INDIA ALTERNATIVE CARE NETWORK

IACN QUARTERLY

Issue 15 / June 2024

Hello,

Dear Colleagues,

The 15th edition of IACN Quarterly is theme-specific and brings forth diverse voices, experiences and perspectives on **Family and Family-based Alternative Care Interventions** such as Foster Care, Kinship Care and Community-Based Care etc. Its multifaceted nature and essence, and its importance in a child's life and overall development are highlighted.

The write-ups present relevant interventions in providing protective factors to families and promoting a strong culture of care and a safe environment within the family. They emphasise strategies such as assessment and case management tools and the necessity to train workforce in providing psycho-social support to families in order to strengthen them. The quarterly reflects on the importance of working with families, communities while addressing the potential roadblocks, and the way forward to ensure that every child thrives in a safe and nurturing family environment.

We want to express our gratitude to everyone who contributed to this issue of the IACN Quarterly.

If you wish to share any resources, information or articles for the IACN website or Quarterly newsletter, please write to us at **iacnsecretariat@iacn.in.**

Sincerely,
IACN Secretariat

Knowledge Resources

Information and Knowledge resources on Alternative Care

Family Strengthening Interventions: A Practitioner's Perspective and Insights from the Field was published in CYC – Online- https://cyc-net.org/cyc-online/feb2024.pdf

Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2024 : Excerpted salient features about the guideline and Family Foster Care for programmatic reference - https://iacn.in/admin/docs/guiding_framework/345a8798c37bedb84836d9123de96a43.pdf

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Gen Z, family, and child protection: Nurturing Relationships for a Brighter Future – Ian Forber Pratt, CERI

A Decade of Evidence Generation and Academic Engagement on Family Strengthening and Alternative – Dr. Gurneet Kaur Kalra, Udayan Care

Need for Prioritising Family Strengthening in the Context of the Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2024 – Satyajeet Mazumdar, CSA

Updates from the Field

Learnings and experiences shared by our Fellow members

Exploring Children's Growth Across Diverse Family Structures – Asoni Grace, Udayan Care

Protection of Child's Rights within the family: Effective Practices and Challenges – Lopamudra Mullick, Railway Children

Caring Communities: How Nuamunda VCPC's supported Kinship Care in migration season – Leher

Family Strengthening Interventions in Child Protection: Empowering Kinship Caregivers – Rashmi Taylor, Prerana

Perspectives around Family Strengthening from CINI's Work in the Communities – Subhadeep Adhikary & Dr. Maninder Kaur, CINI

Placement Disruption in Foster Care – Dr. Vasundhra Om Prem, CEAC & Chetna Desai, UNICEF, Chhattisgarh

Events and Announcements

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

Care Collective Initiated - Towards a Family for Every Child in Our Lifetime – MiracleFoundation India

Strengthening Families, Thriving Children – CTWWC & IACN

Webinar on Model Foster Care Guidelines, 2024 – IACN

For Every Child, A Family

Knowledge Resources

Information and Knowledge resources on Alternative Care

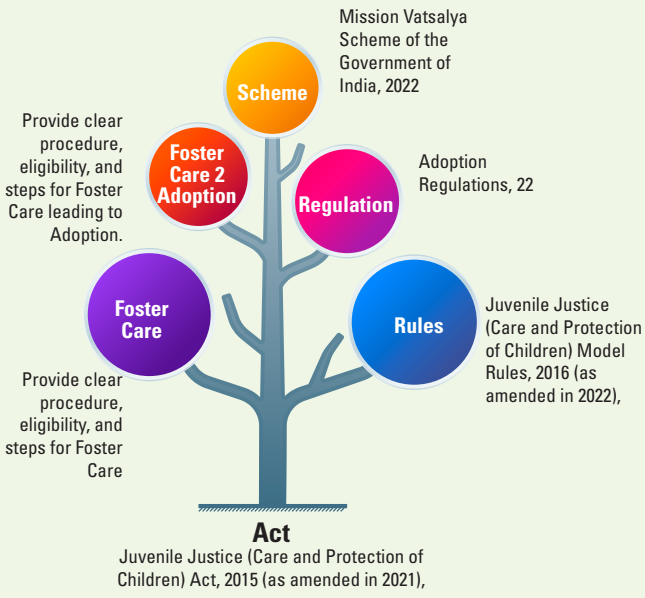
- A paper titled, ***"Family Strengthening Interventions: A Practitioner's Perspective and Insights from the Field"*** was published in ***CYC - Online***, an e- journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network. Through insightful practitioner's perspectives, it endeavours to delve into the intricate realm of family-focused interventions in the context of family strengthening. The document explores the experiences, perceptions, and strategies employed and adapted by Udayan Care, as practitioners, across its various programs, highlighting the critical role they play in uplifting children and youth at-risk and preserving their familial ties. https://cyc-net.org/cyc-online/feb2024.pdf

  Authors: Kiran Modi, Gurneet Kaur Kalra, Leena Prasad, Asoni Grace

Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2024 : Excerpted salient features about the guideline and Family Foster Care for programmatic reference

– **Manoranjan Dash & Nivedita Guhathakurta**
Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

Introduction and Premises: The new model Foster Care Guidelines 2024 is a shift (first preference to the extended family of the child rather than an unrelated family to foster) from limited to expanded scope with multidimensional provisions to approach Foster Care as a solution for both **Prevention** (of children living in communities) and **Deinstitutionalization** (of children living in institution). Based on various provisions as laid down in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, Model Rules, Adoption Regulations, and the Mission Vatsalya Scheme of the Government of India, the model foster care guideline 2024 emphasizes to preserve the family relationship, social connections, cultural milieu, participation and rights of the child. Taking Best interest of the child as paramount consideration, the model guideline provides clear procedures, criteria, and steps for execution and monitoring of Foster Care (Family/Group) and Foster Care leading to Adoption by the same Foster Family who have kept the child in their foster care for a period of two years.



Foster family does not include the child's biological or adoptive parents

Best interest of the child shall be of paramount consideration

Preference to place the child or children in their own socio-cultural environment;

Every child has the right to grow in family or family like care environment

Decisions, initiatives and approaches are to be made on a case-to-case basis, based on the principles of necessity and appropriateness

Must respect the child's right to be consulted; with full participation of families and legal guardians where available

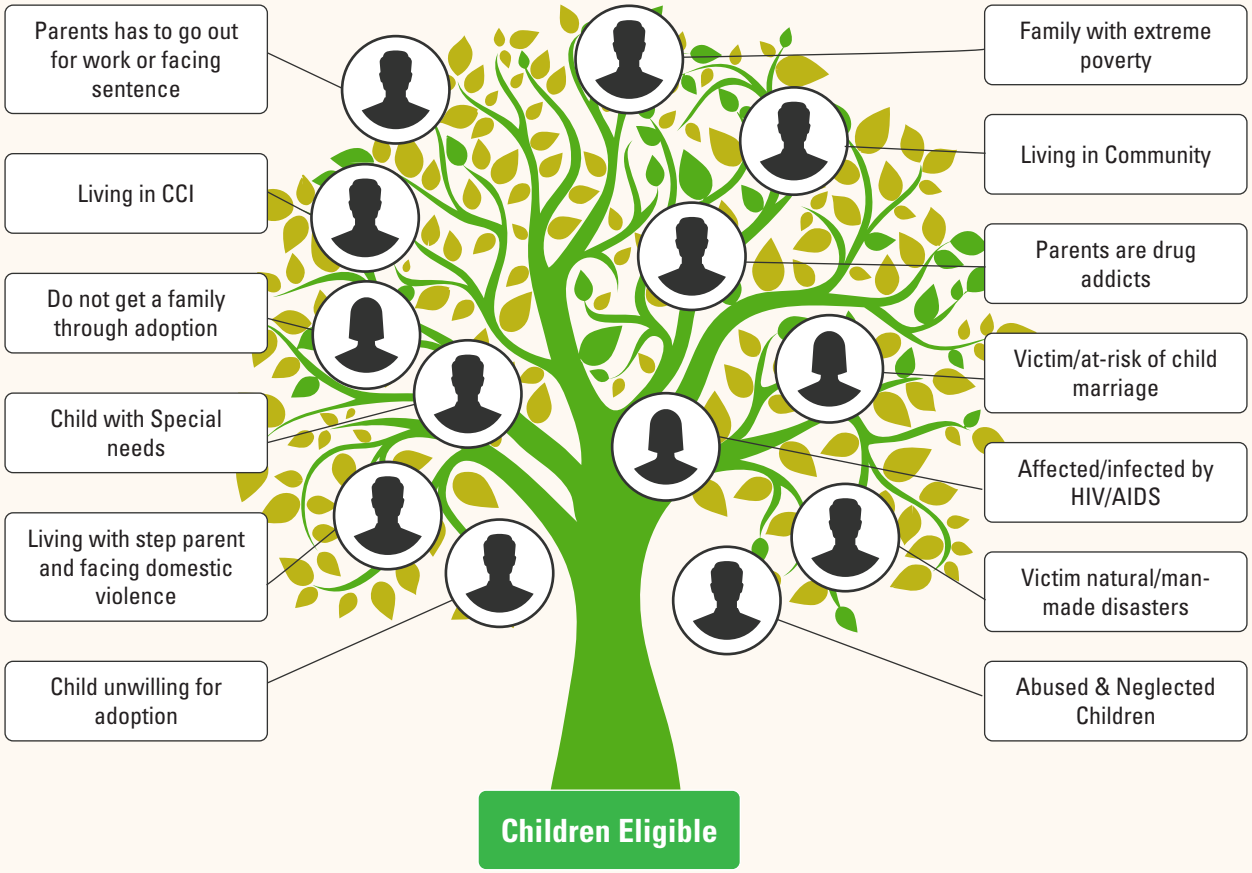
In case siblings are to be separated in their best interest, the consent of both the siblings and approval of CWC shall be mandatory

Fundamental Principles

Child Rights Under Foster Care:

Best Interest	• The best interest of the child placed in foster care is upheld
Care Plan	• Child's views are taken into consideration as far as possible in his/her placement as well as the individual care plan developed
Access to Information	• Child shall have access to information on the situation of his/her biological family • Child shall have information/ access regarding government schemes and programme for his/her development

Children Eligible: All children in need of care and protection (above the age group of six years) including children living in community, in childcare institution and who do not get a family through in/inter country Adoption and placed under the category of hard to place and having special needs.



Physically, mentally, emotionally and financially capable
Not having any life threatening medical condition
Not have been convicted in criminal act of any nature or allegedly involved or accused in any case of child rights violation.
Any person(s) - Single/Unmarried/Widow/Widower/Divorcee/Legally Separated; and not/have biological children
Must be Indian citizen(s)
Consent of both (in case married couple) is required
A single female can foster a child of any gender
A single male shall not be eligible to foster a girl child
Couple/spouse having stable marital relationship of 02 years
Final selection of prospective foster parent shall be based on consent of the child
Minimum age of each parent shall not be less than 35 years

Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2024 *...continued*

Prospective Foster Parents Eligible: Health, Age, Gender, Capacity and social credibility, Willingness, Marital Relationship, etc. are the key criteria.

Age Criteria For Prospective Foster Parent

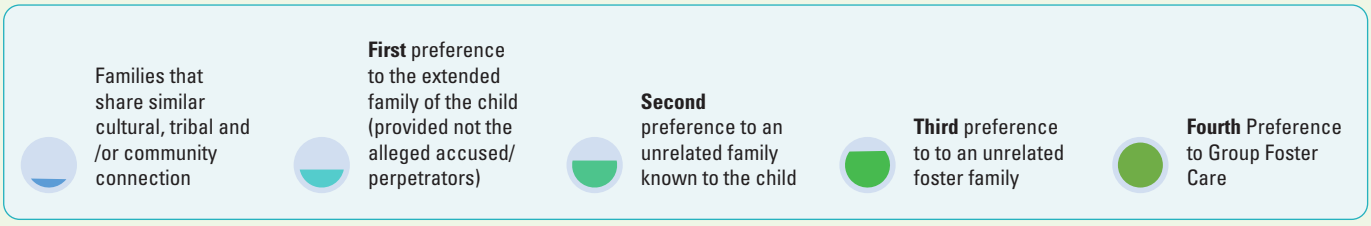
Age of the child	Minimum age (in Years) of PFPs		Maximum Age (in Years) of PFPs	
	Composite age of Married Couple	Single	Composite age of Married Couple	Single
6+ to 12 years	70	35	110	55
12+ to 18 years	70	35	115	60

Short-term
- For a period of not more than one year

Long-term
- For a period exceeding one year
- Can be periodically extended by the Committee till the child attains eighteen years of age

Limit of Foster Care: The number of children placed under family foster care should not exceed 2 children at a given point of time. The total number of children should not exceed 4 including the biological children of the foster parents.

Preference for Placement of Child



Nodal Authority

District Child Protection Unit and Child Welfare Committee

District Child Protection Unit	Child Welfare Committee
Nodal authority for implementation of foster care Program in the district	All decisions related to placement of the child in foster care within 3 months (from the date of receipt of application)

Sponsorship & Foster Care Approval Committee (SFCAC): Every district shall have a Sponsorship and Foster Care Approval Committee to review and sanction sponsorship (for preventive settings only) and Foster Care fund. Decision of SFCAC can be taken by the quorum of four members including the chairperson (District Magistrate).

Financial Support and Procedure

As stipulated in the Mission Vatsalya Scheme
DCPO shall open an account in any scheduled bank/Post Office in the name of the child to be jointly
operated by the child and one of the foster parents.
District Magistrate shall be the competent authority for sanctioning the release of amount from Mission
Account to the child's account
State Governments/UTs are encouraged to give additional grants to the SCPS under Sponsorship and Foster
Care Fund
State Governments/UTs may initiate steps to proactively identify children who need protection with the
support of Panchayti Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies(ULBs)
The foster care assistance shall be discontinued, if the child has to be institutionalised

Registration Process And Documentation Required For Family Foster Care: The prospective foster parents willing to foster care a child are required to register online in the designated portal and upload the required documents. Once registration is complete, DCPU will verify the application and upload the relevant documents in the designated portal as given below:

Documents to be uploaded by prospective foster parents (PFPs) while registering on the designated portal	Documents to be uploaded by DCPU on the designated portal
• Current family photograph or photograph of PFP(s)	• Individual Care Plan – Form 7
• Aadhar Card or Passport or Voter card or Driving License or Birth Certificate and PAN card (if applicable).	• Social Investigation Report of the child – Form 22
• Birth Certificate or Proof of date of birth.	• Child Study Report- Form 31(in case the child is in community)
• Medical fitness certificate(s) that PFPs as well as their family members do not suffer from any chronic, contagious, or fatal disease and they are fit to take care of child.	• Home Study Report of prospective foster parents – Form 30
• Proof of residence (Aadhar Card or voter card or passport or current electricity bill or telephone bill).	• Order of foster care placement by CWC-Form 32
• Proof of income of last year (salary slip or income certificate issued by Govt. Department or income tax return).	• Undertaking by foster family– Form 33
• Marriage Certificate or Divorce Decree or Declaration from the competent court or affidavit on oath pertaining to divorce in case of divorce governed by personal law where decree of divorce is not mandatory or Death certificate of spouse whichever is applicable.	• Monthly inspection of foster family/group foster care – Form 35
• Two references from individuals of good standing from the community for verification	• Medical Examination Report-Schedule III of the child as per Adoption Regulations

Termination Of Foster Care: Conditions including Loss of foster parent or foster family disruption, violation of child rights, neglect and abuse of child, Poor attendance, request of biological parent to take the child back, etc.

Access the new Model Foster Care Guidelines, 2024 here
- https://iacn.in/admin/docs/guiding_framework/345a8798c37bedb84836d9123de96a43.pdf

Perspectives

Commentary, Analysis and Insights

Gen Z, family, and child protection: Nurturing Relationships for a Brighter Future

– By Ian Forber - Pratt
Deputy Executive Director,
Children's Emergency Relief International (CERI)

In the bustling world of today, where screens glow brighter than fireflies and conversations often happen through emojis, something precious is at risk of fading away: real, heartfelt connections. As we delve into the world of Gen Z and child protection, it's crucial to address a growing concern — the trend of feeling less connected. This, in part, is a child protection problem to be solved.

Our world is changing rapidly, and with it, the ways we connect with one another. While technology has brought us incredible advancements, it has also created a digital landscape where personal interactions sometimes take a backseat. This shift affects not only the young ones but also their guardians, with parents sometimes feeling disconnected from their children's worlds. As a parent of a 7 year old and 2 year old and a mentor to young LBTQAI+ teens, I see the glaring impact of technology on a daily basis. It's profound and it impacts us all; ignoring it just won't work.

The Crisis in Parenting

Parents today face unique challenges. Juggling work, household responsibilities, and the constant buzz of digital distractions, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and disconnected from our children's lives. It costs more to live and the information overload causes untold amounts of stress. The result? A crisis of parents not attending to their children. This crisis in parenting is not always about neglect but about the struggle to find a balance in a fast-paced world and to give children the attention their brains and bodies need for optimal development.

We know that at the heart of child development lies a fundamental need for relationships and human connection. It's not just about the quantity of time spent together but the quality of those interactions. This is where the science comes in, showing us that nurturing relationships lay the foundation for healthy emotional, social, and cognitive development in children.

Solutions at Hand

So, what can we do to bridge this gap and nurture stronger connections with our children? The answer lies in positive parenting practices, building parent peer groups, and offering simple coaching for both kids and parents.

- Positive Parenting: Encouraging positive reinforcement, active listening, and empathy in parenting can go a long way. Celebrating small victories, showing genuine interest in our children's lives, and creating safe spaces for open communication are vital.
- Parent Peer Groups: Establishing support networks where parents can share experiences, exchange advice, and offer each other a listening ear can provide immense comfort and guidance.
- Coaching for Kids and Parents: Teaching emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and digital literacy can empower both kids and parents. Understanding how to navigate the digital world safely while maintaining real-world connections is key.
- Measuring Comfort with Parenting: It's essential to create tools to measure how comfortable parents and children are with their digital interactions. This could involve simple surveys or discussions to gauge feelings and address any concerns.

A Message of Hope

Despite the challenges, there is hope. Gen Z is a socially conscious and diverse generation, filled with potential to create positive change. They care deeply about the world around them and are eager to make a difference.

But they need our intervention now. By prioritizing relationships and connection in our child protection efforts, we can lay the groundwork for a brighter future. Let's come together as a community, supporting one another in this journey of parenting and fostering the meaningful connections that our children need to thrive.

In the end, it's not just about protecting our children but also about empowering them to become the best versions of themselves. Let's commit to being present, listening with our hearts, and nurturing the bonds that truly matter.

Together, we can create a world where every child feels seen, heard, and valued.

Referenced Research (sorry to have two reports from one source, but they are statistically sound and well reported)

Generation Z | Pew Research Center, Parenting in America Today: A Survey Report (2023) | Pew Research Center, What You Can Do to Improve Social Connectedness | CDC

A Decade of Evidence Generation and Academic Engagement on Family Strengthening and Alternative Care: A Case Study of Institutionalised Children Exploration and Beyond (ICB) Journal

– Dr. Gurneet Kaur Kalra,
Manager, Research and Advocacy
Udayan Care

As practitioners on child and youth care for over 30 years, Udayan Care has always focussed on implementing a family-strengthening approach to all its work. As part of this framework, including evidence through research and documentation has helped improve youth and family strengths, enhance child development, and learn from good practices globally. In the realm of academic research and scholarly pursuits focused on Family Strengthening and Alternative Care for children and youth without parental care, the 'Institutionalised Children Exploration and Beyond' (ICB) journal stands as a beacon of multidisciplinary excellence. With its roots deeply embedded in the Asian region yet resonating with a global perspective, ICB, in collaboration with Sage Publications, has been highlighting critical issues, influencing policy reforms, and elevating standards of care. With years of experience of Dr Kiran Modi as a practitioner, working for children and youth without parental care, the need for an academic journal on alternative care was identified to influence policy reforms, and decision-making and thereby improve practices and standards of care.

In order to have regional representation, the geographic coverage of the journal initially was decided to be South Asian countries, since these countries shared almost similar kinds of culture, practices etc. and all the other journals on alternative care during those days were published by Western countries only. During the inception of the journal in 2014, institutional care was considered the most prominent alternative care for children. But the foreseeing pioneers of the journal decided to explore beyond institutional care and explore the best places for a child to thrive and develop which led to the naming of the journal, 'Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond'.

A double anonymized peer reviewed journal, with contributions from more than 220 authors based in 18 countries, and 90 peer reviewers, ICB Journal has also published special issues on various themes including,' depression in children and young persons living in alternative care, 'evolution of trends in alternative care for children in South Asia', 'child sexual abuse in alternative care', 'caregivers', 'deinstitutionalisation', 'alternative care in the times of COVID', 'alternative care for children & young persons with different abilities', two issued on 'aftercare and care leavers', 'child trafficking in alternative care', and ''tracing evolution on alternative care in South Asia'.

In 2024, celebrating a decade of commitment to research and evidence-based practices, ICB has emerged as a pivotal platform for disseminating original research papers and exemplary models of care practices. The recent milestone achieved by ICB marks a significant triumph in its academic journey globally. The journal has been officially recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and is now listed in the prestigious UGC Care List. This recognition not only underscores the quality and credibility of ICB within the academic community but also highlights the exceptional contributions of its authors, peer reviewers, and dedicated readers. As ICB continues to chart new frontiers in research and scholarship, its inclusion in the UGC Care List amplifies its reach and influence, reaffirming its status as a leading voice in the discourse on family strengthening and alternative care. In conclusion, the recognition bestowed upon ICB by the UGC Care List is not merely a testament to past achievements but a clarion call for future endeavours

So far 21 issues of the journal have been released and with each issue, ICB endeavours to foster dialogue, inspire innovation, and catalyse positive change in the lives of vulnerable children and youth worldwide. This journal aims to address limitations in research, and inform better practices of care through evidence generation, and encourage the integration of children and young persons without parental care into the mainstream. ICB so far has been able to create a rich platform for sharing discourses, developing dialogues around law and practice, and bringing together practitioners, academicians, and policy makers on the same platform. Previous versions have also documented movie and book reviews on the subject, and ICB has thus collected 17 book reviews and 17 movie reviews so far. In the different issues, an intensive interview with several global experts including Rinchen Chophel, Delia Pop, Mike Stein, Asha Bajpai, Patrick Tomlinson, Neils Rygaard, Amanda Bissex, Merry Barua, Mark Riddell, Preeti Patkar, Khdijah Madihi had been captured and the journal has gathered together their expertise and insights that one can learn from.

2024 marked the ten years of a journey that began in 2014 and at this juncture ushers in another decade with new hope, motivation, innovation, and a vision that we hope will be transformative for Asia with a global impact. Along the way ICB journal strives to redesign and bring in ideas that are noteworthy. Its mission and vision continue to be unwavering in its dedication to encourage collaboration and participation in different ventures and to broaden its reach and depth of scientific inquiry and expertise. Going forward, ICB journal focuses on social and cultural factors that complicate the lives of orphaned and separated children and contribute to their institutional care and placement. This shift is an attempt to cast a wider net regarding factors that exist in society at large that add to the complexity of care and placement of these individuals. The journey of ICB promises to be one of continued growth, collaboration, and impact. With the support of its partners, stakeholders, and the academic community at large, ICB remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing knowledge, promoting best practices, and championing the rights and well-being of children without parental care.

ICB's 20th special issue titled "The Evolution of Alternative Care in South Asia over the Last Decade and Way Forward" was launched at 5th BICON, 2023 in Kathmandu, Nepal, by Honourable Minister, Surendra Acharya, Honourable Minister, Minister for Women, Children and Senior Citizens, Nepal; Indradevi Dhakal, Member Secretary NCRC, Nepal; Rajeev Kumar, SOS Children's Villages; @EnamulHaque and Sumnima Tuladhar - Editorial Members ICB; Dikshya Thapa, Shine together care leavers network. This special issue provides a real, raw and compelling view of alternative care in seven countries which seeks to delve into the multifaceted process of child protection system reform across these nations, thereby examining the challenges, progress so far, and lessons learned from the past ten years providing a direction to the way forward. In an effort to delve into the lived experiences of care leavers, this issue presented a collection of written interviews conducted with care experienced youth from Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka to amplify their voices. The recent March 2024 edition of the journal was launched on March 19th at the "2nd Annual Round Table on Strengthening and Empowering Families in Delhi", and it emphasizes evidence-based practices in alternative care for community empowerment. This issue features an interview with Khadijah Madihi of Asia Family First, along with eight global research papers. This event took place in a hybrid mode, reaching out to over 60 participants in person and more than 40 virtually, with two panel discussions to discuss community-led approaches to support families in India and how evidence facilitates driving positive change and fostering sustainable change.

As we embark on the next phase of our academic odyssey, let us reaffirm our dedication to excellence, integrity, and compassion in all our scholarly pursuits. Through the pages of ICB, let us continue to explore, illuminate, and transcend boundaries in our quest to create a world where every child is nurtured, protected, and empowered to realise their full potential. We welcome original research articles, good practices/models that raise important, new and relevant research questions, from academicians, researchers, practitioners, social workers, policy-makers, mental health experts, managers, activists, and students working in the field of family strengthening and alternative care. Please refer to the Submission Guidelines. Write to us at icbjournal@udayancare.org. We would like to invite you to be a part of this insightful academic engagement by subscribing to our journal in both online and print version.

Need for Prioritizing Family Strengthening in the Context of the Model Guidelines, 2024

– Satyajeet Mazumdar,
Director – Advocacy,
Catalysts for Social Action

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India issued the Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2024 (hereinafter '2024 Foster Care Guidelines'), on 26th April, 2024[1] . These guidelines replace the Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2016 (hereinafter '2016 Foster Care Guidelines')[2] . The updating of the guidelines was made necessary to bring processes and procedures with respect to foster care in alignment with the 2021 amendment of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (hereinafter 'JJ Act, 2015' or 'the Act'), the 2022 amendment of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016 (hereinafter 'JJ Model Rules, 2016', or 'Rules'), and the Adoption Regulations, 2022.

This article stresses on the increased need for focus on family strengthening initiatives in the context of the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines. It begins by highlighting the new and amended provisions of the Guidelines on the adoption of children in foster care. Further, it delves into the core objective of foster care and summarises different provisions of the law which lay emphasis on family strengthening and reunification of a child with their biological family. It ends with recommendations on the implementation of the Guidelines.

The 2024 Foster Care Guidelines have introduced several provisions aimed at making foster care more viable for children and foster parents. Significant among these are the following:

1. Any person is now allowed to foster a child irrespective of their marital status, as against the 2016 Guidelines which allowed only a married couple to accept a child in foster care[3] .

2. The eligibility criteria for children[4] in the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines includes "children with no visitation[5] ", "children having unfit guardian[6] ", and "hard to place child[7] ", with the objective to facilitate their deinstitutionalisation and placement in family-based alternative care.

3. There is no waiting period for children who are legally free for adoption (LFA) to be eligible for foster care, as in the 2016 Guidelines[8] . The 2024 Foster Care Guidelines makes all children in need of care and protection (CNCP) above the age of six, living in child care institutions (CCIs) or in the community, eligible for foster care[9] .

4. The duration of stay of a child with a foster family for them to be eligible to apply for adoption of the child has been reduced from five years[10] in the 2016 Guidelines to two years[11] in the 2024 Guidelines.

By defining "children with no visitation" and "children with unfit guardian" in the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines, including these categories in the eligibility criteria for children, and by broadening the eligibility criteria for foster parents, it is evident that the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines seeks to address the issue of difficulty in restoration of children from these categories in CCIs, and intends to attract more people to consider accepting children in foster care. Furthermore, by reducing the minimum duration of foster care required before a foster parent can apply for adoption of the same child, the new Guidelines seek to improve the chances of creating a permanent bond between eligible children and their foster parents.

While adoption through foster care is indeed a positive outcome that provides eligible children with a permanent home, it is important to note that adoption is not the primary goal of foster care. Foster care is meant to provide temporary substitute care for children when their natural family is undergoing a crisis. Children may need to be removed from their natural home to prevent them from facing a situation of risk or neglect, and may be placed in foster families till the crisis is over[12] .

The JJ Act, 2015 (as amended in 2021) recognises the biological family of a child, where available, as the primary responsibility holders for the care, nurture and protection of the child.[13] The Act gives every child in the juvenile justice system the right to be reunited with their family at the earliest[14] . The Act requires the CWC to make provision for alternate care services / facilities (i.e. placement in a CCI or fit facility, or with a fit person or foster family) for children only when they have no family, or no "ostensible support", and they are in "continued need of care and protection, till suitable means of rehabilitation are found for the child[15] ." Clear preference is also given for rehabilitation of the child by restoration to family or guardian[16] .

Examining the provisions related to the placement of children in foster care, it is clear that the Act, Rules, and 2024 Foster Care Guidelines recognize foster care as a temporary solution, prioritising reunification with the biological parents as the preferred outcome. Section 44(5) of the JJ Act, 2015, on Foster Care, provides that where a child's placement in foster care is due to their parents being found unfit or incapacitated, the child may return to the parent's homes once they are determined by the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) to be fit to take care of the child[17] . After the commencement of foster care, the same clause also allows parents to visit the child in the foster family at regular intervals, unless the CWC feels that such visits are not in the best interest. On similar lines, Rule 23 of the JJ Rules, 2016 which provides the eligibility criteria for foster care and specifies roles and responsibilities of different functionaries, recognises that every child has the right to grow in a family environment, and states that "every attempt shall be made to reunite the child with his biological family, if possible.[18] "

Given the importance placed on a child's relationship with their biological family by the JJ Act, 2015, it is imperative that as we implement the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines and place children in need of care and protection with foster families, priority is given to family strengthening programmes to facilitate the reunification of children with their biological parents, where possible.

The introduction of "children with no visitation" and "children having unfit guardian" as categories of children eligible for foster care is indeed a welcome development which has the potential to facilitate deinstitutionalisation and placement in foster care of thousands of children in institutional care who have not been visited by their parents, guardians or relatives for years, and those whose parents or guardians are deemed 'unfit' by the CWC. However, unless the process of identifying and placing children in these categories in foster care is undertaken with utmost care, and unless sufficient efforts are made to trace or strengthen the capacity of biological parents or relatives, it may disrupt family integrity and violate the child's right to their biological family. This is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where a significant number of children in institutional care (nearly 50% according to a 2018 study by the MWCD) have parents who have been declared 'unfit or incapacitated' to take care by the Child Welfare Committee (CWC).

To enhance efforts toward strengthening biological families and facilitate the reunification of children in foster care with their biological families, thereby preventing the disruption of family ties, the following is recommended:

1. *Periodic evaluation of families deemed 'unfit or incapacitated':* For children placed in institutional or non-institutional alternative care due to their parents being deemed 'unfit or incapacitated' by the CWC, it is essential to assess the family's need for support and commence family strengthening activities at the time when the child enters the juvenile justice system. Regular follow-ups should be conducted to monitor the support provided, document changes in the family's circumstances, and identify any additional support needed with the objective to facilitate reunification of their child with their family at the earliest. It is important to recognize that a person's inability or unwillingness to parent a child may not be permanent and can change with evolving circumstances.
2. *Family tracing for children with 'no visitation':* For children in this category, it is imperative to make dedicated efforts to trace and locate the biological parents or extended family not just to evaluate the possibility of reunification but to also ensure and facilitate the child's contact with them after their placement in foster care. The term "visitation" may also be broadly defined or interpreted to consider telephonic or postal contact between parents or relatives and children depending on facts and circumstances of the case.
3. *Orientation for foster families:* Comprehensive orientation and training of foster families before they accept a child into foster care is necessary for them to fully understand the objectives of the programme and the fact that it is temporary in nature. Foster families also need to understand their responsibility of facilitating and maintaining contact between foster children and their biological families. Foster parents should be encouraged and equipped to support and nurture these connections, understanding that reunification, where possible, is a primary goal of foster care.

Foster care isn't a new concept for India, with various models in place since as early as 1970. The Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2024 offer a renewed opportunity to develop a foster care system tailored to our specific context. As we move forward, it is crucial to stay focused on the primary objective of foster care and to learn from our past experiences as well as established foster care systems worldwide. By doing so, we can build a robust and effective system which is best suited to cater to the needs of children experiencing difficult circumstances in India.

Footnotes

1. Available at https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/MODEL%20FOSTERCARE%20GUIDELINES%2C%202024%20%281%29.pdf, last accessed on 21 May 2024
2. Available at https://cara.wcd.gov.in/PDF/foster%20care%202016.pdf, last accessed on 21 May 2024
3. Para 13 of the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines
4. Para 4 of the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines
5. Para 2(2) of the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines; defined as "*all such cases where there is no visitation made by the child's parent, guardian or relative to meet the child or vice-versa in the last one year*".
6. Para 2(3) of the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines; defined as "*whose parent or guardian is unable or unwilling for parenting, indulging in substance (drug) abuse, abuse or alcohol, known to have abused or neglected the child, having a criminal record, in need of care themselves, mentally unsound etc.*"
7. Regulation 2(13) of the Adoption Regulations, 2022
8. Para 7.A of the 2016 Guidelines
9. Para 4 of the 2024 Guidelines
10. Para 7.B of the 2016 Foster Care Guidelines
11. Para 19 of the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines
12. Bajpai, A. (2017). *Child Rights in India Law, Policy, and Practice* (Third Edition). Oxford University Press. Pp. 519
13. Section 3(v) of the JJ Act, 2015, as amended in 2021
14. Section 3(xiii) of the JJ Act, 2015, as amended in 2021
15. Section 36(3) of the JJ Act
16. Section 39(1) of the JJ Act
17. Section 44(5) of the JJ Act, 2015, as amended in 2021
18. Rule 23(8) of the JJ Model Rules, 2016, as amended in 2022

Updates from the Field

Learning and experiences shared by our fellow members

Exploring Children's Growth Across Divers Family Structures

– Asoni Grace
Documentation Officer
Udayan Care

"As families evolve, so do the risks of child separation. Understanding these shifts is crucial for safeguarding children's well-being in an ever-changing familial landscape." **- Professor Andrew Cherlin**

In the heart of South and South East Delhi, amidst its bustling streets and vibrant culture, lie vulnerable communities facing the profound impact of evolving family structures. The fabric of familial bonds is shifting, with dynamics altering in response to societal changes, economic pressures, and cultural influences. As these transformations unfold, the risk of children facing separation from their families looms large. Understanding the nuanced interplay between these factors is crucial in safeguarding the well-being of children within these vulnerable communities. The landscape of family structures has been evolving rapidly in recent decades, presenting new challenges and opportunities for understanding the risks associated with child separation. Decades of research have uncovered the limitations of residential care, orphanages and children's homes, and the importance of a family in the healthy development of children.

The shifting landscape of family structures

Traditionally, South Delhi's communities have been characterized by close-knit familial ties, often extending beyond nuclear families to include extended relatives. However, contemporary realities paint a different picture. Economic migrations, urbanization, and changing social norms have led to a diversification of family structures.

Single-parent households

In today's dynamic society, single-parent households represent a significant segment of family structures. Whether by choice, circumstance, divorce, or loss, single parents embark on a challenging yet rewarding journey of raising their children solo. One of the primary risks associated with single-parent households is the heightened vulnerability to family separation. Whether due to financial strain, limited social support networks, or the demands of balancing work and childcare responsibilities, single parents may face increased stressors that can strain familial relationships and increase the likelihood of separation.

"FiT Families Together, a community based project of Udayan Care works closely with 60 families to reintegrate the children back to their families and prevent the risk of separation by strengthening the families. Of the 60 families we serve, 22 are single-parent households shouldering the responsibility of caring for their children alone facing unique challenges that can increase the risk of family separation."

Migration

Migration often serves as a catalyst for profound changes in the structure and composition of families, consequently increasing the risk of separation for children. When families migrate, they are often confronted with a myriad of challenges, including economic instability, social dislocation, and cultural adaptation.

"The tragic loss of her husband left a single mother responsible for her five children. Seeking livelihood opportunities, they migrated to Delhi, where they found themselves living on the footpath in front of a temple, relying solely on the temple for sustenance. However, the harsh reality of their circumstances forced the mother to make a difficult decision: she had to send two of her children to a children's home for around 10 years. This separation, though heart-breaking, was a desperate measure to ensure the survival and well-being of her family amidst economic instability and lack of support."

Disability

Disability can significantly impact the structure and composition of families, often increasing the risk of separation for children. Families with a member who has a disability face unique challenges, including financial strain, limited access to support services, and social stigma. These challenges can strain familial relationships and lead to disruptions in family cohesion.

"A family of 5 members, grappling with the challenges of a caregiver's disability, faced dire financial circumstances, limited access to support services, and social stigma. Unable to find livelihood opportunities and lacking social support, the family migrated from Bihar to Delhi in search of better prospects. However, their vulnerability led to resorting to begging for survival, challenging their dignity and stability. Faced with these harsh realities, the parents made the agonizing decision to place one of their children in a children's home to ensure safety and well-being. Meanwhile, the other two children remained with their parents, enduring a childhood defined by constant movement in pursuit of meagre opportunities. This perpetual upheaval deprived the children of the stability and security every child deserves, highlighting the fragility of family structures in the face of disability-related challenges."

Child- headed household

Child-headed households, where children are responsible for the care and management of their siblings due to the absence or incapacity of adult caregivers, represent a poignant example of the changing structure and composition of families. In such households, the risk of separation is inherent and multifaceted.

"In one family grappling with significant financial constraints, the difficult decision was made to place one of their children in a children's home. This choice stemmed from the lack of adequate resources and support, compounded by the loss of the father and abandonment by their mother. These circumstances led to the fragmentation of the family, highlighting the vulnerability of families facing economic hardship and social instability. The eldest child took on the role of head of the family, lacking parental guidance and support. With the father deceased and the mother absent, the elder sibling had to shoulder adult responsibilities prematurely. This shift in familial roles reflects the adaptability and resilience of individuals in adversity. However, it also underscores the strain on children and the potential jeopardy to their well-being and development in the absence of proper adult care and guidance."

Conclusion

The evolving family structures in South Delhi's vulnerable communities demand a proactive and holistic approach to safeguarding children's well-being. Understanding the intricate interplay of economic, social, and cultural influences on family dynamics is essential for developing tailored interventions that enhance resilience and empower families to provide nurturing environments for their children. Through collective action and a commitment to equity and inclusion, we can envision a future where every child in South Delhi thrives within a caring and supportive family setting.

As society continues to grapple with family instability, it's crucial to prioritize children's needs by addressing socioeconomic disparities, strengthening support networks, and advocating for policies that promote child well-being. Investing in family support not only benefits children but also leads to transformative outcomes for communities. While challenges remain, the imperative to restore family connections where possible, remains paramount. By supporting long-term solutions for vulnerable families, we can ensure that children are integrated into loving, self-sustaining family environments.

In reflecting on our own initiatives, we recognize the importance of evaluating and adapting our approaches to best serve the needs of children and families. As we strive to act in their best interests, we must remain open to change and responsive to emerging challenges. Together, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and families, fostering environments where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Protection of Child's Rights within the family: Effective Practices and Challenges

– Lopamudra Mullick
Senior Manager – Program and Strategic Alliance, Railway Children

Working with families of children protected and transport terminal and vulnerable children living within slum communities settled around transport terminal is an integral part of Railway Children India's programme. The insights gained from the extensive work with children over a period of 28 years, have guided RCI in shaping its case management approach and identifying key priority areas to establish a robust family safety net, thereby mitigating unnecessary family separations in the future.

The factors identified related to both the individual or family context and the broader community context:

- Maintaining daily activities without significant disruption.
- Negative perceptions and impacts of life on the streets.
- A strong sense of responsibility towards the family.
- The presence of supportive or attachment figures within the family or community.
- Satisfaction with current life circumstances.
- Parental understanding of their children's needs leads to agreement with their choices.
- A small act of support to empower a family member who can then find solution themselves. E.g. a sewing machine and training to enhance the income level.

Our involvement with families extends beyond children reunified from transport terminals in and around Delhi NCR, where we intervene. We also engage with families residing in slum settlements located within 1 to 2 km from these transport terminals.

Family reintegration in the context of children protected at transport terminals

Railway Children India's Family Reintegration Programme is a structured process aimed at ensuring the child's

well-being and successful reintegration into their family. The process begins as soon as a child is identified at a transport terminus. Initial assessments focus on understanding the child's situation, including identifying risks, vulnerabilities, and strengths, with the child's best interest at heart.

Following the initial assessment, the family reintegration process involves re-assessment to develop a comprehensive understanding of the immediate and ongoing needs, as well as potential risks, of the child and their family. This re-assessment paves the way for the creation of tailored Family Reintegration and Care Plans, which are critical for addressing the specific needs of both the child and the caregiver. These plans include targeted interventions and activities designed to mitigate risks and build on the child's strengths.

The implementation of these plans varies based on the child's geographical proximity to the project areas. Direct interventions are provided to children residing within 2-3 hours of travel from Delhi, and children living beyond these travel limits are assisted through network interventions.

This structured approach ensures that children identified at transport terminals receive tailored support and interventions, facilitating their successful reintegration into their families and communities. The ultimate goal is to provide a safe, nurturing environment where children can thrive and develop positively, supported by a stable family and community network.

Family work in the context of vulnerable slum communities around transport terminals: Children from these settlements often find themselves spending time on railway tracks due to reasons such as stone pelting, dropping out of school or never having attended, lack of monitoring and supervision from the parents. Additionally, there are instances where parents attempt to marry off their daughters or push their sons into child labor.

Presently RCI is working with 1789 children and 944 families across 7 slum settlements across the railway tracks in Delhi NCR. The intervention was deemed necessary not only to prevent the children from developing harmful connections with street life, and becoming victims of any form of abuse and exploitation but also to prevent unnecessary family separation.

Thus, to reinforce the family safety net and prevent 1789 children from being drawn into vulnerable street life, and thus avoiding unnecessary family separation, RCI, started working with the cohort of children created along with follow-up visits to the families and meeting their parents, assisting them in accessing government schemes and services as part of family-strengthening initiatives. Initiatives for resilience building within families have also been introduced to enhance parenting skills and foster strong bonds between parents and their children. 829 families out of 944 were linked with various government services and entitlements in close coordination with the District Legal Services Authority (DLSAs), District Child Protection Functionaries, Medical Associations, and local NGOs through Medico-Legal Camps held in the communities.

A compassionate team of Care Leavers, serving as Community Mobilisers, works closely with families and children. These Care Leavers understand the importance of staying in the family and the pitfalls if the child has to face unnecessary separation. They prioritize keeping families together and are vigilant in identifying any emerging vulnerabilities that could lead to separation. Their interventions include linking children with government schemes, providing emotional support, connecting families with entitlements, and facilitating participation in meetings and training sessions to educate them about rights and legal implications.

To further enhance community engagement, 7 parent groups are functional, and parents actively participate in the meetings and the sensitization workshops held for them.

Below are two classic examples illustrating how rigorous follow-up with children and families across seven slum settlements has helped identify emerging vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities could potentially lead to unnecessary separations and expose children to abusive situations.

A sewing machine: An empowering & transforming force for women in communities

35-year-old Kanika (name changed) has 3 children, 2 adolescent boys, aged 17 and 18 years, and one adolescent girl aged 14 years. RCI supported all her three

children, who frequented the Community Activity Centre. Her 17-year-old son has been enrolled into Computer Training and is presently studying in class 9, RCI regularly follows up to ensure his smooth transition into class 10 and adequate support for his board exams. The 18-year-old son had dropped out of school, RCI enrolled him in 10 class through open schooling.

Kanika's daughter attends school regularly and actively participates in activities at the Community centre. Given the financial circumstances of the family, it was crucial to closely monitor the children to prevent the risk of adolescent boys dropping out of school and engaging in labour activities.

Kanika, like many homemakers living in the urban slums, lived with financial constraints due to limited employment opportunities outside her home. With a family of five and her husband earning a modest income as a rickshaw puller, Kanika grappled with significant financial challenges. However, sewing machines emerged as a transformative instrument, enabling women in the community to earn an income while remaining in the comfort of their households.

Railway Children India's timely intervention altered Kanika 's life. This gesture provided Kanika with an avenue to explore livelihood opportunities and supplement her husband's income. Armed with the sewing machine, Kanika wasted no time in leveraging her newfound opportunity. She sharpened her sewing skills and commenced offering tailoring services within her community.

She earned approximately Rs. 1200 to Rs. 1500 per month, depending on the frequency of orders, which were sporadic rather than consistent. However, she aspires to broaden her clientele within the neighbourhood, and word of her adept craftsmanship is spreading rapidly. The income she generates from her sewing business has enabled her family to afford essential expenses and enhance their quality of life. Kanika's narrative illustrates the transformative potential of a seemingly modest gift – a sewing machine–in enhancing the livelihood of a struggling family.

This serves as a classic example of family strengthening, from the lens of securing the economic stability of a family and being able to take better care of her children, and preventing separation.

From reluctance to acceptance, how the RCI's team supported a family ensured their daughter went to school

The young 9-year-old named Shaheen (name changed), resided in a modest three-set rented house. Shaheen's father had once operated an embroidery machine, providing for his family. However, their lives took an unexpected turn when he suffered a debilitating fracture six months ago, rendering him unable to work. It was then that Shaheen's mother bravely took on the role of a sweeper, working tirelessly in people's homes to make ends meet. Shaheen had two younger brothers and two sisters, all living together in their humble abode. Despite their dreams of a better future, the family's precarious financial situation kept Shaheen from attending school.

In June 2023, Shaheen was identified as "not going to school" during a vulnerability assessment conducted in the community. RCI team visited Shaheen's house for a follow-up. The entire family had gone to their village, Bahuara Post, in Hariharpur District, Darbhanga, Bihar. Determined to help Shaheen, our team member Shubham spoke to the mother over the phone, learning about their return plans.

In September when Shaheen's family finally returned to Tulsi Nagar, the RCI team member explained the importance of education and informed them about school admission. The father, though unwell, promised to consider the idea.

Concerned about their financial constraints, Shaheen's mother expressed her worries about obtaining the necessary documents and photos for school admission. Shubham reassured her and supported the family in obtaining the photos and required documents to process the school admission. Finally, after continuous efforts, the school application form was filled out and submitted to the admission in-charge. Shaheen, full of hope and excitement, started attending 3rd grade regularly for the first time.

The story of Shaheen's journey to education is a testament to the determination and unwavering support of the RCI team. They had not only opened the doors to learning for Shaheen but also brought a ray of hope and happiness into her family's life. With regular follow-ups, Shaheen's educational journey was set to flourish, offering her a path towards a better life.

Caring Communities: How Nuamunda VCPC's supported Kinship Care in migration season

– Leher

Child Rights Knowledge and Practice Organization

"When we left the village for work, we never left Hemant (10 years) behind. Yes, his schooling was interrupted, but for families like ours in Nuamunda, we take our children along. Who would feed and care for our children if we left them in the village? -Hemant's father

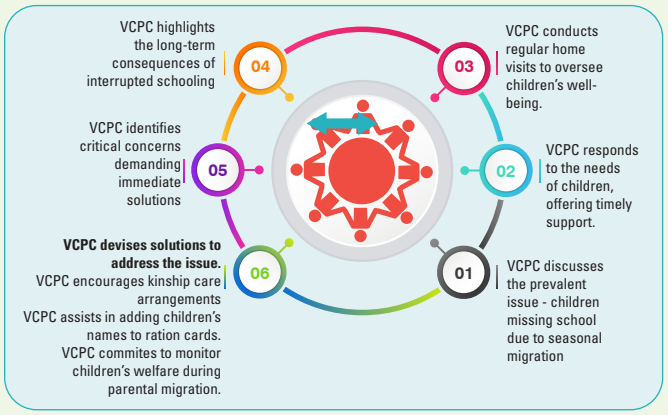
For decades, Hemant's family, like many others in Nuamunda, grapple with seasonal migration. Each year, they embark on arduous journeys to brick kilns in distant states, leaving behind their homes and disrupting their children's education. Seasonal Migration is a common plight faced by families in Nuamunda, where literacy rates struggle to rise above 50% (Census 2011)[2].

- There were 15 million seasonal migrant children accompanied and unaccompanied in India - UNESCO's 2013 Report on Social Inclusion of Internal Migrants[1]
- In India, 10.7 million children aged 6 to 14 lived in rural households with a seasonal migrant in 2013. About 28% of youth aged 15 to 19 in these households were illiterate or had not completed primary school, compared with 18% of the cohort overall (Chandrasekhar and Bhattacharya, 2018).
- About 80% of seasonal migrant children in seven Indian cities lacked access to education near work sites, and 40% worked, experiencing abuse and exploitation (aide et action et al., 2015).

Nuamunda is among the 235 villages where Leher establishes Bal Suraksha Hubs, practising community-led child protection initiatives across four states. Communities were mobilised to form Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) {and children's groups}, and trained to function as effective child protection mechanisms at the village level. These ***VCPCs,*** *including the one in* ***Nuamunda, convene regularly to discuss and take up issues affecting children in the village****.*

In Nuamunda, the migration season was approaching in August 2023. As per usual children would miss many months of school, experience exhaustion from accompanying parents through their long working hours, older children working alongside their parents, and residing in unsafe makeshift housing. They would return weak, malnourished and unable to catch up in school having missed many months of class. It is not uncommon for children to have experienced abuse. Every year many children would drop out of school. Anticipating this cycle, the **Nuamunda VCPC decided to discuss *seasonal migration and the consequences of parents taking their children along***.

"...if we leave our child behind, who will provide them with food and care? We're traveling a considerable distance for work and will not be able to come back home frequently." –a parent



Parents were in agreement on the importance of schooling, but felt they had no option. They emphasized the need for a safe space where their child's needs for food, shelter, and safety would be met. **The VCPC identified these concerns as critical needs requiring immediate attention and solutions.**

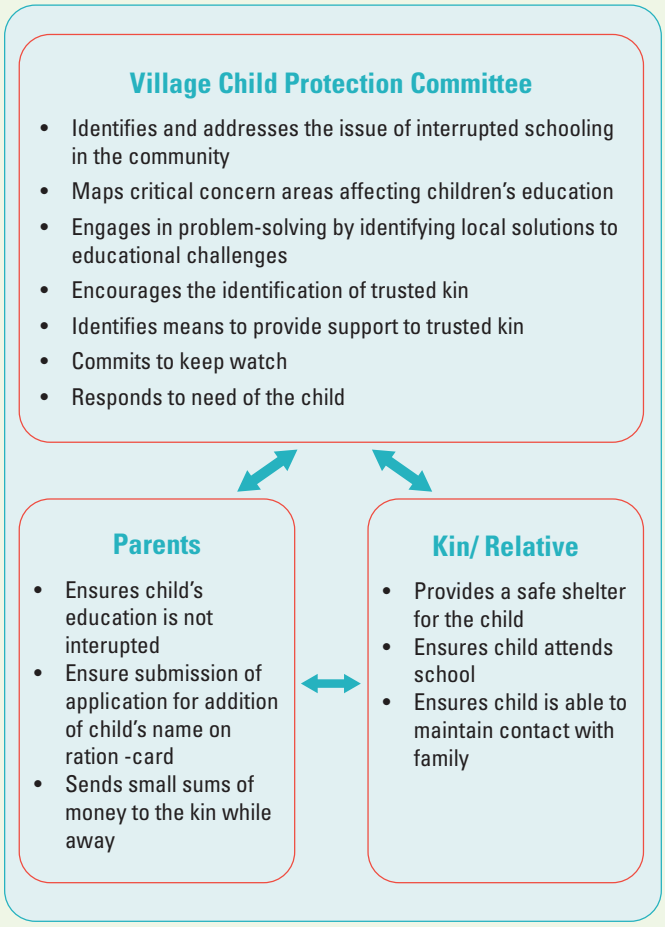
Over weeks of deliberations, home-visits conducted, the VCPC and parents began to identify solutions. Taking the issue of shelter, the VCPC **encouraged** migrating parents to **seek assistance from relatives/ kin** (they were comfortable with/ trusted) in the village to provide a home for the migration period. Recognizing that the relatives providing food and shelter needed support too, to cater to the needs of the additional mouths to feed, the **VCPC assisted the migrating parents in adding the children's names to their ration cards.** This ration card was left behind by the migrating parents so that relatives/kin are able to draw rations for the child/ren left behind in their care. Furthermore, the **VCPC committed to collectively oversee and ensure the child/ren's** continued school attendance throughout the migration period, typically lasting six months.

Hemant's parents feeling encouraged, arranged to leave him with his (paternal) uncle Sandeep. Gopal, a VCPC member took responsibility to check in on Hemant from time to time. Sandeep, had three adult children, and reared goats for a living. He took the responsibility of caring for Hemant. **During the visits Gopal made inquiries verified and updated the VCPC on a periodic basis.** Hemant was well-cared for, attending school regularly. His uncle did not engage in the cattle grazing work.

A few months later (January 2024), Hemant fractured his hand while playing cricket. Sandeep immediately informed both Hemant's father and Gopal. Gopal accompanied **Sandeep as he took Hemant to Tikrabara PHC,** where he received treatment for his injury. Concerned, Hemant's father returned to the village three days after the accident, and stayed for ten days to ensure Hemant's full recovery.

Each stakeholder—the parents, the VCPC, and trusted relatives like Sandeep—played a crucial and complementary role. Without the collective responsibility and effort of all involved, Hemant would have been unable to continue going to school, underscoring the importance of collaboration among these stakeholders, emphasizing that it truly takes a village to raise children.

While seasonal migration remains a persistent challenge, the Nuamunda VCPC's approach demonstrates how community-driven initiatives can make a tangible difference. Hemant's story inspires and shows that it is possible to create support systems for children such that they do not have to migrate with their families. Other alternatives such as seasonal hostels can also be implemented for children if community stakeholders are sensitized to support them.



The Nuamunda VCPC's model provides a blueprint for establishing a system where kin/relatives can be encouraged and supported to care for the family's children, while their parents migrate. If such efforts are promoted and scaled up, then children like Hemant will have a chance at breaking out of inter-generational exploitation.

Author - Leher is a child rights knowledge and practice organization. Our work reaches 10 districts across three states. Leher enables community led initiatives towards systems change—child protection, social protection, public services for children; helps communities rise to prevent, respond and connect with the system; addresses root causes—gather information, frame local solutions, dialogue, and become aware, leading to sustainable change in thoughts, attitude and practices. Leher's goal is to build strong local ecosystems where conversations and small local actions for children to snowball into acts of behaviour and systems change.

Footnotes

1. Social inclusion of internal migrants in India - UNESCO Digital Library
2. Nuamunda Village Population, Caste - Saintala Balangir, Odisha - Census India

Family Strengthening Interventions in Child Protection: Empowering Kinship Caregivers

Written by: **Ms Rashmi Taylor,** *Prerana*
Reviewed by: **Ms. Priti Patkar, Ms. Ruchika Chavan and Ms. Pooja Yadav,** *Prerana*

Aashiyana, Prerana's[1] flagship program, has operated in Maharashtra's Mumbai Suburban and Thane districts since June 2022, supporting over 700 children vulnerable to institutionalization. Focused on underserved communities, it intervenes when families seek institutionalization through the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) due to insufficient childcare support or when children are placed in institutions without adequate assessment. The program provides comprehensive support during restoration and reintegration phases. Its approach aims to ensure regular assessment of care plans for children in institutional care, facilitating timely and appropriate decisions for deinstitutionalization. Aashiyana's prioritises the psychological, emotional and developmental well- being of children from vulnerable communities, safeguarding them from harmful experiences like unnecessary institutionalisation. By collaborating with various child protection stakeholders, including the CWC, the Department of Women and Child Development, other duty bearers, non-state responsibility holders and communities, Aashiyana implements Gatekeeping[2] strategies to provide holistic support.

The Aashiyana project's Family Strengthening initiative employs strategies to empower families, aiming to establish stable, nurturing environments conducive to children's well-being. Recognizing that strong families are fundamental to healthy communities, this approach emphasizes crisis intervention and support for families in need. Family strengthening efforts prioritize the welfare of both children and caregivers, adopting a holistic approach that addresses economic stability, access to essential documents and social security schemes, education, healthcare, and social support networks. These efforts also include enhancing family relationships, parenting skills, parental resilience, life skills, and promoting emotional well-being. By equipping families with knowledge of child development and connecting them to support services, both within their communities and extended families, Aashiyana ensures the safety and protection of children while fostering a supportive environment for their growth and development.

During interventions, the project team encountered cases of abandoned or orphaned children, leaving their grandparents with caregiving duties. Despite facing age-related and financial challenges, these grandparents were committed to providing love, care, protection, and support for the children's development. With family strengthening interventions, these families showed remarkable resilience. This article showcases two cases where, through access to family-strengthening interventions, the children thrived in their extended family, preventing institutionalization.

Asmita's journey

In June 2023, Asmita's grandmother approached the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) requesting to admit Asmita, an eight-year-old girl and her 6-year-old brother in a Children's Home (CH) for proper care and uninterrupted education. She explained that Asmita's father struggled with alcoholism, leaving him unable to care for the children, and their mother had abandoned them three years ago. As a result, the paternal grandparents assumed responsibility for the children's well-being. As per section 30 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the CWC passed an order for Prerana to conduct a social investigation assessing the children's needs, safety, family circumstances, and necessity of institutionalisation.

The social workers conducted the social investigation visit and presented a report on the children's circumstances to the CWC. During the visit, it was known that the grandfather had previously worked as a truck driver, while the grandmother worked as a domestic worker. They had managed household expenses together, but after the grandfather's passing, the grandmother's income of Rs 6000 per month became insufficient to support the family. Struggling with the increasing financial burden, she contemplated placing the children in a Children's Home, despite wanting to protect them from the trauma of separation and neglect experienced with their parents. However, financial constraints hindered her ability to provide for their education and care. After reviewing the report, the CWC concluded that the children did not currently require institutional care and deemed the responsibility for their care to lie with the father and grandparents. Consequently, Prerana intervened through the Aashiyana project's Family Strengthening program to prevent institutionalization due to financial strain. **The Family Strengthening Plan aimed to ease the grandmother's financial burden through temporary financial aid, connecting her with government support programs, and providing emotional support. It involved consistent check-ins, assisting the**

grandmother in understanding her role, empowering her to make decisions in the best interest of the child, and fostering social connections.

To ease the financial burden, a monthly assistance of Rs 1100 for three months was provided. Simultaneously, the Aashiyana team monitored the children's academic progress to prevent drop out. Further, the team offered guidance on accessing sustained support through government schemes such as the Bal Sangopan Yojana (BSY)[3] - a state financial support scheme for vulnerable children and the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)[4] offering cashless medical treatment up to Rs 5 Lakhs annually in listed hospitals, along with the Widow Pension Scheme. The grandmother found relief and expressed interest in applying for the schemes to decrease their financial burdens. With the team's assistance, the family obtained their PM-JAY Card in February 2024, and Asmita's bank account was opened in March 2024. Efforts are underway to help the family obtain their income certificate, domicile certificate, and ration card required to apply for the BSY. However, the grandmother didn't qualify for the Widow Pension Scheme due to exceeding the maximum age criteria.

As social workers worked with the family, they observed resentment towards the mother from the grandmother and the children, often surfacing during family discussions and negatively affecting the children's emotional well-being. In addition to imparting parenting knowledge and child development understanding, the social workers engaged in discussions with the grandmother, emphasizing the importance of sensitivity and effective communication strategies. Through ongoing support and intervention, the goal is to foster a nurturing environment conducive to the children's overall development and well-being.

Prem's journey

Prem, a 14-year-old boy, was referred to Prerana by his school authorities due to concerns about his poor academic performance and his grandmother's ability to care for him and his 15-year-old sister. Living with their 63-year-old paternal grandmother since their father's passing when Prem was 2 years old, followed by their mother's abandonment. the siblings faced financial and emotional challenges. Financial and emotional challenges persisted despite their grandmother's efforts who worked as a local vegetable vendor, leading her to contemplate institutionalization due to Prem's academic struggles.

As a part of Prerana's interventions, the children were encouraged to attend curricular and co- curricular sessions at Aashiyana's Community Centre, tailored to their ages and ensuring their safety in their grandmothers' absence. Assessing the siblings' health and academic needs, the team discovered that despite being in the 10th standard, Prem struggled with basic tasks such as holding a pen, identifying alphabets or numbers, and participating in group activities. He also faced difficulties with speech, mobility, emotional regulation, and confidence. The team realized that his social reluctance stemmed from bullying related to his speech issues and academic performance, almost leading to a near dropout situation.

Recognizing that Prem's educational challenges differed from cases of general neglect in his school, where students were promoted despite poor literacy levels, the team identified the need for tailored intervention. It was felt that Prem was grappling with undiagnosed challenges leading to the child's apprehension with education. Following discussions with other teams as well as the grandmother, the team proposed IQ testing to gain deeper insights into Prem's challenges and develop a targeted intervention plan.

Prem's grandmother and sister understood the importance of IQ testing to develop a plan that would address his "developmental delays". However, the grandmother expressed concern about the associated expenses and loss of income during the hospital visits. Prerana extended monthly financial assistance of Rs. 1100 for five months to ease the burden. A Prerana social worker accompanied Prem, his grandmother, and sister for an assessment at the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disability (NIEPID). Following thorough assessments, Prem was diagnosed with a 25% intellectual disability categorized as Mild Disability, attributed to developmental delays due to trauma during birth and early-life neglect. The NIEPID team explained that Prem's psycho-emotional condition had worsened as he frequently witnessed violent interactions between his parents, creating a detrimental environment for his well-being. Moreover, the lack of early intervention and neglect resulted in subsequent issues such as difficulties in emotional regulation, a weak academic foundation, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and social anxiety.

A comprehensive trauma-informed care plan was developed, prioritizing educational support, emotional healing, and family education to cater to the child's needs, with his well-being and development as primary focuses. Specialized interventions were tailored to enhance Prem's self-esteem, confidence, and academic performance. Prem's journey highlights the impact of early intervention and collaborative efforts among social workers, school authorities, and healthcare professionals in fostering children's well-being despite adversities.

These cases highlight the importance of family strengthening interventions in supporting kinship caregivers to provide nurturing environments for

vulnerable children and families facing challenges like financial strain, emotional distress, and educational barriers. By addressing these issues and offering tailored support, program's like Prerana's Aashiyana play an important role in preventing unnecessary institutionalization of children and promoting family-based care. Additionally, the support aids in identifying and responding to early warning signs of child abuse, such as bullying, which could ham children's overall development and well- being. In Asmita's case, the intervention focused on alleviating the grandmother's financial burden while providing access to essential government support schemes. Monthly financial assistance and linkages to the BSY and PM-JAY, ensured the family had resources to meet the children's needs without resorting to institutional care. The emotional support from social workers addressed underlying family dynamics, like resentment towards absent parents, creating a nurturing environment for holistic child development. Similarly, in Prem's case, family strengthening interventions addressed his complex needs, including intellectual disability, emotional trauma, and academic struggles. Financial assistance enabled access to specialized assessments and interventions, leading to a comprehensive care plan. Personalised support addressed his cognitive, emotional, and educational needs, empowering Prem and his grandmother to navigate the challenges effectively. Overall, these cases highlight the impact of family strengthening interventions in empowering kinship caregivers and promoting children's well-being. Regular check-ins by social workers addressed pressing issues and unidentified needs impacting the well- being of the children were addressed before they overwhelmed the child and family. The families were also guided on parenting skills through sessions and discussions aimed at making the environment conducive for the children's development. By addressing underlying factors contributing to family instability and providing holistic support, these programs create safe, nurturing environments for children to thrive. Collaboration among stakeholders, including civil society organizations, government agencies, and community members, is crucial in safeguarding children's rights, ensuring conducive family environments and building parental/ kins resilience to manage stress and bounce back from challenges.

Footnotes

1. Prerana, a civil society organization established in Mumbai in 1986, focuses on breaking the inter-generational cycle of prostitution of children in the Red-Light Areas. Over the past 38 years, the organisations mission has expanded to safeguarding children belonging to other marginalised and underserved communities from harm, abuse and violence.
2. In the context of child protection, gatekeeping is the process of referring children and families to appropriate services or care arrangements with the aim of limiting inappropriate placement of children into alternative care such as institutional care, foster care, adoption etc., if not in the best interest of the child. Its primary goal is to facilitate the prevention of unnecessary separation of children from their biological or extended families. It also ensures that the principle of necessity, suitability and appropriateness is practised while making decisions regarding children who have lost parental care or are at risk of losing such support.
3. Bal Sangopan Scheme.pdf (maharashtra.gov.in)
4. Official Website Ayushman Arogya Mandir (nhp.gov.in)

...because families are important and the best place to thrive – Perspectives around Family Strengthening from CINI's Work in the Communities

– Mr. Subhadeep Adhikary,
Thematic Lead – Child Protection, CINI

– Dr. Maninder Kaur,
Partnership and Resource Mobilisation Officer, CINI

Sonia[1], 11, was living happily with her family in the state of Jharkhand, India, when suddenly, in May 2021, her father died from COVID-19 and her world turned upside down. Since her father was the sole breadwinner, after his loss, the family entered a financial crisis. With schools closed, Sonia's education was suddenly cut short, instead she primarily got involved in housework and helped grow vegetables. Her mother wasn't around much as she searching for work to support Sonia and her younger brother, Ajeet. This meant Sonia was alone for long periods, missing school and not eating properly while coming to terms with the traumatic loss of her father.

Sonia's mother was planning to place the child in a local Child Care Institution (CCI) and then migrate to another state in search of work. In the absence of urgent financial help, there was also a serious risk that Sonia's mother could have sent the child to work in another state to help feed the family. This situation could have pushed Sonia into risk situations stemming from trafficking, child marriage, child labour, or ending up in a CCI, never to see her family again.

However, the local community health worker soon identified Sonia as vulnerable and at risk of exploitation and abuse. CINI community volunteer worked with the family to identify possible ways to address the vulnerability factors and support the family. The family and the child were brought to the attention of the District Child Protection Officer (DCPO) and were linked to schemes like sponsorship, widow pension and MNREGA job card. The family was also supported with counselling support using CINI's Better Parenting toolkit. Discussions with school authorities and the School Management Committee (SMC) were initiated post-COVID-19 to send the child back to school. With continued family support and home visits, in a short span, Sonia is back on track and enjoys studying at her school. With the sponsorship and other social welfare schemes, her mother is now taking good care of her and fulfilling all her basic needs.

"Recognising that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding." – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children.

Families are important for a child's identity and evolving as a responsible citizen. Growing up in families helps the child to acquire the life skills necessary to venture into the social world. However, parents should be able to provide for their children holistically and meet their needs. Thus, there is no doubt about the importance of families and the need to strengthen families to support the children's overall well-being. It is important to de-code Family Strengthening as there cannot be a "one size fits all" solution, as the needs and requirements of all families and children are different. There has to be a tailored contextualised approach when it comes to Family Strengthening.

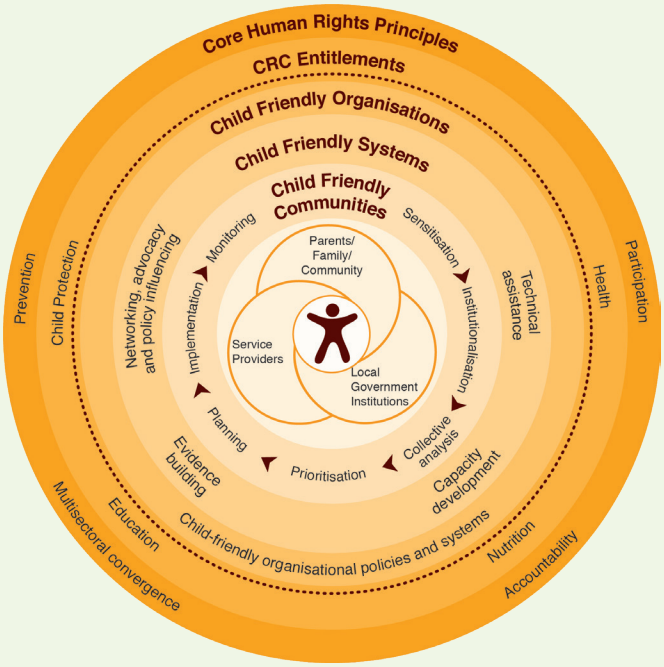
Family Strengthening is the endeavour to make families capable, resilient and sensitive to provide a safe milieu for development, and protection of their children and ensure love and care. Family Strengthening lends a perspective on how families can provide for their children in emotional, social, physical, cultural and financial aspects. At this juncture, it is worth noting that the concept of family is not limited to biological families but extended families or other forms of families. This is important to mention, as children who are re-integrated from the CCIs might not be restored to their biological parents but rather placed in alternative family settings in kinship care, foster care, extended families or others. Simultaneously, children might be placed in alternative family settings, to prevent their unnecessary family separation and institutionalisation. Family Strengthening works as a preventive as well as a curative approach. For children who are identified as vulnerable, Family Strengthening becomes a tool for preventing unnecessary family separation and works on parenting aspects. At the curative stage, Family Strengthening becomes the base of child reunification, making the restoration sustainable.

Over the years while working with the children in communities and families, we have learned that the lack of families' resilience to deal with different issues, leads to the institutionalisation of children sometimes just to meet their basic needs. Children with strong families and communities grow up to be responsible adults who in turn provide a safe and happy childhood to their children.

Family Strengthening is a complex and challenging endeavour, influenced by multiple stakeholders, particularly in terms of financial resilience and sustainability. Various duty-bearers play crucial roles in this process, and long-term benefits are significant, as a strengthened family supports intergenerational well-being for children, transcending temporal barriers, reducing reliance on institutional care, and most importantly, striving to provide a happy and secure childhood.

CINI's extensive work with children over 50 years has helped CINI to come up with the CINI method. The CINI method is a child-centric method which has evolved over 50 years of practice with deprived communities. The model presents an integrated approach for ensuring child rights encompassing primary duty-bearers in the government, community and families. The method talks about the accountability and importance of the

synergy for all stakeholders for ensuring child rights. It focuses on the EPHN (Education, Protection Health and Nutrition) services for addressing child rights issues holistically.



The preventive model of child protection adopted by CINI consists of three levels: (i) primary prevention; (ii) secondary prevention; and (iii) tertiary prevention. Primary prevention encompasses all the children in the community and ensures that basic amenities and services such as education, health, nutrition, and protection are available to them. The objective is to ensure access to these necessities to keep the child within the family safety net. Children who fall through this safety net and are at risk of being harmed or victimised are targeted at the secondary prevention level. Here the community, with support from the government child protection system, maps the vulnerable children and assesses their risk levels, as well as works towards eliminating the elements of risk or threat from the child's immediate surroundings. Despite all these efforts at the family as well as at the community levels, some children are victimised, and harmed and are staying in exploitative environments such as streets, railway stations, exploitative families or workplaces. These children often need specialised targeted services and often, unfortunately, end up in institutions. These children are being targeted at the tertiary prevention level. The objective here is to work towards the child's restoration with their family, or other type of community-level family-based care. As we move from primary to secondary and secondary to tertiary levels, the responses become more specialised. The preventive model strives to keep children within the primary prevention level and support children to move from tertiary to secondary and secondary to primary levels through partnership with community service providers.

Limitations towards Family Strengthening:

- Lack of Awareness and acceptance of the Family Strengthening process.
- Meeting the identified need with social security scheme linkage becomes difficult due to bottleneck and redtapism.
- Lack of willingness and proactiveness of the family towards participating in this process is a continuous challenge.
- The role of frontline workers and first-hand duty bearers is crucial in this process, but their lack of awareness, capacity and other engagement is always a concern.
- Through different policies and laws talk about the importance of family, but don't have any route map or SOP on Family Strengthening, which slows down the process and creates a gap in implementation.

Conclusion

The pressing issue of children facing vulnerability and exploitation due to family failures is a critical concern, particularly in regions like Jharkhand characterised by poverty and malnutrition. While Childcare Institutes (CCIs) offer protection, they often fall short in providing the holistic development and emotional stability that children require for a successful future. Family Strengthening emerges as a crucial solution, aiming to empower families to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children. By addressing the multifaceted needs of children, families and communities, Family Strengthening can prevent unnecessary institutionalisation and promote intergenerational well-being, thereby creating a happy and secure childhood. Despite obstacles such as limited awareness and slow bureaucratic processes, this approach, as exemplified by CINI's method, holds immense potential for transforming the lives of vulnerable children and families, both in preventive and curative approach, making it a promising avenue for child protection and development.

Footnotes

1. All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality

– **Dr. Vasundhra Om Prem,** *CEAC*
– **Chetna Desai**, *Child Protection Specialist , UNICEF Chhatisgarh*

Abstract

This article presents the findings on factors associated with disruption in foster care in the state of Chhattisgarh. The child protection literature suggests that placing vulnerable children in a stable family environment can mitigate the adverse impacts on children's mental health and over all well-being.

The study included 24 children aged 6-17 years in foster care in the state. It reviews the incidence and contributing factors for discontinuity and disruptions in foster care and its impact on children and foster family.

1. Background

This article presents findings from the study on factors associated with disruption in foster care. The vision of Mission Vatsalya is to secure a healthy and happy childhood, ensure opportunities to enable children to discover their full potential and promote family-based non-institutional care with emphasizes on stability.[1] Foster care means, providing a family-based care to a child who is unable to live with biological parents.[2]

Centre of Excellence in Alternative Care (CEAC),[3] is engaged in implementing foster care with the support of UNICEF and Department of Women and Child Development in 10 districts of the state of Chhattisgarh since 2022. The process of recruitment to placement takes months and every placement is a new experience. However, there are situations when there is breakdown and disruption become inevitable.

For the purpose of this study disruption is defined as the phenomenon when a foster placement is terminated and the child returns to Child Care Institution (CCI) or placed with another foster family

3. Purpose and objective

This study seeks to delve into the complexities surrounding disruptions within the foster care system, its impact on children and families and develop strategies to enhance placement stability and well-being of children.

CEAC observed 38% of disruption which is higher than the research for stability. To improve stability and continuity in foster placement it was felt necessary to study the reasons and root causes of disruption and work towards stabilizing the placements.

4. Methodology

Descriptive research methodology was adopted for this study which allows flexible approach and obtain first-hand data from the respondents. The following activities were carried out for the analysis:

- Physical and telephonic interview with foster parents
- Case history of child
- Experience of child while in foster care
- Comparison of successful placements against failed placements

The sample consists of placements that have survived the challenges and disrupted cases. Out of 24 placements, 9 children returned to CCIs. The risk factors identified from the literature review are organized by child, family, and system related characteristics.

5. Factors associated with disruption

There are multiple factors contributing to foster care placement discontinuity. Several studies and research have revealed the complexities of successful placement and combination of factors that lead to disruptions in placements.[4]

5.1 Child related factors

5.1.1 Behavioral challenges

A direct association is found between behavioral problems and disruption. Children with severe trauma history are reported to have difficulty in developing attachments with foster families.[5] The reported behaviour which triggered displacement were lying and manipulation, defiance, aggression, stealing, hyperactivity and threat of running away. Apparently 30% of disruption was due to behavioural issues.

5.1.2 Disrupted attachment history

Children residing in CCIs have attachment[6] disorder and difficulty in stress regulation, impacting self-control, coping skills and emotions. Open hostility, defiance and controlling other are their coping skills[7]. The more foster parents attempted to offer comfort and care, the more distrustful and angry they became, resulting in disruption.

5.1.3 Sibling placements

The finding is mixed regarding whether siblings be placed together is a risk or protective factor, due to nuances of sibling relationships and biological and extended family dynamics. The sibling disruption of 50% was surprising as compared to the findings of Oosterman et.al. (2007) which showed that placements with siblings had less breakdown.[8]

5.1.4 Age at placement

Though many researchers suggest that stability in older children is a challenge as compared to young children.[9] However, the success of stability was higher in older children in Chhattisgarh when compared with many studies that suggest breakdown when older children are placed.

5.2 Parent related factors

5.2.1 High or unrealistic expectations

Foster family's high expectation from child without understanding the challenges and trauma that the child has encountered, has led to 22% disruptions. The idealized expectations by foster families and imposing unrealistic expectations on their progress made situation difficult for the child.

5.2.2 Caregiver Commitment

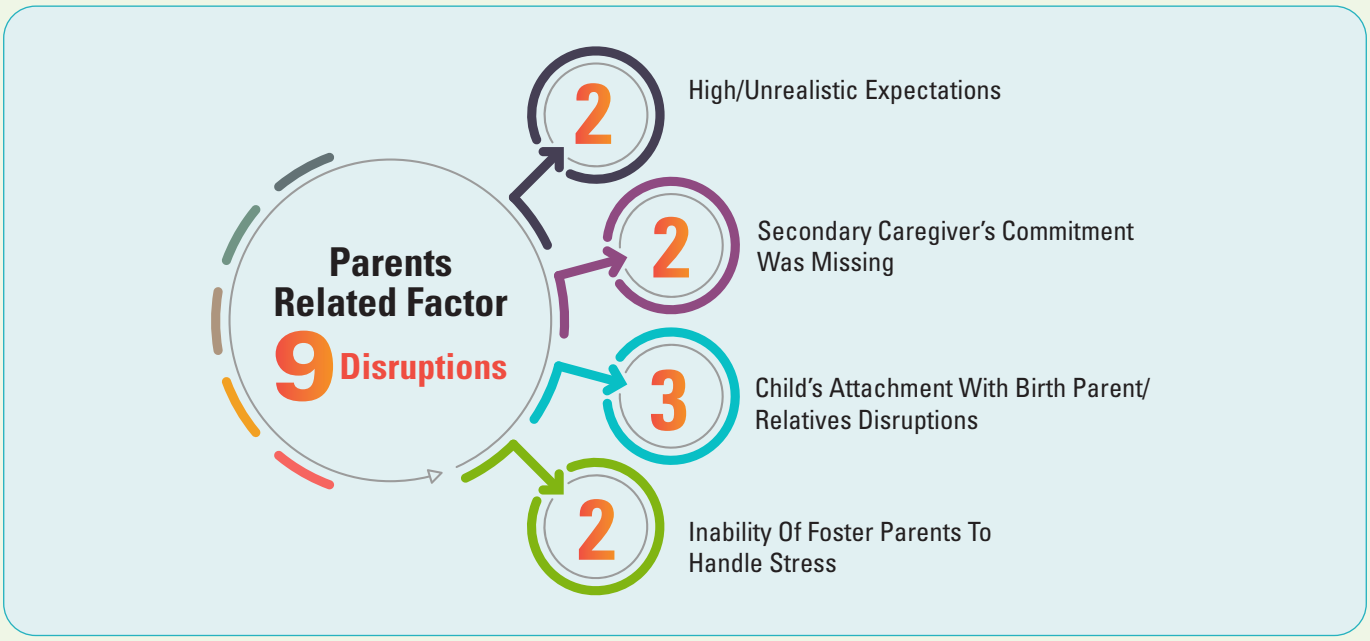
The commitment of both the caregivers, has huge influence in the success of foster care. It was observed that in 22% of foster families, the whole burden of fostering came down to the foster mother, which becomes overwhelming, resulting in disruption. Wherever, two parents are not involved in fostering, the placement has resulted in disruption.

5.2.3 Continued attachment of child with birth parents or relatives

The strong and continued attachment with relatives or memories of biological parents has posed a strong risk of disruption. The attachment, relationship and memories of biological parents have led to disruption in 30% of cases. This study corroborates with Oosterman's findings that children in foster care are less likely to experience disruption when quality contact with family members is combined with professional intervention, promoting successful placements, stability, and reunification.

5.2.4 Caregivers inability to handle stress

The inability of parents to understand the behaviours exhibited by foster child caused significant stress, leading them to quit from the role of foster parents. Foster families are underequipped to deal with stress which comes into their lives due to behavioural issues or management of time or trying to be perfect etc.



5.3 System related Factors

5.3.1 Lack of training to foster families

It was observed, one-day orientation was insufficient to equip foster family with skills necessary to foster children who come from different backgrounds and trauma baggage. Foster Family didn't have knowledge of trauma informed care which plays important role in establishing attachments and long-lasting relations.

5.3.2 Information sharing

Not sharing enough information about child was identified as one of the risk factors in stability. Due to fear of negative consequences, many children restrain from disclosing the actual information to CCI staff/counsellors, leading to absence of background information in the case files and a situation of mistrust and misinformation between foster family and stakeholders led to disruption in 33% of cases.

5.3.3 Parent child matching

The analysis indicated that the longer the time given to foster family and child to understand, better was the result. Inclusion and a sense of belonging plays an important role in permanency. Participation of child in the whole process of matching influences the

adjustment and well-being of foster children. On the contrary, too much indulgence of child or biological parents in the process also leads to disruption. A balance needs to be maintained by social workers to respect child, biological parents and foster families.

5.3.4 Technical and Ongoing support

This finding supports the results of Oosterman that placements with social worker support and training were less likely to disrupt.[10] Answering the distress call of foster family and providing multidimensional support and solutions had better outcomes.[11] Increasing family access to resources such as support groups or counselling or mental health therapists have proved to increase the chances of stability.[12]

6. Conclusion

The disruption rate of 38% in this study seems high at first glance, however, it's important to note that foster care is still novice in India. Behavioural issues often stem from a combination of individual challenges and past traumas which negatively clouds the foster care environment. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that prioritizes emotional support and effective communication. Team parenting is essential for fostering positive relationships and promoting the well-being of children in foster care.

Fostering a child comes with myriad of challenges for foster parents like managing behavioural issues, educational concerns, navigating trust and communication issues, and fostering emotional connection and integration within the family. Effectively strengthening the child protection system and mandatory training of the foster parents are crucial to assist foster parents in addressing these challenges and providing a nurturing environment to foster children. Read the complete article here: https://iacn.in/images/resources/e93acea33d7023fb73e1afefacf448eb.pdf

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Events and Announcements

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

Care Conversations: ICB Podcast

– Dr. Gurneet Kaur Kalra,
Manager, Research and Advocacy ,Udayan Care

With a major shift taking place nationally and globally on moving away from institutional care towards family and family based care, it is imperative to create knowledge that can be widely and creatively shared with the larger world. On the jubilant occasion of 10 years engagement, Journal titled 'Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond', a niche journal on family strengthening and alternative care, hosted 'Care Conversations: ICB Podcast', a series of five podcasts. It features internationally distinguished personalities who possess remarkable expertise and experience in the fields of family strengthening and alternative care and have been associated with the journal in various capacities including authors, peer reviewers, and interviewees. The experts included, Dr. Monisha Nayar Akhtar, Mr. Niels Peter Rygaard, Mr. Martin Punaks, Mr. Leon Fulcher, and Dr. Delia Pop.

This series aims to serve as a platform to listen to the insights and wisdom of the subject experts that can empower different stakeholders, including policy-makers, practitioners, and academicians working in this field.

In the first episode of the ICB journal's podcast series, Dr. Kiran Modi, Founder and Managing Trustee, Udayan Care, converses with Dr. Monisha Nayar Akhtar, who is a licensed child, adolescent, and adult psychotherapist and Psychoanalyst located in the Greater Philadelphia Area with over 30 years of experience. She is also the Editor in Chief of the Journal, Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond. Dr Akhtar highlights the importance of evidence generation with ICB journal's example, which aims at addressing the multifaceted needs of children and adolescents in care, and provides insights into the trauma and attachment issues along with sharing some evidence-based interventions that have shown promising results in this field.

The second podcast episode embarks on an enlightening voyage through the remarkable contributions of Niels Peter Rygaard, a licensed Danish-American child psychologist and the CEO of the non-profit organization; Fair Start Foundation. His journey and unwavering commitment to enhancing the lives of abandoned children and their caregivers have garnered global acclaim and prestigious accolades. Mr. Rygaard in conversation with Ms. Leena Prasad, Associate Director,

Udayan Care, shares his experiences from worldwide travels studying orphanages and foster systems along with sharing tips on how we can make a positive impact in our communities.

In the third episode, the conversation with Mr. Martin Punaks, a child rights specialist with over twenty years of experience working in diverse settings from grassroots social movements to NGOs and UN agencies, revolves around the evolution of his ground-breaking campaign against orphanage trafficking and voluntourism. The discussion also covers shaping of his views on children's rights through his experiences in South Asia and East Africa, the impactful advocacy campaigns and the systemic changes for global child welfare.

The fourth episode of the Care Conversations series, embarks on yet another captivating journey with Mr. Leon Fulcher, PhD, an international consultant renowned for his extensive experience spanning over forty years in the fields of social work and child and youth care. Mr. Fulcher in conversation with Dr. Modi enlightens with many gaps that need to be addressed to attain long-term holistic development of children in alternative care. He delves on the need for a systemic action in order to witness a long lasting visible change with more focus on bringing change on the grassroots to introducing credible policy reforms, and delving into the unique aspects of alternative care with an aim to address the issues of children without parental care and those at risk of separation.

In the fifth episode of the podcast series, Ms. Leena Prasad, explores the inspiring journey of Dr Delia Pop, Director of Tanya's Dream Fund and a seasoned child protection professional with over two decades of international experience across more than 30 countries. She brings to the discussion a wealth of knowledge and expertise in developing advocacy strategies and fostering sustainable development for children and families in adversity. She also shares instrumental information in catalyzing systemic change and advocating for children's rights and care reform globally.

Care Conversations: ICB Podcast ...*continued*

Each podcast episode has been a testament to the power of collaboration, advocacy, and dedication in shaping a brighter future for vulnerable children worldwide. With this series of podcasts, 'Care Conversations', the aim is to carry forward the spirit of compassion and advocacy, ensuring that every child's voice is heard and their rights are upheld. Together, let's continue to champion the cause of child welfare and strive towards a world where every child can thrive. As we continue to dive deeper into the realms of Care Conversations, we're eager to hear from you! Your insights, opinions, and questions are what make this podcast truly dynamic and engaging.

Whether you've been tuning in from the beginning or just discovered us, we value your perspective. We can't wait to hear from you and continue this enriching dialogue together.

Every child deserves a voice. Let's amplify their stories and advocate for their rights.

Tune into 'Care Conversations: ICB Podcast', and learn the different ways to create impact.

https://open.spotify.com/show/2jfvQsi9PkXJIYRbKswIuh

Care Collective Initiated | Towards a Family for Every Child in Our Lifetime

– Upasana Upadhyaya
Assistant Manager- Program Communication
Miracle Foundation India

Miracle Foundation India's endeavors are focused on devising a long-term, scalable, sustainable model of change owned by the state governments, dedicated towards keeping children safe, preventing unnecessary separation of children from their families, and facilitating their safe and permanent reintegration with families, to empower children and youth to realize their fullest potential and lead fulfilling lives.

An innovative idea to make that happen is to have seasoned local organizations (Care Collective: Centers for Excellence) - identified in consultation with the state government departments and capacitated by Miracle Foundation India - play the distinctive role of Family Strengthening (FS) and F-BAC know-how, training and mentoring hub to be locally available for scaling and sustainably supporting the districts' child protection systems towards operationalizing Government of India's Mission Vatsalya guidelines.

In January 2024, Miracle Foundation India launched the Care Collective: Centres for Excellence with five partner organizations, namely Aarambh in Madhya Pradesh; Cornerstone Children's Home in Tamil Nadu; and Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi, New Vision and Vipla Foundation in Maharashtra. Through comprehensive training, mentoring and strategic interventions, the Care Collective: Centers for Excellence will be facilitated to gear up to become the champion of family-based care.

About the Author

Ms. Upasana Upadhaya is part of Miracle Foundation India, working as a Program Communications professional. With a background in Communications & Development. She brings valuable expertise and passion to her role inspiring , engaging & driving real change in the lives of those she serves.

Second Edition of Leadership Dialogue

– Upasana Upadhyaya
Assistant Manager- Program Communication
Miracle Foundation India

Miracle Foundation India initiated holding 'Leadership Dialogues' aimed towards shaping conversations around Family Strengthening (FS) and Family- Based Alternative Care (F-BAC), while acknowledging, recognizing and celebrating the invaluable contributions of the child protection workforce in the realm of child care and protection. We have successfully organized two such impactful dialogues so far!

Our inaugural dialogue, held on October 26, 2023, focused on best practices in the realm of prevention and gatekeeping at the level of CWCs, besides deliberating on the role of community in ensuring children stay with families.

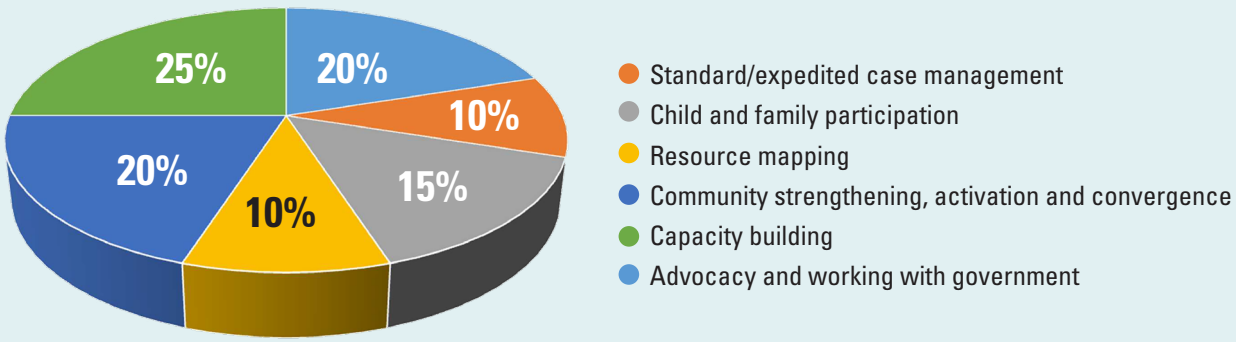
The second Leadership Dialogue, organized on February 15, 2024, centered on the role of local governance bodies in prevention and gatekeeping. The panel comprised Pankaj Pandey, National Program Officer, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India; Smita Sen, Founder and Executive Director, Rupantaran Foundation; and N. Riyaz Ahamed Basha, District Child Protection Officer, Social Defence Department, Tamil Nadu Government.

Question: There is a notable emphasis on convergence between different departments under Mission Vatsalya. Could you elaborate on this approach and its impact on addressing child protection issues?

Answer: Mission Vatsalya emphasizes the necessity for collaboration among various departments to address child-related issues comprehensively. Apart from the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), all departments are urged to provide support for children, be it preventive measures or intervention. This collaborative approach extends to the functioning of the Child Helpline within the district, where Child Helpline workers play an active role.

Convergence is not limited to addressing issues reactively; it also encompasses preventive measures. Therefore, engaging all departments is essential. For instance, when dealing with issues such as child marriage, collaboration with the police department becomes crucial. Effective collaboration ensures a holistic approach to child welfare, where each department contributes its expertise and resources towards safeguarding children's rights and well-being.

Which of the following themes would you like to explore for the next edition of the Leadership Dialogues?



For more information, the recording of the second edition can be found here.

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Ms. Upasana Upadhaya is part of Miracle Foundation India, working as a Program Communications professional. With a background in Communications & Development. She brings valuable expertise and passion to her role inspiring , engaging & driving real change in the lives of those she serves.

– **Manoranjan Dash,** *CRS*
– **Sandhya Mishra,** *Miracle Foundation India*

Webinar on Family Strengthening Framework: Validation and Way forward

Changing the Way We Care India initiative in consultation with Family Strengthening Working Group, Child Protection Officials and Civil Society Practitioners have been working to bring a contextualized Family Strengthening Framework and Guidance to support practitioner understanding and capacity to apply a practical approach in Indian context. The effort to build a framework of this kind is to sustain the process and momentum of family strengthening to support the care reform movement in India. On 20th March 2024, Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC) - India and India Alternative Care Network (IACN) came together to jointly organize a validation workshop on the draft family strengthening framework.

79 of 108 registered people including IACN members, UNICEF' child protection specialist, Donor representatives, Alternative Care and Care Reform Practitioners, Government Child Protection Officials and Young people with care experience, across 12 states and 33 organizations contributed to the virtual validation. Participants viewed the pre-reading materials "Strengthening Families in India – BRIEF" as a useful resource https://bit.ly/3ynEsY1 and was helpful for preparing their participation.

While Sandhya Mishra, Co-convener, IACN did set up the context and objective of the virtual validation, G. Senthil Kumar, Executive Director- CRS delivered the keynote followed by the conversation between Beth Bradford, Global Care reform expert, and Vandana Kandhari, UNICEF-India to draw the larger context of family strengthening in respect to national policy ecosystem and regional programmatic dynamics in India. The webinar CTWWC Strengthening Families Workshop unpacked the salient features of the family strengthening framework for building the perspective followed by breakout discussions to collage the feedback and suggestion on the usefulness and improvement of the Framework facilitated by Sandhya Mishra, IACN, Prabhat Kumar, UNICEF, William Gali, Family for Every Child, and

Participant's Feedback (Total#24)

- **92%** people found the Strengthening Families in Inda-BRIEF a useful prereading resource.
- **67%** people experienced the virtual design and format is very effective.
- **79%** people have come across any information in the workshop that would be useful in their work.
- **Top 3 useful/interesting** sessions are FS Framework Presentation followed by Breakout reflection and fireside chat.
- **Three tiers and Entry point** for family strengthening found as very useful elements.
- The framework itself is well articulated and **for the first time** we have seen it being presented in a paper.
- Inputs were very vibrant and **can be applied in the field**. The framework is useful for assessing and planning the family strengthening initiatives.
- It would be helpful to have a **guidance and training** to implement the framework and good to develop a **M&E framework** for this family strengthening framework.
- Appreciated the detailing of **triangular model of prevention** where case management, follow up etc are well explained.
- More reflections sharing on peer experience related to topic, may be as part of pre-session task or during the session.

Manoranjan Dash, CTWWC. Participants found the discussions engaging and provided post event feedback including the 4 pager pre read and 3 tier frameworks and developing the MEL framework and training materials were the key highlights in the feedback.

Going forward CTWWC is working on incorporating the feedback and suggestions received from the participants during and after the virtual validation to strengthen the Framework. Further CTWWC and IACN will bring the comprehensive framework for the use of organisations and practitioners through featuring it in the IACN webpage; and most potential and critical elements of the framework will be elaborate in small article series and be published in IACN Newsletter. The recording of the webinar is available here for your reference.

India Alternative Care Network (IACN)

India Alternative Care Network (IACN) hosted a Webinar on new "Model Foster Care Guidelines, 2024 on 30th May 2024. The webinar received an overwhelming registration of 279 participants and around 190 attendees across the country joined the webinar, which included Government officials, academics and practitioners, NGOs and CSOs partners.

Recently, the Ministry of women and Child Development, Government of India, issued the new "Model Foster Care Guidelines, 2024. The new guidelines introduced several new provisions such as "child with no visitation, child having unfit guardians, foster adoption, etc. and have simplified several other provisions to align with the amended JJ Act and rules. The webinar was organized with the objective to build understanding on the new provisions of the guidelines, discuss challenges in implementation and to cover the related themes.

Dr. Jaganaath Pati who heads a division of an autonomous body (CARA) of the Ministry of Women & Child Development as Director and Mr. Satyajeet Mazumdar, Director - Advocacy at Catalysts for Social Action (CSA) joined as the panelist. The panel discussion was moderated by Dr. Vasundhra Om Prem, Founder and Managing Director of Centre of Excellence in Alternative care, India (CEAC).

The discussion highlighted the significance of digitalization and promoting best practices in foster care, with an emphasis on replicating the seamless procedure for adoption. The panelists also discussed challenges in implementing the guidelines, particularly the lack of awareness and decision-making capacity among Child Welfare Committees, and the need for increased involvement from CSOs and identification of extended family members as potential foster parents. The panelists agreed on the necessity of extensive awareness and due diligence in evaluating potential foster parents.

Additionally, the panelists discussed strategies to prepare foster parents for avoiding disruptions and providing better care for children, especially those with special needs. Mr. Satyajeet Mazumdar emphasized the importance of assessing a family's capability and intention to care for a child who has faced trauma, as well as providing ongoing support and training for the foster parents. Dr. Jaganaath Pati highlighted the need to create a favourable atmosphere in the country to encourage more parents to adopt or foster special needs children.

To watch the full video of the webinar click on the following link - https://youtu.be/fmo-x0n1x-Q