

Editorial: Consequences of Child and Youth Welfare

In focusing on the topic of “Consequences of Child and Youth Welfare”, the Annual Review of Social Work and Social Pedagogy in Austria is picking up on public debates and academic discourses that have significantly influenced the Austrian landscape of social service provision in recent years. In this discussion, “consequences” are understood not so much as “effects” and more as far-reaching individual and social repercussions related to child and youth welfare. There is a particular focus on residential out-of-home care institutions, known historically in Austria as *Heimerziehung*; children’s homes. This term has negative associations and is linked to this day with different forms of stigmatisation (Zeller 2018, pp. 792 f.).

Today, the term *Heimerziehung* is no longer in professional use in Austria. Legally, it was replaced by the term *volle Erziehung* (literally “full child-raising”, see the Austrian Federal Child and Youth Welfare Services Act, B-KJHG 2013). In the profession, this change in language use was meant to signal and effectively precipitate the end of large-scale facilities for children and adolescents. In fact, however, this type of accommodation continues to be used by the child and youth welfare services, for example for work with unaccompanied refugee minors. Large-scale institutions for children and adolescents have a greater need for institutionalisation; in the last century they were run as “total institutions” (Goffman 1961/2014). In recent years, the number of violence and human rights violations that have occurred in the history of homes for children and young people has become clear. Many of these homes can be described “as a total institution with the repertoire of total education”¹ (Scheipl 2016, p. 253).

The denouncing of violence against children and young people in institutions in other European countries initially led to discussion in Austria about violence in institutions run by the Catholic church. In 2010, this led to the establishment of an independent victim protection law centre (*Unabhängige Opferschutzanwaltschaft*) designed to help victims gain formal recognition of the injustice, compensation payments and sometimes the chance of ther-

1 In the German original “als eine totale Institution mit dem Repertoire einer totalen Erziehung” (Scheipl 2016, p. 253).

apy (Scheipl 2016). Its horizon was, however, soon extended beyond the church, with incidents being taken on at institutions run by other public and private bodies. Victim protection commissions or agencies were established in different Austrian federal states whose work is based on the example set by the law centre. Eventually, the current revision of the Federal Act on Pensions for Victims of Foster Homes (*Heimopferrentengesetz*) created a legal basis for pensions to be given to people who were victims of violence in residential out-of-home care (homes, foster families, hospitals) between 1945 and 1999 (see the *Heimopferrentengesetz* [HOG] 2017).

At the same time as these social and political developments, academia began to re-examine violence in the history of Austrian children's homes and hospitals; a process that is still going on today. One early study was a report by the Vienna Commission of Historians (*Wiener Historikerkommission*; Sieder/Smioski 2012). This studied the history of children's homes in Vienna on behalf of the city council. As a result of this, attention was particularly drawn to extreme forms of violence at the Wilhelminenberg children's home, which former residents made public, and which the Wilhelminenberg Commission (2013) was set up to investigate. Throughout Austria, this research into the memories of former residents of Austrian homes led to former victims themselves becoming organised, contact centres being established for victims of institutional violence in childhood and adolescence, and further-reaching research. In recent years, the consequences of this practice and policy of child and youth welfare and care has thus increasingly come into the public eye.

The first issue of the Annual Review of Social Work and Social Pedagogy in Austria – OeJS – takes up this subject as its central focus, looking into recent findings and the consequences this historical legacy has for contemporary social work and social pedagogy. This begins with a contribution by *Hemma Mayrhofer*. She was involved in the research on the Wilhelminenberg children's home (Kommission Wilhelminenberg 2013) and on children and adolescents with disabilities in Viennese psychiatric clinics (Mayrhofer et al. 2017). In her article, she uses these studies to elaborate the structures and conditions that have allowed violence to be inflicted on children and adolescents for decades. In her historically rooted work, she situates the reconstructed abuse, among other things, in the balancing act between the stigmatising perception of children and adolescents in out-of-home care, staff at the institutions being professionally overtasked and the diffusion of responsibility within the institutions.

As already mentioned, the studies on the history of Viennese children's homes were followed by further research, mostly focused on individual

institutions, such as SOS-Kinderdorf (Schreiber 2014) or individual federal states. The most extensive study is on the history of children's homes in Tyrol and Vorarlberg (Ralser et al. 2017). This comes to the conclusion that violence was a constitutive element of the children's residential care system (see the review on this subject by *Josef Scheipl* in this volume), and that tens of thousands of children and young people in Austria had thus grown up in a public care system "that for the most part proved more violent than any parental upbringing they were meant to have been protected from"² (Ralser et al. 2017, p. 17).

This is the point taken up by the second special section article. In their study, *Elvisa Imširović, Ingrid Lippitz and Ulrike Loch* deal with systematic violence towards children and young people in the Landesjugendheim Rosental state children's home and the curative education department (child and adolescent psychiatry) at the state hospital in Klagenfurt, Carinthia. Their study sets a precedent in its revelation of a "perpetrator/victim/institution dynamic" which for decades, through the interaction of "factors related to individuals and institutions" (Wolff 2018, p. 1188), enabled the administrators and policy-makers behind the child and youth welfare services to subject children and adolescents to sexualised violence. In their contribution, the authors elaborate on the conditions enabling the emergence of this systematic violence. They see it as coming from a depersonalised practice of curative education diagnostics focusing on physical symptoms, which undermined the credibility of the affected children and young people, and supported the establishment of a cross-institutional network trapping them in "total institutionalisation".

Engagement of this kind with the history of violence in child and youth welfare services is stimulating current developments such as the introduction of protective concepts involving ombuds-committees, giving children and young people more opportunities to participate, or opening up institutions to their social environment (e. g. Fegert/Wolff 2015). From this, Struck and Schröer (2018) derive the idea that "practices of secure placements for children and young people"³ should be re-examined as a consequence of these historical experiences (p. 760). This finding corresponds with historical study results from Austria on secure accommodation. De-

2 In the German original: "das sich mehrheitlich als gewaltvoller erwies als jenes elterliche, vor dem sie hätten bewahrt werden sollen" (Ralser et al. 2017, p. 17)

3 In the German original: „die Praxen geschlossener Unterbringung von Kindern und Jugendlichen“ (Struck/Schröer 2018, p. 760)

spite this broadly supported stock of knowledge, Zeller (2018) observes that the number of secure placements in Germany has tripled or even quadrupled in the last 15 years, with a general tendency for constraint to be legitimised (p. 805). In Austria, secure accommodation is not yet permitted under the law. Nonetheless, since 2013 there have been relatively intense efforts to introduce it. The background for this is violence and sexual assault being perpetrated against and among young people in prisons, leading to a discussion on “alternative care services” falling somewhere between “the two extremes of imprisonment and being left to their own devices”⁴ (Federal Ministry of Justice 2013, pp. 6 f.). The representatives of the child and youth welfare services who are involved in the discussion have declared their support for care without any restriction of liberty. Nonetheless, it also appears of interest to the discussion in Austria to examine the experiences gained in other countries which have secure accommodation. In her contribution, *Marei Lunz* examines how young people process their experiences when subject to constraint in secure youth welfare facilities in Luxembourg. This reveals how the young people partly distance themselves while at the same time remaining exposed to a paradoxical power structure consisting in a combination of controlling and disciplining professional practices and a virtually lawless space enabling violent practices by peers. Reconstructing this interplay from the young people’s perspective raises the question of how legitimate such institutions are in terms of children’s rights, and how much sense they make in terms of social work/social pedagogy.

The subsequent two contributions to the main topic deal with the consequences of out-of-home care coming to an end, with children returning to their family of origin, and with their transition to independent living. The article by *Christina Lienhart*, *Bettina Hofer* and *Helga Kittl-Satran* relates to the amended 2013 version of the Austrian Federal Child and Youth Welfare Services Act, which declares the “reintegration of children and young people into their family”⁵ an explicit goal of welfare (B-KJHG 2013). International studies show that young people frequently come into contact with their family of origin and live with family members after leaving child and youth care, often out of sight of the child and youth welfare system (Collins/Paris/Ward 2008, p. 54). Working with parents and leaving open the option of young people returning to their family of origin are approaches which

4 In the German original: „den beiden Extremen ‚Inhaftierung‘ und ‚Sich-selbst-überlassenbleiben‘“ (Bundesministerium für Justiz 2013, pp. 6 f.).

5 In the German original: “Reintegration von Kindern und Jugendlichen in die Familie.” (B-KJHG 2013, p. 2)

have long played an important role in youth welfare care concepts, but only been put into practice to varying degrees. Little is known about how families develop during the time spent in care or about the situation in families after they return home. Lienhart et al. attempt to close that research gap by describing family members' and professionals' experiences of reunification processes, using those data to develop some initial considerations and conclusions regarding successful returns home and family support.

The final article in the special section focuses on care leavers. The status passage of leaving care, the transition from child and youth welfare to independent living, is a biographical challenge for which the Austrian social system as yet provides very little institutionalised support. The same applies to the youth welfare system. Recently, various actors have taken up this set of problems and launched projects designed to improve care leavers' situation. One example is "Plattform 18+", a multidisciplinary project involving various stakeholders, initiated by the DÖJ (Federation of Austrian Youth Welfare Institutions). FICE Austria and SOS-Kinderdorf (SOS Children's Villages) are also involved in projects in this field. Internationally, in recent years a broad range of research into care leavers has become established which shows that education – especially in the form of formal education – plays a significant role in social participation, inclusion and the fulfilment of key options in life (Driscoll 2013; Gharabaghi 2011; Köngeter/Mangold/Strahl 2016). Against this background, the article by *Maria Groinig, Wolfgang Hagleitner, Thomas Maran* and *Stephan Sting* examines the educational situation of care leavers in Austria. In addition, they reconstruct the influence of social contexts on educational pathways, and the educational relevance of action-guiding orientation frameworks emerging from people's biographies. Altogether, it becomes clear that the conditions of growing up in youth welfare institutions lead to a focus on acquiring intermediate educational qualifications, making it difficult for young people to go on to further education. This puts young people with experience of youth welfare at an educational disadvantage.

In the general contributions to this issue, *Niels Rosendal Jensen* focuses on the importance of preschool institutions for vulnerable children and families in Denmark. By investigating institutions in socially deprived residential areas, he shows that appropriate professional practice in this field needs to follow a social pedagogical approach which takes into account the fact that behaviour is linked to the children's and families' social context, and which is designed to introduce new courses of action both in everyday institutional practice and in the families' daily lives. *Selina Heppchen* analyses how working relationships are established between professional social

workers and convicted juveniles and young adults in the context of court-ordered punitive measures. These relationships, initially based on constraint and obligation, gradually develop into a constructive form of cooperation in which the young people themselves realise they are gaining further autonomy and experiences of self-efficacy. As the author relates based on her empirical research in Germany, they may thus potentially be willing to continue the measure voluntarily.

On the subject of “Consequences of Child and Youth Welfare”, this volume also contains several reviews of recent publications, such as the book reviews by *Sabine Klinger*, *Josef Scheipl* and *Julia Wiederhofer*. These provide a discerning insight into current international professional discourses and research findings.

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