



IACN

QUARTERLY

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Hello,

Dear All,

We are pleased to share with you the 21st Edition of the IACN Quarterly, which focuses on the theme of "Family Strengthening and Family-Based Alternative Care." This edition highlights the shift toward family-based and community-driven child protection approaches in India. It brings together diverse perspectives, field experiences, and knowledge resources that emphasize the prevention of family separation, psychosocial support, and collaborative action across sectors. The issue underscores a growing transition from institutional care to family-based, community-driven models, emphasizing the need for convergence across government departments, civil society, and community structures.

The Perspectives section explores critical themes such as the challenges of transitioning from institutional living to independent living for care leavers, the experiences of trans individuals in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) and beyond, perspectives on adoption strategies, and the importance of family-based care.

The Updates from the Field section showcases case studies on family-based approaches to preventing separation, amplifies youth voices, highlights the importance of providing holistic support to families beyond financial assistance, and presents the Bihar state government's efforts in strengthening aftercare systems.

The Quarterly also includes knowledge resources on disability, support for frontline workers, and links to relevant online events.

We would like 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, please write to us at iacnsecretariat@iacn.in

Sincerely
IACN Secretariat

Knowledge Resources

Information and Knowledge Resources on Alternative Care

- Disability and Child Protection Laws in India: A Study of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 and Disability Laws - By Keystone Human Services India Association**
<https://iacn.in/resource/disability-and-child-protection-laws-in-india/>
- Most Burdened, Least Supported: Towards Security and Wellness of Frontline Social Workers - By The Solidarity Network, a Shakti Shalini Initiative**
English version: <https://shaktishalini.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Research-Print-Final-Version-2.pdf>
Hindi version: <https://shaktishalini.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Research-Hindi-Version-1.pdf>
- Bihar State Guidelines for Aftercare by Government of Bihar**
<https://iacn.in/state-framework/bihar-state-guidelines-for-after-care-2026/>

Perspectives

Commentary, Analysis and Insights

- From Shelter to Self-Reliance: Building Work Pathways for Care Leavers - By Ramya Sundararajan, Chief Executive Officer, WeLive Foundation**
- Family Strengthening: The Primary Strategy for Child Protection - By Aabida Gani, Counsellor, Human Welfare Voluntary Organisation (HWVO)**
- If not me, then who? - By Rajkumar Sharma, A Trans Woman Care Leaver**
- Human Trafficking, Adoption, Perspective and Mother India - By Ian Forber-Pratt, President, Children's Emergency Relief International (CERI)**

Updates from the Field

Learnings and experiences shared by our Fellow members

- Local Governance as a Shield for Children: The Jharnipali Model - By Pramod Kumar Bagarti District Consultant, ARUNA**
- Preventing Family Separation through Community-Based Support: Case Studies - By Humanity the Ultimate Faith**
- Strengthening Families, Elevating Youth Voices: Lessons I'm Taking Forward from BICON 2025 - By Albert Justin, Assistant Manager, Youth Program, Miracle Foundation India**
- From Vulnerability to Stability: Livelihood Empowerment and Family Strengthening in a Community Setting - By Dr. KM. Pratima, Associate Researcher, Foster Care Society**
- Family Strengthening: Building Resilient Families for the Well-being of Children - By Syed Asima Ali, Counsellor, Human Welfare Voluntary Organization (HWVO)**
- Bihar's Journey in Building a Rights-Based Aftercare Ecosystem - By Mr. Banku Bihari Sarkar, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Bihar & Ms. Ranjana Srivastava, Associate Director, Advocacy, Research and Training Department, Udayan Care**

Events

Interview with Children, Young Adults and Care Leavers and Practitioners different Care Settings

- Dasra Philanthropy Week 2026: Child Wellbeing as the Foundation of India's Development - By Dasra and UNICEF**
- Leadership Dialogue - 9 - By India Alternative Care Network (IACN) & Miracle Foundation India**
- Breaking the Cycle : Voices from the Field to Integrate Family Strengthening Principles to Practices - Part - III (East and Northeast Region) - By India Alternative Care Network (IACN) & Udayan Care**

For Every Child, A Family



Knowledge Resource

Disability and Child Protection Laws in India: A Study of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 and Disability Laws

<https://iacn.in/resource/disability-and-child-protection-laws-in-india/>

By Keystone Human Services India Association

The year 2025 marked ten years of the Juvenile Justice Act and entry into the tenth year of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act. Both laws reflect a decade of progress that has laid the foundation for a more inclusive future. There has been significant progress within the child protection space, including the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015, and Mission Vatsalya 2022, towards family strengthening, prevention of separation, and deinstitutionalization.

Similarly, several significant legislative and policy milestones have created pathways for greater inclusion of children and persons with disabilities in mainstream society. This includes the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, the Mental Healthcare Act 2017, and the Accessible India Campaign, among others.

However, these two streams of progress have largely evolved independently. The absence of meaningful intersections between disability and child protection laws has resulted in gaps, inconsistencies, and

ultimately, children with disabilities falling between multiple unaligned legal frameworks. Building on this, Keystone Human Services International and Keystone Human Services India Association have undertaken an analysis of the Juvenile Justice Act 2015 with the disability legislation, primarily the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. This task, while enriching, unveiled the magnitude of work that lies ahead of us as we embark on a collective journey to make India an inclusive country, particularly when it comes to children with disabilities in need of care and protection.

Most Burdened, Least Supported: Towards Security & Wellness of Frontline Social Workers

English version: <https://shaktishalini.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Research-Print-Final-Version-2.pdf>

Hindi version: <https://shaktishalini.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Research-Hindi-Version-1.pdf>

By The Solidarity Network, a Shakti Shalini Initiative

This research study is an initiative of The Solidarity Network by Shakti Shalini, a grassroots NGO in New Delhi, India. This is a pan-India network of frontline social workers and human rights defenders affiliated with NGOs, civil society organisations, and other collectives as well as

independent social workers, and other professionals.

Drawing insights from a key stakeholder consultation with members of The Solidarity Network followed by online surveys with frontline social workers, this study report assesses the current status of physical, psycho-emotional, and financial securities of frontline social workers in India. Moreover, it

compiles actionable recommendations for key stakeholders - funding agencies, leadership and management of organisations employing frontline social workers, and law enforcement agencies and state actors - for translating these research findings into concerted action for improving the securities and wellbeing of frontline social workers.



Perspective

From Shelter to Self-Reliance: Building Work Pathways for Care Leavers

By Ramya Sundararajan
*Chief Executive Officer,
 WeLive Foundation*

It's your 18th birthday and you have to move out of your home.

This is the situation faced by youth in childcare institutions (orphanages/shelter homes) when they turn 18 and are no longer children, but are recognised legally as adults. From being referred to as children in need of care and protection (CNCP), they are now referred to as care leavers. Now, think back to your 18th birthday and recall what you were doing at that time and what you would have done if you had to move out of your home at 18.

With an incomplete education of 10th/12th, no job or money in hand, and lacking identity documents, care leavers are left to figure out where to sleep at night and how to ensure they eat enough to survive.

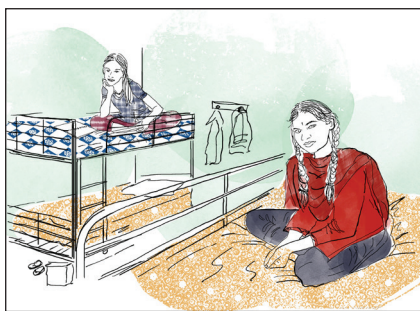


The focus that is available on providing care and protection below 18 is not extended to provide training for autonomous adulthood for care leavers above 18. They leave the institutions in an emotional state that's left fragile by the trauma of institutionalization and lack of family support. Their resilience is fractured due to the lack of exposure and experience of the world outside. Hence, it's a huge burden and an overwhelming leap for care leavers to move from care to autonomous adulthood, many times more so when compared to youth with societal support.



'Adulting' is now a word in dictionaries. For care leavers, the reality of adulting means accelerated adulthood with responsibilities being thrust on unprepared shoulders the day they turn 18, which makes it difficult for them to survive, and almost impossible to thrive.

On one side there are entry level jobs in retail stores, hospitals, hotels, cafes, plumbing, carpentry, building work with many skill institutes that train youth to work in these jobs, but on the other side for care leavers is the everyday challenge of adulting, which is completing routine tasks like managing money if they are lucky enough to have funding support, cooking, traveling, taking care of self, figuring out a space to live and maintaining it.



Institutionalization of children is considered to be the last resort option for any child, as it's traumatic not to grow up as part of a family. Care leavers, who spend their childhood in CCIs, sometimes more than one, carry this trauma into adult life. This makes it harder for them to step into autonomous adulthood, more so than for youth from other under privileged background and certainly more so than youth who have grown up in families with opportunities galore.

Care leavers struggle to become resilient and functional as adults as they grapple with confusions on their identity and belonging. Starting with getting out of bed in the morning, ensuring that they eat enough, taking care of self when ill, to figuring out what work they want to do, tackling workplace issues, relationships with partners, completing education, all make it challenging for them to find a job and stick with it. Each youth may need months or years to understand what work they should do and where to do it, so that they stick with a job for a sustained period of time.

While they are undergoing this confusing and conflicting transition from childhood to adulthood, the pressure to do it quickly and to secure financial, emotional, and social support while they are finding their feet compounds the complications. Without the provision of a roof over their heads or food in their stomachs, the possibility of their success is low.

WeLive Foundation has been working with care leavers since 2019 through residential and non-residential bridge programs designed to aid them in their transition to independent adulthood. The experience in working with more than 250 care leavers from across the country in a 1-3 year residential program in Bengaluru, which is deep and intense, has shown us that

anchoring their momentum to work and to financial independence has supported their progress in other aspects of their lives. If they anchor themselves to showing up at work every day, they are able to build their resilience and capacity to manage themselves socially, academically, emotionally and financially.



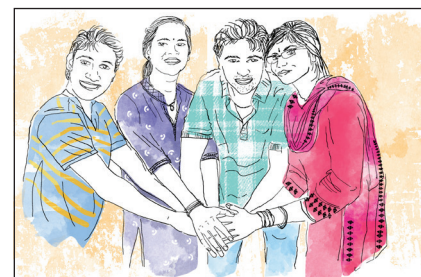
Building their tenacity in being “work-able” provides a workable way forward for these youth to grow in confidence and capacity. Small and steady steps forward become possible in dealing with emotional upheavals, navigating personal and work relationships, saving for the future, completing their education and becoming self-regulated.

It's not a solution, but a means of evolution.

Life will continue to be taxing and an exacting journey for youth from institutions, with one step forward, but two steps back. But it's crucial that they keep moving forward, else they face the risk of falling where they stand. And when they fall, they seldom have someone to catch them, but the life they have spent in care

has habituated them to expect that someone

would. It's a fall that's made harder and more painful by the harsh truth that they have outgrown care and protection, but are yet to grow the muscle power of taking care of themselves. It's a journey that they need to undertake on their own many a time, but if they can be equipped with the strength of regular work and steady income, that may just be what care leavers need to leave care in reality and not just on paper.



Family Strengthening: The Primary Strategy for Child Protection

By **Aabida Gani, Counsellor,**
Human Welfare Voluntary Organisation
(HVVVO)

“There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues are created, strengthened and maintained.”

Winston Churchill

This timeless observation captures the essence of why family strengthening lies at the heart of child well-being and social stability. The family is the first space where a child learns trust, empathy, responsibility, and resilience. Long before schools, institutions, or policies shape an individual, it is within the home that character, identity, and emotional security are quietly built. When families are supported and empowered, they become the most effective and humane system of care for children.

Family strengthening refers to the process of empowering families economically, psychologically, and socially to build resilience and protective capacities. Unlike rescue-based interventions that remove children once a crisis has escalated, often resulting in trauma, emotional harm, and unnecessary separation, family strengthening intervenes before families reach a breaking point. Across diverse social contexts, children enter institutional care not because families do not want them, but because families are overwhelmed by poverty, unemployment, migration, domestic violence, substance abuse, chronic illness, or the loss of a breadwinner.

Extensive UNICEF research on alternative care has demonstrated that the majority of children living in institutional care globally are not

orphans. UNICEF’s global situation analyses show that family separation is most often driven by poverty, social exclusion, disability, caregiver illness, or lack of support services rather than abandonment or neglect. Furthermore, UNICEF documents that long-term institutionalization is associated with emotional deprivation, attachment disruption, developmental delays, and increased mental health risks, even in institutions that meet children’s basic material needs. As a result, UNICEF consistently emphasizes family strengthening and prevention of unnecessary separation as central pillars of effective child protection systems.

In the context of Kashmir, Family strengthening is more than a social objective; it is a critical mental health intervention. Decades of socio-political volatility have profoundly reshaped family structures and caregiving capacities. Research documented in the Social Work Bulletin and clinical assessments conducted by the Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Kashmir (IMHANS-K) indicate high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety disorders, and psychosomatic symptoms among adults, particularly caregivers. IMHANS-K findings highlight that prolonged exposure to conflict-related stressors such as violence, loss, economic instability, repeated disruptions, and pervasive uncertainty has significantly affected caregivers’ emotional regulation, coping mechanisms, and parenting capacity. Parents struggling with untreated trauma often experience emotional exhaustion, irritability, withdrawal, and reduced emotional availability. This psychological burden weakens the family’s protective role,

even when caregivers are physically present and deeply committed to their children’s well-being.

Importantly, IMHANS-K observations emphasize that caregiver mental health directly influences child outcomes. Children living in households marked by chronic caregiver distress are more likely to display emotional dysregulation, behavioural difficulties, academic decline, sleep disturbances, and symptoms of secondary trauma. In many cases, families internalize feelings of inadequacy and helplessness, leading them to perceive institutional care or boarding arrangements as safer alternatives for their children.

This understanding is reinforced by global research from the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO guidelines on mental health and psychosocial support in emergency and conflict-affected settings emphasize that prolonged caregiver stress and trauma significantly reduce parenting capacity and increase risks of emotional neglect and adverse developmental outcomes for children. WHO therefore advocates for family- and community-based psychosocial interventions that support caregivers alongside children, rather than isolating child-focused responses.

WHO further underscores that strengthening caregiver mental health is a preventive public health strategy, essential for breaking intergenerational cycles of trauma. In contexts such as Kashmir, where psychological distress has become normalized, family strengthening operates not only as a child protection measure but as a community-level mental health response.

Responding to this complex context, Human Welfare Voluntary Organization

(HWVO), with support from UNICEF, has implemented a Family-Based Alternative Care (FBAC) project grounded in family strengthening and child-rights principles. The initiative prioritizes intervention within the child's immediate family as the first and preferred system of care, *aiming to prevent unnecessary separation and institutionalization.*

The FBAC project reflects UNICEF's global child protection priorities, particularly the prevention of unnecessary family separation, promotion of family-based care, and integration of psychosocial support within child protection programming. In cases where a child is categorized as an orphan due to the loss of one parent while the mother is alive, HWVO focuses on strengthening the surviving parent-child unit through psychosocial counselling, livelihood linkages, parenting guidance, and access to social protection schemes. Where both parents are deceased, HWVO explores care within the child's extended family as the preferred alternative, supporting suitable relatives through counselling, education and healthcare access, livelihood assistance, and linkage to government welfare schemes. Institutional care is considered only when no safe and appropriate family-based option is available.

Reflections: Case Studies from the field

Case Study 1 : Anusha 's Story: When Education Feels Like Abandonment

Anusha (name changed), a 15-year-old girl, experienced intense emotional distress when her family decided to send her to a boarding school outside the valley. Although the decision was motivated by aspirations for better education, Anusha was not consulted. She interpreted the move as rejection

and internalized feelings of shame, believing she was a burden on her family.

Overwhelmed by despair and unable to express her emotional pain, Anusha attempted suicide. During counselling, she revealed that her distress stemmed not from the boarding school itself, but from the feeling of abandonment. Parallel counselling sessions with her family helped caregivers understand the emotional impact of their decision and rebuild communication and trust.

This case highlights how the absence of emotional support and inclusive decision-making can deeply damage a child's sense of belonging. Family strengthening through counselling and parental support helps families make informed, empathetic decisions that protect children's mental health.

Case Study 2: "When Home Becomes a Need, not a Choice"

Tehmeen (name changed), a 15-year-old girl residing in a Child Care Institution (CCI), displayed severe emotional distress due to prolonged separation from her family. Despite a structured environment, she repeatedly expressed a desire to return home to her mother. Her outward confidence masked deep attachment disruption, unresolved grief, and fear of abandonment.

Her behavioural challenges resistance to routines, conflict with caregivers, and repeated pseudo-illnesses were expressions of separation distress rather than indiscipline. Counselling sessions focused on emotional regulation and attachment needs, while parallel family sessions supported reunification. This case reinforces UNICEF's evidence that institutional care cannot replace the emotional security of a family, particularly for adolescents. Family strengthening and reunification are essential to restoring emotional stability and identity.

Case Study 3: Daneen's Story: When Family Conflict Breaks a Child's World

Daneen (name changed), a 15-year-old girl faced severe emotional distress following her parents' separation. During this period, she was asked to stay away from home and manage all household chores on her own, as neither parent wanted to take responsibility for her care. At school, teachers observed changes in her behaviour, including withdrawal, irritability, and declining academic performance, reflecting the emotional strain she was experiencing.

At one point, there was consideration to place Daneen in a CCI or hostel until her parents' conflicts were resolved. However, through counselling, Daneen was able to safely express her emotions, while parallel sessions with her parents focused on understanding her needs, reducing conflict, and rebuilding trust.

This case illustrates how family strengthening is critical in situations of parental separation and neglect. When families receive psychosocial support, children like Daneen can be kept in emotionally safe environments, reducing the need for institutional placement and helping them rebuild stability, self-worth, and resilience.

Conclusion

Family strengthening repositions child protection from a reactive, crisis-driven response to a preventive and restorative approach. It recognizes that the most sustainable safety net for a child is not an institution, but a stable, emotionally available family supported by counselling, livelihood opportunities, social protection, and community-based services. In conflict-affected regions like Kashmir, strengthening families is as much a mental health intervention as it is a child welfare strategy.

Supported by UNICEF, Human Welfare Volunteer Organization's FBAC initiative demonstrates how global child protection frameworks can be effectively adapted to local, conflict-affected contexts through family-centred, trauma-informed practice. By prioritizing parental care, supporting extended families, and reserving institutional placement as a last resort, this approach restores dignity to families and continuity to children's lives.

Ultimately, protecting children means protecting the environments in which they grow. When families are

strengthened, children are not merely kept safe; they are allowed to belong, to heal, and to thrive. In societies shaped by adversity, investing in families is not optional; it is the most ethical, effective, and enduring form of child protection.

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If not me, then who?

By Rajkumar Sharma,
A Trans Woman Care Leaver

I used to believe that staying quiet was a form of survival. That if I kept my head down, adjusted myself, and learned to fit into systems that were never built for people like me, life would eventually become easier. Silence felt safer than questioning, and compliance felt more rewarding than resistance.

But silence has a cost.

For care-experienced children, especially those who feel "different," that cost can be dignity, identity, and voice. Over time, I learned that remaining unheard does not protect you; it erases you. This article is a reflection on how I moved from silence to speech, and why speaking up is not a choice but a responsibility for those of us who have lived within care systems and seen their gaps firsthand.

Growing up unseen

When I was nine years old, my life changed without warning. My uncle

moved my brother and me into a child care institution because he was no longer able to care for us. I entered with a small bag, but I carried much more inside, like confusion, fear, and a quiet sense that I did not quite fit in, even before I had the language to understand why.

I spent the next ten years growing up within institutional walls. Those years gave me safety, routine, and structure, but they also taught me how to suppress emotions and questions that felt inconvenient or uncomfortable. By the time I turned nineteen and moved out, one truth was unmistakable: I was different. What I still lacked was the clarity and confidence to name that difference, let alone claim it.

Like many care leavers, I stepped into adulthood carrying unanswered questions about identity, belonging, and worth. These questions become heavier when there are no safe spaces to ask them and even heavier when systems prefer silence over discomfort.

Aftercare and the first glimpse of possibility

After completing my 12th grade, I moved to Bengaluru and joined the WeLive Foundation for aftercare support. For the first time, I was not just surviving- I was learning how to live independently. Through skilling courses, work exposure, and mentorship, I began to understand responsibility, professionalism, and self-belief.

What stood out most was not just the training, but the presence of people who believed that care leavers deserved more than survival. This phase showed me the power of aftercare spaces that are intentional, supportive, and rooted in dignity. It also made one thing clear: systems can either shrink people or help them expand.

It was through a mentor during this time that I first heard about the **LIFT (Learning In Fellowship Together) Fellowship*** run by Udayan Care.

*LIFT Fellowship is a one-year program implemented by Udayan Care focused on developing and nurturing Care Leavers in India as agents of change, who will further the cause of improving the overall.



Entering LIFT: The question that changed everything

On the first day of the LIFT Fellowship, I sat quietly in a room full of unfamiliar faces. People spoke confidently about leadership, systems, and change. Inside, my heart was racing. I had never seen someone like me, someone with my background, my identity in spaces like this before.

I remember asking myself, *What am I doing here?*

Then another question followed, heavier and more persistent: *If I don't do this, then who will?*

That question stayed with me throughout the fellowship and continues to guide my work today. Because my journey was never just about personal growth. It was about responsibility to my community, to other care leavers, and especially to LGBTQIA+ care-experienced individuals whose realities are often erased within care systems.

The invisibility of LGBTQIA+ care-experienced youth

In India, we often speak about children in numbers and policies. But when it comes to LGBTQIA+ children and youth in Child Care Institutions, there is almost no data, no visibility, and no structured conversation. When people

are invisible on paper, they are invisible in practice.

I knew this invisibility intimately. Long before the fellowship, I had lived it. Growing up in institutional care, I felt different but never spoke about it. Leaving care at eighteen was overwhelming. Coming out was even harder. My journey was shaped by fear, stigma, stereotypes, and emotional pain but also by resilience and self-discovery.

I did not enter the LIFT Fellowship with all the answers. But I entered knowing that silence around identity and inclusion within care systems had to be challenged.

From lived experience to leadership

LIFT* fellowship became a turning point not because it changed who I was, but because it helped me become who I was always meant to be.

Through its four pillars- personal and professional development, mentorship, financial support, and state networks, I found grounding. More importantly, I began unlearning habits shaped by years of invisibility: the habit of shrinking myself, of softening my truth, of believing my experiences were "too uncomfortable" to be spoken about.

Leadership, I learned, does not always arrive loudly. Sometimes it begins quietly, with honesty.

During the fellowship, I worked on a project rooted directly in my lived experience: ***Documenting Intersexuality among Care-Experienced Youth and Sensitisation***. Intersexuality is often misunderstood, ignored, or avoided entirely. Initiating conversations around it required patience, trust, and courage.

Over the year, I conducted eight sensitisation sessions, reaching more than 130 care-experienced youth and professionals across regions. Initially, there was resistance. Silence. Discomfort. But gradually, there were stories. Listening. And small but meaningful shifts in understanding.

Mentorship, challenges, and growth

I did not walk this journey alone. My mentor, Khushi, played a critical role in shaping not just my project, but my confidence. She did not give me ready-made answers. She helped me trust my own thinking and refine my intent.

There were difficult days- unanswered emails, limited networks, emotional exhaustion, and moments of deep self-doubt. But each challenge strengthened my resolve. The fellowship taught me that systems change slowly, but personal clarity accelerates action.

As I began to speak more openly, something else shifted. The spaces around me started changing too. What began as a quiet personal journey gradually opened doors into larger conversations. I found myself invited into spaces where care-experienced voices are rarely heard not as a token, but as someone whose lived experience held value.

In March, I spoke at a two-day workshop in Delhi with Saarthi, engaging participants on care experience and community realities

beyond policy frameworks. Around the same time, IACN invited me to join a panel discussion on the struggles faced by orphaned and care-experienced communities, and on building safer, more inclusive spaces for care leavers.

In June, CSGMR invited me to share my life journey, allowing me to reflect on resilience beyond survival. In July, I worked with Miracle Foundation India, contributing to the strengthening of their youth programme by integrating lived experience into programme design.

By August, I was speaking with other care-experienced individuals through ENFOLD, sharing my journey so that those still struggling could see what

might be possible. Towards the end of the year, the work took me to Sikkim, where I supported the design of an aftercare programme moving from someone shaped by systems to someone helping shape them.

Recognition, I realised, is not validation alone. It is my responsibility.

Why this work cannot stop

When I look back now, I see two versions of myself:

- the one who entered the fellowship quietly, unsure, holding her breath;
- and the one who walked out speaking clearly, standing firmly, unapologetic in her truth.

LIFT taught me that lived experience is not a weakness; it is leadership. Systems do not change on their own. People change them.

Sensitization within Child Care Institutions is not optional. There are young people right now who feel different and have nowhere safe to speak. This work must move beyond fellowships and enter policies, institutional practices, and everyday care environments.

The fellowship year may have ended, but the mission has not.

I carry forward gratitude, clarity, and courage and I return to the question that started everything:

If not me, then who? If not now, then when?

Human Trafficking, Adoption, Perspective and Mother India

By Ian Forber-Pratt, President,
Children's Emergency Relief
International (CERI)

Disclaimer: At IACN we strive to tell stories, in appropriate and kind ways, of adoptees and care leavers; as professionals, we feel that is our duty. Ian Forber-Pratt is a frequent author in IACN Quarterly and he reached out to us and asked if his story would help our cause—to drive quality and best practice in the field of child protection. We said yes. When we read his story, we were moved. We decided to run it off-cycle and open up a way for you all to dialogue about it.”

Author Note: *This article is written from the perspective of an inter-country adoptee whose origins are tied to the 2016 Sree Krishna Nursing Home trafficking investigation in Kolkata. It is not an anti-adoption manifesto, but a plea for a more sustainable, family-centered approach to child welfare in India.*

In the world of child protection, we often speak in terms of policies and “cases,” but we must first acknowledge the human landscape. Within our field, child protection advocates, social workers, and government officials represent the full spectrum of humanity—some are exceptional, others are flawed, and most are somewhere in between. For centuries, good people with the best of intentions have labored in this field. However, we are learning every day. What we know now is light-years ahead of what we knew “then.” It is time we try to crack the code of why our systems still fail the most vulnerable.

I approach this not just as a survivor, but as a trained professional. I am a clinician trained in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP). I have spent years working in the child protection field around the world. While I do not facilitate root

searches, I have provided therapy and counseling to many navigating the profound trauma of searching for their origins. My professional journey included serving as one of the first three counselors within CARA (Central Adoption Resource Authority) to support domestic adopting families, and I was part of the BBC’s “*Searching for Mum*” project.

I adored my time in those roles. Like all of you, I am a “messy” human being trying to figure this out. If I am certain of one thing, it is this: we haven’t figured it out yet.

Introduction: The Ghosts of MG Road

In the summer of 2006, I stood on MG Road in Kolkata holding an 18-page court order—a document that was supposed to be my map home. Instead, it was a dead end. I had followed every CARA guideline, yet I found no results. Ten years later, the news

broke: the nursing home listed on my birth certificate was the epicenter of a massive trafficking racket. Babies were found in biscuit boxes, and skeletal remains were unearthed in gardens.

For many in the professional community, these are “rackets” to be busted. For me, it is the haunting possibility that my “journey” to a better life in the United States began with a crime against my biological mother. As a survivor and a professional who cares deeply for India, I believe we must move past the polarized debate of “Institutionalization vs. Adoption” and focus on the only truly sustainable path: **Community Empowerment and Family Strengthening.**

The Active Gatekeeping Model

The “secret” to keeping children safe is not found inside a facility; it is found in the community. Success, for me, is defined by:

1. **Care Reform and Adjustment:** The strategic process of reducing the number of children in any particular institution and repurposing budgets and facilities into community-based services (Family Preservation, Family Strengthening, Foster Care, and Kinship Support).
2. **The 3-Pillar Approach:**
 - ❑ **Prevention:** Identifying families at risk of separation due to a clear and ever-adapting rubric that takes the “subjectivity” out of the determination while still allowing for humanity.
 - ❑ **Reintegration:** Actively working to return children from institutions or who are rescued to their biological or extended families when safe and supported.

- ❑ **Alternative Family Care:** When the biological home is truly unsafe, moving directly to domestic kinship or foster care, rather than a «temporary» institution that becomes permanent.

The UNCRC and the Right to Family

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is clear: a child should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding. While international adoption is often framed as a “rescue” mission, we must ask: What are we rescuing children from, and could that “threat” have been mitigated?

We often treat a symptom of poverty as a terminal failure of parenthood—it’s the family’s fault because they couldn’t help themselves—it’s not that easy. Systematic inequality, race, ethnicity, and a host of factors make us inherently unequal at the human level while, in my opinion, fundamentally equal at the spiritual level. Family search is messy and difficult; our systems and education haven’t traditionally trained us for it. But if we flip the script and start by strengthening existing families, we change the narrative. We must be honest about the raw reality: many believe families who “can’t provide” deserve to lose their children. This is old thinking—a lack of critical exposure to the complexity of human life and the nuances of working with human beings.

Deconstructing the “One Right Way” Myth

The professional community often swings between extremes:

- ❑ **The Risk of Institutions:** Developmental trauma and «failure to thrive.»

- ❑ **The Risk of Foster Care:** Instability and the fear of «aging out» without a safety net.
- ❑ **The Risk of Biological Families:** The reality that addiction or abuse can make some homes unsafe.

The truth is that no single journey is right for every child. However, the current system often prioritizes the legality of a paper trail over the integrity of the child’s history. My story is proof that a “legal” adoption can be built on a foundation of theft. Most likely the organization that I came from was “procuring” babies from rural West Bengal areas telling our mothers that we would have better lives. And materially many of us did. But many of us did not.

There’s not one way, no certainty. Because after adoption, the support and follow-up very rarely happened. I was given an incredible life with an incredible family. Others adopted at the same time as I was have committed suicide, have grown up with a “primal wound,” and have been abused and mistreated. Until this is better mitigated (because no human condition is perfect), we have work to do.

Sustainability Through Empowerment

True child protection is not about building better orphanages or faster adoption pipelines. It is about:

- ❑ **Economic Resilience:** Preventing relinquishment due to temporary financial crises.
- ❑ **Community Watchdogs:** Strengthening local Panchayats and urban bodies to identify vulnerable families before a child is «abandoned.»
- ❑ **The Professional Shift:** Moving budgets from institutional care to social work interventions that keep families together.

Conclusion: A Narrative of Integrity

We must stop viewing child protection as a logistics problem and start viewing it as a human rights imperative. We owe it to the children of India to ensure that their “best interests” are not defined by the desires of those who, from the outside (either from India or outside), perceive those children would be better off with them. That may be true, but not always.

Let’s first strengthen and support the communities they were born into when safe, sustainable, and kind. No non-profit or government can “save” these children, and we often return to our roots. What’s the logical thing? Strengthen the roots and let them do the heavy lift, the gatekeeping, the self-regulation. Then all the system works from the bottom up and top down. Immersive social change and care reform research continues to show us the way; let’s assure most children do not have to tell a story such as mine.

The Path Forward for India

To be “pro-child” in India today is to be “pro-community.” We must move toward:

- ❑ **Community-Based Gatekeeping:** Empowering District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) to provide immediate financial and psychological support to mothers in crisis.
- ❑ **Ending the Institutional Incentive:** Redirecting funding from large CCIs (Child Care Institutions) toward family-strengthening grants but ONLY when the systems are strengthened and ready.
- ❑ **Tracing with Integrity:** Ensuring every «abandoned» child’s case is treated with the forensic rigor of

a missing person’s case, not just a paperwork hurdle. Even if you can’t find anything, to be able to say you tried, helps many demons be put to rest.

Final Word: Empowerment over Extraction

My life in the US is the result of an “extractive” model of child protection—one that took a child from a vulnerable community to solve a problem elsewhere. I was given a blessed life, and I am forever grateful - but my story is only a segment of the stories - many are not as good. The future of India’s child protection must be “empowering”—building a nation where no mother feels that a biscuit box is the only way to ensure her child’s survival.

Let us build a system where no child ever has to stand on MG Road wondering if their life began with a lie.

Recent Context & Research relevant to this article (2020–2025)

1. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

- **Article 7 & 8:** Recognizes the child’s right to a name, a nationality, and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by their parents. It mandates states to respect the right of the child to preserve their identity.
- **Article 20 & 21:** Establishes that if a child is deprived of their family environment, alternative care must be provided with due regard to the desirability of continuity in a child’s upbringing and to the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic background.

2. Adoption Regulations, 2022:

- These regulations replaced the 2017 version, notably shifting the authority to issue adoption orders from the Judiciary (Courts) to District Magistrates (DMs) and Additional District Magistrates (ADMs). While intended to expedite the process, it places a massive burden of “Integrity Checking” on administrative officials rather than judicial ones.

3. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act, 2021:

- Strengthened the oversight of Child Care Institutions (CCIs) and gave DMs more power to audit the “legality” of children arriving at nursing homes and hospitals.

4. Mission Vatsalya (2022):

- The Central Government’s flagship scheme emphasizing “Family-Based Non-Institutional Care.” It prioritizes sponsorship (financial aid to biological families) and foster care over long-term institutionalization. Mission Vatsalya 2.0 is soon to be published.

5. 2023–2024 CID Crackdowns:

- Recent enforcement actions in West Bengal show the CID continues to uncover “shadow” pathways in private nursing homes that bypass the CARINGS (Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System) portal, highlighting that the 2016 biscuit box racket was a symptom of a systemic gap that is only now being addressed.



Updates from the field

Local Governance as a Shield for Children: The Jharnipali Model

By Pramod Kumar Bagarti District Consultant, ARUNA

From Vulnerability to Self-Reliance: The Human Impact

Before 2024, families in Jharnipali Gram Panchayat faced the painful reality of being unable to adequately support their children at home, often placing them at heightened risk of neglect or separation. Today, that narrative is

slowly shifting through the strategic use of local government budgets.

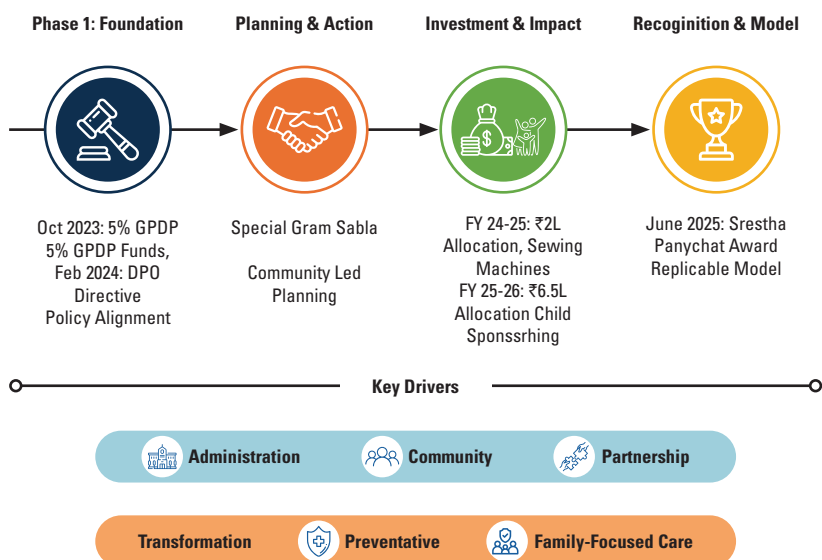
For women like Sasmita (name changed), the Panchayat's support has been transformative.

This growing economic stability acts as a powerful **family-strengthening shield**, ensuring that children remain safe, supported, and nurtured within their own homes.

"I used to worry about how I would feed my children," she shares.

"With the sewing machine provided by the Panchayat and the training I received, I now earn nearly ₹5,000 a month. My children are in school, and I will ensure they continue their studies."

Empowering Local Governance for Lasting Child Safety



The Catalyst: Aligning Policy with Local Leadership

The success of Jharnipali stands as a testament to what becomes possible when national mandates like **Mission Vatsalya** are meaningfully localized through committed governance and civil society partnership. This transformation began during a district-level perspective-building meeting on **October 18, 2023**. In this foundational session, the District Administration—with vital facilitation support from **ARUNA**, Catholic Relief Services' implementing partner—offered hands-

on guidance on navigating the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) process. By demystifying policy provisions and demonstrating how to strategically earmark at least **5% of untied grants** for child welfare, the effort moved beyond mere compliance. It built genuine local capacity, enabling grassroots leaders to elevate child protection from a peripheral issue to a core development commitment.

Sustaining Momentum through Administrative Action

This administrative impetus gained further momentum on **February 8, 2024**, when the District Panchayat Officer (DPO) issued a formal directive to all 14 Block Development Officers. This ensured that the commitments emerging from the perspective-building sessions were translated into sustained action across the district. To bridge the gap between policy and practice, the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) and ARUNA collaborated with Jharnipali to convene a **Special Gram Sabha**. This forum went beyond routine governance, allowing ward members and community residents to identify specific local vulnerabilities. As a result, child-centric actions were systematically embedded into the GPDP under **Themes 3 and 9**, focusing on creating child-friendly and women-friendly environments.

Tangible Outcomes and Fiscal Evolution

Jharnipali’s commitment is reflected in its bold resource allocation and measurable social outcomes. Starting with an initial allocation of ₹2,00,000 in FY 2024–25, the Panchayat launched focused livelihood initiatives and



family-strengthening programs. Beyond providing sewing machines, the Panchayat took proactive steps to support other vulnerable families by raising community awareness on critical issues impacting child welfare and family stability.

Encouraged by these early results, the Panchayat more than tripled its allocation to ₹6,50,000 for FY 2025–26. Furthermore, with the dedicated technical support of the DCPU, the Panchayat proactively identified and enrolled vulnerable orphans and children of single parents into the Mission Vatsalya Sponsorship Scheme. This strategic intervention has established a robust, long-term safety net, ensuring that those most in need are protected through sustained institutional support.

A Blueprint for the Last Mile

Recognized as a **“Srestha Panchayat”** on June 12, 2025, **The Jharnipali Model: Integrating Child Protection into Local Budgets** has emerged as a replicable blueprint of how administrative direction and technical facilitation can advance national goals at the last mile. The Panchayat’s strategic use of the 5% GPDP untied fund has enabled a shift from reactive responses to a proactive, family-strengthening approach. By keeping children safe and supported within their own communities, Jharnipali demonstrates how local governance can effectively **“complement and complete”** India’s child welfare agenda. This journey proves that when the administrative spark meets community ownership, the most vulnerable families are no longer left behind.



Preventing Family Separation through Community-Based Support: Case Studies

By Humanity the Ultimate Faith

Case Study – 1 – Story of Usmaan from Adijan Village

By Mr. Sajad Malik,
District Coordinator, Kulgam,
Humanity the Ultimate Faith

In the small village of Adijan in Kulgam district, a family of three was on the brink of separation due to compounded vulnerabilities. Usmaan (name changed) was living with his mother and elder sister (18 years) in their maternal aunt's home, after being forced out of their own house following his father's prolonged illness, financial collapse, addiction, and eventual abandonment of the family. The father's medical treatment had exhausted the family's savings, and the sale of their land further weakened their economic stability. As domestic violence escalated and the father, who later disappeared, the household was left without income and shelter. This placed Usmaan at high risk of school dropout, child labour, emotional distress, and long-term family separation. His sister discontinued higher education, and Usmaan began taking up labour work to support daily household needs, further increasing his vulnerability.

The situation was identified by a Community Protection Group (CPG) established by Humanity the Ultimate Faith (HUF), under the UNICEF-supported Family-Based Alternative Care (FBAC) Programme. HUF initiated a structured case management process to prevent family breakdown and strengthen the caregiving environment. Immediate efforts focused on stabilizing Usmaan's education through community-based sponsorship support, ensuring continuity of schooling and reducing the need for child labour. A dedicated mentor was assigned to

monitor academic progress and provide guidance. Alongside educational support, psychosocial counselling was provided to Usmaan and his mother to address trauma related to domestic violence, abandonment, and emotional stress, enabling the family to rebuild trust and resilience.

Recognizing that sustainable family strengthening requires institutional linkage, HUF facilitated documentation and coordinated with the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Kulgam, advocating for inclusion of Usmaan under the Preventive Sponsorship Scheme of Mission Vatsalya. Following assessment and approval, regular financial support was initiated, helping the family meet essential needs while maintaining the child within a family-based care environment. Additionally, through HUF's advocacy, the family was linked with the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), securing access to safe and permanent housing, a critical protective factor against future displacement and separation.

As a result of this integrated intervention, the family has achieved improved economic stability, emotional well-being, and social security. Usmaan has returned fully to education, his mother is better equipped to care for her children, and the risk of family separation has significantly reduced. This case highlights the effectiveness of community-led identification, coordinated government linkages, and holistic family strengthening approaches. Through timely intervention, HUF successfully transformed a high-risk situation into an opportunity for stability, dignity, and long-term protection, reinforcing the core principle that children thrive best when supported within safe and strengthened family environments.



Case Study - 2 – The Story of Ayaan Rashid

By Mr. Gazi Maqbool,
District Coordinator, Anantnag,
Humanity the Ultimate Faith

Nine-year-old **Ayaan Rashid** (name changed) faced a life-altering crisis in 2019 when he lost his father to sudden cardiac failure. The family's fragile stability further deteriorated when his mother remarried in 2020, leaving Ayaan at serious risk of separation and institutional placement. With no immediate caregiver available and emotional distress compounding his vulnerability, the child stood on the brink of being placed in institutional care, a transition that could have disrupted his emotional well-being and development. At this critical juncture, a **community-based solution emerged through kinship care**. Ayaan's cousin brother, who is also an active **Child Protection Group (CPG) member**, stepped forward to provide care and shelter to Ayaan. This intervention ensured continuity of family bonds and emotional security, allowing the child to remain within a familiar and culturally supportive environment. Recognizing the need for long-term sustainability, an application for **Preventive Sponsorship under Mission Vatsalya** was facilitated in 2022. The sponsorship was approved, significantly easing the economic burden on the caregiving household.

Alongside financial support, **psychosocial counselling services** were provided to Ayaan and his caregiving family to help them process the trauma of losing their father and adapt to their new caregiving arrangement. These sessions strengthened emotional resilience and supported healthy adjustment within the kinship care setting. As a result of these coordinated efforts, **family separation was successfully prevented**, institutionalization was avoided, and a stable caregiving arrangement was established.



The case demonstrates how kinship care, when supported through government schemes, community structures, and psychosocial interventions, can serve as a sustainable and child-centered alternative to institutional care. Ayaan's story reflects the power of community solidarity and structured case management in safeguarding children's right to grow up in a family environment that nurtures safety, dignity, and belonging.

Case Study 3 - The Story of Khushboo from Sheikhpura

By Mr. Gazi Maqbool,

*District Coordinator, Anantnag,
Humanity the Ultimate Faith*

In the remote village of Sheikhpura, located nearly 20 kilometers from Anantnag town, lives 7-year-old Khushboo (name changed), a bright child whose life changed dramatically after the death of her father, Farooq Ahmad Gujree. Farooq, a daily-wage

laborer and the sole breadwinner of the family, passed away suddenly due to a heart attack, leaving behind his wife, Kaneeza Begum, and their five daughters with no stable source of income or support. The family resides in a semi-kaccha house, struggling to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and education. Overwhelmed by grief, financial hardship, and community pressure, Kaneeza expressed her intent to send her daughters to a Child Care Institution (CCI), believing it would ensure their survival and schooling. The local community, too, agreed that institutional care might be the only viable option, a reflection of limited awareness about family-based alternative care and available support mechanisms. The situation placed Khushboo and her four elder sisters at high risk of family separation, emotional trauma, and loss of community identity.

The turning point came with the establishment of Community Protection Groups (CPGs) under the HUF initiative, supported by UNICEF, in Sheikhpura and adjoining villages. During routine community mapping, Khushboo's case was identified as a priority for intervention under the Family-Based Alternative Care Program. The HUF team, along with trained CPG members, initiated a series of actions to prevent the separation and strengthen the family's coping capacity: HUF's team conducted intensive counseling sessions with Kaneeza and community elders, highlighting the emotional, psychological, and developmental impact of institutionalization on children. The family was sensitized to understand that CCI should always be the last resort, and children thrive best when nurtured within their families and communities.

The CPG members, supported by HUF, mobilized immediate food and clothing assistance for the family. Khushboo's documentation for Preventive Sponsorship under the Mission Vatsalya Scheme (MVS) was

facilitated and submitted to the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU). She later received financial assistance, ensuring continued schooling and stability. HUF successfully linked Kaneeza with a local Civil Society Organization (CSO) that agreed to provide financial aid for the education of her other daughters. The same CSO also enrolled Kaneeza in a skill development program, enabling her to learn basic tailoring to generate income and move toward self-reliance.

The case strengthened the role of CPGs in Sheikhpura, who now proactively monitor families in distress and coordinate with HUF to ensure early intervention. All five daughters remain with their mother, continuing their education while staying in the comfort and love of their home. Through skill development and financial linkages, Kaneeza now contributes to household income.



The case inspired other families and community members to trust local child protection structures rather than institutional options. The CPG now acts as a bridge between the community and formal protection systems, ensuring that similar crises are addressed in a timely manner. Through timely intervention and collective community action, HUF and the CPG network in Sheikhpura successfully prevented the institutionalization of two young girls, transforming a story of despair into one of resilience. Khushboo and her sister continue their education and live with dignity proves that with awareness, empathy, and support, families can be kept together even in adversity.

Strengthening Families, Elevating Youth Voices: Lessons I'm Taking Forward from BICON 2025

**By Albert Justin, Assistant Manager,
Youth Program, Miracle Foundation
India**

I recently participated in the 6th Biennial International Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia, held on October 15–16, 2025, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Organized by Family for Every Child, Forget Me Not Australia, Hope and Homes for Children, SOS Children's Villages, Udayan Care, and UNICEF Malaysia, the conference brought together government officials, practitioners, researchers, civil society leaders, and a strong delegation of care-experienced youth from across the region.

The theme for BICON 2025, 'Care Reform for Children: Building Inclusive Societies, Resilient Families, and Thriving Children, set the tone for meaningful dialogue and collaboration focused on strengthening family-based care and re-imagining child protection systems in Asia. A major highlight this year was the participation of 34 care-experienced leaders from 8 countries (India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, and Vietnam), who contributed as facilitators and co-panelists, bringing authenticity and lived insight to every conversation.



Representing Miracle Foundation India, I had the opportunity to speak during the Care-Experienced Youth Sharing

Session and participate in a panel discussion. I shared perspectives on the challenges faced by care-experienced youth and highlighted the positive steps being taken towards their enablement.

Based on my observations and reflections at BICON 2025, it became clear that we at Miracle Foundation India have a powerful opportunity to deepen our engagement with care-experienced youth. The conversations, youth-led sessions, and region-wide learning reaffirmed that young people transitioning out of care require intentional, long-term, and holistic support systems. Drawing from the insights shared by practitioners, governments, and care-experienced youth themselves, here is how I believe that Miracle Foundation India can strengthen its approach to enabling care-experienced youth across the programs and partnerships.

1. Institutionalize Aftercare as a Core Program Pillar

Insight: BICON 2025 emphasized that aftercare is not a privilege — it's a right. Care-experienced youth need structured, long-term support to transition successfully into independent life.

Proposed Actions:

- Integrate a dedicated "Aftercare Program" within the Youth vertical, focusing on housing, education, employment, and emotional well-being.
- Develop Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs) for each young person exiting care.
- Collaborate with State Child Protection Units to ensure every eligible care-experienced youth

is registered under Aftercare Schemes.

- Create a "Care-Experienced Youth Fund" or resource pool to support urgent needs like accommodation, documentation, and skill training.

2. Build a Strong Care-Experienced Youth Network

Insight: BICON showed how peer networks build resilience, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

Proposed Actions:

- Facilitate the creation of a "Care-Experienced Youth Collective" — a national or regional network where youth can connect, provide peer support, mentor each other, and influence change collectively.
- Host quarterly leadership circles (both online and offline) for care-experienced youth to share experiences and opportunities.

3. Focus on Mental Health and Psycho-social Well-being

Insight: Emotional safety is as vital as financial independence. Many care-experienced youth struggle with trauma, anxiety, or isolation post-transition.

Proposed Actions:

- Embed trauma-informed practices into all youth and aftercare programs.
- Develop a mental health support ecosystem — including access to trained counselors, peer supporters, and helpline resources.
- Train staff and mentors in psychological first aid and youth-sensitive communication.

- Celebrate “Wellness Weeks” or “Healing Circles” for care-experienced youth to normalize conversations around mental health.

4. Enhance Livelihood and Life Skills Readiness

Insight: Sustainable independence requires both hard and soft skills.

Proposed Actions:

- Strengthen partnerships with vocational training / professional courses institutes, CSR programs, and digital learning platforms.
- Introduce financial literacy, digital literacy, and career planning modules tailored for care-experienced youth.
- Establish mentorship programs pairing care-experienced youth with professionals from Miracle Foundation India’s networks (alumni, volunteers, corporate mentors).
- Support internship-to-employment pathways through partnerships with youth-friendly employers.

5. Promote Youth Participation in Policy and Program Design

Insight: Youth at BICON 2025 called for formal mechanisms for participation in decision-making.

Proposed Actions:

- Create a Youth Advisory Board made up of care-experienced individuals to advise on program strategies, campaigns, and advocacy initiatives.
- Include at least one care-experienced representative in every external delegation (conferences, policy meetings, etc.).
- Train youth in communication and leadership to represent their peers effectively.

- Document and publish youth-led research or position papers to influence policy discourse.

6. Improve Transition and Case Management Systems

Insight: Smooth transitions require coordinated planning between homes, families, and systems.

Proposed Actions:

- Develop a standardized transition checklist for care-leaving preparation (documentation, housing, employment, psycho-social readiness).
- Train social workers and caregivers to prepare youth for independent living two years before they exit care.
- Track care-experienced youth for at least two years post-transition to assess well-being and provide continued support.

7. Influence Systemic Change

Insight: Change must go beyond individual programs to influence national and state-level systems.

Proposed Actions:

- Collaborate with MWCD (Ministry of Women and Child Development) and State Governments to strengthen the Aftercare component under the JJ Act.
- Partner with Family for Every Child, UNICEF, and Udayan Care for regional advocacy on the rights of care-experienced youth.
- Contribute to a National Aftercare Framework, ensuring funding, monitoring, and accountability.
- Use storytelling and media campaigns to amplify lived experience narratives and shift

public perceptions about children and youth with lived experience..

8. Strengthen Internal Capacity and Partnerships

Insight: Effective care-experienced youth work requires well-trained staff, collaboration, and consistent funding.

Proposed Actions:

- Train program staff in care-experienced youth engagement, trauma care, and youth leadership facilitation.
- Build partnerships with corporates, universities, and NGOs for scholarships, mentorship, and resource support.
- Establish an internal care-experienced youth task force to monitor progress, collect feedback, and adapt strategies.

The Bigger Vision

By acting on these learnings, we can move closer to a future where every child and every care-experienced young person has the support, stability, and opportunities they need to thrive. The vision is not about any single organization becoming a leader—it is about building systems and communities where young people leaving Child Care Institutions are never left behind.

BICON 2025 reinforced that real progress happens when children and youth are at the centre of care reform, shaping the policies, programs, and practices that affect their lives. Our collective responsibility is to ensure they have the tools, networks, and enabling environments to build strong, fulfilling futures.

As the conference so powerfully reminded us: “We can’t change their past, but we can help build their future.” Every young person

deserves trust, opportunity, and the right support at the right time—and creating that environment begins with all of us. True inclusion is not about inviting youth into spaces; it is about listening to them, learning with them, and partnering with them at every step.

My journey with BICON began in 2023, which was my first global platform and a moment that strengthened my belief that youth voices are finally being heard. This year's BICON deepened that conviction. It reaffirmed the importance of creating spaces where care-experienced

young people can connect, influence change, and support one another. Inspired by these conversations, I am now working to build a care leaver network in my state—so that more young people can access the community, opportunities, and confidence they deserve.

From Vulnerability to Stability: Livelihood Empowerment and Family Strengthening in a Community Setting

By Dr. KM. Pratima,
Associate Researcher, Foster Care Society

Case Background

In India's child protection and alternative care landscape, it is widely acknowledged that the most common reason for family separation is economic and social insecurity. When families struggle for livelihood, dignity, and stability, children become increasingly vulnerable to being pushed into institutional care. In such fragile moments, strategies like *Family Strengthening* and *Gatekeeping* emerge not merely as interventions, but as lifelines that hold families together.

This case study comes from the city of Udaipur in Rajasthan. It tells the story of a community-based livelihood intervention that did much more than help a woman earn an income—it restored her confidence, safeguarded her children, and prevented an entire family from slipping into crisis. This is a story of resilience and hope, reflecting the work carried out under the *Sutra Project* implemented by Foster Care Society, where timely support transformed vulnerability into strength and dependence into self-reliance.

Lakshmi (name changed), a 35-year-old woman from Udaipur city, has long been the primary caregiver of her family. For

years, her life revolved around rag-picking—work that was physically exhausting, unsafe, and uncertain. The income from this work was meagre and irregular, barely enough to meet the family's basic needs. Each day was a struggle to survive, with no assurance of what tomorrow might bring.

Alongside economic hardship, Lakshmi carried the invisible weight of social neglect, low self-esteem, and constant anxiety about the future. The family lived under continuous stress, and this strain slowly began to reflect on the children's education, health, and emotional well-being. The home, which should have been a space of safety, was instead overshadowed by worry and instability. This situation was a clear sign of growing *family vulnerability*.

Risk Analysis: Threat of Family Separation

Lakshmi's challenges went far beyond a livelihood crisis. Several risks were clearly present:

- Irregular and insufficient income
- Unsafe and undignified working conditions
- Lack of social respect and recognition
- Persistent stress and instability within the family
- Reduced capacity to provide consistent care for the children



In such circumstances, families often begin to see institutional care—either by choice or community pressure—as the only possible solution. This case highlights how economic fragility can slowly and silently push families toward separation, placing children at risk of losing their family environment.

Identification of Intervention: Sutra Project

Through a community-based field team, Lakshmi was introduced to the *Sutra Project*. This initiative focuses on empowering economically vulnerable women by providing skill-based livelihood training. At first, Lakshmi hesitated. Years of hardship had eroded her confidence, and she doubted her own ability to learn or succeed.

However, sustained dialogue, encouragement, and trust-building by the project team gradually motivated her to enroll in the training. This stage

represents a crucial *gatekeeping intervention*, where instead of allowing the family to drift toward institutional solutions, they were connected to community-based support systems.

Alongside livelihood training, Lakshmi also received **psycho-social support** from the Foster Care Society. This support included:

- One-on-one counselling sessions to rebuild self-confidence
- Emotional support to cope with social neglect and feelings of inferiority
- Open conversations around stress, anxiety, and fear about the future
- Guidance focused on strengthening decision-making skills and self-worth

This psycho-social care acted as a vital complement to the livelihood intervention. It helped Lakshmi not only acquire new skills, but also rediscover hope, dignity, and a positive vision for her life and her children's future.

Family Strengthening through Livelihood Support

Lakshmi enrolled in a three-month tailoring training programme. The training was entirely practical and market-oriented, designed to equip her with skills she could immediately use to earn a livelihood. During the course, she learned:

- Operation of a sewing machine
- Fabric cutting
- Basic designing
- Garment repair work

The training went beyond technical skills. Equal emphasis was placed on time management, work discipline, and rebuilding self-confidence—elements that Lakshmi had slowly lost over years of hardship.

Upon completing the programme, she received a certificate. Holding it in her hands was more than a formal

recognition—it became a symbol of her capability and renewed self-belief.

Outcomes: Self-Reliance and Family Stability

Today, Lakshmi earns her livelihood by doing tailoring work from her home. This **home-based livelihood model** proved especially suitable for her circumstances. She now:

- Earns a regular and dignified income
- Manages her family's financial responsibilities independently
- Is no longer dependent on unsafe and exploitative work

This transformation had a direct and visible impact on family stability. The children's needs began to be met more consistently, and a sense of safety and trust returned to the household. The home, once filled with uncertainty, gradually became a place of reassurance and hope.

This change clearly demonstrates how livelihood empowerment strengthens family-based care and reduces the risks that push families toward separation.

Beneficiary's Voice

Lakshmi shares:

"The Sutra Project did not just teach me tailoring—it taught me how to live with self-respect. Today, I am able to build a better future for my children."

Her words reflect that the impact of the intervention was not limited to economic improvement, but extended deeply into emotional and social well-being.

Analysis and Practice-Based Learnings

This case study highlights several key learnings:

1. Economic empowerment is a powerful tool for child protection
2. Timely livelihood interventions can prevent the separation of children from their families
3. Gatekeeping is not only a policy concept, but a practical, community-level action
4. Women's self-reliance strengthens the entire family system
5. This case reinforces the importance of integrating livelihood support within child protection systems as a preventive strategy.

This model holds strong potential for replication in other urban and semi-urban communities.

Ethical Considerations

- The beneficiary's identity has been kept confidential
- The name has been changed
- Dignified and respectful language has been used throughout
- The case is presented solely for learning and policy discussion purposes

Conclusion

Lakshmi's story powerfully illustrates that when families receive the right support at the right time, the need for institutional care can be prevented. Livelihood-based interventions not only enable women to become self-reliant, but also ensure safe, stable, and family-based care for children.

By strengthening one woman's hands, an entire family was held together—and a future once at risk was gently but firmly secured.

Attribution

This case study is drawn from the community-based livelihood and family strengthening initiative of the Foster Care Society's *Pariwar Sahyog Kendra*.

Family Strengthening: Building Resilient Families for the Well-being of Children

By Syed Asima Ali,

Counsellor, Human Welfare Voluntary Organization (HWVO)

“Strong families build strong children, and strong children build strong communities.”

Understanding Family Strengthening

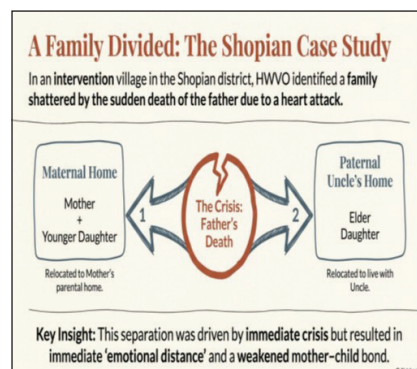
Family strength refers to the ability of a family to provide emotional security, stability, care, and guidance to children, especially during times of crisis. A strong family system is built on emotional bonding, open communication, mutual trust, and adaptive coping mechanisms. Family strengthening is a process of empowering caregivers with emotional awareness, parenting skills, and psychosocial support so that they can effectively respond to children’s needs.



Family strengthening is crucial because the family is the primary environment for a child’s emotional and psychological development. When families are disrupted due to loss, poverty, or stress, children are at increased risk of psychosocial difficulties such as anxiety, emotional withdrawal, low self-esteem, and academic decline. Strengthening families, therefore, acts as a preventive and protective mechanism that promotes children’s well-being and reduces the risk of emotional neglect and separation.

Case Study: Rebuilding Family Unity after Loss

In one of the intervention villages of Shopian district, the Human Welfare Voluntary Organization (HWVO) identified a vulnerable family situation involving two adolescent sisters who lost their father due to a sudden heart attack. Following the father’s death, the family structure was disrupted. The mother and the younger daughter shifted to the mother’s parental home, while the elder daughter began living separately with her paternal uncle. This separation resulted in emotional distance between the sisters and weakened the mother–child bond.



During psychosocial assessment and field engagement, it was observed that the separation had significantly affected the emotional and psychological well-being of both girls. The mother, already coping with grief and socio-economic stress, struggled to provide consistent emotional support to both children. The younger daughter experienced insecurity and fear of abandonment, while the elder daughter showed signs of emotional withdrawal, low self-confidence, and suppressed aspirations. The absence of a unified family environment disrupted their sense of belonging and emotional stability.

A particularly significant aspect of the elder sister’s experience was her

aspiration to become a doctor. Due to limited emotional communication and distance from her mother, she felt unable to share her dreams with anyone. Over time, she began to believe that her ambitions were unrealistic and expressed readiness to choose any academic course randomly, sacrificing her long-term goals. This reflected how family separation can silently diminish a child’s motivation and future orientation.

Recognizing the psychosocial risks, HWVO initiated a structured intervention that included comprehensive psychosocial assessment, parental counselling sessions with the mother, and individual counselling sessions with both sisters. The intervention focused on addressing unresolved grief, strengthening emotional resilience, improving mother–child communication, and emphasizing the importance of keeping siblings emotionally connected within a unified family environment. Through continuous and culturally sensitive counselling, the mother gained deeper insight into the emotional needs of her daughters and the long-term impact of separation.

Gradually, positive changes were observed. The sisters began to express their emotions more openly, and the mother developed a stronger understanding of their psychological needs. As a result of sustained counselling, the mother decided to reunite the family and ensure that both daughters live together under her care from March 2026 onwards. This decision marked a significant turning point in restoring emotional security and stability for the children. The elder sister regained confidence in her dream of pursuing a career in medicine and felt encouraged to express her aspirations without fear or hesitation.

Impact of Intervention

The family strengthening intervention led to significant positive outcomes for both the children and the mother. The emotional well-being of the sisters improved, reflected in better communication, reduced emotional withdrawal, and increased confidence. The mother developed enhanced awareness of her daughters' emotional needs and adopted more responsive and supportive parenting practices. Family reunification contributed to restoring a sense of belonging and emotional security for the children.

The elder sister's renewed motivation to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor indicated a positive shift in self-esteem and future orientation. The intervention also prevented the long-term psychological risks associated with prolonged family separation, such as chronic emotional distress and identity-related challenges. Overall, the case demonstrates how timely psychosocial support and parental counselling can strengthen family bonds and promote sustainable emotional recovery.


Lessons Learned

This case highlights several critical insights regarding family strengthening and child well-being. First, family separation, even when driven by crisis or practical considerations, can have profound psychosocial consequences for children. Second, mothers and caregivers, when provided with appropriate guidance and emotional support, can play a transformative role in rebuilding family unity and nurturing children's emotional resilience. Third, early psychosocial assessment and intervention are essential to prevent the escalation of emotional and behavioural difficulties among vulnerable children.

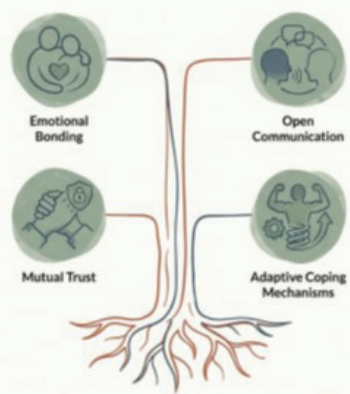
Theory Definition

Strong Families Build Strong Children

Family Strength is the ability of a family to provide emotional security, stability, care, and guidance, particularly during times of crisis.



Insight: Family strengthening is a process of empowering caregivers with emotional awareness, parenting skills, and psychosocial support to effectively respond to children's needs.



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The case also underscores the importance of integrating family-based approaches into child protection and mental health interventions. Strengthening families is not merely a supportive strategy but a fundamental requirement for safeguarding children's rights and well-being. Finally, the experience demonstrates that sustainable change is possible when interventions focus not only on children but also on empowering caregivers and restoring family relationships.

"This initiative is being implemented under the UNICEF-supported Family-Based Alternative Care (FBAC)

framework in Shopian District, Jammu and Kashmir, through the programme titled **"Building Community-Based Care Mechanisms for Vulnerable Children in Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir,"** with a focus on child protection, psychosocial support, grief-informed care, and strengthening family systems to promote children's emotional well-being and resilience."

"When families are supported with care and understanding, they become the strongest shelter for a child's healing, growth, and hope."

Safeguarding Rights, Restoring Hope



The experience in Shopian demonstrates that sustainable emotional recovery is possible when interventions focus not only on the child but on empowering caregivers. Rebuilding the family structure is the only way to ensure the long term protection of a child's mental health and future aspirations.

Case study provided by Human Welfare Voluntary Organization (HWVO).

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Bihar's Journey in Building a Rights-Based Aftercare Ecosystem

By Mr. Banku Bihari Sarkar,
Child Protection Specialist,
UNICEF Bihar

Ms. Ranjana Srivastava,
Associate Director, Advocacy,
Research and Training Department,
Udayan Care

For thousands of young people leaving Child Care Institutions (CCIs) each year, turning eighteen does not signify freedom, it marks uncertainty. With limited family support, weak social networks, and minimal awareness of their legal entitlements, care leavers often step into adulthood without a safety net. Bihar's evolving Aftercare programme tells a different story: one of system reform, youth leadership, and the State's growing ownership of its responsibility toward children transitioning out of care.

Recognising the gap and ground work through evidence-based action

The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 mandates Aftercare support for children leaving institutional care, yet for years this provision remained largely on paper. Recognising this gap, the Social Welfare Department (SWD), Government of Bihar initiated a focused effort in November 2019 to strengthen the State's Aftercare framework, in partnership with UNICEF Bihar and with technical support from Udayan Care.

The initial phase piloted a demonstration model across three CCIs and one home for destitute women above 18 years in Patna and Gaya districts. The objective was clear: embed transition planning from the age of 15, strengthen district child protection systems, and operationalise Aftercare provisions as envisioned under the Juvenile Justice

Act; state Juvenile Justice Model Rules and Mission Vatsalya.

In 2021, a state-wide mapping of children aged 15 years and above living in CCIs revealed critical concerns. Covering 361 adolescents across 34 CCIs in nine divisions of Bihar, the study highlighted overcrowding, a high proportion of Children with Special Needs (CWSN), limited access to therapies and special education, and prolonged institutionalisation due to weak family reintegration efforts.

The findings underscored an urgent need for structured transition planning, rehabilitation pathways, and strengthened Aftercare services, laying the foundation for systemic reform rather than ad-hoc interventions.

Building the policy backbone

Responding to these findings, Bihar constituted a State-level Committee in 2021 to draft comprehensive Aftercare Guidelines aligned with the State Juvenile Justice Rules, 2017 and the Child Protection Scheme. Chaired by the Director, Social Welfare Department, the committee included government officials alongside UNICEF and Udayan Care representatives. The guidelines were later updated in line with amendments to the Juvenile Justice framework and Mission Vatsalya, reinforcing the State's commitment to a legally grounded Aftercare programme.

Care Leavers at the centre and voices reaching national platforms

Perhaps the most transformative shift came with the recognition that care leavers themselves must shape the Aftercare ecosystem. With no existing database of youth exiting

CCIs, identifying care leavers was a challenge. After months of outreach and one-to-one engagement, 45 care leavers were mobilised in 2021.

On 21 December 2021, Bihar witnessed its first-ever State-level gathering of care leavers. Supported by UNICEF Bihar and facilitated by Udayan Care under the guidance of SWD, the meeting led to the formation of **Yuva Sahyogi Sangathan (YSS)**, a care leavers' network conceptualised, named, and led by young people themselves. Participants came from all 38 districts, joined by child protection officials and representatives from the national Care Leavers Network and Association (CLAN).

In 2022, Bihar's care leavers stepped into national discourse. On the International Day of the Girl Child, Gulabsha Parveen, an 18-year-old care leaver from Bihar, raised the issue of skill development for children in CCIs. Her advocacy prompted the Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, to announce skill development programmes across 7,000 CCIs nationwide, bringing Aftercare into the national spotlight.

Strengthening systems and skills

From 2021 onwards, sustained investments were made in capacity building, both of care leavers and child protection functionaries. Training programmes on Aftercare, database management, youth rights, leadership, and life skills were rolled out. The YSS network grew from 45 to over 100 members.

In January 2023, the Social Welfare Department formally notified the creation of **State and District Aftercare**



Cells, institutionalising care leavers' participation in programme planning and monitoring, a critical step toward sustainability.

A platform for collective action

The momentum culminated in September 2023 with Bihar's first State-level Care Leavers Convention. Organised by SWD, SCPS, and UNICEF, the two-day consultation brought together care leavers, policymakers, employers, civil society organisations, mentors, and allied government departments.

The convention celebrated success stories, facilitated employer interactions, highlighted vocational training needs, including for youth with disabilities and resulted in a State Action Plan to support care leavers transitioning to independent life. Over 100 care leavers, 50 officials, and 30 partner organisations participated, signalling a collective commitment to Aftercare.

Concrete outcomes followed. A pilot skill development centre **Nav Srijan** was established under the Aftercare programme in collaboration with the Bihar Skill Development Mission and Labour Resources Department, inspired by exposure visits to best-practice states such as Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Maharashtra.

In 2024, Bihar initiated direct Aftercare financial assistance of ₹4,000 per month to eligible care leavers. With technical support in building databases, more than 30 young people began receiving support by December 2025.

Towards a collective identity and claiming citizenship

In 2024, care leavers came together to define their long-term vision. Facilitated by care leaders from other states, the consultation led to the evolution of the **Bihar Care Leavers Alliance (BCLA)** from erstwhile Yuva Sahyogi Sangathan (YSS) and a five-year Vision Document. The Alliance articulated a clear goal: enabling every care leaver in Bihar to transition into adulthood with confidence, resilience, and access to opportunities.

The 2025 Bihar elections surfaced a new challenge: access to voter identity cards. Many care leavers lacked residence proof or parental documents, putting their democratic participation at risk. Through advocacy, media engagement, and petitions supported by Udayan Care, BCLA raised the issue with the State Election Commission and political parties.

Pooja Kumari, a care leaver, articulated the sentiment powerfully: *"A voter ID is not just a document, it is proof that we belong."* As a result, several care leavers successfully obtained voter IDs and exercised their right to vote.

State Recognition and the Road Ahead

In late 2025, members of BCLA met the Governor of Bihar, followed by strategic engagements with the Secretary, Social Welfare Department, in early 2026. These sustained advocacy efforts culminated in a significant milestone: **the launch of the Bihar State Aftercare Guidelines** on 13 February 2026 by the Secretary, Social Welfare Department, Government of Bihar.

The occasion also marked the release of **the Coffee Table Book** documenting global, national, and Bihar-specific aftercare practices, alongside powerful personal narratives of care leavers that capture the evolution of this journey. Together, these launches signalled the State's commitment to strengthening coordinated systems that streamline access to identity documentation, social protection schemes, livelihood and skill development opportunities. The State also encouraged BCLA to formalize its institutional structure and expand its peer mentoring initiatives.

Bihar's Aftercare journey demonstrates that when policy, institutions, and young people move together, transition from care can become a pathway to dignity and citizenship. The road ahead lies in scaling these efforts, ensuring last-mile delivery, and sustaining youth-led leadership, so that no young person leaving care is left behind.



Events

Dasra Philanthropy Week 2026: Child Wellbeing as the Foundation of India's Development

By Dasra and UNICEF

India is home to millions of children, yet many continue to face risks shaped by poverty, climate vulnerability, migration, and systemic gaps in services. While progress has been made across sectors, support systems often reach children only after harm has occurred.

The session 'Child Wellbeing as a Foundation for India's Development' at Dasra Philanthropy Week 2026 brought together diverse perspectives to explore how India can strengthen child protection systems and advance preventive, family- and community-based approaches to ensure children's safety and wellbeing.

Dr. Delia Pop: Why Families Are the First System of Protection

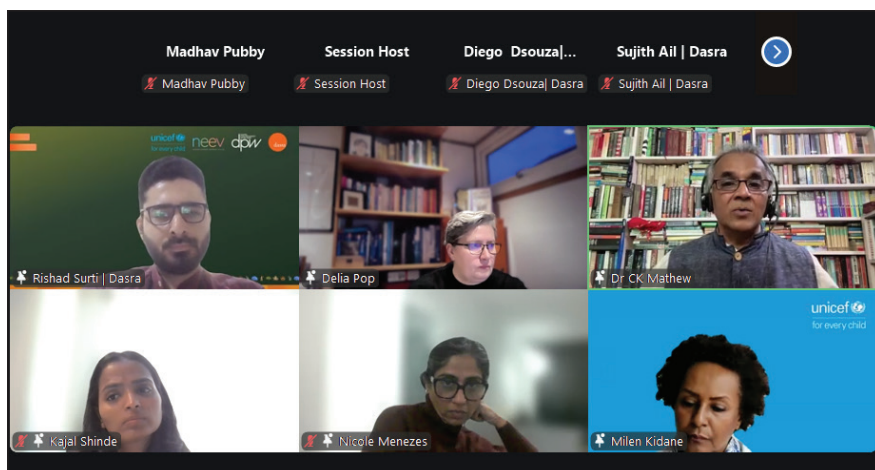
Drawing on decades of global research and reform experience across 40 countries, she explained that no institutional system, however well resourced, can replicate the emotional stability and responsive caregiving provided within families.

Most children separated from families globally are not removed because of abuse but because families lack economic security, housing, disability support, or community systems. When families are provided with the right support systems and community support, children are safer.

Dr. Pop outlined five principles shaping effective prevention systems worldwide:

1. Invest before crises emerge.
2. Treat prevention as a budget and not an expenditure.
3. Co-create solutions with families rather than designing for them.
4. Build skilled, supported frontline workforces.
5. Connect community innovation to national policy frameworks.

Philanthropy, she argued, plays a unique role as risk capital that enables experimentation, sustains care reform through political change and ultimately influences how public resources flow.



Nicole Menezes: Understanding Where Children Fall Through the Cracks

Nicole Menezes framed child wellbeing as a holistic concept that includes economic stability, peer relations, political rights, and developmental opportunities.

As per government figures from 2015, there are 170 million vulnerable children across the country. Many children experience overlapping risks shaped by caste, geography, disability, migration, and generational poverty, highlighting the scale of children “falling through the cracks.”

India has spent over two decades strengthening response systems. The next phase requires shifting toward prevention, a transition envisioned within Mission Vatsalya.

Nicole emphasized the need to strengthen community-based mechanisms like Village Child Welfare and Protection Committees, bringing children’s needs within the purview of local self-governance systems and fostering solutions within the immediate environments of children and families. However, she highlighted a critical gap: prevention work requires years of consistent engagement, but funding systems are not designed to support long-term community processes.

Dr. C K Mathew: A Governance Roadmap for Change

Dr. C K Mathew shifted the discussion toward actionable governance reforms.

1. The need for a unified and publicly accessible child data ecosystem. While data exists, it remains fragmented, limiting policy responsiveness.
2. A comprehensive review of child protection legislation implementation, noting rising crimes against children despite existing laws.
3. As per the 73rd constitutional amendment the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) hold responsibility for women and children but this remains underutilized. Untied grants recommended by the 16th Finance Commission can support child wellbeing initiatives.
4. The interest and voice of political leadership is critical in driving investment in child protection.

Dr. Mathew emphasized the need for stronger collaboration between government and civil society.

Milen Kidane: Child Protection as a Nation-Building Agenda

Milen Kidane reframed child vulnerability as a macro-development

issue, arguing that development that fails to protect children cannot be sustainable.

She emphasized that when children grow up in safe, nurturing family environments, they are more likely to stay in school, develop cognitive and emotional capabilities, and participate meaningfully in society. She also highlighted Mission Vatsalya’s commitment to creating a coordinated system that recognizes children’s needs as continuous and interconnected.

She highlighted four interconnected principles:

1. Early investment in children yields the highest social and economic returns.
2. Systems must break sectoral silos across health, education, nutrition, and social protection.
3. Families are the strongest protective environments and must be supported accordingly.
4. Social norms and digital transformation must be addressed thoughtfully to protect children in evolving contexts.

Milen urged stakeholders to reflect whether systems are designed to reach vulnerable children early enough and support them effectively.

Kajal Shinde: Lived Experience and the Meaning of Wellbeing

The session’s most personal perspective came from Kajal Shinde, who shared her experience of entering institutional care as a child following her father’s death and her family’s financial struggles. While institutional care provided physical safety, she described the emotional loss and identity challenges children experience when growing up away from families.

Today, as a case manager of the NGO Prerana, she sees first-hand how early support can prevent family-child

separation. Her story underscored the importance of strengthening families and communities as preventive systems rather than relying on institutional responses.

Closing Reflections: The Shift India Needs

In final reflections, speakers converged around several transformative shifts:

- Political commitment must elevate child wellbeing nationally.

- Prevention requires long-term investment and patience.
- Collaboration between government, civil society and the philanthropic community must deepen.
- Child protection narratives must shift from crisis to possibility and hope.

The session concluded with a powerful message: child protection is not a cost but essential infrastructure for human development. As India stands

at a critical demographic moment, investments in children today will shape the country's future resilience and prosperity.

Watch the full recording of the event here - https://drive.google.com/file/d/17diKmKqu8YoeF13_W2RP26fV2o7Ub-AX/view?pli=1

Leadership Dialogue - 9

By India Alternative Care Network (IACN) & Miracle Foundation India

The 9th Leadership Dialogue, organized by Miracle Foundation India in collaboration with India Alternative Care Network on 29th January 2026, focused on the critical theme of "Education and Employability in the Context of Family Strengthening." Bringing together 111 participants from across India and a few international representatives, the session created a platform for meaningful exchange among stakeholders committed to improving youth outcomes.

The panel, moderated by Ms. Smitha Shetty, CEO, Catalyst for Social Action, featured esteemed panelists, Dr. Subhomoy Bhaduri, Associate Director, Capacity Building & Collaboration, Magic Bus India Foundation Mr. Sanjay Kabir, State Program Manager – Pedagogy & Learning Management, Jeevika (BRLPS), Government of Bihar, and Ms. Nidhi Kumari, Youth Ambassador, Bihar.

At a time when India is making significant investments in education and skill development, the dialogue emphasized the urgent need to ensure that no young person is left behind. Discussions highlighted the importance of building strong education-to-

Ninth Edition of Leadership Dialogues
Innovate. Collaborate. Strengthen.
Towards a Safer Future for Our Children.

January 29, 2026 | 3-4:30 PM (IST) | Virtual (Zoom)

THEME
Education and Employability

MODERATOR
Smitha Shetty
CEO,
Catalysts for Social Action

PANELISTS
Dr. Subhomoy Bhaduri
Associate Director, Capacity Building & Collaborations,
Magic Bus India Foundation
Sanjay Kabir
State Project Manager-Pedagogy & Learning Management,
JEEVIKA (BRLPS),
Government of Bihar
Nidhi Kumari
Youth Ambassador,
Bihar

employability pathways that are inclusive, responsive, and aligned with the evolving needs of the workforce.

The session explored key challenges such as gaps in access to quality education, limited career guidance, and fragmented support systems. At the same time, it showcased promising practices and government initiatives

that are helping bridge these gaps. Participants underscored the value of coordinated systems, timely guidance, and sustained mentoring in enabling young people to transition successfully into the workforce.

A key focus of the dialogue was strengthening cross-sector collaboration among government, civil

society, and private sector actors. By fostering shared understanding and collective action, the dialogue aimed to place youth transitions at the center of education and employability efforts.

Overall, the session reinforced the need for holistic, youth-centric approaches that integrate family strengthening with education and career pathways, ensuring better life outcomes for young people.

Watch the full recording of the discussion here - <https://miraclefoundationindia.in/ninth-leadership-dialogue/>

Breaking the Cycle : Voices from the Field to Integrate Family Strengthening Principles to Practices - Part - III (East and Northeast Region)

By India Alternative Care Network (IACN) & Udayan Care

On 12th February 2026, IACN in collaboration with Udayan Care, organized the third part of the series – Breaking the Cycle: Voices from the Field to Integrate Family Strengthening Principles into Practices. The session focused on experiences from the Eastern and North eastern regions. The session emphasized the growing shift toward family-based care, supported by evidence indicating a decline in institutionalization and a stronger focus on preventing unnecessary child-family separation.

Speakers highlighted the importance of context-specific approaches. Father Lukose, Cheruvalel, Director and Chief Functionary, Snehalaya Charitable Trust, discussed the unique socio-cultural landscape of Northeast India, pointing to factors such as substance abuse, migration, and the erosion of traditional family structures. Mr. Banku Bihari Sarkar, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Bihar, presented Bihar's initiatives, including conditional

cash transfers and community-based systems, while also noting gaps in coordination and the need for improved grassroots implementation. Ms. Paulami De Sarkar, Programme Manager, Terre Des Hommes Foundation, India, shared a resilience-focused intervention model from West Bengal and Jharkhand, emphasizing sports as a tool for psychosocial support and family engagement. The panel was moderated by Ms. Ranjana Srivastava, Associate Director, Advocacy, Research and Training Department, Udayan Care

Across discussions, the importance of multi-sectoral strategies addressing poverty, migration, and mental health emerged as a key theme. Panelists also underscored persistent challenges, particularly limited engagement of fathers and male caregivers, and the influence of patriarchal norms. The session concluded with a call for more innovative, inclusive, and community-driven approaches to strengthen families and ensure better outcomes for children.

Watch the full recording of the session here - <https://youtu.be/7zXXvm6CR5A>

The banner features logos for UDAYAN CARE (Where young lives shine), IACN, and a 'Join Us' icon. The title 'Webinar Part 3 Breaking the Cycle- Voices from the Field to Integrate Family Strengthening Principles to Practice' is displayed in a blue bar. Below, four speakers are introduced with their photos and titles: Ms. Ranjana Srivastava (Moderator, Udayan Care), Fr. Lukose Cheruvalel (Director and Chief Functionary, Snehalaya Charitable Trust), Mr. Banku Bihari Sarkar (Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF, Bihar State Office), and Ms. Paulami De Sarkar (Programme Manager, Terre des hommes Foundation in India). The date and time '12 FEBRUARY, 2026 | 4- 5.30 IST' are shown at the bottom.