Hello,

Dear Colleagues,

In this edition of IACN Quarterly, we bring you resources that highlight COVID-19 and its impact on children in alternative care and bring attention to the educational needs of children in alternative care. In the perspectives section, we share a piece titled, group foster care: An army of child care institutions or a multitude of large families? Please check out the events and announcements section for the recordings of the webinar organised by IACN, and details on BICON, a conference on the rights of children and young people in alternative care in Asia, scheduled in December.

Sincerly,
IACN Secretariat

Updates from the Field

Learnings and experience shared by our fellow members

Academic Support to Children During COVID-19 Pandemic: CINI's Initiative to Address Vulnerabilities by Strengthening Gatekeeping Mechanism | **Anita Sinha and Abhijit Chanda, CINI**

Children Orphaned and Semi-Orphaned due to COVID-19: CINI's Response | **Lopamudra Mullick, CINI**

Yuva Shakti Sangathan: After Care Youth as Agents of Change | **Udayan Care**

Strengthening Family-Based Alternative Care with Focus on Aftercare in Bihar Hausla Stitching Centre: An Udayan Care Initiative Supported by Social Welfare Department Bihar and UNICEF Bihar | **Udayan Care**

Perspectives

Commentary, analysis and insights

Group Foster Care - An Army of Small Child Care Institutions or A Multitude of Large Families? | By Ian Forber-Pratt,
Director of Global Advocacy, Children's Emergency Relief International

Events and Announcements

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

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

Biennial International Conference on Alternative Care in Asia, 8 Nov 2021- 9 Nov 2021: Register now

Webinar | Learning Session on Kinship Care | **IACN**

Webinar | Preventing Separation and Strengthening Communities | **IACN**

UNICEF/UN0380036/PANJWANI

Knowledge Resource Updates

UNSPLASH /YOGENDRA-SINGH

Suo Moto Writ Petition (civil) No. 4 of 2020 in Re: Contagion of COVID-19 Virus in Child Protection Homes

https://bit.ly/3fn1vT

UNICEF/UN0439948/BORO

Suo Moto Writ Petition (civil) No. 4 of 2020 in Re: Contagion of COVID-19 Virus in Child Protection Homes

https://bit.ly/2ZXsfbq

UNICEF/UN0389261/PANJWANI

Support Care Leavers to have Better Outcomes in Life: Submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, towards DGD 2021

https://bit.ly/3nU4OI4

UNICEF/UNI347192/SINGH

Care and the COVID-19 Challenge: The Missing Link in the Fulfilment of Educational Needs of Children and Young Persons Living in Alternative Care

https://bit.ly/3mNVzdb

UNICEF/UN0378071/PANJWANI

COVID, Its Impact on the Mental Health of Caregivers in Childcare Institutions of South Asian Countries and their Coping Techniques

https://bit.ly/2ZUUyrp

UNICEF/UN0439818/BORO

A Critical Analysis of the Recent Developments in Alternative Care Space Across South Asia Amidst the COVID-19 Crisis

https://bit.ly/3A2Djkm

UNICEF/UN0378058/PANJWANI

Educational Policy and Practice that Promote Care Reform

https://bit.ly/3042Ay6

UNICEF/UN0382149/SINGH

For every child, a family

Resources

Some key additions to our fast growing resource data base

Suo Moto Writ Petition (civil) No. 4 of 2020 in Re: Contagion of COVID-19 Virus in Child Protection Homes

By The Supreme Court of India

> Suo Moto Writ Petition (civil) No. 4 of 2020 in Re: Contagion of COVID-19 Virus in Child Protection Homes
>
> **https://bit.ly/3EI2ZVq**

In this order, the Supreme Court passed directions to States/UTs for the measures to be taken for children who have lost parent(s) to COVID-19 to ensure their care and well-being. The court also authorised the Amicus Curiae to collect information on the status of schemes and relief measures announced by States/UTs for children who have lost parent(s) to COVID-19.

UNSPLASH /YOGENDRA-SINGH

Suo Moto Writ Petition (civil) No. 4 of 2020 in Re: Contagion of COVID-19 Virus in Child Protection Homes

By The Supreme Court of India

> Suo Moto Writ Petition (civil) No. 4 of 2020 in Re: Contagion of COVID-19 Virus in Child Protection Homes
>
> **https://bit.ly/2ZXsfbq**

The Supreme Court observed that the information submitted by States/UTs on the status of schemes and relief measures announced for children who have lost parent(s) to COVID-19 is not clear. The court directed the States/UTs to upload the data of children who have lost a parent after March 2020 either to COVID-19 or otherwise without any delay. Further directions regarding the identification of the affected children and the steps to be taken by the concerned authorities have been given in this order.

Support Care Leavers to Have Better Outcomes in Life: Submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, towards DGD 2021

By IACN, MAD, Udayan Care and CLAN

> Support Care Leavers to Have Better Outcomes in Life: Submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, towards DGD 2021
>
> **https://bit.ly/3nU4OI4**

Children with experience of institutionalisation struggle during their transition to independent living because of the adverse effects of institutionalisation and the lack of social, emotional, and financial support systems necessary for a safe transition. They also often lack the safety net and buffer a supportive family offers, which puts them at a high risk of falling back into the vicious cycle of poverty. This submission is on behalf of young persons with experience of care from India. The inputs are based on the discussions in a webinar with over 65 care leavers from India. The event titled "What do care leavers in India want to have better outcomes in life?" was held on June 5, 2021. It was co-facilitated by Care Leavers Association and Network (CLAN), India Alternative Care Network (IACN), Make a Difference (MAD), Udayan Care and supported by UNICEF. Care leavers were divided into five groups. The discussions in groups centred on different aspects of improving care for care leavers, i.e., - understanding care for children and caregivers, meaningful participation of children, strengthening aftercare practice, challenges faced by care leavers, the impact of COVID on care leavers and the support they want and their recommendations

UNICEF/UN0389261/PANJWANI

Care and the COVID-19 Challenge: The Missing Link in the Fulfilment of Educational needs of Children and Young Persons Living in Alternative Care

Kiran Modi, Leena Prasad and Gurneet Kalra

This paper, published in the Indian Journal of School Health and Wellbeing, highlights the importance of addressing and gearing the overall child protection system along with the education system of India thereby providing recommendations and highlighting the importance of training and sensitizing teachers and carer staff in schools in handling children without parental care. The paper highlights the existing gaps in the rights to education of children in vulnerable groups, challenges faced by them with respect to mental health issues, emotional distress, and trauma which consequently impacted their academic performance. It also highlights the importance of widening the understanding of childhood trauma, and developing a clear policy to provide guidance about safeguarding children at large, in particular children coming from institutions.

COVID, Its Impact on the Mental Health of Caregivers in Childcare Institutions of South Asian Countries and Their Coping Techniques

By Kiran Modi, Gurneet Kalra, Leena Prasad and Najeebullah Babrakzai

This paper documents the mental health status of caregivers (residential staff staying with children), in residential care spaces in the COVID times and to determine how the new stresses impacted them and the coping patterns they acquired in current situation; across different countries of South Asia, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This exploratory rapid assessment project aimed to reach out to the registered childcare homes/ institutions, across the South Asian region, with the help of different NGOs, as well as Government mechanisms. The data was collected through purposive sampling and analyzed quantitatively where the sample included the selected caregivers of participating CCIs across these nations. This study aimed to synthesize the responses of caregivers across the region; develop an analysis, which may help authorities to rethink, reform and strengthen the current practices, in order to develop approach-centered strategies for improving the well-being of caregivers as this has a direct bearing on the well-being of children in their care.

UNICEF/UN0378071/PANJWANI

A Critical Analysis of the Recent Developments in Alternative Care Space Across South Asia Amidst the COVID-19 Crisis

By Kiran Modi, Gurneet Kalra, Leena Prasad, Rajeshwari Narsimha and Jyoti Singh

This paper focuses on the recent developments in policies and arrangements in the alternative care space in the South Asian countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It also highlights the impact of COVID-19 on alternative care space in South Asian countries, its effect on the children living in alternative care, and the measures taken by respective governments in these countries to support them

during the pandemic. It states that an assessment of the recent developments in the policies related to alternative care space in different countries is crucial for understanding the problems faced when dealing with children in institutional care as well as the impact on the de-institutionalisation process due to COVID-19. It is a secondary review of desk research on such developments to understand the possible post-COVID-19 impacts on functionary and regulatory changes in alternative care systems for 'Children without Parental Care' in the South Asian region.

UNICEF/UN0439818/BORO

Educational Policy and Practice that Promote Care Reform

By Miracle Foundation ▼

Educational Policy and Practice that Promote Care Reform
https://bit.ly/3042Ay6

This article establishes an evidence-based link between a child's right to education and the right to family. Miracle Foundation works to ensure that every child has an opportunity to grow up in a family, to become a healthy, happy, educated, income-producing person and experience a true sense of belonging. By leveraging its proprietary Thrive Scale™ methodology, the organization facilitates transitioning children from CCIs back with family or family-based - alternative care options, ensuring fulfilment of children's rights right where they are in the communities. More than 250 children were sent back home from some of Miracle's partner CCIs during the

first wave of the pandemic. Miracle Foundation had been working to build the capacity of its CCI partners on integrated case management, particularly coining the expedited case management to effect safe and permanent reintegration of children during the emergency crisis situation like the pandemic. Within this larger context of upholding a child's overall right to family, Miracle Foundation is committed to ensuring that there is no disruption in the educational journey of the child as they walk the reintegration path. The paper brings out how in keeping with its belief, and upholding the spirit of the order of the Supreme Court of India, to cater to the educational needs of children who have been restored with families, Miracle Foundation undertook a mix of hybrid/blended educational interventions. The paper highlights Miracle's learnings, insights, and challenges in this journey.

UNICEF/UN0378058/PANJWANI

Updates from the field

Academic Support to Children During COVID-19 Pandemic: CINI's Initiative to Address Vulnerabilities by Strengthening Gatekeeping Mechanism

Anita Sinha and Abhijit Chanda
CINI

Background and Context

COVID-19 has an unprecedented impact on school education. It has affected many children across states, class, caste, gender and region. The shutting down of schools and the decision to shift traditional classrooms to digital platforms have increased learning inequality among children but also pushed many children out of school due to the digital divide. Impact of closure of schools due to current surge in the COVID-19 pandemic spread has been visualised as the long-term impact on learning, psycho-social behaviour and continuation of education of children.

Child in Need Institute (CINI) works closely with the government by investing in system strengthening and making the system more responsible. During the second surge of the pandemic, Mission Director, National Health Mission, Jharkhand urged Civil Society Organizations functional in the State (through its letter - Reference number 9/RCH-52/2020-1260 (MD), dated 04.05.2021) regarding collaboration with Government for providing necessary support to the people in need during the crisis. CINI extended many COVID relief support to the government and also decided to support communities in addressing such issues that may not have an immediate impact on children but can increase their vulnerabilities and may lead to family separation.

The long-term impact of school closure on the education of children, especially of marginalised children, was visualised as one of the significant post COVID challenges that may affect many development indicators of the State. So, when things started moving towards normal, CINI decided to offer necessary support to the community to continue education for school-going children. Creative engagement of children too was taken into consideration for their mental and emotional wellbeing. CINI planned to offer this support in three priority districts of Jharkhand, namely, Khunti, Simdega and Ranchi.

Problem statement

Child in Need Institute (CINI), in partnership with Hope and Homes for Children, is working towards addressing the adverse situation arising out of the current COVID-19 pandemic. It envisages improving behaviour and practices to mitigate the risk of being infected by COVID-19 and linking marginalised communities, in the targeted districts, to the services and information within the formal health systems (that the government has already established) when they are infected.

COVID-19 pandemic has altered the lifestyle of people without differentiating. It has impacted many lives, and it took some time for everyone to adopt the new normal. Its impact resulted in the closure of schools and other educational institutions for more than 18 months.

During the closure of educational institutes, online education emerged as an alternative, but it reinforces the digital divide, learning inequality, gender disparity in education etc. Jharkhand, with limited access to smartphones among rural communities, grappled with the education of children during the lockdown. Even for families with access to smartphones, regular attendance of children in online classes was a challenge. Children had difficulty accessing online study materials due to limited data availability. Families with more than one

child found it difficult to ensure the regular attendance of all children in online classes. As a result, many children and their families were found struggling to access necessary academic support. Moreover, the children residing in the slums and the rural areas were seen losing their interest in studies and indulgence in other activities like substance misuse, eve-teasing, theft etc. Many of them reported abuse and violence too. Many girls said that their parents were forcing them to get married or are overburdened by the household chores. Children became vulnerable to child labour, child marriage, trafficking, school-drop out and other child protection risks.

Programmatic Approach- Academic Support to the School Going Children

The field team initiated a discussion with the communities, adolescent groups, and parents in selected CINI intervention villages/slums to understand the issues and challenges to education. The interest shown by children and parents during those interactions motivated us to move forward, and with support from some community members, the concern for children's education was discussed during Gram Sabha. Gram Sabha affirmatively accepted the community's concern and approached CINI to help their children continue their studies.

CINI engaged 11 academic educators for 15 villages/ slums and built their capacities on assessing child academic level, facilitating joyful learning, identifying class appropriate gaps and their bridging etc. The capacitated team started their work in respective villages, and after initial rapport building, the mapping of children and their needs were undertaken with community leaders/ frontline workers. The community offered an appropriate space where CINI was supported with some basic materials such as writing boards, chalks, duster, Tarpaulin etc., for facilitating sessions.

The class appropriate categorising of children was done into four groups from standard 1st to 10th (Primary,

Middle, and Secondary and Higher Secondary). Their session plans are being prepared and are being taught regularly in coordination with the community leaders and parents. Currently, this initiative is benefiting 1270 children through 15 learning centres.

"CINI has introduced an attendance and performance tracking system for children using open data platform, KoboCollect."

CINI has introduced an attendance and performance tracking system for children using open data platform, KoboCollect. The educators are updating the attendance and sessions regularly and the academic performance of children periodically. Children are showing gradual improvement in their academic skills.

Besides, the children are also engaged in creative activities like music, drawing, poem recitation, story-telling, observation of significant days, etc. Moreover, they have also been oriented on COVIID-19 pandemic, preventive measures and necessary appropriate COVID behaviour such as steps for hand-washing, proper use of mask, maintaining physical distance etc.

Conclusion and Learnings

The CINI initiative of offering academic support to children is appreciated by the community leaders, parents, and children. It is encouraging that academic educators appointed by CINI have been able to extend

necessary support to the children in joyfully continuing their studies. Now, when the government has opened schools from class VI onwards, the community and children would like to have continued support from CINI. It is being hoped that further continuation of this support will help children bridge their learning gaps and lay a strong foundation that will help children perform academically well and grow into informed and aware adults. The Gram Sabha monitors the performance of these learning centres where the regularity of children and academic educators are also being tracked.

The intervention has the following learnings:

▌ Catering for the academic need of children can help address many vulnerabilities like drop-out, early marriage, child labour, child trafficking etc.

▌ We can strengthen community gatekeeping with active engagement of community, parents and community level institutions.

▌ In a crisis, most of the tmes, immediate needs are given priority while other needs are forgotten in the long term. It is essential to assess the needs of children and the community in a timely manner to make the interventions more holistic and move beyond relief to rights.

Children Orphaned and Semi-Orphaned due to COVID-19: CINI's Response

By Lopamudra Mullick
CINI

COVID-19 has unleashed some very alarming trends in child protection issues across the country. The two subsequent waves have impacted many children in India; with the rising death tolls, several children have lost either of or both the parents to the pandemic and the prospect of their education, health, and nutrition care and support seem to be bleak.

> "....between March 2020 and May 2021, a total of 1,742 children became orphans while 140 were abandoned due to COVID-19; and 7,464 children lost a parent."

As per NCPCR's affidavit placed to the Supreme Court of India, between March 2020 and May 2021, a total of 1,742 children became orphans while 140 were abandoned due to COVID-19; and 7,464 children lost a parent. This data was uploaded by 25 states, and five union territories added up to 9,346[1] . Given the rising death tolls and significant under-reporting (probable) of deaths across the country, the reported numbers of vulnerable children are likely to be significantly underestimated.

Illegal offers for adoption have been rampant on social media especially targeting these orphans due to COVID-19. It is an unprecedented situation where the scale of children losing one or both their parents to the pandemic is enormous and growing. And it is hard to get an estimate on the number of COVID-19 orphans, especially from the communities. Children who have lost parents face an increased risk of child protection risks such as trafficking, illegal adoption, abuse, child labour and child marriage. It is thus the need of the hour to identify these vulnerable children at the earliest and bring them within the radar of the response mechanism.

Children orphaned due to COVID-19 are categorised as Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) as per the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015. As per Section 2(42), Orphan means a child- (i) who is without biological or adoptive parents or legal guardians; or (ii) whose legal guardian is not willing to take or capable of taking care of the child. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 had laid down the process of taking care of these children in need of care and protection. However, owing to the onset of the vulnerabilities and its aggravated nature coupled with chances of trafficking and illegal adoption, there arises a need to come up with an Intervention Procedure for children orphaned and semi orphaned due to COVID-19. CINI has coupled its experience with the

procedure articulated in the law and has drafted this intervention protocol below:

Intervention Process	
Step 1	Early identification of these vulnerable children (children who have lost their parent(s) due to COVID-19) from the community. These children can be identified from the community by the frontline workers of the government, any social worker, public servant, any individual from the community or any person associated with a nursing home/hospital or any maternity home (such as a nurse, doctor or management of a nursing home, hospital or maternity home) It is to be noted that during early identification in the community, if a semi orphan child gets identified (a child who has lost one of the biological parents/ legal guardians) and if the child comes within the purview of the category of children in need of care and protection as per Section 2(14) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015, then the case has to be referred to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC). For a child who has lost both the parents, s/he automatically comes under the CNCP category and therefore has to be referred to CWC.
Step 1A	The case can be referred to Childline/ informed to the Police, or the child can also be directly produced before CWC)

Step 1B	If the case is referred to Childline, then:
	    The child is produced before the CWC within 24 hours, excluding travel time. Virtual production of the child before CWC can also take place by using an online platform (in view of COVID-19).
	    A written intimation on the case should also reach CWC.

Step 2	The CWC passes an order for conducting Social Investigation Report (SIR). The CWC can also order for the temporary stay of the child in a Child Care Institution (CCI) or a Fit Facility. While passing the order, the CWC shall keep in mind the health conditions of the child owing to COVID-19 (if any) and pass orders for appropriate health care arrangements accordingly. It is also imperative that if at the time of production of a semi-orphaned child to the CWC, his/her extended family member also appears before the Committee seeking custody of the child, then CWC has to release the child and give the custody of the child to his/her extended family members with due procedures (declaring the fit person).
Step 3	The child is immediately referred for short term stay/temporary stay in the CCIs or a Fit Facility while the Social Investigation Report is being conducted.
Step 4	The SIR is conducted, and the report is submitted before CWC.

Step 5	Based on the SIR report, the CWC, taking into consideration that the family is the best place for a child, institutionalisation is a measure of last resort and also in the best interest of the child, can also pass the following orders:
	    Placement of the child in kinship care (when extended family members can be traced and they have exhibited willingness to take care of the child).
	    Placement of the child with a Fit Person (when the extended family members have not exhibited willingness to take care of the child) – then the child can be placed in the care of such a person, who is

Intervention Process

	willing to own the responsibility of the child and after the inquiry process will be declared to be a Fit Person by the Committee.
	
	As a measure of last resort, when the child cannot be placed in kinship care, then the CWC may pass an order to place the Child in Child Care Institution (CCI)/ Specialised Adoption Agency (SAA) for safe custody, temporarily. In such a case when the extended family members or legal guardians are not traceable, then the CWC will undertake the following actions in accordance with the Adoption Regulation 2017:
	
	    The CWC will direct the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) to advertise the details, photographs and particulars of the orphaned child in a national newspaper with wide circulation within three working days from the time of receiving the child.
	    The CWC will also ensure entry of the data in the designated portal in its missing or found column by the concerned CCI.
	    Despite the efforts, if nobody related to the child could be traced, then the DCPU shall submit a report to the CWC within thirty days from the date of production of the child before the CWC.
	    The CCI or Specialised Adoption Agency will also submit a report to the CWC, immediately after the completion of the thirty days, from the date of production of the child before CWC, and the report will include all information that has been revealed by the child during his/her short term stay. If, during the short term stay, any person(s) has approached towards claiming the child, then those details should also be reflected in the report.
	    The CWC will also make use of the designated portal to ascertain if the orphaned child is a missing child also.
	    The CWC will then take actions in accordance with the regulations, Act and rules and then declare the orphaned child legally free for adoption.

Step 6	When the child is placed in kinship care, if required, the CWC can refer the case to the District Based Sponsorship Foster Care Approval Committees (SFCACs) for Sponsorship. Also, when the child is placed in the care of the Fit Person[2]. The SFCACs verify the case, and after due diligence, if criteria match, the child is linked with Sponsorship.
Step 7	A follow-up mechanism should be in place in coordination with DCPUs and Childline to conduct follow up of these children. Efforts should also be made to link the estranged children and the families with the schemes and services of the government as an extended measure of family strengthening.
Step 8	Mandatory Health and Safety Measures if the child is COVID-19 positive. As a precautionary measure, a final health check-up should be conducted. A COVID-19 test is mandatory, and upon ascertaining that the child is COVID-19 negative and the child is medically fit and can be restored, the entire restoration/reunification process should be initiated. (Commencing from Step 7)

Below are the case studies of semi-orphan children and how CINI's intervention prevented these children from gravitating towards institutional care.

Kinship Care saves a child who lost their mother to COVID-19-19 from an abusive father

14-year-old Fatima lost her mother due to COVID-19. She was left under the care of her father and had to take care of three younger siblings, two sisters aged four years and two and a half years and a six-year-old brother. She lived in a remote rural pocket of South 24 Parganas in West Bengal. Her father sexually abused Fatima after the demise of her mother. The community members informed about the case to Diamond Harbour Childline run by CINI. CINI assisted the extended family members to complain and getting the father arrested. Fatima, with her siblings, were petrified. The younger siblings felt insecure with the sudden absence of their father, who was incidentally also an abuser. But Fatima was worried that her father would pose risks to the two younger sisters and desperately wanted to protect her siblings. In the meantime, the younger brother started visiting the nearby local markets to sell guavas and to earn and feed his younger sisters. Fatima availed of a temporary stay in a CCI. She was traumatised and was also worried about the safety of her siblings. She was offered intensive individual counselling for healing and addressing her trauma.

CINI completed the SIR and Individual Care Plan for Fatima's siblings. Furthermore, CINI advocated the case with the district-based Child Welfare Committee. Based on the SIR, they were placed with their extended family (uncle) in a kinship care arrangement instead of long term care in CCI.

Effective case management was possible with the multi-sectoral engagement of the Police, CWC, District Child Protection Officer, Childline, Panchayat Pradhan, ASHA workers, Anganwadi Workers and CINI's outreach workers. The immediate and effective actions to provide safety, security and protection to the victim child and her siblings have assured the trust and faith of the extended family members and community. Besides, placing the semi orphans in alternative care (kinship care) other than in a long-term institutional care system also re-emphasised CINI's belief in the Juvenile Justice Principle of Institutionalization as the measure of last resort.

Preventing Family Separation

11-year-old Sonia lost her father due to COVID-19. Her father was the sole bread earner of the family. Soon the family started experiencing financial hardships. Sonia's mother faced difficulty in earning a living. Sonia was left alone to take care of her three-year-old brother. She also did all the household chores and grew crops on her father's small piece of land. During the regular field visits, Sonia's case came to the attention of CINI's outreach workers. CINI, in coordination with the Khunti District Administration of Jharkhand, visited Sonia's family to determine the support her family required. The visit revealed that Sonia was at the risk of being sent to another state to earn and financially support her family. She was also at risk of child early and forced marriage. There were high chances that Sonia would soon get separated from her family.

Determined to prevent this, the CINI team and the district administration helped Sonia's younger brother access support from the government through the Preventive Sponsorship scheme. Sonia was also enrolled in a government residential school nearby. Here, Sonia would be cared for and could see her family regularly on the weekends and go home during the holidays. CINI, through its convergent efforts, prevented the child from separating from her immediate family.

Sonia and Fatima are examples of hundreds of such children who have been orphaned or semi orphaned due to COVID-19. CINI across the states of Jharkhand and West Bengal has linked 161 cases of semi orphans and orphans with the social security schemes of the government. CINI has placed 98 such children in kinship care arrangements and has referred none, such children, for long term institutional care.

Endnotes

[1] *https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/9347-kids-orphaned-by-pandemic-sc-told-101622574300265.html*
[2] *if required then the child can also be referred to the District Based Sponsorship Foster Care Approval Committees (SFCACs) for Sponsorship.*

Yuva Shakti Sangathan: After Care Youth as Agents of Change

By Udayan Care

"Today marked a day of several firsts for me, right from travelling in a bus and train to having a formal yet engaging meeting with my fellow Care Leaver youth. Most importantly, though, I felt zest and fervour for being a part of my group, my YSS, my family. I did not know that I was so homesick for a place I had never known."

-a young care leaver and Yuva Shakti Sangathan (YSS) Ujjain member, sharing his experience at the second state workshop held in Aug 2021

Care leavers are one of the most disadvantaged groups in society in India. Their exit from Child Care Institutions (CCIs) on turning 18 years of age brings enormous changes in their lives while transitioning from dependence on supported living towards independent living. Often, their circumstances and lack of a supportive family ecosystem push them to start their journey of self-sufficiency much earlier than their peers staying in families. At a young age, they have to worry about finding safe and affordable accommodation, getting employment that pays them decently, supporting their day to day living expenses, and being ready to manage their household chores. These tasks become even more challenging as, most of the time, their stay at the CCI does not expose them enough to life or living skills or prepare them for an independent life outside the safe confines of CCIs. They often find difficulties in arranging accommodation and are left homeless with poor educational qualifications, lower earnings and unstable jobs and even lower future expectations from their life. The COVID- 19 pandemic has further exacerbated the challenges they face by causing loss of employment and educational opportunities, reducing access to support services and pushing them to stay in situations of isolation, stress and insecurities. Therefore, for the child protection system, it becomes imperative that systems and processes are evolved to

extend continued support in various domains to care leavers, some being housing, education, vocational and life skilling, mentoring, employment and most importantly, platforms where they can come together and bond as a safe family. Care Leavers collectives are one such safe space that the youth with lived experiences have formed as peer self-support groups and networks. Such collectives give them a sense of belongingness and pave constructive pathways for their support.

UDAYAN CARE

Over 2000 children are living in various CCIs in Madhya Pradesh, and annually, it is estimated that about 400 children exit these homes on turning 18 years of age. The Government of Madhya Pradesh (GoMP) has detailed data of these care leavers from 2017 onwards. However, there is no information on young people living in aftercare homes. In Sept 2020, the GoMP, with support from UNICEF state office and technical partner Udayan Care brought together a group of 10 such youth with lived experiences of care from three districts to ideate on forming a state collective of care leavers. The youth took on this opportunity with zest, and soon, they created a strong collective of over 137[1] members in the state with representation from more districts across the state. Recently, the collective had a successful meeting in Bhopal, where representatives agreed to give their collective a name, chosen by all of them in a participatory manner and also developed its logo as part of carving an identity of their collective. Known as Yuva Shakthi Sangathan (YSS), the name reflects the power of the youth collective and the ownership that each member has for strengthening it with time. YSS is evolving as an independent body of care leavers, owned, managed,

and run by care leavers themselves. The members believe that this collective will be able to ensure better outcomes among care-experienced young adults in the state. YSS members have the conviction that together and with the support of the state government and other stakeholders and service providers, it can operate as a support system available for all care leavers in the state and will serve as a critical resource in preparing their younger care leavers for independent living. YSS members wish to give back to society and ensure that their own care- experience helps to mitigate and solve some of the challenges that they experienced and have already been through YSS members have a strong determination to be heard by the system and have their voice included in the future policy-making on care leaving at the state level.

UDAYAN CARE

The need for peer-led networks like YSS has become especially relevant in the new normal of the COVID-19 pandemic, where the world has pushed young care leavers to remain isolated. A YSS member shared her experience in these words: "Knowing that we are all young people with similar experiences and all of us are together to listen to each other, help each other and work as a network, gives me power and confidence that we can make a difference and keep going even in times of COVID crisis." So far, YSS members have also virtually interacted with care leavers from Odisha, Delhi and Gujarat and like one of them shared, "Meeting people with similar experiences from different cities makes me feel supported and inspires me to do a lot more starting

from the mentoring to the overall development of care leavers". Yet another member said, "Today, while in the cab back to Jabalpur, the one great thought I know will repeatedly nudge me is that I have a group; a family, of my own."

Using the YSS safe space as a platform to express their needs, aspirations and challenges, the care leavers felt a sense of solidarity. Some of their key concerns and aspirations are captured below:

Lack of support with higher education and vocational skilling and training opportunities is a common experience for all. They felt it often leads to compromising with less paid jobs and stifles their dream of career progression. The care leavers strongly want a clear focus on their education and vocational skilling and opportunities for upskilling, whenever possible, through scholarships, subsidies and mentoring.

Lack of identity cards and other documents, such as Aadhar, Caste certificate, etc., deny them opportunities to access benefits that they may be entitled to.

Lack of access to professional counselling services often means they go through difficult times, coping on their own, without seeking professional help. It adversely affects their performance in studies and at the workplace. They expressed the need to build capacities to deal with crises. Most of them felt they had no information on who to approach and what to do when they felt low in life.

The need for a safe, affordable home for themselves is their biggest concern, especially during the initial years after leaving care. Most youths shared that if this were guaranteed to them from the state or the private sector, it would aid them in focussing on their education and skilling and give them opportunities to work towards their dreams.

The lack of awareness of their legal rights and often, not having all their identity documents with them hinders their access to social protection schemes. They recommended that the state govt. issues a "Care Leaver Card" to every care leaver, which can facilitate their access to support services.

Care Leavers aspire to get equal participation at various platforms and discussion forums at the district, state and national levels so that they can input into policy-making processes on leaving care.

Most care leavers desire that the child protection system keep a relationship with them after they leave care. Follow-up calls from their caregivers and other staff members who cared for them when they were children instil a sense of belongingness.

Care leavers often struggle to find good jobs for themselves without support. They need handholding support and guidance in writing their CVs, preparing for interviews, registering on job portals and related areas. Workshops must be curated for YSS members in this regard.

A few young persons shared their concerns regarding the lack of sports facilities, space and equipment, in the childrens and aftercare homes. They demanded that this be shared with the state government for necessary action on this front.

They took upon themselves the responsibility of expanding and strengthening YSS as a state-wide network. They aspire to be change agents to themselves and many others who are in care and face various vulnerabilities.

UDAYAN CARE
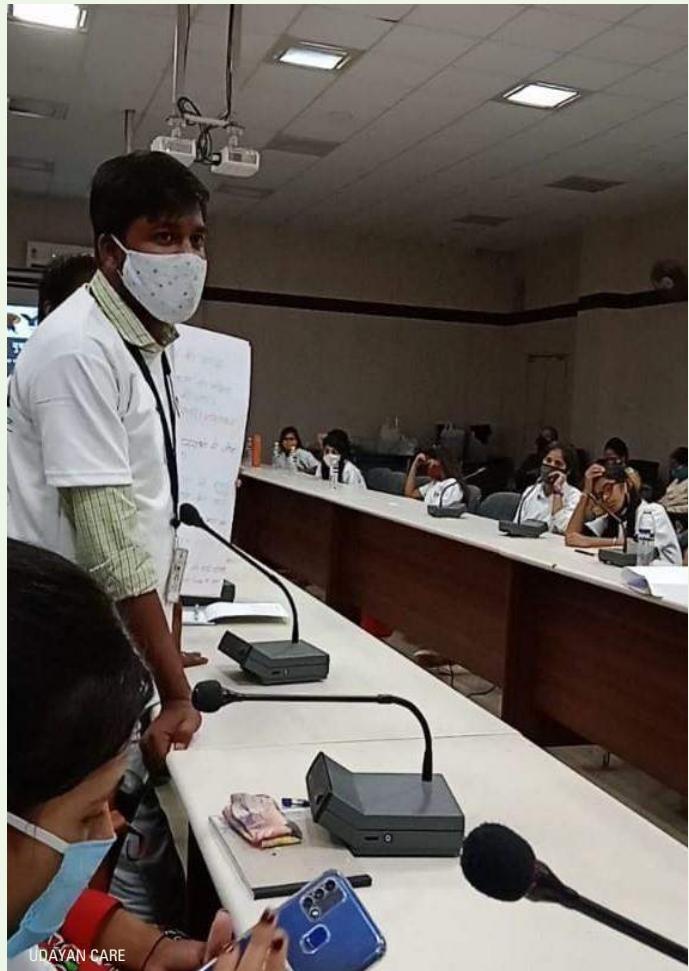
Endnotes

[1]Including youth in Aftercare girls homes in Bhopal and also children in the age group of 15 to 18 years living currently in the child care institutions of Ujjain and Bhopal.

Strengthening Family-Based Alternative Care with Focus on Aftercare in Bihar
Hausla Stitching Centre: An Udayan Care Initiative
Supported by Social Welfare Department Bihar and UNICEF Bihar

By Udayan Care

Lack of opportunities and vulnerability lead to untapped potential in children. Children who enter Child Care Institutions (CCIs) have often experienced multi-dimensional deprivations and, therefore, are highly vulnerable. These vulnerabilities are often exacerbated when such children reach adulthood and have to leave their respective care setting to live on their own. The absence of a continuum of care services and a holistic rehabilitation plan impedes children from living productive and dignified lives. Even though provisions for aftercare are included in The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, as well as the Child Protection Services Scheme, the real challenge lies in the correct understanding of the legal provisions by stakeholders, as well as in its effective implementation. This demands proper training of the

stakeholders and structuring of resources in a lined-up manner so that all parties involved in the decision making should have a complete plan for the rehabilitation of the child before they reach the age of 15.

In order to help better the situation, an initiative towards rehabilitation planning for the children in CCIs was taken up. Udayan Care, in collaboration with UNICEF, started an Alternative Outreach Program in Bihar in December 2019. As part of this initiative, a stitching centre was set up at Balika Grih, Nishant, Patna with the support of UNICEF Bihar and due permission from the Social Welfare Department, Bihar. Skill development is an essential aspect of preparing children to become independent and contributing members of society. The inauguration of the centre was done by the Social Welfare Department Bihar, UNICEF Bihar and officials of CCIs and aftercare home along with children and girls in the aftercare programme.

UDAYAN CARE

This journey began when Udayan Care was developing Individual Care Plans (ICP) for girl's in CCIs and aftercare homes. ICPs become extremely valuable for setting individual plans for each child staying in CCIs and exiting CCIs for their holistic development and facilitating their journey of reintegration. The first step in preparing the ICP is to identify the interests and needs of children concerning education, vocational skills, aptitude and career interests. As many children expressed interest in learning stitching, Udayan Care approached Usha company to start a three month certified home for girls in CCIs.

Initially, children were a bit apprehensive about the training, but now they have started taking the initiative to learn, are enthusiastically involved and have even become peer facilitators in the process. New children are joining the course and willing to learn every day. The stitching centre is overbooked with children keen to learn from the inspiring resource person. This initiative has provided children with a new outlook towards rehabilitation.

UDAYAN CARE

Udayan Care team is coordinating with agencies/companies to provide placement opportunities to the trained, above 18 years girls and make this model a self-sustainable model by marketing the stitched materials by the girls from the unit. With motivation, determination and a little help from society, we can all contribute to making "Young lives shine".

UDAYAN CARE

Group Foster Care - An Army of Small Child Care Institutions or A Multitude of Large Families?

By Ian Forber-Pratt,
Children's Emergency Relief International

The child protection system could be making a step in the wrong direction, with the best intentions at heart, and it seems to be happening now. Without careful evaluation and planning of the next steps, we could see an army of small child care institutions (CCIs), under the name "group foster care", high jacking the future of children and families in India.

The concept of foster care falls in line with core Indian values, the idea that family is the heart of the community. Foster Care is a legal concept in India defined in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act [JJ Act], 2015 [JJ Act]as "means the placement of a child, by the Committee for the purpose of alternate care in the domestic environment of a family, other than the child's biological family, that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care." In other words, a family can be authorised by a district government authority to care for a child that needs care and protection. Here's where things get complicated. Globally, foster Care is designed for a licensed family within the community (given authority by the government and supported/monitored by the government) to take care of a child for a temporary time until the child finds their forever home (either through reunification with family or adoption or another means depending on the country). The keyword here is family. The complexity comes with another concept introduced in Indian law called group foster care.

The concept of group foster care was introduced to Indian law in 2015 within the JJ Act, a concept not found previously in the JJ Act, 2000. Now, in 2021 the concept and its implementation are expanding quickly. Key states are leading with foster-care-specific guidelines that give further clarity around the concept of group foster care. The problem is, group foster care is equated by the law to a small CCI.

The definition found in the JJ Act – "group foster care means a family-like care facility for children in need of care and protection" –clearly indicates that group foster care is a facility, not a family. In fact, the official order from the district level authorising body, the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), licenses a group foster home as a "fit facility". Further, the JJ Act lists a "fit facility" under the definition of a "child care institution". (JJ Act, 2015 Section 2, 21).

The worst-case scenario is that, in the name of group foster care, the country will convert all its large CCIs (the mainstream child protection service) to an army of small CCIs doing the same thing.

But there is great hope.

If we redefine group foster care to "small group homes", with an emphasis on family and individualised care; if we continue to carefully use the words "foster care"; and focus on building mechanisms and best practices for prevention of separation and strengthening families, the future of children and families in India is bright.

Preferred goal
a safe and nurturing birth family

Other family-based care
a safe and nurturing kinship, foster, kafalah, or adoptive family

Small group homes
specialised, focus on family placement

Institutional care
progressively eliminated

Within continuum   Outside continuum
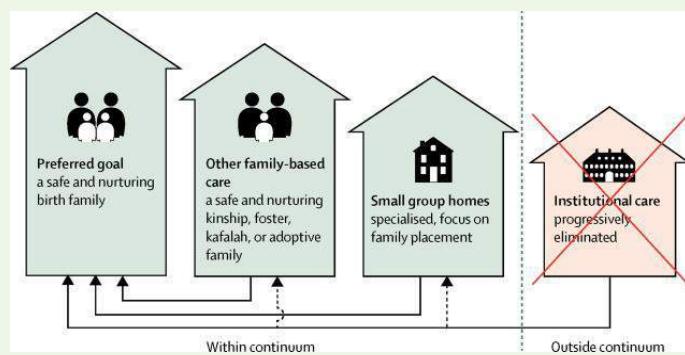
Reference

Philip S Goldman, et. el., Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of children 2: policy and practice recommendations for global, national, and local actors, The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, Volume 4, Issue 8, 2020,

Events and Announcements

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

Getting Care Right for Children and Youth: Newsletter on Global Updates on Alternative Care
https://bit.ly/3El2ZVq

Getting care right for children and youth brings you the most recent developments in the alternative care space with current news and publications globally. It sets out to highlight the current developments in the International and Asia perspective and the latest research at a glance underlining new resources including publications, tool kits, policy briefs on alternative care.

This monthly wrap-up is intended to serve as a compendium of the latest developments in the area of alternative care. We hope you will find it useful and be able to use it in your day-to-day work on research, writing, and practice on child and youth care. You can reach out to Udayan Care at icbjournal@udayancare.org for any suggestions or feedback on the newsletter.

Biennial International Conference on Alternative Care in Asia, 8 Nov 2021- 9 Nov 2021: Register Now

Since 2014, the Biennial Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia (BICON) has been a leading conference focusing on the rights of children and young people without parental care (CWPC). Due to the unprecedented and unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are hosting the 4th Annual BICON Conference online, with practitioners, policymakers, academics, young people with lived experience, discussing regional challenges, best practices, and emerging issues related to alternative care and child rights in Asia.

More than 300 delegates from across the globe are expected to participate in BICON 2021 interactive workshops, plenaries, and panel discussions to explore: Strategies to address unnecessary family separation in Asia, including for children with disabilities and children on the move; Regional approaches and practices to formal and informal kinship care, foster care, and guardianship; Policies and practices to support children and young people leaving care; Social welfare workforce development and systems strengthening; and, Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in alternative care, and their protection during the pandemic and other emergency responses.

Previously hosted by Udayan Care, BICONs are conceived as a regional advocacy platform to bring stakeholders working on child and youth care together for sharing, learning, and connecting. The BICON 2021 is an important event for stakeholders to work together to drive care reform in the region. The conference will spotlight the results from the Day of General Discussion held in September 2021 and aim to champion emerging new practices and consider their impacts.

For more information, click here: BICON.Asia

Webinar | Learning Session on Kinship Care | IACN

Date: 15th September, 2021

This webinar featured sharing from practitioners and organisations working on kinship care in different contexts in India and findings of a qualitative research with children and caregivers in kinship care in Ghana.

The details of speakers are as follows:

> Alpa Vora, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Field Office, Maharashtra: Supporting kinship care through community-based mechanisms in the backdrop of migration of parents in rural districts of Maharashtra
>
> Anjali Sood, Programme Manager, Family Strengthening and Family-Based Alternative Care Initiatives, Miracle Foundation India: kinship care in the context of reintegration of children from CCIs back into their families and prioritising kinship care for children who have lost parent(s) and caregivers to COVID-19
>
> Shilpa Vaishnav, Samvedana Trust, Gujarat: Leveraging State scheme (Balak Mata Pita) for kinship care in Gujarat
>
> Alhassan Abdullah, PhD Scholar at Hong Kong University: Understanding experiences of children and caregivers in kinship care in Ghana

Webinar | Preventing Separation and Strengthening Communities | IACN

Date: 27th October, 2021

The webinar explored Hope and Homes for Children and CINI's work in Jharkhand and West Bengal, specifically the implementation of their community strengthening approach which focuses on strengthening the community response mechanisms through a 'multi-stakeholder convergence model'. The model emphasizes the importance of collective action as an approach towards preventing unnecessary institutionalization of children and facilitating access to community services and alternative care. Additionally, Hope and Homes for Children gave a global perspective on interventions on the prevention of separation and strengthening communities.

The sessions and speakers included:

> Global examples of preventing separation and strengthening communities by Otto Sestak, Head of Learning and Engagement, Hope and Homes for children and Mark Riley, Technical Lead, India, Hope and Homes for Children
>
> The CINI approach to preventing separation by empowering communities and creating a sense of sense of ownership, Lopamudra Mullick, Programme Manager, Child Protection, CINI
>
> Case study on preventing separation and community strengthening from Khunti, Jharkhand by Subhadeep Adhikary, Programme Manager, CINI