10 years Guidelines Alternative Care for Children

Looking back and forward

Network Day Better Care Network Netherlands

1 November 2019

10 years Guidelines Alternative Care for Children

Looking back and forward

Chair: Valerie Jans, SOS Children's Villages International

Welcome

Mirjam Blaak, Defence for Children – ECPAT Nederland (Chair BCNN)

There is a diverse group of participants present today, from different backgrounds but with the same goal: helping vulnerable children in the Global South. This month the UN Convention on the Rights of Child exists 30 years and the UN Guidelines for Alternative Care for Children 10 years. These Guidelines were the reason for setting up the Better Care Network Netherlands (BCNN). BCNN receives a lot of support from different organizations and many volunteers. Last years a lot has been achieved by working together. There has been a focus on responsible volunteering with children abroad. Two years ago BCNN started a campaign for volunteers and trainees to stop orphanage tourism. This campaign/message was picked up by the liberal political party VVD and let to a white paper that generated a lot of support from other MPs. After a debate with the responsible Minister (Kaag), a research has recently started into the nature, size and financing flows of orphanage tourism from the Netherlands. Last week the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has included a strong discouragement on volunteering in orphanages in its travel advice. Due to the campaigns young people are also more aware of the harmful effects of volunteering in orphanages. A number of commercial organizations that offer voluntary work stopped offering projects in orphanages and there is a pledge by private development initiatives and by universities to stop voluntary work or internships in orphanages. These pledges have already been signed by 18 private initiatives and 2 universities. There is also a lobby at UN level with recommendations on caring for children without parental care. Today we focus on all developments and initiatives worldwide and we will discuss what is further needed to improve alternative care of children. Please share your concerns, doubts, initiatives and ideas.

Valerie Jans, SOS Children's Villages International

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care for Children are welcomed in 2009 by the UN. It complements the UN Convention Rights of the Child. The basic principles are:

1. Necessity principle: prevent necessity (strengthen family and community based care) + prevent unnecessary placement of children in institutions ('gatekeeping')
2. Suitability principle: a range of care services should be available with minimum quality standards, to meet the unique needs of each child

Always in the best interest of the child: not the best interests of the system, parents, professionals or volunteers.

Care Reform in Asia and Africa

Tessa Boudrie, Hopes & Homes for Children Asia + Michelle Oliel, Stahili Foundation

Stahili Foundation

Stahili Foundation focusses on reintegration and family support programmes, emergency foster care, training of government officials, mapping project and bringing together government stakeholders.

Hopes & Homes

Hopes & Homes has 16,297 children transitioned from institutions, prevented 129,495 children to live in institutions, 55,103 professionals trained and closed 111 institutions.
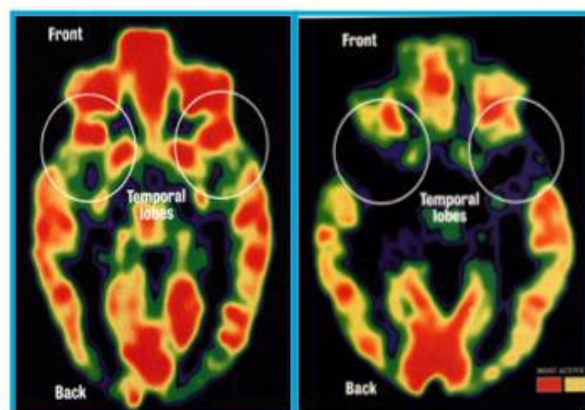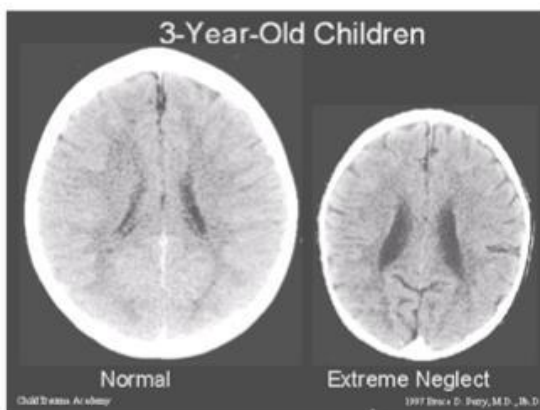
Effects of growing up in institutions

Video: Together we can End the Silence - the campaign film

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=aKTiLTlzt4E&feature=emb_logo (2.21 min)

Decades of research proves that growing up in institutions has detrimental psychological, emotional (inattention, hyperactivity) and physical (lower weight, height, head circumference) implications, including attachment disorders and delays in cognitive (lower IQ) and brain development, as well as a lack of social (disinhibited social engagement) and life skills (low educational achievement), leading to multiple disadvantages during adulthood (unemployment, usage of mental health services). Growing up in institutions is damaging, since children are often subject to high levels of abuse and neglect and live in a world without love. Orphanages actively contribute to family separation by providing a one-size-fits-all response to deeper societal problems which are left unaddressed. Many orphanages are unnecessary since many of them don't care for orphans, because 80% of these children do have one or two living parents.

Brain Development

Reasons why children are placed in institutions

Input from participants: violence, living on the street, poverty, war, tourism, neglect, disability, HIV, alcohol, mind set of care givers (don't believe they can do it), death, stepparents, stigma, lack of alternatives, natural disasters, abuse, tribalism, black magic. -> This shows the diversity in drivers: push and pull factors.

Push Factors: Family separation/divorce, Family/household economic status, Various forms of child abuse and neglect, Harmful cultural beliefs/practices, Disability, Orphanhood, Abandonment, Terminal illness incapacitating the parent's ability to provide care, Child relation to caregiver, Children in conflict with law,

Pull Factors: Promise of support with basic needs, Education, Elements of juvenile justice system, Inadequate community based support, but on the other side mushrooming "ready support" available in the institution, Voluntourism, Donor willingness to fund orphanages, especially the faith based community, Lack of stringent measures to enforce laws, especially strong gatekeeping mechanisms

Funding institutions is much easier. Most of the money for orphanages comes from outside the country (Nepal more than 80%). Much more can be achieved when the money is spent on family based care. It is 6-10 times cheaper to support family based care than institutions.

Video: The love you give

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=34&v=xDOzyoQHQOs&feature=emb_title (full film, 18 minutes)
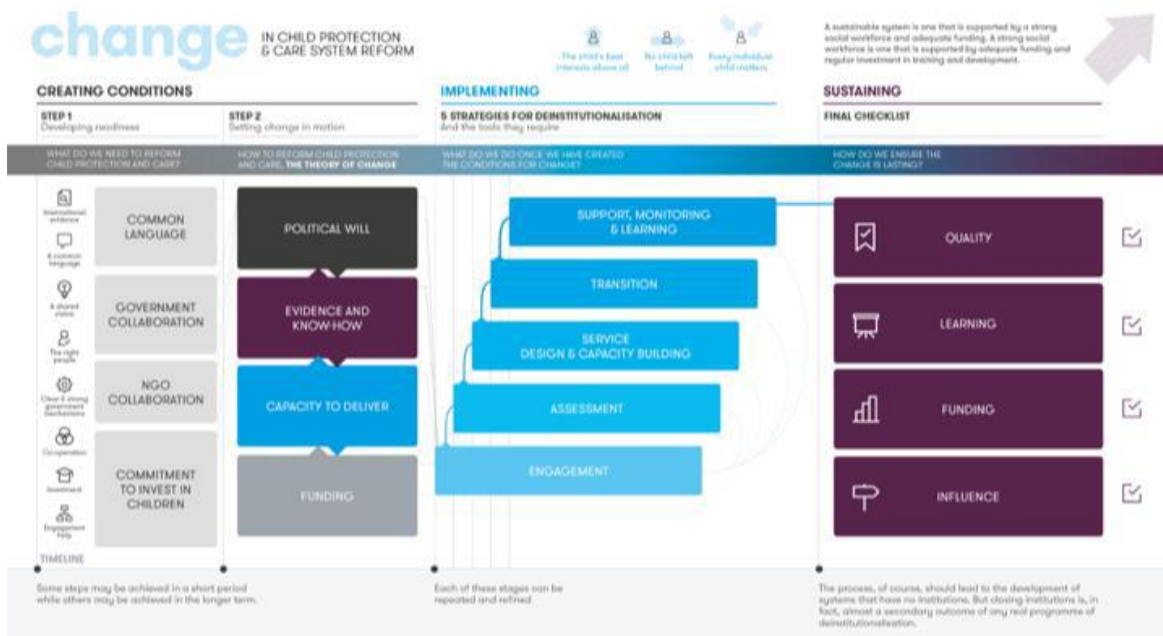
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjMw0h4a3U4 (trailer, 1 minute)

In this video (at 5.02 min) care leaver Peter explains what it was like to grow up in an institution in Kenia: Peter lived in orphanages from the age of 2 until he was 18 years old. He believes that the key reason why parents bring children to orphanages is poverty. The Western countries are funding orphanages, however in these Western countries there are no orphanages anymore. A child needs more than a roof, food and education. It needs the love and care and belonging to a family.

Care Reform

Care reform should focus on prevention of separation and family preservation and transforming institutional care (safely, long process) to family based care. Examples of countries where successful initiatives are taking place: Panama, Greece, Bulgaria, Rwanda, Zambia, Cambodia, Guatemala, Kenya, India, Haiti, Uganda, Colombia, South Africa, Nepal and Sudan (Sudan is almost done!). Learn from each other. Countries are different, but children's

rights and laws are similar. There are common features and steps to take. The key-principles in care reform are: rights-based, do no harm, prioritize the best interest of the child, prioritizing family-based care, strength-based approaches (focus on what is going well and work from that), collaboration, participation of children and families, evidence-based approach.

Reasons why family-based care is not prioritised

Input from participants: Lack of interest, lack of money, invisible for sponsors, more difficult to show, trauma, lack of awareness, lack of social work, political will, lack of incentive, lack of effort, countries not well enough organized, lack of control and check, abuse in families, lack of legal context (you can't hold a family accountable to take care of children from others).

Continuum of Care

Gatekeeping can help keep children from entering institutional care. There are many active key stakeholders and players that can help prevent children from entering (institutional) care in the first place: police, doctors, teachers, family members. It is important to strengthen the abilities from the surroundings. For instance in Nepal there are change makers that talk to parent's families about prevention and harmful effects of institutionalization. However, it is difficult to know who needs services and support and when to intervene with what kind of services. Foster care is not as developed as it could be, it takes time and resources. And it should fit the country´s culture. Kinship care is complicated and the question is if it should be formalized. On the other hand institutions are present and available when needed.

* A moratorium has been placed on inter-country adoptions
** This includes group homes
*** A moratorium has been placed on the registration of new CCIs

Kenya Case study

The majority of institutions in Kenia are privately run, usually by religious groups, private individuals and NGOs/civil society. There are 45,000 children living in 854 registered child care institutions, another 1,500 children live in 29 statutory institutions. More boys than girls live in these institutions. The actual number of CCIs in Kenya is unknown. Today it is not possible anymore to start an orphanage in Kenya. The government did not decide this in a day, it was a process. Stahili gathered in the Murang'a district data and talked to children, parents, institutions, government officials, etc. Data is important! How many children it concerns, why they are there (main reason is poverty), where they come from and where they can go to. When you have data, you can develop policies and can convince stakeholders. There is knowledge, there are lessons learned. Learn from each other and share what you know to make sure this is moved forward.

Practical example

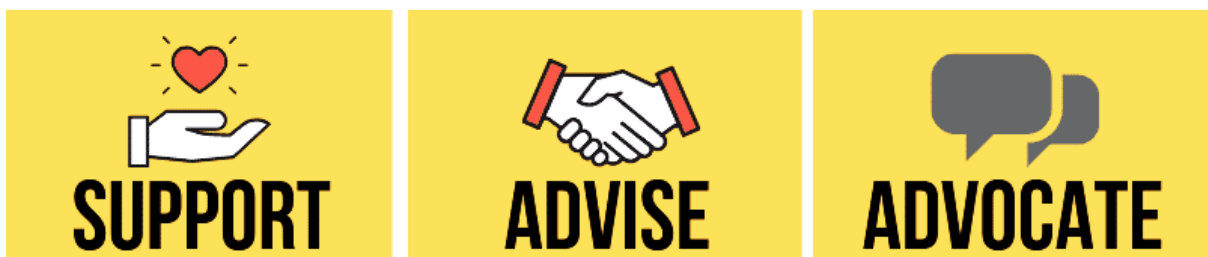*Rajendra Maher, Youth Council Development Alternatives (YCDA)*

YCDA is a community based organization. It is not that easy to say we only need family care. Radical decisions should be avoided. Changes need to go very slow and careful, taking care of social contexts. In India 9% of the children live without parental care, 4% are orphans (lost 1 or 2 parents). Child labour is a problem in India. Malnutrition is also a big challenge. Child marriage is a common situation (42% of women are married as a child, especially in rural areas). Another major problem is child abuse (2/3 of children are victim of physical

abuse). There are changes in socio-economic dynamics, such as lower joint family system, where family members take care of each other and disasters, such as floods. There is a large number of orphans in India. Radical changes to close children´s homes are not possible. You have to take very slow steps. There is more damage to children when orphanages are closed quickly. Than children are compelled to the streets.

In India the culture of helping children is large, so kinship care (children living with families) is popular, but is slowly decreasing. Foster care has just started and it is being learned how this is possible. It goes very slow. People want young children. Child headed households are not recognised by the government. Children are not supported, because you need to be 18 years to receive support from the government (for instance to receive a loan). Aftercare is lacking when children leave institutional care. Guardianship is large in India. You can be a guardian, but don't take them home and take care for the children permanently.

Data is lacking on the exact numbers of orphans. The exact number of orphanages is also not known in India, but there are more than 10,000. Many are run by NGOs and faith based groups. All these orphanages cannot be closed. Children need a place to go when they live on the street or when they are not safe at home. But the children should stay there only a short time and there should be looked for alternatives. Institutional care is seen as a shortcut method and charity (owning an orphanage) is seen as good.

YCDA shows strong alternatives to government. We are not saying: these countries are doing that, but demonstrate what works in India. Involve also communities and caste groups. Form Village Child Protection Committees, Self Help Groups and Children´s Associations where the issue of children living without parental care is being discussed and actions are taken. Mobilize and train community members to monitor the families where orphan/vulnerable children are placed for safety and security.

YCDA helps staffs of children's homes in building their capacity to facilitate transition from residential to family care. Preparing all involved parties is key in the transition process from institutional care to family-based care: prepare children -> prepare family -> prepare community -> prepare government. Bringing back a child to a family is a delicate process. YCDA is committed to give a firm place to various family based care (foster care, kinship care and after care), facilitate families to live together (economic strengthening, parental skills), work on strong gatekeeping (decision making processes of authorities and family members to avoid family separation), facilitate de-institutionalization (step by step process to release children from institutions to family care) and strengthen Care Leavers Association of Yong Adults who left care arrangements for solidarity and support.

Discussion

Argument that 80% of children is not an orphan is not true

The goal to let children grow up in families is one that anyone can support, but the arguments that are being used are not effective. The first argument that 80% are not orphans is not true. Children are also orphaned when they have lost one parent. Many women are left alone with their children, fathers don´t offer any support. Then when the mother dies, the child has no parent anymore that is taking care of the child. It is even worse when children are abandoned.

Responses: It is irrelevant if a child is an orphan, it should not live in institution. They should grow up in family surroundings.

When you start the conversation with every child needs a family, you shut the doors to work with institutions

Responses: We should mention that with the knowledge at that time, starting an orphanage was the sensible way to go. But with the knowledge we have now, we are ready for the next step: family based care.

Children's homes are being closed, is that good for the children?

Orphanages or children's homes are struggling, because funding is less due to negative communication about it. This does not help the children.

Responses: The message of our campaign is that donor money can be better used. Transformation from homes to family takes time and costs money. Rushing this process is not in the best interest of the child. The child protection system should be ready, so that children are not being dropped at home without support. Implementing case management is of upmost importance and a lot of training needed.

What is better: child on the street or in a caring children´s home?

Responses: There are many children's home stating that their home is the best option for the child, but when you really look into the life of each child you'll be surprised how many family members there are. The problem is that other alternatives are not examined further and the child stays in the children's home. Searching for alternatives should not stop because the children's home believes this is the best place for the child. Children are stuck in the system of children's homes. It is like with the Titanic. When the boat hit the ice, people needed to go on lifeboats to safe them. They should not stay on these boats. But this happens with children in need. They stay for years in these 'lifeboats' (homes). There need to be systems and standard procedures within these children's homes so that the children stay in such a home for a specific time, not forever.

For disabled children children's homes are often the best option

It would be good that children with disabilities would live with their families, but these children are not being treated well at home. There is a stigma for these children. We miss the step to get rid of the stigma and help the parents to love, support and be proud of their children. There are not enough specialised schools for disabled children and it is too difficult to go to normal schools,

therefore these children stay at home, hidden, not able to show their parents what their qualities are. There should be more effort to have better schools for disabled children.

Responses: Focus should be on prevention of family separation and family support: the first few years is a very important phase. When a child is born with a disability the family is in despair. This can lead to abandonment, there is a lack of specialized care and a lot of stigma. Prevention should be early intervention, when the child is born. Then family support should be there. We need to organize the parents, they should fight for the rights of their children, not the NGO's, not the institutions, but the parents; as is being done in the Ukraine!

Not every children's home is the same and not every country is the same
Responses: Comparing settings is not possible. In every setting the focus is the best interest of the child. The child protection system should aim to offer different options for children, because they have different needs. There needs to be minimum quality standards and processes.

Transitional process
Johanne van Dijk, Wilde Ganzen

Wilde Ganzen is working on combating poverty with private development initiatives and local partner organizations. Wild Ganzen has stopped supporting orphanages. When organizations that receive support from Wilde Ganzen have a relationship with an orphanage or support an orphanage, Wilde Ganzen will start a dialogue with that organization. Wilde Ganzen supports initiatives to transform orphanages into community and family based care or initiatives to prevent children from being separated from their parents. Wilde Ganzen facilitates visits to experienced organizations that are already working on deinstitutionalization (such as YCDA). When a transition is initiated, Wilde Ganzen finances that initiative, such as: tracing parents and family (is a lengthy process), identifying, screening and training foster parents, creating safe place where children can be stay temporarily, support placements where children can live permanently and safely, prepare children and (biological) families on reintegration, mobilize foster families to 'self-help groups' (post placement), creation of community committees that monitor the welfare in foster care, support for (foster) families and economic support of (foster) parents by setting up revenue-generating activities.

If you are working with a children's home, Wilde Ganzen would like to financially support the transition to family-oriented care.

Question: Not all children will find foster parents and more children are coming in. Transition is therefore difficult. Does the children's home have to close within so many years?
Response: No, there is no time limit. It is a process.

Panel Discussion
Rob Oliver (Stahili Foundation), Rajendra Maher (YCDA), Tessa Boudrie (Hopes and Homes for Children), Johanne van Dijk (Wilde Ganzen), Monica Woodhouse (Give a Child a Family)

Sometimes family care is not the best option for a child

Tessa: All over the world some children don't function well in families. However, that's a minority. There should be options for them as well. Residential care is part of alternative care (as a child growing up in the family is non-alternative). Only if it's in the best interest of the child. Other options should be properly assessed before the last option of institutionalization. There is a range of other options: kinship care, foster care, small group homes, shared homes by youngsters. All these options are alternative care, including temporary group homes.

Monica: All options, family-like, can be fine. Quality features should be in place, this applies to all care settings.

Rob: Alternative care is not a black-and-white issue, no either/or. Closure of orphanages can result in problems. This needs time. In Kenya when the court involved and children temporarily go into residential care, they often stay there much longer than initiated. We need social workforce trained and strengthened. In all options.

Monica: There should be policy within the institutions: individual development/care plan for every child. Complex court cases result in long duration of stay. Movement of children has to be part of the policy. Case management should be consistent and regularly checked. Social services should be included and come on board.

Are there circumstances where volunteer work in orphanages is possible?

Johanne: In all orphanages, all volunteering is bad for all children due to attachment problems.

Rajendra: Quality of basic facilities are often poor. We need to build the quality of care in all care facilities. Orphanage can be considered as last resort, thus there we need to improve conditions. When volunteers build the capacity of an orphanage and train local people it's okay. When volunteers become ambassadors for orphanages and visiting of volunteers becomes a regular practice, that's not okay.

Monica: We should set up real perimeters. Defining volunteering and voluntourism. There are people with pure intentions to serve. Even locally. We should not create a selfish community by discouraging volunteering. We need to identify the criteria for the two.

Rob: Dutch government does problematize volunteer work in orphanages now. Also the Committee on the Rights of the Child mentioned it as an issue. The number of volunteers might be increasing the number of orphans in children's homes. We do need to keep up the advocacy fight and put attention on care reforms. Not just decreasing number of volunteers, but redirection of funding towards family based care.

Johanne: It is good to campaign against voluntourism. There is huge amount of orphanages and children will be kept in there as it turns into an industry. It is a commercial issue. Children will be used to attract volunteers to come. Not in all orphanages of course. This does harm to children. BCNN is determined on campaigning and make people aware of negative effects of volunteering in orphanages. Even the Secretary General of the UN has mentioned the campaign in its report on the Convention on the Rights of Child. There is positive attention to the campaign.

How can we generate more positive or clear campaign communication?

Johanne: That is an important issue in order to avoid misunderstandings. We do not want to close orphanages immediately. It is a complex story to be told. Unfortunately, media often put phrases out

of the context. We do tell the media about the alternatives, and the positives of volunteer work. What we did last year: organized a meeting with private initiatives and discussed with them in role-playing about: how to bring the new message to your donors? How to avoid losing their support? We should learn from meetings, like today.

<u>Rob</u>: I would like to give congratulations to BCNN: the level of awareness on these issues is very high, higher than France, Germany and England. But we need to move towards a more nuanced message.

<u>Tessa</u>: Things have changed. Along the way, we learn. There is no point in telling anyone that the effort, time, money that they put in children's care was wrong to do so.

Networking