

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of youth regarding their participation in the Child Welfare Service in Norway. An additional aim was to examine how these youth experienced participation in their aftercare. This was done by first looking at their participation before they turned 18, and then studying the experiences they had with participation in aftercare, which is received after they turn 18. This distinction was made as the legal regulations concerning participation change when the youth turn 18. The qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used in order to answer the research questions. Altogether, 26 youth have participated in this study. The findings have been discussed through using theoretical frameworks such as the social studies of children and childhood, the main principles in the Child Welfare Service, participation theories and the concept of citizenship. Albeit there are some variations, this study indicates that the youth have not adequately participated in making decisions in issues that concern them. However, some youth also said that they did not believe that it was always right for them to participate in making decisions. Regarding the issue of aftercare, these findings indicate that the youth participate more in decisions concerning their aftercare and that they are generally more satisfied with this assistance than the assistance they get before they are 18. This is not always the case, however, as there are also some variations in the experiences of the youth in such participation before and after they are 18 concerning this issue there are also some variations. In addition these findings also indicate that not all youth are informed about the possibilities of receiving aftercare.

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ACRONYMS

NOK	Norwegian Kroner
NRK	Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation
NSD	The Norwegian Social Science Data Services
SSB	Statistics Norway
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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1 Introduction

This year, 2014, the 25th anniversary of the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is celebrated. The UNCRC is a legally binding Convention, which states that children have the same rights as adults, and in addition, rights that recognize their vulnerability (Burr & Montgomery, 2003). Norway has both ratified and implemented the UNCRC into Norwegian law, implying that if there is a conflict between Norwegian law and the UNCRC, the UNCRC will have precedence (Collin-Hansen, 2013).

Norway is well-known for being a frontrunner in the field of children's rights (Kjørholt, Bjerke, Stordal, Hellem, & Skotte, 2009). One example that illustrates this, is that on 13th May, 2014, the Norwegian Parliament included a paragraph in their Constitution which states that children have the right to be heard in matters concerning them, and that their opinion shall be weighed according to their age and maturity (Stortinget, 2014). However, violations of the rights of children in Norway do still occur (Chatenoud, 2012). Norway was for instance recently criticised in the United Nations (UN) for not ensuring the rights of children adequately, and part of this critique concerned whether the Child Welfare Service in Norway, are in fact, acting in the best interests of parents and children (Karlsen, 2014). Additionally, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) recently broadcast a series of documentaries critically discussing different aspects of the Child Welfare Service in Norway (NRK, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

The Child Welfare Service in Norway is the system that takes care of vulnerable children, primarily when they are not adequately looked after by their caregivers (Collin-Hansen, 2013). In accordance with the Child Welfare Act, the Child Welfare Service has to ensure that children and young people living under conditions that can damage their health and development get the necessary help and care they are entitled to. The Child Welfare Service is also obliged to contribute to ensure that children and young people grow up in safe environments (Collin-Hansen, 2013). In 2012, 53 200 children and young people in Norway received assistance from the Child Welfare Service (SSB, 2013a).

One of the key principles of the UNCRC is the right of the child to express his or her opinion on issues affecting his or her life (Ennew, 2000). Children's right to participation in their child

welfare case is also a legally binding premise for the Child Welfare Service in Norway (Gulbrandsen, Seim, & Ulvik, 2012). As Freeman (1992) argues, legislation, both national and international is important as a symbol, but true recognition of children's rights requires the implementation of these rights into practice. Several studies have concluded that children and young people in the Child Welfare Service in Norway are not adequately consulted and listened to (Bakketeig & Backe-Hansen, 2008; BLD, 2009; Follesø, 2009; Gamst, 2011; Hærem & Aadnesen, 2008; Slettebø & Seim, 2007; Storhaug & Bratterud, 2008; Strandbu, 2011). Consequently, this topic is of interest to study further, and participation of children and youth in the Child Welfare Service is thus the topic of this dissertation.

The key topic for this dissertation will be the experiences that a selection of youth have with their participation in the Child Welfare Service. Furthermore, this study aims to examine the experiences the youth have with participation in their aftercare. Aftercare is assistance provided from the Child Welfare Service to persons between 18 and 23 (Storø, 2012). In principle, the Child Welfare Service only provides assistance to persons below the age of 18 (Bakketeig & Backe-Hansen, 2008). However, in paragraph 1-3 of the Child Welfare Act it is stated that persons up to the age of 23 can also receive assistance from the Child Welfare Service (The Child Welfare Act, 1992). This assistance from the Child Welfare Service is commonly known as aftercare (Storø, 2012).

1.1 Objectives and Research Questions

The objective of this thesis is, as described above, to provide insight into the experiences of young people who have received assistance from the Child Welfare Service. This is done through conducting interviews with a selection of young people who all have had experience with the Child Welfare Service. The main focus of this study will lie on the participation of the young persons before they turned 18 years, as this was an issue that all the youth had experience from. Specifically, I am interested in exploring whether they feel that they have been able to participate in their child welfare case. In addition, I will also explore the experiences the young people have with participation in aftercare. When looking at participation before and after the youth have turned 18, it is important to note that the legal premise for participation for youth in the Child Welfare Service, changes when they turn the age of 18. This will be described in-depth in the background chapter. The analysis will be divided into two to differentiate between the experiences these youth had before and after

they turned 18. To contribute to the general discussion on the participation of children in the child welfare system, it is thus important to look at what happens after they have turned 18. This resulted in the following two research questions:

- What experiences have the youth had with participation in their child welfare case?
- What experiences have the youth had with participation in their aftercare?

1.2 Terminology

Some words and concepts in this study have been translated from Norwegian to English. This might lead to some confusion, which is why I choose to define some key terms which are used throughout this thesis. The term “the Child Welfare Service” refers to what in Norwegian is called *barneverntjeneste*. “Aftercare” is translated from the Norwegian word *ettervern*. The Norwegian word *saksbehandler* is translated to “caseworker”. The term in Norwegian used for describing the interventions the Child Welfare Service provides, *tiltak*, is translated as “assistance”. The Norwegian word *fosterhjem* is translated to “foster home”. *Tilsynsfører* is here translated as “supervisor”. “The Child Welfare Act” is translated from the Norwegian word, *barnevernloven*. Specific words and concepts mentioned few times will be translated in footnotes.

1.3 Clarification

The common definition of “a child” is, as defined in the UNCRC, “any human being below the age of 18” (UNCRC, 1989). Even though I interview persons aged 19, who are officially above the judicial definition of “a child”, I still use methods and theory that are most commonly used for researching children and young people. One reason for this is that I interview the youth mainly about events that have happened in the past, when they were legally considered as “children”, according to the above definition. As Backe-Hansen (2001) points out, children and youth who are in contact with the Child Welfare Service can be potentially vulnerable to research based on their previous life experiences. I therefore find it especially important to concentrate on issues such as protection from harm, confidentiality and informed consent, which are topics that the literature on researching children and young people is particularly concerned with.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Involving children and young people in research is a relatively new phenomenon (Masson, 2004). Children's lives have traditionally been explored through the views of the child's adult caretakers (Cook & Hess, 2007). Until the 1980s the dominant trend within childhood research was to view children and young people as objects to study, and not as competent and reliable subjects of their own lives (France, 2004). The notion of viewing children and young people as competent actors is important because it widens our understanding of them. It also affects the way we do research with children and young people. This shift has enabled children's views and ideas to become the central focus of the research (James & James, 2008). This way of perceiving the child has been influenced by the implementation of the UNCRC, which emphasizes the rights of children (Repstad & Ryen, 2001).

I agree with Bunkholdt (2006) who argues that those who are involved in making decisions on behalf of children and youth, must gain knowledge about how children and youth themselves experience their situation. This is also in line with what Follesø (2006) states; that if we want to create good services for children and youth, we need to learn more about the child or youth's reality, from *their* own perspective. She encourages asking children and youth about what they think and feel, and to trust their experiences, competence and sense of judgement. This is furthermore in accordance with what Thrana (2008) argues, which is that research with people who have been in the child welfare, provides valuable and useful information about what it is like to be a child in contact with this service. To summarize, the views of children and youth are important when researching topics concerning them, and this is accordingly central in this study.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. In *Chapter Two*, background information regarding the research questions will be given. To begin with, Norway, with a particular focus on Norway as a welfare state, will be discussed. Thereafter, the Child Welfare Service will be described, and hereunder, the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC is addressed as it is incorporated into Norwegian legislation, implying that the laws of the Convention will have precedence if there is a conflict between the UNCRC and Norwegian law (Collin-Hansen, 2013). The two central concepts of participation and aftercare will be explained, and brief literature reviews regarding these two topics will be provided. *Chapter*

Three consists of the theoretical framework for this study. The social studies of children and childhood will be examined and discussed, as well as the three main principles of the Child Welfare Service. This chapter furthermore contains a description of Hart's Ladder of Participation and finally a discussion of children and citizenship. Methods and methodology is the topic of *Chapter Four*. In this chapter issues such as sampling, data collection, the data analysing process, ethical issues, the validity and reliability of the research and limitations to the study will be addressed. The analysis and discussion are divided into two chapters. The first of these chapters is *Chapter Five*, where the theme is the experiences the youth in my study have regarding their participation in the Child Welfare Service. In *Chapter Six*, the issue examined is the experiences the youth have with participation in aftercare. Finally, in *Chapter Seven* concluding remarks will be provided.

2 Background

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter background information will be provided to illuminate the context of this research. Norway will be described, with a particular focus on Norway as a welfare state. As Rakvaag (2008) argues, child welfare is a field that is constantly affected by factors such as changes in society. In order to get a better understanding of what the Child Welfare Service is, it is therefore useful to take a look at how children have been cared for in the past (Rakvaag, 2008). A brief historical overview of how vulnerable children have been treated in Norway, with a focus on the child welfare legislation will accordingly be presented. Furthermore the Child Welfare Service of today will be described. The incorporation of the UNCRC into Norwegian law implies that if there is a conflict between the ruling of this law and the Norwegian law, the UNCRC has precedence (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). Due to this, the Convention and how the articles apply to the Child Welfare Service in Norway will be presented. Furthermore, the focus will be on children's participation in the Child Welfare Service, and previous relevant research on this topic. Additionally, aftercare and a description of the legal procedures for receiving this assistance will be provided, as well as the previous research on this topic. This is to clarify what rights the youth have when it comes to receiving such assistance. The literature reviews provided will, in accordance with what Ennew and Abebe (2009) argue, provide an overview of the research topics, as well as help to identify gaps in the available information on the two topics.

2.2 Norway: A Welfare State

Norway is a country situated in Northern Europe, with approximately five million inhabitants (SSB, 2014b). According to data from January 2013, children and youth, under the age of 18, constitute 22 per cent of Norway's population (SSB, 2014a). The country is divided into 428 municipalities and 19 counties (The Norwegian Mapping Authority, 2014). Norway is known for being a so-called welfare state. The term *welfare state* refers to a way of governing where basic services are mainly provided by the Government. This way of governing is based on ensuring that people have insurance if they are not able to work or are in need of assistance (Collin-Hansen, 2013). Storø (2012) argues that the Norwegian welfare state is known for having an ideal of social and economic equality. The welfare services in Norway are mainly provided by the Government, and financed thorough taxation (Storø, 2012). As Eide and Skorstad (2008) point out, the welfare system in Norway is a result of the consensus amongst

the inhabitants of Norway that there should be a certain level of welfare for all people living in the country.

In Norway it has always been parents' responsibility to take care of their children, and this is still the case today (Collin-Hansen, 2013). Before Norway developed its welfare state, children without parents to care for them, and without an extended family, did not have many places to go. Some children received help from the church or private organizations, but others did not receive any assistance (Hagen, 2001). In 1896, as the first country in the world, Norway passed a law which laid down the foundations for a public Child Welfare Service. In the time before this law was passed, there had been an increase in youth criminality, and several young people were sent to prison. The aim of the 1896 law was therefore to help children and young people who were in trouble, rather than to punish them (Hagen, 2001). Even though the expressed intentions of the law were humanitarian, it is argued that the law was based on the interests of the society rather than on the needs of the children and youth (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008).

As time passed many cases of abuse of children, who had been taken from their homes in accordance with the 1896 law, were revealed (Rakvaag, 2008). In 1953, a new law was passed, which focused on providing assistance to parents, instead of taking children out of their homes (Collin-Hansen, 2013). However, this law also received a lot of criticism for not ensuring the rights of parents and children adequately. Bunkholdt and Sandbæk (2008) argue that some of the weaknesses of the law were that the criteria for intervention were not clear, and that the Child Welfare Service intervened too late. Another issue was the conflict of roles for the Child Welfare Service, as both a provider of assistance, and also as being the authority which prepared and decided on cases of forced intervention. This critique laid the foundation for the Child Welfare Act of 1992, which is the current law for the Child Welfare Service in Norway (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). The changes included the establishment of Fylkesnemda¹ which, according to Hagen (2001) strengthened the legislative aspect of the law. As Bunkholdt and Sandbæk (2008) argue, with the establishment of Fylkesnemnda, the decision-making on severe interventions, such as cases where children were taken out of their home, was delegated to the government level. In other words, before Fylkesnemnda was

¹*Fylkesnemnda* is a governmental administrative court-like institution (Lindboe, 2012). *Fylkesnemnda* takes the final decision in cases such where parents or youth do not agree with the decision, or cases where children are taken out of their home, independent of whether parents consent to this decision or not (Aasberg, 2008).

established it was the municipalities who decided in these, often complex cases. One of the goals of the new law was to increase the law's legal protection for children and parents (Rakvaag, 2008).

2.3 The Child Welfare Service in Norway

The tasks of the Child Welfare Service are divided between the State and the municipalities (Collin-Hansen, 2013). The municipalities are responsible for executing all tasks that are not assigned to the State (Collin-Hansen, 2013). The municipalities choose themselves, under certain conditions, how they want to organize their Child Welfare Service. One condition is, for instance, that they need to have an administration with a leader (Collin-Hansen, 2013). Kildedal and Nordstoga (2011) argue that the different size of the municipalities in Norway leads to great variations concerning the organization and administration of the Child Welfare Services. Another condition is that the employees in the Child Welfare Service need to follow the principle of legality (Børresen, 2004). In practice, this means that when they intervene in people's lives, this intervention needs to be justified in the prevailing legislation of the Child Welfare Service (Collin-Hansen, 2013).

The Child Welfare Service in Norway can provide assistance such as advice and guidance, economic support or contributions to day-care and kindergarten. They can also hire a person to carry out different activities with the child, or different parent-child-programs, to name only a few (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). The Child Welfare Service also has a mandate to remove a child or youth from his or her biological parents, when this is in accordance with the legislation. This last mandate gives the Child Welfare Service significant power over people's lives (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). However, as Clifford and Øyen (2013) found, one central trend regarding the assistance the Child Welfare Service provides, is an increase in children who receive interventions while living at home.

Kvaran and Holm (2012) and Hagen (2001) describe two dilemmas that they believe the Child Welfare Service faces. As Hagen (2001) describes, when the media covers cases in the Child Welfare Service, they usually describe two types of cases. One type of case is where parents have been deprived of the custody of their child and this is portrayed in media as being unjust. The other type of case is when the Child Welfare Service intervenes too late, and one asks why the Child Welfare Service did not do anything earlier (Hagen, 2001). In

short, the Child Welfare Service is criticized for either intervening too early and too much by taking a child out of his or her home, or too late and too little by not being there when a child needs help and protection.

As Norway has both ratified the UNCRC and incorporated it into Norwegian law (Collin-Hansen, 2013), the UNCRC is particularly relevant for the Child Welfare Service in Norway. When discussing the Child Welfare Service it is therefore useful to have insights into the UNCRC. This convention will therefore be described below, and for the purpose of this research, a particular focus will be on the participation of children.

2.3.1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has contributed to putting children's rights on the political agenda (Strandbu, 2011). As Kjørholt (2010) points out, the UNCRC greatly influences how we understand children and childhood today, both nationally and globally. The UNCRC was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 (Lee, 2001) The Convention consists of 54 articles. It states that children have the same rights as adults, and that they, in addition, have rights that recognize their vulnerability (Montgomery, Burr, & Woodhead, 2003). The 54 articles can also be categorized into what is popularly known as the three P's, namely provision, protection and participation (Franklin, 1995). Alderson (2000) explains that by *provision* one means the provision of necessary goods, services and resources. *Protection* means protection from neglect, abuse, exploitation and discrimination. *Participation* is that children are viewed as active members and contributors to their family, community and society (Alderson, 2000). It is also common to say that the Convention has four general principles. These are the protection against discrimination (article 2), the «best interests of the child» (article 3), the inherent right to life (article 6) and the child's right to express his or her opinion (article 12) (Ennew, 2000). None of the articles in the UNCRC are in principle more important than the others (Ennew, 2000).

There are, however, some critics of the Convention. It is argued that the principles of the Convention can be difficult to apply to local contexts (Montgomery et al., 2003). In addition, childhood is defined differently in different cultures, which for instance might make the age limit of eighteen conflict with the cultural practices of the different societies (Montgomery et al., 2003). However, as Burr and Montgomery (2003) debate, the UNCRC is still one of the most important documents for protecting children's rights. James and James (2004) also point

out that the Convention is not just a general statement of good intent, it is also a legally binding instrument on the States that ratify it.

2.4 The Participation of Children in the Child Welfare Service

In this part I will describe the legal framework concerning the participation of children in the Child Welfare Service. In the theory chapter a more thorough discussion of children and participation will be provided. As Thrana (2008) argues, when discussing children's participation, the judicial framework reflects how the society regards and includes children. Article 12 in the UNCRC is the most central international decision concerning children's right to be heard (Sandberg, 2010). The specific wording of article 12 is:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (UNCRC, 1989).

In the Child Welfare Act it is paragraph 6-3 that addresses the child's right to participation. In the first part of the paragraph it is stated that:

A child who has turned seven, and younger children who are able to form an own opinion, has to be informed and given the chance to express themselves before a decision is taken on issues concerning him or her. The child's opinion shall be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (The Child Welfare Act, 1992).

Save the Children Norway recently published a report where the objective was to seek advice from different adolescents and adults who had been in contact with the Child Welfare Service (Redd Barna, 2013). Many of those interviewed criticised article 6-3 in the Child Welfare Act. Those interviewed believed that the age specification of seven years led to cases where

caseworkers do not consult children under the age of seven. The participants of the study therefore proposed to remove the reference to a specific age (Redd Barna, 2013). This is an issue which Sandberg (2010) also addresses. She emphasizes the need to ensure that those below the age of seven are not ignored. The participants of the Save the Children study also further criticized the wording of article 12 in the UNCRC about the definition of “maturity of the child”, as they consider this definition to be too vague. The adults and youth interviewed were concerned that different assessments of the child’s maturity could prevent children from getting the chance to be listened to. The conclusion from this discussion was that there is a need for a clarification of how the assessment of a child’s maturity should be carried out (Redd Barna, 2013).

Furthermore, a child who has turned 15, and understands the case, can be considered as a party² in the Child Welfare Service (Collin-Hansen, 2013). In cases of children with behaviour problems, the child shall always be considered as a party (Collin-Hansen, 2013). The rights of being a party includes for instance to be able to make a legal complaint regarding the decision of the Child Welfare Service and to appeal the decision (Slettebø & Seim, 2007). It also implies the ability to access documents and to have the possibility of getting a lawyer to defend you (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008).

The Norwegian Parliament added a paragraph concerning children’s participation in the Child Welfare Act. The paragraph states that the child should be given the opportunity to participate and that conversations with the child shall be facilitated (BLD, 2014). The paragraph also states that children in the custody of the Child Welfare Service, shall have the opportunity to have “a person of trust”³. The “person of trust” is a person who the child trusts, who can accompany the child when he or she has conversations with the Child Welfare Service. The Ministry can specify the regulations concerning the role and function of the “person of trust” (BLD, 2014). This paragraph will enter into force on the 1st June 2014 (BLD, 2014). It will be interesting to follow how the implementation of this paragraph will turn out, and whether it actually leads to any changes for the participation of children in the Child Welfare Service. As for instance argued by Dinardi, the “person of trust” does not receive any compensation for the work they do, which could make this difficult to implement (Holst, 2013).

² In Norwegian: *Part i saken*.

³ In Norwegian: *Tillitsperson*.

Concerning the issue of children's participation, one also needs to ensure that the child or youth does not feel pressured to have an opinion (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). It is therefore important to underline that the child or youth does not have an obligation to express his or her opinion if he or she does not wish to do so (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). The way Sandberg (2010) addresses this issue is to underline that the child has a right to express his or her opinion, but no duty to do so. It is also interesting to ask whether participation should be strived for in all child welfare cases. Even though children and youth have the right to be heard, they are not expected to be responsible to decide everything (BLD, 2009). As Scheie (2005) argues, the child's right to participate does not imply that adults can put the responsibility of making a decision onto the child. This issue will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three.

2.4.1 Previous Research on the Participation of Children in the Child Welfare Service

As mentioned above, the legislation ensuring children's right to participation is addressed in the Child Welfare Act as well as in the UNCRC. There is also an increasing emphasis in Norway on asking the child for his or her opinion (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). In this section the focus is on previous research concerning the participation of children in the Child Welfare Service. A description of the most recent research publications on this issue will be addressed below. The research included in this overview are the publications which are most relevant for the focus of my study. These publications will provide an insight into the topics of research for my study, and also provide useful when, at a later stage, analysing the collected data.

Thrana (2008) has studied the existing research concerning the extent to which the Child Welfare Service, had in fact, had conversations with the children they have been in contact with. She concludes that a majority of the studies indicate that children get to express their experiences to caseworkers in the Child Welfare Service only to a small degree. She claims that although there are some variations, the evidence is that the child is rarely consulted in the caseworker's process of gathering information and knowledge about the child (Thrana, 2008). Norway has received some criticism from the Committee on the Rights of the Child⁴ regarding children and participation. In a report to Norway from the Committee it is expressed

⁴ The Committee on the Rights of the Child is an UN institution which examines the progress made by states in realizing the standards of the UNCRC, and assists and advises in the implementation of the UNCRC on the Rights of the Child (Verheyde & Goedertier, 2006).

that the Committee is concerned that children's right to participation is not fully implemented in all processes where children are affected (BLD, 2010). In the report concern is raised that children are not adequately participating in cases where there is a question of who should have the custody of the child. The authors of the report recommend that Norway promotes and strengthens the country's work on enabling children to participate (BLD, 2010).

Vis and Thomas (2009) argue that the extent of children's participation in the Norwegian Child Welfare Service seems largely unknown. Vis and Thomas (2009) conducted a study of children's participation in 43 child welfare cases, and found that the participation of children only occurred in 46, 5 % of them. Although their research focused on children's participation, the scholars only consulted the children's caseworkers, and not the children themselves. They acknowledge that this is somehow a paradox when researching children's participation, and they encouraged researchers to include children in further research (Vis & Thomas, 2009). Nevertheless, their findings do still indicate that children do not participate adequately in their child welfare cases, as children's participation was only seen in less than half of the cases that they studied.

Seim and Slettebø (2011) interviewed ten young people about their participation in the Child Welfare Service. The youth argued that they wanted to be better informed about decisions that had been made by the Child Welfare Service when they were younger, decisions such as, why they had been placed in a foster home, or why they had been moved. They all agreed that they wanted to know the truth, even if the truth would be difficult to bear. In addition, the youth wanted to be able to be heard and to be able to speak confidentially with their caseworkers, without their parents or foster parents being present. Furthermore, they all wanted to be able to participate more in the development their plans of the future (Seim & Slettebø, 2011).

A report researching parents and children's experiences with the Child Welfare Service in Trondheim, found that the degree of participation that the children and young people themselves experienced, varied (Haugen, Paulsen, & Berg, 2012). The researchers recommended, amongst other issues, that guidelines should be developed for involving children further in their child welfare cases. Important aspects the participants brought up were that they wished to be better informed by their caseworker and that their caseworker needed to be respectful and attentive (Haugen et al., 2012).

Bakketeig and Bergan (2013) have interviewed twenty-four youth with experience from foster homes and six caseworkers about the youth's participation when living in a foster home. They found that the youth's participation varied, from those who experienced a high degree of participation to those who experienced very little participation. However, not all the youth who had not participated, felt that they should have participated more. As Bakketeig and Bergan (2013) point out, those who did not feel the need to participate further, were often satisfied with their foster home. They discuss that when one wishes to change the situation one is in, the need for participation will be greater. Accordingly, some of the youth were frustrated and had wanted to participate more. The researcher also found that even though the caseworkers had a clear awareness of the youth and their participation, it was not systemized through procedures in their daily work. The researchers argue that there is a need for the development of better guidelines (Bakketeig & Bergan, 2013).

In a report from the Ministry of Health, 44 municipalities in Norway sent supervision reports to their County Governors⁵ (Statens Helsetilsyn, 2012). One of the purposes of this was to find out whether the Child Welfare Service ensures that children participate in their child welfare case. The authors found several flaws when it came to the participation of children. First, they found that it seemed to be random whether children were spoken to or not. Their second finding was that most of the municipalities lacked guidelines for talking to children, or had guidelines that they did not follow. Third they found that if the Child Welfare Service did have conversations with the child, they did not systematically document this. Fourth, the Child Welfare Service lacked competence concerning the participation of children (Statens Helsetilsyn, 2012).

In 2011, Forandringsfabrikken⁶ published a report with suggestions on how to improve the Child Welfare Service. The suggestions came from 200 children and youth, who were aged between 10 and 20 (Barnevernsproffene, 2011). Amongst the suggestions was that the Child Welfare Service should give them better information, as this would make it easier for them to express their opinion and to participate. They further suggested that every child or youth who

⁵ In Norwegian: *Fylkesmann*. The County Governor is the Government's representative in the County (Collin-Hansen, 2013). Concerning the Child Welfare Service in the municipalities, the County Governor is obliged to ensure that they are following their duties according to the law, that they are receiving advice and assistance and to supervise the child welfare institutions (Collin-Hansen, 2013).

⁶ *Forandringsfabrikken* is an organisation that has as a goal to include children and youth in giving suggestions on how to improve the services the children and youth are in contact with (Forandringsfabrikken, 2014).

is not able to live at home, should always be able to participate in the decision of where he or she should move. They urge the Child Welfare Service to remember the huge responsibility it has when moving a child or youth, and that the child should get good and honest information throughout this process of moving (Barnevernsploffe, 2011).

The research presented in this section suggests that, although there are some variations, children and youth have not been or are not participating in the Child Welfare Service with the extent that they, according to the prevailing jurisdiction described above, should have been. Together, these studies outline the need for increased participation for children and youth in the Child Welfare Service. However, there are also some variations, and some youth are satisfied to the extent to which they have participated. To summarise, these studies highlight the need for clearer guidelines and protocol for how to really ensure the participation of children in the Child Welfare Service.

2.5 Aftercare

As explained in the introduction, aftercare is the assistance the Child Welfare Service provides to persons when they turn 18 (Storø, 2012). There are some conditions for receiving aftercare. First, the person has had to have received assistance from the Child Welfare Service before he or she turned 18. Second, the young people themselves have to agree to receive the assistance. Third, the caseworker in the Child Welfare Service has to believe that giving the young person aftercare is necessary for him or her (Storø, 2012). In practice, this last condition means that the person has no *right* to receive aftercare and that even though the youth might want to receive aftercare, if his or her caseworker does not agree, the youth will not be provided with aftercare (Bakketeig & Backe-Hansen, 2008).

Aftercare is a topic which has received a lot of attention in recent years, both among scholars (Bakketeig & Backe-Hansen, 2008; Bogen & Nadim, 2009; Kristofersen, 2009; Storø, 2012) and in the media (Rønvold, 2011; Viggen, 2013; Walseth, 2013). As Bogen and Nadim (2009) argue, many children and youth who receive assistance from the Child Welfare Service are in a vulnerable situation. As Bogen and Nadim (2009) explains, many of these children and youth have little or no contact with their families, and because of this, they do not have many people to support them when they no longer receive assistance from the Child Welfare Service. Therefore, as Kristofersen (2009) argues, aftercare is important, and points

to the fact that young adults who have not been in the Child Welfare Service usually receive aid from their parents in the time after they turn 18.

In 2009, a new sentence was added to paragraph 1-3 in the Child Welfare Act. The sentence states that if the aftercare the child receives is stopped or denied, he or she can complain about this decision (Collin-Hansen, 2013). Paragraph 1-3 also states that the decision on whether a person gets aftercare or not, needs to be based on a decision of what is in the «best interests of the child» (The Child Welfare Act, 1992). The intention is that this amendment is to ensure that the Child Welfare Service conducts a thorough evaluation of whether aftercare should be provided or not (BLD, 2011).

The law has some specific rules concerning children who the Child Welfare Service have placed out of their homes. In paragraph 4-15 it is stated that:

In good time before the child turns 18, the Child Welfare Service shall, together with the child, consider if the placement should continue, or if the child should receive any other types of assistance (The Child Welfare Act, 1992).

In other words, if the child is for instance living in a foster home, the Child Welfare Service need to consider whether the person should continue living in the foster home or if he or she should receive any other type of assistance. However, as Bakketeig and Backe-Hansen (2008) argue, the law does not define what they mean by “in good time”. This paragraph is particularly relevant for this thesis, as many of the youth in my study were removed from their home by the Child Welfare Service.

In 2012, 6,600 youth in Norway received aftercare (SSB, 2013a). There are, however, large variations in the number of persons receiving aftercare between the 19 different counties in Norway. There was, for instance, a twenty per cent increase in the distribution of aftercare in the county of Oppland, and a five per cent reduction of aftercare in the county of Troms in 2012 (SSB, 2013a). In 2008, the following types of assistance for persons between 18 and 22 in the Child Welfare Service was provided, ranging from most to least often used: economic support, foster homes, getting assistance to live in an apartment by themselves, help to live in an apartment with additional guidance and advice and counselling (Clifford & Øyen, 2013).

As Lurie (2008) point out, participation for youth receiving aftercare in the Child Welfare Service, should get particular attention due to four factors. Firstly, he argues that one goal in aftercare is to assist the youth in a process to become independent of the adults and the caseworker in the Child Welfare Service. Therefore, increased participation and the ability to take the responsibility for one's own life, is an important aspect of this process. Secondly, as stated in paragraph 6-3 in Child Welfare Act, which is thoroughly described above, the right of the child to participate should be given weight according to the age and maturity of the child. Accordingly, the participation of youth receiving aftercare should be heavily weighed. Thirdly, the young persons have to agree to receive aftercare. This implies that the discussion of receiving aftercare should be considered together with the youth. Fourthly, when the youth turns 18, he or she becomes a part in their child welfare case (Lurie, 2008).

2.5.1 Previous Research on Aftercare

As Clausen (2008) argues, there was relatively little research conducted on aftercare in Norway until 20007. The following presentation of previous research on aftercare mainly focuses on research concerning specific experiences of aftercare by youth. My focus will be on research publications from Norway. The findings presented will provide as useful into gaining insight into the research topic, and also during the analysing of my findings.

Kristofersen and Clausen (2008) have conducted a longitudinal study about the life situation of children who have received assistance from the Child Welfare Service. One of their findings was that 70 per cent of the children had received social benefits one or more times after they turned 18. In their control group the percentage was 12. Another finding was that almost 70 per cent of the children in the study had been registered as unemployed. Of particular interest concerning the issue of aftercare, is that the persons in the study who had received aftercare had a 47 per cent higher chance of achieving a so-called “successful adult career”⁷ than those youth who had not received aftercare (Kristofersen & Clausen, 2008).

In Trondheim municipality a study was conducted on the transition to adulthood of youth who had been in the Child Welfare Service (Storhaug & Bratterud, 2008). The researchers found that, in general, the youth were satisfied with the assistance they had received. Those who

⁷A «successful adult career» is here defined as fulfilling at least three of these four criteria: Having an education beyond high school, a gross income above 200.000 NOK, and not having received social benefits or having been unemployed (Kristofersen & Clausen, 2008).

were satisfied with the assistance, also felt that they had participated in the decision of what type of aftercare they would get. However, not all the youth felt that they had got the assistance which they needed. To summarise, the recommendations from the youth were; to be understood based on their individual situation, to be heard, and to be able to decide themselves what assistance they should receive. The researchers recommended that youth should be better informed about the fact that they may regret it if they say no to aftercare (Storhaug & Bratterud, 2008).

Elisiv and Mathisen (2008) conducted a focus group discussion with five girls between the ages of 22 to 26, who had all been in the Child Welfare Service. The researchers focused particularly on the way the Child Welfare Service had dealt with the girls' transition to adulthood. Many of the youth spoke of loneliness as an issue, and pointed out that a strong relationship with a person whom they could talk to as important. The youth in the research further focused on their need of financial support from the Child Welfare Service. Some felt that the jurisdiction of receiving aftercare forced them to appear competent, as they needed to know their rights, but at the same time, they had to ensure that they did not appear too competent. If they appeared to be too competent, their caseworker might not consider them as in need of aftercare (Elisiv & Mathisen, 2008). The degree to which the youth felt that they had participated also varied, and some expressed that the framework for participating did not necessarily fit their individual needs (Elisiv & Mathisen, 2008). The scholars of the report additionally suggested that there is a need for further research on the topic of youth in aftercare and the factors that promote and prevent their participation (Elisiv, Oterholm, & Backe-Hansen, 2008).

In a study conducted by Fransson (2009), 27 youth between 19 and 27 who had moved from three different youth homes were interviewed. Over half of the youth in her study said that they were offered aftercare. Fransson (2009) found that the concept of aftercare seemed a bit unclear to most of the youth, even to the youth whom she believed had, in fact, received such assistance. She argues that this could be due to a lack of explicit information about aftercare (Fransson, 2009).

Seven youth with minority backgrounds were interviewed by Bogen and Nadim (2009). Four of the youth in this study had received aftercare. Several of them mentioned that the transition to adulthood was sudden, and they wished that they could have been better prepared,

particularly when it came to issues such as handling their finances and other aspects of living on their own. All of them talked about the relation to one specific person whom the Child Welfare Service had put them into contact with. They all described this relation as important to them in their transition from childhood to adulthood (Bogen & Nadim, 2009).

Aannestad (2004) interviewed seven girls between 18 and 22 years. All of them had a minority background and had lived part of their lives in an institution. The youth all said that the most important thing the Child Welfare Service had done for them was to introduce them to a person who had become very important in their lives. Some of the girls said that they were afraid that the Child Welfare Service would end the contact when they turned 18. They said that they did not feel ready to end the contact when they turned 18, and hoped that they could receive support until they turned 23 (Aannestad, 2004).

Thirteen youth with drug and behavioural problems were interviewed in a study by Reime (2008). The objective was to explore the experiences of these youth of moving out of a child welfare institution and in to their own apartment. The youth said that it was often people from the institution where they had lived who followed them up. According to the youth, this was positive, as these were people they knew and had a relationship with. Those of the youth who received aftercare had only positive experiences of this (Reime, 2008).

The studies presented above provide evidence that most youth who receive aftercare are generally satisfied with this assistance. The review also indicates that those receiving aftercare are satisfied regarding their participation. The studies further draw our attention to a wish from some youth for further participation, and the need to take individual needs into account when providing assistance. Furthermore, a common theme expressed was that the Child Welfare Service had introduced them to persons who have become meaningful in their lives.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

As Nilsen (2005) argues, theoretical concepts can provide insights and understandings into the empirical experiences. In this chapter the theoretical framework for this study will be presented. First, the dominant paradigm of how one in general understands and views children and childhood will be presented. This is relevant because, as Punch (2002) argues, the way children and childhood is viewed has implications for the whole research process, from choice of design, methods, ethics, participation and analysis. In addition to this, as Rakvaag (2008) argues, the Child Welfare Service is constantly changing and is affected by the way we view children in our society. I therefore find it necessary to examine the dominant way of viewing children and childhood. Further, the three guiding principles of the Child Welfare Service will be described. This is done in order to gain insight into the framework of the Child Welfare Service. This knowledge will be useful for getting a better understanding of the collected data. Furthermore, children's participation will be theorized, with a focus on different approaches to children's participatory rights. Furthermore Hart's Ladder of Participation will be presented. This will be a useful tool when it comes to discuss the degree of participation the youth in my study feel that they have had as individuals. Lastly, children and citizenship will be addressed, hereunder the implications of viewing children as citizens.

3.2 The Social Studies of Children and Childhood

James and Prout (1990) discuss some key features to what were, at the time they wrote the article, the emerging features of the "new" sociology of childhood. The key features clarify the differences between how one used to perceive children and childhood and to how children and childhood are commonly viewed today. Understanding these key features will be useful when trying to understand the dominant paradigm of viewing children and childhood today.

Firstly, James and Prout (1990) argue that *childhood is a social construction*. This implies that childhood is not a natural nor universal feature, but a structural and cultural component of many societies. As Rogers (2003b) explains, social constructionist approaches view understandings of what constitutes a child as the product of different world views. Rogers (2003b) exemplifies and discusses the way the law defines when childhood ends and adulthood begins. She gives an example of her own life. Her childhood legally ended when she turned 21, but if she had been born after the year 1950, it would have ended when she was

18. This illustrates how childhood is not a natural or universal given, but changeable and socially constructed (Rogers, 2003b).

The second feature is that childhood is viewed as a *variety of childhoods* rather than as a single and universal phenomenon. Childhoods are affected by variables such as gender, class and ethnicity (James & Prout, 1990). As Franklin (1995) argues, being a child is not a universal experience, but reflects differences such as gender, class, ethnicity and historical factors. As for instance Rogers (2003a) argues, a child's gender determines how the child sees themselves and relates to others, the boundaries of what children can and cannot do and also their life opportunities. She further discusses that a child's gender is strongly affected by where and when the child is living. Rogers (2003a) addresses the fact that in some countries in the South, girls, as a general trend, are receiving less education than boys. She further turns to the North, where there is a more equal access to education for girls and where there is a trend that girls are outperforming boys at school. However, this does not seem to result in greater earning capacity or equal access to powerful positions for women (Rogers, 2003b). Both the examples from children's schooling in the North and the South illustrate how variables, and from these examples, the child's gender, can affect the childhood of children.

The third point is that children are *worthy of study in their own right*, independent of the perspectives of adults (James & Prout, 1990). Closely tied to this point is the debate on the child as a "human being" or a "human becoming". The "new" sociology of childhood criticises the pre-sociological perspectives on children, where the child was viewed as a "human becoming", rather than as a "human being" (Clark, Moss, & Kjørholt, 2005). Lee (2001) notes that the "human being" (the adult) is seen as complete, stable, self-possessed and self-controlling. Whereas "the human becoming" (the child) is seen as changeable, incomplete, lacking in self-possession and self-control (Lee, 2001). As Gulbrandsen et al. (2012) argue, the shift was away from seeing children as "unfinished adults", to seeing children as people and participants in society in their own right. Lee (2001) argues that this assumption of children as "human becomings" has led to adults gaining power and responsibility over children's lives. As he explains, due to the fact that children are considered to be "human becomings", they cannot be properly said to speak for themselves. They speak from and for ignorance and unreason. Only "human beings" are capable of speaking for themselves (Lee, 2001).

Fourthly, children are seen as *active in the construction of their own social lives*, and not only as passive subjects of social processes (James & Prout, 1990). Klocker, Robson, and Bell (2007) argue that where one previously viewed children and youth as passive and innocent dependents, or even as victims, the dominant paradigm is to view children as individuals with the capacity to act and shape their own lives. James and James (2008) argue that this way of viewing children and young people, implies that the children and young people have a certain control over the direction of their own lives. It also implies that they play a part in the changes that take place in society (James & James, 2008). This capacity can also be defined as *agency*. James and James (2008) define agency as “the capacity of individuals to act independently” (p. 9), while James (2009) adds that agency is children’s ability to act creatively and to make things happen.

3.3 Three Main Principles in the Child Welfare Service

It is commonly said that there are three main guiding principles for the Child Welfare Service in Norway. These are: that the assistance has to be in the “best interests of the child”, the biological principle, and the principle of mildest intervention (Holgensen, 2013; Raundalen, 2012). These three principles are described and discussed below.

3.3.1 The Best Interests of the Child

The principle of the “best interests of the child” is considered to be the overriding principle in the Child Welfare Service, and is also the only principle which is explicitly mentioned in the Child Welfare Act (Raundalen, 2012). Specifically it is stated in paragraph 4-1 that:

When applying the decisions in this chapter, finding measures that are in the best interests of the child shall be of decisive importance. This shall include giving the child stable and good contact with adults and continuity in the care (The Child Welfare Act, 1992).

In practice this means that when the caseworkers in the Child Welfare Service act, they must ensure that the “best interests of the child” is the determining factor (Collin-Hansen, 2013). As Bunkholdt and Sandbæk (2008) argue, the «best interests of the child» is a normative concept, which is influenced by the attitudes of society. As Kjørholt (2008) points out, there is no way to universally establish what the «best interests of the child» are. The concept of the

“best interests of the child” is open to a wide range of interpretations and consensus is not easily achieved (Montgomery et al., 2003).

Discussions about the “best interests of the child” in the Child Welfare Service often include a discussion concerning continuity and stability (Follesø, 2009). *Continuity* means to ensure that the child receives care which is coherent with a sense of belonging somewhere. *Stability* means that the child has adults around him or her who are predictable and reliable. The discussion about the relative weight of these two considerations is debated within the disciplines of both law and child welfare (Follesø, 2009). As Bunkholdt and Sandbæk (2008) explains, this discussion boils down to the question: What will harm the child most; to end the continuity in the care for the child in order to increase the child’s chances of stable care, or to let the child live in an unstable home so that he or she can experience continuity? This is a question the Child Welfare Service needs to address if they consider moving a child, for instance to a foster home or to a child welfare institution (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008).

3.3.2 The Biological Principle

The biological principle is one of the fundamental values in Norway (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). The biological principle is based upon the assumption that a child should grow up with his or her parents, and that this has a value in itself (Lindboe, 2012). The biological principle was dominant in the preparatory work of the Child Welfare Act, although it has not been expressed explicitly in the Act (Lindboe, 2012). Bunkholdt and Sandbæk (2008) argue that the starting point for the Child Welfare Service is that children should grow up with their parents. The assistance from the Child Welfare Service should therefore primarily enable children to grow up with their parents (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008).

In 2012, a report which evaluated the influence of the biological principle in the Child Welfare Service, was published (Raundalen, 2012). The authors of this report recommend that a new principle called “the principle of development enhancing attachment”⁸ should be added as a new and equivalent principle to the general principles in the Child Welfare Service (Raundalen, 2012). This principle is based on attachment theory. Attachment theory is based on the belief that the child develops attachment through interaction with their primary caregivers (Storø, 2012). Smith (2013) argues that there is a trend that the status of the

⁸ In Norwegian: *Prinsippet om utviklingsstøttene tilknytning*.

biological principle has been weakened in favour of attachment theory. Those proposing this new principle argue that the three following aspects are important to consider in cases where the Child Welfare Service considers taking custody over a child: The first is whether the attachment and relationship between the child and his or her caregivers is development enhancing or not. Second, how serious and stable the neglect of the child is, and third, whether the characteristics of the care-givers are permanent or temporary (Raundalen, 2012). Smith (2013) argues that there is reason to believe that this report will lead to proposals for changes in the child welfare legislation. This would among other things probably imply that the question of adoption would arise earlier and occur more frequently (Holgensen, 2013).

3.3.3 Mildest Intervention

Following the principle of mildest intervention means that one always first considers providing assistance to the child in his or her home. This can also be seen as being in line with the biological principle, where the overall goal is that children should grow up with their biological parents (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). Specifically, the law states that one should not make an intervention more intrusive than is necessary (Lindboe, 2012). As Raundalen (2012) argues, the child welfare legislation is rooted in the idea that assistance to children and youth should be based on cooperation and voluntarism. This is based on the idea that the best way to help children and youth is through cooperation (Raundalen, 2012). Lindboe (2012) categorizes the different forms of assistance the Child Welfare Service provides into five categories ranging from least intrusive to most intrusive. These are: Assistance with consent in the child's home, assistance in the home without consent, voluntary care in an institution or a foster home, forced care outside the home, and the most intrusive form of assistance, namely, forced adoption of the child.

3.4 Children and Participation

In this section the issue of children and participation will be debated. The term "participation" is a diverse concept. Montgomery et al. (2003) argue that children's participation is about children being consulted over matters which affect their lives. It is also about being able to influence decisions on issues affecting them. They further claim that participation takes place when children and young people are being treated with dignity and respect, and when their activities are being recognised. Finally, it is about being listened to (Montgomery et al., 2003).

Vis and Thomas (2009) comment that although definitions of children's participation may vary, there can be an agreement on certain key features of their participation in decision-making processes. First, that the child has information so that he or she can understand the content of the decision-making, and what the arguments and options are. Second, the child needs to have the opportunity to express his or her views and wishes. Third, the child's opinions should be considered, and the opinions should actually have an influence on the final decision (Vis & Thomas, 2009). It will be interesting to look closer at this ideal of participation in relation to the answers the youth in my research give about their own participation in their child welfare case.

3.4.1 Protection or Participation?

Children's participation is closely tied to the debate about children as rights bearers. The debate about the different approaches one has to children's rights, is closely linked to how much children are both excluded and included from decision-making in society, and also to what extent children should be listened to and have their view-points validated and supported (Montgomery et al., 2003). As Stoecklin (2013) points out, interpretation of the participatory rights of children depends on the viewpoints people have about childhood. Below, three different ways of regarding the participation of children will be discussed.

As debated by Montgomery et al. (2003) taking a *protectionist approach* to the rights of children implies that children are viewed as in need of adult protection and help. Accordingly, adults are the ones competent to make decisions on behalf of the child. Alternatively, having a *participatory approach* to the rights of children implies that children are in need of empowering, in order to make decisions on their own behalf. The belief is that children are capable of making decisions themselves (Montgomery et al., 2003).

Moosa-Mitha (2005) draws our attention to a third perspective on children's rights, which is *the liberal paternalist view*. As argued by Freeman (1992) to take children's rights seriously requires us to take seriously both the protection of children and a recognition of their autonomy. In practice, this means to take seriously both nurture and self-determination, and that we adopt policies, practices, and laws which both protect children, and also their rights (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). In other words, this last approach takes into account *both* the arguments for taking a participatory and for taking a protectionist approach to the participation of children.

3.5 Hart's Ladder of Participation

Hart (1992) has designed a Ladder of Participation which is meant to serve as a tool for discussing children's participation. Hart's initial interest was children's participation in environmental projects, but the ladder metaphor has also been applied more widely (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003). As Wyness (2006) argues, this is an influential model which has been applied by a number of academics and professionals. The different stages of the ladder describe different degrees of children's participation. Hart (1997) argues that this ladder can be used as a basis for discussing how adults can support the involvement of children. He argues that the first three levels of the ladder are unacceptable, and that the next five stages can be categorized as being "models of genuine participation" (Hart, 1992, p. 12). The different stages of Hart's Ladder of Participation (1997) are described below.

1. **Manipulation** refers to cases where adults use children to carry out their own messages. This can also be the case if adults deny their own involvement in a project, and pretend that it was a child-initiative (Hart, 1997).
2. **Decoration** can for instance be seen when children wear t-shirts with a political slogan (Hart, 1992). Children do not, however, understand the cause they are promoting (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003). This is one step higher than manipulation, since adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by children (Hart, 1992).
3. **Tokenism** is when adults design projects where children *seem* to have a voice, but in fact have little choice about the subject or style of communicating it, or no time to formulate their own opinions (Hart, 1997). Hart (1997) argues that tokenism is a very common form of involving children, and he hopes that by discussing this fact, we might be able to push some of these interactions further up the ladder.
4. **Assigned, but informed.** In this stage adults decide on the project, and children and young people volunteer for it. The adults respect the children's views and the children feel fully informed (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003). Hart (1997) argues that, unfortunately, the way these projects are often carried out, is in a manner which does not actually meet the requirements of genuine participation.
5. **Consulted and informed.** These projects are run and designed by adults, yet children understand the processes, are consulted and taken seriously. At a minimum for this stage, children should be informed about all parts of the process, asked to volunteer and to be fully

informed of the results (Hart, 1997). The children also have a meaningful, rather than “decorative”, role (Hart, 1992).

6. **Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children.** At this stage, adults have the initial idea, but children and young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation process (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003). This stage of the ladder is, according to Hart (1992), real participation because even though the projects are led by adults, children are still a part of the process of decision-making. To reach this step of the ladder, children need to be involved to some degree in the entire process (Hart, 1997).
7. **Child-initiated and child-directed.** Children and young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is carried out. Adults are available, but do not take charge at all (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003). These types of initiatives are particularly difficult to find, except for in children’s play (Hart, 1997). When children work together in their play to carry out projects, we call this child-initiated and child-directed (Hart, 1992).
8. **Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults.** In this part of the ladder children design and directly influence themes they are interested in (Hart, 1997). However, they can also involve adults, and, as Hart (1997) argues, if children direct and manage the project and choose to involve adults, they should be allowed to do so. However, there is a fine line between an adult offering assistance and children feeling that they have no choice but to accept the adult’s recommendations.

3.5.1 Limitations

It is also useful to consider some of the limitations of this ladder approach. Kirby and Woodhead (2003) argue that one might be tempted to judge projects according to how high up they are on the ladder, as if the higher stages are more desirable than the lower ones. They point to the fact that in some contexts it may be more appropriate for adults to actually take the lead (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003). This is also a point which Hart (1997) himself makes. As discussed when describing children’s participation in the Child Welfare Service, the child’s right to participation does not imply that the child has a responsibility to decide everything (BLD, 2009). Another limitation of the ladder approach is that children’s participation is a multi-dimensional concept and cannot easily be put on a linear scale (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003). Hart (2008) also cautions that the ladder is limited in describing the varying roles adults play when it comes to children’s participation.

3.6 Citizenship

In the following discussion of citizenship I have chosen to focus on the issues which are most relevant for the objective of this thesis, these being the definition of citizenship, citizenship in relation to children and the four main building blocks which Lister (2008) argues constitute children's citizenship. In addition to these three aspects I will also discuss some limitations of viewing children as citizens.

3.6.1 Defining Citizenship

As Lister (2008) points out, there is no single definition of citizenship. Shafir and Brysk (2006) draw our attention to the fact that citizenship is rooted in the Greek tradition and is one of the oldest political concepts in Western political philosophy. As Moosa-Mitha (2005) argues, citizenship has always been linked to the notions of inclusion and exclusion in society. When defining citizenship, the following quote from Marshall's essay from 1977 is commonly used as a starting point:

Citizenship is a status bestowed to those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed (Marshall, 1977, p. 84).

In other words, Marshall (1977) argues that citizenship is a status for everyone who are full members of the society, and that this status gives the person rights and duties which are the same for everyone (Bjerke, 2012). Smith and Bjerke (2009) emphasizes that citizenship entails belonging to a society, having meaningful interaction within the society, being heard and noticed, and having obligations and rights. Liebel (2007) argues that the notion of citizenship is closely connected to notions of democracy and participation. Liebel (2007) further debates that civil, political, cultural, social economic rights are fundamental to citizenship. Bjerke (2010) argues that being a citizen is about having an identity in a dual process where one shares experiences, interests, values and lifestyles with others.

3.6.2 Citizenship and Children

First, one could question, as Winter (1997) does, whether children today are in fact citizens or not. According to him, there seems to be general agreement among scholars that children are not citizens in the formal political sense of the word. Only when the child turns the age of 18

and he or she he can vote is he or she considered to be a citizen (Winter, 1997). Cohen (2005) discusses that children in liberal democracies are, on the one hand, considered to be citizens, due to the fact that they, in most cases, hold passports and receive at least one nationality at birth. On the other hand, children are not citizens, as they are judged to be incapable of making rational and informed decisions that characterize self-governance (Cohen, 2005). Cohen (2005) accordingly describes children as “semi-citizens”, as they are citizens by certain standards, yet not by all. Moosa-Mitha (2005) argues for a difference-centred approach to citizenship, where the definition of children’s citizenship is not defined with a reference to adults as a standard through which their citizenship is measured. The idea here is to define children’s citizenship in ways that take their status and rights as citizens seriously on the basis of their identity as children, as opposed to the exclusion of them as children. Children are not understood in the term of “not-yet-adults” (Moosa-Mitha, 2005).

The notion of children’s citizenship has become an increasingly popular tool the last decade for rethinking children’s position in society (Invernizzi & Williams, 2008). One could question the relevance of discussing children and citizenship. Bjerke (2012), for instance, debates that the increased focus on children’s rights and children as citizens can be seen in a historical context for social equality and justice. As Roche (1999) discusses, the demand that children should be included in citizenship is simply a request that children can be seen as members of society too, with a legitimate and valuable voice and perspective. Kj rholt (2010) argues that to recognize children as citizens foremost entails respecting the equality of children with regard to their human dignity and the right to be included in the society as competent contributors. The participation of children in civil society is seen as significant for the child. It is also beneficial for the society in the long run, as it is in the long run beneficial for the society that children learn democratic processes, skills and knowledge which are useful for the society (Kj rholt, 2010).

It is furthermore possible to spot the power dimensions concerning children and citizenship. As for instance argued by Winter (1997), citizenship works as a social dividing line, between active and inactive people, between the powerful and the powerless, in other words, between children and adults. Smith and Bjerke (2009) highlight that adults have a very important part to play in recognizing and supporting children’s citizenship, in how they construct childhood, and in how they create spaces for children to participate. They further describe this process as interdependence between adults and children. They argue that for children to be able to

achieve citizenship, the practice and attitudes of adults need to change (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). Smith and Taylor (2009) highlight, being listened to, respected and taken seriously, shows that one can stand up to oneself and others, and make a difference, in opposition of being helpless recipients of what other more powerful persons do to us.

3.6.3 Four Main Building Blocks of Children's Citizenship

According to Lister (2008), there are four main building blocks that constitute children's citizenship. These are; membership, rights, responsibilities and equality of status, respect and recognition.

Membership is related to children's sense of belonging, which is built up of children's reciprocal relationships, acceptance and respectful treatment. Children's recognition as political beings, having a sense of democratic responsibility is supported by them being counted as members of their communities and involved in individual and collective decision-making (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). As Smith and Bjerke (2009) argue, children are social participants at home, school, in work and in the community. These settings provide them with the opportunity to practice citizenship. Further, Lister (2008) argues that *Rights* and especially participatory rights, are of particular significance for children and citizenship, as children cannot vote. Children's disqualification from adult-citizenship rights is justified on the grounds of their need of protection. Few would argue against this. However, as for instance Archard (2004) maintains, the use of 18 as a point of transition is unfair, and questions whether it is right to assume that an 17-year old can, within a day, have the capacity or competence to have certain rights. Another component of citizenship is *Responsibilities*, which implies following the law, and also responsibilities in daily contexts such as in the family and or through work (Lister, 2008). The last building block of citizenship is the *Equality of Status, Respect and Recognition*. These aspects are as important to children as to anyone else (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). As Lister (2007) points out, a common theme in the literature concerning citizenship is a lack of recognition and respect for the responsibilities that children and young people exercise. She debates that this reflects a wider notion that children and young people are not respected and therefore do not enjoy genuine equality of status as citizens (Lister, 2007).

3.6.4 Limitations

As Kjørholt (2010) points out, the notion of children as citizens is not unproblematic. As for instance argued by Winter (1997) considering children as citizens can give the child too much responsibility, and could be a burden for the child. He further argues that it is the responsibility of the adult to create circumstances which are crucial for the quality of life for the child (Winter, 1997). This argument resembles the main arguments concerning children and participation, where, as discussed earlier, if children have the responsibility of making decisions, this can be giving the child too much responsibility and put the child in a difficult situation. Lister (2008) also points to the fact that although citizenship is sometimes treated as being a unitary concept, it is not.

4 Methods and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an elaboration of the methods used to answer the research questions will be provided. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) claim that one way to define *methods* is as “the way to a goal” (p. 82). They also give a more specific definition, namely that methods are “A systematic, more or less rule-based, procedure for observation and analysis of data (p. 325)”. According to Ennew and Abebe (2009) research *methodology* explains the reasons for using certain methods. To begin with, the methods used, namely semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be described. Further, an elaboration of how access to youth was gained in order to select my participants will be provided, followed by an elaboration of the process of data analysis. Ethical considerations encountered during the conduction of this research will also be assessed, including concepts such as confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent. Lastly, the validity and reliability of my research will be described, and finally the limitations of this study will be elaborated on.

4.2 Being Part of a Research Team

As discussed in several studies (Alderson, 2004; Ennew & Abebe, 2009; Haugen et al., 2012) gaining access to children and youth can be challenging. My supervisor therefore arranged a meeting with me and a PhD candidate, Veronika Paulsen⁹, as she and I were conducting research on similar themes. Consequently we collaborated on gathering and exchanging data. In addition, I participated with Paulsen in four focus group discussions with youth who all had experience with the Child Welfare Service. As pointed out by Lloyd-Evans (2006), the material gathered from focus group discussions, is a reflection of the views of that group. The data collected from the focus group discussions will therefore be used in my data analysis to spot general trends and tendencies. I do not use any direct quotes from the focus group discussions. The main focus of this study lies on the individual interviews I conducted.

In addition to participation in the focus group discussions, I received two transcriptions from interviews which Paulsen conducted with a caseworker in the Child Welfare Service, and also with the police. I agree with Ennew and Abebe (2009) who argue that insights and opinions from other persons than the child him or herself, such are valuable sources of information as

⁹ Veronika Paulsen is affiliated to the Department of Social Work and Health Science (ISH) and NTNU Samfunnsforskning AS and writes her thesis concerning the Child Welfare Service in Norway.

their experiences can provide insight into the children's lives. Willis (2006) additionally argues that before conducting interviews, one should prepare well by reading all available relevant material, as it will enable you to get more out of the interview. The information from the interviews conducted by Paulsen enabled me to get a deeper insight into how the Child Welfare Service operates and proved beneficial in the analysis process. As Tjora (2012) argues, increased knowledge about a theme will enable the researcher to ask more precise questions. He, however, warns that knowing a lot about a theme might also lead to bias (Tjora, 2012). My intention was, in accordance with what Dalen (2011) suggests; to use my preconceived knowledge to increase my understanding of the experiences and expressions of the participants.

4.3 Sampling and Sample

Sampling is the process of selecting participants for data collection. Correct sampling processes will provide reliable data, and a sample which is wrongly chosen might make the research invalid (Ennew & Abebe, 2009). However, as the scholars further argue, in research with hard-to-reach and mobile populations, researchers cannot afford to be too detailed about sampling, as the problem might be to find any suitable persons at all. The research will be scientific if researchers are truthful and precise when they write about how they got into contact with their participants (Ennew & Abebe, 2009).

4.3.1 Strategic Sampling

The sampling method I used is called strategic sampling. Strategic sampling is when the researcher first decides which target group he or she wants, and then chooses persons from the target group to participate in the study (Johannessen, Tufte, & Christoffersen, 2010). My target group was young adults who had received, or were still receiving assistance from the Child Welfare Service. I therefore planned to strategically find persons who were in this target group. This was done through contacting specific persons who worked with people in this age group. A meeting was arranged where I presented my project and a decision to collaborate was made. As Masson (2004) argues, so-called "gatekeepers", persons who control the researcher's access to children and youth, can have the positive function of ensuring that children are protected from emotional harm. Researchers should expect gatekeepers to test the researchers' motives and act as a barrier to potentially damaging research. Researchers therefore need to be prepared to explain their research and their steps to minimise the

potential risks of their research (Masson, 2004). I ensured that I was clear about my whole research, especially regarding the ethical aspects. Through this contact, I carried out three semi-structured interviews with three youth. The remaining seven interviews and the focus group discussions were arranged through Paulsen. Masson (2004) states that when researchers gain access to children and youth through persons who provide services for them, the child or youth might feel pressured to participate. The participatory aspect of the study was therefore emphasized to the youth at several occasions. I am additionally aware, as Mason (2008) argues, that when researchers sample people for strategic purposes, this sample is not necessarily representative in every possible sense of the population at large. My sample is not defined as a representative sample that can draw conclusions about the population as a whole (Ennew & Abebe, 2009).

I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with ten different youth, six girls and four boys. They were all aged between 16 and 19. One youth was 16, another was 17, three of the youth were 18 and the remaining four were aged 19. In addition to this, I participated in four focus group discussions with altogether 21 young people. Four of the participants in the focus group discussions were girls, and seventeen were boys. The gender balance represents an overrepresentation of boys. This could reflect a trend in the Child Welfare Service in general, as data from 2012 show that more boys than girls received assistance from the Child Welfare Service (SSB, 2013a). Five of the youth in the focus group discussions were youth I also conducted individual interviews with. Accordingly, I interviewed 26 different youth. Table 1 below illustrates the age of my participants, and additionally the total number of youth who participated in each research method.

Table 1: Participants

Method	Semi-structured interviews	Focus group discussions
Ages	16 to 19	17 to 24
Total	10	21

In order to fully understand the answers the youth gave, it is important to know something about their background. Bearing in mind my responsibility to ensure their confidentiality (Ennew & Abebe, 2009), I will below describe the youth as a group, focusing on the factors which they have in common. My main focus will be on the ten youth with whom I conducted

semi-structured interviews. As can be expected, and as Thrana (2008) also points out, these ten youth all had different reasons for why they were in the Child Welfare Service. What they all had in common was that the Child Welfare Service believed that they had all been exposed to neglect from their caregivers and that they were in need of some sort of assistance.

4.3.2 Contact with Youth Initiatives

All the youth in my individual interviews and in the focus group discussions have been in contact with one of two initiatives for youth in a city in Norway. In order to ensure their anonymity the description of these two initiatives will not be provided. These two initiatives provide assistance and aftercare to youth. Naturally, due to this, many of the youth in my study have received aftercare. The fact that they have been in contact with one of these two initiatives could perhaps increase their probability of receiving aftercare.

4.3.3 Troubled Childhoods

As Thrana (2008) argues, children and young adults in the child welfare system are a heterogeneous group, and the reasons why they are in contact with the Child Welfare Service vary. However, as Kristofersen and Clausen (2008) also found in their longitudinal study, almost all the participants in my individual interviews described that they have had troubled childhoods. Numbers from Statistics Norway (SSB) show that in 2012, the reason for why the Child Welfare Service intervened, was half of the time due to problems in the child's home (Bergjordet, Dyrhaug, & Haugen, 2011). Other important reasons for the intervention of the Child Welfare Service were parent's psychological issues and also their lack of ability to care for their children, drug abuse and violence and additionally the youth's behaviour problems. However, the reasons do also overlap (Bergjordet et al., 2011).

These findings correspond with the findings in my study. The youth described parents who, at certain times during their childhood, were not able to take adequate care of them. Issues such as the parents' problems with drugs, alcohol, violence, psychological issues and continuous arguing were themes addressed by the youth. Some youth did not agree with the Child Welfare Service' decision to take them out of their home and could not understand why this was done. Some of the participants also mentioned their own problems with drugs and behaviour, usually as a result of having a difficult childhood.

4.3.4 Mobility

The number of times the youth in my study had moved varied. Three of the youth had only moved once, two had moved twice, one had moved three times, three youth had moved four times and one youth had moved five times. By “moving” I here refer to the times where the Child Welfare Service had been involved in placing the child outside his or her home. This includes both voluntary and involuntary moving, and also if the child has moved to an emergency home¹⁰. An emergency home is a place where children who are in urgent need of care can live. They live in this home while they wait for the Child Welfare Service to make a more permanent decision on what is going to happen to them (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). Due to the fact that many of the youth have moved several times, several of them have a great deal of experience from different institutions and foster homes. As Bunkholdt (2006) argues, when children move into an institution or a foster home, their most important source of continuity is often broken. In light of the “best interests of the child”, where one of the key factors is that the child or youth should experience continuity and stability, these changes in their life situation can be problematic (Follesø, 2009).

4.4 Data Collection

I will below describe the two methods I used, namely semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Ethical considerations related to these two particular methods will be discussed in the paragraph titled “Ethical Considerations”.

4.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

To interview the youth, one method I used was semi-structured interviews. According to Ennew and Abebe (2009) a semi-structured interview is a research method with open-ended questions. The interviewer uses a checklist of topics rather than closed questions. Semi-structured interviews are relatively informal, and usually give the participants greater control over the direction of the conversation and allow them to tell their story in their own way (Ennew & Abebe, 2009). The reason I chose this research method was that my aim was to explore the experience of youth, where their stories were central. Willis (2006) argues that semi-structured interviews ensure that the areas the researcher finds important are covered, and also give the person who is interviewed an opportunity to voice her or his own ideas and thoughts. I believe that by using semi-structured interviews, I was able to let the participants

¹⁰ In Norwegian: *Beredskapshjem*.

guide me to ask them about issues and topics which they found relevant and important to discuss. As O’Kane (2008) states, by encouraging children, young people and adults to set the agenda, we are more likely to get new and more relevant areas of questioning as we proceed.

During the interviews an interview guide was used, which had been prepared in advance. An interview guide is a script, which outlines the course of the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) discuss that how strictly one follows the interview guide will depend on the aim of the research. As the aim was to investigate the youth’s experiences and perceptions it was important for me that the youth were able to talk freely about what they had experienced. I did however, notice that I, as Willis (2006) also discusses, relied much more on my interview guide during my first interviews, than after I had conducted a couple of interviews. As I became more comfortable I was able to follow the answers of the participants better. I also, as Christensen (2004) emphasized in her ethnographic study with children, made clear to the youth that I was interested in *their own* experiences of the situation, which hopefully encouraged the youth to talk about this. This resulted in the fact that a topic which I had not included in my interview guide, was included in my analysis, namely the youth’s cooperation with NAV (The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration).

4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions

In addition to conducting ten semi-structured interviews with ten youth, I participated with Paulsen in four focus group discussions. Focus group discussions are group based interviews which usually last for one and a half hours to three hours with around six to eight participants (Lloyd-Evans, 2006). Worth having in mind is that the data recorded from these discussions are opinions rather than facts (Ennew & Abebe, 2009). Focus group discussions are useful for exploring what people think, how they think and why they think the way they do, without pressuring them to make a decision or to reach a consensus (Liamputtong, 2011).

The role of the researcher is to facilitate the interaction between the members rather than to control the discussion (King & Horrocks, 2010{Lloyd-Evans, 2006 #58}) The youth were at the beginning of the interview informed about the themes which we were interested in. However, it could seem as if the youth experienced some freedom to discuss relevant issues which they believed were important. Interestingly, in several of the discussions, the youth started asking each other follow-up questions, which resulted in some very interesting discussions. As Lloyd-Evans (2006) argues, focus group discussions can be empowering, in

the sense that the participants find strength in numbers and feel that they are in some sort of control of the process. She further argues that a good moderator is someone who facilitates the discussion, but who does not dominate or lead the group (Lloyd-Evans, 2006). However, this did sometimes result in quite long interviews, which Lloyd-Evans (2006) points out can make the data difficult to analyse.

Lloyd Evans (2006) argues that one limitation to this method is that groups might become subjected to peer pressure and that some voices might be dominating while others might be silenced. This was a fact which we were aware of, and we therefore tried as Lloyd-Evans (2006) suggests; to let everyone have an equal chance to speak their opinion. In addition to this, ethical considerations were taken into account beforehand. Informed consent, which will be described in depth below, was obtained both in writing and verbally. As King and Horrocks (2010) debates, the issue of ensuring confidentiality is crucial if researchers wish to stimulate discussions in focus group discussions. We therefore stressed that their confidentiality would be ensured and asked the youth to sign a declaration of confidentiality.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

As Alderson and Morrow (2011) argue, ethics pervade every step of the research process. Doing research with children and youth raises some ethical issues, which are important to address before, as well as during and after the research is conducted (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). There are several ethical considerations one could discuss, but I have chosen to concentrate on the concerns that I needed to be particularly aware of and also ones that I encountered in my study. My research has been approved by the NSD¹¹ (see Appendix 1).

4.5.1 My Role as a Researcher

The role of the researcher has a crucial impact on the quality of the scientific knowledge in the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As Ennew and Abebe (2009) argue, researchers must be clear and honest about their research. The manner in which I approached this issue was to explain my objective several times to the youth, in order to make my role as clear as possible. I also before and after the interview asked if they had any questions or if anything was unclear. Robinson and Kellet (2004) discuss that power relations between researchers and

¹¹ The Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) is the Data Protection Official for all the universities, university colleges, several hospitals and research institutes. The NSD reviews applications to conduct research (NSD, 2014).

children and young people need to be addressed when conducting research. Ennew and Abebe (2009) argue that barriers between the researcher and the participant might be reduced when the researcher and the participant are equal in age. I hope that the fact that I was almost the same age as many of my participants could make them feel comfortable, and that I could perhaps more easily relate to them. Nevertheless, I also needed to ensure that I was clear about my role. Further, Mikkelsen (2005) points out that researchers also need to clarify what will be done with the information gathered and to keep promises they make. One way I ensured this was to be clear in the informed consent sheet that I gave to the youth (See Appendix 2). The issue of informed consent will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

4.5.2 Protecting Research Participants

Researchers are responsible for protecting all their research participants from any emotional and physical harm they might suffer from the research (Ennew & Abebe, 2009). In order to prevent harmful research, risk-benefit assessments need to be made (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Assessing the risks in social research is about figuring out the possible and definite harms of the research (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Risks for the participant might be feeling distressed, anxious or embarrassed (Alderson, 2000). Both adults and children can become emotionally upset when talking about their experiences of exploitation and danger (Ennew & Abebe, 2009). The issue of not causing emotional harm to the youth by asking about sensitive topics will be discussed under the section “Respecting Privacy”.

I took some precautions in order to try to make the interview as comfortable as possible for my participants. I followed Willis’ (2006) advice which is to think carefully about where to conduct the interviews. I stressed that it was up to the youth whether he or she wanted to be interviewed, and that the most important issue for me was that they were comfortable with the location. As a result of this my research locations varied. I conducted interviews in the homes of some of the participants, in my own home, at a café and in a room at an institution that some of the youth were attached to.

4.5.3 Informed Consent

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that ensuring informed consent is, first, to inform the research participants about the purpose of the investigation. Second, it is to be clear about the main features of the design. Third, it is to inform those interviewed about any possible risks and benefits from the participation in the research, and lastly, it is to make clear that all

participation is voluntary, and that the participant can withdraw from the study at any time (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As Alderson and Morrow (2011) argue, in order to help people to make an informed decision, they need to be told about their rights. These rights include, first, their right to agree or disagree with their own participation. Second, that no pressure should be put on them, and third, that they could refuse or drop out at any time without having to give a reason. All these issues were expressed to the youth in my research. In the informed consent sheet I gave to the youth, I presented myself, explained my project, gave information and stressed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time (See Appendix 2).

France (2004) stresses that researchers need to provide detailed information about the research so that the participant can make a truly informed decision about whether to participate or not. One way I approached this issue was to ensure that the youth got explicit information about my research at three different times in the process, and in addition, I obtained their consent both writing and verbally. Firstly, they were informed and asked whether they wanted to participate by those who facilitated my participation with them. If they agreed to participate, I contacted them through phone and explained who I was and what my project was about. I again emphasized that their participation was voluntary, and gave them the chance to ask me any questions they might have. Lastly, I again repeated that their participation was voluntary, and explained my motives, before the interview began. My intention was to enable them to make a truly informed decision and ensure that they were fully aware that their participation was voluntary. By repeating this information several times I believe that the room for misinterpretations was minimized.

I furthermore followed the advice of Ennew and Abebe (2009), who argue that one should obtain some kind of record of the consent to participate and also to share a copy with the research participant. This ensured that if the youth later regretted their decision to participate, they could contact me. Due to the fact that all the youth I interviewed were over 16, I did not obtain consent from their parents. This is backed by several scholars (Elisabeth Backe-Hansen, 2001; Gulløy & Haraldsen, 2012; Solveig, 2001) who argue that consent from parents is usually not necessary when children are over 16.

4.5.4 Respecting Privacy

I also needed, as Ennew and Abebe (2009) emphasize, to make sure that I did not violate the youth's privacy by asking sensitive questions or by probing for information when it was clear that the youth did not want to answer the question. Before the interview I stressed that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to answer. I additionally tried to sense when a topic was uncomfortable for the youth and to not probe further on that particular issue. If a youth started to talk about sensitive issues such as violence or abuse, I was always prepared, as Willis (2006) argues, to move onto another topic if the participant was clearly uncomfortable. I did not push anyone to talk further about such issues, however, I tried to be open and facilitate the participant to decide whether they wanted to go further into the sensitive issue or not.

4.5.5 Ensuring Confidentiality

A central issue in my research has been to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Ensuring a person's right to confidentiality implies that you conceal their identity and sometimes other details when you report them (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Ennew and Abebe (2009) maintain that one must protect the participants by changing their names, or not collecting any names at all. However, one does have to collect relevant information to the research such as gender and age (Ennew & Abebe, 2009). The issue of ensuring the confidentiality of the participants surfaced during the transcribing of the interviews. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggests, in sensitive cases it might be advantageous to mask the identities of the person you are interviewing when you are transcribing. I ensured that I never wrote down the name of the youth I interviewed, neither towns, nor places or names of persons which might make them recognisable. In the transcripts I gave to Paulsen I also made sure that I did not reveal the identity of the youth. When writing the analysis I have used factious names for all the youth.

4.5.6 Reciprocity

As Mikkelsen (2005) debates, it is impossible to give any clear guidelines concerning research reciprocity. Nevertheless, she points out that some researchers choose to retain some reciprocity by giving gifts which they believe are appropriate for the situation, such as for instance food and drinks. At the end of the interview I thanked the youth and gave them a chocolate, as a symbol that I appreciated that they offered their time to participate in my study.

Another issue concerning reciprocity is as Alderson and Morrow (2011) point out, that sometimes a direct benefit for the person being interviewed can be that they enjoy having a willing listener. Many of the youth also expressed that they were happy to tell their story and hoped that their stories could be used to improve the issues that are not working in the Child Welfare Service. Thea (19), for instance, had a lot of negative experiences with the Child Welfare Service. At the end of the interview she said:

It is really nice to be able to say something about the Child Welfare Service.

Stian (19) said that when he was asked to participate in my research, he was really happy, as he wanted to tell someone about his experiences and give his recommendations as he hoped that this could improve the service. This is an issue also highlighted by Follesø et al. (2006) who interviewed youth between 18 and 27 about their experiences with the Child Welfare Service. A reflection from their study is that the persons interviewed were persons with knowledge and will, who wished that they could improve the Child Welfare Service by telling their story (Follesø et al., 2006).

4.6 Data Analysis

To analyse data means to systematically sort and order the data so that trends, links, similarities and gaps can be identified (Ennew & Abebe, 2009). In order to analyse my data, I transcribed all the interviews. Below I will describe the transcribing process for the interviews, and elaborate on how the data in this research were analysed.

4.6.1 Transcription of Interviews

Transcribing is the process of transforming the interview from the oral form to the written form (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As Dalen (2011) argues, when researchers are familiar with their transcriptions, preferably having conducted the transcriptions themselves, this can strengthen the further analysis process. I transcribed all my individual interviews, and collaborated with Paulsen regarding the transcriptions of the focus group discussions.

As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue, an interview is a live social interaction. When this interaction is transcribed, the tone of the voice, intonations and breathing are lost (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Willis (2006) encourages researchers to add some own comments when

coming out of the interview, in terms of for instance location or non-verbal communication during the interview. This is something which I did immediately after each interview. In the transcriptions I also included situations when the participant for instance laughed or when there were significantly long pauses in the conversation. Ennew and Abebe (2009) also stress that one needs to record the exact words and body language that people use, and that one should not correct “language mistakes”. I also followed the advice of King and Horrocks (2010) which is to adopt a consistent style of transcribing, as this makes it to read in further stages of the analysing.

As Willis (2006) states, recording allows you to focus on the interview without having to worry about taking notes during the interview. It also enables you to check the meaning of words and phrases you might have missed during the interview. However, Willis (2006) also argues that the presence of a tape recorder could make participants reluctant to speak as they might fear that what they say could be traced back to them. Before I conducted the interviews, I asked all my participants whether I could use a tape recorder. All the participants agreed to this. One boy told me after the interview that he, at first, experienced it as a bit strange to use the tape recorder, but that he soon forgot about it and spoke freely. Perhaps some of the other youth also had similar experience and that this affected their answers. However, I concluded that the benefits of using a recorder were greater than the potential risks of the tape recorder affecting the participant’s answers.

4.6.2 Analysing Process

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that underpinning the process of analysis is to *know* your data. The way in which the data were analysed was through a thematic analysing process. As described by Gibson and Brown (2009), thematic analysis refers to a way of analysing through searching for commonalities, relationships and differences within the data. The aim is to search for “themes” within the data, hence the name “thematic” (Gibson & Brown, 2009). In practice, I followed a basic three staged thematic analysis system described by King and Horrocks (2010). This system will be elaborated below.

In stage one of the analysing system, the transcripts are read through as a whole, yet without being analysed. This is done in order to become familiarised with the context, and the interview as a whole (King & Horrocks, 2010). In this stage one is also advised to review the interview through highlighting anything in the interviews which might help to understand the

experiences of the participants. As King and Horrocks (2010) suggests, the way one organizes this is up to oneself. I used both colour-coding and wrote notes in the margins. The final step of this stage is to use the comments one has written in order to define some codes which describe the data (King & Horrocks, 2010). One example of a code used in my analysing process is “Aftercare”.

In the second stage, one is encouraged to try to define codes which go beyond the accounts from the participants, and to focus more on one’s interpretation of their meaning (King & Horrocks, 2010). One example of such a coding from my data is the code “Not Informed”. The aim in this stage, is not, however, to draw directly from theoretical concepts (King & Horrocks, 2010). The third stage consists of identifying overarching themes and key concepts of the analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010). From my data, a key concept which I found beneficial to use was “Power Relations”.

4.7 Reliability and Validity

As King and Horrocks (2010) debate, validity and reliability are universally recognised criteria for assessing the quality of the analysis in the field of quantitative research. Concerning qualitative data, there is no such general agreement, and scholars debate what the most optimal indicators are (King & Horrocks, 2010). Nevertheless, as for instance Tjora (2012) highlight, validity and reliability are often used as indicators of quality in research, and I do believe that these two criteria highlight significant aspects concerning this thesis.

One way to define *Reliability* is as “A measure of whether the research results will be the same if the research is repeated. This term describes the extent to which a method of data collection will produce similar results if used by other researchers or by the same researcher more than once” (Ennew & Abebe, 2009, p. 16). One way I ensured the reliability of my data was to discuss my findings with the PhD candidate whom I collaborated with, Paulsen, and check whether she had the same interpretations as I had. As Boeije (2010) suggests, when several researchers collaborate in collecting data, the comparison of data provides an opportunity to assess both the reliability and the validity of the data. As Tjora (2012) argues, how informants have been selected and the relation between the researcher and the informants, can also affect the reliability of the research. He argues that in order to strengthen the research’s reliability, one needs to be open about how one has conducted the research, and

any conditions internally which could affect the research. I have therefore stressed openness throughout this thesis and accuracy when it comes to discussing my research process.

Validity can be defined as the strength and soundness of the statement, in other words, if a method enables you to find out what you intend (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Or as Abebe and Ennew (2009) put it; accuracy and truth of the data and results that are produced in research (p. 10.23). Boeijs (2010) suggests that in order to strengthen the validity of the study, it can be beneficial to let someone examine the instruments which you plan to use for your data collection. In my case my supervisor examined my interview guide and gave me critical comments. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue, a common critique of research interviews is that the findings might not be valid because the informant's answers might be fake. They further argue, that, on the other hand, an interviewee might not be "telling the truth" about the actual state of affairs, but the statements may still express the person's view, of him- or herself, for example. Also by knowing the field one is able to ask questions and check the answers of the participants.

4.8 Limitations to the Study

The focus of this study is to explore the opinions and perceptions of a selection of youth who have been in contact with the Child Welfare Service. Haugen, Paulsen and Berg (2012) focus on users of the Child Welfare Service in their study. They argue that focusing on only one side of the story might make their report unilateral. One might argue that in order to get a more nuanced picture one could in addition interview persons working in the Child Welfare Service. In a study of young adults with experience from the Child Welfare Service, conducted by Follesø et al. (2006), it is argued that other persons might nuance, supplement and even conflict with stories told by the youth. As was the case with Follesø et al. (2006) these persons have not been consulted, as the perspectives of the youth was the main concern of her research. This is also the issue in the case of this master thesis, as my aim is to get a better understanding of the youth's experiences.

Seim and Slettebø (2011) argue that there are dilemmas in increasing user participation in the development of child welfare cases. They argue that a selection of informants from the Child Welfare Service cannot represent all persons who are receiving assistance from that service. As explained earlier in this chapter, I am aware of the fact Mason (2008) points out, which is

that when researchers use strategic sampling as a method, which is the sampling method used in this thesis, this is not necessarily representative of the population at large. On the other hand, as Seim and Slettebø (2011) further argue, this does not alter the fact that the perceptions of some users can widen and challenge the administrative and professional perspectives that underlie the Child Welfare Service. I am aware that a larger sample could increase the representation of youth in the Child Welfare Service. However, due to the time schedule for this thesis, this proved difficult.

5 Youth and Participation in the Child Welfare Service: Their Experiences

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the research question: *What experiences have the youth had with their participation in the child welfare case?* Through analysing the interviews, I found that the youth revealed different experiences regarding their own participation. Accordingly, the findings have been grouped into three different categories. The first group consists of those youth who experience that they have been able to participate. The second group consists of those youth who feel that they sometimes have been able to participate. The youth in the third group all have in common that they have for the most part not been able to participate.

Further, I will present and discuss a selection of issues which the youth discuss when describing their participation in the Child Welfare Service. These issues are; First, the implications of not having the same caseworker throughout the time they have had contact with the Child Welfare Service. Second, issues concerning participation in both foster homes and child welfare institutions, as many of the youth brought up these issues when discussing their participation. Third, the experiences the youth have with their supervisor¹², as the role of the supervisors is to pay attention to whether the youth are adequately taken care of and that their opinions are presented to the Child Welfare Service (BLD, 2006). Finally the suggestions the youth have for participation in the Child Welfare Service will be described. All these issues will together illuminate different aspects of the experiences the youth have concerning participation in their child welfare case.

5.2 “I am allowed to decide most things”

Two of the youth in this study expressed that they felt that they in general had been listened to by their caseworker in the Child Welfare Service. They both expressed that they, albeit to various degrees, have been able to participate. Lisa (16) had been in contact with the Child Welfare Service for about two years. She recently moved to an institution for youth. Lisa is the only person in my study who has only had one caseworker in the Child Welfare Service. Concerning the issue of participation, Lisa said that she feels that she had been able to participate and express her opinion:

¹² In Norwegian: *Tilsynsfører*.

I am allowed to decide most things. And then I also get to give my opinion on the issues I want.

When asked to elaborate on how she participated, Lisa said:

I said that I wanted to move out because it didn't work to live with my Mum because we argued all the time, and they listened to me and helped me to find other options.

Another person who also said that he had been able to participate is Stian (19). Stian has lived in both an institution and in a foster home. He has had two different caseworkers. He came to Norway with his father when he was a young child. Stian said that he feels that he has always been listened to. He described his participation as follows, in this case focusing on how he interacted with his caseworker:

I did talk a lot with her, but it was Dad who took, that, adult talk. I was young, but we did talk as she knows my history and some things like that, so she was really easy to talk to. Because she knew me well and all that.

If one looks back at Hart's Ladder of Participation, these two findings resemble stage five of the ladder. In this stage the children understand the processes, they are taken seriously and consulted, yet, the adults are still in control (Hart, 1997). In this stage the children also have a meaningful rather than "decorative" role (Hart, 1992). As both Lisa and Stian were taken seriously and seemed to have a meaningful role, their experiences could be placed on this stage of the ladder. In addition, the adults still have some control, for instance as Stian said, it was his Dad who took the "adult talk". As Lisa said, she was able to decide "most things", implying that there is some adult control indicating that they had the "final say" regarding the decision-making. Stian described being talked and listened to. Stian did not say anything concerning whether his caseworker in general took his opinion into consideration, but it could seem evident from the statement presented below that he is satisfied with the assistance he has received from the Child Welfare Service and that his caseworker has in fact been able to provide assistance that he benefited from:

I don't have words for how grateful I am. Things have become so good, I don't know... I have changed. For the better.

As discussed when theorizing children's participation, participation does not necessarily mean that the child has to have the full responsibility of making decisions (BLD, 2009). This is also reflected in Bjerke's (2011) research with 109 children and young people in Norway, concerning children's views on their own responsibilities. One of Bjerke's findings was that the children and young people interviewed expressed ambiguity when it came to their own positions as responsible beings. They gave a number of examples of how they took responsibility, yet also, a number of examples of responsibilities which they believed were the adult's responsibilities, and not theirs (Bjerke, 2011). As Scheie (2005) argues, adults cannot place the responsibility of making decisions over on to the child. Both answers from Lisa and Stian could illustrate this point. As Stian expresses, it was his Dad who took the "adult talk". He does not describe this as a problem, as he states that he was "young", so for him this was the natural way for things to happen. Lisa also said that she is satisfied with the degree to which she has been able to participate, even though it would seem that she has not been able to decide everything herself. All these reflections can illustrate that they believe that it was not always appropriate for them to decide, and they were sometimes fine with someone else making decisions on their behalf, which is in line with the *liberal paternalist approach*.

These findings can furthermore be interesting to discuss in light of how much children should be able to decide concerning their participation. This issue could be illuminated through a discussion of the different ways of viewing the rights of children. As described previously, taking a *protectionist approach* implies that children are viewed as in need of adult help and protection, and that adults have to make decisions on behalf of children (Montgomery et al., 2003). In this sense, one would argue that the caseworkers of Lisa and Stian were entitled to make decisions on their behalf, in order to protect them from having to make the decisions themselves. On the other hand, taking a *participatory approach* implies that one believes that children are capable of making decisions for themselves, and that children should be empowered to take these decisions (Montgomery et al., 2003) In this sense, Lisa and Stian should be able to decide themselves, in all issues concerning them. Finally, one could take a *liberal paternalist approach*, which implies to focus on both the child's need to participate and decide, but also the need for protection (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). In this sense one could argue that Lisa and Stian should have the possibility to participate and express their opinion, but at the same time, that they are entitled to be protected from making difficult decisions.

Lisa has only had one caseworker and Stian has had two caseworkers, and they were both satisfied with how much they had participated in the Child Welfare Service. This might indicate that having fewer caseworkers increases the chances of being able to participate. As the youth in Barnevernspoffene (2011) point out, many of the children in the Child Welfare Service need stable adults around them, whom they can learn to trust. In order to do this, they need time and not too many adults around them to relate to. Haugen et al. (2012) found in their study that those who had a caseworker who was there for them, were satisfied with the assistance they had received from the Child Welfare Service. This is in line with the notion of *stability*, which is a component of the principle of the “best interests of the child”, the overriding principle in the Child Welfare Services (Raundalen, 2012). The notion of stability entails having stable adults around who are predictable and reliable (Follesø, 2009). As Stian said, his caseworker was easy to talk to because she knew him well. She seemed to be a stable and reliable adult for Stian.

Concerning the issue of the citizenship of children, the factors which, according to Lister (2008), constitute children’s citizenship could also be relevant to examine in light of these findings. The notion of *Membership* could be especially interesting to discuss. To ensure membership, children have to experience reciprocal relationships, acceptance and respectful treatment. Their recognition as political beings is supported by children being involved in individual and collective decision-making (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). One could argue that Lisa and Stian both have been involved in the decision-making process, and they have been treated in a respectful manner. As Kjørholt (2010) argues, to recognize children as citizens is important for the child, with regard to their human dignity and the view that they are competent contributors to society. As Roche (1999), debates, including children in citizenship is to view the voice of children as valuable and legitimate. As for instance Lister (2008) points out, viewing children as citizens is also to view children as competent social actors who contribute to their own lives, here and now. The example of how Lisa said to her caseworker that she did not want to live with her mother could illustrate how she actively contributed to an issue concerning her own life. This is also in line with the notion that children have agency, which is that children have the ability to act creatively and make things happen (James, 2009). The opinion of Lisa was additionally recognised and valued, which Montgomery et al. (2003) argue is an important aspect of being able to participate.

5.3 Participation is Multi-dimensional

The following stories from Helene (19) and Jonas (19) both illustrate the fact that participation is, as Kirby and Woodhead (2003) debate, a multi-dimensional concept. Helene (19) explains that she wished that the Child Welfare Service had listened to her and her family. However, she also points to those in the Child Welfare Service who have done their best, and who indeed have listened to her. The following quotes from Helene can illuminate this:

But I started to ask for help from an early age. They said to me all the time “Yes, we’ll help you.” But I never got the help I needed. They tried other things.

She further turns her focus on those who have actually listened to her:

So I know that they do things in different ways, and I have had quite a few from the Child Welfare Service who have been so good and nice and actually tried their best. There are two ladies there who have helped me a lot. They have also listened to me.

Another example of how participation has many dimensions, can be seen in the case of Jonas (18). Jonas has received assistance from the Child Welfare Service since he was a young child. He has lived in an emergency home, a foster home and in an institution. He has had five different caseworkers. He has varying experiences concerning his participation with the Child Welfare Service. He said that he in general felt that he had been able to participate, and explained how he, together with the Child Welfare Service, came up with solutions, such as where he should live. However, he also described a situation from when he was younger, on the question of whether he felt that he had been able to participate when decisions concerning him were to be made, which could indicate that he did not fully participate. In this case he is discussing who took the decision of him moving from his mother:

Jonas: Hmm, a little unsure. I think it was sort of decided “over my head” at that time. Hm, but I guess it was my aunts and uncles and my grandparent’s decision. I guess so. I am a bit uncertain. But it was okay. I myself did not understand the situation that well, back then, but when I look back I understand what the deal was and things like that.

*Interviewer: Is there any other way they could have helped you to understand better?
Or so that you could have understood more?*

Jonas: No, at that time, I don't think that... I think it was pretty okay.

Placing the experiences of these youth in a stage of Hart's Ladder of Participation can lead to some difficulties. One of the critiques towards this ladder-approach is, as Kirby and Woodhead (2003) argue, that participation is a multi-dimensional concept and cannot be easily put on a linear scale. However, from the first quote from Helene one could argue that it seems that she has not been able to participate. She tried, without succeeding. In Hart's Ladder of Participation, this would fit into the lower ranges of the ladder, where participation is not taking place. On the other hand, the next quote from Helene illustrates that the Child Welfare Service have actually tried their best, and that she was in fact listened to. However, as Helene herself explains it, the Child Welfare Service was not able to do much. In this way, according to the factors Strandbu and Vis (2008) have for participation, which are to be informed, consulted and to actually affect the decision, Helene did not in fact fully participate, as she was not able to affect the decisions the child welfare made.

The example from Jonas can again raise the debate concerning how much a child should actually participate in the decision-making process. As Jonas explained, things were decided "over his head", but he, however, further said that it worked at that time, as he did not understand much. This could represent the stage which Hart (1997) describes as tokenism, where children do not have any choice in the decision which is being taken. However, even though this stage of the ladder is unacceptable according to Hart (1997), Jonas does not seem to see this as a problem. As highlighted earlier, the child's right to participate does not mean that the child should have the responsibility of making decisions in difficult situations (Scheie, 2005). As Thrana (2008) highlights concerning the debate around participation and protection, to protect children is a part of the mandate of the Child Welfare Service, and to protect the child from difficult home situations. The quote from Jonas could imply that he believed that it was not a problem that someone else than he took a decision at that particular stage in his life. This is in line with the *liberal paternalist view*, where children need to be seen as both in need of protection and that their autonomy be recognized (Freeman, 1992).

From this example of Helene it is also possible to see how she performed agency when saying to the Child Welfare Service that she needed help. As described previously, *agency* can be defined as an individual's ability to act creatively and to make things happen (James, 2009). This is in line with the notion of children as active in the construction of their own lives, not just passive subjects of social processes (James & Prout, 1990). However, Helene's opinion seems to not be taken into account, even though she did experience that she had, at some point, actually been listened to. However, according to for instance Abebe (2007), children's agency has been glorified, in the sense that they have been recognized as competent and independent social actors. He further argues that the context in which children participate and exercise agency needs to be elucidated and understood through empirical research (Abebe, 2007). James (2009) also raises the question of what circumstances might inhibit or prevent children from exercising their agency. Applying this argument to my study, one could debate that children and youth do in fact have agency, but the degree to which they are able to exercise their agency is influenced by the manner in which the Child Welfare Service meets the child or youth.

5.4 “I have not been able to decide anything”

Six of the youth in this study describe that they have not been given the information which they need in order to be able to make an informed decision, nor been given the opportunity to express their view, or to affect the decisions in the Child Welfare Service. To begin with, the experiences of the youth who describe situations where events took place without them understanding what was happening will be described. Further, the experiences of those youth who also describe that they have not been listened to will be discussed, however, these examples focus more explicitly on the power relations between the youth and the Child Welfare Service.

Maria (19) was taken out of her home and placed in a foster home when she was the age of eight. She lived in the foster home until she was 18. She explained that she felt that she was fortunate in one way, as she has heard many stories of people in the Child Welfare Service who have had to move a lot. Nevertheless, she was not satisfied with the foster home she lived in, nor is she satisfied with her experiences with the Child Welfare Service. Maria's (19) answer to the question of whether she felt that she had been able to participate in the Child Welfare Service was:

No. Not at all. There have been meetings, there has been assistance, there has been diagnoses and treatment. And all those things, I have not been able to decide anything. And got the message afterwards that “Okay, now we have said this and that. Now it will be like this, this, this”.

Another youth, Andreas (19) had quite similar experiences. Andreas came into contact with the Child Welfare Service in early primary school. As a young teenager he had a problem with drug addiction. He went to rehabilitation, and is now sober. One of the issues that he seemed particularly concerned about is that he feels that he is not getting the assistance that he needs. On the subject of whether he feels that he has been listened to and been able to participate, Andreas said:

No. They come to me and say, “You will have that”. And then I have it sort of.

Malin (19) also has quite similar experiences to those that Maria and Andreas describe. Malin was moved from her mother when she was in early primary school. She has lived in two different institutions. She described her participation in the Child Welfare Service as follows:

Like, just came in and said “Now we have decided that” sort of. It was not a question of what YOU want.

What all these youth describe, is that things are “suddenly” occurring and happening without them understanding the situation. This issue is also expressed by several of the youth in the focus group discussions, where they describe that the Child Welfare Service decided things, and *then* informed them about what was happening. This issue is also found in a study conducted by Thrana (2008) where eight youth with experience from the Child Welfare Service were interviewed. The youth in her study spoke of being moved by the Child Welfare Service without knowing or understanding what was happening. They described this as sudden and furthermore that they did not understand why they had to move (Thrana, 2008). The youth in Barnevernsproffene (2011) argue that children in the Child Welfare Service need to be informed about what has been decided, and what options there are for future assistance. Good and complete information makes it easier to form an opinion and to be able to participate in the decision-making process (Barnevernsproffene, 2011). None of these youth have been able to participate and form an opinion on the issues concerning their lives. The

adults made the decisions, without the youth being consulted. This fact demonstrated the power relations between the youth and the Child Welfare Service. As Wyness (2013) argues, children's perspectives, participation and voice cannot be fully understood unless one takes into account the relationship between children and adults. The examples below will examine this issue further.

The three following examples from Erik (17), Thea (19) and Kristine (19) all together illustrate examples of how they have not been able to participate in their Child Welfare Service. In addition, the youth more directly mention aspects of power relations between them and the adults in the Child Welfare Service. The experience of Erik (17) can highlight something concerning the power relations between him and his caseworker. Erik was moved to a foster home when he was around nine years old. He has moved three times altogether, and is currently living at an institution for youth. Concerning his experiences with making decisions in the Child Welfare Service he states:

And, but I have sort of not had a lot of choice. It was like "Yes or no" and then "Choose one thing" and then they say "This or this". And then I only have two options and then it's like, then it's the next thing then, and there's no going back. (...) But it was like, very determined, and then it's like, they sort of dominate more than me, and then I am not controlling it sort of.

Thea (19) is one of the persons in my study who has moved several times. She has been in contact with the Child Welfare Service since she was very little, and said that she has had between 12 and 13 different caseworkers. Thea said that she has not been able to give her opinion to the Child Welfare Service:

No. I have wanted SO many times, to tell them exactly what I feel. But when I am young, I am not believed.

Thea further explains that many people have asked her why she does not tell her story to the public. Her argument for not telling her story can illustrate something about the powerlessness she felt:

So I want to wait until I am 30 and then bring it up. Because there is a big difference

between listening to a girl who is 15-16, than one who is 30. Because when you are 15-16 you are just a fjortis¹³. But when you are 30 you are an adult. So maybe I will be believed then for example. Because I have experienced that I am not believed. They don't want to listen. They just say "Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Mhm. Sure".

Another example that can clearly illustrate the power relations between children in the Child Welfare Service and their caseworkers, can be highlighted by Kristine (19). Kristine has had a lot of experience with the Child Welfare Service, as she was placed out of her home when she was a child, and is today herself a mother, and due to this she is still in contact with the Child Welfare Service. Kristine answered this when questioned whether she feels that she has been able to participate:

I think my answer is no. I do not feel that they listen to me. I still don't. It makes me tired, but... It is just, I hope it can change one day. For my sake. For my child's sake. For everybody else's sake. It is hard not to be listened to. When they have the power. They have the power over my whole life.

From many of the quotes above, we can see how the youth mention, directly and indirectly, the Child Welfare Service's power over their lives. As Alanen (2001) argues, "childhood is essentially a generational phenomenon (p. 11)". She argues that children's ability to influence, organize, coordinate and control events taking place in their daily lives, is linked to generational structures in society, in the sense that children have less power than adults (Alanen, 2001). This lack of power can clearly be seen in many of the quotes provided above. As Bunkholdt and Sandbæk (2008) argue, it is a challenge to create a good collaboration where children and parents experience that they are listened to, due the Child Welfare Service's strong power position. From all the examples presented above, the power relations between the youth and the Child Welfare Service are prominent.

Turning our focus to the notion of citizenship, and as debated by Smith and Bjerke (2009) the fact that adults have a very important role in recognizing and supporting children's citizenship. The scholars further argue that in order for children to be able to achieve citizenship, the practices and attitudes of adults need to change (Smith & Bjerke, 2009). It

¹³ Norwegian slang and a slightly derogatory word for «a young teenager». Stemming from the word *fjorten*, which means fourteen.

seems from these examples that the youth have not been involved in the decision-making processes, nor with respect or recognition which are some of the key aspects of citizenship (Lister, 2008). As Smith and Taylor (2009) argue, not being listened to or respected could make the child feel a helpless recipient of what people in more powerful positions do to us, as opposed to a person who can stand up for him or herself and actually make a difference. As Smith and Bjerke (2009) argue, adults have a very important part in recognizing and supporting children's citizenship. The more children are treated as citizens, the more likely it is that they will actively participate in society.

In light of Harts Ladder of Participation, the experiences of these youth can remind us of stage three of the ladder, called tokenism. As Hart (1997) argues, children might seem to have a voice, but in fact have little choice about the subject or style and little time to formulate their own opinions. As expressed by Erik, he was given two options to choose from, which does imply that he was informed beforehand. However, he also explains that he felt that it was "determined" and that he is not "controlling" it. Erik was indeed informed about the situation. However, he did not get the possibility to formulate his opinion and affect the decision. In reality, it seems as if his ability to affect the situation was in fact limited. This stage of the ladder also seems to resemble the experiences of the rest of the youth, as they have not had the time to formulate their own opinions before decisions were taken, nor influence the decision being made.

As mentioned earlier, Norway is well-known for being a frontrunner in the field of children's rights (Kjørholt et al., 2009). However, a key finding from this section is that many of the youth in this study have not been listened to, nor have they able to express their opinion. This is of great concern, also when looking at my findings in a legal perspective. As both article 12 in the UNCRC and paragraph 6-3 in the Child Welfare Act state, children shall have the opportunity to participate in matters affecting him or her (Sandberg, 2010). It is useful to again look specifically at paragraph 6-3 in the Child Welfare Act. Here it is stated:

A child who has turned seven, and younger children who are able to form an own opinion, has to be informed and given the chance to express themselves before a decision is taken on issues concerning him or her. The child's opinion shall be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (Lindboe, 2012, p. 295).

From my findings, it is clear that this paragraph of the law is not being followed. None of the examples from the youth in this section illustrate that they have been adequately listened to.

As Vis and Thomas (2009) argue, the three key factors to participation are, to be informed about the situation, to get the opportunity to express your view and, lastly, to actually have an influence on the decision being made. The youth in this section have not been adequately informed about the decision, nor had the opportunity to express their view, or in fact affect the decision being made. This is problematic, as for instance argued in the guidelines on how to talk to children in the Child Welfare Service, when children are involved in the decision-making process, this is a signal that he or she is important (BLD, 2009). A good conversation can contribute in letting the child or youth gain a better understanding of their own lives (BLD, 2009).

In the sections above the opinions the youth in general have regarding their participation in the Child Welfare Service have been discussed. Below I will shift my focus to factors which the youth describe as central when it comes to their participation, and illuminate some of the different experiences the youth had, in different situations. I will begin by focusing on the experiences the youth have with their caseworkers, and how this could affect their ability to participate. I further highlight their experiences with participation in foster homes, child welfare institutions, and finally their experiences with supervision.

5.5 Caseworkers

As Haugen et al. (2012) argue, the caseworker in the Child Welfare Service is a person who shall create trust and lay the foundations for cooperation with both children and their parents. Many of the youth in both the individual interviews and from the focus group discussions said that they have had several caseworkers. This corresponds with the findings from a recently published report from SSB, that from 2010 to 2011 the percentage of persons leaving their job in the Child Welfare Service, was 31, 5 (Johansen, 2014).

Table 2 below illustrates how many caseworkers the youth in my individual interviews have had during their time in the Child Welfare Service. Regarding this table it is important to note that some of the youth did not remember the exact number of caseworkers they have had. Sometimes the youth, after some reflection, gave me a number which they believed was the most correct. The answers also varied according to how long the youth had been in contact

with the Child Welfare Service. The person who had only had one caseworker, had been in contact with the Child Welfare Service for about two years. The two youth who said that they have had ten or more caseworkers, expressed that they were not completely sure about this number, but that this was their estimate. They had both been in contact with the Child Welfare Service since they were very young.

Table 2 The number of caseworkers the youth had during their time in the Child Welfare Service

Caseworkers	Youth
1	1
2	3
3	2
4	1
5	1
10 or more caseworkers	2

Turning our focus to the experiences the youth have with their caseworkers and whether they felt that they have been able to participate or not, and to begin the experiences of Maria (19) will first be described. Maria was moved to a foster home by the Child Welfare Service when she was a young girl. She explained that a man and a woman whom she had never met before, came to her home and drove her to the foster home where she was going to live. She explained that a man from the Child Welfare Service had, in the car on the way to her foster parents, told her that they were going to visit some people for a long time and that they after the visit were going to drive home again. The following quotation from Maria could indicate frustration and confusion as to what was happening:

So then she [foster mother] said immediately “Here is your new room”. And I completely broke down. I just remember sitting in the sofa, I just sat and had no one, sort of, “What am I supposed to do now?” I was surrounded by three adults I had never met before and I sat there and realized “Something is not right here”.

The following quote from the day Malin (19) was moved from her mother and to an institution sounds quite similar to Maria’s story:

She came to us and said “We have decided that you are going to move.” And they brought each of us to different places. Us four kids who had lived with our mother. And it was maybe ten unknown persons who came, from the police, child welfare service and from those places where we were going to live.

Kristine’s (19) story is also quite similar. When asked how many caseworkers she has had, she replies:

A lot. My case, like, it has not just been my case, but also for my siblings and my Mum, mainly. I think we have had... At least ten different caseworkers. There are many that neither I have met, nor my mother. She has not met them, I have not met them. There are names in the papers of people who we have not heard of because we have like, never met them. The day I was placed¹⁴, I remember walking out of the room, and there was a lady who was crouching down, and was apparently our caseworker, but I had never seen her before.

As described earlier, according to the principle of mildest intervention, the assistance the Child Welfare Service provides should strive not to be more intrusive than necessary (Lindboe, 2012). The decision of moving a child from his or her home, without the parents or children agreeing, is considered to be an intrusive form of assistance (Lindboe, 2012). In these cases the Child Welfare Service needs to take into account all the implications of moving the child, and consider the weight of principles such as the “best interests of the child” and the biological principle. As Bunkholdt (2006) argues, listening to children and youth is an important way of working for the «best interests of the child». As the youth who participated in the project by Barnevernsproffene (2011) highlight, they want to be able to participate in the decision of where they should move. They stress that children need to get good and honest information throughout this process of moving (Barnevernsproffene, 2011). They further debate that although some children do not have a problem with expressing their opinion to strangers, most children need to be able to have a person whom they trust in order to say their opinion. In a study conducted by Seim and Slettebø (2011), some of the youth expressed that it was difficult to talk freely to a person who they only met two or three times a year. Bearing

¹⁴ In Norwegian: *Plassert*. A common way of referring to situations when the Child Welfare Service makes the decision of moving a child or youth.

this in mind one could question whether Maria, Malin and Kristine were able to express their opinion about moving to a person they had never met before.

Haugen et al. (2012) interviewed parents and children in the Child Welfare Service in Trondheim, and one of their findings was also that some of their informants expressed frustration over a frequent change of caseworkers. One family said that they have had 17 different caseworkers. Many of the participants in the study described it as negative that there was such a frequent change in their caseworkers, and believed that this broke the continuity which they needed. Several youth also addressed this and said that they did not know who their caseworker was (Haugen et al., 2012). Erik (17) explained that he found it difficult that his caseworker was frequently on sick leave, and that he felt that his child welfare worker did not know him, as they only met four times a year. He said that he was not assigned to have a new caseworker while his own caseworker was on sick leave, and described some difficulties concerning this:

And like, didn't feel that they knew me that well, because I met my caseworker like maybe four times a year. And that is not exactly a lot of time. And my caseworker was very, ehm, she was kind of on sick leave for a long time. And she has been that a lot. So I think, the longest sick leave she had was a bit longer than half a year.

From the focus group discussions, several youth also mentioned that they had to wait a long time for the Child Welfare Service to reply when they had questions or for instance applied for economical support. They said that their caseworkers were not easily contactable, and mention factors such as their caseworkers being away a lot, being on sick-leave, becoming pregnant or on vacation. One boy in the focus group said that it was difficult to gain a trusting relationship with his caseworker, as they were frequently changing. As he explains, there is no point in him gaining a trusting relationship with his caseworker, as he does not know if he will get a new caseworker in the near future. A girl in one of the focus group discussions also described how the Child Welfare Service took a long time to actually understand that she needed help, and that there were a lot of changes in caseworkers and that after three years she finally received assistance.

As Slettebø and Seim (2007) argue, the problems stemming from children having little contact with their caseworker is a finding which can be seen in several studies. As they argue,

children do not have anyone to discuss their feelings with, and they themselves have to create a sense of meaning from what is happening to them. They do not have anyone who can help them to understand, for instance why they are being moved out of their home (Slettebø & Seim, 2007). This is an issue in accordance with my findings, as several of the youth express that did not understand what was happening when they for instance were moved out of their home. According to the factors Vis and Thomas (2009) argue constitute participation, which is to be informed, to be able to express their opinion and to affect the decision being taken, one could argue that these factors have not been fulfilled for the situations the youth have described in this section.

As mentioned in the theory chapter, when discussing the «best interests of the child», the importance of continuity and stability is often brought up (Follesø, 2009). As Bunkholdt (2006) argues, that the child has contact with people who can give the child a clear signal about who the child is, is what the child builds his or her identity on. When this contact is broken, the picture of the child's identity becomes unclear. When the time comes to meet the adult life and find one's own path, this can prove difficult, because the experience of who one is, is unclear (Bunkholdt, 2006). The Norwegian Union of Social Educators and Social Workers (FO)¹⁵ have expressed concern that there is such a high turnover rate in the Child Welfare Service, and argue that in order to do a good job, child welfare is a field in need of stability and continuity.

On the other hand, Andreas (19), points to a more positive trend, where he explains that the Child Welfare Service has in fact become more accessible:

I actually have contact with them when I need it. Now it is actually possible to contact the Child Welfare Service because they have got mobile phones and it is possible to send a message. Before it was like, tried to call five times in five days, and then maybe you got a reply. It was lousy. So it's a good thing that they have changed that.

In this section the experiences the youth have with their caseworkers concerning participation have been addressed. It has been indicated that the relationship the youth have to their caseworkers affect how much they are able to participate and affect the decisions which are

¹⁵ In Norwegian: *Fellesorganisasjonen* (FO). The Norwegian Union of Social Educators and Social Workers (FO) is a voluntary Professional Association and Trade Union with about 26.500 members (FO, 2014).

being made. In the next section I will look at how the youth have experienced participation when living in foster homes.

5.6 Foster Homes

In Norway at the end of 2012, 9,600 children and youth were living in a foster home. This is three times higher than 25 years ago (Elisabeth Backe-Hansen, Havik, & Grønningsæter, 2013). This indicates that there is an increase in youth who live in foster homes. From my individual interviews, three youth had lived in a foster home, and one had lived in two different foster homes. Two persons had lived in emergency homes. In this section I will examine the experiences the youth have with their participation while living in these homes.

Below is a quotation from Thea (18), where she described some of the difficulties she has had with moving several times, and also how she was not listened to in her foster home. In this foster home, her foster parents had own biological children who also lived there. Thea explains:

So it's very hard to get friends when you move from an orphanage where it's horrible, to a foster family who don't listen to you, and to a completely new environment and new people and everything is just chaos. So yes, I did try to do everything I was told, without saying... I was just like "Thank you" and "Yes". Just smile and like, "Yes". It was like, I never had the possibility to talk to them, like, alone. Because there were always so many other children there. Biological. Who had the first priority.

Thea lived in another foster home before she moved to the foster home which she described above. She said that in this foster home she was met with care. However, as she explains, as she had so many bad experiences, her foster parents did not know how they could handle her. She was therefore sent to an orphanage. She gives a suggestion as to how the Child Welfare Service could have given her foster parents more advice on how to handle her when she was upset:

They should also have given advice to my foster parents and said that "These children are having a very hard time. Use longer time to try to understand them instead of

getting angry because they are ruining their things”, or things like that. And the fact that I slammed the doors and stomped down the stairs and threw things at people, was just because there was a lot of emotions. Not that I was a brat. Like, I know that I was a very difficult kid. But I am also living with a feeling that it was very difficult.

One of the issues Thea (18) raises is that she wishes that the Child Welfare Service could have given her foster parents more advice. This issue is also looked at in a documentary from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) about foster homes. In the documentary families who have been foster parents express that they wish that they could have been given better information and advice from the Child Welfare Service (NRK, 2014a). This is also a finding in a study by Havik (2013). Half of all the foster parents and three thirds of all the caseworkers believed that in order to make it more attractive to be a foster parent, the Child Welfare Service needs to improve how they support the foster parents, in order to strengthen their ability to be foster parents (Havik, 2013). These findings are in line with the view of Thea that foster parents should be given more advice.

Maria (19) has lived in one foster home from when she was around eight until she turned 18. She described her life in the foster home and explained that she did not feel that she had been heard:

There were was so many times, at least when I was younger, that I cried myself to sleep. And I didn't dare to show how sad I was because I was sure that they would become angry if they saw how sad I was. (...) And respect. Never been respected by them either. They don't respect me now either. They just “Yeah, yeah, do whatever you want”. Like that. Yes. Never felt that I have been heard. It has been a bit, lonely.

When asked whether she tried to say something to the Child Welfare Service about her situation, Maria said:

I have never been asked. It has been, typical, that I have experienced that the child welfare service have come to visit, often when I am at school. And then asked “How is Maria doing?” And then they said “No, she is doing fine”.

Bakketeig and Bergan (2013) have interviewed six caseworkers about youth and their participation when they are placed in foster homes. The caseworkers pointed out a number of barriers that made it difficult for them to realise the right of the youth to participate. For instance, the caseworkers mentioned that they were under a lot of pressure in their everyday work, such as the limited opening hours in the Child Welfare Service and also the division of responsibility between them and the youth's foster parents, where the idea is that the caseworker receives information about the child from the foster parents instead of consulting the child him- or herself (Bakketeig & Bergan, 2013). However, from what Maria said, it seems that she would have wanted to be asked by the Child Welfare Service about how it is going in her foster home.

Stian (19) has positive experiences from the foster home where he lived. He only lived there for eight months, as there were some issues with the foster parents. These were not directly related to him, however, it did involve him moving back to the institution in which he had lived before. He described how his foster parents encouraged him to talk and express how he felt:

And then I moved to the foster home, and that's when things became better. It was, I felt that he read me sort of. My body language and everything. So one couldn't say "No, I don't know, it's nothing". It was like "Yes, I see that there is something". So it was good that someone for the first time actually did that. And they said "Yes, we see that there is something. You don't need to hide it, you can be honest, you can trust us". Because with my Dad I was not used to sitting down one on one and to talk like that.

As the guide on how to talk to children in the Child Welfare Service states, when talking to children, one has to be aware of the non-verbal communication the child is expressing. One needs to be attentive not only to the words the child is expressing, but also the intentions and feelings behind the words (BLD, 2009). Stian's story shows that his foster parents are attentive to his feelings, and as Stian himself expresses "I felt that he read me sort of". From Stian's story it seems that he in this foster home got the stability he needed to express his views and that he was met by foster parents who listened to him and his needs. Although it is not expressed by Stian, one could question whether it would have been beneficial for him to live there for longer, as he had to move after eight months. From the examples from Thea and

Maria one could argue that the persons around them who were supposed to take care of them and listen to them, have not adequately fulfilled this task.

From these three examples we see that Stian is satisfied with the foster home where he had lived, and that he felt that he was listened to and “seen”. Both Thea and Maria have experienced the opposite, they were not listened to. However, Thea had positive experiences from the first foster home she had lived in, but as her foster parents did not know how to handle her, she was sent to an orphanage. She suggests, which is also the finding of several recent studies, that her foster parents should have received better advice on how to handle her. Maria also expresses that she was never respected by her foster parents. This notion could be interesting to analyse in light of what Lister (2008) argues is one of four main building block of children’s citizenship, namely *Equality of Status, Respect and Recognition*. Neither Thea nor Maria seem to have been recognized or respected. This again affected their ability to participate, and they both expressed that they were not listened to by their foster parents. One could argue that Stian, however, experienced that he was respected and recognised by his foster parents.

All these examples together illuminate that foster parents can have an important role when it comes to ensuring the participation of children in the Child Welfare Service. Below I will turn my focus on the youth who have lived in child welfare institutions, and discuss their participation when living in these institutions.

5.7 Child Welfare Institutions

Numbers from Statistics Norway (SSB) show that in 2012 there were in total 1,279 children and youth placed in child welfare institutions (SSB, 2013b). In my study, eight of the youth have lived in one or several different child welfare institutions. This includes the youth who live or have lived in a child welfare institution as part of his or her aftercare. In this section I will not focus on the experiences of the youth who have lived in institutions as part of their aftercare, although it could be worth noticing that these youth were particularly satisfied with their participation, and experienced a high degree of personal freedom and economical support.

One of these youth is Kristine (19). Kristine lived in an institution as a youth. In this institution, she felt that she was not listened to. She described that there were too many rules at the institution that she believed were too strict. Below is a description from Kristine to the answer of whether she had tried to express her opinion about the fact that she was not satisfied with the child welfare institution where she had lived:

I was so miserable that I kicked, I tried to kick them down the stairs, I tried to spit at them, I said all this to my caseworker (...). And no matter how much I spoke out, it was just “No, it is just that you are not able to adapt to the frame work, the rules” I got that thrown back at me the whole time. And I started to cut myself when I lived there. I tried to take my own life. And to show them that “I just can’t take living here, all I want is to go home to my mother”. That was the only thing I wanted, it was to live in [name of city]. And still it was nothing. She didn’t take any notice of me, the caseworker. It seemed as if they didn’t care at all how I was doing. And it was actually so bad that I ran away. I ran away ALL the time.

Thea (18) has a lot of experience with different institutions and foster homes. She also said that there were too many strict rules and that she was not able to participate. This is how she describes the institution where she had lived:

Because when I lived at the orphanage, it was horrible. It was COMPLETELY terrible. There were loads of people who bossed you around, decided things for you and tried to pretend like they were your parents. (...) And if you swore then you had “inside-day” they day after and they sat on top of you when you did your homework and you had to wash your room and change your bed and wash the bathroom and wash your clothes and all those things yourself, EVERY week, alone. And it was like, I turned 12 when I lived there. And then I got 50 kroner a week or something like that. It was awful.

Concerning the issue of rules at child welfare institutions and the children’s participation, Tjelflaat and Ulset (2007) found that routines and rules can be good tools for structuring the everyday lives of persons in the institution. However, many of the youth they interviewed expressed that when the rules become too strict, they became counterproductive, and prevented the participation of the youth (Tjelflaat & Ulset, 2007). It seems evident that this is

an issue which both Kristine and Thea have experienced. They both said that the rules were too strict, and that they were not able to participate

Malin (19) was asked to recall a situation where the Child Welfare Service did something that was wrong for her situation. She spoke about a situation at the institution where she had lived. Her story illustrates her experience with abuse, and the fact that she was not listened to:

Malin: I don't think it worked to send me to the place they sent me to. There were people there who never should have had the job they had, and they didn't even have the education they needed to get that job. Sitting with old men who touch you and grab you.

Interviewer: The employees?

Malin: Yes. And it's like, it's supposed to be proper people who like children and youth who don't take it out on you if they have a bad day.

Interviewer: But they touched...

Malin: Yes.

Interviewer: Was this addressed in any way?

Malin: What is one supposed to say? You are not believed anyway because you are the youth, and they stand together. They are the adults, they are the ones who have something to say, and they decide. It doesn't matter if there are more youth who say the same thing. Because we are just youth, brats, yes, hooligans at an orphanage. So why should we be listened to?

This quotation illustrates how powerless Malin felt in relation to the adults in the institution. As she so clearly states, "They are the adults, they are the ones who have something to say, and they decide". Here again it can be relevant to look at what Alanen (2001) discusses concerning generational structures in society. Alanen (2001) argues that children have less power in society than adults, and that this affects the child's ability to influence and control events taking place in their everyday lives. It is clear here from the examples above that

neither Malin, nor Thea or Kristine felt that they had been listened to, and that it was the adults who had the power to make decisions. Turning to the discussion concerning viewing children as “human beings” or human becomings” Lee (2001) debates that when one views the child as a “human becoming”, it can lead to the abuse of children, where the child does not have the opportunity to protect him or herself, as there is doubt on their ability to know anything better than adults. This seems to be the case for Malin, as she experienced that she was abused by the persons at the child welfare institution, but due to the fact, as she puts it, that she was just a “youth and a brat”, she was not believed.

As Thrana (2008) argues, there has been increasing focus on the dark chapters of Norwegian child welfare institutions. Recently, NRK (2014b) broadcasted a documentary about an institution in Norway where the youth, and the authority responsible for supervising the institution, reported cases of extensive use of isolation and a strict disciplinary scheme. Some of the youth interviewed by the NRK who had lived at the institution in the 90s received compensation. However, as both the youth they interviewed and the supervision-reports¹⁶ indicated, many of these methods are still used at the institution.

However, not all the youth had these experiences with the institutions where they had lived or still were living in. Stian (19) was very satisfied with the institution where he had lived and said that the persons working at the institution would ask the youth what their opinion of the institution was, and ask what they thought about them who were working there:

We have had meeting, Wednesday-meetings, where us youth and two adults who worked there, it varied, sat down and talked about how things... “Was there anything we needed? Was there anything we wanted to talk about?” So then we had Wednesday-meetings where we just sat down and said everything we had on our mind.

This last example from this could be interesting to analyse in light of Hart’s Ladder of Participation. His experiences could be placed in stage six of the ladder. At this stage, the adults have the initial idea, but the children are still a part of the decision-making process. It was the adults at the institution who arranged the Wednesday-meetings, who had the idea, which gave the youth the possibility to express everything they “had on their mind”. As

¹⁶ In Norwegian: *Tilsynsrapport*.

argued in the guidelines for how to talk to children in the Child Welfare Service, children need time and that the adult can lead the conversation, but not control it (BLD, 2009). It seems as if the adults at this institution took the leading role, and at the same time created the necessary time and space for the youth to express their opinion.

In this section, examples from youth who have not been able to participate in decisions concerning their lives at the child welfare institutions where they have lived have been presented. One boy said that he had been able to express his opinion and was satisfied with how he had participated. The experiences the youth have with their supervisors and the issue of talking to their supervisor and caseworkers in private will be discussed later.

5.8 Supervision

When discussing their participation, many of the youth mentioned how the supervision which they are entitled to get did not function as it should. Another finding concerning this was that the youth mentioned that they did not have the privacy to express themselves freely to their supervisors, as other persons, such as foster parents, were present. One boy from the focus group discussion, however, had only positive experiences with his supervision, as will be discussed below. I will first briefly explain the responsibility of a supervisor.

For children living in foster homes, the Child Welfare Service has a duty to appoint a supervisor for children living in foster homes (Lindboe, 2012). The supervisor is formally attached to the Child Welfare Service, but needs to have an independent position from the Child Welfare Service and also from the foster parents (Lindboe, 2012). The supervisor needs to visit the child at least four times a year, and the visits can occur expected or unexpectedly (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). For children living in child welfare institutions, it is the County Governor¹⁷, who has the supervision responsibility (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008). The objective for this supervision is to be attentive to all conditions which can have an impact on the child's development, well-being, welfare and legal protection. They have to visit the institution at least twice, and at least one of these times unexpectedly (Bunkholdt & Sandbæk, 2008).

¹⁷ In Norwegian: *Fylkesmann*.

Thea (18) has lived in two different foster homes. She explained that she was not satisfied with her second foster home. She also said that the Child Welfare Service did not follow her up as they should have. She said that it was a problem that her foster parents were always present when she wanted to talk to her supervisor or the Child Welfare Service about her situation:

Like, you get a supervisor in the Child Welfare Service who is supposed to follow you up, who is supposed to ask you how you are doing. "Are you happy here? Is everything okay?". I never got to talk to him alone. So I really wanted to talk to my supervisor alone. Or my caseworker. But my foster home number two always had to be there. I never got the chance to say how I really felt. And I did not like it there. But I never got the chance to express it, because they always had to join. Because they, they in the other foster home, they didn't want it to come out that things weren't any good.

When asked whether she had said that she wanted to talk alone with a person from the Child Welfare Service or her supervisor, Thea (18) said this:

Yes, but they did not feel that I needed it, sort of.

From one of the focus group discussions it was also expressed by many of the youth that it was a problem that they could not talk to their supervisors alone. One boy said that it was difficult when the supervisor asked him, with his foster parents present, if there was anything he wanted to bring up, as he experienced his supervisor more as a "support person" for his foster parents, than actually being there for him. This is also an issue which Thea (18) highlights when she explained her relationship to her supervisor:

In was a guy from the orphanage I had lived at who came there. And he always supported THEM. Not me.

This issue is also an issue that many of the youth in the research project by Barnevernsproffene (2011), address. Several of youth have experiences that there have been close ties between the supervisor and the persons who are supposed to provide care for them for instance their foster parents or employees at the institution where they lived. This is

problematic, as explicitly stated in the guidelines from the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, that the main duty of the supervisor is, independent of the interests of the Child Welfare Service, foster parents or parents, to pay attention to and consider whether the child is adequately taken care of and that the opinions of the child is communicated to the Child Welfare Service, who is formally responsible for the placement (BLD, 2006).

In contrast to this, one boy from the focus group discussion expressed that he was satisfied with the supervision he had received. He explained that he has had the same supervisor for eight years, even though his caseworkers have changed. He explained that this person has followed him throughout, and he is very satisfied with this solution. This seems to be in line with the thought behind having a supervisor. The fact that he had the same supervisor represents *stability* for the boy. As argued by Follesø (2009), stability entails that that the child has adults around him who are predictable and reliable. This is a component of the principle of the «best interests of the child», which is the overriding principle of the Child Welfare Services (Raundalen, 2012). In this case, one could assume that the supervisor was a predictable and reliable person, as that person had been having contact with him for eight years.

5.9 Suggestions from the Youth

In this part I will concentrate on the youth's suggestions regarding children and participation in the Child Welfare Service. Smart (2002) argues that recognizing the validity of the experiences of children is one step towards treating children with greater respect, and a starting point for hearing what the child has to say. As for instance Follesø et al. (2006) points out, in order to create good services for children and youth, we need to listen to their voices, and learn from *their* reality. I agree with Thrana (2008) who highlights that research with people who have been in the Child Welfare Service provides useful information about what it is like to be a child in the Child Welfare Service. I therefore devote this section to the opinions of the youth, and *their* suggestions concerning participation.

As Montgomery et al. (2003) argue, participation is about being treated with dignity and respect, and about being listened to. Several of the youth who participated in this study encourage the Child Welfare Service to focus more on listening to the child. This is in line with several of the finding from the previous research conducted on this topic, which have

indicated that children and youth are not being adequately consulted concerning the decision-making in the Child Welfare Service (Bakketeig & Bergan, 2013; Seim & Slettebø, 2011; Statens Helsetilsyn, 2012; Thrana, 2008{Vis, 2009 #74}). Below is a selection of some of the suggestions from the youth concerning this issue:

Listen more to the child or youth. Don't just sit there in the office and make a decision based on what they feel is important, without putting themselves into the whole situation. (Andreas, 19)

The adults need to dare to ask and to not be afraid to get an answer which forces them to actually do their job. (Maria, 19)

Listen to what the child has to say, that is what I would say is the most important. Don't just make a decision without listening to what the child has to say. Doesn't have to be in a cold way. I get it if you work for a long time and send children here and there that it can be difficult and that you get a bit cold in the end. But I think that when you work in the Child Welfare Service and things like that then you should be able to talk to people. (Malin, 19)

One of the most important things is that they listen to us about what we say and that they actually care. (Helene, 19)

As several of the youth stress that the Child Welfare Service needs to become better at listening to children and youth, one might question why children's participation in the Child Welfare Service seems to be challenging. Strandbu and Vis (2008) argue that children's participation is challenging for the Child Welfare Service for a number of reasons. Firstly, they argue that it has not been clear what it actually implies to let children participate, and which criteria need to be fulfilled in order to claim that a child has participated. Secondly, there are not enough guidelines or special attention as to how participation is ensured in the Child Welfare Service. However, it is worth to mention that in 2009, the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion published guidelines on how to talk with children in the Child Welfare Service (BLD, 2009). Thirdly, children's right to participate challenges the view of children as vulnerable and in need of protection. They argue that in order to dare to include

the child in decision-making processes, we need to believe in the child's competence (Strandbu & Vis, 2008). This issue has been discussed several times in this chapter.

Gulbrandsen et al. (2012) point out that in Norwegian child welfare textbooks, there has been, from the 1980s and 1990s, a lot of emphasis on talking to children and considering children's views. Follesø (2009) discusses why many people in the Child Welfare Service still find it difficult to talk to children. She questions whether they fear the conversation because of what the child might say. Children who are in contact with the Child Welfare Service often have many painful experiences and it can be difficult to hear these stories. Gamst (2011) also addresses this issue and claims that many might find listening to stories of abuse or neglect so painful to hear that one protects oneself from hearing the child's story.

6 Youth and Participation in Aftercare: Their Experiences

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will shed light on the experiences the youth have from participation in their aftercare. The focus will be on the research question: *What experiences have the youth had with their participation in aftercare?* The answers from the youth regarding their participation seemed to fall into three categories. The first group consists of those who felt that they have been able to participate when decisions were taken concerning their aftercare. The second group consists of those youth who have been informed about aftercare and have been able to express their opinion concerning this assistance. However, these youth have not to the degree to which they wish been able to affect the decisions on the type of aftercare they should get. The final group consist of those who say that they had not been informed about aftercare, and therefore did not have the chance to participate in the decision-making concerning aftercare. These three groups will be described below. Further, when discussing the participation of the youth in aftercare, several of them brought up the issue with The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration¹⁸ (NAV). This deserves further examination and I will therefore describe the collaboration some of the youth in this study have had with NAV, with a focus on their participation. Finally, the suggestions the youth have for improving aftercare will be presented.

6.2 The Youth and Aftercare

In this section a brief description of whether the youth have received aftercare or not will be provided. In my individual interviews, Lisa was 16 and Erik 17. These two were, naturally, not receiving aftercare, as aftercare is the assistance provided from the Child Welfare Service after reaching 18 years of age (Storø, 2012). However, of the eight remaining youth, seven had received, or were currently receiving, aftercare. In other words, only one person in the group interviewed individually (who could technically receive aftercare) had not received this assistance. In the focus group discussions, however, there was greater variation. Several of the youth in the focus group discussions were currently receiving, or had, received aftercare, while others had had been transferred to adult services, and did not know that they could have asked to continue receiving the type of assistance they had before they turned 18.

¹⁸ The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) is the authority responsible for administering social benefits such as for instance unemployment benefits, work assessment allowances, sickness benefits and child benefits (NAV, 2013).

6.3 “Now I decide everything”

In the group where semi-structured interviews were conducted, six youth had been informed about aftercare and felt that they were able to participate in decisions regarding this assistance. In this section, the experiences of these youth will be presented. First, the experiences of Erik (17), Stian (19) and Jonas (18) will be discussed, as their experiences seemed to be quite similar. They have all been informed about aftercare, and have knowledge about what aftercare is. Second, the experiences of Malin (19), Maria (19) and Thea (18) will be examined, as these three girls all felt that they were finally able to participate once they started to receive aftercare. All these three girls have also, as will be explained below, been informed about aftercare.

Erik (17), has not turned 18, and does therefore, not receive aftercare. However, he has been informed about aftercare. He explained that he was informed about this both by his caseworker in the Child Welfare Service and by the youth institution where he currently lives. He is not yet sure whether he wants aftercare, and said that this depends on how things are the day he turns 18. The fact that Erik has been informed that he can receive aftercare is in line with what Lurie (2008) points out, which is that the issue of aftercare needs to involve the youth. Erik also seems aware that he is the one who decided whether to receive aftercare or not. Of the factors that Vis and Thomas (2009) argue constitute participation, which are to be informed, consulted and able to affect the decision, Erik has indeed been informed and consulted. Whether the aftercare will be in accordance with his wishes, still remains to be seen.

Stian (19) receives aftercare. He had a meeting where he was informed about aftercare by the institution where he had lived. Stian explained what that they had asked him and how he had replied:

“Do you want to continue or do you want to end it?” So then I said “Yes, I want to continue.” But I can end it whenever I want.

He further described:

And it's okay, I do want a little help now, and I don't want to be, if I get too much help, I know myself well, then I just become worse at things. That I am just too easy about things and like "It will work out". But I know when I should stop getting so much help. So, I just wait until that time comes.

The experiences of Jonas (18) are quite similar to Stian's. Jonas is satisfied with the aftercare he receives. He explained that he was informed by the employees at the youth institution where he currently lives, about the possibility of receiving aftercare. He said that for him aftercare is important, as he is able to continue living at the institution where he is currently living. He described the meeting where he was informed about aftercare:

It was explained what it was and that if you agreed to it you would be bound to a sort of contract. I don't know. I am a little uncertain about that. You get covered, you get to still live at [name of youth institution] and things like that. And I think aftercare is okay, because you can end it.

Erik, Stian and Jonas all have in common that they lived in an institution before they turned 18. This implies that, according to the law, it ought to be considered, in collaboration with the youth, whether the youth should continue to live in the institution or not (BLD, 2011). This seems to be the case for all these youth. All three are also aware of the fact that they have to agree to receive aftercare, and that they can end it (Lurie, 2008). This is a point that both Stian and Jonas made. In light of the debate concerning citizenship, one could argue that several of the building blocks that Lister (2008) argues constitute citizenship are fulfilled. The youth are put in the position where they have the *responsibility* in the decision-making of whether to receive aftercare or not. They are *respected* and *recognized* for this responsibility. In addition, they are able to be involved in decision-making processes, in the sense that they are able to decide whether they want aftercare or not, which is central in the building block named *membership* (Lister, 2008).

However, one could question whether to make the decision to receive aftercare or not can (at least in some cases) be too big a responsibility for the youth to take when turning 18. As Winter (1997) points out, giving children too much responsibility could be a burden for the child. Even though aftercare is the assistance received from the day one turns 18, the youth need to make a decision before this day. As found in a study conducted by Storhaug and

Bratterud (2008), it was difficult to motivate youth who wanted to end the assistance from the Child Welfare Service when they turned 18. However, as stated in the guidelines regarding aftercare, if the youth does not wish to receive assistance, he or she should be informed that it is possible to change one's mind. It is also stated that the Child Welfare Service should contact those youth who refused to receive aftercare one year after the assistance has ended, in order to ask the youth whether he or she wishes to receive aftercare after all (BLD, 2011). In this way, if the guidelines are followed, the youth can have a second chance if they change their mind.

Similar to Erik, Stian and Jonas, three of the girls interviewed individually spoke of how they were able to participate in decisions concerning aftercare. However, these girls had not previously felt that they had been able to participate, and made a point out of this. One of these girls is Malin (19). She was informed about aftercare by the youth project she was involved with before she turned 18. She was asked whether she wanted to continue to receive assistance from this project. Malin answered this about whether she felt that she had been able to participate:

Not when I was younger, no. Then I felt that I was not heard. (...) I don't feel that I was listened to, but when the aftercare came in, then I felt that I was listened to.

Thea (18) lived in a youth institution, and was informed about aftercare around half a year before she turned 18. She expressed that she had not been able to participate before the day she turned 18, and explained how she felt that before this day the Child Welfare Service had the power when it came to making decisions. Thea also addressed the issue of being able to end the aftercare if she wished to. This is how Thea described turning 18:

Thea: I decide over MY life and THAT is a good feeling. It is actually the best feeling with turning 18. It's like, when people turn 18, it's like "Yes! I can buy snuff and cigarettes and beer." But for me it was like, "I can decide over my own life. Cut out the Child Welfare Service". Because now I can go there and it takes me five minutes to end the cooperation with them.

Interviewer: Yes, when you are 18.

Thea: I have the power and that is good. Because the day before I turned 18 I did not have any power. They decided everything. Now I decide everything. They do wish to have me, but it is me who decides if I should continue or not. And that is a very good feeling.

Similar to Malin and Thea, Maria (19) also said that her participation increased once she started to receive aftercare. Maria lived in a foster home, and was asked by the leader of the Child Welfare Service in the municipality where she lived whether she wanted aftercare. She was not satisfied with her participation in the Child Welfare Service, but when her aftercare started. In the following quote Maria described her relationship with the social worker she has in the youth project she currently receives aftercare from:

And the way she offers to help and the way she shows that she is on MY side. She is there for ME. (...) And she almost never takes up issues, it is always I who take up things and then we talk. And I have really positive experiences with the whole [youth project] actually. And I am very thankful for it. In addition, they have supported me financially as well.

According to the factors Vis and Thomas (2009) argue constitute participation, these girls have been informed, consulted and able to influence the decision of whether to receive aftercare or not. All three girls have been informed about aftercare and have been able to decide whether to receive this assistance or not. All the youth have actively chosen to say yes to receive aftercare. As Maria described, she is the one who “takes up issues”, and then she and her social worker talks about these issues. As Montgomery et al. (2003) argue, participation takes place when children and young people are being treated with dignity and respect and when their activities are being recognised. In this sense, Maria was treated with dignity and respect, and the issues she believed were important to discuss were recognized and taken seriously by her social worker.

Holland (2001) assessed children’s participation in 16 cases in two social agencies in Britain. One of her findings was that children were increasingly listened to as they become older. This is also in accordance with the prevailing child welfare jurisdiction, as Thrana (2008) argues, the right to participation is related to age and maturity. Hereunder, this implies that those responsible for the child need to assess the child’s maturity and the child’s age (Thrana,

2008). All the examples presented in this section describe how the girls were able to participate when they were older, or more specifically, when they turned 18. However, this is not in accordance with the prevailing jurisdiction for the Child Welfare Service, as the child's right to participate is a legally binding premise for the Child Welfare Service (Gulbrandsen et al., 2012) and one of the key principles of the UNCRC (Ennew, 2000).

The fact that these girls said that they were not listened to when they were younger, but were listened to when they started to receive aftercare, can be analysed in light of the debate of viewing the child as a "human being" or a "human becoming". As James and Prout (1990) argue, childhood is a social construction. This implies that childhood is, is not a given, but dynamic and changeable. According to these three girls, they were suddenly able to participate in their child welfare case when they turned 18. When a child turns 18, he or she is officially an adult. This is a construction which society has established. As for instance Archard (2004) debates, it is unfair to assume that a 17-year old can, within a day, have the capacity or competence to certain rights. As Lee (2001) argues, viewing children as "human becomings" leads to adults having more control of children's lives. When children are viewed as "human becomings", they are viewed as being "unfinished adults" (Gulbrandsen et al., 2012). One could argue that these girls were viewed as "human becomings" in need of guidance from adults. However, as their aftercare came in, they were increasingly viewed as "human beings", whose opinions needed to be taken seriously.

6.4 "They will always have the power"

According to Bogen and Nadim (2009) the question has been raised recently as to whether youth receiving aftercare are in fact getting the assistance that they require and need. Both the following examples from Andreas (19) and Kristine (19) can illustrate that even though several of the youth in this study experience a great sense of participation and satisfaction concerning their aftercare, some experienced that the Child Welfare Service still has the power.

Andreas (19) was informed about aftercare. He currently receives aftercare in the form of having a social worker who is attached to a youth institution, who provides assistance to him in different aspects of his life. He is satisfied with this part of his aftercare. When asked whether he remembered how he got into contact with aftercare he said:

So I came to a meeting and I didn't have any expectations really. It was like "Assistance, Yeah. Yeah. But it was much better than I imagined. Sat in the meeting and thought "Yes, this is nice. This sounds okay". I got a social worker I was happy with. They are good at finding matches. They came and asked me "What sort of social worker do you want?". Got to choose their gender and interests. So that was kind of cool. So I got a person who suited me well. Nice guy.

However, as will also be described in-depth when discussing the collaboration between the Child Welfare Service and NAV, Andreas wished that he could get financial support from the Child Welfare Service. This is his biggest concern when it comes to aftercare. He has tried to express this, but with no result. Andreas said the following concerning aftercare in the Child Welfare Service:

Andreas: Their aftercare doesn't work. It's lousy.

Interviewer: From [name of youth institution] or the Child Welfare Service?

Andreas: The Child Welfare Service. That is basically the one thing I can point out that does NOT work. That should change, that HAS TO change if you ask me. I have heard about many who have said that their aftercare doesn't work.

Kristine (19)'s experiences are in one way quite similar to those of Andreas. Kristine was not informed about aftercare. However, she went to the Child Welfare Service when she was 19 and asked to receive aftercare. This request was approved. Kristine's experiences concerning not being informed about aftercare will therefore be described in the next section. In this section, the experiences she had when she in fact did get aftercare will be discussed. After she received aftercare, she described that she was satisfied with the aftercare which she received, which is though a youth initiative:

They believe me and they listen to me and they help me with like, everything.

However, Kristine (19) further reflects on how the Child Welfare Service still has the power over her life even though she has turned 18. Her reflections also revolve around the fact that she currently has two "roles" in the Child Welfare Service, both as a receiver of aftercare, and

as a mother whose child is in their care. As stated above, she is in one way satisfied with her aftercare, yet at the same time she feels that the Child Welfare Service still have the power:

So when you become an adult, when you turn 18, you are supposed to feel that “Now you are free”, but I still feel that I will never be free sort of. No matter how hard I try, no matter what I have on paper from doctors, midwives or public health nurses, no matter! It is stated there that I am a good mother and that what happened was not my fault, they always will, they will always have the power.

Kristine is satisfied with the aftercare she receives, but as she said, even though she has turned 18, the Child Welfare Service still have the power. As for instance argued by Bunkholdt and Sandbæk (2008) the power the Child Welfare Service has, can imply that if there is a conflict, the assessments made by the caseworkers in the Child Welfare Service will be given more weight. In other words, if the youth have the opinion that they for instance are in need of financial support, it is the decision of the caseworker in the Child Welfare Service that counts. In the case of Andreas, as some of the youth in the study by Storhaug and Bratterud (2008) also argued, it seems that he wants to be able to decide more on what sort of aftercare he should have. This may be related to the fact that the youth have no *right* to receive aftercare (Bakketeig & Backe-Hansen, 2008). The caseworker in the Child Welfare Service has to believe that giving the youth aftercare is necessary for him or her (Storø, 2012). This could illustrate something concerning the power the Child Welfare Service has when it comes to decision-making in aftercare. As the youth in the focus group discussion pointed out, it is the caseworkers who are “on top”. Even though there might be agreement between the youth and for instance, the people working at the institution, it is still the youth’s caseworker who has the final say in whether the youth should get aftercare and if so, the type of assistance the youth should receive.

Both Andreas and Kristine do, also on the other hand, describe that through their aftercare they have got into contact with persons who seemed to be important in their lives. This is also a finding from several studies concerning youth and aftercare (Aannestad, 2004{Reime, 2008 #135; Bogen & Nadim, 2009; Elisiv & Mathisen, 2008}). It seems that their feeling of lack of participation in aftercare concerns the Child Welfare Service, and not the persons from the youth projects who the Child Welfare Service has put them in contact with. Concerning this assistance, they are satisfied and feel that they are listened to and able to participate.

6.5 “I haven’t heard anything about it”

As described previously, one condition for receiving aftercare is that the youth agrees to it (Storø, 2012). As Lurie (2008) argues, this implies that the discussion of aftercare needs to involve the youth. It follows that to be able to participate in the decision of whether or not to receive aftercare, the youth have to be informed about this possibility. Three of the youth in my individual study had not received information about aftercare. The circumstances for the youth varied, as will be described below.

One of these three youth is Lisa (16). Lisa had not been informed about the possibility to receive aftercare and did not have any expectations or thoughts on the issue. She did not think she would want aftercare. Lisa currently lives in an institution for youth. All the other youth in the study who also live in this institution were informed about aftercare when they were around 17. One could imagine that the policy of the institution is to consult the youth at a later stage, and that Lisa will be informed about aftercare when she approaches the age of 17.

With the regards to the question of when to inform the youth about the possibility of aftercare, it is stated in the guidelines from the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, that the Child Welfare Service shall, in good time before the youth turns 18, inform the youth about the possibility of receiving aftercare, and discuss with the youth what he or she wishes (BLD, 2011). However, as Bakketeig and Backe-Hansen (2008) points out, what is meant by “in good time” is not specified. Kristofersen (2009) argues that the Child Welfare Service needs to plan aftercare early, as “discharge” from aftercare sometimes begins when the youth are around 15-16 years old. Elisiv and Mathisen (2008) also argue that it is important to start the planning of aftercare early, as the planning is viewed as a process, where the Child Welfare Service needs to talk to the youth about this issue several times. As the guidelines are so vague, the fact that Lisa has not been informed yet, does not necessarily mean that she will not be informed, but it may be an indication that the youth are not getting information about aftercare early enough.

Helene (19) is the only person in my individual study who was over 18 and who had not received aftercare. Helene has lived with her mother, and not been placed out of her home during her contact with the Child Welfare Service. When questioned about aftercare, Helene

said that she was not sure what aftercare was. However, after some reflection she remembered that the service had spoken to her mother about it. She said:

I think they talked to my mother about it, not to me. And it's just, it was right before the summer that they were here so... I haven't heard anything about it other than that. I did not hear anything about it before I turned 18 either. So I haven't heard anything about it. Because they came to talk to my Mum, but I was home, so they asked if I wanted to join, so I joined. So like, I came in when they were talking about it I think. So they talked to my Mum and not to me.

After an explanation of aftercare was provided, and on the question of whether this was something she would have wanted, her answer was that she was in one way basically happy to abandon the Child Welfare Service. In the following quote she elaborates on why she does not wish to receive aftercare. She has been in contact with a youth project before she turned 18, which is who she is referring to when she said “them”:

I have sort of, I sort of manage to stand on my own feet and manage most things now. I sort of don't need them anymore. Although I sometimes wish that I needed them. They somehow made things so much easier for me. But I don't need them anymore so that's why I don't have so much contact with them.

Although Helene stated that she does not wish to receive aftercare, one could question the decision of the Child Welfare Service of talking to her mother and not to her concerning the decision of aftercare. As described earlier, the Child Welfare Service shall, inform the youth about aftercare and discuss with the youth what he or she wishes (BLD, 2011). From what Helene says, it is evident that she has not been informed about her rights, nor had the possibility to participate in expressing her opinion. It seems as if Helene did not actually have any of the possibilities of being informed, of having the chance to express an opinion and of actually having an influence of the decision which is being made, which are the factors of participation which Vis and Thomas (2009) highlight.

One could question whether Helene would regard aftercare differently had she been properly informed about it and able to discuss what aftercare in fact does imply. Helene was the only person from the individual interviews who had lived at home before she turned 18. As Elisiv

et al. (2008) found in their study, there are not many youth who live at home and receive aftercare. Most of the youth receiving aftercare have either lived in a child welfare institution or in a foster home. The authors argue that this is an area where there is a need for more research, as we do not know a lot about this group of youth (Elisiv et al., 2008).

The fact that Helene was “happy” to get rid of the Child Welfare Service and that she said that she “does not need them anymore” resembles what some of the youth from the focus group discussions said. Some of the youth were of the opinion that it was not a problem that their aftercare ended when they turned 18, and said that they wanted to be able to take care of themselves alone. However, they also pointed out that it was positive to have option of receiving aftercare. The issue of youth feeling that they are no longer in need of assistance from the Child Welfare Service is the same finding as a study of youth in the Child Welfare Service conducted by Elisiv and Mathisen (2008). Half of the youth said that they did not want assistance from the Child Welfare Service when they turned 18. The scholars discuss whether this could be due to the fact that the youth were not, in fact, in need of this assistance, or that it reflects a notion of them not viewing the Child Welfare Service as a provider of help (Elisiv & Mathisen, 2008).

Kristine (19) has been moved four times by the Child Welfare Service. She explains that she has not been asked whether she wanted to receive aftercare. Kristine explained:

It is supposed to come automatically, or they are supposed to ask if you want to receive aftercare. But with me that did not happen.

Kristine said that she thinks that the person who was supposed to inform her about aftercare simply forgot to do it. Kristine’s sister receives aftercare from a youth project. This is how Kristine got to know about her right to apply for aftercare. Kristine explained how she went to the Child Welfare Service and asked for aftercare:

And then I went there and said “Yes, I want aftercare.” (...) And then they said that it was okay. It worked out pretty quickly actually. So I was lucky.

As with the example of Helene, it is evident that the regulations for aftercare have not been followed in the case for Kristine. Before she went to the Child Welfare Service and asked for

help, she had not, according to the factors Vis and Thomas (2009) argue as essential for participation, been informed about her rights, nor had the possibility to express her opinion or affect the decision which was made. As Storhaug and Bratterud (2008) argue, in order for youth to truly participate, he or she needs to be informed about what aftercare actually implies. Both the case of Helene and the case of Kristine illustrate how important it is that the youth are actually informed about aftercare, in order for them to participate in the decision regarding it.

On Hart's Ladder of Participation, this example would represent the lower stages, defined as non-participation (Hart, 1997). It is stated in a guideline from the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion that it is important that the Child Welfare Service informs the youth about the possibility for further assistance when they turn 18, and clarifies with the youth what he or she wishes. In addition, the youth should be informed that they can change their mind if they say that they do not wish to receive aftercare (BLD, 2011). It could seem evident that none of the youth in this section were aware of this issue.

Malin (19) is one of the youth in my study who currently receives aftercare. Her reflections on the youth who are not informed about aftercare can shed light on this issue. She said that she knows many people who, at the age of 18, returned to parents who were on drugs and that they have no place they can go. Her opinion seemed to be that it is a problem that people are not offered aftercare:

They have no place they can go. It's like straight to NAV and that's no future. I feel bad for them that they are sent back where they were sent from sort of. What is the point of sending them away for a couple of years, and then sending them back? Then the whole point is gone sort of. Then they are doomed to... So, I think it is very important to have aftercare. Like, I don't know what I would do if I didn't get any help afterwards.

This statement again reinforces the necessity of information about aftercare. Without the knowledge about their options, the youth are not able to participate or make their own decision. One of the girls in one the focus group discussions had been involved in a youth project, but when she was 18, she was sent to a place where she did not feel she fitted in. As she said, it was a place for drug addicts. She said that she wished that the youth project she

was involved in would have continued until she was 20. In theory, this youth project does provide aftercare, but the girl did not know this. Some other youth from other focus group discussions also did not know that they could continue to receive this assistance after they turned 18. All these examples can show that whether the youth are informed or not about aftercare can affect their ability to participate and actually make an informed decision about this assistance.

As Oterholm (2008a) found in her study, the most common reason for youth not receiving aftercare, according to caseworkers in the Child Welfare Service, is that the youth does not wish to receive this assistance. As Storø (2012) argues, some youth might be determined not to receive it. The way to approach these youth is to ensure that their last meeting with the Child Welfare Service ends well, and that they are informed that they can change their mind (Storø, 2012). As also discussed above, it seemed as if the youth were not aware of this last point, the fact that they could change their decision if they later found out that they wished to receive aftercare after all, again reinforcing the fact that information is central to participation in the decisions concerning aftercare.

As Storhaug and Bratterud (2008) argue, it seems that it is rather random whether youth receive aftercare or not, and it is to a large extent the youths' relationship with their caseworker that affects this decision. In a report from Save the Children it was suggested that the information given to the children and youth who are in contact with the Child Welfare Service needs to be improved. They specifically suggest producing an information leaflet for youth who are turning 18 about aftercare (Redd Barna, 2013). Bunkholdt (2010) argues that whether the youth who have lived in foster care get offered aftercare among other things depend on the economy of the municipality and that this leads to a lot of youth never being asked whether they want assistance. Oterholm (2008b) found in her study that the Child Welfare Service said that they felt that they had too little time to have conversations with the youth about aftercare. She further argues that many youth, due to changes of caseworkers, might not know their caseworker, and that it is therefore difficult to discuss aftercare (Oterholm, 2008b).

6.6 Collaboration with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)

Albeit the focus of this thesis is the youths' experiences with the Child Welfare Service, some of the youth mentioned their relationship with NAV. The youth talked about difficulties in this collaboration, or rather, lack of collaboration between the Child Welfare Service and NAV, and several point to how they have not been listened to in this process. A finding from this research is that several of the youth address financial support as central for them when it comes to aftercare. This is in accordance with the findings from other scholars (Bogen & Nadim, 2009; Elisiv & Mathisen, 2008). However, a problem seemed to occur when it comes to who should provide the youth with this financial support.

As described previously, Andreas (19) was in one way satisfied with the assistance he had received from the Child Welfare Service, but on the other hand, he also wished that he could have received financial support from the Child Welfare Service. This is how he described how he is in need of financial support and how he has tried to tell the Child Welfare Service about it:

Andreas: And it was like, 18, having been in rehabilitation for drugs, and having received help the whole time and then you suddenly have to take care of yourself alone. (...) I have received way too little help to be able to cope on my own.

Interviewer: Have you told the Child Welfare Service that you need financial help?

Andreas: I have tried, but there is apparently a lot of rules and shit. Having to struggle with NAV now. Ever since I moved home I have been waiting for a response from NAV. Or, I should soon go and deliver a new application because I got a rejection because I am going to school. So, it's like, NAV doesn't help people who are going to school, and the Child Welfare Service doesn't help people either apparently, like financially, when I have turned 18. And I think that's stupid.

As Lurie (2008) points out, participation of youth in aftercare is particularly important because of their age and the increasing focus of taking the responsibility for one's own life. In addition, the youth has to agree to receive aftercare, which implies that there should be a

thorough discussion with the youth of the type of assistance he or she should receive. From the example of Andreas, it seems evident that the form of aftercare he is in need of is financial. When expressing this opinion he has been listened to, but it seems that his opinion has not been adequately taken into account. According to the factors Vis and Thomas (2009) argue constitute participation, one could debate that the two first factors, namely to be informed and to be able to express an opinion, have been fulfilled for Andreas. However, it is evident that regarding the last factor of participation, the issue of being able to actually influence the decision, that this part has not been fulfilled.

Kristine (19) explained in the example below that the youth project she was involved in as part of her aftercare, helped her when NAV did not:

And now I don't have an income, I got a rejection from NAV and all that. So now I don't know what to do. And they actually helped me with all that.

Malin (19) described her relationship with NAV as turbulent, but that the youth project she received aftercare through helped her when NAV did not:

They don't give me money for rent, but it happens a lot that there are some problems with NAV or that there is some problems in the papers with the rent so that I sit there without food and... There is always something. So then they can buy some groceries for me if it's an emergency.

From both these examples one could argue that their aftercare functions as a “safety net”. As the Ministry of Children Equality and Social Inclusion stresses in their guidelines, if the youth is in need of assistance from other organs, the Child Welfare Service should have a particular responsibility for helping the youth to get into contact with these instances, and to coordinate this assistance (BLD, 2011). Almost all the youth in a study conducted by Bogen and Nadim (2009), said that they have had financial difficulties, and almost all had at some point had contact with NAV. However, as the scholars point out, whether the Child Welfare Service had helped them with this contact or not, varied.

In the focus group discussions some of the youth felt that the 200 NOK (Norwegian Kroner) a day from NAV was not fair compared to the amount of work which they did. Many said that

they wanted to receive economic support from the Child Welfare Service, and not from NAV. One might question why the youth are so reluctant to receive assistance from NAV. One reason could be that the youth feel stigmatized when receiving such assistance. Kristofersen (2009) argues that the Child Welfare Service should consider using more economic support as aftercare, instead of sending the youth to the NAV when they are 19-20. This is also supported by Elisiv and Mathisen (2008) whose view is that the youth should increasingly receive financial support from the Child Welfare Service, without having to become social clients at NAV. Elisiv et al. (2008) argue that there is a great variation among municipalities in Norway concerning the responsibility of the Child Welfare Service and NAV. The authors of the rapport argue that to promote higher quality in aftercare, guidelines should be established, where routines for aftercare should be clarified (Elisiv et al., 2008). These points are in line with what the youth said. There seems to be a need for more financial support for youth leaving the Child Welfare Service. In order to ensure this, and ensure that all youth have the same possibilities, there should be clearer guidelines for the Child Welfare Services in the municipalities.

6.7 Suggestions from the Youth

This section will shed light on the different suggestions the youth have for improving aftercare. Interestingly, when asked to describe the “perfect” aftercare, several of the youth said that they were satisfied with the aftercare they received. This is in accordance with a general trend in the studies examined in the literature review in the Background Chapter.

I guess it's an aftercare that helps you. No, what should I say, I feel that things are pretty okay for me. (Jonas, 18)

And I just have good experiences with them. I have. So it's all just very positive. (Maria, 19)

That you know that you can call if there is an emergency. Or just that you in general want to talk to someone. That they show that they are there for you even if you don't live there. Like at [name of institution] after you have turned 18. So I think that the aftercare I have now is really good. (Stian, 19)

And like the perfect would be that they sort of give you clear tasks and provide you so that you are in top quality to do everything alone and master everything alone. (Erik, 17)

It is important that the youth is listened to. And not just “You are placed there and then we don’t listen to you”, because, like, they think that you are okay. (Lisa, 16)

As the youth in the study conducted by Thrana (2008) also emphasize, the youth in this study say that they want the Child Welfare Service to see *them*, as individual persons.

The Child Welfare Service should think more individually. Get to know the child and try to figure out what can work for this child. They did not ask for MY opinion, more what is “regular” to think. (Erik, 17)

The most important is that they are there for you, and that... I think that the most important is that they are there for you and that they support you no matter what. And that they have to be easy to talk to, not that you feel insecure or afraid to talk to them or something like that. And that they really show that they care. That is important. (Stian, 19)

Understanding. Very understanding. And that they don’t follow the book. They try to understand you, not talking through the book, but understand you as a person. (Thea, 18)

And then I think that it is important that they see you as a PERSON and not as a USER¹⁹. As I joked when I was younger, that in the Child Welfare Service and at NAV I am just my birth number. They almost don’t ask for my name, they just ask for my birth number. So it is important that even though I am maybe a drug addict, or what ever you are they still look at you as a human being. That they, even if there is little hope, that they maybe have a little faith that I can also change. Andreas (19)

¹⁹ In Norwegian: *Bruker*.

These examples all illustrate how the youth wish to be understood and taken seriously. As Andreas emphasizes, he wants to be seen as a “human being” and not as a “user”. As Thrana (2008) argues, instead of viewing children and youth in the Child Welfare Service as “users” it is more appropriate to use the term “actors”²⁰. This is more suitable as it reflects the notion that children and youth are actors in their own lives (Thrana, 2008). The issue of respect could also be central in the case of Andreas, meaning that he wishes to be respected. As the debate concerning seeing them as “human beings” or “human becomings” one could argue that the youth want to be seen as “human beings”, in the sense of being active participants in society (Lee, 2001). The youth want to be listened to, and that the Child Welfare Service sees them as individual persons and that they try to understand them.

Lastly, the following quotes from Andreas (19) and Kristine (19) can illustrate that for some youth, aftercare is particularly important:

I need softer transitions. I can't just come out after having been a problem-child and not having had so much time and then I suddenly have to stand on my own feet and be just as strong as a youth who has followed the regular development most people have.
(Andreas, 19)

They are the ones I have to support me. Because I don't get support from anyone else. So I think they do a really good job, just the way they are doing it right now.
(Kristine, 19)

Moreover, these quotes illustrate the point made by several scholars, such as (Elisabeth Backe-Hansen, 2001; Kristofersen & Sverdrup, 2013; Storø, 2012), that children who have been in the Child Welfare Service, in most areas, are more vulnerable than other children. Several of the youth from the focus group discussions also address this issue. What many of the youth argued, was that that turning 18 does not make you independent. This is in line with what Binde (2008) argues, which is that it is important to acknowledge that most people are not ready to support themselves the day they turn 18. Binde (2008) further debates that today the period where one is “a youth” lasts for longer than before, and many people still live with their parents for some time after they turn 18. This is also a finding from the study conducted

²⁰ In Norwegian: *Aktør*.

by Thrana (2008), where the interviewed youth were worried that the Child Welfare Service would end the contact with them too early. They all said that they at least needed help from the Child Welfare Service until they are over the age of 20. As discussed previously, childhood is a social construction, which is changeable (Rogers, 2003a). The time when childhood officially ends and adulthood begins, is not a given, but is constructed by factors in society.

7 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I will present the main findings of this study. The aim of this research was to provide insights into the experiences a selection of youth in Norway had with participation in their Child Welfare Service. This was done by looking at the participation of the youth before they turned 18, and the experiences the youth had with participation in their aftercare, after they turned 18. This distinction was made as the legal regulations concerning participation in the Child Welfare Service changes when the youth are 18.

The experiences of the youth with participation in the Child Welfare Service varied. However, some main trends and similarities in the answers did emerge. The majority of the youth felt that they had not been able to participate when decisions were made about their lives in the Child Welfare Service. The youth wished that the Child Welfare Service would have listened to them before they made decisions that concerned them. Several of the youth also said that they wished that they could have received better information from the Child Welfare Service. However, while noting this finding, it is important to take into consideration that some of the youth saw it as positive that the Child Welfare Service made decisions on their behalf when they were younger. This is in line with the notion that children may be in need of protection and should be protected from making difficult decisions. So, although a majority of the youth in this study wished to participate further, the Child Welfare Service also needs to take into account the need of children to sometimes be protected from having to take difficult decisions.

The reasons for the lack of participation varied. However, one there seemed to be a connection between how many caseworkers the youth has had and whether he or she has been able to participate or not. The two youth who were particularly satisfied with their participation as well as the assistance they had received from the Child Welfare Service, had only had one or two caseworkers. Those youth who had had several caseworkers seemed to have participated less, as they did not regularly meet their caseworker or did not even know who their caseworker was at certain times. In relation to this, trust seemed important. The more caseworkers a child has had, the more difficult it seems to be to have been to build up a good relationship. This again reinforces the importance of continuity and stability for the children and youth in the Child Welfare Service.

A majority of the youth in this study were satisfied with their participation in their aftercare. Several of the youth mentioned specific persons from institutions or youth projects as key persons in their aftercare. Several also pointed to the fact that they could end the aftercare whenever they wanted, which they saw as something positive. Some youth said that when their aftercare came in, they were finally able to participate. It is also evident that there is a connection between being informed and actually receiving aftercare, as information is crucial in order to be able to make an informed decision on whether to receive aftercare or not. Not all the youth had in fact received such information about aftercare, and in particular not been informed that they could later change their mind if they first refused aftercare upon turning 18. This leads to youth not knowing that aftercare is an option, and therefore opting out of an offer of service they could have been in need of. In other words, the youth were not able to take an informed decision about aftercare.

The finding from this study that several youth have not been able to participate or even been informed about what is going to happen to them is of concern. There seems to be a communication gap. This is an issue that should be examined further. It should also be looked closer at the structural factors that enhance or prevent participation of children and youth, including at the power relations between the children and youth and their caseworkers. As several of the youth mentioned the importance of having good relations with their caseworkers, it would be interesting to interview caseworkers to get their perspective, in addition to the perspectives of the youth. This was not possible for the frame of this study, but it is an issue future studies could provide better insight.

Furthermore, as several of the youth also indicated in the interviews, there is a need to study the relationship between the assistance provided by the Child Welfare Service and by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). There seems to be different practises when it comes to who provides what type of assistance. I believe that this issue that needs to be examined further and that clear guidelines should be established outlining who provides what assistance. In addition, the practices concerning informing or not about aftercare, and particularly the fact that youth can change their mind after having first refused aftercare, needs to be studied further.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Receipt from NSD

Appendix 2: Informed Consent

Appendix 1: Receipt from NSD

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
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nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Gry Mette Dalseng Haugen
Norsk senter for barneforskning
NTNU
Loholt Allé 87, Pavillion C
7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 19.06.2013

Vår ref:34662 / 3 / MSS

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 04.06.2013. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

34662	<i>Unge voksnes erfaringer med tiltak fra barneverntjenesten</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	<i>NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
Daglig ansvarlig	<i>Gry Mette Dalseng Haugen</i>
Student	<i>Sissel Eidhammer</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

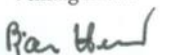
Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.06.2014, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen


Bjørn Henrichsen


Marie Strand Schildmann

Kontaktperson: Marie Strand Schildmann tlf: 55 58 31 52
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Sissel Eidhammer, Ilevollen 42, 7018 TRONDHEIM

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices

OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uo.no
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TROMSØ: NSD, SVF, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. nsdmaa@svt.uit.no

Appendix 2: Informed Consent

Forespørsel om å delta i intervju i forbindelse med en masteroppgave

Jeg er masterstudent i Childhood Studies ved NTNU og holder nå på med den avsluttende masteroppgaven. Jeg har en bachelorgrad i barnevern fra HiOA. Temaet for masteroppgaven min er ungdoms erfaringer med tiltakene de har mottatt fra barneverntjenesten. Det jeg er interessert i å finne ut av er hva du mener om disse tiltakene, og hvilke råd og anbefalinger du har når det gjelder tiltakene du har mottatt.

For å finne ut av dette, ønsker jeg å intervju 10-12 ungdom over 16 år. Spørsmålene vil dreie seg om erfaringene dere har rundt tiltakene dere har fått av barnevernet. Som en del av oppgaven vil jeg også se spesielt på brukermidvirkning og hvilke erfaringer du har med dette. Jeg er også interessert i ettervern, og hvilke forventninger og erfaringer du har knytta til det. Jeg vil bruke båndopptaker og ta notater mens vi snakker sammen. Intervjuet vil ta omtrent en time, og vi blir sammen enige om tid og sted. Intervjuet vil i tillegg bli brukt i en doktoravhandling om ungdom, barnevern og brukermidvirkning og et forskningsprosjekt som ser på hva ungdommer som har fått bistand fra [navn på institusjon/navn på tiltak for ungdom] mener om disse tiltakene.

Det er frivillig å være med og du har mulighet til å trekke deg når som helst underveis, uten å måtte begrunne dette nærmere. Dersom du trekker deg vil alle innsamlede data om deg bli slettet. Alle opplysninger som samles vil bli behandlet konfidensielt, og ingen enkeltpersoner vil kunne gjenkjennes i den ferdige oppgaven. Opplysningene anonymiseres og opptakene slettes når oppgaven er ferdig, innen 1. juni 2014. Dersom du har lyst å være med på intervjuet, er det fint om du skriver under på den vedlagte samtykkeerklæringen.

Hvis det er noe du lurer på kan du sende en e-post til [e-mailadresse]. Du kan også kontakte min veileder Gry Mette Dalseng Haugen ved NOSEB ved å sende en mail til [e-mailadresse].

Studien er anbefalt av Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste (NSD).

Med vennlig hilsen

Sissel Eidhammer

Samtykkeerklæring:

Jeg har mottatt skriftlig informasjon og er villig til å delta i studien.

Signatur