

**LEAVING CARE IN QUEBEC:  
THE EDJEP LONGITUDINAL STUDY**  
**EL TRÁNSITO A LA VIDA ADULTA DE JÓVENES DE PROTECCIÓN EN QUEBEC:  
EL ESTUDIO LONGITUDINAL EDJEP**  
**A TRANSIÇÃO PARA A VIDA ADULTA DE JOVENS EM PROTEÇÃO EM QUEBEC:  
O ESTUDO LONGITUDINAL DA EDJEP**

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<p><b>KEY WORDS:</b> Transition to adulthood Youth in care; Education; residential stability; Homelessness; Longitudinal data</p>	<p><b>ABSTRACT:</b> This article reports results from the first longitudinal and representative study of a cohort of youth leaving care in Quebec (EDJeP study). Focusing on education and residential stability, we show that youths from youth protection services accumulate important vulnerabilities that make their transition out of youth protection services very challenging. In particular, compared to their peers in the general population, youth leaving care have significant educational delays that complicate their integration into the labor market. Our data suggest that a system that better encourages school perseverance and success would limit these academic delays and promote graduation. We also find that nearly half of the youths from the protection system experienced residential instability in the months following their release from placement and that 20% of them experienced at least one episode of homelessness. These last elements clearly show the extent of the vulnerability of youth leaving the protection system. We suggest some areas of reflection to improve this situation.</p>
<p><b>PALABRAS CLAVE:</b> Tránsito a la vida adulta; Jóvenes en acogimiento residencial; Educación; Inestabilidad residencial;</p>	<p><b>RESUMEN:</b> Este artículo informa los resultados del primer estudio longitudinal y representativo de una cohorte de jóvenes que salen de la tutela en Quebec, Canadá (estudio EDJeP). Centrándonos en la educación y la estabilidad residencial, mostraremos que los jóvenes de los servicios de protección juvenil acumulan vulnerabilidades importantes que hacen que su transición fuera de los servicios de protección juvenil sea muy desafiante. Más específicamente, en comparación con sus pares en la población general, los jóvenes que salen del sistema de protección juvenil tienen un importante retraso educativo que complica su integración en el mercado de trabajo. Nuestros datos sugieren que un sistema que fomente mejor la perseverancia y el éxito escolar limitaría estos retrasos académicos y favorecería la graduación.</p>

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Déficit habitacional; Estudio longitudinal	También encontramos que cerca de la mitad de los jóvenes del sistema de protección experimentaron inestabilidad residencial en los meses posteriores a su salida del acogimiento y que el 20% de ellos experimentó al menos un episodio de sinhogarismo. Estos últimos elementos muestran claramente la medida de la vulnerabilidad de los jóvenes que salen del sistema de protección. Sugerimos algunas áreas de reflexión para mejorar esa situación.
<b>PALAVRAS-CHAVE:</b> Transição para a vida adulta; Jovens em acolhimento residencial; Educação; Déficit habitacional; Estudo longitudinal	<b>RESUMO:</b> Este artigo relata os resultados do primeiro estudo longitudinal e representativo de uma coorte de jovens que deixam os cuidados no Québec (estudo EDJeP). Centrando-se na educação e residencial estabilidade, mostramos que os jovens dos serviços de protecção dos jovens acumulam importantes vulnerabilidades que tornam a sua transição para fora dos serviços de protecção da juventude muito desafiante. Em particular, em comparação com os seus pares na população em geral, os jovens que abandonam os serviços de protecção de jovens têm atrasos educacionais significativos que complicam a sua integração no mercado de trabalho. O nosso os dados sugerem que um sistema que melhor encoraje a perseverança e o sucesso escolar limitar estes atrasos académicos e promover a graduação. Verificamos também que quase metade dos os jovens do sistema de protecção experimentaram instabilidade residencial durante os meses após a sua libertação da colocação e que 20% deles experimentaram pelo menos um episódio de desalojamento. Estes últimos elementos mostram claramente a extensão da vulnerabilidade de jovens que abandonam o sistema de protecção. Sugerimos algumas áreas de reflexão para melhorar esta situação.

## Introduction

The need to know more about what happens to young people who have been placed in out-of-home care and the importance of better supporting them during their transition to adult life have been emphasized in numerous government reports and expert opinions, including the Cloutier report (2000), those of the Conseil permanent de la jeunesse (CPJ, 2004 a and b) and several other documents (ACJQ, 2002; Courtney *et al.*, 2019; Goyette & Turcotte, 2004; Mann Feder, 1999). In Canada, unlike in other countries (Frechon, 2005; Grant *et al.*, 2012; Stein *et al.*, 2011; Strahl *et al.*, 2020), support for most youth in care ends when they reach age 18. It is consequently impossible to follow their progress because there is no system for tracking data on the status of youth after they leave care, as there is in the United States (*United States National Youth in Transition Database*). This situation creates a knowledge gap about the future of youth in care. This is a major issue considering that each year in Canada approximately 65,000 children are removed from their family environment and placed in out-of-home care. In Québec, 12,000 youth are in care (Trocmé, 2010) and 5,000 are enrolled in a process to increase their independence (ACJQ, 2002). The literature sheds light on the diversity and accumulation of social difficulties and vulnerability processes among adults who were placed in care during childhood (Lee & Ballew, 2018; Schelbe, 2018).

Beyond the context of adversity that youth in care face, international studies show that youth leaving care are more vulnerable than youth in the general population (Courtney, 2019; Goyette, 2019). Although these youth have skills and resources to navigate their transition to adulthood, they tend to lack other forms of support.

International studies found that few of these young people had completed high school (Duncheon & Relles, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2019; Marion & Mann-Feder, 2020): between 19.2% and 43.2% held a diploma at (Dumaret *et al.*, 2007, 1997; Jahnukainen, 2007; Lanctôt, 2006; Yergeau *et al.*, 2007). Berlin *et al.* (2011) identify dropping out of school as the most important risk for youth in care, a very disturbing finding in Western knowledge societies. Further, while approximately half (between 31% and 54%) of the young people work in the first few months after leaving the youth protection system (Frechon, 2003; Lanctot, 2006; Rutman *et al.*, 2006), these jobs are mostly low-paying and unrewarding (Courtney, 2019; Goyette, 2019; 2007; Kufeldt, 2003). Many youth report that their wages are not sufficient to meet their needs (Kufeldt, 2003); in fact, one-third of them live below the poverty line (Pecora *et al.*, 2006). Not surprisingly, young adults who were placed in care are more likely to receive social assistance than the general population (Courtney *et al.* 2019; Goyette, 2006; Tweddle, 2007). In addition, the first few years after leaving placement are often characterized by housing instability; many experience at least one episode of homelessness after reaching age 18 (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Dietrich-Ragon, 2020; Frechon, 2005; Rutman *et al.*, 2006). In Montréal, 50% of youth under the age of 30 living with homelessness have spent “at least 6 months in a youth centre” (Latimer *et al.*, 2016). Youth who have been placed in care thus present an accumulation of persistent social problems, and are overrepresented among marginalized adult populations (Courtney, 2019; Goyette, 2019). More than half of them report mental health problems (Pecora *et al.*, 2005). The prevalence of depressive symptoms is particularly high, and nearly one quarter of youth in care have attempted suicide

in early adulthood (Goyette *et al.*, 2011; Lanctôt, 2006; Pecora *et al.*, 2005; Rutman *et al.*, 2006). Drug and alcohol abuse are also issues that particularly affect this population. Stein and Dumaret (2011) argue that these difficulties associated with youth must also be understood within an analysis of the way interventions support young people and the conditions in which the transition to adulthood takes place (Goyette, 2019; Goyette *et al.*, 2011). Allègre (2011) emphasizes the importance of family solidarities that exist in advantaged social environments; in a bleak economic context, the absence of such solidarities contributes to the intergenerational transmission of inequalities.

In a context of adversities, external supports play a central role (Goyette, 2019; 2011). Yet several studies show that youth who were placed in care often receive little support from their families of origin, be it emotional or financial (Collins, 2001; Courtney *et al.*, 2011). Nearly half do not feel close to their parents or family (Rutman *et al.*, 2006), or consider them “useless” to their support (Fransson & Storo, 2011). Individuals who still have ties to their mother or father often view these ties as inhibiting or blocking integration (Kufeldt, 2003; Frechon, 2005; Goyette, 2006). Further, the new relationships forged outside the family are not necessarily successful. Those who live in a couple (between 46% and 80%), do not always find support in this relationship. In particular, young women report a high prevalence of domestic violence (Dumaret *et al.*, 1997; Jahnukaiken, 2007; Lanctôt, 2006). Goyette, 2011 has shown that youth who leave care have limited relational capital compared with youth in the general public, both in terms of the extent of available resources (quantity, duration of relationships, diversity) and the dynamic activation of these resources. Very few interventions address the interdependence of transitions to adulthood and multidimensional supports (Goyette, 2019; Munro *et al.*, 2011). Existing interventions do little to support the transition to adulthood (Mann Feder, 2007; Ward, 2011). Several researchers demonstrate the discontinuity between youth and adult services (Goyette, 2011; 2006; Frechon, 2013). As a result, youth find it difficult to navigate through adult support systems (Munro *et al.*, 2011; [Goyette *et al.*, 2007a and b]). This is why the importance of supports, or *being able to rely on support*, must be recognized. There is a consensus in this research on the positive impact of the stability of the affective ties developed by these young people, whether this stability results from the continuity of care, the regularity of family relationships or the existence of lasting friendship or family networks (Goyette *et al.*, 2021; Lee & Ballew, 2018; Schelbe, 2018).

## Theoretical approach

In addition to drawing from the literature on the future of young people in care, generally within an evaluative perspective of the outcomes of care, the theoretical framework within which the project is situated include three perspectives: theories of knowledge mobilization in public administration (Anderson, 2011; Johansson, 2010), actors and their flexibility (Giddens, 1987; Crozier & Friedberg, 1977) and supports (Martuccelli, 2002; Bidart, 2006). These three perspectives are complementary in capturing the practice of actors within their contexts. First, the theoretical perspective on knowledge mobilization in public administration considers that change in practice and policy is complex in a context where the actors are interdependent and interconnected and when they have a partial solution to a problem (Anderson, 2011; Jack *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, the literature emphasizes the fact that scientific knowledge is not independent of the context of production and use: actors’ ability to influence the collective environment in which they work is directly related to contextual factors of this environment (Anderson, 2011; Jack *et al.*, 2010). Hence the need for a bottom-up approach based on stakeholders and implementation actors (Lipsky, 2010) and the need to focus on the views of key stakeholders, namely youth. This position is in line with our desire to rethink the research and ethics in making “visible” situations, conditions and needs of so-called “weak” actors (Martuccelli, 2010; Renault, 2004). Indeed, work on actors and flexibility allows us to take into account the role of youths’ interactions with their environment, while recognizing their power in their trajectory and their ability to make choices, to share their views on services and their capacity to accept and refuse support, even in adverse social contexts. Finally, theoretical perspectives on social networks, seen as facilitators for integration, will shed light on the nature and significance of the relations of vulnerable individuals. Thus, in the prism of analysis of the results of public action, the intersection between biography and relations stresses the importance of taking into account the interaction in the study of the sequence of events that occur in different spheres of life to understand the integration process, especially in light of the functioning dynamic of social networks and its role (Bidart, 2006; Bonvalet & Lelièvre, 2012). It is then possible to assess how well public actions support the transition to independent life in three adult (Goyette *et al.* 2006) integration social spaces, either work or education, housing and family (Furstenberg, 2006; Ertul, Melchior & Warin, 2012)

and to identify levers and conditions to support the improvement of policies and practices (Ertul, Melchior & Warin, 2012).

### **Methodology**

Our longitudinal study on the fate of youth in care was launched in 2014 in collaboration with many youth service stakeholders in Québec, including all youth protection actors. Our project aims to fill this knowledge gap on the post-care period, which is rarely addressed by studies that most often examine specific services or sub-groups of youth. However, these studies raise issues surrounding the break in the service path that young people face as they enter adulthood. Thus, our project focuses on the living conditions and exit from care of youth ages 17 to 21 years placed in out-of-home care in Québec. The EDJeP study, is the first representative study in Canada that aims to understand the fate of an entire cohort of youths leaving youth protection “for independent living.” Specifically, the study looks at the trajectory, the exit from care and the fate of youths in three waves of surveys. The research project notably addresses housing stability, education, career path, personal difficulties, and the resources mobilized in the social circle and by social and health services.

This study is being conducted in close collaboration with members of the EDJeP’s Youth Committee. The committee is made up of 12 young people aged 18 to 35 who have all been in care, and who are participating in the research project in order to improve the services offered to young people who leave youth centres and begin their journey to independence. The youth committee acts as an advisor to the researchers and the various committees and partners involved in the research. It ensures that youth participation is meaningful and rights-based in every phase of the research, from planning to implementation. The committee meets at least monthly and has contributed to all stages of the research, from the construction of data collection tools to the selection of research assistants and the public dissemination of results.

### **Data and Sample**

We use panel data consisting of two waves of interviews with a cohort of youth exiting placement in Québec, as well as data from their administrative records. All youth between 16 and 18 years of age during the first wave of data collection, who had cumulated at least one year in out-of-home placement at the time of data extraction (excluding short placements of 72 hours or less) were

identified. After cleaning the administrative data, the final cohort consisted of a population of 2,573 adolescents. From this adjusted population, we were able to obtain contact information for 1,687 adolescents, all of whom were invited to take part in our study. Of those contacted, 1,136 adolescents completed our first questionnaire (67% of those for whom we had contact information, and 44% of the entire target population) during interviews held from April 2017 to April 2018 in locations across Québec. 37 interviews were conducted over the phone and 1099 (96.7%) were held face-to-face at the respondents’ preferred location. Respondents’ average age in Wave 1 was 17.2. The second wave of interviews started in April 2019 and ended in December 2019, although the vast majority of the interviews were conducted during the spring and the summer. We met with 835 participants (74% of the initial respondents) in the second wave, including 790 who participated in face-to-face interviews and 45 completed the questionnaire over the phone or videoconference. Interviews typically lasted one to one and a half hours, and included questions about respondents’ experiences in out-of-home care, their relationship with their biological, adoptive or foster care family, and many other topics of interest. The average age in Wave 2 was 19.07 years; the youngest respondent was 17.5 years and the oldest 20.86.

All participants were free to participate or stop participating at any time. Participants also gave written consent for us to combine information from their administrative records with the information they gave us during the interviews.<sup>1</sup> To shed light on the issues that youth experience, we will present data related to their education and housing situation.

## **Results**

### **Studies and educational attainment**

At the time of the first wave, 83.5% of EDJeP participants were still in school and 15.6% had finished school. Among the 17-year-old participants, 37% had already experienced a dropout episode, compared with 8% for all 17-year-old Quebecers in 2000. The Longitudinal Study of Child Development in Québec (ELDEQ) has been following a representative cohort of young Quebecers since 1998. This study therefore provides an important point of comparison with the general population of the same age.<sup>2</sup> At age 17 years, only 5% of the ELDEQ participants had dropped out of school, compared with 12.4% of participants from more specifically disadvantaged backgrounds. In other

words, not only are the young people in care much more likely to drop out of school than young Quebecers in general, but they are also more likely to

drop out than young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

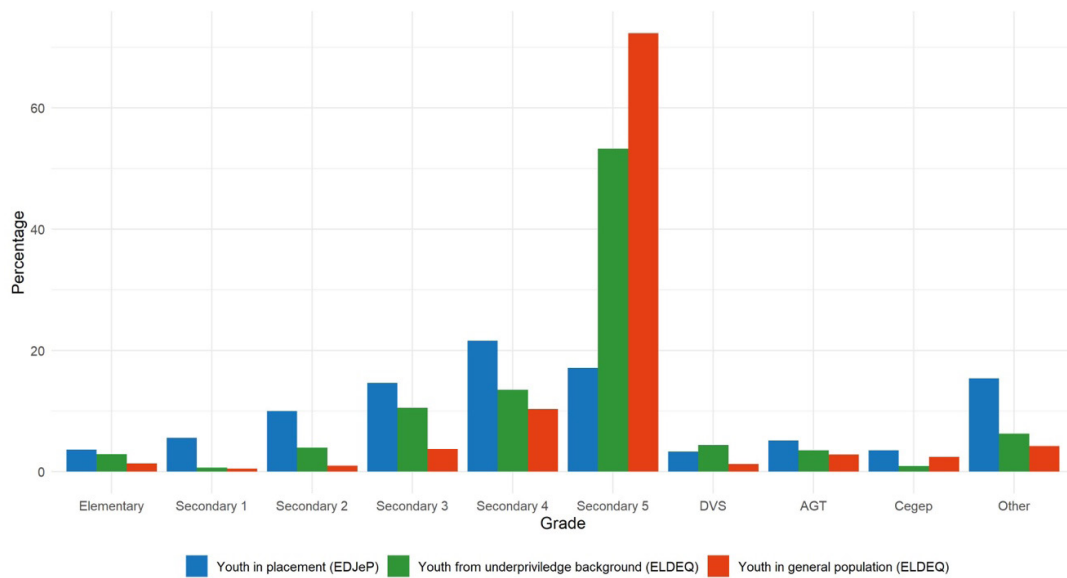


Figure 1. Current year grade level.

This sombre picture of educational attainment for youth in care is clearly associated with significant academic lags affecting the vast majority of these youth. Figure 2 illustrates youths' educational delay by comparing EDJeP participants to ELDEQ participants. At age 17, 79.8% of all ELDEQ participants had never repeated a grade; this proportion dropped to 60% among youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among EDJeP youth in care, only 26.7% had never repeated a grade. Thirty-one percent of EDJeP youth had already repeated a grade, compared with 13.4% of ELDEQ

youth and 22% of ELDEQ youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among EDJeP youth, 22.4% had already repeated two grades, compared with 5.4% and 17.7% respectively of all ELDEQ participants and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among Québec youth, those who had repeated a grade were in the minority. This was also true for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, although a higher percentage of this group had already repeated a grade. Among young people in care, those who had never repeated a year are the clear minority.

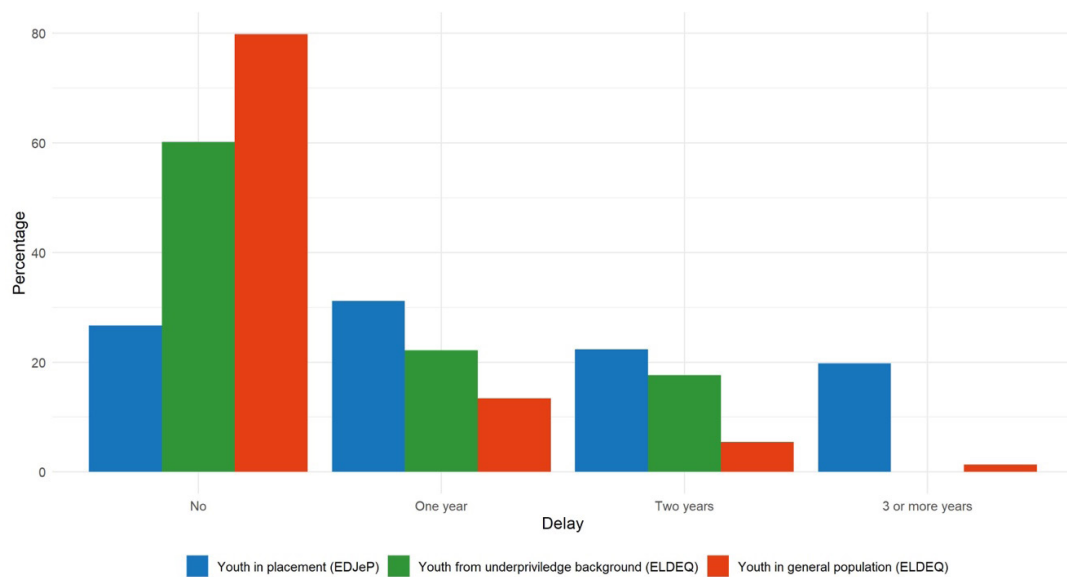


Figure 2. Academic delay.

Interestingly, Figure 3 shows that the more youth in care perceive that they were encouraged to continue their education beyond high school, the more likely they are to have a high level of education completed. This suggests that young

people in care who feel supported truly benefit from this support. These benefits are especially important in that education is evidently a crucial element for the future of young people.

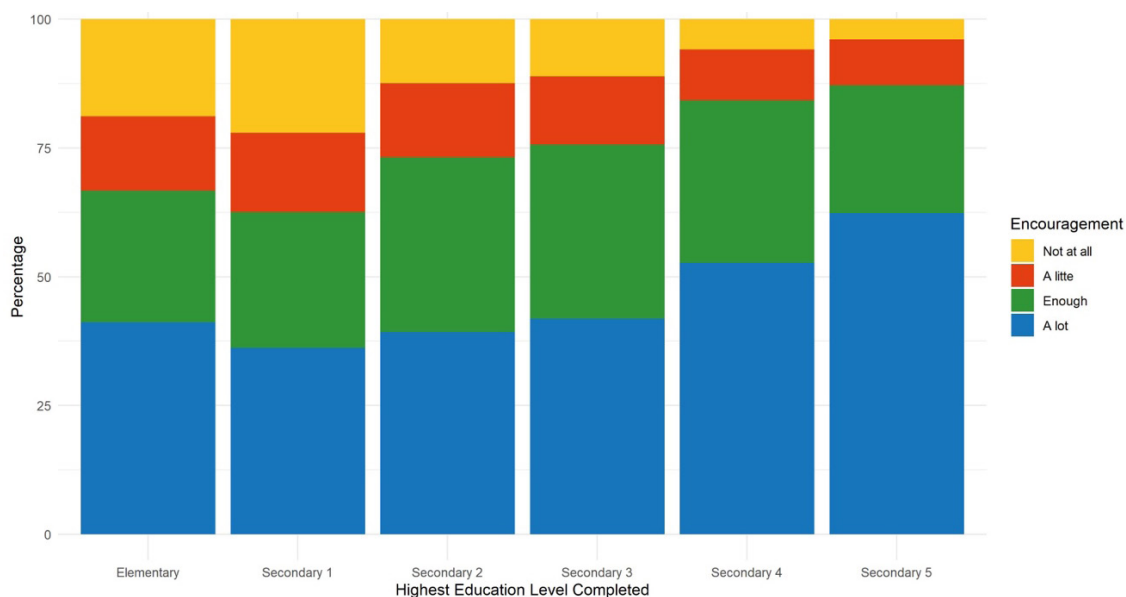


Figure 3. Encouragement received and highest level of education completed.

Further, by cross-referencing the data on the services and placements trajectory derived from the administrative data on youth protection of EDJeP participants with the results of our questionnaire in wave 1, we could analyze in detail the factors influencing the youths' situation at age 17. It is thus possible to isolate the specific effect of one variable, with all other factors being equal. For example, placement instability emerges as an important risk factor for being neither in the workforce nor a student, even after taking into account the total cumulative duration of placement, the proportion of this placement time spent in a rehabilitation centre and in foster care, the sex assigned at birth, the age at first placement, and current age (Goyette *et al.*, 2021). It is also possible to isolate the specific effect of the proportion of placement time spent in a rehabilitation centre, all other factors being equal. For example, a youth whose first placement was between the ages of 6 and 12 and who did not spend any time in a rehabilitation centre has a 27% probability of being in the process of obtaining an SSD or equivalent by age 18 at wave 1. This probability decreases to 12% for youth with the same characteristics but whose placement was spent entirely at a rehabilitation centre.

### Access to housing and housing instability

The first challenge that young people face when they are about to leave care is finding a place to live. During wave 2 of our study, we asked youth who had already left care at the time of the interview where they lived immediately after leaving care. We also asked them if they considered this place as "a temporary solution while you waited to find a more permanent place to live." More than 45% of the youths who had left care replied YES, suggesting that a large portion of youth who leave care start adulthood in a situation of housing instability.

Housing instability among youth who leave care is well documented in our recent report issuing from wave 2 of the EDJeP data collection (Goyette *et al.*, 2019). The study notably finds that 19,4% percent of youth who age out of care experience at least one episode of homelessness in the year after they leave care, and that 32% experience housing instability. Only 49% are in a situation of housing stability since they left care. Therefore, more than half of the youths who left care experienced either housing instability or at least one episode of homelessness in the months after they left care<sup>3</sup>.

Visible homelessness is defined, as in many other studies, as a situation involving sleeping in



public or private places without authorization, for example a street, park or unoccupied private building (squatting); living in ad hoc shelters, such as cars, garages or makeshift shelters; or the use of emergency shelters. In this research, youth were identified as having experienced visible homelessness if they replied Yes to the following question: "Since you left care, have you slept...". The three choices were: In the street? In a default/ad hoc shelter? (bus station, car, van, metro, etc.), and In emergency shelters? The category Provisionally Accommodated describes situations where people are living in interim housing for people who are homeless, people living temporarily with others but with no guarantee of continued residency ("couch-surfing"), living in temporary short-term accommodations without security of tenure (motel, hostel, rooming house), people in institutional care who lack permanent housing arrangements (for example penal or mental health institutions), and people who live in reception centres for newly arrived immigrants and refugees. Lastly, people at risk of homelessness are those who, for a variety of reasons, are at imminent risk of becoming homeless, or whose housing situation is precarious. Although the questionnaire did not raise the question of hidden homelessness directly, we attempted to determine the housing situation of the young respondents. In fact, the situations described by the youth clearly convey their instability and even hidden homelessness. This phenomenon will be illustrated in the tables below.

Table 1 reports the percentage of youth who answered Yes to these items depending on whether or not they were still in care at the time of the interview. The table also illustrates the proportion of youth still or previously in care who reported that they had experienced any one of the situations. Among participants who left care, 12.7% said that they had already slept in the street, compared with less than 3% (n=2) of those who were in care. More than 12% of youth who left care say they had already slept in a place not intended for human habitation, such as a bus station, car, van or subway station, compared with 4% of participants who were still in care. Lastly, nearly 9% of youths who left care said they had already slept in emergency shelters, compared with 4% of participants who were still in care.

**Table 1. [While in care/ Since you left care], have you slept...?**

	While in care		Since you left care	
	%	n	%	n
In the street	2,63	2	12,72	96
In a default/ad hoc shelter	3,95	3	12,45	94
In emergency shelters	3,95	3	9,4	71
Either one or the other	7,89	6	20,26	153

Among youth who reported at least one episode of homelessness, the average number of episodes was 4. This average is 5 for males and 3 for females. Some youth mentioned that they had left care shortly before we met them (21% said they had left care within the past six months), while others said they had left much longer ago (8.5% said they had left 2 or more years earlier). The average duration since youth left care was 13.5 months, or slightly over one year. This interval since leaving care is evidently important when considering episodes of homelessness.

Table 2 shows the percentages of youth who said they experienced any one of the visible homelessness situations, along with the number of episodes of homelessness according to the time elapsed since leaving care. First we can note that the percentages of youth who report having had an episode of visible homelessness generally tend to be higher among youth who had left care a longer time ago. More advanced analyses confirm a significant relationship between the propensity for having experienced a visible homelessness episode and the time elapsed since leaving care ( $p < 0.01$ ). In addition, the number of episodes of visible homelessness also tends to increase the longer the youth have been out of care. Once again, more extensive analyses confirm that this relationship is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). To summarize, the more time that elapsed since the youth left care, the higher the risk of their having experienced an episode of homelessness. For those who experienced an episode of visible homelessness, the longer the duration since they left care, the more episodes they experienced. Therefore these analyses show that the risk of homelessness increases over time and that the risk of homelessness becoming chronic also increases with time. Overall, girls are slightly less likely than boys to report having experienced homelessness episodes.

**Table 2. Number of episodes of visible homelessness since leaving care**

	At least one episode		No episode		One episode		Two or more episodes		Male		Female	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
6 to 12 months	15,47	28	84,53	153	8,84	16	6,63	12	16,85	15	14,13	13
6 months or less	13,38	21	86,62	136	7,64	12	5,73	9	16,25	13	10,39	8
12 to 18 months	23,68	45	75,92	145	13,09	25	10,99	21	27,71	23	20,56	22
18 to 24 months	26,71	43	72,84	118	16,05	26	11,11	18	29,87	23	23,81	20
24 months and over	24,24	16	74,63	50	10,45	7	14,93	10	28,12	9	20,59	7
Total	20,26	153	79,74	602	10,99	83	9,27	70	22,99	83	17,77	70

In addition to analyzing the association between youths' housing situation and their academic personal difficulties depending on their housing situation. In terms of physical and psychological health, young people who had experienced a homelessness episode were significantly more likely to report health, physical and psychological problems in the past 12 months (32%) than were stable youth (21%) ( $p < 0.05$ ) and youth in a situation of housing instability (24%) ( $p < 0.1$ ). Despite this greater perception of difficulties, youth who experienced a homelessness episode reported significantly more difficulties in accessing care. They were thus more likely not to have a family doctor, and to not be "followed up by a doctor or other professional" compared with other youth. Lastly, youth who experienced homelessness were more likely to have been hospitalized in the past 12 months. In fact, their difficulties seem more marked. For instance, they claim to consume alcohol or drugs more often than the other respondents. Not only did we examine health difficulties, but we also explored legal problems that youth may encounter. Here again, youth who experienced at least one homelessness episode were twice as likely to lack confidence in the youth criminal justice system than other youth, and were twice as likely to have been arrested by the police in the last 12 months. In general, youth who experienced at least one homelessness episode have a more complex relationship with the legal system, which increases their vulnerability compared with other youth.

## Discussion

The current knowledge on the fate of youth in care indicates that schooling is a complex issue. The EDJeP findings reflect the challenges faced by

youth and the intervention workers that support them. The significant disparity between youth in care and youth in the general population in terms of social support, housing stability and educational lag point to a glaring inequality of opportunity in a knowledge-based society.

Conversely, our data show that youth who perceive that they are supported are more successful. This finding underlines the importance of supports within social and other networks; certain types of placements seem better able to deploy them. While the issues experienced by youth in rehabilitation centres likely make these supports less available, not all responsibility should be placed on the shoulders of youth who have been removed from their families. Thus, tutoring for the youngest children, mentoring in various forms (peer, intergenerational, etc.) for the oldest and an increased effort to develop new partnerships and new links with the school environment are among the avenues most often cited in the literature.

Similarly, some authors contend that certain placement settings need to transform their culture to prioritize youth education in addition to rehabilitation objectives (Goyette, 2019, 2003; Marion & Mann-Feder, 2020; Schelbe, 2018). Lastly, the transformation of placement settings is another avenue. Some authors argue that their structure is not conducive to optimally supporting youth along their education path. Other scholars show that youth centres do not teach youth as much autonomy as they would gain in a foster family. Indeed, youth in foster care are more successful and feel more encouraged.

In Quebec, a commission of inquiry on youth protection and the rights of youth released its report in the spring of 2021. This report, which relies heavily on EDJeP's findings, makes a dozen recommendations for implementing supports



aimed at preparation for adulthood and support for youth who age out of care. Courtney (2019) and Frechon and Marquet (2019) argue that structures designed to promote schooling yields gains in academic achievement and graduation among youth in care. Gains in schooling are linked to improved living conditions in adulthood (Goyette *et al.*, 2019) in addition to preventing homelessness (Frechon & Marquet, 2019).

From this perspective, data from France show that the extension of housing stabilization and education services to age 21 reduced homelessness among youth leaving placement by 11 percentage points (from 19 to 8 percent). Analysis of the effects of this program also shows that the longer a youth remains in the program, the greater the likelihood that he or she will graduate. In this regard, the scientific literature and our analyses of EDJeP data clearly show that improving graduation increases the probability of being employed and decreases the risk of homelessness. Finally, it is easier to act early to prevent school dropout, as returning to school later in adulthood is generally more difficult (Courtney, 2019; Frechon and Marquet, 2019). More broadly, our results are in line with an international literature that promotes post-placement follow-ups insofar as youths who turn 18 have significant support needs, even more so when they have been placed (Goyette, 2019; Strahl *et al.*, 2020). From this perspective, preventing homelessness requires better planning for youth leaving placement in order to create a safety net around youth.

Finally, the prevention of youth homelessness would be reinforced by better linkage between

the various youth actors in order to avoid depriving youth of services when they reach age 18.

## Conclusion

The EDJeP, given its representative nature and its scope for developing new knowledge, can contribute to service improvement. Courtney (2019) conducted longitudinal studies that affirmed the need for services, and performed evaluations showing the benefits, including economic, of sustained intervention up to age 21 in a variety of spheres of youth life. Based on the mobilization of stakeholders around this research, more than 30 American states have implemented flagship programs that extend state care beyond the age of legal adulthood, sometimes up to age 25. In Canada, a few jurisdictions have also implemented comprehensive and sustained service programs, including financial and psychosocial services, to age 21, 25 and 29, at the urging of children's rights advocates.

Of course, a government decision such as extending the period of support for youth in care also depends on public opinion and individuals' values about the age at which they believe a young person should be supported to become an independent adult. In a context where most Western societies are experiencing a delayed onset of adulthood, particularly for youth who pursue advanced studies, it can also be expected that the age deemed appropriate for the transition to independent living has increased since child welfare policies were introduced over 40 years ago.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The project was authorized by the research ethics committee of the Institut universitaire jeunes en difficulté du CIUSSS centre sud de l'île de Montréal (MP-CJMIU-16-02) in July 2016. In addition, each of the 16 regional health and social services institutions responsible for youth protection in Quebec authorized the collection of data in their institution and access to medical records (youth protection trajectories). Finally, the research consent form signed by the youths interviewed during the [name of the research project] data collection waves authorized the research team to access and cross-reference administrative data with the questionnaire data. This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), and the [name of a research chair].
- <sup>2</sup> Some of the results presented in this document make use of data from the Longitudinal Study of Child Development in Québec (ELDEQ) conducted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ) and funded by the Ministère de la Famille, the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur, the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, the Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail, the Centre hospitalier universitaire Sainte-Justine and the Institut de la statistique du Québec. The data used were compiled from the ELDEQ final master file "E18" (1998-2017), © Government of Quebec, Institut de la statistique du Québec.

<sup>3</sup> To better understand this housing vulnerability and situate youth on a continuum of stability, we sorted youth into three categories: youth in a situation of housing stability, youth in a situation of housing instability, and youth who experienced one or more episodes of homelessness. Youth who experienced at least one episode of homelessness are those who answered Yes to one of the choices pertaining to visible homelessness. Differentiating youth who are experiencing housing stability and instability is more difficult, and requires us to make an external judgment about their situation. The criterion of housing stability must be refined according to the time elapsed since the youth left care. In our case, the criteria to be considered to be living in a housing instability situation was that a young person who left had a rhythm of care 12 more than two places of residence (that is, technically 3) per years since they left care.

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