li nibqgħu. [Paul].

Like my siblings: we were always close, we always loved each other, it's true that we quarreled, but we always got along and thus ... we still contact each other – we hope to remain so. (Paul)

In a study eliciting children's perspectives on families by Virginia Morrow (1998), sibling relationships were found to be important. While such relationships are rarely conflict-free, they are often underpinned by a good deal of mutual affection and support.

One of the respondents explained that when he used to visit his grandfather, the relationship kept him somewhat away from trouble:

...per eżempju jien qabel, li kien ifisser ħafna għaliġa, kont immur man-nannu tiegħi, ma' kontx nagħmel dawn il-kummiedji. [Mark]

For example, before, and that meant a lot to me, I used to go out with my grandfather, I never gave him a hard time. (Mark)

In a study by Dunn & Deater-Deck (2001), it was found that grandparents were key confidants for children facing family changes. One participant who is adopted speaks very positively of his parents and of how they support him:

Għal qalbi ħafna. Ihobbuni. Ommi tiegħi ħafna paċenzja bija. Missieri ġieli jeħodni x-xogħol miegħu u dejjem jgħiduli x'għandi nagħmel u biex inżomm kalm. Jixtruli kollox u kuntent ħafna. [Andrew].

I feel very happy. They love me. My mother is very patient with me. My father sometimes takes me to his workplace and they always tell me how to behave and to keep calm. They buy me everything I need and I am very happy. (Andrew)

Another participant first speaks of the arguments he has with his brother "X'nilgħabu?! – nagħtu bis-serjeta'...Imbagħad nagħmlu xi ġimgħa ma nitkellmex" "What? We play together?! – We are always fighting really... Then we don't even say a word to each other for a week."and then explains that he does not get on well with his mother but speaks positively of his relationship with his father:

Mal-mummy ma tantx immur tajjeb għax ma tantx inkun id-dar u n-naqra li nkun id-dar brodu. Mad-daddy naħseb

immur tajjeb ħafna ...Għadni sa' lllum noħroġ magħhom.
 Fil-weekend immoru bil-lanċa nistadu...meta jkun bnazzi.
 [Jason]

I'm not on good terms with my mother because I'm rarely to be found at home and the little time I spend there is awful. I think I get along very well with Daddy ... I still go out with them. During the weekend we go fishing with the boat ... when the weather is fine. (Jason)

3.1.2 Family background strongly characterized by loss & longing.

There were several moments in the interviews where the participants expressed a strong sense of loss. This emerged particularly when the respondents related the most significant memories of their life. Three of the participants described how they felt when a member of their family died: “Meta miet missieri – Alla jaħfirlu, din dejjem insemmiha. Ma ridtx immur l-iskola...” [Louisa] “When my father died – May he rest in peace! I always recount this - I didn't want to go to school ...” (Louisa); “Tad-dwejjaq meta mietet iz-zija u hekk u meta tlajt ġo *homes* ohra fejn ma xtaqtx immur jien ...tad-dwejjaq.” [Faye] “It was sad when my aunt died and even when I had to go to other homes where I didn't like to go ... really sad.” (Faye); and:

Tal-mewt ta' missieri – għax it-tip ta' memorja li l-iktar iffissajt fuqha: dik il-ġurnata, u hekk... u nibqa' niftakarha, u hekk...għax niftakarha. Għax hekk jew hekk, il-missieri nirrispettah u hekk ...Fis-sens li – kif kien iġibli rispett...u kif dejjem ħabbna sa l-aħħar...qadt ma' missieri sakemm wasal il-dik tiegħu (referring to his father's death) – il-bqija imbagħad bdejt nara aktar li rrid naħseb għar-rasi għax ma nafx fejn naqbad immur...ħafna taħwid għax spiċċajna mill-iskola... [Paul]

When my father died – because it is that kind of remembrance that always comes to mind: that day, you know ... and I will always remember it, you know ... because I remember it. Because

anyway, I respect my father and so ... I mean that – the way he respected me ... and the way he loved us till the end ... I stayed with him till the thing happened (referring to his father's death) – afterwards then I started to realize that I had to take care of myself because I did not know where to go ... there was a lot of confusion as we had finished school ... (Paul)

Another participant explained how finding out that her father is not her natural father created confusion in her life:

Meta kont żghira l-mummy kienet iġġibli l-ħwejjeġ mill-Ingilterra, mill-magazines kienet iġġibhomli. Bdejt nikber qisni bdejt nimmatura u hekk. Kont indum ħafna barra. Imbagħad il-mummy qaltli li d-daddy mhux missieri proprja u qisek iktar, thawwadt. [Lara]

When I was young my mother used to buy me clothes from England, she used to choose them from magazines. I started to grow up and I felt like becoming mature and thus. I used to return home late. Then my mummy told me that daddy isn't truly my father and I felt more confused. (Lara)

A great sense of loss is expressed by Anna who explains that her family was normal until her father began drinking: "Ifhimni kelli l-background tiegħi ta' familja – normali. Missieri beda jixrob, kien hemm is-swat, xorb, għajjat u biża." Listen, my family's background was normal. My father started drinking; there was beating, drinking, shouting, and fear."

Another respondent expresses disappointment when describing a memory of her Holy Communion: "Meta ghamilt il-preċett kien ikrah ħafna, ma' hadtx gost u hekk, għax kienet qaltli ommi li ġejja u ma ġietx." [Helen] "My First Holy Communion was really ugly, I didn't feel any happiness at all, because my mother had told me that she will be there, but she didn't come." (Helen). There is also a sense of loss with

regards to innocence and a happy childhood expressed by a participant who explains that she has hardly any nice memories:

Ma tantx għax meta kont żgħira qisni dejjem l-ikrah rajt fhimt? Ma tantx niftakar affarijiet sbieħ. [Karen]

Not really, because when I was young I always looked on the dark side of life, do you understand? I don't remember so many nice things.

3.2 Theme 2:

Appraisal of services

All interviews in some way or another elicited the children's views, judgements and appraisal of the service they are in. Perhaps this is the theme which has the most sub-themes due to the individuality of each child, the differences between one service and another, and the various aspects to the services. This section begins by an overview of the children's feelings about being in the service. It then highlights what the children like most and their tendency to compare living in the residence to living in their home. The findings and discussion moves on to other sub-themes: their relationship with the other residents; having to cope with stigmatisation; having little to do at the services; and that decisions take a long time to be taken.

3.2.1 The children's feelings about being in the service

The children expressed a range of feelings about being in the service but most of the participants suggested that the feeling is not nice, ranging from sadness to outright disgust and rebellion. However, one respondent claimed that he enjoys being in the service:

Nieħu gost, daqqa ngħin lis-surmast, nagħmel l-'crafts', imbajjad, innaddaf, nagħmel il-lessons u dejjem insib x'nagħmel. [Andrew]

I like it, sometimes I help the headmaster, do the crafts, paint, do the cleaning, attend the lessons and I'm always occupied.
(Andrew)

A respondent explains that if she were to tell a friend how she feels in the service, she would say that she could mention nothing positive about the service:

...ma nista' ngħidilha xejn sabiħ. Għax eżempju jekk jieħduk x'imkien ha jieħduk bil-karita', hekk... trid tmur tittallab għax ma jkollomx biżżejjed budget biex tħallas. Minn fil-għodu sas-sebgha irridu noqogħdu hawnhekk bil-fors. {Lara}

... I can't tell her anything nice. For example, when they take you out with them they do it out of pity, you see ... you have to go and beg because they don't have a big enough budget to be able to pay. We have to stay here from the morning till seven o'clock. (Lara)

One participant expressed mixed feelings about the service. There is an undertone of monotony and lack of stimulation in his description of the repeated schedule and similar days:

Daqqa tajjeb, dan l-aħħar qisni hekk, inħossni naqra ħazin. Inqum fil-għodu, nagħmel id-duties, nagħmel ta' bilfors jigifieri, dan l-aħħar, imbagħad immur għall-kors, niġi hawnhekk ninħasel u mbagħad ikolli il-biċċa tiegħi, nagħmilha u wara noħrog u niġi biex norqod...Dik il-ħajja tiegħi hawn. {Josef}

Sometimes I feel good, lately it's so and so, I feel rather down. I wake up in the morning, I do my duties, not heartily that is, lately, then I go for the course, I come back here and work and then I do the task which awaits me and afterwards I go out and come back to sleep ... That's my life here. (Josef)

Another participant speaks about the disillusion he felt when he entered the service. He describes it as:

Li thawwadt...li dħalt f'dinja differenti ovvja...hawnhekk...
li dħalt f'dinja differenti milli kont taf u hekk...u almenu

kif smajt fuq qabel hawnhekk, ħsibt li ħa nidħol f'xi ġenna, imma ma tantx jidher li qisu post sabiħ. [Paul]

That I get confused ... that I entered a different world obviously ... in here ... that I entered a world which is different from the one I knew and so ... and at least as I got to know about this place before, I thought I would be entering some paradise, but it does not seem to be a nice place. (Paul)

Replying to the interview question: *What is your experience in the service? How would you describe it to a friend* (together with the various probes related to this), most of the responses clearly suggested that: to them, the experience is not nice and that one should avoid going there. One participant said that he'd suggest that one should escape from the service: "Jahrab, jahrab" [John] "He should escape, escape." (John). Another participant speaks about the lack of liberty he feels:

Li jidħol hawn, l-ewwel ħaġa, ma' nixtiequx li jkolli ħabib jidħol hawn ġew. Għax m'hawnx ħafna esperjenzi sbieħ hawn ġew. L-ewwel ħaġa li tkun maqtuġħ minn mal-familja tiegħek...li m'għandekx libertà, hawnhekk m'għandekx libertà. [Mark]

First of all, I wouldn't like him to come here. I don't like a friend to end up here. There aren't many nice experiences here. Foremost you will be separated from your family ... you can't live the way you would like to live, you don't have any freedom here. (Mark)

Another respondent also speaks of the lack of liberty in another service and speaks of how he feels tied down by the duties:

Id-duties tiddejjaq bilfors. Il-ħin tagħhom bilfors, u anke nidħol hawnhekk, għandek duty fil-għodu, jitfagħlek waħda wara nofs in-nhar u waħda fil-għaxija. Niddejjaq. Trid tlaħħaq bla libertà qisu. Ma naħsibx jekk immur ngħix waħdi ser noqgħod nagħmel dawn l-affarijiet jiena... (Id-duties) kuljum u tqazzist issa." [Josef]

You can't but get bored with the duties. Their time is enforced. Even when I come here, I have to do my morning duty, another one is scheduled for the afternoon and another in the evening. I get bored. You have to keep up with the deadline and thus you can't enjoy freedom. If I were to go and live on my own I don't think that I will do all these things ... (The duties) everyday and I'm really fed up now." (Josef)

Another participant would advice a friend not to come to the service and to be careful of the carers:

Nghidilha tiġix 'l hawn...Nghidilha tkellimhomx għax jekk tghidilha xi haġa taqbeż fuqek (referring to a care-worker). Hekk ha nghidilha, nghidilha lesti *machine gun* għax bis-serjeta'. [Lara]

I will tell her not to come here ... I'll tell her not to speak to them because if you tell her something she will pounce on you (referring to a care-worker). That's what I'm going to tell her, I'll tell her to be ready with a machine-gun for it's really so.

The following words of Louisa, clearly shows how she feels:

Participant: L-esperjenza, lil shabi ta' l-iskola u lil kulhadd: biex ma jersaqx l'hawn għax ma tantx nohorgu. Ġewwa. Qisek qieghda – imajina ħabs – hekk. Imma imbagħad nurses ok imma. Kulhadd ihobbok... Imma bil-hinijiet biex tiekol, m'għandekx hin li tista' taqbad u tiehu platt inti. Qisu hemm struttura ta' hinijiet – ehe – li trid toqghod għalihom u ma tistax tiekol meta trid...jekk ma jkun hemmx xi hadd qalbu tajba u jtina x'nixorbu... Nghidilha biex ma tersaqx l'hawn. Għax naħseb aghar mill-ħabs – għax il-ħabs, tista' tghid kelma imma hawn ma tistax tghid li trid. Xejn.

Interviewer: Trid iġġib ruhek sew hux? [Interviewer]

Participant: Sew, inkella, inkella *single room*.

Interviewer: *Single room* x'inhi? [Interviewer]

Participant: Toqghod wahdek ghal ċertu hin – perkazu skond x'ghamilt. Jien darbtejn dhalt. [Louisa]

Participant: The experience, to my schoolmates and to everybody: not to come to this place because we seldom go out. We are kept inside. As if you are in a prison, that's how it is. But on the other hand the nurses are OK. Everyone loves you ... But there are fixed times for eating, you can't just take a plate and eat when you feel like eating. There seems to be a fixed time-table – which is to be followed and you can't eat whenever you like ... as far as there isn't a kind hearted person who's ready to give us something to drink ... I'll tell her not to come to this place. Because I think it's worse than being in prison – because in prison you can say a word but here you cannot say anything. You can say nothing.

Interviewer: You have to behave well, no?

Participant: Well or else, or else 'single-room'.

Interviewer: What is 'single-room'?

Participant: You have to stay alone for some time – it depends on what you've done. I found myself inside there twice. (Louisa)

One participant described mixed feelings about the service he is in. He begins by criticising the system: “L-iskola m'hiex xi skola tajba.” “The school isn't a good one.” He then speaks positively of the relationships he has there: “ħbieb ghandi, teachers iħobbuni l'istess... qisni qieghed id-dar...” “I have friends, I'm also loved by the teachers ... it seems like being at home ...”. Following this he says that he feels he does not learn enough in the school: “Li ma tantx titghallem (silence)... naghmlu siegħa kitba fil-klassi, siegħa, siegħa u kwart, il-bqija nilgħabu fil-ground...”

“That you don’t learn a lot (silence) ... we spend an hour writing in class, one hour, an hour and a quarter, the rest of the time we spend playing in the ground.”. On the other hand he’d promote the school to a friend:

**Ejja hu gost – jġifieri, ma’ tiddejjaqx hemmhekk...tgħaddi
ż-żmien hemmhekk, jġifieri filgħodu nidhol...dik is-siegħa
naraha ġurnata u il-bqija lanqas narah għaddej il-ħin.
[Jason]**

Come and enjoy it – that is, you won’t get bored there ... you’ll have a good time there. That is, I come here in the morning ... that one hour seems as long as a day, otherwise time flies by. (Jason)

3.2.2 What they like most

In reply to the question asking what the participant likes most about the service, Maria says: “Il-kamra nahseb tiegħi...żewġ sodod, għamara bajda, bit-toilet u bix-shower tagħna, jġifieri għandek tiegħek stess” “My room. I think ... Two beds, white-coloured furniture, we have our toilet and shower, that is you have your own.”. The sense of privacy is clearly important for this participant. She also says that she likes the fact that the residents cook, the reason being that: “halli forsi la nikbru...inkunu diġa’ nafu nsajru...Anke innadfu u hekk – għal ġid tagħna.” “Maybe when we grow up ... we will already know how to cook ... Even how to do the cleaning and so – for our own good.”

Another participant clearly states that the time she likes most is that spent with the Occupational Therapist:

**Meta tiġi l-O.T...teħodna il-gym, nagħmlu il-fuħħar
– il-clay, u għandna treadmill, ġieli inpingu, innadfu il-
kamra aħna...nieħdu pjaċir, u ġieli jekk noqgħodu kwieti,
toħroġna... [Louisa]**

When the O. T comes ... she leads us to the gym, we do some pottery – the clay, and we have a treadmill, sometimes we do some drawing, we clean our own room ... we enjoy it, and, if we behave well, she might take us out ...[Louisa]

One participant speaks positively of the service, emphasising that she does not feel tied down: “M’ghandix irbit hawn...” [Anna] “I’m not tied down here ...”

3.2.3 Tendency to compare the community/residential life to life at home.

Another sub-theme which was quite significant is that the children tend to compare life in the community/residence with the life they know at home. A few participants spoke of how different their life is now that they are in the services. The sense of loss in their words is evident:

Hemm tfal oħra probabbli jmorru l-baħar. Huma jgħidulna li rridu nimxu bħal familja oħra. Bħal familja oħra ma tistax timxi. Għax huma filgħodu jmorru il-baħar u aħna minn filgħodu sas-sebgha ta’ fil-għaxija rridu noqogħdu ġewwa bil-fors.” [Lara]

There are other children who will probably go to the seaside. They tell us that we should get along like any other family. We cannot behave as another family. Because in the morning they go to the seaside and we have to stay inside from the morning till seven in the evening.” (Lara)

Participant: Xi kultant inhossni daqsxejn imdejjaq, minhabba li għax jaqbd u mieghek u hekk, u li mhux xi ambjent familjari...

Interviewer: Familjari x’tifhem bija?

Participant: Fis-sens l-ambjent li kont drajt qabel u hekk, meta kont nghix ma’ missieri u omni u hekk, inbdilt f’hafna affarijiet...hinijiet speċjalment... [Paul]

Participant: Sometimes I feel a bit down, because they start picking on you and so, and that is not a familiar environment ...

Interviewer: What do you understand by ‘familiar’?

Participant: I mean the environment I had got used to and so, when I used to live with my father and mother and so, I changed in many a way ... especially the times ... (Paul)

Most children expressed a deep sense of longing for their parents now that they are in the services. Lara explains that being in the service is an ugly experience because of this:

Esperjenza kerha. Ma tistgħax tgħid li inti ferħana għax inti ma tkunx qiegħda mal-familja tiegħek. Perezempju jien nixtieq immur m'ommi. [Lara]

An ugly experience. You can't say you're happy because you are not living with your family. For example, I would like to live with my mother. (Lara)

Another participant says that she would give the following advice to a friend:

Nghidlu li kieku jersaq l'hawn, ommok u missierek mhux ser jarawk dejjem, li xi ftit granet hux, xi granet biss... Pause [Louisa]

If he were to come here, his mother and father will not be seeing him always. That is only a few days no, some days only ... Pause (Louisa)

Two other participants expressed a great sense of longing for being with particular family members: "Għax hawn m'hawnx l-ahwa, jew ommijiet...(very sad)" [David] "You don't find your siblings here, or mothers ... (very sad)" (David)

and: "Niddejjaq hafna...Għax jien irrid noqghod mal-mummy mhux hawn." [Peter] I get bored ...for I want to stay with my mother and not here." (Peter)

Several participants highlighted the lack of freedom, the regimental aspect of the timetable which is incomparable to being at home, too strict

at times, inflexible rules and how they feel about this:

Heq nagħtu kas ġieli ikun hemm, nagħtu kas irrid nara program fuq it-TV u ma nkunx nista'. Thossok irrabjata... tiddejjaq. [Maria]

Let's say maybe there is, let's say I want to watch a programme on T.V. and I will not be able to do so. This makes you angry ... I won't like it. (Maria)

Jien inħossni naqra imdejja għax nippreferi li noqgħod id-dar nieħu pjaċir, niekol fi x'ħin irrid, u hekk. [Louisa]

I feel a little down because I prefer to stay at home enjoying myself, eating whenever I feel like it, and so. (Louisa)

An interesting very strong message was from those children whose family background is abusive and/or experiencing problems. These children appreciate the fact that even though they may not be happy in the service, it is safer than home and also provides for their basic needs:

Mhux kuntenta, imma tajjeb: aħjar mid-dar. [Helen]

I'm not happy, but it's good: better than at home. (Helen)

Kont għaddejja minn storja d-dar – qisni ħadt ir-ruh – timmissjom lil tal-familja imma dejjem aħjar. Dejjem trid tqis għat-tajjeb tiegħek. [Anna]

At home I had a troubled life – now I'm feeling better – one misses the family members but it's better. One should always keep in mind one's well-being. (Anna)

...jien hawn irrid nibqa' għax hawn qiegħda komda. Hawn, ċerta li mhux qiegħda nissawwat... Li n-needs tiegħi kuljum qed isiru, l-ikel qed nieħdu, qed ninħasel – mhux titfili l-gyser. X'ħin irrid nista' noħroġ. Mhux għax tkun irrabijat jew jġi...nagħmlu mod tiġi xi carer hawn bin-nervi, ħa

tiġi tixrob, ħa tiġi ssawwattni? Le m'għandix dritt! Imma d-dar kienu jgħiduli jiena ommok u missierek għandi dritt insawwtek. {Anna}

... I want to stay here for I'm comfortable here. Here, I'm sure I'm not going to be beaten ... That everyday I will have all I need, I'm being provided with food, I can wash myself – no one switches the water-heater off. When I feel like it I can go out. If somebody is angry or comes ... let's say that some care worker comes here feeling angry, is she going to start drinking, is she going to start beating me? No, she can't do it! But at home they used to tell me: "I'm your mother/father, I can hit you." (Anna)

One participant says that the service is better than home because of the company she has which she doesn't have at home:

Ifhem, ġieli ngħid aħjar hawnhekk u ġieli ngħid aħjar id-dar... Mhux eżatt bħad-dar, mhux bħal ma tgħix id-dar għax regolamenti u hinijiet u hekk. Imma aktar aħjar hawn għax tkun mal-ħbieb, hekk imma dejjem id-dar aħjar. {Karen}

Listen, sometimes I tell myself that it's better here and sometimes I say it's better at home. It's not exactly like home, not like when you live at home, because there are rules and fixed-times and so on and so forth. But it's better here because you'll be with your friends, you know, but home is always better. (Karen)

3.2.4 Other residents – A negative effect?

Through the interviews, it became clear that several children feel that the other residents pick on them and that their privacy and personal space is not always respected. This is a real challenge. Others speak positively of the other residents and some express mixed feelings about this. It is very clear that the children's experiences vary according to: their own character, personality, ways of relating and communicating. Their experiences also depend significantly on the other residents.

One respondent speaks very positively of the other residents, some of whom are older than she is: “Uuu jhobbuni. Qishom mummies tieghi” “They love me so. They seem to be my mummies.” She seems to have developed her own philosophy about how to relate to the other residents:

La timxi sew magħhom huma ħa jimxu jekk inti ħa toqgħod tirrabja ħa toqgħod tinnervja għal xejn – iġġib in-nies ta’ barra qabilhom...din familja. Inti trid titrattahom bħalma trid li jittrattaw lilek, ma tridx titratthom ħazin u taħseb li inti ħa jittrattawk tajjeb. Għax dan kulħadd iħoss... [Anna]

If you treat them well that’s how they’ll treat you. If you get angry and lose your temper for no reason at all – you treat outsiders better than you treat them ... this is a family. You have to treat them like you want to be treated by them, you should not treat them badly and then pretend that they should treat you well. For everyone has a heart. (Anna)

The following are mixed comments: “ġieli orrajt u ġieli le.” [Maria] “Sometimes they’re all-right sometimes not.” (Maria); “Ok, għax tampar xulxin u naqblu” [Lara] “OK, we’re peers and we get along.” (Lara); “Mat-fajliet all right...” [Karen] “It’s all well with the girls ... (Karen)

Insomma. ġieli joqgħodu jaqbd u miegħi. Dejjem...ġieli perkažu, jiena niddejjaq jekk taqbad u tmissli oġġett bla permess tiegħi. U jaqbd u ibabsu... [Louisa]

It depends. Sometimes they start picking on me. Always ... Sometimes, for example, I don’t like having somebody touching something which belongs to me without first asking for my permission. And they start meddling ... (Louisa)

Għall-ewwel li ġejt kont niġġieled ma wiehed għax qabziti u tajtu daqtejn ta’ ponn, imma issa ikkalmajt. [Andrew]

At first, when I came here, I used to quarrel with a person because he got on my nerves and I punched him, but now I calmed down. (Andrew)

One participant says that one should be on his guard with regards to the other residents and basis this on his own experience. He would advice the following to a friend:

Ovvjament biex ma jhallix lir-residenti l-oħrajn jagħmlu li jridu bih. Li ma jafdax affarijiet personali tiegħu bħal wallet, sigaretti u affarijiet hekk. Joqgħod attent fejn jagħmilhom, joqgħod attent lil min ħa joffri u ovvjament jekk ikollu ħajja daqsxejn iebsa, ma jgħidx lil kulhadd għax imorru ixandruha, u jinqered hemmhekk imbagħad ... eħe, u forsi 'l quddiem jidra xi residenti u hekk u jkun jista' jara ċar li jista' jafda u hekk. Imma mall-ewwel imbagħad, ma jaqbillux, biex ma jiġrilux bħali. [Paul]

Obviously so as not to be pushed around by the other residents. That he should not leave personal belongings like a wallet, cigarettes or similar things, running around. He should be careful where he puts them, to be on his guard to whom he's going to offer and obviously, if he had had a rather hard life, he should tell nothing to anybody because they will tell others about it, and that's when he will feel dismal then ... and yes, maybe, as time passes by, he'll get to know some of the residents and so he will be able to see more clearly who he can trust and so. But not from the very beginning, it would be good for him, so as not to experience what I have been through ... (Paul)

Some of the youngsters idealise the other residents whose behaviour may influence them in a negative way.

Jogħgobni (is referring to the other 'residents'). Nitgħallem ħafna affarijiet. Għadni zgħir u tghallimt. Ippruvajt nagħmel kollox fil-ħajja. Tgħallimt ħafna affarijiet...perezempju kelli ħafna esperjenzi. Perezempju man-nies tad-droga hawnhekk...Ma' nies perezempju li qatlu hawn...[Mark]

I like them (is referring to the other residents). I learn a lot of things. I'm still young and I have learnt. I tried to do everything in life.

This same participant explains that these persons helped him:
 ...jgħidulek tagħmilx hekk għax jiġrilek hekk u jiġrilek hekk...jgħiduli toqgħodx titkessaħ pereżempju b'dan il-mod, jew tagħmilhiex ma' ċertu ħbieb għax hekk. Hawnhekk kulħadd akbar minni. Fhimt? Kulħadd ifehmni biex ma nergax nidhol hawn. [Mark]

I learnt a lot ... for example, I went through many experiences. For example, with drug abusers here ... With people here, for example, who have committed murder... (Mark)
 : - they tell you not to do this because this and this will befall you ... they tell me not to behave badly, for example, in this manner, or not to seek the company of certain friends, you know. Here everybody is older than me. You understand? Everybody explains to me so as not to return to this place. (Mark)

He may be unaware of how the other persons may be influencing him.

3.2.5 The service perceived as stigmatising.

A few of the participants spoke about how the very fact that they use the service, almost inevitably leads to labeling especially when it is made obvious that they are service-users. An example is that of Roberta who goes to school in a vehicle that has words printed on it that indicate that she is using a particular service:

...ġieli nistħi mmur l-iskola għax ġieli jwassluni huma r'hawnhekk u fuq il-karozza jkun hemm miktub dipartiment xi haġa. U meta mmur l-iskola jgħiduli, insomma huma jafu, ħafna minnhom jafu li qieghda l-istitut imma niddejjaq... [Roberta]

... Sometimes I feel ashamed to go to school because sometimes they take me there, people from this place, and on the car there are the words 'Department ...' something. When I go to school they tell me, you know, they know, many of them know that I am in the institute, but I don't like it ... (Roberta)

Another participant describes the comments that people normally pass once they get to know that he has been in the service. Seemingly, such comments make him feel judged.

...ma' tkunx xi haġa sabiġha, anke toħroġ barra – dak kien (name of service). Pereżempju lili ma' tagħmillix differenza, imma mhux meta n-nies jgħidu ara dak kien (name of service), għandu 16-il sena. Anke pereżempju tkun tkellem tfajla, tmur tfiehem lil missierha li jien kont (name of service), mhux affarijiet sbieħ hu, anke għall-kondotta, ix-xoġhol għall-kollox. [Mark]

... it's not something nice, even when you go outside – he was at (name of service). For example, it doesn't do any difference to me, but when people point and say: 'Look! He was at (name of service), he is 16 years old.' Even, for example, if I were to go out with a girl, how am I to go and explain to her father that I was at (name of service); these aren't nice things no, even for one's conduct certificate, for employment, for everything. (Mark)

One participant explains how he has learnt to keep his personal life-experiences to himself. He has had a bitter experience where he shared a personal issue with another resident and this was spread around the neighbourhood. The following words show a strong underlying sense of betrayal and exposure:

Participant: ...hajtek u hekk, mhux tmur ixxandar ma' kulhadd għax id-darba l-ohra kont għidt kelma hawn ġew jiena u marru jxandruha u anke in-nies ta' barra saru jafuha. Issa dawn in-nies ta' barra ma jafunx, l-ewwel darba li rawni hawnhekk, dawn in-naħat, jġififieri, ma nafx...

Interviewer: Qisek ġejt ittimbrat...

Participant: Ġejt jġififieri: 'boom dak għamel dik il-haġa'.

[Paul]

Participant: ... it's your life you know, you should go and tell everybody because last time I said something in here and it was spread around and even people from outside got to know about it. The outsiders do not know me, the first time they saw me it was in this neighbourhood, that is, I don't know ...

Interviewer: You feel like having been stigmatized.

Participant: I was, that is: "Boom, he did that thing?" (Paul)

A few participants explained that due to their background and situation, they have been labeled since they were young:

Li missieri jixrob...[l-istudenti l-oħrajn kienu jgħidu:] 'imsawwta, fejn hu x-xurban? Sakranazz!'...Dejjem inżomm ġo fija. [Anna]

That my father was a heavy drinker ... (the other students used to say): 'Victim, where is the drunk? Drunkard!' ... I always restrained myself. (Anna)

It is clear that it would help if persons responsible for running the services take all necessary precautions to avoid giving anyone the opportunity/reason to label the child any further.

3.2.6 In the service you have to obey the rules.

Whilst many of the participants had already suggested that they would advice their friends to run away from the place if they were to be admitted, nevertheless most of them were aware that in the service you were bound to obey the rules. When asked what advice the residents would give to a friend about the service, the most repeated answer was the understanding that to get on well one should obey the rules:

Ngħidilha biex tobdi r-regoli u r-rules. U jekk ikollok xi sistema biex taħrab taħrabx għax tiġi aġħar. U tobdi mill-care workers." [Roberta]

"I will tell her to obey the regulations and the rules. And if she ever dreams of escaping, she should never do it, for she would

be much the worse for it. I will also tell her to obey the care workers.” (Roberta)

Heqq, trid tnaddaf, inkella konsegwenzi, jekk tidgħi nagħtu kas inaqsulha il-pocket money, u hekk. [Maria]

Hey, you have to clean, or else you'll suffer the consequences, if you swear let's say, you'll have less pocket-money, and so. (Maria)

Jogħhod sew. Għax inkella konsegwenza... Hekk meta johroġ minn hawn jipprova ma jergax jagħmel li għamel biex ma jergax jigi hawn. [Faye]

To behave, or else he will suffer the consequences ... When he leaves this place he should try his best not to repeat what he had done so that he won't come back here. (Faye)

L-ewwel ma' ngħidlu oqgħod sewwa u obdi ħalli ma' tidħolx hawn ġew... Biex jobdi mill-ewwel ħa jitlaq minn hawn. [Helen]

The first thing I'll tell him is to behave well and to obey so that he will never come here ... To obey at once so that he will leave this place. (Helen)

3.2.7 Very little to do at the service.

In various interviews, participants say they are bored and have nothing to do to occupy their time. Several children feel at a loss as to how to spend their time. Notwithstanding the rigid timetables in some services, some children explained that this does not fill their time, and that what they need is more games, activities, outings and flexibility to be able to plan their free-time properly:

...ma tantx għandna biex negħdew, fhimt? Għax filgħodu naħslu, imma qisu għal nofs in-nhar, paċenzja nara t-television, ma tantx għandi, imma ġejja u sejra fil-bitħa,

**imma m'hemmx dawk l-affarijiet li rridu nagħmlu fhimt?...
Iva l-ġurnata twila ħafna. {Karen}**

...we don't have many things to do so as to while away the time, you understand? Usually we work in the morning, but at about mid-day, I can't stick watching television, but I'm always on the go, going in and out of the courtyard, but there aren't those things we like doing, you understand? Yes, the day is rather long. (Karen)

**Il-ħin iktar ma nagħmel xejn milli nagħmel affarijiet. Eq u li
kieku ikollna daqsxejn iktar ħin għal ħrug u hekk...{Paul}**

I spend a lot of time idling rather than doing something. Eh, and if we were to have more time to go out and so ... (Paul)

Two children stand out in their ability to make the most of what they have. There is a sense of resiliency – where both participants are creative and resourceful. This clearly helps them to cope with their situation and to fill up their time. Louisa explains that:

**Hawnhekk, min ikollok...bħali...xi ħaġa biex tqatta il-ħin,
jien għandi d-drawing book u affarijiet, ġibthom mid-dar
biex ikolli x'nagħmel. {Louisa}**

Here, you should, like me, have something to while away the time with. I have a drawing book and things which I brought with me from home so that I can fill my time. (Louisa)

Moreover she said that when she is in the single room and has nothing to do she manages to invent a game:

**...Jiena b'kollox nilgħab – tgħidli mela proprja belha inti....
Jiena l-aqwa li kelli dan...noqgħod nilgħab b'subagħja
taparsi *puppets*...qattajt il-ħin hekk. {Louisa}**

I play with anything – you might say that I'm really stupid ... Since I have this, I can't ask for more ... I play with my fingers

imagining they are puppets ... I spend a lot of time like this.
(Louisa)

The other participant explains that he likes the crafts most. He goes on to describe how he puts personal effort in what he does. There is an underlying feeling of pride and contentness:

Il-‘crafts’, għax ngħaddieh il-ħin. Ara din il-mejda, irrangajtha jien. Kienet bis-saqajn jiċċaqalqu, invitajtha u issa ara kemm hi soda. Għamilna dak l-almanakk. Dak jibqa’ għal dejjem. Issa fil-‘crafts’ ħa nibdew xi xogħol bl-injam. Nieħu gost anke nbajjad u nirrangaw il-kmamar. Għamilna l-air conditioner u bajjadna barra. {Andrew}

The crafts, because I fill my time. Look at this table, I fixed it. Its legs were shaky, I screwed it and now, look how steady it is. We did that almanac. That will remain there forever. During the crafts lesson, we will soon start working with wood. I enjoy painting and arranging the rooms. We installed the air-conditioner and painted the wall on the outside.

3.2.8 Decisions take a long time to be taken – care orders in particular

A small number of residents who are on care order expressed the distress and helplessness they feel when it takes so long for decisions to be taken. Such decisions regard, for example, sleeping at their parents, meeting parents and holding meetings with their siblings. This participant sounded frustrated and angry at the lengthy process:

Dak iż-żmien (of abuse from father) stajt naqtgħu. Kont immur għand il-mummy u stajt naqtgħu, għax stajt nagħmel hekk. Imma hawnhekk ma tistax. Issa rrid nistenna sitt xhur sakemm tkellem il-board imbagħad tistenna sitt xhur wara u mhux dejjem tgħidlek tista’ titlaq. Ħafna affarijiet per eżempju nkun irrid norqod id-dar, trid tara thalliniex jew le. {Lara}

That time (of abuse from father) I could stop it. I used to go to my mummy and I could stop it, because I could do so. But here you can't do that. Now I have to wait six months till I can speak to the board, then I'll have to wait another six months and one is not always given permission to leave. There are many things, for example, if I would like to go and sleep at home, I'll have to see whether I will be allowed to go or not. (Lara)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that, except if it is contrary to the child's best interest, it is the children's right to meet their parents regularly. (Article 9.3 *Convention on the rights of the child*. U.N. General Assembly, 1989) Such lengthy procedures may at times be depriving the children of this right.

3.3 Theme 3

The Professional Staff

There was mention of members of staff several times throughout the interviews. Such comments have been gathered in this section, with an emphasis on the way in which the children relate with the professional staff, and their need for significant relationships. The term 'professional staff' shall be used throughout this section to refer to all the professionals involved in the children's lives. This includes for example psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, psychiatrists, care workers and so on.

3.3.1 Feelings towards the professional staff.

Several comments were passed describing how the child feels with regards to the professional staff. A number of respondents spoke positively of their relationship with members of the professional staff: "Ghax jifhmuna hawnhekk, in-nurses u hekk jifhmuna. Anke O.T. u hekk." [Helen] "Because they understand us here, the nurses and others understand us. Even the O.T. and others do understand us." (Helen); "Tajjeb. Sejra tajjeb hafna mal-care workers... jien għaliya inhossni sew." [Faye] "I'm doing fine. I'm doing fine with the care workers ... on my part I'm feeling all-right." (Faye).

Il-carers kollha x'hin tridhom ser ikunu hdejk fhimt? Ikollok problema ser issibhom hemm. Dejjem għandek spallejn fuq x'hiex tistrieħ – dik importanti...għax tkun id-dar mhux ser toqgħod tgħidilha kollox għax tweggagħha – dawn le. Dak li tħoss tista' tgħidu. [Anna]

Whenever you need the care workers they'll be beside you, you understand? If you have a problem they'll be there to help you. You will always find a shoulder to lean on – that's important ... at home you will not tell her anything for fear you'll hurt her – that problem does not exist here. You can say whatever you feel like saying. (Anna)

Research shows that the majority of children with more difficult behaviour find that having a particular member of staff whom they trust and can turn to in times of trouble helps them to manage and improve their behaviour. (Ofsted, 2005).

3.3.2 Expressed need for significant relationships and attachment.

In answer to the probe 'what helps you most in the service?' several participants spoke about the support they feel by having significant relationships based on good communication:

Il-careworkers għax biċċiet minnhom jifhmuni ħafna. [Karen]

The care workers, because some of them understand us a lot. (Karen)

(Meta) jigi 'is-psychologist' tiegħi. [John]

(When) my psychologist comes. (John)

Nagħtu kas jkollna xi ħaġa – eżempju: niġġieled jiena u missieri, nagħtu kas. Tigi tgħini l-careworker u hekk,

noqogħdu nitkellmu. U hekk, qisna nerggħu nirrangaw.
[Maria]

Let's say we'll have some problem – for example, let's say I quarreled with my father. The care worker helps me and so, we spend time talking to each other. And so, it seems that we return to be on good terms again. (Maria)

Il-care workers u s-social workers joqogħdu jtkellmu miegħi u meta' ma nkunx nista' nifhimhom joqgħodu jkellmuni bil-mod u jfhemuni. [Roberta]

The care workers and the social workers talk to me and when I find it hard to understand them they speak slowly to me and explain to me. (Roberta)

Another participant, when asked what helps her most, expressed the need for having such relationships – someone with whom she could speak to about how she is feeling:

Li... il-pinolli...mhux pinolli, il-mistura. U li jkollna min jkellimna u ifehmna u t-tobba li jiġu, l-OT, u ġieli jekk jkun hawn xi nurse li tista' tiftaħ qalbek, tiġi...Anke ġieli jekk perkażu jiġu xi studenti wkoll. Jekk perkażu għandi ħabiba tiegħi hawnhekk għanda carer, wkoll tista' tiftaħ qalbek magħha. [Louisa]

That ... the pills ... not pills, the medicine. And having someone to talk to us and explain to us, and the doctors who visit us, the O.T., and sometimes if, for example, some students also come to visit us. If for example, here I have a friend who has a care worker, you can also confide in her. (Louisa)

One participant clearly states that at times he feels respected, 'treated well' and has learnt many things through the professional staff. He is also frustrated when at other times, he feels that his views and opinions are not given any weight and this frustrates him:

Ifhimni eh, daqqa jittrattawk tajjeb u daqqa litteralment hazin... Nixtieq allura li, naf li jkolli raġun, jagħtijuli. Mhux haqq għal-baġhla ittini tort biss hux?! Daqqa niċċajta, daqqa jkollna l-argumenti hux?! Mhux dejjem xorta... Ifhimni hares, dawn hawnhekk għallmuni hafna lili. [Josef]

Listen here, sometimes they treat you well and sometimes they really treat you badly. Therefore, I would like that when I know I'm right, I am given that right. And not, by the dickens, I am always to blame?! Sometimes I joke, sometimes we quarrel, no?! It's not always the same. Listen here, these people here have taught me a lot of things. (Josef)

Another participant confirms the wish to be respected and understood by the professional staff:

Kuntent hafna għax jgħallmuni u jisimghuni... Qed nitgħallem naqra ftit ftit u li jifhmuni mhux ikeċċuni u jgħajjtu miegħi. [Andrew]

I feel happy because they teach me and listen to me. Little by little I'm learning to read; that they understand me and do not send me away or shout at me. (Andrew)

Another respondent explained that when she is given several repeated things to do, she gets confused because of the way she is told:

Il-carers hemm all right, jġifieri imma hemm ċertu minnhom...Eżempju: trid tagħmel xi haġa – jien għidli darba u daqshekk! Jien nkun naf, mhux toqgħod tgħidli mur aghmel hekk, mur aghmel hekk, mur aghmel hekk. Hi tehodlok rasek u mbagħad fl-aħħar tinfixel. [Lara]

The care workers are all-right, that is, but there are some of them ... For example, if I have to do something, just tell me once and that's that! I'll understand what I'm expected to do, and I hate being told repeatedly to do a thing. She keeps drumming it in and then finally confusion sets in. (Lara)

Such words are indicative that clarity and checking with the child if s/he has understood would help.

A respondent emphasised how the professional staff strengthened her, boosted her self-esteem, helped her to believe in herself and helped her grow. The following words are beautiful and clearly demonstrate how a caring, empathic, encouraging and supportive relationship could help a young person flourish:

Imbagħad iġibuk aktar konxja tiegħek innifsek, jgħidulek – jien kelli *s-self esteem* veru baxx. Jiena allavolja għandi 16, minn dak li għaddejti iġgħaluk tikber iktar – is-self-esteem kien veru zero – kelli ħafna abbuż fuqi...fhimt? U billi ma kellix self esteem, jgħidluli ‘Inti tiswa’ għal xi ħaġa! Inti tajba għal xi ħaġa!...Inti tajba għal ħafna affarijiet! Għala ma’ tgħinhomx? Għala ma’ tħallihomx jikbru dawk l-affarijiet, tħallihomx imutulek, qegħdin f’idejk użahom’. [Anna]

Then they’ll make you understand better who you are, they tell you – I had a very low self-esteem. Although I am sixteen years old, the experiences that I have been through, make me feel bigger – my self-esteem was at zero level – I was heavily abused ... you understand? And as I had no self-esteem, they tell me: “You’re worth something! You’re good for something... You are good for many things! Why don’t you help them? Why don’t you let those things flourish, don’t let them die, you have them in your hands, use them.” (Anna)

For effective teaching and learning and improved behaviour to take place, children with challenging behaviour need to feel that they are wanted and valued by at least some of the professional staff (Visser 2003). These findings have been replicated in published studies of the University of Birmingham’s EBD Research Team Daniels et al (1998), Cole et al (1998); Visser, Daniels and Cole, (2001) and other researchers including Munn et al (2000).

One participant emphasised the importance of professional workers recognising and acknowledging the internal strengths and drives that individuals have. She claims that no matter how much professionals might try to drive a person into a particular direction, it will never work unless the client is striving internally in that direction because s/he believes in it and feels ready to do so. Moreover, she claims that what an individual needs is guidance, encouragement and that the worker moves at his/her own pace:

M'intx se tmexxini int. Għaliex għandek tmexxini int once li jiena nista' nimxi?!...Forsi – imbilli tgħidli – dan il-ħin...dal-ħin ma' nistax jien. Miniex lesta, se jagħmilli ħazin, u mhux tajjeb...X'ħin tkun lesta int, inkun lesta jien. Ngħinek...fidi ħa...nista' ngħinek. Fhimt?... Billi tgħidilha int għal xejn. Hi trid timxi – wehedha [Anna].

You're not going to lead me. Why should you lead me, once I can walk on my own? Maybe – it's no use telling me – this is the moment ... I can't at this moment. I'm not ready yet, it will do me harm, and not good ... When you are ready, I will be ready too. I will help you ... take my hand ... I can help you. Do you understand? Your telling her is useless. She must walk – on her own. (Anna)

A Maltese report by Fr. Victor Zammit McKeon et al. (2005) about "The need for a therapeutic childcare community in Malta" emphasises that particular therapeutic programmes hold excellent results due to the:

...high staff to children ratio, the excellent team work between all staff members, the great respect for children, the absence of punishment, the absence of shouting by staff members and consequently the gentle way of speaking to the children, the learning from each experience approach, the ongoing training of all members of staff, the ability to adapt to each child's needs even in group situations.

3.4 Theme 4: Understanding why they are in the service

Clarity, goals and aims pertaining to a service/programme are necessary pre-requisites to the outcome and effectiveness of the service. One of the interview probe questions asked the child what explanation s/he gives for having ended up in the particular service. This consequently gave an indication of what the child *has understood* with regards to why s/he is in the service.

3.4.1 Perceived sequence: significant events leading to being at the service

Several children interviewed explained that coming to the service was the result of a significant episode that led to a sequence of events. Two participants for example, explained that their behaviour changed greatly because of happenings at school. This could be somewhat related to what research has found that the challenging behaviour of many younger pupils arises mainly as a result of poor language, social skills and emotional development fitting to their age (Ofsted, 2005). Other such episodes were: being bullied; peer pressure; disobedience and risky behaviour; no longer fitting in a residential home; unclarity; family difficulties, abuse and dealing with death. It is interesting to compare these factors to the definition of challenging behaviour⁷.

3.4.1(a) Negative experiences at school

One respondent explained that in primary school: “kont bully first class, kollox kont nagħmel sew” “I was a first class bully, I did everything well.”. However when he moved into secondary school:

Is-surmast ma ħax grazzja miegħi u dejjem kien ikeċċini 'l barra mill-klassi...min kien jgħidli xi ħaġa kont intihielu. Insejt kif naqra u nikteb għax is-surmast ħarbatni u dejjem jaqbad miegħi. Fl-aħħar kont ġieli nagħmel għalih.
{Andrew}

⁷ Refer to definition of challenging definition on pg....(include def from Fr. Antoine's report)

The headmaster didn't like me at all and he was always sending me out of class. I was always fighting whosoever said something about me. I forgot how to read and write because the headmaster confused me and was always picking on me. Finally I even started to attack him. (Andrew)

He went on to explain that he was never understood in that school: "Għax qatt ma fhemuni, qabdu miegħi u għamilt minn kollox biex nitlaq. Ma ridtx nibqa' l-(school's name)." "Because they never understand me, they picked on me and I did everything to leave. I didn't want to remain at (school's name)."

It is clear that this participant connected the lack of understanding and his misbehaviour to how he was treated by the headmaster's attitude. There is even an underlying sense of rejection in the respondent's words. This is emphasised further when he explains that the fact that he has a good relationship with the present headmaster has helped him to move on:

Is-surmast li għandi bħalissa jħobbni ħafna u qalli li kif nagħlaq is-sittax-il sena jsibli xogħol hu. Issa diġa qed nispelli għax qabel l-anqas kont naf ittra waħda. [Andrew].

My present headmaster likes me a lot and he told me that when I'll turn sixteen he will find me a job. Now I already know how to spell because I didn't know one single letter. (Andrew)

Another participant explains that he has very negative memories of school. He didn't get on well with the teachers or the other students. He then explains:

Minni, minni ukoll, minni kien jiġi ħażin...Kont niddejjaq ħafna hemm...pereżempju lill-oħrajn kien itihom kitba hekk, u lili itini kitba għaliha...lili u lill-ieħor fil-bank miegħi. Kont niddejjaq hu...Sal-year three għamilt allright u imbagħad it-teacher...kienet ħarxa...u minn hemm bqajt sejjer lura...Sal-year three...kont naf nikteb u naqra u nagħmel,

imbagħad bdejt sejjer lura...l-mummy kienet titla' xi tlett darbiet fil-ġimgħa l-iskola... kienet tkun iktar l-iskola milli d-dar. [Jason]

It's my fault also, I didn't get on well ... I used to get very bored there ... for example, he used to give a type of written work to the others, and a different kind to me ... to me and my bench-mate. I didn't like that, no ... Up to year three I was doing fine and then I had a teacher ... she was harsh ... and from there on I started regressing ... Up to year three ... I knew how to write and read and get along, then I started slipping back ... my mother used to come to school about three times a week ... she spent more time at school than at home. (Jason)

3.4.1(b) Bullying

Two participants describe how the bullying they experienced effected their own behaviour. This participant explains how he would keep all the anger he felt inside and then let it out when at home.

Participant: Ġieli jkolli nervi mill-iskola u nmur id-dar bihom.

Interviewer: Kif kien ikollok in-nervi mill-iskola?

Participant: Shabi jagħmluli n-nervi.

Interviewer: Kif?

Participant: Jiġġieldu mieghi u jghajruni.

Interviewer: U int x'kont tagħmel?

Participant: Ma nagħmlilhom xejn imbagħad immur id-dar u noqgħod niġġieled għax ikolli n-nervi. [Peter]

Participant: Sometimes I get nervous at school and when I return home I'm still nervous.

Interviewer: How is it that you used to feel nervous at school?

Participant: My friends make me nervous

Interviewer: How come?

Participant: They used to quarrel with me and call me names.

Interviewer: And how did you react?

Participant: I didn't react in any way, but then when I returned home I used to pick up fights because of my nerves.
(Peter)

The other respondent explains that when she was bullied she would do whatever she was told:

...Ibbuljaw lili biex nagħmel hekk, u jiena, qisni tiġieġa -
ħeqq nagħmel kollox li tgħidli...smoking, serq, xorb...ħabba
shabi għax dejjem ngħid 'iva' 'u iva', 'iva'... U l-iva li għidt jien
u għal kemm-il darba għidt 'iva' spiċċajt hawn. [Louisa]

... They bullied me to do so, and I, acting like a chicken, used to do whatever I was told to do ... smoking, theft, drinking ... It's all the fault of my friends because I always say 'yes', 'oh yes', 'yes' ... And the 'yes' I used to say and the many times I said 'yes' landed me here. (Louisa)

3.4.1(c) Peer Pressure

One participant acknowledged the fact that he was influenced by his friends to have taken the direction he is in now. He explained that:

Imbagħad bdejt nagħmel ma' ċertu ħbieb, bdejt minn haġa żgħira, imbagħad tibda kbira u tibqa sejjer biha. Imbagħad kelli ħafna ħbieb, illum l-aħjar il-ħbieb sa l-għatba tal-bieb.
[Mark]

Then I started frequenting certain friends, I started with a little thing, then it started getting bigger and you'll get hooked. Then I had a lot of friends, today I don't trust anybody. (Mark)

3.4.1(d) Disobedience, Impulsivity & Harm to self/others

Disobedience at school, and with parents, was one factor that clearly

led one child to begin using the service she is currently in.

Em, ma obdejt lill-Mummy meta bdiet tghidli...bdejt nghanidilha mhux veru u hekk u spicċajt hawnhekk...Tagħtini parir u ma ħadtux. [Faye]

Eh, I didn't obey mother when she tried to open my eyes ... I used to tell her that what she was saying wasn't true and that's why I ended up here ... I did not accept her advice. (Faye)

Impulsivity is another factor, which emerged in two of the interviews. One person impulsively acted out in a way that could have seriously injured herself and/or one of the professional staff. Her explanation for doing so was that:

Gejna għall-laqgħa mal-psikjatra u qagħdu jgħidu fuqi. Qagħdet tugżani li għamilt xi affarijiet, u qbadt u... [Helen]

We came to meet the psychiatrist and they started discussing me. She accused me with doing certain things, and I started to ... (Helen)

Another participant actually described the pattern of impulsivity: **Bdejt nghanġġel ħafna b'moħħi. Bdejt nara kbir, fhimt? Għax jien tip ta' bniedem li naghmillek per eżempju erba' xhur, ħames xhur, sitt xhur kwiet. Jiġi xi ħaġa ġo moħħi. Fhimt? Noqgħod newden fuqha, nibda nghanid għal xiex jien kwiet, nibda naghmel ħafna affarijiet. F'gimgha waħda, f'gimgha waħda kemm hu veru, fi tlett gimghat, jew xahar spicċajt (mentions name of service). [Mark]**

I was lost in fantasy. I was seeing things out of proportion, do you understand? I'm that type of person who, for example, spends four months, five months, six months living calmly. Then I think of something. You understand? I start brooding on it, I start asking myself why is it that I'm so calm, I start doing a lot of things. In a week, in one week, truly, in three weeks, or in a month's time I ended up at (mentions name of service). (Mark)

“Moffitt and Lynman (1994) propose that underlying the development of disruptive behaviour, disorders are neuropsychological dysfunctions associated with a difficult temperament, which pre-disposes children to impulsivity, irritability and over-activity. Consistent with this, Newman & colleagues (1997) found that children who showed a difficult, under-controlled temperamental type at age 3 were more likely to be rated as antisocial in adulthood... (However) other longitudinal research indicates that the link between aggression and difficult temperament is not a direct one; instead it is mediated by family factors (McMahon & Estes, 1997)” (Wenar & Kerig 2005).

3.4.1(e) No longer fitting in the residential home

Three respondents explained that they ended up in the service because they felt there was an age gap between themselves and the other residents in the residential home they were in. They emphasise that it was their own decision to leave the residential home they were in and to move into the service. Here, naturally a question arises as to whether these children really *do* have challenging behaviour and consequently, whether these children have been placed in the right service for their needs. The following are the participants' words:

Le għax ridt jien biex ma nibqax fejn it-tfal iż-żgħar hu.
[Roberta]

No, I came here of my own free will so as not to remain in the company of young children. (Roberta)

...Kien hemm hafna tfajliet u hekk u kienet qaltli ħa npoġġik (mentions name of current service she is in) għalissa. Imbagħad kienet tiġi tgħidli.... 'kif inti sejra?' u hekk. Għal bidu kont naqra ahjar minn issa, għax għal bidu tibda tara kollox sabiħ u qegħdtilha.... u mbagħad bqajt hawnhekk.
[This is one of the participants who did not seem to have very challenging behaviour.] (Claudine)

... There were a lot of female adolescents and she told me that she will be placing me at (mentions the name of service she is currently in) for the moment. Then she used to come and ask me ... "How are you getting along?" and so. At first I was feeling better than I'm feeling now, because in the first days everything seemed wonderful and I told her ... and then I stayed here. (Claudine)

Participant: L-ewwel kont għand is-sisters, iddejjaqt u ġejt hawnhekk...kollha tfal żgħar u hekk, ma taqbilx magħhom.

Interviewer: Bdejt thossok kbira għal hemmhekk?

Participant: Kbirra ehe. Kelli sittax-il sena. B'dak il-mod imbagħad ġejt hawnhekk. [Maria]

Participant: First I was under the care of the nuns, I got fed up and so I came here ... they were all young children and so, I didn't fit with them.

Interviewer: Were you feeling that you have grown up and that you couldn't stay anymore in that place?

Participant: Of course I was a grown up. I was 16 years old. That was what made me come here. (Maria)

3.4.1(f) Family difficulties, abuse and coping with death.

A few respondents connect particular emotionally burdened episodes that have caused an upheaval and turmoil in their life to being in the service. They see that such episodes have led to a sequence of events that in turn, resulted in them using the service. Such episodes are related to family difficulties, abuse and difficulties in coping with death. Quotes of the children's words shall not be used so as not to disclose personal information that may make it easy to identify the child.

The survey carried out by (Ofsted, 2005) shows that many of the pupils showing challenging behaviour in early years settings and schools are

from troubled families or are in public care. These vulnerable pupils are more likely to display difficult behaviour when they feel that responses to them by staff or other pupils are insensitive or derogatory.

3.4.1(g) Unclarity

One respondent Karen, related the sudden way she ended up in the service. The abruptness and sudden decision clearly left an impact on this child and the actual reason why she has ended up in the service seems to be shadowed by her parent's abrupt decision and thus has remained unclear. Several times, the parent would tell her: "ha naqflek, ha naqflek" "I will lock you up, I will lock you up." though this never happened until once she woke up in the morning and she was told: "ha niehdok hemmhekk [name of service], pakkja hwejgek." [Karen] I'm taking you there (name of service), pack up your things."

This young person clearly expressed helplessness in the interview by the following words: "Jigifieri ma stajtx naghmel mod iehor." "That meant that I could not do otherwise." She seems to have not understood exactly why she has been 'sent' to the service and in fact claims that she does not agree that she should be in the service:

"Jien ma naqbilx ma [mentions parent] li qeghda hawnhekk. Jien ghalija qiegghda ghal xejn hawnhekk. Min-naħa tiegħi...imma hekk ngħid qegghda ghal xejn hawnhekk...".
[Karen]

"I don't agree with (mentions parent) that I'm here. As I see it, there is no reason for me to be here. As I see it. But that's what I say. I'm here for no reason whatsoever ..." (Karen)

3.4.2 Need for clear goals and timeframe

As can be seen in section 2.4 some children see a strong association between behaving well and entering or leaving the programme. It was interesting that no children mentioned any clear time-frames or goals. Even though there was no direct question about this, a sense of confusion, frustration, unclarity and irritation came out several times in this regard. Whilst this section considers these feelings, it is important

to keep in mind that this section is based entirely on the children's views. The professionals' and parents' views have not been heard, nor have the children's files been consulted.

One participant in particular, spoke about the many times he asks the doctors and his mother when he can leave the programme and go home. The answer is always that he would go home when his behaviour is good.

Participant: Ġieli nibki, u ġieli noqghod fuq is-sufan u nitlob biex immur id-dar...

Interviewer: Ġieli għidtilha lill-mummy kif thossok hawnhekk?

Participant: Iva, u tghidli issa jara t-tabib biex johorgok, u tghidli biex noqghod bil-għaqal...

Interviewer: ...ġieli kellimtu [lid-daddy] fuq hawnhekk ?

Participant: Iva, l-istess li ngħid lill-mummy.

Interviewer: U x'jgħidlek ?

Participant: Bħal mummy biex noqghod bil-għaqal...

Interviewer: Ġieli għidtlu lit-tabib kemm inti mdejjaq u tibki ?

Participant: Iva u jgħidli li jekk noqghod bravu nkun nista' mmur id-dar. [Peter]

Participant: Sometimes I cry, and sometimes I sit on a sofa and pray to be sent home ...

Interviewer: Have you ever told your mother about how you feel being here?

Participant: Yes, and she tells me that the doctor will see when I can be dismissed, and she tells me to behave well...

Interviewer: ... Did you speak to him (your daddy) about this place?

Participant: Yes, the same things I tell my mummy.

Interviewer: What does he tell you?

Participant: Like mummy; to behave well ...

Interviewer: Did you ever tell the doctor that you're feeling down and that you cry?

Participant: Yes, and he tells me that if I behave well I would be able to go home. (Peter)

There is a strong sense of helplessness where it seems that the power and control is in the doctors hands. He says that he spends his time praying to go home to his mother:

Fuq is-sufan – dejjem l-istess – (ħareġ kuruna tar-rużarju mill-but) nitlob biex forsi mmur mal-mummy – u nikteb lill-mummy (urini poeżija ta' Dun Karm jisimgħa 'Warda' – li kkopja minn fuq ktieb ta' tifla, madwar penga l-fjuri u kiteb 'To Mummy'). [Peter]

On the sofa – always the same – (he took out the rosary beads from his pocket) I'm always praying maybe I'll go back with mummy – and I write to my mother (He has shown me a poem by Dun Karm called 'Warda' – which he copied from a girl's book, he drew some flowers around it and wrote the words 'To Mummy'). (Peter)

Claudine (who the research team believes that she is placed in the wrong service), expresses confusion, irritability and an inability to feel that she can settle or feel part of one place:

“Fil-fatt...is-social worker li kelli qabel, kienet tinkwieta ħafna għax jiena għamilt xahar ma nafx jekk ser nibqa. Kont ngħidilhaimma x'ser nagħmel? Ħa nibqa hawnhekk? jew mhux ser nibqa hawnhekk? Għax hekk, tkun qed tgħix ġo post ma tafx ser jiġri minnek.... Imbagħad kienet qaltli...ma nixtieqx li tibqa hawnhekk imma ma għandix fejn tmur....ħallewni hawn. Jiġifieri bħala homes hawn ftit ukoll. [Claudine]

In fact ... the social worker I had before, was very worried because I spent a month toying with the idea of quitting. I used to ask her: 'But what am I going to do, am I going to stay here, or am I not going to stay here?' For, you know, living in a place where you don't know what is to become of you ... Then she told me ... 'I do not like you to remain here but I cannot send you to any other place' ... They kept me here. It must also be said, that as regards the homes, there are only a few. (Claudine)

In a study, carried out by MacDonald and Williamson (2002), it emerged that with regards to agreeing on goals and action plans, a difficulty was that staff often did not distinguish between the 'overall purpose of the work' and the 'desirable outcomes'. Unless 'pinned down' to specific changes, such aims are almost impossible to monitor. Best practice suggests that it should be clear *in whose opinion* these changes should occur and called for *desired outcomes* that were observable, specific and stated in simple language.

In this light, it is necessary that services for children with challenging behaviour assess the child prior to accepting him/her into the service/programme. Clarifying with the child *why he or she is in the programme* is of great importance so as to minimize fear, confusion and helplessness, and in turn to promote support, understanding and clarity. Setting goals, clear guidelines and action plans within a timeframe will also give the child far more control in the situation. The child will be able to know that this will not go on forever – that if s/he keeps to the goals he will no longer need to use the service. Such goals and action plans should be applied consistently to the child's life in general.

The child needs to experience consistency not only when *in* the programme but also *out of it*. This implies that a multi-systemic proactive approach (Henegger et al,2002) will contribute to achieving such consistency for the child. It also inevitably implies that professional

⁸ Refer to Article 12.1 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. U.N. General Assembly, 1989 mentioned in the introduction.

staff need to adopt an approach that is integrative – where the child is involved in the decision making process, where the focus is on acquiring new skills and where the child feels in control of what is happening to his/her life. After all, this is a right clearly stated across nations:

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (Article 13.1 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. U.N. General Assembly, 1989)

This is of particular significance when discussing and deciding upon the child's future and life⁸.

3.4.3 Inappropriate behaviour is equated with being in the service.

As is evident in the words quoted in the previous section, most of the children relate the 'service they are in' to 'challenging behaviour'. The children *do* understand that challenging behaviour is somehow connected to the service they are in. What differs across the interviews is their understanding of 'challenging behaviour' and their understanding of the scope of the service.

For some children, even though they are actually in the service, it is unclear as to how the service is supposed to help and support them. When Jason was asked why he thinks he is in the service he said: "Jien naf? Biex jiggduli aktar dixxiplina support"

A few children are clearly aware that their behaviour is inappropriate: "Aggressiv. Kont aggressiv l-iskola. Ghadni sa lllum jgigifieri." [Josef] "Aggressive. At school I was aggressive. That's how I still am, that is." (Josef). Some others regard what they do as 'wrong' by realising that they disobeyed their parents: "Ma' kontx nobdi...lill-Mummy...Kont irrid xi haġa, irrid, inkun - inkun irridha bil-fors..." [David] "I did not obey ... mummy ... I would have liked something, wanted it, wanted it by all means ..." (David). As mentioned in the section 2.6 "In the service

you have to obey the rules.”, a few participants claim that they’d advice other children to be good so as not to end up in the service they are in: “L-ewwel ma’ nghidlu oqghod sewwa u obdi halli ma’ tidholx hawn gew.” [Helen] “The first thing I would tell him is to behave well so that he will never have to come to this place.” (Helen)

One participant claims that to be good his mother tells him not to do what the other children in the service do: “Biex ma naghmilx affarijiet li jaghmlu dawn it-tfal – it-tfal t’hawn...Jghidu affarijiet hamallaġni.” [Peter] “Not to do the thing these children do – the children here ... They say vulgar words ...” This same participant and others, believe that so as to leave the service one must ‘be good’. Peter actually tells other children: “Jien nghidilhom biex joqghodu bravi halli jitolqu minn hawn” “I tell them to behave well so that they will leave this place.”. With this believe it does not make sense to this child *why* he is still in the service. His words indicate confusion and irritation when saying that even though he was naughty at home, he is not naughty in the service. Logically in his view, he should leave the service because he is behaving:

Interviewer: Ġieli staqsejt lil xi hadd, lit-tabib, lin-nurse, lill-mummy jew lid-daddy, għalfejn qieghed hawn?

Participant: Iva u jghidu ghaliex kont imqareb...

Interviewer: Tahseb li veru ?

Participant Hawnhekk mhux imqareb. Id-dar kont. [Peter]

Interviewer: Did you ever ask somebody, the doctor, the nurse, you mummy or your daddy, why you are here?

Participant: Yes and they tell me due to my having been naughty ...

Interviewer: Do you think that is true?

Participant: I’m not naughty here. At home I was. (Peter)

The children’s level of awareness seems to effect the extent to which the children understand why they are in the service and what is appropriate behaviour. This is very helpful for change to take place

(Macdonald & Williamson, 2002) In this section clearly emerges that it is vital for children to understand exactly what aspects of their behaviour is unacceptable and what they need to be doing during the programme for them to be able to move out.

The above indicates that approaches, which are multi-systemic, cognitive-behavioural, and based on functional-assessment, will be beneficial to the child. Other afore-mentioned factors that hold an effect on the way the child behaves (e.g. family difficulties, loss, bullying and abuse) clearly indicate that the child may need the intervention of a psychologist and possibly of family therapy. The service-providers/professional staff should be trained to properly assess the child's needs prior to and whilst using the service. At the moment as Zammit McKeon points out

“We have an alarming rate of disturbed children but what we are offering them is far from a solution to their problems – exclusion from public schools, high support carers and when everything fails they are admitted to the YPU which adds more problems to these children who are not mentally ill, but hurt and discouraged children.” (Zammit McKeon et al., 2005)

3.5 Theme 5: School experience

The children's experience at school varies greatly. Some children describe their experience in a very positive way: “L-iskola kont niehu gost mal-hbieb u hekk.” [Lara] “At school I used to enjoy life with friends.” (Louisa); “Kont nikteb pulit u noqghod bil-ghaqal – kienu jhobbuni t-teachers.” [Peter] “I had a good handwriting and behaved myself – the teachers loved me.” (Peter). Other children describe it as a difficult time.

3.5.1 The social and academic aspect

Participant: Kont immur tajjeb, imma qisni sfrattajt fl-ahhar Miss. Ghax kont idejjaqt...

Interviewer: X'dejqek?

Participant: Il- homework...Kien ikolli naghmlu d-dar."

{Karl}

Participant: "I did pretty well, but finally I became unruly, Miss.
I got annoyed ...

Interviewer: What annoyed you?

Participant: The homework ... I had to do it at home." (Karl)

It is clear that for most respondents the social aspect of school, in particular, the relationship they had with students and school staff, has a strong effect on how they experienced school.

"Tajjeb u ħażin. Tajjeb fis-sugġetti, mhux ħażin fis-sens li l-eżamijiet ngħaddi minnhom u hekk. U ma tantx kelli ħbieb u hekk. Kont waħdi." {Faye}

Good and bad. I was good in the subjects, not bad keeping in mind that I always passed the exams. I didn't have many friends. I was lonely. (Faye)

The following words - apart from indicating why the participant is currently in the service – show how he was influenced so much by his friends at school and by the school context. He explains that one leaves school with what he has 'learnt' or 'been exposed to' at school:

L-iskola ma' ddejjaqtx hekk, imma ma kontx inħobbha ħafna, ħafna l-iskola. Mill-iskola qisek tibda', issa l-iskola tkun liema tkun fhimt? Jiġifieri mill-iskola ssib ħbieb...Issa jekk trid toħroġ mill-iskola ta' injorant toħroġ, skont inti. Imma m'għażiltx dik it-triq, għażilt mat-tip tal-livell...{Mark}

I was not very annoyed at school, but I didn't like school very much. You start at school, whatever kind of school it may be, understand? That is, you make friends at school ... Now it depends on you whether you leave school without having learnt

anything. But I did not choose that way, I chose according to the type of level ... (Mark)

The rest of the interview with this young person indicates that when he speaks of leaving school as someone 'ignorant' he seems to mean that a person can choose to leave school as someone naïve and un-exposed to the realities of the world. He compares this to the direction he chose: leaving school as someone 'at a different level'. By this, he seems to mean someone who has acquired knowledge and experience of the realities of life and has been exposed to the criminal world.

One participant explains how having to endure bullying has left him with very negative memories of school: "Le, jien dejjem kwiet kont. Dizastru hux. Jien dejjem kwiet kont...". "No, I was always a quiet boy. A disaster, that's it. I was always quiet ...". He also goes on to explain that his life at home was full of conflict and abuse. [Josef] In fact, (as already mentioned in 3.4.1a: *Negative experiences at school.*) bullying at school, and having difficult and harsh relationships with members of staff, was a major factor that determined the child's behaviour at school.

Jason explained that because a member of staff picked on him continuously his experience was:

"Ħazin ħafna... Kollox – teachers, tfal kollox...kont niddejjaq ħafna hemm... iqqabbizomli s-sir u ingaralu l-mejda". [Jason]

"It was very bad ... Everything ... teachers, children, everything ... I used to be very annoyed there ... the teacher used to get on my nerves and I threw a table at him." (Jason)

As the children themselves imply, building a good relationship with the pupils is vital for them to profit from their time at school. This warrants great effort from the teachers, as Cole (1998) points out in his research.

3.5.2 Changing schools

Interestingly two respondents explained that they had to change from one school to another several times. One of them who is still in primary school, has already been to 4 different schools. These constant changes must have certainly had an impact on the quality of the relationships this child has developed at school.

Another participant, who is at the end of secondary school, has also been to 4 different schools. This participant explains that she managed to cope with the situation by getting to know the other students: “Għall-ewwel hekk ma tkunx tafhom hekk lil shabek, sakemm jidrawk, u sakemm tidra lilhom, imbagħad orrajt.” [Maria] “At first, you know, you don’t know your friends well, until they get used to your company, and till you get used to theirs, then all is well.” (Maria). This possibly helped her to learn how to adjust and be more flexible, and consequently to adapt to life in the various services she was in.

On the other hand, other respondents speak of the difficulties they found when they moved from primary to secondary school. The change in schools shows a clear shift in their experiences. Paul speaks positively about his childhood at school. However he describes a shift between the primary school and secondary school. In the first school he recalls being more at ease and close with his peers. In secondary school, however, he wasn't as close with his new peers and this bothered him.

Meta kont żgħir kont close u hekk mal-ħbieb, u konna nidħqu u hekk – niċċajta... l-aħħar skola li kelli...ma konniex close daqshekk fil-klassi, qisna niġu bżonn meta jkollna l-eżamijiet u hekk, il-bqija, vaganzi u affarijiet hekk, ma tantx konna inkunu f’kuntatt...[Paul]

When I was young I was really close with my friends, and we used to laugh and joke ... in my last school ... we weren’t that close in class, we just helped each other when we were having exams and so, otherwise, holidays and such things, we didn’t keep in contact. (Paul)

3.5.3 The family and the school

Finally, research shows that problems at home, and the baggage that children carry with them to school, also has its toll on how they get on. This emerged throughout several interviews. A study shows that children who had difficult, negative relationships with either father or mother were more likely to be anxious, depressed, worried or to be aggressive or have problems at school. It was not clear whether the poor relationship caused the adjustment problems or vice versa. (Dunn & Deater-Deck, 2001).

Moreover, in the same study, children were asked to complete 'maps' of the emotional closeness of their various relationships and the youngest (aged 5-6) also drew pictures of their families. Both 'maps' and drawings paralleled the findings from talking to the children. For instance, children who placed their fathers or stepfathers on the 'map' as not emotionally close were almost three times more likely to be reported by teachers as having problems at school.

3.6 Theme 6 See me, listen to me!

The message – *listen to me, see me as an individual, understand me, talk to me, discuss with me and value me* – is one of the strongest messages that has emerged from the interviews. The following are such examples, each quote expressing the child's need to have someone to speak to and understand him/her:

Il-care workers u s-social workers joqghdu jtkellmu mieghni u meta ma nkunx nista' nifhimhom joqghodu jkellmuni bil-mod u jfhemuni. [Roberta]

The care workers and the social workers speak to me and when it's hard for me to understand them they speak slowly to me and explain to me. (Roberta)

Għax jifhmuna hawnhekk, in-nurses u hekk jifhmuna. Anke O.T. u hekk. [Helen]

Because they understand us here, the nurses and others, they understand us. Even the O.T. (Helen)

Il-careworkers. Għax meta nħossni mdejqa immur niftaħ qalbi magħhom. [Faye]

The care workers. When I'm feeling down I go and confide my worries to them. (Faye)

Other children used the interview as a direct request to the professional staff and persons responsible asking them to listen to what they have to say. Furthermore, the research by Virginia Morrow (1998) shows that in response to questions exploring 'being listened to', children want to be able to 'have a say' in what happens to them, rather than to make decisions themselves.

In this regard, two of the participants emphasised that it is important to listen to the child's voice and not just the parent's:

**Li l-lehen tat-tfal jisimgħuh... mhux joħduh for granted...
mhux jisimgħu mill-parents tagħhom, minnhom iridu
jisimgħuh, hawn ħafna jisimgħu mill-parents tagħhom.
[Anna]**

That they should listen to what the children have to say ... they shouldn't be taken for granted ... they shouldn't listen to what their parents say, they should hear them speak, there are many who listen only to their parents. (Anna)

**Hawn per eżempju, it-tfal isiru jafu l-istorja tagħhom sew,
biex idahħluhom fil-homes fejn tlajt jien. Mhux għax x'tgħid
l-omm biss u allura tal-bint mhux ser jisimgħuha għax qalet
hi. Isiru jafu t-tnejn. [Faye]**

Here there is a clear indication that narrative therapy, story telling, and other expressive forms of intervention (drama therapy, art therapy etc.) would help the child express his/her feelings and stories whilst knowing that s/he is being valued and listened to.

Confidentiality is also emphasised by one participant who explained that when one shares her feelings or past with a professional staff this must be kept confidential. She explains that she had shared some personal information and this was disclosed to the whole class.

Għax imbagħad huma ikabbru l-affarijiet...mhux se tgħid 'jiena nsib l-għajjnuna meta jien nitkellem miegħek, niftaħ qalbi, dik għajjnuna kbira għalija'... huma jkabbru...Għalfejn tikxfni mal-klassi kollha dik il-problema li ġejt ngħidlek? ... allura worth it ngħid din mal-klassi kollha l-problema tiegħi – mhux miegħek biss – għax xorta ser isiru jafu. [Anna]

Another important finding is the children's wish to be given the time and place to comment on how they feel in the service. One service dedicates time in which the residents can speak about how they are feeling: "Nagħtu kas x'idejjaqna mill-careworkers, kif qegħdin nimxu ahna..." "Let's say, what we don't like in the care workers, how are we behaving ...". This is referred to as the 'residents meeting' and was mentioned by several participants. It seems that there is a body of knowledge which advocates for professional staff to engage in effective inclusive practices, which can have a significant impact on reducing challenging behaviour (Visser, 2003). One respondent explained that she wishes that such meetings keep being held on a regular basis:

Participant: Suppost darba fil-ġimgħa. Suppost!

Interviewer: Tixtieq li tibqa' darba fil-ġimgħa?

Participant: Tibqa'. Tibqa', u darba f'xagħrejn mingħalija ikollna staff and resident's meeting. [Maria]

Participant: It's supposed to be held once a week. That's how it ought to be.

Interviewer: Would you like it to be held once a week?

Participant: It should be held. It should be held, and once every two months, as far as I know, we hold a staff and residents meeting. (Maria)

She explained that in fact, some of the residents' complaints have been listened to and action has been taken. Another participant said that if she were to be in a power position, she'd listen to what children have to say: "Kieku mmur fl-istituti u nara x'qed idejjaqhom it-tfal halli nipprova nirranġa." [Lara]. Another respondent explained that if she were a carer

herself, she'd calm an angry child down, and be there for the child, rather than get angry with her:

...jikkalmawhom, joħorguħom naqra fil-ġnien jikkalmaw naqra...mhux tkompli tġhidilha 'ħa ntellek Mt. Carmel ġħax hemm l-aħjar'...hi iktar ħa tibda tirrabja. [Maria]

They calm them down, they take them outside, in the garden to calm down a bit... and not to keep on telling her, "I'll send you to Mount Carmel for it's better there? "... She will surely get angrier. (Maria)

Another participant [Helen] asks that professional staff attempt to understand the children as much as possible "Li jifhmuna tajjeb.": "They should understand us well." She explains that whilst some nurses already do so, others do not.

The respondent who seems not to have challenging behaviour explained how important it is to be able to express one's feelings and opinions. Her words advocate for all children – whether they have challenging behaviour or not. She speaks in retrospect and acknowledges that as a little child she had no one to speak to: "Qabel ... I mean... hekk ma kellniex ma min nġhidu x'inħossu u hekk..." "Before ... I mean ... we had nobody to whom we could say what we feel and so ...". She also explains that they weren't allowed to speak their opinion in the children's residential home she was in:

Jekk inti ħa tqum biex tiddefendi ruħek taqlaha. L-unika persuna li diffendiet ruħha spiċċat qalatha u telġhet hemm fuq ukoll. U bil-kura sa' lllum , ġħax iddefendiet ruħha din. Ma kellna leħen ta' xejn. Dik l-importanti I mean... jekk persuna ikolla bżonn l-ġħajnuna issib mill-ewwel, fhimt? [Claudine].

If you stand up to defend yourself you'll be paid back. The only person who defended herself was paid back and was also sent to Mount Carmel. And she is still under a cure, just because she defended herself. Nobody ever listened to what we had to say.

That's the important thing. I mean ... if a person needs help, she will find it at once, you understand? (Claudine)

On a more general note, one participant spoke of the need to be listened to by someone who is open minded, non-judgemental and would not be scandalised by what s/he hears:

Per eżempju (mentions name of village) il-qassisin kollha xjuħ, ma jifhmukx! M'hemmx żgħażaġħ. Tgħidilhom mort nieħu d-drogi, "x'inhu !?!!" u ħafna ġenn. Ma jifhmukx. Ma ta' (name of place) ma tistax tqerr magħhom. [Anna].

For example (mentions name of village) the priests are all old; they don't understand you! There are no young priests. You tell them that you tried drugs, "What?!?" and they make a lot of fuss. They don't understand you. With those of (name of place) you can't confess to them. (Anna)

Another participant asks people not to judge, condemn or focus solely on what a person has done. He claims that if one deserves to be corrected for what has been done than, then one should be given some sort of consequence. However, if one is making an effort to change his/her life, to keep learning and so on, then that must be taken into consideration. He feels that he should be given another chance because of the effort he is showing. The following message is clearly asking society to listen to him and to see him as a whole person, as an individual who has done mistakes:

Ningħata ċans, l-aħħar wieħed, imbagħad jekk nitilfu dan iċ-ċans, ngħid ħaqqni hu. Imma jien qed nagħmel ħilti li mmur l-iskola. Ftit li hawn...hekk, li jagħmluha ta! Ara kemm tisma' fuq droga u hekk, u jtuhom iċ-ċans, aħseb u ara jien. Mhux m'għamiltx affarijiet kbar...imma fejn ħaddieħor ma' nħossnix li għamilt affarijiet kbar... [Mark]

I should be given a chance, the last one. Then, if I throw away this chance, I will have to blame myself. But I'm doing all I can to attend school. There are only a few ... that is, who do it! A lot



Jessica Darmanin – Zabbar – 14 years

is said about drugs and other things, and they are given a chance, then what about me. Not that I didn't do serious things ... but compared to others I don't feel I did serious things. (Mark)

3.7 Theme 7: The Children's Suggestions

“Li jirrangaw ommi u missieri, jien naf....fejn trid tmur jekk mhux go *home*.”

“That my mother and father should settle their differences. I don't know ... where can one go if not to a home.”

It was only a very small number of participants who hardly gave any suggestions. However, as in the above quote, throughout the interviews their words said more than enough about their wishes and needs. In this section the children's suggestions are presented. All of the children's proposals have been gathered into sub-themes and have been summarised in the table below.

What the children put forward is clearly related to their individual needs and wishes both within and outside the service. They give suggestions that are specific – to the service they are in, and at other times, more generalised – at a national level. The fictional name for each participant was omitted throughout this section so as to avoid any possibility of determining who the person is, from the suggestions that s/he made.

Table H: The children’s Suggestions.

| The Children's Suggestions | | SUB-THEMES: A NEED FOR... |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | 7.1 | A better environment and atmosphere |
| | 7.2 | Privacy |
| | 7.3 | Finding things to do – Indoor & Outdoor activities |
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7.1 A better Environment and atmosphere

Several children spoke of the wish to have nicely finished rooms with a warm environment that feels like a home and that is welcoming to children and young people.

Kieku tfal ta' l-eta' tiegħi u hekk, servizz ikun aħjar kieku tidhol go dar ...mhux qisek dħalt go Mużew...bla divertiment, kieku tgħid hemm xi daqsxejn indoor games jew xi haġa, jew mużika...

Maybe for children of my age and so, the service will be better if one enters a home ... not like you're entering a Museum ... without any entertainment, although there are some indoor games at least, or something else, or music ...

Moreover, in one service there was no available room to carry out the interview and this had to take place outside and in full view. This, in itself, suggests the need for adequate counselling rooms which are available and may be used when needed. A request was also made to have the computers within the service utilised, updated regularly and made available for the residents.

Computer m'għandniex. Ilni ngħidilhom żmien. Anke l-iskola meta kont qed nitgħallem il-computer jiena...all right, għaddejt...għaddejt mill-eżami tal-computer...imma l-ħin kollu mmur għand sħabi biex dana u hekk.

We don't have a computer. I've been asking them for a long time. Even at school when I was studying the computer ... all-right, I passed ... I passed my computer examinations ... but I had to continually go to my friends in order to practice.

Għandna (computer) wieħed f'kull kamra. S'issa għadhom ma tawnix lezzjonijiet fuqu.

We have (a computer) one in every room. But still we have not had a single lesson on it.

A comment was made about the quality of the food given to the residents:

Jiena ma nafx...imma hawnhekk l-ikel qisu dejjem...jixtrulna imma qisu dejjem ikun second hand. Nagħmlu mod il-mayonnaise vera hażin...Qisek tidher li qegħda ġo home... anke frott u hażix. Iġibuhom b'xejn mil-pitkalija. Għalfejn? Ikunu ser jiħassru dawn...dejjem leftovers ta' xi hađd. Anke nagħmlu mod filli ma jkollniex yoghurt u filli jiġi xi container yoghurt. Ikun ser jiskadi u xi hađd jagħtihomlna. Dik inhossa... vera hekk... Anke l-hobż jixtru hafna u jifriżawh. Imbagħad meta immorru aħna biex nieħdu biċċa ħobż ikollna npoġġuha ġol-microwave. Jiġi qisha dan, kollha qisha ilma.

I don't know ... but the food here seems to be always ... they buy things for us, but it seems that it's always of a poor quality. Just to give an example, the mayonnaise is really horrible ... As if one shouldn't expect better in a home ... even the fruit and vegetables. They are brought for free from the vegetable market centre. Why? They are almost rotten ... we always get the leftovers. Let's assume that we have had no yoghurt and all of a sudden we are supplied with a container full of yoghurt. Having reached its expiry date, somebody sent it to us. This hurts, it really does ... It's the same with bread which is bought in bulk and then frozen. Then when we want to have a piece of bread we'll have to place it in the microwave oven. It gets soggy.

7.2. Privacy

A clear suggestion is to acknowledge and respect the child's need for privacy both in his/her own room and with regards to his/her personal life.

Jekk inti tfajla oħra ma tistax tidħol, imma carer tista' tidħol biċ-ċavetta. Ippruvajna niġġieldu għalhekk, għax hemm min jaqbad u jidħol, mhux sew li tidħol ġo kamra....

If you are another girl you can't come in, but a care worker can come in because she has a key. We tried to plead against this, because there are some who just open and come in; it's not becoming to enter into a room ...

Irrid il-ħajja privata tiegħi...Le qatt ma jista' jkollok privacy hawn. Privacy biex tinħasel biss. Lanqas biex torqod ngħidlek jiena...biex torqod man-nies ħa torqod...

I want to have my private life... No, one can never enjoy privacy here. You can enjoy your privacy only while you are washing yourself. I would dare say not even while you're asleep ... you have to sleep with people.

7.3 Finding things to do – Indoor & Outdoor Activities

A large number of participants spoke about the lack of stimulating events in the service. They ask to have indoor games to use, so as to occupy themselves and while away the time.



Plus hekk, ikollna xi logħob biex ngħaddu l-ħin għax hawnhekk l-anqas jgħaddi l-ħin.

Plus this, we have some games to while away the time because here time seems to stop.

Li jimxu aktar tajjeb magħna. Per eżempju mhux toqgħod hawnhekk minn filgħodu sas-sebgha irid ikollna xi ħaġa mhux ma

Tiziana Mercieca – Żabbar – 15 years

nagħmlu xejn. Taf x'jigifieri niċċassaw, noqogħdu nħarsu lejn xulxin? Għax it-televiżjoni wara nofsinħar jinfetaħ...

They should treat us better. For example, we should not stay here from the morning till seven in the evening with nothing to do. Do you know what it means just staring in each other's face? The television set is turned on in the afternoon ...

This is also the case for outdoor activities where the main message is 'take us out!'

Li għandna li ma tantx għandna biex nedgħew, fhimt?... Hekk, anke nagħmlu mod ikollna logħob bejnieta jew bħal playstation, affarijiet hekk fhimt li jokkupawlna aktar il-gurnata.

The problem is that we don't have much to while away the time with, you understand?...So it would be good were we to have games we could play together or a Playstation, things like these with which to fill our day, do you understand?

Il-ħin iktar ma nagħmel xejn milli nagħmel affarijiet. Heqq, u li kieku ikollna daqsxejn iktar ħin għal ħruġ u hekk...

I spend more time idling than I spend doing something. You see, it would be good if we were to have some more time for going out.

Nghidilhom...lill-gvern kieku jien...li imqar jghid li kbir t'hawn tal-YPU – lil ta' Mt. Carmel...ghax Mt. Carmel kollu...biex imqar it-tfal speċjalment, mhux tajjeb thallihom g'ewwa. Joħorghom naqra, mhux igibu skuza ħabba x-xemx. Għax jekk tilbes beritta u tagħmel naqra sunblock... tkun protectedu naqra nuċċali tax-xemx.

I would tell them ... to the government maybe I ... at least to tell the boss here at the YPU – to those at Mount Carmel ...

because all Mount Carmel ... at least the children especially, it's not correct to leave them indoors. They should be taken a little outdoors, and they shouldn't find an excuse because of the sun. If you wear a cap, a pair of sunglasses and apply a sun-block, you'll be protected.

One child suggests that the children could be offered various opportunities to learn new skills:

Ikun hemm teachers għal affarijiet li jixtiequ jittgħallmu t-tfal...Min jgħallem per eżempju sign language u hekk. Jien nixtieq ħafna nitgħallem is-sign language.

There should be teachers for the subjects children would like to learn...For example, there should be teachers to teach sign language and the rest. I would like very much to learn the sign language.

7.4. Acquiring basic skills

The appreciation of existing activities and the emphasis on maintaining this emerged in several interviews. This includes addressing two aspects. The first is that of learning to acquire basic skills, including cooking, cleaning, hygiene and basic home economics. The second is that of acquiring psychological, social and emotional skills. In other words working on skills including: learning to calm down, working on anger management, self control, decision making, coping skills, dealing with peer pressure, being assertive, assuming responsibility for actions and weighing the consequences of one's actions. All these issues emerged across the various interviews and were expressed by the participants in several ways.

7.5. Venting out feelings

Emphasis was put on the need to have a safe place, and to hold regular meetings, where the residents are given the space to express their feelings and ideas.

Nagħtu kas resident meeting ilu daqsxejn ma jsir issa. Għax ġieli qas ikolla ċans għalina. Darba minnhom għamilna xahar mingħajr resident meeting.

For example, it's quite a long time since we had a residents' meeting. Sometimes we don't have the time to meet. Once we spent a month without having a residents' meeting.

Jagħmlu xi post u noqgħodu nagħmlu crafts u hekk, sports u hekk...Għaliex fejn inkunu nistgħu niżvugaw fl-affarijiet.

They should provide a place where we can practice crafts and things like that, sports and similar things ... In such a place we would be able to relax while we're doing these things.

7.6. Regular group sessions

One participant in particular expressed the need for regular group sessions:

“Eżempju jagħmlu qisu speċi ta' laqgħa bejn iż-żgħażaġh, u kulhadd jagħti l-opinjoni tiegħu – x'jaħseb li ...kif nistgħu insolvu dawn il-problemi hawn t'hawnhekk għall-istess problemi u hekk, li għaddew minna. Qisu speċi ta' grupp... ovvjament ikun hemm xi hadd li jista' jmexxi...itihom parir. Qishom isiru ħbieb imbagħad. Joqogħdu jitekellmu...ihtar ma jgħaddi iż-żmien...jibdeu jjtilgħu, ħbiberija u hekk il-problemi isiru parti mill-background u imbagħad jarawk 'il quddiem iktar kuntent hux... m'hemmx għalfejn ikunu ta' l-istess eta, għax kieku anke kbar...hawn ħafna mill-kbar li jtuk pariri tajjeb u forsi għandom iktar esperjenza”.

“For example, they can organize some kind of meeting among the young people, and everybody expresses his opinion – what one thinks that ... how we can solve these problems, the ones we have here, the ones we encountered. It will be like a type of group ... obviously there has to be someone to lead ... advices them. They will become like friends then. They will talk ... the more

time passes ... friendships will be built and thus the problems will become part of the background and then, as time goes by, they'll see that one feels happier, isn't it so ... there's no need to have only peer groups, for there may even be adults ... there are many adults who are able to give a good advice and probably have more experience."

7.7 Being kept informed

One participant spoke of the wish to be informed of meetings, visitors and phone calls. She feels that the residents should be informed directly – rather than through the staff – of changes and decisions taken, especially if this concerns or effects them; one case in point is when donations are brought to the service:

Meta jkunu ser jagħmlu xi haġa jgħidulna...Darba kienu qaluli li ġabu computers. Flokk tawh lilna ħaditha s-social worker u tas-social worker ta' qabel tawh lilna fhimt?...jekk ikun hemm xi laqgħa inkunu infurmati għax mhux dejjem jgħidulna....Nagħmlu mod nirrorangaw fuq il-pocket money sewwa...li jżidulna lira oħra, lilna jgħidulna, isma židnilkom dana oħra. Għax jista' jkun li ma jtuna xejn fhimt?... Ehhe ġieli jaqbżuhom il-carers... affarijiet...ħafna...jew jinsew jgħidu qed tifhem? Jew ikollna xi appuntamenti li ma jgħidulniex...hekk...jew iċempel xi ħadd...

When they are planning something they should let us know. Once I was told that they brought a computer. Instead of being given to us, the social worker took it, and we were given the one which was used by the previous social worker, you understand? If a meeting is to be held we should be informed because they do not let us know ... Let's figure there was some agreement about pocket money ... that it was increased by one lira, they should tell us: "Listen, we have given you an increase!" For maybe they will not give us anything, you understand? Eh, sometimes the care workers do not tell us these things ... many ... or they might forget, you understand? Or we are not informed that we have some appointments ... you know ... or somebody phones ...

7.8 Career preparation, independent living and financial support

Throughout the interviews – especially with the older participants - a great need for being prepared for the future emerged. Such needs included career planning, enhancing awareness of existing services, finding a job, and being assisted towards finding a place to live independently. Continuation and follow-up in this regard is mentioned as necessary. Appreciation was shown by participants who felt supported in this.

Nipprova nimxi waħdi...nipprova jġifieri. Ħafna nipprova. Imma m'hawnx fejn taħdem u jien ma nafx ħafna skola, imma rrid nitgħallem ta'...

I try to do things on my own ... I do try. I try a lot. But it's hard to find a job and I don't have much education, but I do want to learn ...

Iva qed jgħinuni biex insib post fejn noqgħod u post fejn naħdem ukoll.

Yes, I'm being helped to find a place where to live and also a place where to work.

Nixtieq immur noqgħod waħdi imma li m'hawnx fejn taħdem...mhux it-tort tiegħi.

I would like to go and live on my own, but there's nowhere to work ... it's not my fault.

Li kieku taf x'ngħidlu?... 'Aħjar issibli post!'

Do you know what I will tell him? - "You better find me a job!"

Li nixtieq jien, la nitlaq minn hawn insib xogħol, għax jien b'idejja nagħmel kollox. Inbajjad, inkaħħal, basta b'idejja.”

“When I leave this place, all I want is to find a job, because I'm able to do everything with my hands – painting, plastering – given that it's a job I can do with my hands.”

One participant spoke of the need for professionals and the government to acknowledge the difficulties that these young persons face when trying to find a job. Moreover another participant expresses the need to be encouraged, reinforced and perhaps assisted towards achieving positive goals:

Qed nagħmel minn kollox biex imqar insib part-time imma issa qed niddejjaq. 'Lilkom ħadd ma jridkom' – hekk jgħidulna.

“I'm trying everything to find at least a part-time job, but now I'm getting fed up. 'Nobody wants you' – that's what they tell us.

Li jekk ha jagħmlu xi haġa għal ġid tagħna...ma tkunx diffiċli għalina. Li nkunu nistgħu nidhlu għal din il-ħaġa. Bħal eżamijiet u hekk ma jkunux tqal, nifhima, għax dan ha jkun xi naqra, imma...almenu tgħid forsi inkunu nistgħu ingibuha naqra u hekk dil-ħaġa, inkunu nistgħu naslu għalija... edukazzjoni u affarijiet oħra...eżempju bħall-karozza – naħseb ždiedet il-dik tal-komputer...hawn ħafna li m'għandomx computer...trid tbatl naqra biex igġib il-liċenzja.

If they are going to plan something for our benefit ... it should not be difficult for us. It should be within our reach. A thing like an examination should not be hard, I do understand that it will be a little hard, but ... at least we can be left with some hope that we'll be able to succeed ... education and other things ... like for example the car – I think that the computer has been

included ... there are many who do not have a computer ... it would be rather hard to obtain the license.

Ġabuli applikazzjoni u hekk għamluli ħafna kuragg biex nagħmel it-test u gġieldu ħafna għalija biex nagħmel il-kors ta' 'mekkanik engineering'.

They brought me an application form and that encouraged me a lot to do the test and they did their utmost so that I would be able to follow the mechanical engineering course.

One participant also spoke of the need for financial support. She explained that the residents need pocket money to go out in the evenings and to buy basic things that they wish for. More than that however, she speaks of another resident whose parents do not provide her with the basic material needs (e.g. clothes). She feels that when this is the case such children should be assisted and provided with these basic needs.

7.9 Less rigidity

The lack of flexibility especially with regards to time tables and routines leads to frustration.

Inkun ġej lura u ninqabad fit-traffic jiena, imbagħad tiġi hawnhekk u ngħidilhom 'inqbadt fit-traffic' u jgħiduli 'ma jinteressanix, missek kont hawn!'.

On my way back, sometimes I do get stuck in a traffic jam. When I arrive here and tell them: "I was stuck in the traffic", they just tell me: "It's not our problem, you should have been here!"

Fil-ħdax, ħdax. Jew it-telephone box...tinfetaħ fit-tlieta u ikun it-tlieta neqsin ħamsa u, nagħmlu mod, ħabiba tkun ser toħroġ....hemm min jiftaħa, hemm min ma jiftaħix (is referring to careworkers). Qed tifhem?

The time limit is strictly 11 o'clock. As regards the telephone-box ... it is opened at 3 o'clock and the time is five minutes to three ... and, let's figure, one of my friends is going out ... there are some who open it, there are some who don't (is referring to care workers). Do you understand?

The need for space, more freedom and more flexibility is mentioned by a number of participants:

Minn mindu kont żgħir s'issa inħossni ħabs...imbagħad kif trid il-bniedem ma jitlax aggressiv.

All the years since my infancy seem to have been spent in a prison; therefore how can it be possible that a person will not grow up to be aggressive.

Illu forsi li jirrangaw ta' l-irqad ta' wara nofs in-nhar...mhux għalija biss għax hawn residenti li jieħdu il-pilloli u hekk... tkun ġej mix-xogħol...xejn wara nofs in-nhar ma tkunx tista' (torqod).

To try and change the policy of not allowing any sleeping in the afternoon ... not only for me because there are residents who take pills and so ... you have just returned from work ... you're not given the chance of taking a nap in the afternoon.

Kulhadd iżomm iċ-ċavetta tal-locker tiegħu...Biex imqar ma jgħidux 'Aħna m'aħniex afdati?' jgħidu 'Aħna afdati'.

Everyone keeps the key to his locker ... So that at least they will not say: "Aren't we trusted?" On the contrary they would be able to say: "We are trusted."

Interviewer: X'tissuġġerixxi pereżempju fuq il-hinijiet ta' l-irqad?

Respondent: Għall-iskola orrajt. Pereżempju jekk naraw xi film inkomplu narawh...mhux jieqfu f'nofsu...tiddejjaq



Emmanuel Farrugia – Victoria, Gozo – 15 years

ma tistax tarah jispiċċa. Fis-sajf heqq ukoll sal-11:00. Heqq imqar ituna sal-11:30.”

Interviewer: What are your suggestions about the times to sleep?

Respondent: “During schooldays, it’s all well. For example, if we start watching a film we should see it all ... it shouldn’t be stopped halfway ... it’s annoying not to see how it ends. In summer it’s also up to 11.00 p.m. At least we should we allowed up to 11.30 p.m.”

Iktar affarijiet forsi biex igawdu biex jieħdu pjaċir bihom...
Mhux qed ngħidlek li ma jżommux dixxiplina ta...l-ommu,
imma l-bniedem trid tħallih naqra maħlul, ma tistax tħallih
issikkat.

More things with which they can enjoy themselves more ... Listen,
I'm not saying that there shouldn't be discipline ... There should
be discipline, but you have to give some relaxation to a person,
you can't keep him always restrained.

7.10 Regular meetings with family members – especially siblings

One participant expressed a strong wish to meet her siblings
regularly:

“Inkun irrid narahom imqar darba f’gimgha. Imma ili
ngħidilhom ...għal xejn.”

7.11 Professional Staff

“Lill-gvern kieku jien...ngħid li l-istaff – mhux ħażin biss.
Għandhom it-tajjeb ukoll tagħhom!”

“I would like to see the Government ... I would say that the staff
– is not only negative. They have their positive side too!”

The children addressed three main aspects whilst offering suggestions
about the professional staff. The first aspect was the way in which they
wish the staff to relate with them. As was evident in section 3.3, children
wish the staff to support and guide them when in times of crisis or conflict
with other residents, or with family members. One participant explains
that whilst she wishes this to happen she does not want the staff imposing
beliefs or decisions upon her. She wishes that the staff realises that by
doing so she would only become more rebellious: “Iktar nagħmel kontra,
nagħmel kontra u nisfidak lilek... fhimt?” “I will do more contraries, I’ll
do the contrary and I will defy you ... do you understand?”

In the interview, the same participant went on to explain that the staff
needs to respect the child’s pace, especially when the child is experiencing

abuse at home, and when the child is brought up with the believe that whatever happens in the family should be a secret.

Ommi dejjem rabbitni “tgħidx kollox, aħbi”... jekk ikolli ħabiba li għaddejja minn dak li kont għaddejja jiena...trid iġġibha ftit ftit hawn, imbagħad tasal f’konklużjoni. Iddaħħala l-APPOĠĠ u bil-mod tiġi hawn. Kollox bil-mod, għax naf jien kemm trid ħin biex tiġi hawn. Billi ngħidilha oħroġ mid-dar u ejja hawn...billi kienu jgħiduli... u eluf kienu jgħiduli, imma jien x’hin sib t il-ħin jiena ħriġt mhux x’hin qaltli dik jew l-oħra, x’hin ridt jien.

When I was growing up, my mother always told me: “Don’t tell everything, keep things to yourself” ... if a friend is going through what I was going through ... you have to bring her here, then you’ll come to a conclusion. You first take her to APPOĠĠ and gradually she will come here. Everything gradually, for I know how long it takes to come to this place. It’s no use telling her to leave home and to come here ... it was no use telling me ... thousands used to tell me, but when I found the right time, I left, not when I was told to leave by that or the other, when I wanted to.

Another clear message, already presented in section 3.6, is the need for the staff to listen to the child and to acknowledge their needs and wishes. In that section it clearly emerged that the child wishes for the staff to listen to his/her story and version of what happened.

The second aspect addressed by the children’s suggestions was the need to consider the professional staff’s aptitude to work with the children. One participant clearly states that some members of staff, in particular the careworkers who are, after all the front liners in the service and who have the most contact with the children, should have ongoing training:

Mhux ser issib kulhadd l-istess, però naħseb li għandhom bżonn ħafna taħriġ il-carers hawnhekk...biċċiet minnhom.

You will not find everybody to be the same, but I think that the care workers need a lot of training here ... some of them.

Hawn biċċiet minnhom all right, jimxu all right magħna, oħrajn le...Ifhem, anke l-istaff. Bħala staff anke tinduna ħafna d-differenza. Min hu hekk... min jifhimni.... min jgħajjat.... Ifhimni dik kullimkien issiba, mhux ser issib kulħadd l-istess, però naħsab li għandhom bżonn ħafna taħriġ il-carers hawnhekk ... biċċiet minnhom.

Some of them are all-right, they treat us well; others don't ... Listen, even the staff. Regarding the staff, you can also see that there are differences. Someone is one type, someone understands me ... someone shouts ... Listen, you find such a situation everywhere, you can't find everybody to be the same, but I think that the care workers need a lot of training here ... some of them.

It would be valuable that training includes anger management. One participant specifically states that when a member of staff does not have the skills and aptitude to deal with children who have difficulties s/he must be fired:

Biex ikeċċu s-surmastrijiet li ma jifhmux it-tfal għax mhux sew u lili tellifni ħafna s-surmast.

To get rid of the headmasters who don't understand children, it's not just and the headmaster was responsible for my missing my education.

Children also wish that professionals maintain confidentiality and discuss children's progress when it is the time and place to do so:

Ġieli nismagħhom jitkellmu fuq xulxin ... ġieli inkunu hdejhomm, inkunu qegħdin jitkellmu bejniethom imma aħna nisimgħu. {Claudine}

Sometimes I hear them gossiping about each other ... sometimes we are near them, while they are talking together, but we overhear what they say. (Claudine)

Jekk inti qed tgħid fuq persuna thallijjex tisimgħek....I mean jien kont fuq fil-kamra tiegħi ... filgħaxija u qed tgħid x'gara u qed tgħid fuqi u hekk.... I mean smajtha u ma hadtx gost....

If you are talking about somebody see that she does not listen to what you're saying ... I mean ... I was upstairs in my room ... in the evening ... and she was telling what had happened and she was talking about me and so ... I mean, I heard her and I was not pleased.

The youngsters also wish that carers re-consider the issue of giving punishments in order to correct the children's behaviour:

...xi kultant bil-konsegwenzi li jagħtu...it-tfal minflok jirrangaw, it-tfal aktar jirribellaw magħhom...Per eżempju huma naqra punishments ħorox. Nağhmlu mod tinqabad f'kamra ta' haddieħor ikollok torqod taħt it-tarağ...Jekk waqt it-television itella saqajk fuq is-sufan tara t-television fuq sigġu għal ġimgħa jew xahar.

... sometimes as a consequence for the punishment they mete ... the children, instead of correcting themselves, the children will get more rebellious with them ... For example, they mete out rather harsh punishments. Let's say, if you are caught in someone else's room you are made to sleep beneath the stairs ... If, while watching television, you put your feet on the sofa, you will have to watch television sitting on a chair for a week or for a month.

They also wish that the staff learn how to manage, plan, co-ordinate and supervise the duties that the residents have to do – in a consistent way, and how to handover information and daily-happenings to the staff on the next shift:

Li jorganizzaw naqr'iktar l-affarijiet...per eżempju il-hinijiet, jirrangawhom naqa...li ħafna staff jiftakru jagħmlu xogħolhom, mhux jinsew jiffirmaw li lest id-duty u imbagħad nispiċċaw neħlu duty extra...

That they should organize more things ... for example, the timetable should be bettered a little ... that many members of the staff should remember to do their work, and not forget to sign that the duty has been done and then we end up having to do some extra duty ...

The third aspect, which the children speak of is related to staff turnover and coping with such changes, especially when this has a direct effect on the staff-resident relationship. One participant speaks of the good relationship there was between the head of home and the residents, which unfortunately shifted when she assumed more responsibilities. This happened at the cost of her availability and presence with the children:

Problemi aktar jikbru. Biex inkellmuha hekk...Anke meta ikollna xi punish mingħand il-carers...Qabel konna ngħidulha...immur nitkellem magħha u hekk. Issa: 'ma nistax.. għandi x'nagħmel....sejra id-dar'...

Problems will get bigger. When we would like to talk to her ... Even when the care workers give us some punishment ... Before, we could go and talk to her ... I used to go and talk to her. Now she tells me: "I can't ... I have something else to do ... I'm going home" ...

7.12 Re-evaluating the way 'Mt. Carmel' is used.

Unfortunately, there seems to have developed a strong association of the YPU service with punishment – at times even by staff so as to threaten or control a child. There is a great need to re-construct such an idea:

...dejjem min imur hemmhekk għax ikunu għamlu xi buzulotta, fhimt?...Bħala konsegwenza...mhux għax għandhom bżonn. Bħala...għax ma qagħdux bil-għaqal...mela titla hemmhekk.

... whoever ends up there would surely have done something eccentric, you understand? It's a consequence, not because they really need to be sent there. As if they would not have behaved well and therefore they were sent there.

There is a clear need to clarify further *when & for what reasons* a child must be taken to Mt. Carmel.

Veru iddejjaqni dil-biċċa xogħol...jaqbd u itellawhom Mt. Carmel...Jien naf darba minnhom...tfajla kellha r-rabja u faqqat ħġieġa. Qabdu u tellawha Mt. Carmel. Anke titkellem nagħtu kas daqsxejn ħażin mal-careworkers – itellaw Mt. Carmel...mhux lil kulhadd ta'...

I really hate this ... they just sent them to Mount Carmel ... Just to give one example ... one day a female adolescent was in a rage



Nicole Marie Callus – Siggiewi – 11 years

and smashed a pane of glass. They sent her to Mount Carmel, there and then. Even if you address foul language at the care workers – they’ll send you to Mount Carmel... Listen, not everyone...

One participant provides suggestions showing that responsible persons need to explore and consider different alternatives to Mt. Carmel, whenever this is possible. This also links with the need for training staff how to cope with and contain such behaviour:

Jew jikkalmawhom, joħorguħom naqra fil-ġnien jikkalmaw naqra, u per eżempju tgħidilha nagħtu kas, mhux tkompli tgħidilha ‘ħa ntellek Mt. Carmel għax hemm l-aħjar’...hi iktar ħa tibda tirrabja.

Or they should calm them down, take them out in the garden to calm down a bit, and, for example, she should tell her, let’s say, she shouldn’t keep telling her: “I’ll send you to Mount Carmel, for that’s where you should be” ... she will surely get angry.

7.13 Assessment: The right service for me

The following young person’s words suggest that assessment in order to create a suitable. As has already been pointed out earlier there is no proper individualised care-plan that matches the child’s needs and some youngsters are not placed in the appropriate service.

Fejda huwa propju programm. Huma ħafna li m’għandhomx bżonn programm li qegħdin hawnhekk.

Fejda is the right programme. There are many who don’t need the programme for which they are here.

Also, one participant expresses the need for specialised services for children with challenging behaviour in times when their behaviour is difficult to control, as an alternative to sending them to Mt. Carmel. Moreover this participant emphasises that if the child *does not need* to be sent there, s/he should never be sent.

Il-fatt li jitolaw Mt. Carmel ma naqbel xejn xejn magħha. It-tfal isiru aghar, vera...agħar isiru. Għandu ikun hawn xi...li għandhom naqra dixxiplina li flok imorru Mount Carmel imorru f'dawn il-homes...Pero' ma għandux ikun tfal li ikunu sewwa... għax daħal mhux hażin, imbagħad ikun hareġ aghar milli daħal.

I totally disagree that they are sent to Mount Carmel. Children get worse, believe me ... they get worse. There should be some ... they should have some form of discipline. Instead of being sent to Mount Carmel they would be sent to these homes ... But this should not happen to those children who are behaving ... or else, if one's behaviour was fair on his arrival here, on his departure one will be behaving much worse than one was behaving when one arrived here.

Another participant asked that the government and authorities focus more on this issue, especially with regards to resources:

"Kieku jien iktar nagħmel għan-nies bħal dawn...bħali".

"If it was in my power I would do much more for people like these ... like me."

7.14 Re-evaluating the effectiveness of having youngsters of different ages in the same service

The children, through their suggestions have questioned the effectiveness of the programme when children of different ages are placed together in the service.

Anke m'ilux kien hawn tifla kella eleven magħna. Jien bdejt nitlob li jibgħatuha lura. Għax I mean eleven ma ta' sittax il-sena li għaddew minn esperjenzi koroh f'ħajjithom sewwa? Għalfajn għandek tħallat tifla ta' ħdax ma tfajliet kbar.

Not so long ago, together with us there was an eleven-year old girl. I prayed for her that she might be sent back. For, I mean,

is it a good thing to have an eleven-year old with sixteen-year old girls who have had bad experiences in life? Why should a girl of eleven be placed among older adolescent girls.

In one particular service, the result of such a mixture of ages led to the decision that all children, irrespective of their age and maturity, have to follow the same house rules and timetables.

Fl-ghaxra u nofs,... tidhol torqod.....I mean ghax hemm min ma jqumx. Dik il-problema. Hemm tfajliet mhalltin fhimt? Haww min ma jqumx filghodu. I mean, jiena ... mhux skola obligatorja, nista mmur nahdem kieku irrid, imma jiena ghazilt ghal futur tiegħi, qed tifhem? Imbagħad qishom jitrattaw lili bhal haddiehor.

You have to go to bed at half past ten... I mean, because there are some who don't wake up. That's the problem. There are all types of adolescent girls, you understand? Some do not wake up in the morning. I mean, I ... I'm not obliged to attend school, I can choose to work if I want to, but I chose in favour of my future, you understand? But then they treat me like they treat the others.

Għax jien għalija is-sibt ġieli nohrog nieklu. Ġenn, peress li nmorru Paceville biex nieklu, ġenn biex niġu lura. Fhimt? Niġi tard naqla konsegwenza.

Sometimes, come Saturday, I go out to some eating-place. It's crazy, when we go to Paceville to eat, the haste to come back. You understand? If I arrive a little late, I will have to face the consequence.

Jien l-iktar li nixtieq hija dik tal-ħinijiet. Mhux kulhadd għandu l-istess età.. nagħmlu mod anke sal ħdax u nofs għalija hemm gap, tagħmel differenza. Jekk flokk titlaq fil-ghaxra u nofs titlaq fil-ħdax neqsin ħamsa, il-ħdax.

I would greatly appreciate if they were to do something about the time-limit. Not everybody is of the same age ... if, let's say, they were to allow us up to half past eleven, the small gap there is, makes a difference. If instead of leaving at half past ten, you leave at five minutes to eleven, eleven o'clock.

One participant explains that when older residents are mixed with younger ones they tend to influence them: "hafna godda li jidhlu t-tfajliet jippruwaw jinfluenzawhom." "the female adolescent try to influence the new entrants." Another participant speaks of the same issue where he explains that younger residents listen to what the older ones say and idolise the words. He suggests that when a service has a determine age-range, then people who are either younger or older than the stated range, should not be admitted:

Hawnhekk suppost tfal hawn mhux nies ta' 21, 24 sena. Ikun hawn suppost hawnhekk sa 18 jew 20 sena fhimt?...għax anke tismagħhom jitekellmu per eżempju, għax għamilt hekk u għamilt hekk...tifel li jkun tlett snin iżgħar minni, dak il-hin mill-ewwel, taparsi mhux qed jisma' u jkun qed jisma' u xi darba jagħmilha fhimt?

This place is meant for children and not for twenty-one, twenty-four-year olds. The age limit here is supposed to be eighteen or twenty years, you understand? ... for even when you hear them speaking, for I have done this and I have done that ... a boy who is three years younger than I am, he pretends not to be listening at that moment, but he would be listening and someday he will do likewise, you understand?

7.15 Doing away with the single room and providing better ways of teaching a child.

Several participants spoke about the wish to remove, change or find an alternative to the concept of having a 'single room'.

...jneħħu s-single room hawnhekk. Biex per eżempju minflok nidhlu fis-single room jaqtawlna xi outings u hekk.

...They should do away with the single-room here. So that, for example, instead of being sent to the single-room, we won't be given permission to go for some of the outings and something similar.

U imma mhux, indaħħalhom f' single room u imbarazz hekk. Nohroġhom. Għax dawk hekk iridu... Nitfagħhom ġo kamra u jekk iridu jaqbzu mqar anke jekk tixtrilhom it-trampoline – biex ikollhom biex jegħdew. Għax f'dik il-kamra twegġa tista'. Issabbat rasek mal-ħajt, jew tagħti xi daqqa ta' ponn mal-ħajt – u twegġa. Trampoline mhux sa twegġa. Jew dik tal-boxing. Xi haġa...Tisvoga.

That's not the way, shutting them in the single-room and such rubbish. I will take them out. That's what they need ... I put them in a room with a trampoline and let them jump – so that they can let off the steam. In that room you can only get hurt. You hit your head against the wall, or punch the wall and you'll get hurt. You won't get hurt on a trampoline ... or a boxing punching-bag. Give them something on which to let off the steam.

7.16 Residence for young people who are still under 18 but too old to remain in a children's home

A very small number of children explained that when they chose to come to the service they are currently in, it was because they felt they were too old to remain in a children's residential home: "Le għax ridt jien biex ma nibqax fejn it-tfal iż-żgħar hu." No, I came here of my own free will so as not to remain with younger children". This is, in itself an indirect suggestion that there is a need for a residential place for young adolescents to live in: when they are in the phase of being 'too old' to be in a children's home and 'too young' to be living independently.

Kienet qaltli ..ma nixtieqx li tibqa hawnhekk imma m'għandix fejn tmur....ħallewni hawn. Jiġifieri bħala homes hawn ftit ukoll.

She had told me: 'I don't wish that you remain here, but I don't have anywhere else to send you' ... They kept me here. This means that there is a shortage of homes too.

7.17 Schools

One participant explained that there is a need for the government authorities to continue assisting and supporting schools in keeping up the environment of the school:

Hawnhekk, f'din l-iskola kollox qed nirrangaw. L-affarijiet tbiddu u nkomplu ngħinuhom biex inkomplu nbiddu. Ġabulna l-computers u jkomplu jgħibulna l-affarijiet u nkomplu nirrangaw l-iskola.

Here, in this school, everything is being refurbished. Things have changed and we'll continue to help them so that we'll keep on changing. They brought us the computers and they will continue to bring us other things and we will carry on with the refurbishment of the school.

Other participants suggest that the school should be made bigger "Ikabbara ftit bhala skola ...il-klassijiet" "It should be enlarged as a school ... the classrooms." and that there is a need for a bigger variety of lessons in special schools:

Li l-ewwel iżidulna jew nagħmlu xi lezzjonijiet differenti...Ikun hemm iktar ħin għall-sports, jagħmlulna, hekk futbol.

They should first of all introduce or give us different lessons ... There should be more time for sports, they should organize, let's say, football.

Further suggestions were to assist, help and support children who are experiencing some form of bullying, to increase the number of *understanding* teachers and to re-consider cases where children no longer want to go to school.

Kieku lit-tfal nibgħathom skola oħra u ngħidilhom biex meta jiġġieldu magħhom ma jagħtux kashom u jgħidu lit-teachers biex jgħidu lil ommhom.

I would send the children to another school and tell them not to bother when others pick on you and that they should tell the teachers to tell their mothers.

Inġib iżjed teachers li jifhmu għax aħna hawnhekk qegħdin ftit, tajbin imma ftit. Inġib iżjed tfal u l-iskola nagħmilha bħala skola normali b'ħafna tfal u teachers għax hawnhekk għandna żgħir ħafna. Kieku kont nikkmanda jien, t-tfal li jbatu ma nħallihomx fi skola fejn ibatu.

I'll bring in more teachers who are able to understand us because there are only a few here, good but few. I'll admit more children to make the school a normal one with many children and teachers because this is a very small school. If I were in command, I would not leave children who suffer, in a school where they suffer.

Niddejjaq...B'kollox per eżempju l-iskola nixtieq inwaqqagħha. Niddejjaq.

I get fed up ... With everything, for example, I would like to destroy the school. I get fed up.

7.18 Need for safe leisure and entertainment in the country

At a national level, two participants expressed their wish for: new leisure and places of entertainment for young people, which promote living healthily and are safe to be in:

Iktar postijiet għat-tfal ta' taħt it-tmintax is-sena. Nagħmlu mod Paceville u hekk kullimkien għat-tfal over tmintax. U aktar postijiet fejn nistgħu ngħaddu l-ħin.

More places for children under eighteen years of age. Let's say that Paceville is a place for persons over eighteen. And more places where we can spend our leisure time.

Xi haġa, hekk fejn iż-żgħażaġh, ma jaqbdux hażin. Imorru ġo postijiet oħra... Dan, nagħmel xi haġa għaż-żgħażaġh. U mhux ġo raħal wiehed. F'irħula differenti...Nagħmlu perkazu games room, qisu bar, imma b'xorb tajjeb: bħall-koka u...(drinks) mingħajr l-alkoħol. U affarijiet tajbin għat-tfal...

Somewhere for young people, away from bad habits. They go to other places ... I would do something for young people; and not only in one village, but in different villages ... For example, there can be a games-room, some type of bar where one can get a good drink, like a Coke and (drinks) non-alcoholic, and things beneficial for children.

7.19 The Judiciary system and rehabilitation

Several suggestions were made with regards to the judiciary system and rehabilitation. A participant explained that when someone is still young, s/he should use the Juvenile Court rather than be sent to the Courts of Law in Valletta.

Għax meta tidħol fil-qorti tal-kbar, fil-qorti tal-Belt mhux ta' Santa Venera, għax ta' Santa Venera għinuni. Il-qorti tal-Belt mhux bħal tal-Juvenile.

When you go to the Law Courts, those in Valletta and not those at Santa Venera, because I was given help at Santa Venera. The courts at Valletta are not like the Juvenile Court.

He goes on to claim that the authorities should re-consider the effectiveness of sending young people to prison and how this is supporting or hindering the young person.

Jien ngħidilhom biex meta jaslu f'post, biex jagħmlu xi haġa għat-tfal taħt l-eta', per eżempju bħal m'għandi żmien jiena jew iżgħar ma' jitfagħhomx (għol-ħabs) jew go istituti...

I would suggest that if young people are to be sent to some place, there should be a place for persons under age, for example my age or younger; they should not be sent to prison or to an institute.

He also expresses the need for a bigger emphasis to be placed on rehabilitation and life skills. And if need be also having an alternative rehabilitation programme instead of prison.

Li jifthu x'imkien bħal tip ta' programm mill-aktar fis possibbli. Mhux biex immur jien per eżempju ta, biex jekk ikun hawn xi tifel jagħmel xi haġa ħażina, ma' jidholx il-ħabs, jidhol hemm mill-ewwel.

A new place with some type of programme should be opened as soon as possible. Not for me to be sent there, you know, but so that some boy who would have done something wrong will not be sent to prison, but he will be sent there in the first place.

Jitfagħhom go tip ta' programm biex jgħallmuhom għal meta jkunu barra għall-ħajja. Biex ikunu tajbin għas-soċjetà.



Leanne Verzin – 10 years

They should be made to follow a type of programme which will teach them how to live their life when they are outside, in order that they will be good for society.

Another suggestion in this regard was that the authorities need to re-consider the issue of

re-introduction into society after prison. The extreme differences may be difficult for the individual to cope with alone.

Għax jekk jitfgħak il-ħabs biex toqgħod taħseb...Jien nara li aktar toħroġ ribellus minn hawnhekk. Malli toħroġ issib dik il-liberta'...Trid toqgħod attent, ħafna trid toqgħod attent... Meta tidħol hawnhekk diffiċli biex ma' terġax tidħol it-tieni darba hawnhekk...Jekk ma' toqgħodx attent hu, tħoss dik il-liberta', ma' tikkalkula lil ħadd...

If you are sent to prison you will have time to brood ... I believe that you will become more rebellious when you get out of here. As soon as you are dismissed you will find all that liberty ... You should be on your guard, very much on your guard ... Once you have been here, it's rather difficult not to return a second time ... You have to be on your guard, having all that liberty, you will look down at everybody ...

On a completely different note but one participant expressed her wish to be allowed to get married at a young age, without having to wait until she is 18.

Minħabba ż-żwieġ hu – bilfors trid il-firma tagħhom (parents) jekk ma jaqblux maż-żwieġ tiegħek. Sa 18-il sena. Ta' 18-il sena tista' tmur issuq tista' tmur taqleb id-dinja, tmur tixrob, tmur toqgħod għal rasek, bla sens qegħda... L-eta' u l-maturita' - jista' jkollok 18 u ma tkunx matur, jista' jkollok 16 u jkollok kollox. Hawn min għandu 30 u ma jfisser xejn! Għax qas jifhem...Kieku jien għandi l-awtorita' diġa' ħriġt minn hawn – mort ngħix miegħu. Niżżewweġ, ngħaqqad familja, ngeghlu jaħdem għall-familja...

Because of marriage, isn't it – you need their (the parents') signature if they don't agree with your getting married. Until you reach the age of 18. When you are 18 years old you can drive, you can turn the world upside down, you can start drinking,

live on your own; this doesn't make sense ... Age and maturity – you can be 18 and not be mature, you can be 16 and possess everything. You can find persons who are 30 and aren't worth anything! Such people don't ever understand ... If it was in my power I would have already quitted this place – I would have gone to live with him. I'll get married, build a family, and have him work for the family ...

7.20 Support services in Malta.

Comments and suggestions were also placed with regards to the existing services in Malta. One participant explains that services *do* exist. “Ifhimni ġo Malta hawn hafna (servizzi), imma mhux qed jintużaw, hawn hafna affarijiet” “Listen, in Malta there are many services, but they are not being utilized, there are many things.”. However, the biggest problem is whether people actually use them.

Imma, eżempju, APPOĠĠ qiegħed jintuża, imma hawn familji li għandhom problema u mhux qed jużawh għax jibżgħu. Jiġifieri l-programmi hemm qegħdin. Min jużahom irid...Jew għax jibżgħu, jew għax qed iżommu kollox ġo fihom - dik trid tistudjaha iktar sew...

But, for example, APPOĠĠ is being utilized, but there are families with a problem who are not using it because they are afraid. That is, the programmes exist. They are to be made use of ... It's either the fear or they are keeping everything within their bosom – it's a situation which ought to be studied more deeply ...

This participant explains that if the young person is afraid to access the service, then the professionals through outreach, should encourage them to come forward:

Mhux immur għalihom?!?...Ikellmu lil sħabhom, jaraw minn xiex hi għaddejja, imbagħad huma stess jgħinu fhimt, bil-mod imma...

No, I would not go to look for them?!?! They should speak to their friends, see what experience she is going through, and then they themselves help her, but progressively ...

This should be done in a multi-systemic way: “Ma min ikolli x’naqsam jiena...ma’ l-għalliema...kollox.” “With whom I am to deal with ... with the teachers ... everything.”

Another participant spoke of the need to develop a programme for children with challenging behaviour that helps one deal with problems such as compulsive stealing, peer pressure, personal problems and how to face the realities of life. Such a programme should be run by professionals who are specialised in such areas.

Niftaħ programm. Għax hawn tip ta’ programmi veru – hawn programmi għad-droga, programmi tax-xorb. Daqshekk. Programm tal-vizzju tas-serq, jew problemi, jew għax ikun għadek m’intix matur biżżejjed, jew għax idahħluk f’xi problema shabek...Li għandna hawnhekk, per eżempju, hemm ċertu nies speċjalizzati għal ta’ l-apposta li jibdew jgħallmuk dwar il-ħajja hekk fhimt ?

I start a programme. It’s true there are different types of programmes – there are programmes that deal with drugs, programmes for drinking. That’s it. A programme about the tendency to steal, or problems, or because you are not yet mature enough, or because your friends get you into a problem ... What we have here, for example, there are certain professionals whose duty it is to teach you how to cope with life, you understand?

The same participant explained that a service’s primary aim should be giving care and support to children and assisting them to learn to be part of the community.

Jifthu tip ta’ programm għat-tfal, li jieħdu naqra ħsiebhom u hekk...go tip ta’ programm ikun hemm aktar support

fuqek. 'Tip ta' programm imma flok fuq droga, l-istess sistema, imma mhux fuq droga, fuq ħafna affarijiet, biex tkun tajjeb fis-soċjeta'..."

"They should launch a programme for children, who should be given the care they need ... In such a programme you will be given more support. A kind of programme, but not on drugs, run on the same system, but not on drugs, on various things, to become fit for society."

Other suggestions included the wish to have mixed genders in the services, an increase in the number of social workers for children who live in homes and residential care, and a guarantee that once a child has a professional staff allocated, there would be possible effective ways of reaching the key-worker in times of crises.

Li jkollna xi home bniet u subien. Imma imbagħad ma jkun hemmx kunfidenza żejda. Imma mqar, nafdawhom flimkien."

"That we should have a home for girls and boys. But everybody has to keep within the limits. But at least they should be trusted to be in each other's company."

Ma nafx kemm hemm social workers fil-homes tas-sisters...
Kieku nagħmel ħafna. Għax hemm bżonn....

I do not know how many social workers there are in the homes run by nuns ...I would appoint many more. There is the need ...

Għax aħna għandna social workers individwali, imma bħal issa qegħdin naqra taċ-ċajt. Dik in-nhar kelli bżonn vera inkellima. Inċempel, inċempel l-APPOĠĠ u veru qed ngħidlek...Jiena ma nafx, persuna tkun għaddejja minn problema, mhux tiegħi għax all right kienet urġenti, imma xi ħadd għaddej minn problema, domt nofs ta' nhar inċempel.

Tqabbdek waħda.. ‘zomm il-linja’... ‘jekk jogħġbok zomm il-linja għax il-linji bħal issa kolla okkupati’. Nofs in-nhar mid-disgħa ta' fil-għodu sas-siegħa ta' wara nofs in-nhar. Taç-çajt il-ħin kollu iċċempel u ma taqbadx.

We have an individual social worker, but presently not everything is well. Lately, I needed to contact my social worker. I phoned and phoned to try and get in touch with APPOĠĠ and believe me ... I can't understand, a person is experiencing a problematic moment, I'm not referring to my case although it was urgent too, but if someone is deeply in a problem, I spent the whole morning trying to get in touch. Somebody puts you through and asks you to ... 'hold the line' ... 'please hold the line because all the lines are engaged'. Should it be engaged all the time, from nine in the morning till one o'clock in the afternoon? It is absurd, having to spend all that time on the phone without succeeding to get through.

Conclusion

The rich data presented in this chapter portrays an informative source about the experience youngsters with very challenging behaviour go through as they start experiencing trouble and eventually end up in services meant to help them come to terms with their issues. Their valuable views provide us with some very concrete ideas of how to help them further.

4. CONCLUSION

Kieku kellek tgħid xi ħaġa dwar dan is-servizz lill-awtoritajiet, x'tgħidilhom?:
“Thank you talli jgħajnuna”

If you were to tell the authorities something about this service,
what would you tell them?
“Thank you for helping us.”

In conclusion the strengths and weaknesses of the study shall be presented, followed by recommendations for future research. The implications of the study will be summed up.

A. Strengths and weaknesses of the study.

The research group's decision to listen to the youngsters views and experience inevitably implied one major limitation to the study, this being that the children's perspectives have not been triangulated with other perspectives.

Another limitation resulted from the difficulty in defining *very challenging behaviour* and how to find children with such behaviour. Having decided that the children must be from the six chosen services, it transpired that the children interviewed did not all have challenging behaviour. In the end we felt that this was an important finding in itself and implies that greater scrutiny should be applied when placing children in such services.

The study did not include children with very challenging behaviour who are not currently in those six services. This decision however implied that a more comprehensive picture of these services could be elicited.

Another limitation is that when the data coming out of the interviews was being analysed, the reader could not identify the particular service the youngster was coming from. In some specific instances however this could not be avoided if not by censoring specific feedback given to us by the participants. Apart from the fact that analysing the six services together, had its own advantages, the decision was taken in an effort to protect the children's identity as well as refrain from putting particular services under the spotlight.

Another limitation is the way in which the students from St. Patrick's Craft Centre and Mater Dei School were selected. Whilst the process logically guaranteed having a smaller number of participants who *do* have challenging behaviour in practice, this was not really the case as not all of the children interviewed seemed to have challenging behaviour.

Such a limitation throws light on the referral process used within the education sector to refer a student from their original school to one of the two afore-mentioned special schools.

Also, notwithstanding having gathered the list of names, a large number of the children still did not participate. This was because whilst it was the parents who gave their consent for their children to take part in the research, a number of children did not want to participate. Moreover even though the parents left their particulars, the interviewers did not manage to get through to them.

Finally, another limitation is that the study only interviewed children who are between 10 and 18 years old. This means that it has not interviewed children younger than age 10 who have very challenging behaviour. To a certain extent, the age-bracket chosen allowed for further abstraction and the ability for the adolescents to come up with several suggestions. Moreover it was not feasible in terms of our resources to develop a totally different set of age appropriate interview questions



Daniel Schembri – Siggiewi – 10 years

and conduct a separate analyses of the information elicited from such children.

B. Recommendations for future research.

Most recommendations for further research arise from the limitations of the study. Firstly, it would be interesting to carry out similar interviews with children who have been in the six services but are now no longer using them. Their suggestions would be given with hindsight and would provide a different perspective to the experience.

Another area to look at would be obtaining the views of the primary carers and possibly the professional staff who would, without doubt, have several experiences to share and relevant suggestions to make. A study, which would triangulate such information with that of the children would throw light on the needs of the professional staff (e.g. areas for further training), the family, the parents/carers and the child.

Due consideration should be given to carrying out a study that collects the views of children who have challenging behaviour but who have *never* used one of the six services mentioned in this study.

The needs of children with a disability, such as autism for example, who may also present with very challenging behaviour need to be studied in their own right.

It is also very interesting to carry out research with those manifesting very challenging behaviour who seek help in the community without attending a service. It would be interesting to see what the experience is for such youngsters to be taken care of in the community. Was it the case that the parents or the youngsters themselves refuse to attend a service when this was suggested to them? Is the service in the community better in terms of outcome? Is it cheaper or is it more expensive?

Finally another study could attempt to gather the experiences and feelings of children with challenging behaviour who are less than 10 years

old. Such studies could be triangulated by the views of the parents and those of the professionals taking care of them.

C. Implications of the study

The themes and sub-themes that emerged through the study gave rise to a number of implications that need to be considered properly when addressing the issue about services for children with very challenging behaviour. The implications of the study have been gathered into the following three categories: those pertaining to the child, those related to the service and those that need to be addressed at a national level.

The child

First and foremost it is worth noting that all of the children that were interviewed came from a working class background (see Table B Parents Occupation). It would be interesting to see what happens to children with very challenging behaviour who come from middle class backgrounds. It may well be that they are the ones for whom parents seek help in the community probably in private practice rather than in state run clinics. As has been indicated earlier on, it would be valuable to pursue research in this area.

As for the youngsters at the service it transpired that for those who were attending residential programmes, separating the child from their family members gives rise to anxiety and to a sense of loss and longing which can hardly ever be compensated for. At the same time the majority of these children expressed deep regret and sadness about their unhappy family situation. Recognising such complex and difficult family situations, acknowledging them and perhaps even speaking about them with the child could help the child feel understood.

Attachment and significant relationships in the service emerged as major needs that the children have. Such a therapeutic framework, which acknowledges the need for a secure attachment with significant others, would help the professional staff to develop a warm and personal relationship with the youngsters. Such a framework would include

assessment prior to admitting the child to the service and would help in devising a care-plan that is tailor-made to address the individual child's needs.

It is clear that when relationships are based on trust, respect, and good communication, the child perceives the staff in a positive light. This implies the need for the professional staff to receive on-going specialised training, together with on-going supervision so as to minimise any possibility of burn out and so as to continuously provide support to the staff to maintain positive relationships with the children. Such training and supervision could help the professional staff to recognise the hardships that the children are going through and to understand their feelings of frustration, rebellion, anger, loneliness, loss, longing and at times claustrophobia.

The Service

A service should have a pleasant environment that is warm and welcoming to the child or adolescent. The atmosphere should give a feeling of safety and comfort, whilst at the same time allows the child to find and have some personal and private space. Effort should also be put in avoiding stigmatisation as much as possible.

A need emerged to revise the effectiveness of a service when the way it runs is based very much on regimental and rigid schedules and rules. The study implies that service-leaders need to question to what extent rigid rules help the individual child.

It is necessary to find a balance between maintaining structure and rules, and allowing for flexibility according to the child's needs, age, maturity and care plan. Moreover, the care plan and service should provide the child with things to do – with a number of activities, groups, and a timetable that fills up his/her time in a proactive and useful way.

The study also implies that it is fundamental for the staff to be continuously aware of the existing dynamics of the community. The professional staff needs to know how the residents get on together, what

conflicts they have and what relationships exist between them. Action must be taken when necessary, and support should be given to the children when they feel helpless and have difficulties in getting on with the others. The service-leaders should ensure that all the members of staff that have been employed have the right professional characteristics and aptitude for working with these children.

A clear implication is that the staff, parents and children need to know *what the service is catering for*. The findings in the study suggest that the child needs to know what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what happens when the rules are broken. The child needs to know why s/he is in the service and how the service is helping him. Furthermore, children who do not have challenging behaviour should *not* be placed in a service that addresses such behaviour. Rather they should be placed in an alternative setting, which addresses the needs of that child. For example, someone who can no longer remain in the original family due to abuse, should be placed in an alternative context (e.g. with foster parents or in a residential home) and not in a service which has the goals of addressing very challenging behaviour. It is also questionable as to how effective the service would be if its goals are: to address the challenging behaviour and simultaneously to be a residential home. Do the two goals compliment each other?

Several issues need to be addressed with the child including, for example, peer pressure and self-control. Also children need to be provided with the skills to make the right decisions, to consider short-term and long-term consequences and to cope with their situations. A number of children have several issues (e.g. related to family, cognitive, social, behavioural, emotional and mental health) that need to be addressed professionally. Opportunities to discuss, speak about, and work on such issues need to be provided for the child both through individual sessions and group sessions. This implies that a service needs to work hand in hand with psychologists, social workers, youth workers, family therapists, psychiatrists and so on.

It is clear that having clear aims, care plans and goals is a necessary pre-requisite for the service to be effective. This requires assessing the child, having clear guidelines, preparing action plans that are tailor-made to the needs of the child and following-up the child throughout. Goals should not be limited merely to how the child behaves in the service but how s/he behaves across contexts. Thus a multi-systemic approach is necessary where one works with the family, the school and the other contexts in the child's life. These conclusions also imply that, so as to address the issue of *challenging behaviour*, there needs to be a shift in focus. We can no longer aim at *eliminating the challenging behaviour* without first addressing the *individual child's needs*. Hopefully this will then result in eliminating the undesirable behaviour as a natural consequence.

A service must give space to the child to voice his/her opinions and suggestions, possibly to participate in choosing or planning the timetable and the activities, to have ownership in what is happening and to feel part of the service. It is essential that the staff adopts an approach that allows children to speak, that listens to the children, and that gives space for discussion, venting out feelings and dealing with conflict.

Policy Issues at National Level

Several suggestions were put forward by the children, which implied the need to re-assess some issues at a national level.

One main issue is the apparent need for a residential service for children who are too old to be in a children's home but yet too young to live independently. Another issue is the need to place further emphasis on intervention in schools. Many children have told us how they first started experiencing problems at school when they were still very young. Early intervention is crucial for such children. Teachers and parents need to be supported by other professionals in order to be able to provide care for these children. Clinical psychologists, family therapists and social workers who work hand in hand with the school can provide valuable intervention at this stage. This therapeutic infrastructure is still lacking in our schools when in fact we know that early intervention at a multi-

systemic level is the treatment of choice for children with challenging behaviour (Henegler, 2002)

Several findings in the study imply that it is necessary for services to work hand in hand to assist the child. This is especially the case when the support system fails to support the individual child, when there are gaps in the system, when there is too much red-tape and when procedures restrict or slow down the possibility of assisting the child effectively. These should be brought to the foreground and to the attention of the persons principally responsible for policy making, and for the provision of financial, legal and social support, in an official manner. Limitations, progress and changes should be recorded, assessed and revised continuously. This implies also the need for ministries to co-ordinate their resources, research and ideas in a way that minimises overlap and promotes synthesis towards addressing such issues (See KNF, 2003 Building Bridges) .

Conclusion

It may be regrettably far too late to provide substantial help to the youngsters who have generously shared their views and experiences with the interviewers forming part of the research team. Let us hope that the young children attending our schools and who are exhibiting oppositional behaviour will be given the attention they deserve. Oppositional behaviour does not necessarily have to develop into very challenging behaviour. •

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Appendix 1:
Interview Questions - Part A

Age: ____ **Nationality:** Maltese: __ Other: _____
Gender: Male __ Female __

How many are you in your family? ____

Siblings: (specify sexes and ages): _____

Parents: married __ separated __ single parent __
cohabitating __ mother dead __ Father dead __ Both dead __
Other _____

What do your parents do? They don't work __
Work: (specify) Mother: _____
Work: (specify) Father: _____

What are you currently doing?: Work (specify) _____
I don't work _____ School (specify year) _____
Other _____

Who do/did you live with before you came here? (depending on area)
Parents __ Only mother __ Only Father __ Grandparents __
Aunts/Uncles __ Friends __ Alone __ With partner __
Foster Parents __
Residential home /Institution(specify) _____
Other _____

Where are you from (village/town)? _____

For how long have you been residing at X? (depending on area):

Appendix 2:
Interview Questions – Part B
Maltese

Question 1: X'inhi l-esperjenza tieghek f'X? Kif tiddekrivi din l-esperjenza lil xi habib tieghek?

Probes:

- a) X'tghidlu dwar kif tqattghu l-hin hawnhekk?
- b) X'tghidlu dwar kif thossok hawn?
- c) Kif tmur mar-residenti l-oħra f'X?
- d) X'joghħbok hawnhekk?
- e) X'inhuma l-affarijiet li thoss li qed jghinuk hawnhekk?
- f) X'parir tagħti lil dan il-habib kieku kellu jiġi X?

Question 2: Kieku kellek tirrakkonta l-istorja tieghek dwar iż-żmien - ta' meta kont żgħir hafna sa llum - x'inhuma l-esperjenzi tieghek li żgur tinkludi?

Probes:

- a) Kieku kellek tiddekrivi iż-żmien li qattajt l-iskola, kif tiddekrivija? X'tghid?
- b) X'ġara wara li spiċċajt l-iskola? (depending on age)
- c) B'liema mod issemmi, jew tiddekrivi lil familja tieghek?
- d) Xi spjegazzjoni tagħti dwar kif spiċċajt hawnhekk f'X?

Question 3: Kieku kellek tghid xi haġa dwar dan is-servizz lill-awtoritajiet, x'tghidilhom?

Question 4: Kieku *inti* tikkmanda jew għandek il-poter li tbiddel xi affarijiet, jew toħloq xi servizzi ġodda f'Malta, li jistgħu ikunu ta' għajnunha għalik stess, jew għal xi żgħażaġh oħra (li għaddew minn esperjenzi simili bħal tieghek), b'hiex toħrog? X'idejat ikollok?

Question 5: Tixtieq iżżid xi haġa oħra?

YOU ARE...

by JX, 11 years

Y

YOU ARE THE LENSES TO MY GLASSES
YOU ARE THE RAINBOW AFTER A RAINY DAY
YOU ARE THE FEATHERS TO A BIRD
YOU ARE THE CANDLE ON MY BIRTHDAY CAKE.

YOU ARE THE SAUCE ON MY SPAGHETTI
YOU ARE THE HOOK TO MY FISHING ROD
YOU ARE THE SHEETS TO MY BED
YOU ARE THE INK IN MY PEN.

YOU ARE THE TEA BAG IN MY TEA
YOU ARE THE NICE BREEZE IN THE MORNING
YOU ARE THE LEATHER TO MY BOOTS
YOU ARE THE THING THAT I NEVER LOSE.

YOU ARE THE CHAMPAGNE TO MY VICTORY
YOU ARE THE NOTE TO MY TRUMPET
YOU ARE THE POWER FOR MY COMPUTER
YOU ARE ALWAYS WINNER NEVER LOSER

YOU ARE THE WATER FOR MY THIRST
YOU ARE THE FOOD FOR MY HUNGER
WHEN I HAVE A QUESTION
YOU ARE THE ANSWER

The 11-year old boy who penned this poem claims to have written it while keeping in mind the mother he yearns for. His life so far has been largely spent with relatives and foster families rather than with his mother, sisters and brother. He has been through seven schools and is currently living in care.

It is not often that something these kind of children do ends up in the newspapers... except maybe for all the wrong reasons, and usually this happens when these kids give vent to their strong feelings and captivate our attention... in ways that we adults then call "challenging behaviour".

However, a poem like this one, recently published in a local newspaper, gives us an insight at the depth of their thoughts, perceptions and feelings - and the need they have to express it, in whichever way they can. With the right kind of support, these children can survive their often grievous problems and do something positive with their lives, so much so that it would be worth investing in them, rather than writing them off..