



IMMERSIVE SIMULATION LAB: TRANSITION TO FAMILY BASED CARE IN SRI LANKA

2024



"In a family, one is never alone. They belong to something greater than themselves, something that will always be there for them."

On March 20, 2024, an immersive simulation lab event took place at Hotel Berjaya in Mount Lavinia, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Child Protection Allies from the Western Province of Sri Lanka gathered for a hands-on experience aimed at transitioning from a system reliant on childcare institutions to one focused on promoting family-based care and strengthening family initiatives. This pioneering endeavor in Sri Lanka was remarkably successful, highlighting its significance and effectiveness in addressing critical issues within the realm of child welfare.

The event was orchestrated by Sri Lanka Without Orphans (SLWO), with resource allocation facilitated by Children's Emergency Relief International (CERI). Overseeing the proceedings was Mr. Ian Forber Pratt, the Deputy Executive Director of CERI, who chaired the session. The facilitators, identified by the Child Protection Network, received training from Mr. Ian Forber Pratt. Noteworthy contributions in terms of facilitation and funding were provided by esteemed organizations, including Catholic Care for Children in Sri Lanka (CCCSL), OZAID, the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, Community Concerns, One Hope, the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, and Leads. The conference structure adhered to a globally recognized model provided by CAFO, in collaboration with Hope and Homes for Children and Faith to Action.

The conference attendees included esteemed representatives from various organizations and entities, such as government officials from the Department of Probation and Child Care Services, Sri Lanka Without Orphans (SLWO), Abhivurdhi, Awake a Nation, Good Shepherd Congregation, Ebenezer Gardens, Catholic Care for Children in Sri Lanka (CCCSL), Alliance Development Trust (ADT), One Hope, Lanka Prison Fellowship, Community Concerns, Nama Sanctuary Foundation, The Youth Bridge, Mission of Hope, The Ceylon Bible Society, Children's Homes, and Church Leaders. Their presence and participation greatly enriched the session, fostering insightful discussions and constructive exchanges aimed at addressing pertinent issues within the realm of probation, child care, and related social services.

The inherent disparity in perspectives between governmental entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on matters of child rights and welfare often leads to nuanced and sometimes conflicting discourse. Thus, the convening of this conference provided a significant occasion for stakeholders from both sectors to come together in a spirit of collaboration and mutual understanding. It facilitated a comprehensive examination of the feasibility and effectiveness of various initiatives aimed at advancing the cause of child welfare. This cooperative endeavor underscored the shared commitment of all participants to safeguarding the rights and promoting the well-being of children, transcending potential differences in approach or ideology.



Establishing Alternative Care In Sri Lanka



The Alternative Care Policy, developed by the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Dry Zone Development along with the Department of Probation and Childcare Services, with advocacy support from a vast array of partners (including CERI), was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on March 6, 2019. This comprehensive policy provides a framework for various alternative care options and calls for the reform of formal structures offering both in-home and out-of-home services for children who lack adequate care and protection or are at risk.

The National Policy on the Alternative Care of Children in Sri Lanka addresses a wide range of issues affecting vulnerable children, including those within the Juvenile Justice System. It offers strategic solutions to tackle challenges such as child abuse, neglect, child labor, poverty, substance abuse, incarceration, human trafficking, disabilities, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, orphanhood, abandonment, displacement, and the plight of children living and working on the streets. By promoting alternative care options, the policy aims to ensure that all children in Sri Lanka have the opportunity to thrive in safe and nurturing environments.

This policy encompasses six overarching policy statements:

Prevention

Gatekeeping

Children within alternative care systems

Children in contact with or involved in the justice system

Reunification and Reintegration

Legal reforms, policy guidelines, and minimum standards

In Sri Lanka, the concepts of deinstitutionalization (DI) and alternative care (AC) have become a driving force in the broader efforts to reform the child welfare system. Recognizing the limitations of orphanages and institutional care, the Sri Lankan Government has been working towards transitioning to family-based or community-based care models. This shift aligns with the country's commitment to upholding the rights and well-being of children, as outlined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Alternative Care Policy.

Initiatives such as promoting foster care, strengthening kinship care networks, and facilitating adoption processes have been integral to this endeavor. By prioritizing nurturing environments and family connections, the Sri Lankan Government aims to provide better outcomes for children in need of care, ensuring they have the opportunity to thrive regardless of their family circumstances.

The Immersive Simulation Lab on transitioning to Family Based Care and establishing an Alternative Care System aligns seamlessly with the goals of the Sri Lankan Government. This initiative is a testament to our shared commitment to creating a more supportive and sustainable child welfare system.

One Note for You

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the attendees of the inaugural Simulation Lab session held at the Berjaya Hotel in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Your participation and enthusiasm were instrumental in making the event a success.

We are especially grateful to our partnering organizations, whose willingness to collaborate has been invaluable in our mission to promote Family Care as the optimal environment for children to flourish.

We eagerly anticipate seeing how the insights gained from this workshop will be applied to Family Based Care initiatives at both national and state levels.

Implementing a new system of Family Based Care is indeed a challenging endeavor, requiring immense dedication and substantial resources. The collaboration between NGOs and government entities is essential for establishing a more sustainable and effective approach to Family Based Care in Sri Lanka.

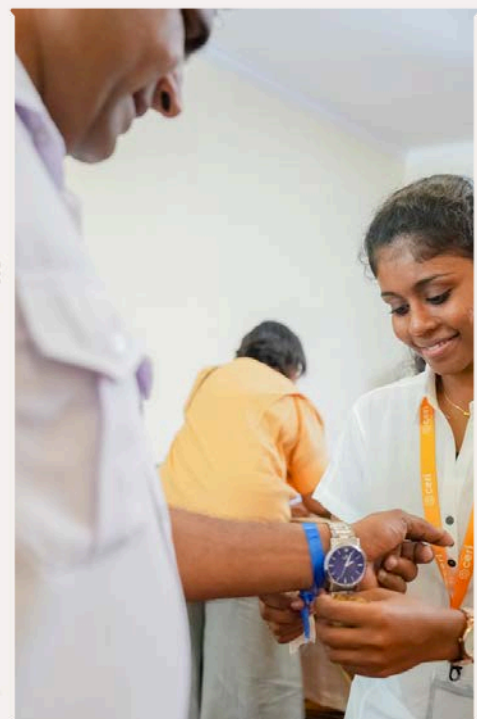
Thank you once again for your support and commitment to this important cause.

78% of the participants provided feedback and comments.

"This Workshop helped to expand my knowledge and it made me to think and see the world through a Family Based Care Lens." - Workshop Participant

"I had the privilege to learn why Family Based Care is important for children and I learnt the possible ways to implement them." - Workshop Participant

"As someone in charge of a home, I am truly impressed by the topic and have gained new ideas on promoting individualized care for each child in the children's home." - Workshop Participant



The Workshop



Following an Introduction to Family-Based Care, a hands-on session was conducted wherein participants collaborated to devise solutions for strengthening families through an activity-based training program.

Participants engaged in a dynamic workshop centered on transitioning a fictional Child Care Institution (CCI) with 74 children in a semi-urban area to Family-Based Care (FBC). Through a detailed case study, including staff and child profiles, funding sources, and organizational history, six expert-facilitated tables explored key topics such as stakeholder engagement, case management, family involvement, asset transition, and result measurement. Spirited discussions ensued as groups rotated through each table, sharing insights and debating strategies for the transition. The collaborative format fostered innovative solutions and garnered praise from participants for its inclusivity and exchange of ideas.

The workshop progressed to consolidating conclusions from the six work groups, highlighting a diverse range of options for transitioning to Family-Based Care (FBC). Participants demonstrated a keen awareness of potential risks to children throughout the process. Despite recognizing challenges, there was unanimous agreement on the necessity and direction towards FBC, with a collective determination to overcome obstacles while prioritizing the children's best interests. Participants acknowledged the difficulty of determining each child's best interest within the current child protection system, emphasizing the need for a more agile approach tailored to individual family situations. Worksheets from the coaching tables provided a starting point for a roadmap but were acknowledged as incomplete in capturing the full spectrum of possibilities.

Table Topics

Engagement

Foster Care

Case Management

Asset Transition

Families

Measurement

THE CASE STUDY



The workshop centered around a single fictional case study, serving as the foundation for every activity throughout the session. It is for the purpose of the case study is to strengthen planning, imagining, discussing, and troubleshooting the process of transition from residential to family care.

Precious Children's Home (PCH) has been serving in Sri Lanka for 26 years. A faith-based couple began caring for children whose parents had died during a conflict. Eventually, it became known as the place to bring children without parental care. This evolved into a home and eventually a nonprofit organization. It is a licensed children's home. The children's home compound contains a small school, a main building, two girls' homes, and two boys' homes. There is a 2-acre garden used to feed the children. In 2014, some foreigners built a small guest house for visitors on the property. PCH currently has 74 children in their care, ages 2-19. Most of the children were born locally. Some were placed in their care by the local government, and others were voluntarily placed by family or caregivers. Twenty-three of the children are being treated for malnutrition, and several have a disability. However, the majority of children are in good health.

The children are loved and well cared for at PCH. It is safe, they are well-fed, and they have plenty of opportunities for learning and play. Nonetheless, when asked, the children say they long for a family to call their own. Once they reach adulthood and leave PCH, most of the youth have struggled to transition successfully into community life and often return to PCH to seek assistance. Approximately one-third of the children living in the home have a surviving parent, and around 80% of them have relatives living nearby. The primary reasons for placement include a lack of funds for education, nutrition, or medical care, a lack of childcare in single-parent families, poor health of parents, or placement by the government due to abuse or neglect. Most children stay with parents or relatives for holidays and school breaks.

PCH boasts a skilled and committed local staff of 25. A foreign couple from the U.S. serves as Co-Directors, and there is a small staff and board made up of every cultural group in Sri Lanka. Two of the caregivers have been with the organization for more than 20 years. Each of the boys' and girls' homes has three female caregivers, who rotate eight-hour shifts. Each caregiver lives in the local village with her family. In addition to 12 total caregivers, PCH has a cook, an assistant cook, two maintenance staff, three teachers, two teaching assistants, two social workers, a nurse, and a staff trainer. Local staff members have varying motivations and attachments to the current model of care. Several of the staff members were once children in the home. On the one hand, they recognize that children naturally thrive in healthy families and want these kids to have families, if at all possible. On the other hand, they worry about their livelihoods and their own families if the care center were to close. For some, like the two women who have worked with PCH for more than 20 years, the center is their family, and they have anxiety about change.



"I really hope this workshop promoting family-based care should reach every province in Sri Lanka, spreading its positive influence and strengthening the advocacy across the nation."

"I find practical sessions to be invaluable for learning how to make efficient decisions regarding family-based care."

"I really appreciate having both government and non-government stakeholders together in the session. It's the best part, as it allows for discussing the practicality of family-based care, which is essential."

The Workshop Photos



87% of the participants agreed that the workshop met or exceeded their expectations.





“I didn’t know what I didn’t know. This workshop was eye-opening for me.” - Institution Director

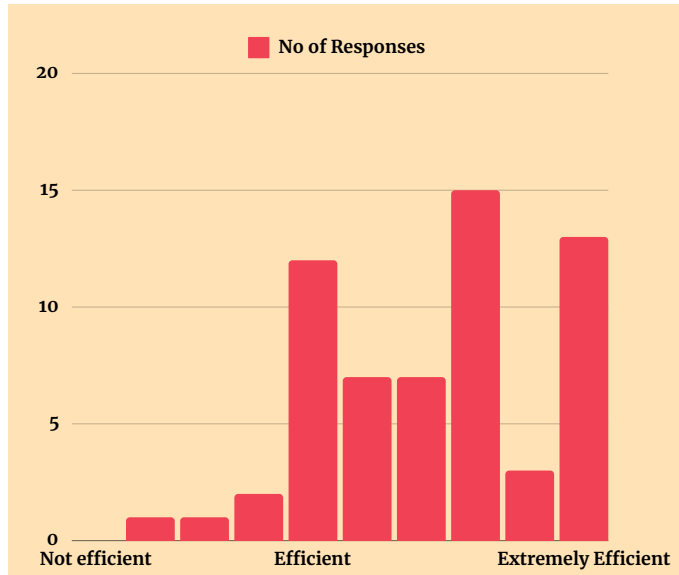


MOVING TOWARDS FAMILY SOLUTIONS

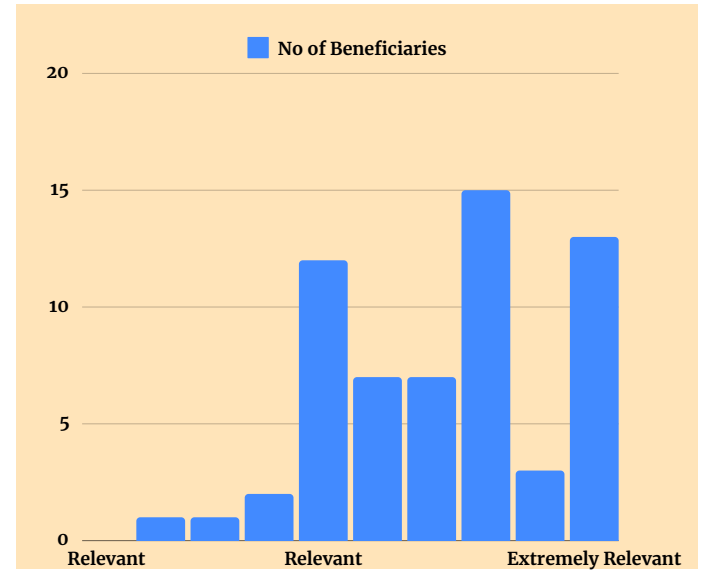
Individual Reflections

Individual reflection forms were provided to the participants. 61 of the participants responded.

On a scale of 1 to 10 participants were asked to rate the efficiency of the workshop in addressing the challenges of transitioning to family-based care, and their ratings are reflected in the graph below.

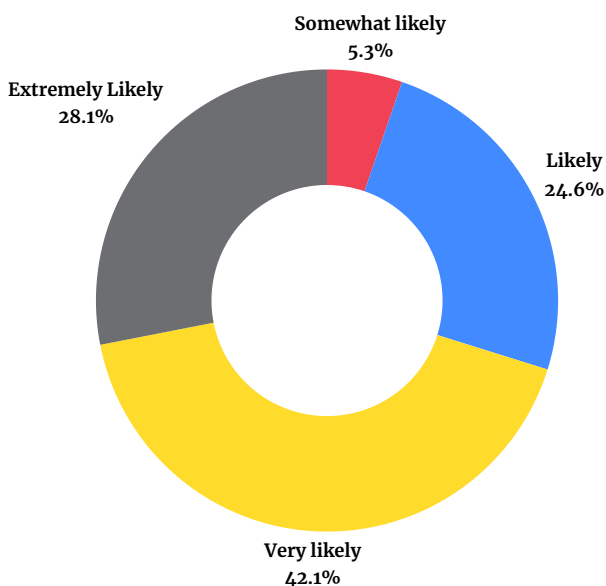


On a scale from 1 to 10, participants were asked to rate the relevancy of the workshop in identifying the specific needs of their orphanage, and their ratings are reflected in the graph below.



On a scale of 0-5 the participants were asked to rate the following questions that are reflected in the graphs below.

How confident are the participants in applying the knowledge gained from the Simulation Lab to improve family-based care in their settings?



How likely are the participants to implement family-based care strategies in their setting within the next six months?

