

Strengthening Families and Preventing Separation

VIDEO SUMMARY

In many cases, family separation and recourse to alternative care can be avoided through the delivery of community-based social and family support services. A key challenge in many countries and contexts is ensuring these services are available, accessible and relevant to families at high risk of separation, particularly those located in remote rural areas.

Towards addressing this challenge, Cambodian Children's Trust piloted a Holistic Family Preservation Program in rural Cambodia. In this video, you'll hear from Sophorn Ngath as he shares some of the key learning from their pilot phase.


Sophorn explores the impact recruitment of locally-based social workers had on the efficacy of risk identification and analysis and how this affected the sustainability of outcomes for families. He also discusses the importance of building strong relationships with families and why CCT has moved towards a strengths-based approach to social work.


DISCUSSION TOPIC


Identification of risk

In the video, Sophorn talks about how the identification of risk is influenced by knowledge of the community context and the social worker's ability to develop a relationship with the family and secure their trust. He points to the dangers of drawing superficial conclusions based only on what risks are visible and/or identified in the referral process.

In your context:

-  Who is responsible for identifying risks in families and what process is used? How do these processes lend themselves towards either identifying surface level risks or root cause level risks? Consider the following in your discussion:
 - Familiarity with the community context and customs
 - Time invested in relationship and trust building
 - Degree to which families participate in risk identification
 - Types of approaches and tools used to aid risk identification and analysis
 - Nature of the risks you're addressing (are they symptomatic or causal risks?)


-  Thinking about a case you're familiar with, what impact is this approach having on families? Are you seeing an increase in resilience and capacity to withstand risk?


-  How could your organisation improve its approach to risk identification and analysis? What are the next steps and resource implications?


Empowering families and sustainable impacts

In the video, Sophorn points to the importance of engaging with families in a way that draws out their strengths, capabilities and networks, rather than focuses solely on their deficits. He discusses how this creates a critical shift in thinking and builds the family's confidence in their ability to stay together and meet their children's needs.

In your context:

-  In what ways does your current approach draw on the strengths of families and communities to enhance the protection and care of children? What opportunities exist in your work or organisation to increase the use of a strengths-based approach to social work and what benefit do you think this would have for children and their families?

-  How might empowerment of families positively influence their thinking and how could these shifts in mindsets improve child protection outcomes and aid in the prevention of separation?

-  How do you work with families to address risks to children without causing families to feel judged or disempowered? What are the challenges to striking the right balance and what, if anything could be modified to better navigate these challenges? What would the implications of those modifications be in terms of processes, skills and resources?

Village Based Social Worker & Family Strengthening

Davy, one of CCT's village based social workers, received a care referral from a third-party organisation regarding three siblings in her target community. The children, whose ages ranged from 5-9 years old, were reportedly undernourished, attending school irregularly and at-risk due to living in insecure housing.

Davy visited the family and introduced herself as one of the CCT social workers who came from a neighbouring village. After an initial conversation, the family realised that they knew some of Davy's relatives and one other family in their village that Davy was assisting. This seemed to put them at ease, and they invited Davy to sit down and drink tea with them in their home.

Davy was able to observe the home and realised that only two of the walls were made with semi secure materials. The other two walls were partially covered with old rice sacks tied to bamboo poles. Davy asked the parents about their family and through that came to know that the mother's parents lived next door with her sister and her sister's family. Davy grew up in this area and knew this was fairly typical housing for the poorer families. She also knew the parents would sleep next to the children in one room and break-ins were unheard of in these villages. The family also had the added security of having extended relatives living next door. Davy concluded

that the protective factors in place were already sufficient to manage any risks associated with insecure housing and this did not warrant an intervention.

Over the course of several visits, the family began to open up about some of their challenges and discussed with Davy what they'd like to do to solve these issues. The main cause of stress in their family was irregular work, which meant they sometimes didn't have enough income to buy enough food or cover the schooling costs for their children's education. The financial stresses in the family also caused tension between the parents.

The mother wanted to start a small shop at the front of their house, however, she needed a small amount of capital to purchase goods to sell. Davy helped the family develop a plan to set up a small business and, in the meantime, referred the children to the local temple that provides free meals to struggling families. She also referred the family to the local Commune Children and Women's Council to get access to a small education scholarship available through the local Commune to ensure the children remained in school. CCT provided a small amount of capital for the mother to start her business, which overtime helped to supplement the father's income.

Davy continued to visit the family regularly to monitor the children's wellbeing, encourage the parents and help them set goals. Whilst issues continued to arise, over time the family's capacity to withstand and overcome these issues through their own means increased, thus reducing any associated risks to their children.