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Eastern and Southern Africa regional learning platform on care reform

Monthly update - May 2023

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, case studies, videos and policy papers [here](#) and [here](#).

Announcements on the platform

will explore the peer to peer methodology used in this research. Date: 23rd June. Time: 11-12.30 Nairobi time. Zoom [link](#) Meeting ID: 862 3656 9273 Passcode: 952272

- **Webinar recording - the transformation of residential care.** In this webinar we heard about international experiences in the transformation of residential care. Two residential care providers from the region told us why they chose to reintegrate children and develop alternative services for vulnerable children and families. The government of Rwanda explained how transformation can be brought to scale through integration in national care systems. A recording of the webinar can be found [here](#).
 - **Opportunity to join a small learning group on the transformation of residential care:** This group will provide an opportunity for residential care providers going through the transformation process and those supporting them to discuss challenges and share lessons learnt. If you are interested in joining this group, please email: Ismael Ddumba-Nyanzi <iddnyanzi@childfrontiers.com> Please share this opportunity with partners who you think might be interested.
 - **Seeking case management resources related to care.** In response to multiple requests, we will be developing a list of useful case management resources that relate to children's care. If you have any guidance, toolkits or SOPs that on any aspect of children's care, please share with Ismael Ddumba-Nyanzi <iddnyanzi@childfrontiers.com>
 - **HelpDesk:** Do you have a dilemma about care reform? Would you like to know about how others have succeeded in their care reform efforts? Whether you are just starting out on your care reform journey or a long way down this road, we can help. As part of the learning platform, we offer a HelpDesk for all UNICEF and government staff in Eastern and Southern Africa. Please contact Emily: edelap@childfrontiers.com or Mona: maika@unicef.org
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The challenges faced by care leavers in Kenya

“One funny thing is that a few days before you leave the orphanage, you have everything, and then you are told to leave and now you find that you have nothing – you have no food, no shelter, and on top of it all, you are all alone,” recalls a Care Leaver, Kenya.

Care leavers are young people leaving alternative care to live independently as adults. In this article, we examine care leavers' experiences and support needs identified by UNICEF and government research carried out with 660 participants (including 316 children and young people) across four counties of Kenya. This research focused on children and young people who have left residential care.

The research found that most young people leave care in Kenya with no or minimal preparation, and are given little choice when this transition happens. The care leavers that took part in the research often had limited life skills and could not carry out basic household chores, manage finances, find work or housing, or access services. However imperfect, residential care had often been a home for these young people, and leaving behind friends and carers was traumatic. Lack of preparation and support for care leavers meant many ended up unemployed or engaged in casual labour. Even highly educated care leavers found it hard to get work due to their lack of connections.

“Being exited from a children's home with no job or somewhere to stay was not so easy. ... I had to sleep in the streets for a while before a good friend offered me a room for a while,” a careleaver, from Kenya.

“It was stressful, I developed ulcers at that time. I really struggled because I was given a bed, two saucepans, and spoons, and they told me to go start life,” added the careleaver.

from family, and culture. This stigma affected all aspects of their lives, damaging their self-worth and preventing them from forming relationships or finding work.

For some care leavers, spending a large part of their lives in residential care meant they did not know how to interact or connect with others in the 'outside' world.

"It was a challenge getting my views heard or putting my point across. Communication was a challenge," says a Care Leaver from Kenya.

This led to loneliness and isolation. Unlike young people who have grown up in a community, care leavers don't have ready-made support networks in their wider extended family or neighborhood. Challenges with social skills that would allow them to interact effectively and appropriately with others made it hard for some care leavers to establish connections in the community. As a result, many care leavers relied heavily on one another. A combination of social exclusion, low self-esteem, and high levels of stress means that many care leavers struggled with their mental health.

Kenya has made some progress in terms of acknowledging the needs of care leavers. Policy documents make specific reference to care leavers, including the [Guidelines for the Alternative Family Care of Children](#), and the [10-year National Care Reform Strategy for Children in Kenya \(2022-2032\)](#). However, the gap between these policies and the experiences of care leavers is stark. Aside from some help with education fees and materials (provided by residential care providers and NGOs), most care leavers receive very little assistance and are excluded from most government programs designed for young people. Care leavers remain off the government radar, and are 'hidden' and 'left behind' in most government programmes. Priority areas of support identified by the research include access to existing social protection schemes, livelihoods and economic empowerment and further education or training, life-skills training, peer-to-peer mentoring, and mediation and counselling. Pockets of good practices do exist in Kenya that could be built on, including the life-skills training and other assistance offered by the Kenyan Association of Care Leavers, and some small-scale NGO-run programmes directed at care leavers.

Other news and resource

- **New alternative care registry in Mozambique:** The Government of Mozambique with UNICEF support have piloted a National Registry of Alternative Care in four provinces. This is a multisectoral mechanism involving the social service workforce, General Prosecutor and Minor Court. The registry keeps track of children in all forms of formal alternative care. It showed that in 2022, 1329 children were admitted into 31 residential care facilities across the four provinces, compared with 239

residential care had lost both parents, and across all four provinces, over 90% of these children have contact with a family member who could potentially care for them. Just over half the children in residential care were girls, 8% were aged 0-3 years, 52% 4-12 years and 40% 13-17 years. Currently, children tend to stay in residential care until they reach 18 as there are few reintegration processes in place. Plans are now underway for the National Registry to be rolled out across the country, and UNICEF are working with the government to ensure greater support to families to reduce entry into residential care.

- **Learning briefs from Changing the Way We Care.** CTWWC have developed a series of helpful learning briefs on different aspects of care reform, including the participation of people with lived experience, disability and care reform, the transition of residential care facilities, and faith engagement within care reform. The briefs draw on learning from CTWWC programmes around the world, including in Kenya. The briefs can be found [here](#) (scroll to the end of the this page for a list of all the briefs).

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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