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Voices of Adolescents in Residential Care Facilities: A Case of Alpha Cottages

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the future aspirations of adolescents living in residential care institutions in an urban setting. Adolescents end up in these facilities due to numerous reasons that may include abuse, parental illness, abandonment, war, and natural disasters. Residential care institutions provide adolescents with a nurturing environment that enables them to tackle life challenges during adolescence, such as goal setting and identify formation. The purpose of the study was to explore the aspirations of adolescents in residential care institutions. The study was grounded on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985) which assumes that people are intrinsically motivated to improve. The study adopted the qualitative approach to research and explored the voices of adolescents in residential care facilities using a case study research design. The target population for the study were adolescents staying at a residential care facility in Masvingo urban. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to solicit data from 15 adolescents within the 13-19 age range. The sample comprised 8 females and 7 males who were purposively sampled. It emerged that adolescents have access to career guidance and individual counselling services that enable them to plan for their future and pursue their goals. All the adolescent participants had access to education. The study found that adolescents aspired to achieve independence and professional success. However, there was a lack of adequate resources for studying. The study recommends the improvement of infrastructure and provision of adequate resources to empower adolescents to pursue their goals and lead fulfilling lives.

Key Words: Adolescents, aspirations, caregivers, residential, voices

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INTRODUCTION

Lack of child protection is a global concern that affects millions of children worldwide, resulting in some ending up living in care institutions. Child Protection Strategy (2021) defines 'child protection' as the prevention of, and response to, exploitation, abuse, neglect, harmful practices, and violence against children. Children growing up in difficult circumstances end up in residential facilities, not by choice. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) obliges states to act on child protection. Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) declares that children have the right to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, harm, neglect, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse, by those who are responsible for their care. Inadequate care and protection violate children's rights, mean killing children, threatening their well-being and stopping them from reaching their full potential, perpetuating inequity, and hindering economic growth (Delap, 2013). Children are the future of any nation (Ghosh, 2020), hence valuing their lives and providing them the necessary support ensures continual development and upholding the nation's legacy. Adolescents in residential care institutions have the right to access education to achieve their aspirations. The Incheon Declaration (2015) emphasises the importance of inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, including vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Residential institutions should collaborate with other stakeholders to ensure that adolescents receive a quality education that meets their unique needs and circumstances. Access to education empowers the adolescents in residential care institutions to achieve their aspirations.

Residential care plays a significant role in the lives of children living in difficult circumstances. Residential care facilities are also referred to as children's homes. The aim of residential youth care services is to offer care and protection and to prepare the young person for a return to society (Brummelaar et al., 2018). The voices of adolescents in residential care institutions are often unheard, leading to a gap in understanding their experiences and needs regarding their future prospects. This lack of understanding can impede efforts to improve the quality of care provided to create a supportive

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environment that fosters the well-being and future success of adolescents in these institutions. Literature on residential care that considers children's opinions, wishes, experiences, and/or the outcomes they believe residential care is achieving for them, is scarce (Porter et al., 2020). Hence the purpose of this study was to explore the future aspirations of adolescents in residential institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The adolescent stage is a critical period in human development that is characterised by varied important developmental tasks that individuals are expected to deal with. Havighurst (n.d) defines a developmental task as a task that arises at, or about, a certain period in life, unsuccessful achievement of which leads to inability to perform tasks associated with the next period or stage in life. Goal setting is one of those important tasks which an adolescent has to think about, whether she is at a residential setting or living with her biological parents. Failure to set personal goals can lead to risks of negative outcomes, unemployment and even psychological problems later in life. Adolescents' career aspirations may reveal their sense of identity, hope for the future, and self-efficacy, all of which are essential in identifying at-risk youth and intervening on risky behaviours (Durotizx, 2017). In Kenya, Apedaile et al. (2022), in their study on the effect of care on the educational attainment of orphaned and separated children and adolescents, found that children living in institutions were more likely to complete primary school and at least one year of secondary school than children in family settings. They were less likely to complete four years' secondary school because they left the institution at age eighteen. The lack of access to higher education may limit career opportunities and future aspirations for adolescents in residential institutions. Once adolescents do not complete secondary education or get some formal training in one's chosen career, it becomes problematic to achieve set goals.

Adolescents in residential care institutions are the most vulnerable group at-risk because they experience higher emotional, behavioural, social and educational difficulties compared to their peers (Sulimani-Aidan, 2018). They end up in these care institutions because of family problems, neglect or some other form of abuse, their challenging behaviour, abandonment, or parents having been jailed (del Valle & Bravo,

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2013; Mukushi, et al.,). These negative experiences lead to negative self-perceptions that have detrimental effects on an individual's self-esteem and confidence, causing them to underestimate their own abilities, or devalue their self-worth. Their expectations for the future are influenced by both contextual and personal factors. The self-perception and expectations for the future of boys and girls in residential care are lower than those of their peers (Sánchez-Sandoval et al., 2022).

Adolescents in residential care institutions are much more likely to experience physical abuse than those in foster care or the general population, and boys are more at risk of harsh punishments (Porter et al., 2020). Many adolescents in residential care have experienced trauma and may exhibit emotional and behavioural issues that can hinder their potential to form positive relationships and succeed in social settings. Adolescents in residential care have emotional and behavioural problems, though the latter are more prevalent (Soriano-Diaz, et al, 2022). Behavioural problems such as aggression, defiance, and conduct disorders, may stem from underlying emotional and psychological problems. Adolescents in residential care may experience higher rates of depression due to past trauma, family separation, unstable living situations, and uncertainty about their future, leading to anxiety (Dozier et al., 2012).

Negative experiences by children in residential care institutions have been documented, leading the United Nations (UN) (2009) to discourage unnecessary placement of children in alternative care, unless when it is necessary, but it must be appropriate for each child's unique needs and best interests. According to Attar-Schwartz et al. (2017), there is a significant risk of abuse and victimisation, neglect and exploitation, in addition to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in residential care institutions in Israel. UNICEF (2021) highlights that residential care facilities often subject children to harmful living arrangements, forced cohabitation, and fixed routines that do not cater to their individual needs. These negative experiences show that residential care institutions may not always provide a safe and nurturing environment for adolescents to achieve their aspirations because of limited opportunities for personal growth

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and development. Additionally, these conditions affect one's mental and emotional well-being, consequently undermining one's aspirations and goals. Adolescents also fail to develop independence and decision-making skills that are essential for achieving future aspirations. Children and young people in care often have low aspirations because of the low self-esteem that is forced upon them through negative statistics and labelling (Mook, 2016).

Despite negative experiences, adolescents in residential care institutions have to think about their future outside the institution. Mendes et al. (2014) view leaving care as a significant life milestone and transitioning process that involves becoming self-sufficient and moving away from dependence on government assistance and accommodation. Marion et al.'s (2022) study in Quebec examined the aspirations of 35 young people aged 14-18, and revealed that while many could project themselves into the future, others faced uncertainty. The study suggests that educational and professional aspirations can transform educational experiences and influence future intentions.

The provision of support is crucial for adolescents residing in care institutions, as it enables them to develop and pursue their aspirations; conversely, a lack of support may result in adverse outcomes and a compromised future. Stein (2014) points out that there is lack of adequate support systems in preparing adolescents for independent living that may cause them to have difficulties when they enter adulthood. Adolescents who lack/have limited access to support systems may be unable to develop critical life skills, struggle to become independent, and find it difficult to pursue and accomplish their future goals. This could leave such children vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and trafficking (Lyneham & Facchini, 2019). Research by Soriano-Diaz et al. (2022), on adolescents in residential institutions, revealed that the adolescents expressed dissatisfaction in several areas of their lives, accompanied by feelings of insecurity and pessimism regarding their future and achievements later in life. Insecurity and uncertainty could impact on decision-making, affect their motivation and goal setting, and result in lack of confidence to pursue opportunities, thereby limiting their future prospects.

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Research indicates that adolescents in residential care institutions may experience low expectations from caregivers and educators, which can lead to a lack of encouragement and support for academic success. A study by Cheung et al. (2012) found that caregiver involvement and a positive literacy environment provided youth in residential institutions with higher academic success. Residential care institutions, teachers and youth workers can play a critical role in fostering a positive or negative learning career (Marion & Tchuindbi, 2023). Teachers and carers play an important role of encouraging adolescents to develop love for learning and a sense of purpose, build confidence, and achieve their academic potential. Lack of supportive and negative interactions lead to low motivation and disengagement in some adolescents. To ensure that the care system successfully addresses adolescents' well-being and supports their growth, it is imperative to gain an understanding of their viewpoints, hence the current study. Exploring their career aspirations may establish the adolescent' health and wellbeing and help gain insights into their levels of hopelessness and self-efficacy (Dudovitz et al., 2017).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study intended to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the aspirations of adolescents in residential care institutions?
2. How do residential care institutions support adolescents to achieve their future aspirations?
3. What challenges are encountered by adolescents in residential care institutions?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Adolescence is a period of life when one is faced with varied options that can either positively or negatively influence one's future prospects regardless of one's environment. Individuals from poor backgrounds have excelled through hard working. The study was guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to explore the future aspirations of adolescents in residential care institutions. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), offers a broad framework for understanding the factors that promote

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human motivation and psychological flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The theory identifies autonomy, competence and relatedness as basic psychological needs that universally must be satisfied for people to experience ongoing growth, integrity, and wellness (Maggino, 2022). These are central in driving adolescents to develop and pursue their aspirations. Autonomy refers to an individual`s need to feel sense of control and agency over one`s life nad choices, whilst competence relates to the need to feel effective and capable in one`s actions and pursuits. Relatedness is the need to feel connected and valued by others. Opportunities for enhancing one's autonomy and competencies boost their capabilities and motivation to pursue their aspirations. Positive relationships with significant others at the institution provide emotional and psychological wellbeing that supports adolescents as they pursue their goals. Whilst individuals play an important role in pursuing their goals, the residential care environment also plays an important role of addressing the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that encourage self-determined aspirations. Social environments that thwart the satisfaction of these three components lead to an array of more impoverished individual and interpersonal outcomes and wellness (Maggino, 2022). Acknowledgement from a caregiver can foster autonomy and motivation in adolescents, while poor relationships can hinder self-determination due to psychological issues. Self-Determination theory is relevant in the study because institutions that apply its principles create environments that support adolescents' motivation and psychological flourishing for them to pursue their aspirations.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative research approach and used the case study design. Qualitative research was chosen because it allowed understanding of the topic, unpacking the meanings the participants ascribe to their lives, activities, and circumstances (Leavy, 2017). A case study design permitted an in-depth exploration of the topic, a detailed understanding of the adolescents' experiences and the factors that influence their academic performance (Braun & Clarke 2013). The study's methodology placed a strong

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emphasis on capturing and amplifying the voices of participants. Information-rich cases were purposively selected to achieve the research purpose. The researchers felt that aspirations of adolescents cannot be measured using numerical data, but rather required participants' views, hence we employed semi-structured interviews to collect data. By engaging adolescents directly and allowing them to share their stories, perspectives, and feelings, the research empowered them and ensured that their voices were central to the study.

Ethics were considered prior to conducting the study and during the entire process of data collection. Ethical approval and access to the selected residential care facility was sought from the Department of Social Services in the Ministry of Labour and Social Services in May 2024.

The target population for the study were adolescents staying at a residential care facility in Masvingo Urban. Participants were purposively selected, in consultation with the administrator, who availed a list of adolescents at the centre. Informed consent was secured from the participants prior to the data collection. For participants under 18 years old, consent was sought and obtained from legal guardians (caregivers). Anonymity and confidentiality assured throughout the research process. The criteria for inclusion in the study were adolescents within the age range of 13 to 19 years and who were staying at the chosen residential care institution. Their reasons for being at the institution included being orphans and vulnerable, and also lack of family support. Eight of the participants were females whilst seven were males. The researchers shared the purpose of the study with the participants and informed them that they were free to participate in the study and that they were not going to be penalised if they decided to withdraw at any stage of the study. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews consisting of ten items were conducted with fifteen adolescents to capture their voices concerning their aspirations, challenges, and the available support services at the institution. All interviews were conducted on an agreed date and time at the institution. Confidentiality was observed by conducting the interviews in secluded rooms within the institution and the interviews lasted from 25 to 30 minutes per participant. Data collected

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from the interviews were analysed using thematic data analysis. The sub-themes enabled a deep understanding of the underlying meanings captured by the interview data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study, based on thematic data analysis of interviews with fifteen adolescents residing in a residential care institution and two key informant caregivers. Respondents were coded using alphabetical letters to maintain anonymity. The findings are structured according to the research questions guiding this study.

Aspirations for educational attainment

This section addresses the first research question, "What are the aspirations of adolescents in residential care institutions?" by exploring the educational ambitions of fifteen adolescents residing in a residential care institution. Thematic analysis of the findings identified two subthemes: personal ambition, and independence and autonomy.

Personal ambitions

All the adolescent participants confirmed that they were actively enrolled in school and expressed a deep passion for their academic journeys. The participants displayed optimism about their educational outcomes, attributing their enthusiasm to the tailored support provided by both the residential care institution and their schools. They highlighted concrete resources such as textbooks, school fees, and uniforms offered by the institution, alongside career guidance programmes integrated into their daily lives, as critical enablers of their ambitions.

For instance, Participant A, a 16-year-old in Form Three, shared:

> "*I am excited about the prospects of attaining higher education and securing a good job with a high salary*."

Her statement reflects not only personal ambition but also a sense of hope fostered by her environment, revealing a strong drive to transcend her circumstances.

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Similarly, participants articulated clear, individualised career goals, with aspirations spanning diverse fields such as nursing, accounting, engineering, computer science, cosmetology, modelling, marketing, catering, the military, electrician work, and banking. Participant B, a Form Two student with a dream of becoming an electrician, explained:

> "*I am studying hard in science subjects and English so that after completing Form Six, I can proceed to university*."

His focus on specific subjects underscores a strategic approach to achieving his goals, shaped by the institution's emphasis on academic preparation. Participant C, aspiring to become a nurse, offered further insight into how extracurricular engagement reinforced her aspirations:

> *"I have a keen interest in nursing, so I've been actively involved in National Aids Council (NAC) activities like quizzes and quarterly meetings since Form One*."

This involvement, facilitated by the institution's partnerships with external organisations, illustrates how participants are not merely dreaming but actively building pathways toward their goals. These findings align with Van Breda and Dickens (2015), who argue that education equips young people for early adulthood by fostering decision-making and critical thinking skills.

Contrary to global trends highlighted by Cameron et al. (2019), which suggest that care leavers typically achieve lower educational attainment than their non-care peers, these participants defy such generalisations. The participants' optimism and access to structured support systems within their residential care setting suggest that context-specific interventions such as consistent career guidance and resource provision can significantly alter the educational trajectories of adolescents in care, challenging the narrative of inevitable disadvantage.

Independence and autonomy

The participants articulated their future prospects with striking confidence, demonstrating a clear sense of agency in

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shaping their own paths and a commitment to diligently pursuing their goals. This finding is in contrast to Sánchez-Sandoval and Verdugo (2023), who reported that boys and girls in residential care institutions often exhibit poorer self-perception and bleaker future expectations compared to their peers outside residential care institutions. In this study, however, the adolescents' optimism and autonomy appeared to be nurtured by the residential care institution's environment, where regular, structured discussions with caregivers about career aspirations are a norm. These interactions, as described by the participants, empowered them to envision lives marked by independence, stable employment, and meaningful relationships beyond the institution.

For example Participant D, a Form Three student who aspires to be a beauty therapist spoke with determination, saying,

> "*I'm working very hard to fulfil my dream of becoming a beauty therapist. After I leave this institution, I plan to live on my own and build my own life*."

Her ambition extends beyond personal success, but she expressed a desire to "*give back to the institution*" that supported her, reflecting a sense of gratitude and purpose tied to her specific journey. Participant D's views on independent living are in concurrence with previous research by Mahuntse (2015) who postulated that living outside the institution has greater freedom as compared to the rigid timetables associated with life within an institution.

Similarly, Participant E, a Form One student aspiring to become a soldier, was already laying the groundwork for her future. She explained,

> "*I participate in sporting activities like athletics, rugby, and women's soccer to prepare for soldier training. I also practice running seven rounds around the compound every week.*"

Her routine is a deliberate effort to build the physical stamina required for military training, a goal she hopes to after completing school. She envisions a future where, free from unforeseen setbacks, she will have completed her education, undergone training, and established herself as an independent soldier who is

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autonomous and self-reliant.

These accounts highlight how the institution's tailored opportunities through caregiver mentorship and access to sports facilities enable these adolescents to pursue individualised aspirations. Their stories reveal a dynamic interaction of personal resolve and institutional support driving their pursuit of self-directed futures, in contrast to the general despair often associated with care homes.

Institutional support

Under Research Question 2, "How do residential care institutions support adolescents to achieve their dreams?" two clear subthemes emerged: emotional and career guidance support, and material and academic support. The residential care institution offers a comprehensive suite of support services designed to empower its residents, creating an environment where their aspirations can thrive. This section presents findings on how the institution facilitates the adolescents' dreams through tangible resources and emotional encouragement.

Emotional and career guidance support

The adolescents emphasised the emotional backing from staff, particularly the administrator, affectionately called 'Gogo' ('Grandmother'), who conducts regular career guidance sessions for all residents, supplemented by external resource persons.

Participant E, the aspiring soldier, noted, "*Caregivers give me encouraging comments about my chosen career*," while Participant F, envisioning a future as a caterer, said, "*They encourage me to work hard and stay focused.*" These affirmations echo Slaatto et al. (2022), who found that caring, trustworthy staff are vital to youth motivation in care settings.

Participant G, dreaming of becoming a model, shared:

> "*I get to showcase my modelling in front of everyone here. A few girls volunteer to compete with me, and it's so encouraging.*"

This peer-supported platform, facilitated by the institution, boosts her autonomy

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and confidence. Similarly, counselling from caregivers helps them remain focused, as seen in the participants' reliance on 'Gogo's guidance. Unlike the bleaker outlook Sánchez-Sandoval and Verdugo (2022) associate with some residential care institutions, here, the proactive engagement of caregivers through emotional support, structured guidance, and peer interactions, creates a nurturing space where adolescents pursue their dreams with clarity and determination.

Material and academic support

The residential care institution provides a robust array of material and academic support services tailored to empower its adolescent residents, fostering an environment where their aspirations can flourish. All fifteen participants are enrolled in school, three in boarding schools and twelve in local day schools, with the institution fully covering their needs, including fees, uniforms, and supplies. This material support ensures access to education, a critical stepping stone for their aspirations. Participant C, aiming to become a nurse, tied this support to specific academic milestones:

> "'*Gogo' pushes me to pass five 'O' Level subjects, including Mathematics and English, so that I can qualify for nursing school.*"

Beyond material provisions, the institution offers in-house study time and academic assistance from social workers, reinforcing their competence. All participants also benefit from career guidance at their schools, but the institution's additional efforts distinguish its role. Research by Frimpong-Manso (2021) and Marion and Tchuindibi (2023) underscores that such resources, paired with personal motivation, drive academic success.

Participant D, a Form Three student aspiring to be a beauty therapist, further illustrated practical support:

> "*The carer lets me practice plaiting her hair and my peers' hair, which helps me build my skills.*"

This hands-on opportunity reflects the institution's commitment to aligning resources with individual goals, enhancing their ability to succeed.

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Challenges

This section directly addresses the third research question, "What challenges are encountered by adolescents in residential care institutions?" by examining the specific obstacles faced by fifteen adolescents living in a residential care home as they pursue their aspirations. Despite the institution's supportive environment, thematic analysis of participants' responses identified clear themes namely limited resources, peer pressure, uncertainty about the future and limited vocational training opportunities.

Limited resources

Participants consistently highlighted a shortage of academic resources as a barrier to their goals. Participant H, an Upper Six student, explained:

> "*We need textbooks, computers, and internet for studies after school, on weekends, and during holidays, but they're not enough*."

This scarcity was echoed by Participant B, who noted:

> "*We get study time here, but the biggest challenge is the lack of textbooks*."

Without adequate materials for research and assignments, their ability to build competence is compromised, despite their personal drive. This resource gap contrasts with the institution's otherwise robust support, revealing a critical area where external constraints limit academic progress.

Peer pressure

Peer dynamics within the institution also pose challenges. Carer A observed:

> *"Some adolescents are too relaxed, spending time reading novels with peers instead of studying."*

While relatedness through peer bonds is vital during adolescence, it can turn into negative peer pressure, swaying focus from academic goals. Participant E, the aspiring soldier, added:

> *"Having a relationship can make*

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you lose focus, trying to find ways to visit your opposite-sex friend."

This aligns with Lou (2023), who notes that peer pressure influences effort and risky behaviours based on the image adolescents seek to project and the institution's academic culture.

Uncertainty about the future

Three participants expressed deep anxiety about life after leaving the institution, a fear rooted in the transition from its structured routine to an uncertain world. Participant J, a Form Four student, confessed:

"*I'm used to this place, so the thought of leaving is scary. At eighteen, we're expected to go, but I don't know where I'll live. Honestly, I'm afraid*."

This fear of the unknown mirrors Sekibo (2020) and Soriano-Diaz et al. (2022), who highlight residential care institution leavers' struggles with social integration and pessimism. Globally, residential care institution leavers face homelessness (Cameron et al., 2019), and in Zimbabwe, Powell et al. (2004) found many remain institutionalised past eighteen due to absence of transition programmes. This uncertainty threatens autonomy, as the lack of preparation leaves them ill-equipped for self-directed futures. Conversely, Caregiver B noted:

"*Some adolescents are too relaxed they read novels instead of planning ahead*"

This finding is akin to Slaatto et al.'s (2022) study, where youth focused on the present, not the future, potentially jeopardising long-term prospects.

Limited vocational training opportunities

Access to vocational training emerged as a significant theme. Participant F, aspiring to be a caterer, lamented:

"*I wish I could train in catering and baking during school vacations, but there's nothing here.*"

This absence of life-skills programmes limits their competence and agency, critical for employment post-institution. Powell (2006) concurs, noting that

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institutionalised youth often lack practical training, leaving them unprepared for independence. Stubbs et al. (2023) states that without such preparation, residential care institution leavers struggle to adjust to new communities, amplifying the transition challenge.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the aspirations of adolescents living in a residential care home, how the institution supports these ambitions, and the challenges they encounter, as guided by its three research questions. The aspirations of the fifteen adolescent participants revealed a profound commitment to their future goals, offering critical insights into their lived experiences and the factors shaping their paths. Far from being passive, these adolescents dream of higher education and high-paying jobs, demonstrating a clear drive to achieve diverse career aspirations, ranging from nursing to electrical work. Their optimism, bolstered by the institution's tailored support, challenges the broader narrative of lower educational attainment among care leavers (Cameron et al., 2019), underscoring the value of listening to their perspectives to inform service provision.

The institution fosters this ambition through resource provision and emotional encouragement. All participants are enrolled in school, with fees, uniforms, and supplies covered, while 'Gogo' and carergivers provide career guidance. These efforts cultivate a sense of support and skill-building in participants.

The adolescents face significant hurdles that deter their progress. They highlighted a persistent shortage of textbooks and lack of computers or internet, constraining their academic competence during study time outside school hours. Uncertainty looms large, with participants voicing fear about housing and employment post-eighteen, a worry rooted in the absence of transition programmes. The lack of vocational training, lamented by Participant F who seeks catering skills, further limits their preparation for independent living.

Despite these resource gaps, the institution creates a nurturing environment where adolescents exercise choice over their futures. To fully

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empower these adolescents, the institution must address the identified shortages: textbooks, Wi-Fi, and library access, as well as integrate transition and vocational programmes. Such enhancements would bridge the gap between their aspirations and reality, ensuring they leave the institution not just with dreams, but with the tools to achieve them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the findings of the study, the following recommendations aremade to ensure that adolescents in residential care settings achieve their life goals:

1. The study revealed a critical shortage of instructional materials, with participants noting the lack of "textbooks, computers, and internet" for after-school study as a barrier to academic progress. To address this, the institution should prioritise acquiring a comprehensive set of textbooks aligned with the adolescents' syllabi and establish a well-equipped library with computers and reliable internet access.
2. Participants benefited from career guidance and practical opportunities, yet expressed a desire for broader exposure. The institution should expand partnerships with local universities, technical colleges, and professionals like nurses, electricians, or caterers to offer workshops or mentorships tailored to the adolescents' diverse aspirations
3. The absence of Wi-Fi emerged as a significant constraint, limiting research and online learning opportunities. The institution, in collaboration with the Social Welfare Department, should negotiate with local telecom providers, such as Econet, NetOne, PowerTel, and TelOne, to donate bandwidth for educational purposes.
4. Participants underscored the lack of vocational training, a gap that hinders post-institution employability. The institution should, therefore, actively seek donations and partnerships with businesses and individuals to fund

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skills programs in areas such as catering, hairdressing, basic mechanics and driving.

5. To address peer pressure and future uncertainty, the institution should increase counselling sessions focusing on peer influence, drug avoidance, and independent living skills, building on the caregivers' current encouragement.
6. The institution should implement a transition programme with gradual exposure to external life, such as short-term community placements or job shadowing with local employers.

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