

RETHINK ORPHANAGES POSITION PAPER ON THE ALTERNATIVE CARE OF CHILDREN

Background:

Rethink Orphanages: Better Solutions for Children is a cross-sector network that aims to prevent the unnecessary institutionalisation of children by shifting the way Australia engages with overseas aid and development.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) states that every child has the right to be cared for by his or her own family whenever possible, and international guidelines and standards provide clear guidance on the process for providing appropriate care for children that cannot be cared for by their own families. The Convention further states that families should be provided the necessary assistance to care for their own children.

Position on Alternative Care for Children:

Research from across the world shows that the majority of children growing up in residential care have a living parent or parents that could care for them if given the opportunity. ReThink Orphanages believes that, with the right support, most children should be able to return safely to their own birth or extended families. In some cases, it is not possible to return a child to their family or kinship network because they do not have relatives; it is not in their best interests; or because all efforts to return them have failed. In these cases, ReThink Orphanages advocates for appropriate, alternative family-based care within the child's own country.

Any decision to place a child with a family should be made on the basis of a comprehensive individual assessment of the child that is carried out by suitably qualified professionals and mandated by the appropriate authority. This requires professionals who are well qualified, coordinated, and sufficient in number, as well as the full range of alternative care options as outlined in the alternative care continuum from which to choose. Where these elements are lacking, the child's best interests are often compromised leading to poor decisions, unsuitable placements and poor outcomes for children.

Where the child's assessment suggests that adoption is in the child's best interests, domestic adoption in the child's country of origin should be prioritised.

ReThink Orphanages advocates for reform of child-care systems in countries where institutional care remains prolific. This includes the development of family and community based services, family-based alternative care, policy and legislative changes, scaling back of institutional care, enhanced standards of social work and a greater recognition of child rights including each child's right to grow up in a family.