



Framework for Family Strengthening within Changing the Way We Care

Defining family and family strengthening

For Changing the Way We CareSM (CTWWC), **family** refers to those within the caring circle of a child; those providing daily emotional, physical and psychological care. This caring circle varies according to culture and circumstance; thus, the use of the term family recognizes that in many societies the care environment of a child is broader than the parents of birth or immediate family and includes the extended family, sometimes called *kinship network*. Families have primary caregivers who can be birth, extended relative, foster or adoptive parents, in some instances, child-, grandparent-, or single parent-headed.¹ CTWWC further expands the term to include families who are providers of family-based alternative care, such as *foster family*.

The U.N. Guidelines on the Alternative Care of Children states,

The family being the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children, efforts should primarily be directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members.²

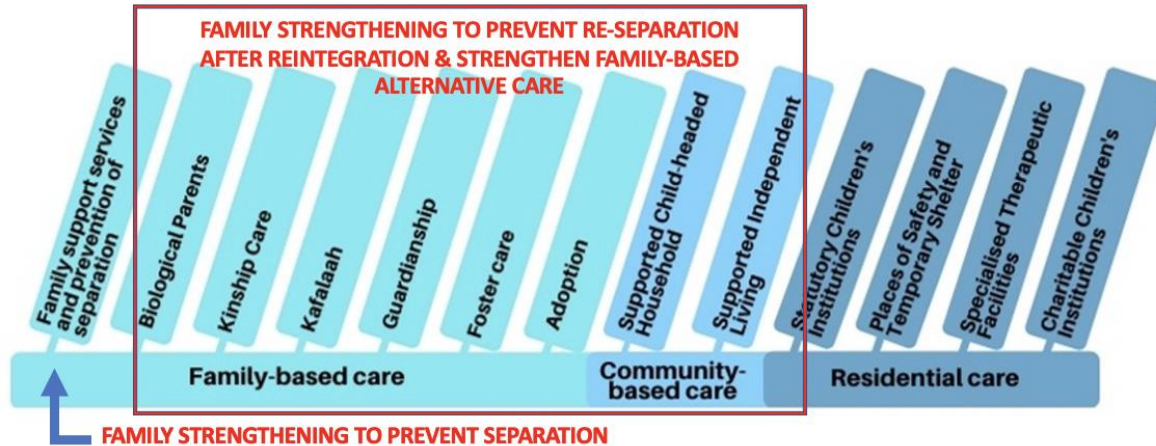
CTWWC believes that children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods and communities. **Family strengthening** refers to programs, strategic approaches and deliberate processes of empowering families with the necessary capacities, opportunities, networks, relationships and access to services and resources to promote and build resilience and the active engagement of parents, caregivers, children, youth and other family members in decisions that affect the family's life.³ CTWWC believes

¹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019). Community Based Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Definitions and Terminology. Accessed at: https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/terminology_and_definitions_reference_list_lowres.pdf

² Page 2 of United Nations. (2010). *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*. Resolution 64/142. Accessed at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20for%20the%20Alternative%20Care%20of%20Children%20-%20English.pdf>

³ Adapted from: Family Strengthening Policy Center. (2004). *Policy Brief No. 1: Introduction to Family Strengthening*. National Human Services Assembly.

that all efforts should prioritize enabling families to stay together when it is in the best interest of the child. Family strengthening is sometimes referred to or used interchangeably with prevention. Family strengthening is understood as more holistic than prevention services on the continuum of care, in that it has three primary aims: 1) to prevent family separation before it occurs in vulnerable families at risk; 2) to build resilience in families who have experienced separation as they reintegrate with children (as in prevent re-separation); and 3) to strengthen families who provide family-based alternative care. This is illustrated in the example of the Kenya Alternative Family Care - Continuum of Care on the following page.



Core principles of family strengthening

According with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, and should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community, recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.*⁴

The **CTWWC family strengthening approach** is grounded in core principles of children's rights and social work practice. CTWWC believes:



The **best interest of the child** is central to all decisions and actions taken.



Every family, every child, has strengths, and recognizing those enables us to build upon the existing capacities and promote resilience whilst still addressing the challenges that children and families face. CTWWC's family strengthening work recognizes the worth, dignity and strength of each child and family.

⁴ UN General Assembly. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577. Accessed at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/international-framework/international-standards-and-policies>



All **decisions and actions should be made on an individual basis**. The interests of children are different from adults, and therefore when adults make decisions that affect children, they must be **child-centred**, thinking carefully about how their decisions will impact children. Families should be at the centre of the strengthening processes and involved in decision-making.



Any engagement with and support to children and families must **do not harm** or expose them to further risk, vulnerability or harm.



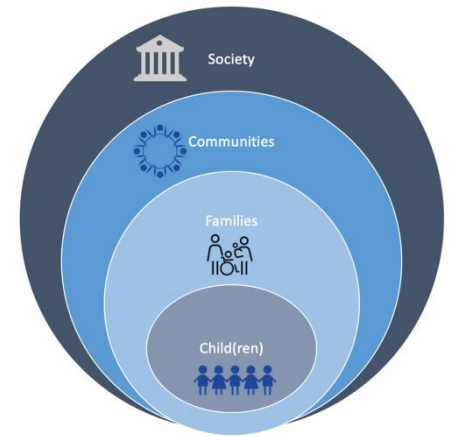
Respecting children and their families regardless of race, religion, ability, ethnicity/tribe, socioeconomic or health status is fundamental, and we **appreciate diversity**, understanding that children and families come in different shapes, sizes and configurations and that no two families are alike.



Participation of children, young people and adult family members in matters which concern them is not only their right but enables and empowers them to take an active role in decisions and actions that impact their own lives.



Children and their families are part of **different but connected ecosystems** (see figure at right), each integral to a healthy and safe environment where a child can develop to reach his or her potential.



What to strengthen and in which families

One ‘principle’ of reintegration that informs effective programming is recognizing the importance of **linking the prevention of (unnecessary) family separation and effective and sustainable reintegration of children into families and communities**. The factors that lead to a separation are often the factors that make it harder for children to be reintegrated back into the same family or the same community and the same interventions are required, along with the same workforce skills and competencies.

Evidence suggests that a range of drivers, both push and pull factors, result in children separating from their families and ending up in alternative care,⁵ including institutions. Although poverty and abuse and neglect are the main reasons for children’s entry into alternative care, **most households in poverty and most households in which there is abuse and neglect do not separate**.

The table on the following page summarizes the risk factors largely associated with family-child separation, and these are the same that are associated with difficulties in effective reintegration. Most often children and families face more than one barrier, propelling them into high risk of separation. There is no one type of family living

⁵ A formal or informal arrangement whereby a child is looked after at least overnight outside the parental home, either by decision of a judicial or administrative authority or duly accredited body, or at the initiative of the child, his/her parent(s) or primary caregivers, or spontaneously by a care provider in the absence of parents; includes family-based and residential forms of care.

precariouly, just as there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Some families require more intensive services than others. CTWWC family strengthening approach addresses both risk and protective factors.⁶

Risk factors are conditions or variables associated with a lower likelihood of positive outcomes and a higher likelihood of negative or socially undesirable outcomes. For CTWWC, these risk factors include poverty, social isolation, lack of access to services, family dysfunction, substance use/abuse, violence in the home, disability and others.

Table 1 Risk factors associated with family-child separation⁷

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Family characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death of parent(s)/breadwinner • Single-parent household • Elderly caregiver • Migrant parent(s) • Large family size (more than three children) • Reconstituted household/separation/divorce • Unwanted pregnancies/pregnancies outside marriage that are stigmatized • Disability of a child or other household member • Illness/mental illness/HIV or AIDS in household • Death of a child • Abandonment |
| Availability of basic needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Lack of access to (quality) education • Inadequate shelter/insecure housing |
| Behavioral characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence • Abuse or neglect of children in household • Caregivers face challenges in managing children's behavior • Parent abuse of drugs or alcohol • Incarcerated parent • Child in conflict with law • High parental stress |
| Context characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No extended support available • Educational opportunities away from home • Work opportunities for children • Engaged in harmful forms of work • Children affected by harmful traditional practices • Armed conflict • Climate change • Presence of/recruitment by residential child care institutions • Lack of diversion alternatives to detention for children in conflict with the law |

⁶ World Health Organization definitions accessed at: https://www.who.int/hiv/pub/me/en/me_prev_ch4.pdf

⁷ Laumann, L. & Namey, E. (2019). Meeting the Costs of Family Care: Household Economic Strengthening to Prevent Children's Separation and Support Reintegration. Resource Guide. FHI360. Retrieved from <https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/ASPIRES-FamilyCare-v4.pdf>, page 17.

Protective factors have the reverse effect. They enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes and lessen the likelihood of negative consequences when a family is exposed to risks or shocks. Some of the core factors are illustrated in the figure to the right,⁸ and address the factors both associated with family-child separation and those that promote caregiver and child resilience:

- **Caregiver resilience:** Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma
- **Social and emotional competence of children:** Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions and establish and maintain relationships.
- **Social support and connections:** Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support.
- **Responsive caregiving:** Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development.
- **Access to concrete support in times of need:** Access to concrete support and services that address a family's needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges.

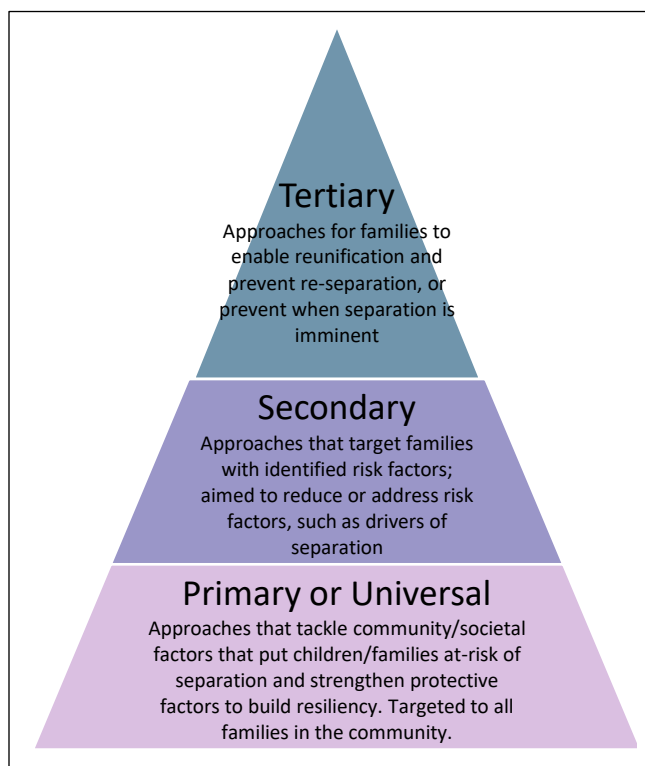


Local and family-level factors will vary. It is essential to identify children's own experiences of why separation happens to plan both prevention of separation and quality and sustainable reintegration.

Targeting of family strengthening

CTWWC's family strengthening approach targets **families who pose a risk for family separation, families facing imminent separation and families who are already separated** and are preparing for reunification or are in the **process of reintegration**. CTWWC tiers family strengthening by primary or universal, secondary and tertiary family strengthening to prevent separation, shown in the pyramid visual, to the left.

Primary or universal means policies and interventions with general application for all community members to address societal factors that can lead to separation (e.g. strategies to combat poverty, discrimination and stigmatization, change attitudes towards disability and single parenthood, reduce family dysfunction and isolation, and to adopt social policies promoting family



⁸ Adapted from the Center for Study of Social Policy. About Strengthening Families and The Protective Factors Framework. Accessed at: <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Core-Meanings-of-the-SF-Protective-Factors-2015.pdf>

empowerment and parenting skills). These can be understood as broad-based approaches, programs or services targeting a rather large group of people who are at risk.

Secondary refers to those services and/or supports to families where there is a specific risk for separation. This could be, for example, linking children or families to social networks and to reduce isolation within the community, individualized counselling, parenting education and in some instances, case management.

Tertiary family strengthening are approaches where separation is likely imminent. For example, a gatekeeping commission has determined the child should be separated or where a child and family are being reunified after having been separated. Efforts at this stage focus on securing conditions that enable a positive re-start, a successful reunification and reintegration, and prevent a return to alternative care. This is typically coupled with case management.⁹

Vulnerability assessments help to determine both risks and existent family strengths, and prioritization criteria helps to determine in which group the family sits (secondary or tertiary) and which families will require case management in addition to other services or referrals. Proper criteria, based on the principles, should be developed and consistently applied for assessing the child's and the family's situation. Assessments are not needed for universal approaches, which typically are more broad reaching and reach a significant part of a community.

What is included in family strengthening within CTWWC?

The CTWWC family strengthening approach includes a range of interventions that aim to mitigate or reduce the risk of family separation and strengthen protective factors of children and families. They may be provided by case workers or case managers directly, by external agents such as community volunteers, or through referral to other service providers. Interventions can be delivered at the household level on an individual or family basis or within the community through community groups or at community centers. Some interventions are designed as activities for children, some for parents or caregivers, and some for both together. Some services are provided by CTWWC and some will be provided by others which are the result of a referral from CTWWC.

It is important to **conduct a mapping of each community to understand which services are available to children and families**. The services should include formal services (such as access to health, education, psychosocial support provided by a local CBO, for example) and informal support (such as participation in faith groups, informal groups for children such as sports clubs, engagement in informal credit groups, for example).

It is likely that for most households some form of economic strengthening is important. **For some, this will mean a 'cash plus care' or 'cash plus' interventions**. Cash plus' interventions combine cash transfers (conditional or unconditional¹⁰), with one or more types of complementary support, which may be (i) components that are provided as integral elements of the cash transfer intervention, such as through the provision of additional benefits or in-kind transfers, social and behavior change communication, or psychosocial support, and (ii) components that are external to the intervention but offer explicit linkages into services provided by other

⁹ Center for Study of Social Policy.*Op.cit.*

¹⁰ "Conditional cash transfers may allow recipients freedom of choice in spending decisions, but are contingent upon specific behaviors, such as use of health, nutrition, or education services or on use of funds for a particular purpose. Unconditional cash transfers allow recipients to set their own spending priorities for the money received." Laumann, L. & Namey, E. (2019). *Op cit.*, p54

sectors, such as through direct provision of access to services, or facilitating linkages to services.¹¹ Evidence from a number of countries shows the benefits of integrating cash and other forms of social support.¹²

‘Cash plus’ interventions are part of, but not the complete package of support. Cash transfers are often useful in the following circumstances: part of stabilization of a family prior to separation or during reintegration, for example by preventing families from selling off resources that they need for income generation or enabling families to purchase one-off needs such as giving cash rather than ‘reunification kits’; social security grants for those who cannot work, for example, old-age pensions or disability grants, or as compensation for caring responsibilities, such as child support, parental/adoption leave or foster care grants; to encourage a particular behavior, such as when a conditional cash grant is related to birth registration or ECD attendance, for example. Social protection support in any form other than that to people who are not able to be actively productive is ideally seen as an *interim step* as a way of stabilizing while it engages in activities to sustainably produce income.¹³ Cash is important, especially as part of a national social protection strategy, but is unlikely to be necessary for all families. ‘Cash plus’ is an important way of providing integrated support to families, and it is important to decide what the best components of the ‘plus’ for the local context and families.¹⁴

| Primary/Universal Family Strengthening | Secondary Family Strengthening | Tertiary Family Strengthening |
|---|--|--|
| Ensuring access to basic health, education and social protection services | Conditional cash transfers linked to other supports | Case management to support: → |
| Ensuring access to specialized services such as health, disability, legal, family violence, substance abuse treatment | Referral to services, conditional cash transfers | Accompanied referral to services – basic and → specialized |
| General community positive parenting education / parenting skills training | Targeted positive parenting education within community groups | Targeted positive parenting education within community groups and home-based → |
| Community SILC groups & financial management skills in community groups | Targeted SILC groups & financial skills training | Targeted household economic strengthening: → Cash transfers / material support IGA & livelihoods activities SILC groups & financial literacy training, COFE, etc. |
| Community sensitization and awareness raising on family care – | Counselling / psychosocial support Community & faith-based support groups | → |

¹¹ Roelen, K., Devereux, S., Abdulai, A. G., Martorano, B., Palermo, T., Ragno, L. P. (2017). [How to Make ‘Cash Plus’ Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors](#). Office of Research – Innocenti Working Paper. WP-2017-10

¹² In South Africa, combining cash grants with parenting support reduced HIV risky behavior by 50 percent for both boys and girls. Cluver, L (2018). Reducing HIV in Africa with ‘cash plus care.’ ESRC blog, UK Research and Innovation. Chile Solidario has combined cash transfers with psychosocial support and preferential access to social services, and has been shown to substantially increase access to health, education and social welfare programs Roelen, R, Devereux, S, Abdulai, A & Martorano, B et. al. (2017). How to Make ‘Cash Plus’ Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors, Innocenti Working Paper 2017-10, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence

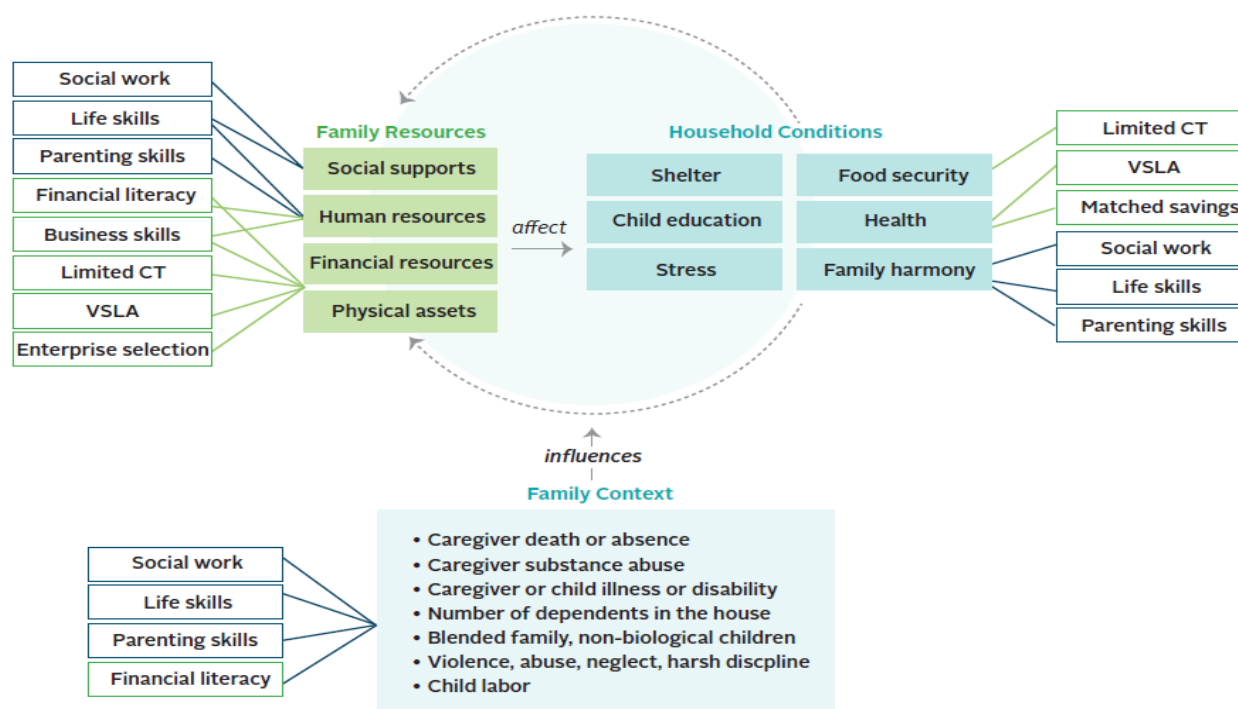
¹³ Laumann, L. & Namey, E. (2019). *Op cit.*, p55

¹⁴ Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (November 2020). [Social Protection & Child Protection: Working together to protect children from the impact of COVID-19 and beyond](#); also in [Spanish](#).

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| community participation in community building events | Youth-focused support groups Targeted ECD & early disability identification/interventions development interventions | Intensive one-to-one counselling and psychosocial support Targeted home-based ECD & disability interventions |
|--|---|---|

Identifying the various components of family strengthening: Figure 2 below illustrates the importance of understanding an individual household's conditions and resources. Family strengthening interventions need to understand existing family resources and conditions and have clear objectives – what needs to be changed.

Figure 1 Drivers of family-child separation with illustrative family social (blue) and economic (green) strengthening interventions ¹⁵



There is no 'one size fits all' and the services will depend on not only what is inside the household, but what is available around the family – social supports are as important in addressing the context as external 'interventions' or services. **The 'package' of support appropriate for each family will depend on their unique set of risks and protective factors** in order to ensure that the family has strengths across **all areas of protective factors** (parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children).

Integrating a family strengthening approach into CTWWC

CTWWC is designed on the premise that children develop and reach their potential when they are cared for in nurturing and safe families. As such, family strengthening is already part of the initiative's foundation. Family

¹⁵ Laumann, L. & Namey, E. (2019). *Op cit*.

strengthening is a core approach used by CTWWC to reach its end goal. Many elements of CTWWC are interconnected and share the same aim of preventing separation and increasing safe and nurturing family care.

Risk factors for family separation are well defined and documented. However, despite risk factors being similar, each family is unique and has their own set of strengths and protective factors. As such, the role of risk assessments and a case management process are critical to determining what type of interventions, secondary or tertiary, are needed to support families in preventing separation and building resilience. Case management tools help to identify the strengths of the family that should be built upon to increase protective factors as well as the risk factors that need to be addressed. A case plan guides the planning of specific services required for the family to move from a place of risk to one of safety, stability and nurturing care. Community service mappings and referral mechanisms help identify services and resources and connect families with them, whilst community awareness and general behavior change addresses beliefs, stigma and helps to develop supportive neighborhoods and communities. Monitoring the outcomes of the case plan and/or family strengthening interventions helps to inform and adjust programming. These are some examples of how family strengthening integrates into CTWWC.

MEAL strategies for family strengthening

CTWWC has Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) strategies, methodologies and tools in place to use with family strengthening. These include:

- Already developed learning agenda questions, around **how to deliver family strengthening?**
 - *How can a holistic view of family strengthening be incorporated in limited resource contexts?*
 - *How can protective factors in families be improved sustainably?*
 - *What support services work well to support reintegration for children with complex needs, including children with disabilities?*
 - *Under what circumstance do government services lead to/support strong families?*
 - *How do families/children move from reunification to longer-term, stable reintegration?*
 - *How do we know when families/children no longer need intensive supports provided by the case management process?*
- Case management monitoring information systems and case management data
- Pre/post-tests designed to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices
- Household survey, looking at family and child outcomes
- Inclusive beneficiary feedback mechanisms
- Training evaluations and workforce capacity assessments

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

The *Changing The Way We Care*SM (CTWWC) consortium of Catholic Relief Services and Maestral International have partnered with other organizations to change the way we care for children around the world.

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