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# **Exploring the External Friendships and Interpersonal Relationships of Young People in Out-of-Home Residential Care Setups in Malta**

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## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work in this dissertation titled ‘Exploring the External Friendships and Interpersonal Relationships of Young People in Out-of-Home Residential Care Setups in Malta’ in partial fulfilment of the Masters in Systemic Family Psychotherapy, was carried out by myself. Appropriate citation has been included when referring to studies by other authors.

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the experience of young people residing in out-of-home residential care setups and their friendships and interpersonal relationships outside of the residential setting. The research explores international literature in the field of out-of-home care, especially in relation to external friendships. It explores the role that the residential home has in these friendships, the support that the young people get from friends and social differences of being in care. These were done within the understanding of Attachment Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. Utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), 8 youths between the ages of 12 and 16 from various out-of-home residential care setups in Malta, were interviewed through semi-structured interviews to explore their experience of friendships outside of care. The findings show that out-of-home care residency tends to offer opportunities for friendships, supported by the encouragement from caregivers. House rules and regulations were seen as interfering with their quality of relationships. Moreover, a residential care identity tends to carry a sense of shame, stigma and social difference which the youths try to avoid mentioning in their friendships, especially if these friendships are not based on trust and safety. Homophily can be a tool for support and advice for the youths who seek reciprocal and bidirectional interpersonal relationships.

**Key Words:** *Out-of-home residential care setups, residential home, out-of-home youths, children in care, friendships, interpersonal relationships, peer relationships, shame, stigma, homophily, social difference.*

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this research:

- To the 8 wonderful young souls who accepted to be part of this research and voice their story to someone who they barely knew. Your resilience is remarkable!
- To all caregivers within out-of-home residential care who I admire their sheer commitment to support and show love to all these vulnerable young people.
- Especially to C, C, K, H & K, the five children who stole my heart in my first full-time job and who were the main inspiration to pursue the Masters in Systemic Family Psychotherapy and the creation of this research topic.
- To all young people living in out-of-home residential care setups, whom I admire their tenacity and strength in dealing with all their life hurdles.

I hope that this research could be of guidance to any policy makers, social welfare professionals and residential home managers in a way which could be beneficial in ameliorating your lives.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Preamble**

My aim for the near future as a psychotherapist is to work with the most vulnerable and to make a difference, which is why I wanted this thesis to reflect this aim. My first full-time job after my degree was in a residential home for children working with five siblings who for that period meant the world to me. I felt that I made a difference in their lives and even though I am no longer working within this sector, I hold this experience very close to my heart. Thus, the objective of this thesis is to provide young individuals in residential care with a voice and a chance to share their experiences of living in care, particularly focusing on the significant aspect of friendships.

### **1.2 Rationale**

#### **1.2.1 Personal and professional interest**

In my early years in primary school, my mother used to ask: “*Who have you played with at school?*” and “*With Spiderman*” used to be my reply. My parents used to have some concerns early in my childhood regarding my friendships. Going into secondary school and further, this was no longer a concern, as building good, strong friendships was no longer a challenge. Nevertheless, the importance of friendships remained a topic in which I felt personally invested, and this was reflected during my time working as a caregiver in the residential home for children. In fact, I hold some particular stories of these children’s interpersonal relationships dear to me and they are partially what drove me to carry this study. One of these stories is the following:

One eleven-year old resident had just started secondary school and he had made it a point with his caregivers that his schoolmates should not know that he lives in an out-of-home care

residential setting. A few months later, he started getting into fights with one particular classmate, one of which occurred in front of me. Together with his other caregiver, I wanted to help this boy to resolve this conflict on his own but our guidance was not enough. Since fights were physical, we wanted to resolve it immediately, and decided to involve the other boy's caregivers. We learned that the other boy was also an out-of-home care resident; they were the only two in the school! It was intriguing to observe that the boy who sought to conceal his out-of-home care background was engaging in conflicts with a youth residing in a similar facility.

### **1.2.2 Local Context**

According to a report by the Directorate for Alternative Care in Malta in 2021, there were 206 children residing in residential and community homes, comprising 44% of children in alternative care (Grech, 2021). This indicates a decrease from Grech's study in 2012, which reported a percentage of 57%. However, Farrugia's thesis in 2011 documented a similar number of 209 young individuals in residential care. Farrugia also identified a total of 25 residential care providers, with 13 of them being children's residential homes based on FSWS placement data in 2010. In a study conducted by Abela et al. (2012) on children in out-of-home care in Malta, it was found that the average age of a child's first admission to care was 3.83 years, and the average length of stay for children in care was 6.82 years. Mr. Bonello, the service manager of the Out-of-Home Care program within FSWS at that time, highlighted the awareness of the need for individualized *"family-based care"* (Grech, 2017, p. 30). However, due to a shortage of foster parents, residential care was used as a means to provide *"individual care"* to these children (Grech, 2017, p. 31).

I was inspired to explore this research topic further after looking at the following research recommendation from Abela et al.'s (2012, p.50) study:

*“A qualitative research study delving into how these children form and sustain friendships and the meaning they give to them, will also shed important insights on how friendship contributes to the well-being of this population of children.”*

In the local context, there is abundant literature on young people in residential homes but no literature at all on their friendships outside the residential home. A quantitative study done by Bakalim & Taşdelen-Karçkay (2016) on adolescence and friendships in Turkey, showed important correlations between friendship quality (which includes companionship, conflict, help, security and closeness), psychological wellbeing and social support. Thus, considering the importance and role of friendships in youth, the purpose of this study was to gain knowledge on friendships within the area of out-of-home residential care.

### **1.3 Research Question**

The main research question that I wanted to explore and answer through this thesis is the following:

*What is the experience of children living in out-of-home Residential Care Setups with friendships outside the residential setting? What role does the residential home and all that it consists of have in these relationships?*

After considering past research done with minors in Malta and abroad, I decided to interview youths between the ages of twelve and sixteen as they would be better able to verbally describe their lived experience unlike younger children who would require prompting through play, for instance. In this way, my interpretation would be focused on the youth’s verbals, non-verbals and pro-verbals. The main research question was explored through the following questions within the interviews:

- *What role does being a youth living in a residential-setting have on the youth's relationships?*
- *What does a youth living in such a residence look for in friendships?*
- *What meaning do youths give to friends?*
- *Do caregivers in the residential homes have a part to play in these friendships?*
- *How do friends perceive the youth's personal situation?*

## **1.4 Abbreviations and Definition of terms**

### Out-of-Home Residential Care Setup (OR Residential Home/Setting):

This term refers to a house/setting accommodating minors who are unable to live with their biological families and which is run by workers (both voluntary and paid).

### Foster Care:

A living arrangement for children who do not live with their nuclear family but who are living temporarily in a house with adults, called foster parents, who take the roles of the biological parents to parent the young person.

### Supervised Access Visit (SAV):

A meeting between children and family members which is supervised by Social Welfare Professionals.

### Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS):

State-Funded Foundation which focuses on working with social welfare problems in Malta

### FSWS' Research Office:

Office within FSWS International Relations, Service Audits, Quality Assurance, Research Department and the Economic Unit which focuses on reviewing and approving prospective research requests.

FSWS' Looked After Children (LAC):

Department within Alternative Care Directorate of FSWS working with minors living in out-of-home placements.

## **1.5 Conceptual Framework**

### **1.5.1 Systemic theory**

Throughout this thesis, I will be asking, reflecting and writing through a systemic framework. This is because “*systemic theory allow[s] us to make sense of the complex attachment relationship networks that children in residential care, their families, and the care workers are part of*” (Grech, 2017, p. 10-11). Additionally, it sheds light on how this is lived within peer relationships and friendships. Moreover, systemic theory will help me understand how friendships influence and are influenced by the youths in residential care, their environment and upbringing. This research gives a better understanding of the holistic lived experience of these young people as the relationship between parts of a system can help us understand the system as a whole (Bateson, 1972; Bateson, 1979). On the other hand, to better understand the relationship that these young people have with their friends, this relationship cannot be taken away from the whole system of the young person (Staton, 2009). Thus, I, the researcher, need to delve deeper in various aspects of these young people’s lived experience. Whilst every effort is being done to portray information impartially, it is still essential to acknowledge my role in building the literature review, in

interviewing the participants and in analysing the transcripts. Therefore, this thesis will also be shaped by my own system, my own perspective and biases. It is dependent on my own ‘involvement’ (Smith & Karam, 2018); which in my case is my previous professional experience in residential care and my own role as the researcher.

### **1.5.2 Attachment theory and Internal Working Model**

Considering that this research is concerned with the examination of relationships among young individuals in residential care, it is essential to incorporate Attachment theory as a conceptual framework. Attachment theory is a socio-emotional development theory developed by John Bowlby which accentuates that individuals have a basic need to be in an intimate relationship. This need starts in an individual’s early years through an emotional bond with the primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1982; Abu Hasan Afandi & Ismail, 2022). The child seeks his caretaker’s protection, safety, comfort, nurturance, and becomes attached to the caretaker who is responding to the child’s needs (Berk, 2006; Zeanah et al. 2011). The attachment of the child becomes internalised and *“forms the basis for self-concept, self-esteem, and emotional, social and cognitive development, through the formation of an internal working model of self and others”* (McLean, 2016, p. 1).

There are four types of Attachment, these being secure<sup>1</sup>, insecure avoidant, insecure ambivalent<sup>2</sup> and insecure disorganised. The first three are distinct and predictable and are a result of the 'Internal Working Model' that the child would have developed depending on the availability of the primary caregiver in situations of anxiety (Mclean, 2016). Insecure Disorganised attachment, on the other hand, is unpredictable and is characterised by disorganization and contradictory behaviour (Mclean, 2016; Delgado et al. 2022). This is typical in situations when the child has inconsistent caregiving and the child finds it difficult to approach the caregiver as they are unaware how the caregiver will react (Main & Solomon, 1986). This means that the child does not develop a clear internal working model. In fact, Mclean (2016) mentions that the main style of attachment associated with children in out-of-home care is disorganised attachment. This could be due to inconsistent primary caregivers, especially in offering support and comfort to the child (Mclean, 2016). Also, studies (Rutter, 2008; Vorria et al., 2003) demonstrate that generally children who are under institutional care show a higher percentage of disorganised attachment

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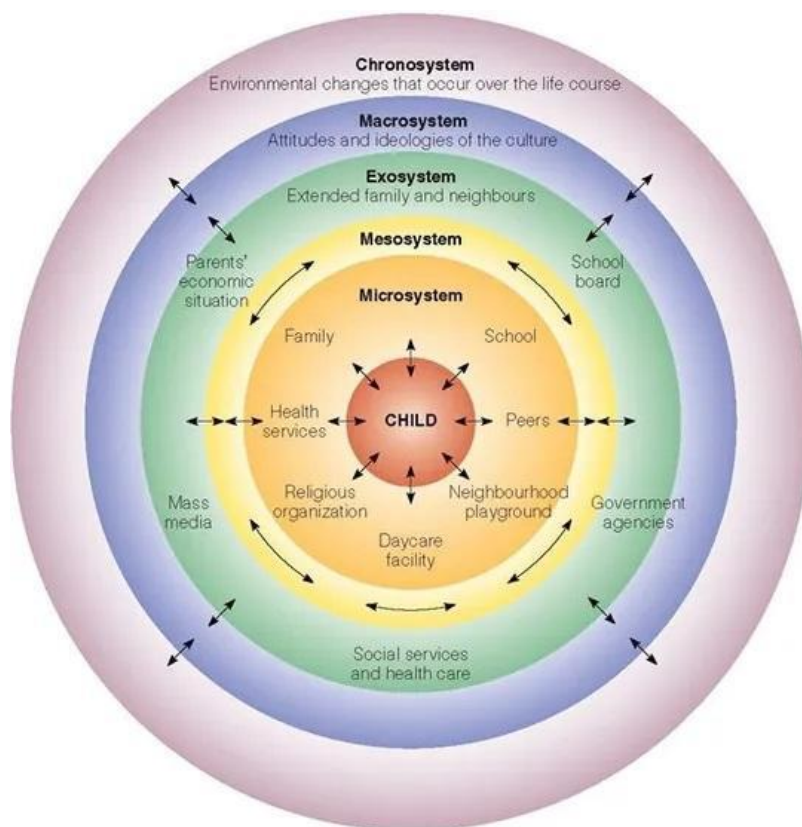
<sup>1</sup> In secure attachment, the child is aware that when in trouble, they will have their caregiver's support, and thus they are able to deal with difficult situations and explore new environments and friendships (Mclean, 2016; Delgado et al., 2022).

<sup>2</sup> In Insecure avoidant attachment, the child is fearful of expressing emotions as they fear that this will push the caregiver away; hiding signs of distress and worry while trying to show indifference in relating with the caregiver (Mclean, 2016; Delgado et al., 2022).

The insecure ambivalent child has a fear of being rejected and develops high anxiety in relating with the primary caregiver showing both anger and huge need for proximity (Mclean, 2016; Delgado et al., 2022).

when compared to other children. Tizard and Reez (1975) investigated residential homes for infants and noticed frequent changes in staff, and staff who were discouraged from having close relationships with the children. Results showed that young children by the age of four would already not show any affection to anyone; and teenagers who lived in institutions when they were younger had more problems in peer relationships compared to other teenagers (Tizard & Reez, 1975; Johnson et al. 2006). Nonetheless, studies show that when a young person is exposed to nurturing, responsive and consistent caregiving, they are able to develop an organised Internal Working model (Dozier & Rutter, 2008; Mclean 2016).

### 1.5.3 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory



(Guy-Evans, 2020)



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory is a developmental theory which is based on the concept of various systems being inside each other like a Russian doll with the central part being the individual. The child is a participative member of these systems and is seen as both a *"product and producer of his or her own development"* (Tietjen, 2006, p.54). It is devised of five systems which have a role to play in the individual's development, however, not all are directly influenced by or directly influence the individual. The system most directly related to the child is the microsystem which includes the family, the school and friends besides others. This is where attachment forms and takes place. The mesosystem, then, is the link between these immediate systems. The exosystem is a system of institutions which do not involve the direct participation of the individual, but which still exert an indirect influence on him/her. In the outermost layer, the macrosystem is the cultural values and customs of the society that the institutions and the individual are based in. Finally, development happens within a process of time which is called the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Tietjen, 2006).

Tietjen (2006) explains that peer relationships are influenced by the development of the individual and by the individual themselves. It is a situation through which the individual acquires and exhibits culturally-based social proficiency and skills. In this research, I am interested in examining the interaction within the mesosystem of a young individual residing in an out-of-home residential care setting, as well as the role that the individual's microsystems and macrosystems play in shaping their experience of friendships. In a prior study, Tietjen (1982) studied social networks in an urban setting in Sweden and found a direct relationship between parental relationships and children's peer relationships. I am curious to comprehend the recollections that young individuals have regarding the interactions of caregivers with their own peers, and the

significance of these recollections in shaping the young individuals' friendships and peer relationships.

Tietjen (2006), through her studies of three different macrosystems, shows that peer relationships of young people reflect the situation and interactions within these systems. Their family situation or the neighbourhood they inhabit, for example are all rooted in a particular cultural setup and *“instability or change at one or more levels of the environment can have significant effects on interpersonal processes and relationships over time”* (Tietjen, 2006, p.69).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Young people living in a residential setting

*“Residential care implies an organised, routine and impersonal structure to the living arrangements for children (...) and a professional relationship, rather than parental relationship, between the adults and children.”* (Browne K., 2009, p. 1)

Young people living in a residential home are living outside the *“normative experience of children”*; that is the experience of living within a family setting (Emond, 2012, p.3). Children living in residential homes are under the care of the state. These children would have started residing in residential homes for various reasons such as: physical, sexual and psychological abuse; neglect, parents’ mental health problems and other circumstances which deem the parents as unable to adequately take care of their children; and risks which are linked to possible poor long-term outcomes for the young person (Muscat Baron, Muscat Baron & Spencer, 2000; Jones et al., 2011, Browne E., 2017). Young people who have their first experience of living in a residential home as adolescents may have been referred due to their behaviour issues (Khoo, Skoog, and Dalin, 2012).

### 2.2 Friendships and peer relationships

Rubin, Fredstrom and Bowker (2008) mention three defining features in friendships:

1. Each member of the friendship is aware and confirm the relationship,
2. Each member of the friendship views the friendships in a positive way,
3. The friendship is chosen and voluntary for both members; it is not obligatory.

While young people do not choose their family, they can choose their friends; and this choice is part of growing up and becoming more independent (Ridge and Millar, 2000). Within friendships, a young person's social interaction is egalitarian in nature, during which the young person can learn to function in a range of social situations, as an alternative to the family's social hierarchy (Rubin, 1980). Friends, especially close peer relationships, safeguard young people from changes, stressors, hardships and negative psychosocial outcomes (E. V. Hodges et al., 1999; DeLuca, Claxton and Dulmen, 2018); while they could also provide good support and advice (Ridge and Millar, 2000). Friendships help young people navigate their way through rules of relationships and get to know more about their self-worth and their sense of belonging (Emond, 2012). Having friends and being a friend is also an essential part of a young person's social identity (Konstantoni, 2012), while, peer relationships present the young person with emotional support and access to resources (Abu Hasan Afandi & Ismail, 2022).

Berndt (1996) explains that homophily is a central theme in the creation of friendships of young people. Golub & Jackson (2012, p.1) write that "*Homophily, a term coined by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954), refers to the tendency of individuals to associate disproportionately with others who are similar to themselves*" These similarities can also be in terms of ethnicity, race, culture, background and behaviour (Rubin, Fredstorm & Bowker; 2008).

Saferstein, Neimeyer, and Hagans' (2005) quantitative study examines the correlation between attachment styles and the quality of friendships. In this study, insecurely attached youths reported lower levels of security and companionship in their friendships and higher levels of conflict. Furman et al. (2002) clarify this through the young person's Internal Working Models. They indicate that the youths' Internal Working Models with their parents is similar to that of the youths' with their peers and friends. Delgado et al. (2022) explain that these youths feel more

secure when their primary caregivers are supportive and available, even though adolescence is a period in which young people start to ask for more privacy and decrease emotional closeness with parents. Moreover, this study continues to prove that secure attachment is closely related to quality relationships between adolescents and their peers; with positive interactions, emotional support and effortless communication. Contrastingly, behaviour problems and externalised behaviour in young people has been linked with insecure attachment with their caregivers (Katsurada et al., 2017). In fact, Attachment theory proposes that young people with insecure attachment style view both themselves and others negatively which makes it difficult for the young person to become closely connected to peers (Delgado et al., 2022). Linking this literature to earlier studies, where it had been mentioned that insecure attachment is very common in young people in residential care, such behaviour problems are even common between these youths who live together (Moore et al., 2017).

Friends and caregivers are two different microsystems for youths, and similarly to caregivers, friends are an important influence on the youths' development and behaviour (McHale et al., 2009). While the way how these microsystems appear in youths' life seem distinct, these two microsystems can be interconnected and a mesosystem would be formed. Mchale et al. (2009) refer to this mesosystem as an important process of development; especially when the messages within these microsystems are congruent. When there is incongruence, the youth must deal with conflicting ideas, rules and values which could lead to "*child-rearing challenges*" for caregivers (McHale et al., 2009, p.1195). The article however does not mention the effect of the incongruence on the youth's development and behaviour, it mentions how such situations subject the youth to new and different socialization processes.

## **2.3 Friendships and peer relationships for young people in out-of-home residential care setup**

In their work, Mead and MacNeil (2014) discuss the potential of peer support as a valuable systemic approach for individuals dealing with mental health issues. They emphasise the importance of moving away from the medical model of support and care. Their approach aims to minimise problem-oriented conversations, recognising that although a shared problem (such as a mental health diagnosis) may connect peers, it should not be the central focus of their relationship. This helped me wonder whether young people connect with other supportive peers within relationships based around central problematic themes, such as difficult childhood experiences (the concept of homophily mentioned above). Another important factor that Mead & MacNeil (2014) mention about peer support is that there is bidirectional support and friendship. The friendship is not based on static roles of carer-and-client relationship that the individuals have with staff and social workers. Mead & MacNeil (2014) insist that such reciprocity helps these individuals to feel as part of a community and insist that peer support offers relational safety to the individual through validation and compassion. Within this support, the person can be authentic and not feel judged.

### **2.3.1 Friendships outside the residential home**

Multiple studies conducted on foster youth (where the term "foster youth" for Deluca, Claxton & Dulmen, 2018's study encompasses all young individuals living away from their biological family home) have consistently highlighted the challenges they face in forming high-quality friendships. These friendships are characterized by a significant level of support and

intimacy (Deluca, Claxton & Dulmen, 2018). Some studies even suggest that such young people would have none (Sala-roca et al., 2012; Tarren-Sweeney & Hazel, 2005). In a study made in the USA by Price and Brew (1998), many children who were separated from their parents show negative behaviours such as aggression and social withdrawal which would reduce the possibility of having good-quality friendships. On the other hand, Gilligan (2007) mentions that the simple concept of being in care has a negative influence on such young people; especially negatively affecting friendships due to the shame in living in care (Ridge & Millar, 2000). Emond's (2012) study identifies several recurring themes in relationships with peers, both at the residence and at school; the concept of normality, changes in friendships, the perspectives of adults on peer relationships, issues of identity, feelings of shame, reinforcement of stereotypes, and vulnerability.

### **2.3.2 Friends as social support**

Most children in care would have gone through trauma and breakdown in family relationships; and in interviews done by Ridge and Millar (2000), participants explained that they valued their friendships as these were a source of social support. This social support is also experienced through social inclusion as when these children make friends, they enter into a whole new "*social milieu*" (Ridge & Millar, 2000, p.8) of friends of friends and/or siblings of friends, and these children would then be less likely to be bullied. Additionally, the young people in Parker's (2010) interviews, talked about how friendships gave them access to the support of the friends' own families which were completely independent of the care system and one participant even mentioned how this gave him an experience of ordinary family life. Such access gives these young people a sense of "*belonging and acceptance*" (Parker, 2010, p.174). Friends are a good source of emotional support as well, especially in early adulthood, and having close friends is a

good predictor of resilience for children in the care system (Jones & Morris, 2012). Moreover, Sala-Roca et al. (2012) explain that social support through friendships includes material and financial support besides the emotional support.

Parker (2010) adds that support needs to be mutual and not one-directional. The participants in this study emphasised the importance of maintaining a relationship with peers who were important to them as these provided opportunities to trust and confide, for companionship, protection, and a sense of belonging. These would be peers who would have similar experiences, are constant and stable, and also stay friends for a long period of time. Friendships are maintained through shared interests and activities, and also spending time with each other. These latter themes were also picked up in a study done by May (2018) with young people in foster care. This study shows that young people look for youths with similar interests, hobbies and characters in their peer relationships but away from the similarity of being in care. It would have been interesting to see the results of youths looking for peers who are different but results in studies mentioned mostly show similarities that youths look for. May (2018, p.31) explains that this may “*reflect a fear of standing out or of being different to other people*”, a theme which will be explored further in the next section.

### **2.3.3 Stigma, shame and social difference**

The concepts of stigma and shame are recurring themes in similar studies, such as those conducted by Emond (2012), Ridge and Millar (2000), and Rogers (2017). Goffman (1963) discusses how stigma creates a distinction that manifests in social interactions, where certain individuals are labelled as deviating from the norm, leading to potential social exclusion (Rogers, 2017). Corrigan et al. (2004) categorizes stigma into two types: public stigma, which is recognised



by a group, and self-stigma, which refers to the internalization of public stigma by the affected youth.

Ridge and Millar's (2000) study remarks that society is based on the concept of family life and these young people who are away from this life are singled out and stigmatized. The children are also ashamed of being labelled as "*care children*" (p.168) which could highlight a social difference from other young people who are not in care. While the care setting provides them with all the resources they need, the identity of being in care inhibits them from opportunities of developing and maintaining social networks of friendships, and these children feel isolated due to this stigma. The theme of normality is also strong in Emond's (2012) study which looks at factors that make the participants different or the same to their friends. 'Sameness' is based on different aspects of the self, such as the cognitive and the emotional self of the youth while that difference is related to their identity of being in care. Being in care for most of the participants in this study caused shame which even led to creating stories to tell their peers about what led to them being in care. Some participants felt that their in-care status was an important part of their sense of self and it was important for them to reveal this identity to their peers. Moreover, most of these children were caught in a tug-of-war between feeling safe in their residential setting, while on the other hand being aware of the public stigma in relation to being in care. Additionally, Rogers's (2017) study brings up the context of shame through two different notions, that of difference and that of feeling devalued. In his study, Rogers' (2017) participants maintained that they felt treated differently; not just by peers but in everyday social situations, such as with teachers. This led to these youths doing things which helped them feel 'normal', doing things that other youths not in care do. Additionally, this study includes further participants' stories of feeling devalued through incidents with their peers. The in-care identity was used by peers to offend a number of participants

in this study; insults which centred around invented stories of parental rejection. This seems to be *“the root of where the young people’s stigma originates”* (Rogers, 2017, p.1088). Instances of bullying further increases the social difference and social exclusion of youths in-care which is a hindrance for these youths’ experience with peers. Nevertheless, this study found that youths do their utmost to manage their situation better by filtering their story for peers not in care and creating their own groups of friends consisting of children in fostering. Contrastingly, there were situations in which the disclosure of their story served to strengthen their relationship with friends who were not provoked by their story.

#### **2.3.4 Impact of care system on friendships**

Emond (2003) explains that the social and political view of young people in residential homes is that such children are troubled or troublesome. Emond (2012) points out that these young people are aware of a universal discourse that young people should live with their families of origin. The researcher points out that children would need support to tell their friends that they do not live in such a natural setting but rather in a residential home; especially when taking into consideration their peers’ social construct of the care system which could have been shaped by the public stigma. Ridge & Millar’s (2000) study mentions several factors which impact children’s friendships such as the movement of children from one residential home to another. This is because the change in residential homes lead to a change in school and/or area. This was also seen from children surveyed in England by the Children’s rights Director (2009) that when young people enter care, over one third of these children lose contact with the friends that they would have had before entering care. This may be less relevant in Malta since everywhere is close by and therefore a change in home may not necessarily cause a change in school and peer relationships. Another

change which may have an impact on the young person is the primary caregivers. May's (2018) study brings out positive themes in relations to friendships of youths in care and she mentions that all interviewees were doing well in long-term placements. She, therefore, mentions how certain support and stability within the care system can give an opportunity for these youths to have meaningful peer relationships. Another theme which arose in the literature was that of rules and regulations within the residential home. Ridge and Millar (2000) findings showed that due to bureaucratic processes in a formal care setting, rules, such as not being able to participate in sleepovers, were enacted which may steer children away from leading a life of normality (a life that they see their friends living). The findings were supported by May (2018) which show how certain rules and regulations may be a challenge in maintaining friendships.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

To gain insights into the participants' subjective lived experiences, a qualitative research design was employed for this study. A qualitative methodology helps the researcher understand how the participants make sense of their own world and discover the “*quality and texture of experience*” (Willig, 2008, p.8) rather than the cause and effect, providing a more systemic and holistic view of the experience.

In order to get an in-depth understanding of these young people's meanings and experience, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)<sup>3</sup> is used as the main research methodology (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA affirms that the participants' words, thinking and feeling are all connected (Miller, Chan & Farmer, 2018). Moreover, an important concept of IPA is the participation of the researcher. IPA recognises that I will be giving the participants' experience my own interpretation through my own view of the world (Willig, 2008). Moreover, my interpretation is shaped by my own friendships and personal experiences working in the field of out-of-home residential care. My reflexivity, together with my social constructs, put such a qualitative methodology in line with Systemic Theory (Burck, 2005).

Furthermore, in a qualitative study; the context is given importance. In this study, there are different contexts in play, such as the context of residential care, the gender of the youths and the running of the residential house. The Maltese context holds significant importance and must be carefully considered when comparing the findings of this study to the existing literature.

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<sup>3</sup> IPA incorporates both Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology in that it lets the participant speak for himself/herself and gives opportunity for the researcher to interpret it (Miller, Chan & Farmer, 2018).

### 3.1 Sampling

8 youths between the ages of 12 and 16 were interviewed. A small sample helps the researcher get an in-depth understanding and perception of the participants' experience (Willig, 2008; Smith & Osborn 2003). This allowed me to explore the friendships of these youths more fully and comprehensively, while still allowing space for possible tendencies to emerge.

This study needed a purposive sampling since it is focused on a very specific theme. While the aim of this study was to get random participants from the sample of youths living in residential care within the selected age range, the participants in this study were still in a way chosen. After the paperwork was confirmed by FSWS' Research Office, the LAC's approval was needed as these young participants fall under Care Order<sup>4</sup>. The LAC added an additional criterion for potential participants in my study in that participants needed to have a psychotherapist or a psychologist. This selection process may have inevitably influenced the results in my study since this selection may suggest that some residents were chosen over others, thus reducing on the objectivity and difference. The mentioned age<sup>5</sup> range for participants was chosen as the target age as at adolescence, friendships would be more supportive, and friends would be closer to each other

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<sup>4</sup>Care order is a legal order where the minor is removed from the family environment s/he live in and would then fall under the Care & Custody of Social Welfare services.

<sup>5</sup>Debono and Muscat Azzopardi (2016) in their research in Malta looking at experiences of children in Foster Care in Malta, suggest that children under the age of 11 should not be interviewed to reduce the possibility of harming the child and as one would need participants mature enough to participate in such research.

(May, 2018). In addition, May (2018) upholds that participants should have been living in the residential home for at least one year to create a sense of homogeneity and for these youths to be able to reflect on the role of care in their friendships. The demography of the participants can be found in Table 1 hereunder:

<b>Table 1: Demography of Participants</b>							
<b>Fictitious name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Residential Care setup</b>	<b>Residential house' gender setup</b>	<b>Length of stay in residential care</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>After School organised activities</b>
Andrew	Male	12	Non - governmental Organisation	Mixed	2 years & 3 months	Trauma-informed independent Church school <sup>6</sup>	Football
Stephen	Male	14	Church-owned <sup>7</sup>	Mixed	4 years	Trauma-informed independent Church school	Athletics & Drums
Joseph	Male	12	State-owned <sup>8</sup>	Sibling home	2 years	State School	Football
Robert	Male	16	Church-owned	Boys only	10 years	ITS	Football
Samuel	Male	15	Independently-led Church Residence <sup>9</sup>	Boys only	2 years	Trauma-informed independent Church school	Football
Stacey	Female	15	State Owned	Girls only	15 years	Unknown	/
Rita	Female	16	State Owned	Girls only	> 1 year and 3 months	MCAST	Girl Guides
Neil	Male	14	Independently-led Church Residence	Boys only	3 years & 6 months	State School	Youth Group

<sup>6</sup> A school with a supportive learning environment for children who may have gone through a challenging period in their upbringing and early years

<sup>7</sup> A residential care home run and funded by the Archdiocese of Malta

<sup>8</sup> A residential care home owned by the Government

<sup>9</sup> A residential care home run independently by a religious organisation

### **3.2 Interview process**

Semi-structured individual interviews were the primary research method in this study. (Willig, 2008). The interviews were audio-recorded via mobile devices, transcribed *verbatim* and analysed through IPA. This involved building a rapport and conversing with the participants prior to starting the interview. Representatives from the young persons' residential setup introduced us to each other and explained to the participants how the interview would be done.

Maintaining a composed demeanour, I refrained from immediately diving into the prepared questions. Instead, I began by introducing myself and utilizing easily understandable language with the participants. The aim of using this approach was to create a comfortable environment for the interviewees. I observed that the majority of encounters were successful, as the participants felt at ease and responded willingly to my interview questions. It was noteworthy that within a few minutes into the interviews, many participants naturally shifted to more relaxed seating positions, indicating a growing sense of comfort and safety.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Data Analysis in this study was done through IPA. Smith & Osborn (2003) emphasise that the researcher needs to familiarise himself with the transcript of the interviews. This was done through careful repeated reading, analysis of the transcripts, noticing recurring themes and taking notes on various things which captured my interest or which I deemed of significance; these included both verbal and non-verbal communication observed during the interview. Following the suggestions of Smith & Osborn (2003), I analysed the transcripts through the use of margins; a left

margin was used to note anything which is deemed interesting and the right margin was created to list emergent themes.<sup>10</sup>

Common and recurring themes were compiled together with arising dominant themes and subthemes. It is good to note that the themes brought out are my own interpretation of the participants' own interpretation of their own stories. This is called Double Hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The significant themes were then organized through a process of abstraction and a table (Table 2 hereunder) was listed with superordinate themes on one side and the subordinate themes on the other side. Such themes were then linked with quotes from the various transcripts.

<b>Table 2: Research Themes</b>	
<b>Superordinate themes</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>
The Out-of-home Care experience in friendships	An opportunity for Friendships
	Staff members supporting and encouraging the youth
	House Rules and Regulations as protagonists in the youth's friendships
A social difference dilemma within the out-of-home residential care identity	Shame in being identified as an Out-of-home Residential Care youth
	Concern that the residential care status can impact their relationships
	Singled out because of the social construct of Residential Care
The complexities of relationships while being in care	Particular Characteristics that youths seek in their friendships
	Being in intimate relationships
	The role of the family-of-origin dynamics within relationships

To give the research a more systemic view, I 'bracketed' (Smith et al., 2009) my own reflections so that I would only put forward themes which reflected the participant's experience.

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<sup>10</sup> See example in Appendix F: Data Analysis Example.



Furthermore, I explored the themes with my supervisor for new insights through a similar process of the reflecting team.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

The participants in this study were informed of all procedures related to their participation and involvement, and the importance of confidentiality and anonymity. This was done in two ways: a) firstly it was done through the (or delegate of) Legal Guardian who would have explained the information on the information sheet before the young person would have agreed to participate in the interview, and b) before the start of the interview, I went through an assent form with the young child which contained all the necessary information. This was done to make sure I had informed assent from the young person. The explanation of the information in the assent form was very informal and used jargon which could be easily understood by the youth. I used this period as an opportunity to build rapport with the participant while creating a comfortable environment. I went through the research procedure and explained the assent form in a manner that they could understand; especially explaining the youth's right to stop any time before or during the interview process. Furthermore, I explained that any topics which may upset the young person will be taken to the child's Social Worker or any other relevant professional for follow-up help (Blagbrough, 1998). I made sure not to refer to the participants' name or the name of the residential home they live in. The young person was also informed that after finalization of the thesis, both transcript and audio recordings will be destroyed.

This research got an Ethics approval from the Research Ethics Committee for IFT-Malta and through the FSWS Research Office. The reason behind the latter is that since this research was

going to conduct interviews with children under Care order, the FSWS Research office needed to be involved, before the LAC office within the same Foundation.

### **3.5 Researcher reflexivity**

*“Research in a social constructionist paradigm calls on the researcher to take responsibility for their own positioning” (Burck, 2005).*

Prior to the interview process, the process of obtaining participants was a long one and this was one of the main challenges when doing this research. I could not market the interviews through advertisements to participants. The closest I could do was contact managers and social workers within various residential care set-ups. I thought that a safe and trusting relationship between the professional and youth would in turn help me in attaining participants for this research. However, due to the rigorous process, where I had to first go through the FSWS Research Team and then through the LAC office, I was not permitted to contact professionals within residential homes; I had to be given permission by the LAC team to be in contact with such professionals. While the LAC team was very supportive, it still took a lot of effort, time and following up from my end to attain the participants needed. Furthermore, I noticed how I was actually contacted only by those residential setting representatives who knew me professionally outside of this research. This helped me understand how my past and present experiences within various residential settings were essential in obtaining participants. Nevertheless, the opportunity to give voice to these youths was a driving force in persevering and working hard to attain a varied participant group.

All participants and the professionals were very welcoming and the participants and I were always given a private space for the interviews to take place. Having said that, most of the

interviewees were initially not sure of the interview's purpose and a good explanation and going through the assent form was required for an informed participation by the youths. Only one female resident felt uncomfortable prior to the interview and, besides introducing myself and a thorough explanation of the interview to help her feel more at ease, we agreed that the door would be left open and that the Home Manager would frequently check on us. Initially, I had concerns that this approach might disrupt the interview process. However, as the interview progressed, the participant gradually became more open, to the extent that she even made negative comments about the Home Manager.

During the semi-structured interviews, I was guided more by the interviewee rather than by the prepared questions. Following the first interview, I met with my supervisor to discuss the questions and the outcome of the interview so that I would try to have a better systemic and social constructionist outcome in future interviews. Nonetheless, after every interview I adapted and refined the structure of the questions to better fit this research. In the first few interviews, I felt that questions related to attachment and other subsystems outside the residence (separately) were lacking and each interview and further reading informed me to improve related questions.

Although I did not personally experience the residential care life as a child and was never a friend of a child in care, I had had a significant professional experience as a caregiver with children in care for more than two years. I was mindful of the possibility that I could inadvertently draw comparisons between the experiences of the children I cared for and the experience of the research participants. Throughout the interview process I remained attentive of this potential bias, determined to be guided by the participants' perspective rather than my own. Acknowledging that I possess preconceived notions and thoughts which could have hindered the interview process, I kept a personal diary to document these reflections (Schwandt, 2015). This practice enabled a

disassociation between the participant's experiences and my personal thoughts and emotional reactions.

The motivation to carry out this research arose from an inclination to augment my understanding of residential care. Such knowledge could also be applied to future endeavours in this field. Through an enhanced insight into the significance, role and importance that young individuals in residential homes give to friendships, this research could contribute to the limited knowledge and information that professionals presently have at hand.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter introduces the main research findings following the semi-structured interviews and an in-depth IPA of the mentioned interviews. As per Table 2 above, three superordinate themes were identified; all of which incorporate sub-ordinate themes relevant for this study. The interrelationship between the youths' out-of-home residential care setting and their friendships is paramount in these findings and these findings will lead the way for the interpretations and discussions in the next chapter.

### **4.1 The out-of-home care experience in friendships**

#### **4.1.1 An opportunity for friendships**

During most of the interviews, it was clear that residential setups did not devalue friendships in the residents' life. All but Stacey had opportunities to make and spend time with friends after school hours in an organised setting. Neil attended a youth group which he was highly encouraged to attend by staff members working in his residential home, Rita attends Girl Guides; Samuel, Robert, Andrew & Joseph train with a football team and Stephen trains athletics.

A change in residence, especially a move from the family-of-origin home to the residential home led to changes in lifestyle. For Andrew, moving to an out-of-home residential care setting meant less freedom and also not being able to go out as he used to when he was still residing with his mother; while for others (Rita, Stephen, Neil, Samuel) this meant that they had more opportunities to go out.

Both Rita and Neil feel that their current residential home stay had a positive effect on their friendships. They believe the residential home was an opportunity to go out and make friendships

that they would not have otherwise made if they had stayed at the family-of-origin home. Rita's outings, for example, got restricted when she had gotten her period due to her mother's lack of trust after seeing her being given a lot of attention by boys.

*Rita: "my mum was very strict, and she did not let me go out, and obviously, I did not use to make friends on my phone (...) ever since I got my period, she didn't let me"<sup>11</sup>*

Neil had a similar experience to Rita, where in his family home, he did not use to go out and rarely talked to school friends. Unlike Rita, whose restrictions were a result of her mother's fear, Neil attributes his own experience to his family problems at the time.

*Interviewer: "What stopped you from talking to others?"*

*Neil: "I don't know. Family problems, mostly"*

*Rita: "If I wanted to go out, yes; but I used to be careful because if I saw my mother's car, I would need to think of an excuse".*

Neil was asked if he now has the opportunity to find friends through the residential home experience, to which he replied:

*Neil: "Here, they give me opportunities to try out new things"*

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix D for Original quotes in Maltese

#### 4.1.2: Staff members supporting and encouraging the youth

For Neil, it was not just the experience of being in care that helped him attain friendships, but also the push he got from specific staff members within the residential setting:

*Neil: “[They would tell me]to go out with groups where they would know I would find new friends (...) Sometimes they say, ‘go try out this new course, perhaps you’ll find new friends over there’ (...) Or else, at school, in the break, ‘don’t sit with the same group of friends’.”*

However, Neil elaborated on how these staff members went beyond merely encouraging him to make friends. They also invested effort in developing their own relationship with him, particularly two individuals who Neil believes truly comprehend and support him. These two staff members have established a long-standing connection with Neil during his time at the residential home, sharing multiple experiences together, especially during moments where he felt genuinely understood.:

*Neil: “They understood me much better (...) They helped me a lot. They supported me as well”*

...

*Neil: “But these people I would have known them for longer, (...) You would know that they would understand you, that they would help you however they can”*

...

*Neil: “I would rather talk with the carer; the carer always understands me.”*

Long-term relationships seem to be essential for the youths' proximity with the caregiver. Neil explained that part of the reason he feels he built a good relationship with these carers is because he knew them since he started residing. This was a similar experience for Robert and Samuel who mentioned that they have a preferred carer who knew them since the beginning of their residency and with whom they feel comfortable:

*Robert: "I feel more comfortable to speak with him than the others, and I joke with him more."*

It is quite common that staff members give suggestions and show support to the youths regarding their friends and intimate relationships:

*Stephen: "Be careful who you hang out with"*

Samuel even points out how the support he got from the carers and the residential home helped him change his behaviour and encouraged him to do better within the residence and outside of it as well. He relates his better attitude to compliance with house rules and sports rules where in both situations he started to observe more with rules he is expected to obey, such as cleaning his room and controlling his anger. He was also given feedback regarding this improvement in attitude by his sports coach:

*Samuel: "They help me get better like I do duties and stuff. I got a better attitude by living here (...) I used to get angry much quicker, and now I clean the plates without them telling me; my room is barely dirty."*



...

*Samuel: "Even in Football (...) My attitude got better than last year because last year I was a mess (...) I used to get angry, you know (...) they (coaches) used to say, you're never going to be good if you keep this attitude"*

#### **4.1.3: House rules and regulations as protagonists in the youth's friendships**

Some youths (n=3) mentioned that house rules limited or blocked the use of mobile phones, social media and online games as compared to other youths living in their family home:

*Andrew: "(if I was with my family) I would have more freedom, for example when it comes to using (...) Social Media"*

*Robert: "8:30PM we switch off the computers, PlayStation, mobiles, everything and we gather together (...) I find this annoying."*

Youths (n=6) mentioned that their outings and time outside of the house is somewhat limited compared to other youths.

*Joseph: "They wouldn't let me go out (...) They (my friends) yes, because they can go out on their own. I cannot (...) I ask them, they don't let me (...) I would go with them if I could (...) They say I'm still young (...) I think, It's more because I live in a residential home"*

This limitation also extends to the types of friendship activities they can engage in, including inviting friends over to their homes and participating in sleepovers. This sense of difference reduces the potential for developing closer bonds with their friends. It is important to note that this limitation does not appear to be specific to any particular gender or residential care arrangement.

*Samuel: “they let you do a lot of things, but the only thing is about going out late and sleeping (...) That's the only bad thing. (...) I'd manage to make a bigger bond with them if I could go out longer with them, I could sleep at their house and things like that. I could get closer with them.”*

Samuel compares himself with his friends but doesn't compare with his girlfriend, who although lives with her biological parents, has stricter rules:

*Samuel: “she's not really allowed to stay out later than me”*

Most of the youths believe that the house rules are rigid and Samuel and Rita believe that these should be more lenient based on trust. On the other hand, Neil feels that he earned this trust and therefore he feels that his rules are not rigid. In fact, he is able to attend his youth group until late and go out for long periods of time:

*Rita: “Well, in my case, every Sunday I am only allowed to go out from 3PM (...) until 9PM (...) (the other days) when I don't have a carer, I wouldn't be able to go out. They*

*think I'm a baby (...) (with my boyfriend) we meet on weekdays, but I don't see him that much"*

*Neil: "I have built trust now (...) They would know I am not doing anything wrong."*

Nevertheless, while Robert feels that the house rules are too "strict" he understands the reasoning behind these rules:

*Robert: "They raise us to be strong (...) They don't give us what we want instantly"*

## **4.2 A social difference dilemma within the out-of-home residential care identity**

### **4.2.1 Shame in being identified as an out-of-home residential care youth**

Youths did not need to recount any particular stories to show that they carry a sense of stigma in being identified as an out-of-home residential care youth. In my interviews, some youths (n=4) use the expression: "*Il-home*" to refer to their residential setting. Moreover, Samuel, whose interview was the only one in English, used the expression 'a home' to refer to the residential setting and the word 'home' to refer to the family-of-origin home. They use a linguistic identifier to refer to their residential setup.

All but Samuel (n = 7) mentioned that they choose which friends to tell about their current situation of being in residential care. Joseph especially, was quite positive about it:

*Joseph: "I feel comfortable telling (my friends) that I live in a home, because they say, 'interesting', the fact that you live in a home"*

On the other hand, Samuel is certain that he does not want friends to know about his residence, not even his girlfriend. There is a lack of safety and trust, and a sense of shame on how he is perceived in living in a setting which is different to his friends':

*Samuel: "But I don't want to tell her that I am in a home (...) I don't feel safe telling her. I'd rather wait till I go home (...) If you break up, she'll go tell someone"*

....

*Samuel: "But the coaches, (...) like I get annoyed like they say (Social Worker's name) told you this and I'm like, and I'm like, yes, yes, yes, quite quickly"*

*Interviewer: "You feel very ashamed about being in a residential home?"*

*Samuel: "Yeah, I want to go home."*

Neil shares this shame, as living in a residential home does not feel "*normal*" to him. In fact, he would not ask friends to come to his house even though he may be permitted to do so by staff members:

*Neil: "I don't like it when they come here. Because I don't like to share the fact that I live here. Only my close friends know that (...) But it's better if we keep it between us (...) Because it's not normal that I live in a home."*

#### ***4.2.2 Concern that the residential care status can impact their relationships***

Youths gave different reasons about their worry of their care status being overt in their relationships. One reason that some of the participants gave was that their home situation was used by friends as a method of verbal offence:

*Rita: “They would start leaving me slowly (...) and I realise that it’s because I live here (...) It’s not the first time it happened”*

*Stacey: “Because that’s what they’ll say, ‘why did you go to that home, what did they do to you, then?’”*

*Robert: “When we used to fight, they would tease me about me living here; that I don’t have a family”.*

Ruth and Neil looked at the impact that an overt identity can have on other systems besides their own friendship subsystem. Ruth gave an insight on how such situations with her friends affected her experience at the residential home, while on the other hand Neil was worried that if his friends knew about his situation, they would be worried about him:

*Rita: “Well, they don’t make it easy for me (...) If they say negative comments, I wouldn’t take it well (...) Even though I didn’t care. But still...”*

*Interviewer: “What used to happen at home then?”*

*Rita: “Everyone would turn on me, like I’m the black sheep”*

*Neil: “So that they wouldn’t worry about my things (...) Not that I would annoy them with my story.”*

In spite of some negative experiences, these youths also had more positive ones in which they experienced friendships who were not altered by the realization of their residential care status. Some friends even started to be attentive on what to joke about with them:

*Robert: “I found a friend that I wouldn’t say anything to him in the beginning; but then, once the opportunity arose, I told him, and he understood me. He wouldn’t tease me because I live here”*

*Neil: “It doesn’t affect those people who I told already. Just so they know that I’m not like those who live with their mums and dads. For example, they would know how to joke, and which jokes are appropriate.”*

#### **4.2.3 Singled out because of the social construct of residential care**

The social construct of children in residential care comes out in different ways in these youths’ experiences. Rita, Robert, Samuel and Neil were worried about the social stigma of being youths living in a residential home:

*Rita: “They think I’m still a child, and that I know nothing, as if I was born yesterday. (...). That I have no life (...) They think I’m a troublemaker, that I don’t go well with people, that I’m a liar”.*

*Samuel: “Because like I don’t have a good family, you know. It’s like my family left me or something.”*

Robert explained how the teachers’ social construct of residential care youth led to him being given special treatment and being singled out. This past experience makes him worried that this could be repeated with current teachers:

*Robert: “Yes, the teachers (...) knew that I live here but they used to prefer us because they used to pity us. For example, during Christmas, (...) they gave me and another kid who lives in the same house, an extra gift (...) I’m not going to tell my current teachers that I live here because they would pity me”*

Neil even resorted to lying when his residential care identity felt too public for him:

*Neil: “They try to share the fact that I live here. But I deny it. Who asks me, I tell them that it’s not true”.*

### 4.3 The complexities of relationships while being in care

All youths interviewed mentioned having someone close to them. Samuel, Robert and Rita had their own intimate relationships, having a boyfriend or a girlfriend; and the other 5 youths all mentioned having close friendships. These 5 youths had close friendships from places that they regularly frequented; Andrew, Stephen, Joseph, and Stacey mentioned school while Neil referred to his youth group as the main sources from where they attained close friendships. Besides Neil, none of the rest had close friends from any after-school groups but considered them as friends. However, Samuel mentioned that he became close with friends of his football friends.

All the youths felt that friends or intimate others are an important part of their life, irrelevant of the stage they are at or how many friends they have:

*Joseph: "Because without friends, (...) you wouldn't have anyone to talk to, always keeping everything inside"*

#### 4.3.1 Particular characteristics that youths seek in their friendships

Youths (n=7) valued the importance of humour and jokes as one form of resilience considering all the difficult times they have been through:

*Samuel: "I like funny friends. I don't want to go out with someone boring."*

Before conducting the interviews, I anticipated that play and activities with friends would be a significant topic for these youths in their friendships. While this assumption held true, I



discovered that conversation between friends held even greater importance in their lives, particularly within close and intimate friendships:

*Joseph: “Even when I confide, I trust them (...) They also confide in me (...) Because I find them every time I need them (...) When I have friends (...) I feel the responsibility (...) I say, it’s like I’m holding gold.*

*Neil: “Not only trust, but that he listens, he cares, and tries to help (...) For example, to be a close friend, you need to listen. And they see me as a close friend. The same goes by. They trust me and they listen to me”.*

In general, mention of friends who also live in a residential home was limited. However, Robert is quite close to his house mates and Stephen mentioned that some of his best friends do also live in residential care. Moreover, Stephen, Rita, Neil and Robert see the benefits of knowing youths with similar life experiences. For example, Rita mentions that even though her boyfriend is not in care, they are able to understand because of similar relationships with their mother.

Andrew, Stephen & Samuel see friends as an available resource for when they need help. Additionally, Andrew sees friends as replaceable; once one friendship ends, another friendship is readily available:

*Stephen: “They help you when you need (...) They are ready to help, for example when you need money (...) Or you are going through tough times, they would be ready to sit down and talk”*

*Andrew: "Because when you have someone as a friend and they stop being your friend, you would have another one. You would be able to confide in someone again. And then, if this happens again, you would have another friend, and another, another..."*

#### **4.3.2 Being in intimate relationships**

Only three participants, Robert, Samuel and Rita mentioned that they were in an intimate relationship and all were in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex. All 3 have turned their focus and commitment on their intimate relationships and do not seem to be close to any other friends outside of the house.

*Samuel: "I have a girlfriend. I go out with her most of the time, I don't really go out with my friends a lot. If my girlfriend can't, I go out with my friends. I go out with her friends, but she doesn't come out with mine."*

Samuel and Robert gave an insight about the positive characteristics that their girlfriends have and what they offer to their relationships:

*Robert: "She is quiet (...) Beautiful, intelligent (...) she doesn't judge, helps and shows respect"*

Only Robert and Rita disclosed their family situation with their loved ones. Samuel, whose relationship is newer when compared to Robert and Rita, does not wish to ever disclose this

information. He is hoping to return to his family home in the near future and is aiming to avoid from mentioning this period of life with his girlfriend because he does not feel safe enough to do it:

*Samuel: "But I don't want to tell her that I am in a home (...) I'll try lie a bit. (...) I'm not ready to tell her. (...) I don't feel safe telling her. I'd rather wait till I go home. (..) If you break up, she'll go tell someone. (...) I don't know what could happen but. If, like a girl tells me that she's in a home, I'd feel a bit different, you know?"*

Reducing time with friends does not seem to be a choice done out of will. They mentioned some conflict between their intimate partner and their friends which may have contributed to such choices:

*Samuel: "But she doesn't really like my friends; my friends are (...) Loud and then they have a lot of energy (...) She says they're annoying, but her friends are OK, so I don't mind staying with them."*

*Rita: "I do have friends but my boyfriend doesn't let me (...) I have more male friends than female friends"*

### 4.3.3 The role of the family-of-origin dynamics within relationships.

Another subsystem that featured in the interviews was the family-of-origin subsystem and the dynamics that come up with it. Stephen and Neil both mention how their family situation interrupted the youths from having relationships with meaningful others:

*Stephen: "When I used to live with my mum and dad, I never understood the purpose of having friends"*

*Neil: "I didn't used to talk to people (...) Because of family problems (...) In Form 3, it affected me (...) (smirking) Three years and a half ago, I didn't used to go out of the house"*

Andrew, Joseph and Rita mention how even though they are living in a residential home, family members offer suggestions on which friends to choose. In case of Andrew and Rita, such suggestions arrive from parental figures while that Joseph, who lives in a siblings' flat, is given suggestions from his elderly siblings; two of whom live within his flat, and from his brother who lives independently:

*Andrew: "To always choose the good from the bad (...) For example, they study, always with a book in hand, they don't use the phone (...) I always used to ignore"*

On the other hand, Neil's family are too focused on their personal situation and there is no space for such conversations and suggestions when they meet:

*Neil: "They don't talk to me about friends, because currently, they are focusing on themselves"*

Robert and Rita mentioned fear of being picked on if their family situation and the information about their current out-of-home care residential stay is known:

*Robert: "I'm not going to tell them that my mum is dead; because that would lead to bullying"*

## **Chapter 5: Interpretation and Discussion of Findings**

This chapter will examine the similarities identified in the results and integrate the findings from this study with the existing literature review. Through the research conducted prior to this study and during the literature review process, it became apparent that there has been a notable absence of similar studies conducted in Malta or abroad (at least in English). As a result, the opportunities for making comparisons with the existing literature have been extremely limited.

### **5.1 The out-of-home care experience in friendships**

The evident theme that was established in the findings of this study was that youths found the residential home to be a resource for integration and go out with friends; an opportunity that some of them did not have before being in care. Friendships seem to be highly valued by the respective residential care setups as shown through the various possibilities of after-school activities that all but one youth were participating in, and the encouragement and advice that most youths got from their residential caregivers. Such activities and these apt caregivers employed could be a part of the youths' care plans devised by residential care professionals to help the youths integrate in society. Additionally, Neil, Robert and Samuel gave an insight on how a few caregivers worked hard on building an understanding and supportive relationship with them. These were caregivers who managed to maintain a long-term relationship with the youths. The supportiveness and availability of these staff members create an environment based on secure attachment

(Delgado et al., 2022)<sup>12</sup>. This was seen in both Neil's and Robert's experiences, as the former has good quality relationships with friends from a youth group and the latter finds this intimacy and support in his girlfriend. It is not clear, on the other hand, how this caregiver-youth relationship has helped Samuel with his close friends and his girlfriend; especially since he is resorting to lies to hide his residential-care status. Nevertheless, Samuel mentioned how settling in his residence with a supportive caregiver helped him to improve his attitude in different relationships systems, those within the house and that of sports. This echoes May's (2018) concepts of stability and support which the youths seek at home. Once these are established at the residence, they provide a platform where the youths can seek friends and explore external relationships. Through this attachment with a stable and supportive caregiver, the youths understand that the caregivers are available in case of need. This availability helps youths to deal with difficult situations and explore new possibilities (McClean, 2016). Nevertheless, Grech's (2017) study on Care Work Practices in Malta showed that there is a significant staff turnover and McCall (2011), who studied the early effects of institutionalization of children, mentioned that these high turnovers make it difficult for children to develop stable relationships with caregivers. Thus, having stability and support through long-term relationships with caregivers might be considered as an unrealistic criterion when considering what could help youths in their friendships. Taking Andrew as an example, he sees friends as replaceable where quantity is important, *"because when you have someone as a friend and they stop being your friend, you would have another one"* (p. 49). This could be influenced

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<sup>12</sup> Delgado et al. (2022) explain how such traits help in building a more secure relationship with the adolescent which in turn results in better-quality friendships. Deluca, Claxton & Dulment (2018) relate this quality to high levels of intimacy and support within friendships.

by frequent staff turnover through which Andrew does not have the opportunity to have nurturing relationships in his residential home. In fact, Andrew did not mention having any close connections with staff members or close friends while Delgado et al. (2022) mention that cultivating strong and supportive relationships with caregivers enhances the quality of friendships. Therefore, through this research, I replicate Grech's (2017) and Zerafa's (2016) appeals that high staff turnover needs to be addressed in the care field.

Tietjan's (1982) study showed a direct relationship between the parents' peer relationships and their children's own peer relationships. However, in this study, it became clear that all youths have no idea of their staff members' relationships with their own friends. Youths may be learning from the staff members' guidance, but they seem to find a brick wall of boundaries which impedes the youth from getting to know the staff member personally and possibly also failing to see a working example of how to relate to others.

During the interviews, an intriguing contradiction emerged regarding the experiences of friendships among these youths while in care. On one hand, as mentioned earlier, most interviews indicated that being in care provided them with more opportunities to meet friends. However, on the other hand, the youths compared their living arrangements and the regulations imposed upon them with those of their friends. They expressed a perception that their own environment was more stringent, which hindered their friendships and highlighted their social disparities. The youths repeatedly complained of having strict rules and regulations, especially in relation to going out, use of social media and sleepovers. This same topic was also explored by Ridge & Millar (2000) who had only picked out sleepovers as to what the rules and regulations hinder on. In their paper, they refer to these rules as "*bureaucratic processes of care [which] impacted upon attempts to normality*" (Ridge & Millar, 2000, p.170). Some may argue that these rules and regulations are



implemented in order to protect these youths. However, the perception of these young individuals differs from this understanding. They attribute the imposition of such rules solely to the fact that they are living in a residential setting. For instance, Samuel frequently compares his evening curfews with those of his friends, yet he overlooks the fact that his girlfriend also has a similar curfew. In fact, he hopes that the change in attitude mentioned earlier will assist him in returning to his biological family and escaping the rules that he strongly dislikes. These youths in care appear to overlook the fact that rules and regulations can exist in any household setting, whether explicitly stated or not. Moreover, these comparisons with other youths outside of care seem to constrain them to overlook their life before out-of-home care. Rita mentioned that her mother was strict and restricted her outings. At the same time, she wishes to leave the residential setup because of these house rules. Conversely, Robert understands that such rules are needed for character development. Neil, Samuel and Rita all understand that this is related to trust; however, only Neil feels that he has earned the trust from the residential home. In fact, he attends the youth group until late. While some youths understand that their situation may be better than it was before, having different rules and regulations to other youths outside of care decreases their satisfaction with their current situation. It increases the worry that their care status creates a challenge within their friendships and relationships, and reduces the possibility of managing to make “*a bigger bond*” (p. 41) within interpersonal relationships.

## **5.2 A social difference dilemma within the out-of-home residential care identity**

My research aligns with the findings of Emond (2012) and Ridge and Millar (2000) in that shame and stigma are strong themes for young people living in residential homes. This sense of

shame is always present; irrelevant of the length of the youth's stay, the presence of friends with similar experiences, or the youths' contentment with residing there. Nevertheless, most of the youths are willing to tell some selected close friends about their out-of-home care identity. The youths in this study consider close friends as friends that they would trust enough with their identity. However, Samuel stood out in these interviews as he did not feel "*safe*" (p.50) to tell anyone about his situation. The feeling of shame was so strong for him that he felt this shame even in situations where there is an indirect mention of this home situation, such as when football coaches mention the names of professionals who work with him in front of his friends. Samuel did not want to be and feel socially different to his peers. Therefore, he does his utmost to keep his various microsystems<sup>13</sup> separate from each other. Linking to McHale et al. (2009), youths may feel singled out because of incongruence between their present home microsystem and friends' home microsystem. This new socialization process at the mesosystem<sup>14</sup> could lead to the "*child-rearing difficulties*" (McHale et al., 2009, p.1195) for these youths' caregivers. As mentioned earlier in this section, caregivers could be doing their utmost in trying to help youths to settle and build a good relationship. However, the youths may still try to keep emotional distance from their caregivers since their home microsystem is incongruent with that of their friends' home microsystem. In fact, Samuel mentioned having a very good relationship with a particular staff member, yet he spent the interview complaining about house rules, and the need to leave the residential home. The incongruence is further highlighted with the residence's implementation of

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<sup>13</sup> Bronfenbrenner explains microsystems as subsystems which the youth is directly in touch with (Tietjen, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> A mesosystem is the link between the youth's different microsystems (Tietjen, 2006).

house rules that for these youths seem stricter than that of their friends'. The incongruence is what possibly leads youths in care to feel "*social[ly] differen[t]*" and "*outsiders*" (Ridge & Millar, 2000, p.68); and thus feeling ashamed of their own home microsystem. In fact, all participants in this study fear being identified as a child in care and most of them choose to limit whom to tell.

Moreover, the macrosystemic<sup>15</sup> influence of such stigma was even clearer in the use of the expressions "*il-home*" (p.42) and 'a home' within these interviews which is commonly used in Malta to refer to out-of-home residential care setups. Using an English word during a conversation in Maltese and with the addition of the Maltese article 'Il-' (the) shows, for me, a sense of stigma in relation to the place and experience of being in care. It is different to '*id-dar*' (for Maltese speakers) and 'my home' or 'at home' (for English speakers) and shows a lack of ownership to and/or identification with the residence; almost distancing themselves from the residence. The youths seem to move away from the meaning of a 'home', a place of belonging (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) towards a 'house', the building people live in (Cambridge dictionary, n.d.). The use of the identifiers '*il-*' and '*a*' show that the participants concede and accept this public stigma related to young people who live in residential homes. The study by Tietjen (2006) showed that peer relationships echo the situation within the larger system – the macrosystem, and thus it is possible that the use of the expression in this study is echoing the stigmatised ideas and shame that out-of-home residential care settings carry in Malta. This further increases self-stigmatization within the youths' life in these settings.

To avoid being singled out, youths may resort to hiding facts or lying about themselves and their family. Rita expressed what Emond (2003) mentioned as a troublesome social view of

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<sup>15</sup> A Macrosystem refers to cultural values and norms of the society (Tietjen, 2006).

youths in a residential care setup and her reasoning behind this was because of one particular experience when friends knew about her home. They started to reject her because they thought she was a “*liar*” and a “*troublemaker*” (p.46). Robert and Samuel also mentioned that their friends may think that the residential status means that they do not have any family. This highlights Rogers’ (2017) idea of stigma being centred around invented stories of parental rejection. These stigmatised views held within certain systems impacted other microsystems. Similar to the participants in Rogers’ (2017) study, Robert mentions how he was treated differently by teachers. He recounts how he and his friend (who also lived in a residential setting) were ‘devalued’ (Rogers, 2017) when being given extra presents just because of their residential status. While teachers may have done this out of their own good will, this act was not helping their case and was only making them more self-conscious of their out-of-home care identity and social difference. He may have felt different to their peers, when in reality the social difference is what he wanted to avoid. This social difference is felt through an indirect mesosystemic relationship between the friends’ home system and their own residential care system. Moreover, Rita used to be offended and teased by external friends and this made her feel uncomfortable when at home; further decreasing a sense of safety and longing at the home system; “*they don’t make it easy for me*” (p.44). My interpretation is that these youths living in out-of-home residential care setups have a certain uneasiness in their mesosystems. This is because their home system is different to their friends’ home system, as most of the time the latter would consist of the family of origin while the former would consist of paid caregivers. Neil and Robert refer to living with biological parents as “*normal*” (p. 43) and therefore their residence situation is what could be considered as ‘not normal’ leading to possible social exclusion (Rogers, 2017). Neil further expresses that he would not tell his friends about his residential status as they would otherwise worry about him. These situations could further explain

why the youths feel uneasy at their mesosystem. Moreover, they carry the awareness of the public-stigma (Corrigan et al., 2004) at the macrosystemic level of being a youth in care which they learn from their interactions within their various microsystems, especially friends' systems. This obstructs their acceptance of their home situation since it is different to that of their friends', which in turn affects the relationship safety within the residential home system.

This study validates other literature in that it may be supportive for the youths that friends know about their living situation. Emond (2012) shows that some youths see it as important that their peers know about their identity; similarly, some participants in this study showed how eager they were to get to trust their friends with this personal information. Neil mentions a positive that he found from letting his friends know about his identity; that they could avoid inappropriate jokes about his family. Robert also mentions that there were other situations in which he was understood by his friends, and friendships did not change. It is possible that such revelations helped in strengthening their friendships as in Rogers' (2017) study. If these youths could have more of these positive experiences rather than the negative experiences mentioned earlier, it would be possible for them to feel safer and share their experience of living in care instead of hiding facts and lying about themselves and their family. The individual's experience and the public view of living in a residential care setup shape the young person's own view of being in care and raises concerns regarding sharing their residential care identity. Youths living in out-of-home residential care could benefit from having opportunities to have their voice heard; especially being part of policy-making procedures in regards to out-of-home residential care. This could lead to a change at the macrosystemic view of such a setting; which in turn could be followed by a change in how these youths and their friends understand the experience of being in care, with the hope that these youths are more comfortable with their mesosystem.

### **5.3 The complexities of relationships while being in care**

A new microsystem for the older participants was that of romantic companionship i.e. a boyfriend or a girlfriend. In romantic companions, they look for positive characteristics which they enjoy, a feeling of belonging, and the possibility of being themselves. Ridge and Millar (2000) referred to social inclusion in external friendships, where friends outside of the residential home give a new social milieu to these youths. This can also be said for romantic companionships as the new social milieu could consist of friends and family members of romantic companions. The participants revealed how an intimate relationship at their young age led to a change in social identity, as all three participants are positioning the intimate relationship microsystem not as a new added system which is joining the previously held ones but rather a microsystem which is replacing the previous one of friends. Moreover, in all these cases, at the mesosystem, there is conflict between the youth's friends and the romantic companion which compels the youth to feel the need to choose between them. This could be linked to the subtheme of house rules. If we are saying that house rules and regulations is a protagonist in these youths' relationships, then it may also be a protagonist in these youth's intimate relationships. In fact, all the three participants who were in a relationship were the most vocal in their disapproval of the house rules. They expressed that if the rules and regulations are eased, their intimate relationships could change; such as Rita would meet her boyfriend more often, Samuel could sleepover at his girlfriend's house and Robert could invite his girlfriend over. Yet, it is not clear whether these three youths would have had more opportunities to meet their friends (besides their romantic companion) if their rules were seen as less limiting as they are at present. It could be that with more time available to go out, they would still give this time to their romantic companion rather than other friends. I also wonder if it is

contradictory that the youths are encouraged to mix and build relationships, yet the way they live such relationships is bound with strict rules on contact time; especially when compared to their external friends.

Within the complexities of these youths' lives lies the influence that members of their family of origin have within their friendships. It is another system that has a role to play in these youths' friendships even though these youths live away from their family of origin and some do not even meet any of its members. The family of origin has an indirect role through the youths' internal working model as this would have been shaped by these youths' early attachment with their biological parents/family and this internal working model shapes the relationship that these youths have (McLean, 2016). Some youths found it difficult to make friendships when the family of origin was going through problems. It was a period during which the youth may have understood that relationships are not safe, that the youth should not belong to anyone and/or the youth is not worthy of love. With such an internal working model, it is difficult for a youth to see the "*purpose*" (p. 51) of friendships or any other relationships as the young person may not have been exposed to healthy relationships.

Some youths also mention a more visible role that family members have in their relationships while in care, like giving suggestions in regards to their friendships. Furthermore, the stigma around their family's situation is quite relevant as it could be another topic which friends may tease them with. This teasing may be a reason why they decide to lie or refuse to mention their family's situation with their friends. Youths seem to be afraid of having their family's story out in the open because it would hinder their friendships and they would be seen differently by their friends. Thus, it could also mean that youths found it difficult to be in friendships when their

family was having problems because they were either protecting their family, being bullied or preventing bullying from their peers.

All of the youths interviewed understood the importance of having someone in their life, and in fact all of them had at least one close person to relate to. Three of the interviewees had a boyfriend or a girlfriend, three had close friends from school, one was close to friends from a youth group and one was close to a friend within the residence. These close friendships were a resource for monetary help, humour and emotional support both in the present but also in case of need in the future<sup>16</sup>. In fact, emotional support was a dominating factor in the participants' friendships. Examples of emotional support given by the youths were: listening to the youth, confiding in them, spending time with their friend and elevating their moods through humour. It was something that they looked for in their friends and something that they give back to their friends; it was reciprocal. This reciprocity helps the youths feel part of a community and relational safety (Mead & MacNeil, 2014). Youth participants therefore recognised the need for emotional support and equated this need to their significant others.

In this study, homophily<sup>17</sup> is still pertinent and prominent in the youth's friendships. Even though only Stephen had external friends who also live in other out-of-home care residential homes, most of the youths sought friends with similar characteristics. The similarities between friends was not based on being in out-of-home residential care. Not even for Stephen, as in general,

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<sup>16</sup>These were factors also mentioned in Afandi & Ismail's (2022) and Sala-Roca et al.'s (2012) studies.

<sup>17</sup> Homophily is the tendency of individuals to associate disproportionately with others who are similar to themselves (Golub & Jackson, 2012)



the youths do not want to be associated with the place they live in. However, some youths declared that if the opportunity arises, they would not turn down friendships with others who live in a similar setting even though they do not actively look for it. Youths mentioned how they have friends of similar interests such as particular sports, playing online and going to Paceville. Rita also mentioned how she and her boyfriend share a characteristic of loss of their respective mothers, even though their stories are different. These characteristics help the youth to have friends who are able to understand their story and can give them good support and advice (Ridge and Millar, 2000). If these friendships are created, the peer support with regards to their stories is bidirectional (Mead & MacNeil, 2014) meaning they could help and be helped, through the understanding of each other's story.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Researcher reflexivity**

Throughout this research process, I have been mindful of my own experiences working with children in care, and also my own relationships. Specifically, I am aware of my preconceived notions of what constitutes strong friendships and intimate relationships which may have a role in the way I interpreted and discussed the data. I am conscious of comparisons I may have made with my own friendships at the participants' age and also with the friendships of the children I used to take care of. I was strongly involved in the children's upbringing therefore any questions I have posed in the interviews were undoubtedly influenced by my past role as a caregiver with children in care. Additionally, I acknowledge that this thesis is influenced by my emphasis on preserving my own friendships and intimate relationship, as I see them as an important resource in my life. That said, I still aimed to maintain objectivity and avoid imposing my own standpoints onto this research.

### **6.2 Research limitations**

All the interviews conducted for this study involved young individuals who were Maltese, white, and of Caucasian descent. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all young people in out-of-home care setups in Malta meet these specific criteria. As a result, the purposive sampling used in this study unintentionally became homogeneous and lacks balance in terms of nationality, race, and culture.

One of the main limitations within this study was the jargon used to refer to friends and friendships. In the literature (which is in English), there were differences and distinctions between

the terms friends, peers and close friends. In contrast, these interviews were all but one done in Maltese, which does not include peer relationships within the vocabulary. This meant that the participants did not use this term within the interviews. Nonetheless, even though there was an interview in English, the interviewee was Maltese and he also did not use this or any related term. Thus, it shows how the language can shape the culture, and the Maltese culture does not seem to include the understanding of different peer' relationships within young people's experiences. All interviewees referred to other youths as friends including peers at school and after-school activities. This meant that most children had a whole-class/group of what they called friends, but the friendship was limited if not non-existent. Moreover, this limitation cannot be clarified unless there is a similar study on the theme of friendships of youths in Maltese so as to see if the latter may also refer to peers in class or in a group as friends.

### **6.3 Directions for future research**

This study was limited to young people in out-of-home care setup in Malta. Following my thorough research in the past three years, I found no similar or comparative studies in Malta. Thus, the main recommendation for research is to extend the theme of this study, i.e. external friends and interpersonal relationships, to various parallel and comparative groups, such as:

1. Young People in Foster Care
2. Young people with separated or divorced parents
3. Adopted young people
4. Young people in out-of-home care setup in a non-Maltese context.

It would also be interesting to use quantitative means of research to further augment the findings in this study. A mixed-methods study on young people (both living with biological parents and also those in out-of-home care) could build a profile of the similarities and differences in the experiences of friendships for youths and interpersonal relationships for youths in these different contexts. This should include the participation of both the youths and their caregivers for a more systemic insight on such an important theme which could be an eye-opener for policymakers in the social field.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

The main aim of this study was to explore the experience of external friendships and interpersonal relationships of young people who live in an out-of-home residential care setup. This study shows that the residential care experience was an opportunity for the creation of friendships and that the complexity of the family-of-origin dynamics may have stalled this process prior to residency. The building of friendships was further fuelled by the tendency for caregivers to encourage these youths to be in such interpersonal relationships. This was mostly effective when the caregivers worked on their own relationship with the youth and when youths had a long-term, stable and supportive attachment figure. In turn, it seems that the young people had a better drive to explore external interpersonal relationships and achieve good quality-friendships.

There was a propensity for young people in care to stress the impediment that house rules and regulations create within their friendships and the way it limited the development of interpersonal relationships. The young people may feel socially different due to these regulations as the comparisons they tend to make are with friends who do not have limiting house rules.

Interestingly, they omit comparisons with themselves in the past and/or with other youths who may have similar rules after all. This social difference further expands the shame and stigma that these youths are facing for having an out-of-home residential care identity. Most youths tend to feel shame of having such an identity as this is distant from the cultural connotation of the ‘normality’ of living with biological parents and different from their friends’ home system. These youths carry the public’s stigmatic view of this identity, which consists of stories of possible family and/or behaviour problems, further reducing the youths’ willingness to be open about their identity. Relationships based on trust and safety can ease the worry within the youth and in return encourage them to be honest with their friends about their out-of-home residential care identity.

Relating to others while being in out-of-home care can be quite complex for the young person. The young person may tend to get into relationships which satisfy their attachment needs while juggling the out-of-home residential care identity and family-of-origin dynamics. Homophily, in friendships, can be a tool for support and advice for these youths who seek a reciprocal and bidirectional interpersonal relationship.

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## Appendix

## **Appendix A – Information Sheet & Consent Form**



# **Exploring the External Interpersonal Connections and Friendships of Young People in Out-of-Home Residential Care Setup in Malta.**

## **Information Sheet & consent form for the young person's Legal Guardian.**

### **Introduction**

My name is Eman Agius and I am currently reading a Masters in Systemic Family Psychotherapy. I have worked in children's residential settings for 4 years and I will be using my experience and interest to give an opportunity to young people currently residing in a residential home for children to voice their experience. I aim to research the experience of these young people's friendships and peer relationships; with special emphasis on friendships and peer relationships outside of the residential home. Young people between the ages of 12 and 18 will have the opportunity to voice such experience through semi-structured interviews. These young people would have been residing within the residential home for at least 1 year, and would be willing to participate in these interviews.

### **Purpose of Research Intervention**

There is little to no information about peer relationships and friendships of young people living in residential care in the Maltese context; and the information in research abroad is limited. This research aims to shed light on this matter with particular focus on young people ranging from



12 to 18 years old. The study is interested in the young person's experience of friendships outside the residential home, highlighting emerging themes, with the intent of giving information to carers and professionals on how to best respond to the participants' needs. My role as a researcher and interviewer will be to facilitate a safe interviewing process with the aim to give a voice to these young people while ensuring that their privacy and confidentiality are respected.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation is voluntary and even the young person can decide not to participate in this research or even withdraw his/her consent at a later stage. Being the young person's legal guardian, you have every right to decline that the young person in question participates in this research.

### **Procedure**

The interviews will be done one-to-one in a room within the residential setting. The aim would be to help the young person feel at ease. However, the room would need to be free from any interruptions by carers and/or other residents. These interviews will be audio recorded with a digital device.

The information will be confidential, and pseudonyms will be assigned for each young person of which I will be the only person aware of whom these link to. The information gathered will be stored in a password-protected laptop, of which only I have access to, and will be deleted immediately after that dissertation has been finalised and the dissertation grades have been received. Research results, conclusions and recommendations will be then sent to you.

### **Duration**

I am asking the young person to participate in an interview which will take no more than 1 hour.

**Risks & Discomforts**

The interview might imply sharing some personal or sensitive information.

**Confidentiality**

Confidentiality will only be adhered to if there is no reference to potential self-harm or harm to others. Any information on any particular young person will be kept anonymous in the research results and I will be creating a fictitious name whom only I will be able to link the fictitious name with the young person.

**Contact Information:**

Email: eman.agius@ift-malta.com

Mobile number: 79042206

**Legal Guardian's Consent**

I, as the legal guardian of \_\_\_\_\_, have been asked to give consent for the young person under my care to participate in this research study which will involve him/her being part of a one-to-one interview with the researcher. I have read the foregoing information, I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily for the young person under my care to participate as a participant in this study.

---

Name &amp; Surname

---

Email address

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

## Appendix B – Participants’ Assent Form



### Participant’s Assent Form for interview in English

Interviewer to mark statements explained to the young person	<i>Explained and assent given</i>
You have been given a general explanation by your legal guardian and the researcher of what the study involves.	
You agree to be interviewed by the researcher on your experience living in a residential home for children and regarding your relationships with peers and friends.	
You freely want to participate in this research.	
The researcher will be audio recording the interview through a digital device. This recording will be stored anonymously.	
All information will be kept confidential and the results would not be linked to you. However, if you reveal any information which shows that there is a risk for your well-being and/or the possibility of harm to yourself and/or others, confidentiality will be lost. In such a case, the researcher would discuss with you what can be done.	
You may refuse to answer any questions by the researcher.	
You can stop or refuse to attend the interview before or even anytime during the interview.	
You can talk to your legal guardian/Social Worker in case you feel the need to talk to anyone after or during the interview.	

Interviewee number: \_\_\_\_

Researcher’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C – FSWS Research Office Approval



Foundation for Social Welfare Services  
212, Cannon Road,  
Santa Venera SVR 9034

22<sup>nd</sup> December 2022

77, Mayflower  
Triq Dun Ġwann Cilia  
Qormi

To whom it may concern

Eman Agius's request to conduct research within the services of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services has been reviewed. The research aims to focus on "Exploring the external Interpersonal Connections and Friendships of Young People in Out-of-Home Residential Care Setup in Malta."

After reviewing this request, the Research Office has given approval for the researcher to conduct interviews.

Although the Research Office has approved the research, the service providers and participants still retain the right to refuse any research request.

It is very important for the applicant to keep in mind that the views expressed by research participants during interviews might not necessarily reflect the FSWS' official position on the topic in question, and this needs to be made very clear in the published study.

Regards,

*Ronald Balzan*

Ronald Balzan  
Senior Research Executive

---

INCORPORATING:  
Aġenzija APPOGG  
Aġenzija SEDQA  
Agency for Community and Therapeutic Services  
Child Protection Directorate  
Alternative Care Directorate  
Gozo Branch

---

<u>Section to be completed by FSWS Research Review Panel ONLY</u>	
We have examined the above proposal and advise	
<b>Approval</b>	<b>Conditional Acceptance</b>
<b>Refusal</b>	
For the following reason/s if any: Approval is being given for the applicant to conduct interviews with a maximum of 5 – 8 young people aged 12 to 18 who have been living in a residential home for children for at least one year.	
<i>Ronald Balzan</i>	
Signature	Date: 22 <sup>nd</sup> December 2022
<u>Note: If conditionally accepted, the recommended changes must be confirmed with the Research Office before the research can proceed.</u>	
<u>Section to be completed by the Research Office for Conditionally Accepted Research ONLY.</u>	
The recommended changes stipulated by the Conditional Acceptance have not been implemented and these changes have not been confirmed by the Research Office. As a result of these changes the research is now <b>Refused</b> . . <input type="checkbox"/>	
The recommended changes stipulated by the Conditional Acceptance have been implemented and these changes have been confirmed by the Research Office. As a result of these changes the research is now <b>Approved</b> . . <input type="checkbox"/>	
Signature	Date
<u>If Accepted/Conditionally Accepted to whom the study will be directed:</u>	
The Unit/s: Looked-After-Children Services (LAC)	
The person/s referred Ms. Laura Fenech, Services Manager, LAC	Contact details <a href="mailto:laura.fenech.1@um.edu.mt">laura.fenech.1@um.edu.mt</a>

Foundation for Social Welfare Services  
212, Cannon Road, Santa Venera SVR 9034  
Tel: 22588000; Fax: 22588939



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## Appendix D – Original Quotes used in Findings

### 4.1: The out of home Care Experience

#### 4.1.1: An Opportunity for Friendships

*Rita: “ommi kienet strict hafna u ma kienetx thallini noħroġ u ovvjament ma kontx nagħmel ħbieb minn fuq il-mobajl (...) U ma kienetx thallini noħrog (...) (minn) meta kien ġieni il-period ma kienetx thallini.”*

*Interviewer: “U min xiex kienet ġejja li ma tantx kont tkellem nies?”*

*Neil: “Boq. L-iktar, problemi ma’ familti.”*

*Rita: “Jekk ridt noħrog iva imma kont noqgħod attenta għax jekk nara il-karozza t’ommi, nara xi skuza ha ngibilha.”*

*Neil: “Għax hawnhekk jtuni opportunitajiet biex immur nipprova affarijiet godda.”*

#### 4.1.2: Staff members supporting and pushing the youth

*Neil: “(Jgħiduli) Immur gruppi, fejn huma jafu li ħa nsib ħbieb godda (...) jien mhux dejjem nisma’ minnhom (...) Ġieli jgħiduli, mur ipprova dak il-kors forsi issib xi erbat iħbieb hemmhekk (...) Jew inkella l-iskola fil-brejk toqgħodx bilqiegħda mal-istess grupp ta’ ħbieb.”*

*Neil: “Fehmuni hafna iktar (...) Ghenuni hafna. Issapportjawni ukoll.”*

...

*Neil: “Imma dawn tkun ilek tafhom iktar, tarahom iktar, jkollok hafna esperjenza maghom ukoll. Tkun taf li ha jifhmuk, ha jippruvaw jghinuk kif jistghu.”*

...

*Neil: “Għax rari inkun imdejjaq fuq xi haga, u immur inkellem lil xi habib. Iktar immur inkellem lil-carer, u l-carer dejjem jifhimni”*

*Robert: “I feel more comfortable to speak with him than the others, and I joke with him more.”*

*Interviewer: “How long have you been knowing this person?”*

*Robert: “Since I came here”*

*Robert: “Biex ma nagħzilx lil ħbieb li jriduli id-deni, li nagħżel ħbieb li huma tajbin u hekk.”*

*Stephen: “‘Oqod attent ma min tagħmila’”*



*Samuel: "They help me get better like I do duties and stuff. I got better attitude by living here (...) I used to get angry much quicker, and now I clean the plates without them telling me; my room is barely dirty."*

...

*Samuel: "Even in Football (...) My attitude got better than last year because last year I was a mess (...) I used to get angry, you know (...) they (coaches) used to say, you're never going to be good if you keep this attitude and stuff like that (...) (now) it's better than last year (...) The coaches told me It's better."*

*Neil: "Jien għandi fiduċja bħalissa (...) (inbniet billi) nitkellmu, jkellmuni hafna. Ikunu jafu li mhu qed nagħmel xejn hazin. Nitgħallem milli jgħiduli."*

*Rita: "Ifhem, nixtieq jibdew jafdawni aktar mal-ħbieb. (...) jekk pereżempju ħa ngħidlek ħa nidhol f'dak il-hin, vera f'dak il-hin niġi. U bħal, jekk ngħidlek li ħa noħrog u minix se nixrob, vera mhux ħa nixrob."*

*Samuel: "If they obey and they do what they're supposed to do, they should go out till what time they want."*

#### **4.1.3: House Rules and Regulations as protagonists in the youth's friendships**

*Andrew: “[kieku mal-familja] ikolli iktar liberta’ biex pereżempju ikolli pereżempju bħal-mobajl, inkun nista nuża is-Social media”*

*Robert: “Bil-ħinijiet: pereżempju sat-8.30pm nitfu il-kompjuters, playstation, mobajls kollox u ningabru flimkien (...) Din jiena naraha żejda”*

*Joseph: “Ma tantx iħalluni noħroġ (...) Huma [shabi] iva, għax huma jistgħu joħorġu weħidhom. Jien ma nistax (...) ngħidilhom ma jħallunx (...) Kieku nista, mmur magħhom (...) Għax għadni żgħir jgħiduli (..) Iżjed għax naħseb ngħix f’dar reżidenzjali nara jien.”*

*Rita: “Ifhem, bħal jiena, nhar ta’ Hadd li jkolli biss meta noħrog mit-3pm sa 8pm; le sad-9pm (..) [granet oħra] jekk ma jkollix carer, ma nkunx nista noħrog. jaħsbuni baby (...) (mal-għarus) Niltaqgħu fost il-gimgha mma ma tantx narah”*

*Samuel: “when my friends stay out late, I hate leaving before everyone (...) they stay later and I have to leave early. It’s so annoying (...) [with grandparents] I could go out till what time I want (...) I got mature now (...) because I got older know (...) I think I have the age to stay at least till 2AM (...) Like not till 11:30pm. It’s a little bit early, you know (...) I feel very sad. (...) We’re having fun and then have... To just leave”*

*Samuel: "they let you do a lot of things, but the only thing is about going out late and sleeping over and stuff to your friends. That's the only bad thing. (...) I'd manage to make a bigger bond with them if I could go out longer with them, I could sleep at their house and things like that. I could get closer with them."*

*Rita: "Nixtieq nitlaq minn hawn (...) Ġbajt u ddejjaqt minn hawn (..) Li ma tistax toħroġ meta trid, ma tistax tagħmel sleepovers..."*

*Rita: "Ifhem, nixtieq jibdew jafdawni aktar mal-ħbieb. (...) jekk pereżempju ħa ngħidlek ħa nidhol f'dak il-hin, vera f'dak il-hin niġi. U bħal, jekk ngħidlek li ħa noħrog u minix se nixrob, vera mhux ha nixrob. Irridhom ikollom iktar fiduċja f'ja."*

*Samuel: "if they obey and they do what they're supposed to do, they should go out till what time they want."*

*Neil: "Jien għandi fiduċja bħalissa (...) [inbniet billi] nitkellmu, jkellmuni hafna. Ikunu jafu li mhu qed nagħmel xejn ħazin. Nitgħallem milli jgħiduli."*

*Robert: "Itellawna Sodi u hekk (...) Iġiefiri ma jtunix dak li rridu, iġiefiri jekk rridu, hekk dak il-hin, ħa nieħduh"*

#### 4.1.4 Dealing with a change in residence.

*Andrew: “S’issa għadni ma hriġtx darba. Qabel ma ġejt id-dar reżidenzjali kont nohrog.”*

*Rita: “Għax qabel jien peress li ma stajttx nohrog hafna, ma stajttx niddeverti hafna, ishom kienu jgħidu minn wara dari. U jien ovvjament ma stajttx nisma għax ma kontx mmur fejn shabi u jgħiduli. U peress li ġejt aw u sirt naf dak kollu li jgħidu minn wara dari, ġgħildt naqra”*

*Stephen: “it-tfal t’hemmhekk kienu iktar tfal bullies (...) U allura trid toqgħod attent ma’ min trid tagħmilha. Ġo din l-iskola (...), hemm inqas bullies, allura ishu tista’ tagħmilha ma’ kulhadd. U iktar orrajt...”*

*Samuel: “I changed from my private school to (new) school. And I prefer it my other school. There was Boys, and girls. And the boys were my type like football, they're good at football. But in [this school] there isn't anyone really good at football (...) they were nicer.”*

*Samuel: “My family is OK like. I was in the home because more of me. But I think I changed. So I'm going to soon go home in the weekend, so when I go home in the weekend. Then it's going to be better”*

## 4.2: A social difference dilemma within the out-of-home residential care identity

### 4.2.1 Shame in being identified as an Out-of-home Residential Care youth

*Joseph: “Jien ma niddejjaqx nghidilom(il-ħbieb) li ngħix go home għax huma anzi (...) jgħiduli ‘interessanti man ishek’ speċi tgħix go home.”*

*Samuel: “But I don't want to tell her that I am in a home (...) I'll try lie a bit (...) I'm not ready to tell her (...) I'm not going to tell her (...) I don't feel safe telling her. I'd rather wait till I go home (...) If you break up, she'll go tell someone”*

....

*Samuel: “But the coaches, (...) like I get annoyed like they say (Social Worker's name) told you this and I'm like, and I'm like, yes, yes, yes, quite quickly. So no one hears, but they say it too loud. They don't tell me: Come, let's speak. They just say it in front of everyone and I don't like it (...) I don't like him saying, (Social worker's name) (..) I get stressed and then I say yes yes yes quickly.*

*Interviewer: “You feel very ashamed about being in a residential home?”*

*Samuel: “Yeah, I want to go home.”*

*Neil: “Ma tantx nieħu gost meta jiġu hawn jiena. Għax ma tantx nieħu gost inxerrida li jiena noqgħod hawn. Il-close friends biss jafu (...) imma aħjar izzommuha bejnietna milli joqgħod jgħidu lil kulhadd (...) Għax niddejjaq għax mhux xi ħaġa normali li inti toqgħod go home.”*

*Joseph: “Xi haġa normali. Mhux xorta ġenituri jew le. (...) Carers ishom il-ġenituri tiegħi.”*

#### **4.2.2 Concern that the residential care status can impact their relationships**

*Joseph: “Jmorru jikxfuni hu (..) joqogħdu jgħijruni, jgħidu ‘ara dak’.”*

*Rita: “Għax jekk tgħidilhom ċertu nies fejn toqgħod (...) mhux kulhadd jieħodha tajba. (...) Isaqsuni kif jien, kif qed mmur hawnhekk. Imbagħad ishom bil-mod il-mod jibdew jaqtawni (...) u jien ninduna li għax qed noqgħod hawnhekk qed jaqtawni (...) Għax mhux persuna waħda biss ġrat hekk.”*

*Stacey: “Għax hekk joqgħodu jgħidu, ‘għalfejn mort ġo dik il-home, x’għamlulek mela?’”*

*Robert: “x’hin ikollna xi ngħidu, kienu joqodu jgħijruni għax ngħix hawnhekk; għax ma għandix familja...”*

*Interviewer: “Dawn il-kummenti kollha li kienu jgħaddu il-ħbieb, kif kienet taffetwalek l-esperjenza tiegħek li tgħix hawnhekk?”*

*Rita: “Ifhem, ma jagħmluhiliex faċli hu (...) Jekk jgħiduli kummenti ħżiena u negattivi minix ħa noħoda tajjeb hu (...) allavolja ma tantx kont nagħti kas. Imma fl-ahhar mill-ahhar xorta...*

*Interviewer: “X’kien jigri hawnhekk (id-dar) imbagħad?”*

*Rita: “kulhadd idur għalja, isni nkun in-nagħga is-sewda.”*

*Neil: “Biex ma joqgħodux jinkwetaw, fuq hafna affarijiet tiegħi (...) Mhux indejjaqhom bl-istorja tiegħi, just indejjaqhom bl-inkwiet li jaqbadhom wara.”*

*Robert: “Ġieli sibt pereżempju ħabib tiegħi li qatt mgħidtlu xejn fil-bidu, imbagħad meta sibt l-ewwel opportunita’ li ngħidlu; għidtlu, fehمني u kollox. Mhux ha jogħqod jgħajjarni għax ngħix hawn.”*

*Neil: “Lilhom, dawn li għidtilhom, ma tantx tafetwahom. Just li jkunu jafu mhux bħal nies li joqgħodu ma’ ommhom u missierhom. Eżempju jkunu jiċċajjaw b’xi haġa, jkunu jafu biex jiċċajjaw, biex ma jiċċajjawx.”*

#### **4.2.3 Singled out because of the social construct of Residential Care**

*Rita: “Jaħsbuni għadni tifla u ma nafx xejn isni twilidt il-bieraħ, jaħsbuni ma kontx nista noħrog, jaħsbu għax jagħmlu l-ħazin huma ma nkunx naf meta l-kelma tigri. Erm.. li jien*

*bla hajja (...) Ifhem, jaħsbuni li jien xi trouble maker, li jien ma naqbilx man-nies, li jien giddieba."*

*Samuel: "Because like I don't have a good family, you know. It's like my family left me or something."*

*Robert: "Iva ta, teachers, li ta meta kont fis-sekondarja, kienu jafu li ngħix hawn imma kien hemm ukoll il-preferenzi, għax kienu jithassruna. Pereżempju fil-Milied, jekk ikollna xi parties, it-tfal l-oħra li għandom familja u hekk normali, ishu rigal wieħed pereżempju. U lili jew tifel iehor għax konna fl-istess dar; flimkien, kienu jtuna rigal extra (...), mhux ha mmur ngħid it-teachers tal-(iskola t'issa) li ngħix hawnhekk ukoll għax jithassruni pereżempju u habba l-assignments u hekk, ikunu jistgħu joqodu jirrangaw"*

*Neil: "Anke li noqgħod hawn, għeli ippruvaw ixxerduha. Imma imbagħad jien għidtlhom kollha le. Li ġew issaqsuni, għidtilhom mhux veru hekk."*

### **4.3 The complexities of relating while in out-of-home care**

#### **4.3.1 Particular Characteristics that youths seek in their friendships**

*Samuel: "I like funny friends. I don't want to go out with someone boring."*



*Stacey: “Għax tkun tidhak, mhux toqgħod mdejja u hekk.”*

*Joseph: “Anke niftaħ qalbi, nafdaħhom hafna jien (...) Kemm il-darba gew jgħiduli: ‘isma, kellhi din il-problema; isma qed ikolli naqra problemi d-dar’ eżempju. Joqodu jifħu qalbhom miegħi (...) Għax kull darba li nfittixom, dejjem nsibom (...) meta jkolli l-ħbieb (...) xi kultant inħossha responsabbiltà’, xi kultant isni nuża dil-kelma li isni qed inżomm id-deheb fidi.”*

*Neil: “Mhux nafda biss. Jisma’ minn xiex ngħid, jagħti kas, jipprova jgħin (..) Eżempju jiena biex ikun close friend, għaliya jismagħni u affarijiet hekk. U huma jekk qisu jarawni bhala close friend. The same goes by. Jafdawni, jisimghu minni.”*

*Robert: “Li tkun tista tafda fih; titkellem ikollok xi problema, jekk ikollok pereżempju, ma tifhemx f’xi haġa ssaqsi... hekk... tqatta il-ħin miegħu pereżempju”*

*Joseph: “Li ngħix f’home qatt mhu nsemmiha. Irrid nkun afdajtek b’għajnejja magħluqa.”*

*Stephen: “Jgħinuk fejn jkollok bzonn l-għajnuna (..) Erm... li lesti jgħinuk eżempju tkun bghatut fil-flus, lesti li jgħinuk (...) Forsi inkun għaddej minn tough times, kif, anke bhalissa inkun għaddej, aw... lesti biex per eżempju jpoggu hdej u jkellmuk.”*

*Andrew: ‘Għax inti meta jkollok xi hadd u jitolqek minn habib, ikollok habib ieħor; tista terġa tiftaħ qalbek. Imbagħad jekk ikollok habib li jerġa jitolqek, ikollok dejjem ieħor, ieħor, ieħor...’*

#### **4.3.2 Being in intimate relationships**

*Samuel: “I have a girlfriend. I go out with her most of the time, I don’t really go out with my friends a lot. If my girlfriend can’t, I go out with my friends. I go out with her friends, but she doesn’t come out with mine.”*

*Robert: “Sibtha kwieta. (...) Helwa, intelligenti., (...) ma tiġġudikanix, tghini u rispett”*

*Samuel: “She has a nice personality.(...) Like, even if you go alone, you’re not gonna get bored with her because she’s funny (...) She takes care of me. (...) I always find her when I’m when I need someone.”*

*Samuel: “But I don’t want to tell her that I am in a home (...) I’ll try lie a bit. (...) I’m not ready to tell her. (...) I don’t feel safe telling her. I’d rather wait till I go home. (..) If you break up, she’ll go tell someone. (...) I don’t know what could happen but. If, like a girl tells me that she’s in a home, I’d feel a bit different, you know?*

*Samuel: “But she doesn't really like my friends; my friends are (...) Loud and then they have a lot of energy (...) She doesn't like them. (..) She says they're annoying, but her friends are OK, so I don't mind staying with them. (...) I'd rather go out alone, if she wants me to go out with her friends, like I'll come.”*

*Rita: “Le għandi imma l-għarus tiegħi ma jhallinix. (...) Heq jien il-ħbieb tiegħi jien għandi iktar subien milli bniet. (...)”*

#### **4.3.3 The role of the family-of-origin dynamics within relationships.**

*Stephen: “Għax meta kont ma' ommi u missieri qisni, hekk ma kontx qed nifhem l-iskop tal-ħbieb (...) Għax ma kontx tifhem l-importanza.”*

*Neil: “Ma tantx bdejt inkellem nies (...) l-iktar (ħabba) problemi ma' familti. (...) fil-form 3 affetwatni naqra (...) (B'daħka) Tlett snin u nofs ilu, qas kont noħrog mid-dar.”*

*Andrew: “Biex nagħżel dejjem it-tajjeb u mhux il-ħażin. (...) Bħal, per eżempju, ikunu jistudjaw ħafna, li dejjem igorru xi ktieb f'idejhom, ma jużawx ħafna il-mobajl (..) Jien dejjem kont ninjoraha”*

*Neil: “Ma tantx ikellmuni fuq il-ħbieb, għax... huma għalissa, bħalissa, fuqhom infushom qegħdin jgħatu kas.”*

*Robert: “Mhux se noqghod nghidilom li ommi mejta ukoll; għax inkella isir bullying u hekk fuqa.”*

*Rita: “Ishom ikollom messagg li jien noqghod m’ommi; mhux jgħijruni b’ommi għax ma nkellimix. (...) Jiena vera ma nkellimix l’ommi mma xorta għandi rispettt għaliha.”*

*Joseph: “Għax jiena l-ħija l-kbir dejjem jgħidli dawk ma tantx huma tajbin; ‘ma min tagħmila, għamila mat-tajbin, għax jekk tagħmila mal-ħżiena, ħażin ħa tispiċċa’”*

## Appendix E – Interview Guide

### Mistoqsijiet għall-Intervisti bil-Malti – Eman Agius

1. Kemm għandek zmien?
2. Kif tindefika ruġek, bħala maskili, femminili jew mod ieħor?
3. Għidli naqra fuqek u min inti.
4. Ma min thossok l-iktar vicin inti, igiefiri għandek relazzjoni tajba? (close)
5. Qatt tlift lil xi had f'hajtek? Kif hassejtek? X'gara? X'ghamilt?
6. Fiex tikkonsisti il-ġurnata tiegħek u kif thobb tqatta' l-ħin liberu tiegħek?
7. L'min tfittex inti biex tieħu gost? Minn dejjem kont tfittxom? X'kont tfittex qabel?
8. U meta tkun mdejjaq, l'min tfittex?
  - a. U għaliex, x'jaghtuk li ma jaghtikx haddiehor?
  - b. Minn dejjem kont tfittex lilhom?
9. Xi jfissru għalik il-ħbieb u l-ħbiberiji?
10. Meta tfittex li tagħmel ħbieb, x'tip ta' ħbieb tfittex?
11. Tixtieq tgħidli ftit fuq il-ħbieb tiegħek?
  - a. X'tagħmel mal-ħbieb tiegħek?
  - b. X'tip ta' logħob tilgħab mal-ħbieb tiegħek?
  - c. Kif tiltaqa mal-ħbieb tiegħek?
12. Kif jinfluenzaw il-ħbieb? U bil kontra?

13. Qatt kont bezghan li ha titlef xi hbieb? Minn fejn kienet gejjja il-bizgha?

X'gara? Kif hassejtek?

14. Qatt tiggieldu int u shabek? Kif thossok meta tiggieldu? X'tagħmel meta

tiggieldu?

15. Qatt hassejtek li l-hbieb mhux jifmuk? X'jigrilek meta ma thossokx

mifhum?

16. Qatt tlift xi hbieb? X'gara? Kif hassejtek? X'ghamilt?

17. Thoss li għandek l-opportunitajiet biex tagħmel il-hbieb?

18. Taħseb li l-hbieb li għandek l-iskola u l-hbieb li tiltaqa magħhom wara l-

iskola huma importanti? Ala huma importanti?

19. Kif tagħzel li tiltaqa ma ċertu nies u mhux oħrajn?

20. Kieku kellek tbiddel xi haġa fil-hbieb tiegħek xi tbiddel?

21. Qatt kien hemm xi tfal/zagħzagħ li xtaqu jkunu hbieb tiegħek u inti ma

ħallejtomx? Ala ma ħallejtomx?

22. Qatt kellek xi ġlied ma' xi tfal/zagħzagħ oħra li kont taf l-iskola jew/u wara

l-iskola? Fuq xix iġġilidtu?

23. Hemm xi affarijiet fuqek li shabek ma jafux u li ma tixtieqx tgħidilom?

24. Il-hbieb jafu fejn tgħix inti? Jekk tagħmel hbieb godda, tgħidilom fejn

toqgħod?

25. Dawk il-ħbieb li jafu fejn toqgħod (*Inkella: Kieku il-ħbieb jafu fejn toqgħod*), x jaħsbu fuq il-fatt li int tghix f'dar rezidenzjali?
26. Hemm xi affarijiet li inti differenti minn tfal oħra li ma jghixux f'dar rezidenzjali rigward il-ħbieb? U Rigward il-ħruġ mal-ħbieb?
27. Kemm ilhek tghix f'dar/djar rezidenzjali?
28. Kif inhi l-esperjenza tiegħek tghix f'dar rezidenzjali?
29. Kif thossok li tghix f'dar rezidenzjali? (kif turiha dik l-emozzjoni?)
30. X'jogħgħbok fid-dar-rezidenzjali tiegħek? X'ma jogħbokx?
31. Bil-mod kif titmexxa d-dar, x'hemm li jogħbok u x'hemm li jdejjqek?
32. Kieku kellhu tqum ghada filghodu u d-dar tkun kif tixtieqa inti, kif tkun id-dar?
33. Id-Dar tiegħek u d-dar tal-oħrajn x'hemm differenti fihom?
34. Tfittex Ħbieb li għaddew minn esperjenzi simili tiegħek?
35. Tfal oħra, kif jarawk lilek li tghix f'dar rezidenzjali?
36. Kieku inti ma tghix f'dar rezidenzjali, kif ikunu l-ħbiberiji tiegħek u ala?
37. Kif inhi ir-relazzjoni tiegħek mal-familjari tiegħek?
38. Il-familjari tiegħek x'jgħidulek fuq il-ħbieb u l-ħbiberiji tiegħek?
39. L-għalliema, qatt qalulek xi haġa fuq il-ħbieb u l-ħbiberiji tiegħek?
40. Kif inhi ir-relazzjoni tiegħek mal-*istaff* tad-dar? Għandek xi membru tal-*istaff* preferut. Kemm ilhek tafhom dawn l-*istaff*?

41. L-*iStaff* kif tarhom jirrelataw bejnietom u ma nies ohra li huma jafu?
42. L-*iStaff* ituk xi suggerimenti fuq il-ħbieb tiegħek?
43. L-*iStaff* li tiltaqa magħhom id-dar, x'jgħidulek fuq il-ħbieb tiegħek?
44. It-tfal li tghix magħhom fid-dar rezidenzjali, qatt qalulek xi haġa fuq il-ħbieb tiegħek? X'qalulek?



## Appendix F – Data Analysis Example

Longing for what he lost in a way			
	Eman	Ok. So sakemm qiegħed id-dar inti; bejn irrabjat għax qiegħed id-dar, so dik tirrabjak lilek; u għandek naqra mistqosijiet imma għalfejn 'jiena qiegħed id-dar....	
Away from family system	Andrew	U għax minix mal-familja tiegħi	Confusion regarding reason for living in an out of home care Residential Care Setting
	Eman	U għax mintix mal-familja tiegħek... u inti għalfejn thoss il-bżonn li tkun mal-familja tiegħek?	
Residential care setup doesn't provide the liberty that the child had prior to his stay? Is this a sense of protection from the residential care setup? Does the residential care set up impede connection with friends?	Andrew	Għax inkun iktar hekk; ikolli iktar liberta' biex pereżempju ikolli pereżempju bħal-mobajl, inkun nista nuża is-Social media..	1. Social Media 2. Lack of experienced freedom for the young person 3. No longer meeting past friends
	Eman	Igħiefiri ħabba r-regoli tad-dar?	
Saw the positives of being in residential care setup	Andrew	Ftit minnhom hekk u hemm eżempju oħrajn għax nkun qed ngħix ma tfal illi huma it-tipp tiegħi u l-karattru; għax idejquni f'it	
	Eman	OK. Igħiefiri d-dar hemm tfal oħra... hemm tfal it-tipp tiegħek; illi taqbel magħhom?	
	Andrew	Iva	
	Eman	U hemm tfal illi ma taqbilx magħhom. U x'jigri f'sitwazzjonijiet bħal dawn illi hemm tfal li ma atqbilx daqshekk magħhom?	
	Andrew	Iktar issoltu niġġieldu daqsxejn, nargumentaw bejniatna	
	Eman	Użgur peress li ma taqblux..	
	Andrew	Eżatt	
	Eman	Ikun hemm drabi li tkunu għaddejjin minn żmien tajeb hekk?	
	Andrew	Le	
	Eman	So ma taqblux l-iktar?	
	Andrew	Ishom it-tnejn <i>same balance</i> ?	
	Eman	U allura xi tfittex inti hekk fi ħbieb?	
What do children look for in friendships: Respect	Andrew	Rispett	Traits in friendships: Respect
	Eman	Hekk bħala karattru... so rispett; x' iktar?	
Looking for Similarities	Andrew	Iktar ikunu ishom it- tipp tiegħi pereżempju bħal, joħorgu hekk; mhux il-ħin kollu joqodu jistudja fuq l-iskola uwekk	Friends who have same interests
	Eman	So inti fil-ħbieb tfittex xi ħadd li mhux iffukat fuq l-iskola imma li jgħix iktar barra?	
	Andrew	Eżatt	
	Eman	Għalekk inti.. u dan il-Live-in ishu idejali għalik għax ħa tkun qed toħroġ	
	Andrew	Ehe	