

Case Study



*Corresponding Author

punnyaparuz@gmail.com

Nurturing Childhood Through Group Foster Care System: A Case Study of Hope Community Village

Punnya S. Pradeep^{1*} and Francina P.X.²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, ²Head and Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Loyola College of Social Sciences (Autonomous) (Research Centre University of Kerala), Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

Kerala is a pioneer in implementing pro-poor laws and social protection schemes, ensuring the rights and welfare of children in underprivileged communities. This study examines the innovative group foster care system of Hope Community Village in Alappuzha, Kerala, as a transformative approach in addressing the needs of Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) by providing a familial environment. A qualitative approach was used, employing focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Participants included children, Hope Mothers, and key organisational staff, selected through purposive sampling. The research focused on understanding the process, benefits, challenges, and coping strategies within the system. The findings indicated that the system follows a structured process of intake, need assessment, care planning, intervention, evaluation, and aftercare. Benefits align with the themes of four basic child rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1992 which include ensuring quality healthcare, age-appropriate nutrition, a safe place to live, protection from physical violence and psychological intimidation, rehabilitation, and re-integration into society with dignity, respect to ethnic background and religion and taking the voices of children into account. Challenges identified include funding constraints, evolving social policies, professional staffing, and societal acceptance which were coped through strategies involving fund management, active policy advocacy, staff recruitment, and social engagement. The study concludes that the group foster care model at Hope Community Village is a replicable framework for providing comprehensive care and protection to vulnerable children.

Keywords

Kerala, child in need of care and protection, group foster care, hope community village

INTRODUCTION

India is a country which has an alarming growth of birth rates. The growing size of the

population demands a growing need to satisfy. Children in India make up a substantial section of the population and are seen as the country's

future. As per Census 2011, India, with a population of 121.1 Cr, has 13.59% (16.45 Cr) of its population in the age group 0–6 years and 30.76% (37.24 Cr) in the age group 0–14 years (Children in India 2018 – A Statistical Appraisal, 2018). Even when the children are regarded as important citizens of a country who have all the rights as common citizens to be enjoyed, a large portion of children are not confined to the protection of living in a family environment. Here arises the relevance of UNCRC which points out the child rights that should be extended to everyone under the age of 18 years, everywhere. In spite of these rights for the children, there are certain classifications in the JJ Act through which the child is ensured that their right is being safe guarded (The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). As an Act to consolidate and amend the law relating to children alleged and found to be in conflict with the law and children in need of care and protection, by catering to their basic needs through proper care, protection and treatment, social reintegration, by adopting a child friendly approach in the adjudication and disposal of matters in the best interest of children and for their rehabilitation through processes provided, and by adopting a child friendly approach, JJ act holds a great relevance in the society.

Kerala is a state which looks forward to ensure that none of its population is left behind. It also provides extra care for vulnerable people, including children, women and old age. Among them the children play a vital role because it is very important to safeguard the interest and protect them from atrocities. It's the duty of the state to provide children with an atmosphere to cherish their

childhood so that they can live a dignified life afterwards irrespective of their colour, sex, race, caste, class etc. For this the State has implemented various policies and programmes. Among them the concept of group foster care system is gaining much attention so as to incorporate the child in need of care and protection to a family environment where they will benefit from the care and opportunities extended to them. This study thus focuses to know in depth about the group foster care system.

Children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines that 'A child is any person under the age of 18' (The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). As per the statistics the Child population (aged 0–18 years) accounts about 444 million in India. Among them a large portion of children are not confined to avail the protection of living in a family environment. Children who lack familial support, are forced into labour, are abused or trafficked, live on the streets, suffer from substance misuse, are involved in armed conflict, civil unrest, natural disasters, etc..12.66 million children were working as 2 children in 2001, up from 11.28 million in 1991. According to the NFHS-3 (2005–2006), 11.8% of kids between the ages of 5 and 14 work, either for their own family or for someone else.12 lakh or so kids are employed in dangerous jobs or processes that are prohibited by the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act. Crime against children increased by 52.5% from 2012 to 2013 (Crime in India 2013 Statistics, 2013). In 2012, the NCRB reported 65,038 children

missing across the nation. According to NCRB, 2,265 kidnapping and abduction cases involving children were reported to the police in 2004 and classified as instances of trafficking. Among the total population in India the statistics proves that about 700 million population of children could be placed under the children who are in need of care and protection (Information Kit on Children in need of care and protection: Issues, Programmes, 2023).

Rights of Children

The UNCRC defines child rights as the minimal rights and freedoms that should be granted to all people under the age of 18, regardless of their race, colour, gender, expression of sexual orientation, language, religion, opinion, origins, level of wealth, birth status, or level of aptitude. (The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The four main rights recognised by UNCRC for the children include:

- ***The right to survival:*** includes right to life, the highest attainable standard of health, nutrition and adequate standard of living, the right to a name and nationality.
- ***The right to development:*** includes the right to education (formal and non-formal), support for early childhood care and development and the right to leisure. Recreation and cultural activities.
- ***The right to protection:*** includes freedom from all forms of exploitation, abuse, inhuman or degrading treatment and neglect, including the right to special protection in situations of emergency and armed conflict.

- ***The right to participation:*** includes respect for the views of the child, freedom of expression, access to appropriate information and freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Child in Need of Care and Protection

According to Section 1 (14) of Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act 2015, a child in need of care and protection means:

- Child who is found without any home or settled place or abode and without any ostensible means of subsistence;
- who is found working in contravention of labour laws for the time being in force or is found begging, or living on the street; or
- Child who resides with a person, whether a guardian of the child or not, and such person- has injured, exploited, abused or neglected the child or has violated any other law for the time being in force meant for the protection of child; ← has threatened to kill, injure, exploit or abuse the child and there is a reasonable likelihood of the threat being carried out; has killed, abused, neglected or exploited some other child or children and there is a reasonable likelihood of the child in question being killed, abused, exploited or neglected by that person; who is mentally ill or mentally or physically challenged or suffering from terminal or incurable disease, having no one to support or look after or having parents or guardians unfit to take care, if found so by the Board or

the Committee; who has a parent or guardian and such parent or guardian is found to be unfit or incapacitated, by the Committee or the Board, to care for and protect the safety and well-being of the child; who does not have parents and no one is willing to take care of, or whose parents have abandoned or surrendered him; who is missing or run away child, or whose parents cannot be found after making reasonable inquiry in such manner as may be prescribed; ← who has been or is being or is likely to be abused, tortured or exploited for the purpose of sexual abuse or illegal acts; who is found vulnerable and is likely to be inducted into drug abuse or trafficking; or who is being or is likely to be abused for unconscionable gain; who is victim of or affected by any armed conflict, civil unrest or natural calamity; who is at imminent risk of marriage before attaining the age of marriage and whose parents, family members, guardian and any other persons are likely to be responsible for solemnisation of such marriage (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2015).

JJ Act and Foster Care

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2015, Section 44(1), states that 'the children in need of care and protection may be placed in foster care, including group foster care for their care and protection through orders of the Committee, after following the procedure as may be specified in this regard, in a family which does not include the child's natural or consanguineous parents or in an unconnected

family recognised as suitable for the purpose' [The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children), 2015]. For providing care and protection to children needing such services, institutions are listed under the term 'Child Care Institution'. Children Homes, Open Shelters, Observation Homes, Special Homes, Places of Safety, Specialised Adoption Agencies, and fit facilities are recognised under this act. The JJ act gives them special responsibilities with regard to children who need care and protection (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2015). Every district or group of districts has a Children's Home established or maintained by the State Government, either directly or through a non-profit organisation, and it is licensed as such for the placement of children in need of protection and care for their care, treatment, education, training, development, and rehabilitation. In order to temporarily receive, care for, and rehabilitate any child who is allegedly in conflict with the law while any inquiry under this Act is pending, a State Government must establish and maintain an observation home in each district or group of districts. This can be done either directly or through a non-profit organisation.

Foster Care System

The State temporarily places children in foster care, also known as out-of-home care, when they are unable to reside with their family. Foster children may live with blood relatives or adoptive parents who are not connected to them. Foster care also includes placement settings such group homes, residential care institutions, homeless shelters, and supervised independent living. In essence,

children are placed in foster care when their family is in difficulty. Foster care is intended to be a temporary solution while a stable and supportive family is being built. To better the situation, foster care transforms people. Children should be raised in devoted, secure environments where their needs are met. The demand brought on by the millions of children stumbling through India's streets is too much for the country's foster care system to handle. Numerous problems pose a severe threat to the creation of a stronger system. To create a sufficient system, not enough money is available. Agencies complain about the lack of help from the government. It is also challenging to maintain the foster care system because there aren't many Indian families eager to adopt youngsters. The majority of foster care is given in boarding homes or orphanages, which frequently have a shortage of committed and knowledgeable professionals. Thus, there are challenges faced by the foster care institutions in India. There are certain criteria and rules in India for carrying out foster care system or in being a foster care parent (Singh, 2022).

Foster care in India has a history that dates back to 1960, when the Central Government launched the first programme of its kind. In Maharashtra, the first non-institutional programme was started in 1972. The 'Bal Sangopal Scheme, Non-Institutional Services' was the scheme's long overdue name change in 2005. Karnataka started a foster care programme for orphans in the late 1990s. After the earthquake in Gujarat in 2001, there were also emergency programmes in place where roughly 350 kids were rehabilitated alongside their family members and

neighbours. Foster care is currently covered by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme, 2009 (ICPS) (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2015). Foster parents are responsible for giving a kid in their care all the amenities of family life, nurturing them in ways that would promote their personal development and sense of self, without maintaining custody of the child's property or legal rights. On 30 September 2018, there have been an approximate 437,283 children in foster care in India (Mane, 2020).

Group Foster Care System

The group foster care system is a concept that is gaining a great attention due to its ability to provide temporary homes and support to children who are left out from families due to various circumstances. Thus, it is critical to give temporary care and assistance to children who are unable to live with their biological families due to abuse, neglect, or parental substance misuse. As every child has a right to grow in a family environment and recognising the importance of a multi - faceted institution to safe-guard the development and well-being of the children in need, foster care system came into effect.

SOS Children's Village

The system of group foster care is offered in three institutions in Kerala, SOS Thrissur, SOS Cochin and Hope Community Village, Alappuzha. SOS Children's Village are an independent, non-profit association that works to promote the holistic development of women, children, and those from vulnerable

homes. SOS Children's townlets was innovated in Austria in 1949, and in India it started operating in 1964. Through their 32 SOS Children's townlets and 32 community enterprise in India, they've helped further than 25,000 children in the once 50 times. SOS India has supported children, families, and communities in both disaster- stricken and disaster-prone areas, offering stopgap to families and communities that are in need. Within the 134-nation SOS International Federation, SOS India is the association with the topmost operation. SOS Children's townlets of India is devoted to the weal of orphaned and abandoned children as well as the development of families and original communities as a precautionary measure in the struggle against societal neglect and abandonment (SOS Children's Village India, 2022).

Hope Community Village

John Veitch, a British businessman with long-standing ties to Alappuzha, founded Hope Community Village. He was saddened by the predicament of the underprivileged kids in this area of coastal India. He went to some orphanages run by the government. He was distressed by the institutional approach, which failed to capture the energy that was conceivable if the caring attitude had been different. John came to see that children require a family approach for their healthy development. He wanted to build families for kids who had lost their parents. Realising the need to involve the community in the caring process, he devised a programme that would provide family care for orphans and also address the needs of the neighbourhoods'

youngsters. The Hope Community Village was established by him in the outskirts of Alappuzha. In order to organise support and resources for the programme of Hope Community Village in Kerala, he formed Hope Community Village UK with the help of his friends' back home in the UK. A charitable society under the name of Hope Community Village was registered in Kerala in 1995 (356/1995). The main goal is to provide orphans and vulnerable children. with long-term family care. There are six houses on the property, and there is 'their mother' residing in each family home with 10 children. Here, a mother is a straightforward woman who is concerned about and tends to 'her' children. Despite not having given birth to them, she loves them as if they were her own. The mother takes care of the children, cleans the house, and performs all other duties in houses. Children who have lost their parents' care and protection can receive long-term family care at Hope Community Village. Children who have lost their parental care are sent there and are given long-term care by the government's child protection agencies. They are typically single-parent kids who lack family support because their parent has remarried, is seriously ill, or is otherwise unable to care for them. All of these kids were poor and neglected, and many of them experienced abuse and exploitation. The child is placed in a family environment with children who are not related to them and non-biological parents under the group foster care system. Hope provides housing for 60 people. Under its implementation in 2016, the Juvenile Justice Act makes provisions for youngsters who need care and protection. The organisation

underwent certain modifications from their own wards to adhere to the norms and regulations as proposed by the government. The agency's use of social workers in its day-to-day operations has also changed. By implementing procedures and strategies, the service provides group foster care for the kids. This is a thorough analysis of the agency's differences from other agencies and how it has changed over time. This is an in-depth study for arriving at a conclusion about working of Hope Community Village as a group foster care system by understanding in detail about their initiatives in protecting the rights and interest of the children in shaping better citizens of tomorrow (Hope Community Village, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach is employed in the research and single case study was used to gain an in depth understanding about the research focus. Among non-probability sampling, purposive sampling method was selected as the participants are chosen deliberately based on specific criteria or characteristics relevant to the research objectives which the researcher has identified through the previous field level engagement over a period of one month.

From Hope Community Village out of the 60 children, the selected 20 Children were divided on the basis of their age, thus they were grouped as childhood group which comprised of children who belonged to an age group from 9 to 11. The Adolescent girls' group comprised of children who belonged to an age group of 12–17. The focus group discussion involved three different groups: the

Children's Group, the Adolescent Group, and the Hope Mothers Group, which had 9, 11, and 6 participants, respectively. An interview guide was used which is a semi-structured list of questions and directives used to direct the interviewer during one-on-one meetings with staffs such as the organisation's administrator, director, and assistant director who were interviewed separately. Thematic analysis was carried out for analysing the qualitative data. The credibility of the findings was ensured through triangulation among the participants.

Ethical Considerations

It is very much essential to think about and handle ethical issues when conducting research in a group foster care system to protect the participants' rights, privacy, and well-being. Initially the permission was taken from the Department of Social Work, Loyola College of Social Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram for approaching Hope Community Village for the purpose of study. Obtained the informed verbal consent of every participant and made sure that they are fully aware of the research's goals, methods, risks, advantages, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of participation. Participants were given the chance to ask questions before consenting to participate, and it was confirmed that they had the mental capacity to understand and give consent. Recognising that group foster care participants may be viewed as vulnerable owing to their age, backgrounds, or current situations the privacy and confidentiality of the data obtained was guaranteed by taking extra care to reduce any potential harm or suffering caused by the research.

FINDINGS

What is the process Hope Community Village follow in the system?

Intake

Typically, a child in need of care and protection is sent to the CWC. Referrals may originate from many different places, including from parents, concerned citizens, schools, the police, or other governmental organisations. The kid is put in a group foster care system if CWC determines that the child should have the chance to live with a family and enjoy a family atmosphere. The DCPU, a government organisation created under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) to ensure the protection and well-being of children in the district, performs its duties under the CWC in every district. Coordination and implementation of local child protection services are its main responsibilities. If CWC prefer to send the child to Hope Community Village, the entire organisation gladly accepts the child.

Assessment

When a child is transferred to Hope Community Village following the initial CWC assessment of the child, the system evaluates the child's medical status by considering a thorough medical examination of the child's blood type, skin, oral health, and other factors, including the Elisa Test. Thus, the organisation ensures the medical fitness of the child through medical examinations and provides a special attention to the child if she/he needs it. A registration register for admissions will be kept, to which information regarding the CWC order

number, OT number, child's photo, Social Investigation Report details, etc. will be added. This acts as the child's official record. The interaction of the kid with the staff and the evaluation of the Social Investigation Report provided by CWC help to ensure their mental health. Professionals with training in child psychology or psychiatry carry out this evaluation to determine the kid's emotional condition, behavioural tendencies, and any particular needs for support or intervention. In the process of evaluating the kid, the staff, especially the social worker, is crucial in putting the finishing touches on the child care programme. The child will get either long or short-term care depending on the assessment's findings.

Intervention

Needs assessment give important information about the particular issues and places where kids in the system of group foster care might need extra assistance or intervention. The system's professionals create focused interventions that address the identified needs. It enables the early detection of problems, prompt intervention, and application of research-supported practices to enhance the outcomes for the kids. A care plan is prepared which serves as the blueprint in directing the system to help the child achieve the well-being. Hope Community Village comprises of six houses each house with a mother and ten children under her. According to the needs assessed the child is determined to be kept at the home appropriate for the child, by taking into account the age of the child, the child's religion, the ability of mother

in dealing with the issues of the child, the gender balance in the family and the vacancy available. The child is welcomed to the Home by the family members and in the assembly the new child receives a special welcome through which the child is integrated to the family environment. The Child is then taken out to shopping along with Mother so as to buy the items for personal use and this promotes the rapport building between the Mother and the child through which the Child gradually gets adjusted with the family they are into. Once the child's expectations regarding the care, protection, health, and nutrition needs are fulfilled through proper interventions at the system then the emotional and psychological support needs, educational and training needs are taken care. Emotional and psychological care are addressed appropriate to their age by employing necessary interventions suiting to the circumstances. The system then intervenes into the life of that child as per the planned assessment through the prepared care plan, based on which the house, school, etc. will be selected taking into account the most appropriate among the choices to satisfy educational and training needs. Daily activities at home involving the child along with the Hope Mother at the system improves the skills of the child which add on to the betterment of the child integrated into the system. If there are girls in the system, it is recommended under the JJ Act that a boy be removed from group foster care when he turns 10 years old. They are shifted to Hope Youth House which is a provision to provide shelter to adolescent boys who are in need of care and protection.

Evaluation

The well-being and development of the children in the care of the carers and professionals involved in the group foster care system are supported and promoted by maintaining appropriate boundaries and using observation as a tool. To evaluate the physical well-being, it is crucial to keep an eye out for any wounds, disease symptoms, or changes in food or sleeping patterns that could suggest health issues. The system thus looks out for indicators of joy, engagement, and pleasant relationships with others as well as any signs of worry, anger, withdrawal, or emotional pain. Understanding the social development of children can also be gained through observation by looking for their participation in group activities, capacity to develop and sustain connections with peers and adults, and social skills including sharing, taking turns, and conflict resolution. The system thus checks to see if the kids behave in an age-appropriate social way and show empathy and collaboration which can contribute for evaluating the future development of the child in developing a desired social behaviour. A special attention is provided to observe how they interact with the learning materials, how they participate in discussions, and how well they follow directions.

Relinking/Aftercare

The system works to build and maintain healthy relationships between the child and their family members because it understands the importance of family ties. This may involve frequent visits, facilitated communication, and joint decision-making

where appropriate and in the child's best interests. The system therefore concentrates on helping kids through transitions, whether going from foster care to a placement with their birth family, to another foster home, or to independent life. It entails preparing the kid for the move, offering emotional support, and making sure that the services and resources need to facilitate a successful and smooth transfer are in place. The efforts for relinking are initiated by the system when the child is grown up to be accommodated to higher studies. The system gives it a try to accommodate the child in their native place so as to provide them with opportunity to integrate the child with the original family if it's safe for the child. Yet another sort of relinking adopted by the system is through making the child self-reliant by pursuing a career according to their ability. Once the child is independent through a job and he/she is capable to earn for their living they are free enough to choose partners whose details will be gained through a proper investigation from the system and if found appropriate the marriage will be celebrated at the system. Twenty-two girls and two men from Hope Community Village were happily married with the support from the agency. The system also maintains certain marriage policies in order to ensure that their beneficiaries have access to economic gains if they follow the parameters as suggested in the policy. Their primary objective of the system is in making their beneficiaries self-reliant and independent so that they can lead a happy life on their own. By speaking up for the child's best interests and serving as a mediator between the child, their family, and other parties concerned, the

system makes sure they play a critical position in relinking. If there is no possibility for the child to be relinked, then the beneficiary will be rehabilitated by the system. The facility of after care provided by the system ensures ongoing support and assistance to the life of the child. They provide a continuum of support to aid young people in effectively making the transition from institutional care to independent living. Aftercare programme at Hope Community Village encourage self-sufficiency and give young people the tools they need to succeed by placing a high priority on educational and career possibilities. The provision of after care is not only available for the children who completes the age of 18 but also for the Hope Mother who doesn't need to go back to their normal family and is urging to live with the children in the Hope Community Village. Or else the mother will not be having a place to go back into. In such a situation they will be placed under the after-care facility of Hope Community Village.

Follow up

Follow-up makes ensuring that children in a system of group foster care receive continuous, uninterrupted care and assistance. It makes it possible for the child's life to shift between carers or placements without any major hiccups. A sense of stability and security is crucial for the wellbeing of foster children, and it can be maintained by routine follow-up. Through this, the child's adaptability to their new surroundings, whether they are receiving the right facilities to meet their needs and if their emotional and physical needs are being fulfilled are all evaluated by the carers, social workers, and

other system specialists. condition. The system frequently emphasises not leaving the child alone, but rather developing a sense of belonging for the child and giving the family the child is reconnected the impression that someone is looking out for the child. Regular visits from the accountable staff are carried out, who serves as a mother or father figure in the system, ensuring that the follow-up is done correctly. To carry out the follow-up process, the system's side will visit the youngster and present gifts utilising the monthly funding about which will be recorded in the monthly report regarding the follow up. If the system finds that there is a need for an extra attention in order to facilitate the well-being of the relinked beneficiary the system intervenes with the appropriate measure. Certain fund allotment is being fixed so as to support the beneficiary through follow up which include Rs.5000 as allowance for pregnancy, Rs. 1,80,000 for marriage expenditure, etc. Regular follow-up enables Hope Community Village, which acts with the utmost sincerity, to continue its advocacy and support for the beneficiaries who were in the foster care system. It makes sure that their opinions are heard, that their rights are upheld, and that their best interests are taken into account.

How is the System Beneficial to the Child?

Quality health care

Hope Community village give importance to a complete medical examination of the child at the time of admission to the agency. Thus, medical examination is added to the record of the child and if any illness is being diagnosed the child is given special attention.

If the Child have a past history of taking any medicine the system ensures that it is being continued at the prescribed level. Regular check-ups are conducted among the children and mothers to ensure that their health is prioritised. Health according to the system does not merely focuses on physical health whereas the other aspects of health is also paid attention to. The mental health of the child in the system is also being taken care of through proper and timely intervention. They can process their experiences, recover from trauma, and create healthy coping mechanisms with the aid of appropriate mental health interventions. Awareness classes on different aspects of health add on to the benefit of the system in safeguarding the health status of the child.

Age-appropriate nutrition

The system ensures that their children is provided with appropriate nutrition by following a proper diet time table which include the vitamin, minerals, protein, etc. that a child need for their growth. Monthly supply of fruits, vegetables, nuts, etc. is distributed equally to the houses so that the children get access to quality food. Proper supply of nutrition will help to have the energy and required to engage in regular activities, encourage muscular growth, and improve their overall physical performance if they eat enough and appropriate food.

A safe place to live

Hope community Village that a child is to be provided a safe place to live in in which they have developed a sense of belonging

through a family atmosphere. Protecting children from immediate harm, ensuring their access to basics, preventing accident and injuries, and fostering their general wellbeing are all important ways to defend their right to survival. The system thus put a high priority on protecting children and offering family support networks help to build a safe and secure environment where children can survive and grow. Children Hope Community Village comprises of 6 houses situated in a single compound in which resides a Hope Mother and ten children under them. A friendly neighbourhood and easy access to social services are essential components of a secure living situation. The mother along with the system ensures that the child is having access to a safe place to live. The pets in the system add to the naturalness of a family environment. The houses take up the shift in caring and grooming the pets so that all of them get chances equally. The neighbourhood at the system provide opportunity for peer group interaction which is at most important at this age and could be beneficial for the socialisation of the child.

Protection from physical violence and psychological intimidation

In order to protect the child from any kind of physical violence the system ensures child protection policy is implemented by child protection team. The team comprises of the Director as Child Protection Officer, Assistant director as Women Representative, Senior social worker, elected representative of Hope mothers, girl and boy representative elected among children. The Child Protection Team arranges monthly meeting or in an

emergency which is a platform to address any sort of violence or problems occurred in the system which shall be solved by certain undertakings as soon as possible. The team functions in order to prevent or address any kind of physical violence, psychological intimidation, protected from child labour, tasks that are dangerous or impede their education. It is crucial for children's emotional and psychological development that they are shielded from these experiences. The suggestion box at the agency is open for accepting suggestions from the beneficiaries who can write their opinions or complaints. The box will be opened every month before the meeting in the presence of Child protection team who shall discuss the issue and take appropriate action. Daily observation conducted by the social worker at the agency is an add on in ensuring that the protection of the child is being taken care of. Thus, they give kids the chance to develop, thrive, and realise their full potential by fostering secure and supportive settings.

Rehabilitation and reintegration into society with dignity

The system also focuses in facilitating the child to socialise in such a way that the child is best suited to live in a society. The life that the child carries out in this group foster care system cater to their basic needs of interacting and interrelating with their siblings and the peer group so that they are moulded in such a way to be a social being. The system ensures that rather than a mere growth of the child the system makes up humans who are fit to live in a society. The facilities provided in the system which ensure their education,

participating them in different activities for their physical, mental and cognitive development, providing them opportunities to engage with their peer group and family empowers the child so as to lead a dignified life. The system provides them with all the assistance they need for their psychological, educational, emotional, and physical needs. By encouraging holistic development, the system provides them the tools they need to reintegrate into society as responsible, productive adults. When children are successfully reintegrated, they have the chance to develop into law-abiding citizens who contribute favourably to society

Respect to their ethnic background and religion

The system plays special attention in understanding and appreciating the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the children they look after. Foster families ought to be understanding of a child's religious convictions and give them the chance to take part in religious observances or activities. The children at the time of intake are assessed about their religion and at the time of intervention they are matched with the family who practice the same religion that they follow thus Child from Christian background will be directed to Christian house and Hindu background to Hindu house. When it comes regarding celebrations the system celebrates all the religious festival with great pleasure which in turn is creating a sense of unity in diversity among the children which is very much needed for creating better citizen who shall accept the diversities. They also are given opportunities to visit the religious place of their choice in

holidays or as per their demand provided if all other conditions are favourable. As a result, the method guarantees that a child's ethnic and religious requirements are recognised and satisfied, and that any difficulties or issues may be handled cooperatively. It is essential for a child's general well-being and identity development in the foster care system to respect that child's ethnic heritage and religion.

Specialised skills and physical and mental abilities

The system provides them opportunities to engage in various extra-curricular activities which include attending classes for keyboard, guitar, music, dance, art and craft, karate, swimming, football coaching, etc. Thus, the child analyses their real potential or ability in some of this area and the system nurtures it. Even the cycle provided by the system helps in catering a sense of independence while the child achieves a motor ability appropriate to their age. Children gain confidence and a sense of success when they excel in a specific skill or area of interest. They gain a strong feeling of identity and establish a positive self-image as a result. A child's academic success can be significantly impacted by specific skills and abilities. The children are provided with training in IT field from an age of five years. Starting from the simple skills the child gains specialised abilities in this regard, not only the academic excellence the motor skills and cognitive skills of the child will also be enhanced through these activities. The children are also provided with sessions on different socially relevant aspects or skills

form resource persons in order to ensure that it contribute to their overall well-being. In order to provide an educational support, the children are given special attention from an age of five by ensuring that they are getting special tuition for various subjects till an age of seventeen until they complete their higher secondary classes. The children in the system are extremely talented in any of these areas and are recipients of many awards in these activities when competing with the children outside. Children's different skills and talents should be valued since doing so fosters inclusivity and a sense of belonging. It contributes to the development of an atmosphere that values, respects, and nurtures the individual talents and skills of every kid.

Taking their voices into account

The agency guarantees this through making the child involved in all the procedures and decision that the system follows. The compulsory participation for them in all the activities conducted by the system and the special roles allotted for them in decision making bodies such as Child Protection Team 53 make them aware about their rights and in ensuring that they advocate for their own rights which creates a leadership quality among the children. Better results may result from actively including kids in decision-making about their care. They have valuable viewpoints and insights on their own experiences, goals, and well-being. There is also accessibility and approachability to any of the staffs regarding an open discussion on any of the matter. The overall functioning of the agency is democratic in a manner that

there is an equal contribution and responsibility from all the stakeholders which include the staff, Hope Mothers, children, etc. This adds on to the efficiency of the system. Children feel respected, acknowledged, and accepted as essential parts of the system when their voices are appreciated and considered. This sense of belonging enhances their general wellbeing and leads to the development of a nurturing and supportive environment.

What Are the Challenges Faced by the System?

Funding

The system is funded by an UK based organisation which accounts a 60% of the total fund, the rest 40% should be managed by the organisation so as to ensure a smooth functioning of the system. Even though the government makes use of the facilities available in the organisation there is only mere support from the government which cater to the functioning of the system. If this lack of funding persists the safety and well-being of children in foster care might be jeopardised, as can the responsibility of carers and service providers which in turn affects the government and more over the life of the children. Thus, managing the fund of the system is a challenge for the system.

Changing laws and policies

Changes in laws and practises also have posed difficulties for the system and affected how decisions are made about placing children in group foster care. It has challenges in funding sources and resource distribution for group foster care programmes impacted by

changes in legislation and regulations. Changes in funding priorities, eligibility requirements, reimbursement rates, or grant opportunities may result from new legislation. A facility's capacity and financial stability as a group foster care facility can be directly impacted by changes in funding, which may have an impact on the resources available to provide children with high-quality care and assistance.

Recruitment of staffs

The system often finds it difficult to assign professionals with the right training and experience to handle the variety of needs of children in group foster care. It is an area which needs special attention regarding the safety of the children in their physical, mental and emotional aspects. The Hope Mothers play a crucial role in the agency as they have a great responsibility to be carried out. Any drawback from their side may contribute to the malfunctioning of the system. The social worker may find it easier to personalise their methods and interventions if the mothers can establish relationships with the kids and comprehend their backgrounds and experiences. Meeting each child's physical, emotional, educational, and developmental requirements is more likely when there is enough staff. Experienced mothers, social workers, and other experts are frequently difficult to come by at the facilities. Group foster care systems can better distribute employees to meet the needs of children and encourage positive results by addressing these difficulties. The system is efficient at implementing the multifaceted strategy that is necessary to address these problems which will be discussed under the next objective.

Social acceptance

Social acceptance is crucial for a system like this that look forward in creating a better future by accommodating the children who are in need of care and protection. But there is a serious challenge caused by lack of knowledge about the service being provided by the system. There was an initial apprehension that the initiative was aimed in promoting a religious charity and thus there was a lack of acceptance. The community also were not aware about the role of the professional social worker and the benefits of the system in moulding the life of a child. Thus, it was a great challenge in making the community aware about the series of activities taking place inside the system and the roles that the staffs play in ensuring well-being of the children.

What Are the Strategies Used by the System to Tackle the Challenge?

Funding

For children in need to get high-quality care and assistance, it is essential to address the funding problems that arise in group foster care systems. The resources required to ensure the wellbeing of children in foster care must be funded. The foster care system ensures that there are enough resources available to satisfy the children's different requirements by addressing financing issues, fostering their overall development and favourable results. To deal with the same the system has come up with certain strategies which have the potential to tackle the challenges posed by funding needs. The strategies adopted by the system

include boosting their publicity among the people so as to mobilise funds through programmes like accepting their general donations. Sponsor a child is a programme that aims to attract people who have the potential to cater a child who is need of care and protection till an age of 18 or more if they wish by ensuring that their adequate needs are met. Offer a meal is yet another programme which have gained much attention as it encourages the people to contribute money so as to provide meal at the system according to their preference for arranging the breakfast or lunch. Certain warm-hearted people from the community have even take up initiatives in contributing for promoting education of the child which is an activity available at the system for providing support for higher education. Thus, the system has adopted certain strategies to tackle the challenges and managing to find their portion of 40% of fund as the system is aware that adequate funding is very much needed to ensure the quality of the system. As a result, by addressing financing issues, the system can offer the kids a constant and dependable support network, encouraging stability and good relationships. So that they continue to successfully meet the needs of kids in foster care and give them the assistance they need for their wellbeing and successful futures.

Changing laws and policies

In order to ensure the system to be effective, responsive, and in line with the best interests of the children in care, it is imperative to address issues associated with changing laws and policies. In the context of altering laws and policies, the system apply

child-centred strategies that emphasise their safety, stability, development, and overall positive results by addressing issues associated to shifting laws and regulations. It makes sure that the practises and processes of the system are in line with the advancement of knowledge regarding child welfare and practises. The system also adapts to new legislative requirements, stay up to date with legal frameworks, and ensure that the rights of children are upheld and protected. The system also encourages participation of stakeholders in the process fosters accountability, openness, and a range of viewpoints. The rules and regulations will ultimately result in more effective and long-lasting reforms as they are taking into account the collective knowledge and input of individuals involved in the foster care system. The agency also takes up initiative in providing platform to spread awareness, promote important reforms, and have an impact on legislative and policy decision-making. By addressing these issues, the foster care system can help bring about broader socio-economic reforms that advance the rights, opportunities, and well-being of children in care.

Recruitment of staffs

The system provides a special attention in tackling the challenge by adopting means in ensuring that the staffs allotted have the potential to bring desired changes in the lives of children. This is being guaranteed through a proper interviewing process which shall affirm that the system opts only professional workers who are trust worthy and active enough to take up the responsibilities in the system in carrying out office works. The

youngsters can be given the proper care and support catered to their unique needs by hiring staff members with specialised skills and knowledge. The Hope Mothers in the organisation play a pivotal role in making sure that the objective of the system is being fulfilled. Thus, that is an area which needs a great care while choosing the Hope Mothers so that the system remains effective in providing care to their children. The hope mothers are selected under certain criteria by publishing an advertisement which calls for the interested ladies to apply for the post. The Hope Mothers are selected after an interview process and additional trainings are provided based on the prepared module. In order to attract workers with different backgrounds and qualifications, the foster care system must overcome recruitment difficulties. This will improve the quality of the children's support. For the welfare, security, and growth of the children in their care, it is crucial to find and keep qualified, committed employees. Taking care of recruitment issues improves the outcomes for the kids and maintains a high standard of care. As a result, the system places a high priority on efficient hiring in order to create a welcoming and encouraging work environment for employees and the benefit of the kids. In turn, this promotes employee retention, motivation, and satisfaction. By attracting devoted professionals who are committed to the welfare of the children, the system's supportive culture promotes a collaborative and cohesive team.

Social acceptance

Foster children are more likely to be accepted and supported by the community

when stigma and discrimination are reduced. Foster children who feel accepted are more likely to take part in community activities, have access to resources, and form good identities as contributing members of society. It encourages locals to actively support and advocate for the needs of foster children, cultivating a sense of civic duty among them. In order to ensure the support from the community the system has integrated different activities which promote participation of the community in addition to providing foster care for the children. The system also provides library facility for the community at fixed time which is being utilised by the members of the community especially youngsters. The system also has kindergarten facility which accommodate the children from the community at a reasonable fee and provide care and the facilities that have the potential to attract more children from the community. Thus, the system organises many outreach programmes by lending a helping hand for the needy which ranges from providing educational support for the neediest for ensuring the community participation. The system also promotes the transparency of its functioning by providing job opportunities for the people from the community. Thus, in all possible ways the system is tackling the challenge posed by the lack of social acceptance which has proven to have positive impacts to the overall functioning of the system. Social acceptance lays the groundwork for a successful course in their life after leaving the foster care system. Foster children thrive and realise their full potential when they are in an environment that values and accepts them as they travel through the foster care

system and beyond which should be ensured by the system for their own upliftment and in bringing a potential change in the lives of their children.

Social Work Implications

Children's experiences in group foster care are influenced not just by the care system, but also by broader societal issues, personal situations, and existing support networks. Efforts to enhance the standard of group foster care and offer all-encompassing support might reduce potential negative effects and encourage favourable outcomes for kids. Thus, there is an importance in social work for the selected topic which helps in knowing in depth about the functioning of the system that takes up a leading role in providing group foster care. Knowledge of the foster care system in relation to child welfare can assist decision-makers, social workers, and organisations involved in child welfare to devise sensible interventions. Studying the organisation's procedures, guidelines, and results can provide information on the benefits and drawbacks of managing a foster care system. Advocacy activities and policy creation targeted at bolstering child protection measures can be informed by evaluating if the rights of children in the system are being protected and whether suitable protections are in place. The system of group foster care also looks forward for family reunification and preservation which cater to the need of identifying the importance of providing a family environment and the ability to children to adapt to it. Foster parents, social workers, and other professionals participating with the

foster care system can benefit from comprehensive policies, guidelines, and training programmes that are created with an overall in-depth understanding of a group foster care system which will be the outcome of this study.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Kerala's system of group foster care is a crucial tool for preserving the rights and general welfare of children who require care and protection. This study has examined the Group Foster care system of Hope Community Village by taking into account many facets and shed light on how important it is in giving vulnerable kids a homelike atmosphere. It is clear as we traverse the difficulties of child welfare that a strong and supportive system, like group foster care, is necessary to safeguard these children's futures. The results of this study highlight how crucial a family atmosphere is for kids who haven't had access to a secure and nurturing home. The group foster care paradigm acknowledges that family extends beyond blood relatives. This approach successfully meets the emotional, psychological, and developmental requirements of these kids by encouraging a feeling of community, support, and direction. Additionally, the research emphasises how group foster care benefits children's overall development. They are given the individualised care, instruction, and medical attention they require within a familial setting, giving them the abilities and emotional fortitude, they will need to succeed in their future lives. It gives them the ability to end the cycle of vulnerability and disadvantage,

empowering them to contribute positively to society. The group foster care system in Kerala lays the groundwork for a more promising and inclusive future by providing opportunities for mentorship, education, and skill-building. The group foster care system's adaptation to religious practices is another factor in its effectiveness. Community values are incorporated into the system to guarantee that children receive care while also maintaining a connection to their history and traditions. Their feeling of identity and pride are fostered by this all-encompassing approach, which also raises their self-worth and self-esteem. The kids are better able to positively impact their communities as a result and are more likely to grow up with a strong feeling of belonging. It is important to recognise that there are difficulties in putting group foster care into practise. The provision of high-quality care depends on providing carers with sufficient training and support, allocating sufficient resources, and conducting ongoing evaluations. The system's viability and efficacy are ensured by collaboration with governmental entities, non-governmental organisations, and communities more closely. It can be ensured that the rights of every child in need of care and protection are protected by consistent efforts. In conclusion, group foster care system of Hope Community Village serves as an example of a progressive approach to child welfare by providing children in need with a homelike atmosphere. This study highlights the value of this system in giving children who have experienced hardship in their young lives love, security, and support. Group foster care opens the way

for a more compassionate and just society by supporting their overall development, nourishing their potential, and giving them the tool, they need to break free from the chains of vulnerability. Stakeholders must keep funding the expansion and improvement of the system for group foster care as we move forward. Every child needs to grow up in a supportive setting where their rights are upheld and their dreams can come true. Thus, it is important to build a brighter, more equitable future for Kerala where every child can thrive and make a meaningful contribution to society by prioritising the well-being of these kids and fighting for their rights.

REFERENCES

Children in India 2018 – A Statistical Appraisal (2018). *Ministry of Statistics and Programme, Social Statistics Division*. Retrieved 1 October 2023, from https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Children%20in%20India%202018%20E2%2093%20A%20Statistical%20Appraisal_26oct18.pdf

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). UNICEF. Retrieved 3 February 2023, from <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>

Crime in India 2013 Statistics (2013). National Crime Records Bureau. Retrieved 12 November 2023, from <https://www.latestlaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/National-Crime-Record-Bureau-Report-NCRB-2013.pdf>

Gilada, P. (1993). *Child Prostitution: A Blot on Humanity*. Retrieved 12 December 2022, from <https://www.nipccd.nic.in/file/reports/kit17.pdf>

Hope Community Village (2023). Retrieved 4 September 2023, from <https://hopekerala.org/>

Information Kit on Children in Need of Care and Protection: Issues, Programmes and Services (2023). National Institute of Public cooperation and Child Development. Retrieved 13 March 2023, from <https://www.nipccd.nic.in/file/reports/kit17.pdf>

Information Kit on Children in Need of Care and Protection: Issues, Programmes and Services (2017). National Institute of Public cooperation and Child Development. Retrieved 15 December 2023, from <https://www.nipccd.nic.in/file/reports/kit17.pdf>

Mane, R. (2020). Concept of Foster care in India. *International Journal for Advanced Legal Research*, 3(4). Retrieved 14 November 2023, from <https://ijalr.in/concept-of-foster-care-in-india/>

Ministry of Law and Justice (2015). CARA, Legislative Department. Retrieved 20 October 2023, from <https://cara.nic.in/PDF/JJ%20act%202015.pdf>

Singh, R. (2022). Foster care system in India. *Legal Services India*. Retrieved 24 January 2023, from <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-10060-foster-care-system-in-india.html>

SOS Children's Village India (2022). Retrieved 5 September 2023, from <https://www.soschildrensvillages.in/sos-childrens-village/>

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). United Nations, Human Rights. Retrieved 24 November 2023, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) (2015). Retrieved 21 December 2023 from <https://cara.wcd.gov.in/pdf/jj%20act%202015.pdf>

How to cite this article: Pradeep, P. S., & Francina, P. X. (2025). Nurturing Childhood Through Group Foster Care System: A Case Study of Hope Community Village. *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development*, 17(1), 70-89.