

The Better Care Network Guiding Principles and Procedures

1. Founding and Purpose of the Better Care Network

Children need and have a right to be cared for by their parents and to grow up in a family environment. This has been recognized through years of experience and research as well as formally recognized under national and international laws, including the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Yet millions of children live in residential institutions, no one knows just how many, while others have inadequate family care or live on the street. In many countries, institutions remain a major care response to poverty or family breakdown, and there are inadequate mechanisms to ensure the most appropriate placements, encourage and support guardianship and adoption arrangements, and provide support and monitoring for foster families.

Recognizing the urgent need for concerted action, a group of organizations concerned about children without adequate care came together to form the Better Care Network (BCN) in 2003. The purpose of the BCN is to facilitate active information exchange and collaboration on these issues and advocate for technically sound policy and programmatic action on global, regional, and national levels in order to:

- Reduce instances of separation and abandonment of children;
- Reunite children outside family care with their families, wherever possible and appropriate;
- Increase, strengthen and support family and community-based care options for children who cannot be cared for by their parents;
- Establish international and national standards for all forms of care for children without adequate family care and mechanisms for ensuring compliance; and
- Ensure that residential institutions are used in a very limited manner and only when appropriate.

The BCN is guided by the UNCRC, the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, and the 2003 Stockholm Conference on Residential Care Declaration. The BCN is *not a legal entity* but an interagency consortium that maintains a relatively informal structure.

2. BCN Resources

The activities of the BCN are undertaken with the financial and technical resources of the organizations that are members of the Steering Committee, as well as additional resources that they are able to secure for the BCN.

3. The BCN Steering Committee

(1) Membership: The membership of the Steering Committee is to be determined in keeping with the following:

- The Steering Committee of 6-10 members will be recruited from among organizations connected with better care and child protection issues, including preservation of family care, interim and permanent family care, and family reunification;
- Efforts will be made to recruit members from the Global South.
- Annually, during the Annual Meeting, the BCN Steering Committee will review and evaluate its composition. Any member of the Steering Committee which has not fulfilled the above expectations may be asked to cede its position on the Committee to a new member. The Steering Committee can entrust the Chair(s) and designated members with approaching potential new members and making recommendations to the Steering Committee as a whole.

The members of the Steering Committee., as of May 2011, are: Cooperative Relief and Assistance Everywhere (CARE USA), Firelight Foundation, Save the Children , United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) and the Office of HIV/AIDS (OHA) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

(2) Consideration for Membership

- (a) Steering Committee membership is by invitation of the current members.
- (b) The decision to admit a new member belongs to the Steering Committee, which makes this decision by consensus.
- (c) Each member of the Steering Committee is expected to:
 - Have demonstrated commitment to the purposes of the BCN listed above;
 - Be prepared to commit the time of a staff member who can consistently represent the member organization in the BCN meetings and periodic consultations where a Steering Committee decision must be made;
 - Provide a minimum annual financial contribution to the budget of the Secretariat of USD 5,000 or an equivalent in-kind contribution (this may be waived for organizations based in the developing world able to make a significant technical contribution to the BCN);
 - Participate in meetings of the Steering Committee and such decision making between those meetings as may be necessary to support the functioning of the BCN; and
 - Promote the aims and activities of BCN to their own organisation, as well as other organisations and audiences, including donors,

(3) Primary responsibilities and obligations of the organizations on the BCN Steering Committee are to:

- Designate an individual to act as its representative on the Steering Committee;
- Designate an individual to act as a secondary point of contact;
- Ensure participation in the Annual Meeting and occasional virtual meetings;
- Respond to periodic requests for guidance from the Secretariat;
- Participate as an active member of the BCN Advisory Group; and

- Take responsibility for leading activities around at least one of area of work in the Secretariat's annual work plan.

Collectively, the members of the Steering Committee will:

- Appoint 1 (or a maximum of 2) Steering Committee member(s) to serve as chair(s) to provide primary supervision to BCN Secretariat staff.
- Coordinate and collaborate with the Secretariat in the attainment of BCN objectives and the implementation of activities;
- Approve the annual work plan of the BCN Secretariat and, as appropriate, provide guidance regarding its implementation;
- Provide guidance on matters of BCN policy;
- Review annual and periodic progress reports submitted by the Secretariat; and
- Provide guidance and support on funding proposals prepared by the BCN Secretariat.

(4) Meetings

(a) The Annual Meeting requires a majority of all the BCN Steering Committee members who are represented in person or by phone (including valid proxies of the same organization).

(b) The Steering Committee meets at least three times per year. In addition to the Annual Meeting, at least two additional meeting are held annually, normally by conference call. Additional, special meetings may be convened, as necessary.

(c) The Annual Meeting is hosted by one its members, as agreed by the Steering Committee and is facilitated by the BCN Secretariat. The Secretariat prepares the agenda and supporting documents and, in advance, submits these to members for review.

(d) Responsibilities of the Annual Meeting:

- Consider and approve the agenda of the Annual Meeting;
- Review the annual report and financial statement submitted by the BCN Secretariat;
- Review and assess the work of BCN over the previous year;
- Define or confirm BCN's strategic priorities;
- Provide guidance and approve the Secretariat's annual work plan;
- Review the membership of the BCN Steering Group, removing or adding members as appropriate;
- Review membership of the BCN technical Advisory Group, removing or adding members as appropriate;
- Consider any other business as agreed between the Chair(s), Steering Group members and the Secretariat; and
- Set the date and location of next Annual Meeting.

(e) The minutes of the Annual Meeting are prepared by the Secretariat and sent to the Committee members for review and approval.

(5) BCN Steering Committee Chair(s)

(a) Roles and Responsibilities:

- Lead the Steering Committee and guide the Secretariat in the execution of the BCN work plan;
- Chair Steering Committee conference calls(unless deferred to the Secretariat) and annual in-person meetings;
- Work with the Steering Committee member responsible for employing the personnel of the BCN Secretariat regarding their hiring, supervision; and if necessary termination;
- Represent BCN in public forums, with partners and stakeholders, and in correspondence, as necessary;
- Engage Steering Committee members in key BCN initiatives, as necessary;
- Convene special Steering Committee meetings, as necessary; and
- Provide direct support to BCN Secretariat for fundraising efforts.

(b) Terms of Office: 1 year, renewable

(c) Method of Selection:

- Candidates for the position of Chair(s) will be nominated by the Steering Committee, and elected by majority vote of the Steering Committee.
- The term will expire one year after official appointment.

4. The Better Care Network Secretariat

(1) As agreed at the meeting of the Steering Committee members in New York in August 2005, the BCN established a Secretariat, which operates with the guidance and direction of the Steering Committee.

(2) The BCN Secretariat, which is currently composed of a Senior Coordinator and an Assistant Coordinator, is responsible for implementation of the BCN's primary activities.

(3) With the agreement of the Steering Committee, the employing agency, the Chair(s), and the agency providing physical hosting arrangements for the Secretariat arrange for oversight and supervision of the personnel of the BCN Secretariat.

[At present, CARE USA, is the host organization responsible for the human resource activities related to the BCN Secretariat. The BCN Secretariat is based at UNICEF Headquarters in New York, which provides day-to-day oversight of the members of the Secretariat and provision for essential work space, communication and internet facilities, and computer equipment.]

(4) The Secretariat's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Compiling, developing, and making widely available to all regions technical information and guidance on better care issues and providing related guidance;
- Facilitating the development and implementation of a work plan in accordance with the BCN and Steering Committees objectives and strategic plan;
- Managing and updating the BCN website and listserv;
- Coordinating the sharing of information with the BCN Steering Committee and Advisory Group members;

- Preparing materials and presentations describing the work of the BCN;
 - Communicating the work of the BCN and its achievements to donors, partners, and stakeholders at meetings and conferences;
 - Coordinating the representation of the BCN at key events, and as appropriate and in keeping with the network's Mission Statement and operational policies, representing the BCN;
 - Identifying experts in the field of child protection, child wellbeing, child development, social work, and alternative care and inviting them to join the listserv and/or Advisory Group, in keeping with priorities established by the Steering Committee;
 - Facilitating and coordinating technical inputs from Advisory Group members and coordinating the involvement of the Advisory Group as a whole;
 - Organizing the Steering Committee Annual Meeting, Advisory Group meetings, and other events of the BCN;
 - In consultation with Steering Committee members, identifying possible sources of funding, liaising with potential donors and preparing funding proposals;
 - Coordinating development and printing of BCN publications;
 - Producing regular narrative and financial reports to be submitted to BCN Steering Committee members and donors as necessary; and
 - Producing the annual report and financial statement to be approved by BCN Steering Committee members at the Annual Meeting.
- (5) Responsibility and accounting for funds designated for the operation and activities of the BCN Secretariat rests with the organization(s) receiving and managing those funds, with the support of the BCN Secretariat. With the support of the finance section of the organization(s) concerned, the BCN Secretariat will produce an annual report and financial statement to be submitted to Steering Committee members in advance of the Annual Meeting.
- (6) The implementation of the workplan of the BCN Secretariat is evaluated by the BCN Steering Committee, and, when financially possible, through periodic independent technical assessments of the BCN's activities and results achieved.

5. Better Care Network Advisory Group

(1) The BCN Advisory Group is an essential component of BCN's technical capacity in identifying and providing relevant information and resource material to practitioners and policy-makers as well as providing technical advice on protection and care issues. Currently, there are 50 members worldwide from multilateral agencies, academic institutions, international and local non-governmental organizations, local organizations and networks, foundations, and donor agencies.

(2) Consideration for Membership

(a) BCN Advisory Group membership is by invitation via the BCN Secretariat in consultation with the BCN Steering Committee members or Chair(s), in keeping with priorities approved by the Steering Committee. It seeks to ensure that that, collectively, members include a broad regional representation.

(b) For an individual to become a member of the BCN Advisory Group she or he must:

- Have the experience and technical capacity and credibility to substantially contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the BCN;
- Have the ability to influence a broader range of actors within his or her sphere; and
- Have demonstrated commitment to the purposes of the BCN, as listed above.

(3) Each member participates in his or her individual capacity. The primary responsibilities and obligations of the BCN Advisory Group members are to:

- Provide technical assistance, advise, and expertise on protection and care issues to the BCN Secretariat as needed;
- Advise on strategic priorities and the work plan of the BCN Secretariat;
- Propose joint initiatives (where appropriate) that could take place within the Advisory Group membership;
- Lead or contribute, as appropriate, to initiatives; and
- Promote the aims and activities of the BCN in appropriate forums.

(4) The BCN Advisory Group members contribute individually at the request of the Secretariat and may meet together as a group, as needed.

(5) During the BCN Annual Meeting, the BCN Secretariat will seek the guidance of the Steering Committee concerning the composition of the Advisory Group and the priorities for its incorporation of priority technical capacities, regional representation and any other essential characteristics.

6. Better Care Network Country and Regional Chapters

(1) Affiliation with the BCN as a national or regional chapter and the use of the BCN logo and name requires the approval of the BCN Secretariat and Steering Committee.

(2) Based on discussions with the BCN Secretariat and Steering Committee, the first national chapter, the Better Care Network Netherlands Chapter, opened in November 2007.

(3) A BCN country or regional chapter should be based upon strong initiatives, networks, and commitments within the relevant geographic area and the need for such a network. It must have strong technical and financial support and sustainability beyond that which may be provided by the BCN (although there may be opportunities for the BCN Steering Committee to provide a small amount of seed money for a chapter).

(4) Prior to beginning its work, a BCN country or regional chapter is expected to:

- Develop a clear statement of purpose in keeping with that of BCN and a strategy to address it;
- Form a core group to provide technical guidance and financial and/or in-kind support;
- Prepare guiding principles of the chapter in keeping with the BCN principles listed above;
- Prepare a 2-3 year strategic work plan and budget; and
- Secure sufficient financial and in-kind support to cover minimum of 2 years of operational costs.

(5) A national or regional chapter's responsibilities are expected to include, but are not limited to:

- Serving as a platform for and facilitating active information exchange on family preservation, interim and permanent family care, family reunification, and other better care issues at country and/or regional level;
- Supporting the development of and advocating for technically sound policy and programmatic action on these issues with local government bodies, donors, and local organizations;
- Communicating the work of the chapter to donors, partners, and stakeholders at country-level and regional meetings and conferences;
- Providing technical assistance and support to country and regional-level partners as needed;
- Working towards establishing national standards for all forms of care for children without adequate family care and mechanisms for ensuring compliance in keeping with the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care; and
- Communicating and collaborating with the global BCN Secretariat on a regular basis.

(6) A BCN chapter must adhere to and uphold the BCN principles listed at the beginning of this document. In order to ensure this commitment, strong relations between the BCN national or regional chapter and the global BCN Secretariat are needed (e.g. quarterly conference calls, ongoing information sharing, linking to BCN website). *If at any time, the global BCN Steering Committee and Secretariat finds that a chapter is not adhering to BCN's overarching principles and standards, all support and assistance will be revoked, including withdrawing the use of the BCN name, logo, identification on the BCN website, and any financial resources that have been provided .*