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Children without a HOME

Content

Foreword

Children should grow up in a family, not an orphanage. You may already agree with this statement. But it is also possible that you now feel a tremendous resistance. Maybe because, with the best intentions, you run or support an orphanage. You may have volunteered in one, or you still do. I understand that resistance all too well because I've had it myself. So please 'tag along' and read on.

Years ago, I read a comment on Facebook stating that orphanages should not have a right to exist, especially with regard to children aged 0 to 3 years old. No further explanation, no reasoning. At that time, the Dutch Tanzania Foundation was supporting two orphanages both financially and materially. Every year, I went there to volunteer. I knew the children well. They came from bad situations and now had a chance at a better life, education and health care. If orphanages would not exist, where would 'our' children go? The streets? They had no one to take care of them. A huge outrage was triggered inside of me. I started writing and expressed my resistance in a blog post.

However, a few years later, the first version of the book 'Children without a home' found its way to me, and I learned that the author of the comment was absolutely right. Children should not grow up in an orphanage. It often has negative consequences for the child's growth, development, health and opportunities. While reading, the pieces of the puzzle fell into place. From my profession as a physiotherapist, I

could see what problems the children in the orphanages were dealing with: attachment issues, stigmatisation, children missing their families, but also growth and speech delays. More and more, I was wondering: what happens to them when they turn 18 and have to leave the orphanage? Where would they go? Are they prepared for a future outside the walls of the orphanage?

This book gave me substantiated, fact-based information on the consequences of growing up in an orphanage and on legislation. It provided many useful real-life examples of other foundations, showing how things can also be done differently. One of the most remarkable things I read was that 80% of the children in orphanages have at least one living parent. I did research in 'our' orphanages and came to the same conclusion. It was even more than 95%. The parents or relatives could even care for these children when provided with the right support. It became clear to me then. It was time for a drastic change. Our foundation had to change course, and we did.

And so I raised the – difficult – subject with the Tanzanian owners of 'our' orphanages. But it turned out to be less difficult than expected. The result is that we are now working together on a transition from institutionalising children to a family-oriented solution.

But what would have happened if the author of that comment had given me a further explanation at the time, had written me a private message, had entered into dialogue with me… I might have seen the light sooner. I now want to be that guide for others. In conversations on the transition from children's homes to care within families, I always focus on one question, making it very personal: "What if it were your child?" Try imagining that you die today or that you'll run into financial problems. Where would you want your child to grow up and why? In

an orphanage or in a family? Chances are that you'll choose the family. We shouldn't want for other children what we don't want for our own, right? Then why are there still so many orphanages around the world?

To further address this in the Netherlands, I initiated the Dutch NGO Pledge #EveryChildAFamily. In the pledge, dozens of Dutch private initiatives involved declare that family is the place for a child to grow up. Together we call on other foundations, companies, churches and schools to invest in family-oriented care so that a child can grow up at home. And we are not alone. In December 2019, all 193 member states of the United Nations adopted a resolution[1], expressing their deep concern about the potential damage growing up in an institution can cause to the growth and development of children. But let's not forget that Better Care Network Netherlands has been committed to addressing this issue since 2007.

Helping vulnerable children is a noble pursuit, however, letting children grow up in an orphanage is not in their best interest. Let's work to give every child what they need and deserve: a family!
Thank you for reading my story. Perhaps you already agreed with me that children should not grow up in orphanages, and maybe you already participate in family-oriented care. If you have a foundation, I invite you to join the pledge.
However, if you were the one who felt resistance at the beginning of my story, I hope this book will help you change your mind, just as it did mine. Children deserve a family. We are here for you if you have questions or need support.

Monique Derrez - *Dutch Tanzania Foundation*

Introduction

Millions of children in developing countries are unable to live at home for a variety of reasons. Sometimes because their parents have passed away or are too ill to take care of them. Sometimes because the problems at home are very extensive, or because the children were separated from their parents by wars, disasters and conflicts. The fate of these children is a concern for many people. Some start projects, volunteer with children or support an orphanage.

This guide is for them. Because of their commitment and involvement, foundations, donors and volunteers are able to make an effort for children without a home. Unfortunately, the reverse could also be true. Many people wrongly believe that children without parental care are best off in a children's home. Practice, however, shows that children need a loving family, and a children's home cannot provide for that. Assistance should focus first and foremost on support for families and least on temporary emergency care in institutions.

This guide is also important for organisations that do not specifically focus on vulnerable children. Because children without sufficient parental care are everywhere: in schools, villages and poor areas in big cities. Sometimes the problems at home make them not go to school or to the hospital in time. When setting up projects, it is important to acknowledge these children, to make sure they too can benefit from them.

1.   Myths about 'orphans'

"We were very poor and my mother had been sick for a long time. My father then decided to take my sister Assia and me to an orphanage. My two other sisters and brother stayed at home. Assia and I felt abandoned, I'll never forget that. After all, we still had parents. I never really learned to trust others again."
• **Rita, former resident of a children's home in Nepal**[2]

   This guide is about children without a 'home'. And by that we mean children who, for whatever reason, find themselves without proper care from their parents. It is often thought that children without a 'home' are mainly orphans. This is not true. Just as often, people think these children mostly live in children's homes. And that these homes are the best solution for the child. That is also not true. In this chapter, we list the most important facts and misunderstandings about children without a 'home'.

Most 'orphans' are not an orphan
   The term 'orphan' leads to a lot of confusion. The West labels a child as an orphan when it has lost both parents. In the rest of the world, you're already an 'orphan' when you lose either one of your parents. There are an estimated 140 million 'orphans' worldwide. Almost 90% of them still have at least one parent.[3] UNICEF warns that we should not misinterpret the numbers on orphans: this could wrongfully reinforce the image that 140 million children are urgently looking for shelter, care and a new family. In reality, the most important thing is to provide the remaining parent with support enabling them to keep taking care of their child.

Most children in children's homes are not orphans

The term 'orphanage' is misleading since the majority of children in a home are not orphans, but still have one or both parents. Research into 'orphans' in Cambodia showed that nearly 80% of the children still had at least one parent.[4] The same goes for Haïti, while in Indonesia, it is even up to 94%.[5] This is why in the remainder of this book, we will use the term 'double orphan' when a child has lost both its parents. We will use the term 'children's home' instead of orphanage.

Most children without proper parental care live with family

UNICEF estimates that 15.1 million children worldwide are missing both parents.[6] Research shows that the vast majority of these 'double orphans' live with a grandparent or other relative.[7] The same goes for AIDS orphans: studies from Zimbabwe and Malawi found that respectively 98% and 99% of the 'double orphans' lived within a family.[8] Losing both parents usually (fortunately) does not mean that a child automatically ends up in a children's home.

Children are placed in a children's home for a variety of reasons

The main reason children are placed in a children's home is poverty. Parents or family members take their child to a home because they think it will be better off there in material terms: the home will provide food, clothes and education. This, however, has an unpleasant consequence: when the number of available spots in children's homes increases, more families will bring their children to a home. This actually happens in practice. Children's homes thus become an expensive and inefficient solution to poverty in families.

Poverty is not the only reason to place a child in care. Sometimes parents are ill or have mental health problems. Sometimes a child is placed in care because it has a disability, other times, children of young single mothers are placed in a home. Emergencies and disasters can also lead

to a child ending up in a children's home, assuming that the parents are no longer alive – even though that may not be the case.[9]

A children's home is no substitute for a family

A children's home is a living environment, accommodating a group of more than ten children without parents or foster parents.Usually, there are caregivers for the day and others for the night. Most caregivers don't last long: it is a tough job, badly paid and undervalued.

A small number of caregivers have a relatively large number of children in their care and, as a result, personal attention leaves much to be desired. Research in India showed that children only received 4 minutes of personal attention from their caregivers per hour that they were awake.[10]

Especially larger children's homes with a limited staffing level offer a clinical and impersonal environment. They run on routine. The children eat, sleep and pee at the same time every day. They can't even organise their 'leisure time' themselves. Children who long-term live in a children's home lose their social network. Ties with their family and environment water down. The people in the nearby surrounding often look down on children from homes: at school and in the neighbourhood they are sometimes excluded and discriminated against.

Children's homes are bad for a child's development

Over the past 65 years, more than 300 studies in 60 countries have been published on the effects of growing up in a children's home. More than 100.000 children were involved in these studies. The evidence for the harmful effects of growing up in a children's home is overwhelming. Children in children's homes lag behind in physical growth and cognitive development. The delay isn't there when they arrive; it is caused by growing up in the children's home.

Moreover, children can develop abandonment issues and attachment disorders. Their self-esteem is lower, and they have difficulties building friendships and relationships. Children in a home have fewer motor skills and get lower grades at school. Their IQ is lower, they are shorter and they weigh less than children growing up in a family.

One of the best ways to turn the tide is to take the children out of the institution and place them in a family environment. Their physical, cognitive and social-emotional development then usually makes tremendous progress.[11]

Children that used to live in a children's home are suffering

The consequences of growing up in a children's home can still be felt once the children are adults. They lack social, household and financial skills to cope with life in society. They often don't know how to make friends outside of the institution. Many of them feel lonely and experience mental health problems. A study on children that used to live in a children's home in England showed that they are more likely to become homeless, involved in crime or teenage parents.[12] A study in Kenya found that care leavers often have great difficulties with completing their studies, finding a job and paying their rent.[13]

Children's homes are expensive

Care in children's homes is often much more expensive than other forms of care for children without a 'home'. Sometimes, the care in children's homes is six to ten times more expensive than care in one's own environment. A children's home requires a furnished building. Salaries have to be paid, food is necessary, and maintenance has to be done. The costs differ per country and per type of care. However, comparative research shows time and time again that alternative care is more cost-effective: for the amount you help one child in an institution, you can support many more children in families or communities.[14]

Children's homes don't necessarily belong to developing countries

Developing countries traditionally did not have children's homes. Children without parents are traditionally cared for within the extended family network. Missionaries and colonial governments exported children's homes at a time where institutional care was a normal phenomenon in their own country. For centuries, this was the case in Europe and America. However, in the West, these institutions have been strongly losing ground since the 1960s. Children that cannot live at home almost always live in foster families. Institutions are now only used for

children with severe disabilities or serious behavioural problems who require highly specialised care.[15]

Children's homes are 'persistent'

Once a children's home is built, you can't all of a sudden get rid of it. Not even when there are cheaper alternatives. The status quo tends to hold. There is permanent staff with a paid income. Suppliers in the neighborhood earn a living from it. They would lose their jobs and market, which can understandably lead to resistance. Moreover, it is easier to raise money for a children's home than for alternative forms of care: in a children's home you can clearly see what the given support leads to, making it an attractive fund for sponsors and donors. It is also complex to set up alternative forms of care such as foster care. It takes investments, lots of cooperation with the government and many other actors.

Western donors and volunteers stimulate the growth of children's homes

In some countries, the amount of children's homes is growing, especially in areas where there's conflict or a severe AIDS epidemic. Cambodia had 154 children's homes in 2005, in 2015, there were 406.[16] Between 1996 and 2006, 24 new children's homes were built in Zimbabwe, mostly by churches of the Pentecostal church.[17]

The growth of orphanage tourism worldwide also contributes to children's homes existing in developing countries. 'Orphanage tourists' visit children's homes during their vacation or volunteer there. This mostly happens in regions that are popular among young tourists, such as Nepal or Cambodia. Tourists contribute with donations or by working there for free. Back in Europe, they often continue to support 'their' children's home. An estimation showed that in Cambodia, children's homes tourists fund at least 248 children's homes.[18]

Research from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs also found that these types of volunteering trips contribute to the maintenance of children's homes in developing countries. The tourists form a link in the 'children's homes industry', in which Western equity funds, private donations and sponsorships maintain children's homes.[19] All this support stems from the belief that children have to be saved and are best off in a home. But it actually maintains the status quo of undesirable institutions.

2. Proper care for children without a 'home'

"My name is Runtendo Mada. I am nine years old. My parents both passed away, and I now live with my grandmother with my brothers and sisters. IMBA helped my grandma start a vegetable garden. We can sell the vegetables at the Jambanja market. Because of that, my grandma can take care of us, and we can eat and go to school."
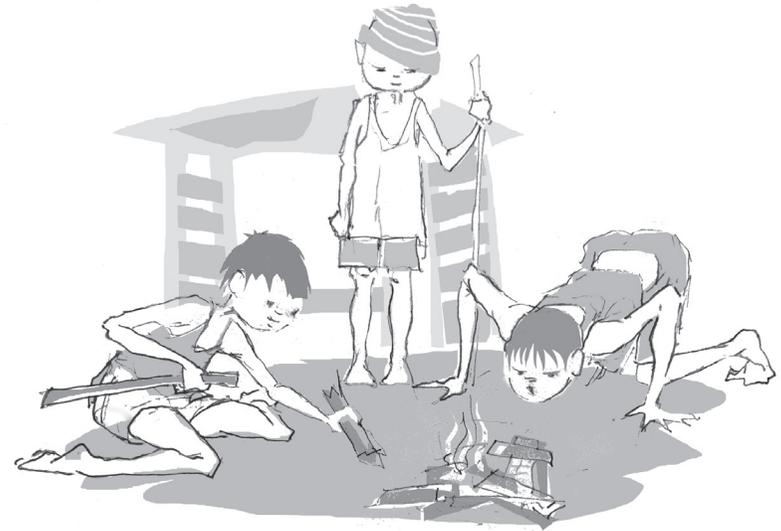• **Rutendo (9) from Zimbabwe**[20]

The best care for children without a 'home' is different from case to case: there is no 'one size fits all' solution. There are, however, a few general rules for alternative care on which there is broad consensus among scientists, policy makers and development organisations. They are based on decades of research into children's social-emotional development. These general rules are laid down in the international 'UN-Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children' (2009) and in the UN Resolution for the Rights of the Child (2019), unanimously adopted by all 193 UN state members. We briefly explain them in this chapter.

The child's own family

It is best for a child to grow up in a family. Children need a safe environment with loving caregivers to whom they can long-term attach themselves. A family best suits that and hands children the best foundation to grow up into emotionally stable and independent adults.[21]

That a child should grow up in its own family may seem self-explanatory. But this principle is often disregarded completely. Many parents and care providers are convinced that a child is better off in a children's home when their family is struggling to make ends meet. At first glance, a child may seem better off in a home with healthy nutrition and proper education than with a broke mother in a hut. But the tight routi-

ne and impersonal care cannot replace the love and individual attention of a family. The personal contact between parent and child is a primary necessity in a child's life.

Even when an educator is not very sensitive, the interaction between parent and child stimulates development. That's what children in a home are missing. Care should, therefore, primarily focus on supporting families in order to prevent children from being placed out of their homes.

A replacement family

Sometimes a child no longer has parents, or their parents cannot or do not want to take proper care of him or her. Then, accommodation in a replacement family is the best option. This is preferably a family within the own family or the community. When asked with whom they would prefer to live, children answer accordingly. They least prefer living in a children's home. For aid workers, this means their efforts must focus on finding and guiding good and local replacement families.[22]

An institution

In some cases, a – temporary – stay in a children's home is the best option. For street children, shelter in a home is often the first step to get them off the streets. Some teenagers ran away and do not want to go back to their family or foster family by any means. Sometimes shelter in an institution is temporarily necessary because of an acute emergency, for example, a disaster.

In general, shelter in an institution should be a last and temporary resort. Preferably, the child lives in the children's home for the shortest amount of time possible, in small groups and with permanent caregivers. The care is aimed at returning to family or placement in a foster family. The shelter makes sure the child can maintain or restore the bond with his family or environment. Children under the age of three should never be allowed to live in a children's home: the developmental delay and psychological damage they incur is then too large and irreversible.[23]

Deciding in the best interest of the child

Each child deserves an individual plan. For some children a family home is the best solution, for others a foster family. Other children benefit most from day care and support from their parents. From time to time, the care a child receives should be reconsidered to see if it is still really necessary and appropriate. The best interests of the child should always be the primary consideration. For starters, this means the child has to have a say in decisions made about his or her life. Parents, brothers, sisters, and others close to the child should also be included in decision-making. In a few countries, the child's decisive voice is laid down by law. In India, for example, children aged 7 or older have to be heard before placing them in a foster family.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on children without parental care in 2019.[24] This resolution builds on the previous UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children of 2009[25] and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by 196 member states.

The resolution and the guidelines state that every child has the right to be taken care of by his or her own parents. It is vital that member states commit themselves to keep families together or, when that is not possible, to provide family replacement care as close as possible to the child's place of residence. Member states should discourage care in large-scale children's homes and avoid unnecessary separation of parents and children. When a child is separated from their parents, this should be temporary and for the shortest possible period. Member states must address the causes of children's institutionalisation and end the driving forces maintaining them – including orphanage tourism.

The 2009 guidelines have been set out in more detail in a manual called 'Moving Forward', which helps governments and aid organisations to apply them.[26] Almost all regular development organisations are now following them. More and more governments are changing their legislation in line with the guidelines and the resolution. In Romania, it is prohibited by law to place children under the age of 2 in a children's home. Since 2010, Malawi has had a law that legally recognises foster care. After years of preparation, Kenya launched a programme to reform the care for children into family-oriented care. However, the implementation of the policy leaves much to be desired in some countries due to a lack of money, knowledge and human resources.

3. Start at the family

"When my parents died, my aunt sent me off to the streets. I mentioned this to one of the street workers, and she suggested we go back together and talk to her. My aunt looked happy and sad at the same time when she saw me. She told me she didn't earn enough money to take care of me and my cousins. Adamfo Ghana now pays my school fees and helps my aunt to expand her own company. I am in my senior year, and things are going very well!"
• Ama, child without adequate parental care and former street child from Ghana[27]

Extreme poverty makes it hard to take good care of children. It is not always possible to find enough food and pay for school fees or medical expenses. This creates a lot of stress for parents. This stress increases when a family also takes care of children of sick or deceased relatives or fellow villagers. This can make it tempting to place children in a children's home. It can also be a first reflex for care providers to think that children in extreme poverty are better off in a children's home. Poverty, however, should never be a reason to separate children from their parents. Support for families should always be the starting point.

This also applies after major disasters, such as the earthquakes in Haïti in 2010 and Nepal in 2015. Many children lost their parents all of a sudden. In some cases, temporary shelter in a children's home is inevitable. But even during disasters, (temporary) shelter may be found within the family, the community or a foster family.

For example, Better Care Network Netherlands made an emotional appeal to those who wanted to work for Nepalese children after the earthquake in 2015: please do not build children's homes. Invest your money in support for families in which the children can be taken care of.[28]

The social worker as a key figure

Help to children in vulnerable families starts with cooperation with a reliable local organisation. This can be a local development organisation, such as a women's group or village committee. The local social worker plays a central role. It can also be a caseworker, family coach, welfare worker or mediator. Sometimes he or she will be a professional, sometimes a well-trained local volunteer. He or she identifies the families with problems and coordinates the support, often with the help of village heads, schoolteachers and religious leaders.

This is happening, for example, at the **Siam-Care Foundation** in Thailand. They support vulnerable families affected by poverty or HIV/AIDS. Some children are infected with HIV, others have lost their parents to the disease. Siam-Care works together with hospitals: the hospital refers families to Siam-Care, after which a social worker contacts them. Many social workers are experts by experience who were once part of the assistance programme themselves. They help families through educational support, budget and parenting training, counselling, peer groups and distributing food packages. Thanks to this help, no child from these families ends up in the streets or in a children's home.

KidsCare in Kenya, which was founded by a Dutch foundation of the same name, also employs social workers. In the Lunga district, the organisation supports 1800 children in 240 families in 24 villages. The social workers work closely with the village communities and often visit families with problems. They do this together with 120 trained volunteers from those villages. In addition, the social workers arrange home care for 150 children with disabilities.

Social workers can help identify problems at an early stage. This happens, for example, in Tanzania, where the **Tan-kids** foundation offers support for neglected children and teenagers, with the help of
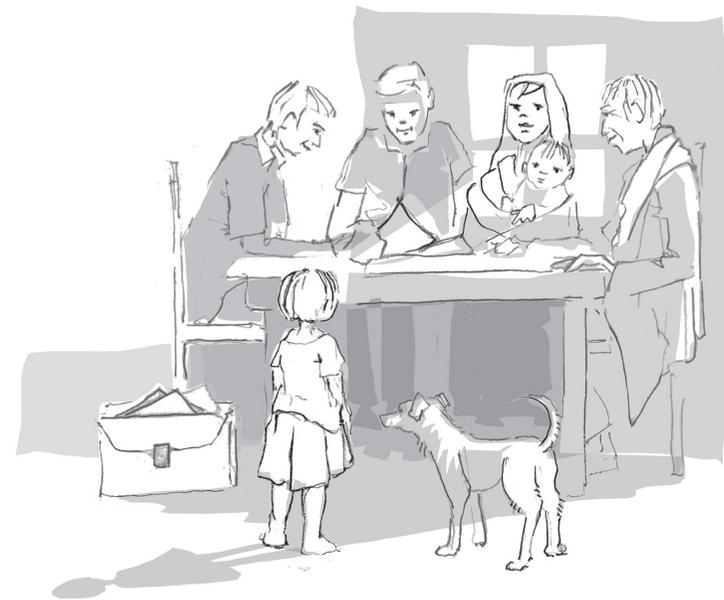
local aid organisations. They raise the alarm when they see children or youngsters that are roaming the streets, not going to school or turn to them starving. That is the cue for them to involve a 'family coach', who contacts the family. After extensive screening, the care team decides what help is needed for the child and family and where that help can come from.

The social workers of **Give a Child a Family** also work in local communities on a preventive basis in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. They do this by giving parents various training courses. Parents are taught about parenting skills, dealing with death and trauma and healthy living. The organisation also has a helpdesk with a social worker. The

social worker pays attention to problems within families and, if necessary, refers them to relevant care providers. The organisation also has a programme called 'Protective Behaviour', which makes children more resilient to abuse, maltreatment and exploitation.

Financial, material and psychosocial help

Offering help to families can be done in different ways. It often involves a combination of practical and psychosocial support. Practical support consists of, for example, distributing food packages, school uniforms and teaching materials. Some organisations give money instead of goods. Participating families at **KidsCare**, for example, receive a sum of money monthly in addition to the support of social workers. With this, KidsCare joins an existing programme called 'Cash Transfer Programme for Orphans and Vulnerable Children' of the Kenyan government, the World Bank and other international organisations. In exchange for this contribution, families have to make sure the children go to school and get regular medical check-ups. A third form of practical care is providing loans to parents and caregivers so that they can earn more income.

Besides practical and financial aid, many families benefit from psychosocial support. Poor families often deal with multiple problems, such as unemployment, illness, alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Parents with problems often do not find their way to help on their own. **Danielle Children's Fund** (DCF) in Ecuador has a team of psychologists and social workers that therefore work together with families who are at risk of their children being removed from their homes by a court. Together they examine what the family needs. They pass this on to the authorities, after which the child and family have access to temporary help to encourage them. In addition, DCF works on broadening the social circle around the family so that they no longer stand alone.

Psychosocial help is also available for participating families at **IMBA**

in Zimbabwe and Malawi. Besides tools to increase the income and food security of their household, they receive guidance to deal with their child's behaviour in a constructive way. During group and individual sessions, topics such as family relations, roles and responsibilities, finances and the development of young children are covered. This way, the support of IMBA focuses on all aspects of family life.

We mentioned the family coaches and partners of the **Tan-kids** foundation before. They are part of the Family-Based Child Care programme, which offers a mix of financial, material and psychosocial help. The programme sponsors the child to go to school and to be able to afford meals and medical care. At the same time, the family coach works on strengthening the family. Parents and caregivers get new opportunities to improve their income through workshops, business training and a small loan. The family coach also stimulates people living in the neighbourhood to help. As a result, single (grand) parents, for example, manage to place roof panels on their homes or are able to install a water tap. During parent meetings, parents experience support from each other, for example by discussing educational questions and helping each other complete a health insurance application.

The **Niketan** foundation also focuses on psychosocial help in Bangladesh. The foundation ensures that children with a complex handicap have access to special education. Parents can share their concerns with teachers at the school. The teachers listen to the parents and give them advice to help their child at home. Some families receive help from a student who is involved with the family as a volunteer. For example: drinking a cup of tea in a local café, going for a walk and playing with neighbours. Children learn a lot from this: greeting someone, saying thanks and starting a conversation with a neighbour kid. Neighbours are more positive towards these children because they see them more

often. They notice the children are much more 'normal' than they thought. They also see that the student did not get 'infected' through contact with the disabled child – a belief that still regularly occurs in new areas where they start to work.

Day care and after-school care
Practical support for families can also take the form of day care or after-school care for children and youngsters. This can really release the pressure on parents and caregivers. This is especially true for parents that are alone or families that deal with multiple problems at a time. Childcare is also very important for families, including children with disabilities. The **SOFT tulip** foundation trains paramedics, educators and social workers in rehabilitation centre Dzherelo in Ukraine. They can therefore offer high-quality personalised care to children and youngsters with mental and physical disabilities. In addition, they offer support to parents when raising their child. Thanks to the service of Dzherelo, parents can keep taking care of their disabled child, and the children are not placed in a children's home.

For mothers dealing with raising their children alone, there is the babysitter centre of the **Mama and Me foundation** in Uganda. Mothers involved in their programme take care of children aged zero to five years old and with that make a living for themselves. The other mothers are able to go to work elsewhere. Children aged six years and up go to school with a Mama and Me sponsorship. In the weekends, the centre organises activities for them. The mothers also set up a trust fund together. Anyone who wants to can put money in or apply for a loan. This enables some mothers to borrow money to go to school and others to set up a small business. Together, the mothers decide who they grant a loan to and how quickly the loan must be repaid.

Children benefiting from daycare, in particular, are street children. These are not necessarily children without a home or family, but children that live without the protection and supervision of adults. They spend their days on the streets, have to take care of their own food, earn money by begging, polishing shoes or washing cars and often do not go to school. Sometimes their parents send them out to beg or work, and at the end of the day they have to hand over the money they made.

For many street children, the step to a children's home or family is too big: they are used to freedom and struggle to accept rules. Daycare can build a bridge between life on the street and the return to a 'normal' existence. **BOSCO Bangalore**, the local partner of the Raja foundation in India, offers day-care, sports, play and many creative activities. This way, children discover their talents and bond with social workers. Well-trained social workers guide the children and know how to deal with traumas and other problems these children have. Systematically, they try to find out where these children come from, what their home situation is and how contact with their families can be restored.

Sometimes assistance to street children is aimed at teaching them to stand on their own two feet. **The Street Children Project** in Kumasi, Ghana, supported by the Dutch Adamfo Ghana foundation, set up a training centre for teenage girls living in the streets. They receive vocational training to become a tailor or hairdresser and learn to read, calculate and handle money. They have conversations with social workers aimed at building their self-confidence and making their own choices.

Checklist: helping families

1. Who are at-risk families in the area your foundation is active? Does the local government or another organisation already have an overview of this?
2. What problems do the families have and what support do they need?
3. What do (local) governments and other organisations do for them? For example, help with raising the children, training and income-generating activities?
4. What can your (partner) organisation mean to those families?
5. Who can you collaborate with? For example: child protection services, local authorities, the police, schools and health organisations, but also local leaders and volunteers.

4.   Looking for 'new' parents

"I open my home and heart for a child without a family, for I do not want a child to grow up in a children's home."
• **Foster parent of Give a Child a Family in South Africa**[29]

Sometimes childcare within the own family is (temporarily) not possible or desirable. When that happens, it is important to look for a foster family for the child. In practice, there is no clear distinction between foster care and informal care by family members. In the guide, by foster care, we mean care in families other than one's own. This could be grandparents or an aunt, families in the neighbourhood of formal foster homes. We also classify care in small-scale family homes as foster care. In family homes, permanent 'family parents' provide a home to a small group of children with whom they live together as a family.

In a foster family or family home, children experience normal family life and receive individual attention. They feel they belong somewhere and can long-term bond with family members. A long-term study in Romania found that young children from children's homes in Romania made tremendous progress when placed in a foster family. Their cognitive and emotional development improved, while children who continued to live in a home fell further behind.[30]

Matching foster parents and children
A good 'match' between a foster parent and a foster child is crucial for a successful placement in a foster family. Screening the foster parents is essential. Foster care by – willing – family members is preferred over care by non-family members.

Living with family strengthens the sense of identity.[29] The chance of success increases if the child and foster family can get used to each

other: meeting a few times, staying overnight, followed by a trial period of one or several months. It can help if the foster parents come from the same neighbourhood, adhere to the same religion and belong to the same ethnic group: it provides common ground and continuity. Proper guidance for parents and children is crucial, also in the months and years after the placement. Finally, it is advised to formalise the placement in a foster family, for example, by having the parents sign a contract or formally registering them as foster parents.

Children in foster families are generally lovingly taken care of. However, placement in a foster family is not without risks. Sometimes the foster parents treat their own children better than they treat the foster child. The risk of discrimination, neglect, abuse and exploitation is higher than when they live with their own parents.

For some, this is a reason to warn against foster care. However, it should be borne in mind that the risk is even higher in children's homes: according to some studies, violence in institutions is six times more common than in foster care.[32]

Finding foster families

Finding foster families is labour-intensive. Just like support for families, it starts with good local organisations with professionally trained social workers offering customised care.

It is almost always possible to find foster parents within the extended family and the own network. Even when the (sick) parents believe there is no one around to help. This was shown, for example, in a project for mothers with HIV in a slum in Nairobi. Half of them initially thought no one in their family would be able to take care of their child should they become ill. A social worker did not accept this and went looking for relatives with whom the mother had lost contact. In almost all cases, she found someone willing to take care of the child without any money or material help in return.[33]

If a foster family cannot be found within the 'extended family', the search broadens. This is what, for example, the **Arise and Shine** foundation puts in practice in Uganda. The foundation has a Baby Care Home; a temporary emergency shelter for babies and very young children. They sometimes lost their mother during birth or have been

taken into care by the government. The foundation does everything to investigate whether these children can grow up with other relatives. In 2018, the foundation started setting up foster care for children no one else can or will take care of. There is a strict selection for future foster parents, who then receive intensive training. There are a number of introductory visits before children are placed in their foster care. After placement, Arise and Shine continues to guide the families. The foundation also ensures that contact with the biological parents and relatives continues, making it possible for the children to eventually return to their families when the time is right.

Finding foster parents also does not happen overnight at **Give A Child A Family** (GCF) in South Africa. GCF, which receives support from the eponymous 'friends foundation' in the Netherlands, recruits, screens and trains about 25 new foster families every year. The families are found through churches and women's groups in the community. Families undergo a strict assessment process: GCF employees visit them at least seven times. They interview neighbours and other members of the community and request a police clearence. Families who get through the selection process receive a five-day foster care training. Only then are they allowed to take in a child.[34]

Several countries, such as Kenya and South Africa, are also working on setting up emergency foster care: foster families where children are welcome 24 hours a day when their home situation is too unsafe for them. This prevents the child from going to a children's home, even if only for a short period of time. This requires careful preparation from foster parents, police, courts and the child protection services, but projects by **Give a Child a Family** and the **Stahili Foundation** show that in practice, it is really quite possible.

Guiding foster parents

Being a foster parent is not easy. Foster parents have to get to know the child, respond to his or her needs and let them settle in the family. Guidance often starts before the placement and continues for months or years afterwards. A local partner organisation of **Adamfo Ghana**, for example, works with introductory visits and a trial period. The organisation and foster care family make clear agreements on the care for the child and document these in a contract. After the placement, follow-up visits take place regularly to see how things are going.

Give a Child a Family does the same thing in South Africa. For example, foster parents are taught how to deal with traumatised children. Both organisations help the foster family to improve their income. They get chickens or learn how to grow vegetables to support themselves.

Formalising foster care

Formalising foster care and involving the environment reduces the chances of abuse and neglect in foster families.
In many countries, formalising foster care is legally obliged: an aid organisation is not simply authorised to place a child in another family. In India, for example, you must have a statement from the Child Welfare Committee. This is done based on a home investigation by a probation officer. Children older than seven have to be heard. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a juvenile court decides on the termination of all parental rights and placement in a foster family. Such a formal decision also regulates what powers the foster parents have, such as giving permission for undergoing an operation in the hospital and enrolling in a school.

Checklist: finding and guiding foster parents

1. Who would the child prefer to live with?
2. Which relatives or families in the area would like to care for the child?
3. Is the family suitable? What do neighbors, fellow villagers, officials and the police say?
4. Does the family need material or socio-economic support? Can your (partner) organisation offer this?
5. What has to be done legally to grant the foster parents custody of the child?
6. In what way can your (partner) organisation support the foster family after the child has been placed there?

5. A children's home: only a temporary emergency solution

"The disastrous effects of growing up in a children's home are abundantly clear after more than 300 studies over the past 65 years involving 100.000 children in more than 60 countries. We found massive delays in physical growth, cognitive development and attachment development. We proved that this is not due to any disadvantages the children already had upon arrival at the children's home. The transition to a family environment appears to be one of the most effective interventions we have seen in pedagogy, psychology or psychiatry, with impressive progress in the physical, cognitive and social-emotional development."
• **Professors of pedagogy Van Ijzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg**[35]

"I really did not like it in the children's home. I am really glad to be home and see my parents. Now I can be with my brothers and sisters again."
• **Sophea, grew up in a children's home in Cambodia**[36]

Sometimes placement in a small-scale facility is temporarily necessary. For example, when a child is abused and not safe at home. Or, when it has lost its parents due to war or a disaster. For children who lived on the streets, it is also hard to go directly from street life to living in a family or foster family. For them, day-care or a shelter is often the first step.

It is important that this care is temporary, in a group not larger than six children, with well-trained and paid caregivers and a high caregiver-child ratio. There must be sufficient personal attention and an individual care plan for each child, in which the child can voice its needs.

The purpose of such a placement should be to actively contribute to the reintegration of the child into the family or, when that is not possible or not in the child's best interests, in a safe and stable alternative family care setting. For example, with a family, a foster family, an adoptive family or through assisted independent living.

The care facility should make every effort to maintain and restore ties with the family or community. It considers the placement as a measure of last resort: the ultimate goal is to have the child grow up in a family situation, not to live in the home permanently.[37]

Reducing children's homes: the difficult reality

However, in practice, this ideal seems far away. Many governments in developing countries want to reduce the number of spots in children's homes and encourage care in families. Often, legislation already exists, but the implementation fails. As a result, many children's homes stubbornly continue to exist, or even new children's homes are set up.

The latter often happens with support from foreign donors. In 1998, for example, a foreign organisation opened a beautiful children's home in Romania alongside a main road. Everyone could see it, and it had an almost luxurious feel to it. The home attracted a large number of new 'orphans', which frustrated official government policy. In Kenya, we still see this happening nowadays: many children's homes or children's villages are built without permission from the government and against government policy.

Many children's homes do not offer a short-term emergency solution, only a permanent living environment. Research in 33 Rwandan children's homes in 1994 showed that 30% of the children had been living there for over ten years. In Malawi, research showed that for over 90% of the children in a children's home, there was no plan whatsoever. In spite of the Malawian government policy to reduce the number of institutions, half of the homes were actively looking for children, through

their own staff or teachers.[36] Other researchers concluded that half of the 'orphans' in Zambia could return to their family, provided there were sufficient funds for reorganising the 'orphanages'.[39]

In recent years, however, we have also seen positive developments. Moldova reduced the number of children's homes by 86% between 2007 and 2016.

Rwanda reunited 70% of the children living in children's homes with their biological family or a foster family between 2012 and 2016. Ghana, Ethiopia and Russia have also closed down children's homes in the last couple of years and children were reunited with their families.[40]

Do not build new children's homes

Initiators with small-scale projects can do a lot to improve alternative care for children.

For starters, by not building any new children's homes – not even when a local community is asking for it. This seems counter-intuitive: after all, an important starting point is that projects have to match the local community's wishes. And often, local communities strongly believe that children without parents or from impoverished families are better off in a children's home. Those who dig deeper, however, find out that poverty within families is the real obstacle. When discussing alternatives together, most people will agree that it is better to help the families than to take their children away from them.

However, for a number of private initiatives, that ship has sailed: they have already built a children's home or donated to an existing one. More often than not, there is a long-term agreement, and the home relies on donations from the Netherlands. Stopping the support is not an option; it would only harm the children. Such a private initiative can go down a couple of roads. The first is to help the home to reunite as many children as possible with their families or place them in foster care. Sometimes this will eventually mean the closure of the children's home. The second option is to convert the children's home into a family home with foster parents for children who can no longer return to their families. A third option is to restructure the children's home into a centre for daycare and support for struggling families from the neighborhood. Whichever route is chosen, it can only succeed when the local cooperation partner is fully behind it.

Understanding and motivation

Basil and Monica Woodhouse of **Give a Child a Family** (GCF) made such a turnaround. They built a children's home in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where they took in dozens of children. Slowly, however, they came to realise that the children in the children's home received too little individual attention. They took the initiative to reunite children with their families or find a foster family for them. The children's home in Margate, once the start of GCF, now only offers temporary shelter for children without a home.

BOSCO in Bangalore, India, also started looking at their existing project differently. The organisation has been taking care of street children in shelter homes for decades. The children that couldn't go back to their families stayed there until they were adults. An experience with a former street child, however, opened BOSCO's eyes. The boy had been living in the shelter home for years, then got married and became a father of four children. Suddenly his wife died. The father did not feel the need to keep his children with him and took them to institutions. BOSCO realised the father would not be able to take care of his children, even if he loved them: in the children's home, he had not learned how to give them affection. The organisation realised that in children's homes, like their own, children did not receive the individual attention they needed. BOSCO is now successfully placing (former) street children in foster families and group foster care.[41]

Back to the family

Caring for children in homes means, where possible, reuniting them with their family or finding a foster family. In the vast majority of cases, one of the parents is still alive, and the children's home knows where they live. Sometimes, however, locating the parents is quite a job. This is illustrated by the experience of organisations working with street children or children that ran from their rescue centres. BOSCO describes how their employees moved heaven and earth to trace the parents of a runaway boy. His parents were rag pickers moving from one place to another constantly. The team was directed to many addresses before they finally found the couple.

Sometimes the organisation puts advertisements in papers and shows pictures in cinemas. BOSCO now also has a system in which, together with the police, they link descriptions of missing children to those of found children. When their parents are found, a BOSCO social worker contacts the family. He or she investigates why a child no longer lives at home and what support the family needs to be able to take care of the child themselves. Sometimes the way home is not easy. For example, when a child runs away from home due to problems or when it is trafficked. Often, multiple meetings are needed before a child can return home. In all cases, aftercare is crucial to prevent the child from running away, being taken away or being trafficked again.

Reuniting children with their parents is also challenging for the **Macheo** foundation. Amongst other things, the foundation takes care of babies who have been abandoned in Kenya. The search for the parents of foundlings is an intensive process sometimes. It can literally mean going door-to-door to ask if people know a woman who was pregnant but is now never seen with a baby. Sometimes the mother regrets what she did and reports herself to the authorities, other times, relatives go looking.

Reuniting mother and child is an intense process. Macheo specialists work together with social workers, government institutions, hospitals, police and courts. Sometimes they can financially empower mothers and families so that they are able to take good care of the child.

Transforming children's homes

There is a lot to consider when converting a children's home: a major renovation may be required, the financial situation changes and donors have to 'agree' to the renewal. But the biggest obstacle is the staff. Different expertise is necessary for placing children back in families than for running a children's home: no caregivers, cooks and cleaners, but social workers. A small-scale family home or day-care also requires a different type of staff than a children's home: no caregivers, but family parents of pedagogical staff. Caregivers in a children's home are not automatically suitable for such a new role. In some cases, it is possible to train or retrain existing staff members.

The **Children's Education Centre** in Namibia, supported by the Dutch SOJA foundation, first decided not to take in any new children. Then, the director looked at which children could return home, together with a social worker from the government. She drew up a support package for the families. Two caregivers from the home were willing to take in children who could not return to their own families. One of the caregivers lived on-site at the children's home. They rented and furnished a house for her to use as a family home. The children were happy they could just live in a family, in a residential area. In addition, the organisation hired a professional social worker to guide the families, maintain contact with schools and arrange trauma counselling. Almost all the children were found to have traumas, for example the unresolved loss of their parents and abuse and violence before they came to the children's home. As a result, they dealt with behavioural problems, alcohol or substance abuse and especially depression. Currently, the social worker is working on setting up an income-generating project. As a result, the often single parents or grandmothers or aunts do not remain dependent on financial support. The foundation has experienced how important it was to have a trained social worker for this kind of work: supporting families turned out to be quite different from running a children's home.

Checklist: From children's home to family care

1. Is the children's home motivated to look for alternative forms of care for the children?
2. What are the consequences for staff, suppliers and buildings?
3. What are the financial consequences?
4. Can the home fulfill a role as a family home, shelter, drop-in centre or daycare for children?
5. Do the staff members have the right attitude and expertise, or can they be retrained?

6.   On your own two feet

"Leaving the children's home was one of the hardest moments of my life. We were told: 'You are too old'. I remember we got an envelope with $100 and that they said: 'You have to find a house and explore how you want to live outside of the home'. I was lucky enough to have a friend that could help me find a house and adjust to life outside. Peers from the children's home struggled to get on with their lives and turned to drugs or prostitution and crime."
• **Stephen, former resident of a children's home in Kenya**[42]

Many youngsters leave the institution when they turn eighteen. At that age, they are expected to be able to stand on their own two feet and manage without assistance. For many youngsters who have lived in an institution for the larger part of their lives, also known as 'care leavers', leaving the institution is often a nightmare. During a conference in 2020, 2300 care leavers and professionals from more than 80 countries discussed the consequences of living in an institution. The majority of care leavers have difficulty transitioning to an independent life. The young people are not part of a family or a community that they can fall back on, and that can help them build an independent life. They often face the challenges that come with that on their own.

Moreover, youngsters in an institution develop little responsibility for dealing with challenges. They lack life skills, often miss several years of education and therefore only have a chance at a job that requires few skills. As a result, many of the youngsters have few hopes and dreams for their future. In addition, the environment often does not accept these young people: they are stigmatised because they grew up in a children's home. All this leads to an unstable beginning of adult life and a lot of mental stress. Care leavers often end up in the streets, they

start using alcohol and drugs, are unemployed or are attracted to the criminal world, after which some youngsters even see no other option than attempting suicide.[43]

Smooth transition

Care for children cannot stop all of a sudden when they leave a children's home or foster family. The institution or foster family has to provide the youngsters with enough skills to function as independent grown-ups. The transition from home to independence should also not be too abrupt. **SOS Kinderdorpen** in Ghana tries to make leaving a children's home a little easier through an intermediate step. They build special youth homes in the neighborhood, where a group of youngsters live together under the supervision of a group leader. Here they learn to stand on their own two feet in a safe way.

Youngsters who start living on their own often need practical and financial support for a long time. Research among care leavers in Kenya for example, showed that many youngsters do receive a scholarship, but no money for living expenses. Aside from studying, they have to work to get money to pay for food and room rent and often don't last long trying.[44]

The **Aman Fund** in Jordan goes about this differently. This organisation grants scholarships to youngsters leaving a home or foster care for continuing education or vocational training. Participators receive sufficient funds for living expenses, until they find a job.

In Kenya, the **Stahili Foundation** has a programme, 'Leaping Gaps', especially for care leavers. They can get support to get an education or take courses and receive guidance from youngsters who (partly) grew up in children's homes as well. The aim of the programme is to make the transition to an independent life easier for young adults who do not have a proper family network to fall back on. They get workshops on personal development, career planning and building an independent life.
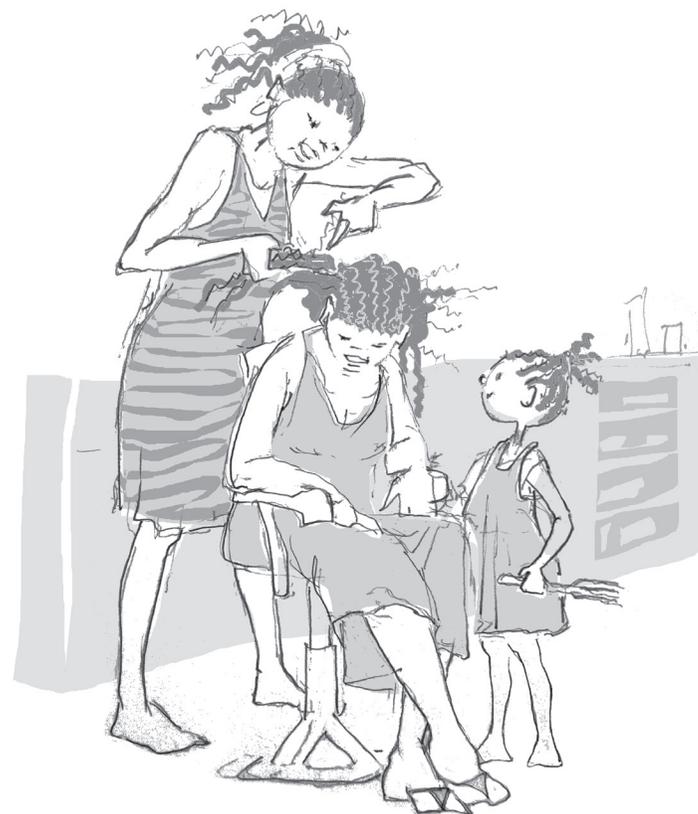
Children growing up in families sometimes also struggle to leave care, for example, daycare. This is especially true for children with a disability. The day-care and rehabilitation centre **Path of Life** in Uzhgorod, Ukraine, therefore has a training centre for assisted living for 18 to 25 year olds with a mental disability. The rehabilitation centre is a partner organisation of the Dutch SOFT tulip foundation. Every other week the

youngsters live in the residential facility. With supervision, they learn to live together; grocery shopping, cooking and taking care of the house. This way, parents can also get used to the fact that their child is taking steps on the road to independence. The parents' biggest fear is that when they die, their child has to live in a facility.

Youngsters helping each other out

Youngsters can do a lot to help each other out. In 2009, care leavers founded the **Kenya Society of Careleavers** in Kenya, a self-help organisation for youngsters who spent the majority of their youth in institutions. The organisation supports young adults who are on the verge of leaving the institution or who have just started living on their own. They give them training to ease the transition to live outside of the institution and to deal with the challenges they face. For example, entering into relationships, communicational skills, dealing with conflicts, but also how to find a job and keeping your finances organised. In addition, they organise sessions on how to cope with violence, abuse and trauma. The organisation talks to governments, policymakers and youth care organisations about how they can adjust their policy and legislation in order to ensure that children without proper parental care and young care leavers can get more support and increase their chances at finding a job.

The **Stahili Foundation** also encourages former children's home residents to support each other. Stahili organises and guides support groups in which care leavers can exchange experiences and help each other with matters they bump into.

In 2020, the international **Care Leavers Association** was founded. They organise meetings, share knowledge on care leavers and lobby to improve the situation of care leavers worldwide and to make their voice heard. Because of their efforts, the needs and desires of care leavers increasingly became a key consideration.

Checklist: Care for 'care leavers'

1. Does the children's home or shelter facility prepare the youngsters for them leaving 'care'?
2. Are the care leavers sufficiently equipped to manage their own life financially, practically and emotionally?
3. Can the youngsters fall back on the children's homes once they have left? Or can they fall back on family or a social network?
4. Does the care leaver need aftercare and can your (partner) organisation offer this?

7.   Volunteer work with children

*"Full of good intentions, but without any relevant training or prepara-
tion, I left for Nepal. For six months, I wanted to give the children in
the children's home my time and love to make their life a little better.
The fact that I was allowed to be with the children just like that,
without training and a certificate of conduct, worries me in hindsight.
The more I learned about volunteer work in children's homes, the
clearer it became that it is not good for children. They clearly have at-
tachment issues and my stay there frankly worked counter-productive.
I went to Nepal with the best intentions, but I never thought about
what impact it would have."*
• **Carmen, from the Netherlands**[45]

It is a worldwide trend to do volunteer work or an internship abroad.
Children's homes or shelter projects for street children are a popular
choice for that. Working in a different environment and being in touch
with other cultures is seen as an enrichment of your life experience. For
the same reasons, tourists visit children's homes on their vacation in
India or Cambodia. In recent years, however, more and more attenti-
on has been paid to the downside: how enriching is it for children in
children's homes to have constantly changing supervisors and visitors
around?

Children need permanent caregivers with whom they can build long-
term relationships. In a children's home with constantly changing care-
givers that have little time for them, they miss that experience. Volun-
teers who stay for a short period, contribute to the continual entering
into and then discontinuing of relationships. In the renowned journal
The Lancet, researchers concluded that volunteer work with children in
homes poses a substantial risk of psychological damage to them and is
bad for the well-being of children.[46]

Those who visit a children's home may witness the first signs: little
children spontaneously run up to them and want to hug them. This
seems cute and endearing. But in fact, this is a red flag: young children
are more likely to adopt a wait-and-see attitude towards strangers. A
child immediately sneaking on every stranger's lap possibly missed the
safety and support of the permanent caregivers around them.

Voluntourism

The last couple of years, there has been a growing criticism of
so-called 'voluntourism': combining tourism with volunteer work. It is a
fast-growing industry of people wanting to volunteer and organisations
facilitating those trips.[47] In the Netherlands alone, there are 1.430 to
1.730 private initiatives, fifteen travelling agencies and nineteen tour
operators actively sending approximately six volunteer workers a year
to children's homes. These figures are probably an underestimation,
possibly this involves as many as 10.000 Dutch persons a year.[48]

Volunteer trips unnecessarily preserve children's homes. Indirectly
these trips can even lead to an offer of 'orphans', that most of the time
aren't even children without parents. It is important to realise that not
all children's homes have good intentions. Some facilities earn money
from the care for children, for example, through donations of volun-
teers. 'Orphans' are their merchandise, and voluntourism is part of this
'orphanage industrial complex'. There is even a link between voluntou-
rism and child trafficking, where children are deliberately taken from
their parents and brought to a children's home, sometimes for payment
and under false pretenses. They then serve as a source of income, for
example, from tourists and volunteers.

With the best intentions, Western volunteers and donors contri-
bute to an undesirable increase in the number of children's homes in
developing countries. In Cambodia, the number of children's homes

grew by 164% between 2005 and 2015, partly due to 'children's homes tourism' and donations from Westerners.[47] A couple of organisations are therefore committed to discouraging volunteer work and internships in children's homes. Better Care Network runs the following campaigns against volunteering in orphanages: #stopweeshuistoerisme, #stopweeshuisstages and #weeswijs. Internationally, campaigns such as www.loveyougive.org and #helpingnothelping were organised. Former children's home resident Stephen's experiences should also discourage every 'children's home tourist': "You can compare living in a home to living in the zoo: in the weekend, people literally came by to look at us. Neighbors, but also donors, for whom we had to sing and dance. They then left, leaving us feeling like we were an object."[50]

What should we do?

Sending volunteers to work at children's homes breaches the international guidelines for proper care for children. The Better Care Network Netherlands, therefore, advises against this. The practice is, however, unruly: many volunteers simply want to work on a foreign children's project for a short period. And many children's homes are happy to have an extra set of hands, more donations and new knowledge. How can you, as a volunteer, ensure you make a positive contribution and that you do not harm the children? The Better Care Network Netherlands drew up guidelines for that.[51] The guidelines are meant for anyone who wants to do an internship or work with vulnerable children in developing countries for a while. Volunteers can also take an online assessment with questions to ask themselves and their travelling organisation.[52]

The most important criterion is that volunteer work cannot take place in a children's home or any other form of care where children reside permanently. Otherwise, you are helping to maintain a form of care that is harmful to children.

A second criterion is that you must have enough knowledge and working experience to work with vulnerable, often also traumatised, children. For example as a social worker, psychologist, educator, teacher or youth worker. This also includes sufficient life experience to be able to react properly to difficult stories about, for example, abuse and mistreatment.

It is also very important that the project takes the way in which children attach themselves to others into account. Children become attached to their parents or caregivers and need permanent people around them. They can discover the world from that safe environment. Projects

should make volunteers aware of how to deal with the children without making them become attached to you. Good projects encourage the bond between children and their caregivers and are focused on children living at home.

At www.stopweeshuistoerisme.nl and www.weeswijs.nu you'll find an elaboration (in Dutch) of the ten most important conditions for projects that really want to do good for the local population.

Checklist: Sending volunteers to children's projects

1. Does the project focus on the community or on children still living at home?
2. Is the way children become attached taken into account?
3. Do the interests and needs of the local population prevail over those of the volunteers?
4. Does the project work on a lasting and sustainable impact?
5. Does the volunteer have knowledge and experience that matches the needs of the local project?
6. Is the organisation financially transparent?
7. Does the organisation have a child protection policy?
8. Is there a complaints procedure for both the organisation and the volunteer?
9. Is there extensive preparatory training?
10. Is there good guidance on site?

8.   Sustainable projects

"KidsCare is committed to being a sustainable project for children with a disability in Kenya. From the start, we were in contact with several governments. In the beginning, the Children's Officer, in particular, played an important role. He gave a lot of advice and helped to select the right pilot villages and families. Now we are also in contact with the highest officials of the province. For example, their officials provide training on agriculture, beekeeping and running a company. In addition, the advisor on special education gives us advice on how to find suitable trainers and register our Special School Units for children with a disability. The government makes all these services available to KidsCare, at no cost and in consultation."
• **KidsCare Kenya**[53]

A project for children without a 'home' should in no way be a one-hit-wonder; care for families, foster parents and emergency shelter is needed for years. A couple of factors increase sustainability. For example, the project should be supported by a local partner who is in control. Dutch foundations, donors and volunteers can offer a supporting role: thinking along, helping and raising funds, but they should not be in the driver's seat. A second factor that determines success is steady cooperation with relevant people and parties, such as the government. The third factor is financing: the local organisation and donors have thought about the long-term income. We will discuss the themes 'cooperation' and 'financial sustainability' below.

Cooperation: circles around the child

Taking care of children without a home requires a case-by-case approach. Not one local organisation can arrange all of this on its own.

Without exceptions, the organisations mentioned in this guide cooperate with other parties. A framework for involving others is to think in circles around the child. The first circle is the child himself and his direct family members. Belonging in this circle are parents (if they are still alive), brothers and sisters, grandparents and uncles and aunts. People nearby form the second circle. For example, teachers, neighbours, friends, village heads, pastors or imams. They know the family and can think along for a solution. The third circle consists of organisations that play a role in the community and, in one way or another, focus on the rights of the child. For example, local development organisations or women's groups. This circle also contains the (regional) government body responsible for the care of vulnerable children and families.

An example showing the cooperation between the different circles can be found at the local partner of **Adamfo Ghana**. They supported 16-year-old Aisha to leave street life behind and return to her family in the north of Ghana. With the support of the local organisation, she then started a two-year vocational training to become a tailor. But it soon became apparent that Aisha's father wanted her to have an arranged marriage to an older man. At the suggestion of the local organisation, Aisha approached the village committee, which in turn talked to the parents. After a representative of the child protective services joined the conversations, the parents tacked on. They agreed that Aisha could complete her training before she got married and that she can marry a man of her own choice.

Cooperation: the government

The government has the leading role in organising proper care for children. All the member states of the United Nations adopted the resolution on this theme in December 2019, and many countries are slowly but surely adapting their legislation and policy to it. In practice, however, planned reforms are not always executed, and in many

countries, the care for children without a 'home' lies in the hands of church organisations, development organisations and private initiatives. At best, they support the government in executing her policy. In the worst-case scenario, they follow their own path, in which they do not comply with legislation and escape from any form of control.

A project for children without a 'home' should match the local government's policy. First of all, for this it is very important to know the local laws. What do they say about the rights and protection of children? In Nepal, for example, it is not allowed to just take a child into a shelter project, even if it lives on the streets. In India and South Africa, foster children have to be officially registered. Very poor families there are legally entitled to some form of child benefit. In Tanzania, staff of a

licensed children's home or institution are obliged to help the child reunite with their family. The same obligation goes for social workers and other persons responsible for the maintenance of a child.[54]

A second requirement is to know the local policy for children without a 'home'. What are the national and regional government's plans? What ministries are responsible, and who has to take care of implementation? Often, the government has its own body responsible for the care of children. In Nepal, this is the Central Child Welfare Board, in Ghana the Department of Social Welfare. At the district level, there is often a special Child Rights Officer (Nepal) or a Children's Officer (Kenya). This authority or person has to be aware of and involved in the project.

Often it is primarily necessary to inform governments on the situation of children. **Adamfo Ghana**, for example, is increasingly committed to lobbying the government – locally, regionally and nationally. The aim is to give them a wake-up call and have them take more responsibility for unaccompanied (street) children. For example, through family support, financing reintegration and poverty reduction. Their lobby is successful: in 2020, a large-scale media campaign led to the ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection inviting their local partner to talk about new policies for street children.

There are many examples of successful cooperation between (small-scale) development organisations and the government. In Malawi, **Het Goede Doel** foundation built a daycare for young children. The Social Welfare Office was involved in the initiative. They arranged training on child care for the parent committee and the volunteers.

OAfrica, an organisation in Ghana, decided to change their way of working in 2006 so that it would better suit the government policy. OAfrica was supporting several children's homes in Ghana at the time.

In collaboration with UNICEF and the Department of Social Welfare, they placed all the children from the children's homes in families and foster care.

Next Generation Nepal also always works together with the Central Child Welfare Board, a government body responsible for the protection of children's rights. Next Generation Nepal tracks down trafficked children and then 'rescues' them from corrupt children's homes. Next Generation Nepal only does that when the Central Child Welfare Board gives them permission to. According to Next Generation Nepal, this requires a lot of patience and is sometimes frustrating, because the government has limited resources and officials. However, the organisation also says it has a lot of respect for the officials 'doing what they can in very challenging circumstances'.[55]

Financing children's projects

Projects for vulnerable children cost money. It is not easy to make them self-sufficient. Just like health care and education, social services always require more money. As long as the local government is unwilling or unable to bear the costs, other forms of financing have to be sought. It is important to think about the financial sustainability of a project, preferably at the earliest possible stage of the project.

The first option is to keep costs low. Support for families is much cheaper than building and running an institution. For a few dozen euros a month per family, you can support them with school tuition and medical care. **JeCCDO**, an organisation that took in thousands of children in homes in the '80s and '90s, also noticed this financial advantage. From 2002, JeCCDO radically changed course and started supporting families. With the same budget, they are now supporting seven thousand children instead of a thousand.

A second option is to provide income. Several children's projects get their income from tourism. In Cusco, Peru, two hotels fund the **Niños**

Unidos Peruanos foundation, a shelter project for neglected children. Other organisations combine their work with small-scale agricultural projects, such as growing vegetables or keeping chickens and cows. With that, they take care of their own food and have an additional source of income.

A third option is to find multiple financiers. It makes a project less vulnerable than when it relies on a single source of income. Try to split the costs, for example, by asking for a contribution from the government. Another option is to raise funds in your own country. For example, **BOSCO Bangalore** is successful in involving local companies, funds and wealthy individuals in their work in India.

Checklist: Cooperation and sustainability

1. What is the official government policy for alternative care?
2. What legislation has to be taken into account?
3. With what government bodies and local organisations can you collaborate?
4. What are the possibilities for co-financing, local fundraising or generating your own income for the project?

Learn and read more

Ask advice

This guide gives an overview of the most important considerations regarding children's projects abroad. Each project is, however, unique and raises specific questions. A number of organisations can help initiators of children's projects with further advice.

• **Better Care Network Netherlands (BCNN)** is a network of organisations committed to supporting children without adequate family care. BCNN organises, amongst other things, meetings and webinars about childcare for private initiatives. On their website and in their newsletter, many examples and information can be found. You may also reach out for an individual consultation. *www.bettercarenetwork.nl*

• **Wilde Ganzen** is happy to talk to any private development initiative that's considering a transition to family-based care. Wilde Ganzen is able to support this in many ways, for example, through coaching, connecting you to other foundations and co-financing costs involved in a transition. *www.wildeganzen.nl*

• **Partin** is the association for small-scale projects in developing countries and represents the interests of these initiatives. Partin offers personal advice, a large number of practical toolkits (including one on the care for vulnerable children) and a platform to exchange experiences, share knowledge and cooperate with other organisations. *www.partin.nl*

• In the Dutch NGO pledge **#EveryChildAFamily**, a growing group of private development initiatives has declared that family is the place for

a child to grow up. They call on other NGO's, companies, churches and schools to invest in family-oriented care. Care for children in children's homes is not part of that. Want to know more or join?
E-mail us at *info@bettercarenetwork.nl*.

Further reading

This guide mentions dozens of examples of organisations that work for children in developing countries, often with support from the Netherlands. Their websites and annual reports are easy to find on the internet. Below we also mention a couple of websites and manuals that can be of value for small-scale initiators.

• On *www.bettercarenetwork.nl* you will find the Dutch version of the **International Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children**. The guidelines have been set out in a practical manual for governments and development organisations, **Moving Forward**. The manual and inspiring examples are available at *www.alternativecareguidelines.org.*

• The Better Care Network Netherlands has developed guidelines for **volunteer work and internships with children abroad**. You can find them in Dutch on *www.stopweeshuistoerisme.nl* under 'Goed project'.

• The international **Better Care Network** offers comprehensive documentation, research, toolkits, videos and manuals on the website. You will also find the current selection of free online courses on the Guidelines for the Alternative Care, prevention, child protection and the transition to family-based care. The selection can be found under 'Events' and is also mentioned in BCNN's monthly newsletter.
www.bettercarenetwork.org

• **Faith to Action Initiative** has developed a range of publications, courses and guidelines on alternative care for children and the transition to family-based care. *www.faithtoaction.org*

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illions of children in developing countries are not able to live at home, temporarily or long-term. Sometimes because their parents have passed away or because the problems at home are just too big. Other times because they have run away or are separated from their families by wars, disasters or child traffickers. The fate of these vulnerable children is a concern for many people. Some start projects, volunteer with children or support an orphanage.

Children without a 'home' is for them. What is the best way to help children without a safe home? What do you need to know about orphanages in developing countries? Why is care in families usually better than care in a children's home? What is important to consider when you want to volunteer in a children's home?

These questions are answered in short chapters with real-life examples. The basic principle is that every child has a right to grow up in a loving family. Help should focus primarily on support for families and lastly on care in children's homes.

Children without a 'home' is published by Better Care Network Netherlands, a network of organisations that offer help to children in developing countries without adequate parental care. This completely revised version contains the latest scientific insights and new practical examples.

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