

**Conference**

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Child and Youth Welfare Policy Perspective

# **»Care Leaving Research 2025: Participation, Equity, Perspectives«**

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Study »Care Leaver Statistics: Participation  
in the Life Course of Young Adults – A Long-  
Term Study«

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# **Child and Youth Welfare Policy Perspective of the Opening Presentation | Tanja Abou and Stefan Wedermann**

## **Why is it so important for child and youth welfare policy to gain more knowledge about the life courses of young people in out-of- home care?**

The state carries a particular responsibility for young people who grow up in foster families or residential care settings, or who have spent part of their childhood and adolescence in the care system. When children and adolescents cannot live with their families of origin, the state—more specifically, the youth welfare offices—assumes responsibility for their upbringing.

This responsibility does not end when young people leave the care system, but extends beyond the period of direct support. In Germany, this ongoing responsibility has been increasingly recognized in recent years in the legal frameworks of child and youth welfare and has been substantiated with concrete legal entitlements—for example, § 41a of the Social Code (SGB VIII). The decision of the German Bundestag to fund the CLS study can also be situated in this context.

Currently, knowledge about the life courses of young people in child and youth welfare and about how support services affect their participation is fragmented and often lacks systematic evidence. Yet, such knowledge is fundamental for the science-based development of child and youth welfare services and for strengthening the rights of young people. Policy makers and federal authorities require robust data as a foundation for further developing the legal frameworks governing child and youth welfare services.

Fortunately, this conference brings together a wide range of research projects, providing valuable insights and findings. Your work is therefore of particular significance for child and youth welfare. Once again, sincere thanks!

## **Why is this knowledge equally important for the practice of child and youth welfare?**

Long-term research is indispensable for practice. It holds up a mirror to professional practice and makes visible which opportunities for participation are actually being created—and where the existing supports reach their limits. Only when professionals and organizations understand the long-term impact of support services can they effectively improve their work and develop sustainable forms of assistance.

The results of research provide concrete guidance for daily practice in institutions and services. They help to realize the rights of young people, and ensure that good intentions lead to effective action. Participation must not remain a buzzword. The CLS study provides the necessary empirical foundation and reveals what participation really means for young people: stable relationships, reliable support, access to education and training, and opportunities for social and civic engagement.

While policy debates often focus on the short-term effects of individual measures, the CLS study takes a long-term perspective on life courses—and thus on the actual participation of young people beyond their time in care. This perspective is essential for practice in order to ensure the quality of support and to consistently strengthen the rights of young people.

## **How can the rights of young people be strengthened through long-term research?**

Children and adolescents have the right to the realization of their rights. This includes the right to well-trained professionals. It also means that professionals should use the available knowledge to align their work with the needs and rights of young people. Long-term research provides essential insights into life courses and opportunities for participation.

Policy makers and federal authorities also require robust evidence in order to further develop the legal frameworks of child and youth welfare and to ensure that the rights of young people are actually put into practice.

It is equally important to make the insights gained from research accessible and understandable for policy, government, and practice. Research should not remain within academic circles, but needs to find its way into decision-making processes and the everyday design of support services.

Moreover, young people themselves—and their self-advocacy organizations—should be involved in communicating findings and developing research further. Their perspectives and experiences are essential for correctly interpreting results and for initiating improvements. Self-advocacy is therefore especially deserving of support, as it makes visible the rights and interests of those at the heart of child and youth welfare.

## Conclusion

Long-term research makes visible how children and young people grow up in child and youth welfare, and what contributions support services make to their social participation. It provides the knowledge needed by policy and practice to fulfil their responsibilities and to effectively strengthen rights.

For this knowledge to have an impact, it must be made accessible and used together with young people themselves. It is only by cooperation between research, professional practice, policy, and the self-advocacy of young people that child and youth welfare can be developed in a way that does justice to the life courses and rights of young people.