

# Every child deserves a family



Every child deserves a family: for children and young people

How EveryChild helps children who aren't looked after by their parents

# A note for adults

This report is aimed at children aged 11 and over. It was produced to provide feedback to children who took part in the consultations for developing EveryChild's conceptual framework 'Every child deserves a family.' However, we hope that it will have other uses too, such as introducing children involved in projects and programmes to EveryChild, or initiating discussions about a loss of parental care.

Adult facilitators should read through the document themselves first to check that they are happy to share all of it with children. Pay particular attention to the case studies which may not be appropriate for all age groups. Children can be left to read the document themselves, or, if they are illiterate or younger than the target group, it can be read and explained to them.

The document is quite long, and it is recommended that children are encouraged to view each part separately, with adult facilitators checking they have understood each section before moving onto the next.

If the children want to further engage and explore the information in the report, facilitators can ask them the questions listed in the red boxes in the text. Brainstorming ideas and answers and displaying them in the form of drawings, paintings, collages, stories or poems can also be fun!

More detailed guidance for teachers and facilitators including a suggested lesson plan to use with groups of children to explore the issues in this report also exists and can be shared on request by writing to the email address below. EveryChild would also appreciate feedback on how the document has been used and received by children. Please contact:  
Sophie Martin-Simpson: [sophie.martin-simpson@everychild.org.uk](mailto:sophie.martin-simpson@everychild.org.uk)

# Introduction



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EveryChild is a charity. We work in 11 countries around the world. We try and help children who don't live with their parents. This report explains who these children are, why we help them, and what we think should be done to help them. To help us write it, we spoke to 412 girls and boys in 10 different countries. We wrote a longer report for adults that we will use to help us in our work to:

- Help children to stay with their mums and dads if it's what is best for them.
- Make sure that children who don't live with their parents are safe, have somewhere to sleep and enough to eat, and can go to school.
- Help children who don't live with their parents at the moment go back to their families if it's what is best for them.

There are millions of children around the world who live without their parents, and, unfortunately, EveryChild can't help all of them. We try to:

- Learn how to best help children who don't live with their parents.
- Use what we have learnt to ask government and others to do more to help children who are living without their parents

# Who are 'children who aren't looked after by their parents'?

Children without parental care are boys and girls who don't live with their parents. They may live:

- In **institutions** – these are large or small buildings where adults look after groups of children who don't have mums or dads, or who can't live with their families for some reason. They are sometimes called 'orphanages,' 'internats' or 'children's homes.' Mariya's story below describes life in an institution in Ukraine.
- With their **relatives**, including grandparents, aunts or uncles, and sometimes older sisters and brothers. This photo shows children in Malawi who live with their grandmother.



- With '**foster parents**' who are adults who are paid to look after children in their own homes.
- On their **own**. Some children carry on living at home alone or with their brothers and sisters once their parents have died or gone away.
- In **jail**.

- On **the streets**, where they sleep on the pavement, in marketplaces or old ruined buildings where no one lives anymore. The boys in the picture live on the streets in Ethiopia.



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- With the **people they work for**. Children may do the housework, farming or other work for these people.

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- ? Where do children who don't live with their mums or dads live in your country?
- ? Where do you think are the best places to live if you can't live with your parents?
- ? Where are the worst places?

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## Mariya's story

Mariya is 19 years old and from Ukraine. When she was a child she lived in an institution. In the beginning she spent her holidays with her grandmother, but when her grandmother died, she spent all her time in the institution. This is what Mariya told us about living in the institution:



... 'we cleaned up corridors before lunch, although this should be done by cleaning ladies. This was a punishment for those who did something wrong. Then they got us to bed. If we didn't want to sleep, for instance, and we started to come out from our rooms, they closed us in. Each room was locked with a key. Or if we made a noise, or stood up from our beds we had then to clean up, or wash up dishes, or tiles. So we were punished in that way. One time I was put into a room alone where sick children should be kept to sit totally isolated and closed in. It was on the first floor with bars on windows and this room was our little prison.'

This picture below shows a bedroom in an institution in Ukraine:



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# How many children live without their parents?



We believe there are at least **24 million children** who live without their parents around the world, this is at least one in every 100 children.

In some countries, many more children live without their mums and dads:

- In some African countries, if you met 10 children, 3 of them would probably be living away from their mums and dads.
- In Russia, around 3 out of every 100 children don't live with their parents.

# What is life like for children who live without their parents?

Children who live without their parents often face many problems:

- **Children feel sad and miss their parents.** Here, two children describe what it is like to be without their parents:

'It is very sad to be separated from parents. You feel very bad when other children hug their parents....on Mother's Day, children give their mothers a present prepared by themselves and it is very sad, and here is when you grumble about it and by saying "why was I born?".'

(A girl from Peru)



'We miss home. All the children miss home; their mothers, the love of their parents.'

A girl who lives in an institution in Moldova

- **Children find it hard to get enough food to eat.** Children who live in 'institutions' or in prisons are sometimes not given enough to eat by the adults who look after them. Meas Chiva's story on page 10 describes what children in prison in Cambodia get to eat. Children who live on the streets often have to beg for money to buy food, or may have to eat food from rubbish bins. Children who live with their grandparents sometimes don't have enough to eat because grandparents are too old and weak to go out to work and get money for food. Aunts and uncles may choose to give food to their own children, rather than to nieces or nephews who also live with them.
- **Children often have to work for long hours.** Without their mums and dads around to give them food or buy them clothes, children, especially those from poorer countries, sometimes have to work to survive. The girl in this photo lives in India and works 12 hours every day making ropes from coconut shell fibre.



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- **Other adults hurt children who don't have their parents around:** Adults may sometimes hurt children when they are supposed to be looking after them. Relatives and adults working in prisons or institutions can harm children when parents are not around. Children may also be harmed by other children, by employers or by other adults, such as the police. Street children often get involved in dangerous gangs, or may be shouted at or beaten by the police or other adults.

A girl in residential care in Georgia told EveryChild:

**“Sometimes the teacher [in the institution] can beat them and yell at them”**



- **Children can't go to school:** In many countries, you have to pay to go to school, and if parents aren't around, children often can't find the money to pay. Children who live away from their parents may also be too busy working to go to school. The picture on this page shows children at a school in Malawi in Africa.

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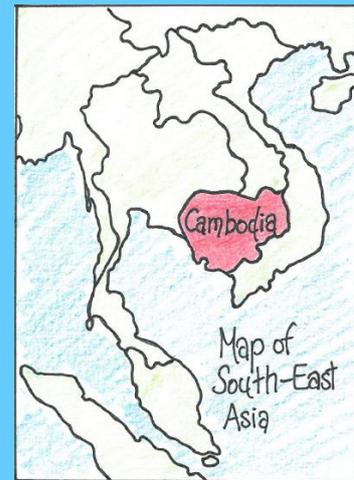
- ? What do you think it would be like to live apart from your parents?
- ? Have you ever lived away from your parents?
- ? What are the bad sides to living apart from parents?
- ? What are the good sides?

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## Meas Chiva's story

Meas Chiva is a 19 year old Cambodian boy who has spent the last six years in prison for a crime he says he did not do. Here, he describes his life in prison:

'Conditions here in prison are hard. A normal day for me is like living in hell: no goal, no mission, no future. I wait until I die. Recently I have been made to share my cell with much older men. The cell is not nice, it is very narrow. We sleep three to a matt on the floor. The guard has put an adult prisoner in cell in charge of the rest of us. He is "the Boss". He keeps us in line - he is scary and we are all afraid of him. If we behave well we are not treated too badly but when someone does something wrong the punishments can be very severe. If someone tries to escape or gets into fights they are chained in a room. I remember a time when one young boy tried to escape. They caught him and chained him in his cell for three months and beat him. I wanted to help him but was too scared that someone would tell the 'boss' or the guards and then I would get in trouble. The food we are given here is very limited, only five grams rice a day with soup like water. It is not enough for us and we are always hungry. One time I got very sick. There is a prison nurse who is supposed to look after us when we get sick but she only becomes nice if there is money. I had no money so had to wait for my family to arrive with medicine. I had a drip in my arm but I was not taken to hospital. I do not know why not.'



The picture below shows children in a prison in Cambodia.



Life is not always worse when children move away from home. Some children leave home because their parents beat them or harm them in other ways. For these girls and boys, life in an institution or on the streets may seem better than home. Many children living with relatives, especially those who live with grandparents, are loved and looked after well.

A girl living in Malawi told EveryChild **"Sometimes grandparents are even more caring than our own parents"**.

## Why do some children live without their parents?

There are many reasons why children don't live with their mums and dads:

- **Their parents may be dead:** Children's parents may have died from HIV or AIDS or other diseases, or from accidents.
- **Parents may be too poor to look after their sons and daughters:** Parents may not have enough money to buy food or clothes for children, and girls or boys may leave home to work or to live with richer relatives. In some parts of the world, children from poor families or who live on the streets go to live in institutions to get good food, clothes and somewhere warm to sleep at night. Onas' story on the next page is about a boy from Malawi who had to leave home to find work. The picture on the right shows the sorts of houses that boys in Malawi like Onas might live in with their families.



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- **Children may run away from home:** Children may leave home because they are beaten or shouted at a lot by their parents, or because they are unhappy because parents are fighting with each other.

A girl from Peru told us **"Girls leave home because they are scared of their parents' arguments."**

- **Social workers might decide that children would be better off if they didn't live at home:** Social workers are adults who try to help children who have problems at home. If children are not being cared for by their parents, or are being hurt at home, they may help children find homes where they hope they will be happier and safer.
- **Children have to leave their parents so that they can go to school:** In some countries, there are very few schools. Children who live in small villages have to travel a long way to bigger villages or towns to go to school. For some children, the only way to go to school is to leave home to live closer to schools.

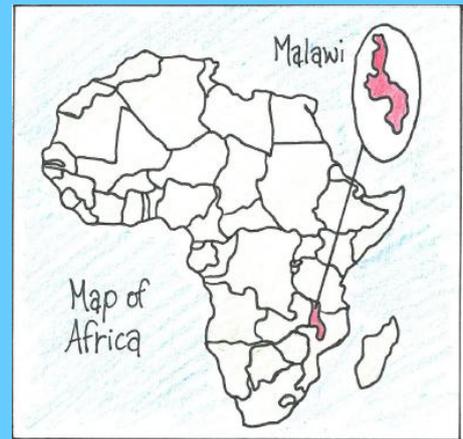
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? Why do you think children become separated from their parents in your country?

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## Onas' story

Onas is a 14 year old boy from Malawi who works as a cattle herder 14 km away from his own village. He left school and moved from his family home when he was 10 years old to take the job. He earns 1000 Malawi Kwacha a month (around £4). He sleeps in a hut close to the herd to stop the cows from being stolen and only occasionally has time to return home.



His father is dead and his mother looks after his two younger brothers and three grandchildren. The family don't have enough food and need the money Onas earns to survive. The picture below shows Onas looking after cattle.

He said: 'I do not enjoy my work – I would rather be at school with my friends. I occasionally grab a few hours with my mother and sometimes even spend a night at home. But opportunities to do this are rare. I have almost no chance to see my friends. I spend all day with the cattle and any free time I have I use to try and help my mother...I hope one day I can return to live in my village, get married and have a family.'



# What can be done to help children who aren't looked after by their parents?

When trying to keep families together, or help children who have already become separated from their parents, we think it is important to remember that:

- **Children have a right to stay with their parents if this is what is best for them:** All children have a right to live with their parents unless their parents are harming them. This means that all adults, including politicians, teachers, parents and other relatives, must help children to stay with their parents if this is best for the child.

## What are rights?

Rights are things every child should enjoy. All children have the same rights. These rights are listed in a report written by the United Nations called the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- **We must listen to children to find out what is best for them:** We can only work out what is best for children if we ask them. So, when adults try to decide where children should live or how they can be helped, the first thing they should do is speak to the children. The girl in this photo lives in Moldova and is being visited by her social worker who talks and listens to her to make sure she is happy about where she is living and who she is living with.



- **It is usually best for children to live with families:** Children should usually live with their parents as parents usually love and care for them. If children can't live with their parents, it is usually best for them to live with their relatives or with foster carers who can give them the love and attention they need.

The children in this photo can't live with their parents. They live in a house in Georgia with foster carers who look after them.



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We think that institutions can be very harmful to children because lots of children are cared for by one adult. This makes it hard for boys and girls to feel loved and properly cared for. Some adults in institutions can also harm them, and it may be hard for children to be able to stop the adults from doing this.

- **Children need to feel at home:** We know that moving around a lot and living in many different places is difficult for children and can be upsetting. We think it's important to give children a home that they can stay in for a long time.

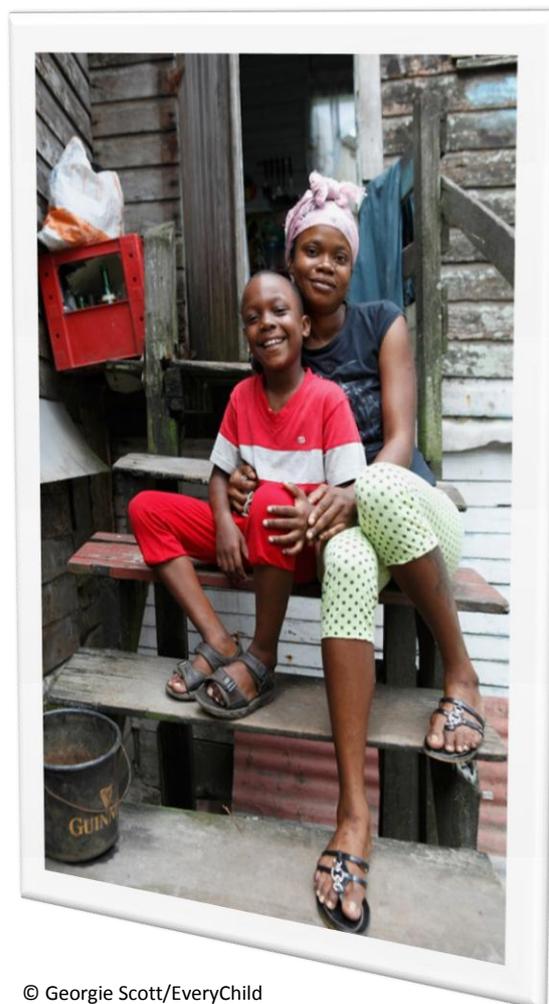
- **Staying close to home:** If children can't live with their parents, it's a good idea to keep them as close to their families and homes as possible. This means that parents and other relatives can visit them, and children can still speak in their own languages.
- **Parents often need help and support to look after their children well:**

Most parents would like to look after their own children. Some can't do this because:

  - They don't have enough money to buy food or clothes for their children.
  - They are too sick, or have other problems, such as drinking too much alcohol, which makes it hard for them to look after their sons and daughters.
  - They don't know how to control their children without hurting them.

We think that parents sometimes need help so that they can keep their children living with them. This might be lending them some money to start their own business, helping them get the medical care they need, or teaching them how to be better parents.

The family in this photo live in Guyana where parents can receive help to understand how to better care for their children and to give their children the love and support they need in growing up.



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## Children who have become separated from their parents need help and support:

Children who live away from their parents face many problems, and need lots of help and support. For example, they may need help going to school, or to stop adults from harming them. Like the boy in the picture from India, they may need someone to talk to because they are feeling sad and miss their parents. We also know that children are often very good at helping themselves and their friends, and adults should encourage and support this.

- **Children who don't live with their parents may need help getting back home to their families:** If children who have become separated from their parents want to go home, it is very important to help them go back. Children may need help finding their families and help with transport to travel home. Families and children may also need some help in getting used to each other again and to make sure that children don't become separated from their parents again.

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- ? What do you think can be done to stop children from becoming separated from their parents?
- ? What do you think can be done to help children who are already living apart from their parents?
- ? What can children do to help other children who don't live with their mums and dads?

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## Summing all of this up

In EveryChild, we hope that all governments, charities and other adults who can make a difference to children's lives will listen to the points we have listed above. We want to make sure that in the future, all children can stay with their parents if they want to, and that any boys or girls who can't be with their mums and dads are well looked after. We will continue to ask children for their ideas, and will make sure that other adults hear what children have to say.

More information about EveryChild can be found at: [www.everychild.org.uk](http://www.everychild.org.uk)

More resources for youth groups and schools can be found at:

[http://www.everychild.org.uk/resources/exhibitions\\_2/listen\\_to\\_me](http://www.everychild.org.uk/resources/exhibitions_2/listen_to_me)