



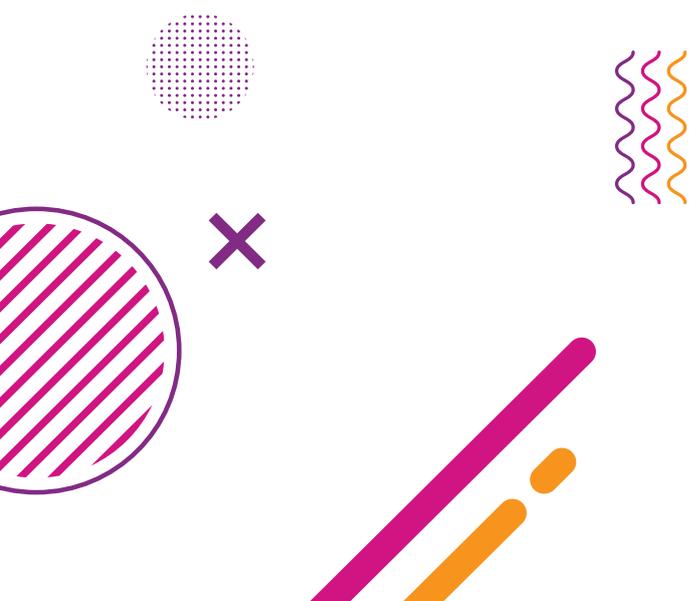
The participation of children and young people in alternative care

Practical examples of the project SUPPORTS

SUPPORTS

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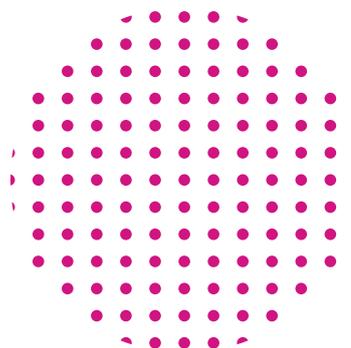
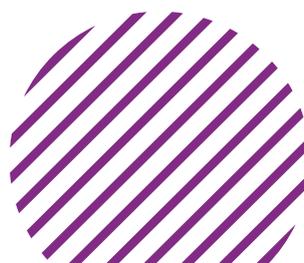
1. SUPPORTS – Brief presentation

This document was produced in the context of the project SUPPORTS – Supporting children in their delicate phase between adolescence and adulthood while leaving alternative care facilities. The project was co-financed by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, through the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme and involves 3 partners from 3 different European countries: Pulse Foundation from Bulgaria; Defence for Children Italy from Italy and CESIS – Centre for Studies and Social Intervention from Portugal. The project took place between 2018 and 2021.

The main objectives of the project were to develop professional skills for the practical implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the alternative care system and to promote the participation of children hosted in residential care facilities regarding decisions about their present and future life.

In this document it can be found the description of the activities which promoted the participation of children and young people in care, involved in the project.

Through this document the project aims to promote a practical application of the child right to participation and inspiring professionals to other innovative practices of children's participation.



2. About the concept of participation

Participation is a right of every child and young person established in article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Under this article, children/young people are considered active agents in their own lives, instead of passive elements under the protection of an adult.

While trying to overcome some barriers that the implementation of article 12 faces - namely the firm belief that children/young people have no capacity to participate; the idea that children's participation undermines authority; or the belief that promoting participation presents a responsibility to children/young people that "withdraws" them from childhood itself - the Committee on the Rights of the Child reinforces the notion of participation as a methodological principle of all interventions with children and young people and considers participation as an on-going process, which includes sharing information and a dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect.

As a right, principle or process, participation proves particularly important in the alternative care context. Why?

- Because it is vital that these children/young people in a context of particular vulnerability feel that their perspectives and opinions are taken into account, which enables them to feel important and respected.
- Because participating also means to inform and informing is a strategy of empowerment.
- Because involves and gives responsibility to practitioners and children/young people.
- Because promotes the knowledge of the other and contributes to the establishment of bonds and relationships of trust.
- Because promotes the development of communicating abilities.

Inspired by the concept of Laura Lundy,¹ the project SUPPORTS intended to create space and opportunity for young people in alternative care homes to participate. Opportunity refers to the possibility of every child to participate in relevant issues in an effective manner. The concept of space for participation involves the creation of a safe environment, where children and young people can feel at ease to share their experiences and opinions, without any constraint or reprisal.

Within the framework of the Lundy model, the project intended to create conditions in order to hear the voices of young people and to guarantee that their perspectives were taken into account.

With this aim, the project SUPPORT tested a few methodologies of participation of young people in alternative care, gathered in this document.

¹ Lundy, Laura 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. 2007 British Educational Research Journal Volume: 33, Issue: 6

3. Practical examples of the project SUPPORTS

3.1. *Space and Opportunity to participate* - *Workshops with young people about their rights*

Considering the objectives of the project and the program that co-financed it - Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme / European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers - the workshops were aimed at young people over 15, which are simultaneously entering into adulthood and preparing to leave care.

The methodology Power Up Power Down - created by the Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) and the Women and Young People for Scotland (CIPCS) - was considered to fulfil this work. In Portugal, this methodology was also applied in the context of the project co-financed by the European Commission - Improving Justice in Child Contact: Children affected by Domestic Violence (IJCC), of which CESIS was partner in Portugal. Applying this methodology in the project SUPPORTS was duly consented by both organisations and their creators and was adapted to the context of the alternative care.

In general, these sessions had the following objectives:

- Inform young people about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and promote a reflection on their rights.
- Enhance the ability of young people to feel capable to change their context.
- Empower and enhance the ability of young people to feel capable to change their own lives.

Ensure the wellbeing of children

The project was presented in Alternative Care Homes by the responsible practitioner and it was given a possibility to participate, explaining the age limits established by the project.

The young people signed the informed consent and they were informed about their right to stop participating when they deemed it necessary. The right to confidentiality was respected and presented to the young people, for which reason no image that could identify them was provided.

An informal and child-friendly environment was created within the possibilities of each Alternative Care Home where the sessions took place. The pandemic situation, however, put a stop to the sessions and once they were resumed, they were on-line which hindered the child-friendly environment and privacy because not all young people had access to internet in their own space, or reserved only for them.

An external element to the Alternative Care Homes was responsible for the sessions (a member of the team of the project with the support of an element of the regional authority, which is a promoter of the initiative). Despite questioning the relevance, advantages and inconveniences of this situation, especially considering that it was part of a project subjected to a set terminus, it was positive seeing as it helped the young people to talk about their experiences in alternative care without the possible constraints.

From the intention of promoting a safe and child-friendly space, it was learnt that:

- Young people appreciate informality.
- It is important to finish each session with something that means sharing/fellowship (e.g.: sharing a cake or a pizza).

The sessions lasted between 1h and 1h30 and the schedules were adjusted according to school/work schedules. It was intended to create continuity in the work, thus initially one session per week took place in each alternative care home. The pandemic and the lock down interrupted this approach, which was resumed on-line afterwards. The continuity was one of the most positive aspects to the team, since it enhanced the proximity and a good relationship with the young people.

“(Really liked it) there were no differences between us (young people and facilitators) which could be seen in the way they sat and talked with us”. (Young person in moment of evaluation)

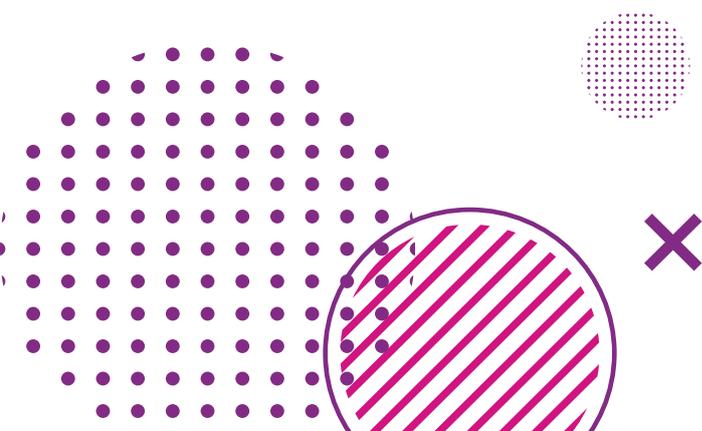
There were involved three alternative care homes in the project and, even though initially it was considered to create mixed groups, there were a few obstacles which led the groups participating in workshops to be organised according to the institution's typology. In a first stage - before the pandemic - the sessions took place in each Alternative Care Home, which may question the necessary neutrality to a participation without constraints, however, on the other hand, being in a familiar space provided a sense of security to the young people.

In this particular case, this was a positive option, at least in a first stage, because the sense of belonging to the alternative care home and the mutual images were favourable to a work with the young people residing in each home.

Planning the Sessions

As previously mentioned, the workshops of the project SUPPORTS where children and young people participated were based on the method Power Up Power Down. However, these sessions were adapted to the reality of the project and also during its performance.

Activity	Description	Resources
1st Session		
Icebreaker activity and presenting the Project	Presenting and breaking the ice. Presenting the Project / initiative or context where the activity takes part.	Presenting the different elements Dynamic "I am... and I always do it this way..." Presentation leaflet or other resource of presenting the Project / initiative or context where the activity takes part.
Basic Rules for the conduct of sessions	Discuss the basic rules for the conduct of the group (duration and privacy issues). Explain that notes will be taken in each session in order to record the important things being said. Present the conduct of evaluation of each session.	Scenery paper or post its to inscribe the main ideas. Evaluation sheets or other resources. In the project SUPPORTS, the evaluation was carried out with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) the help of a target where the young people put small stickers regarding their level of satisfaction with the work session - the closer to the middle of the target, the higher the level of satisfaction; ii) <i>emojis</i> with different expressions that the children/young people stuck to the wall/scenery paper. iii) in some sessions, the evaluation was carried out orally. iv) scenery paper with the question "To me, today's session was...". The young person is asked to write down his/her opinion; v) spider web game based on the previous question.



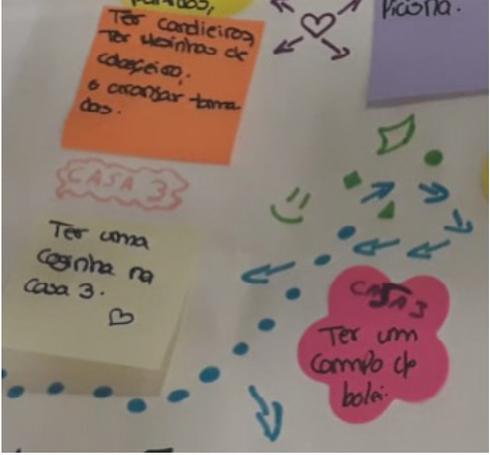
<p>“The Bag of Power”</p>	<p>Theme - <i>What is Power?</i></p> <p>Take images and objects out of the “bag of power”.</p> <p>The children/young people are invited to remove objects and images of the bag and the discussion revolves around the following questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is power? How does the image/object suggests power? Or: what type of power does the image/object suggests? ● Is power good or bad? ● Does this person have power? Or: What makes this object powerful? ● How/why can someone (or the person in the image) gain power? ● How can this person use his/her power? <p>Make perfectly clear the idea that: not all forms of power are positive; Power is expressing our views freely; that information/training is also power.</p>	<p>The “bag of power” should include printed images, magazine clippings and objects. The images and objects should transmit different forms and ideas of power (e.g.: money; social status; knowledge; etc.).</p> 
<p>Dynamic</p>	<p>Blind Car</p> <p>Discuss how you felt. Which power did you feel? How does it feel to have someone with power over us and how does that influences us?</p>	<p>Group dynamic - the child/young person closes his/her eyes and crosses his/her arms. The child/young person lets a peer lead him. Hand in the centre of the back, walking ahead, hand on the right side of the back - turn right, hand on the left side - turn left, hand near the neck on the right side - tight bend on the right, hand near the neck on the left side - tight bend on the left.</p>
<p>Evaluation</p>	<p>Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.</p>	<p>See resources for evaluation suggested previously.</p>
<p>Moment of sharing/conviviality (Ask the group to think about a dynamic to start the next session).</p>		

Activity

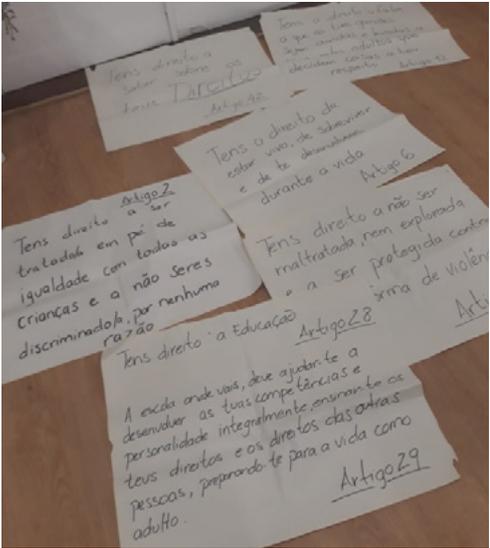
Description

Resources

2nd Session		
<p>Icebreaker activity and “link” to the previous session</p>	<p>Icebreaker dynamic. Resume the main ideas of the previous session.</p>	<p>Use the dynamic suggested by the young people. (in some groups the icebreaker activity did not take place).</p>
<p>The Rope of Power</p>	<p>Theme - <i>Who has power?</i> Stretch a rope on the ground or around the room. Ask the children/young people to remove pictures of people who they think have power from the “Bag of power”. Ask each child/young person to work with at least two types of characters, pointing out/reflecting on how much power they have in our society. Ask them to hang the characters on the rope where they see fit - one end means Strong, the other Weak. While the group is working, encourage them to justify their choices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Why are they hanging the characters in a specific part of the rope? 2) What makes that person powerful/strong? 3) What can powerful people achieve / receive that weaker people cannot? 4) How did they become so powerful? - what do they have that others lack? 5) How can they use their power to help others gain more power? 6) Where would you hang your picture? <p>Once they finish, ask the group what they found out. In the experience carried out in the project SUPPORTS, the girls had a tendency to hang their picture in a position of less power. This is an issue worth discussing.</p>	<p>Rope. Pegs. Pictures of people inside the “Bag of Power”. “Bag of Power” - ensure that it includes different types of people (for example, famous people from different areas, a working mum, children, etc.).</p> 

	<p>In the end of the session, some ideas should be made clear:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Children/young people also have power; ii) Power is controlling our own life and thinking about our future and what we want to be; iii) Power is also being heard and have our views taken into account; iv) Children/young people can have power over themselves; v) Children/young people influence the world, the society and the specific contexts we live in; vi) Girls are not less powerful than boys (make this statement with pictures of young girls with social impact). 	
<p>Power and Alternative Care</p>	<p>Ask the children/young people to, from the previous discussion, reflect on their situation in alternative care. Do they feel that they have power? Do they know their life project? Did they participate in creating the life project? Which responsibilities did they have in creating the life project? What do they think is lacking in order to gain more control over their life project? What do they think is lacking in order to feel more “powerful” in their homes?</p>	<p>Sheet of scenery paper.</p> <p><i>Post its</i> of different sizes where the young people can write down their ideas.</p> <p>If the group includes young people with intellectual disabilities, offer support and make sure that the issues were understood.</p> 
<p>Evaluation</p>	<p>Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.</p>	<p>See resources for evaluation suggested previously.</p>
<p>Moment of sharing/conviviality</p>		

3rd Session		
Dynamic	<p>Game of Loose Words</p> <p>The group is standing in a circle. From the word “Rights”, each young person says words that pop into their minds.</p>	
Snapshot of the rights	<p>Theme - <i>How can we help to balance power?</i></p> <p>Present the rights established in the UNCRC in a child-friendly version. To ease the presentation, different issues can be brought up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which article gives you the right to be heard and to be taken into account? ● How is education perceived in the UNCRC? ● Which article gives you the right to have fun? ● Which article gives you the right to be protected? And what do children need protection from? ● Why are rights important? Do you think that it is important to have a Convention on the Rights of the Child? <p>At the end of the debate, ensure that every child knows that, in Portugal, all adults should guarantee that the rights of the child are promoted and protected, especially the Government and the practitioners that support children and their families.</p>	<p>Posters of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).</p> <p>Take inspiration from the available resources:</p> <p>http://www.gep.mtsss.gov.pt/documents/10182/107789/direitos_crianca_va.pdf/821f4581-82b6-4ecc-8853-c77c21c2dac9.</p> <p>https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016804734f5.</p> <p>https://www.unicef.org/media/56661/file.</p> <p>Sheet of scenery paper.</p> <p>Post its of different sizes where the young people can write down their ideas.</p>
Evaluation	<p>Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.</p>	<p>See resources for evaluation suggested previously.</p>
Moment of sharing/conviviality		

Activity	Description	Resources
4th Session		
Dynamic	“I am... and for me human rights are...”	
Watch videos	<p>Watch videos about influential children: Severn Suzuki, Malala and Greta. These videos have the purpose to encourage the fulfilment of the children’s/young people’s power in promoting and defending their rights. Do they know these young girls, their contexts and the reasons behind their manifestos?</p> <p>Reinforce ideas already discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Power is to be heard and to be taken into account; ii) Children/young people can have power over themselves; iii) Children/young people influence the world, the society and the specific contexts we live in. 	<p>Computer with access to internet and with columns.</p> <p>Several versions may be used:</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIUvH5bOA_8.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBKmxuOuZmY.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMrtLsQbaok.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyJ6H6a1Orw.</p>
Evaluation of human rights	<p>Theme: Put into practice the evaluation of their own human rights</p> <p>Place sheets of paper numbered from 1 to 9 in different parts of the wall or the ground. Give the following articles (other articles can be added if deemed adequate) in different sheets to the children/young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● «All children have all these rights (...). No child should be treated unfairly for any reason» (Article 2) ● «When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. All adults should do what is best for children (...). Governments should make sure that people and places responsible for looking after children are doing a good job» (Article 3) ● «Every child has the right to be alive. Governments must make sure that children survive and develop in the best possible way» (Article 6) ● «Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously» (Article 12) 	<p>Board.</p> <p>Articles of the Convention.</p> <p>Scenery paper with the rights written down.</p> 

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● «Children have the right to get information from the Internet, radio, television, newspapers, books and other sources. Adults should make sure the information they are getting is not harmful» (Article 17) ● «Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them» (Article 19) ● «Every child has the right to an education» (Article 28) and «Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment» (Article 29) ● «Governments should actively tell children and adults about this Convention so that everyone knows about children's rights» (Article 42) <p>Questions to the group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do you evaluate the implementation of your rights? Strong or weak? ● How is the school/institution/project protecting/promoting the rights mentioned above? <p>Reflecting on each article, and using the rope, ask each young person to score from 1 to 5 (1 being «terrible» and 5 «wonderful») the protection of their rights.</p> <p>Debate the choices: What is the school/institution/project doing especially well? What can be improved? How can they improve?</p>	
Evaluation	Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.	See resources for evaluation suggested previously.
Moment of sharing/conviviality		



Activity	Description	Resources
6th Session		
Self-portrait “I am powerful...”	<p>Theme - Summary about «power»</p> <p>Lying down, ask the young people to draw each other’s silhouette.</p> <p>Ask to write inside the silhouette about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● if they were powerful, how would they use their power; ● which personal features could give them more power and protection; ● the importance of protecting the rights; ● Which rights (analysed on the previous session) can be helpful to prepare your future? 	<p>Scenery paper.</p> <p>Think black birros.</p>
Silhouettes of Power...	Take pictures of each other with your super-silhouettes.	<p>Camera</p> <p>Mobile phone with camera</p>
Evaluation	Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.	See resources for evaluation suggested previously.
Moment of sharing/conviviality		

Activity	Description	Resources
7th Session		
Dynamic	Spider web game.	Yarn.
Create a story²	<p>Present the work proposal - create a story from the following clue:</p> <p>there is a young person living in an Alternative Care Home who wants to tell his/her story. We are going to pretend that we are him/her and we are going to imagine his/her story. Thus, we have to decide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) if it is a boy or a girl; ii) his/her age; iii) why is he/her in alternative care. 	<p>Bag with objects.</p> <p>Using the same bag of power, add different pictures that may lead to think about home, family life, the system of justice and protection...</p> <p>Scenery paper to write down the story.</p>

² This proposal is not part of the methodology *Power Up Power Down*. It is inspired by the methodology developed by the project Resiland. Available at: <http://www.resil.resiland.org/pt/introducao.html>.

	<p>We are going to tell the story in four episodes:</p> <p>1st Social and familiar context of the alternative care home;</p> <p>2nd The decision that led him/her to alternative care;</p> <p>3rd Life in alternative care;</p> <p>4th Preparing to leave alternative care.</p> <p>Each episode will be developed in one work session. In each session, the Bag should have different objects. Ask each young person alternately to remove one object of the bag and discuss its meaning to the story. Avoid any resemblance to a young person in particular.</p> <p>Gather different opinions and discuss them until a unanimous version is achieved.</p>	
Evaluation	Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.	See resources for evaluation suggested previously.
Moment of sharing/conviviality		

Activity	Description	Resources
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11th Session		
Dynamic	Spider web game.	Yarn.
Power Up Power Down Moment	<p>Read the full story.</p> <p>Discuss with the group:</p> <p>i) which characters have more and less power?</p> <p>ii) Is the power of each character stable throughout the story? When does it increase or decrease?</p> <p>iii) And regarding the rights of the child: which ones were respected? And which rights were not respected? How could those rights have been respected?</p> <p>iv) Which are the risk factors (or that did not allow protection)?</p> <p>v) Which are the protection factors?</p>	

Rewrite the story	If necessary, rewrite the story - without changing the outline - in order to respect the rights of the child/young person.	Scenery paper.
Evaluation	Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.	See resources for evaluation suggested previously.
Moment of sharing/conviviality		

Activity	Description	Resources
12th Session		
Dynamic	Spider web game.	Yarn.
Final Evaluation	Discuss with the group what was learnt. Ask permission to the children/young people to share the conclusions with the practitioners of the alternative care homes, or the main aspects with implication in the life of the institution, concealing the identity of those who participated.	Different coloured post it.
Moment of sharing/conviviality		

Planning the sessions was constantly adapted according to the methodology Power Up Power Down and the reality of the different groups and their particular interests.

Hence, it is important to mention that:

- i) The presented planning with themes per session is a result of adjustments performed during the project and should be seen as a flexible proposal that may not suit each group.
- ii) The possibility of (re)creating a story from the reality of a central character - and guiding the young people to create his/her past and future - is not part of the basic methodology, which proposes a complete story created as a strip cartoon. That story leads the young people to the context of a family where domestic violence is present, resulting in the mother leaving with the children who, afterwards, go through a process of regulating parental control.
- iii) Despite adapting this strategy - and preparing another successful approach in other project promoted by CESIS - it was not implemented in the context of the SUPPORTS project. Considering that an external element to the alternative care homes was responsible for these sessions and that a more profound work with the young people was needed in order to overcome their traumas and past experiences, it was concluded that this type of methodology would be negative, since there was not enough time or space for an individual approach of a psychotherapeutic nature.

iv) Thus, the project SUPPORTS reformulated the sessions based on the young people's worries. In this sense, what follows is a new planning proposal as of the 7th session.

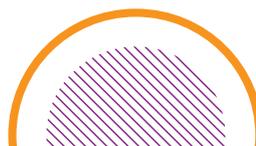
v) Considering that the sessions were on-line, their duration was shortened to no more than an hour.

7th session		
Welcoming	<p>At this stage, the sessions were on-line, so they started with a welcoming and a small briefing of the previous work.</p> <p>The young people had an opportunity to talk about their anxieties and fears about the pandemic.</p>	
Group discussion	<p>Ask the group about the issues that they would like to debate. Considering that, for some, leaving alternative care is upon you, what worries you the most?</p>	<p>Use the platform Jambord to register the main ideas discussed during the session.</p>
8th session		
Welcoming		
Access to the job market	<p>Role play - simulation of a job interview between the practitioner and a young girl who had a job interview that week and did not feel prepared.</p> <p>Two other young girls participated in the role play</p>	
The protection in the job market	<p>Connect the rights and duties in the workplace with the protection against forms of exploitation.</p>	<p>Use the platform Jambord to register the main ideas discussed during the session.</p>
Evaluation	<p>Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.</p>	<p>See resources for evaluation suggested previously.</p>
9th session		
<p>How do you live alone after leaving alternative care?</p> <p>Participation of a young girl of the Advisory Board</p>	<p>Contribution of a young girl of the Advisory Board of Young People.</p> <p>Issues covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hardships in finding employment ● How hard/easy is to be alone ● How to seek housing ● Support of the practitioners of the alternative care home ● Support of the family <p>At the end of the session, it is important to make clear:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) The risk factors after leaving alternative care ii) The factors that can protect young people after leaving care 	<p>Use the platform Jambord to register the main ideas discussed during the session.</p>

Evaluation	Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.	See resources for evaluation suggested previously.
10th session		
What is the life project	<p>Discussion about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● what is the life project? ● how does the life project implements the rights? ● how does the life project prepares me to leave alternative care? 	Use the platform Jambord to register the main ideas discussed during the session.
Evaluation	Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.	See resources for evaluation suggested previously.
11th session		
What kind of support/protection do you need after leaving care	<p>Introduction of the Local Network Supporting Young People Leaving Care.</p> <p>Gathering opinions about the Network's operation.</p>	Use the platform Jambord to register the main ideas discussed during the session.
Evaluation	Ask the opinion of the children/young people regarding the session and how they felt.	See resources for evaluation suggested previously.
12th session		
Final Evaluation	<p>Discuss with the group what was learnt.</p> <p>Ask permission to the children/young people to share the conclusions with the practitioners of the alternative care homes, or the main aspects with implication in the life of the institution, concealing the identity of those who participated.</p> <p>In the project SUPPORTS, all informative materials were presented to the groups at the end of the sessions and their contents - constituted by the conclusions drawn - were verified.</p>	<p>See resources for evaluation suggested previously.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Very important, make us think about (and be more aware of) the rights that we have;</i> ● <i>There was an openness to express what we wanted without being judged;</i> ● <i>There should be more sessions like these, they were very few. With other topics</i> <p><i>Assessment of young people of the group sessions.</i></p>



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3.2. Facilitate audience; manage influence - Advisory Board of Young People

The Advisory Board of Young People is part of the project SUPPORTS and is a strategy to promote the participation of young people who have left alternative care and to share their experience about:

- The hardships of being in the alternative care system and present possible improvements;
- How their life project was built and what preparation did they have to leave alternative care;
- The support after leaving care and what could be improved;
- How do young people view the Local Network of Support for young people leaving care.

In Portugal, the group was to be composed by 10 young people, who had resided in one of the alternative care homes involved in the project, and who were willing to participate voluntarily.

Group composition

To partake in this group, it were invited individuals who had left the three alternative care homes, 10 years before at most, and who still kept in touch with the alternative care homes involved in the project. The residential area was also a criteria and, considering that the project was developed in the council of Matosinhos, the young people contacted lived in the council or neighbouring councils.

Initially, the practitioners explained the project, the idea of creating an Advisory Board of Young People and its objectives. The aim of this first approach was to gain authorisation to give access to personal contacts to the project's team.

Secondly, an e-mail was sent to invite them to a first meeting - this e-mail was signed by the President of the City Council of Matosinhos.³

Five young people (three girls and two boys) were present at the first meeting and, even though the participation in the sessions of this Advisory Board was rather irregular (aggravated by the pandemic), there were involved a total of 15 young people (three boys and twelve girls). At a final stage, the group was composed by five young people who were about to leave alternative care and who participated in all workshops.

³ The project was developed in the council of Matosinhos and had the active support of the City Council of Matosinhos.

Methodological questions

- The on-site sessions took place in a neutral space, that is, the alternative care homes were never used.
- Pleasant spaces were sought and that transmitted dignity (the first meeting took place in the room for private sessions of the City Council of Matosinhos and the following at the Youth Club). This way, the importance of their presence and participation was acknowledged.
- A circle (of trust) was always created where everyone could be each other and there were no positions of hierarchy.
- Different forms of communication (e-mail; mobile phone) was used to reach the young people.
- The sessions took place at the end of the day to ensure the participation of those working or studying.
- Throughout the sessions, it was enhanced that no one had to talk about their own experience, if they did not want to.
- The on-site sessions had food available for the young people.
- When the pandemic broke out, the sessions became on-line.
- The young people were informed about the project in general and they signed an informed consent.

Challenges for the future

- Even though it was never asked, most young people want to share their life experience before, during and after alternative care, which implies an ability to manage possible anxieties from those who do not wish to expose themselves.
- A few individuals have a negative opinion about the way they were treated while in alternative care, which may collide with more positive experiences.
- Some young people reveal a few emotional frailties and a difficulty in sharing them with the group - which makes even more apparent the need and relevance of a specialised follow-up even after leaving care.
- Participation was always active but some individuals had a very irregular presence. The lack of a habit of participating and the fact that they could be confronted with non-resolved issues could explain this irregularity.

The results of the work done with the Advisory Board of Young People – young people managing influence

Since the beginning, one of the intentions of the project was to publicly present the point of view of the Advisory Board of Young People about alternative care. This point of view is very valuable, for it constitutes the perspective of those who went through the system and felt its advantages and inabilities.

Hence, the project provided the participation of a young girl in a meeting of the National Advisory Board (constituted by several public and private entities with intervention and competence in childhood and youth affairs). The young girl gave her testimonial and made a critical reading about the alternative care.

In another occasion, an individual participated in a transnational meeting where he/she mentioned the fears associated with leaving alternative care.

In every moment, the project's team considered every opinion of the young people stated throughout the meetings.

Thus, the following materials were produced from the contributions gathered.

i) Welcoming video

It was clear, from the young people's statements, that entering alternative care is a defining moment and that a good preparation to leave alternative care is dependent on the trust gained and the positive relationships established from the moment they step into alternative care. Hence, the first work sessions were dedicated to write the text and to produce the video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9esWnDCI-Wt4>. The young people wrote script. Practitioners of the three alternative care homes and young people from the Advisory Board participated in the video.

ii) Flyers, videos and informative podcasts

Four informative flyers were produced by the young people:

- Moment of entrance
- What is the life project
- Leaving alternative care
- The Local Network that Supports Young People

The first three flyers originated other informative formats (videos and podcast) that can be used in several ways.

iii) Video “Todas as crianças e jovens têm direito à não discriminação” (TN: *Every children have the right to non discrimination*)

The message of this video is that young people in alternative care deserve the same respect as any other young person. Like the others, they are young people with fears, dreams and perspectives about their future.

Access to the links where all these documents are hosted can be found at the end of this product.

iv) Manifesto of the Young People

The Manifesto of the Young People summarises all the contributions, observations and comments made throughout the project. Besides the perspective of the young people of the Advisory Board, it also contains aspects discussed in the workshops with young people still in alternative care.

The Manifesto was presented by the Advisory Board to the President of the City Council of Matosinhos, in a meeting with several entities of the Social Network of Matosinhos.

The Manifesto was also presented in the International Seminar (29 April) that closed the activities of the project SUPPORTS.

Manifesto

We, the young people of the Advisory Board of the project SUPPORTS state that:

1. Every practitioner dealing with young people, in any organisation, should know the rights of the child and young person and, more importantly, should know how to implement those rights in their professional practice and how to give orientation to young people to, when in need, revindicate the access to said rights. Namely, preparing us to leave care.
2. We value the care that every practitioner in the Alternative Care Homes show and we consider that they should all be qualified people and their work should be acknowledged as very important. We believe that these people should love what they do and feel motivated to encourage and support children and young people overcome the hardships that constitute their past.
3. Each Alternative Care Home should have a number of staff sufficient to meet the requirements of said Home and not overload each element of staff.
4. We love when practitioners:
 - Listen to us and give us attention.
 - Know all of us really well.
 - Are kind and respect us.
 - Sit on the ground with us.
 - Leave us notes of encouragement or comfort.
 - Show that they understand our past and perceive its impact on our lives.

- Make us laugh.
 - Talk to us in a way that we understand.
 - Explain our rights and demonstrate what is beyond the care home.
 - Devise the rules of the children's home with us.
 - Make us grow and, above all, help us to build our own path.
5. We know that the best period to prepare leaving care is when we still are in care. Thus, we want to participate more in the lives of the children's homes: we want to be allowed in the kitchen, to help decide what is for dinner, to learn how to cook, to be able to decorate our bedroom and other rooms, to make proposals, to assess.
 6. We want to be able to organise small parties and to receive our friends without jeopardizing the right to privacy of the other children and young people that are in care. It would be lovely to have facilities to make that possible. Ah! ... For those in care and who are 18 or older, it is very important to go out with friends, from time to time. Alas, have a normal life!
 7. We are young like the others. We do not want to be looked at differently, with pity or recrimination. We have fears and dreams; abilities and problems like everybody else. We are young citizens with rights and duties.
 8. We would like to have a (small) space to call our own.
 9. We believe that the Alternative Care Homes that welcome us should be small, in order to create a cosy and familiar environment.
 10. Before leaving care, we want to know how to cook, how to run a house and manage our budget to make financial ends meet. We want to be able to take public transportation without making a fool of ourselves. We want to know how to fill an income tax form and to know our rights and duties when we finally start a job. For this to happen, we acknowledge the importance of the life project, but it is essential that we are heard and that our needs, desires, abilities and talents are known and acknowledged as well.
 11. We want to have access to information on sexual and reproductive health. Taboos regarding this issue is not good for any of us, whether you are a boy or a girl.
 12. We do not want you to have low expectations about us. We can go far! Like any other young person, we can go to university, but we do need a push sometimes. Sometimes, there is a need to make us understand that we also have the right to education and that university is a space for us as well! Why not?!
 13. For some young people leaving Alternative Care Homes, there is a need of specific support before finishing higher education. Not only study support, but also scholarships that allow further studies to those who lack support and have economic difficulties.

14. For some of us, it may be hard to establish affective relationships with people beyond those that surround us. But those positive affective relationships should happen in our lives. For those who most struggle with this, there should be a free and qualified psychological support.
15. More than finding employment, it scares us finding a house. There should be special housing programmes for young people leaving care.
16. But of course that having a job is super important. Without jobs there is no money, without money there is no way of being independent. We need support to enter the labour market and, since we know how vital it is to have a good CV and show experience, we would like to propose the establishment of internships in the City Council of Matosinhos or other organisations that would like to participate in our proposal. This could be a good example to be followed in other locations.
17. Finally, we hope to be able to count on the Local network that supports young people leaving care in the City Council of Matosinhos. We do not want to feel that we are alone!

The Advisory Board of Young People

April 2021



3.3 Manage influence - the participation of young people in the evaluation process of the care system

The perspectives of the young people as an integral part of the process of continuous evaluation of the alternative care homes were not present in the care organizations involved in the project SUPPORTS. The meeting between practitioners of the three alternative care homes, direct participants in the project, and the Casa Pia de Lisboa, member of the National Advisory Group of institutions (in February 2020) allowed to introduce this issue. The Casa Pia mentioned the advantages of knowing the evaluation of the children/young people in alternative care that could be regarded in two different perspectives: i) for the children that see their point of view being taken into account; ii) for the institution that listens to the children/young people and has an opportunity to improve its intervention gradually adapting it according to the interests of the residents.

It was not possible to experiment a process of evaluation carried out by the children/young people regarding the alternative care homes involved in the project during its duration. However, it was possible to create a tool - from what was stated by the young people - for a possible further development in the institutions involved in this project or others that may desire. This tool was not implemented but it was discussed and validated by the Advisory Board of Young People.

My opinion about the Alternative Care Survey

The aim of this survey is to find out your opinion about your alternative care home.

The answers are anonymous, hence no one will know your answers.

Carefully read all the questions and answer honestly. It is very important to know what you really think. There are no right answers, or wrong for that matter, only your opinion.

And your opinion counts to improve our work.

Mark with an X your answer to each question.

Do you feel that you are treated well?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Do not know/Do not answer
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Do you feel safe?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Do not know/Do not answer
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Do you feel that your privacy is respected?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Do not know/Do not answer
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Do you feel that you are heard, do you feel that your point of view is taken into account in matters that concern you?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Do not know/Do not answer
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Are you well acquainted with your life project?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Do not know/Do not answer
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Do you think that you participate in everyday life at the house?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Do not know/Do not answer
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Do you feel that you have someone here who you can talk to when something concerns you?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Do not know/Do not answer
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Do you feel that everyone who works here helps with your difficulties?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Do not know/Do not answer
<input type="checkbox"/>				

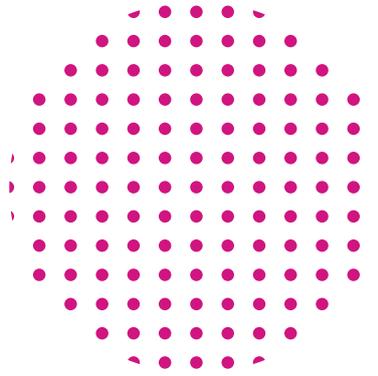
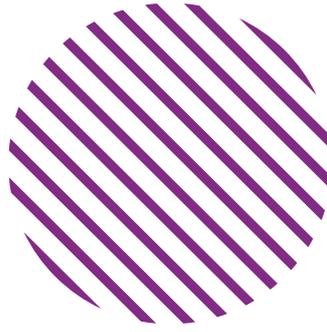
How do you rate the work they do here?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Do not know/Do not answer
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Regarding the alternative care home and your stay - what do you care for the most?

And what would you change?

We really appreciate your participation.



Information material of Project SUPPORTS

Materials addressed to children and young people

VIDEOS

Momento de entrada no Acolhimento Residencial

PT <https://youtu.be/BdKyc9WZZBk>

Entry into the residential care system

EN <https://youtu.be/IUsvemNlIP4>

Projeto de vida

PT https://youtu.be/aiDc71Yjc_w

About the life project

EN <https://youtu.be/d8VnYJoPkSM>

Preparar a saída

PT <https://youtu.be/zgP5C4GacIM>

Preparing for leaving

EN <https://youtu.be/k1PHpszluko>

PODCASTS

Momento de entrada no Acolhimento Residencial

PT <https://youtu.be/bdAr8wkiB4Y>

Entry into the residential care system

EN <https://youtu.be/2tQ7EBOBBAY>

Projeto de vida

PT <https://youtu.be/UEVyvll1RAg>

About the life project

EN <https://youtu.be/WHaeqSS6ZZY>

Preparar a saída

PT https://youtu.be/6F_S-0jLSJI

Preparing for leaving

EN <https://youtu.be/2sfJly0FC2c>

FLYERS

Momento de entrada no Acolhimento Residencial

PT https://www.cesis.org/admin/modulo_projects/upload/files/SUPPORTS-Leaflet_acolhimento%20residencial.pdf

Entry into the residential care system

EN https://www.cesis.org/admin/modulo_projects/upload/files/SUPPORTS-Leaflet_Entry%20residencial%20care.pdf

Projeto de vida

PT https://www.cesis.org/admin/modulo_projects/upload/files/SUPPORTS-Leaflet_Projeto%20Vida.pdf

About the life project

EN https://www.cesis.org/admin/modulo_projects/upload/files/SUPPORTS-Leaflet_About%20the%20life%20project.pdf

Preparar a saída

PT https://www.cesis.org/admin/modulo_projects/upload/files/SUPPORTS-Leaflet_Momento%20Saida.pdf

Preparing for leaving

EN https://www.cesis.org/admin/modulo_projects/upload/files/SUPPORTS-Leaflet_Preparing%20for%20leaving.pdf

Rede Local de Apoio a Jovens à saída do Acolhimento

PT https://www.cesis.org/admin/modulo_projects/upload/files/SUPPORTS-Leaflet_Rede%20Local.pdf

Manifesto do Conselho Consultivo Jovem

PT https://www.cesis.org/admin/modulo_projects/upload/files/SUPPORTS-Manifesto.pdf

Manifesto of the Advisory Board of Young People

EN https://www.cesis.org/admin/modulo_projects/upload/files/SUPPORTS-Manifesto-EN.pdf

Todos/as jovens têm direito a ser quem são. Todos/as jovens têm direito `não discriminação

PT https://youtu.be/zhnt-Q_n7M8

All young people have the right to be who they are. All young people have the right to non-discrimination

EN <https://youtu.be/NCVgdhAevXY>

Materials addressed to professionals

A relevância da participação na promoção dos direitos das crianças em acolhimento residencial - Orientações para profissionais

PT https://cesis.org/site/upload/documentos/SUPPORTS-Guia_Profissionais.pdf

The importance of participation in the promotion of Children's Rights in alternative care facilities - Lesson learned and orientation from the SUPPORTS' experience

EN https://www.cesis.org/site/upload/documentos/SUPPORTS-Lesson_learned_orientation_EN.pdf

A participação de crianças e jovens em acolhimento residencial - Exemplos práticos do projeto SUPPORTS

PT https://cesis.org/site/upload/documentos/SUPPORTS-Experiencias_de_participacao.pdf

The participation of children and young people in alternative care - Practical examples of the project SUPPORTS

EN https://www.cesis.org/site/upload/documentos/SUPPORTS-Practical_examples_EN.pdf

Apoio após a saída do acolhimento - A experiência do projeto SUPPORTS com a Rede Local de Acompanhamento a Jovens à Saída do Acolhimento em Matosinhos

PT https://cesis.org/site/upload/documentos/SUPPORTS-Rede_local.pdf

Local Network that Supports Young People Leaving Alternative Care The experience of the project SUPPORTS in Portugal

EN https://www.cesis.org/site/upload/documentos/SUPPORTS-local_network_EN.pdf

Projeto de Vida como instrumento de concretização da Convenção sobre os Direitos da Criança - Orientações para profissionais

PT https://www.cesis.org/site/upload/documentos/SUPPORTS-formulario-projeto_vida-orientacoes.pdf

Life Project as a tool to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - Guidelines for practitioners from the perspective of SUPPORTS project experience

EN https://www.cesis.org/site/upload/documentos/SUPPORTS-form_life_project_guidelines_EN.pdf

Technical Sheet

Title: The participation of children and young people in alternative care
Practical examples of the project SUPPORTS

Entity: CESIS – Centro de Estudos para a Intervenção Social

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Legal Advice

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SUPPORTS SUPPORTS - Supporting children in the delicate phase between adolescence and adulthood while leaving alternative care facilities.

SUPPORTS is a transnational project involving a partnership of 3 countries from the European Union - Bulgaria, Portugal and Italy - which join forces in order to develop comprehensive care for children leaving residential institutions. The main goal of the project is to create skills in teams of professionals working in the protection system and the CRC for holistic approach to child as a preliminary step towards the development and implementation of sustainable follow-up plans. The project focusses to promote the participation of children hosted in residential care facilities regarding decisions about their actual and future conditions.



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