

Care Leaders Council: Member Bios

Grace Njeri - Kenya



Grace Njeri is a remarkable child protection practitioner and human rights advocate, particularly focused on the well-being of children and young people in Kenya. With a background in Sociology, she has significantly contributed to shaping Kenya's National Care Reform Strategy through her involvement with the Kenya Society of Care Leavers. Grace's influence extends globally, as evidenced by her role in co-crafting a strategy for involving individuals with lived experiences in the "Changing The Way We Care" project and co-authoring a pivotal research paper by CAFO on care reforms in the Global South. Her leadership roles in the

Global Care Leaders Council and active participation in the Kenya Society of Care Leavers underscore her commitment and expertise in care reform. Grace envisions an ideal world where future generations live free from violence.

Maicol Londoño - Colombia



Maicol Londoño has a degree in Philosophy and Religious Sciences, with certification in youth leadership and educational methodologies from the Ministry of Israel Mashav and others. He holds a diploma in political campaign management and development. His personal experience of transitioning from State care allows him to understand and address the challenges faced by young people in their transition back to the community and to adulthood, dedicating himself to giving them a voice and visibility.

As a founding member and director of the first association of care leavers in his country (ASCEP) and in Latin America, Maicol has led and

implemented social projects for children and young people transitioning from state care and protection. His leadership extends to platforms such as the Care Leaders Council and YouthLead, where he promotes the exchange of ideas and collaboration.

He is a recipient of the Civic Award for a Better City and has represented youth at various international forums, including the United Nations Forum on Global Statistics in Dubai and the High Policy Impact Forum in New York.

Neelam Udayan - India



Neelam has over two years of work experience in the non-profit sector and earned a Bachelor of Computer Application degree. She has also worked with IBM India for over five years. Neelam grew up in a non-profit orphanage (Udayan Care) where circumstances and surroundings accustomed her to adult and youth rights, education, and women empowerment.

Neelam is one of the founding members of the Care Leaver Association Network (CLAN), a group of vulnerable youths abandoned by their residential organization on reaching the age of 18 with no extended support. She is also a Care Leaver, and after dealing with her distressing circumstances, she decided to establish CLAN and pull other care leavers from vulnerability. Neelam has helped Care Leavers get their government IDs created and instigated the awareness of their fundamental rights. This momentum has led thousands of CLAN members to sign a petition to gain support. It has motivated Udayan Care, UNICEF, Care Leavers Worldwide, and India's Woman & Child Welfare Committee to organize the International Care Convention to hear from youth such as Neelam.

She has assembled documents that would instill financial literacy and educational guidance to residential care children, nurturing, and strengthening their transition to an independent life. She has extended a strong commitment to Child Right and You (CRY) to instill holistic development and empower disadvantaged children in rural areas with limited to no educational access. Neelam has leveraged her technical skills to enable the VigyanShaala International-Kalpana program (promoting STEM education amongst young women) participants to get accustomed to the virtual platform.

Mbangowa Elvis Ngwa – Cameroon



Mbangowah Elvis is a passionate social worker, with extensive experience in Child Protection and development. He holds a Masters Degree in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action and has been supporting the Child Protection Departments of various International NGOs and Faith-based Organizations in Cameroon and abroad. Elvis is the Founder of ‘Stars From Scars Network’ which is actively involved in advocating for Care Leavers and Care Reform in Cameroon. He passionately mobilizes Children and Youths with lived care experience organizing training sessions on life skills and mentoring them especially during their transition from Care Institutions. Elvis is the founding President

of Stars From Scars Africa, a non-profit that prioritizes the protection of street children and other vulnerable children and also supports humanitarian response in conflict-affected regions in Cameroon.

Ruth Wacuka - Kenya



Ruth Wacuka is a child and youth rights advocate whose life experiences have profoundly shaped her professional career as a speaker, changemaker, and advocate. Trained in journalism and communications, Ruth uses her expertise to challenge systems affecting children and youth with care experiences. Ruth is dedicated to ensuring that the lived experiences of children and young people in care are not only heard but also integrated into policy and programming decisions. She is a founding member and the current Director of the

Association for Care Leavers Networks in Africa, a pan-African, youth-led organization that unites care-experienced youth across the continent for a unified voice and action.

She has served in various capacities, supporting governments, NGOs, and donors in advancing the rights of children and young people with care experiences through care reforms in Kenya

and globally. Ruth is also passionate about redirecting voluntourism towards community and family-based initiatives.

Ruth's advocacy extends to issues of identity, culture, and justice, particularly for young people. As a recognized speaker in international forums, she has championed the work of care-experienced youth on the global stage, while always remaining proud to call Kenya home. Ruth is committed to seeing care leavers supported and recognized as equal stakeholders. She believes that care leavers are not just recipients of decisions but have valuable solutions if given the right support. Passionate about challenging the traditional narratives that view care leavers as charity cases, Ruth emphasizes their success and resilience, advocating for a shift in perception to one that celebrates their achievements and potential. Cognizant of the role care leavers Networks play in transforming systems of care, as a member of the Care Leaders Council, she seeks to rally support and investment for care leavers Networks in Africa and globally.