



A CASE STUDY OF A HIGH-RISK TRANSITION

Lighthouse Children's Village

Partnerships **PLUS**



Summary

Lighthouse Children's Village* was established in 2004 as a privately-run and privately-funded residential care institution.

In 2014, its long-time principal donor made the decision to phase out of financially supporting institutional care. The directors of Lighthouse were quick to agree to the concept of family-based care but blocked the transition process over a tumultuous two-year period, with the aim of protecting their own interests. Evidence of intentional child rights violations culminated in the reporting of abuse and exploitation to authorities, the closure of the institution, and the transfer of children into small group homes as a measure of protection from the directors.

This case study highlights some of the early warning signs and subsequent discovery of unethical and criminal behavior that can sometimes be observed in a transition process. While the presence of so many high-risk factors may not typically be seen in a single transition, some of them have been frequently observed in cases where directors harbor motivations that override the best interests of children. The case study is organized around the various stages of transition and explores some of the key themes outlined in the [Transitioning Models of Care Assessment Tool](#). It also features a timeline that provides a visual representation of the key milestones and durations of each of the stages of transition.

**Names and locations of individuals and organizations have been changed; however, the details represent a true account.*

Founding History

In 2004 a Norwegian woman named Kim traveled overseas with a friend and was introduced to an expatriate couple involved in charity work with communities living near a rubbish dump.

When the expatriate couple met a young national woman named Maya who had grown up in an institution and wanted to establish her own, they co-founded Lighthouse Children's Village together.

Maya took on the role of co-director and the primary caregiving role, while the expatriate couple filled the dual roles of principal donor and co-director by taking on both the primary fundraising responsibility in addition to management of the day-to-day operations of Lighthouse. Through her deepening relationship with the expatriate couple, Kim became increasingly involved with Lighthouse and brought teams over on an annual basis to volunteer and interact with the children living there.

After a period of supporting the expatriate couple through worsening medical, mental health, and personal issues that ultimately prevented them from continuing in their roles

with Lighthouse, Kim took over the role of principal donor. The expatriate couple were removed from their positions and an entity was established in Norway to raise and disburse funds to Lighthouse.

As the new principal donor, Kim and a fellow board member of the Norwegian funding entity sought registration as members of Lighthouse's governing board with the appropriate national government ministry. Kim took steps to put measures in place for organizational and financial accountability of Lighthouse, and she also undertook a comprehensive update of the child sponsorship program.

Kim soon realized that the number of children she had been raising funds to support was different from the number of children who actually lived in the institution. She was unable to reconcile some of the photos of children with previous ones, as unbeknownst to her, new children were replacing those who had previously lived at Lighthouse. Extensive questioning of the various people involved with Lighthouse led her to discover that many of the children did indeed have parents and that some of them went in and out of care. Children who were supposedly orphans had families to return to during public and school holidays and were sometimes visited by their parents who passed them food through the gates because they were not allowed inside Lighthouse.

During this time, the national co-founder and director, Maya, had often come into conflict with the expatriate couple but had primarily remained in the background without having had much contact with Kim. As the expatriate couple's return to Norway became imminent, Maya invested heavily in her relationship with Kim, presumably to retain access to funding. Maya's husband, Liam, also a national, was hired as building supervisor as part of the reshuffle but quickly promoted himself to acting manager when the national manager resigned.

At this point Liam effectively became the director, taking charge of the daily operations and liaising with donors, while Maya faded into the background again, citing health issues and the need to care for their three young biological children. Due partially to the stress incurred from the recent management changes and partially to an increasing difficulty in raising funds for the institution, Kim decided to seek another organization to permanently take over the management of Lighthouse.

Initial Engagement and Buy-In

Towards the end of 2015, ten years after she had first become involved with Lighthouse, Kim was put into contact with Transform Care Foundation, an organization working in the care reform sector.

Rather than accepting her request to take over management of Lighthouse, Transform Care encouraged her to work towards transition instead. After a brief period of initial onboarding discussions, Kim and other board members of the Norwegian funding entity decided to move forward with transition.

When they presented the idea of transition to Maya and Liam, the directors agreed almost immediately, without posing the usual questions around how they might be impacted. For a short time, Maya latched onto the idea that they could continue providing residential care for older children in a boarding school setting, but after a few discussions addressing the necessity of providing community-based care for all children and young people, she did not raise the idea again.

Following the finalization of key partnership documentation, Lighthouse signed a three-way agreement with the Norwegian funding entity and Transform Care, formally consenting to the outlined terms for phasing out of institutional care and exploring post-transition programming.

While Kim and board members of the donor entity believed in the benefits of family care, they had no reason to doubt that Maya and Liam were providing good care for the children at Lighthouse. Thus the overriding factor in their decision to pursue transition was more about decreasing the responsibility of management and financial burden on themselves and their supporters than it was about an urgency to reintegrate children out of a harmful situation.

However, it would later become apparent that Maya and Liam had agreed to transition with no intention to do so, in the hopes that verbal reassurance of their full buy-in might afford them a lower level of oversight and involvement from both Transform Care and Kim.

Planning for Transition and the Importance of Risk Management

As part of the standard preparation process for transition, Transform Care supported Kim through a planning period that included organizational assessments of both Lighthouse and the Norwegian funding entity, strengthening of organizational and child protection policies, and the development of a strategy for phasing

out of residential care and moving towards support for families. Comprehensive risk assessments and risk management plans were also developed in consultation with Liam and Kim to ensure that all parties were in clear agreement on how to respond should any risks be realized throughout the transition process.

While Transform Care would oversee the transition process and primarily manage the relationship with Kim, one of the key aspects of the preparation process entailed securing the appropriate people in-country to assist in the implementation of the social work component of transition. Regardless of the degree to which institutions participate in the social work process, Transform Care had learned the importance of involving an independent party that could protect against director bias in case work, particularly around placement decisions.

As such, they enlisted one of their partner organizations within close proximity to Lighthouse to provide social work support, including training on family-based alternative care and social work supervision. One of Transform Care's in-country consultants was tasked with providing technical support to the partner organization to contextualize their training and supervision to appropriately address the unique challenges of undertaking social work within a transition setting.

A critical component of the risk management planning process entailed developing a sabotage response plan together with Kim and the Norwegian funding entity, prior to the commencement of the social work process. The plan outlined preventative and reactive measures to manage various areas of risk frequently observed in transitions, including an established monitoring schedule for the timely identification of potential warning signs, clear designations of the individuals responsible for each aspect of implementation, and concrete indicators that would trigger the activation of response procedures.

While sabotage response plans are developed as a measure of precaution in most transition projects, in the case of Lighthouse, the degree to which Kim and Transform Care would later rely upon it far exceeded what they could ever have predicted.

Early Warning Signs of Profit Motivations

Based on Transform Care's familiarity with the cost of living in the country where Lighthouse was operating, one of the first areas identified as a clear red flag was the inflated budgets Liam was sending through to Kim on a monthly basis. There were food items budgeted at five times their market price, and digging into the education budget revealed that it included private school tuition for the directors' three biological children. Despite Maya having taken a step back from her functional duties as director, with staff reporting that she was rarely seen at Lighthouse, she and Liam were both paid full-time salaries that were well above what they should have been in comparison to similar positions in other organizations.

Further, Kim had inherited from the expatriate couple the financial responsibility of covering rent for a lavish building that Maya and Liam used to house themselves, their biological children, and as would later be discovered, several of their extended family members. As some of the young people boarding in two of their smaller rooms were under the care of Lighthouse, the directors had dubbed the entire villa as a learning center to justify their rent coming under the organizational budget. Observational assessments subsequently revealed that these young people were being utilized as cooks and cleaners for Maya and Liam's family, as well as caretakers of their biological children, in exchange for room and board.

It became clear that their positions within Lighthouse had afforded the directors and their family a standard of living that was disproportionately high, not only in comparison to the children in their care, but even in comparison to their surrounding community.

All of these findings indicated that Maya and Liam stood to lose a lot throughout the course of a transition process that could force financial accountability and curtailing of profiting practices. However, rather than accusing the directors of unethical behavior, Transform Care simply shared with Kim the various pieces of information as they discovered them, without drawing conclusions for her.

Raising concerns of financial misappropriation at this stage with Kim would have been premature, given the close relationship she had formed with Maya and Liam, and the strong loyalty she felt towards them. Every call Kim had with the directors regarding Lighthouse operations and funding ended in declarations of their love and respect for each other, and Kim was convinced that they genuinely cared about the children. Although she had already expressed her frustrations with Maya and Liam around their lack of progress towards reducing their monthly budget, she chalked the budget-related findings up to financial inefficiency and an unfortunate by-product of previous mismanagement by the founder expatriate couple.

Interference with the Social Work Process

During initial discussions addressing the social work component of transition, Liam raised his discomfort with sharing confidential case files on the children in their care, even though he had not been asked to do so at that point.

He indicated that they could handle all of their reintegration work in-house, dismissing recommendations to hire an external social worker to support them.

Instead, Liam assigned his nephew into the role of social worker, despite his complete lack of relevant experience or skills. While wary of the arrangement, Transform Care responded by requesting their partner organization to deliver relevant training and social work supervision to Liam's nephew as part of a trial period. Transform Care also adapted their in-country consultant's role to work more closely with Lighthouse and, alongside the partner organization, directly oversee the nephew's case work. By ensuring that they had full oversight of the social work process being outworked by Lighthouse, Transform Care positioned themselves to be able to provide frequent updates to Kim on the nephew's capacity and case progress.

This allowed for two outcomes critical to moving the transition process forward. Firstly, it demonstrated to Kim that despite their concerns regarding the budget-related issues, Transform Care was willing to keep an open mind and provide opportunities for the existing Lighthouse staff to participate in the reintegration process. Secondly, it allowed for visibility of any further warning signs or concrete evidence of interference with the social work process. Bringing such evidence to the surface for Kim to witness would be crucial to minimizing any risk of compromised reintegration processes.

Through their nephew's active participation in the social work training, Maya and Liam were able to demonstrate to Kim that they were voluntarily cooperating with transition. In actuality, they held full control over the social work process via the influence they wielded over their nephew. With the justification that his nephew had been trained as a social worker after three half-day sessions, Liam instructed him to visit the families of a group of children he had hand-picked to assess for the feasibility of reintegration.

Not surprisingly, the nephew returned with stories of family hardships, which Liam promptly conveyed to Kim and Transform Care. At Transform Care's insistence and Kim's encouragement that an experienced social worker from the partner organization should accompany the nephew on future family assessments, Liam conceded. In practice, however, he either postponed scheduled appointments or announced cross-country visits without giving sufficient notice for the social worker to be able to attend.

Maya and Liam's interference with the reintegration process culminated in the return of two children to their family without any preparation, despite them having been in care for several years. Future allegations would eventually confirm that the premature placement of these two children had been an attempt to prevent the discovery of abuse.

Failing to mention the significant event for a few weeks, Liam eventually allowed the partner organization's social worker to accompany him on a visit to the family, where she witnessed his domination of discussions with families. By this point, he had taken over his nephew's role of social worker, conducting multiple visits to families without informing any of the individuals who had the mandate to oversee Lighthouse's case work.

Despite having witnessed eight months of increasingly concerning warning signs, Transform Care was highly cognizant of the possibility that accusing the directors too soon with too little could result in Kim rushing to their defense and disengaging from transition altogether, threatening the entire process. Throughout their engagement with Kim, it had become apparent that her close relationship with the directors extended to the children as well. Over the years she had developed emotional connections to the children in care, knew their stories, and cared deeply about their welfare.

Therefore, Transform Care made a decision to approach Kim with their concerns about the children who had been sent home overnight, focusing on the potential negative impacts on children rather than accusing Liam of harboring underlying motivations. Highlighting the pressing need to prioritize and bring transparency to the social work process, Transform Care pushed for the hiring of an external social worker. Despite her strong sense of loyalty to the directors, Kim was able to recognize that they might be out of their depth with reintegration work, and advised Maya and Liam to start the hiring process.

Sabotage of the Social Work Process

Following a few more months of delaying tactics through his authority over the recruitment process, Liam finally hired an external social worker, Zuri, to outwork the reintegration of children in the care of Lighthouse.

While Zuri's employment contract was with Lighthouse, Transform Care had made prior arrangements stipulating that for two days per week, she would receive training and social work supervision at the office of the partner organization. By carving out a safe space away from the influence of Liam, Transform Care's plan ensured that Zuri would be able to keep them updated on case work progress in real-time and report any potential further interference with the social work process.

As Lighthouse's case files primarily consisted of birth and admission records, with almost no information on client history, it was decided that Zuri's first assignment would be to collect and document case information from Maya. Since Maya had longstanding relationships with the families of the children and possessed direct knowledge of the reasons for their admission into care, the information she held was indispensable to informing reliable assessments and ensuring appropriate placement decisions.

Zuri was immediately met with resistance and obstacles at Lighthouse. Blaming the sudden onset of headaches just prior to most of their appointments, Maya postponed meetings with Zuri for weeks. Liam steadily pushed Zuri into a caregiving and teaching role, leaving her little time to do her case work. When Zuri approached caregiver staff at Lighthouse to ask whether they could provide any information on the children, Liam accused her of neglecting her duties and informed her that she was only permitted to gather information about the children during her break times. Both the partner organization

and Transform Care shared this information with Kim via regular updates regarding general progress of the transition project.

Despite her limited interaction with the children, Zuri came to witness corporal punishment of the children by the caregivers. As Lighthouse's newly updated child protection policy dictated, she reported her concerns to Maya and to the child protection officer at the partner organization. In response, Liam gave permission to a few of the older children to physically punish younger children on Lighthouse's behalf, as the children involved would later confirm to social workers.

Liam also ramped up his harassment of Zuri, reminding her that Lighthouse paid her salary and that she was not to report to anyone else regarding Lighthouse matters. He publicly shamed her in front of the children and staff in the hopes that she would resign. He escalated his interference with the social work process and instructed children not to speak with her, threatening them if they did. He called families ahead of her visits and instructed them to inform her that they could not care for their children and did not want them to leave Lighthouse. Liam also intentionally misinformed families and children that Transform Care would pay Zuri a commission for every child she reintegrated.

Nearing the end of Zuri's first three months at Lighthouse, Liam called her into his office without warning and informed her that she had failed to pass her probation period. When Kim was informed of this, she asked Liam to explain his reasons for wanting to dismiss Zuri. His justification was that he was better positioned to undertake the case work because Zuri did not have the client information to make case decisions, despite he and Maya having been the ones to have withheld that information from Zuri in the first place. In lieu of actual capacity or misconduct issues that would warrant the termination of her employment, Liam offered up superficial excuses, most notably providing photographic evidence of Zuri sitting cross-legged rather than in a traditional sitting position during a staff meeting.

Response to Sabotage and Removal of Directors

Over the course of the previous six months, a period partially overlapping with Zuri's employment at Lighthouse, Transform Care had been carefully presenting Kim with evidence of the directors' interference with the reintegration process, intentionally revealing small pieces of information at a time.

Amidst growing suspicions during this period that not everything was above board in the operations of Lighthouse, Kim had started to recognize Liam's behavior as problematic and potentially indicative of resistance to transition. However, it was Zuri's allegations of child maltreatment that sparked in Kim a galvanizing concern for the safety of the children.

As Kim's loyalty to Maya and Liam was based on a deep sense of trust developed over a decade, accusations of unethical behavior without evidence of ulterior motives could have jeopardized the transition process, ultimately leaving children in a potential situation of harm. Kim might have been quick to dismiss the conclusions of an organization that barely knew the directors and could have lost her confidence in Transform Care, rescinding on her decision to transition.

Apart from the long-standing relationship Kim had with the directors, a compounding factor in her inability to objectively view the directors' actions was their purportedly shared Christian faith. Because the directors had cultivated their relationship with Kim on the basis that they inherently embraced mutual principles of honesty and service to others, her natural response was to explain away their behavior with the rationalization that they were still good Christians who had a heart for children.

As Maya and Liam's sabotage became increasingly apparent and inexcusable throughout this period, Transform Care advised Kim to travel overseas to pay an in-person visit to Lighthouse to collect documents that might reveal evidence of the suspected financial misappropriation. While the allegations of abuse and the directors' interference with efforts to reintegrate the children were the most concerning of issues, Transform Care instead chose to pursue evidence of their financial misappropriation as grounds for termination of their employment. Rather than involve children in a potentially unsafe situation whereby Maya and Liam could pressure or

threaten them to retract their disclosures, the goal was to remove the directors from Lighthouse so that the children would no longer be in their care.

In response to Kim's unexpected visit and request for financial records, Liam realized that he was cornered. Acting out of desperation, he physically restrained Kim to prevent her from leaving the office, with Maya further blocking Kim's exit. Both staff and children were within earshot and eventually Liam's nephew intervened, opening the office door and escorting Kim out.

After the altercation, Kim's allegiance fully shifted to the children and all efforts were focused on ensuring their safety, as is often the case when donors come to realize that they have been deceived and manipulated by directors they have long supported. As Maya and Liam had been forced to show their true colors to Kim, plans were made to terminate their employment in accordance with staff disciplinary procedures. Although staff employment contracts had been put in place as part of the preparation work prior to commencing reintegration, a review of the paperwork revealed that they had not been signed by the directors or other employees.

Further probing into Lighthouse's governance documentation to enact the termination of the directors revealed that the Norwegian board members were not legally registered with the national government as members of the Lighthouse governance board, despite assurances from Liam that they had been. Liam had provided Kim with documentation outlining a falsified governance structure, complete with photos of the Norwegian board members, informing her that it had been submitted to and legally registered with the government. In reality, Maya, Liam, and another staff member were registered as the organization's board members, which gave them sole and full authority over Lighthouse.

This meant that the Norwegian funding entity had no legal authority to intervene or to hold the directors accountable for their actions. As this significantly curtailed their ability to appropriately respond to their concerns of financial misappropriation and child maltreatment, they reported the directors and Lighthouse to the national government department responsible for child welfare and residential care. The deputy chief of the department, who held the mandate to respond to such reports, was frustratingly slow and inappropriate in his handling of the matter. It would later come to light, following his failure to respond to reports of historical trafficking of children into Lighthouse, that Liam was an old friend of his, resulting in zero accountability for the directors' actions at Lighthouse.

Without any legal authority to remove the directors from their positions, Kim agreed not to press charges for the assault in exchange for Maya and Liam's voluntary resignations and a generous severance package. While far from ideal,

the deficit of governance structures and lack of government intervention meant that the bartering of a criminal charge was the only feasible avenue to the removal of the directors and to protecting the safety of the children.

Evidence of Abuse and Exploitation

Once a transitional board and management team were put into place, counselors and psychologists were sent in to work with the children and staff who were all reeling from the unexpected departure of the former directors.

Zuri, who was emotionally exhausted and unable to recover from her experience at Lighthouse, resigned after a total of four months in her role. A new team of social workers with reintegration and transition experience was hired to start the reintegration process again, exposing the children and families to their third set of social workers in less than a year.

Additionally, the resignation of the directors did not signal the end to their ongoing interference or further concerns about the children. Many of the children remained in close contact with Maya and Liam following their departure and carried out their instructions to vandalize the property, physically threaten the new social workers with shards of glass, and report to Kim false claims of abuse by the new manager. Staff and young people came forward to the new management team with allegations of previous abuse, triggering a lengthy and exhaustive investigation of multiple cases and incidents.

Young people who had spent up to ten years living at Lighthouse felt lost at having their caretakers sent away without explanation, as Kim could not subject them to the knowledge that Maya and Liam had been exploiting them for their personal profit. Although a comprehensive review of financial records would later reveal that the directors had taken the equivalent of US\$50,000 for themselves out of donations and designated funding for Lighthouse, Kim had signed a non-disclosure agreement that prohibited her from speaking of the reasons for the directors' resignation.

When the new social work team tracked down previous care leavers of Lighthouse to offer them support, the names of other care leavers and young people that did not appear in the original roster began to surface. Their stories confirmed that they had been sent away from Lighthouse because they had confronted Liam with their own evidence of financial misappropriation and direct observations of abuse of the younger children.

As social workers listened to their accounts of what they had witnessed during their time in care, the young people confirmed multiple incidents of sexual abuse perpetrated by a female caregiver staff member who also happened to be Maya's sister. Older children revealed that they had been instructed by Liam to use physical violence against younger children to cause chaos within Lighthouse during the time of transition.

After learning to speak English well enough to be able to communicate their concerns to donors, the young people were viewed as a threat, and Maya and Liam went out of their way to discredit them. They accused them of stealing large sums of money or engaging in prostitution to cast doubt on any allegations they might make against the directors. This involved traveling to the young people's villages of origin to publicly present their falsified findings in front of their families and communities, with the aim of taking away their existing support networks.

This, combined with the typical effects of institutionalization on young people who have spent most of their lives in care, ultimately led to the incarceration of one young person and, for another, involvement in sex work leading to irreparable damage to her relationship with her mother. In the latter case, the new social workers shared evidence of the directors' actions with the young person's family, helping to rebuild their relationships; however, her mother's untimely death just prior to this discovery prevented their reconciliation.

One of the most severe cases of historical neglect and abuse came to light as the result of an extensive investigation launched by Transform Care, involving the cover-up of the death of a young child in Maya and Liam's

care. As an indication of the culture of violence that had been instated within the institution by the directors, one of the older children was involved in an unsupervised incident that resulted in permanent brain damage to a four-year-old boy. Inexplicably, Maya and Liam failed to access appropriate medical treatment for the child for weeks. Transform Care's investigations would later reveal that the child had likely been trafficked into care as an infant by Liam's colleague, explaining the directors' fear of outside intervention into his case.

The child's condition eventually deteriorated to a point where Kim, during one of her scheduled visits, was shocked to find that a previously healthy and typically developing child suddenly appeared to present as severely disabled, no longer able to speak, walk, or even hold up the weight of his own head. She arranged visits to clinics, hospitals, and eventually overseas to a neighboring

country, skeptical of the consistent diagnosis of an underlying genetic condition passed on by his mother.

An independent and extensive investigation of the child's medical records, through discussions with medical staff at hospitals where he had been treated at Kim's insistence, revealed that he had sustained a traumatic brain injury. It was then that she realized that the consistent diagnosis across a number of clinics and hospitals had been the result of the directors taking advantage of the language barrier and inaccurately translating what doctors had been saying all along.

In the end, Maya and Liam found his resulting cognitive and physical impairments too difficult to cope with, and as the child's condition worsened, the directors sent him away to a rural province to be cared for by a childless couple until his death, eight months after the incident.

Reporting to Authorities

As social workers began to track down most of the families of the children in care, stories surfaced of how parents of children who had been recruited into care were unaware of their children's whereabouts and had searched for them for years.

Written contracts preventing parents from visiting or contacting their children were discovered within the children's files, including baseless threats to confiscate the parents' national identification cards if they breached the contract terms. Most of the information given by Maya and Liam

regarding the situations of the families turned out to be false, and there were credible suspicions that some children had been trafficked into care from across the country by Liam's colleague, as in the case of the young child who died.

When the individual suspected of trafficking attempted to remove those children from Lighthouse following the directors' resignation, displaying falsified birth certificates and claiming that they were his adopted children, the situation was reported to local police and authorities, as well as the national government child welfare department responsible for overseeing residential care services for children. After months of several meetings with the senior government official representing the child welfare department resulted in no action, it came to light that he had a long-standing friendship with Liam and he ultimately chose not to exercise his duty of care to the children.

Closure of the Institution and Transfer of Children to Small Group Homes

As it became clear that Maya and Liam were continuing to work behind the scenes to sabotage the new management team and the reintegration process, the decision was made to move the children into two small group homes in a different area of the city, firstly to remove them from the physical environment where many had endured years of abuse and the resulting culture of violence, and secondly to increase the geographical distance from Maya and Liam.

Children and families were consulted, sibling groups kept together, younger children separated from older ones who were physically abusive, experienced caregivers hired, typical houses indistinct from others in the community rented out, and children enrolled into new schools.

As the counselors and social workers continued their work, the children began to thrive almost immediately. Levels of violence drastically reduced, high-risk behaviors decreased, school progress soared, and within 18 months, all of the children had been reintegrated into family or community-based care settings.

A program for care leavers was established to support them to safely transition into life outside of Lighthouse, and some of the young people slated for independent living even decided to return to their families. While monitoring of most of the cases is ongoing and social workers are still faced with numerous challenges and frequent risk of placement breakdown, none of the children have been reinstitutionalized and most are faring reasonably well, considering the years of abuse and trauma most of them endured.

Donor Commitment to Children

During the years that followed Kim's decision to transition, she endured unfathomable levels of stress and internal conflict as she struggled to cope with the overwhelming sense of betrayal from the actions of Maya and Liam.

As more details were uncovered regarding the abusive and criminal behaviors of multiple individuals associated with Lighthouse, Kim witnessed firsthand the vicious backlash for having exposed all of it. Kim simultaneously faced multiple emergencies and health issues within her own

family, and refinanced her house and sold personal assets to be able to continue funding the transition process. She remained engaged in legal battles with Maya and Liam until the end of 2020, nearly five years after the start of the transition process.

In a rare display of unwavering commitment to children, Kim stayed engaged with the transition process even when she was emotionally and financially drained and felt she could not continue. Although similar situations have been known to fail spectacularly with untold damage done to children, the unusual combination of circumstances and interventions resulted in an unlikely story of a group of people who chose to remain involved, and the children whose lives were changed because of it.

Final Reflections on Motivations

While Kim demonstrated genuine concern for the children's well-being alongside a deep sense of loyalty to the directors for their work in caring for children, Maya and Liam's motivations for involvement in institutional care were overwhelmingly dominated by the ruthless pursuit of financial profit and self-preservation at any cost.

The initial motivations of Maya for establishing an institution were never made clear but she undoubtedly reaped the benefits of the profit-seeking actions of her husband.

As Liam had effectively replaced Maya in her role as director by the time the transition commenced, Maya initially appeared to have been merely complicit in the deception without instigating it. However, as further allegations surfaced throughout the course of transition, it was discovered that she had gone to extreme lengths to put children and young people at harm in an effort to protect herself and the institution, and to ensure that funding would continue to flow from the Norwegian funding entity.

The presence of these motivations that superseded the best interests of children, combined with a highly relational and trust-based partnership between the directors and Kim, set within a country with weak regulatory frameworks, created a volatile situation that resulted in an institutional culture of abuse of power over children and their families as well as over staff members. Although key gaps in organizational processes

were identified, it served Maya and Liam's interests to block efforts to address them.

Having agreed to transition without ever having had any intention to change their model of care, Maya and Liam went through the motions of appearing to cooperate while undermining and sabotaging any possibility of real change. They contacted other donors in an effort to secure funding from other sources, including attempts to establish a new institution and coerce children into joining them through false promises of financial and educational support. Until the resignation of the directors was negotiated and the children were physically moved away from their proximity, it was nearly impossible to effect any positive influence and commence the social work process.

When Kim initially agreed to transition away from supporting institutional care, the overriding reason for the decision was not necessarily a realization that children should be in families. Believing that the children were well cared for and had no families to return to, she could see phasing out of institutional care as a solution to the challenges they faced in funding a long-term and ongoing commitment, and that it could also resolve their concerns that the directors were not managing the institution in a cost-effective way.

However, when suspicions of more serious unethical and criminal behavior arose and were later confirmed, Kim's motivation for pushing forward with the transition transformed into focusing entirely on the safety and well-being of the children. Amidst an enormous sense of betrayal from uncovering years of deception, financial profit, abuse, and exploitation at the hands of people she had fully trusted and vouched for, it was the responsibility she felt towards protecting those children that kept her involved in a transition process that most others would have abandoned.

Considerations for Practitioners Supporting Transition

It bears noting that many of the interventions employed throughout this transition were only feasible in this situation because of the technical support-providing practitioners' direct experience of living and working for many years in the country where the institution was operating.

It is unlikely that these interventions could have been carried out by international practitioners unfamiliar with the context and unable to rely on extensive networks and existing relationships with individuals, organizations, and local authorities for assistance.

The interventions effecting transition in this case study were constantly adapted to the changing situation, in

response to ever-increasing insight into the nature of the institution's culture. Despite having risk management and sabotage response plans in place prior to the commencement of transition, some of the previously-planned interventions were deemed insufficient to account for what turned out to be a truly nightmare scenario. The interventions developed in real-time throughout the course of this transition were designed with the utmost gravity of the situation in mind, and with the desire to minimize the resulting consequences, risks, and potential harm to children and families as the paramount concern.

The transition also took a significant psychological toll on the donors and practitioners who supported and engaged in the process. Those diagnosed with secondary traumatic stress disorder as a result of what they experienced throughout the transition are still accessing mental health services to this day.

Thus it is strongly recommended that any use of the interventions described in this case study should be carefully considered within the context of other transitions.

All identifying information, including the names of people, organizations, and locations, have been changed or omitted to maintain anonymity and to respect the privacy of those involved. All names were randomly selected or created, and any similarities to existing organizational names or individuals are purely coincidental.

This publication was made possible through the generous support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development under Partnerships Plus cooperative agreement number 7200AA18CA00032, funded September 28, 2018, and implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. and Better Care Network, a Project of Tides Center. The contents are the responsibility of Better Care Network and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Lighthouse Children's Village

Timeline of Transition and Closure Process

Time from first warning sign to discovery of full extent of abuse and director sabotage: 16 months

Early warning signs of director resistance include hasty verbal agreement to transition, inflated budgets, reluctance to share case files, and delays in hiring external social worker

Escalation of director interference in family assessments

Evidence of director sabotage and abuse includes financial misappropriation, blocking of social worker access to children and families, and ultimately, substantiated claims of abuse

Time from first organizational assessment to final revisions in organizational structures and policies: 2 years. Buy-in achieved in 2016 through signing of formal agreements but governance strengthening continued through 2017.

Start of formal SW process to final child placement: 22 months

Time from initial awareness to preliminary agreement: 5 months

Time from preliminary agreement to signing of formal partnership: 5 months

Time from signing of formal partnership to first child sent home: 4 months

Principal donor and director engaged in legal battles regarding transfer of land: 3 years 7 months

2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020

Stage 1 Engagement

Stage 2: Preparation & On-boarding

Stage 3b: Safe Closure/Divestment

Aug 2015

General Advocacy

Principal donor is introduced to the concept of family-based care

Principal donor seeks an external organization to take over management and financial support of institution

Jan 2016

Targeted Awareness Raising

Technical support agency advocates for principal donor to consider transition and director to consider post-transition programming opportunities

Preliminary Agreement

Jan: Principal donor agrees to transition

Feb: Director immediately agrees to transition

Mar 2016 - Organizational Assessments

Assessments conducted of principal donor entity and institution

Mar to Jun 2016 - Strategic Planning

- 3-year project framework and budget
- Project risk assessment and mitigation plan
- Child protection risk assessment and response plan conducted with director
- Sabotage response plan developed with principal donor

Jun 2016 Buy-In

Principal donor and director sign formal partnership agreement with technical support agency

Mar 2016 to Dec 2017 - Governance Strengthening

Technical support agency works with principal donor and director to put following in place:

- Child protection policy with clear reporting procedures (Mar to Jun)
- Staff employment contracts
- Financial policies and accountability measures

Apr to Dec 2016

Reintegration Processes

Apr to Oct: Technical support agency establishes case management system, provides reintegration training, and develops messaging to staff, children, families, and care leavers

Jun: Director's husband assigns his inexperienced nephew into role of social worker and interferes with family assessments

Oct: Director sends children home outside of SW process, later discovered to cover up abuse by institution staff

Nov: Hiring process for external social worker begins, after months of delay by director

2017

Organizational Level Processes

Jan to Apr: Technical support and concrete funding opportunities provided to director for post-transition programming but director fails to make any progress

May:

- Evidence of financial misappropriation uncovered
- Confrontation between principal donor and director escalates and director physically restrains donor from collecting incriminating documents
- Director resigns in exchange for donor agreement not to press charges for physical assault
- Emergency plan implemented and interim management put into place
- Director and institution reported to government authorities
- Allegations of sexual and physical abuse at hands of institution caregivers and youth emerge from children and staff
- Jun to Jul: Full extent of director sabotage discovered and confirmed as new social worker investigates allegations, staff failing to perform their duties are terminated
- Aug: New manager and social work team hired

2018

Reintegration Processes

Feb: External social worker hired and trained, in consultation with all parties

Feb to May: Director threatens external social worker, sabotages social work process, blocks social worker access to children, coerces families

May: External social worker resigns after four months

May to Dec: Director continues to sabotage social work process through ongoing contact with children and families, incites children to violence against new staff, appeals to other donors to fund a new institution

Jul to Sep: External counselors hired to support children and staff

Jul to Dec: New social worker restarts social work process with children and families, connects with youth who left institution without support

Aug to Dec: Care leaver support program established, life skills training conducted, family tracing and family reconnection commences

Reintegration Processes

Feb: Children transferred into two small group homes in the community, under the care of newly hired and experienced caregivers

Throughout 2018:

- Young people supported to leave care
- Children reintegrated into birth families and kinship care
- Children placed in foster care
- Aug: All children reintegrated out of one small group home
- Nov: All children reintegrated out of second small group home
- Nov: Residential care services programming terminated permanently

2018-2021

Ongoing monitoring of child placements and care leavers

2004

Director establishes institution

2005

Principal donor begins funding institution