



Learnings: Promoting positive caregiving for children at risk of separation or in the process of reintegration in Kenya

CHANGING THE WAY WE CARE

Changing the Way We Care is a global care reform initiative that promotes safe, nurturing family care for children reunifying from institutions or at risk of family separation.

CTWWC has three strategic objectives: governments promote family care; children stay in or return to their families; and key stakeholder groups make commitments towards family care.

Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC) Kenya is working with four local non-governmental and faith-based organizations in the western part of Kenya (Kisumu, Nyamira and Siaya Counties) and on the coast in Kilifi County to strengthen family based care for children with an aim to prevent child-family separation and increase family-based alternatives for those that are separated.

The support received by families is largely provided by community level cadres – skilled and trusted volunteers who work directly with families to understand the challenges that they face and the strengths upon which they can build. The workforce is represented by Community Health Volunteers, Child Protection Volunteers, and Lay Volunteer Counselors; all of whom play a role in supporting children and families.

Members of these cadres conduct home visits, facilitate groups and exchange information about positive parenting, financial management skills with an emphasis on childcare, and refer to other services such as child protection or disability support. As community members, they not only know these families but are also familiar with the services available in their area.

Kenya's National Strategy for Care Reform

Three core components of care reform:

1. family strengthening and prevention of separation
2. expansion of family-based alternative care
3. reintegration of children from residential care and support for transition of residential care to community resources for strengthening families. In 2022, approximately 5,000 families in some stage of the reintegration process or families identified at risk of separation are receiving family strengthening support by the CTWWC.

POSITIVE PARENTING

Positive parenting supports a child's physical, emotional, social, and mental development by providing loving and supportive care in a stable environment that is sensitive to children's needs, protects them from threats and provides opportunities for learning through play, stimulation and relationships. [1]

Families are identified through community awareness raising – the NGOs implementing the program conduct awareness-raising activities and collaborate with local leaders including Charitable Children's Institutions (CCIs) that are seeking to support reintegration, and the local Directorate of Children's Services (DCS) Children's Officers to identify families that are at risk of separation.

Supporting families with positive parenting programs is one of the most effective ways of working with families as it provides basic skills and information aimed at healthy and nonviolent parenting techniques. Economic interventions such as financial literacy programs, savings and loans groups, access to social transfers for the most vulnerable, and referrals to vocational training opportunities are also valuable interventions for families at risk of separation or those in the process of reintegration.

What is positive parenting?

CTWWC Kenya is now planning to ensure that every enrolled family receives an eight-week parenting program as part of a group or delivery during home visits for people who are not able to travel to a group session because of distance, frailty, or mobility challenges. Positive parenting is followed by financial literacy programming.

Positive parenting begins with the strengths that parents and caregivers already have, valuing the family, and providing an opportunity for parents and caregivers to learn some information about child development and their importance in children's developing, and think about and practice skills that help build the bond with children and their children's development. A positive parenting program should encourage people to feel more confident about what they are already doing and get more enjoyment from their family. It can also be a way to support families that are struggling, by helping get access to other support and services.

THE FAMILIES TOGETHER CURRICULUM

The group program includes the following sessions:

1. Family Relationships
2. Child Development and Meeting Children's Needs
3. Looking After Ourselves
4. Values and Discipline
5. Communication
6. Building Strong and Secure Attachments
7. Communicating with Your Children About Safety
8. Helping Our Children Feel Safe, Secure and Loved

Each group sessions take 2.5 hours and include additional introduction and graduation sessions. The home visit sessions take 45 minutes, with Session 7 and 8 delivered over two visits.

[1] Global Initiative to Support Parents (2021). GISP Inter-Agency Vision

POSITIVE PARENTING

One unexpected benefit of the program is that the emphasis on communication and discussion about gender roles and expectations has led to some increased involvement of male caregivers.

Positive results from Families Together

Below is a summary of key highlights of positive experiences and ongoing challenges identified by caregivers and parents and facilitators after one year of implementation.

Building confidence and strength

“The most interesting thing on this education is the firm bonding of parents and caregivers with their children. The goodness we need to our children, brings us joy, peace and security as a family and it also gives trust to our children.”

Caregiver, Kilifi County

“The biggest success I have found when delivering the Families Together is that parents have appreciated themselves considering the role they play in raising their children and have started being responsible including caring for them as well. For example, getting their children birth certificates is the duty which had been neglected before the sessions, currently a good number of families have obtained the named documents.”

Parenting facilitator, Kilifi County

Increased involvement of male caregivers

“I used to eat in the kitchen but now we eat together with my husband, and I have taken them for baptism, my children also sing in church together. I used to quarrel with my partner but now we don’t, and I also brought him to the group, and he has reduced in his drinking habit.”

Caregiver, Nyamira County

Building communication skills

“I got excited about parenting since when I asked the questions caregivers would open up and share their deep secrets. Some of the children were also excited and parents started communicating with their children about positive parenting... One caregiver shared with me that my child is now more open with me.”

Parenting facilitator, Kilifi County

Talking about violence and protecting children

“I have noted their sign of commitment to their families. We told them children need safety, I told them to make sure that they know where and who sleeps with their children, and I have seen many of them make changes. one of my group members told me that her children are big adolescents and now I have separated their sleeping arrangements so that I know who is sharing bed with who.”

Positive parenting facilitator, Kilifi County

“Parenting has made me come down even if a child is so mkali (harsh) you come down and talk to her gently.”

Caregiver, Nyamira County

SUPPORTING FAMILIES AT RISK OF SEPERATION

"Families were able to know the gaps and work on them after the sessions."

Parenting facilitator,
Kilifi County

"Staying together as a family. We learnt more about the roles both in the family and for the children"
Caregiver

How Families Together is supporting families at risk of separation

Families Together places a strong emphasis on practicing skills at home, which is true of many of the most effective parenting programs in Kenya and globally.

One very important aspect is home practice. Parenting facilitators have talked about the benefits of understanding what needs to be done within the family. This has been especially important for families that have been through separation or where there is a lot of conflict. Parenting facilitators have talked about how this home practice has been where people have had a chance to think about some of the issues that challenge them in their parenting role.

Promoting the idea of why it is important for families to stay together and providing examples of skills that parents and caregivers can use in their own lives has had a significant impact on participants.

The program has placed a strong focus on including families with adults or children with disabilities. Many children with disabilities are placed in residential care because of lack of access to support for the family or because of the stigma associated with disability. The parenting program was reviewed by disability experts and the images and content are intended to promote disability.

Understanding the positive effects of staying together and the potential harm of separation

"The most significant change I have noticed in children and the families that are participating in the program is that first, the children have built back their trust with their caregivers /parents and secondly is that the parents/caregivers now have changed their ways of parenting towards their children, and they are well taking care of them no matter their financial challenges."

One facilitator shared that according to the group he has currently, the most significant change has been children's behaviour change/ they have become more supportive. Their self-esteem has greatly improved because of their parents change.

Disability inclusion

"I have a child with a hearing problem. To me it was important to learn how to communicate with my child."



THE PARENTING WORKFORCE

“Sometimes when I mention that I am a community level worker, they imagine I have come to solve their problems and they expect so much so by third week they expect to get something.”
Parenting facilitator

The parenting workforce

Delivering Families Together for one year has emphasized the importance of investing in parenting programs and recognizing the role of the community-level workforce in delivering this material. However, delivering parenting in communities and with families that are extremely vulnerable is a challenge.

The benefits are also felt personally by the parenting facilitators who themselves are parents. Despite the challenges, there is still a strong commitment to doing the work.

Understanding what my children’s needs are made a real difference to me.”

Parenting facilitator, Kilifi County.

“The biggest part of this role is giving. Giving our time, our resources, thoughts, in all kinds of manner there is need. If there are challenges, we should always look for ways to discuss and not talking at one another so that we get solutions.”

Parenting facilitator, Kilifi County

LESSONS LEARNED PROGRAM DESIGN

Lessons learned about program design

One challenge is that the parenting program is delivered alongside other material benefits – delivering parenting programs when there are expectations to receive other forms of support is an ongoing challenge

“After sitting and listening to parenting sessions we should be at least given some support to help better our families. We joined them with high hopes and expectations.”

Caregiver, Nyamira County

“Vulnerability made others withdraw from the program because they expected to be given money.”

Parenting facilitator, Nyamira County



PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Preparing for the future

Most importantly, the program should continue to provide parents and caregivers with skills and knowledge that empowers them to feel proud and confident of their own skills.

"I have seen very many families uniting, strengthening, children changing and supported other families and they have understood concepts around disability. I have understood more how to bring up children in a better way."
Parenting facilitator,
Nyamira County

"The sessions have brought hope; we as a group have registered as a self-help group and have a certificate. I have seen some being transformed from being drunkards to caring and responsible mothers."

"Parenting is not easy at all, but the skills acquired during the session makes one understand simple does and don't when interacting with the family members. I am proud now that my children feel comfortable to share with me issues, they undergo in school and at home."
Caregiver, Kilifi County



Changing The Way We CareSM (CTWWC) is implemented by Catholic Relief Services and Maestral International, along with other global, national and local partners working together to change the way we care for children around the world. Our principal global partners are the Better Care Network, Lumos Foundation, and Faith to Action. CTWWC is funded in part by a Global Development Alliance of USAID, the MacArthur Foundation and the GHR Foundation.

Need to know more? Contact Changing the Way We Care at, info@ctwwc.org or visit changingthewaywecare.org.

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