

# Stories of Leaving Care in India

Struggling, Moving On and Surviving





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# Preface

Alternative Care, for children separated from their families, of which Aftercare is an important component, is poised strongly on the international child protection agenda. In a historic step, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) had resolved to focus on 'Children without Parental Care' in 2019 (UNGA Advocacy WG, 2019). Youth of this country are our hope. Our experience of working with youth has shown us that they are ever willing to learn, explore and experiment. These Aftercare youth, or Care Leavers (CLs) as we know them, are amongst the most vulnerable sections of the youth population, but they have immense potential and we need to support them so that they become resilient and independent citizens, who can not only live a better life with dignity, but also give back to society.

We initiated the study on "Current Aftercare Practices" (CAP) in 2017. This has been a result of Udayan Care's long-term desire to see all CLs getting the care and support that their special circumstances deserve and what their rights entail under law. This desire emanates from our long years of being practitioners in ensuring quality care for children, who are provided care and protection in our small group homes, called Udayan Ghars. Since the beginning, we have continued to support them even after they turn 18, through sustained engagement as part of our Aftercare model till they get reintegrated into mainstream society. Our experiences have proven that CLs need special attention and strategic importance both locally and at the state level, if we want them to gain success in meaningful rehabilitation. This, most of the time is not forthcoming, despite clear policies and laws in place. This led to a desire for creation of evidence.

The CAP research evolved after a pilot study was conducted in Delhi with 47 CLs in partnership with the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) in 2017. It led to a much bigger multi-state research project that has been carried out in five states of India: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Delhi once again, using uniform research design and tools. This multi-state study was made possible in partnership with Shri Deep Kalra, UNICEF and Tata Trusts, and the support of the state governments in respective five states, along with various individuals and institutions such as the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in Karnataka, and Deepak Foundation in Gujarat.

The data for the five states clearly shows that CLs achieve consistently poor outcomes in education, housing, life skills and other such domains of life. The data also shows state-level variances in CLs' experiences and outcomes, thus establishing the need for more targeted local approaches as a pathway to the specific challenges faced by them in different regions of the country. Meeting the CLs' needs and aspirations is not possible unless we can build effective partnerships at different levels between those government functionaries holding responsibility for such children, stakeholders, corporates, communities and individual mentors. Across the states, the study highlights that the quality of support received by CLs is not comprehensive and that their journey through the first decade of adult life is often disrupted, unstable and full of challenges. They struggle to cope and are often socially

excluded. They suffer from mental illness that is not addressed adequately and have to undergo phases of uncertainty and unemployment, not being independent and yet not knowing who to depend on. CLs have told us that they often find it difficult to navigate through services and find out what financial support they are entitled to. The study has put forward the concept of a **'Sphere of Aftercare™'** that can help reintegrate CLs to mainstream society. None of the eight domains of the Sphere can be ignored for any CL. As CLs transition into independent life, they may require support/services under one or more of these domains depending on their unique needs and aspirations. In all the five states, it was heartening to listen to the strong voices of the CLs at the State Consultations and Round Tables conducted during the study. We are so humbled by these resilient CLs, who were a part of this study, who spoke their minds and hearts out and shared their hopes with us. Detailed state reports on Aftercare in each of the five states are available for those interested.

This publication delineates the lived experiences of CLs in the present Aftercare systems prevalent in the country, as well as the complete lack of support among some. It has been a long practice of Udayan Care to observe and work with children by considering each day of a child and youth as an essential milestone of their lives. In this backdrop, the research team of Udayan Care dedicated few months in field work to capture the experiences in the forms of challenges and narratives from CLs across the five states explored in the study. The tools used for this case study were indigenously designed to make the process of fieldwork therapeutic and informative for respondents, while studying their situations with objectivity. Based on the experiences, challenges, and stories of the CLs, this publication hopes to inform research-based practice, to address the needs and aspirations of CLs and improve their life outcomes.

Udayan Care remains committed to listening to the voices of young children and youth, to making our best efforts in working with them and with all other actors and stakeholders, towards achieving the rehabilitation goals of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015; and in sustaining practice-informed, evidence-based advocacy on Aftercare, in their best interests. We welcome any support that helps to take forward this crucial agenda on child rights and translate it into action, so as to concretely impact the lives of these youth in meaningful, and empowering way.

**Kiran Modi, PhD**

Founder Managing Trustee

Udayan Care



# Foreword

The case studies outlined in this publication draw upon earlier work, which suggested that young people leaving care may broadly fall into one of three groups: those successfully 'moving on' from care; those who are 'survivors'; and those who are 'strugglers'. These groups are clearly detailed in the text, including the 'protective' and 'risk' factors associated with each group – or put in terms of relevance to policy and practice, the factors which may promote ('protective') or pose barriers ('risks') to the resilience of young people from care to adulthood.

The three groups were identified through reflection on the findings of leaving care research studies carried out between 1980 and 2012 through in-depth interviews. The studies, were mainly qualitative in design which included follow-up of young Care Leavers or CLs by interview between one to three years after leaving care through interviews. The studies also included interviews with Care Leavers or CLs social workers and specialist leaving care workers from both statutory and third sector organisations. There was also evidence that these three groups were not set groups – some Care Leavers or CLs moved between them over time, and as their circumstances or the support they received changed.

Recently, a body of international research, including demographic studies, longitudinal follow-up studies and research reviews, have provided confirmatory evidence of the main resilience promoting factors. Young people who 'do well' from care are likely to experience:

- stable placements providing good quality care and attachments which promote their well-being, mental health and a sense of identity
- appropriate schooling, including achieving educational success which lays the foundations for post-16 further and higher education, training and finding satisfying employment; success at school is also associated with good psycho-social outcomes in adulthood
- holistic preparation in practical, self-care, emotional and inter-personal skills, as well as gradual transition from care, reflecting normative experiences
- formal and informal support on their main pathways to adulthood, including assistance with accommodation, education, career, health and well-being

The case studies clearly illustrate how the dimensions detailed above impact upon the lives of young people. Reflecting on some of the cases in this publication, the failure to provide Mamta with a range of support on her pathway to adulthood, leading to her 'struggling' greatly; some support Yamna received in her upbringing in a care institute, helping her 'survive', but she would have also benefitted from more assistance by formal Aftercare services, and; the consistent and high quality support Sameer had received from his guardian in helping him to 'move on' - *'who listened to his needs and aspirations and encouraged him to pursue his goals'*. Sameer's positive experiences reflect the main challenges facing Aftercare services – to provide the love, support and care any young person should expect from a parent as they become independent.

## Prof. Mike Stein

Emeritus Professor of Social Policy, University of York  
Joint Co-ordinator of the Transitions from Care to Adulthood  
International Research Group (INTRAC)



# Foreword – Care Leaver Perspective

It has been about fifteen years since I left care, yet for my work as a professional photographer, I regularly interact with NGOs and Government bodies that support out-of-home care children and youth. The change in care provision, when compared to what I had experienced growing up in care, has been drastic. While with the establishment of the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), the objective has been to improve care systems in the country, however, the systemic changes have actually, on many fronts, disadvantaged children and youth.

Restoration is today's go-to narrative. Without a doubt, the premise is noble in wanting to place children with their families to ensure they get the best care possible. The reality however is that children are restored back to their home and back to the troubled situations from which they needed protection to begin with. We received home-like care in our shelter homes back in the day, before these stringent rules and restrictions came into being. The outcomes too have been positive for many of us who left care before, when compared to the many children today who are restored, only to be seen back on the streets in a month's time. The focus today, sadly, is on numbers; how many children have been restored. But at what cost and to what outcomes for the children?

Discussions with staff from the care homes and institutes made me realize that today, staff are having to spend 90% of the time on paperwork and administrative formalities, with around 10% of their time dedicated to actually caring for the children. In our time, it was the other way around. Our carers always had time for us and as a result, it felt like we were in a home and were part of a family. In so many instances, it feels like the staff today are working to clock in their hours, while before, the carers worked because they genuinely wanted to care and support the children, and would go out of their way to do so. Children learn the importance of social relationships from such connections and bonds, which are integral in their transition to adult life. Furthermore, the rules stipulated by law for care systems in recent times have essentially converted the homes to institutes that resemble prisons; welded windows, barbed wire fences, and severe curtailments on children's freedoms to live a normal life. This is a black mark for the present care systems. In my own experience, when I was placed in a care institute with such restrictions, I ran away in a few days and preferred to be on the streets, until I was fortunately placed in a home that took care of my basic needs and supported me appropriately in an environment akin to a home, and so I felt like staying on. The fact is that children who want to run away will do so, regardless of the strictures, and such things are only making conditions of care deteriorate for the majority of other children.

Specifically in the context of Aftercare, the push towards mediocre vocational training when children approach 18 years of age is another major issue, as also revealed in the case studies that follow. The children have varied talents and interests. Yet, care homes and institutes choose to have them compromise their futures by providing only basic vocational training support that would entail minimal costs for them, in as short a duration

as possible. Six-month certificate programs are preferred over three-year graduate degrees. The consequence is that youth are stuck with minimum wage jobs for years of their adult life, many of them unable to progress any further and living with the dissatisfaction of their aspirations, skills and talents unfulfilled. Aftercare must take into consideration the importance of quality higher education, so that Care Leavers have better prospects in life.

The quality of care is what matters most. Even today, years after we have left our care home, we do not hesitate to reach out to our carers for support and guidance related to aspects of our life, be it financial, health-related or in any other areas we face difficulties with. We know they will stand with us. It makes me sad that all children and youth do not receive such care. I took it upon myself to become independent and accomplish the dreams of my life, to never make my caregivers feel like there were any deficiencies in their care for me. This has been a powerful motivation and drive for me to lead an independent life, and I hope for the same for all children in care.

**Vicky Roy**

Care Leaver, India and Professional Photographer

# Introduction

## Overview of Aftercare

### 1.1 Introduction

Alternative Care is defined as care for orphans and other vulnerable children, who are not under the care of their biological parents. It includes foster family care, guardianship care, organized residential care, and other community-based arrangements for the care of children in need, particularly for children without primary caregivers (UNICEF, 2006). For children without parental care, who are living in formal or informal Out-of-Home Care (OHC) settings, the state is mandated to act as their guardian and ensure their safety and development through child protection measures, dictated by national and state legislations and frameworks. In India, the principal instruments governing this are the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act, 2015), the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules 2016 (JJ Rules, 2016), and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS).

The United Nations Guidelines on Alternative Care of Children (UNGACC, 2009) lay down two fundamental principles for the care of children living in an alternative setting: the principle of necessity and the principle of suitability. These principles postulate that separation of children from their biological families must be prevented at every cost and taken to as the last resort only if it is necessary and in the best interest of the child. In all such cases of separation, the UNGACC prescribes that the best suitable care

arrangement shall be the responsibility of the state.

Recent estimates put the number of children in need of Alternative Care in India at approximately 23.6 million (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, MOSPI, 2018). For them and many more children who are at risk of separation from family, preventing separation and finding suitable alternative family-like care environments is challenging, given the sheer number of children in the country and the absence of community-oriented interventions. Institutional care is the last resort in law but often is the most relied upon for vulnerable children in India. Non-institutional forms of alternative care that have been proposed for children in OHC settings, such as foster care, are at a very nascent stage in the country. Aftercare is the provision of continued care and support to youth, including those with special needs, after they have reached the age of 18 years and are discharged from Child Care Institutions (CCIs).

### 1.2 The Transition from Childcare to Aftercare

In many countries, current legislations prescribe that upon attaining a certain age of maturity (usually 18 years of age), children living in Alternative Care have to leave the care setting and move on to lead an independent life as adults within the community. This transition from living in a protective care facility to independent living often brings a host of difficulties, due to the absence of a pivotal family-like ecosystem, minimal community integration, and limited ownership of

essential resources. Youth transitioning from care are thus at a higher risk of facing personal, professional and social hardships than those who have a family ecosystem to support them. Youth without support during this crucial transition phase are at a higher risk of a trail of adversities, including inadequate social and life skills, low educational achievements, physical and mental health concerns, and social issues including homelessness, substance abuse, conflicts with law, abuse, violence, teenage pregnancy, social exclusion, incarceration, self-harm and suicide, (Kuligowska, 2015; Montgomery, Donkoh, & Underhill, 2006), all effectively slowing down or denying their full settlement in life. In actuality, the transition period is an enabling one (Akister, Owens, & Goodyer, 2010), marked by the distinct needs of the youth who with their immense potential, need to be supported, guided and counselled to soar. In the absence of these inputs by care providers and the sudden exposure to a barrage of responsibilities and complexities that come with independent living, they run the risk of losing opportunities befitting their capabilities. They may face problems across multiple life domains, such as locating and accessing safe and stable housing, building strong and positive relationships with members of their social networks, being able to manage crisis and stress, and pursuing higher education or acquiring meaningful vocational and life skills towards steady and lucrative employment (Fryar, Jordan, & DeVooght, 2017).

The transition is also characterized by growth, where youth are exposed to new circumstances and opportunities towards an independent life, which can flourish if provided with timely support and guidance (Stein, 2006). Young adults are capable of identifying opportunities and possess the skills to explore, reflect upon, and take risks in their journey towards an independent life. However, to do so, youth need

constant guidance in developing life skills, knowledge about their legal rights and responsibilities, and training on how they can nurture their personal development, through self-care and pro-social behaviour (Human Service Community Service, 2010).

Working with young people requires not only helping them with their accommodation and financial needs but also addressing their trauma and attachment related concerns. It must be noted that apart from having to go through the physical and emotional transition into life as an adult, which is challenging even for youth raised in primary care, the transition becomes more arduous for Care Leavers (CLs) due to their adverse experiences in care (Barn, 2010). The trauma must be addressed by improving access to mental health support systems and by providing them with opportunities to maintain links with OHC support, in order to reduce the possibility of further stress and disrupted attachments (Meade & Mendes, 2014). CLs may not reach out for help while transitioning into adulthood, feeling that they do not have a reliable support network (Mann-Feder, & White, 2003). It is thus imperative to ensure that young people leaving residential care receive care and support continuously without interruptions, till they are able to manage on their own (Modi, Nayar-Akhtar, Ariely & Gupta, 2016).

According to a study titled *Youth Aging out of Foster Care: Supporting their Transition into Adulthood*, access to education and employment opportunities are critical to meeting life's basic needs (Torricono, 2010). Another important factor is the continuity of services in meeting educational and vocational needs. For children and youth in Alternative Care, it is common to face frequent changes in schools, resulting in disrupted relationships with teachers and peers. Ruptured education and relationships have an impact on

students' educational progress and related developmental outcomes. In fact, students can lose four to six months of academic progress with every school change (Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, 2008). Due to poor performance and improper guidance, children begin to lose interest in school, are unable to concentrate on studies and, as a result, end up with low educational achievements. Those who show academic inclination are also limited by the lack of financial support for higher education and skill development. In the long run, poor academic performance often leads to adverse long-term outcomes such as unemployment or low wages, making it difficult for young people to earn a decent livelihood (Torricco, 2010).

Mental health is another essential component of Aftercare support. Given that many young adults raised in Alternative Care have experienced trauma (Sridharan, Bensley, Huh, & Nacharaju, 2017), and perhaps continue to do so, support in the forms of free counselling, guidance, interventions, psychological assessment services and crisis management, from designated mental health professionals, must be made available through Aftercare. Each child/youth in and from care has had unique and often adverse life experiences. Hence, treatments and interventions must be tailor-made rather than adopting the 'one approach fits all' principle. Listening to the needs of the child/youth and developing interventions along with their inputs and active participation, have successful outcomes (Doucet, 2018). Mental health support must extend to counter the often unaddressed stigma, trauma, and discrimination experienced by young people in care, psychologically and socially, in turn, shifting focus to promote their contributions as citizens.

At this critical juncture of their lives, Aftercare support is meant to address the challenges faced by adolescents while

also enabling them to identify their latent talents and explore opportunities that may be available, according to their interests. The role of a well-designed Aftercare program is to also ensure sustained delivery of essential rehabilitative services and hand-holding required by youth emerging out of care systems, until they learn to cope on their own - termed as the Continuum of Care approach for CLs. Under this approach, it is pertinent that before being left 'all on their own', the youth need to have a supportive environment that builds their resilience and develops their life skills, to be able to eventually take care of their physical and mental health, social relationships, housing, and employment, among other life domains. The level of investment made for young people leaving care in terms of housing, finance, and personal support, which are all critical in promoting resilience, are markers in making transitions successful (Stein, 2006). In the absence of a support system, which is usually provided by one's parents and/or family, young people growing out from CCIs experience episodes of 're-traumatization', with their abandonment, social adjustment issues, anxieties and stress being repeatedly triggered, especially in the initial years after leaving care.

Aftercare is a crucial final stage in the continuum of care, as it ensures smooth rehabilitation and reintegration of a child in OHC as she/he steps into adulthood. This is especially required if a child has gone through a long period of institutionalisation, which is likely to result in the lack of social adjustment. The provision of Aftercare attempts to smoothly move away from institution-based life to independent living, along with extending need-based support to youth who have grown up in Alternative Care settings.

## 1.3 Policy and Legal Framework for Aftercare

### 1.3.1 International Framework

<p><b>UN Guidelines on Alternative Care, 2009, (UNGACC)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intended to help everyone responsible for the care and wellbeing of children.</li> <li>• Explains why it is necessary to make arrangements for some children to live away from their parents and which alternatives might be right for children in different situations.</li> <li>• Provides illuminating and comprehensive guidance on minimum standards for Aftercare services, including a specific section dedicated to support for Aftercare.</li> </ul>
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### 1.3.2 National Level Policies, Laws, Schemes and Programs applicable to Aftercare

<p><b>National Policy for Children, 2013</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reiterates commitment to safeguard, inform, include, support and empower all children within its territory and jurisdiction, both in their individual situation and as a national asset.</li> <li>• However, the policy undervalues Aftercare, excepting the context of preventing HIV infections at birth and ensuring that infected children receive “Aftercare”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The National Policy for Youth, 2014</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caters to the needs of all youth in the age-group of 15-29 years.</li> <li>• Recognises that “there are a number of youths at risk and marginalised youth who require special attention in order to ensure that they can access and benefit from the government programmes”.</li> <li>• Acknowledges “Youth in institutional care, orphanages, correctional homes and prisons” as a vulnerable group.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims to meet the challenge of skilling at scale with speed, standard (quality) and sustainability.</li> <li>• Core objective is to empower individuals, by enabling them to realize their full potential through a process of lifelong learning where competencies are accumulated via instruments such as credible certifications, credit accumulation, and transfer, all of which can benefit CLs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under Section 46, articulates the objective of Aftercare as being a service “to facilitate child’s reintegration into the mainstream of the society”.</li> <li>• Under Section 2(5), defines Aftercare as “making provision of support, financial or otherwise, to persons, who have completed the age of eighteen years but have not completed the age of twenty-one years, and have left any institutional care to join the mainstream of the society”.</li> <li>• Section 46 states that any child leaving a CCI on completion of eighteen years of age may be provided with financial support in order to facilitate the child’s reintegration into mainstream society.</li> <li>• Encourages state governments to establish or recognize ‘Aftercare Organisations’ (ACOs), and the functions that may be performed by them, to care for and support juveniles in conflict with law or children in need of care and protection after they leave CCIs.</li> </ul>



<p><b>The Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides financial resources to aid the implementation of the JJ Act, 2015, including Aftercare services.</li> <li>• Has elaborate arrangements for identification of voluntary organizations interested in and capable of providing Aftercare support.</li> <li>• Under clause 6.3, the State Child Protection Society (SCPS) has been entrusted with the task of providing financial support to the young Aftercare adults under the support of an ACO.</li> <li>• SCPS has the power to release a grant of up to INR 2000 per youth per month to the concerned ACO.</li> <li>• Under the scheme, it is the responsibility of the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) to identify, enlist and involve suitable voluntary organizations, ready to run the Aftercare programs.</li> <li>• Aftercare provisions under ICPS take into consideration the needs of the youth, including residential arrangement, vocational training, financial literacy, independent living, counselling and guidance, and enabling support through stipends and loans.</li> </ul>
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Evidently, policy and law in India mandates financial and non-financial Aftercare support for CLs. Despite this strong mandate, Aftercare remains an extremely neglected and low-priority agenda in child and youth care and protection. It is mired by negligible investment in terms of budgetary or human resource support. Several NGO-run and civil society interventions exist, some of which are quite innovative and promising, but unfortunately such interventions have not been properly documented, reviewed or scaled up in the country.

Udayan Care published its seminal research study on Aftercare in India in 2019. The study was conducted with support from UNICEF India, Tata Trusts and other supporters. Using these existing frameworks, practice-informed knowledge from Udayan Care's experience in service delivery, and the pilot study in Delhi, the team evolved a framework for approaching Aftercare comprehensively, proposing the **Sphere of Aftercare™** as a comprehensive ideology of rehabilitation support and services for CLs transitioning out of care. The Sphere of Aftercare framework divides

the scope of Aftercare support into 8 distinct yet interdependent domains that are essential for CLs' mainstreaming as they transition out of care.

The domains, while distinct from one another, are intricately interdependent. It is posited that to achieve independence and social reintegration, none of these domains can be ignored. As CLs transition into independent life, they will require support under these domains depending on their unique needs and aspirations. The circular shape of the Sphere signifies the provision of holistic support based on individual needs that is aimed at decreasing dependency and empowering CLs towards independent living. As a circle has no beginning or an end, nor a base or a top, the domains of the Sphere are equally weighed in importance and impact on adult life, and gaps in any one of the domains risks derailing a CLs settlement in society.

The research in each state brought together stakeholders including CLs, in designing the research, garnering the data, and in dissemination of findings, for a shared understanding on Aftercare across

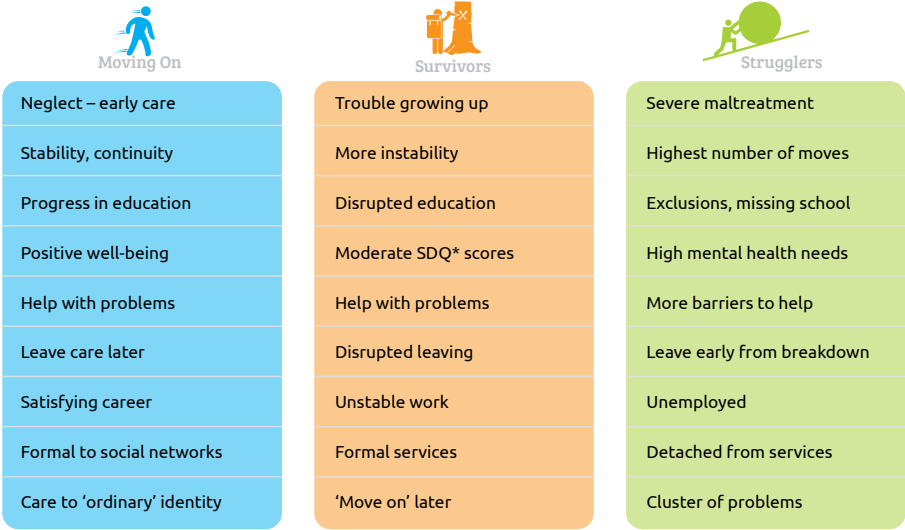


Figure 1. The Sphere of Aftercare

states. The case studies were formulated through a structured interview of CLs, using an interview schedule developed by Udayan Care’s multidisciplinary team of experienced practitioners, with inputs from international and Indian research scholars specializing in Aftercare research. The probes were crafted keeping in mind the sensitivities of the CLs. Any questions with the potential of triggering any negative emotions were reworded or removed. In-depth interviews with CLs covered various aspects such as separation, trauma, neglect, life in CCIs, opportunities and challenges in their present life, and perceived successes or failures of a young adult. The indigenously developed qualitative questionnaire was successful

in gaining the youth’s experiences and quality of life along the eight dimensions of the **Sphere of Aftercare™**.

The case studies have been categorized on the basis of Prof. Mike Stein’s analysis of research studies, following up young people from care completed over 30 years, which identifies 3 main outcome groups (Stein, 2012) situated within a Resilience Framework: young people ‘moving on’ - who demonstrate greater resilience; ‘survivors’ - who have faced greater disruptions; and ‘strugglers’ (formerly termed ‘victims’)- who have the highest mental health needs and have faced the most barriers to help (Stein, 2005, 2012). The Resilience Framework developed by Prof. Stein is shown below (Figure 3).



\*SDQ = Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire

**Figure 2. The Resilience Framework**

However, it is important to bear in mind that the journey through Aftercare is a dynamic one and often the situation of CLs change, and so does the categorization.

The Resilience Framework has guided the classification of case studies in this report, enabling the understanding of CLs' situations along the three empirically established categories.

# Avoidable Tragedies

*Mamta\* was transferred to a CCI at the age of 12, where she spent a few 'happier' years before her life twisted out of control.*

Mamta's father, who had contracted HIV from an extra-marital affair, eventually passed the disease to her mother. Her mother, though HIV+, became pregnant with her younger sister. Post the delivery, both her mother and sister died due to AIDS related complications and that very year, even her father passed away. Mamta was then raised by her paternal uncle, who sent her off with his daughter (Mamta's cousin) to her in-laws place post her marriage. In the new place, Mamta struck up a friendship with a boy who lived in the neighbourhood, which led to much gossip and rumours in the community. Egged on by society, Mamta's cousin was prompted to file a report with the police, who then sent Mamta to the CCI.

Mamta felt at ease in the CCI where she made friends, learnt jewellery making, and also entertained her peers and staff with her talent for singing. Even though she was keen on education, she could not continue with her studies beyond class 8 as she had to wait for the transfer certificate from her previous school. The staff at the CCI did not provide her help with the required paperwork for completing the necessary process. It was during this time that the CCI tried to trace her family. Troubled by the idea that she would be asked to go back to her uncle whom she feared, she ran away from the CCI.

When she arrived at the railway station of a village in Andhra Pradesh, she was befriended by a woman who expressed concern for her and offered care and support. However, after a couple of days, the woman forced Mamta to smoke, drink, and have sex with multiple men including her husband and other 'high profile' men like policemen, lawyers, railway



officials etc. Mamta stayed in captivity for a year before she found a way to escape from there. By this time, she was already pregnant. With the help of her CCI, she moved to Bangalore where she gave birth to her child who was given away for adoption much against her wishes.

Mamta is now staying at a government-run Aftercare home where she has been assured she can stay as long as she wants. Though she appreciates that she has a home, she is benumbed by her past experiences which does not allow her to take any step forward in life.

*“I should not have run away. I don't know whether it was my fault or fault of the people around at the CCI. I don't have a social life now. I am ashamed of speaking to anyone, I do not deserve any respect as well by the society”*  
– she states regretfully.

She is also depressed about the fact that she had to leave her baby and could not take care of it. Mamta feels disconnected from the larger community and has no hope of ever being reintegrated in society. She

feels helpless and hopeless for the position she is in today and is deeply disturbed. She feels that her life is doomed due to her past experiences and her lack of education and that she has nothing to look forward to anymore.







*She says,*  
*“I want to complete my studies, but I am still waiting for the transfer certificate from my previous school.”*

Currently, Mamta is not in a mental state to think about a life of self-reliance, one where she could pursue a vocation that could bring her happiness and help to lead her life independently. Without appropriate psychological therapy and socio-rehabilitation support, she will never be able to imagine a better life for herself.

*“Youth must be nurtured with love, care, and support and staff must have cordial relations with all youth and girls should be empowered to be able to take care of and protect themselves independently”*  
– she says.

### Sphere of Aftercare

Mamta's experiences of **“struggle”** bring to the fore the lack of support that youth in CCI and Aftercare experience in multiple domains of their lives. Among the fundamental eight domains of the **Sphere of Aftercare™**, her experiences indicate a significant lack of inputs in at least six domains:

-  Higher education and vocational skills
-  Mental and emotional well-being
-  Independent living skills
-  Financial independence and career
-  Identity and legal awareness
-  Interpersonal skills and social relationships.

# Unfulfilled Dreams

*After she turned 18, Shruthi\* was sent back to her old grandparents rather than to an Aftercare institute, effectively ending her desire to become a nurse and help people in distress.*

Shruthi was sent to an NGO-run CCI at the age of 8 by her grandparents post the death of her parents. Her two brothers were also sent away to different CCIs, as their grandparents were not financially able to take care of their upbringing due to their old age. Shruthi stayed in the CCI for a decade where she led a happy and productive life. Her days were filled with activities like studies, games, and various extracurricular activities. Girls at the CCI were provided with various life skills, and the caregivers were always ready to listen and help them whenever required.

Shruthi along with the others, attended school that was maintained by the CCI within its premises. She gives credit to the school for nurturing her passion to become a nurse.

***“Here I was given the responsibility of supervising the running of the healthcare centre for five years”  
– she says.***

It was during this time that she not only got over her queasiness at the sight of blood, but also learnt how to examine patients, administer injections, and developed the passion for helping people in distress and saving lives. She was able to find that confidence in her abilities and skills as the CCI helped her identify and nurture her talents.

But somewhere she faltered during her 10th Std. examination which she regrets having failed. Now, back at her grandparents’ house after CCI, she is caught up with household work, taking care of her grandparents and therefore unable to either get time or have the



ability to concentrate on her studies. Her grandparents' house is basic and does not have any of the facilities that the CCI had provided her.

*She says,  
"I miss social interaction, and guidance and information from seniors and mentors on how to take my life forward. I feel lonely. I do not have any friends here."*

Shruti spends most of her time inside the house and she cannot share her concerns with anybody. She is also terribly anxious that she will not be able to take her dreams forward and become financially independent in future due to her difficult circumstances. From a supportive space at the CCI, Shruti was propelled back where she neither has any opportunities, nor social or emotional support.








*"My will power is my only source of strength, and I am determined to do my best and complete my education"  
– she states bravely.*

She often thinks of her future when her grandparents will not be there anymore, and she hopes that her cousin brother, currently the sole breadwinner of the family, will help her when such a situation arises. She can't rely on her younger brothers as they are still living at their CCIs.

Shruthi feels, "Aftercare is a crucial form of support without which youth are lost in their path towards adulthood. Aftercare must include quality education, accommodation, support with employment and job placements, proper guidance and social support, and as required, support with enabling social relationships such as with marriage."

### Sphere of Aftercare

Shruthi's experiences of **'struggle'** exemplify the adversities that youth can face across multiple domains of their lives when they do not receive Aftercare support after leaving CCI. Among the fundamental eight domains of the **Sphere of Aftercare™**, her experiences indicate a significant lack of inputs in seven domains:

-  Higher education and vocational skills
-  Mental and emotional well-being
-  Independent living skills
-  Affordable and adequate housing
-  Identity and legal awareness
-  Interpersonal skills and social relationships.
-  Financial independence and career

# A Forlorn Life

*Amit\*, 18 years of age, does not have much aspiration and lives the life of a vagabond, while trying to etch out a living which will provide him with his daily needs.*

Amit cannot recall his earliest childhood or his real parents. He was raised by his 'step-parents' from the age of five, who would often disapprove of his leaving and wandering away from home. One day, tired of his parents' disapproval, he left home for good and lived with other children across railway platforms in Gujarat and Maharashtra for almost two years. At the age of seven, he was brought to a CCI by the police.

His tendency to wander off persisted even at the CCI, where he would attempt to run away many times. Each time, he would go back to the railway stations where he preferred to earn money by selling things, loading cargo, and supplying water to the trains – as he had done during his childhood. He would be brought back to the CCI and often transferred in the hope that he will eventually find a CCI conducive to his ways and settle in. Amit does not have any complaints about the facilities that he received in these CCIs, but he was never able to develop any close relationship with caregivers who were cordial to him and only reprimanded him if he were upto some mischief.

***At the last CCI, he attempted to run away when he was 16 years of age; he explains that, "I felt alone as most of my friends were restored to their families, and I did not have anybody there to hang out with or talk to."***

His lack of connection with caregivers, and/or lack of emotional support probably had fuelled his need to run away. Not surprisingly, Amit does not have any interest in pursuing his education after finishing class 8. He says he does not have any aspirations in life beyond securing a blue-collared job for himself.





*Once, he was interested in playing cricket, but he says, "The CCI never encouraged me or my friends who were interested in playing cricket or other sports, so now even that interest is dead."*

Amit taught himself how to drive a tempo which has helped him acquire a job as a driver in a factory. The owner allows him to stay in the factory where he is provided food and water for a monthly fee. Amit's only aspiration right now is to get a driver's licence which will allow him to take up a driving job anywhere, but for that he needs to provide proof of residence that he does not have. He is trying to get his employer to help him out with the papers. If life turns out correct, perhaps he would like to start his own driving business.

Currently, he earns a monthly income of INR 7,200/- which he spends on his daily needs, and the rest he squanders on his friends. His work gets over by 1pm, post which he spends his time his friends loitering around. Amit has no savings or

a bank account. His primary concern is to find a stable accommodation, which is not a hostel like that in Aftercare. Perhaps this stable living space will help him with necessary papers through which to get his driver's license, bank account, and a semblance of a normal life.








Amit feels nervous in front of strangers and does not like talking to people. His social circle consists of only his friends.

*He confesses that, "I do not share my thoughts and feeling with my friends. Sometimes, when I see other children with their parents, then I feel wrong about being alone in life, so I don't think too much."*

He does not know what Aftercare means, and when explained, felt that youth without parents should be provided a home, vocational training and jobs until the time they are able to live on their own.

### Sphere of Aftercare

Amit not only failed to receive Aftercare support, but the inadequate care he experienced in his CCIs left him to **'struggle'** with too little resources to help him improve his life. Among the fundamental eight domains of the **Sphere of Aftercare™**, his experiences indicate a significant lack of inputs in seven domains:

-  Higher education and vocational skills
-  Mental and emotional well-being
-  Independent living skills
-  Affordable and adequate housing
-  Identity and legal awareness
-  Interpersonal skills and social relationships.
-  Financial independence and career

# Compromising on Life

*Rahim\*, 21 years, had to leave his desire of pursuing his Bachelors in Architecture from NIT since his work as an online graphic designer does not fetch him enough to take care of his financial needs.*

Since his father passed away due to AIDS, Rahim's HIV+ mother has become the family's sole breadwinner as a caretaker in an NGO. His younger brother who is also HIV+, lives with her in the same NGO. Rahim's mother was encouraged to put Rahim in a CCI that supported children of HIV+ families for a better future. Rahim was 14 years of age when he moved into the CCI. The NGO-run CCI helped him complete his education till 12th Std. and provided him with technical training to develop his skills in computers, art (painting), guitar, French and graphic designing. He expanded his knowledge with the training he received there in nutrition and health, fitness, conflict resolution, effective communication, self-esteem, motivation, ego resiliency, and computer literacy. He was also encouraged to develop his skills in photography.

As his talent as a painter got better, he was able to sell his paintings which fetched him some income. But soon, it led to parting of ways.

***I had to leave CCI because I realised that they were keeping a substantial amount from the sale of my paintings for themselves instead of giving it back to me”  
– Rahim says.***

The CCI refused to provide him with any further care provision, and disconnected from him completely. He now stays in a shared accommodation with two of his friends from the CCI. Though Rahim has maintained good relationship with his peers from the CCI, mentors, caregivers, and the head caregiver of the CCI, he often feels distanced from the youth of



the general population, who he feels “will not understand his circumstances”.

Rahim is currently pursuing his Bachelors from a government college since the fees are low, something which he can afford. He had to let go of his dream of pursuing Architecture due to his financial constraints. His income from his online job barely covers his expenses, and Rahim is worried about his future and the possibility of not being able to take care of finances. His distraught mental state has resulted in his developing migraine which has added to his stress, apart from the emotional distress of taking care of his ailing mother.

*“I feel low whenever I think of my physical and mental health. Not a day goes by when I am not stressed”  
– he says.*

The sudden lack of financial support for his education has negatively impacted Rahim’s transition, calling the need for a continuum of care as provided by Aftercare. Rahim

feels that he has not got any opportunity to help him transition into an independent adult. He also asserts that youth must be supported with housing, education and employment opportunities, through government or NGO Aftercare provisions, without which youth might suffer physical and psychological health problems, with some resorting to illegal activities.


*He rightly says,  
“Youth who leave the CCI, without support, will start considering themselves as a failure. It is not easy to be accepted by this society and to reintegrate on one’s own. In my own case, for now things are going on, but I have had to compromise on many of my aspirations.”*

Rahim now feels his only hope is to start his own business as he has a strong interest and acumen for doing business. He wants to be financial stable soon so that he can take care of his family and his future.


### Sphere of Aftercare


Among the fundamental eight domains of the **Sphere of Aftercare™** that require appropriate support for development, Rahim’s experiences of ‘**struggle**’ indicate a significant lack of at least five domains:

 Financial independence and career

 Mental and emotional well-being

 Independent living skills

 Interpersonal skills and social relationships.

 Physical health

# Against Her Will

*Bhakti\*, 21 years, is currently working as an unskilled labour at a garment factory and lives in a small apartment with two of her friends from the CCI who are her pillars of strength.*

Recalling her early years, Bhakti has fond memories of the CCI where she spent most of her relatively 'happy' childhood. She was four years old when she was brought to the CCI, and remembers nothing about her family or why she grew up there. The CCI provided her with all basic amenities, support and compassion that she required to grow up safe and happy. But, the most important thing that she found at the CCI was her deep connection with the friends that she made here.

However, Bhakti's interest in formal education was severely lacking which could have been a result of various childhood cognitive issues, an area that needed due attention by the staff at CCI. Even though initially the staff at CCI insisted on her education, her apparent lack of interest made them shift her to vocational training in a beautician course after class 5th standard.

This very lack of education from her side and lack of career guidance from CCI's side created problems for her when she shifted to an Aftercare hostel. The hostel supported only those youth who were keen to continue their education. Those who were not, especially girls, were married off. Since Bharti was not inclined towards education, the staff at the hostel decided that Bhakti should also be married off.

Bhakti was against the marriage from the very beginning, but the staff at the Aftercare, who also chose the groom for her, did not pay her any heed. With no support to stand up against this, Bharti was forced to agree to the marriage. However, the marriage turned out to be abusive and in the first two months itself, she was tortured daily. Unable to bear the physical and mental violence, Bhakti finally reached out to her friends in a desperate state. Although her friends helped her file a complaint with the police, the police instead of taking legal action against the family, asked her to go back to the very same family. Her Aftercare



hostel staff also did not come forward to provide her with any further legal or emotional support.

*“I am very disappointed that nobody from the Aftercare supported me. I don’t want to approach the staff myself as they will force me to go back to that family”*  
– Bharti insists.

It was at this point that her friends took her in. Both her friends from CCI have been her constant support throughout her troubled experiences, lending some sense of stability in her otherwise precarious life. Since she did not finish her education, Bhakti is forced to work as an unskilled labour to earn money. She now earns a small amount of INR 6,000/- per month to take care of her daily needs, but her inability to earn more and pay back her friends weighs heavily on her. She is keen to work at a beauty parlour as that’s the sector she had been trained on at the CCI, however, getting a good break requires connections which she does not have.

*“This marriage has really impacted my career, my physical and mental health, and also my social life”*  
– Bhakti says

Traumatised by the course of events in her life, Bhakti continues to live in fear, especially since she is still a married woman.








*“Aftercare means nothing if an organization makes catastrophic decisions regarding the lives of the youth, which are not in their best interest. Aftercare must provide youth the freedom to make their life choices and support them towards a better life” - she says.*

All she wants right now is to get a legal divorce and be financially independent. Without proper legal guidance and support, she is unable to proceed further. Her hostel continues to remain aloof indifferent even after knowing about her problems, putting to question its ethics and functioning.

### Sphere of Aftercare

Bhakti’s experiences of **‘struggle’** bring to the fore the lack of support that youth in Aftercare experience in multiple domains of their lives. Her friends have been fundamental to extricate her from what could have otherwise been a complete collapse of her life.

Among the fundamental eight domains of the **Sphere of Aftercare™**, her experiences indicate a significant lack of inputs across a worrying seven domains:

-  Higher education and vocational skills
-  Identity and legal awareness
-  Physical health
-  Financial independence and career
-  Independent living skills
-  Affordable and adequate housing
-  Mental and emotional well-being

# Surface Care

*Extremely introverted, Yamna\*, 20 years, resides in a working women's hostel and struggles to transition into adulthood all on her own.*

Yamna's mother was forced to beg on the streets after her father died when she was an infant. Her mother was the third wife of his father, and post his death, her step-siblings refused to take care of them. The terrible situation at home pushed her mother to leave her and her two elder sisters at the CCI. From the age of three, she stayed at the CCI till class 6. Her life was "happy, secure, and stress-free" there. At the CCI, she was provided training in football, cooking, singing, karate, and Kathak. The CCI ensured that girls received holistic training, growth and development especially encouraging them to take up sports, martial arts and other activities that helped build their innate talents.



After she had completed her class 6th standard, her mother who was unwell, came to CCI to take back her eldest daughter. The caregivers of the CCI were reluctant to let her sister go and she was one of their most favoured students. This led to an argument between her mother and the staff at CCI, resulting in her mother withdrawing all of them from the CCI. Eventually, her elder sister was married off and her second sister tried to support them with finances by taking up a job, which was still not enough for their daily needs. Soon her second sister also got married.

Being extremely introverted, Yamna has not been able to develop deep ties and hence not in touch with anybody at the CCI, except a person who she accepts as her mentor. Though girls were well cared for at the CCI, Yamna feels that she was never given an opportunity to open up and share her feelings, which she was unable to initiate on her own.

***Yamna mentions that, “I have got friends but I only interact with them on a surface level, and in general, I have no social life.”***

And this lack of secure attachment could probably have negative consequences on her ability to develop positive social relationships in future.

Yamna is currently residing in a working women’s hostel but does not have any financial support. Her sisters are unable to help as they do not have any stable income themselves. Yamna is trying to finish her education in subjects which interests her. Along with completing her B.A. degree from a government college, Yamna has taken up coaching in sales and marketing of consumer goods. She aspires to pursue a degree in Hotel Management upon completing her present degree. An avid reader, she is also passionate about composing poems and hopes to refine her writing skills.

***“I like the role a nutritionist play in life and want to learn more on the subject to keep myself fit and help others in benefiting the same way” – she says quietly.***

To fund her education and interests, Yamna does part-time jobs in her free time. Unlike CCI and Aftercare, there is no one at the hostel to guide her regarding her career and life decisions.

I feel disturbed most of the time by the lack of proper direction in my life and struggle with worry and depression” – Yamna mentions.






As a result, she is unable to sleep and prefers to further isolate herself from her friends. She hopes to talk to her mentor one of the days and ask him for help with seeking a therapist.

***She says, “Lack of guidance and financial support has greatly impacted my mental and physical health” as she continues with her struggle to handle the transition into adulthood by herself.***

Yamna thoughtfully recommends that the government and CCIs should maintain a follow-up mechanism by which a record is kept of children and youth who leave care, lest they are lost to deleterious lifestyles without support.

### Sphere of Aftercare

Among the fundamental eight domains of the **Sphere of Aftercare™** that require appropriate support for development, Yamna’s experiences of **‘survival’** indicate a significant lack of the same across at least five domains:

-  Interpersonal skills and social relationships.
-  Mental and emotional well-being
-  Independent living skills
-  Financial independence and career
-  Affordable and adequate housing

# Help From a Good Samaritan

*Sameer\* is 19 years old and pursuing his education in 12th grade. His is one of the rare stories of hope, where he has found care and guidance from a good Samaritan who is keen to see him achieve his dreams.*

Sameer was found wandering alone at Ahmedabad's railway station by the police when he was six years old. He was taken to a CCI who tried to locate his parents but without any result. Sameer has no recollection of his family or how he came to be at the railway station. In the span of 12 years, Sameer was transferred to five CCIs primarily due to his keen interest in getting a good education which many of these CCIs failed to provide.

Sameer recalls his experience with education in some of the CCIs where there were many children but very few staff to adequately take care of all their needs. In one CCI, children were given basic education in one hall; in another, there was no education and children played all the time with no knowledge of the outside world or time of day/month etc. It was at the last CCI that Sameer finally found the space and facilities to start dreaming his dreams. Sameer was given a chance at getting good education because unlike others, he was able to voice his needs and demand for his basic rights.

He was happy at the last CCI, primarily because it provided him with the education that he wanted. There were only 10 children here and hence the staff was able to give more attention and better care than the previous CCIs. The children were also taught life skills through workshops on various topics such as developing relationships, importance of friendship, handling emotions, understanding the intent of others, and staying safe. He enjoyed sports and games too, which was supported by the CCI who also encouraged him to participate in sports fests in the district. Many of his peers from the CCI continue to be his friends.





***This felt like home, it was a place where I could approach the caregivers and speak with them about my feelings and thoughts openly” – says Sameer about the CCI.***

Sameer takes his studies and fitness seriously as he aspires to become a police officer. He is inspired by how the police force dedicate their lives for the good of the nation and is determined to complete his graduation which will allow him to sit for the Civil Services Examination. Once, he related all this to the driver of the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) who would visit the CCI during Diwali to distribute sweets and crackers. The driver conveyed Sameer’s enthusiasm to the DSP who, impressed by his passion, soon took him under his wing as his guardian. Sameer left the CCI to live with the DSP’s family. He has been provided with a one-room space, food, clothing, education, pocket money for his other expenses, and emotional support and guidance.

***I am confident of my ability to achieve my goals and aspirations in life and I feel that my only responsibility now is to work hard and get a good education” – says Sameer determinedly.***

He plans to pursue his undergraduate education in Arts and also aspires to do the NCC course. Sameer’s physical and mental health is in good shape, for which he credits his healthy routine, discipline and consistent support from his guardian.

***Sameer feels that Aftercare is very important for youth like himself, who do not have a family to go back to once they leave the CCI and must include good education and support with job placements, until youth they are able to manage independently. “I was fortunate to have been acquainted with my guardian, who listened to my needs and aspirations and encouraged me to pursue my goals with full support. If I did not have this support, I would have had no other option but to pursue some basic course like many of my peers” – Sameer says.***

Sameer’s is a rare story of hope, where human kindness has helped him traverse the adversities of his life to move closer to his life’s aspirations. All youth deserve such care and support, and to nurture life goals and Aftercare must make this possible for them.

### Sphere of Aftercare

Sameer’s experiences signify that he is **‘moving on’** quite well upon leaving his CCI. However, his statements indicate a lack of support in at least one of the eight fundamental domains in the **Sphere of Aftercare™**:



Interpersonal skills and social relationships.

# Power of Nurturing Relationships

*Nirmal\* is 27 years old, employed, self-reliant, and happy with further more goals that he wants to achieve in due time. He is one of the few success stories of how good care, support, love and nurturing can help youth become caring and confident adults.*

When his father died of AIDS, Nirmal, his mother and elder brother had to face extreme ill-treatment and discrimination from their extended family. So much so that it compelled his mother to attempt suicide. However, she survived and also managed to secure a job at the CCI. The Father, who headed the institution, encouraged Nirmal's mother to put him in the CCI when he learnt about his passion for education. Nirmal was the oldest at 16 years when he joined the CCI.

The rigidity of the routine and discipline that was followed at the CCI did not go down well with Nirmal, and he ran away from the institute within two days. The Father was able to trace and bring him back.

***"He poured all his love and affection on me. Because of his overwhelming love and care, I decided to stay in the CCI and got accustomed to the daily routine eventually",***  
***– Nirmal says.***

Reflecting back on those times, Nirmal feels that this very discipline and morals which he learnt at the CCI that are responsible for standing him in good stead today, keeping him grounded in all circumstances. At the CCI, he enjoyed being the big brother to the younger children and helped the staff



take care of their needs. Various trainings were provided to the children including a daily morning walk for fitness. Based on his interest, the CCI supported him to complete a computer course. His good performance led to his being enrolled for a diploma, and eventually the completion of his degree in B.E. (EEE).

He is currently working in the hospitality industry, managing the electrical requirements of a service apartment and supervising a team of 11 people. Before joining the CCI, Nirmal used to work in the night at a local bar and earn a measly amount of INR 250 per month. Now, with good education and a job, he is able to earn INR 30,000/- per month.

**He says,**  
*"I never imagined that I would be able to lead such a fulfilling life where I would be in a position to help and guide others."*

Not only that, Nirmal and his friends from CCI had created a 'Best Volunteers' group which would meet often to plant trees in neighbouring schools and public spaces. Nirmal and his network of friends have continued to participate in such activities, a good example of how moral values inculcated in children and youth help in becoming better citizens and have a life-long impact in guiding positive behaviour.

Nirmal aspires to become an IES (Indian Engineering Services) Officer, and is passionate about learning and exploring opportunities for his future. His current work engagement allows him the time to focus on his exams and Nirmal is confident about fulfilling his aspirations. He also helps out his brother financially who has limited resources to manage his own family.

Nirmal is grateful to his mother and the staff at CCI for all non-financial support that they have been providing which shows how significant social relationships have been in his development and life, clearly delineating its position in the continuum of care for youth.

**Nirmal believes,** *"Aftercare is crucial for youth, especially at a time when they are developing their individuality and all support provided by CCIs until then is insignificant if they do not help the youth transition towards an independent life. Genuine love, care, affection and proper guidance must be hallmarks of all good Aftercare support."*

A rare example, Nirmal's case reveals a holistic Aftercare provision that has, for the most part, successfully taken care of the fundamental eight domains of the Sphere of Aftercare.

# Progressing Towards a Stable Future

*Sarah\*, 19 years, is a keen learner and has her heart set on becoming a social worker and work for children with special needs.*

Sarah was ten years old when both her parents died. Though her grandmother initially took care of Sarah, her younger sister and brother, she was unable to carry on with the responsibility further. All of them were subsequently placed in a CCI; where unable to bear the trauma and changes in his life, Sarah's brother ran away within two years of admission. Sarah and her sister continue to search for him with the hope of finding him one day.

At the CCI, Sarah shared her room with 15 more girls who were looked after by one carer or house mother, providing a sense of security, support and stability amongst the girls. Sarah enjoyed her life at the CCI which she felt had a "free environment" where they would all help each other. Her love for studies and singing were encouraged at the CCI, where she also received professional training in singing to enhance her obvious talent. This allowed her to sing in front of others on various occasions giving her further confidence. The CCI also provided the girls with various opportunities to learn and grow through trainings in different courses. She talks fondly of the library facility at the CCI. At every step, Sarah was provided the support and guidance that she required to take her life forward in the right direction.



***"I learnt about this (NGO-run) Aftercare home from my CCI. I am happy that they are giving me the same kind of support and guidance that I used to get from the CCI" – she states happily.***

She is currently studying to complete her 12th Std. in Humanities, so that she can join an NGO who works with children with special needs. Her career choice stems from one of the courses she attended on Child Development; where one of the educators from an

international NGO found her passion and dedication compelling and offered her a job post completion of her schooling.

Sarah feels at home at the Aftercare, which according to her is less like a hostel and more like a family.

*She adds,  
"The staff here is constantly present and ready to guide us, while encouraging the youth to solve our own problems."*

The Aftercare provides them financial support for the first three months post which they are expected to secure jobs and become financially independent. Sarah works as a tele-calling agent for ICICI to support herself while studying to complete her schooling. Though it has not been much of a deterrent to Sarah, this financial


pressure to secure a job at such a short notice and earn money at a time when youth are required to study for appropriate qualifying degrees, can cause dissonance and tension among youth who are not prepared.


Sarah, who often interacts with girls from similar background while travelling the local trains, feels that similar Aftercare support should be provided to all youth in need. Though in all likelihood Sarah will stay with her maternal aunt, with whom she has been in regular touch, post Aftercare, she feels that her life has always been limited to "group homes" and hence, that's where she wants to continue to stay.

*She says,  
"Since I do not have a "personal life" as such, living in such places is not an issue for me."*

### Sphere of Aftercare

While Sarah's experiences of **'Moving on'** have shown stability and continuity overall, her statements indicate a lack of support in at least three of the eight fundamental domains of life in the **Sphere of Aftercare™**:

 Independent living skills

 Interpersonal skills and social relationships.

 Lack of Financial support

While life in CCI and Aftercare has been more comfortable for Sarah, much of the challenges she may have to face may emerge when the time comes to leave her Aftercare home.

# A Truly Integrated Life

*Sunny\* started living with his relative after leaving/exiting the CCI, which still helps him emotionally and financially. Sunny has completed his graduation, and works for an IT company. He dreams of pursuing his studies in MBA and buying a house of his own.*

Coming from a conservative state of Rajasthan, it is not surprising that Sunny and his HIV positive mother faced tremendous adversity when his father passed away. His mother, by sheer luck, came to know of a CCI and moved to that town. He and his two younger siblings were placed in the CCI, where his mother also found a job as a caretaker. He was 11 years old when he came to the CCI.

**Sunny says,**  
*"I got lot of love and support from my CCI, something which I never got from my family or community back in my village. The supportive staff took care of all the children's needs and ensured their good health."*

Here, all the children were provided with formal education, training on various skills, and coaching and extra classes to facilitate the progress of their studies as required which not only ensured their education but all-round development and growth. Sunny's interest lay in painting and he was provided training to enhance his interest and skills which allowed him to create many paintings with confidence.

After **"Moving on"** from CCI, Sunny has not only completed his graduation but is now employed with a website developing company, a job which his CCI helped him secure. Even though his work is well appreciated by his colleagues, Sunny aspires to achieve more. He wants better work opportunities, pursue a post-graduate degree in MBA, and also own a house- few dreams which he is confident of achieving with the help and support of his friends, peers and CCI.



Sunny earns his own living, and is not financially dependent on either family or Aftercare. He manages his time between coaching for his post-graduate entrance exams along with his job. He knows that if required, or during any emergency, he can seek help from his family, friends and the CCI, who continue to help and support him in his dreams and endeavours. He is happy with his life, feels fully reintegrated within the society, and is grateful for all the support and opportunities that have led him to achieve this without many hurdles.

*"I do not feel the need to expect anything from them now. I want to achieve my goals on my own, and I know they have always got my back" – says Sunny of his CCI.*

His very statement proves the CCI's success in treading a fine line of not only making him feel that he could always rely on them but also empowering him to stand on his own feet, lest he become too dependent and limit his own potential.

*Sunny feels, "Aftercare support is necessary for youth like me, to instil hope and confidence in their abilities to achieve their goals by taking care of their higher education and coaching, and their health and other related medical expenditures. I wish that all youth would receive the kind of support I did from my CCI, to accomplish and flourish in life."*

The story of Sunny is a rare example of a smooth transition into society without receiving Aftercare support. The fact that he had his relative to count on for accommodation and that his CCI continues to support him emotionally and as necessary, financially, gave him the kind of assurance that a good Aftercare home would provide.

His statements indicate that the circumstances, opportunities and people in his life enabled the fulfilment of the eight fundamental domains of the **Sphere of Aftercare™**, according to his needs and expectations.

# Conclusion

Findings from the case studies, as a distinct sub-section of the national Aftercare research by Udayan Care, shed light on the opportunities presently available to OHC youth, and the many challenges that they face. Along with serving the purpose of creating a platform to voice the stories of the youth, by the youth, the qualitative interviews with CLs and the resulting case studies provide a comprehensive understanding about their lives; ranging from their individual likes and dislikes, to the resources and support systems available to them, and everything in between. They spoke about their dreams, their fears, the joys of their life, the trauma, their relations, attachment and love, their insecurities, their education and career, their sense of independence and also their uncertainty of the future. The narratives were revelatory to the fact that although many of the challenges they face are common, the experiences and journeys of the youth are unique to each one of them.

Systemic inadequacies have stifled the growth, development and transition of several youth. The complete lack of mental health care for Mamta following her traumatic life experiences, the lack of educational support and career guidance for Shruthi, failure to provide Amit Aftercare support which left him with too little resources to improve his life, and the abuse faced by Bhakti from a marriage arranged by her CCI without her consent, all reflect the negligence of the CCIs and Aftercare institutes in provision of support services along the eight fundamental dimensions of care towards their

independent life. Their moving accounts must be a wake-up call to all stakeholders in Alternative Care, to understand the gravity of the impact that inadequate care can have on the lives of children and youth, and to work together to bridge the gaps in provision of care.

The hearteningly successful stories of Sameer, Nirmal, Sarah and Sunny indicate that there are CCIs and Aftercare homes dedicated to providing the best care and support, often continuing to remain an integral part of their lives into adulthood. Some have proven that a CCI can be nothing short of a family to the CLs, which most nobly serves the purpose of their functioning. The hard work, dedication, sincerity and compassion invested in caring for the children mould their character and potential. As nation-builders, CCIs and Aftercare institutes thus have the tremendous responsibility of creating moral, valuable citizens of the future.

The CAP research was conceived aspiring to understand the present Aftercare practices across 5 states in India, acknowledging the positive efforts that could be adapted across care contexts, and comprehending the gaps in support and the challenges faced by CLs. The detailed accounts shared by the CLs have fulfilled these objectives thoroughly. The way forward is for government and NGO functionaries responsible for Aftercare support to pay attention to their voices and ensure that positive change is engendered through informed strategies, policies and services, so that each CL thrives.



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The life trajectories of Care Leavers included in this booklet were collected as part of a research project conducted during 2017 to 2019 in five states of India, leading to five state reports and one collated report.

All the six reports can be accessed at <https://www.udayancare.org/research-and-publication/research-studies-and-papers>



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