

Child's i Foundation

Foster Care Project Impact Report



MJF Global
Part of the Martin James Foundation

child's i foundation
we make families not orphans

JULY 2026

Partner Overview

Child's i Foundation was established in 2009 with the aim of ensuring that every child in Uganda has the opportunity to grow up in a family, not an orphanage. The organisation works with national partners, government bodies, and international supporters, and maintains a strong focus on systems and community structures to ensure that the work is sustainable and in line with the Ugandan Children Act (amended in 2016 and again in 2024). Child's i holds a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ugandan Government and is legally authorised to work on alternative care, including foster care. They have strong experience in delivering effective projects in prevention, emergency care, tracing, reunification, family support, and have successfully closed orphanages in three districts.



Overview of Project Aims and Goals

Reliance on institutional care in Africa has grown rapidly in recent decades, fuelled in part by child sponsorship-based fundraising and volunteering. To date, Uganda has reported one of the highest numbers of children in institutional care, as residential care has been the most widely used form of formal alternative care. A baseline measure carried out by the government in 2012 indicated that 50,000 children were living in institutions. Since Uganda ratified the Children Act Amendment in 2016 – a strong piece of legislation that references family-based alternative care alongside a clear National Children's Policy (2020) – there has been significant progress in how organisations can sustain family care in Uganda¹.

Child's i Foundation has a proven track record within communities of providing effective gatekeeping and family strengthening. This work has enabled hundreds of children to remain safely at home with their biological families. This made them the perfect partner to pioneer foster care practices as they are codified into policy throughout Uganda, since they provide foster care only to children who truly require alternative care.

1. Over the course of the project, this legislation underwent further development, resulting in another amendment in 2024. Additionally, in 2025, the Government of Uganda approved a set of additional guiding documents, including the National Alternative Care Framework, the National Gatekeeping Guidelines, the National Foster Care Guidelines and Training Manual, the Closure of Unapproved Homes Rules, the National Case Management Tools, and the Standard Operating Procedures.

This project aimed to establish and document foster care in three targeted districts: Wakiso, Masaka, and Mpigi. Traditionally, Wakiso is a more urban environment with easier access to resources, while Mpigi and Masaka are rural communities with fewer community organisations and networks, although Masaka was recently declared a city and is growing. This specific report focuses on their Foster Care project, which ran from November 2021 to October 2024, and includes reflections from its project reporting and discussions with the MJF Global team.

Overview of the Project's Districts



Primary Interventions

Child's i Foundation's initial interventions for this project centred on establishing foster care properly in practice and policy throughout the three target districts. At the beginning of the project, the draft National Foster Care Guidelines had recently been released. Child's i worked with government leaders and linked organisations to map available community resources in each district, while also working to increase community awareness of the concept and feasibility of foster care. This work contributed to the review of both the National Foster Care Guidelines and the accompanying National Foster Care Training Manual.

At the outset of the project, Child's i aimed to train and approve 90 foster families across the three districts, place 90 children requiring alternative care into foster care (including children previously cared for in residential care facilities), train 25 government officials to facilitate system change and implementation across the districts, and share good practice and documented lessons learned with the government to support its review of the National Foster Care Guidelines.

Most of these interventions were built around the well-established mechanisms of work that Child's i has designed and implemented over many years. Central to this approach is the organisation's deep commitment to community leadership and ownership. Child's i approached the establishment of foster care in much the same manner as they have implemented community gatekeeping and family strengthening. Their team began by asking what was working well, what strengths were already present within each community, and how they might build upon that work, together with leaders and families, to create meaningful impact for children.

Once foster carers were trained and approved, Child's i provided consistent wrap-around support to carers and their biological children through the ACTIVE Family Support Approach. This provided families with basic necessities, including milk, soap, sugar, detergent, millet flour, and crushed silver fish to supplement their food supply and nutrition. Child's i also regularly visited these families in each district to provide ongoing support to carers and consistent assessment of the child's wellbeing during their time in foster care.

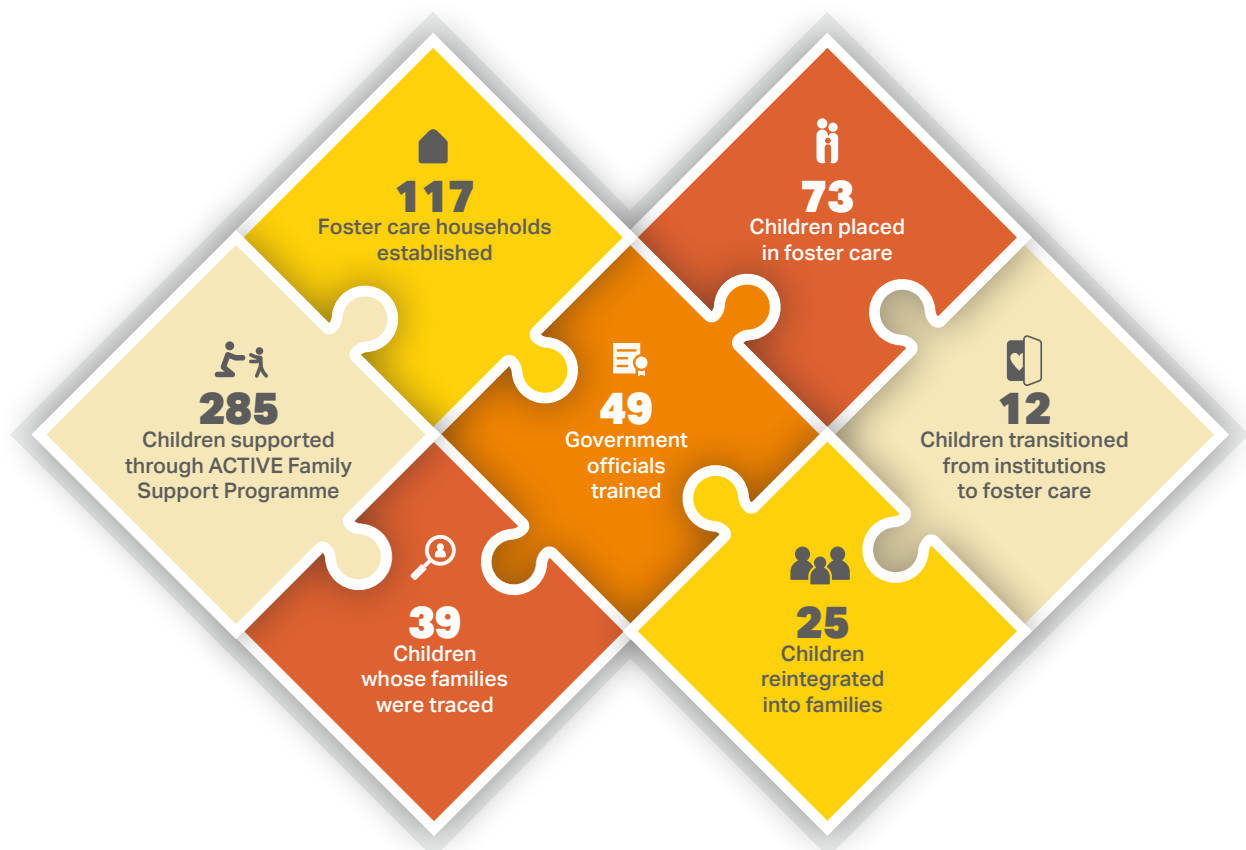


Major Milestones and Progress Achieved

Over the course of the project, Child's i met and exceeded their goals for the number of foster carers trained and assessed as foster care households, achieving **117 carers** across the three districts. This resulted in **73 children** being placed in foster care throughout the project.

At the outset of the project, the team estimated that 90 children might require foster care. However, as the team worked with families, strengthened gatekeeping and assessment processes found that fewer children than anticipated required alternative care. As a result, the number of foster care placements was lower than originally estimated. This learning has informed MJF's approach to target setting. In this case, a lower number of children in foster care should not be interpreted as reduced project success. Rather, it reflects a positive outcome: children were only placed in alternative care when it was necessary and in their best interests, ensuring family separation was avoided wherever safe and appropriate.

Additionally, the team transitioned **12 children** from a residential care facility to foster care, and traced families for **39 children**, resulting in **25 children** reintegrated to their families to date. Alongside this significant progress, their team also trained a total of **49 government officials**, ensuring that the progress made has the opportunity to take root in local systems and structures, benefiting children for many years to come.



Child's i and their partners were also instrumental in establishing Alternative Care Panels in each district. These panels operate within the UN's necessity and suitability principles and convene to determine whether a child needs alternative care and, if so, what the best placement is, and they work to approve foster carers through training and assessment. Child's i pioneered the processes involved, provided ongoing training and support, as part of the handover to the relevant government officials who are now responsible for this framework moving forward.



MJF Contributions to Partner

Over the course of the Foster Care Project, MJF contributed £120,995, comprising 70% of the total funding required. MJF also supported Child's i with two learning grants and sponsored a learning visit to MJF partner FAMInternational in Madagascar for regional learning and shared impact.

MJF also provided consistent training and support throughout the duration of the project, including reviewing case files and providing training on foster care recruitment, training, and assessment. Furthermore, MJF provided references and guidance on funding bids and facilitated introductions to other organisations and funders.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

After the official project period ended, MJF Global met with members of the Child's i team to reflect on their work and identify the significant lessons learned and challenges faced from their team's perspective.

Foster care works.

The project's successful implementation proved that foster care is achievable and possible in the Ugandan context and that it consistently provides significantly better alternative care than residential care facilities. As Uganda continues to face the introduction of new, often unregistered orphanages (particularly in high tourist areas), this finding is critical to sustaining the momentum necessary to continue to embed family care in systems, practice, and policy nationwide. Beyond those macro effects, the team observed that foster care worked well for the children and families involved. The foster carers were able and deeply willing to truly blend the children in foster care into their family lives. This was facilitated and sustained through the ACTIVE Family Support Approach, but it also proved that on both a micro and macro level, throughout these three districts and beyond, foster care is feasible and more effective for children who require alternative care.

Collaboration was the engine.

Working directly with government from the earliest stages was, in the team's view, critical to building systems alongside government leaders for them to ultimately own and manage. If the project had progressed without this linkage, the team believed that it would not have been as successful. The team also highlighted how significant their partnerships were throughout the project and continue to be today. In each district, the team worked to map the key partners operating in the region to help them understand the importance of foster care and provide access for foster families to a broader range of services than Child's i could facilitate within their team alone.

Foster care is not a standalone solution.

It cannot exist in a vacuum or as the sole solution for the various vulnerabilities that a community faces. The extensive gatekeeping and family preservation work done by Child's i daily is key to the sustainability and success of their foster care initiatives. By deliberately and consistently keeping children safely with their families, the system can

facilitate alternative care for children who truly require it. In particular, in Mpigi, the team noted that, due to their family strengthening activities, the abandonment rate in the area was markedly low. Furthermore, most of the reports throughout the project note a child protection concern as the primary reason for placement into alternative care, indicating that poverty-driven cases were successfully mitigated through the team's family strengthening support.

Managing expectations was a constant challenge and opportunity.

The team noted that in several areas, they were consistently managing expectations from those involved in the process of establishing foster care. This included carers who were already informally fostering children who wanted to be approved through the Child's i process but were not interested in taking in additional children. Others indicated an expectation for financial remuneration beyond what the project provided.

This expectation also extended, at times, to government officials who expected to be paid additional compensation to fulfil their role in the process, even when policy indicated the role was part of their job as it stood. The team reflected that contextualising foster care in each locality was key: working to both remove stigma and unrealistic expectations was necessary to keep the well-being and best interests of children at the heart of the conversation.



Family tracing brought its own challenges.

Some parents of children placed in residential and foster care were hesitant to be fully identified for fear of the responsibility that this might entail. This resulted in approximately 80% of the reunited children being reintegrated with extended family rather than immediate family. This points to the continuing need to reinforce kinship relationships in both policy and practice to truly keep children with their families.

The work is personal, and that matters.

The team's reflections kept returning to specific moments: times when they really laboured over whether to move a child who was struggling within a foster placement, or late-night calls where the team was left wondering how best to serve the child and the family well. For our team at MJF, this reinforces the depth of care that is both required and deeply

costly to truly do this work well. If the team at Child's i had been more distant and removed from the work, we truly believe that we would have seen a less successful project. Instead, their determination and dedication to each child, as reflected in the numbers throughout this report, are the most significant keys to the success observed here.

Next Steps and Progress Made

The work pioneered in this project continues in each district. The Alternative Care Panels continue to meet weekly in each district, discussing ways to support vulnerable children and families, often with a Child's i staff member at the desk serving as an advisor to the panel alongside government officials. Moving forward, the project identified a particular gap around serving children with disabilities, as the team found that fewer foster families felt equipped and ready to take these children into foster care. As such, Child's i has recently begun work to assess families previously served through their programming. They seek to determine the depth of inclusion for children with disabilities within Child's i current programming and examine what additional services are necessary for this population to be served with even greater excellence and efficacy moving forward.

Child's i continues to serve locally, regionally, and throughout Africa, acting as a key voice of leadership within Transform Alliance Africa and other regional convening bodies. We anticipate that the sector will continue to have much to learn from the organisation's work for many years to come.





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