

**CASE STORY** OF TRANSITION  
**Transition of Residential Care  
for Children with Disabilities:  
Returning to the Original Vision  
of Community-Based Care**





Photo Credit: Karen Kasmauski for CRS

**Changing the Way We Care<sup>SM</sup>** (CTWWC) is a global initiative designed to promote safe, nurturing family care for children, including reforming national systems of care for children, strengthening families, family reunification and preventing child-family separation, which can have harmful, long-term consequences, development of alternative family-based care, and influencing others toward family care.

CTWWC is committed to supporting the transition of residential care facilities such as residential institutions, orphanages and children's homes by helping to safely reunify and sustain children with families or in family-based alternative care and helping organizations to divest or transform into new family and community services. This case story is meant to illustrate transition, the actors involved, the challenges and the success factors; recognizing

that each transition is an individual process with different starting points, different dynamics and different evolutions. This case story complements the *Transitioning Models of Care Assessment Tool* by illustrating one or more stages of change. The name and locations have been changed to maintain the anonymity of the organization. The *Returning to Original Vision* case story demonstrates reunification of children with disabilities as a critical step in transition. It also highlights the challenges of maintaining organizational vision within a process of transforming services.

**To watch a video about this transition story please visit the YouTube link [here](#).**



## Background

The residential center in this story became so in 2010 in response to the children's needs identified after the earthquake in Haiti. It was started by a Catholic Sister of the congregation of *The Little Sisters of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus*, who carried a charisma for working with children with disabilities. Actually, before becoming an "orphanage", the center provided community services to children and adults with disabilities. It had been operating for many years with support from their diocese and Catholic donors from the United States. As the needs of children became more apparent over these years and then when the earthquake hit, they began providing overnight protection services to children with disabilities. Mostly children were placed in the residential care because their families did not have the resources to care for them or to access services for their disabilities. Even more children seemed to have this need after the earthquake and supporters were also happy to donate to such a cause. At the time of their decision to transition from residential care back to their original vision of community-based services, the center housed 26 children and young adults and nearly half children with cognitive or physical disabilities.

From before 2010 up to 2019, the center offered children with disabilities basic services such as clean and safe accommodation, nutritional support and feeding, education, health services, and different forms of rehabilitative and life skills therapy. Despite offering these services, problems such as malnutrition, poor health and hygiene, and inappropriate care by stressed and overworked staff were observed at the center. A preliminary evaluation of the children's home, conducted by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a partner of the Catholic Church in Haiti and implementor of Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC), revealed

that there was no specific budget for the care of the children, nor for the salaries of the staff; meaning consistency and assurance of day-to-day services was scarce. The Sisters did their best.

**According to** a study conducted by Lumos in 2017<sup>1</sup>, in Haiti many families experiencing poverty place children into orphanages in hopes of a better life for their children. CRS staff note that large family sizes and extreme poverty in Haiti has resulted in parents placing the youngest child or a child with a cognitive or physical disability into residential care as a way to provide adequate basic services that might not be otherwise accessible.


## A Pilot Project for Transition in Haiti

The center had an established relationship with CRS through the longstanding relationship with the Catholic Church in Haiti and the linkages with the diocese in this region of Haiti. CRS' has more than 60 years of history in Haiti and works in the country at the invitation of the Episcopal Conference of Haiti. Demonstrating transition of residential care to family care with Catholic actors was a natural fit. *The Little Sisters of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus* came forward with their desire to transform back to their original vision.

**Based on** global and Haitian evidence demonstrating the benefits of family-based care and the detriments of institutionalization of children, the Haitian government has been committed to strengthening families, reunifying children and establishing alternative-family based foster care since 2018<sup>2</sup>.

1 Lumos (2017, June 20). *Child Exploitation in Haiti's Orphanages*. Lumos. <https://www.wearelumos.org/news-and-media/2017/06/20/config-ure-child-exploitation-haitis-orphanages-highlighted-seminal-anti-trafficking-conferen/>

2 Crary, David (2018, July 26). *New to Haiti: Foster care for the nation's parentless kids*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/b83446830dad4d9784e-c755e0a19e70a/New-to-Haiti-Foster-care-for-the-nation-s-parentless-kids>



Sister Elita, who currently runs the community center, said she doesn't think the decision to transition away from residential care was a difficult one.

**“It was always on the heart of our congregation to serve the community and we know children with disabilities thrive when they are with families”.**

Photo Credit: Karen Kasmauski for CRS

They were a center within the geographic focus of CRS' work and the Changing the Way We Care initiative had just been introduced. *All Haitian Children Live in Capable Family*, was launched as part of CTWWC and with financial support from CRS. Its primary aim was to demonstrate or pilot transition of one Catholic residential center in Haiti.

## Preparing for Transition

Through a series of meetings coupled with mentoring, support and accompaniment with the *The Little Sisters of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus* congregation director and the center director, CTWWC team dove into topics around the importance of family care, disability inclusion and addressing community stigma, case management and family strengthening. The center had already begun supporting reintegration of children back to their families some years earlier and they were seeing the benefits for children. CRS was able to encourage US donors to help by supporting staff retraining and equipment needed for a community center. Within the first year of collaboration, the remaining 26 children

and young adults were reunified with family, placed in foster care or in supported independent living. With their experience working with children with disabilities the staff were now well positioned to continue services for both the children who had left and for other children in the community, but as a day center.

As in any transformation of this kind, there were legitimate concerns from the staff about their own job security. Regular training programs and support around change management helped.

## Staff Training Topics

- assessing children and families' strengths and needs through case management
- monitoring wellbeing and reintegration success
- day services for children with disabilities
- disability stigma and community behavior change
- business development and fundraising.



## Steps in Transitioning Children

1. Holistic assessments of each child's individual needs
2. Complete case files for every child
3. Family tracing to identify family members for reunification
4. Family assessments
5. Development of care or case plans including plans for monitoring and follow up
6. Approval from the Haitian governmental body, Institute of Social Welfare and Research (IBESR)
7. Child preparation for reunification (psychological support, counselling, provision of any adaptive equipment and home adaptations, medical and rehabilitative treatment, etc.)
8. Family economic strengthening (business trainings, income generating activity startups, access to small loans, etc.)
9. Family parent skills training on child protection, nutrition, and positive parenting.

### Transitioning Children

The center partnered with CTWWC to learn to provide best practice monitoring with the children, youth and families. The resources CTWWC brought allowed helped the center make home visits that otherwise they may not have afforded. The families also brought the children to visit, receive training on disability management and to participate in activities.

Seven of the youth to be reintegrated were no longer children and connecting them with their families of origin was not possible. Several were reunited with extended family like older siblings, aunts and uncles, while others were placed in a community-based supervised independent living situation (a communal living house with one-to-one social work support) near to the school they attended. These community houses offered spaces for the youth to grow in autonomy, build life skills and connect with community, while living in a stable, caring and supported environment with their peers and proper supervision. This program was run by another NGO. All seven youth continued to attend school and received the economic strengthening and follow up support from CTWWC.

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**“I love the project so much because now my child lives with me. I feel better and I am happy and not alone.”**

QUOTE FROM A FAMILY MEMBER

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**“I feel good. I didn't expect to have an operation in my lifetime (with support from the center). I will be able to walk well now and take care of me. The center was my home and now they are my support. They help me regain my confidence.”**

QUOTE FROM A YOUNG PERSON WHO LEFT THE CARE OF THE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING.

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Photo Credit: Karen Kasmauski for CRS



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## Transforming as an Organization

Now that the children were back with their families or in the community, *The Little Sisters of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus* began considering their role in preventing institutionalization of children with disabilities and in strengthening families to care for their children. Efforts shifted to providing community services that could support entire families, not just one child.

Recognizing that the primary reason children were placed was poverty, the congregation sought to extend their reach to vulnerable families in the surrounding community who were at risk of separating. Access to the same economic strengthening and parenting trainings provided to reintegrating families was provided to community families. Community leaders were identified and engaged with around the importance of family care and to address community stigma toward children with disabilities. CTWWC found a donor willing to support a disability and other equipment purchases to

improve the community center in providing specialized day services and classes such as cooking, sewing and knitting.

CTWWC supported the center to establish contacts and collaborative relationships and alliances with other service providers for children, especially disabilities-focused networks and organizations. This helped facilitate referrals for children that the center did not have the capacity work with, and created a network of service providers for the center to continue to connect with. One of these disability partner organizations ended up providing several specialty trainings for the center staff.

Today *The Little Sisters of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus* operate a school for community, stimulation and rehabilitation day services for children with physical disabilities and nutrition and feeding support for children who are malnourished. Every day is a bustle of activity!

## Managing Monitoring in Unstable Context:

Conducting monitoring visits can be dangerous in some parts of Haiti due to the criminal activity, not to mention that during the project period there were additional natural disasters, political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. The team responsible for monitoring families often had to take monitoring virtual; contacting families and children by phone or internet.



## Concluding Lessons

- ① Strong global evidence in support of family-based care, helped to persuade an organization already considering an adjustment of their own vision. While some argued that children with disabilities necessitate residential care to receive special services, seeing first-hand how children flourish in families was the final convincing evidence towards lasting change.
- ① Mentorship, consistent support and accompaniment from an organization like CTWWC through CRS's Haitian local and trusted operations helped move the transition along
- ① Trainings went a long way in helping staff feel supported to try new things and gave them skills needed for new services.
- ① Working in and on collaborative relationships built networks that last beyond the project period: disability networks have gained new champions, community leaders in economic empowerment know who else can support the families, Catholic congregations pull together naturally to support each other, and community members banded together as child protection committees carry on with effective gate-keeping to keep families together.
- ① Transition may be easier for organizations that have their origins in community-based services. Being able to reference original vision, past registration paperwork and build from historic donor relationships. This history seemed eliminate some of the challenges seen with founders who are want to remain tied to a vision of residential care.





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**Changing The Way We Care<sup>SM</sup> (CTWWC)** is a global initiative funded by USAID, the MacArthur Foundation and the GHR Foundation, and implemented by Catholic Relief Services and Maestral International, along with other global, national and local partners working together to change the way we care for children around the world. Our principal global partners are Better Care Network, Lumos Foundation, and Faith to Action. CTWWC's vision is to be a bold global initiative designed to promote safe, nurturing family care for children, including reforming national systems of care for children, strengthening families, family reunification and preventing child-family separation, which can have harmful, long-term consequences, development of alternative family-based care, and influencing others to build momentum towards a tipping point of change for children.

### **Need to know more?**

Contact Changing the Way We Care at [info@ctwwc.org](mailto:info@ctwwc.org)  
or visit [changingthewaywecare.org](http://changingthewaywecare.org)

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