

CASE STORY OF TRANSITION

Journey of Change and Safe Closure





Photo Credit: Karen Kasmauski/CRS

Changing the Way We CareSM (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 *Phases of Transition Interactive Tool* by illustrating one or more stages of change. The name and locations have been changed to maintain the anonymity of the organization - we will call it Journey Center. The Journey of Change and Safe Closure case story demonstrates the process of early engagement and awareness to supporting the long-term reintegration of children in families.

The Journey Center was established in 2010 in a Kenyan coastal town. It registered officially as a Charitable Children's Institution (CCI) two years later. Journey was founded by a Dutch woman, who visited Kenya's coast as a tourist and had the vision to *help enable needy children to achieve their dreams in life by establishing and leading institution to promote children's rights*. Journey received children who had been abused, abandoned, or were orphaned on a long-term basis through referrals from the Department of Children Services (DCS). The funding for the programming was primarily provided by an international private foundation based in the Netherlands.

Phase 1: Introducing change through learning and exploration

The journey towards change began in 2017 when DCS hosted a series of informational meetings about care reform across Kenya. Those who attended the meetings had many concerns about the ideas being presented and the changes that were suggested for CCIs. Initially, the manager of Journey was resistant and thought the idea of transitioning CCIs and reintegrating all the children into their families was unnecessary – maybe even unsafe. *What would they do instead?* There were concerns from many of the CCIs about maintaining staff once the children were reunified into the community and it was unclear just how the government would support their efforts to reintegrate children and families – even if they knew this was possible.

Care reform is defined as the changes to the systems and mechanisms that promote and strengthen the capacity of families and communities to care for their children, address the care and protection needs of vulnerable or at-risk children to prevent separation from their families, decrease reliance on residential care and promote reintegration of children, and ensure appropriate family-based alternative care options are available.

Despite some resistance from CCIs, the government continued to lead a strong campaign for care reform across Kenya. In order to support Journey and other CCIs, DCS hosted meetings and presented at forums and CCI network meetings. These meetings provided a good opportunity for the government to share the details of how they would provide support and they gave the managers and social workers space to further understand the concept through interactive question and answer sessions.

The Association of Charitable Children Institutions Kenya (ACCIK) created and shared additional resources on family reunification and case management, targeted to CCI managers and social workers to develop their capacity.

Phase 2: Embracing care reform and preparing for transition

By 2018, Journey was gaining momentum in changing their model and began embracing the ways they needed to shift their programming. Care reform was becoming common knowledge by much of the social services' professional community in the coastal area of Kenya, yet still many of those involved with Journey needed to be informed of the transition, including donors abroad and staff, children and families.

PREPARING STAFF MEMBERS: FOCUS ON CASE MANAGEMENT

As the facilitators of the transition, the staff began to receive specific training about becoming a family-based service provider. Staff recalled how one of the DCS sub-county children's officers took great care in training the CCIs on the transition process and helping to create care plans for the children's reunifications. Changing the Way We CareSM (CTWWC) came in with training for staff on case management for child and family assessment, care planning, safeguarding during transition, case conferencing, follow-up and monitoring, and case closure. With these trainings, the staff were prepared

to support the children through the entire process of reunification and reintegration by utilizing a case management system to track the children's needs and progress.

“But more than that, the staff was able to understand they had a role in the future and they were given space to process their own anxieties around change,” center director describing the staff training.

PREPARING CHILDREN: EMOTIONAL READINESS FOR REUNIFICATION

Family reunification was not expected by the children living at Journey at the time. Historically, children had remained in the center until class 8, or age 13, on average. Journey staff created safe spaces for children to express their concerns: from

the fear of the unknown to worrying about missing meals and the life and friends they knew at Journey. For many children, Journey had become “home” and many still experienced the trauma from losing a parent.

In order to emotionally support children, a counselor from an outside organization met with the children. The counselor met with each child individually at least four times to help process their concerns and prepare them for reunification with their family and life in the community. The manager and social worker also engaged in preparation and involved the children in their placement process. Those children for whom it was appropriate, contributed to the decision as to where they would be placed. Some children were able to return home to their parents while others were placed into kinship care.

Key to preparing for reunification, biological parents and kinship families received support including positive parenting training and counselling sessions for emotional support.



Photo Credit: Karen Kasmauski/CRS

PREPARING THE ORGANIZATION: BROADER CHANGE

The government had suggested that some CCIs continue to operate as rescue centers, or centers providing short-term care for children who have experienced abuse and neglect at home and are awaiting a court case process to determine an appropriate permanent placement. Journey staff saw this as an opportunity to continue operations however, donors were uncomfortable with the short-term model.


Once Journey decided to embark on a full transition to family services, donor representatives from the Netherlands were invited to participate in a meeting with children's families, to better understand the transition process as well as hear family concerns. The meeting had the dual purpose of educating and preparing caregivers for the reunification processes and allowing donors to hear the possibilities of family care. Caregivers highlighted their concerns regarding access to education for the children, and donors saw a ready way to help.

The emphasis on donor education and involvement resulted in continued support for family services, even though the amount of support went down. Once the donors were able to better understand the importance of family and how their resources

would be utilized to support children, most were willing to continue. Journey did begin collaboration with additional donors like-minded in family care.

Although the reintegration process was being supported by the donors, transition for them was not without its struggles. When challenges in the reintegration process arose, some donors became sceptical and doubted the entire process. Some lessons came out of this:

- Preparing donors for expected challenges as well as providing consistent communication with updates regarding the process deserves attention from start to finish. It takes time and attention.
- Donor relationships can be improved by opportunities to discuss with other donors outside their own organization who are committed to family-based care. Peer-to-peer support is key.



Donors saw supporting children's education as a way to continue their desire to help Kenyan children. They were quick to assure families continued support for education fees, uniforms and supplies.

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Angel was two and a half years old and an orphan when she was placed at Journey. She was a shy and withdrawn child. Journey knew that Angel had a living grandmother. But it wasn't until the transition process was underway that they informed the grandmother that reunification was possible. Journey has helped the grandmother with income generating activities and psychosocial support. Now, Angel is with her grandmother; growing and thriving in a safe and nurturing family and learning to be a fully participating member of the family and community.

Phase 3: Implementing the Transition

Journey's manager and volunteer social worker initially assessed the children's family placements to ensure the homes were safe and ready for reunification. In partnership with the children and families, they created transition plans for each child. The center itself focused operations on setting up process for the services children and families would need once reunified.

In 2019, Journey began the process of transformation. All children were reunified with parents or kinship relatives, with the exception of one child who was placed in a foster family under the supervision of

the DCS office. The local DCS was instrumental in supporting the whole process, working closely with The Center's staff on case management to ensure that the reunification process followed all legal procedures. Children and caregivers experienced different challenges in the reunification process. Several caregivers came with complaints about challenging behaviors, discipline issues, and children running away. On-going psychosocial support was necessary and was provided to children and families throughout. Case conferencing with the child, caregiver, and other household members helped to address needs in a holistic way. Ongoing monitoring of child and family well-being has been important to identifying and addressing challenges and mitigating future risks of re-separation.

To support successful reintegration families received support ranging from income generating start up activities, food products, bedding, cash transfers to increase economic stability for the home to connection to other services in the community like the school and health clinic.

Covid-19 & Economic Hardship

The COVID-19 pandemic created multiple complications to reintegration processed. Six children were left living at Journey when the pandemic began and although their families had been evaluated, the actual reunification was still being planned for. Children were meant to receive additional counselling services, which were halted due to restrictions. The children were reunified more rapidly and prior to all of the psychosocial preparations being completed. After being reunified with their children, many families continued to struggle economically with added pressures caused by COVID-19's impact on the economy. Additional economic and food assistance combined with regular virtual monitoring calls helped.

Phase 4: Looking to the future of organizational transformation

With the reunifications complete, Journey continues today to ensure a fully supported *reintegration* process. The manager and social worker conduct regular follow-up visits with children and families, monitoring the child's safety and transition into the family and community.

Journey established formal partnerships with the children's schools to support school reintegration. As part of the collaboration, teachers monitor and report on the child's academic progress and behaviors, their connections with friends and schoolmates, and the caregiver's engagement in learning.



Photo Credit: Michael Stulman for CRS

Despite having government support for transition and seeing that serving children and families can be done at a fraction of the cost, Journey has faced logistical and legal challenges in finding a registration status that appropriately represents the services they could provide. This coupled with reduction in donor support and the costs of maintaining a large building, Journey ultimately decided to move toward divesting their organization – once they feel all children have found permanency in their families and communities. Even with great ideas for maintaining community-based programming around family strengthening services that would serve the broader community and keep the staff at various points throughout the transition process, these programs have yet to be established. Journey has plans to lease their buildings to another organization and will use the proceeds to continue supporting the reintegrating children. Hopefully, the future for the organization will also become clearer.



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Changing The Way We CareSM (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
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