



INDIA ALTERNATIVE
CARE NETWORK

IACN QUARTERLY

Issue 7/February 2022

Hello,

Dear Colleagues,

The 7th edition of the IACN Quarterly brings to you, insights, approaches, research, and interventions aimed at strengthening family units and family-based alternative care for children at risk. The resources in the newsletter highlight the strategies and tools addressing both the preventive and restorative aspects of child protection. The reflective write-ups delve upon crucial interlinkages between technology and case management for children, and the strategies to respond to the dangers of the unplanned and rapid return of children living in CCLs to their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The case studies highlight the importance of thorough preparation and continued follow-up support for children's successful reintegration into their families and kinship care. The newsletter features discussions on aftercare and the relevance of support networks and youth participation in achieving better aftercare outcomes for care leavers. Under the events and announcements section, the readers can look out for introduction to a podcast series, covering possible alternatives for the care and protection of children in India. The section also includes details of the recently held BICON on the Alternative Care for Children in Asia, a webinar on family strengthening and non-institutional alternative care, and the Global Care Leavers Convention. We wish to express our gratitude to everyone who helped us bring out this edition of the IACN Quarterly. Please contact us at iacnsecretariat@iacn.in if you wish to contribute any resources or information for the website or initiate discussions on promoting the well-being of children in vulnerable situation.

Sincerely
IACN

Updates from the Field

Learnings and experience shared by our fellow members

The Bihar Care Leavers Network: Yuva Sahyogini Sangathan | Sharad Saurabh, Udayan Care

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Community-Led Approach: A Strategy to Strengthen Government Child Protection System | Anita Sinha, Pritha Mukherjee, CINI Jharkhand

Building Self-Sufficiency in Families for Successful and Permanent Reintegration: Virtual Learning Events | Anjali Sood, Miracle Foundation

Aftercare Outreach Programme: A Journey Towards Self Sufficiency for Aftercare Youth in Madhya Pradesh | Ashish Bansal, Udayan Care

Perspectives

Commentary, analysis and insights

Bridging the Gap: Youth Participation and Advocacy Leading to Innovative Practices for Better Aftercare Outcomes | Rini Bhargava, UNICEF

How Technology and Evidence-based Decision Making is Contributing in Expediting Case Management | Aditya Kr. Das, Subhadeep Adhikary, CINI Jharkhand

Rapid Return: Mitigating the Risks of Rapid Return of Children in CCLs | Florence Koenderink

Events and Announcements

Catch up on the latest updates on webinars, trainings and conferences from our network

Getting Care Right for Children and Youth: Newsletter on Global Updates on Alternative Care | Udayan Care

Biennial Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia (BICON) - A Brief Report | Gurmeet Kaur and Judith Johnson, Udayan Care

Connecting Care Leavers Beyond Borders: The Global Care Leavers Community | Judith Johnson, Udayan Care

Care of the State- A podcast | Catalysts for Social Action

Promoting Family Strengthening and Non-institutional Alternative Care Services for Children in Need of Care and Protection | IAPA

Case Studies

In depth studies of our fellow members

Kinship Care Prevents the Institutionalisation of Children Orphaned Due to COVID-19 | Lopamudra Mullick, CINI

Case Study - Kinship Care | Anjali Sood, Miracle Foundation

Knowledge Resource Updates



Vulnerabilities Assessment of Children and Families

<https://bit.ly/3Hs04IO>



Essence and Scope of Strengthening Community-Based Preventive Child Care and Protection Systems in India

<https://bit.ly/3Hu22C8>



Before, Not After: An Evaluation of CINI's Preventative Approach to Child Protection in India

<https://bit.ly/3rpzHqN>



Standardization of a Participatory Questionnaire to Assess the (Fulfilment of) Needs of Children in Care (QANCC) In India

<https://bit.ly/3A2Djkm>



Research Paper on Kinship Care by Miracle Foundation India

<https://bit.ly/34mfMOS>



For every child, a family

Resources

Some key additions to our fast growing resource data base

Vulnerabilities Assessment of Children and Families

By Udayan Care and UNICEF

Vulnerabilities Assessment of Children and Families

<https://bit.ly/3Hs04l0>

The Government of Madhya Pradesh, committed to child protection in its State Plan of Action on Alternative Care, 2018 where it stated a clear mandate to promote family-based models of alternative care, including family strengthening programs. Keeping this in mind the CPF of Ujjain conducted its first pilot Child Vulnerability Mapping (CVM) from December 2020 to February 2021 in three blocks of the district (Ujjain, Badnagar and Nagda) with technical support from Udayan Care.

CVM is a systematic process of assessing the deprivations that children face such that it facilitates the

preparation of adequate and robust child protection plans at district and state levels. CVM strengthens linkages with appropriate agencies and institutions to support

identified risks and vulnerabilities. It aids to identify vulnerabilities at the family and community level and take measures towards family strengthening and community linked support services that prevent unnecessary separation of children from their birth families. It also aids in planning intervention strategies for restoration and reintegration of those children already separated from their own families and living in Alternative Care settings, mostly institutional care.

The CVM aimed:

to develop a demonstrable model of mapping children's vulnerabilities towards rehabilitative and family strengthening measures, including Alternative Care,

to develop the District Child Protection Plan (DCPP) with focus on preventive and rehabilitative measures,

to ensure family strengthening through various measures, including linkage to social protection schemes for identified vulnerable children and families.

This report is a documentation of the process and highlights the key findings of the CVM along with recommendations for the way forward. The CVM received overall support and guidance from the Department of Women and Child Development, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh and UNICEF MP Field Office.



The categories of respondents and total coverage of 3 Blocks(Ujjain,Badnagar and Nagda)



5219

Family and Community

- Households: 5219
- Community groups FGDs: 35 with 1100 individuals



3580

(Gender dis-segregation of children was almost equal)

Children with Vulnerabilities

- (6-18 years)
- drop out from school: 495
- not attending school now: 872
- abandoned: 37
- history of running away from family: 73
- doing household work: 1038
- experience of family dispute 223
- child sexual abuse: 20
- use of substance: 26
- child with single parent: 1725



860

Fuctionaries

- JJ system: 34
- AWWs: 787
- ASHA: 24
- Teachers: 13



233

Children in Institution

- CCI under JJ Law: 209
- Gurukuls: 24

Before, Not After: An Evaluation of CINI's Preventative Approach to Child Protection in India

By Elizabeth Donger and Jacqueline Bhabha

Before, Not After: An Evaluation of CINI's Preventative Approach to Child Protection in India

<https://bit.ly/3rpzHqN>

This report documents innovative community strategies for preventing serious violations of children's rights. It describes CINI's "systems strengthening" approach to improve holistic overall functioning of child protection systems so that different types of harm and violence against children are prevented from occurring.



Research Paper on Kinship Care

By Miracle Foundation India

Research Paper on Kinship Care

<https://bit.ly/34mfMQS>

In India, kinship care for children without adequate parental care is the most common form of care in almost all regions, religions, castes, and ethnic groups due to the tradition of the joint family system and close ties among relatives. While this care option is the most common, it is also the least systematically recorded, monitored, or supported option.

In light of the above statement, Miracle Foundation India, with the support of our CCI partners, is trying to take active measures to ensure systematic implementation of the case management process for the safe, permanent,

and sustainable reintegration of children. The Miracle Foundation has hence conducted a study in May 2021 which examined the success of children reintegrated into kinship care over the past 2 years. The study was Miracle Foundation India's contribution to the paper on kinship care to be submitted to UNGA DGD. Along with CINI and Shishuadhar, under the aegis of IACN, a small team at Miracle Foundation India was created to pull the practical insights together. Primary data was collected within the purview of experiences, challenges, and recommendations which were analysed by the Miracle team.

The findings from data analysis through structured interviews with concerned stakeholders and analysis of data of the 71 children (reintegrated to kinship care) from the case management tracker—a tracking system developed by Miracle Foundation India covering all six stages of the case management process—helped in capturing the experiences, challenges, and recommendations for strengthening the kinship care system which is elaborated in the report.



Essence and Scope of Strengthening Community-Based Preventive Child Care and Protection Systems in India

By Ranjan Kanti Panda, Lopamudra Mullick, Subhadeep Adhikari, Neepa Basu and Archana Kumar

Essence and Scope of Strengthening Community-Based Preventive Child Care and Protection Systems in India

<https://bit.ly/3Hu22C8>

This article reflects different programmes and resource components that may be promoted to keep children with either their own family or within alternative family care, to achieve their rights to overall development. In India,

the concept of promoting family-based care mechanisms through government systems has not been fully realised, owing to lack of synergy between resource allocation and existing government programmes, policies and plans of action for child protection. Additionally, the common public discourse is that Child Care Institutions (CCIs) offer suitable care and protection for children outside the parental care. CCIs continue to be identified as the ultimate and the most common response for children at risk. This practice nullifies the scope to explore opportunities for the child to live with their family or in any alternative family care mechanisms. Child in Need Institute (CINI), partnering with Hope and Homes for Children, have analysed the vulnerability factors that led children to arrive at the selected CCIs in Ranchi and Khunti districts of Jharkhand in India. While working with children in the communities, CINI endeavoured to understand the drivers and vulnerabilities leading to family/child separation and mechanisms which could address the vulnerabilities at source and prevent separation. CINI promoted a participatory governance process with the involvement of community-level institutions along with children's and women's groups, incubating safe spaces for children that aided in identifying, tracking and promoting multi-sectoral development plans for children at risk.



Standardization of a Participatory Questionnaire to Assess the (Fulfilment of) Needs of Children in Care (QANCC) In India

By Kiran Modi, Gurneet Kaur Kalra, Sudeshna Roy

Standardization of a Participatory Questionnaire to Assess the (Fulfilment of) Needs of Children in Care (QANCC) In India

<https://rdcu.be/cAyzD>

This paper was published in the Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma in October 2021. The paper illustrates how listening to the direct voices of children and incorporating their inputs into actual care practice can go a long way towards improving the holistic wellness of children living in an alternative care setting. The results indicate that all needs of the majority of children in Udayan Ghars, which include emotional needs, fundamental/basic needs, educational needs, and interpersonal needs were met. This paper had two objectives, where at one end, the deductions of the longitudinal data were made (2011–12 to 2016–17) with the aim of demarcating the differences with the 2018–19 data, and at the second level, there was an update on the efforts made to establish the reliability and validity of the tool and create a standardised tool that can be implemented by other child care organisations in India.



Updates from the field

Learnings and experience shared by our fellow members

The Bihar Care Leavers Network: Yuva Sahyogini Sangathan

By Sharad Saurabh
Udayan Care

Care Leavers Networks are a powerful means to build the community of care leavers as they provide a strong support system and safety net for them and have shown positive results globally as well as in many states of India. Even as it brings all young people with lived experience of care to come together, learn and offer peer support to members of the network, it is also a safe space for them to become aware of their rights, build relationships among peers, build their leadership and advocacy skills, and become a resource to each other as well as to the Juvenile Justice System by becoming the voice of care leavers and children in care.

In Bihar, it took time and effort before a State Care Leavers Network could be launched. The process of orientation of functionaries of Child Care Institutions and After Care Homes, Child Welfare Committee (CWC), District Child Protection Unit, State Child Protection Society (SCPS), and Social Welfare Department, Bihar, about the purpose and objectives of such a network began in early 2020, as part of the demonstrable project being implemented by Udayan Care with support from the state government and the UNICEF state office. The most challenging work in this regard had been the listing of care leavers and getting their contact details from the District Child Protection System, which finally came through.

Several virtual and in-person meetings with the identified youth were undertaken, with an initial group of ten members coming together. Finally, over six months of continuous motivation and encouragement efforts, 45 care leavers had been reached and informed about the network, its concept, importance, and benefits.

The care leavers were also encouraged and motivated to participate in meetings and workshops on a regular basis in both online and offline mode. A participatory workshop was organised for the youth to come up with a name for their state network, design a logo for the network, and also decide upon the mission, vision, and goals of their association. This exercise was done with the participants to instil a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the network.

Finally, on December 21, 2021, the first ever state level in-person gathering of Bihar Care Leavers happened. The event was organised and facilitated by Udayan Care with the support of UNICEF Bihar and under the guidance of the Director, Social Welfare Department, Government of Bihar. The name of the association, "Yuva Sahyogini Sangathan (YSS)", was coined by the members of the association, and the logo was also designed and approved by YSS members. The launch programme was attended by the Director, Social Welfare Department, Bihar, officials from UNICEF Bihar, the SCPS Bihar, SARA Bihar, and the CWC, Patna. The directors of Patna's Aftercare Home and Child Care Institution were also present to give the event a boost. The team of Udayan Care was also present, some online, some in-person. The occasion got amplified because of the presence of a member of the Care Leavers Network and Association (CLAN), Delhi. Also, care leavers from the 38 districts of Bihar joined online and showed their solidarity.

As part of its ongoing project in the state, Udayan Care is looking forward to reaching out to more youth and motivating them to join YSS. Through regular awareness sessions on youth rights, schemes and youth programmes, leadership skills, team building and life skills sessions, more and more care leavers will be capacitated.

In the course of doing so, the organisation aims to establish the official recognition of the association at state, national, and global levels and also make the association sustainable by instilling a sense of ownership and responsibility of the members towards the entity. In the long run, YSS members shall be able to identify issues of their own and advocate for their solutions with respective officials and stakeholders.

The young members are very excited, as is the SCPS of Bihar, and in the times to come, it is hoped that the network will emerge as a strong voice for care leavers in the state.



Building bridges for children in care to prepare for their transition and aftercare support

Building Bridges for Children in Care to Prepare for their Transition and Aftercare Support

By Sharad Saurabh
Udayan Care

Udayan Care is in its second phase of the project on alternative and aftercare in Bihar, with the close support of the state UNICEF office and the Social Welfare Department of the Bihar State Government. Mostly, children who attain the age of 18 are expected to leave the Child Care Institutions (CCIs) and be brought into the aftercare program, as developed by the state. The children who leave the CCIs are gradually shifted from a phase of dependence to a phase of independence and live a financially, mentally, and emotionally independent life. This a kind of life is only possible if children are equipped with life skills and employability skills during their stay at the CCIs or in the aftercare programme; but on the ground, such practices are absent at large.

Udayan Care is closely working with 3 CCIs and 1 aftercare home in Bihar with the aim of developing plans and linkages for children in institutions, especially those in the age group of 15 to 18 years, i.e. children in the transition phase. A mapping of each child's interests and aptitudes is done, and then opportunities that may fit into

the criteria are explored. As part of the process, efforts are constantly made to search for agencies and resource people who provide or may be instrumental in providing such kinds of aid and support to children through partnerships and collaborations. The course skills or vocations that are provided are expected to lead to employment or enhancement in employability skills, along with life skills, confidence, and personality development.



One such quest came through [Upendra Maharathi Shilp Anusandhan Sansthan](#), a handicraft body of the Department of Industries, Government of Bihar. Two children have been enrolled in an Arts & Crafts course. The process took a lot of effort, ranging from assessment of the interests and aptitudes of children, along with gaining their confidence and obtaining consent. In the background, constant liaising and advocacy took place, which resulted in an enabling environment for children.

background, constant liaising and advocacy took place, which resulted in an enabling environment for children. The two enrolled children will get trained under the guidance of skilled craftsmen and also learn entrepreneurial skills, promotional activities connected with the traditional arts and crafts of India. The institute offers six-month training programmes in two sessions (January-June & June-December). This training programme will hone the creativity and potential of the two children in various craft sectors, and over and above that, they will also receive a monthly stipend. The two boys enrolled are aged 16 and 17 from Apna Ghar Boy's CCI in Patna and will be pursuing the Sikki Art & Craft course. There were 10 seats in the course for the whole state of Bihar. We have also been successful in getting hostels for both the boys. After successful completion of the course, the two boys can apply for craft trainer/teacher, craft entrepreneur/exporter, get an artisan card from the Government of India, and participate in workshops organised by the Development Commissioner for Handicrafts and various exhibitions in India.

With these linkages, it is hoped that the two children will be able to smoothly transit out of the CCI at 18 years of age and will be able to make an independent living with an early start and be soon mainstreamed in society. As part of our intervention, we also hope that more children are linked with such life skills and employability courses and are able to settle on their own and be ready to give back to society.

Endnotes

¹Sikki crafts are various handicrafts that are made from a special kind of grass known as sikki, which is found in Bihar. The art of making items from sikki grass is an ancient one in the province of Bihar. Bihar's ancient Sikki handicraft is gaining global attention for its beauty, utility, and eco-friendliness. The traditional craft has not only reached all over India but also carved a niche for itself in the international art galleries and markets



Community-Led Approach: A Strategy to Strengthen Government Child Protection System

Community-Led Approach: A Strategy to Strengthen Government Child Protection System

By Anita Sinha, Pritha Mukherjee
CINI, Jharkhand Unit

Context

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) views the community as the most crucial place for optimal child development and the attainment of their rights. The child's primary environment is his or her family and the wider community. Building the capacities of communities for strengthening care and protection of children remains one of the prominent focus areas of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), which recognises the pivotal role of families and communities in both preventive measures as well as facilitating swift responses to violations of child protection.

A Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC) has been constituted under ICPS to build a child-friendly community through awareness building, identification of vulnerable children, need-based referral of cases, etc. The government's efforts to strengthen the community level tracking and gatekeeping mechanism through the VLCPCs have not been very successful. A top-down approach, the absence of dedicated frontline cadre within the child protection system, a lack of strategy for engagement of the community and parents, a lack of community ownership and poor reporting and monitoring mechanisms are the factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of the VLCPC. Some more efforts and strategic changes are required to make them self-reliant and vibrant. The traditional governance system, i.e. Gram Pradhan, Munda, Manki, Pahans and PRIs, still has a significant influence on regulating the system at the local level and needs to be involved in the development and functioning of the VLCPCs.

CINI believes in a human rights-based approach to development and advocates the creation of Child-Friendly Community (CFC) functions, where families, schools, police stations, service providers, etc. are committed to respecting, protecting, and fulfilling children's rights in the spheres of health, nutrition, education, and protection from all forms of abuse, exploitation, and violence. Under the CFC approach, key community stakeholders, including women and children, are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process and prioritization of what community support is needed. CINI extends support to primary duty bearers, viz. communities, service providers, locally elected representatives, etc. to support key rights holders in fulfilling their rights.

Through its years of learning, CINI has realised the gap and, along with the Core Group, has introduced the concept of community-led child protection mechanisms, which involves engaging with the community, facilitating activation of CPCs, and strengthening families to prevent family separation of children and keep them within the community safety net.

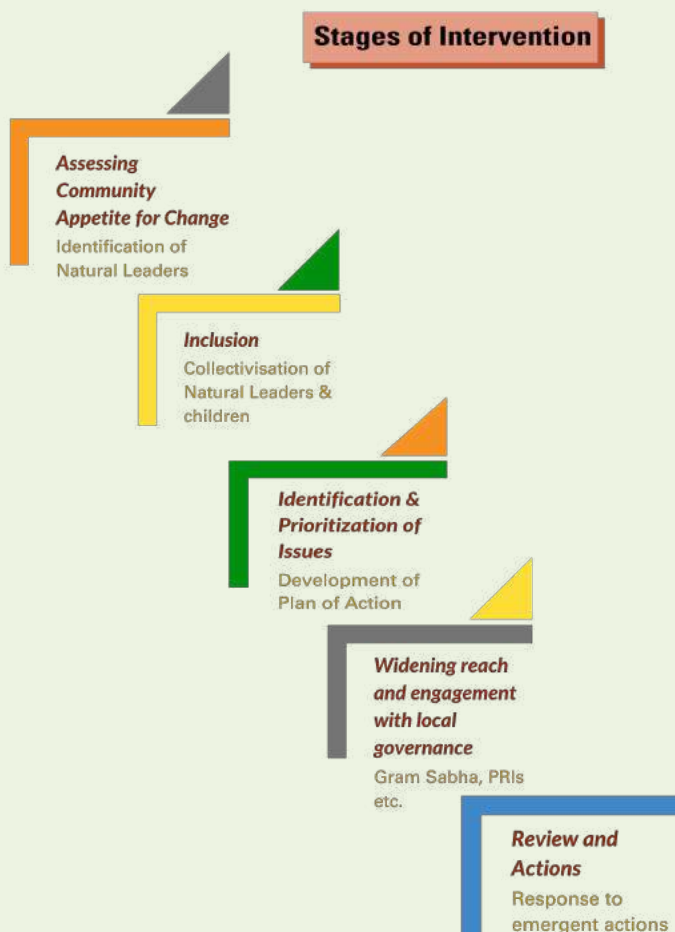
Process

The need to have a locally owned, civic process wherein communities mobilize themselves around child protection and take steps to address self-selected child protection issues using their own resources and problem-solving abilities has been identified. A link has to be established between the Village Level Child Protection Committee, Panchayats and Gram Sabhas to develop a comprehensive, sustainable child protection ecosystem within the community. To develop such a civic process, four Indian agencies—Child in Need Institute, Chetna Vikas, Plan India, and Praxis—together with the Child Resilience Alliance (formerly the Columbia Group on Children in Adversity), named as the "Core Group" with support from the Oak Foundation, are enabling, documenting, and testing a process of community-led child protection in Jharkhand. The Core Group is a shared leadership platform where the wisdom, experience, and learnings of every agency are shared with a common

vision of promoting a community-led child protection approach.

The community-led child protection approach seeks to create a child-friendly community driven by a cadre of natural leaders (or community level child protection champions) and the village child protection committees (as proposed under the ICPS), who can identify key issues related to children; track or identify vulnerable children, and take tangible actions to address these vulnerabilities through community resources as well as government resources. However, these Village Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPC) will be accountable and answerable to the Gram Sabha, which takes the ownership of making the children within their communities safe and secure.

The critical steps for executing community-led child protection are as follows:



A community-led approach results in vulnerability reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people across the globe, irrespective of their location, class, age, and socio-economic background. The severity of the pandemic in India has resulted in a huge increase in parental loss (according to NCPDR, 1,47,492 children lost either or both parents). Children have become overburdened with household chores and are exposed to domestic violence. There has been a significant increase in teenage pregnancies, and many children are not attending school. Families and communities are concerned about the well-being of their children, recognising that a lack of education and routine can negatively impact a child's overall development.

Kumkuma and Taro villages of Siladon Panchayat in Khunti district, Jharkhand, were not immune from the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. But with support from CINI, they developed an approach to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and support children throughout the pandemic. Natural Leaders in both these villages initiated a discussion on this issue with their Gram Sabha to identify what the main challenges were. They approached and requested CINI to provide academic support to children in the villages.

Working in partnership with the community leaders, CINI supported the establishment of a learning centre to support 'out-of-school' children to access educational services until they could be reintegrated back into mainstream schools. Learning facilitators were recruited by CINI and the local leaders (Gram Sabha) took the responsibility of monitoring the functioning of learning centres.

A total number of 112 students from both the villages have been attending the centres and receiving much needed educational support, in line with the national curriculum. Regular monitoring of the learning centres is taken care of by the community leaders.

Additionally, a "real-time mobile-based application" has been developed and introduced by CINI to monitor the progress and attendance of the children. The process for the development of the Learning Achievement Tracking System has been initiated, which will support tracking the academic achievement of children. Another 13 learning centres have been opened and are functional in the intervention areas of CINI in Ranchi, Khunti, and Simdega.

Learnings and Outcomes

Evident Learnings of Community Led Actions



Self Reliance

Identification of issues and finding their local solutions



Community Ownership

Collective actions for addressing vulnerabilities and its follow-up



Children and Adolescent Leadership

Children as vibrant actors contributing to decision making planning and taking actions



Prevention

Collective efforts to prevent children from harm

Conclusion

In the community-led approach, inclusive dialogue regarding the harm(s) to children that the community wants to address is enabled by a non-directive facilitator who works to include different voices and views. The selected harms to children represent the collective concerns of girls, boys, women, and men in the community. Through community-led dialogue, communities themselves identify the harms and risks to children and devise solutions through collective decision-making. The sense of ownership leads them to look inwards at how they need to change and to identify their own resources for enabling and sustaining the change. Since this process is community-driven, it is not seen as an 'NGO project', and it recruits communities' own creativity and ability to change behaviour. The slow process of collective, critical dialogue and community-led change makes this a powerful approach for changing social norms.

Efforts need to be made to further scale up the community-led approach. CINI shares the advantage of being partners in various decision-making committees at the district as well as at the state level and is also leading many strategic alliances. The evidence of the effectiveness of the model and its learnings are being shared on different platforms for replication and its integration within the existing child protection mechanisms. CINI, with support from the core group

members, is also taking the model and the lessons learned to other civil society organisations for them to integrate them into their own projects, as well as to academic institutes to create a trained workforce on community-led approaches. Its potential for replication and integration into government systems are the keys to making the community-led child protection process a sustainable model in the days to come.

About the Authors

Anita Sinha

A social sector professional with 20 years of extensive experience working on adolescent, women empowerment and child protection issues in Jharkhand. Being associated with the Department of Women, Child Development and Social Security, Govt. of Jharkhand in key professional capacities for 18 years. She led the implementation of many government schemes across the state. Anita has extensive experience in designing, planning, and providing strategic directions in the implementation of government initiatives on adolescent well-being, women empowerment, child protection, etc.

Pritha Mukherjee

A social development professional with over 9 years of working experience in two states; West Bengal and Jharkhand, India. Pritha has significant experience in women empowerment, child protection, and migration. She is equipped with excellent community engagement, advocacy, and liaising skills.

Building Self-Sufficiency in Families for Successful and Permanent Reintegration

Building Self-Sufficiency in Families for Successful and Permanent Reintegration: Virtual Learning Events Organised by Miracle Foundation India

By Anjali Sood
Miracle Foundation


The success of our very first webinar on Safe and Permanent Child Reintegration, held in December 2020, paved the way to starting a discourse on the emerging trends of convergence, the existing process of child

reintegration, and plans for bridging gaps in ensuring child rights and child protection in India.

Understanding the rich scope of learning, this year Miracle Foundation India has created a series of webinar workshops. These workshops strive to empower professionals, organisations and government officials working for children's rights and families to gain in depth knowledge and develop invaluable skills in practical case management processes, focusing on tested

approaches and tools, led by Miracle Foundation experts with real-world, on the ground experience. Also, as children are the primary stakeholders in a safe and permanent reintegration process, the workshops highlight their thoughts, suggestions, and opinions through the active participation of children in these workshops. Currently, we have successfully completed three of the workshops from the series. The first workshop in the series focused on 'Effective Assessment for Safe and Permanent Reintegration' which aimed to understand the vitals for an effective child and family assessment, including the need for assessment, key skills for assessors, and effective usage of tools for assessments for recommendations on placement decisions. The workshop also highlighted the 'youth voice' through the active participation of Miracle's Youth Ambassador, Maria, who shared her experience in care and presented the findings of a short survey which she conducted with 10 children who were reintegrated into their families. Some key quotes from children when asked about their expectations upon their return to the family included:

What Did You Expect When Returning to Your Family?



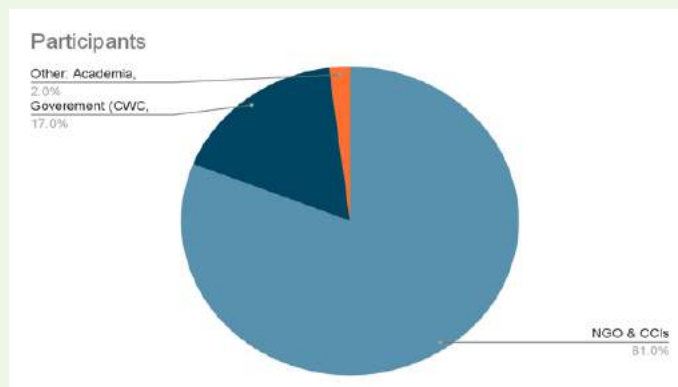
"I like to stay in my home, and am going to continue my studies with my friends."

"I will be missing my friends in CCI. That only first came to my mind and also happy to live with my parents' love."

"Most children are afraid to return home and have many unanswered questions in themselves."

"I am happy that am going to spend time with my family at the same time I really miss my friends too, when am staying in a CCI, *we always play and talk. But now I am feeling very alone at my home. And then the many facilities available in CCI but not here.*"

The children emphasised the importance of active participation of children throughout the assessment process not just for mere consultation but valuing their opinions regarding reintegration throughout the process and most importantly investing more time in child and family preparedness to know what to expect. The workshop attended by 186 child care professionals from government and non-government organisations that catered to about 3675 children, was conducted in two languages: English and Hindi.



The workshop also provided an opportunity for a practical case discussion with Q & A with boots on the ground who shared some best practices, struggles and way forward plans while discussing how they were able to effectively utilise the assessment tool for placement decisions and devise intervention plans for the children and families.

The workshop addressed some pertinent questions from participants, focusing on:

- How to build a trusting relationship with children who are unable to open up due to past trauma? – special focus on children in CCI who have been survivors of abuse or neglect.
- How to restart work with children and families in the case when a child returns back to the CCI after a failed family placement?
- How to measure the well-being of children and families post reintegration in the context of remote follow-ups due to the COVID 19 situation?

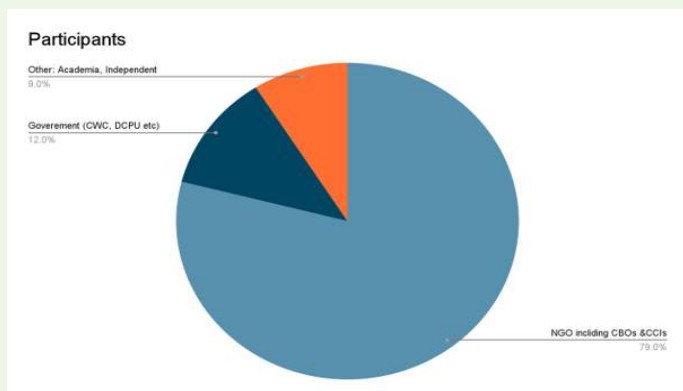
The speakers shared some key insights on utilising **soft skills** such as building trusting relations, questioning skills and listening & observation skills' which were vital during the assessment process. They shared experiences with the application of assessment tools, especially **The Thrive Scale™** - developed by Miracle Foundation India. This tool helps to assess the individual child and family's progress in five domains of wellbeing: family and social relationships, living conditions, household economy, education, health and mental health. The speakers highlighted the importance of the **Expedite case management process** as a response to the immediate return of children to their families due to COVID-19.

The second workshop, titled 'Wrapping Support Around the Family' underlined the need to identify the drivers of family separation while addressing them through effective community support services. The experiential sharing on practical approaches to implementing the Family Strengthening Project at Community by our community initiative partner, Deepak Foundation, focused on:

- | How to initiate work with a community starting from identification
- | Some key on-ground tools that were most effective for ensuring community engagement
- | The importance of a participatory approach since the beginning of the project

Most importantly, the workshop amplified the Youth Voice, where child representatives from Bal-panchayats shared the various on-ground initiatives in their regions focusing on key child protection issues in the community. A Few of these included: promoting children's right to be 'heard' and safety of children in communities; prevention of early marriages and school-dropouts, etc.

This workshop was also conducted in 2 languages – English & Marathi to maximise participation. In total 128 participants (from government, NGOs and academia) attended. They in turn work with over 3000 children and families.



Some participants also drew attention to key struggles/concerns from their experiences that had slowed down the activation of the community-led initiative model in their regions, these include:

Child Protection committees (CPCs) are only on paper and not activated on the ground. The Village Child Protection Committees are formed, but are not familiar with ICPS provisions. There is a lack of accountability of WCD when CPCs are not formed or are dysfunctional. Many times the families are connected to the Social Protection Schemes. However it takes lot of time for the schemes to get activated and families to actually receive the benefits.

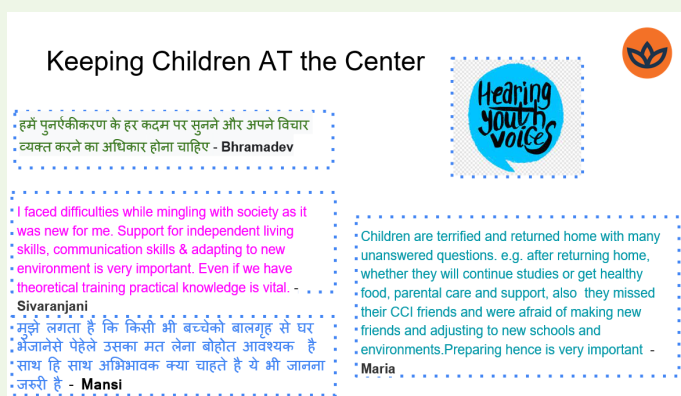
The third workshop titled 'New Beginnings – Letting go of the Past and Embracing the Possibilities of Family Reintegration', focused on the critical element of planning for the transition process. This workshop was divided into 2 parts:

- | The first part focused on understanding the transition process from institution to family
- | The second part highlighted the importance of family preparation for sustainable placement

The workshop helped to answer the key question which had been raised by many participants in previous workshops – *'how can we build upon the strengths and skills of the child and family members to allow for successful reunification/placement of the child?'* The workshop focused on adopting a Strength-based approach in the transition process. It also addressed the fact that assessment should not merely be seen as a tool to evaluate the family's current situation, rather essentially as a key step in helping in understanding their needs, their relationships with each other, family dynamics, their values and help in setting goals towards a smooth transition. The workshop, which was conducted by Miracle's mental health consultant, - a trained clinical psychologist and expert from the TISS i-call program, aimed at strengthening the abilities of the participants to work on 'soft skills' like building family resilience, and working on strengthening familial bonds. The workshop addressed the impact of unplanned transitions on

on children & families and provided some key tips, tools and techniques to ensure a smooth transition and sustainable placement.

The workshop also captured children's voices through the powerful testimony of a reintegrated youth, Sanjana, who shared her journey of transition from CCI to family care. Other children also shared their views on the importance of preparedness in the transition process (quotes mentioned below):



The workshop was also able to successfully address questions raised by the participants regarding:

- What needs to be done if a child protection concern arises during the transition process?
- How to address issues of families' lack of preparedness when the authorities press for reintegration?

The workshop summed up with a key message that the smooth transition of children into families is not an overnight process, and should be seen as a collective responsibility, and not an extravagance. All stakeholders including government, community, non-profits play an equal and important role towards its success.

The next and final workshop in this series will focus on the importance of post reintegration support. This workshop will conclude the series and will be held regionally (in-person/remote – depending on COVID situation) in Tamil Nadu and Tripura.

Aftercare Outreach Programme: A Journey Towards Self Sufficiency for Aftercare Youth in Madhya Pradesh

Aftercare Outreach Programme: A Journey Towards Self Sufficiency for Aftercare Youth in Madhya Pradesh

By Ashish Bansal
Udayan Care

The lifecycle from childhood to young adulthood is a prolonged process that requires a considerable amount of love, patience and support from parents and guardians. While children growing up in various Child Care Institutions (CCI) are already deprived of this deserved set of care due to the lack of family members, their level of vulnerability increases a degree higher upon attaining adulthood and when the time comes to leave the care offered by CCI. After having spent years of their life on supported living, these children, on becoming care leavers, face various hurdles during the transition phase towards a self-sustaining life. Suddenly they need to worry about necessities starting from finding a safe accommodation to suitable employment that can

bear with all the expenses of daily life and to taking care of themselves, many times, without any preparatory training provided by their Care Homes or their family/guardians. As a result of insufficient exposure to life skills, they often face difficulties in blending into the mainstream society as they suddenly become no one's responsibility.

In this background, Udayan Care conceived the AOP (Aftercare Outreach Program) to facilitate and support Care Leavers in the eight domains of the 'Sphere of Aftercare,' a rehabilitative framework, designed by it, such as education, career development, housing, psychosocial support, independent living and social support as well as resolving identity crisis. The focus is on providing financial support as well as hand-holding and mentoring support for educational and vocational skill attainment and life skills and setting up a model for Aftercare that will establish evidence of its positive impact in their lives

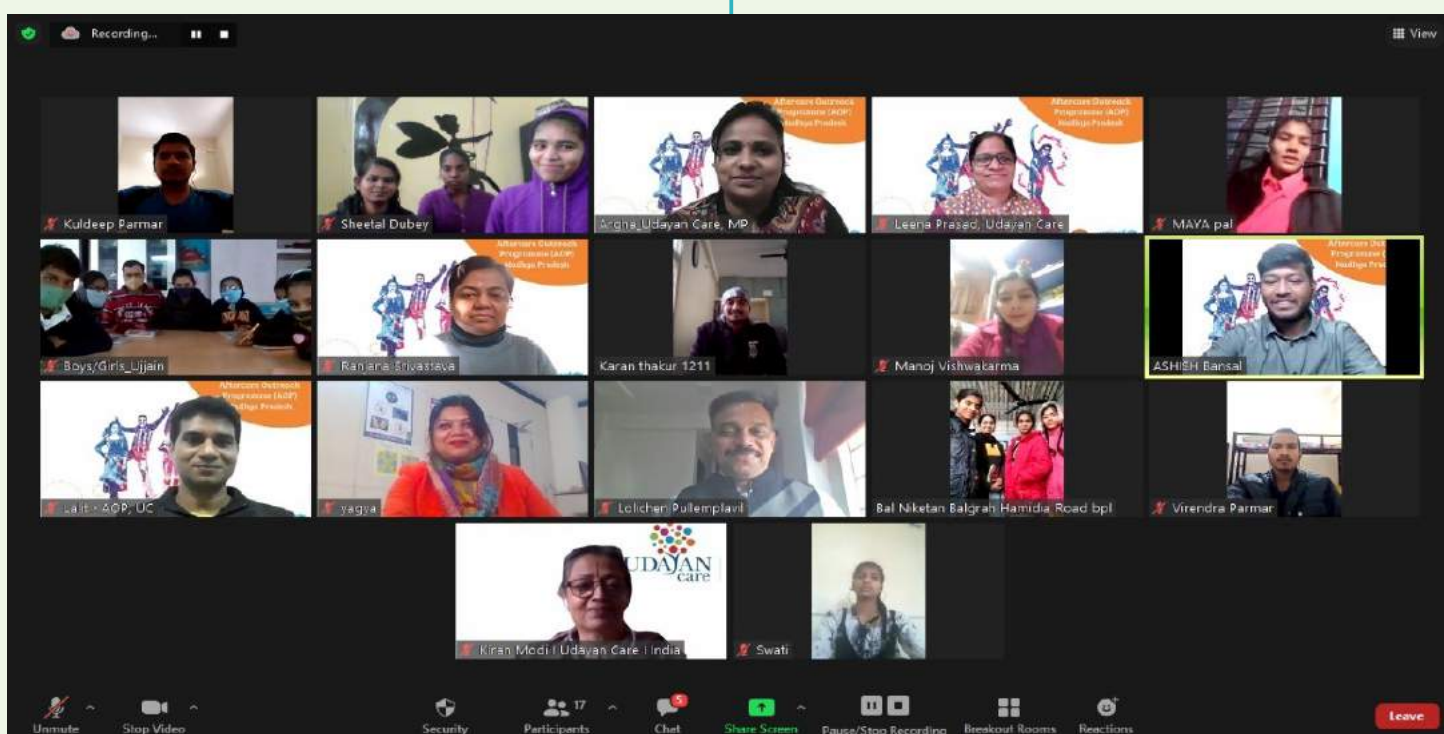


AOP reaches out to care leavers to ensure they are prepared for this change and can continue their dreams and aspirations through support from government and non-government stakeholders. Recognizing that every youth is unique and their development is important as per their requirements, AOP facilitates their journey towards complete reintegration and independent living in society as contributing young citizens.

The journey of AOP in Madhya Pradesh.

Aftercare Outreach Programme started in 2020-21 in Delhi and Vadodara and after the successful intervention and continuous support of partners, it has been successfully launched in Madhya Pradesh in October 2021. Being implemented as part of its alternative care strengthening project in the state in partnership with the state government and UNICEF state office, AOP serves to meet the overall goal of building models of care for children and youth living in alternative care in the state.

AOP is designed as a three-phase intervention, with the first phase being the preparatory one of three months, where the identification and selection process of potential care leavers is done. Across the three districts, twenty youth have been identified and inducted in the program from both government as well as NGO-run child care institutions and also from the community, where some youth with families have been restored on attaining adulthood. The identification phase involves a close Needs Assessment and a set Selection Process to understand and shortlist the most vulnerable youth in need of support. In the first phase, efforts are also made to identify and explore partnerships with educational



institutes and those offering vocational training and skilling courses with some guarantee of placements in jobs thereafter. Formal induction takes place of all selected youth and then in the 2nd phase of twelve months, each youth is guided by professionals to map their needs, talents and aspirations along with their competencies and resiliencies. An individual aftercare plan and strategy is developed for all youth as per the domains of the Sphere of Aftercare. Mentors are assigned to each youth for personalized guidance and support. The youth are also trained in the 'work-life readiness' modules that have been designed especially for aftercare youth around the Sphere of Aftercare. The intervention in the 3rd phase of three months focused on getting internships and jobs for the youth once they complete their skilling courses and then as part of the follow up plan, their career progression plan is developed and the youth join their city care leavers networks and start giving back to society. Efforts are made to ensure they retain their jobs and grow in their jobs, as well as continue to pursue their educational pursuits as far as possible.

For most of them, AOP came as a sigh of relief and an opportunity for continued support. Efforts are being made to reach out to the civil society to support such youth in the form of mentorship and positive results are being seen. Through the AOP programme, Udayan Care, in partnership with UNICEF, state government and other partners has enrolled 20 youth in MP and over 170 youth in other five cities of India. It is trying to bridge the gap and towards that end has started working with the youth, working on enhancing their skills which will help them to sustain. It is giving platforms to the youth and having a regular conversations with the youth to motivate them to go beyond their limits, dream high and work hard to achieve their goal of becoming independent, resilient and contributing citizens of the country.

The efforts in Madhya Pradesh so far has led to a listing of 134 youth in Bhopal, Indore and Ujjain. The identification has been done with the close collaboration of the different CCIs in the various districts, the District Child Protection Unit and the Child Welfare Committee members. Efforts have been successful in reaching out to many youth who have been restored to their families after completing 18 years of age. A comprehensive needs assessment has been carried out for all the 134 youth to holistically understand their needs, educational and health status, their aspirations, strengths, habits and talents. A few trends that have emerged from this small data shows that more than half of them do not even know how to start a computer machine and lack basic life skills. Almost 1 out of 4 expressed discomfort in leaving their child care setting. A majority of them expressed the need to get into an early start with any kind of job, to begin with, to reduce their dependency on others financially. In the process, even though they felt that their education and skilling would be negatively impacted, the young persons felt hopeless in the absence of a supportive ecosystem around them.

Case Studies

In depth studies of our fellow members

Kinship Care Prevents the Institutionalisation of Children Orphaned Due to COVID-19

By Lopamudra Mullick
CINI

17-year-old Ravi Dalui¹ and 16-year-old Rani Dalui lived in a remote village in South 24 Parganas. They lost both their parents in the 2nd wave of COVID-19 and were left alone after their parent's demise with no resources to support their food and nutrition, "At times we had to starve." In addition to food insecurity, their vulnerabilities have intensified.

Ravi was already a dropout when he completed class 10th and had to join the family-owned welding shop. Meanwhile, the local perpetrators took advantage and started offering him low-paid jobs in the unskilled labour market. On the other hand, Rani was continuing her class 10th with a high chance of quitting her studies. Family members were already on the hunt for a bridegroom. Both the siblings' vulnerabilities had manifolded as they stood unaccompanied and unprotected. CINI met the siblings during their routine field visits to the community. The case was immediately referred to CINI partnered Diamond Harbour Childline. As an immediate measure, the children received nutrition kits given by CINI.

During home visits, the scope of alternative family care arrangements to avoid unnecessary institutionalisation of the two siblings got priority. CINI visited the extended family members and initiated conversations with the grandfather, paternal uncle, and aunt on the importance of family-based care, the adverse impact of institutionalisation, and the role extended family members could play in the lives of these two siblings orphaned due to COVID-19.

Simultaneously, CINI produced the children before the Child Welfare Committee, ascertained the Social Investigation order, conducted the investigation in due time and submitted the report to the Committee.

Individual Care Plans for both the children were developed and submitted to the Child Welfare Committee and the Child Protection Unit.

The Child Welfare Committee finally passed the order, and the children were placed in the care of the grandfather, paternal uncle, and aunt. They had agreed to take care of the siblings. Ravi and Rani's participation was ensured in the decision-making process for their lives. Both Ravi and Rani were overjoyed; tears rolled down their eyes when they heard that they would continue to live with their family and did not have to go to the child care institution away from their family. CINI coordinated with the School Authority and discussed the issue of providing educational support to the two siblings in the School Management Committee. This facilitated Ravi's readmission to an age-appropriate class (class XII) in the government school where he had previously studied, and simultaneously regularised Rani's continuation in class 10th. The School Management Committee assured the children of educational support to prevent them from failing in exams. Follow-up conducted by CINI ensured retention and delineated all possibilities of dropout.

Ravi and Rani are preparing for their boards and will be appearing for their board examinations in March 2022. Presently, all efforts are being geared towards providing educational support to help the children appear for their boards smoothly.

Furthermore, CINI advocated the case with the respective District Magistrate and District Social Welfare Officer, which led to the issuing of the Prime Minister's COVID-19 Care Fund for Ravi and Rani. CINI also submitted a detailed follow-up report to the Block Development Officer for leveraging funds and other support for the siblings.

Endnotes

¹Pseudonyms have been used to ensure confidentiality

Case Study - Kinship Care

By Anjali Sood
Miracle Foundation

This is a real-time case study of a child Shivani¹ (now 18 years old), who was reintegrated into kinship care in April 2021. The case study explains the case management process interventions that occurred at each stage (represented in Figure 1) ; and the importance of the **Thrive Scale™** assessment tool, which was utilised at various stages to measure the progress of reintegration (represented in Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 1: The six steps in the case management Process

Shivani, now 18 years old, was admitted to a Child Care Institution (CCI) after the demise of her parents, three years ago, in 2018. She has two older siblings. Her sister is married and was unable to care for Shivani at the time, due to a large family and a lack of acceptance from her in-laws towards Shivani. Shivani's brother Dilip, at the time, was struggling to meet his ends with no stable place to live and was unable to find suitable job opportunities to support himself. There was no support from the extended family, which led to Shivani's institutionalisation. Shivani adjusted well with the staff and other children at the CCI. She also had regular contact with her siblings, who would often visit her and spend quality time during their visits. Right from the time the child entered the CCI, the social worker focused on preparing the Individual Care Plan (ICP) to address her developmental needs, including health needs, educational needs, and life skills education. Shivani lacked interest in studies. She was provided with individualised career guidance, during which she expressed her desire to become a qualified social worker and help children in need just like her. At the CCI, Shivani was visited by her brother and sister every month, with whom she shared a good bond. The child expressed her wish to reintegrate with her brother once his condition improved.

In 2020, the CCI team conducted a home visit at Dilip's place, to explore the option of reintegrating Shivani with her family. The findings of the home visit were captured in the Social Investigation Report (SIR). It was found that Dilip was living in an urban slum and had a stable paved dwelling (*pakka*) room near his other sister's place. However, the room lacked proper ventilation. He was still in search of a stable job and was doing odd jobs to support himself. At this stage, Dilip was not ready to take responsibility for his sister and asked for more time until he could find a stable job.

After the successful SIR, the planning phase, which entailed the preparation work to ensure the smooth transition of Shivani into her brother's care, commenced. The preparation work involved individual counselling sessions by the social worker and programme officer for future adjustment issues, and the continuation of education and career guidance. It also involved family counselling sessions with the siblings, focussing on relationship building.

Life Book Work Sessions (therapeutic tool) were conducted on developing soft skills like expressing emotions, family life, wishes, dreams and aspirations. Shivani was engaged in sessions regarding adolescent life skills such as financial management, interview skills, empathy, emotional management, and responsible sexual behaviour.

On April 1, 2021 (during the preparatory phase), the 1st Thrive Scale™ assessment which focused on five well-being domains – Physical & Mental Health, Education, Family & Social Relationships, Home Finances and Living Conditions – was conducted to evaluate the state of Shivani's future living environment at her brother's place. A baseline score was generated based on the needs assessed in each domain while also ensuring realistic implementation plans. The baseline assessment indicated that Dilip and his other sister are excited to provide care for Shivani and look forward to the latter's reintegration with the family. However Dilip frequently worried about

Shivani's safety and feared that if she interacts with boys outside, she will get into the wrong company. Regarding the financial condition of the family, it was found that Dilip recently lost his job as a railway cleaner due to COVID. He was now working for a catering job, which allowed him to manage his immediate needs. The family was supported by the CCI along with an NGO to provide grocery support to the family. Further, support was provided to the siblings to avail of the ration card and orphan certificate. Shivani was continuing her study through support from the Miracle Foundation, which would continue even after her reintegration. After undergoing thorough preparation, on April 27, 2021, Shivani was re-integrated into the care of her brother.

On May 14, 2021, (1st Post Placement) Thrive Scale™ assessment was completed remotely due to the COVID lockdown to evaluate the progress of the family and understand how they were adjusting post-reintegration. The assessment indicated a close bond between the siblings. Dilip and Shivani supported each other to

manage the household chores. Parental guidance was provided to Dilip. He was also exploring other job opportunities to improve the family's financial condition. The siblings were provided with three months of ration support by Miracle Foundation. Shivani was continuing her studies, but it was found that she needed regular guidance and support to continue her education, which was provided through remote follow-ups by a CCI social worker.

On June 17, 2021 (2nd Post Placement) Thrive Scale™ assessment was completed remotely due to COVID lockdown. The assessment provided nearly the same findings as the 1st Post Placement assessment.

On July 22, 2021 (3rd Post Placement), the Thrive Scale™ assessment was completed remotely due to the COVID lockdown. The assessment showed that Shivani had become more focused on her education and that CCI was helping her explore options for higher education.

Figure 2: Tabular representation of Thrive Scores over time

Domain	Pre-Placement	1st Post Reintegration	2nd Post Reintegration	3rd Post Reintegration	4th Post Reintegration
Family & Social Relationship	75	97.5	100	77.5	80
Household Economy	75	75	75	55.5	75
Living Conditions	75	75	75	75	75
Education	75	75	75	75	75
Health & Mental Health	75	75	75	82.1	75

However, Shivani was experiencing some adjustment issues with Dilip. The reasons included Dilip's sceptical and overprotective attitude regarding Shivani's interactions with her male friends. Dilip's apprehensions manifested in bouts of anger, especially after he consumed alcohol. The CCI provided relevant guidance and support to the brother, who seemed reluctant to seek the same. At this point, the CCI began to look into other extended relatives as a backup option for Shivani in case the situation at her home worsened, and the other sister was also unable to take on Shivani's responsibility. In the meantime, the ration support continued. The CCI team helped Dilip with the required employment skills and guidance to seek secure jobs.

Shivani was finding it difficult to deal with Dilip's dominating attitude and his habit of consuming alcohol. She also got very uncomfortable with his friend circle. Shivani was thus shifted to her grandmother's place. On September 27, 2021 (4th post placement), the Thrive Scale™ assessment was completed following a home visit at her grandmother's place. Shivani looked happy as she shared a healthy relationship with her grandmother.

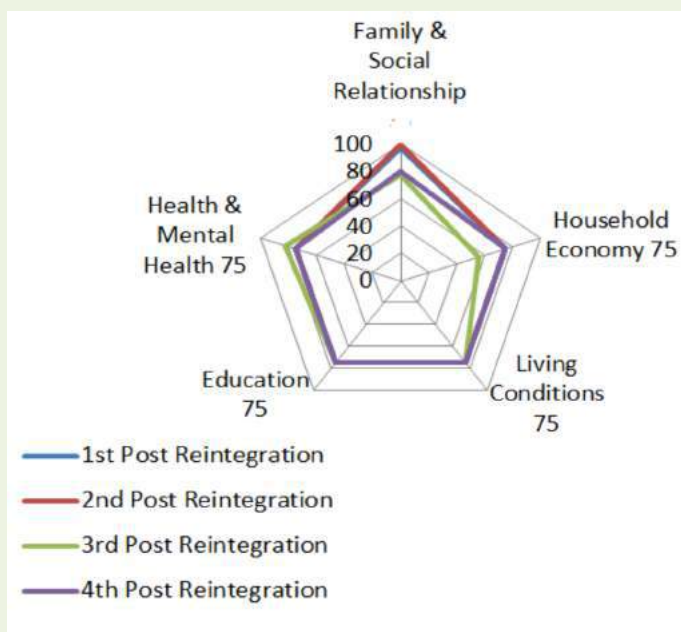


Figure 3: Graphical representation of Thrive Scores over time

Dilip got his job back as a railway cleaner, and was earning Rs. 10,000, and the grandmother also earned Rs. 10,000 per month. Regarding living conditions, no major concerns were reported. All basic amenities were available, and the living conditions were safe and secure. Shivani completed her Higher Secondary Education with 64% marks and now she is enrolled in Bachelor of Social Work, first-year course at a university with the support from the CCI team. Her online education is going well with Miracle Foundation's supported tablet. The university has suggested transferring her admission to the Pune branch. Shivani, too, is interested in going for better opportunities. She is also interested in a part-time (weekend) job opportunity to support herself; the CCI team is helping her to look out for such opportunities. Dilip has been referred to a nearby church which has an AA support group to help him deal with his alcohol issue and provide guidance.

Shivani continues to stay with her grandmother and has regular contact with her brother and sister. She continues with her remote education until the college reopens. The CCI team will be supporting Shivani in finding a residential hostel when she decides to move. The follow-up will continue through fortnightly or monthly telephone calls and quarterly visits by the CCI team to conduct Thrive scale assessment.

Endnote

¹Names have been changed to protect their identity

Perspectives

Commentary, Analysis and Insights

Bridging the Gap: Youth Participation and Advocacy Leading to Innovative Practices for Better Aftercare Outcomes

By Rini Bhargava, Edited by Alpa Vora
UNICEF, Mumbai

Introduction

In the last few years, field observations, case studies and researches conducted on aftercareⁱ have been successful in highlighting challenges, developing a theoretical framework, documenting scalable models, and bringing 'aftercare' to the forefront of the alternative care discourse in India. With increased opportunities for networking and collectivisation, youth-centric initiatives have increased exponentially – *alumni reunions, online discussions and podcasts, social media campaigns, docufilms, etc.* – and have successfully captured the voices of care leavers. The biggest impact has been achieved in the way care leavers view themselves in relation to the society. As active participants in the process, many have begun to identify as 'change-makers' instead of 'beneficiaries.' So compelling is the potential of care leavers that they have garnered widespread support in a short span of time. As a direct result of youth-led advocacy, innovative interventions have cropped up across India. **This article summarises the path taken, which can be replicated for developing promising practices and leveraging youth's agency.**

1. Enabling Safe Spaces

Throughout the history of institutional care, leaders have naturally emerged from CCIs and many have championed the aftercare cause as their own. It is not uncommon to see care-experienced adults working within the child care system during adulthood. Moreover, care leavers naturally come together to support each other – children and their caregivers in CCIs become their lifelong family – and their relationships with each other are profound and

long-lasting (Doucet, 2018). The potential for self-empowerment and self-improvement has always existed within youth of the care system. Care Leavers' Association and Network (CLAN) in Delhi, Youth Leaving Care Association (YLCA) in Pune and Yuva Shakti Sangathan (YSS) in Ujjain are examples of regional youth-led organisations that have gained momentum in India, with numerous other informal whatsapp/facebook groups. Child and youth care NGOs like Vinimay Trust, Udayan Care, SOS Children's Villages, etc. also have their own peer groups with dedicated events organised for and by care leavers. It is evident that CCIs have an important role to play in maintaining the 'continuum of care' for young adults exiting institutional care. However, instead of the hands-on approach towards child care, aftercare requires a more behind-the-scenes supportive approach from NGOs. Common learnings emerging from these initiatives highlights that:

- Care leavers require only minimal logistical support to collectivise into groups
- Care leavers are able to identify and articulate their challenges and needs in a coherent manner with little facilitation
- The impact of care leavers' voices doesn't only garner public support for their cause, but parallelly develops their sense of agency
- Care leaver collectives require need-based professional mentorship and curated opportunities for development

This suggests that the first step for CCIs to enable safe spaces for youth is to provide administrative/secretarial support for initiating peer group meetings, and act as a safety-net for young adults transitioning from institutional care to independent living.

In the last few years, NGOs have collaborated with youth-centric organisations like Make a Difference (MAD), Pravaah, Udayan Care, UNICEF, Youth Ki Awaaz, YuWaah, etc. for formally collectivising care leavers. They have also connected with care leavers networks from Germany, Australia, Nepal and Sri Lanka for cross-learning and exposure. Sharing personal stories and discovering commonalities deeply instils confidence and a sense of belongingness – a first for many care leavers. The momentum generated by empowering the youth is incomparable.

Herein lies the role of youth-centric organisations as peer mentors and facilitators across various domains like navigating adulthood, career development, leadership and self-sufficiency, well-being and mental health, social relationships and networking, etc.

2. Youth-led Advocacy

In 2019, Udayan Care, UNICEF and TATA TRUSTS organised a national-level report launch of their research study. The care leavers from CLAN hosted the event and performed a biographical street-play. The research also inspired YLCA - an independent youth initiative in Mumbai-Pune that gained ground by getting orphan certificates prepared for themselves through advocacy and activism (Jain, 2018). During COVID-19, YLCA provided relief through distributing ration, medicine and even emotional support to care leavers living independently. During the pandemic, all such groups have quickly adapted to socializing over “chai” zoom-meetings, and conducting online advocacy through podcasts and webinars.

In 2021, Yuwaah! – a collaboration between the Indian chapter of Generation Unlimited and UNICEF under the overall Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework and the UN Youth 2030 Strategy - brought together the care leavers from across 10 states to interact and share their concerns, experiences, and aspirations (Yuwaah!,

n.d.). The young adults deliberated on the process of forming a collective platform and, within a few online meetings, had developed its charter, identified significant challenges and prioritised their concerns. During the event, private sector representatives committed their support by offering skill training for job readiness, career guidance, access to industry insights by professionals and support in amplifying (National Care Leavers Network) NCLN's efforts through various channels. This is the kind of support needed for a holistic approach to aftercare (Stein, 2012). Such events have multiple beneficial outcomes.

- They are exposure opportunities for care leavers to develop their networking, leadership and oratory skills
- They instil ownership amongst care leaver collectives and make them active and vocal stakeholders in aftercare programming
- They provide a platform for intersectoral convergence and help in identifying linking opportunities for youth development
- The continuum of child care responsibilities is broadened from CCIs and Department of Women & Child Development to include duty-bearers and stakeholders for higher education, skill training and job readiness, health and psychosocial wellbeing, legal inclusion and entitlements

Thus, child and youth welfare organisations, both governmental and non-governmental can play a pivotal role in providing financial, technical and professional support in organising high-impact advocacy events. When such activities are led by youth as primary stakeholders, the process of self-advocacy empowers them and they become “change-makers”.

For example, involving care leavers in developing advocacy products such as short films, street plays and online art, charter presentation, media launches, impact studies etc. has a direct impact on them and their peers' future prospects.

Examples of innovative prospects for care leavers

a. Fizaⁱⁱ who lived in a CCI in Dombivli, is an example of a “change-maker”. She has been selected for the first batch of a competitive fellowship, especially curated for care leavers by Udayan Care. Fiza has planned to conduct advocacy events for younger girls in Dombivli’s CCIs regarding career planning, recognising one’s strengths and choosing the right career path. She hopes this will prepare them for an easier transition into adulthood and the realities of independent living.

(Udayan Care, n.d.)

b. In the docufilm ‘**Bridging the Gap**’, the story of Rohanⁱⁱⁱ – a care leaver from Mumbai – drew particular interest. As the 5-min youtube film went viral in the care leavers’ community, Rohan, who values fitness and mindfulness, became a role model for his peers. His story also piqued the interest of ‘CoolCoach’ - a start-up that provides a 3-month crash course in health, fitness coaching, English-speaking and grooming skills free of cost. In the last 3 months of 2021, they conducted orientations for care leavers in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and other parts of the country to recruit interested youth.

It is time to scale and formalise need-based aftercare programmes into a self-governance model led by care leavers themselves. This model will gain more legitimacy and impetus if adopted and endorsed by state governments; and if programming is undertaken in a decentralised, needs-based manner with care leaver representatives in collaborative and decision-making roles.

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ⁱResources accessed are cited under ‘Bibliography’

ⁱⁱName changed

ⁱⁱⁱName changed

3. Way Forward

Through this perspective, one can see how enabling youth-led safe spaces by providing logistical, financial and mentorship support can lead to empowerment. Providing platforms for self-advocacy sensitises private corporations and CSO members towards investments required in higher education and skill development, their potential as skilled workforce and entrepreneurs, their wellbeing needs, and their legal and human rights. Importantly, it also transforms members of care leaver collectives into “change-makers” and leaders in their own right.

How Technology and Evidence-based Decision Making is Contributing in Expediting Case Management

By Aditya Kr. Das, Subhadeep Adhikary,
CINI – Jharkhand

Section 1: Context Setting

Children constitute 39% of the country's population (Census 2011). They deserve the best in national investment for their survival, good health, development opportunities, security, and dignity. The National Plan of Action on Children (NPAC) 2016 takes due note of the importance of strengthening the ability of communities and families to support children and to ensure their overall survival, well-being, protection and development. In this context, it aims at establishing effective coordination among all stakeholders, including ministries, departments, and civil society organisations in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of all policies and programmes adopted for children. Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) are becoming more critical in development and humanitarian work, especially in the post COVID situation. While health and education lead in the use of ICT, its application to child protection remains sparse and unadopted. Policymakers, funders, and researchers are increasingly using data to make important decisions around resources and priorities. But the child protection sector is still nascent in linking ICT to improvements in the efficiencies of case management processes

Section 2: Problem Analysis – The Missing Link

Although the country recognises the need to create a protective and responsive environment for its future citizens, it has identified the presence of 40% of India's vulnerable children, who are at the verge of becoming at risk to several vulnerable indicators. This is indicative of a lack of community-based child protection mechanisms, appropriate parental care, and convergence between various government stakeholders for effective decision making. This lack of synergy and multi-stakeholder convergence at the community level is also affecting the

case management process and redressal of child vulnerabilities, that compels the system to become overly reliant on institutionalisation of children.

While dealing with the communities and children with vulnerabilities, the Child in Need Institute (CINI) observed severe gaps and challenges on the referral and redressal mechanisms of Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) cases. For instance, the individual child tracking data on the different vulnerability indicators (captured in VLCPC registers), stays in VLCPC registers and never comes up at the Block Level Child Protection Committees (BLPCPC) and the District Level Child Protection Committees (DLPCPC). There are hardly any quantitative assessments on the linkages made under the Sponsorship and Foster Care, Reintegration and other flagship programmes of the social welfare department. Absence of a stringent evidence based follow up and monitoring mechanism system fails to provide directions for resource allocation and improved community programming for reducing the vulnerability of children. This flaw in the process results in the increase of CNCP cases and more children being placed into Child Care Institutions, which we know are damaging to children's growth and development.

Section 3: Solution to this Menace: Incubating Technology for Fostering Ownership, Credibility, and Accountability.

The pandemic has left a significant negative impact on health, nutrition, education, and livelihoods. Due to the lack of adequate child engagement options and loss of employment in the family, the degree of child vulnerabilities and child protection issues has increased, risking family separation. Many of the children have lost their parents due to the pandemic. These children need care and protection to prevent family separation and other threats. The pandemic also highlighted and prioritised that case tracking, referrals, evidence-based decision making, and grievance redressals need to be promoted on a real time basis to expedite the case management process.

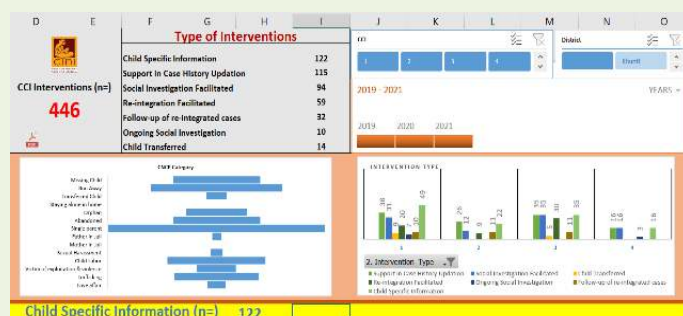
Digitizing the Process for Real Time Evidence Based Decision Making

CINI believes that sustainable ICT solutions, have a high potential for use in child protection and can build on increasingly solid evidence-based work. CINI fortified itself with in-house application development and piloted the initiative of collecting data through the Open Data Kit (ODK) platform.

CINI conducted a pilot with the district administration for digitizing the data collection process through a mobile-based application known as “KoBoCollect” that will help in real time data collection and expedite the decision making process for CNCP. The application tools and training support provided on the KoBoCollect mobile application, helped the Front Line Workers (FLWs) to minimise the data loss; and promote data transparency, real time checks and paperless documentation. The application dashboard also helped the district team in analysing the data trend that promoted prompt decision making and prioritising CNCP to prevent unnecessary family separation

With the use of this KoBoCollect App, community groups (with CINI’s technical facilitation role) have, over the last 1 year, organised **177 community meetings with 2848 stakeholders to prevent unnecessary family separation of 247 children who could be placed into CCIs**. The ICPS vulnerability tracking tool on all the child development indicators was converted into app-based tools for use by the community outreach worker for tracking and monitoring of the CNCP cases. Using the KoBoCollect App and with CINI’s technical support role, Childline and the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) conducted social investigation visits of vulnerable families to understand the required linkages and family strengthening options to reduce child vulnerabilities.

The KoBoCollect App has also incorporated the child reintegration process like case history updates, SIRs, reintegration follow-ups, and family strengthening options for children in CCIs. The DCPU team have the user access which is easy for them to refer to, analyse, and take decisions. This user-friendly tool has been very well adopted by the district team as it is confidential and they can validate, update, view, and download the data for their use. Within a span of 6 months, the district team could successfully reintegrate **28 children** with their families with effective family strengthening plans and stringent follow-up mechanisms to sustain reintegration



CASE STUDY

Sonia and Diya (names changed) are two young girls, 11 and 15 years old from Khunti, Jharkhand. COVID devastated their happy childhood and took the live of the father - the sole bread earner. There were no employment opportunities and livelihood options that could help the family to survive. School closures and no meaningful engagement of the children exposed children to several vulnerable situations. As a result of the crisis, they were forced to drop out of school and work. The app data filled in by the community outreach worker helped to identify the cases on a priority basis. During the home verification, it was found that the family was not able to take care of the child due to an inadequate income source. The team felt, that if not supported, the family might end up in severe vulnerable conditions. The visit findings were captured in the KoBoCollect tool and a recommendation was given to enrol the children into formal schooling and develop linkages with the relevant social security schemes to sustain their families.

The App MIS findings helped the DCPU decide on these cases. Both Sonia and Diya have been enrolled with formal education system in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya. The family was encouraged to apply for relevant social security schemes. The DCPU will extend support for the linkage and family strengthening.

Thus, technology helped in highlighting the vulnerabilities in real time and promoted an effective decision-making process through system convergence.

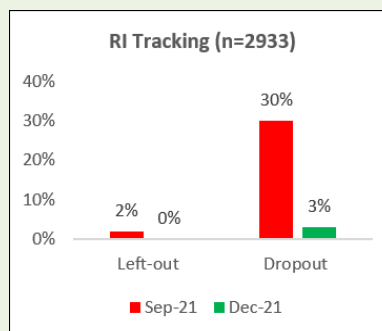
The unprecedented increase in COVID cases, followed by school closures, brought the development of children to a standstill. Loss of jobs, unemployment, rise in domestic violence and lack of creative engagement of children are some of the factors that have exacerbated vulnerabilities in the communities. CINI took the use of technology to engage approximately **250 adolescents** in the communities through the Virtual Safe Space platform

for meaningful child engagement and participation on various life skill topics and art & craft activities.



CINI introduced Virtual Safe Space through 'Google Classroom' platform where experts facilitated counselling sessions, skill and knowledge building sessions, about their rights and entitlements and addressed issues of concern during this lockdown. It was during one of the sessions that the adolescent girls shared a child marriage case that was about to take place in the community. With the joint effort of the DCPU team and block officials, the marriage was stopped. This real time use of data/information helped in safeguarding the life of a girl child. This provides evidence of how the effective use of technology can promote the best interests of children.

Another example where CINI demonstrated the usage of ICT for improved decision making is in the area of Routine Immunization. With a sample size of 2933 children (<3 years of age), CINI identified 30% of the children as dropouts and 2% as left out from routine immunization.



The assessment, tracking, and community mobilisation were initiated in the intervention areas from Sept 2021. The community outreach workers were equipped

with a real time tracking application, that identified the child's status as left out, dropout, full immunization, and age-appropriate immunization. For mobilizing the community on routine immunization, CINI prepared a sub-centre wise due and defaulter list of beneficiaries eligible

for vaccination, and engaged health frontline workers for community mobilisation activities, to increase service access and facilitate VHNDs.

Post 3 months of this intervention, in December 2021, the results showed a steep decline in the left out and drop out cases of immunization. This advocacy effort with the government helped in showcasing evidence-based work to promote decision making and how technology can be instrumental in identification of the gaps, effective planning and developing robust implementation strategy.

CASE STUDY

Rupa (name changed) is from Simdega and was born in July 2021. The community outreach worker was informed that it was a home delivery and the baby had not yet received any vaccinations. On probing the mother, the response was "We are also surviving without vaccines; our children will also survive". The family had a lot of misconceptions about vaccines. Aside from that, the myths and rumours surrounding COVID imposed limitations on immunization.

This case was highlighted in the KoBoCollect Application to attract the attention of the health officials and local service providers. The Sahiya was informed, and she made a home visit for counselling with the mother. She patiently listened to the mother's views and tried to clear her misconceptions. The next day, the Sahiya also asked her husband to join the discussion. She asked them to visit her VHSND sessions and hear out other mothers. In one such VHSND session, the parents visited, and Rupa was provided the age-appropriate vaccines.

The team is regularly following up cases like that of Rupa, which have increased during the pandemic, and with the help of technology and data, they are trying to reach out to these vulnerable families to access the services.

Section 4: Key Takeaways for Scaling Up

It has been established that data and evidence-based decision-making help in expediting the identification of CNCP children, service delivery mechanisms, and promoting multi-stakeholder convergence. This article narrated (through some case specific examples), CINI's perspective and learnings, attained by using real time data through the mobile application developed on "KoBoCollect App", for improved programmatic planning, strategy development, system convergence, and setting accountability standards. This use of data and evidence also helped in developing a robust monitoring mechanism to reduce the vulnerability standards.

The following are some of the key takeaways for scaling up;

- Real time data analysis helps in connecting services with the end line beneficiaries.
- Administrators (such as block, district officials or programme facilitators) can use information to manage resources and tailor programmes according to the needs of individual cases.
- Solutions that are cost effective and have zero dependency on external agencies will have a greater scope of success and scalability.
- The solution sets a high degree of accountability, ownership, and credibility at each level for the effective functioning and delivery of the services.

Based on experience and learning, CINI believes that if such mechanisms are fully adopted into the government systems and scaled up across more districts and states, collectively we can prevent a large number of children from falling into high levels of vulnerability and prevent unnecessary separation and institutionalisation of children.

Rapid Return: Mitigating the Risks of Rapid Return of Children in CCIs

By Florence Koenderink

Founder of Family-Based Solutions, independent consultant

Moving children from an institution back to their own family or into alternative family-based care is a complex process that requires knowledge and understanding of what it involves. It also takes considerable time to be done properly, else, the risks to children are high.

On September 26, 2020, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) in India directed eight states to ensure that children living in Child Care Institutions were returned to their families, preferably within 100 days. The eight states in question (Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Mizoram, and Meghalaya) account for almost 72% of children living in institutions in India or around 184,000 children. These eight states were to be the first phase of the Indian rapid deinstitutionalisation effort. When the children from these states were reunited with their families, the plan was to roll out the programme to other states¹. In November 2020 with the Supreme Court mandate, the order was lifted². However, at that point, many tens of thousands of children had already been sent back to their families with little or no preparation or support across India, since the start of the pandemic³.

While we all want children's transition to family-based alternative care, it needs to be done safely and in the best interest of the individual children. Without thorough assessment, planning, preparation of children and the families they go to, a support system, and ongoing monitoring, the families are likely to be unable to cope. This could result in children being returned to the (or another) institution—yet another traumatising abandonment. Children could be married off, forced to do heavy or dangerous work, be trafficked, end up living on the street, or be trapped in an unsafe or abusive situation within their family.

In response to the NCPCR order, interventions were made at two levels. On the top-down level, officials were persuaded to extend the deadline and/or to accept emergency intensive training and capacity building to ensure that key decision-makers were aware of what is involved in responsible deinstitutionalisation. At the grassroots level, strategies were developed to help institutions prepare children for the move as well as possible, in the limited time allowed, and to help organisations support children who had already been moved out with little or no preparation or support, to mitigate the risks of these situations. These strategies were written in response to the situation in India, but in a way that is relevant to other countries too.

The two strategies help to ensure that all possible efforts are made to improve the chances of successful and sustainable reintegration of children into their families. They assume a basic understanding of the process of responsible transition of care and provide sped-up or adapted versions of the normal steps involved. These steps are outlined in the document "Model for Alternative Care Reform". When used along with this document, the strategies provide comprehensive guidelines aimed at a successful transition process. These strategies will help increase the chance of successful, sustainable reintegration of children into their families.

About the Author

Florence Koenderink is an independent consultant on child protection and alternative care reform, with 15 years of experience in alternative care across three continents, including India. She has a strong focus on specific areas of vulnerability, including the inclusion of children with disabilities and the prevention of volunteering in institutions. Aside from 13 publications, her website www.familybasedsolutions.org holds 200+ blogs on issues connected to care reform.

Endnotes

¹ Pandit, A. (2020). Human Rights organisations call for withdrawal of NCPCR directive to restore children from CCIs back to their families. *The Times of India*. 7 October 2020.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/human-rights-organisations-call-for-withdrawal-of-ncpcr-directive-to-restore-children-from-ccis-back-to-their-families/articleshow/78540047.cms>

² Unknown (2020). Supreme Court sets aside NCPCR plan to send child inmates from children's home back to parents due to Covid-19 outbreak. *India Legal*. 1 December 2020.

<https://www.indialegallive.com/ncpcr-childrens-home-covid-19-supreme-court/>

³ Pandit, A. (2020). Nearly 64% of children in child care institutions restored to families since SC order in April. *The Times of India*. 5 December 2020.

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/nearly-64-children-in-ccis-restored-to-families-since-sc-order-in-april/articleshow/79584157.cms?utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=TOIDesktop



Events and Announcements

Catch up on the latest updates on webinars, trainings and conferences from our network organisations

Getting Care Right for Children and Youth: Newsletter on Global Updates on Alternative Care

By Udayan Care

Getting Care Right for Children and Youth: Newsletter on Global Updates on Alternative Care

<https://bit.ly/3E12ZVq>

It is time to jumpstart a new year full of possibilities! Personally and professionally we can take each day with a fresh attitude and approach. While facing uncertainty for the future, we, at Udayan Care, look forward to the year 2022 as a year full of hope for a better decade for children as we see many opportunities emerging from these difficult times. With an unwavering attitude for advocating, by means of a more central place for protection of children in all humanitarian responses, this newsletter brings you the most recent developments in alternative care space with current news and publications.

Biennial Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia (BICON) - A Brief Report

By Gurneet Kaur and Judith Johnson
Udayan Care

*"Aftercare support can help us navigate from nowhere to somewhere."
- A young participant at the conference*

With a commitment to advocate the voices and protect the rights of children and youth without parental care, the 4th Biennial Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia (BICON), titled "Strengthening Alternative Care for Children and Preventing Separation: Opportunities and Challenges in Asia", was held virtually on 8th and 9th December, 2021. Since 2014, BICONS have been the leading conferences in South Asia, bringing stakeholders

to work together and share their learnings and experiences to drive reform. This time its format was expanded to Asia. Spread over two days, from the 8th and 9th of December 2021, this conference brought together various stakeholders, including practitioners, policymakers, academicians, and young people with lived experience, on one platform to discuss their regional challenges, emerging issues, and best practices related to alternative care and child rights in Asia.

*"There is no care reform conversation worth having without us."
Dikshya Thapa, a care experienced youth*

As the need of the hour is to prevent family separation and hear the unheard voices of children and care leavers, along with supporting the social service workforce, this conference was held under the aegis of the Organising Committee, comprising of The Better Care Network, Family for Every Child, Forget Me Not, Hope and Homes for Children, Lumos, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages, and Udayan Care. The Conference saw more than 390 registrations. Individuals and organisations working on alternative care, government officials from Asian countries, researchers, academicians, practitioners, care experienced children and care leavers, civil society organisations, and donors, joined to make it an outstanding virtual experience. The 2-day event covered 11 sessions with varied themes, such as specific aspects of care reform and strengthening of child protection systems. These included family strengthening with prevention at the core, issues of trafficking, inclusion, foster care, quality care, and social workforce development with cross-cutting themes, such as the recently held "Day of General Discussion", which brought together the global agenda for care reform and addressing the issues related to the current pandemic. BICON was also backed up with a clearly defined safeguarding policy.

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"Foster care homes create an atmosphere of a close-knit and cheerful family system for children. It is visible how children feel more content in the foster care environment than being placed in institutional care."

- Anuprerna Singh

*Commissioner and Joint Secretary for Department for Child Rights,
Government of Rajasthan, India*

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The first day saw discussions around understanding the Care Reform in Asia, its trends and approaches, and the outcomes of the 2021 UN Day of General Discussion on Children's Rights and Alternative Care. It also engaged speakers to talk about tackling unnecessary separation of children in Asia from their families, through family strengthening, inclusion of prevention techniques and preventing the separation of families on the move. A panel of experts also discussed the critical need for specialised foster care services, the associated challenges, and the need to invest in, and strengthen kinship care to enable children to grow and thrive in families, thereby presenting good models of community-based foster care.

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"Dealing with children with disabilities requires a twin track approach that is far more than an exclusionist approach, which will never be funded well"

Radhika Alkazi

Founder and Managing Trustee – ASTHA, India

”

The second day of the conference kicked off with a recap of the previous day's sessions, along with discussion around the good practices, challenges, and improved pathways for differently-abled children in Asia, along with highlighting the recommendations for various stakeholders to strengthen, scale, and adapt for best practices and family-based care. The next session illustrated the trends in building the capacities of the social welfare workforce in Asia with the hope to ensure an effective child protection system and gatekeeping with an increased understanding of the significance of community and cultural approaches to child protection and safeguarding in workforce development. The Care Leavers session vocalised their stories, experiences, and

perspectives on institutional care; they also talked about their struggles as care leavers and provided suggestions on how governments, CSOs, donors, and other stakeholders can help overcome the hurdles faced by them.

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"Quality care is one where children and young people are heard and their views are respected, and which enables them to take complete ownership of matters related to them."

Manoj Udayan

Youth Ambassador and Founding member, CLAN India

”

The 4th BICON echoed pivotal topics varying from access to **mental health** and **psychosocial support services** to **advocacy** and **awareness programmes** and **inclusive education** to **address discrimination and negative stereotypes about children and/or parents with disabilities**. It was clearly brought out that the **impact of COVID** on care leavers must be responded to through a **child and family-centred response**, and that collecting data on children's care at regular intervals must be a part of the COVID-19 response. The event highlighted the need for ongoing legislative and policy reform in most Asian countries. **Improving the coordination and cooperation among agencies**, information systems, and actors with responsibilities related to alternative care is an important area that needs more attention at the regional level. It is important to develop formal cross-border and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, much like the role played by SAIEVAC in South Asia.

The 4th BICON, coupled with the prior BICON events over the years, indicates a slow but persistent push representing the voices of care leavers. The BICON this year not just celebrated the advancements made in family strengthening measures and alternative care mechanisms over the years, but also acknowledged the strong urge to work for the best outcomes for children and families in Asia hereafter. A full report will soon be shared with everyone in this space.

Connecting Care Leavers Beyond Borders: The Global Care Leavers Community

By Judith Johnson,
Udayan Care

No matter where you are in the world and which form of care you have lived in, children leaving alternative care systems after turning 18 years of age are faced with nearly the same realities and challenges in community integration and becoming self-independent. With the few opportunities in a competitive world to underlying gaps in the policies and the absence of a family ecosystem around them, the young persons with lived experience of care, also known as care leavers, seek a safety net to build a secure future as young, independent adults.

Recently, key stakeholders have started to understand the necessity of continuing support to care leavers towards their mainstreaming into society as resilient adults and improving their adult outcomes by laying out opportunities for them. While there is a need for more awareness and advocacy towards achieving a comprehensive goal ahead, active discussion forums and platforms are paving way for vocalising the thoughts of the care leavers, pushing their own identity as an individual and community. The pandemic, despite being tough on care leavers, has at the same time provided opportunities to connect virtually, breaking boundaries of countries and continents.

To enable and empower care leavers' welfare and drive change, Udayan Care, in partnership with SOS Children's Villages International (Headquartered in Austria), Stiftung Universität Hildesheim (Germany) and Kinder Perspectief (The Netherlands), organised the [First International Care Leavers Convention](#), 2020. The convention staged the connecting of more than 500 young people with care experience from across the globe to policymakers, academicians, researchers, child rights professionals and experts, and service providers interested in advancing the cause of care leavers. The pre-events leading to the

convention centred on a few themes, highlighting the voice of care leavers and the need for networking. The Convention strived to compile global research, illustrate best practices in aftercare and work towards policy change to propose scalable solutions to stabilise care leavers' lives. The entire convention was co-created by care leavers as four of their networks took an active leadership role as organising members and many other care leavers demonstrated their skills of leadership by anchoring the different sessions over the three days. Amidst the COVID-19 crisis, the Virtual Care Leavers Convention in October-November 2020 was a silver lining, with care leavers joining from across the countries to share their needs, aspirations, and challenges giving conception to the Global Care Leavers' Community and a resource website dedicated to their cause.

Before the Convention, the ["Declaration reflecting the transnational needs of care leavers amidst COVID – 19"](#), which has been further endorsed by 42 networks and organizations, was made over a series of virtual webinars wherein over 100 care leavers participated. With the participation of close to 2300 participants from over 83 countries from 6 continents, the 1st International Convention also led to the inception of a series of guiding documents to help [policymakers](#) and [practitioners](#) devise policies on leaving care, as spoken by care leavers themselves before a panel of policymakers from 11 countries. The policy document catalysed the idea of participation and inclusion, support from government and Civil Society, continuity of relationship with caregivers, creating a "safety net" for care leavers, consensus on the age of leaving care as 25, financial security, a partnership among agencies and maintenance of adequate data systems. Most significantly, the convention stimulated the power of sharing, connecting, and extending peer support with and amongst care leavers globally.

The notion of peer support and connection evolved into the [Global Care Leavers Community](#) out of the First International Care Leavers Convention, 2020, to act as a podium to aspire and tie care leavers and care leavers'

networks at a transnational level. The community facilitated a virtual stage for the care leavers to unite beyond international borders. The Global Care Leavers Community activated discussions leading to the advent of online **Care Leavers Cafe** sessions every last Sunday of the month. The sessions started in January 2021 and covers themes proposed by the care leavers providing a safe online space for the care leavers to share their stories and past experiences with other care leavers in the breakout rooms. Steered by the young adults, the community has successfully organised **12 cafe sessions with care leavers** from Sri Lanka, Egypt, the United States, Germany, France, the Philippines and a few Latin American and African countries. Young adults are striving to bring forth more care leavers from across the globe to extend support and togetherness.

The global community of care leavers has also created a **Care Leavers Community Forum** for active discussions

and exchange of opportunities, news, and events, pulling down the international boundaries to assist the extended peer group of care leavers. Commencing in the New Year of 2022, the Global Care Leavers Community is enhancing its vision with a more focused outcome of connecting with individuals and groups associated with care leavers across the globe. The platform also aims to motivate care leavers to be the torchbearers for steering the change they envision, while the community strives to support and guide these young adults for an optimistic future. It is hoped that the Care Leavers Café and the next Convention will emerge as a strong platform **of care leavers, for care leavers and by care leavers**, to propel the need for active initiation and collaboration of more networks and to address the hurdles faced by care leavers with the aim of coining viable solutions. The upcoming 2nd Convention will be organized by the care leavers and their networks, echoing "Nothing about us without us."

Care of the State- A Podcast by Catalysts for Social Action

Care of the State- A Podcast by Catalysts for Social Action

By Catalyst for Social Action 

Care of the State - a podcast by Catalysts for Social Action is a series that was launched in October 2021 with the objective to help common people understand the plight of children living in vulnerable situations in India, the care and protection options available to them, and the role of organisations and government bodies in providing care and protection to children growing up in difficult situations. Each episode of this podcast, which was released weekly, deals with a specific topic in the continuum of care, including institutional care, aftercare, community and family-based care, adoption and foster care. In this podcast, experts on the subject and professionals from the space speak about different issues in each episode and help the listeners understand the ground realities, the struggles, how the pandemic affected vulnerable children and what needs to be done

to provide a safe environment for children without parental care to grow and reintegrate into society. The podcast has been hosted by Satyajeet Mazumdar, Head of Advocacy at Catalysts for Social Action.

The podcast is available on all popular podcast apps, which can be accessed here: <https://csa.podlink.to/careofthestate>

A Brief About the Episodes and Guests

Episode 1: Vulnerable Children in India - Justice Madan Lokur, former judge of the Supreme Court of India, and Arlene Manoharan of Enfold India speak about the plight of vulnerable children in India, the struggles they face, and the authorities and systems in place to look after them.

Episode 2: Institutional Care - Part 1 – Priti Patkar, Co-founder and Director of Prerana, Dr. Nilima Mehta, Child Protection Expert, and Anandhi Yagnaraman, CEO of CSA discuss institutional care, provisions of law that govern

them, the crucial role that Child Care Institutions (CCIs) play in providing care and protection to vulnerable children, the challenges that CCIs face and how they can be strengthened.

Episode 3: Institutional Care - Part 2 - This episode delves deeper into the ground realities of CCIs. Deepesh Choukse, Senior Program Manager of CSA and Mr. Rabindra Panda, Assistant Secretary of Banabasi Seva Samiti, Odisha shed light on the management of CCIs, their funding issues, the dearth of resources and the relationship they have with the government.

Episode 4 - Aftercare - Part 1 – In this episode, Gita Gopal, Founder of A Future for Every Child, Dr. Kiran Modi, Founder of Udayan Care, and Vipul Jain, Founder of CSA discuss issues faced by care leavers, the ground realities of aftercare in India, and what needs to change in the system.

Episode 5 - Aftercare - Part 2 – Vaishali & Suraj – youth who have grown up in institutional care, - talk about the situations they faced after they left a CCI. Bharathy Tahiliani, Founder of Kshamata, speaks about what it takes to successfully rehabilitate and reintegrate care leavers into society.

Episode 6 – Adoption - Smriti Gupta, Founder of Where Are India's Children and Dr. Aloma Lobo, ex-chairperson of CARA and Adoption Coordinating Agency, Karnataka, discuss the adoption process, the systemic challenges, and the reason why there continues to be a stigma around adoption in India.

Episode 7 - Family Based Care - Ian Anand Forber-Pratt, the Director of Global Advocacy for Children's Emergency Relief International, Subhadeep Adhikary, Program Manager of Child Protection at the Jharkhand Unit of the Child in Need Institute, and Dr. Shekhar Seshadri, Psychiatrist and Professor of the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in NIMHANS, speak about the different kinds of care options children have, apart from

institutional care. They discuss the importance of strengthening communities and the effects of institutionalisation on the minds of vulnerable children.

Episode 8 - Foster Care – In this episode, Devashish Mishra, National Child Protection Consultant, Children's Emergency Relief International, speaks about the legal framework of foster care in India. Roselle Solomon, a member of the Child Welfare Committee in South Goa narrates her personal experience of being a foster mother to a 21-year old daughter for the last 15 years.



Promoting Family Strengthening and Non-institutional Alternative Care Services for Children in Need of Care and Protection

By IAPA 

The Indian Association for Promotion of Adoption and Child Welfare (IAPA), strongly believes in family-based care for children and has been providing various Non-institutional Alternative Care (NIAC) services for children in vulnerable situations, over the last five decades. A webinar was held on 20th January 2022, with the objective of creating awareness about some of the non-institutional, family-based, and community-oriented alternatives, for Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP).

Speakers: Dr. (Mrs.) Nilima Mehta, Professor & National Consultant – Child Protection and Adoption, Mrs. Laxmi Nair, Senior Project Officer- IAPA, Mrs. Nilima Karkal, Project Officer-IAPA, Ms. Yogita Lande, ex-client- IAPA.

Moderator: Ms. Smita Zankar, Manager Programmes-IAPA.

The webinar provided an overview of the subject and reflected the need for NIAC services, without which psychosocial economic pressures and family circumstances, can lead to family disintegration and child destitution. It was discussed that special programmes on family strengthening and child protection can help to support families "at risk", including single-parent families, parent(s) who lack economic means to fulfil their parental role and those who experience illnesses or mental or physical disabilities. The support ensures the "child's right to a family environment" and protects vulnerable children from neglect, abuse, and exploitation.

It was brought out that there has been a significant paradigm shift in the approach to child protection when seen from a historical perspective. The approach of custodial care in large, impersonal institutions is being replaced by a holistic integrated approach of family strengthening and developing family based alternative

care services. Children outside parental care can live with their extended families in kinship care arrangements or in other types of alternative care, such as adoption, foster care, and other variations of family and community-based care.

The speakers were of the view that care in residential institutions could be considered as the last resort, after evaluating the appropriateness in the given situation and best requirements for the child. Studies and experiences have shown that a child deprived of family care and brought up in a large, impersonal institutions may exhibit some characteristics of the Institutional Child Syndrome: insecurity, emotional isolation, inability to trust, submissive/rebellious behaviour, poor self-esteem, and behavioural and academic issues. It was emphasised that only a minority of children living in institutions or children's homes are parentless or fully orphaned, and they could be reintegrated into their families, through family strengthening schemes that provide financial and social support.

The speakers brought out the significant role of IAPA in implementing the **Maharashtra State Government's Bal Sangopan Yojana (BSY), one of the NIAC Schemes for CNCP**. It was discussed that IAPA plays the role of a gate-keeper under this foster care scheme when caregivers approach the Child Welfare Committee (CWC)—the statutory body under the Juvenile Justice Act 2015—for placement of their children into residential institutions. IAPA's social workers present during CWC sittings do spot-counseling where required. In other cases, the possibilities of assistance from the BSY Scheme are explored and taken up after an appropriate home assessment. Under this scheme, financial support is provided by the government to the caregivers, through NGOs like IAPA, to continue looking after their children. It was highlighted how, along with regular counselling and the backing of IAPA's free support services for mental health, vocational training, micro-credit, and the like, this scheme has gone a long way in preserving and strengthening the family for the child. Alternatively, the

child is placed with an extended family within the kinship circle (kinship foster care) or in the community, with the assistance of this scheme. It was discussed that crisis intervention and timely networking for other required services, has helped many families "at risk" of disintegration to mobilise their own strengths to cope with their crisis situations. This support is generally continued until the child reaches 18 years of age, unless there are justified reasons for terminating the support before that. An ex-client of IAPA shared her personal experience of having overcome critical situations with its support. This was testimony to the effectiveness of this scheme when combined with IAPA's support services, which succeeded in rehabilitating the client's family into becoming self-reliant and productive members of society.

In conclusion, it was emphasised that an inadequate care environment can impair children's emotional and social development and leave them extremely vulnerable to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. Every child has a right to be brought up in a family. National policies have now evolved to promote such alternative forms of family strengthening and protection programmes for children. IAPA proposes to organise more such webinars, to spread awareness and information to promote non-institutional, family-based services, across the state of Maharashtra.