

**Conference INGO at the Council of Europe
Civil Society Committee on the Rights of the Child**

**Webinar: Best Interests and Rights of Children in Parental Separation
and Care Proceedings, 21 June**

**Parallel Workshop 3:
How to promote the rights and wellbeing of older children and
adolescents experiencing the care system?**

Submission prepared by the

**International Movement
All Together in Dignity – ATD Fourth World**

6th June 2022

ATD Fourth World is an international movement for human rights engaging with individuals and families experiencing persistent poverty, with the aim of eradicating extreme poverty. Consultations with 9 to 25-year-olds who have experience with the care system in Europe have resulted in the following recommendations.

Prioritizing quality relationships

Caring and lasting relationships are the most important to young people's success, and they have to be real and two-way, from teachers to decision-makers to loved ones. Young people need to feel respected and valued and that they belong. They need systems - especially care systems - to support, strengthen and empower the relationships that matter to young people.

Enabling contacts with members of the family

In the UK, a group of 19 and 20-year-olds living in supported accommodation said that growing up in care had made it hard for them to develop a sense of who they were because they lacked information about their family background and also because “we needed to please so many people, and different people wanted different things from us”.

The solitude and insecurity of being removed from their biological families and, in some cases, separated from brothers and sisters who were also placed in care undermines self-confidence and the development of a sense of self.

We recommend that if placement in care must occur, kin relations should be placed together. If for certain reasons this cannot happen, we recommend that children be able to maintain contact with siblings as well as parents during the time of placement, if they so wish.

Ensuring they leave the system with the education and training required to enter the job market

Many teens and children coming from poverty, whether they are in foster services or not, end up in various forms of special education. This not only does not lead to valid diplomas and work possibilities, but also special education is a negative label a person can carry for life. Special support needs to be provided to children and young people in the care system to ensure that they exit the system with the skills they will need to gainfully earn their living, and not end up living on the street.

Facilitating co-training for social workers and other child care professionals

The process of leaving care can be traumatic — especially if young people are not consulted. Children and young people caught up in the care system feel that social workers do not always consult them, and decisions made on their behalf are wrong for them. Care-experienced young people need more, not less, support than other young people; and they need to be treated as individuals rather than with blanket policies and procedures. Young people often know what they want and need better than social workers. Appropriate means should be redirected to the kind of support families and children are asking for.

We recommend co-training to be done with social workers as well as any others who intervene in the lives of children and young people through a series of focused, facilitated sessions with children or young people. In these sessions, the thinking and experience of the children and young people should be privileged and respected.