

## Portuguese Young People at Risk in a House of Hosts: From the Educational Course to Autonomy for Life (Case Study)

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**Abstract:** Residential care is considered a last resort for children/young people at risk, when all other options have proven to be ineffective in terms of protection, promotion and development of their life project. Institutionalization in shelters aims to satisfy all basic needs in young people at risk, promoting their integration, both in the family, at school (educational/training path) and in the community, in order to contribute to their personal, social and professional valorization, in the construction of your life project, which implies the issue of your autonomy and empowerment. The theme had within the theoretical-conceptual framework and literature on institutionalized children and young people at risk and their academic career/performance, research in this area and, in particular, some studies carried out in institutions in Castelo Branco, as our approach focuses at the Shelter in the city of Castelo Branco (ADME) -Portugal. The problem of the qualitative methodology study (case study), which took place between 2021-22, aimed to understand what support and interventions institutional care technicians at the school develop, so that these young people at risk (sample N= 11) could build their life project. We established the following objectives: analyze the perception of young people hosted in the foster home regarding the process of autonomy and the challenges it entails; analyze the integration of these young people at risk in the school context, knowing that they attend different schools; understand the learning difficulties of these young people in their schooling process; determine the socio-educational path of these institutionalized young people with their respective academic performance and performance; understand the intervention of the institution's technicians in the school and training process of these young people; learn about the collaboration between the host institution and the school, in promoting coexistence and socialization relationships; understand the construction of these young people's life projects, identifying their perceptions, expectations and ambitions. We used the following techniques and instruments to obtain data: documentary, natural/empirical and participant observation; semi-structured interviews (young people; technicians; school teachers); recording field notes; 'Focus Group' at ADME with young people. We performed content analysis and data triangulation in evaluating the research questions formulated. The results confirmed the important role of the institution's technicians in supporting young people's academic career and performance and in building their life projects. We highlight the good interrelationship between the host institution and schools with regard to the development of autonomy skills and young people's desires for their personal/social integration into society.

**Keywords:** Institutionalization, Young people at risk, Educational path, Life project, Foster home.

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### Introduction

The family plays a fundamental socialization and educational role in the development of children and young people, promoting autonomy and appropriate social integration (Gomes, 2019). Institutionalization is a measure to protect children/young people at risk with adverse life trajectories, providing them with conditions, support and care appropriate to their full development, which they often do not enjoy in their family contexts. The residential care measure, a measure to promote and protect children/young people, is only applied as a last resort in situations of danger and risk in which young people find themselves (Sousa, 2015). Reception implies the issue of their autonomy, in the elaboration of their life project and respective transition to society (Fonseca, 2023; Saltão, 2022; Silva, 2022)

It is known that a young person's autonomy is their ability to assume individual responsibility for their own actions and choices, that is, it is responsibility at an emotional, physical, economic level, at the level of the ability to assume values and decisions own (Rodrigues, 2022). Therefore, it is essential to know how those responsible and technicians within the host institution work with this autonomy. On the other hand, the transition to adulthood is considered a process experienced by all young people as an important event, which entails many changes, experienced with feelings of insecurity, fear and fear of not being able to become autonomous, it is It is urgent to be aware that many of the young people who are in care may not have family support after leaving and, therefore, the skills acquired during their care and at school will be fundamental (Gaspar; Alcoforado & Santos, 2015; Moreira, 2028).

Our conceptual theoretical model was guided by the approach to literature on the subject, clarifying some concepts and addressing the legislation related to children/young people at risk or in danger and institutional

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care and, especially, the studies carried out in the Castelo Branco area on institutionalized children/young people at risk (Aguiar, 2021; Caio, 2014; Farromba, 2013; Freitas, 2017; Gomes, 2019; Pinto, 2020). We adopted a qualitative research methodology, based on the interpretative or naturalistic paradigm, in the case-institution study modality (Yin, 1994), addressing the information and narratives of young people at ADM Estrela (institution located in Castelo Branco/Portugal), about their experiences of institutionalization and schooling, within the scope of their personal, academic and social development and in the construction of their life project. This type of qualitative methodology “is rich in reports made by the subjects themselves”, that is, it is “the understanding of behaviors from the perspective of the research subjects” (Bogdan, Biklen, 1994, p. 16). It is also a situational, exploratory, descriptive, analytical and interpretative case study with a sample of young people at risk (N=11), with 3 technicians/professionals from the institution and 4 teachers from schools, with the purpose of analyzing/interpreting the trajectory socio-educational and life project for these young people.

We therefore address the educational/training path of young people at risk in institutional care and the construction of their life project. We know that any young person's life project integrates expectations and ideas of what they want to be and the values developed and acquired throughout their schooling and socialization, with repercussions on interpersonal relationships (social and emotional skills). This information was collected through life stories that the subjects provided us during the study (interviews and participant observation with field notes) and which, in turn, were analyzed and interpreted, enabling the construction of their own life project. We assume from the literature that all the trajectories narrated contributed to the construction of the life project of these young people, knowing the influence of the school/educational, social and institutional environment in which they were inserted, as well as the knowledge and understanding of the support and measures/responses that institutionalization and school are decisive for their life project (Ferreira, 2016; Saltão, 2022).

The purpose or problem of the study was to understand the educational path, the daily life of the young people under study and the construction of their life project, as everything has the potential to constitute something that allows us to better interpret our object of study. The study objectives, converted into research questions, were guided by the following formulations: analyzing the school career and life project of ADME young people; know the relationships of these institutionalized young people with their peers and teachers at the school they attend; understand the forms of collaboration/support between the institution's technicians and schools and teachers; identify the perceptions of these young people, understanding their paths; analyze the academic performance of these young people in terms of learning in schools and in foster homes; describe the interrelationship between the school and the ADME foster home. We use several data collection techniques: documentary observation, natural/informal (in loco - observation) and participant observation; the interview survey of institutionalized boys; semi-structured interviews with class directors and support technicians at the host home; and records of field notes, as due to post-Covid 19 restrictive measures we were unable to carry out the planned focus group. We analyze and process the data obtained, based on content analysis, and then subject it to triangulation, with interpretation based on the researched grounded theory. The results confirmed the contributions of the institution under study and the school attended by the young people and in the construction of the life and learning project.

## **1. Framework of the topic in conceptual and legislative terms**

In the research of specialized literature and the conceptual clarification of concepts relating to the theme, having resorted to the theoretical field and legislation (Portugal, 1999, 2015, 2018, 2019) on the protection and reception of children and young people at risk/in danger Portuguese and , as well as a panoply of empirical investigations on institutionalized children/young people, who attend school, undertake and follow their socio-educational journey and prepare their life project and autonomy (Brandão, 2015; Ferreira, 2016; Fonseca, 2023; Leal et al., 2018; Silva, 2022). We highlight in this heuristic bibliographic research or 'State of the Art', the reference to studies already carried out in shelter institutions for children/young people at risk in the Castelo Branco region (Aguiar, 2021; Caio, 2014; Farromba, 2013; Freitas, 2017 ; Gomes, 2019; Pinto, 2020).

### **1.1. Conceptualization of Children/Young People at Risk or Danger**

When the family does not create the necessary conditions for children to remain within their family, putting them in danger, as they have the right to be protected from the danger in which they find themselves and to be welcomed in an institution, where they can receive answers suited to their needs and a safe and stable environment (Ramião, 2017). Therefore, according to Law no. 147/991, of September 1st, article 3 (Legitimacy of Intervention), no. 2, a child or young person is considered to be in danger when (Law no. 147/99, of 1 September, with changes imposed by Law No. 26/2018, of July 5):

- a) It is abandoned or lives on its own;
- b) Suffers physical or psychological abuse or is a victim of sexual abuse;
- c) Does not receive the care or affection appropriate to their age and personal situation;
- d) Is forced to carry out activities or work that are excessive or inappropriate for their age, dignity and personal situation or harmful to their training or development;
- e) Is subject, directly or indirectly, to behaviours that seriously affect their safety or emotional balance;
- f) Engages in behaviours or engages in activities or consumption that seriously affect their health, safety, training, education or development without their parents, legal representative or whoever has de facto custody opposing them in an appropriate manner to remove this situation.

The very concept of children and young people at risk continues to suffer from some ambiguity, despite the extensive bibliography that already exists on this topic, however, this collective of children/young people has been analysed by numerous researchers from various scientific disciplines and from different perspectives (Guerra, 2018). In fact, the term 'risk' is a recurring concept in several scientific areas, more or less explicitly, in contemporary discourses, despite different origins, languages, formats and objects that they may adopt (Sampaio; Cruz; Carvalho, 2011). The risk is not limited to a range of aspects of ways of living or specific disciplines of knowledge. Any risk situation in children/young people arises from: Experiential deficit; Lack of a set of positive experiences; Difference between the type of experiences expected/desired in children, depending on their age; Presence of negative experiences. Thus, we detected three significant aspects of the notion of risk in childhood, according to the criteria used to classify children and young people: Psychosocial perspective; Logical-functional and pragmatic perspective; Legal perspective (juvenile justice). While the term "danger" in literature means the imminent realization of a threat that places the individual at the limit of their entire human integrity and, therefore, we speak of a continuum, in which the concept of risk and danger are part of the same dimension, the developmental one, where risk, danger and vulnerability converge (Moreira, 2018). In other words, the 'risk' situation is related to the individual's development (Carvalho & Cruz, 2015).

When a child/young person is in danger, there are measures to promote and protect their rights that aim to keep them away from the danger they are in, providing them with conditions that allow them to protect and promote their health, ensure their education, safety, development and training (Delgado, 2018; Delgado & Gersão, 2018), as well as providing recovery (psychological, physical) for those exposed to any form of abuse and exploitation (Article 34 of the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger Law -LPCJP, with the amended by Law No. 23/2017, of May 23). According to article 38 of the LPCJP, the Commissions for the Protection of Children and Young People (CPCJ) and the Courts are responsible for applying measures that promote the rights and protection of children and young people in danger. In turn, the Commissions for the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger (CPCJP) intervene when other bodies are unable to put an end to the dangerous situation that the child/young person finds themselves in, and this requires the consent of the parents and the non-opposition of the children. who are over 12 years old (Guerra, 2018).

These measures are grouped into two categories: measures carried out in a natural environment (support from parents, support from another family member, trust in a suitable person and support for independent living); and, placement measures (family care and institutional care). There is another measure that fits into both models at different stages: trust in the person selected for adoption (natural living environment), the foster family or the institution with a view to future adoption (placement) (Guerreiro, 2011). In fact, placement measures are legally framed by the Law for the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger (LPCJP), which defines them as the

“(…) placing the child or young person in the care of an entity that has permanent reception facilities and equipment and a technical team that guarantees adequate care for their needs and provides them with conditions that allow for their education, well-being and integral development” (Article 49 of the LPCJP).

The dangerous situations that lead to the institutionalization of children/young people fall into five groups: physical abuse, situations of neglect, situations of psychological abuse, sexual abuse and other situations. The promulgation of Law No. 147/99, of September 1st – Law for the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger – constituted the main tool for “promoting the rights and protection of children and young people in danger, in order to guarantee their well-being and integral development” (Article 1). The legitimacy of intervention began to be recognized by entities with competence in matters of children and youth, these being “natural or collective public, cooperative, social or private persons” (item “d” of Article 5).

## 1.2. Portuguese legal Protection Regulations

Legal regulations, for example the Guardianship Organization for Minors (Decree-Law n° 314/78 of October 27th), Law n° 147/99, of September 1st (Law for the Protection of Children and Young People in

Danger), the Law No. 166/99 of 14 September (Educational Guardianship Law), were enacted not only to define what constitutes a child and young person at risk and in danger, but also to establish responses to their protection, determining what is a foster home and what its role is (Guerra, 2018). We also intend to understand the protective actions and warning signs for preventing children and young people at risk. One of the social feedbacks in favor of the protection of children and young people - and one of the various roles given to reception institutions - is institutional guidance and intervention in the rehabilitation of subjects, that is, protecting them from risk factors and not allowing them to deviate from practicing good conduct. Since parents are legally prevented from caring for the minor, the role of taking care of health services, school and social activities is assumed by the host institution (Henriques, 2015; Pereira, 2016). Law No. 147/99 already establishes protection guidelines and how to deal with dangerous situations for these children and young people. There is a concern on the part of the legislator for the rights of minors, with the main objective of strengthening the powers of social institutions with the aim of preventing dangerous situations (Alves, 2007; Guerra, 2018; Ramião, 2017).

One of the points considered positive in Law n°147/99, of September 1st (Portugal, 1999) was the inclusion of two new rights for children/young people in care. One of them states that the child or young person must be, whenever possible, welcomed in a shelter that is close to their family context of origin and the other concerns the non-separation of other siblings in foster care, unless the best interests of the child so require. contraindicate, as referred to in art. 58th, paragraphs i) and j). Furthermore, this legal standard is based on the principle of subsidiarity, which defines that intervention in promoting the rights and protection of children/young people must be carried out successively, and, at a first level, promoted by competent entities in the area of childhood and youth (health, education, professional training, leisure time, among others).

The protection commissions (CPCJP) converge on two measures, support with parents and institutional care, with much lower application of the remaining legally provided measures such as care with another family member. In this way, institutional care becomes an option when the support measure with the parents fails (Delgado & Gersão, 2018). This tradition of institutionalization attempted to be reversed through Law No. 147/99, of September 1st. However, it failed due to the channeling of available financial resources towards the functioning of the institutions, instead of being applied to the remaining legally foreseen measures. In other words, when the new law of 2015 was introduced, however, existing practices were not changed (Portugal, 2015). The 2015 legal review contributed to this change, however, it is not enough to legislate, there must be a link between the legislation and the practices that exist for the change to really happen (Delgado & Gersão, 2018; Guerra, 2018). This review therefore constitutes a significant change in relation to the assumptions of family care, prioritizing this measure over residential care, especially in the case of children under 6 years of age. For foster care to be successful, it is imperative to gradually modify the existing map of foster homes, both in terms of their size and the number of existing homes. life as close as possible to family life (Gaspar; Alcoforado & Santos, 2015).

### **1.3. Residential Care System for Children/Young People at Risk**

The institutionalization of children/young people is considered an ambivalent process, as it is a measure that aims to remove the child/young person from the danger in which they find themselves, playing a fundamental role in satisfying their basic needs (Casa 2022, 2023; Leal et al. , 2018) However, it can become a protective measure that exposes the child/young person to other risks with implications for their development, for example: the difficulty in developing close relationships with others; trust issues (self and straight); and confusion regarding family identity (Sousa, 2015). The ambivalence of institutionalization is experienced by children/young people with strong feelings of ambivalence (positive and negative) regarding parental ties and their situation of suffering (Silva, 2022). Thus, when a child/young person is removed from their family environment to an institution where they have to live with people who are strangers to them and where they receive collective treatment, feelings of anxiety arise resulting from separation from their family and emotional abandonment- emotional (Rodrigues, 2022). Hence, one of the problems of reception is minimizing the negative consequences of separation and inadequate parenting of these minors (Fonseca, 2023). The challenge of institutionalization involves providing them with a life project that is a strong path of support and construction for their insertion into society and training for citizenship (Casa 2022, 2023; Neto, 2021).

In fact, residential care for children/young people, according to article 49 of Law No. 142/2015, “consists of placing the child or young person in the care of an entity that has facilities, reception equipment and permanent human resources, duly sized and qualified, which guarantees them adequate care.” This legal regulation implements this measure when parents, legal representatives or guardians endanger the safety, health, training, development or education of children and young people, including if this danger is the result of the action or omission by third parties or by the child or young person themselves (if those responsible do not do anything to remove them). In fact, the life trajectories of these institutionalized children/young people are

marked by losses, neglect, situations of abuse and abandonment (Gaspar; Alcoforado & Santos, 2015). For these reasons, the reception proposal arises with the objective of promoting better living conditions for them, as described in article 58 of Law n° 142/2015 (Portugal, 2015).

Evidently, the key aspects in promoting institutional care are (Alves, 2007; Carvalho & Cruz, 2015; Sousa, 2015): the principle of individuality of each child/young person, promoting the self-esteem of the person receiving care; the principle of respect for your rights and the rights of your family, in order to generate self-confidence; the principle of 'schooling and educational alternatives', giving children/young people the opportunity to think and decide; the principle of 'adequate satisfaction of the basic needs' of each child/young person, making them believe in their abilities; the principle of 'health care', promoting an environment that is therapeutic; the principle of social integration, stimulating a sense of belonging; the principle of 'preparation for autonomy', instilling the necessary security so that they are capable of making their own decisions; the principle of 'support for families', respecting the uniqueness of each family; the principle of 'safety and protection', ensuring the stability and protection of children and young people; the principle of the 'life project', allowing children and young people to believe in the future; and the principle of respect for the 'right to participation', providing children with knowledge that allows them to make reflective decisions and actively participate in defining their life project. It is estimated that there are currently more than five thousand children/young people in care, whose essential principles of intervention and functioning are the following: protection, stability, (self)confidence, inclusion, security, solidarity, responsibility and autonomy (Casa 2022, 2023). However, this reception measure should not be applied with the aim of filling an inadequacy in the family, but in order to promote the opportunity to provide added value that is effective for both the child/young person and their family (Silva, 2022).

Law No. 147/99, of September 1st, already distinguished "short-term reception" from "long-term" depending on the duration, differentiating institutions according to the type of reception and, hence, there are "temporary shelters" and "nursing homes". childhood and youth" (Delgado & Gersão, 2018). Now this differentiation disappears with Law n° 142/2015, naming reception institutions as shelters (art. 50, paragraph 1 of that diploma). This article also states that these can be organized into specialized units, namely: houses designed to respond to emergency situations; homes designed to respond to specific problems; and autonomous apartments. With this regularization, a new name "precautionary title" appears, previously "provisional reception" and, therefore, whenever specialized units do not exist, children and young people, whatever the purpose of reception, are welcomed in generalist homes in situations emergency or during the period of diagnosis of the child or young person's situation, regardless of the expected length of reception (Delgado & Gersão, 2018). Therefore, reception institutions can be cooperative or public, private or social and operate on an open basis, that is, parents can visit the child or young person, in accordance with the rules and schedules of the institution, unless the court decides otherwise (Guerra, 2018; Rodrigues, 2018).

Alves (2007, p.75) states that the National Reception System "(...) is made up of the set of reception responses from the State and civil society (Private Social Solidarity Institutions and other entities) aimed at children and young people in situations of danger." In fact, the institutional care measure is aimed at children/young people who, temporarily or definitively, cannot remain within their family of origin, as this does not guarantee them conditions, at least immediate, for their reception and education) (Saltão, 2022; Silva; Oliveira & Marques, 2019).

In Portugal, residential care is considered to be the last protective promotion measure to be applied to children/young people, as this extra-family placement measure aims to guarantee their protection from adverse and risky situations that they experience in their family environment. This is a legal action aimed at dangerous situations and approaches in which other interventions have not been successful, such as support and advice for parents or other family members and adoption, in which foster care appears as the last measure. to be implemented (Carvalho, 2013). This measure consists of three types of response according to intervention needs: reception in an Emergency Unit; temporary reception in a Temporary Reception Centre; and prolonged care in a Children's and Youth Home.

The Temporary Reception Centre allows children/young people to be accommodated for a period that should not exceed six months of stay with basic care and support from a multidisciplinary technical team, as this is an appropriate response to the nature and severity of the situation in which they are involved. is in relation to their safety, health, training or development, but also if "(...) the socio-family context in which they find themselves does not allow for an objective diagnosis of their situation and the planning of the most appropriate intervention" (Alves, 2007, p .77). In these institutions, basic care is guaranteed, with an initial diagnosis of the child/young person's situation being carried out by a team of experts, with the aim of defining the most appropriate solution.

As for Children and Youth Homes, they are a social response aimed at children/young people up to the age of 21, and it is possible to extend their reception up to the age of 25, when defending the best interests of the

young person so requires, in accordance with the Law no. 23/2017, of May 23 (Guerra, 2018). This type of response is prolonged in nature and intended for dangerous situations that are considered complex and that put the integrity of the child or young person at risk, therefore requiring long-term care (Sousa, 2015). In other words, this response provides living conditions as close as possible to those of family life, with its objectives being "(...) satisfy all the basic needs of the child/young person; promote their reintegration into the family and community; contribute to their personal, social and professional development" (Alves, 2007, p.75). In order to promote life structures similar to those that exist in the family structure in children/young people at risk, the Children's and Youth Homes operate under an open regime and are organized into units with sufficient elements that allow the existence of a favourable family-type affective relationship, and an individualized and personalized daily routine (Carvalho, 2013; Delgado & Gersão, 2018; Fonseca, 2023).

In fact, these Portuguese children/young people at risk remain in foster care institutions for an extended period of their lives, despite having weak personal and social skills that hinder the development of their autonomy, adaptation to the educational and training process, socialization and social inclusion and professional (Silva; Oliveira & Marques, 2019). As a result, they may develop behavioural problems, difficulties with school and relational integration, learning and socio-emotional functioning. These children/young people, when institutionalized, lead with them life paths marked by mistreatment, affective-emotional deficits, deprivation of their well-being, suffering and relationships that are little or not at all rewarding. These aspects come from the social and family environment (misstructured and/or problematic families, with inappropriate parenting styles), as the family does not provide the child with the basic conditions (responsible citizenship, transmission of values, parental supervision) that allow for integral development, and adaptive to the different dimensions (cognitive, ethical-moral, affective-emotional, social and relational) (Saltão, 2022). Its affective-emotional component is marked by instability, as it affects their learning at school, social and personal levels. Therefore, when these children/young people are unable to achieve their own goals they end up in self-exclusion, or else, they are not very persistent, unmotivated and have little faith in their abilities (Rodrigues, 2018; Silva, 2022; Sousa, 2015).

Therefore, as care in a transitional home is temporary until a more stable situation is found, it is necessary for the intervention to be carried out according to the skills of the child/young person, identifying those that need to be developed so that they can achieve their goals. In this sense, it is important to allow the child/young person to assume a sense of responsibilities, according to their age level and capabilities, enhancing and optimizing their educational process and sustained autonomy, their ability to make individual decisions and consciously and problem-solving (Ferreira, 2016). Thus, the intervention and activities carried out at the institution constitute a key device for their future socio-professional integration, being a training advantage, as they are activities that are not easily carried out in their community of origin (Freitas, 2017). In other words, it is intended that they develop skills: at the level of relational/personal autonomy, such as the acquisition of skills relating to self-esteem, self-concept, emotion management, self-confidence, self-esteem, the ability to solve problems and also the acquisition of responsibility skills regarding decisions; at the level of functional autonomy, the acquisition of essential skills for autonomy in various areas of personal and social life (Leal et al., 2018; Neto, 2021).

## **2. Empirical Methodology: Sampling, Data Collection Techniques and Procedures**

The qualitative methodology study, based on the interpretative paradigm and in the case study modality, referred to subjects in institutionalized situations, in the shelter, called ADM Estrela (Social Association Social and Development) in Castelo Branco/Portugal, which is an IPSS (Private Social Solidarity Institution), opened in December 1989, whose headquarters are located in Vale de Estrela – Guarda/Portugal. It is an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) providing long-term residential family-type care to young men at risk (Law n° 147/99, of 01/09), whose action is based on social solidarity, promotion and development of social activities, education, social and community inclusion, training and professional development. Its human resources are made up of a technical director, social worker, seven educators, three operational assistants and a teacher placed by the Ministry of Education, under the 'Casa Project', which develops relevant work with young people at risk and socially vulnerable, with the purpose of providing a social and educational response, providing them with conditions for autonomy and a life project, in an individualized dimension for each young person (Casa 2022, 2023). The institution, which has partnerships with many entities in the region, aims to stimulate and educate young people towards a restorative change, promoting their integration, social, personal and emotional development, with a view to realizing their life projects, investing in their full social and professional integration.

ADME in Castelo Branco/Portugal is located in a more or less large house, with three floors with spaces designed to serve the activities carried out by young residents, offices for the director and technical team (social worker and educators), bedrooms, study, living rooms - socializing. They carry out diverse activities (leisure,

sports, educational and/or recreational) inside or outside the establishment, with support and monitoring knowing that institutionalized young people have a previously established routine, having flexibility for personal or collective reasons. The institution's main objectives, in accordance with the Children and Youth Home Regulations: Ensure the protection of children and young people in danger; Promote the well-being, integral development, active citizenship and social (re)insertion of children/young people, through strategies, procedures and therapeutic and/or educational programs; Assess the needs and develop the potential of each child and young person, based on their life story and family situation; Provide a normative living environment that provides them with diverse, rich life experiences suited to their needs and potential; Provide an environment close to a harmonious and affectionate family environment, promoting emotional bonds and coexistence relationships; Ensure compliance with and respect for the rights of children and young people in care; Promote the active participation of children/young people in the general context in which they are inserted and in decisions that concern them, particularly in defining their life projects; Know the conditions of the nuclear and extended family and develop their abilities and skills in order to, if possible, a future (re)integration, always focused on the best interests of the child/young person; Prepare children/young people for their autonomy and social integration.

Between the years 2021 and 2022, ADME welcomed 11 boys (sample N=11) from situations of social vulnerability, parental neglect, exposure to deviant parental models, victims of abuse and orphan hood from the region and Porto, with 7 of them to attend compulsory education (from the 6th year to the 12th year), 3 to take a professional course, with the aim of entering the job market (transition) and, still one, to attend a higher education course in Literature. They are all male, aged between 12 and 23 years old, having entered the institution between 2016 and 2019, which confirms that they are adapted to the institution, as they take more than a year (a young person) up to 10 years stay in residential care (average institutionalization time of 5 years). We used the following data collection techniques and instruments: documentary observation about the ADME institution and young people's processes (coded J); informal/natural observation and participant observation in the host institution; semi-structured interview with institutionalized young people (Nj=11), the institution's technical team (Ni= 3 -DT=technical director, AS=social worker and Pi=Teacher placed by the School) and 4 class teachers (Np=4) of the schools where young people attend; 'Focus Group' with young people at the institution about their autonomy, training path and life project; field note records. In terms of ethical-legal procedures and authorization to carry out the study, compliance with the rules of ethics in research, having requested in an official letter to the person responsible for ADME to access the data of the young people studying and, also, in the School Groups where the young people attend, so that we can interview the teachers responsible for class directors. This entire legal procedure was carried out under the existing protocols between the Castelo Branco Polytechnic Institute/Higher School of Education, and the School Groups in the region, having in this particular case submitted the term of free acceptance to the interviewees and/or responsible technicians ADME. Knowledge of consulting diagnoses, social reports and school documents and reports was also provided.

### 3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis and interpretation of data from the techniques and instruments used in the research, enabling the combination and crossing of multiple points of view of the study subjects' responses through triangulation. This triangulation technique constitutes a process of better rooting the knowledge obtained with this qualitative methodology, allowing us to expand and complete the production of knowledge with the sustainability of the grounded theory on the topic addressed. We will analyze the content of the data in the semi-structured interviews carried out with the subjects under study (institutionalized young people; technicians from the ADME professional team and school teachers).

#### 3.1. Analysis of interviews with institutionalized young people

In relation to the interview survey with young people institutionalized in ADME (Nj=11), triangulated with participant observation (records of field notes and documentary analysis), we obtained the following results regarding institutionalized young people, typifying the respective categories of content analysis ( Cat.1=Impact of institutionalization on young people; Cat.2=Reception measure applied to young people; Cat.3=Perception of the school and pedagogical relationship; - academic performance/performance; Cat.6=Support/monitoring provided by ADME; Cat.7=Relationship between ADME and Schools; life and training), with the respective supporting subcategories and text segment evidence issued by the subjects under study.

**Cat. 1.** One of our aims was to analyse the impact of the reception institution on young people and its impact on their school career and life project. The majority of young people have a good impression of ADME,

highlighting the support and advice given by the team of technicians and educators, in addition to the environment at the institution with colleagues (friendly relationships).

**Cat. 2.** Regarding the young people's opinion on the reception measure applied to them, the majority of them consider it 'fair', considering it a 'personal, academic and social added value' for them, highlighting the factor of protection and prevention on the part of the institution, where they generate 'very positive bonds of friendship, interpersonal relationships and coexistence', in addition to the proximity and interrelationship in 'contacts between ADME and the school'. Only one young person (J1) considered the reception measure 'unfair and caused him to suddenly distance himself from his parents/family. Now this issue pointed out by J1 implies a reflection on the ways and procedures of contact with the 'family' during reception, as their removal or separation is a negative factor that weighs on the 'construction of one's life project' (Henriques, 2015; Delgado, 2018; Freitas, 2017)

**Cat. 3.** We highlight the good impression that most young people have with the school, with 2 of them standing out with a 'very positive' conception, which is associated with the pretension of wanting a better future, even if 2 of them affirm a less positive conception good at school, as they don't like studying and consider 'the school environment to be hell' (J4) or 'it's indifferent to me, as I don't relate it to my professional future' (J8). For all young people, school is very important for their future lives and teaches them valid content. On the other hand, most of them consider their colleagues to be 'very cool', making some friends and having a good relationship with their peers, despite 2 of them (J1; J10) not communicating much. While most teachers maintain a 'good pedagogical relationship', with 2 of them (J3; J9) having a 'regular relationship' and 1 of them 'Bad' (J5), due to their difficulties with socio-emotional and communicative skills (Aguiar, 2021; Caio, 2014; Rodrigues, 2018). Two of them repeated the year, but later achieved a certain normality, with the need for pedagogical support at school.

**Cat. 4.** Young people consider that residential care has an influence on their performance and academic performance, as they have a very positive image of ADME, as they practice many activities, play sports, go on trips, have autonomy in decisions and interact with each other and technicians, in such a way that they grew a lot with these value aspects, with repercussions on academic results and their behavior. However, they recognize some differences in their performance and the improvement in their income due to some assiduity and continuity in monitoring by ADME professionals, as they have specific schedules, the imposition of 'rules/norms' that cause them discomfort and habituation, They want greater encouragement and motivation from those responsible for the institution in developing their life project and in the transition to adult life.

**Cat. 5.** In relation to the educational path/trajectory and academic results before and during reception, between the years 2020-2022, they mainly consider the commitment and dedication of ADME managers and professionals and school teachers so that they have good training, good relationships interpersonal skills and better academic results, which confirms literature studies (Del Valle & Arteaga, 2009, cited by Carvalho & Salgueiro, 2019) in relation to 'Regulatory Response Models' (incentives to comply with routines, tasks and obligations), 'Didactic Response Model (dialogue with the young person to understand their concerns, problems and needs in relationships and behaviour's), 'Empathic Response Model' (development of self-esteem, empathy and overcoming conflicts) and 'Relational Response Model' ( affective-emotional relationship and development of socio-emotional skills, in order to promote self-confidence and autonomy). Most of them do not like studying or many 'subjects', which involves some difficulties, especially in mathematics and English, but they are aware that their school career, in terms of 'regular or positive' performance, with two of them saying so 'average' because they are demanding of themselves (J3; J10) and J8, being 'lazy', doesn't have much desire to be in classes. There were 5 young people (J1; J2; J3; J5; J11) who had learning difficulties, but tried hard to succeed at school and not fail. Even so, there were 5 young people (J2; J3; J5; J8 and J11) who had some failures (repetitions), but which were later overcome. The majority do not really like doing their homework, presenting difficulties, requiring support from the institution's technical team.

**Cat. 6.** Regarding the type of socio-pedagogical support provided by the institution and support for studies, the majority highlights the support/counselling given by technicians at the host institution and teachers at the school, through tutorials. However, technicians from the ADME institution recognize the need for more intense and daily supervision, so that young people develop study habits and skills, as well as deepen their 'representations' about school (inadequacy to the rules and regulations) through interactive dialogue. school routines) and the training process.



**Cat. 7.** Regarding the type of relationship maintained between the host institution, the school and teachers, young people identify that ADME technicians/professionals contact the school to exchange various information (about punctuality and absences, school performance and performance, learning difficulties, pedagogical support, behaviour, lack of discipline or disrespect), being duly consulted in everything by teachers and course coordinators. We can say that there is a good logic of interaction and proximity between ADME and the school.

**Cat. 8.** In relation to the intervention challenges presented to the ADME technical team in the social and academic support of young people, they indicate the 'lack of routines' and 'habits of compliance with standards', the very strong presence of 'negative experiences they experienced before institutionalization', the 'adaptation to the institution's family-type environment', the presence of 'periods of academic lack of motivation with certain subjects and learning', the 'lack of concentration, dedication and effort to carry out schoolwork'. However, these professionals and volunteers from the institution recognize that they constitute a 'very interactive group, with capacity for change', the 'organizational capacity of ADME in responding to the desires and needs of young people', the persistence in studying and valuing school more for your future.

**Cat. 9.** Young people are aware that they must improve their academic performance/performance, their own relational behavior, adjusting to the norms of the institution and the school, in order to be able to build their life project: "success at school is an important factor for our development, well-being and integration" (J11). In this sense, the majority do not know exactly what they want for their future, which is understandable because they are still in the process of compulsory schooling, expressing some expectations for personal, social and professional life in their autonomy. But four of them are more convinced of their decisions at a professional level (they attend professional courses and higher education). Between them, J2 and J6 are very clear about what they want (higher education), J7 wants to go to the republican guard and J5 to the army. However, they all know that training is crucial for the future, and they are therefore aware of the need for will and dedication in their training.

### 3.2. Analysis of interviews with school teachers

We carried out semi-structured interviews with 4 class director teachers (Np=4) from schools attended by institutionalized young people from ADME (Castelo Branco School Groups). The teachers available for the study were aged between 35 and 45 years old (=2 teachers, Female=1; Male=1) and 46 to 55 years old (=2 teachers, Female=1; Male=1), with professional experience, between 15 and 25 years of teaching service, with a bachelor's degree or equivalent and a master's degree in teaching. We typified the teachers (Pt1, Pt2, Pt3, Pt4) and established the following categories (subcategories and respective text evidence) for content analysis: Cat.1=Characteristics of institutionalized young people; Cat.2=School adaptation -Integration of young people in the class; Cat.3= School route; Cat.4=Relationships between young people and the class (pedagogical relationship); Cat.5=Support/monitoring given to learning difficulties; Cat.6=Relationship between schools and ADME.

**Cat. 1.** All teachers consider it important to know the characteristics and life stories of institutionalized young people (processes provided by ADME), so that they can learn about their educational needs, the problems and difficulties in the teaching-learning process and how they should carry out the intervention school: "I have direct access to the information given by the ADME technical director...they are young people who talk little about it" (Pt1); "Their story demonstrates who they are and what they need to be able to develop pedagogical strategies for them" (Pt2); "We must be condescending towards them due to their life history in the past to individualize our pedagogical intervention" (Pt3); "Their life story constitutes a risk factor in their school career, so it is important to provide support and understand them in their actions" (Pt4). In other words, teachers know and respect the young people's past, re-emphasizing their life stories and try to intervene in an individualized, participatory and interactive way, providing them with the necessary support for their integration into the school/classes.

**Cat. 2.** Teachers identify the process of adaptation/integration of institutionalized young people in school and classes, having a 'democratic' attitude (Pt1; Pt3), 'interactive participation' (Pt3) or 'enabling good adaptation' (Pt4), but everyone recognizes that this adaptive and inclusion process takes time, and it is therefore normal for them to need support and counseling to integrate into classes. The classmates of these institutionalized young people know their life stories and express their support/friendship and affection, without stigmatization and school exclusion from the class, on the contrary, they try to include them in the educational process provided by the school and in the educational coexistence.

**Cat. 3.** Teachers consider that the school contributes to the training and socio-educational path of young people and, consequently, in the development of their personal and socio-professional life projects. 'Socialization is not easy' (Pt2; Pt4); 'They need our support and dedication to integrate' (Pt3), 'Our participation' (Pt1). All teachers state that academic performance is different among institutionalized young people, some 'try hard, commit themselves, but need personal and academic guidance' (Pt1; Pt3), others 'express a lot of difficulties in some subjects, especially in mathematics' (Pt1) and some of them had 'no interest in learning, a reaction against studying and carrying out tasks' (Pt4). Teachers generally consider that 'uncontrolled impulses', 'aggressiveness' and 'lack of motivation for studying' are aspects that young people manifest in their daily behavior, which is why some young people have low academic success and sometimes repeat (repetitions between 1 or 2 times), requiring individualized or specific support. It was evident in the teachers' statements that institutionalization (trauma). It has consequences for their performance and academic performance and, therefore, they need psycho-pedagogical guidance from the school.

**Cat. 4.** Teachers of classes of institutionalized young people at risk consider that the 'condition of institutionalization has some consequences on relationships with the class, as they express a certain discontent and aggressiveness' (Pt2), but in general they do not consider it decisive, with divergences on this issue, with different perceptions in the classroom context itself. However, at the beginning the 'relationships are difficult' (Pt1; Pt4), since this 'relationship directly interferes with the young people's life project and socio-educational path' (Pt3). Based on the intervention carried out by teachers, in 'teamwork' (Pt1; Pt2), they manage to improve coexistence and social and educational relationships between them (educational climate in the class): 'It is from relationships with others that we determine the future inside and outside the school space' (Pt3), since the 'intervention carried out directly interferes with the life project and socio-educational path of these institutionalized young people' (Pt4).

**Cat. 5.** The teachers are all of the opinion that the traumas that drag these institutionalized young people harm their training and academic performance with consequences for academic success, as 'They need help to continue their studies' (Pt2), as support must be given 'as much by the school, as well as by the foster home' (Pt1; Pt2; Pt3), but 'if there is no support, it is more difficult at the school level to reverse the difficulties of these young people' (Pt4). Teachers are unanimous in recognizing the lack of families in these young people, as it brings negative marks on their school and learning trajectory (academic performance).

**Cat. 6.** The class teachers unanimously recognize that the communication and interaction relationship between schools, class directors and ADME is 'Very good' (Pt1; Pt3; Pt4) or 'Excellent' (Pt2), with there always being '(...) something in this collaboration to improve' (Pt4). The need for common projects between schools and institutions that care for children/young people at risk, oriented towards 'coexistence', 'socio-emotional skills' and 'interculturality' were mentioned by teachers, considering it an added value to improve school inclusion.

### 3.3. Analysis of interviews with the institution's technicians/professionals

We carried out semi-structured interviews with the ADME technical team (Ni=4), consisting of: technical director (Dt) with a master's degree in the field of sport; the social worker (As), graduated in Social Work and with two years at the institution; and a teacher placed at the institution (Pi), with experience in primary and secondary education and has spent 4 years at the institution. These individuals range in age from 35 to 48 and reside in Castelo Branco and are always available to young people with their needs and problems. From content analysis to semi-structured interviews, we established the following categories (with subcategories and respective text evidence): Cat.1=Characteristics of institutionalized young people and families; Cat.2=Integration of young people in ADME and respective difficulties; Cat.3=Social relationships of young people in ADME; Cat.4=ADME responses and social/school intervention; Cat.5= Trajectory and life project of young people.

**Cat. 1.** The members of the technical team consider it extremely important for the intervention and responses given by ADME to know the life history and respective characteristics of institutionalized young people, as well as their families, as it 'makes it easier for us to contribute to their lives, to act and know how to deal with them' (As). Many of the life stories have to do with family neglect, vulnerability, abandonment, family disjunction, mistreatment and parental impediment (imprisonment of one of the parents). The person in charge recognizes that 'When the boys enter, they usually do not understand how they will proceed in their lives and, therefore, the teachings given are useful for their life project over time' (Dt). The entire technical team is unanimous that the past and life history influence their socio-educational path and life project and, consequently, young people need to overcome these traumas and difficulties with the support of the institution and school, as 'the lack of family is

fundamental for them' (As; Pi), although they 'don't always take the young person's institutionalization situation well' (Dt), or 'They don't see it favourably, but they end up accepting it' (As). Furthermore, they consider that the 'family-youth' relationship depends on the 'individuality of each young person' (Pi), often 'Many parents are absent, generating insecurities in young people and negative behaviours' (As), which can sometimes 'affect the young person's well-being, or not... is difficult to predict' (Dt), as is the case in 'constructing one's life project' (Pi). In other words, in general, in the opinion of the technical team, contacts with families do not contribute to an adequate socio-educational path for young people, as 'They are people incapable of leading a normalized life' (Dt).

**Cat. 2.** The members of the technical team consider that young people normally react well, however 'There always comes a time when they feel trapped in movement and freedom' (Dt), and sometimes they manifest 'Aggressiveness and impulsiveness in their reactions...but then they learn to deal with impulses and emotions' (As), but the intervention made makes them 'Learn the need for social and emotional skills at a relational level' (Pi). The institutionalization of these young people and their inappropriate and inappropriate behaviours sometimes constitute a disturbing factor for their educational path and life project (Dt; Pi). Young people are encouraged to know how to deal with feelings of rejection, revolt, '(...) their frustrations and impulses, as it is a learning experience for them and for us, being a practice to be explored together in the intervention' (Dt), in a 'Close monitoring of each one of them (As), to help them overcome the difficulties of their journey.'

**Cat. 3.** ADME is considered by the technical team as a family, young people feel in a welcoming and familiar environment 'They create great bonds with us and between them' (Pi), generating 'An excellent relationship between us and them' (As) having as a reference the 'Technicians and professionals at the institution set a good example and support' (Dt). The institution's technicians create emotional and friendly bonds with young people, also having a good relational and communicational coexistence between them, despite the fact that 'each one has their own personality' (As). The close connections and coexistence in the institution produce a satisfactory and pleasant environment of trust among young people: 'There has to be a good relationship between everyone' (Dt), 'These young people are different days every day, and that's why I see this work as a mission and an exciting challenge' (As), since these 'Relationships permeate very good socio-educational actions for young people' (Pi) at the level affective-emotional, communicational and relational. While the difficulties or weaknesses encountered with young people are at the level of routines and rules, to overcome the 'marks' brought from the past and the problems experienced at family level and this 'conditions our work from the outset' (As). Despite this identification and difficulties, the positive discourse of the professionals and the proximity between them know how to extract 'Their strengths in a very interactive group with the capacity or desire for change' (Pi) and, in this way we find 'The challenges of overcoming all days of doing more and better, of innovating and finding appropriate strategies' (Dt).

**Cat. 4.** The role of the technical team and ADME is to 'Make them safe, confident and happy' (As), 'Educate them to create life goals' (Dt), in order to 'Enable their inclusion in school and society, favouring the construction of their life project' (Pi) and then 'There is good communication and socio-pedagogical and psychological support' (Dt) for all institutionalized young people. When they arrive at the institution, young people not be motivated to learn 'We try to make them motivated themselves and enjoy acquiring knowledge' (As), that is, 'Initially strong and gradual supervision is necessary, so that they acquire some autonomy' (Dt). It is true in the opinion of the technical team that 'These young people do not have study habits so we have to intervene little by little' (Pi) and if necessary '(...) in more individualized monitoring as we do not have specific hours for them to study and Sometimes we have the help of the Teacher assigned by the School Group (As). The young people's responses do not entirely coincide with those of the technical team, as they state that they only study when they have attendance/tests, while others have the power of initiative to study 'two or three hours while others no more than thirty minutes a day' (To the).

On the other hand, the institution maintains good interaction and collaboration with schools in an 'Operation on a weekly basis, to exchange information about students' (Dt), therefore there is 'Good coordination between ADME and schools, contributing to the young people's school career' (Pi), such that there was 'In terms of school results, the majority improved a lot' (Dt). On the other hand, the activities developed by ADME contribute to the adaptation of young people in social, school and community terms.

**Cat. 5.** The members of the technical team consider that the life project of these young people at risk are the perspectives they have in relation to their future (perceptions, expectations), relating in this journey the determining social, educational and professional aspects, but requiring a 'development adequate, with self-confidence and a sense of responsibility' (Dt; Pi). This intervention work is carried out and worked on by the

entire technical team, educators and staff of the institution. They consider that 'knowing how to listen' (As) 'makes them analyze their decisions and have self-esteem' (Pi), as the 'function of the institution is to help them build their life project' (Dt). In fact, all the intervention and guidance given by the institution's staff is channeled '(...) into the path that young people have to follow in their lives' (Pi), corresponding to '(...) the incalculable socio-educational value of setting objectives for development of the life project' (Pi) with 'support in the social and relational sphere with others' (As). Finally, the institution maintains a 'Connection of more than 50% with young people who left and we continue to have contact with these young people' (Dt).

#### 4. Results and Reflections

Reception is a transitional condition until it is possible to find a more stable solution for young people at risk, with institutionalization requiring an appropriate intervention planned according to the specificities of each young person, identifying what they need so that they can achieve their goals. (Carvalho & Cruz, 2015). In this sense, the work developed by the ADME technical team constitutes an essential tool for the school journey, life project and future socio-professional integration of young people, by developing in them a sense of responsibility, self-confidence and self-esteem in order to enhance the process of growth and autonomy and the ability to make decisions and solve problems (Rodrigues, 2019; Silva; Oliveira & Marques, 2019). This work is carried out by the institution's professionals, however, it would be ideal to have a specific service that worked in parallel with the institutions, through a type of tutor who would accompany young people on their school journey and then in the first years of their transition to society.

Young people and the institution's technical team mention the importance of the answers given to the construction of their life project. From our perspective, institutions should have dedicated professionals to work on issues of autonomy, from the young person's entry into the institution until their departure, as longer-term follow-up after institutionalization would contribute to better protection of them. The fear of life outside the institution is something real felt by young people during the interviews.

It is true that ADNE provides, as far as possible, with living conditions for young people in care that are as close as possible to the family context, allowing for the existence of an individualized and personalized routine and a favorable emotional relationship (Mateus, 2020). It is essential to define limits and norms in the day-to-day lives of young people so that, when they act inappropriately in specific situations, they have the ability to self-assess justice and correct their own actions, since this is the existence of these imposed limits and norms (institution and school) that will allow them to have this capacity and build their autonomy process in a structured and safe way (Moreira, 2018). However, the characteristics and history of each young person make it difficult not only to achieve ADNE's objective of providing a family environment, but also to create the conditions for their autonomy. From our perspective, social and school intervention should aim to work on young people's skills, in order to lead to the promotion of autonomy, based on a relationship of trust. In this way, the role of the technical team and teachers and the models they disseminate becomes fundamental, as young people in care do not always have positive references that allow them to face the challenges of autonomy, such as the ability to plan their lives (project of life), to develop healthy and stable relationships and that has the ability to counterbalance the emotional and cognitive components (Carvalho & Cruz, 2015; Carvalho & Salgueiro, 2019; Fonseca, 2023; Rodrigues, 2018).

Indeed, we know from the literature that autonomy and the transition to adulthood is a complex process, producing transformations (Gomes, 2019; Pereira, 2016; Silva, 2022). In the case of institutionalized young people, some of them have experienced disturbing situations, with an impact on the development of life skills, which negatively influence this journey. The acquisition of skills for life autonomy must, therefore, begin as early as possible. However, it is not always possible to develop and promote autonomy early, and this is only worked on during adolescence, a phase of life in which it becomes effectively relevant given the proximity of leaving the institution. For this work to be effective, the intervention carried out with young people must be socio-affective and behavioral, through demonstration and experimentation (Leal et al., 2018; Mateus, 2020). In this way, the skills training process directs us towards two fields of work: skills at the level of relational/personal autonomy and skills at the level of functional autonomy. The transition to adulthood is experienced by all young people as an important event which entails many changes and therefore can be experienced with a feeling of insecurity because one considers one does not have the capacity to do so (Moreira, 2018). Contrary to the possibility of young people living in a stable family environment making a more conscious and safer transition to adulthood (Gomes, 2019), a considerable number of young people in care, after leaving the institution, will not be able to count on family support. for this transition. Therefore, the skills acquired during their reception will be decisive for them to achieve successful autonomy (Brandão, 2015; Saltão, 2022; Silva, 2022).

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