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Eastern and Southern Africa regional learning platform on care reform

Monthly update - July 2022

Introduction

Welcome to the monthly update from the regional learning platform on care reform in Eastern and Southern Africa. The platform is an opportunity for policy makers and practitioners in Government, UNICEF and NGOs to exchange learning on care. The platform was established by UNICEF and Changing the

Way We Care (CTWWC) and is supported by the consultancy firm Child Frontiers. Explore our past webinars and resources [here](#) and [here](#).

Announcements on the platform

- **Webinar: Lessons learnt on care reform from COVID-19, 28th of July 11-12.30 Nairobi time.** The COVID-19 pandemic posed a fundamental threat to the care of children in Eastern and Southern Africa. It exacerbated many causes of separation and violence in families and placed a huge strain on services that aim to improve children's care. Responding to these challenges also led to rapid adaptation, innovation, and learning. This webinar explores lessons learnt on care reform from the pandemic, drawing on examples from Malawi, Kenya, and Uganda. Join the Zoom meeting [here](#) (Meeting ID: 844 1892 0338 Passcode: 985254)
- **Webinar: At the Core of Care - The social service workforce and care systems.** Join us for a look into the social service workforce and children's care. Hear from experts and workforce representatives from around the region, and gain insights on who the workforce is, what roles they play, and how to strengthen the workforce as part of strengthening care and protection systems. A moderated panel will take questions and share examples of: enumeration and workforce mapping; training and capacity building; motivating, supporting and supervising; innovations in practice; and regional resources and tools. Don't miss this deep dive into a core aspect of children's care! Date TBC - 7th or 14th of September. Watch out for your invitation.
- **Watch a recording of the webinar on harnessing the power of data for care reform.** Our last webinar looked at why data is important for informing care reform, and how data can be collected and used effectively. A recording of this webinar can be found [here](#).
- **Small group discussion on reintegration for street connected children.** In June we held an informal online discussion with UNICEF, government and NGO colleagues from Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia on the reintegration of street connected children. The discussion was set up following a request to our Helpdesk from UNICEF Malawi who wanted to identify good practice in the reintegration of street connected

children. Key learning from the discussion included the need to: invest time in building up relationships of trust with street connected children (e.g. through a strong focus on participation so that children feel listened to); understand and address the factors that keep children the streets (including their relationships with other children); promote a role for community volunteers who can mentor and support children, and adjust case management tools so that they meet the specific needs of street connected children. For a recording of this discussion, see [here](#).

- **Helpdesk.** As part of the platform, we have set up a Helpdesk for UNICEF country office staff and government counterparts. For guidance on any aspect of care reform, please contact Emily Delap of Child Frontiers (edelap@childfrontiers.com) or Mona Aika from the UNICEF regional office (maika@unicef.org).



Case study: The reintegration of children from residential care during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments across the region, including in Kenya, directed residential care providers to send most of the children in their care back to their families to reduce COVID-19 infections. The rushed nature of this reunification

meant that many providers could not adhere to global and national guidance on reunification and reintegration. As the pandemic progressed, government and NGO partners in countries such as Kenya were able to give some assistance to children returning to live with families. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this reduced vulnerability, further confirming the importance of properly supported reintegration. The case study of Mary in Kenya illustrates both the challenges associated with rapid reintegration during COVID-19 and the value of longer and more intensive support for children returning to live with families.

Mary is a 12-year-old girl from Kenya. When she was seven years old, Mary's parents died and she was placed in the Vision of Charity Children's Home by her extended family, who felt they could not care for her or ensure that she continued with her schooling. When the government issued a directive requiring most children from residential care to return to their families, Mary was sent to live with her maternal grandparents.

Changing The Way We Care (CTWWC) collaborated with a local organisation, Coastal Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC), to determine the needs of Mary and her family. Initially, the family was given emergency material support to help them deal with the loss of income associated with the pandemic and to support Mary's care. To ensure Mary's grandparents could look after her in the long term, CICC helped the family to apply for government cash transfers and the National Health Insurance Fund, (NSSF). The family was also given a grant to start a small business selling eggs and firewood. Due to COVID-19, social workers' travel was curtailed, and initial contact with Mary was conducted by phone to check that she was well. Once social workers were designated essential workers and travel restrictions were lifted, Mary and her grandparents met their case worker.

Mary missed her friends from Vision of Charity Children's Home and found rural life hard. She described challenges adjusting to a new home, getting to know her grandparents and other family members, contributing to household chores, and adapting to the simpler life of the village. She remembers desperately wanting to be back in the familiarity of the children's home with her friends.

"I just wanted to be with my friends... I didn't want to share a bed with my cousins. I wanted familiar meals and to go to my old school again," says Mary

When schools and residential care facilities re-opened, Mary returned to the Vision of Charity Children's Home. Her grandparents supported this move as they wanted Mary to be happy, educated and assumed the schooling would be better in the children's home than the village. However, the COVID pandemic had given Mary an opportunity to reconnect with her grandparents, wider extended family, and community. Social workers continued to emphasise the importance of family care and provided counselling to Mary and her family. Mary was allowed to visit her

grandparents regularly. Joint efforts were made among residential care members of staff, CTWWC, government social workers, Mary, and her grandparents to ensure that she is reunited with her family.

To ensure safe and long-term reintegration, the family was given support for their business, while Vision of Charity Children's Home enrolled Mary in a local private school. Mary's social worker reports that she is now living happily back with family, and describes a happy scene she recently witnessed:

"She was returning home from school. She was with a whole group of friends. They were laughing, smiling, skipping, sharing stories of their day... Mary's happiness, her comfort at home, is visible," says the social worker

Mary highlights how important support from social workers is for successful reintegration:

"I like having someone who understands that it takes time for me to get used to the changes... I can call Jane [Mary's social worker] and she listens to me and pays attention to what I'm going through. Her advice has helped me to learn how to be at home." says Mary.

Other news and resources

- **New commitments to care and protection:** Delegates at the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Kigali committed to child care protection reforms through this [declaration](#). The declaration acknowledges the growing vulnerability of many children as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the harm caused to children from institutional care. It calls for the implementation of the [UN resolution on the rights of children without parental care](#), including greater efforts to prevent family separation and the provision of a range of quality, family-based alternative care options for children. It includes specific recommendations around care for development agencies, and restrictions on [orphanage voluntourism](#).
- **New research on trauma associated with residential care in Kenya:** Research has just been published that shows that children in institutions have a high prevalence of PTSD, anxiety and depression. Rates were particularly high amongst younger children in lower primary. The study can be found [here](#).

Want to share resources or advertise a webinar or event on care reform in Eastern and Southern Africa? Please contact Bertha Lutome of Child Frontiers: blutome@childfrontiers.com

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