MIRACLE
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-INDIA-

Fourth Edition of

Leadership Dialogues

Empower. Strengthen. Innovate.

Towards a Safer Future for Our Children

Frequently Asked and Most Important Questions

How can we ensure that families remain self-sufficient and do not become overly reliant on social workers or case managers after reintegration and during the follow-up period?

To ensure families do not become dependent on social workers post-reintegration, the focus should be on empowering them to become self-sufficient. NGOs and social workers should define their role as facilitators of family strengthening, guiding families to build strong relationships, achieve financial stability, and access necessary services. The follow-up mechanism should be designed to build resilience and independence, with families encouraged to become role models for their children. Institutional care should be emphasized only as a last resort. Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), District Child Protection Units (DCPUs), and stakeholders must work together to shift mindsets, incorporating extended kinship counseling and community involvement to support families. Leveraging successful models like Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and incorporating community workforce training can further enhance follow-up efforts.

Are aftercare services available only for children transitioning out of the Child Care Institutions (CCIs) or for children in kinship care and foster care as well?

Aftercare services are primarily designed for children transitioning out of CCIs to help them reintegrate into society as they move toward independent living. However, aftercare support is increasingly recognized as important for children in other forms of alternative care, such as kinship care or foster care. While the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, explicitly mandates aftercare for children leaving CCIs, some states and organizations are extending these services to children in kinship and foster care as well. This broader approach acknowledges that children in these alternative care settings may also face challenges as they transition into adulthood, requiring similar support in terms of education, vocational training, counseling and financial assistance. The availability of aftercare services for children in kinship or foster care, however, can vary significantly depending on state or district policies and resources. Therefore, it is important for local governments and stakeholders to influence policy and develop comprehensive aftercare programs that cater to the needs of all children in alternative care settings.

Is there a limit or cap on the number of children who can receive sponsorship support within a district?

Under the Mission Vatsalya scheme, there is no explicit cap or limitation on the sponsorship support provided to children in need of care and protection. Mission Vatsalya aims to offer comprehensive support to vulnerable children, including those in need of care and protection, through various schemes and programs.

The sponsorship program under Mission Vatsalya is designed to provide financial assistance to families or guardians to help them care for children who are at risk of being institutionalized due to financial constraints. The primary objective is to strengthen families and prevent the separation of children from their families by offering targeted financial support. A monthly grant of ₹4,000 per child is provided for Sponsorship, Foster Care and Aftercare to the state government. State governments are encouraged to provide additional grants to the State Child Protection Society (SCPS) under the Sponsorship and Foster Care Fund. Additionally, there is a provision for private-aided sponsorship, where individual, group, and community sponsorships are listed.

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In Maharashtra, specifically in Mumbai and Thane, we observe the mushrooming of 'hostels' that offer to accommodate children at no cost, yet there are inadequate monitoring mechanisms for regulation, supervision, or oversight. Economically distressed parents often choose this option. Is there a similar trend in Tamil Nadu?

The rise of residential schools and hostels is a trend observed across various regions, including Maharashtra, particularly in Mumbai and Thane as well as in Tamil Nadu. One significant factor contributing to the mushrooming of these hostels is the large number of CCIs that once operated in these states. Many of these CCIs are now gradually shutting down due to challenges in meeting registration requirements or as part of the broader movement toward deinstitutionalization. This shift allows them to operate without the stringent regulatory oversight required for CCIs, making them an attractive, albeit risky, option for economically distressed parents seeking free-of-cost care for their children. In response to these challenges, regulatory frameworks have been developed. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has issued guidelines specifically for hostels attached to educational institutions, aiming to ensure that these facilities maintain a basic standard of care and safety. State governments are increasingly recognizing the need for stringent monitoring and regulation of these hostels to protect children from potential exploitation and neglect.
https://ncpcr.gov.in/uploads/167662785263ef4f8c59a1b_81907500.pdf

For instance, the Goa State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR), in collaboration with the Directorate of Education, has taken proactive steps to safeguard the welfare of children in hostels and boarding institutions. They have adopted comprehensive guidelines formulated by the NCPCR, which serve as a blueprint for other states aiming to strengthen their monitoring mechanisms.

In some villages, there are not enough quality services for education and overall development of the child. There may also be situations of floods or drought. What are the options for such children?

Natural disasters can occur unexpectedly, but both the government and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are vigilant in providing timely relief and rehabilitation for children and vulnerable families during such events. Their efforts also focus on protecting these families from exploitation. For instance, following the recent Wayanad landslide, the media emphasized that compassionate individuals wishing to adopt children orphaned by the disaster would need to adhere to the official adoption process. According to Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) guidelines, they must register with the relevant government agencies and await their turn in the queue, ensuring that the children's best interests are safeguarded. In villages lacking quality educational facilities, various support mechanisms can be implemented. Children may be provided with transportation, such as Panchayat-arranged vehicles or bicycles, to access nearby schools. In extreme cases where local educational facilities are inadequate, children may be placed in residential schools or hostels. It is crucial that local governance bodies proactively collaborate with the District Magistrate and the education department to address and escalate these issues, ensuring that all children have access to quality education and development opportunities.

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How can family reunification be effectively managed for children who have never lived with their biological families, especially when they are teenagers?

Family reunification, especially for a teenager returning to a family they've never known, requires careful planning and ongoing support. A continuous dialogue with the parents is essential to emphasize that the family is the best environment for the child to thrive. Regular, structured visits between parents and children at CCIs should be organized to rebuild the relationship. Additionally, facilitating home visits during holidays with thorough preparation can help the child gradually acclimate to the family setting. Preparing parents for the transition is equally important to ensure they are equipped to support their child's reintegration and address any challenges that may arise.

How can we convince the extended family to take care of children and support them on F-BAC?

To encourage extended family members to care for children under Family-Based Alternative Care (F-BAC), it's important to emphasize the emotional and developmental benefits for the child, such as maintaining cultural continuity and familiar bonds. The 2024 Model Foster Care Guidelines prioritize placing children with extended family, acknowledging the stability and security this environment can provide. To support this, the government offers financial aid of ₹4,000 per child per month, which helps alleviate the economic burden on families. By providing this financial assistance and engaging in ongoing dialogue with the extended family, child protection officials can reassure them of the feasibility and importance of fostering their relative's child, ensuring the child's well-being within their family network. Mutual coordination between CWCs and DCPUs is crucial, as they are responsible for identifying suitable parents for foster care and conducting child safety counseling.

What is the role of CSO duty bearers and line departments to ensure an effective community-based child protection system?

CSOs duty bearers, line departments, and the District Child Welfare and Protection Committees (DCWPCs), as well as Child Welfare and Protection Committees at the local governance level, all play vital roles in establishing an effective community-based child protection system. They work collaboratively to identify and support vulnerable children, promote awareness of child rights, and ensure access to essential services. DCWPCs, as mandated by Mission Vatsalya, are instrumental in coordinating local efforts, overseeing child protection measures, and ensuring compliance with guidelines. Their role includes monitoring and addressing child protection concerns, thereby enhancing community resilience and creating a protective environment where every child can thrive.

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Please provide some insights into successful models for case management methodologies.

Organizations such as Miracle Foundation India, Udayan Care, Prerana, and Changing The Way We Care India have effectively demonstrated successful case management methodologies. These organizations implement comprehensive case management systems that prioritize the holistic well-being of children and families. These models can be explored in detail by visiting their respective websites or consulting the India Alternative Care Network (iacn.in) for further insights. These models often emphasize a child-centered approach, coordination with local services, and tailored support plans to ensure the best outcomes for children in alternative care.

How can one work with the tribal communities for family strengthening as their customs are different?

To work effectively with tribal communities for family strengthening, building trust by understanding and respecting their customs is essential. Involving community leaders in the planning process, adapting interventions to fit local traditions, and integrating beneficial traditional practices into your programs can be beneficial. Please provide culturally sensitive education and resources, and remain flexible to community feedback and needs.

How is the child's perspective integrated into the decision-making process?

Integrating a child's perspective into the decision-making process involves several key strategies. Firstly, involving children in their Individual Care Plans (ICP) ensures that their voices and preferences are considered when making decisions about their future. This participation helps tailor interventions and support to their specific needs and wishes. Additionally, preparing children thoroughly for family life, whether through educational sessions or practical support, equips them with the necessary skills and confidence for a smooth transition. Establishing children's groups also provides a platform for them to express their views, share experiences, and influence decisions affecting their care and well-being. Moreover, acknowledging the child's perspective throughout the transition journey ensures that their needs and concerns are continually addressed. By actively engaging children in these ways, their perspectives are effectively integrated into decision-making processes.

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What steps CWC and District Child Protection functionaries should take in implementing Mission Vatsalya guidelines?

To effectively implement Mission Vatsalya guidelines, CWCs, and District Child Protection (CP) functionaries must coordinate closely to ensure comprehensive support for children in need. They are responsible for overseeing the transition of children from institutional care to family-based settings, conducting assessments to identify suitable placements, and facilitating family reunification processes. Additionally, they should engage in regular training on Mission Vatsalya provisions, to stay updated on best practices, monitor the quality of care provided, and collaborate with other stakeholders to address any gaps in service delivery. Their role also includes ensuring compliance with guidelines and providing feedback to refine and improve the implementation process. The DCPUs and CWCs are like a grandparent and the CCIs are like temporary parents to children in need. If grandparents are monitoring the parents well, there can be an effective reintegration of children. Both need to work in tandem with each other for family strengthening For example, in Karnataka, 761 children are provided with sponsorship programmes and 9 children for foster care, 7-8 adoptions in Karnataka. Along with this, the DCPUs and CWCs also play a great role in supporting the child.

In our community, we have found that orphaned or single-parent children often miss school, engage in child labor, or take up the careers of their peers due to financial hardships. We approached the DCPU to connect these children to sponsorship schemes, but we learned that there is a limited annual quota for the scheme, preventing most of the children from being onboarded. As a result, many children continue to face significant challenges. Additionally, in cases of orphaned or single-parent children, we have encountered families who prefer to send the children to CCIs as relatives are unwilling to take responsibility for their education and well-being.

In scenarios where quotas for sponsorship schemes limit the number of children who can be supported, influencing policy becomes crucial. However, as mentioned above Mission Vatsalya doesn't restrict the number of children to be approved for sponsorship. States that have effectively articulated their needs have often secured increased resources, as seen in regions where funding has doubled due to convincing arguments. If current resources are insufficient, it's vital to explore additional funding sources beyond Mission Vatsalya. This could include approaching other departments such as Tribal Welfare or Mining, or utilizing specific funds like the Construction Workers' Welfare Fund. Collaborative efforts with state-level organizations to advocate for increased support and innovative funding solutions can help address the needs of children facing hardships due to financial constraints or lack of family support.

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Why is important to streamline the M&E framework in Mission Vatsalya for effective implementation?

Streamlining the M&E framework in Mission Vatsalya is crucial for ensuring effective implementation. It enhances accountability, provides data-driven insights for decision-making, improves program effectiveness by identifying successful practices, optimizes resource allocation, and fosters stakeholder engagement through transparency.

Resource Links

- D.O. Letter from MWCD to All States and UTs for Strengthening Non-Institutional Care
- Miracle Foundation India Monthly Updates
- Research Paper on Transitioning Children from Institutional Care towards Family-Based Care Published in Children's First Journal, DCPCR
- Case Management Series - How to Evaluate Family Strengths and Challenges
- Research Paper on Kinship Care
- Draft Framework on Family Strengthening by CTTWC and IACN
- Anita and Abhishek's Journey of Resilience and Building a Home: An Emphasis on Family Strengthening Efforts, Community-Based Child Care Services, and Consistent Follow-ups
- Tracing the Evolution of Alternative Care for Children in India in the Last Decade and the Way Forward

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