

# Inside **Philanthropy**

Who's Funding What, and Why

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## Why This Collaborative Wants Philanthropy to Stop Funding Orphanages

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Back in the fall, we ran a story about a woman who founded a nonprofit that [supports orphanages](#) in India. Our story, written as part of an ongoing

series on fundraising strategies, looked at how this nonprofit raised money from donors in the U.S. to strengthen high-impact orphanages serving poor Indian children.

That story came to the attention of the Elevate Children Funders Group (ECFG), which describes itself as "a consortium of private and public foundations dedicated to building strong families and a life free from violence for all children." Its members include the GHR, Nduna, Oak, Bernard van Leer, and UBS Optimus foundations, as well as Comic Relief and the Human Dignity and World Childhood foundations. As part of its mission, ECFG "strongly believes and supports the idea that children are best able to thrive and reach their full potential when they remain with their families and communities rather than living in an orphanage." As the members of ECFG see it, philanthropists should *stop* giving money to build or improve orphanages, and instead "invest in opportunities that build strong families and communities."

This is a bigger global development issue than you might think.

There are over 150 million orphan children in the world, and the great majority—some 132 million—live in developing countries. A slice of this population lives in orphanages, although exact numbers are hard to come by. What is clear is that the number of orphanages has dramatically increased in recent years in some places.

But what's so bad about orphanages, exactly? Well, according to ECFG:

Years of research have shown that residential care (or orphanages) can cause long-term and sometimes permanent detrimental effects on children's cognitive, physical, intellectual and social-emotional development, particularly for young children. Worldwide experience has shown that orphanages can also lead to increased risks of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

Some research has found that many orphans work in commercial agriculture, street vending and housekeeping. Others are sold into the sex industry.

Findings like these explain why the United Nations has called on member states to ensure that every child and young person lives in a protective and caring family environment.

What is ECFG doing to make this vision a reality?

Well, for one thing, it supports efforts to prevent children from being unnecessarily separated from their families in the first place. According to the group, this includes family strengthening programs, violence prevention programs, supportive social services, and government policymaking geared toward youth empowerment.

More broadly, ECFG makes investments in like-minded organizations working to “strengthen systems for family-based care and reduce dependence on the institutionalization of children.” Recognizing that there may be no option but to separate children from their parents, ECFG also supports alternatives to residential care such as kinship care, foster care, and domestic adoptions.

Such programs face an uphill funding battle, as much-needed resources are directed to residential care facilities and programs rather than to the alternatives advocated by ECFG.

ECFG members are engaged in a variety of efforts in this area. For instance, the GHR Foundation’s Children and Families program is aimed directly at preventing kids from being separated from their families. GHR supports organizations working in Zambia and Cambodia, two countries that have some of the largest orphan populations in the world.

Additionally, the [Human Dignity Foundation’s](#) Child Protection program

works to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families.

That said, this is still a very uncrowded funding space in the larger world of philanthropy. Other than ECFG and its members, there are very few donors paying attention. A notable exception, here, is J.K. Rowling, whose nonprofit Lumos keeps children out of group homes and orphanages by backing organizations that offer alternatives.

Ultimately, it's unlikely that funders will stop supporting orphanages altogether. However, the philanthropic movement to avoid the institutionalization of children is gaining some steam.

<http://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2017/2/9/this-collaborative-wants-philanthropy-to-stop-funding-orphanages-find-out-why>