

THEY THINK THEY KNOW BEST

152 children aged 11-18 about
residential childcare institutions



C O N T E N T S

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Changefactory Knowledge Centre
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Photo: Knut Stormoen, Morten Brun
The photos are of participants in the survey

T H A N K Y O U

A million times thank you, to you brave, strong and kind children who have shared your experiences and given advice for this report. Thank you for the valuable experience and advice. We hope national authorities, politicians, professionals and students take the advice seriously and use it wisely. Know that you are wise, good and important. You know what it feels like to live in an institution, and what it takes for the institutions to feel safe and feel like a home. Norway needs this knowledge.

Without you, it wouldn't have been possible to bring forth this important knowledge. We are deeply grateful that you have shared experiences and given advice, so that children can be met safely and get useful help in institutions.

THANK YOU FROM OUR HEARTS

About the qualitative survey

The qualitative survey THEY THINK THEY KNOW BEST has collected experiences and advice from 152 children aged 11-18. The children have lived in institutions throughout the country, from north to south. They live or had recently lived in residential emergency childcare institutions, residential childcare institutions, residential childcare institutions for treatment and residential childcare institutions for children with behavioural issues at the time of sessions and one-to-one conversations. The institutions were private, non-profit - and state institutions.

The right to speak about the system

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child(UNCRC), children, regardless of age, have the right to express themselves about how they experience all systems that concern them. This applies to kindergartens, schools, mental health services and child protective services. Children have this right as individuals (UNCRC art. 12 no. 1) and the right also applies to children as a group (General Comment no. 12 paragraph 9).

Conducting the qualitative survey

The qualitative survey was conducted in 2018-2020. The children in the survey were invited through residential childcare institutions and child protection services. All the children were informed that they could choose whether they wanted to participate, that they could participate in sessions together with other children or alone, that they could choose how much or little they wanted to say, and that they could withdraw at any time, without having to explain why. They were also told that the experiences and advice they shared would be summarised and anonymised. No one would know exactly what they had said. After the sessions and conversations, the researchers were available to the participants, to be able to support and answer any questions.

Out of consideration for privacy and the individual participant, the researchers worked to ensure that the children's history or family did not become the focus in the sessions. The focus was on their encounter with the system and advice for this. Consent was obtained in accordance with current regulations.

Question and themes

The children were first asked open-ended questions, then in-depth questions on recurring themes. A semi-structured interview guide was used, with formulations for in-depth questions. The participants were informed from the start that everything written down would be anonymised.

Main themes

Good about living in an institution
Safe about living in an institution
Not so good about living in an institution
Unsafe about living in an institution
Help to have a better everyday life
Help to feel better on the inside
Adults children feel safe with
Qualities and background for adults in institutions
Information
The right to express oneself freely
Good care in institutions
Participation in decision-making at institutions
Solutions that Norway needs when children cannot live at home

About the results

Answers that were repeated by many children were summarised in the form of text or bullet points. Each percentage is calculated based on how many people answered the question.

The word children

The participants in the qualitative survey were aged 11-18. In this report, we have chosen to use the definition in Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that every person under the age of 18 is a child.

CHANGEFACTORY

KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Why knowledge directly from children?

Children and young people have to feel that the school, kindergarten, support services, police and legal system are safe and useful for them. Children and young people all over Norway have experiences from meeting these systems and advice on how they can be the best possible. Authorities, professionals and students often lack this knowledge from children and young people, when frameworks and what constitutes good practice are to be determined, nationally and locally. Therefore, it must be brought in to a much greater extent and, together with other knowledge, be part of the knowledge base, in order to develop and ensure the quality of good systems for children and young people.

More than 10 years of collecting knowledge

For more than 10 years, Changefactory (CF) has systematically collected experiences and advice from children and young people about how they experience school, kindergarten, support services, the police and the legal system. In 2017, the Prime Minister opened Changefactory Knowledge Centre, to collect knowledge from children and young people about the public systems. As far as we know, there are few knowledge centres in Europe whose main purpose is to gather and disseminate knowledge directly from children and young people about the systems they are in. CF seeks collaboration with similar organisations.

Participatory and practice-oriented method

In order to collect, systematise and disseminate summarised experiences and advice from children and young people, a participatory and practice-oriented method is used. CF has called it the Changemethod. The Changemethod has been developed in close collaboration with children and young people. It greatly considers that children have the right to express their opinion, in ways that feel safe for them. The method consists of process descriptions and tools that help many diverse children and young people to participate. It's based closely on a participatory method used in action research, called Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

Safety is most important

The experiences and advice are collected directly from children and young people in sessions or interviews. The sessions are organised with an emphasis on ensuring that they are experienced as safely as possible for the children and young people who participate. The adults who facilitate are, among other things, trained by children to meet children and young people with openness and human warmth. This is based on the main findings from children about what adults have to be like, in order for children to be able to tell honestly.

Experiences and advice are summarised

Experiences and advice from the sessions are documented in transcripts and other written and visual documentation. The data is summarised and systematised. No links are made to theory. Experiences and advice that are repeated by many children and young people in many places in the country, become the main answers. We call this knowledge directly from children.

Children and young people present

The knowledge from children is presented in reports, films, podcasts, books and online. Participants in the qualitative surveys can also be invited, as pros, in communication and professional development. The pros present knowledge directly from children to politicians, national authorities, professionals and students.

Selected publications



Not mean

Advice from 103 children on how conversations, interrogations and punishment can be done in safe and helpful ways



If I was your child

Advice from 63 children about coercion in mental health care



Wisdom about drug abuse

Advice from 58 young people on how adults can meet drug abuse in safe ways



Angry on the outside, hurting on the inside

Advice from 101 children on how to meet children and young people who are angry and use violence



Needs to help for us

Advice from 101 children on how family guidance has to be for it to feel safe and helpful for children

Dear adults in residential childcare institutions

Dear all of you who show us love and are curious

You who try to make it safe for us to talk

You who collaborate with us to find solutions

Those of you who know how important it is not to talk behind our backs

You who do a little extra, so that we can feel safe

You who try to reach in to the pain we have in our hearts

You who think that we are kind and do the best we can

You who stop us in a safe way, when we are struggling

Dear brave, kind, warm and safe adults

We are grateful that you exist

We know that you have had to endure a lot of hurtful things

Anger, yelling, closed doors, screaming, harsh and hurtful words and rude answers

We understand that you can be both scared and provoked in those situations

Thank you for still meeting us calmly, and with lots of warmth and honesty

Thank you for reminding us that you know that we are kind

Also when we say or do bad things

We know that you can be bad-mouthed by other adults

As adults who do not set limits for us or stop us

Or who are too kind

But know that you are the kind of people who save lives

Know that we can remember you for a long time, as the good adults

Someone who shows us that there are adults who wish us well

Someone who is important in our lives

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for that

We think you know that we do bad things because we are hurting

We know that many people want to meet us in ways that feel safe to us

Although we don't always notice it in the situations

We believe that most of you want to make it safe for us

We believe that many of you know that we are kind, not dangerous or mean

We believe that you know that we are not sick, even if many people talk about us like that

We know that you lack the frames that allow you to show this

We hope this report can be taken seriously

so that you can get such a framework

1000 CHILDREN

Menon Economics: Currently, there are around 1000 children and young people living in residential childcare institutions in Norway at any given time. In total, more than 13000 full-time-equivalens are employed in the Child Protection System, with just under 1000 of these working in the institutions. In other words, the institutions seize a large share of the resources in child protection, both measured in terms of number of employees and money.

In 2019, 53 percent, or NOK 3.9 billion, went to the purchase and financing of institutional places. This is despite the fact that the institutional places comprise a small proportion of children and young people who are at all times under the care of the Child Protection System (approx. 8 percent).

Changes that contribute to increasing the quality and efficiency of this part of the Child Protection System could have a major impact on the well-being and development of children and young people over time. Furthermore, such changes could have major financial consequences and could free up resources for other work for children and young people in a difficult situation. (publication no. 54/2020, page 6)

Lack of knowledge from children about the benefits

According to Menon's report, almost NOK 4,000,000,000 (312.5 million GBP) and 53% of Norway's budget for the Child Protection System goes to residential childcare institutions. It costs approximately NOK 3.9 million on average for each of the 1,000 children in institutions.

Residential childcare institutions are the most invasive measure for children in the Child Protection System. Many reports have pointed out serious errors and major challenges at the institutions. Reports from the Civil Ombudsman, The Office of the Auditor General of Norway (OAG), the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision, the Norwegian Ombudsperson for Children and Sintef all have important and serious messages. This report, with experiences and advice from 152 children in institutions, comes in addition to the reports mentioned above.

Norway does not know if it's useful

- How many of the 1,000 children feel that the institution is in their best interests?
- How many of the 1,000 children experience feeling safer?
- How many of the 1000 children experience feeling better inside?
- How many of the 1,000 children experience getting a better everyday life?

Norway does not have answers to any of the questions above.

Could this then be the right use of resources?

We have no certain knowledge from children about the benefits.

NOK 3.9 million on average for each child. When so many resources are used, there must be answers from children that the institutions are helping them. The quality of residential childcare institutions, seen from the child's point of view, must be measured.

Children are guinea pigs

Norway lacks knowledge:

- there is no knowledge from children that shows that today's residential childcare institutions are perceived as safe and useful for children
- there is no knowledge from children that standardised ways of meeting them and treatment methods help children

Norway is experimenting:

- when frameworks and initiatives are created that are not based on surveys with feedback from many children, in many places in the country
- when national bureaucrats and experts come up with the solutions for safe and useful institutions for the children concerned, without knowing from the children concerned

Norway is obliged to follow the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- help must be given based on a concrete assessment of what is in the best interests of each child
- the framework for which Child Protection workers must ensure children's procedural rights according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- "The emphasis on 'matters that affect them' in article 12 implies the ascertainment of the views of particular group of children on particular issues." The state is obliged to listen to their views and give them weight in the drafting of new legislation.

Children are guinea pigs when we do not systematically and regularly collect feedback from them. The findings in this report show this.

Norway must find out from the "customers"

One of the boys who took part in the survey explained that he was often asked what he needed, in shops and in restaurants. He thought this was because they wanted to gain trust, so that he would buy what they had to offer. In order to do that, they had to ask him what was needed.

He believed that residential childcare institutions should do the same. They should ask what is needed to make it safe to live at the institution. And what they do should be based on his answers. He found it very strange that so many shops and places to eat were much more concerned with asking him what he needed, than the institution where he needed it the most.

The answers in this survey show that the institutions to a small extent are structured in this way. Customers are constantly asked about what is important to them and what can be done better. Children in institutions rarely get asked about this. When they are in a lot of pain and show it with strong expressions of pain, they get even fewer questions. Some adults are the exception, they ask, take to heart what the children say and they save lives.

Shouldn't Norway ensure quality with answers from the children?

Shouldn't we find out from them whether they feel safe and feel better when they live in a residential childcare institution?

Shouldn't we have residential childcare institutions that can meet children based on what each individual child says is safe, without standardised arrangements and methods?

VITAL NATIONALLY



Living safely measures

Residential childcare institutions of the future

Since 2009, children in residential childcare institutions around Norway have given advice on how institutions need to be in order to feel safe and useful. The answers children in residential childcare institutions shared with the management of The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) in 2009 and with national authorities in the following years are frighteningly similar to the answers children have shared in recent years, with the Ministry of Children and Families, Bufdir and parliamentary politicians.

The advice in 2009 and in this qualitative survey is frighteningly similar

The children who have taken part in qualitative surveys have, year after year, given advice on fundamental changes, so that residential childcare institutions will be safe and useful. In order to know what is safe and useful for children, children have known that national authorities have to make a choice, to fundamentally understand the advice given by children. If they wanted to, they could make the changes that were most important to those whom the residential childcare institutions are supposed to help.

The residential childcare institutions of the future must be measures where children can be LIVING SAFELY. To be successful, the solutions must be A LOT more based on the advice of children in residential childcare institutions.

The descriptions of the residential childcare institutions of the future that follow here - Living safely - have been prepared by a group of young people with experience from institutions. They have familiarised themselves with the advice Changefactory has received from children in institutions, from 2009 until now. They have also familiarised themselves with children's rights to how they should be met, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Children request that four types of measures be made:

LIVING SAFELY emergency
LIVING SAFELY care
LIVING SAFELY drug abuse
LIVING SAFELY enforced

Municipal measures

In order for children not to have to move far away, if they do not think they need it themselves, there must be municipal and inter-municipal measures in all regions, it often feels much safer. It can also make it easier to stay in touch with important people in their lives. The measures must be based on children's needs and have flexible frameworks, adaptation to each individual child and a mixed group of staff including staff with their own experience from the Child Protection System.

The admission offices must be located in the municipalities, but may be inter-municipal. If the Child Protection System wants to move a child to the LIVING SAFELY measure, they contact the admissions office. The adults at the admissions office always meet the child first and then make suggestions for places. The child can then visit the measures. If they wish, they can bring an adult they trust. After the visit, children must always be allowed to express themselves freely, about whether they would like to live there.

Building on knowledge from children

How it is decided that children will be moved, organised, rules and routines must be made based on what knowledge from children who live or have recently lived in an institution say is important. Experts and specialists cannot have the heaviest votes when the solutions are to be determined. Initiatives and skills enhancement cannot be started without ensuring that this has been taken in to account and is based on a knowledge base that also includes knowledge from many children.

Securing children's rights

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child became part of Norwegian law in 2003. In the event of a conflict, it takes precedence over what is stated in special laws. The Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children procedural rights to ensure how they are met by adults. The duty to secure these rights apply when an action or decision is to be taken that concerns the child. Situations like this arise all the time in institutions, and consequently the procedural rights must be secured:

- Decisions must be made in the best interests of the child
- Children have the right to receive all important information
- Children have the right to express themselves freely
- Children have the right to respect for their privacy

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is clear about the fact that these rights are legally linked. In order to assess what is in the best interests of the child, the child must be allowed to express itself freely. In order for the child to express itself freely, the child must receive sufficient and comprehensible information, and the child's right to have what they say protected must be safeguarded. When one of the rights is violated, the child's best interests cannot be properly assessed.

The views of the child, central to assess what is in the best interests of the child

The view of the child must be the starting point for the assessment of the child's best interests. How much weight the view of the child should be given must be based on a concrete assessment, for each individual child.

The assessment cannot be defined by what research or recognised practice recognises as important, or by the professional's opinion. If the child's views are not to be given decisive weight, the consequences must be assessed. It must be justified and documented that what is to be done or decided outweighs the disadvantages of not giving importance to what the child has said.

Children's right to information

Children need to know about what the situation is, what needs to be done or decided and what information the adults have. Children must receive new information throughout the process and information must be repeated, if necessary. The information must be provided in a considerate and understandable manner. It must be ensured, as far as possible, that children have understood the content and significance of the information. Children have the right to know what can happen to what the child shares, before they start expressing their views.

Children's right to express themselves freely and safely

Children have the right to express themselves freely about what they believe is in their best interest, before an action is taken or a decision is made. Adults cannot assess what is in the child's best interests, without this being ensured in advance. Being able to speak freely means that the child must be able to talk to someone the child trusts, in a place that feels safe and without influence or pressure.

When something important to the child is to be decided, the child must be able to speak directly to the person making the decision. Alternatively, the child's statements must come to the decision-maker in a way that feels safe for the child. Adults cannot say that a child has been allowed to express themselves freely, without the child themselves experiencing that it has been allowed to express themselves in a way that feels safe for the child. If actions are to be taken or decisions made that are not what the child wants, the child must be given the opportunity to express its views on how the child thinks this will turn out.

Children's right to have information shared in a safe way

If an adult considers sharing information about or from a child, the child must be informed and allowed to express their views freely about it. This right applies regardless of whether the information is to be shared with parents, the Child Protection System, others at the institution or other services. Sharing of information must be necessary and adults must have a legal basis for sharing. If the child does not want the information to be shared, the adult must try to figure out why the child does not want this. The adult must then assess the risk of losing a relationship of trust with the child and then whether it is in the best interests of the child. If something is to be shared, the child must be told beforehand. This applies as far as possible, also in emergency-like cases. Children have the same right every time adults consider writing down something from or about the child.

Good adults for children

Adults who children feel safe with

Adults who will work in the LIVING SAFELY measures must be adults who children experience as safe. There are adults who show warmth in body language, voice and words. Those who focus more on why children do what they do than on the actions themselves. They dare to ask what bad words or actions are about. They constantly focus on making it safe to live there. They are adults who do not give up, even if children don't manage everything right away. They make good memories together with the children and meet them with love. Safe adults are adults who share about themselves and who believe in children. Who are honest about what they think and what they feel and who show that they love children.

Adults with different backgrounds

Seen from the perspective of children, adults with their own experience from the Child Protection System are important in the LIVING SAFELY initiative. They are often easier to trust than others, because they can understand better. Children say that institutions should not only have adults trained in protection of children. Different adults, with different educations, should work together with adults with their own experience from living in institutions. There must be a mixture of vocationally trained and adults with higher education.

In drug abuse measures and in reinforced measures (previous behaviour and treatment), extra confident and courageous adults are needed, who can reach out to what's hurting/painful. Children ask for adults who have experience with being able to make it safe for children.

Adults with good children's vision

In the LIVING SAFELY measures, leaders and professionals have a common view of children. A good view of children, built on knowledge from children:

Children have a lot of knowledge about their lives.

They do the best they can, based on how they feel inside.

They are kind and need love.

They must be trusted and collaborated with.

The adults in the measures are employed with this children's view as a foundation. Children who live there should feel that the adults know that the children are kind. They must notice this through how the adults talk about the children and to the children. They must also notice it through how closely the adults work with the children.

Safe organising

Live with other children and few adults

There is always more than one child living at each LIVING SAFELY measure. Exceptions are only made if the child says over time that they want to live alone. Separate Institutions for One Single Young Person (separate institution) must never be used without the child having been given completely honest information about what separate institution mean and have been able to express freely that they want it. All children must be given alternatives to separate institution. Adults cannot pressure or influence by telling children that they should agree to separate institution because the child is so sick or dangerous that they need more adults to look after them. When a child feels that it is safe where they live, all children can live with other children. No one is too sick or too dangerous for that. When the adults take responsibility for making it safe for all the children, several children can always live together.

In the measures, there must be some adults, but not too many. For the measure to feel like a home and a safe place to be, the few adults who work there must spend their time on what the children who live there say is important.

Safe rotation

All LIVING SAFELY measures must have a co-living rotation, preferably 4/7, 3/7. It is the rotation that most children answer as the safest and most helpful. It makes it easier for children to get to know the adults better and it feels like the adults have more time for the children. The rotation determines a lot about how everyday life will be, it has to feel safe for children.

Flexible frames adapted to each child

The framework and rules for how it should be in the LIVING SAFELY measure are made together with the children who live there, for it to feel safe. The rules are adapted to what each individual child needs.

If a child is having a hard time at night and needs a car ride, it can be done even if it is after indoor time. How long the internet should be on and when bedtime is adjusted in collaboration with each individual child. The adults can take the children home to the adult, go on trips, buy ice cream, give them their phone number and have contact with the children when they are not at work. The rules can be adapted when needed, and can be changed if a child is having difficulties and needs it.

Useful help

Purpose of living there

All LIVING SAFELY measures must aim to reach the pain inside the child, and provide tools for everyday life so that children can feel better and manage themselves in the future. It must be safe and useful to live there. To achieve this, the adults collaborate closely with the children and the focus is on the fact that children need love and safety in order to get better. Stopping the actions or expressions of what hurts is not a goal. The focus is to make it safe enough, so that children can talk about the pain.

Help adapted to each individual child

LIVING SAFELY measures do not work according to specific methodologies or models. The help and the way the children are met is adapted to each individual child. Each and every child who moves in can safely tell what they need to get better. They need to know the options available and what happens to what they say. The children must be allowed to say something about what they need to be able to speak up about important things and to be able to feel better. What the children say becomes the basis for what help the child will receive. This is the only way one can find the help that works.

Reach in to what's difficult or painful

When children do bad or hurtful things, it's about something painful inside them. The children have to work through the pain to get rid of the expressions, to feel better inside and in life. The adults must focus on making it safe enough where the child lives, so that the child can tell. Children must not be sent on to Children and Adolescents' Psychiatric Outpatient Services (BUP) if they do not want it. They must have the opportunity to talk to the adult they feel most safe with.

Children often do not tell about the worst at first, the adults must continue to be curious and show that they want to hear. The adults show feelings, reactions, warmth and believe the children when they tell about painful things. The feelings and thoughts the children have about the pain are most important and they must be allowed to continue telling the adult they trust, regardless of what kind of competence the adult has or does not have. In order to get better, it is the painful things that must be talked about. Then the expressions may eventually disappear.

Collaboration

Talking safely

The adults know that nothing can be decided correctly without children having been able to talk safely. All children should know that they can talk to an adult they trust. When the LIVING SAFELY measure wants to know something from a child, the child is asked who they would like to talk to, to ensure that it will be safe. The adults let the children choose where they want to talk. The adults never try to influence or try to make a child think something, even if it might be the easiest solution or what the adults think. In the LIVING SAFELY measure, children receive honest and enough information. They get to know everything that concerns them and everything they need to know about decisions and options. Adults should not withhold information. Being able to talk safely is crucial to finding good solutions.

Sharing information safely

All sharing of information about or from a child must be done in collaboration with that child. Before handovers, or other meetings, one of the adults talks to the child about what the child thinks can be shared further. Also when there are planned meetings with several services, an adult must talk to the child about who should know and what they should know.

If the child and the adult disagree, the adult must find out by talking to the child whether this is really necessary to share. Is it useful for the child? Why does the child not want it to be shared? What happens to the trust if it is shared? The child's statement must carry weight. If adults finally decide to share something, the child must always be told.

When the adults write daily reports, monthly reports and other documentation, these are actions that concern children. The procedural rights must be followed. The adults must remember that what is written about children can follow them for a long time. It can affect the help children receive and the way children are met by other adults. Together with every child, writing must be done safely. Adults can check off with the child what can be written or adults can check off with the child after something has been written. It is different what children think is wise and safe to write, therefore writing must be agreed with each individual child. The child must always be able to speak up if they think something should not be allowed.

Decide in collaboration with children

In the LIVING SAFELY measure, all decisions, small and large, must be made together with children. It is the important things that are most important to decide together; how the children will be met by the adults in the measure, what kind of help they will get and how it will be in the measure. If adults had to decide for themselves, it would have been random whether it turned out to be right for that child. Therefore, all children must be allowed to take part in all decisions that concern them.

In order to find the best interests of the child, it is important to figure out what the individual child's opinion is. The adults try to understand why the children think what they think. Adults may have different thoughts about what is best, but what the child thinks is tried out first, or the child and the adults meet in the middle.

Stop safely

Safety means everything

Everything that is done in the measure can contribute to safety or to insecurity. The LIVING SAFELY measures and the adults there must therefore feel safe for the children. It will dramatically reduce the chances of unsafe situations arising and situations escalating. Safety and collaboration, seen from the child's point of view, must be in focus from the day the child moves in. Situations where children have to be stopped almost always start long before it becomes dangerous or scary. In the LIVING SAFELY measure, the adults must try to understand and talk to the children about what triggers them and how they can avoid it. Safety and trust prevent unsafe situations and are the most important part of stopping safely, also with children who can do dangerous things.

Plan for pain

Every time a new child moves into the LIVING SAFELY measure, a plan must be made for pain/hurt. This is a plan for what the adults should and should not do when the child feels pain or feels things are difficult, so that situations where the children already have a lot of bad feelings inside, do not become even worse and scarier. The plan is made by the child and an adult the child has chosen as safe. It is important, because for the plan to work, the child must be able to confidently say what they need. The adult and the child must agree on which of the employees should be able to see the plan. The plan must state what adults can do, what they can say and which adults the child wants to talk to. It is also a good idea to include in the plan what can trigger the child, so that the adults can avoid doing/saying it. The plan must be evaluated regularly, and after it has been used, to ensure that situations are resolved as safely as possible for children.

Stop safely when something happens

In LIVING SAFELY measures, children must be stopped safely when dangerous or painful situations occur. Children who threaten, run away, harm themselves, break things or create chaos must be met with warmth and honesty. The adults must be brave and say honestly how they feel inside if they get scared, sad or uncertain. Children must be met with an understanding that something is hurting them, and that the adults know that the children are kind.

The plan for pain/hurt is followed and the adults remind the children that they are good people. They don't deserve to be in pain. The adults must try to understand why the situation arose, what triggered it or what made it unsafe. Even in unsafe situations, the adults must think that the children are doing the best they can, based on how they feel inside. Coercion and physical force are only used when there is a direct danger to life, the plan for pain/hurt has been followed and nothing else can be tried. The coercion shall cease as soon as the danger is over.

Change must come quickly. Children need residential childcare institutions built in close collaboration with them. If Norway wants residential childcare institutions that are safe and useful for children, the knowledge of children must be taken seriously, and form the basis for how residential childcare institutions should be. Children's rights according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child must be the basis of all residential childcare institutions. Following children's rights is not an elective.

1

Knowledge from children:

Collaborate
with children



EXPERIENCES

Wanted to talk safely

80% were unable to talk safely

Summarised experiences

What children have wanted to tell:

- how it was at the institution
- the most difficult things they needed help with
- painful things they had experienced

Why children have not been able to talk safely:

- they thought the adults would not believe them
- they were asked to give feedback through a form
- they felt that adults believed explanations from other adults more
- they experienced that child protection, the school, BUP and often the county governor trusted the adults in the institution more than the children
- adults came up with solutions without being open and wanting to know what the child thought first
- adults had previously given strict consequences, used restraint or other forms of force on the children
- adults shared what a child had said or done, without the child knowing

Why children have been able to talk safely:

- they met some open, honest adults whom they were able to trust
- they felt that adults really wanted to know
- they were invited to give feedback on how the institution and adults felt for them
- they were confident that adults were not going to tell others without them knowing
- adults understood that it was crucial that children felt safe
- adults wanted to understand what children explained, before deciding anything
- adults rarely or never used consequences or restraint
- adults understood that they had to make an agreement with children before they shared information from or about them
- the head of the institution or the head of the department spoke to them directly to gather feedback

Wanted to know the important things

98% didn't get to know what was most important for them

Summarised experiences

What children haven't received enough information about:

- which adults they could talk to if they were having a hard time
- how long they were going to stay at the institution
- who they should tell if other children or adults felt unsafe
- which adults that were going to work there
- why the rules were the way they were
- what was written in reports to the Child Protection System
- what was going to be decided about them
- which alternatives were available and what the various alternatives actually meant
- what consequences each of the alternatives could have for them

How it has turned out for children when they haven't received enough information:

- they could only answer based on what little they knew, or answer what adults suggested
- they became insecure or sad
- they felt adults had lied to them by withholding information
- they waited a very long time for information about crucial things to find peace and feel better

Wanted to know about what is being written

100% didn't get to know enough about what was written about them

Summarised experiences

What children didn't get to know about what was going to be written about them:

- what adults at the institution wrote about them
- the benefit of adults writing down so much
- what the things that were written were going to be used for
- who would see what was written

What children have gotten to know a little about, when they have read something written about them:

- descriptions written by adults about what children had said or done
- descriptions they didn't recognise themselves in
- almost no descriptions seen from them, of events they had told about
- few or no explanations from themselves, about why they did what they did, or what thoughts and feelings they had
- that what adults did or said before events was often not written down
- descriptions they experienced as exaggerations of events at the institution
- descriptions they experienced as understatements of coercion adults had used

How it has turned out for children when they haven't gotten enough information:

- very unsafe
- difficult to tell about important or hurtful things
- they have felt difficult feelings about how these papers could follow them for the rest of their lives

Wanted to know which information was going to be shared

81% weren't told what was going to be shared

Summarised experiences

When adults didn't talk to children before they shared information to somebody else:

- adults shared something children said or did, to parents, others at the institution, the Child Protection System, school, BUP or other systems
- adults told children that it was important that adults around the child knew enough to help
- they weren't allowed to say anything about what the adults shared, until it had been shared
- it became scary and difficult to trust adults
- they were left with things inside them that made the pain worse
- they felt the institution was "set up" for adults to share information with other adults, because they had to do handovers, write in papers, talk to parents, have contact with other services, discuss and get guidance

When adults talked to children before they shared information:

- adults didn't share without first talking to children about it
- they became important adults that children could trust

Didn't want to be rewarded

40% experienced rewards as negative

Summarised experiences

How children got rewards:

- they could be rewarded for getting up in the morning, eating, showering, going to school, going to bed, not hurting themselves, not taking drugs or not acting out
- they could often get consequences when they weren't able to do what the adults wanted and bad things happened, because children carried painful thoughts and feelings inside
- they could get benefits or "points" for doing the "right" things or behaving nicely

How punishment and rewards felt to children:

- as if adults thought they could raise children in the same way as with dogs
- as easy and superficial ways of getting children to do what adults want them to do
- when they didn't receive a reward, it could feel like a kind of punishment, for hurting on the inside

Wanted to have a say in decisions

99% didn't get to be involved in the decisions that were most important to them

Summarised experiences

What children have been allowed to have a say about in decisions:

- what they should eat
- which activities or trips they should take part in
- what kind of contact they wanted with their family
- their opinion was listened to before anything was decided

What children were allowed to decide too little about / were not allowed to have a say about in deciding:

- the decisions that were most important to them
- what they thought about things that would be done or decided
- who should be their main contact
- what should be done when they felt painful feelings and what help they could or should get
- how long they were to stay at the institution
- which adults should be informed about things they had told
- what would be written down

How it has turned out for children when they were not allowed to have a say in decisions:

- too much was decided without adults knowing how children were feeling
- too much was decided without adults knowing what was most important to children
- they felt that adults pressured them to get to know an adult when they were not allowed to choose the main contact
- they felt that adults had decided who children should trust
- not safe to tell important things to the institution
- more difficult for the institution to help them
- what the adults decided did not help them and they could get worse
- they somewhat gave up thinking that what they said was important

QUOTES - COLLABORATION WITH CHILDREN

Too many of them think they know everything. Know it all. They think so, but they actually know very little about me.

This one person here asks me about my suggestions for how things can be done. He has probably realised that it won't work if they don't collaborate with me.

I don't understand why they have to tell my parents everything, I don't know if they even have a good reason.

The adults here think they know best. Every time I notice it, I feel like it's boiling inside me. Then I leave. Why should I stay here, they think they know best without me, anyway.

I want to take part in writing, show my perspective. Then I can write what I feel. Then they can write what they feel. Now the adults just write everything.

I try to tell them things, but most people here don't listen. They need to meet me in the middle instead of just deciding something else entirely.

Some of the adults, I've noticed, are trying everything they can. We feel they are kind. I've started to trust them a bit.

Here you can't say anything to an adult without at least 12 others finding out.

I have not been given an explanation as to why they have such strict rules. They just say that's the way it is. It feels like they think we're shitkids.

I wish I could help set up who should be on the teams, so that there is always someone I trust at work. I can't be there if no one is safe there.

meet
us
warmly



Usually they have come up with the answer themselves first and don't really need to hear what I think. But it's a lottery whether what they decide is right or not.

When an adult goes after you with a reward, I might as well give a paw, then you are no longer a human, but a dog.

The institution told everything I did, straight to the Child Protection System, then the Child Protection System took it up at the next meeting. I stopped going out of my room, then they had nothing to say to the Child Protection System.

I couldn't manage things and never got rewards. They didn't know I couldn't do it because it was hurting too much.

I wish I knew a little more, then maybe I could tell them more too.

Not sure how they think they're going to help me, when they don't make it safe to talk here. I trust one person, but they don't ask me if I want to talk to her.

When they come up with so many things that are supposed to help me and it doesn't work, they must soon realise that they have to ask me.

Got lots of papers from the lawyer before I went to court. What little trust I had in the institution disappeared when I saw what they had written about me. Hardly a kind word.

I wish they wouldn't write things about me, without me knowing.

Don't understand why they have to write. You don't do that with your own children.

ADVICE

Decide together

You can rarely know what we need without talking to us about it first. If it's to be safe enough, we must be involved in deciding everything that concerns us. We need to get enough information to know what to answer and what possibilities exist. We need to know what happens to what we say. We need to be able to talk to an adult we trust about how everything feels to us, and what we want going forward. We must decide the important things together; treatment, how we should be met and how it should be at the institution.

Believe us and seriously try to understand why we mean what we mean. Ask us what we think is best for us now and follow that as far as possible. If you think differently, talk to us about it and try to find a solution together with us. If you still think the solution should be different, consider what consequences it might have for our trust in you and for the usefulness of what you decide, if you decide something we don't agree with. Remember that when you decide something we don't agree with, it can quickly feel like coercion to us. Try out what we say before you decide the complete opposite or meet us in the middle.

Believe us and show us that you really want to know

In order for us to talk honestly, we need to know that you really want to know. Show it with body language, warmth, questions, voice and words. Don't think you know the answer until you've talked to us. You cannot know, no matter how many children you have met before or how much experience you have. You have never met exactly me. You must always listen to me, to be able to decide something about me.

We need to know that you are open to what we think. If it's going to be safe enough for us to say important things, you can't influence us or try to get us to give a certain answer. We need to know that you believe that what we say is how it feels for us. We need to feel that there is some point in telling you. Why should we explain, from our hearts, if nothing happens with what we've told afterwards? Show us that you are going to do something about what we say. We know that there's not everything you can do something about, but we need to see you trying and that you take what we say seriously.

Have to be allowed to talk to someone we feel safe with

We have often had little trust in adults. We need the opportunity to be able to talk to an adult we trust, regardless of whether it concerns something big or small. You must explain to us that we are allowed to do that, and we must be allowed to do that. This also applies if the institution wants to know something from us. To be able to tell honestly, it must be the adult we ourselves have said we trust, with whom we must speak. When choosing the main contact, we must be allowed to help decide which adult it will be, so that it will be an adult we are safe with. It's often the main contact who is with us at meetings and who talks to us about what it's like to live at the institution. Then the main contact has to be someone we can talk to honestly.

It's important that the shifts are safe for us. Without that, it'll be unsafe to be at the institution and you cannot expect us to be able to be there. Who we trust can change, so ask us regularly. Let us say something about who will be on the various shifts, so that we know that there is always at least one person we feel safe with. We have to tell the manager or whoever sets up the shifts. If we want to, we must be able to bring someone we feel safe with. If it's not possible to have a safe adult on shift one day, explain honestly why and try to find solutions together with us.

Give us understandable information

We need to know quite honestly why the rules are the way they are. We may be used to many rules and a lot of control, others come from homes without rules. We need to have the rules explained in a kind, understandable and honest way, so that we don't feel that the rules are designed for adults to have control over us. We need to know who the adults who work at the institution are and why they work there. Tell us what adults at the institution are allowed to say and do to us, and what they are not allowed to say and do. Explain it to us honestly and concretely, and tell us what happens if we tell about something like that. This is important both for us to feel safe in what will be our home, and to be able to speak up if something is not right.

We need to know what needs to be shared with others at the institution or the child protection service, about handovers and about meetings. We need this information not only when we move in, but throughout the time we live at the institution.

It's our lives, and often we notice when adults know something that they are not telling. If we understand that there is something you have not told us, we may lose trust. We need to know what you know, so that we can correct if something is wrong or misunderstood. It could be that the adult you have learned something from has misunderstood something we have said or done, and that what you have learned is not true. Perhaps we do not agree with the descriptions you have received.

Consider what information needs to be shared

Many of you have been taught to share information with other adults. That can break a lot of our trust. Before anything we have said or done is to be shared with others, you must have a good reason for sharing. We have the right to not have you share information about us, without a concrete reason. If the institution thinks that something must be shared, an adult we trust must talk to us about what we think about it being shared. If we say no, you must find out together with us why we say no and how it can possibly be shared in a safe way.

In the beginning, it's crucial that we gain trust in you. We have to learn that you are kind, that you will collaborate with us when information is to be shared and that it's safe to tell you things. At the very start, you must explain to us how you share information and that you want to collaborate with us before that happens.

Handovers can feel very unsafe. Many adults can be there and we don't know what is being said. All of the adults never need to know everything. It's not safe for us that everyone gets to know everything. Talk to us in advance about what will be shared in handover, so that we can say what is important to us and so that we can keep our trust in you.

We understand that you will sometimes want to talk to other professionals or systems. But expressions of pain and hurtful or bad actions are about something inside us. If you share something without us knowing, there can be even more chaos inside us. Collaborate with us also when we show that we are in great pain. It's about trust then as well.

We must be able to trust both you and the child protection service, if you are to find out what is important for us. When the institution must share information with the child protection service, this must always be agreed upon by us. You cannot share anything we have said or done with the child protection service without us first knowing and having a say in it.

Write kindly and together with us

It may feel strange and unusual for us that you write. At the start, we therefore need information that you write about us. Give us information about what is being written and who can see it. Also explain why you are writing. What you write must be correct and important to us. There must be a reason why you write it down, and it must feel okay to us. Quarterly reports, final reports and such can become crucial for our lives. You cannot write them without collaborating with us on it.

Remember that you are writing about our lives. What you write can stay with us for a long time and can become important for how other adults view and meet us. Write nice things and things we manage to do, even if we don't always manage to do everything. Write kindly about us, choose kind words that don't hurt for us to read or that make us look bad. Even when we do bad things, it's important that you write kindly about us. Don't write that we are dangerous, even if we do dangerous things. Actions we do must not become the description of us. Never write anything you wouldn't say to us. Imagine that we are always sitting on your shoulder and reading what you write about us.

We usually don't want to spend time every day writing with you. But we want to have a say about what should and should not be written. We may want to read through what you write afterwards, or once a week. You must work out with each of us how it will be done safely for us. We need to know that we can speak up if there is something we don't want to be written, so you must always check with us before what is to be written is "locked" in our files.

Ask for feedback

The manager or head of department must regularly ask for advice and feedback on what it's like to live where we live. The managers can say that they ask because they need to know from us, and not just from the adults. We need to know that the manager wants to believe in us and that they are asking us because they want to use the answers to change important things. It can be quite scary to tell a manager honestly how things are. We need to know that the manager does not pass the word on to anyone else, without our knowledge. The manager must never ask us if they don't intend to take the feedback we give seriously. If we don't feel safe with the manager, an adult we have told you that we feel safe with, must talk to us, and then share the things we think is okay to share to the manager, in collaboration with us.

2

Knowledge from children:
In to what's
difficult or
painful



EXPERIENCES

Carried a lot of pain

79% told of carrying a lot of pain

Summarised experiences

What children in the qualitative survey said they carried with them:

- painful or frightening experiences from growing up
- painful or frightening experiences from foster homes or institutions
- events, words, smells or sounds
- dreams or nightmares that caused anxiety or fear
- fear of anything that reminded them of the pain they had experienced

How the pain came to light at the institution:

- they withdrew from others
- they fell out of situations and did not understand what was happening
- they got angry
- they used drugs
- they hurt themselves
- they hurt other children or adults
- they destroyed objects or the house they lived in
- they used violence or committed other forms of crime

Focus on actions

66% met one or more adults with a strong focus on actions

Summarised experiences

What children did that adults focused on:

- withdrew from the community
- dissociated
- hurt themselves
- vandalism
- acted out or were violent
- withdrew from care
- drug abuse

How it has turned out for children:

- they felt that many adults did not understand deeply enough that something triggered or hurt children inside
- it could feel like adults didn't care enough
- it became even more difficult to tell honestly about what was painful
- they felt that if adults had understood, they would have said and done different things than they did
- they became sad, disappointed and lost confidence
- their expressions and actions became stronger

Came in to what was hurting

47% have met one or more adults at the institution who they felt safe with

Summarised experiences

Why it felt safe enough to tell:

- they noticed that the adult did not think badly of them, even if they did bad things
- they noticed that the adult understood that there were reasons why they did something bad or hurtful
- the adult understood that they could not know what life felt like for children
- the adult was more concerned with how children felt inside than their actions
- the adult dared to talk to children about what hurt inside them
- the adult was honest and open even when they were unsure of how to help

Went outside the framework

22% have met one or more adults who went outside the framework

Summarised experiences

What adults did so it became safer:

- moved away from frameworks, routines or treatment plans, when it was important for children
- explained that they thought something was important to do, to make it safer for children
- took children home, to a cabin or activities with the family
- changed the bedtime slightly or went on drives at night with children
- gave children their telephone number, to give them the opportunity to make contact even when they were not at work
- did something even if it was not the way it should be done within the framework
- explained that the frameworks and rules they had to work within could get in the way of helping children in ways they knew were wise

How it has turned out for children:

- they gained a lot of trust in these adults
- they were given the chance to get better
- it was crucial for children to cope at the institution
- it became safer and they were able to trust adults more again

Reasons why some of these adults quit:

- they did not have enough or the right education to work there
- they were asked by management to quit
- they felt that it was becoming too difficult to help children with the framework that was there

Triggered bad memories

88% have met one or more adults who triggered bad memories

Summarised experiences

What adults did that triggered painful memories:

- were strict, authoritarian or superficial
- joked when children were sad, scared, irritated or angry
- showed little emotion when something became difficult or painful for children
- showed little emotion that felt real, when children experienced sad or painful things

How it has turned out for children:

- they became sad, quiet, scared, restless, irritated or angry
- they did bad things to themselves or others
- they didn't want to be at the institution
- they stayed away from adults as much as possible
- they ran away to get away from adults who made it unsafe
- there was chaos and pain inside them
- it felt scary or dangerous
- it felt as if adults thought it was right and good to be strict
- it became difficult to feel safe at the institution
- it became almost impossible for children to be honest with these adults

Tried to tell

72% have tried to tell something important to an adult in the Child Protection System

Summarised experiences

How adults could meet children when they tried to tell in words or expressions:

- were open and wanted to understand
- understood something but did not take their words or signs seriously
- explained that there was too much to do before they could talk
- said it was better for children to talk to BUP than to them

How it has turned out for children:

- they would prefer to talk to adults at the institution, whom they trusted
- they lost trust in adults when they were sent to BUP and couldn't manage to tell there
- the hurt exploded in expressions, when they waited a long time for an adult to understand
- they tried to run away from pain, by hurting themselves, being rude, getting angry or taking drugs
- it became difficult to tell more if adults did not react with emotion
- they were able to tell more if the adult showed with body language that they cared

Consequences blocked for reaching in

Summarised experiences

How adults could use consequences:

- they tightened rules around children when they hurt themselves, were rude or threatening, ran away or in other ways went beyond the rules
- they called it necessary to do, to stop children from doing more bad or hurtful things
- they introduced consequences without first talking to children about what they thought they needed

How it has turned out for children:

- they shut down because of emotions, or defended themselves so as not to recognise emotions that triggered them
- they felt as if the institution punished them for being in pain
- it made it impossible to be honest with adults
- it triggered bad feelings because their parents had done the same
- the pain inside children was still there when strict frames or other restrictions were loosened
- it made bad feelings inside children even worse



when we
feel pain
inside,
it has to
come out

The treatment was not adapted enough

99% did not find the treatment at the institution useful

Summarised experiences

What adults could call treatment:

- house rules
- sleep cycles
- trips and other physical activity
- cultural activities
- cooking
- music therapy
- being locked in, restricted freedom of movement

Why children have not felt that treatment was helpful:

- the treatment was the same for everyone
- they were not allowed to say anything about what was important to them
- they did not receive enough information about the treatment
- they did not feel any better inside
- they did not get rid of their expressions or got stronger expressions
- they lost hope that they could receive treatment that felt useful
- they started thinking that they couldn't get better
- adults did not make it safe enough to talk about bad thoughts and feelings
- adults said the treatment was the best and only option

Why children have felt that treatment was helpful:

- they got help with what was important for them to get better
- they were able to talk to someone they trusted about what was painful
- things got better inside them, and they had fewer expressions for what hurt

QUOTES - IN TO WHAT'S DIFFICULT OR PAINFUL

Everyone here wants me to go to BUP, but actually I want to talk to that one person on the night shift. He is braver than the rest, dares to ask more.

I become insecure when the adults are strict, when I'm upset and become rude. I feel they are punishing me because I am in pain.

I think the adults here think their job is to get me to stop hurting myself. That's the only thing they care about. They forgot that there is a reason why I hurt myself and that someone needs to help me with that reason.

Sometimes I got to have dinner at her home with her family. Then I felt that she was not afraid of me. It made me trust her a little more.

I tried to say that things are not okay. Haven't said much in words, but there's something that's not good when I eat broken glass.

The bad things I've experienced are stuck inside me, that's why there's chaos. But the people who work here don't get to know that, they think I'm dangerous.

There is someone who works here who understands that when I run away or punch, it's because I'm not okay. She's the only one I've said a little to.

When I was most upset, I made hell. My protection is to be rude. I had to put on a shield and was defensive when the adults triggered me. In the papers they called it bad behaviour.

She seemed very kind, but it hit hard when she spoke to me. She reminded me of a teacher who did a lot of bad things to me.

This one guy has given me good experience with adults. Now I can trust adults more easily. He didn't judge me for what I did. Then I could feel safe.

My institution doesn't know, but when I was little there were quite a few things that happened. Pretty bad stuff, which is really the whole reason I do criminal stuff. That's what they should focus on.

The ones who feel most safe are those who have spoken to me when they have had time off and send messages that they miss me and that they really care about me.

Here they don't understand that if the treatment is going to help me, it has to be made together with me, they can't make a standard thing for everyone.

When adults shout or do things that trigger, I get scared. Not just of the adults who do it but of everyone, even the good ones.

Restricted freedom of movement for weeks was part of the drug addiction treatment plan. But it didn't help for what I needed to take drugs to escape. I just got more desperate.

The adults have made a plan of things I should do as part of the treatment. How can going to the theatre, painting or cooking lunch for the Monday staff-meeting make me feel any better inside?

They never talked to me about the drugs, except that it is not good for the body and that it is illegal. I was told that if I destroy something, or injure staff, I can be reported. They never asked why. I thought I wasn't worth that much.

The one guy who works here always says that he cares about me and will miss me when he goes home from work. I don't think he knows what it does to me, he's the first adult in 4 years to say he cares about me.

ADVICE

Understand when bad memories are triggered

When we hurt ourselves, run away, destroy things, are threatening, or use violence, it's often about bad memories being triggered. It can be from our childhood or from other events we carry with us, which are triggered by adults or children at the institution. We need you to meet us safely, with the understanding that it's about something that's hurting and that you try to understand what triggered us. Meet us with warm words and feelings. Ask who we need to talk to and if there is anything else that can help. Don't be strict or use loud voices. Please don't joke when we're having a difficult time. It can make an already painful and difficult situation much worse.

Take it seriously when we want to tell

We often try to tell with words first. We can try to tell by hurting ourselves, staying in our room, getting high or getting angry. Remember that there's a reason when we do those things, and that it's something you must understand. Take both words and expressions seriously. It hurts if you dismiss these words or expressions. Ask us what it's about, and try to find out what we feel inside when we do bad things to ourselves or others. If you don't understand, we need you to ask more in depth. Ask more in depth if you think it's safe enough for us to answer. We understand that there is a lot to do at the institution, but take us seriously when we are in pain and try to speak out. How we are met when we try to tell, determines whether we are able to tell and can continue to tell you.

Reach in to the things that hurt most

In order for us to feel better inside and to feel better in life, we need to be able to talk about what hurts. We often have something painful that sits deep in our hearts. Often there are things we haven't talked about much. It may be that we have never talked to anyone about it before, and it may be that we have tried but that adults did not do it safely enough for us to tell more. You must try to get to the most painful in our hearts, because that is how we can get better. Keep talking to us about it, so that we can properly talk through the feelings and thoughts we have about it. There may be many other things that you have learned are "correct" treatment, but from our perspective, this is what makes us feel better. We need adults who are focused on reaching in, who try to do it safely enough, and who understand that this is important for us to get better.

Show human warmth

We need adults who show human warmth and who show that they care about us. We need to see and learn what love is, and how good love should feel. Without knowing human warmth and love, it's almost impossible to get into what is painful or difficult. We need warm eyes and warm words. Then everything becomes safer. We who are not used to warmth and love need to learn to feel it. It's important for how we feel at the institution, and for life later on. Show that you care about what we say, even if you may not even understand how it feels to us. Stand with us through the hurt, as far as you can. Share warm, kind words and preferably a hug when you get to work. Say you care about us and look forward to coming back when you leave. Do this also when we are having a difficult time and show this with strong expressions. Then perhaps we need it the most. You can be the adults who teach us that it's possible to care about us and the adults who can reach into the pain inside us.



Be brave

All adults can become an adult to whom we can tell important things. Do not pass us on to others because they have more expertise, or are experts in children. We need brave adults who dare to talk to us about the pain we feel. You must trust yourself and dare to have the important conversations with us. We have met so many kind, good and brave adults at the institution. All of you can become adults whom we trust enough to tell the bad things to. You may have the "expertise" we need. We choose which adults we tell based on who we feel safe with and who we trust, not based on how much education they have. You work where we live and we need to know that we can talk to you when we are having a difficult time. Then you can't just send us to some specialists, even if it's well-intentioned. We need to know that you are brave and want to reach into what hurts inside of us.

Make it safe to talk

In order for it to be safe enough for us to talk about important things, we need to be asked where we wish to talk. It can be easier outside the institution or while we are doing something together. Give examples of activities or places we can go, then we will understand what is possible. Then we also learn that you really want it to be safe enough for us to talk. Show that you really care about us, not just because it's your job. When you want to do something extra like go for a drive, buy something tasty, talk about something we like, let us meet someone you care about, meet someone in your family or your friends, then we know you really want to. We can also feel that you trust us. When we know that you trust us, it becomes easier to feel safe. And security is the only thing that helps to be able to open up about the pain.

Don't give up on us

We need you to not give up on us. In order for us to dare to believe that you are someone we can trust, we ask you to be humble and patient. When we do bad or hurtful things, show that you understand that the expressions we have are about something painful. Show us that you understand that what hurts is not going to go away through focusing on, or treatment for, getting rid of the expressions we have. Don't give up on us even if we can't manage to do everything or aren't able to talk right away. Keep trying to make it safe for us. Show that you really want us to feel better. Also if we fall back to the expressions, don't give up, remember we are doing the best we can. Meet us with love, not with limitations or punishment when we are in pain and do bad things. Then it can feel like you are doing the same to us as our parents or other adults did. It can trigger bad memories and make the expressions stronger. Living with adults who do not understand this can make life very scary and painful. It can become almost impossible. Then the expressions of pain have become overwhelming and incomprehensible to adults.

3

Knowledge from children:

Feels like
a home



EXPERIENCES

Rarely feels like a home

97% did not feel that the institution felt like home

Summarised experiences

Why children have not felt that the institution is a home:

- the houses have felt sterile
- there have rarely been pictures there of the young people or anything else related to them
- adults have handovers
- there have been standard models for routines and how adults should meet children
- a lot of focus on treatment
- difficult to settle down and feel safe there

Why an institution has felt like home:

- ordinary houses, in ordinary neighbourhoods
- furniture that makes it homely
- few adults

Adults with their own experience provided security

62% have met one or more adults who felt safe because they shared their experience of having a difficult time

Summarised experiences

How adults who shared experiences provided safety:

- did less "by the book", and met children more openly
- viewed children at the institution as ordinary children
- were easier to talk to
- understood in a different way that it was about something painful when children did bad things
- children could talk more directly and honestly with them and share more of their feelings

Adults who gave good experiences

68% have met one or more adults who gave them good experiences

Summarised experiences

Why good experiences gave safety:

- adults brought them with them on experiences that they felt were nice or important, such as cinema trips, cabin trips, car trips, vacations, restaurant visits, dog sledding, theatre, ice hockey, football matches or swimming
- children helped plan the experiences, so they felt pleasant and safe
- it was easier to get to know each other when children got out of the institution a little with adults
- the experiences made it safer to live in an institution

Adults who saved lives

23% have met one or more adults who they felt saved their life

Summarised experiences

What adults have done for children that has saved their lives:

- cared for children in a different way
- felt like a bonus mum or dad, aunt or uncle
- gave hugs or said they care about the child
- were honest for better or worse about what they felt and thought
- understood that in order to be able to set boundaries, children first had to become safe with adults and know that the adults care about them
- joked and laughed with children
- didn't take themselves too seriously

Unsafe with many adults around

100% felt it was unsafe with many adults around them at the institution

Summarised experiences

Why it became unsafe for children when there were many adults around them:

- there were adults everywhere and many adults they did not know
- there were different adults changing all the time, in what was supposed to be the children's home
- they almost always felt observed by adults
- with three shifts a day there were misunderstandings and the feeling that life was not connected
- what the child had agreed with one adult could easily be lost in shifts and handovers
- adults spent more time on writing and meetings than on being with the children
- adults did much of the practical work, so children learned little about washing or cooking
- adults drove children around, so they didn't get used to getting around on their own
- they wondered how they would manage in life after living in an institution with so many adults

QUOTES - FEELS LIKE A HOME

This is one of my fifty parents. There are far too many adults for it to feel like a home.

I always go to a football match with one employee, we have gotten to know each other much better when we can do things outside the house too.

Here they try to give love, make it safe, figure things out with me. They are not that terribly strict, here it comes down to trust.

It's not normal to have an office in half your house and for them to write down everything you do in a day. It doesn't exactly look normal then.

The best employees are those who have experience from something themselves. They believe in me and speak the truth. They have known it, not just learned it. They know more about what they are talking about.

I live here, it should look like a home, not have lots of white walls and big metal doors. Now it looks like a prison.

How do they expect me to fend for myself after living here? It's cool that they cook for me and wash my clothes, but it'll be impossible to take care of myself after that.

The adults here are very supportive almost no matter what, they have a sense of humour and they actually seem to care about what I say.

It doesn't feel very safe when you don't get to know the employees before they shift. If I take a power nap, there are suddenly four new people in my house.

I want to live in a foster home. This is not a proper home. It's strange to live in a place where adults have plans for how to talk to me.

She saved my life. She's like my extra mom. Cares more than anyone else has before.



here,
it's
about
trust

ADVICE

Look and feel like home

Make the institution homely. It's where we will live, and where we will feel safe. If it looks neutral or sterile, it can quickly feel cold and unsafe. Find out with us how it can become homely. We must be allowed to help decide the colours of the walls, pictures, furniture, carpets and anything else that can contribute to the common rooms feeling safe. We also have to be able to choose how our rooms should look, what kind of furniture, and what else is important to us that is there. When the institution looks and feels like a home, it becomes much easier for us to feel safe there.

Meet us like normal children

When we live in an institution, we need adults who think of us and meet us like normal children. We have experienced a lot of pain that is stuck inside us. We can show that in many different ways, but it must be met with a lot of warmth and as much normality as possible. Think as much as possible that you are ordinary adults who are going to our home to help make it a little safer inside us. For this to be able to help, you must feel that you are in a way our family. Imagine that you are going to meet your nieces or nephews. You cannot speak or do things in very particular ways. Think outside the box. The most important thing is that you show us that we are a normal child that you have faith in.

Fewer adults

In ordinary homes, there are not many adults who look after children. It's normal to have one or two. Ask us how many adults we think should be with us at a time, so that it will be as safe as possible for us. With fewer adults, it's easier to relate to them and get to know the adults. The feeling of being watched and looked after gets smaller and it becomes easier to feel safe.

Those who govern Norway may have thought that it's good help, useful or safe for us to have many adults in the institution, but safety is rarely created by there being many adults there. Safety is determined by how we are met. The adults must get to know us and meet us safely with warmth and love. The adults who are at the institution must know what it means to be safe adults from the perspective of children. When it becomes safe at the institution, there is no reason why there should be so many adults looking after a few children.

Share about yourselves

Share about yourself by being yourself. Don't behave differently so that we will like you. It becomes safe when we know that you are yourself. We quickly notice if you are not, or if you take on a stricter or "cooler" role. Be honest about who you are, what you like and what you have experienced in life. Then it's easier to also be honest with you.

Share with us if you have experienced something similar to our experiences or something else that has made you feel painful feelings. Then we can feel that you trust us enough to tell honestly about painful things you yourself have experienced, and it can be easier to trust you back. We feel more safe with you, and you can understand a little more how different things feel and are connected inside us.

Show that you care about us

It's important that you show emotion when we tell you about something painful, so that we can feel that you really care. Tell us honestly and with lots of warmth what you think and feel about what we have experienced. Give us hugs and be there for us when we're having a difficult time. Show and tell us that you care about us. We need you to smile, laugh, have warm eyes and relaxed body language so that we can feel safe with you. We need to know that you really care. Then it becomes much safer and easier to talk about both good and bad things.

It's nice when you can laugh with us and we can find things to joke about together. Don't be afraid to tell boring jokes, and don't try to seem cool or funny. Most of all, we need you to be as you are, completely for real. When you meet us again after your time off, tell us if you are happy to see us again and have missed us. Smile, be curious about what we've been up to since you last saw us and how we're doing. Then we can more easily look forward to a Friday evening on the sofa or a trip together at the weekend. The institution is our home, we hope you can think of it as your home too.

Teach us to manage on our own

Remember that you shall help us to become independent and to be able to fend for ourselves when we move out of the institution. If you do all the cooking, laundry, and driving us everywhere, we won't learn how to do that when we move out and live on our own. It's better if you invite us to cook, wash clothes and pay bills. Deep down, we all want to learn to fend for ourselves. It would be nice if you could show us how to find bus routes, order things, find opening hours and how to contact places we need in our lives later.

Also remember that the most important thing to cope with all the everyday life later on, may be to be able to create good things around and inside yourself. Talk to us about it and invite us to try it. This can feel scary or painful inside us. Maybe we don't have so many good memories from that, maybe we don't quite dare and maybe we feel so bad at the institution that everything inside us resists it. It would be nice if you then try to ensure that the adult, or the adults, we like best can be there a lot and help us find out how we can learn to fend for ourselves. It may be our greatest opportunity to find faith that we can do it.

4

Knowledge from children:

Stop safely



EXPERIENCES

Met as sick and dangerous

53% have been met as sick or dangerous by adults in an institution

Summarised experiences

How children were met as sick or dangerous:

- adults spoke or wrote about them as sick or dangerous
- adults described them as children with complex and multifaceted needs
- they were asked whether they had rested and relaxed enough
- they were asked whether they needed more medication or another admission
- adults said that it was important for children to go to BUP in order for them to get better or healthy
- adults locked the doors, used physical restraint by holding the young person, used restricted freedom of movement or body searched them
- children faced severe consequences if they harmed themselves or others
- what could be broken was replaced with plastic or cardboard
- adults locked things up or locked parts of the institution

How it has turned out for children:

- they were not given the opportunity to safely say how they should be met
- it felt like the adults didn't need to hear what the children thought
- it hurt and it was difficult to think that anything would get better
- it was easy to want to give up
- they began to believe that there could be some truth in what adults had said
- it felt as if adults were afraid of them and thought they were dangerous
- it felt as if adults felt sorry for them
- doing sick or dangerous acts became a way of protecting oneself and at the same time giving adults what children felt the adults wanted
- it became difficult to think kindly of oneself and to think that things could get better
- it became impossible to show that they were kind

Adults who were honest and wanted to understand

34% have met one or more adults they felt were honest and wanted to understand

Summarised experiences

What adults could do so children noticed they were honest and wanted to understand:

- show that they were ordinary people who could get scared and sad
- be humble and understand that they alone couldn't find solutions for children
- understand that there was something behind the actions of children
- be honest when they were scared or unsure of what to do
- explain how it felt inside them when children ran away, broke things or threatened
- want to find out things together with children
- be calm even if there was chaos at the institution
- want to listen to what children thought was smart

How it has turned out for children:

- they learned that adults also feel emotions
- they managed to gain a lot of trust in these adults
- they often felt safe when they were with these adults

Adults who wanted to take control

47% have met one or more adults they felt wanted to take control of them

Summarised experiences

What adults could do so children felt they wanted to take control of them:

- feel confident that they had the answers
- feel humble to a small extent
- feel as if adults thought they "owned" the institution
- use force and coercion more often than the other adults
- trigger children with use of their voice, what they did or said

How it has turned out for children:

- they were reminded of bad things that had happened earlier in their lives
- they could often scream, be rude or do something physical to these adults
- they could more often throw things at, threaten, hit or kick these adults
- they lost faith that adults wanted them well
- they lost faith in getting better

The situation started long before

100% said that hurtful events often came from feelings they had carried

Summarised experiences

What could start situations:

- adults had met them unsafely over time
- adults had triggered something painful the child had previously experienced
- the fear and insecurity inside children had become greater and greater
- they had tried to explain with words, or less serious actions
- they felt that adults had not dealt with it when they tried to speak up
- adults had not understood early enough, so the situation was not resolved and became more serious than necessary

we don't
run away
withouth
a reason



Physical restraint caused damage

84% have experienced physical restraint

Summarised experiences

What children had done before they were restrained physically:

- broken something
- tried to escape
- attacked
- hurt themselves
- hurt others

How it has turned out for children:

- it was perceived as punishment for what they had done
- caused traumas from previous events to resurface
- memories and nightmares could return
- made them afraid and could create new wounds inside them
- felt they just had to get away from there
- felt like a new assault, which they had also experienced before
- felt that adults did not understand the major consequences of doing this
- made them lose confidence and that it then became almost impossible to get better

Ran away because something hurt

98% have run away from the institution one or more times

Summarised experiences

Why children have run away:

- something became unsafe at the institution with adults or other children
- they experienced conflicts or grief in the family
- they experienced that friends were in pain
- they were scared, sad, angry or desperate
- it didn't feel like adults understood or cared enough
- adults didn't have time to talk about the pain
- they wanted adults to understand that they were in a lot of pain
- they experienced limitations at the institution over time
- they hadn't been told what would help them before the restrictions came
- they were rarely allowed to go out and had to take every chance to get time without adults

The police were called quickly

70% have experienced the police being called

Summarised experiences

The institution has contacted the police:

- when children ran away, even before adults at the institution had looked for them
- when there was chaos at the institution
- after adults had threatened to call the police, if children did not return

What the police could do:

- quickly try to take control of the situation
- hold children down, lay them down or handcuff them
- enter the institution with shields
- roughly held children who had run away
- drive children to the institution, the police station or the Child Protection Emergency Unit
- meet children harshly, in a way that is perceived as scary or authoritarian

How it has turned out for children:

- it felt as if adults did not understand or care
- it felt as if adults thought they were criminals and had given them up
- it felt strange that those who were supposed to show care called the police when children were in pain
- they quickly lost trust in adults when they called the police before trying to find a safe solution
- it didn't feel like the police understood that when children run away it's about something
- they have later had problems calling the police when they have been in need

QUOTES - STOP SAFELY

The one woman who works at my institution is completely different. She never uses coercion. The others should learn from her.

It's not like I snapped at the employee because he asked me to clean up. It has built up over several weeks. He comments on everything I do wrong, just like my dad did.

I ran away from the institution because I was afraid of the adults who used coercion. I would rather go out at night than be there.

Institutions should talk to those who live there about what to do when they see that we are on the way to snapping, then the adults can do smart things instead of coercion.

When adults call the police, the safety disappears. I wish they were braver than that.

The adults said I couldn't go out. I was a danger to myself and others. Then I started to believe it. Then it became dangerous.

We don't run away to bother the adults. There is almost always another reason. When we are on our way out, they must try to understand the reason.

This is my home. I thought I would get better and then they use coercion and punish me. Coercion makes it impossible to get better.

There are some who always manage to stop situations safely. Then there are those who always use coercion. It's about the adults, it's not like I become ten times more dangerous when they're at work.

The institution, the Child Protection System and BUP believe that I am ill. I know that what I do is because of things that I have experienced. But when they so often call me sick, it doesn't exactly get any easier to get "healthy".

No adult should be allowed to use coercion. It destroys me. I need hugs and to know that I'm good.

Don't force me back with the police, when things are exactly the same as when I left. Then I'll just run away again.

I often broke things at the institution. They just changed the barrel and glass to plastic, so I couldn't break it. Then the TV got broken instead. They understood nothing about that there was a reason for it.

When I threatened her with a knife, she just stood there and said she knew I was in pain and that I was kind. I had a completely different relationship with her after that day.

The police have so much power, without knowing me. They just become my new abusive stepfather.

If I notice that the adults honestly want to understand, there will never be dangerous situations. So easy.

Don't punish me when I get home, but say they've been worried and are happy to see me. Don't say I have to tell what happened, but rather say they are there to talk if I want to.

There is no logic in someone who is supposed to calm us down, coming in screaming. They must be calm for us to be calm.

ADVICE

Think about safety and plan for hurt

To avoid painful situations, it has to become safe. Their focus at all times has to be on making it safe for us at the institution. If we can trust you and feel that you care about us, it can be safe enough to talk honestly. Then we can say when something is bad before it becomes chaos. This applies from the time we move in and every single day until we move out. We ask you to remember that safety means everything. None of us want to be mean or hurt anyone. Make it safe so that it can be easier for us to avoid having to do bad things to ourselves or others.

At the start after we have moved in, we ask you to make a plan for what you will do when we are in pain. In order for us to be able to say something honestly, we must be able to choose the adult with whom we will make the plan. The plan must be made for when we do bad things at the institution and when we run away. The plan must state how we can speak up if we find it painful or difficult, in words or in other ways. It could be a code word, a code emoji on a message or that we sit in a certain place in the house, for example. The plan must state which adults we are able to talk to when things are difficult. It must be explained from us what the various adults at the institution can do in the various situations, and what they cannot do. The plan must be concrete and possible to change along the way. After something bad has happened, we must, together with someone we trust, see if something in the plan needs to be changed.

Stop us with honesty and understanding

When there is so much chaos inside us that we have to be stopped, we ask you to speak kindly to us. Use a warm voice, kind words, warm eyes, and warm and open body language. Be calm, so we don't become more unsafe. Say you're not angry or disappointed and that you know we're not mean. Say that you understand that something you said or did could have triggered it. Tell us that you still want to try to make it safe for us. We must know and believe that you do what you do because you want us to get better. Ask us if you can sit next to us, hold our hand or hold around us. Ask if we can sit down together, go for a drive or if there is something else you can do for us.

We can notice that you can also feel many emotions. When there is chaos, we ask you adults to explain what the chaos does to you. It's nice if you explain to us when you don't know what to do. Then you show us that you are people with feelings and that makes it safer for us to explain. Explain to us that it hurts you to see us in pain. We need to understand how it affects you inside. Then we can more easily stop hurting ourselves and others.

Avoid physical restraining

You must do everything you can not to physical restraint by holding the young person, even in very difficult situations. Restraint often feels like one of the worst things adults have done. We have often experienced a lot of pain growing up, and most of the time you don't know about it. When child protection workers or the police use physical restraint by holding the young person, you have no idea what memories it awakens, or what emotions it creates in us. We are not dangerous, but using physical restraint by holding the young person can help make us more desperate and afraid. Always try to stop us safely and find other solutions together with us. Restraining must not be a solution.

In order for us to feel that it's safe when we are in great pain, you must understand that we are not sick or dangerous. Ask calmly and humbly about what is happening inside us. When we know that you are trying to understand and are not going to yell, it becomes safer and easier to stop what we are doing. Try as best you can to understand why we create chaos and what we need. Then it may be possible to stop doing it.

Ask if there is anything you can do for us to make the situation safer. Say that you would be very happy to help. Ask if you can be with us until it becomes easier to talk. Ask if there is something we can do together, so that it will be safer to talk about what we feel. Say that you don't have the solution, but that you want to figure something out with us. Do everything you can to avoid using physical restraint by holding the young person.

Stop us safely when we want to run away

Try to find out why we want to leave the institution. Remember that there's always a reason for it. Be calm and show that you want to understand why when you talk to us. We need to know that you really want us to stay at the institution. We don't leave to make it difficult for you. Keep talking to us calmly even if we're about to leave the institution. Say you want us there.

Ask us if we can come up with something together instead of leaving the institution. It could be drinking a cup of cocoa or going for a walk. If we continue walking, walk quietly behind us a little while you say kind words to us. Tell us that we are worth a lot and that you love us. If we don't stop after a short distance, or we start running, we ask you to turn around and go back to the institution.

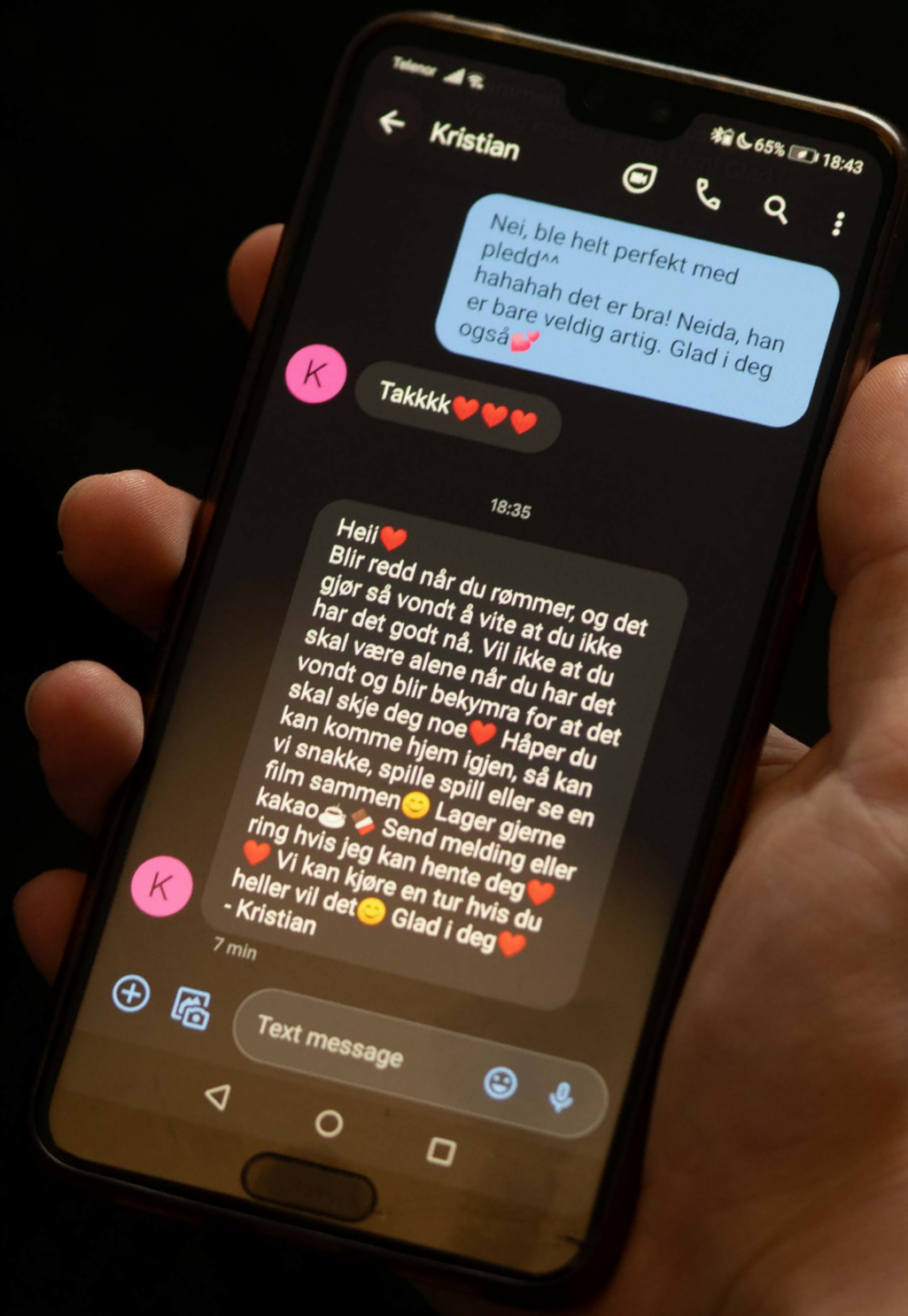
Make it safe to come home

Try to get in touch with us after we have left the institution. It MUST be someone we have said we trust who writes to us. Try to get the adult we trust the most to contact us, even if they are not at work. There is little point if it's not someone we trust. We need warm messages that you want us home, miss us and love us. Write that it's safe to come home and that you will not get angry or punish us. We need the adult we trust to explain from their feelings how it feels when we are out alone. Try to make us want to come home. Ask us how it can be safe to return and what you can do to make us want to come home.

Do not contact family or friends when we have left the institution. You don't know what it can do when parents or friends find out. They may get scared or angry. We quickly lose trust in you when we learn that you have gone behind our backs to parents whom we do not want to worry or who we may be terrified of. Friends may stop contacting us or withdraw. Most of the time, it only gets worse for us if you make contact with other people in our lives without us knowing and wanting to.

Give us a warm welcome when we get home

We are often afraid that you will be angry or upset when we return. Therefore, meet us with a lot of warmth when we return home. Punishing us for escaping will not make it safer for us to be in the institution. Tell us you're happy we're back. We need an adult we trust to talk to us pretty soon after we return, to try to find out why we left. If you don't try to understand why we left, or don't make it safe for us to be there when we come back, we will easily leave again. Speak with a lot of warmth in your voice and be humble that you understand that something happened that made us leave. Ask us in the conversation if we can make a plan together for what it's wise for us and you to do, if we think of escaping later. Find out with us what to do if it becomes so difficult that we still end up leaving.



Avoid the police

Before you call the police, remember that it's rarely safe with the police. If we create chaos in the institution and do things that could be dangerous, it does not mean that we actually want to do something dangerous. We are often in great pain. We are in pain regardless of whether we say or do something harsh or hurtful. What we say or do is often about protecting ourselves from feeling the pain. Know this before you call the police. When the police arrive, they can use a lot of force to take control of the situation. It doesn't make us calmer or kinder, it often makes us even more desperate. It doesn't get any better inside us either. If you call the police, we usually lose all trust in you.

The best thing you can do is usually to find a solution together with us, in order to stop us safely. Try everything you can to contact us if we've run away, before you call the police. If the police must be called, clearly ask them to call you if they find us. It's best if someone we trust from the institution picks us up, instead of the police doing it.

Coercion in residential childcare institutions

Coercion is not the main theme of this report. In 2019, Changefactory Knowledge Centre launched a report on how coercion is experienced in residential childcare institutions. Here are some findings from this qualitative survey, called "If I was your child". 55 children and young people gave clear answers to Norway about what the use of coercion does to children. The answers showed that the widespread use of coercion can contribute to making it very unsafe to live in an institution and make life after institution more difficult. Coercion must therefore be risk-assessed to a much greater extent. The report also provides important advice on how to stop children safely.

EXPERIENCES

Coercion awakens memories and makes them change their view of themselves

Four out of five have previously experienced parents or family who have used coercion, violence or have committed abuse. Many have not told the Child Protection System about this. Most of them have not told the residential childcare institution about this. Some of them have not told anyone about it in the public sector. All the young people have experienced neglect in various forms. These experiences are in the bodies. Using coercion brings back many memories of growing up.

Many of the young people explain how being followed, being in short term isolation or physical restraint causes them to change their view of themselves. They have begun to see themselves as sick, someone who can hurt themselves or someone who can hurt others. Many people tell very specifically about how being held hard, held on the ground, followed or forced into to short term isolation in situations where they are in a lot of pain, feels degrading. It can feel like they are not worthy, and that's why adults can do these things. Repeated use of coercion and force could strongly influence their thoughts.

When society allows child protection workers to use physical restraint, short term isolation and restricted freedom of movement as part of good practice, what do young people learn? When they learn that those assigned to look after them can use physical force, what is the thought after they turn 18? Several answered that this had taken away their faith in people and in the point of living. In the qualitative survey, the children asked many questions about whether the use of coercion was a simplistic and inhumane solution, which adults used, without thinking it through and without caring enough about the children who have experienced a lot of pain in the past.

Coercion produces serious reactions

Almost all the young people talk about after-effects of the use of coercion in an institution: Fear of loud noises, nausea of smells associated with the use of coercion, fear of looks similar to those of employees, fear of cold and ironic voices similar to the voices of employees who have used coercion, fear for people who resemble those who have used coercion at the institution.

Some get "flashbacks" from events in their upbringing, some tell of their body "freezing" and that they then only do what others ask them to do. Others have violent counter-reactions and report that pain from previous experiences can rage through the body. This can make them rude, aggressive or very violent.

Some of the young people say that when staff at an institution used coercion, it was worse for them than the experiences from when parents or siblings did it. They were people in the Child Protection System who they thought were supposed to help. Several young people explain that they are now undergoing treatment to process the injuries they have suffered after being subjected to coercion. Most of those who took part in the qualitative survey have not been helped to talk about and process the experiences from the use of coercion. They talked about how they struggle with the aftermath in various ways.

Coercion destroys boundaries

Many of the young people have experiences of adults in their childhood who broke down the boundaries of what others can do with their bodies. The use of short term isolation, following and physical restraint in an institution has meant that boundaries have once again been broken. It helps to destroy even more boundaries for being able to say no or to walk away when they experience something painful or stupid.

Adults in the Child Protection System must protect children from what is harmful to them, at the same time they are made to do actions that do not respect children's boundaries. This helps to reinforce the feelings that others can take power over their bodies and step over boundaries that are very unclear inside them. Physical restraint, short term isolation and following in a residential childcare institution have reinforced what they have learned earlier in life, that they deserve that others use force or sexually abuse them. It may also have contributed to them seeking out people who take physical power over their bodies.

ADVICE

Say you understand we are in pain

It would be nice if you explained that you know we are in pain. That you know that this is why we do what we do. Tell us with words that you understand that self-harm, breaking things or anger are signs. At the same time, you can say that you do not think what is happening now will help us in the future. And that you think we can find other ways to get the bad stuff out. Feel free to use examples from when you have done something bad. The fact that you, as adults, talk about yourselves can help many of us. Do everything you can to also remind us that we are good. It's nice if you don't scold and don't think about punishing us. It's also not a good idea to say anything preachy, it can be very triggering. You don't know what experiences we have with words like that. We ask you to hold on to the fact that this happens without us wanting it.

Remember we could have been your child

What would you do if one of us was your child? If we struggled a lot, were sad or very angry. Wouldn't you hug us and tell us how much you care about us? Wouldn't you meet us with warmth and kindness? We think most of you would. But why should we be met in a hard way? Why should we be held fast and followed? Does anyone seriously think this is good for us? Does anyone seriously say out loud that this is in the child's best interests? Why shouldn't we be met with warmth and kindness?

Drugs may be the only safe thing

Taking drugs can be the only thing we're able to do in some situations. It has become a familiar path that quickly becomes a habit. It's difficult to give up drugs, once you have used drugs. There can be a lot of sadness in giving up the addiction. And things can happen that make drug addiction the only solution to living with the bad feelings. Sometimes it can be difficult to stop us safely. We beg you, don't give up.

As a starting point, we all want to be stopped from using drugs. You adults must always remember this. But we must be stopped as people who are in pain. You must never stop us to punish, but to help. We must be stopped in safe ways. What helps is honesty and human warmth. It's also that you are open, humble and want to collaborate closely.

Meet with warmth and that we are worth a lot

Most of us who have struggled with drugs have felt very small. When drugs tempt us, we need adults who can provide safety and warmth. It's very nice if you use warm words, a warm voice and warm eyes, which show that you are concerned. It can feel very good if you tell us that we are worth a lot. Many of us have heard it rarely or never, and if we have heard it, we have not believed it. But we have missed it greatly.

Document coercion wisely

If a protocol for coercive measures is to be written, the young people's experience must be documented first, before the adults' thoughts or opinions. The young person must be given the opportunity to write in the protocol together with an adult they trust. One of the managers must help write and ensure honesty. The person who has used physical restraint on a young person cannot be the one to describe what happened, unless the young person themselves asks for it. If the adult and the young person have different descriptions, these two experiences must stand separately. Whoever writes the protocol must write humbly and warmly. In order for the young person to be able to share honest experiences of how they experienced the coercion, the adults must first say that they're sorry. It must come from the heart and be an honest apology.

NATIONAL TROUBLE



National trouble

The view on children

4 out of 5 children in residential childcare institutions have experienced the use of force, violence or abuse in their own family (If I was your child: about coercion in residential childcare institutions, FF 2019). There are children who have experienced a lot of pain and the pain is in their bodies. This can be expressed in bad or hurtful words or actions.

Children who are going to a residential childcare institution are currently divided into categories and are moved to residential childcare institution for children with high risk behavioural issues, residential childcare institution for children with low risk behavioural issues, residential childcare institution for drug abuse, and residential childcare institutions. The institution they will be moved to is determined based on the behaviour of the children. National authorities explain that more and more children have complex difficulties, are ill or have serious behavioural problems. New secure institutions for children with serious behavioural issues are created for children who commit crimes.

Norway has decided that a lot of coercion and restrictions can be used on children in institutions. If children living at home had been exposed to so much use of force, they would have been moved. That this is done in an institution is about the view Norway has on the children there, we believe. How can Norway treat children in institutions as less valuable?

Most children know inside that bad or hurtful actions they do are about something that hurts inside them. They have experienced how the solutions, when the pain becomes too violent, often become more framework. They notice how adults look at and talk about them. For children who have experienced first-hand how Norway has created the framework around residential childcare institutions, it becomes very painful.

Standardisation gives the wrong help

In recent years, national authorities have strongly believed in standardisation. Care pathway within mental health care has been rolled out. The belief in mapping through ASEBA and other standardised forms and interviews is the basis for much of the help in residential childcare institutions. In many institutions, treatment or help is standardised. Plans, measures and reward systems are used. Most of this is not made in collaboration with those who are to be helped.

The knowledge from children is clear that standardisation can contribute to a lot of wrong help. All children at the same institution are treated according to the same method. Mapping with a focus on social skills, emotional difficulties and behavioural difficulties causes children to quickly lose trust. Children learn that the adults focus on what they do when they are in pain or difficulty and not how they feel inside. Several models for help focus on changing the behaviour of young people through standard ways of doing this. But the fact that the behaviour has changed does not mean that the child has had to deal with what hurts.

The SINTEF report on standardised treatment plans

A report on the institutional provision for young people with a simultaneous need for care and mental health care, which came out in 2020, looked at the course of treatment at two pilot institutions that had a clear standardised treatment plan. The report showed that when the researchers asked both employees and young people how they experienced the standardised offer, the experiences were very different. The adults largely supported the use of DBT. The young people were very critical of the offer. The researchers wrote that the stay did not seem to give the young people any benefit. SINTEF concluded that there is no reason to recommend the model for further establishment of institutions.

Standardisation of the pathway for care and change (OEM)

Children in care institutions need care. Many have experienced a lot of stress or pain. The focus on reducing the expression of pain, as an expression that something is stressful or painful, is clearly evident in OEM. Focusing on removing expressions of pain is not caring. In order to get better, children must be allowed to talk about the bad things.

In OEM, children must be surveyed and practice skills. Here are some challenges:

- The aim of the course: Reduction of suicide attempts and self-harm, of problem behavior such as violence and threats of violence, of running away, of actions that can reduce the quality of life, for example casual sexual contact, absence from school, social isolation and/or excessive use of social media.
- The beginning: Mapping, obtaining and strengthening commitment
- Along the way: Skills training in groups, individual change work, generalising skills and new ways of handling situations, using the institutional environment.

Does Norway want such a focus, in help for children who have had a difficult or painful time? The knowledge directly from children points in a completely different direction.

Pain turned into sickness

In 2015, 400 young people from all over the country took part in the research project "Mental health of children and young people in residential childcare institutions". The findings were very serious for children in institutions and for the Norwegian authorities. Several large investments were then to ensure good help for children in institutions. The idea and the discussion that children in institutions are sick was lifted up high. Joint institutions were created for BUP and child protection, BUP became responsible for institutions and there was a big focus on the fact that these children needed mental health care.

From the report's summary: "Our results show that there is a high incidence of 76% of mental disorders within the last 3 months among young people in residential childcare institutions, and only 38% state that they have received any form of psychiatric help from the specialist health service for these disorders during this period. The young people also have a high degree of comorbidity between anxiety, depression and serious behavioural disorders. This paints a picture of young people who have major and complex challenges, especially for those placed on the basis of child protection clauses without their own or their parents/guardian's consent." p. 9

Knowledge from children shows that this is not a wise development. One of the findings in the report "If I was your child" shows that 4 out of 5 children who live in an institution have experienced violence, abuse or neglect in childhood. Thus, it is only natural that one finds a high incidence of strong and painful emotions and that the expressions of pain the children show mean that they are diagnosed with mental disorders. Most of the children do not ask for expert help, but want to talk to an adult they trust, where they live.

Random where children are sent

The children in this survey (They think they know best, Changeactory 2021) often experienced it as random which institution they were moved to. They could be sent far away for no reason that they understood. The National Unit for Treatment Initiatives (NABE, formerly NIT) assists intake with mapping and target group differentiation of all young people for whom the municipality applies for a treatment institution in accordance with § 4-24 and 4-26. Descriptions from children about how intake was experienced show that children's rights are often violated. They have often lacked information and have never been able to speak safely about what they have experienced, how life feels now and what they really need in the future. The child must have been able to speak to someone they feel safe with, without influence or pressure. Most of the children have experienced that the decisions about where to move were made by adults they didn't know where. They were often told that the institution they were transferred to was the only offer available. In order for NABE to be able to make assessments in the best interests of the child, the rights must be secured.

The Office of the Auditor General of Norway's report: "The investigation shows that the Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufetat) places children in residential childcare institutions without sufficient information about the child's needs. This means that the Bureau does not have enough information about the child to be able to choose the residential childcare institution that can give the child the best offer. Sufficient information about the needs of the child is decisive for the choice of institution to be adapted to the needs of each individual child".

Behaviour as an entry condition

When moving to residential childcare institution

for children with behavioural issues, "serious behavioural difficulties" are decisive for whether a decision to move is made. The entry condition takes the focus away from what the child has experienced, thinks and means. This is often not thematized.

The principle of the mildest intervention must also apply to children. A involuntary placement in residential childcare institution for children with behavioural issues will in most cases be very invasive for a child. Before such a placement, the child must be provided with a framework in which to express themselves freely. Serious behavioural difficulties as conditions are formulated in such a discretionary way that it can make the move arbitrary. It may be in violation of Article 37 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on, among other things, deprivation of liberty.

When the frameworks are based on behaviour, children are often not allowed to express themselves freely to the Child Protection System. Children are rarely asked why they do what they do. Both the child protection services and the residential childcare institutions are given poor conditions to be able to provide useful help. It can be completely accidental if consideration of the child's best interests is ensured.

Participating in legal proceedings where the child's behaviour is the subject can be a burden for the child. What the child has experienced and the parents' inability to look after the child is to a small extent an issue, although in many cases this is an important reason for the expressions the child has, and thus for the move to an institution.

when they
focus on
behaviour,
I don't tell
anything
important

Violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Most children have experienced that their rights in connection to how they should be met were violated during their stay in childcare institutions. When one of the rights is violated, actions and decisions made by adults in the institution are often not in accordance with the best interests of the child.

The childcare institutions could decide, without the children being informed or expressing themselves freely and safely about what kind of help the children should receive, who they would talk to, what kind of programme they would have while there and what the children should practise when they lived there. The child's statements were often not given due weight when decisions were made. For some children, it was decided that the police should be contacted when they ran away or acted out in the childcare institution, without them having a chance to express themselves freely beforehand.

Children are often not provided with enough information about who the adults in the childcare institution are talking to, why they are talking to them and what they are talking about. They often do not know how long they will stay at the childcare institution. They often lack information about what the adults in the childcare institution are not allowed to do to them.

Information about and from children can be shared with parents, child protection services, schools, mental health services or other adults without children knowing about it or having a chance to express themselves freely about it. This can happen in handovers, papers, collaborative meetings and phone calls. Children often do not get a chance to express themselves freely about what they need the adults to do instead of being subjected to physical restraint if they were to do dangerous things to themselves or others, or if they make trouble at the institution.

Experts make recommendations

Buudir has made professional recommendations for the prevention and handling of conflict-filled situations in residential childcare institutions. They are mainly based on proposals from a group of experts. The training as it works today, from the perspective of children, will not sufficiently contribute to adults in institutions becoming better at preventing or handling conflict-filled situations.

The recommendations have a strong focus on safety for the employees, that they must assess safety and create distance and the possibility of retreat. Instead of being honest with the child about the feelings adults have in the situation and which affect them then and there, they should say that they see that, for example, the child is angry. Little is said about the adults having to remind children that they know the children are kind, or that the adults understand that it is about something painful. In addition, the adults are trained in various techniques for using physical restraint on children.

The recommendations violate children's rights in several ways, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In order to determine actions concerning the child, these rights must first be secured. If the recommendations are to ensure that institutions meet children who threaten, are angry, use violence, are intoxicated or run away, as wisely as possible, they must fundamentally incorporate knowledge from children and children's rights according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Coercion is used on young people with trauma

The Child Welfare Act and the Rights Regulations guide child protection workers in institutions to use physical force, short term isolation, searches and restricted freedom of movement. This is often done without those who are assigned to do it knowing what kind of experiences the children carry with them (If I was your child: about coercion in residential childcare institutions, Changefactory 2019). Most of the children in residential childcare institutions have not told anyone there about their most serious traumas. Some of the children have told something, but very few have told the worst. Many have also not shared with child protection workers what previous episodes of coercion have done inside them.

Employees are tasked with holding the children until they "calm down" in a way that may remind children of violence or sexual abuse to which they have been exposed in the past. The children may have flashbacks and once again experience that the limits of their own body are trampled down. Employees are given the task of short term isolating children, without knowing whether they have experienced being locked up and short term isolation growing up. Staff have to search rooms, clothes and bodies without knowing whether these experiences trigger violent experiences in the children's lives. Employees have to follow a young person without having any idea what kind of memories this can trigger and thus without knowing what kind of pain, grief, anger or rage this can create inside children.

After the use of coercion, only a few children have had the strength or courage to talk honestly with the adults at the institution about how they really experience or experienced the coercion. Few have told about what the use of coercion does to them and how it leaves a mark on their lives.

They think they know best

Children in residential childcare institutions often answer that they meet too many adults who seem to think they know best. They can make decisions and decide how children should be met, without collaborating with the children about it. It happens in residential childcare institutions, and it happens in national development processes.

In Norway, many people think that various types of experts can create good residential childcare institutions for children, without first checking with the children for whom they are created. Initiatives, new offers and training programmes can be rolled out without children having had a say in them.

When it comes to children who have strong expressions, who are described as criminals, very sick or dangerous, the only solution for Norway has been to bring in experts. Experts come to the institution, expert committees are set up and expert institutions are created. For children in residential childcare institutions, it can be experienced as if those who decide in Norway think they know better than the children who live in institutions every day, those who feel it first-hand.

What Norway often does not understand is that the experts who are missing to find the right solutions are the children who live in institutions today. Adults rarely know best on their own, even if they have a long education, a lot of experience or because they are adults. Children who live in institutions now must contribute to the solutions if Norway is to create institutions that help children.

NATIONAL

REPORTS



National reports

In recent years, several public reports have focused on several of the same challenges that the knowledge from children points to. Excerpts from some of these are presented here. The purpose is to highlight findings in these reports that clearly emphasise the seriousness of challenges seen from the perspective of children.

The Office of the Auditor General of Norway (OAG)

Investigation of whether state child protection authorities ensure the best for children in residential childcare institutions (2020)

Excerpt from background and goals:

- "The Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children and young people under the age of 18 special human rights protection. It is an overarching principle in the Child Protection Act § 4-1 that one must place decisive emphasis on what is in the best interests of the child when taking appropriate measures. The aim of this investigation is to assess whether state child protection authorities ensure the best for the child when placing and following up children in private and state residential childcare institutions, and any weaknesses in the area."

Excerpt from findings:

- Inadequate mapping of the needs of children entails a risk of incorrect placement. It can have serious consequences for the children involved.
- It is serious that the follow-up from the National Bureau of Statistics is not sufficient to ensure the development and future of all children who are in residential childcare institutions.
- The system for follow-up by institutions has not sufficiently ensured the quality of the services provided to the children. The consequence may be that children do not receive proper care and treatment, and that the services provided are not adapted to their needs. This is serious for the children.

- OAG has gone through a selection of cases where children have been placed in a residential childcare institution. 14 of these were placements in private residential childcare institutions that were started after the current routine was introduced. Of these, nine of the placements lack documentation on the basis for choosing a residential childcare institution according to routine.
- In the cases that have been reviewed, it is both difficult to see whether and how the Bureau has collected and assessed the views of the children.
- residential childcare institutions lack action plans for children and do not report on the children's development.

OAG presented the following advice as a result of the investigation:

OAG recommends that the Ministry of Children and Families ensure:

- that the choice of residential childcare institution is adapted to the needs of each individual child and that the child is given the opportunity to contribute to their life situation
- that there is sufficient documentation of the assessments that form the basis for choosing a residential childcare institution and that the child's development at the residential childcare institution is evaluated and documented
- that plans are drawn up to ensure the development of children in residential childcare institutions
- that Bufetat follows up the quality in residential childcare institutions in a good way

Sintef

Final report: New institutional offer for young people with a simultaneous need for care and mental health care (2020)

Excerpt from goal:

- "Sintef's overall aim with the project has been to gather knowledge and experience, and to evaluate the establishment and operation of the pilot institutions that test the integrated model where care and treatment for mental health problems are provided at the same time."

Excerpts from the findings:

- "The great emphasis on treatment seems to have partially overshadowed the focus on care, relationship work and the young people's participation. Whether this is due to the method(s) itself or how the methods are understood and implemented, we do not have a good enough basis to conclude. In a new Swedish study that has looked at the development within residential childcare institutions, the authors point out that it is a common feature in this institutional landscape that the emphasis is shifting from a logic of care where environmental therapy is strong, to a professional logic where evidence-based methods (such as DBT) win out" p.111
- "Elements of DBT, such as Plan for extra help (PFEH) and diary cards, receive particularly critical feedback from the young people. Both interviews with the young people and the PFEH documents show that many young people do not understand the meaning of the Plan for extra help, and they clearly express that they experience the measures as punishment following special incidents. The employees will be able to justify such actions with the fact that limitation and boundary setting are necessary and an expression of care (expressed in interviews). However, the young people do not seem to have the same understanding of it. We also question the name "plan for extra help" for measures that are exclusively limitations or consequences. (...) There is little indication that the Plan for extra help overall has a positive effect on the young people and their situation, and there is every reason to take the young people's expressed "punishment experience" seriously." p. 113

- "The young people (...) experience a fierce focus on treatment, little emphasis on (what they refer to as) care, very many employees, little degree of domesticity and no idea of where they are going after leaving the institution. At the same time, the young people talk about elements they appreciate in the new, for example a good relationship with an environmental therapist. (...) However, the documents do not give indications that the treatment is working and that there is a positive change in the young people during their stay in the institution. Despite the fact that employees have many good experiences with this way of working, our overall assessment is that there are many and major challenges with the new institutional offer, while the target group appears to have little benefit from the stay. It is therefore difficult to conclude that the offer as it is today is a positive addition to collaborative models between child protection and mental health care. According to our assessments, the negative consequences are greater than the positive ones." p. 109
- "The data sources have given us different and partly contradictory impressions of how the institutions function. Employees highlight many positive aspects of the new offer, while young people, on the other hand, are largely critical of the offer. The documents go a long way to confirm the clear focus on treatment that the young people describe as experiencing." p. 10
- "After an overall assessment of the model for the new institution offer, we believe there is no reason to recommend the establishment of several institutions according to the same model. In the further development of an integrated offer between child protection and health for the target group, the starting point should be the good experiences the employees have had, while also taking into account the less good experiences expressed by the young people. The goal must be to create an offer that both young people and employees feel is good." p. 11

if you are
kind I am
able to be
kind



The Civil Ombudsman

Excerpt from the Norwegian Ombudsman's opinion on the proposal for a new child protection act:

"The civil ombudsman will also encourage the ministry to assess whether the prohibition against coercion and force in the current rights regulation should still only apply to "physical" coercion or force. Although physical coercion poses a high risk of injury, strong psychological pressure to restrict movement or freedom of action can also have serious damaging effects. It is pointed out that Section 30 of the Children's Act, which includes a prohibition against psychological violence and is aimed at parents, is intended to provide guidance for institutional staff's right to use coercion and force against residents.

Findings and experiences from the ombudsman's visit show that employees in some places understand "physical coercion" in the current rights regulations section 13, only as physically restraining, carrying or laying the child on the floor. Our concern is that the current ban does not reflect that even strong psychological pressure can be so threatening or frightening that children and young people suffer injuries or trauma. That psychological coercion can be as serious as physical coercion is also reflected in the UN Convention on Torture, art. 1.

The Civil Ombudsman's findings show that treatment methods that involve significant psychological pressure and strain are in some places integrated into the treatment plan, without any evaluation of whether the methods are in accordance with child protection legislation. In the ombudsman's view, the ministry should consider drafting the ban in a way that makes it clear that undue psychological pressure such as threats or other intimidating behavior is also prohibited as part of treatment or upbringing, as it is for the child's parents." (p.5)

Report from a visit to Jong Youth Home (2019)

- "The guidelines for the rights regulation state that the institution is the residents' home during the period they live there. It is basically a goal that they should have an existence that is as similar as possible to the situation of children and young people who do not live in an institution. (...) It is difficult to see how locked doors to central common areas such as the kitchen contribute to such an experience."

Report from a visit to Stendi Nymogården (2019)

- "Findings during the visit caused particular concern that young people placed under coercion felt to a very small extent that they were allowed to participate in small and large decisions that concerned them."
- "One of the young people who lived alone in these housing communities had had to deal with 31 employees on co-living rotation during the 4-5 months the young person had been placed there, while another had met 21 employees on co-living rotation over the course of 4 months."

The Children's Ombudsman

They Think We're Shitkids (2020)

The children's ombudsman read 77 child protection cases to young people who live or have lived in an institution, spoke to 39 young people who or have lived in an institution and interviewed the management and employees of 4 child protection services and 17 institutional departments.

Excerpt from the report:

- "Today's practice and system mean that it is not always possible to have the child's best interests as the starting point for choosing an institution. It varies how much the child protection service knows about the young people before they move to an institution, and the information is not systematised and analysed well enough. The Child Protection System's mapping and assessments vary between the types of cases, even though the young people's needs may be similar. As a rule, there is a lack of analysis of what the information implies for the child's need for care and treatment. This makes the

argument for the choice of institution often become standardised, and that it is difficult to assess what kind of help will be in the best interests of the child. The institutions experience receiving too little or wrong information about the child who is going to move in, which can also affect their ability to provide the right help and the well-being of the young people who live there before." (p.6)

- Several institutions we have visited have recently removed long shifts and switched to a three-part rotation. According to what we have been informed, the young people have not been heard in this process. It may seem that the change is based on practical considerations, without the best interests of the children being assessed or emphasised. It is important that the young people's opinions come forward, and that great emphasis is placed on the child's best interests when changes are made to the custody schedule. p. 38
- "Young people need to feel that adults love them and care about them. They tell about adults who are good and genuine carers, and who the young people know want them well. It is about how the adult manages to create security, show love and provide care. In a good relationship, the adult dares to share his own experiences and feelings, so that the young person can get to know them and feel safe. If the adult also has similar experiences to the young person themselves, this is a big plus." p. 41
- "Children and young people in institutions are mostly not concerned with methods and specialist knowledge, but with being understood and treated like normal children." p. 44

The Norwegian Board of Health Supervision

Summary of nationwide inspections (2018)

In 2018, the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision carried out a nationwide inspection which was summarised in the report "Children's home. Adult responsibility". The inspection included 37 private, 19 state and 4 municipal residential childcare institutions. The subject of the inspection was residential childcare institutions' work with proper care and the use of coercion. The child's participation was a consistent and integrated theme in all matters investigated.

Excerpt from summary

- "(...) In total, failures in the form of offences and/or need for improvement were thus uncovered in 45 out of 60 residential childcare institutions examined. In 15 residential childcare institutions, neither violations of the law nor a need for improvement were found.
- There were far more residential childcare institutions with offences that failed in their work to provide proper care than in their work with coercion." pp. 3 and 7

Extract from overall assessment

- "(...) They uncovered institutions that failed in their work with the use of coercion. Children said that they felt unsafe, that they did not trust the adults and that they were afraid when they themselves or others were subjected to coercion." p. 35

Excerpt from summary

- "The inspection shows that it failed in several places in how the institutions got to know the child and systematically followed up and assessed the child's statements about their own situation. That the staff know the child well and know what challenges the child has is necessary to be able to provide proper care and prevent the use of coercion." p. 43

Use of force in residential childcare institutions (2021) - Extent of coercive use and the county governors' handling of force use complaints in 2019

The county governors have registered a total of 7,738 decisions about the use of coercion in 2019. This is an increase of 7 per cent from 2018, where a total of 7,247 decisions were registered. From 2017 to 2019, the number of registered decisions has increased by 16 per cent nationally. p. 8

As we have highlighted earlier, the figures are affected by many factors, and the figures in this report do not give us an answer as to what the reason for the increase may be. But the fact that measures increase over a longer period, gives reason that the actors in the Child Protection System should be curious about and reflect on what lies behind. The Directorate for Children, Youth and Families, the Norwegian Agency for Children, Youth and Families, state and private institutions and the supervisory authority sit together on a lot of information that can be the starting point for such a discussion. p. 13

As in previous years, coercion in acute dangerous situations is the second most used coercive measure nationally. The Norwegian Board of Health Supervision is concerned that the number of decisions on this basis is stable and high compared to other types of coercion. There is reason to look more closely at the use of coercion in acute dangerous situations. As we get into in the report's chapter 5, this is also the type of coercion that the young people complain about the most and where most are upheld, and is the coercion that the young people experience as the most intrusive. p. 11

At the same time, there are relatively few decisions about forced use under the rights regulation that are actually appealed, and mainly only certain provisions are appealed. In 2019, only 9 percent of all enforcement decisions were appealed.

Why don't the children complain more? In order for the complaints system to be a real guarantee of legal certainty and to prevent illegal coercion, the complaints system must be designed and practised in a way that makes it understandable for the children, and that they feel that it is useful to complain. The Norwegian Board of Health Supervision believes there is reason to question whether the scheme and its implementation take care of this well enough. p. 23

The Institute of Public Health

Good residential childcare institutions: systematic mapping overview (2020)

Extract from a survey to see what research from 2010-2019 says about measures, methods and strategies that will facilitate good care for children and young people in residential childcare institutions.

Excerpt from findings:

- "There do not seem to be any studies from Norway or other Nordic countries that have investigated the effect of or experience with care work in youth institutions."
- "Nor do there seem to be any studies in Norway or in other Nordic countries (from 2010-2019) that have investigated what constitutes good care for children and young people in youth institutions."
- "They emphasised that employees who have a good balance between rules and freedom, show empathy and are available for support when the young people needed it were significant for the young people's development. (...) In order for the institution to be able to give the child the best possible care, the child's participation is also very important. Conversations with young people are central to obtaining the necessary information and knowledge of the individual's identity and needs (including the need for care). It is important that young people have the opportunity to tell what can create both security and insecurity for them."
- "It seems that a characteristic of good care provision is that the young people have autonomy, self-determination and freedom."

Lastly

The institution is our home. Where we live and should be safe. There we shall get love and get help to work with the pain inside us. Where we shall have adults who we know love us, and who want us to get better.

We who live in residential childcare institution, residential childcare institution for children with low risk behavioural issues, residential childcare institution for children with high risk behavioural issues and residential childcare institution for drug abuse, are the same children. Because we show what hurts inside us in different ways, we are met differently. It is weird, when the vast majority of us have known and experienced much of the same things.

We have lived in places where you have treated some of us and had models of help for others. For most of us, the treatment and help have not helped. For some of us, it has made it worse. The focus has almost always been on getting us to stop using drugs, stop self-harming or stop committing crime.

When it was decided that there should be standards for how we should be met where we live, you forgot to ask us if it was a good idea. The thought has probably been good, but for us it has not become safe.

We know that Norway is now focusing on lifting experts and competence. If we had chosen, this would not have happened. The idea that if only adults know more, then it would be better for us, is a scary thought. Because most of us have already met adults who think they know best and who have the solutions before they have met us.

We do not believe that children should live with adult experts. We don't understand how you think this will work. We ask Norway to really remember that this is our home.

this was
supposed
to be my
home, I
thought it
would get
better

I think
Norway has
experimented
with us long
enough



