



LET ME THRIVE

*A Research Study on
Foster Care in Malta*



Commissioner for Children, Malta

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The research question

What factors in the system of foster care contribute to meet the holistic needs of the fostered child in line with the principles enshrined in the UNCRC?



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Methodology: A child-centred qualitative approach

- In-depth interviews and participant observation
 - 20 interviews with children and young people
 - 42 interviews with stakeholders (foster carers, social workers, birth parents and professionals)
- Statistical and legal overview
- Ethics and ethical considerations of children as participants
- Researchers' positionality



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Tools used

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989
- The UN Guidelines to the Alternative Care of Children, 2009
- The best interests of the child principle
- The participation of the child principle



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The main concerns

- A *decreasing* supply of foster carers
- The welfare system is *not set* within a comprehensive legislative framework
- The system is *not sufficiently resourced* to allow for a realistic workload for key professionals



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The findings

- Timely support and monitoring of the birth family
- Professionalising children's contact visits with birth families
- Insufficient ongoing support of foster carers
- Increasing the resources of welfare agencies
- Respecting the voice of the child (decision-making)
- Establishing judicial review
- The best interests of the child
- Non-discrimination: migrant children and children in trouble with the law
- Behaviour management in foster care
- Reduction of social stigma



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Commissioner's Recommendations

- Need for **Permanency Planning** –
 - Children's need for permanence and for a sense of belonging to a caring family is of utmost importance and should be addressed in a timely manner.
 - Statutory strength to concurrent policies that address two main possible pathways: family reintegration and Permanent alternative care.
- Sufficient **resources and adequate budget allocations**
- The **Voice of the Child** –children do not consider that the current mechanism was adequate.
- need for a decision-making process - a system which is child-friendly and that allows for judicial review of important decisions affecting their lives as well as automatic access to representation.



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Recommendations...

- Strengthen the **best interests** of the child principle to be widely known and integrated.
- It should be consistently applied in all legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings as well as in all policies, programmes and projects
- There should be **no discrimination** regarding the availability of welfare agency services to address children's needs.
- The same services need to be made available to non-Maltese nationals as those provided by Maltese Nationals.
- More positive and holistic approach to **meaningful behaviour** is required, such as specific training and support when dealing with challenging behaviour.
- The need for a **crisis intervention centre** as well as the setting up of three-tier therapeutic intervention service.



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Thank you!

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