

INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF THE DEINSTITUTIONALISATION PROCESS IN GEORGIA

June 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The consultant, and UNICEF, wishes to thank the staff of Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA), Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and the Non Government Organisations (NGOs,) especially Georgia Association of Social Workers (GASW,) Children of Georgia, EveryChild and Save the Children for giving their time, knowledge and expertise during the preparation of this independent assessment.

The independent assessment and report was conducted and prepared by Andrew Dunn, during the period March to June 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March and April 2010 an independent assessment of the deinstitutionalisation of children from special education boarding schools and child care institutions was carried out with the support of UNICEF and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs and (I)NGOs notably EveryChild, Save the Children and the Children of Georgia.

The methodology used in the independent assessment was key informant interviews and visits to reintegrated children, children in foster care, small group homes, child care institutions, special education facilities and to Social Service Agency offices. Discussions were also held with ministry headquarter staff and the staff of (I)NGOs.

In common with other CIS/CEE countries Georgia is working to change the impact of previous policies of institutionalisation of children with disabilities and children from poor families. The use institutional care in Georgia had been less widespread than neighbouring countries and the country had already made significant efforts to reduce the number of children in these places from 5,000+ in 2005 down to about 1200 in 2009. Many children had already been returned to live with parents, placed in foster care or placed in newly established small group homes. Reflecting current international child care policies and practices, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs Child Action Plan for 2008 to 2011 had “deinstitutionalisation” as one of its three main goals. A particular challenge for this Ministry was that the caseload of children still residing in the child care institutions were expected to be “difficult to place” or hard to reintegrate cases.

In essence the independent assessment examined the deinstitutionalisation process (1) from 8 special education boarding schools and (2) from 10 child care institutions during the period 2010 to March 2011.

(1) EveryChild together with Children of Georgia assessed 8 Ministry of Education and Science special education boarding schools and the social and education needs of 306 children who were enrolled. 54% of these children were assessed as not requiring special education. Few of the schools were found to be delivering quality education and most of the premises were in a poor state of repair. 111 children were successfully reintegrated into their biological families, 9 children were placed in guardianship with relatives and 6 children were placed in kinship care. The challenges that remain are that 48 children could not be immediately reintegrated and were transferred into the child care institutions. Many of the children assessed as requiring special education remained in the boarding school system. A small number of children assessed as having learning difficulties were enrolled into the state public school system after a very brief orientation to inclusive education within these schools.

The positive policy outcomes were that the Ministry of Education and Science decided to close 5 poorly functioning schools and to henceforth limit admissions to special schools only to children who had been assessed as needing special education. One of the negative aspects was that the decision to close 2 schools was counter to the assessing (I)NGO recommendations. The speed of the closure of these schools left the NGOs under pressure, led to hastily planned reintegration and in the view of the NGOs, placement of children that was insufficiently prepared and not necessarily in their best interests.

(2) During 2010 and up to March 2011, the social workers of the Social Service Agency supported by NGOs, particularly Save the Children, assessed 557 children living in 10 child care institutions, of these 217 children were supported to return home or had a new non-institutional placement. Relatively few children were placed in small group homes. Major challenges to the reintegration of children were chronic poverty and homelessness of the children's families. The Social Service Agency social workers numbering about 200 are relatively new in post and have few services or resources to offer families, to support them to care for the children. Most of the social workers interviewed and the directors of child care institutions thought that with more time and resources, more children could have been returned to live with their families.

The independent assessment found children had been placed into families that were often very poor, but that the parents wanted to care for their children and that there were no reports of child protection concerns. Where needed and available financial and material resources had been appropriately allocated. The children had been followed up by social workers. Those children visited in foster care appeared to be enjoying good standards of care. The placements seemed appropriate and in the child's best interests. The Social Service Agency social workers were supervising the child and foster parents.

The independent assessment findings deal with both deinstitutionalisation processes together as the issues are similar. The achievement of the deinstitutionalisation process is that out of 863 children who were assessed, only 441 of these children remain in the institutions. Five boarding schools and 2 child care institutions have been closed. The major challenge is to develop and administer a State and NGO reintegration package that overcomes the remaining financial and housing barriers to reintegration. For those children, who for child protection reasons, cannot immediately return home the challenge is to establish a bank of foster parents living close to the child's home area, to enable a child to be matched and placed with foster parents. The second option is to ensure that there are places available in small group homes for children who cannot settle in family life or who are unwilling to be fostered.

The information system being used is not yet adequate to allow child care placement planning. The policy direction with regard to deinstitutionalisation is positive, but the current legislation is not supportive of a developing professional social work service. Issues of parental responsibility are not covered and the grounds for admitting a child into care are out dated. The partnership and cooperation between government and non-government organisations has in the main been positive and a good learning experience. The potential to develop public private partnerships to deliver child care and alternative care services is considerable.

The major recommendations are that the information and case management systems need upgrading, which will help in the delivery of best practice services. Similarly it is important that foster care and small group home places are made available close to the families and children that require them. As the Child Action Plan is in its final year it is recommended that this plan is reviewed and consideration given to a new goal of developing family support services and prevention. Also that the gatekeeping policy is further developed to cover admission to 24-hour care and the allocation of family support services.

ACRONYMS

CCI	-	Child Care Institution
GASW	-	Georgia Association of Social Workers
GoG	-	Government of Georgia
INGO	-	International Non Government Organisation
MOES	-	Ministry of Education and Science
MOLHSA	-	Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs
NGO	-	Non-Government Organisation
SC	-	Save the Children
SGH	-	Small Group Home
SSA	-	Social Service Agency of MOLHSA
UNCRC	-	United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child
UNICEF	-	United Nations Children's Fund

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT

The task was to conduct an independent assessment around the challenges and successes of the deinstitutionalisation process and outcomes for children to inform future work.

The Consultant's role was to assess the quality of de-institutionalization efforts of Ministry of Education and Science (MoES,) Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) and the outcomes for deinstitutionalized children as supported by UNICEF and NGO partners. Specifically, the consultant looked at the process of de-institutionalization in 2-3 institutions within the sphere of MoLHSA, and the 5 boarding schools within the sphere of MOES that were assessed and closed in 2009-2010.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment was carried out during two visits to Georgia by the consultant from 23 March to 1 April 2011 and from 1 May 2011 to 7 May 2011. For the purposes of the independent assessment a desk review was carried out using information collected for and during a prior visit to Georgia to work with UNICEF and partners on the Child Care Reform Process, (this included visits to Tbilisi Infants Home, Rustavi Child Care Institution, and small group homes in Tbilisi and Rustavi.)

For the independent assessment key informant interviews or meetings were held with staff from MoLHSA, MoES, UNICEF, INGOs and NGOs.

MoLHSA, MOES, Save the Children, EveryChild, Children of Georgia and Georgia Association of Social Workers have provided data on the deinstitutionalisation process. Information has been used from key informant interviews and visits to:

- ❖ Households/families caring for of reunited children x 5.
- ❖ Foster Parent/Families x 4.
- ❖ Child Care Institutions; Tbilisi, Tskneti, Surami, Telavi.
- ❖ Small Group Homes in Dusheti, Telavi, Tbilisi and Rustavi.
- ❖ Special Education Boarding School, Tbilisi.
- ❖ Public School – Gurjaani.

- ❖ Social Work Offices in Telavi, Dusheti, Lagodekhi, Khasuri, Isani-Sangori and Rustavi.

For reasons of confidentiality the names of children, their families and foster parents have not been included.

This report deals separately with the deinstitutionalisation in the Special Boarding Schools and the Child Care Institutions, as they were separate processes. However the findings and recommendations are broadly similar and are dealt with together.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION

The child's right to education, without discrimination is to be found in a number of declarations and conventions. The right to education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enhanced in Article 13 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which state that: "Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages" and "Elementary education shall be compulsory." Articles 28 and 29 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child describe a child's right to education in similar terms. In 1990 the World Conference on Education for All and the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 have added frameworks for achieving the right to education. The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action was agreed in 1994, informed by the principle of inclusion and by the recognition of the need to work towards "schools for all" - an important contribution to the agenda for achieving education for all and for making schools educationally more effective. Internationally the trend has been to try and include children with special needs in mainstream schools. The transfer of children out of these special boarding schools is in line with these frameworks.

Towards the end of the last decade the policy in Georgia had been shifting to take into account the developing international framework on child care and protection:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly the right of the child with regard to family care
- Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendation Rec (2005)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the rights of children living in residential institutions
- Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children recognised by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 2009.

GEORGIA POLICY CONTEXT ON CHILD CARE AND "SPECIAL NEEDS" EDUCATION

The trend over the last five to ten years in Georgia and other CEE/CIS countries has been to reduce the number of children living in large institutions. The placement of children in institutions was a result of social policy to help parents and the State manage the effects of poverty and disability. In general special boarding schools were used for children with disabilities and learning difficulties; child care institutions for children living in poverty and facing other social problems.

In Georgia the culmination of policy development, donor support together with advocacy and support from UNICEF and NGOs enabled MoES to reassess it's provision of

education for children with special needs and MoLHSA to begin a more systematic process of deinstitutionalisation in 2010. This process is still underway and is projected to continue through 2011 and 2012.

The immediate context for the deinstitutionalisation in 2010/2011 are the recent developments to the child care system in Georgia with Government's Children's Action Plan (2008-2011) and the Child Care Standards. According to UNICEF, ^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} the data from the Government of Georgia indicates continued decreases in the number of children in residential institutions from approximately 5,000 in 2005 down to 1060 in 2010. The number of institutions decreased from 46 to 18 during the same time period. It is stated that the decrease was largely achieved through an expansion of alternatives, including foster care (over 600 placements in 2010 compared with 490 in 2008,) community based family support / day care centres, particularly for children with disability (22 in 2010,) and new small group homes (11 in 2010.) The increase in availability of alternative care is in tandem with improved gatekeeping at district level from guardianship and care panels who decide and monitor placements of children. MoLHSA is leading the deinstitutionalisation process, and is making a major effort to close the remaining large institutions for children in the coming two years.

BACKGROUND TO THE MANAGEMENT OF CHILD CARE PROVISION IN GEORGIA

Until 2009 the MOES managed the provision of children's social services through the Child Care Division. This included both child care and education for children with special needs and/or who came from families with social problems. The services provided were:

- Special Boarding Schools
- The Child Care Institutions
- Family support through guardianship and care
- Adoption

Admission to these facilities or the provision of services was, prior to reforms, via the Commission for Minors.

In 2001 MOES decentralised child care services to raion level with the provision of education resource centres to which were attached social service centres. 18 social workers were appointed to cover the 67 raions.

From 2004 the Commission for Minors was dissolved and decision-making regarding the provision of child care services was decentralised to regional level through the establishment of Guardianship and Care Panels. Part of their role was to monitor and oversee the decision making by the social workers. They had a gatekeeping role and monitored the use of state services and resources.

Admissions to boarding school was normally through the education resource centre but it appears that in some cases admission was done directly by the staff of the school at the request of the parents. Not all children in the boarding schools have a disability or any special education needs. Similarly some children the child care institutions were disabled and have special learning needs.

FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT Child Protection Section input into UNICEF Annual Workplan 2011

In some of the cases the parents' of children in the child care institutions have had their parental rights suspended or restricted by the courts. But more usually admission and monitoring is the responsibility of the guardianship and care panels.

In 2009 the responsibility for social services for children was transferred to the Social Service Agency in the MoLHSA. Social workers were appointed to each raion and now there are 200 social workers working at raion level. Responsibility for managing children's homes became the task of the State Care Agency that also manages facilities for the elderly. Boarding Schools and assessment of children with special education needs remained with MoES.

Social Work Practice in Georgia

Until recent years the child care in Georgia was an administrative task allocating child care services to those children who met the criteria of beneficiary as provided for in the law. Poverty, homelessness, single parenthood, disability, neglect were criteria by which children were viewed as being deprived of parental care. Services were limited financial support or the provision of residential care. Social workers were not trained in counselling, casework and effective case management was rarely practised. It seems that once a child was placed in residential care little work was done with families in regard to assisting eventual reintegration with the family. Social workers were desk bound and confined their practice to individual care plans with the child.

Professional social work in Georgia is in its early stages of development. Although MoLHSA Social Services Agency (SSA,) has posted social workers to every raion, they are more concentrated in regional centres and the capital. These government social workers have received 3 months social work certificate training. There are now graduate social work and master's courses at universities in Georgia, but these are recent developments and only one or two groups of students have so far graduated. The graduate students are usually employed by NGOs who offer more rewarding terms and conditions.

The last three years has seen rapid development of social services for children, there is the provision of day care and targeted social assistance to very poor families. Social workers with the SSA have limited experience and few resources for the work in preventing family breakdown or working with parents to enable children to return to live with families. Although there is now a system of referral for child abuse cases, in reality the social workers have a limited but growing experience of handling child abuse cases.

Disability and education

Georgia has been practising the medical model with regard to education for children with disabilities, which were seen to arise from difficulties or impairments in the child or young person. Gradually being introduced is a more inclusive social model looking at barriers to learning, participation and changing the education environment. However Georgia still has some progress to make and is now addressing the problem by looking at children with "special education needs" and categorising children according to their educational need. While moving in the right direction Georgia's movement on inclusive policies, cultures and practices is in its infancy.

There are similarities in the deinstitutionalization from boarding schools and the children's homes. The policy outcomes were shared, the methodology was similar but some of the issues with regard to process and implementation have overlaps but are distinct, and this report will deal with the processes separately.

DEINSTITUTIONALISATION FROM THE BOARDING SCHOOLS

In 2010, MoES took the initiative to work with UNICEF and NGO partners to assess 306 children attending 8 special education boarding schools, which in practice closely resembled large scale child care institutions. There was an assessment of the children's education and care needs, which appears to have been thorough and comprehensive. The following schools were assessed:

1. Samtredia public school # 15
2. Kokhnari School # 2 in Chokhatauri raion (Now closed)
3. Kutaisi Public School # 45 with residential care for children with hearing impairments
4. Chiatura Auxiliary Public School # 12 with residential care
5. Gurjaani School with residential care for children with cerebral palsy (Now closed)
6. Zemo Bodbe School (Now closed)
7. Gumati School # 2 in Kutaisi (Now closed)
8. Kachreti # 2 Public School (Now closed)

Objectives

According to the interim report ^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} the project aims were to study and assess children currently residing in 8 special boarding schools, establish their needs in the "process of optimization" and carry out deinstitutionalisation by offering the children the best alternative child care services. It was expected that the majority of children would be deinstitutionalized and recommendations provided for the smooth process of the schools' optimisation.

The initial expectation was for a project duration of 4 months. This timeframe was realistic for the assessment phase but had to be extended for a further 6 months to allow for planned reintegration, and transfer of children into the SSA care system or transfer of children to other special schools.

It was strongly stated that the project recommendations would be built on the best interests of the child.

Approach

For the NGOs, 2 teams of psychologists/experts and 8 teams of social workers were involved in the implementation of the project, supervised by two social work technical advisors. The approach was to undertake a social work assessment and an assessment of the child's educational needs. The social work assessment of the child's needs included 4-5 weeks observation of the child, interviews with the child and carers to find out the child's needs and interests. The child's family was also visited "to find out the child's needs and identifying opportunities for their re-integration; assessing family reliability, motivation for the child's return in the family, socio-economic conditions of the child's family, reasons for the child's institutionalisation, etc."

Findings taken from the NGO assessment and reports

With regard to the provision of education the Interim Report^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} found that the “Academic process at Zemo Bodbe, Gurjaani, Gumati and Kokhnari boarding schools are practically not taking place.” 54% of the children in these 8 schools were assessed as not needing special education, for example in Kutaisi School for Children with Hearing Impairments, 13 out of the 55 children were found to have normal hearing. Nearly all the children in the assessed left the boarding schools for holidays. Several of the schools were described as being in a dilapidated condition or unhygienic.

During 2010, MOES closed 5 of these boarding schools. The immediate closure of 2 (Kokhnari and Gumati) was recommended by the NGOs in their interim report. The report further recommended the cessation of education activities but not the residential child care at Zemo Bodbe, and the closure of Gurjaani School within 12 months. The immediate additional closure of Kachreti, Zemo-Bodbe and Gurjaani special schools was decided upon by MoES who did not follow the letter of the NGO recommendations in this respect. The view of the NGOs involved in the project was that these additional closures led to rushed decision making with regard to; placements, poor preparation of children, families and schools where inclusive practices for children with learning difficulties had to be quickly learnt. The NGOs thought that some decisions were not in the child’s best interests.

Outcomes for the assessed children

According to the EveryChild/Children of Georgia Report^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} 33 children enrolled on the boarding schools were not actually attending the schools or had “graduated.” These children could not be found. The project social work teams assessed the remaining 273 children: the placements after the care planning and review at the end of the project are reported as the following:

Remained in Special Education Boarding Schools or other boarding education

87 children remain as boarders in special education schools (either in the same institutions, or they were transferred to another special school after the closure of the one they originally attended.) These children are presumably the children found to have special education needs though this is not explicitly stated in the reports.

6 children were enrolled into Kachreti Vocational School as boarders and all are expected to return to their families after graduation.

Transferred into the care system

48 children were transferred to child care institutions managed by MoLHSA State Care Agency (SCA.) These were Telavi, Kojori, Rustavi and Tbilisi Child Care institutions.

3 children were placed in small group homes (1 in SOS village in Kutaisi, 1 in Breath SGH in Kutaisi, and 1 in a SGH in Etseri.)

2 children were placed in foster care.

Reintegrated with their families

111 children were reintegrated back with their biological families.

9 children were placed in guardianship with relatives.

^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} EveryChild, Children of Georgia 2010. Interim Report, Assessment of 8 Special Boarding Schools with the Aim of their Optimization

^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} EveryChild and Children of Georgia 2011, Draft Final Report “In Attempt to Better Lives” Assessment of 8 Special Boarding Schools managed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

6 children were placed in kinship care.

Unresolved

1 case still remains open. This is the case of a girl with challenging behaviour from Kachreti, for whom a suitable placement was not found.

While placing children with their families EveryChild referred 13 cases of a “child being in need of protection” to SSA. According to EveryChild these children were referred through the mandatory child abuse referral procedures. ^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT}

EveryChild social workers were able to assist reintegrated children with modest material assistance and to refer the families to the SSA for targeted social assistance. EveryChild continued to monitor and support all children transferred to new placements or returned home for the duration of the project.

DEINSTITUTIONALISATION FROM CHILD CARE INSTITUTIONS

The process of deinstitutionalization has been on going in Georgia for many years. Government and children’s organisations have acknowledged the living conditions in these large dilapidated institutions as poor and that they do not serve the child’s best interests. At the beginning of 2010 there were 22 child care institutions in Georgia managed by MoLHSA. Ten of these institutions were assessed and care plans made for the children. During 2010 MoLHSA closed the institutions in Dusheti and Lagodekhi

Findings taken from the Save the Children Report

From the Save the Children Report, ^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} their 2010 children’s assessment showed that most of the **346 children** in the six institutions ^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} jointly assessed were from the regions where the institutions were located. More than 97% of resident children had at least one parent alive and known. The most frequent reason for admission into the institutions was poverty. Other reasons included parental divorce/remarriage, inadequate parental care, family homelessness, family violence and alcohol abuse and mothers’ absence due to imprisonment or emigration. The assessment resulted in individual service plans for all children, and the reintegration of **144 children** into their families and communities.

Objectives

The problem formulation by GoG in the 2008-2011 Children’s Governmental Action Plan ^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} was that “Wide use of “large-scale” care institutions is harmful for the development of the child.” The goal was for the state, through different sectors, to ensure emotional, psychosocial and individual development of children deprived of care in the family or in an environment resembling family care. The objective was to “Ensure high-quality, needs-based, individual and varied services for children in need by the state care system at the local level.” The objective was to be achieved by:

^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} Joint order of the Minister of Labour, Health, and Social Affairs of Georgia, the Minister of Interior of Georgia and the Minister of Education of Georgia on “Procedures for Child Protection Referral and adoption of forms” March 2010, Tbilisi

^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} Save the Children in Georgia, 2010. *Rebuilding Lives Project, September 3, 2004 – September 2, 2010* Final Report

^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} Please see Save the Children 2010, *Rapid Assessment of Residential Childcare Institutions in Georgia*, Surami, Tskneti, Saguramo, Aspindza, Tashiskari and Tbilisi

^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} Decree of the Georgian Government #869, December 10, 2009, Tbilisi, on approving 2008-11 Children’s Action Plan

1. Developing family substitute services;
2. Development of a robust gatekeeping and decision-making system;
3. Closing the majority of large-scale child care institutions by 2012 and
4. Awareness raising regarding these processes.

Approach

Assessment and decision making

Working together, the NGOs (usually Save the Children) and SSA Social Workers conducted rapid assessments of 6 child care institutions using tools and methods developed by Our Home Association (Poland)/Save the Children (SC) and EveryChild. These assessments were to firstly, look at the “optimization possibilities” of these institutions through assessing the infrastructure, facilities, human resources and care of the children. It was thought that these homes could be transformed and have another use such as a small group home or day care centre. Secondly assessments were made of the psychosocial needs of the children and whether these needs could be better met in a non-institutional placement.

The methodology^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} used to assess the children in care and their families was similar for all the institutions and included a database jointly designed by the SSA and Save the Children for the children’s document review. For the comprehensive assessment of individual children and their families, the standard statutory social workers’ methodology was used. This is an initial assessment of the child, then the family followed by completing a full comprehensive assessment of the child and the family.

Save the Children and SSA assembled teams of social workers numbering from 9 to 22 personnel to conduct the assessments during February, March and April 2010. Stage one of the process was looking at the documentation that was available to provide information on:

- Resident children; their numbers, age, gender and place of origin.
- Issues related to children’s placement in residential care (where the children lived before placement, who made the placement decision, the reasons for the decision and length of stay in institutional care.)
- Children’s families (number of children with parents and families, frequency of contact with the children and how many children have siblings in institutions and/or elsewhere.)
- Education of resident children (school enrollment, grade level, school performance), and
- Health of resident children (including possible disabilities.)

Stage two of the process was individual interviews with the child followed by visits and interviews with the family. Provision was made for 10 days to complete the child assessment, 25 days to undertake the family assessment and then prepare a care plan to be discussed by the NGO and SSA social workers conducting the assessment of the institution, before taking the recommendations to the guardianship and care panel for ratification. The social worker who assessed the child was not always the same social worker who visited the family.

Usually working independently, SSA social workers assessed the needs of children in 4

FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT Save the Children, 2010, Rapid Assessment of Residential Child Care Institutions in Georgia 2010. Surami Childcare Institution

other child care institutions, ^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} but they used a similar approach

Support for reintegration, new placements and follow up

Although many of the reintegrated children spent time with their families during holiday periods, all children assessed as being able to return home, visited their family at least once in the month prior to reintegration. Usually there was six months pre reunification or new placement work completed with the child, family, foster parents or the small group homes.

Families were assisted to apply for targeted social assistance, vouchers for food or day care where this was appropriate and Save the Children had available financial and material assistance to overcome barriers to reintegration such as clothing, bedding, facilities for the child at home. In some cases rent was paid or the home was renovated prior to the return of the child. This budget was limited and was not able to meet all material needs. Generally the children were followed up and visited until the end of the project. SSA social workers are obliged to visit for 6 months.

Outcomes for the assessed children

From March 2010 until today **557** children were assessed in 10 children's homes, by the SSA and NGO partners. (This figure does not include the children in Satnoeba and Momavli Sakhli Child Care Institutions where 38 and 29 children have just been assessed in 2011.) Out of the **557** children who were assessed, **217** children went home or had a new non-institutional placement.

Remained in 24 hour residential care or transferred to a boarding school

295 children did not have a change of placement and remained in their original child care institution.

11 children were transferred to other child care institutions to be nearer their families or relatives.

4 children were placed in boarding school catering for children talented at mathematics.

12 children were transferred to small group homes.

3 children were placed in children's homes run by the church by guardianship orders.

Reintegrated with their families, adopted or fostered

170 children were reintegrated with their families.

6 children were placed for adoption.

17 children were placed in foster care; the majority of these placements were with relatives.

5 children left the institutional care to be married.

13 children were found to be over 18 years old.

21 children could not be found.

INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT - THE DEINSTITUTIONALISATION PROCESS

Children reintegrated with families

All the reintegrated children that were visited were from poor families. For most of these children the fathers were deceased or absent. However there were no immediate concerns from social workers or reports that these children were at risk of harm or in need of protection. Two of the children visited in one family had been listed as a child protection case by the NGO concerned who had wanted a residential care placement for the children who were previously in a special education boarding school. The mother refused to admit the children into an institution, wanted the children back home and the initial concern that they were at risk from a stepfather disappeared when he left the household. Another child reintegrated from a special boarding school who had also been previously placed in an infant's home was not attending the local school because he said he had no suitable shoes. Several reintegrated children were visited who had received appropriate financial assistance from NGOs to renovate the facilities in the family home for their return. One family had received help with rent for housing and had been linked to an NGO project providing income generation projects; they received 20 chickens.

Foster care placements

All the foster parents visited had been assessed and registered by SSA social workers. One of the foster parents had been a staff member at one of the closed child care institutions. This Georgian couple were looking after 3 Azerbaijani sisters. In one of the cases an aunt was looking after 2 children after her home had been renovated by an NGO. All of the foster care cases appeared to be in the child's best interests and foster parents were aware of the possible eventual reintegration of some of the children with their parent(s). Foster parent allowances were being paid and the families supervised by SSA social workers. According to the social worker in Khasuri some of the foster parents registered by her office had had children placed who originated from Tbilisi.

Small Group Homes

The 5 small group homes visited (run by 3 different NGOs) are consistent in their approach and team of staff. Often there is a non-resident NGO coordinator who may be responsible for more than one home or other projects. Usually there are two staff (a married couple) who provide care on a 24-hour basis for the five weekdays who are then replaced by another couple at the weekends. Some of the homes had very high material conditions using additional NGO income as well as the state grant. One SGH was managing on the state grant. Relatively few children had been placed in the SGHs as a result of the deinstitutionalization process in the past two years. For instance in Telavi 22 children were in SGHs, 15 had been transferred from the Telavi Child Care Institution prior to the 2010 deinstitutionalisation programme, 5 had been transferred from institutions in other regions and 2 were new admissions from the community. One home in Rustavi had admitted "street children" referrals from Tbilisi. However there were 7 transfers to the Dusheti Small Group Home from the Dusheti Child Care Institution. Many of the children in SGHs received visits from their families. Two children in a Rustavi SGH were being placed with foster parents but otherwise the SGHs are becoming permanent places of residence for the children.

Several issues arise from the visits to small group homes:

- Some of the SGHs reported having no control over admissions. The Guardianship and Care Panels can send them children if there are available places. The mission

statements of the SGHs that state that they provide care for only certain client groups are not always respected.

- SSA Social Workers are not visiting the children on a regular basis in some of the SGHs particularly in Tbilisi.
- When married couples are employed, it seems that if one has to leave or is dismissed then both are most likely to have to leave.

The Education Facilities

Tbilisi Public School 200 is a school for children with special needs. It has recently been renovated. 155 children attend the school of which 96 are boys and 59 girls. 125 children are boarders of which 35% are from Tbilisi. 15 are day pupils and another 15 attend as day pupils but also stay on after wards for day care. After the closure of the 5 special education boarding schools the Tbilisi school received 32 transfers. Only one child has not settled.

After the closure of the Special Education Boarding Schools, Gurjaani Public School has enrolled 3 children with special learning needs. The children have individual learning plans and the school has been supported by psychologists employed by the NGO Children of Georgia, who are also working with other public schools in the Gurjaani area. The school now has an inclusive education coordinator and 20 staff have received training to prepare them for teaching children with special needs. The children receive transport from a school bus funded by the local municipality.

The Child Care Institutions

Most of the child care institutions are large and in need of repair. Those that have had children reintegrated or transferred appear to have kept their staffing complement.

In general the directors of the child care institutions expressed satisfaction with regard to the cooperation between themselves, the SSA and the NGO social workers during the period when deinstitutionalization was an “active” project.

According to the Director of Tbilisi Child Care Institution, she enjoyed good support from the Save the Children and SSA social workers. At the start of the deinstitutionalization assessment exercise in 2009 there were 72 children in the institution and 34 were identified for reintegration. By August 2010, 20 children had been reintegrated with their families. The Director felt there was no need for these children to be in the institution and once reintegrated these children continued to attend the same public school as they did while in the institution. With regard to the 14 children identified but not reintegrated there were several reasons given:

- Grandparents were actually the caretakers and they were assessed as either too old or in poor health to care for the children.
- Parents were unable to demonstrate parental skills.
- One case of a child from an IDP family who was not apparently not reintegrated when the family was allocated a house in Mestre.
- Poverty to the extent that it could not be mitigated by the Save the Children social fund.
- For 4 children whose family lived on the outskirts of Tbilisi, there was apparently no nearby school. Access to education appears to have been the issue.
- Parental choice; some parents who had homes were too busy working to provide care.

In the opinion of the Director of Tbilisi Child Care Institution there was no clear boundary between these cases and the cases that were reintegrated. Since August 2010

5 children have been admitted, 2 from a special school and 3 child protection cases. It appears from the information given that if there was access to a social fund or a reintegration allowance was available, 10 children could be reintegrated immediately. 47 of the children have siblings in institutions and 10 children have younger siblings living with their parents at home.

On 16 March 2010 there were 48 children at Surami Child Care Institution. The joint assessment was completed in June 2010. By this time, 6 children were reintegrated, 2 children placed in foster care, 2 aged out, 3 got married and left the home. In November 2010 a further 5 children were reintegrated by SSA social workers. Since June 2010 there have been 4 new admissions. At the time of the Independent Assessment visit, Surami Child Care Institution accommodated 33 children, of which half go home for school holidays. The Director thought that these children could be reintegrated if there was help to improve living conditions.

SSA and NGO social workers jointly assessed Tskneti Child Care Institution in 2010. Apparently at the start of the assessment there were 102 children the institution. The new Director in post said of these 10 were reintegrated and 33 were placed in small group homes all over Georgia. This information regarding small group home placement is at variance with the total number of children placed from all institutions reported as 17.

Telavi Child Care Institution will be assessed during 2011. It currently accommodates 83 children. 7 children were transferred from Lagodekhi Home so that it could close in March 2010. A total of 24 children were admitted from Gurjaani, Zemo Bodbe and Kachreti Special boarding Schools during November 2010. There have been 12 additional admissions for other reasons since November 2011. It is reported that despite initial concerns the new arrivals have settled in well.

The Social Services Agency and (I)NGO Field Workers

Meetings were held with SSA social workers, lawyers and other staff at Telavi, Isani-Sangori, Khasuri, Dusheti, and in Lagodekhi. Meetings were also held with social workers and other staff from Save the Children, Children of Georgia, EveryChild and UNICEF. Discussions were also held with staff at SSA Headquarters.

For the most part social work staff from government and NGOs viewed their joint collaboration on deinstitutionalisation as positive. The partnership between SSA and the NGOs with regard to deinstitutionalization from the child care institutions appears to have been more effective than the collaboration between MOES, SSA and the NGOs involved in working with the special education boarding schools. From the SSA perspective they were not adequately informed about the process and were later presented with a number of difficult cases to which they had to react. From the NGO perspective MoES did not follow their recommendations and they felt that the SSA was unwilling to act on properly presented referrals.

At a field level, both NGO and SSA social workers thought that with more time and resources a greater number of children could have been reintegrated. In discussion with both groups of social workers it was difficult to discern the grounds and criteria on which decisions are made to place a child in 24-hour care or to reintegrate a child into a family.

The assessment form used to inform decision making with regard to reintegration of children into families was not specifically designed for this purpose but is the generic

child care and protection assessment form used by SSA social workers. Its purpose is really to assess rather than review a case.

All SSA social workers were concerned about the relative absence of support services to assist families continue to care for reintegrated children. They were also concerned at the limited travel allowances available to them to conduct visits to a child's family.

The social work office nearest to the residential care facility or the foster parent undertakes the case management of the children in residential care. Where the children's parents live outside that particular raion or region the work with the family is undertaken by another social worker from that area. It appears that in these cases without the support of the NGOs and their resources, communication between the different social workers is variable and they have struggled to effect reintegration plans.

With the MoLHSA SSA training and placement of social workers in raion offices from 2009 onwards the social workers visited in Khasuri and Lagodheki had been reintegrating children with their families especially where the residential care setting and the family were in the raion, or a neighbouring raion in which they operated. In such cases they had full control of the case management and were not limited by travel expenses or communication with social workers in other raions or regions. In Khasuri, 5 children have been reintegrated since the end of the Save the Children partnership project. The SSA social worker has been particularly effective at reintegration, within Lagodekhi.

INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Deinstitutionalisation

Out of **306** children in the **8** boarding schools, **138** are no longer living in large institutional education settings. **111** children are now living with their biological families. (**33** children (ghosts) were not actually attending the boarding schools.) **87** children continue to remain in the state special boarding school system and **48** children were transferred into MoLHSA child care institutions.

For the **557** children who were assessed in the child care institutions, **217** children went home or had a new non institutional placement, but **306** remained in institutional settings.

The major achievement of the deinstitutionalisation process is that out of **863** children who were assessed, only **441** of these children remain in the institutions. The rest of the children are with their families, in alternative family care or living in small group homes. Five boarding schools and **2** child care institutions have been closed.

The challenge is for a State and NGO reintegration package to be developed and administered that overcomes the remaining financial and housing barriers to reintegration. For those children who for child protection reasons cannot immediately return home the challenge is to establish a bank of foster parents living close to the child's home area, to enable a child to be matched and placed with foster parents. The second option is to ensure that there are places available in small group homes for children who cannot settle in family life or who are unwilling to be fostered.

Information Management

Accurate up to date information with regard to children in 24-hour care has been difficult to obtain. The SSA, SCA and INGOs all collect data, but in different formats, at different intervals and for different purposes. Without good data it will be more difficult for the SSA and other organisations to plan and develop foster care, small group homes and other services, including field social work that are close to the child's family.

Total number of children in 24 hour public care

Year	Foster care		Small Group Homes	Child Care Institutions	
	With relatives	Non relatives			
2009				105	1228
January 2010	196	225		130	1244
March 2011				129	913

Admissions, discharges and transfers of children in to and within the 24 hour care system in 2009 and 2010

Year	Foster care		Small Group Homes		Child Care institutions	
	Entering	Leaving	Entering	Leaving	Entering	Leaving
2009	290	182	177	12	329	242
2010	158	308	91	49	325	309

**Table -
Child
Care
Instit
utions
2009 -
2011**

	Child Care Institutions	Region	Current Status	2011 March SSA		2010 January SCA		2009 December	
				B	G	B	G	B	G
				oy	ir	oy	ir	oy	ir
				s	ls	s	ls	s	ls
									Number of children
1	Lagodekhi	Kakheti	Closed in 2010 Assessed by SSA	0	0				0
2	Dusheti	Mtskheta-mtianeti	Closed in 2010 Assessed by SSA & SC	0	0				0
3	Surami	Shida kartli	In service Assessed by SSA & SC in 2010	18	15				33
4	Tskneti	Tbilisi	In service Assessed by SSA & SC in 2010	44	19				63
5	Saguramo	Mtskheta-mtianeti	In service Assessed by SSA & SC in 2010	21	13				34
6	Aspindza	Samtskhe javakheti	In service Assessed by SSA & SC in 2010	3	3				6
7	Tashiskari	Shida kartli	In service Assessed by SSA & SC in 2010	12	3				15
8	Tbilisi Dighomi	Tbilisi	In service Assessed by SSA & SC in 2010	32	25				57
9	Tsalenjikha	Samegrelo	In service Assessed by SSA in 2010	26	15				41
10	Makhinjauri (Infants)	Adjara	In service Assessed by SSA in 2010	24	21				45
11	"momavlis sakhli"	Tbilisi	In Service Assessment in process by SSA, 2011						29
12	"Satnoeba"	Tbilisi	In Service Assessment in process by SSA, 2011	21	19				40
13	Tbilisi (Infants)	Tbilisi	In service To be assessed by SSA & SC in 2011						159
14	Kodjori (Disability)	Tbilisi	In service To be assessed by SSA & SC in 2011						30
15	Telavi	Kakheti	In service To be assessed by SSA & SC in 2011						87
16	Mestia	Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	In service To be assessed by SSA & SC in 2011						18
17	Zugdidi	Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	In service To be assessed by SSA & SC in 2011						40
18	Senaki (Disability)	Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	In service To be assessed by SSA & SC in 2011						47

19	Kodjori	Tbilisi	In service			70
20	Rustavi	Kvemo Kartli	In service			7
21	Batumi	Adjara	In service			50
22	Kutaisi	Imereti	In Service/Opened in 2010	29	13	42
23	Tbilisi child crisis center	Tbilisi	In service			
				230	146	913

As can be seen the figures are not complete, nor do the figures for entering and leaving necessarily correspond to the total numbers of children in the different placements. However the figures do show a reduction in the use of the child care institutions of 331 (25%) if the figures are accurate, as the SSA figures for reintegration's from the child care institutions show that 256 children were reintegrated, otherwise left or were transferred to other placements. (See above)

Policy

The policy level decisions by GoG to accelerate the process of deinstitutionalisation from large child care institutions are appropriate and timely. This is in line with the UNCRC, and international guidance including specific observations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child. "The Committee recommends that the State party expedite the deinstitutionalization programme, including reunification with families and the recruitment of foster parents."¹

The decision to transfer children not requiring special education to other public day schools is appropriate and better meets the right to education. It appears from the NGO assessment reports that the provision of education in the dilapidated boarding schools that were closed, was not to a minimum standard. The policy decision by MoES to ensure that enrolment into special boarding schools are only made after children have been assessed as requiring this provision is welcomed. The previous use of special education boarding schools to meet child care needs was inappropriate and although the transfer of these children to other placements especially to the child care institutions was precipitous and not well prepared it may, in the long term, be in the better interests of the affected children. If more time and more resources had been made available it would appear from the views of NGO and SSA social workers that they could have assisted more children to be reintegrated with families.

The placement of children in 24-hour care and the reintegration of children into their families in Georgia takes place in an environment where single (pregnant) mothers are stigmatised, claiming maintenance from fathers is difficult and where there is a legal framework of "parental rights" rather than parental responsibilities. This coupled with poor access to social housing and many people (especially single mothers) living in poverty makes reintegration of children with their families a difficult process. This report acknowledges the hard work and skill of many social workers from the state and (I)NGOs that has led to the achievement of children returning to live with their families.

Legislation

The current child care legislation does not assist decision making with regard to deinstitutionalisation or meet the demands of a modern child care and protection system that is increasingly being staffed by trained social workers. Currently the law is inadequate on the grounds or criteria for admitting a child into care and there is little guidance to social workers who may want to exercise caution with regard to reintegration of children into poor families. These difficult decisions with regard to returning children home in conditions of poverty may be obviated in the future if government reintegration allowances are made available together with donor/NGO funding for entitled cases.

Partnership and cooperation

The involvement of NGO partners has been critically important in terms of skilled social work, material resources and logistics but it has been sometimes necessarily constrained

1 COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, , 2008, CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 44 OF THE CONVENTION. Concluding observations: GEORGIA

by project timeframes and resource allocation. The cooperation between government and NGOs delivering: day care, foster care and small group home residential care through public - private partnerships has considerable potential with regard to future choice and the range of services.

Case management

If the system of case management had been more efficient then the need to reassess all the children in the child care institutions would not have been necessary. It would have been a matter of reviewing the cases in the light of the change in policy towards family care and the availability of family support services.

The work required from the social worker to effect reintegration usually concerns creating change at the level of the family rather than at the level of the child. The present system of the social work office closest to the child care institution holding the case does not lend itself to intensive work with the child's family, who may be at a distance from the institution and the social worker. Having one social worker for the child and another for the family may save money on travel but requires very effective communication.

The allocation of one social worker as key worker to both the family and child would be better practice. Likewise for the current assessments it would be better practice for one social worker to assess both the child and the family. At the end of the assessment and reintegration with the specific child care institution/region/raion the responsibility for the next steps for further work with children and families on reintegration is still left with uncertainty as regards the decision-making on the case.

Social workers, directors of child care institutions and managers of small group homes think that the difference in the degree of risk/hardship between the cases that were reunified and many that remain in the institutions or were transferred to SGHs to be small. With more time to address relationship issues but also more critically extra resources to address housing and poverty issues they thought more children can return home. Save the Children social workers thought that with more time and resources a further 70 children could have been reintegrated with their families

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is critical for the next phases of the deinstitutionalisation process that the government promise of paying reintegration allowances for a longer time while making available targeted social assistance, education materials and vouchers for food is realised.

The most difficult cases in the child care institutions where there was evidence of child abuse or neglect in the family will need careful consideration. It is important for such cases that there are locally available placements of foster care or small group homes that will assist social workers to continue to work with the child and the family to find permanent solutions that are in the child's best interests.

It is important to review the current system of case management and to make improvements not only for the current deinstitutionalisation process but also for the development of good social work practice. It may also be necessary to review the current location of social workers, their caseloads and to develop a human resource development plan to place social workers closer to communities where there is poverty, homelessness and the greater number of children in need.

There should no longer be a societal expectation that the government will provide residential care to children from poor families who say they are unable to provide for their children, or for families who have children with disabilities. A communication strategy should be developed to provide understanding of policies to support and promote family care

Evidence from small group homes and the child care institutions is that children continue to be placed in 24-hour care for reasons of poverty, homelessness related to poverty and marital breakdown. There is a need to prevent children who live these circumstances from being placed in 24-hour care (institutions, the new SGHs and foster care) as this effectively: increases the current 24-hour care caseload; undermines the deinstitutionalization process; and otherwise utilizes the limited foster care and small group home resources. It will be important for the MoLHSA to revisit the policy on gatekeeping, so that it is not just restricting the placement of children in child care institutions but prevents the placement of children into 24-hour public care who could continue to live with their families with improved access to income support and other services.

It is recommended that MoLHSA develop a definition for children in need that can be used as a criteria for providing services and it is also recommended that the grounds for admission into public care are more closely defined and that decisions with regard to the use of public care will be made on the grounds of whether the child has been abandoned or is suffering serious harm or is at risk of suffering serious harm and needs care and protection.

There is a growing body of evidence ^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} of the harm ^{FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT} done to babies and infants who are placed in child care institutions or large infants home and the placement of children under 5 years of age in residential care will gradually be phased out in Georgia and the infant homes closed. For the two infants homes it is recommended that the reintegration of children be given greater priority, coupled with placement of abandoned children for adoption and the use of foster care for all children under 6 years of age who need 24 hour care.

The Child Action Plan is now in it's final year. It is recommended that this plan is reviewed and a new plan developed with greater emphasis on the development of an effective social work service focusing on prevention and family support.

FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT Prof. Kevin Browne, 2009, *The Risk of Harm to Young Children in Residential Care*, Save the Children and Better Care Network

FILLIN * MERGEFORMAT Save the Children, 2009, *Keeping Children Out of Harmful Institutions. Why we should be investing in family-based care.*

APPENDIX 1

Persons met and meetings held.

Marika Zakareishvili	General Education Development Division. Responsible for Boarding Schools Coordination. MoES
Tamar Oghlishvili	School Director, Public School 1, Gurjaani
Rusdan Turashvili	School Inclusive Education Coordinator, Gurjaani
Marina Ujmajuridze	Director, Tbilisi boarding School N200
Eka Sanebldize	Deputy Head of Social Programme Department, SSA,
Marina Shaghashvili	Social Work Coordinator, Responsible for Coordination of Children Assessment at Residential Institutions
Eteri Tskhakaia	Head of Child Care Services SSA
Amiran Daneshidze	Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs
Ketevan Demetrashvili	Social Service Agency
Nana Khechoshvili -	Director, Telavi, Children's Institution
Tina Gogiashvili	Senior Social Worker, Telavi & 13 social workers
Ketevan Panchvidze	Senior Social Worker, Lagodekhi
Lado Chokadze	Social Worker, SSA Dusheti
Lali Undilashvili	Social Worker, SSA Dusheti
Jilda Chikaitdze	Social Worker, SSA Dusheti
Lela Merabishvili	Director, Tbilisi Child Care Institution
Mevlud Gogaladze	Director, Surami Child Care Institution
Nana Gelashvili	Social Worker, SSA Khasuri
Eliso Maisuradze Director	Tskneti Child Care Institution
Natia Macharashvili	Senior Social Worker, SSA Isani-Sangori Office
Anna Mania	Social Worker, SSA Isani-Sangori Office
Nana Burduli	Social Worker, SSA Isani-Sangori Office
Tako Tsiklauri	Social Worker, SSA Isani-Sangori Office
Aaron Greenberg	UNICEF
Natia Partskhaladze	UNICEF
Andro Dadiani	Director, EveryChild
Maya Mgeliashvil	Social Work, Technical Advisor, EveryChild
Lesley Orr	Advisor, EveryChild
Eteri Patariaia	Social Worker EveryChild
Eter Chuinidze	Social Worker EveryChild
Keti Vanisvili	Social Worker EveryChild
Maka Ghlighvashvili	Social Worker EveryChild
Ana Jvelvgi	Social Worker EveryChild
Keti Kalndze	Social Worker EveryChild
Nona Tsikhelashvili	Project Coordinator, EveryChild, Dusheti
Natia Mekvabauri	Coordinator, Telavi Small Group Home, Breath Georgia
Nino Omanashvili	Carer, Telavi Small Group Home, Breath Georgia
Gogita Tabasidze	Carer, Telavi Small Group Home, Breath Georgia
Maguli Shaghashvili	First Step Georgia
Nino Nutsubidze	Save the Children
Natia Deisadze	Save the Children
Lesley Wison	Country Director, Save the Children, Georgia
Jaba Nachkebia	Director, Children of Georgia
Nino Mikaia	Psychologist, Children of Georgia
Tamuna Nakaidze	Psychologist, Children of Georgia

APPENDIX 2

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