

# The Importance of Processing Stakeholder Emotions in Transition



## VIDEO SUMMARY

The transition of a residential care service involves significant change at all levels of an organization and affects many different stakeholders, including the children, their families, the staff, and the board and management of the organization. As with any significant change, transition can result in a range of emotional reactions amongst those most impacted, such as fear, uncertainty, and worry. Unless these emotions are acknowledged and addressed, it is common for stakeholders to resist change, regardless of its overall merits.

In this Video, Anne Kinuthia, shares how social work practitioners from Kivuli, a residential care service provider in Kenya, used a simple, fun, and non-threatening activity called My Say to help children, families and staff, surface and process their emotions during the organization's transition. In addition, Anne explains how the activity created an easy and meaningful way for children to participate in the reintegration planning, and to ensure their concerns and needs were factored into reintegration plans from the outset.




## DISCUSSION TOPIC

### Removing communication barriers for children


In this video Anne explains how children experienced conflicting emotions when informed about the decision to transition and commence reintegration planning. Whilst most children desired to live with their families, they were worried about whether they could continue their education, receive enough food, or have access to all they needed, if they left Kivuli and returned home. These mixed emotions created anxiety, however the children often initially struggled to name their emotions and communicate to social workers exactly how they felt and why. This created challenges for social workers to support children to process their feelings and address the underlying root causes in the reintegration process.

Anne explains how the My Say cards overcame these communication challenges for children and their social workers. The cartoon-like emoji cards allowed children to identify with the characters' facial expressions and body language as a simple and fun means of exploring and naming their own feelings. Once the children selected the cards that best reflected their own emotions, the social workers would use follow up questions and other strategies to help children unpack and process those emotions, identify what issues were causing them, and what needed to be resolved before reunification could take place. In this sense, 'My Say' not only helped children process the pending changes to their care, the activity also removed communication barriers to children's participation in their reintegration planning.


## In your context:

-  Discuss what barriers or challenges you've observed to children expressing their emotions, and whether this is exacerbated for certain groups of children, such as young children or children in residential care.

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-  What current strategies or approaches do you or your organization use to:
  - emotionally prepare children undergoing reintegration for change
  - engage children in participatory reintegration planning
  - discuss how effective these approaches have been and the strengths and weaknesses.

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-  Think about and discuss ways to further improve practice in emotionally supporting children and engaging them in reintegration planning. Brainstorm different ideas, including whether approaches such as those explored in the video might work in your context.



## DISCUSSION TOPIC

**Processing emotions with staff**

In the video, Anne explains how the process of transition was initiated by the Australian board members, who flew to Kenya to start conversations with the Kenyan board and staff. While the reaction of the local staff and board was positive, and staff acknowledged that family-based care was better for the children, they still had concerns about how transition may negatively impact them, including their job security and income. Anne realised that unless staff were equally supported to express their feelings, process the change, and have their concerns resolved, they may cause resistance and negatively impact the reintegration process for the children.

Anne describes how the My Say card activity was also used with staff and provided a safe and non-threatening way for staff to surface their emotions and concerns. This allowed staff to openly discuss the sensitive topic of their ongoing employment and income post transition or closure. This led to a negotiation between staff and the board to provide seed capital for staff to start their own businesses, which resolved staff fears about loss of income.

**In your context:**

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- ① What are the types of concerns staff of residential care services typically raise when faced with the prospect of transition or service closure? Based on your experience or observations, how easily and openly do staff share these concerns?
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- ② How can staff resistance and unresolved fears and concerns impact transition and the reintegration of children? Discuss what you have seen, experienced or learnt from others.
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- ③ How can you/your organization be more intentional about supporting staff to surface and process their emotions, and to resolve concerns as a part of the transition process? Brainstorm ideas and what next steps you might take to begin to implement those ideas.