



Photo credit: Schimbator Studio

Insights from Moldova:

Role of Targeted Economic Support in Reintegration of Children

CHANGING THE WAY WE CARE MOLDOVA

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.

Changing the Way We Care Moldova's key partners include Partnerships for Every Child, Keystone Moldova, Copil, Comunitate, Familie (CCF) Moldova.

In September 2022, Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC) launched an initiative to provide targeted economic support to assist the reintegration of children into families or placement into family based alternative care. Informed by previous experiences in reintegration and information captured in the individual child and family assessments, the CTWWC team developed a standardized and equitable approach to identifying the type and amount of targeted economic support required. The approach aimed to ensure that: (1) decisions about economic support are made based on a clear criteria and (2) critical learnings are documented to inform advocacy efforts and provide evidence as to the types of support required to facilitate safe and sustained family placement.

Over a year into the initiative, the CTWWC team found that the targeted economic support can have an almost immediate benefit for a child and a family.

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By identifying economic barriers to reintegration, targeted economic support helps leverage the resources – both financial and services – needed to ensure children grow-up in supportive and loving families.

Ana Palii,
Partnerships for Every Child/CTWWC
Moldova implementing partner

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The Case for Targeted Economic Support

Poverty is often a push factor for the unnecessary separation of children by increasing a family's vulnerability. In a report by Changing the Way We Care Moldova, caregivers cited the lack of financial resources and access to inclusive education as the main reasons for sending children to the Hîncești Residential Institution.* Lack of resources can also become barriers for families, both biological and foster, from integrating a child into their home.

A growing body of evidence shows the benefits of supporting reintegration efforts by providing families with a combination of targeted economic assistance plus access to care services. Research has found that economic support can help address the root causes of separation and placement of a child in residential care. However, this support is more impactful when combined with other services and when there is a shared understanding among families, children, and social workers of how the support will be used.

*Insights from Moldova: Closing of a Residential Institution, Changing the Way We Care, 01 Feb 2023, Better Care Network

INSIGHT 1: EQUITY AND TRANSPARENCY: ESTABLISHING ECONOMIC SUPPORT CRITERIA

Establishing clear criteria for targeted economic assistance at the beginning of the process can **help ensure an equitable and transparent approach** that considers the needs of the whole child and the context of the child's family placement.

Equity and Transparency: Establishing Criteria for Targeted Assistance

Before launching the targeted economic support initiative, CTWWC convened an internal working group tasked with developing a clear process and format for assessing services and economic support required for each placement. To align with existing case management processes and tools, the team utilized existing wellbeing benchmark criteria to organize and assess needs as well as gaps.

The 8 wellbeing benchmarks include:

1. Health
2. Engagement
3. Cared for with affection
4. Play and leisure activity
5. Respect
6. Responsibility
7. Safety
8. Inclusion

Each of these wellbeing benchmarks align with criteria to be assessed to see if they are being met and if not, what needs to be done to ensure they are fulfilled. The criteria serve as a guide to assess "success" in each area and identify any gaps. If the gaps are not covered by other service providers and are necessary to ensure the safe and sustained reintegration and/or family placement, this is noted and used to inform the specific request of targeted economic support.

A targeted assistance database was developed and shared among partners. The database is the primary tool to help manage targeted economic support requests. The data collected serves as an important source of information to inform future advocacy efforts.

Wellbeing Benchmarks for Targeted Assistance



HEALTH ASSESSMENT

Assesses the physical and emotional health conditions of the child, personal hygiene, adequate food and meal times, treatment in case of a disability caused by a chronic illness.



ENGAGEMENT

Reviews the child's results in various activities, the existing conditions for development and learning, the child's ability to address problems, and the degree of preparation for independent living.



CARED FOR WITH AFFECTION

Observes the attachments of the child, the affection of the parents towards the child, the existence of a person with whom the child can talk, the appearance of the child, etc.



PLAY AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Understands the child's leisure activities, the possibility to achieve their interests and capabilities, participation in family events and activities outside the family, the balance between learning / free time / household responsibilities.



RESPECT

Assesses the child's sense of self-respect, respect of other people who are in contact with the child (children and adults), if the child's opinion is consulted in the family, school, and/or community.



RESPONSIBILITY

Determines whether the child takes responsibility for his own actions, has responsibilities in the family, is able to distinguish between right and wrong.



SAFETY

Observes whether the child is protected from any form of abuse, neglect, or harm at home, at school, and in the community and feels safe in these environments; determines if the home where the child lives is suitable for his growth and development (there is no risk of accident/trauma).



INCLUSION

Assesses if the child communicates with peers/adults/colleagues, participates in community events, and is integrated into the educational process.

INSIGHT 2: ARCHITECTS OF THEIR FUTURE: INVOLVING CAREGIVERS AND CHILDREN IN ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Families and children should be actively **involved in the planning, developing, and implementing** of their individual plan including targeted economic support.

The role of Caregivers and Children in Targeted Economic Support

Active involvement of caregivers and children in decisions regarding targeted economic support provides a crucial opportunity to engage these stakeholders and move away from the construct of passive recipients of assistance to caregivers and children becoming active architects of their own future. In Moldova, this approach has helped to ensure long-term changes at the family and child-level. Families take more responsibility as they engage in budget planning around their children's needs including educational needs.

Before providing the targeted economic support, the family participates in discussions regarding the advantages of supporting a child's educational needs, school inclusion, and integration into the community. The discussion helps to build a plan that takes into account the families needs and capacity, as well as the local context. Informational support is provided to assist with the reintegration process which may include how to transfer a child into a community school, how to support adolescents in their journey toward independence, and how to plan for their future needs and financial sustainability.

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We need to focus on the family more broadly.....if parents of the child are unable to get proper health care and are not being helped with employment than this will affect the environment in which this child will grow.

Roman Zhukovskyi,
World Bank Social Protection Specialist

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Spotlight: Targeted Economic Support and its Impact on Children & Families

A SPACE TO CALL HER OWN

Carolina, age 17, was still sharing a room with her parents and sleeping on a cot that was too small for her. After an assessment, a separate room was identified and furnished and she finally had a place to call her own.



BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Mihai faced barriers to enrolling in vocational school due to his lack of identity papers. The community social assistant worked closely with the family to navigate the bureaucracy and secure the necessary documents. A new set of clothes were purchased and a space at the school was secured. "Are all these things mine?" exclaimed Mihai.



FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE

Ion loves to draw and listen to music. He has a smile that lights up a room. Last year, the residential institution he had been living in since he was a young child closed and he moved into a new house with his foster care mother. Almost 16, Ion needs a wheelchair to get around. Like many teenagers, he increasingly takes pride in taking care of himself. CTWWC supported the family to purchase an electric wheelchair that Ion can operate himself, allowing him to move around house with greater independence.



*Names were changed to protect identities.

INSIGHT 3:
LASTING IMPACT
OF RESIDENTIAL
CARE ON
TARGETED
ECONOMIC
SUPPORT

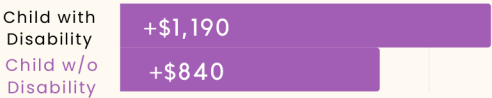
Initial findings indicate that there may be a link between the length of time a child has stayed in a residential institution and the need for targeted economic support to ensure **they have the resources required to thrive** in their new family environment.

Trends in Targeted Economic Support

CTWWC’s analysis of the targeted economic support provided to 57 families found that those caring for children with disabilities on average needed +35% more targeted economic support than those caring for children without disabilities. This finding was not unexpected as there is often a need to adjust or make changes to a home to ensure it is accessible, which may involve purchasing expensive mobility equipment. Perhaps more surprising was the difference in economic support needed based on the length of time a child lived within a residential institution. There appears to be a link between number of years living in an institution and an increase in expenses. A child living in institution for +5 years may require almost twice as much financial support (53%) than a child who has been in an institution for less than 6 months. There are many possible explanations, including as the child ages there may be increased educational needs and social support needs. For children with disabilities, a lengthier time in care may exacerbate the disabilities and make it more costly to address.

CTWWC Moldova
Targeted Economic Support

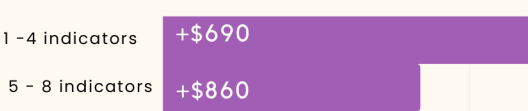
Average amount of economic support provided per child with disability and without disability (USD)



Average amount of economic support provided per child in terms of time spent in residential care (USD)



Average amount of economic support provided per child in terms of the number of affected wellbeing indicators (USD)



The gains from investing in children are immense, unmatched by any other kind of investment.

Ilija Talev,
Deputy Representative UNICEF Moldova

The data also found a possible link between a child’s wellbeing (as measured by wellbeing benchmarks) and the need for targeted assistance. A child who has been assessed to have needs in +5 wellbeing benchmarks, on average will need almost a quarter more resources (22%) than a child who has assessed needs in less than four benchmarks.

As additional data is gathered, CTWWC will continue to monitor these trends to gain a better understanding of the needs of children and their families and use this data to help inform policy and practice.

**INSIGHT 4:
THE
CASH + CARE
MODEL PROVIDES
A HOLISTIC
APPROACH THAT
SUPPORTS THE
FAMILY AS WELL
AS THE CHILD**

Targeted economic support, while often important to reintegration efforts, **is not sufficient on its own and needs to be integrated into a broader approach** that includes other child and family support services.

Cash + Care: A Holistic Approach to Families

A family's vulnerability often proceeds the birth of a child. By taking a holistic approach to family strengthening, which supports vulnerable families at all stages of their lives from prenatal support to elderly care and all the stages in between, a child has a better chance to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment.

Though cash assistance is often a key component of a holistic approach to supporting vulnerable families, there is growing recognition by social protection experts around the world that cash alone is not sufficient to address the spectrum of vulnerabilities that children and families face. While cash assistance can alleviate stressors on a household, it cannot address underlying causes to vulnerability that may include psycho-social needs, the needs of children with disabilities, violence and abuse in the household, and other risks.

A number of recent studies show you get better outcomes for families by combining cash assistance with care services than you do from either cash or care alone. The approach is called 'cash plus care' and it is becoming a centerpiece of World Bank and UNICEF programming globally.

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At every stage during the life course, care and support are essential to maintain human dignity, quality of life, and fulfill human rights.

Dr. Stefania Ilinca
World Health Organization

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Cash plus Care

Holistic Approach to Family Strengthening
at every stage of life



Case Management: identify, assess, and deliver services

Pregnancy Support

- Access to health services
- **Cash assistance**
- Parenting classes
- Prenatal classes

Parenting Support

- Access to health services
- **Cash assistance**
- Parenting programs to support all the stages of childhood and adolescence
- Livelihood support

People with Disability

- Access to health services and rehabilitative services
- **Cash assistance**
- Inclusive education support

Early Childhood

- Access to health services
- **Cash assistance**
- Early intervention
- Early childhood development services

Adolescence

- Access to health services
- **Cash assistance**
- Inclusive education support
- Vocational or technical training

Active Aging

- Access to health services
- **Cash assistance**
- Kinship care and guardianship support

Voices of Care

Transitioning a child out of a residential institution into a family often requires strong case management and a team of people to support. Social workers, foster care parents, and specialized school support staff often work together to ensure a successful transition that meets the child's needs which may include targeted cash assistance and always includes a case plan.

Changing the Way We Care and its partner Partnerships for Every Child Moldova (P4EC) have been working with such a team in Taraclia, Moldova to support the transition of a child with disabilities who had been living in an institution since he was a young child. Each team member had an important role to play. Valentina, the social worker, identified the foster care parent and using the cash + care model, helps to ensure the family has the resources and support they need. Ala, the specialized support teacher, ensures that he is integrated into the school environment in a way that supports both his educational and social needs. Dominica, an experienced foster care parent, is the glue that holds it together, caring for the child, taking him to school, medical and therapy appointments, and advocating for his needs. CTWWC provided targeted cash assistance to address key financial gaps including the purchase of an electric wheel chair.





Photo credit: Schimbator Studio

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

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