

Fostering Resilience: The Child's Home Boarding School as Seen by its Graduates from a Distant Perspective

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Abstract

The article relates to the therapeutic and educational impacts of The Child Home boarding school, from the perspective of its graduates some 65 years ago. The research aim is to examine the processes and experiences undergone in the school, and to study its unique therapeutic and educational attributes. The research method is qualitative, based on semi-structured interviews with 25 graduates. They perceive the physical and emotional care administered as well as the processes and experiences undergone as beneficial and optimal. They regard the school in its inherent format as being a sound substitute for a dysfunctional home and a model for the ideal boarding school - one that could serve as a source of inspiration for boarding schools operating today.

Keywords: Resilience; children's boarding school; positive total institution; attachment; educational staff.

Introduction

In the 1950s, at a time when immigration to Israel was soaring, in particular from countries in the eastern hemisphere, a need was felt to find a suitable framework for child care and education. This was especially acute in the case of parents who were unable to provide for their children due to difficult living conditions, as well as for children who had been separated from their parents or were orphaned, perhaps after their parents perished in the Holocaust, leaving them with no one to sponsor them or provide them with proper care. Such cases were generally identified by the welfare authorities and were referred to educational and care frameworks. Children were

transferred to educational institutions operating on the lines of boarding schools.

One of the first boarding schools for children, opened in the 1940s, in Israel, was Child's Home. In 1950 a Holocaust survivor from Hungary was appointed principal of the school, a position he was to hold for the next 35 years. Immediately on assuming his position he opened a first grade class, followed by an additional class each year thereafter, up to fourth grade. Graduates of the fourth grade were sent to other boarding schools. The most significant common denominator among the children who were sent to Child's Home in the 1950s was educational and economic hardships.

The educators, headed by the principal and his wife, as well as the institution's matron and caregivers, provided the children with kind and loving care. They had not been formally trained in child care and learned the ropes only through self-instruction on the job.

Despite the separation from the parents and residence in the boarding school – not the ideal place to raise children (Dozier et al., 2014) – the Child's Home graduates we located grew up in most cases to be competent, learned adults holding respectable positions and raising stable families.

The present research study examines the processes and experiences undergone by children in Child's Home, while scrutinizing the caregiving and educational characteristics that were unique to the boarding school. The aim is to see if they can serve as an inspiration for boarding schools operating today, perhaps as an operational paradigm that could be adapted to the realities of life in the 21st century. The study is based on descriptions and perceptions of the period spent in the boarding school, as seen by the graduates from a 65-year perspective – a period that apparently made a decisive contribution to their lives as adults.

Theoretical Background

Boarding Schools for Children and youths

Assignment of children to boarding schools (or out-of-home placement of children, in modern terminology) generally stems from the prevalence of difficult living conditions at home, such as physical and emotional neglect, and social and academic deprivation, preventing optimal development (Zaira, Attar-Schwartz & Benbenishty, 2012).

The transfer of a child from the home to a boarding school challenges the child's adaptive resources. The period of transition to the boarding school is one fraught with additional stress, over and above that which was inherent in the situation prior to the intervention of welfare authorities. It is a period characterized by uncertainty around the issue of leaving home, as well as the question of the boarding school itself and the future that awaits the child there.

On arriving at the boarding school the child feels an outsider and must get used to a new place, new friends and new staff (Shechory & Sommerfeld, 2007).

Findings in Israel regarding adaptation to boarding schools point to differences in the level and type of adaptation. Some of the differences stem from the personal and familial attributes brought by the youngsters to the boarding schools, while others may be ascribed to the complex experiences the youngsters undergo in the boarding school framework itself (Schiff & Benbenishty, 2003; Schiff & Kosher, 2005). Shechory & Sommerfeld (2007) found that children who were sent from home at a young age (before 7) experienced fewer difficulties in adaptation: they suffered less from social problems, depression and anxiety as compared to children who left home at an older age. The researchers explained that the duration and intensity of the injuries suffered at home could serve as indicators regarding the severity of the clinical picture. Bidding farewell to the home at an early age shortens the duration of the damaging period, with its destructive consequences.

A research study conducted by Pinchover & Attar-Schwartz (2012) on a sample of 1,314 students in care- and rehabilitation-oriented boarding schools found that the climate in the school and relations with peer groups and staff members were highly significant factors contributing to the students' welfare and performance. Another study on a sample of 93 youths in out-of-home placement found many positive changes in their lives. Over time they change their behaviour, learn to distinguish between good and bad, understand the boundaries of acceptable conduct, and in addition receive a supportive environment which they begin to esteem (Davidson-Arad, 2005). This process helps them once their stay in the boarding school comes to an end and they begin to apply the things they learned there (Benbenishty, 2009; Broad, 1999).

Research has been carried out in the past on the impact that boarding schools have had on the later lives of the inmates there, many of which pointed to their negative aspects – see the review by Hamilton-Giachritsis and Garcia Quiroga, 2014, which is in line with the United Nations recommendation to close these schools, based on the belief that they were an unsuitable framework in which to raise children (Dozier et al., 2014; United Nations, Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2009).

Despite this recommendation, and in view of the fact that there are still vast numbers of children who are in need of an alternative framework to home (neglected waifs who roam the streets, children who have lost their parents, and others), boarding schools continue to offer a reasonable solution. It is therefore essential that the boarding school environment be distinctly better than the one in which the child has grown up. Research efforts are required in order to determine ways in which the boarding school environment can be the best possible one for the child's development. Despite the negative effect that time spent in such an institution can have on children (Johnson et al., 2006), it

appears that this experience can also have a positive impact on children's lives (Garcia Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2016; Whetten et al., 2009). Indeed, graduates of boarding schools have been known to give this verbal expression; for example, Israeli researchers who interviewed graduates of boarding schools on the period they spent there found feelings of satisfaction and references to the period as being good, characterized by mental, social and physical well-being (Benbenishty & Zaira, 2008).

Many factors can make a favourable contribution to life in the boarding school in offering a suitable alternative to home. Alongside a study of these factors, an investigation should be conducted into the possibility of boarding schools helping to develop resilience in its inmates.

Resilience as a Defence Mechanism

For many years researchers focused on the risk factors that create emotional and behavioural problems in children and the adverse effects they have later on in life as adults (Werner, 2005). This focus created the impression that exposure in childhood to traumas such as abandonment, removal from the home, sickness of the parent, alcoholism or other family problems, would inevitably lead to negative developmental outcomes. Among other things, this impression stemmed from the fact that the researchers examined the lives of "victims" rather than the lives of those who had survived despite the difficulties.

From the early 1980s a change began to be evident in the approach. Long-range research that monitored individuals from childhood to adulthood consistently showed that only a small number of children who had been exposed to risk factors actually developed emotional disorders or behavioural problems (Werner & Smith, 1992). These findings constituted the basis for examining the phenomenon of resilience, a dynamic process that leads to positive adaptation despite adversity – an ability to bounce back. Researchers suggest that psychological resilience is related to personal and environmental attributes that allow a person to stand firm in the face of traumatizing situations, to grow in spite of hardships, and return to a level of robustness after coping with obstacles and challenges (Bonanno, 2004).

Defence or risk factors have been identified that reduce or raise the probability of resilience. The environmental defence factors that were found to mitigate the impact of traumatic events and contribute to the development of resilience include, among other things, support, closeness with attachment figures (McFarlane & Van Hoof, 2009), reliance on adults in the community (emotional support, advice), a preferred figure who serves as a source of emulation, youth counsellors, church members, supervision by and contact between community members (Theron, Theron & Malindi, 2012), and a religious environment that gives meaning to life (Werner & Smith, 1992).

Exposure to traumatic events often prepares the person for better adaptation in the future, an outcome of which is development of a consolidated identity (Werner, 2005). A number of long-range research studies examined the phenomenon from childhood to adulthood. Such a study, conducted in Hawaii, examined development from birth to middle age (age 40) (Werner & Smith, 1992), focusing on the effect of a number of biological and psychosocial risk factors, stressful life events and defence factors in a group of 698 children who were born in 1955 on the island of Kauai. The researchers who tracked the children found that in adulthood the vast majority of them had succeeded in maintaining marriages, family frameworks and steady jobs, challenging the myth according to which a child who grows up in a "risk group" is destined to be a life loser. It was found that defence factors have a greater impact than risk factors on the lives of people who succeeded despite difficulties and against all odds.

Attachment Figures as a Protective Element

Children coming into the world have a primal need to form an emotional attachment to those caring for them, in particular the mother, who is with them from the moment of birth. This attachment is essential for sound emotional and social development (Bowlby, 1982). In the first years of his life every child develops his own mode of attachment that is the outcome of the attitude of significant people around him. The commonest form of attachment – the secure attachment – forms the basis for sound emotional and social development (Ainsworth, 1967). Healthy youths who are happy and sure of themselves generally come from families in which both the parents give extensively of their time and attention (Bowlby, 1988). The first years are those which determine if the child will develop a secure attachment or one that is characterized by anxiety or avoidance. According to Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) the process of consolidating the attachment could continue up to age 4, when the child forms a special attachment to specific people.

Bowlby and many of his successors also recognize the possibility of changes in the nature of the attachment due to meaningful experiences over the years. Research studies attest to the fact that it is possible to shift from, say, an insecure or anxious attachment, to one that is secure as a result of contact with stable caregivers who in practice are there in lieu of the parents, providing the children with kindness and love (Waters et al., 2000). The very presence of a steady external figure who attends to the needs of the child over a period of time, helps him and supports him, could create in the child a sense of security and alter the anxious pattern of attachment that characterized him in the past (Garcia Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2016; Gur, 2006; Pace & Zavattini, 2010). The greater the trust the child places in the staff and the

firmer his perception of their representing a secure anchor, the less will he display depression, anger and behavioural problems (Pinchover & Attar-Schwartz, 2012). He could also improve his relations with his parents and his perspective regarding them (Gur, 2006).

Presence of Siblings as an Element of Protection

Numerous research studies have focused on the special attachment that exists between siblings, especially during the childhood years (Cicirelli, 2006; Gass et al., 2013). Researchers agree that especially close relations exist between siblings and that these relations could mitigate responses to situations that are fraught with tension, thus improving adaptation to new frameworks (ibid). Special importance is attached to the connection between siblings in cases where they suffer from social isolation, and in this context such a connection is more important than one with members of the peer group (Cicirelli, 2013).

Cicirelli (2013) offers three possible explanations for sibling support: 1) Attachment Theory, according to which in parallel with attachment to the mother there is also attachment to a big brother, and the wiser and stronger he is, the more he is able to offer security and help in stressful situations; b) Normative Commitment Theory, according to which most bigger brothers have been educated by their parents to help their younger brothers and they feel a commitment to act in accordance with these norms (Rittenour et al., 2007); 3) Exchange Theory: in reality commitment to others is contingent on mutual help. A brother is committed to help his brother if in the past his brother helped him, but even when such mutuality does not exist, e.g. where the big brother has not received help from his younger brother, he will in many cases tend to help him based on previous mutual help received, and not necessarily from the brother in question (Brody, Masatche & Noberini, 1983).

Positive Total Institution

The total institution, with its negative characteristics, exacts a toll from those confined to it – in the way of loss of identity, hostility between staff and dependents, and reliance of the dependents on the staff – and this is perceived as a hindrance to effecting a change in the residents (Goffman, 1961). Following criticism over these attributes, changes and improvements have been incorporated in a large number of such institutions, eliminating to a great extent the coercion and suppression that were practised there (Scott, 2010). Mauselis (1971) claimed that these charges are nullified when entry into the institution is voluntary or when it operates humanely, nurtures, and treats its dependents with respect.

A child who is forced to leave home and join a boarding school will therefore be expected to describe his initial stay in the institution in negative

terms. However, in the course of time, after experiencing kindness and care from the professional staff and management, and exposure to physical aspects that impart a warm, non-alienating ambience, his impression will give way to one that is more positive. White (2004) states that narrowing the gap that separates caregivers from dependents and incorporating a certain degree of autonomy in the dependents could mitigate the negative experiences and turn the place into a positive one with potential for growth and change. It should be noted that neither the totalitarian system itself in all such institutions nor its impacts are identical. Their adverse influence also depends on the importance that society attaches to spending time in them (Benbenishty, 2009).

Aim of the Research

The aim of the present research is to understand and examine the processes and experiences that children underwent in Child's Home. The research is also aimed at studying the therapeutic and educational characteristics of the boarding school while determining whether it could serve as an inspiration for boarding schools operating today, even if only to a partial extent, after adapting it to the realities of the 21st century.

The above is based on the descriptions and perspective of graduates who spent their childhood years there some 65 years ago. According to their testimonies, their stay there made a decidedly beneficial contribution to their lives as adults. To date only a few qualitative research studies have been conducted on the perceptions of boarding school graduates regarding their stay in institutions of this kind.

Method

Participants

A total of 25 graduates of Child's Home took part in the research, which also happens to be the total number of children who attended the boarding school in any given year during the 1950s. The participants, currently in their seventies on average, comprise 16 men and nine women, most of them married and parents (Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of the Participants in the Research

Name	Age	Marital status + number of children	Education/ profession	Years in the school (age)	Siblings	Family background
1. Emmie	68	Widow + 3	Kindergarten teacher	9–11	One brother	Young mother, widow in dire financial straits
2. Sam	66	Married + 4	Teacher	2–8		Abusive parents
3. George	70	Married + 4	Teacher holding a	10–12		Dysfunctional family due to

			senior managerial position in the Ministry of Education			the father's imprisonment
4. Josef	68	Married + 4	Teacher	4.5–10.5		Dysfunctional family and abusive mother
5. Benny	69	Married + 4	Economist, bank employee	6–11	One brother	New immigrants with financial problems
6. Nelly	68	Married + 2	Quality controller	7–11	One brother	Widowed mother, financial problems
7. Gerry	71	Married + 3	Accountant	6–8		Widowed father, financial problems
8. Alex	64	Married + 3	Economist in a high tech firm	6–12		Widowed father, financial problems
9. Sofi	68	Married + 3	Librarian	6–7		Dysfunctional family, financial problems
10. Anna	69	Married + 4	Printing press owner	4–10		Orphaned, under grandmother's difficult care
11. Rachel	70	Married + 2	Lecturer with Ph.D. in education	3.5–7		Widowed father struggling to raise the family
12. Chris	72	Married + 3	Captain in the merchant navy	6–9	One sister	Widowed father, financial problems
13. Kim	72	Single	Actress, high school education	3.5–9.5		Orphaned, under grandmother's difficult care
14. Amber	71	Married + 3	High school education	3.5–8.5	One sister	Immigrated without parents, relations raising her with difficulty
15. Rose	71	Divorced + 2	Owner of a boutique, high	9–12		Widowed mother,

			school education			financial problems
16. James	70	Married + 2	Owner of a bakery, high school education	6–10		Parents abandoned him and returned to Germany
17. Liam	72	Married + 4	Teacher	6–11		Immigrated without parents, relations with financial problems
18. Jacob	70	Divorced + 3	Mechanical engineer, industrial plant manager	6–10		Divorced parents, financial problems
19. Beth	69	Divorced + 2	Kindergarten teacher	6–10		Deceased father, violent stepfather
20. Nick	66	Married + 3	Judge	8.5–10	Two brothers	Violent, alcoholic father, ailing mother
21. Lilly	69	Married + 1	Kindergarten teacher	6–9	One sister	Immigrated without parents, under grandmother's difficult care
22. Steve	72	Married + 3	Economist, managing director of steel firm	4–9		Immigrated without parents, relations with financial problems
23. Roger	70	Married + 3	Lecturer with Ph.D. in education	9-11		Widowed mother, financial problems
24. Robert	70	Married + 3	Construction technical engineer	9-12	One brother	Widowed father, financial problems
25. Taylor	71	Married + 3	Doctor	6–10	One brother	Mentally ill mother, blind father, raising children with difficulty

* Not their real names.

Table 1 shows that the age of the graduates ranges from 64 to 72 (M=69.75). Of the graduates, 20 are married, three are divorced, one is single and one is widowed. All (with the exception of one) have children. Most of them (n=19) have academic degrees. The graduates have a variety of professions: teaching (n=7), accountancy/economics (n=4), lecturing (n=2), engineering (n=2), and private businesses (n=3). There is also a sea captain, a judge, an actress, a librarian and a quality controller. The participants stayed in the boarding school for an average of 3.8 years, at ages ranging from 2 to 12. Nine of the 25 graduates had brothers who were with them in the boarding school. Most of them belonged to families which for various reasons found it difficult to raise their children (see details in Theme 1 below).

Research Tool

The research tool was the semi-structured interview, based on the Interview Guide. This kind of interview consists of face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and interviewee on the subject of the research. We chose this tool since it allows the interviewer to gain in-depth insight into the interviewee's perspective while clarifying issues that were raised by the interviewee but do not appear in the Interview Guide (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Shkedi, 2003). The Interview Guide included principally questions on the period spent in Child's Home and its impacts on the interviewee. The Interview Guide also included short informative questions on personal, familial and occupational background.

Procedure

The 25 research participants, who stayed in Child's Home in the period 1950 to 1960, were located by the researchers and agreed to be interviewed. The current institution's management provided the researchers with a list of 40 graduates, of whom the researchers succeeded in locating 25 (some had passed away, some were abroad, and the others could not be traced).

The participants were assured that they would remain anonymous and that no identifying details about them would be published. In all the interviews only the interviewee and interviewer were present. The interviews lasted about one hour on average. Statements were recorded verbatim after the interviewees were requested to adjust their speech to the speed at which the interviewers were able to record everything. The number of participants (25) represented to a large extent the saturation point: by and large, the last interviewees repeated statements that had been heard from the previous interviewees and added little new information.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data in the research was carried out in four stages: primary analysis, mapping analysis, focused analysis, and theoretical analysis (see Shhkedi, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The primary analysis stage included initial classification of attitudes and perceptions with a view to identifying themes and performing a careful examination of the data. Mapping analysis in the second stage was intended for classifying the themes found and for distinguishing between them. Focused analysis included concentration on central themes that were added to the focused, rich and significant description based on the two previous stages. Theoretical analysis was intended to present conceptual explanations for the phenomena being investigated, based on the data found and the research and theoretical literature in the field.

Determination of reliability and validity in the present research was done by open and transparent presentation of the perceptions and views that emerged from the research from the start of the process to its end. Such transparency allows the impartial reader to relate to the research and examine it according to its unique conceptual context. The present research is accompanied by quotations from the participants' statements, facilitating identification of the themes and subsequent establishment of the discussion on factual ground. Identification of each of the themes was based on the statements of at least five interviewees.

Findings

From the statements made by the interviewees, a total of eight themes stood out which referred to the background from which they came, adaptation and life in the boarding school, the totalitarian framework, the resilience they developed, and their present life as adults.

Theme 1: The Children Came from Broken Homes

The 25 participants in the research came to Child's Home from homes that are defined in the literature as broken, where the families were not able for various reasons to raise their children (Wells & Rankin, 1991).

Five of the participants were sent to Child's Home after arriving in Israel without their parents, and after no relatives were found who would take them in. Two of them, sisters, were smuggled from Iraq with the help of relatives in Iran. Another two left their parents behind in their country of origin. One, who was 6 years old, came from Iran together with his 4-year-old brother with the help of the welfare authorities. A girl arrived through the same help together with four sisters and a brother when their ailing mother was no longer able to look after them.

Three participants were brought to Child's Home by the welfare authorities after removing them from their homes because of a violent or

abusive parent. Josef states: "I remember my mother abusing me physically all the time. The abuse reached such proportions that I lost an eye. I was taken away from home ... from there I was transferred to the kindergarten in Child's Home. The Child's Home principal knew of the abuse I had received at home and did not allow my father to take me home [in days off]."

Fourteen participants came from dysfunctional families that found it difficult to raise their children, whether it was because of the death of one of the parents or their absence, dire economic conditions, or a want of mental resources to cope with their situation. Jacob relates: "My parents were Holocaust survivors. We had financial difficulties. My parents divorced, I ran away from home and they couldn't find me for three days. I don't know how I survived. At the age of four and a half my mother ... cleaned hallways in buildings for a living, with me trailing her. People from a Christian mission saw me and suggested I be taken to a Christian boarding school ... there I was beaten badly. They wanted to convert me. I was hospitalized, and was taken away from there by the welfare authorities ... six months later I ended up in Child's Home."

One of the participants was abandoned by his parents when they got divorced and left separately for Germany. Another was transferred to Child's Home after his father was sent to prison. Taylor, an additional participant, was taken away from his parents by court order, against their wishes, and against his own wishes because of his mother's mental illness and his father's blindness. He says: "My parents were able to bring me into the world after a long period of trying, during which they suffered greatly. My father was already 42 years old. After several years the welfare agency decided that my parents were not fit to raise me and my younger brothers because of my mother's schizophrenia and the blindness that had afflicted my father. The authorities felt they knew better than my parents as to what was best for me and simply severed us from them in an indescribably cruel way. So at the age of 5 I began my debilitating journey, in the course of which I arrived at Child's Home."

The 25 participants experienced crises of one kind or another before they were transferred to Child's Home. Some of the parents did not have basic parental abilities or skills. Some were apparently not fit to develop proper communication in their children (Maccoby, 1992), engage them in close interaction through which to develop pro-social behaviour (Paterson, 1992), develop a positive self-image in them, and provide them with a model of positive, effective and mature behaviour (Sroufe & Fleener, 1986). To all appearances, had they not been transferred to a boarding school, most of them might have suffered additional injuries and crises, possibly affecting their chances of growing up in human conditions, and developing normative, healthy and mature personalities.

Theme 2: Adaptation and Religious Holidays as a Time of Crisis

The period of entry into the boarding school was hard. It was a stage of transition between severance from the home and gradual adaptation to a new framework that provided care and education. Generally relationships began to be formed with the staff and the peer group within a short time, although there were children whose integration was more difficult and prolonged.

Some participants described this difficult period. George: "The first night [in the boarding school] I felt the zap. You are suddenly alone in the world. I am alone at night ... one of the children volunteered to give me the upper bunk. I had a headache, and they wanted to be nice to my mother [who brought me to Child's Home]. This was a huge sacrifice since the person who does not have an upper bunk has nowhere to sit. After my mother left I found myself with five children furious at me for having taken the upper bunk from Rom (not his real name), and one boy stood behind me and said, 'You took Rom's bed.' I turned around and smacked him. Suddenly there was silence and each one went to his bed. I cried all night. I then realized that I would have to deal with the new life."

The initial period in the boarding school was also characterized by a number of attempts on the part of the children to run away. In Taylor's words, "After we were brought to Child's Home I and my younger brother, who was then in kindergarten, made repeated attempts to run away from there. It was only after two months that I resigned myself to my destiny and my brother's, and stopped my attempts at returning home."

During moments of crisis, when the daily routine was disturbed, several children would be seized with severe homesickness for their parents. This was manifested in attempts at escaping Child's Home to return home, in bedwetting, and in bitter tears, mainly at night. Moments of crisis occurred especially during the holidays, when parents and other relatives would arrive to take the children home to spend the day there. Many children feared that none of their relatives would come to take them. Roger has the following story about one of the holidays: "Those visiting days were difficult for both the caregivers and the children. The pain I felt when no one came to visit me was as intense as the pain I felt on my first day in Child's Home." A number of participants relate that they remained in the boarding school during the religious holidays since there was nobody to take them. They were extremely envious of children who left the place during the holidays to be with their families. Their sense of abandonment during these periods is a recurrent theme in the statements of a number of participants.

Theme 3: Traumas

Children who have been taken away from their parents to live in a boarding school are exposed to stresses that could be traumatic. The start of intervention in their condition, followed by separation from the home and arrival at the boarding school can traumatize children due to their sudden severance from their parents (their first figures of attachment) or from others who cared for them, and their need to adapt to the place, to friends and to a new caregiving staff (Shechory & Sommerfeld, 2007). The very stay in the boarding school could also be traumatic. Children in boarding schools could suffer from social isolation, from taunts and even from sexual abuse from staff members or other children (e.g. Grier, 2013).

An examination of the content of the memories evoked during the interviews with some of the participants revealed severe and traumatic experiences. To begin with, there is content that relates to the suffering endured at home and the sudden severance from the home on being sent to Child's Home. According to Emmie: "I hardly remember anything about the boarding school, I suppressed everything. Perhaps I shouldn't have suppressed my mother's dire situation, for which she had to send me and my brother to the boarding school ... the only experience I remember is going home on our own steam for the holiday. Nobody opened the door to us. We knocked on the door but nobody opened it, we sat on the steps and wept and finally went back to the boarding school." Benny refers to the harshness of the sudden cut-off from home: "How did my mother have the heart to send two small children, ask her, not me, I feel the terrible pain I felt then." Roger, who put memories to paper in a book he authored, "Country of Lost Children," explains: "Life in Child's Home dulled feelings, and children learned from experience how to grow up without the love of a mother or father. Although Child's Home gave us kindness and love, this was apparently no substitute for a father and mother."

Three participants mentioned extremely negative experiences during their stay at Child's Home, both in terms of emotional and physical abuse from the counsellors (two participants) and an attempt at sexual assault by an older youth in the school, an act that was prevented by the immediate intervention of the school coordinator (see below). Taylor says: "My brother [who was with me in Child's Home] wet his bed to a late age and every day was a battle for him. I would come every morning to help him change the bed linens. Once a counsellor embarrassed him in front of all the children in the group. She said, 'Look who's here. Hello little pisser.' He began to sob. He had a huge load to bear and this was the last thing he needed. I stood up, dropped her to the floor and began punching her, screaming all the while, 'Today I am going to kill you.' I poured all my brother's pain into the blows I rained on her, till the children pulled us apart." James describes abuse on the part of a counsellor: "I carry around a trauma from those years, I remember being abused by a

counsellor who had it in for me and beat me at times. Till today I carry around the horror of the encounters with him. I felt like a punching bag." Jacob describes the sexual abuse he experienced from a counsellor: "In Child's Home I had a serious trauma. There was a boy who was three years older than me who used to assault me sexually. He tried to rape me. I screamed and the school coordinator rushed up to me and took me in her arms, stroked me. I felt good there, apart from the trauma of the older boy who tried to abuse me sexually."

A number of interviewees described feelings of isolation. George, for example: "A child needs a home. [In a boarding school] he has no one to talk to. When you are sick there is no one at your side." He adds: "I was not for a second angry at my parents. I shared nothing during my difficult times, they thought I was okay. I told them everything was fine because I didn't want to upset them. So now I have a scoop: I had it bad ... it took me years to mend my self-confidence. The institution caused me to lack confidence in myself. There is nothing like the warmth of a home. In the final analysis, in an institution you are alone."

With most of the graduates who were interviewed, their stay in Child's Home is perceived and described principally as a positive, trauma-free experience, possibly based on the fact that they were the recipients of dedicated and loving care. Most of them apparently did not suffer from social isolation, taunts or sexual abuse. For example, Sam claimed: "I do not remember abuse because I felt very good there. My childhood was good, good experiences ... relative to the standards of the time, Child's Home was a wonderful place to grow up in. We were treated well, the care was good, it was a positive place however you look at it." Conspicuous in the statements made by many interviewees was the use of positive superlatives regarding their stay in the school, such as: "My childhood was spent fabulously ... the memories of my childhood in Child's Home are like those in a magical fairy tale" (Gerry). "I remember my childhood particularly in Child's Home as a wonderful one that gave me a warm home" (Amber). Chris sums it up: "I felt good there ... Child's Home was the best substitute for home."

There are those who even describe the boarding school as one that saved them from traumas. Josef describes it thus: "I know today that I was subjected to abuse at home, I remember my mother constantly abusing me, but the abuse stopped when I got to Child's Home ... I remember Child's Home as a place that saved me." In more general terms, Beth states: "Child's Home saved me from a childhood of misery."

Theme 4: Proper Physical and Emotional Care

According to most of the participants, they received proper care and were treated with affection by the staff, the principal, the counsellors and the

teachers, who served with great success as substitutes for their parents and relatives. Indeed, firm relationships were formed with the professional, top quality caregivers in Child's Home, individuals who contributed greatly to effective intercommunication, and sound emotional and social functioning on the part of the children. Nick: "In Child's Home they [the counsellors and teachers] were superb. They not only gave us warmth and love but also moulded us in the best way possible –knowledge, teaching us to aspire to progress and inculcating in us an understanding of our identity ... they were terrific."

Alex explains: "If I had remained at home with my father [after my mother died] I don't know what would have become of me. I received warmth in Child's Home, something our father did not have." Anna declares: "I have fond memories of Child's Home, the principal, the matron, the counsellors. They raised me. I did not feel alone because I was always cared for by the counsellors."

Almost all the participants mention the names of figures in Child's Home who were significant in their eyes even after the passage of some 65 years. Nelly states: "I remember the principal, Ruth (not her real name) the amazing teacher. I also remember the matron, also an amazing woman." A special place is reserved for the principal in the participants' recollections. Alex states: "I remember the principal, a good person who would host children in his home on Saturdays and religious holidays. We were his guests on several occasions."

In addition to the principal the school matron is also mentioned repeatedly by the participants. According to the descriptions she was a relatively older woman, resolute and pedantic. She would nevertheless invite the children to her apartment and let them listen to plays on the radio. The participants also assert that the kind treatment they received from the caregivers in the school was reciprocated by the children. Sam, who was in Child's Home from the age of 2 to 10, says: "We loved the counsellors and teachers. Two years ago we were invited to a reunion. I was extremely moved. We met Jane [not her real name] there, who was in charge of the stores. I remember her as a cuddly person."

Child's Home is ranked high in the view of some of the interviewees relative to other boarding schools that were attended by a few of them at some stage during their childhood. Benny, for example, states: "The attention we received from the principal and his wife in Child's Home was by far the best compared to the other places." Nelly concludes his statements in the interview with an assessment of the quality of life in the boarding school: "I don't agree with research studies on children growing up in boarding schools [which conclude that it is better for a child to grow up in the framework of his family than in an institution]. We were without parents, but our childhood was a good

one. It all depends on the treatment given by the principal and counsellors. We were treated well."

Theme 5 – Siblings in Child's Home as an Element of Support

Nine of the 25 interviewees had siblings in Child's Home during their stay there. As part of the need to find solutions for children from broken homes, the boarding school sought the absorption of siblings, while attempting to avoid discriminating between them and the single children. The rationale was twofold: 1) A desire to alleviate to some extent the trauma of separation from the parents and the home, and to maintain a connection with the family through the siblings; and 2) A desire to use the older sibling in helping the younger one in the crisis caused by the transfer to the school. Chris, who was admitted to Child's Home with his sister, says: "It was easy for me to acclimatize myself to Child's Home ... also because my bigger sister was there with me." On mobilization of the older brother to support his younger brothers, Taylor states: "It turned out that from the age of five I acted as a father image for my younger brothers during the period when we drifted from one institution to another ... I protected them and supported them ... and naturally this called for considerable mental resources, apart from the personal pain I bore."

As evident also from the statements of interviewees who were the older siblings, they served as substitute parents. Emmie, for example, states: "The only thing I remember about my brother is that he used to run away and was very mischievous, and I had to protect him ... I had to take care of him all the time." This responsibility is also manifested in the fact that older siblings often serve as models for emulation by those younger than them (Cicirelli, 2013). Robert, who was sent to Child's Home together with his brother who was three years younger than he, asserts: "My younger brother was stuck to me all day. He would latch on to my leg wherever I went. From time to time we would run away together." The importance of support from the older brother in the reality of a boarding school may be seen in Roger's story of five-year-old Betty: "Betty adopted Nathan as a big brother without consulting him about it ... she realized the change that had occurred in her life [on entering Child's Home] with no mother or father, but with a caregiver and with Nathan. So Nathan became the big brother under whose wing she sought refuge, and at times she too was a comfort to him."

In summation, it may be stated that the fact that some of the interviewees had siblings in Child's Home who supported them or who were supported by them made their absorption easier, contributed to their mental vigour and social integration, and reduced their chances of suffering hurt.

Theme 6 – Child's Home as a Positive Total Institution

Child's Home apparently had many attributes of a total institution, according to the description by Goffman (1961): an institution that is perceived as a negative, arbitrary framework that coerces its occupants to change according to its perspectives and aims (Walins & Wazner, 1982).

A careful examination of these attributes in Child's Home points to the fact that mainly positive characteristics were cultivated there, those that were needed to rehabilitate the children from the traumas they had experienced, improve their self-image, and impart education and values. The children in Child's Home were relatively detached from their parents, their other family members, and the external social environment in order to protect them from further harm.

All aspects of life were conducted within the framework of the boarding school – eating, studying, playing and sleeping. Kim says: "There were activities throughout the day. Those who studied well continued to do so, and those who did not study well were helped." The children's lives were supervised for years by a relatively small group of educators and caregivers, including the principal and his wife, the school matron, the teachers and the counsellors. The interviewees describe the children receiving the best care according to their age, In Nelly's words: "We were treated well. We were not humiliated. We were a lot of times at the homes of David [the principal] and the matron, so that we did not feel homeless." The absorption of the children in Child's Home, the care they were given and the activities that were carried out around them were geared, as stated, to one all-important purpose – to give the children from broken homes a nurturing therapeutic, educational and social framework that would rehabilitate them from the damage to which they had been subjected and provide them with an education that was oriented to values and education. Nick states: "There were children from one hundred and twenty seven diaspora communities, some from broken homes in Oriental countries, from Europe, some who were born in Israel. A heterogeneous group that became one highly successful dough kneaded by the management staff of the institution as well as the counsellors."

Conspicuous in the vast majority of the interviews was the assessment of the interviewees that the framework indeed succeeded in achieving its aims. For example, Sofi points out: "... this strengthened me [the years in Child's Home], gave me a lot of confidence, which inured me to a great extent for the bad years that were to follow." Unlike the total institution typified by Goffman, there was no deliberate separation between the staff and the children. The caregivers would frequently hug and kiss the children, the children were invited to the homes of the principal and the matron for various activities and for spending time there during holidays. According to Anna: "I was always looked after by the counsellors, I will always remember with

fondness the kind-heartedness of the principal and the caregivers, and in general that of all those who raised me and gave me so much warmth and love, something I did not get from my parents or relatives."

Unlike Goffman's total institution, the children were not subjected to hazing on their entry into the boarding school. On the contrary, they were warmly welcomed by the staff. Gerry states: "I remember how David, the principal, used to announce with great joy every Friday the names of new children who had joined Child's Home."

One of the shortcomings of the traditional total institution is the development of a dependency on the institution and its representatives (Scott, 2010). However, the interviewees pointed out a different reality, one in which manifestations of independence and originality were encouraged. As described by Emmie: "The boarding school taught me to do things on my own." She sums it up thus: "At Child's Home we were encouraged to act with independence, initiative."

Typical of Child's Home was its nurturing family atmosphere, coupled with its location in an idyllic natural setting surrounded by trees and orchards, suited to children's games. Gerry provided a brief description of the atmosphere in the place: "The orchards surrounding us, the kindness we were shown, the absence of economic worries, it was all magical." George provides his own, more detailed description of the landscape: "The place was a paradise on earth. Surrounded by orchards, a huge area ... a delightful nook in every way ... we would climb trees, there were birds, hoopoes and ordinary song birds ... it looked like a convalescence home." Three interviewees mentioned the excursions they made in the area beyond Child's Home.

In summation, it appears that despite the fact that Child's Home was a total institution it was experienced more as a nurturing and protective framework and less as one that was emasculating.

Theme 7: Resilience

Psychological resilience, as stated earlier, is associated with personal and environmental characteristics that allow a person to stand firm in the face of traumatic events, grow despite distress, and return to a high level of robustness after coping with obstacles and challenges (Bonanno, 2004; Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Many of the interviewees referred in their statements to the resilience they acquired during their stay in the boarding school. Emmie notes the empathic capacity she developed, manifested in a desire to support those weaker than her. "The school gave me an approach to the underdogs, the desire to help the weak, these are probably the qualities I acquired because of being a boarding school girl myself, and this inured me ... my childhood moulded me such as to stand up to and do everything on my own." Josef refers to the

development of a capacity to deal with difficulties by himself: "In such places, far from one's parents, one learns to live on one's own and to manage with what there is, inuring one to life. Thanks to Child's Home I am independent, I know how to look after myself ... and stand on my principles." Gerry talks about the way his personality has been shaped: "From the time of Child's Home and on, my personality has been consolidated and this has undeniably given me the strength to cope with any difficulty and succeed." Two of the interviewees compared themselves to their sisters and brothers who were not in Child's Home. Kim relates: "When I returned home I was in a state of shock. That was the difference. I was not sent [to school] in the transit camp [and my brothers were], and the result was a lack of learning, taking its toll on an absence of responsibility, no independence and deficient education. Something that did not happen to me in Child's Home. There we were encouraged to be independent and to have initiative."

Theme 8 – Succeeding Against All Odds

Objectively, most of the participants have succeeded professionally and financially, as well as in terms of family. Most of the graduates indeed view their lives as being successful. Samples of statements from the interviewees include: "We have a flourishing print shop. We live in a spacious villa. All our children own their homes and all of them are well established economically" (Anna). "I have a doctoral degree in education. I have worked as a lecturer. My husband is now a lawyer and we have two sons, both of whom are doctors" (Rachel). "I have been successful in my job. At one stage I was consultant to the prime minister. I am now the proprietor of a consulting firm" (Chris). "We are currently living in a prestigious neighbourhood and our financial situation is great" (Lilly).

Some have attributed their success in life to their childhood, to their stay in Child's Home, and the influence of the staff in the boarding school who believed in them and cultivated them. According to George: "There was a counsellor by the name of Rubbie who influenced me greatly, he was only 17 ... but with a lot of sway. I still write the way he taught me to." Chris adds: "The counsellor was very significant in our eyes, she herself had no idea to what extent she was influencing our lives and our success. I had an amazing teacher by the name of Sue, who told me 'You will make it to university'. It's not usual to tell a child in third grade that he will make it to university. This affected me greatly." Nick sums up: "The boarding school not only gave us warmth and love but moulded us in the best way possible ... [to want] to aspire and advance, it instilled in us insights with respect to our identity ... they gave us unique baggage that has no equal. They were great ... it produced only a very few failures ... they gave us tools to strive to excellence ... our

personalities were formed by ingesting the material, by learning and by creating the right foundation."

Discussion

The present research focuses on the recollections of 25 interviewees with respect to the boarding school they attended some 65 years earlier. Hundreds of children were sent to Child's Home in the years following establishment of the State of Israel – children who for various reasons could not remain in their regular family framework. The principal of the school, the matron, the caregivers and the other staff members transformed it into a substitute for the homes that had been taken away from the children. The school's location in quiet pastoral surroundings, relatively far away from the children's communities, enabled the children to turn a new page by cutting them off, both mentally and physically, from their previous lives.

For most of the interviewees the boarding school created a new reality, which from many points of view was far better than the reality they had lived in prior to joining the school.

Entry into a boarding school is often accompanied by a severe crisis due to the separation from family members, as well as the disorientation and loss of control experienced in a new and unfamiliar framework (Fisher, 1984). The crisis generally abates as the child adapts to the new setup and social environment (Harris & Lipian, 1991).

A number of research studies have found that settling in to the new boarding school framework depends on the child's expectations (Mason, 1997). According to studies (Anderson, 2007), a harsh family background and precarious mental condition, in parallel with a warm welcome and the satisfaction of emotional and physical needs, result in relatively easy integration into the school. In contrast, children who come from a functional family that is perceived as loving and protective could on leaving home suffer from a loss of their primary connections, experience traumas as a result of taunts and harassment, develop insecure attachments, and resort to defensive isolation (Schaverien, 2011). This was the case with two brothers in Child's Home who had been separated from their parents against their will, and who continued to maintain close contact with their parents even after joining the school. The older brother expressed harsh criticism of Child's Home. His descriptions of violent occurrences and hurtful behaviour on the part of the staff as well as other children differed from those of the other children. His point of departure with respect to his attitude to Child's Home was negative, preventing him from establishing secure attachments to the caregivers there, leading in turn to a refusal to accept the new reality in which he now lived.

The most acute crises experienced by the children in the boarding school occurred in the initial weeks after joining it and generally during the

religious holidays, periods in which the children went home to their parents or other relatives, or returned from these visits (Hadwen, 2015). Numerous research studies that focused on the homesickness felt by children in boarding schools found that some three-quarters of all children reported missing home (Fisher et al., 1986; Van Tilburg et al., 1996).

Most of the interviewees were competent and successful in objective terms, and indeed, this was how they viewed themselves. They feel appreciation for their stay in Child's Home as one that was positive and trauma-free. Nevertheless, there is no denying the possibility that the stay in the boarding school and the severance from the home did in certain cases exact a mental toll, defined in the literature as the "boarding school syndrome" (Schaverien, 2011). This syndrome typifies a fair number of boarding school graduates who had suffered traumas on starting school from the loss of their primary connections with their parents, as well as from social isolation, taunts or even sexual assault (Grier, 2013). It is in the nature of traumas to be suppressed, although it can be brought to the surface with psychotherapy (Schaverien, 2011). Thus there could be graduates of boarding schools who are suffering from the boarding school syndrome but who are not aware of it.

There were a few interviews in which traumas experienced during the stay in the boarding school surfaced – traumas which could have served as fertile ground for development of the boarding school syndrome. The presence or absence of traumatic experiences in the context of separation from home and stay in a boarding school is a subject that must be approached with caution during interviews. The possibility of touching on painful content depends on the interviewer and on the interviewee's recourse to defence mechanisms such as suppression and denial, and since the interview does not include psychotherapy, it is difficult to expose this content (Lobbestael et al., 2009).

In actual fact, there was only very little evidence of the boarding school syndrome in the interviews conducted. As regards the possible consequences of the stay in a boarding school on coupled relationships, only three of the 25 interviewees describe domestic problems that ended in divorce, in two of the cases after 20 years of marriage. All the interviewees studied or were trained for a profession and continued working for many years. All of them reported enjoying a high economic status and feeling good in general.

One explanation for the fact that most of the interviewees did not appear to suffer from the boarding school syndrome is the development of resilience, a quality that enables a person to stand firm in the face of traumatizing situations, to grow despite hardships, and to bounce back after coping with hurdles and challenges (Bonanno, 2004; Connor & Davidson, 2003). Resilience is a personality trait, acquired partly from the environment, among other things, through contact with positive figures.

The fact that the children came to the boarding school from families that could be defined as broken, where they experienced severe traumas of various kinds, obliged Child's Home to meet their special needs, first and foremost of which were human kindness, personal and social acceptance, and long-term stability. Evident in the participants' statements was the fact that they received dedicated and loving care. The concern for their physical and mental welfare – such as the provision of food, housing, clothing and medical attention – during a period that was known for its economic deprivation, and the emphatic and nurturing treatment they received in parallel, generally resulted in relatively speedy adaptation to the boarding school environment by the children and in positive functionality within it. The caregiving and educational activities on the part of the staff members and the close daily contacts with them had a highly positive, protective impact on the children's lives, one that stands out in the stories told by the interviewees. Practically all the interviewees mentioned the names of staff members who treated them on a personal level, encouraged them, showed them kindness, and saw to their mental and physical welfare in the school. This impact is referred to in many studies as being of prime importance (Anglin, 2004; Gur, 2005).

Nine of the 25 interviewees had younger siblings in Child's Home. The presence of siblings can ease the crisis of separation from the family, and the older sibling can help the younger one in the process of absorption in the school (Whelan, 2003). A special relationship exists between siblings: they can be mutually supportive, contribute to the development of resilience, and perhaps enable more secure attachments. The older sibling has a more dominant role to play and he often regards himself as acting in place of the parents (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Cicrelli, 2013).

A number of interviewees stated that they looked after their younger siblings, protected them, served as a behavioural model and, from their viewpoint at least, filled the role of the parents. This role helped in developing a sense of responsibility and maturity. As regards the younger siblings, the support they received from their older siblings eased their process of absorption, contributed to their social integration, and perhaps reduced the probability of their developing the boarding school syndrome. Witness to the importance of the reciprocal benefits inherent in the presence of siblings is the fact that a five-year-old girl in Child's Home adopted a boy of nine to be her big brother, to take notice of her, nurture her and protect her. In doing so, it may be reasonably assumed that she not only benefited herself but also helped to boost the boy's personal and social self-image.

Child's Home can be regarded as a positive total institution which used the positive aspects of such a framework to rebuild with sensitivity and kindness the world of children who were sent there. According to Nissenholtz (1989), the staff in a total institution, backed by professional management of

the place, has the power to neutralize the negative attributes that could be part and parcel of the stay there.

Reference can be found in the literature to the physical characteristics of the total institution, which can create a homelike ambience that is non-alienating, nullify the negative experiences that go hand-in-hand with residence there, and transform it into a positive place with potential for growth and change (Wolins & Wozner, 1982).

The closed total institution has come under fire in the years following publication of Goffman's article (Davies, 1989). This has led to changes and improvements in many institutions of this kind, which began to curb their coercive and suppressive leanings to a great extent (Bullock, 1999; Scott, 2010). Some of them even take in residents who arrive of their own volition in search of change and improvement.

Many such institutions are typically laxer regarding the separation between caregivers and inmates, while also allowing a certain degree of autonomy alongside an understanding that some measure of surveillance would still be exercised (White, 2004). Some institutions are also investing resources in landscaping, with a view to providing a homelike, non-threatening atmosphere. In this and other ways, Child's Home was decades ahead of other institutions.

For most of the interviewees the boarding school created a new reality which was far better in many ways than the reality in which they had lived earlier, and which almost certainly led to most of them forming secure attachments, albeit gradually (Bowlby, 1982). As stated earlier, research studies testify to the fact that it is possible to change the nature of the attachment from insecure or anxious, for example, to one that is secure as a result of exposure to stable caregiving figures acting as substitute parents (e.g. Waters et al., 2000). The very presence of stable adult figures who paid attention to the children's needs over time helped to instil in them a sense of security in their attachments in place of those that were characterized by anxiety or avoidance (Garcia Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2016; Gur, 2006). The greater the trust the children placed in the staff, regarding them as a firm anchor, the less they displayed feelings of depression and anger and the less problematic was their behaviour (Pinchover & Attar-Schwartz, 2012).

The interviewees spoke about their residence in Child's Home during the period 1950 to 1960 from the perspective of some 65 years. This can be viewed as a limitation in the research and the question can be asked, To what extent do the graduates' memories reflect the Child's Home reality? Except that this question is not of real importance for our purposes: it is not the objective facts that are important but rather the perspective of the people who experienced the place and the impact it had on them (Berger & Luckmann,

1991). To quote Nietzsche: "There are no facts, only interpretations" (Kaufmann, 1954).

The present qualitative research presents the attitudes and experiences of 25 Child's Home graduates who we had succeeded in locating. It should be borne in mind that the ability to generalize the findings of qualitative research is relatively limited, and it is possible that the sample exhibits a favourable skew, namely, by presenting those graduates who survived the experience, developed a resilience and succeeded in life.

In conclusion, from a 65-year perspective, the physical and emotional care that was shown to the children, and the processes and experiences they underwent in Child's Home under the dedicated management of the staff, the caregivers, the counsellors and the teachers (whose work was mainly based on a sense of national duty to save the children), is perceived by the graduates we interviewed as a worthy substitute for a dysfunctional home and a model of a positive boarding school that apparently strengthened the majority of them, and allowed them to grow and succeed against all odds.

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