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## Quality in Alternative Care – What do young people think?

Findings of the SOS Longitudinal Study



**SOS  
KINDERDORF**

25 Years Latvian Association of SOS CV – October 5th, 2022  
Dr. Yvonne Kaiser, SPI, SOS Children's Village, Germany



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2. **About SOS Longitudinal Study**
3. **Quality4Children as Framework**
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  - Relationships
  - Belonging
  - Participation
  - Education
  - Preparation for independent living
  - Time in Care in retrospect



- The legal foundation in Germany is the so called *Youth Welfare Law*, Book VIII of the German Social Code (SGB VIII)
- Legally two different kinds of alternative care

**Foster Care** ( § 33 SGB VIII)  
also kinship care

**Residential Care** ( § 34 SGB VIII)  
in a home or other  
supported accommodation

- The person with parental responsibility has the legal entitlement to the service.



<http://www.hzemonitor.akjstat.tu-dortmund.de/>

Number of Cases 2020	Foster Care § 33 SGB VIII	Residential Care § 34 SGB VIII
Number of young people (in care)	89.736	126.912
Average Age (at beginning of care)	7,1 years	13,7 years
Average Duration (at termination of care)	49,7 months	21 months



SOS CV Kaiserlautern



SOS CV Worpswede

## Residential Care ( § 34 SGB VIII)

The development in residential care during the past years includes:

- differentiation of facilities,
- the construction of small homes close to home based placements and care similar to a family situation,
- improvement in post-care supervision,
- a fundamental development towards decentralization and flexibility.



- **Federal initiative in Germany called “Future Forum on Residential Care” (2019-2021)**
- funded by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth
- central development needs and structural features of successful residential care were elaborated and publicly discussed
- Expertise Paper highlights fundamental requirements for the advancement of residential child and youth care in Germany

### Future Impulses for the further development



- Ensuring that the **fundamental rights** of children and young people and the social rights of young individuals and their parents are upheld!
- Shaping residential care as a place for enabling **non-discriminatory participation** of young people in the social and institutional environment of growing up!
- Conceptualising residential care as a facility for enabling **educational** and developmental processes!
- Enforcing „**inclusive residential care**“ for young individuals with disabilities!
- Empowering **self-advocacy** in residential care!

Analyses of our panel study data show that about every fifth youth who is living in an SOS facility previously lived in a foster family for at least three months.

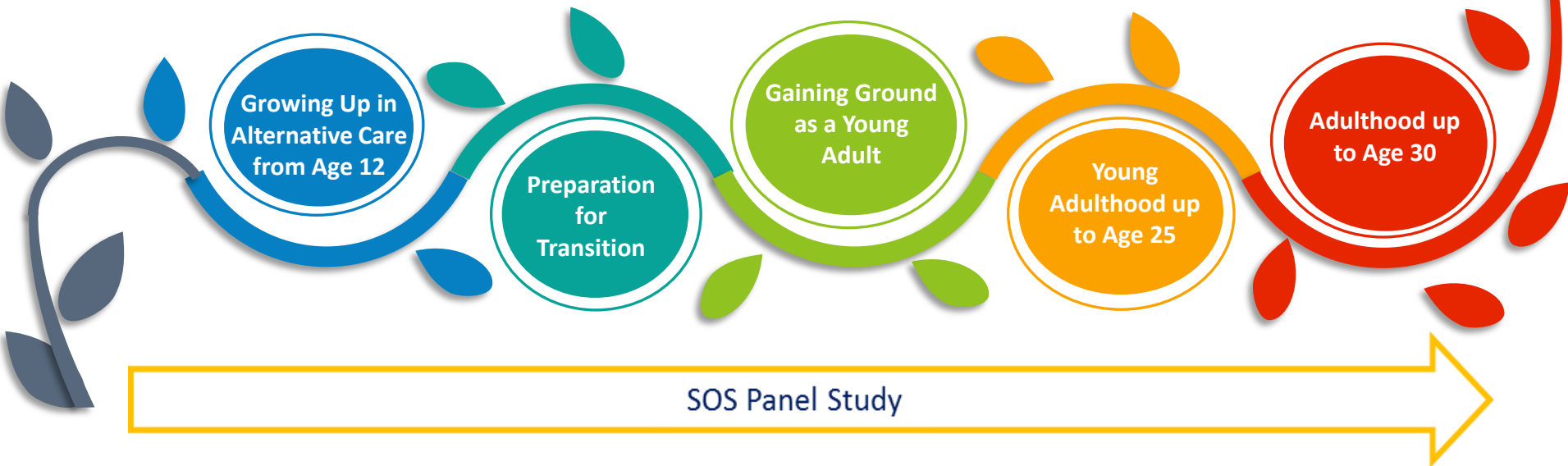


## Experiences with Foster Care

*"I was in about three, four foster families, in an childrens` home, and am now in the SOS Children's Village, that was six stations for sure. [...] I actually came to the SOS Children's Village because it unfortunately didn't work out in one foster family and since there were difficulties, and after ten years I said for my part, this can't go on. [...] the foster family [...] kept taking in more children. [...] And they were only concerned with their own problems [...]. And they finally just completely ignored me."*  
(Laura, 21 years old)

*"I came to a foster family when I was two. It was actually O.K. And then, somehow, I don't know why, for some reason it didn't work out. Then, when I was six, I was in a childrens` home for a year. This was not so great [...] and then when I was seven [...] I came to the Children's Village [...] from the very beginning it felt directly like a home, it felt different than at the other places. I immediately knew that I had arrived."*  
(Valentina, 20 years old)





The goal of the SOS Longitudinal Study is

- to examine individual development processes and transitions over a longer time and
- to continually improve our pedagogic practise on site in the homes based on this empirical basis.

“What does it mean for young people not to grow up in their own families?”



“What do they experience growing up in an institution?”

We ask about different life spheres:

- social relationships
  - education
- health and well-being
- burdens and life-satisfaction
- and different aspects of the support they receive

“What do young people need to be able to lead a life according to their own conceptions?”

## Mixed Methods Approach

### Quantitative Data

- \_ every two years since 2014
- \_ in 29 SOS facilities

**Questionnaires**

**2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022**



### Qualitative Data

- \_ every two years since 2015

**Interviews**

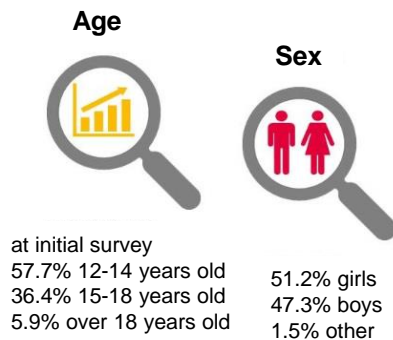
**2015, 2017, 2019, 2021**



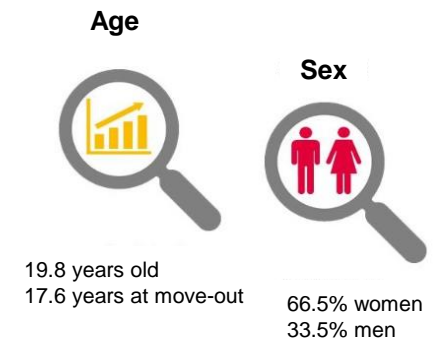
## How many young people have been included in the SOS Panel Study so far?

<b>1144</b> (only as residents)	<b>354</b> (as residents and as careleavers)	<b>1498</b> (altogether)
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### Residents



### Care Leavers



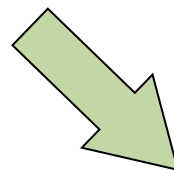


- The mission of Quality4Children (Q4C) is to improve the situation and development chances of children in out-of-home care.
- The Q4C Standards have been developed in the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## Quality4Children Standards - Standard Area 1:

### Decision-making and admission process

- Standard 1: The child and his/her family of origin receive support during the decision-making process
- Standard 2: The child is empowered to participate in the decision-making process
- Standard 3: A professional decision-making process ensures the best possible care for the child
- Standard 4: Siblings are cared for together
- Standard 5: The transition to the new home is well prepared and sensitively implemented
- Standard 6: The out-of-home care process is guided by an individual care plan



## Quality4Children - Standard Area 2:

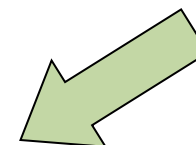
### Care-taking process

- Standard 7: The child's placement matches his/her needs, life situation and original social environment
- Standard 8: The child maintains contact with his/her family of origin
- Standard 9: Caregivers are qualified and have adequate working conditions
- Standard 10: The caregiver's relationship with the child is based on understanding and respect
- Standard 11: The child is empowered to actively participate in making decisions that directly affect his/her life
- Standard 12: The child is cared for in appropriate living conditions
- Standard 13: Children with special needs receive appropriate care
- Standard 14: The child/young adult is continuously prepared for independent living

## Quality4Children - Standard Area 3:

### Leaving-care process

- Standard 15: The leaving-care process is thoroughly planned and implemented
- Standard 16: Communication in the leaving-care process is conducted in a useful and appropriate manner
- Standard 17: The child/young adult is empowered to participate in the leaving-care process
- Standard 18: Follow-up, continuous support and contact possibilities are ensured



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## **Standard 12: The child is cared for in appropriate living conditions**

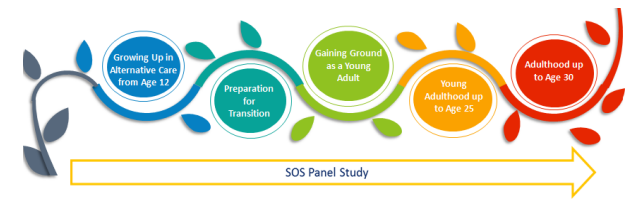
- **The living standards and infrastructure of the care organisation satisfy the child's needs in respect to comfort, security, healthy living conditions as well as uninhibited access to education and to the community.**

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# Q4C Standards and SOS Findings



## Findings on:

Belonging

Caregiver's Relationship

Participation

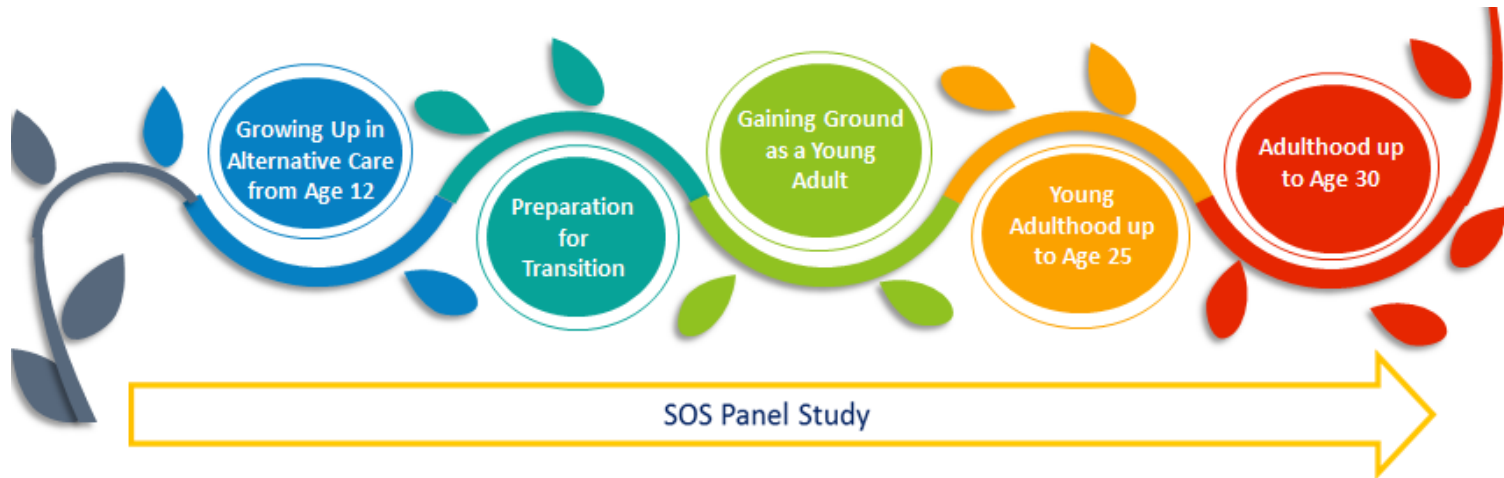
Education

Preparation for independent living

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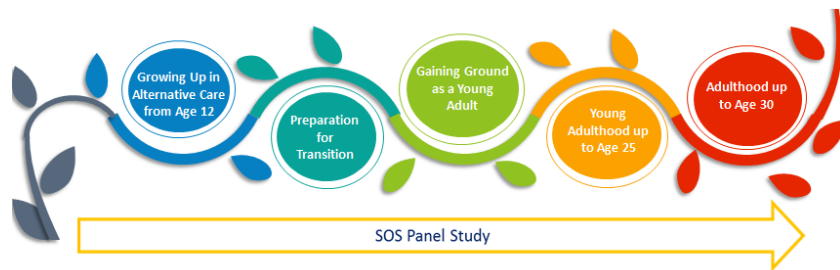


## What do young people say about

- Belonging
- Social Relationships
- Participation
- Education
- Preparation for independent living
- Time in Care in retrospect



## Q4C-Standard 8: The child maintains contact with his/her family of origin



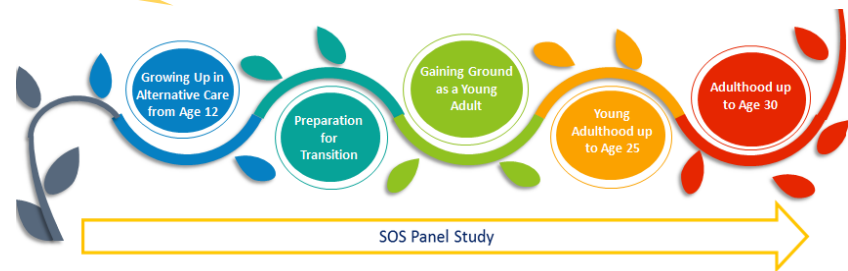
*"She (the birth mother) visited us regularly in the Children's Village [...] and when I got older, we could drive there, where she lived."  
(Niko, 27 years old)*

*"In the Children's Village [...], the very first year when I lived there, my mother came by. [...] And then we were in a care-planning discussion, and she was also there. But really active contact never actually existed."  
(Valentina, 20 years old)*

## Q4C-Standard 8: The child maintains contact with his/her family of origin

Jimmy's (17 years old) caregiver reported:

*"Jimmy has two homes. I believe that being here (at SOS) is okay for him and that it is a bit of an everyday nest and also a protective place. And then there is the great longing for his family, his biological family. For him, when he compares them with one another, it (the family) is at least as important, yes."*



**Double allegiance to both the SOS and the family of origin**



## At Home Both Here and There

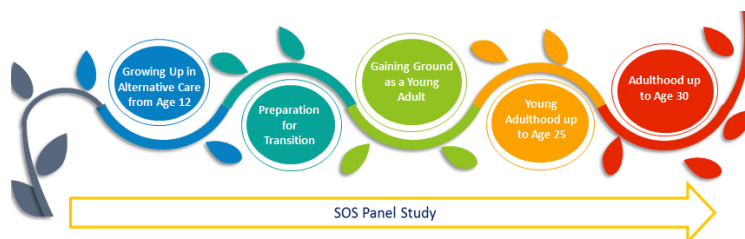
- About 1/3 of the young people in SOS care (32%) feel at home both in the Children's Village as well as in their own families.
- This "double allegiance" makes it easier for them to profit from their time in the SOS facility. Their well-being and life satisfaction are comparatively strongly formed. They regard the supportive system positively.

Questionnaires filled out by youth in SOS care between 2011 and 2018, initial questionnaires: n = 906

### Q4C-Standard 10: The caregiver's relationship with the child is based on understanding and respect

*"I really value the Children's Village a lot because the caregivers were the first ones in my whole life who appreciated me and my strengths, my characteristics, my character [...]. And that actually [...] changed my whole worldview and that of myself. That was crazy."  
(Laura 21, years old)*

*"They never said, you did that and that wrong, and they never scolded, but had a really good and neutral view of what had happened and then looked for a solution. And we always had fun and, yes, one simply [...] felt protected and also that somebody really wants for things to go well for one in the future."  
(Thorsten, 25 years old)*





### Trusting relationships as a resource

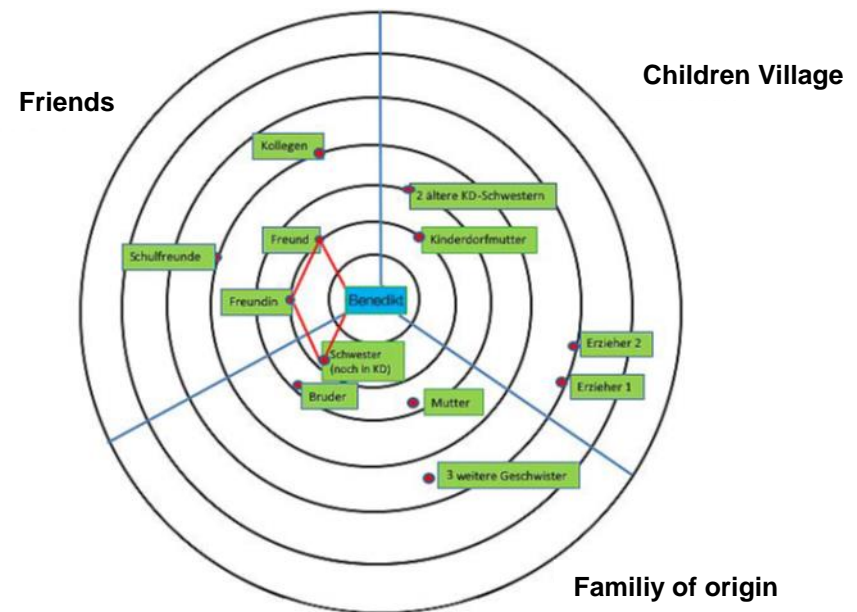
- 60% of the youths in the SOS Children's Village families or group homes say that they have a trusting relationship to at least one of their caregivers. For 32% this is just partly the case.
- Leaving the community of the Children's Village constitutes a severe break in the life of the SOS care leavers.
- Social relationships are an important source of support during transition into autonomy.

Relationship to our trained personnel: questionnaires answered by residents in 2020, n = 468  
Relationship with siblings: questionnaires answered by residents in 2018: n = 424  
and by former residents in 2020: n = 203

## Social Networks – resources und challenges:

- The creation and maintenance of strong networks often constitutes a great challenge for the young people.
- Care Leavers have primarily small networks.
- A “friend” is “important” or “very important” in the lives of 89% of the interviewed SOS Care Leavers (n=328)\*.
- For many, the SOS Children`s Village mother is an important role model, even after leaving.

## Care Leaver´s Social Network Map

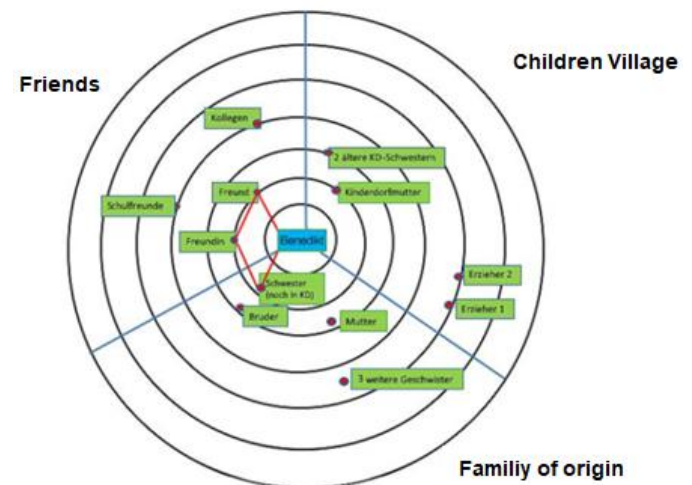


\* SOS Panel Study Care Leavers 2015-2020, first survey as Care Leaver

## Recommendations

- **Competency in networking should be strengthened as early as possible.** While they are still in care, care leavers require support in the process of becoming emotionally autonomous and in creating sustainable external peer networks.
- **Release from the community must be consciously prepared.** Transition requires the professionals to consciously perform the change in the care relationship during the care leaver's process of becoming independent.

Careleaver's Social Network Map





## Educational Differences

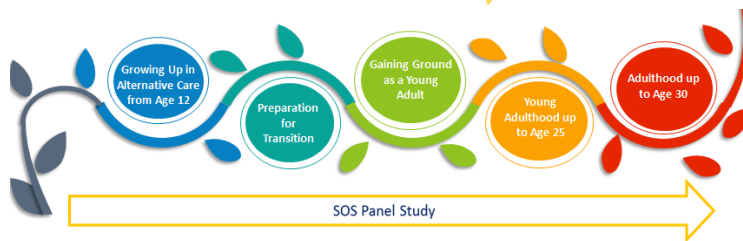
- 9% of SOS care leavers had no school-leaving certificate, 9% attended a school for children with special needs, 36% received a graduation certificate of secondary education, 34% received a general certificate of secondary education (level 1) and 11% achieved a university-entrance qualification (A Levels).
- In contrast, 50% of their same-aged peers achieved their A Levels or advanced technical college entrance qualification.

34% of the questionnaires filled out by 251 former residents in 2015, 2016, and 2018; Educational Report 2020, p. 143.

## Q4C-Standard 12: The child is cared for in appropriate living conditions (including uninhibited access to education)

*"My Children's Village mother often gave me a shove; otherwise I wouldn't be where I am today. I got relatively good A-Level results. If she had not been there, I probably would not have completed it at all."  
(Karolin, 20 years old)*

*"That was also a little bit the Children's Village mother [...], because I always said that I wouldn't get into medical school, and then she said, yes, you will, you will manage, try to get you're A-Levels. Even if you don't get it, you will still have completed your specialist training. Then she showed me the way, that I should do it anyway and finish it [...]. And then she said, yes, you will succeed, you only have to believe it and we will help you."  
(Valentina, 20 years old)*



## Q4C-Standard 11: The child is empowered to actively participate in making decisions that directly affect his/her life

### Contact to family of origin

- A majority of the young people in care felt they were well involved. 84 % said that they were able to take part in decision-making or that they were asked their opinion.

Questionnaires filled out by residents in 2020: n = 434



*"My Children's Village mother always left it open, she said if you want to see them (the family of origin), don't worry, then we'll immediately arrange a meeting. But then if I said, no, I don't want to see them, that was also okay. She left it completely up to me. And then we usually settled it so that I only met my biological mother during the help-planning discussions.  
(Karolin, 20 years old)"*

## Q4C-Standard 11: The child is empowered to actively participate in making decisions that directly affect his/her life

### Group regulations

- 74.8 % of the young people in care marked that they were involved in setting up group regulations and could partake in decision-making or were asked their opinions on the topic.



*"I finally really had problems with the group regulations, and that was the reason why I wanted to get away from here." (Kiara, 21 years old)*



## Opportunities to Participate

- Over half (61.5%) of the young people in our care are satisfied or very satisfied with the participatory opportunities in the SOS facilities, 30.5% are indifferent or undecided, and only 7.9% are not at all satisfied.
- Only 38% of the care leavers reported that they had not or not sufficiently been involved in their passage into self-determination.

Questionnaires filled out by residents in 2020: n = 442

Questionnaires filled out by former residents in 2020, initial enquiry: n = 93

## Q4C-Standard 14: The child/young adult is continuously prepared for independent living

*"My Children's Village mother taught us that early. [...] washing clothes, washing up, cooking, things like that, dealing with money, which is really existential. [...] that was subliminal from the very beginning [...] simply part of the upbringing."*  
(Karolin, 20 years old)



### Preparation

- in every day routine
- in special group programs
- in special living programs

*"There was a group every Tuesday from 3 to 5 pm. Then all sorts of things like contracts etc. were quasi explained in lectures."* (Tarek, 23 years old)

*"In the shared living quarters for youth in which I lived, there were two apartments, one was available to learn how to live independently and to be more independent. And where all money was provided, whether for groceries [...] to see if you were able to move out."* (Ines, 23 years old)



## Prepared for Moving Out

- 58.9% of care leavers reported that they had been well prepared to move out during their stay in the Children's Village.
- Professional supervision before, during and after moving out is important. This should encompass a wide range of supportive measures and be tailored to the individual's needs.

Interviews with former residents in 2016 to 2020: n =17;  
Questionnaires answered by former residents in 2020, initial enquiry: n = 90

### Summarized Findings

\_ stabilized in life situation and character, gained competence in independent living

\_ prevented from becoming socially isolated, had a good life, not disturbed by negative parental influence

\_ experienced community membership and gained self-confidence, helped to cope with the past

\_ enabled to attend school regularly and acquire school-leaving qualifications, managed transition into vocational training or study



SOS Panel Study Care Leavers  
2015, 2017, 2019

**The interviewees reported an overall positive influence while growing up in SOS care.**

# Five Attitudes in Retrospect

Questionnaire

## Growing up in SOS facilities as ...

### **"Rescue"**

It was good to grow up in a SOS facility; otherwise life would have been worse. Alternative care had a sustainable influence and was the best thing that happened to me.

### **"Chance"**

Time in care gave a positive direction to life and opened up many possibilities; growing up in the youth welfare system is part of their own biography.

### **"Blemish"**

It still feels awkward having grown up in a SOS facility, and nobody should know about it. They are still sad and angry about not having grown up in their families of origin.

### **"Normality"**

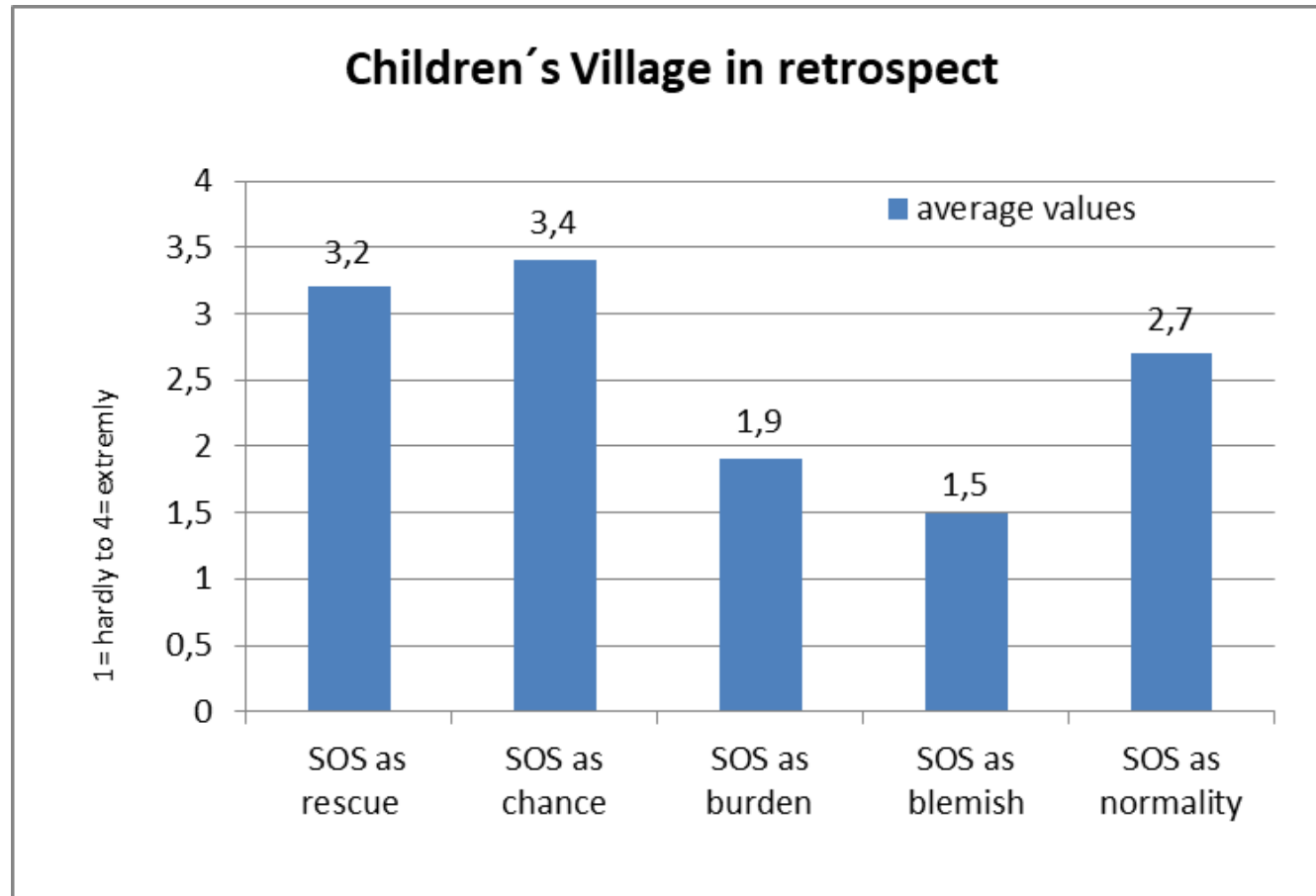
Care leavers treat growing up in care openly and discuss it with other persons, even if they aren't close friends.

### **"Burden"**

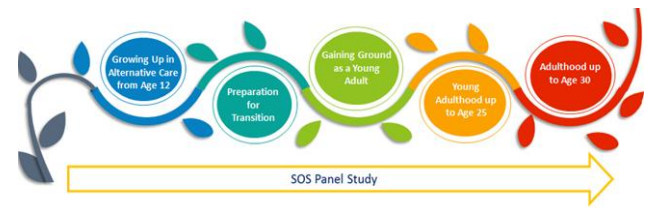
They had experiences in SOS care that are still present in their minds and also have the impression that others treat them badly when they find out they lived in the youth welfare system.



## The average characteristics of the five basic attitudes



## SOS Study: Conclusions



- **Belonging:** “Double allegiance” makes it easier for young people in care to profit from their time in the SOS facility. Their well-being and life satisfaction are comparatively strongly formed.
- **Social Relationships:** Reliable relationships are a very important resource during the time in care and give young people the needed support to enable them to master the transition into independence. Competency in networking should be strengthened as early as possible.
- **Education:** The young people in SOS care complete their education with low school-leaving qualifications. Confidence and support by a trusted person and individual encouragement can help the person in care to increase their educational efforts and expanding their capacities.
- **Participation** is a central operating principle in youth welfare. Opportunities to participate in the facilities have not yet been satisfactorily implemented in all areas and must urgently be further improved.
- **Preparation to independent living:** The care leavers feel well prepared for their everyday, practical tasks. More attention must be paid to psychosocial factors. The supportive measures must be designed individually and according to need.

## Thank You for Your Attention!

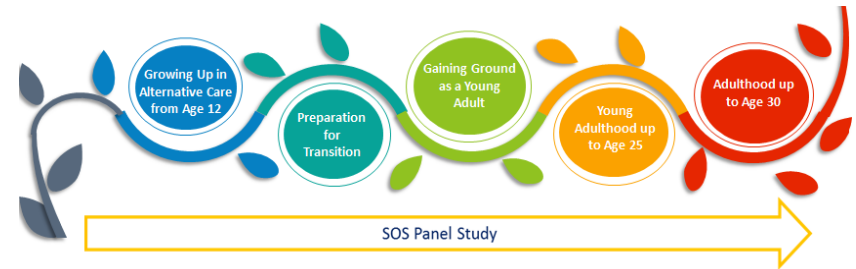
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