

A BRIEF MAPPING OF POLICY, DISCOURSE, LAW & PRACTICES ON AFTERCARE FOR NEO-ADULTS IN INDIA



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1. Introduction: Juvenile Justice Law caters to the rights and needs of (1) children in need of care and protection and (2) children in conflict with law. Aftercare is available to both these categories of children but, this policy analysis does not engage with the subject of aftercare for children in conflict with law and instead it confines the inquiry and analysis to law and practices on aftercare for children in need of care and protection.

2. National figure on aftercare for FY 2023-24 is 1835 as per website[1] of Mission Vatsalya, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. Same source reports 4326 child care institutions and 28564 children in such child care institutions. Figures of beneficiaries of non-institutional care mechanisms are as below:

- 1.Sponsorship Care: 148390
- 2.Foster Care: 815
- 3.Aftercare: 1835
- 4.Adoption: 4029


3. Let us begin the journey of this exploration and policy analysis with the recognition that aftercare is conceptually a larger set of rights, duties, protections, and entitlements aimed on continuing care, protection and support to those beneficiaries who pass through juvenile justice system to adulthood than what is prescribed in laws of our times.

4. Let us also move forward with an acknowledgement that what is provided in various provisions of JJ Act and its rules on matters related to aftercare is an appreciable beginning and it does not conclude and settle full range of aftercare. The approach to aftercare being adopted for the purpose of this policy analysis is child centric.

5. Is there a need for aftercare? Juvenile Justice Law creates a duty on state to provide its care to children who need it. There is a mechanism to determine who are these children and there is a process to provide such care. Does the need of such care cease to exist the moment a child in care attains the age of 18 years? Answer is a “No”. The nature of care may change, the nature and extent of State responsibility may change, the manner and modes of providing such care may also change. Aftercare, thus, is a continuum of care guaranteed under JJ Act.

6. JJ Act creates a modulated and customizable model of care, last leg of which continues to be available to the beneficiaries of JJ Act even after they turn adults. In essence, it is “Aftercare”.

7. Do people leave “care” if they avail benefit of “Aftercare”? If a person continues to receive aftercare, he/she cannot be said to have left care. Children leaving institutional care are intitled to aftercare. Form of care may change based on various variables but no one as such ever leaves care. All the citizens and to some extent even non-citizens present on Indian soil continue to receive various kinds of state care through a system of rights, entitlements, and welfare schemes.



8. Questions that Neo-Adults in Aftercare Ask: Children as such are curious creatures owing to their developmental needs but children in child protection system are uniquely curious because they have so many existential questions which come into their life because of their exposure to child protection system and they hardly find anyone around to provide answers. I am flagging only those questions which are pertinent for those who are transitioning out from an institutional life and are turning adults where they have legal majority but emotionally they are not ready to carry the weight of such newly arrived adulthood in terms of their rights, duties and protection. Some of these questions have formed the fabric of contemporary aftercare conversations in India and globally too. For some we have answers. For most there is uncertainty and curiosity.

1. Can I or anyone else tell my story in a public event or on social media or in any audio-visual publication, after I turn 18 years of age?
2. After I turn adult, can I take away all my original record from JJB or CWC or Child Care Institutions?
3. After I become adult, can I make it public that I had committed a crime sometime in my life? Or that I have spend most part of my life not knowing who my parents are and that I have lived in a children's home?
4. Do I have a right to access and avail all my record maintained by various agencies in Juvenile Justice System?
5. My identity documents still contain several identifications that I used to live a child care institution. After becoming adult, how do I get rid of those identifications?
6. What kind of support I can hope to receive from State Government after I become adult and leave the child care institution where I am staying presently?
7. Can I continue to stay in this child care institution even after I have become 18 years of age?
8. Name or identification of the NGO/ child care institution where I used to stay as a child is included in my name and it is even recorded in all my official documents? How do I get this removed from my name and also from all my official documents?
9. Who gave me my name? What was my religion? What was my caste? From where I am? Is there any part of my family history available for me to see?
10. I have no one out in the world outside this Child care institution. Who do I reach out if I ever get into a trouble? Who is my family now?

9. When Aftercare for minors started in Law: The Reformatory Schools Act, 1897: This law is considered as founding stone of juvenile justice in India. It was the earliest law which created a pathway in criminal justice system towards a reformatory justice system for persons below the age of 15 years. This Act made it possible that certain minor male persons who have been awarded sentence of transportation or imprisonment, described as “Youthful offenders” could be placed in reformatory schools instead of undergoing sentences.

10. Though the term “After care” or any other term of similar import does not appear anywhere in the text of Reformatory Schools Act but one can trace in here some early and basic elements of what may today be understood as “after-care” in a broad sense. Section 13 of this Act created an unconditional prohibition on detention in reformatory schools beyond 18 years of age. No detention beyond age of majority, even on the ground of care and welfare, is the foundational rule of law established through this Act. Care shall not be detention.

Section 13. Persons found to be over eighteen years not to be detained in Reformatory Schools.

(1) If at any time after a youthful offender has been sent to a Reformatory School it appears to the Committee of Visitors or Board of Management, as the case may be, that the age of such youthful offender has been understated in the order of detention, and that he will attain the age of eighteen years before the expiration of the period for which he has been ordered to be detained, they shall report the case for the orders of the State Government.

(2) No person shall be detained in a Reformatory School after he has been found by the State Government to have attained the age of eighteen years.

11. Arrival of Aftercare in Laws for Children: The Bombay Children Act, 1948

Section 4 (a1). ‘after-care’ means care during the period of release on licence of a child from an Approved Centre or Approved Institution or any other institution under this Act.

Section 4 (a2). ‘After-care Home or Hostel’ means an institution established and maintained or recognised under sub-section (3) of section 25 of this Act.

Section 25 (3). The State Government may establish and maintain or recognise any institution to be an After-care Home or Hostel for the Reception and Rehabilitation of children and youthful offenders during the period of their after-care.

12. Shift from a service to an Institution: Aftercare in The Children’s Act, 1960

Section 12. After-care organisations

(1) The Administrator may, by rules made under this Act, provide for the establishment or recognition of after-care organisations and may vest them with such powers as may be necessary for effectively carrying out their functions under this Act.

(2) Every such organisation shall take care of the children when they leave children's homes or special schools and shall, for the purpose of enabling them to lead an honest, industrious and useful life, take all such measures as it may deem necessary or as may be prescribed.

13. Strengthening of Institutional Aftercare in The Children’s Act, 1960 as amended by the Children (Amendment) Act, 1978

Section 12. After-care organisations.- The Administrator may, by rules made under this Act, provide-

(a) for the establishment or recognition of after-care organisations and the powers that may be exercised by them for effectively carrying out their functions under this Act;

(b) for a scheme of after-care programme to be followed by such after-care organisations for the purpose of taking care of children after they leave children’s homes or special schools and for the purpose of enabling them to lead an honest, industrious and useful life;

(c) for the preparation and submission of a report by the probation officer in respect of each child prior to his discharge from a children’s home or special school, as the case may be, regarding the necessity and nature of after-care of such child, the period of such after-care, supervision thereof and for the submission of a report by the probation officer on the progress of each such child;

(d) for the standards and the nature of services to be maintained by such after-care organisations;

(e) for such other matters as may be necessary for the purpose of effectively carrying out the scheme of after-care programme of children.

14. Aftercare in India's First National Juvenile Justice Law: The Juvenile Justice Act, 1986

Section 12. After-care organisations.-The State Government may, by rules made under this Act, provide-

- (a) for the establishment or recognition of after-care organisations and the powers that may be exercised by them for effectively carrying out their functions under this Act;
- (b) for a scheme of after-care programme to be followed by such after-care organisations for the purpose of taking care of juveniles after they leave juvenile homes or special homes and for the purpose of enabling them to lead an honest, industrious and useful life;
- (c) for the preparation or submission of a report by the probation officer in respect of each juvenile prior to his discharge from a juvenile home or special school, as the case may be, regarding the necessity and nature of after-care of such juvenile, the period of such after-care, supervision thereof and for the submission of a report by the probation officer on the progress of each such juvenile;
- (d) for the standards and the nature of services to be maintained by such after-care organisations;
- (e) for such other matters as may be necessary for the purpose of effectively carrying out the scheme of after-care programme of juveniles.

15. Aftercare in a Post-UNCRC India: The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 and Its Model Rules

Section 40. Process of rehabilitation and social reintegration.- The rehabilitation and social reintegration of a child shall begin during the stay of the child in a children's home or special home and the rehabilitation and social reintegration of children shall be carried out alternatively by (i) adoption, (ii) foster care, (iii) sponsorship, and (iv) sending the child to an after-care organisation.

Section 44. After-care organisation.-The State Government may, by rules made under this Act, provide

- (a) for the establishment or recognition of after-care organisations and the functions that may be prescribed by them under this Act;
- (b) for a scheme of after-care programme to be followed by such after-care organisations for the purpose of taking care of juveniles or the children after they leave special homes, children homes and for the purpose of enabling them to lead an honest, industrious and useful life;
- (c) for the preparation or submission of a report by the probation officer or any other officer appointed by that Government in respect of each juvenile or the child prior to his discharge from a special home, children's home, regarding the necessity and nature of after-care of such juvenile or of a child, the period of such after-care, supervision thereof and for the submission of report by the probation officer or any other officer appointed for the purpose, on the progress of each juvenile or the child;
- (d) for the standards and the nature of services to be maintained by such after-care organisations;
- (e) for such other matters as may be necessary for the purpose of carrying out the scheme of after-care programme for the juvenile or the child:

PROVIDED that any rule made under this section shall not provide for such juvenile or child to stay in the after-care organisation for more than three years:

PROVIDED FURTHER that a juvenile or child over seventeen years of age but less than eighteen years of age would stay in the after-care organisation till he attains the age of twenty years.

16. Aftercare Re-Imagined: The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

Section 2(5).-“aftercare” means making provision of support, financial or otherwise, to persons, who have completed the age of eighteen years but have not completed the age of twenty-one years, and have left institutional care to join the mainstream of the society.

Section 8. Powers, functions and responsibilities of the Board.- (3) The functions and responsibilities of the Board shall include---(b) ensuring that the child’s rights are protected throughout the process of apprehending the child, inquiry, aftercare and rehabilitation.

Section 37. Orders passed regarding a child in need of care and protection.-(2) The Committee may also pass orders for---(ii) getting after care support under section 46 of the Act.

Section 39. Process of rehabilitation and social re-integration.-(4) The Children in need of care and protection who are leaving institutional care or children in conflict with law leaving special homes or place of safety on attaining eighteen years of age, may be provided financial support as specified in section 46, to help them to re-integrate into the mainstream of the society.

Section 46. After care of children leaving child care institution.- Any child leaving a child care institution on completion of eighteen years of age may be provided with financial support in order to facilitate child’s re-integration into the mainstream of the society in the manner as may be prescribed.

Section 101(1). Appeals.- Subject to the provisions of this Act, any person aggrieved by an order made by the Committee or the Board under this Act may, within thirty days from the date of such order, prefer an appeal to the Children’s Court, except for decisions by the Committee related to Foster Care and Sponsorship After Care for which the appeal shall lie with the District Magistrate:


Provided that the Court of Sessions, or the District Magistrate, as the case may be, may entertain the appeal after the expiry of the said period of thirty days, if it is satisfied that the appellant was prevented by sufficient cause from filing the appeal in time and such appeal shall be decided within a period of thirty days.

17. Aftercare Expanded under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016

While JJ Act continues to be obsessed with financial support based aftercare, Model Rules actually expanded idea of aftercare beyond financial support and has converted it into an aftercare programme.

When Model Rules were enforced on 21st September 2016, responsibility to prepare aftercare programme was cast upon the state government. But subsequently when these Model Rules were amended in year 2022 and enforced from 1st September 2022, responsibility to prepare aftercare programme was shifted from State Government to the District Magistrate. It means a programme which was initially envisaged to be a programme to be conceived at state level was localised to be conceived at the district level. Changes introduced in Sub-rule 1, new sub-rules 2A, 2B and 2C in Rule 25 are thus required to be taken notice of.

Rule 25. After Care of Children Leaving Institutional Care.- (1) The State Government, through the District Magistrate shall prepare a programme for children who have to leave Child Care Institutions on attaining eighteen years of age by providing for their education, giving them employable skills and placement as well as providing them places for stay to facilitate their re-integration into the mainstream of society.



(2) Any child who leaves a Child Care Institution may be provided after care till the age of twenty-one years on the order of the Committee or the Board or the Children's Court, as the case may be, as per Form 37 and in exceptional circumstances, for two more years on completing twenty-one years of age.

(2A) The District Magistrate may facilitate scholarships for higher education; loan for education or starting small business for children leaving the Child Care Institutions and convergence with the Government schemes or private entrepreneurs may be explored for the purpose.

(2B) The District Magistrate may facilitate campus placements and apprenticeship assignments in collaboration with the local business and industry, subject to the condition that such business or industry or agency is found suitable for engaging with the children and prescribes to the Child Protection Policy as mandated under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Rules, 2020.

(2C) The District Magistrate may maintain oversight on such arrangements with the help of Police and other stakeholders to ensure that the interest of children are not compromised in any manner.

(3) The District Child Protection Unit shall prepare and maintain a list of organisations, institutions and individuals interested in providing after care as per their area of interest such as education, medical support, nutrition, vocational training etc. and the same shall be forwarded to the Board or the Committee and all Child Care Institutions for their record.

(4) The Probation Officer or the Child Welfare Officer or Case Worker or social worker, shall prepare a post release plan and submit the same to the Board or the Committee, two months before the child is due to leave the Child Care Institution, recommending after care for such child, as per the needs of the child.

(5) The Board or the Committee or the Children's Court, while monitoring the post release plan will also examine the effectiveness of the aftercare programme, particularly whether it is being utilized for the purpose for which it has been granted and the progress made by the child as a result of such after-care programme.

(6) Children who are placed in after care programme, shall be provided funds by the State Government for their essential expenses; such funds shall be transferred directly to their bank accounts.

(7) The services provided under the after-care programme may include:

(i) community group housing on a temporary basis for groups of six to eight persons;

(ii) provision of stipend during the course of vocational training or scholarships for higher education and support till the person gets employment;

(iii) arrangements for skill training and placement in commercial establishments through coordination with National Skill Development Programme, Indian Institute for Skill Training and other such Central or State Government programmes and corporates, etc.;

(iv) provision of a counsellor to stay in regular contact with such persons to discuss their rehabilitation plans;

(v) provision of creative outlets for channelising their energy and to tide over the crisis periods in their lives;

(vi) arrangement of loans and subsidies for persons in after-care, aspiring to set up entrepreneurial activities; and

(vii) encouragement to sustain themselves without State or institutional support.

18. Aftercare Under Mission Vatsalya Scheme: In year 2022, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India approved and issued guidelines of Mission Vatsalya Scheme. These guidelines prescribed and indicated financial norms for aftercare, which became applicable from 1st April 2022[1]. It is absolutely essential to take note of these financial norms because roll out of aftercare is dependent on these financial norms and its mechanisms.

- **4.3 After Care**

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, provides for After Care of Children living under the Institutional care vide Section 2(5) and section 46 which mandates that “Any child leaving a child care institution on completion of eighteen years of age may be provided with financial support in order to facilitate child’s re-integration into the mainstream of the society in the manner as may be prescribed”.

After Care is meant for all young persons, who during their childhood have grown up in any form of Alternative Care such as children’s Homes, Observation Homes, etc., or fit facilities and had to leave them upon attaining 18 years of age. This transition for a young person leaving the childcare setting and moving to independent living throws up various challenges as well as offers opportunities as they go through these situational and emotional changes. This transition period is a delicate period because if young persons remain unsupported during this time, opportunities available to them may be lost.

The State Government shall prepare a programme for children who have to leave Child Care Institutions on attaining eighteen years of age by providing for their education, giving them employable skills and placement, industry apprenticeship, loan support for starting business as well as providing them places for stay to facilitate their re-integration into the mainstream of society. Such plan may be preferably made when the child attains 16 years of age and implemented once she/he becomes 18 years of age.

4.3.1 Criteria for receiving After Care

Each young person who has turned 18 years of age and who has been cared and protected in any formal or informal form of alternative care as a child (i.e., under the age of 18); such care being either child in need of care and protection as well as to children in conflict with law and is in further need of close support shall be provided with close and continued long term After Care services and facilities in the manner laid down in these guidelines.

4.3.2 Duration of After Care

After Care support shall be provided to young person after completion of 18 years onwards for a maximum of three years (till 21 years of age) and may be extended till 23 years of age (in exceptional cases) or till the young person is mainstreamed into the society, whichever is earlier.

4.3.3 Financial Norms

Financial support of Rs. 4,000/- per month per child shall be provided to Child Care Institutions/organizations/individuals interested in providing After Care to fully implement the Individual After Care Plan (IAP) for meeting the basic needs including food, clothing, health care and shelter; age appropriate and need based education and vocational training, stipend, and any other requirements of the young person. The main focus of After Care shall be to help the young persons gain skills for increasing their employability and enable them to adapt to life in the society.

The State Government may provide additional financial support to such young persons in addition to the central support through convergence of various schemes for the youth. Some of the relevant ministries/departments are those pertaining to housing, higher education, skills development, sports, youth affairs, social justice, tribal development, department of financial services, department of industries, etc.

19. Evolution of Terminology on Aftercare

1.	1897	...
2.	1948	After-care, After-care Home or Hostel
3.	1960	After-care Organisation
4.	1978	After-care Organisation, After-care Programme
5.	1986	After-care Organisation, After-care Programme
6.	2000	After-care Organisation, After-care Programme, After Care Organisations
7.	2015	Aftercare, After-care programme,

20. Aftercare is recognised as a legal entitlement for children in conflict with law (CiCL) and for children in need of care and protection (CNCP) under India’s Juvenile Justice Law. It entitles them to be considered for receiving State’s care and financial support up to the age of 21 years after they move forward from life in Childcare institutions. In exceptional cases, Juvenile Justice Boards, Child Welfare Committees, Children’s Courts and High Court are empowered to pass judicial orders extending such aftercare support for two more years (up to the age of 23 years).

21. Though aftercare has always been in discussions in all mazor childcare related law/policy deliberations and spaces, it is only in the past few years that there has been visible progress in the efforts to give impetus to this extremely crucial component of childcare at the Government as well as at non-government levels. In December 2023, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India took an initiative towards building a robust ecosystem for children who are entitled to aftercare under JJ Act and Mission Vatsalya Scheme. They issued a letter[1] requesting all the union Territories and State Governments to look into rolling out the aftercare component. This initiative not only sets the stage for several directions and further implementation level work to flow at the Union Territory/ State Government level towards building a robust and rights based ecosystem for neo-adults in India but also provides adequate impetus, necessary guidance and a carefully crafted seven-point action plan to serve neo-adults.

- 1. **Verified database of care leavers-** DCPUs may consolidate data of care leavers from all registered CCIs
- 2. **Address Proof for Care Leavers-** DPCU’s address may be used to facilitate care leavers for purpose of securing identity proof up to 23 years age. Use of particular CCI as address proof may be avoided.
- 3. **Identity Proof-** Care Leavers and Children 16-18 years presently in CCIs must have necessary documents like Birth Certificates, Aadhar Card, Ayushman Health Insurance Card as well as CCI leaving certificate. The care leavers as per verified data base of DPCU and the prospective children, who will attain 18 years in the CCI, must be provided Voter ID Card and PAN card by the concerned DCPU.
- 4. **Temporary Shelter-** As per Rule 79(9) JJ Model Rules notified on 01.09.2022, DCPU to map CCIs with Working Women’s Hostels and Shakti Sadans to provide temporary shelter to Care Leaver Girls on priority basis.

5. **Completion of Education-** State to facilitate mobilization of resources and facilitate the completion of education of verified care leavers. DPCU to update After Care Plan for children leaving CCIs for completion of education, skill development and entrepreneurship programme.

6. **Vocational Training & Placement-** State to invite State Skill Mission, Corporations, NGOs to undertake vocational training activities for the children, provide apprenticeship, and placement with a view to gainful employment for existing care leaver and for older children after completion of their period of stay in the CCI.

7. **Children leaving the CCIs-** They may be registered in Mission Vatsalya Portal and the data set of children in CCIs and Care Leavers must be maintained, to track and trace the care leavers after exiting the CCIs to lend them support towards their re-integration. Special attention may be given to care leavers and children for access to other government programmes and services linked to HIV+ and Persons with Disabilities.

22. FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Amend Section 101 (1) of the JJ Act, 2015 to replace words “Foster Care and Sponsorship After Care” with “Foster Care, Sponsorship and Aftercare”.

2. Words “Aftercare”, “After care” and “after care support” have been used in the JJ Act. For the sake of uniformity, word “aftercare” should be used. Hence section 37 (2) (ii) is required to be amended to replace words “getting after care support” with “getting aftercare”. Similarly, title of Section 46 needs to be amended to replace word “After care” with “Aftercare”. Amendment in section 101(1) suggested above will take care of uniformity in that section.

3. Term “care leaver” is not consistent with the law. In the philosophy of Juvenile Justice Act, aftercare is in continuum of state’s duty to provide care and protection, hence there is no leaving of care as such. Term “care leaver” is not a legal term. It is not recognised by JJ Act. It is neither used in child protection Laws nor Mission Vatsalya makes usage of term “Care leaver”. Certain NGOs have popularised this term and it is recommended that this term should be abandoned and eliminated. There is no tangible benefit of coining a term like “care leaver”, instead it attaches a permanent and inseparable mark on a person of being a care leaver which revolts against basic dignity and respect of individuals.

4. PM Cares for Children scheme was announced by Hon’ble Prime Minister of India on 29.05.2021 and it is operated as per its guidelines dated 05.10.2021. This scheme is also mentioned in Mission Vatsalya Guidelines 2022. It makes financial provisioning for children in non-institutional care at the rate of Rs. 4000/- per month per child to be provided to Children (in account with guardian) and for children living in institutional care, a maintenance grant @ Rs. 3000/- per month shall be given to Child Care Institutions. The eligible children who have been enrolled in this scheme from 29.05.2021 to 31.12.2021 are expected to continue receiving benefits of this scheme till they attain the age of 23 years and this scheme is also expected to continue till the year when every identified beneficiary turns 23 years of age. This scheme inherently operationalises aftercare and should be viewed as such. There must be systemic and operational challenges being faced by beneficiaries and duty holders in Child protection systems like DPCU, CWC, JJB, Children’s Court and District Magistrates/ SDMs etc. An effort may be made for mapping and resolution of systemic and operational challenges.

5. Mission Vatsalya Scheme primarily views aftercare as a financial support to be provided to Child Care Institutions/organizations/individuals interested in providing After Care. It is destined to lead to an organisational setup of aftercare instead of being a direct financial aid to young adults transitioning out from juvenile justice system. Scheme thus channelizes aftercare into a particular organisational format, which is not the statutory intent in JJ Act. Probably a harmonization of the Aftercare related provisions in the JJ Act, 2015, Model Rules 2016/ State JJ Rules wherever framed and guidelines of Mission Vatsalya is needed.

6. Being part of a tracking and tracing mechanism has to be permitted and allowed by children who transition out from Child Care Institutions on attaining adulthood. It should not be an automatic system enrolling such neo-adults. Agency of care-experienced Neo Adults must be respected and practiced even in beneficial aftercare processes.

7. Conceptual, Legal, procedural, financial and administrative landscape of aftercare continues to be complicated and confusing, making it difficult for aftercare to be rolled out. In most part of the country, aftercare is either being practiced as a component of functions of child care institutions or it is being rolled out in the nature of various kind of support initiatives/ CSR activities of industry. Aftercare flowing to children through judicial orders of JJBs, CWCs and Children's Courts using state's finance is still a distant reality.

8. Since aftercare is unique to Juvenile Justice Act, there are no precedents of judicial orders which are to be passed by JJBs, CWCs and Children's Courts creating an entitlement of aftercare in favour of a child set to leave a child care institution. Order writing on aftercare is also not included in most curriculums on JJ Act, neither any training is imparted on this specific aspect of aftercare.

9. Support of aftercare is critical for children living with disability or with mental health concerns. Unfortunately, entire regime on aftercare in Juvenile Justice Act, its Rules and in guidelines of mission Vatsalya is uninformed by any disability related concern of neo adults transitioning out of child care institutions. Need of mental health intervention is however partially acknowledged in Rule 25 (7) (iv) of Model JJ Rules. Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has taken judicial cognizance^[1] of this concern and it is expected that we will witness some progress or development in this regard.

Conclusion

Aftercare is not merely a service; it is a lifeline for young adults who exit the child protection system without a support network. India's evolving legal and policy frameworks reflect a growing recognition of this need, yet significant gaps remain. A coordinated, rights-based approach that centers the voices of "neo-adults entitled to aftercare" is essential to transforming aftercare from a policy on paper to a lived reality of dignity and support.

Aide et Action in collaboration with UNICEF, is working to strengthen support for care leavers—young adults who exit institutional care at age 18. The goal is to establish a self-sustained Association of Indian Careleavers-SAARTHI, which is by care leavers and for care leavers. To be sustainable, SAARTHI must offer services that match care leavers' real needs. A supportive policy environment is key to enabling this. To understand the gaps, a study was conducted on existing policies and schemes. It revealed several areas where policy support is weak or missing. Based on the findings, a policy brief has been developed. This brief will outline key demands to advocate at the national level. The aim is to influence government action for care leavers' rehabilitation. The brief will explore practical, legal, and systemic reforms needed. It will also recommend aftercare support aligned with best interests of youth. The focus is on easing the transition from state care to independent living. This will help unlock the full potential of aftercare in India- Mr. Pranab J Panging, Regional Manager, North East, Aide et Action