

SNEH



Supporting, Nurturing & Enabling Happy Families

**A Compendium of Perspectives & Practices on
Family Strengthening and Family-Based Alternative Care
from the Governments, Practitioners & Stakeholders**

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAAs	Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ARUNA	Association for Rural Upliftment and National Allegiance
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
BICON	Biennial International Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRLPS	Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society
CAFT-India	Children And Families Together-India
CARINGS	Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System
CCI	Child Care Institution
CiCL	Child in Conflict with the Law
CMHF	Child Mental Health Foundation
CNCP	Child in Need of Care and Protection
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSA	Catalysts for Social Action
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CTWWC (PARiVAR+)	Changing The Way We Care
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
CwD	Children with Disabilities
CWPC	Child Welfare and Protection Committee
DAY-NRLM	Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission
DCPO	District Child Protection Officer
DCPU	District Child Protection Unit

DDU-GKY	Deen Dayal Upadhyaya-Grameen Kaushalya Yojana
DM	District Magistrate
D.O.	Demi-Official (letter)
DPDP	Digital Personal Data Protection (Act, 2023)
DWCD	Department of Women and Child Development
ECHO	Empowerment of Children and Human Rights Organization
F-BAC	Family-Based Alternative Care
FRC	Family Resource Centre
FS	Family Strengthening
GP	Gram Panchayat
GPDP	Gram Panchayat Development Plan
IACN	India Alternative Care Network
IAFSN	International Association of Family Support Networks
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
ICP	Individual Care Plan
ICPS	Integrated Child Protection Scheme
ILO	International Labour Organization
J&K&L	Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh (High Court)
JJ Act	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psycho-social Support
MWCD	Ministry of Women and Child Development
NCPCR	National Commission For Protection of Child Rights
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIPUN Bharat	National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy
NITI Aayog	National Institution for Transforming India

NREGS	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
NRLM	National Rural Livelihoods Mission
PAI	Panchayat Advancement Index
PIB	Press Information Bureau
PMKVY	Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
POCSO	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Act, 2012)
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
PwDs	Persons with Disabilities
RIST	Rural India Supporting Trust
RPwD	Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Act, 2016)
RTE	Right to Education
SCARF	Schizophrenia Research Foundation
SHG	Self-Help Group
SIR	Social Investigation Report
SNEH	Supporting, Nurturing & Enabling Happy Families
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SSEVS	Samagra Sikchhan Evam Vikas Sansthan
TISS	Tata Institute of Social Sciences
UBS	Union Bank of Switzerland
ULB	Urban Local Body
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VCPC	Village Child Protection Committee
VLAP	Village-Level Action Plan
WBCPCR	West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights
WCD	Women and Child Development

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Every child who stays within a loving family, every young person who finds their footing after leaving institutional care, is the true measure of the work this Compendium documents. It is to them, and to the families striving to stay whole against real odds, that this volume is ultimately dedicated. What follows in these pages exists because a great many people, across government, civil society, and the sector at large, chose to think alongside us, share what they had learned, and speak plainly about both progress and what remains unfinished. We are grateful to every one of them.

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We extend our sincere gratitude to the esteemed speakers of the 6th to 10th Leadership Dialogues, whose insights, field experience, and candour form the backbone of this Compendium. Their contributions are recorded in full in Chapter 3, and it is their willingness to share both progress and unfinished work that gives this volume its honesty.

This Compendium also draws extensively on reports, circulars, consultation notes, and learning circle proceedings available in the public domain, generously produced and shared by government departments and statutory bodies, the judiciary, United Nations and international agencies, civil society organisations and networks, and philanthropic and knowledge partners working across India and the wider region. We are grateful to each of these institutions for the openness with which their work is documented and shared, without which a volume of this kind would not be possible.

Finally, our heartfelt thanks to the entire team at Miracle Foundation India, whose work across states — in the field, in data, in design, and in every quiet act of coordination that a volume like this depends on — sits behind every page of this Compendium, even where it does not appear by name.

Foreword by CEO, Miracle Foundation India

It is with continued optimism and gratitude that we welcome you to this second National Family Strengthening and Family-Based Alternative Care Conference, and to Volume 2 of the SNEH compendium. Volume 1 asked where this sector was headed during COVID and post- COVID, anchored in our first five Leadership Dialogues and launched at our inaugural Summit in 2025. This volume shows the answer: the sector is moving, faster and more deliberately than most of us expected two years ago.

This progress has Government of India leadership at its core. Mission Vatsalya, the Ministry of Women and Child Development's flagship mission, set the direction when it named family-based, non-institutional care as the default, and institutionalization as a measure of last resort. That direction is increasingly being explored beyond the Ministry itself. Across states, Panchayati Raj Institutions are examining opportunities to strengthen child protection through un-tied fund allocations, local committee structures, and Child-Friendly Village approaches. Similarly, potential linkages with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Rural Development; including livelihood missions, MGNREGA and NRLM, are being mapped to understand how existing public systems and schemes can better support vulnerable families and prevent child-family separation. This volume captures these emerging pathways and opportunities for stronger coordination across sectors.

It also documents a much wider set of contributions. Cross-sector training initiatives like the KAWACH Learning Series, a British Asian Trust programme delivered through the government's own iGOT-Karmayogi platform, now bring Women and Child Development, Panchayati Raj, Education, Health, and Police officials onto a shared child protection curriculum. Alongside this, CSO field models, from Rupantaran Foundation, Vipra Foundation, Leher, Catholic Relief Services/PARiVAR+, Sangath, SCARF, and many others featured in these pages, gave us practical, tested approaches to gatekeeping, case management, and economic strengthening. International learning, from BICON, International Association of Family Support Networks and UNICEF's work across the region, sharpened our own evidence base and rights-framing. And reflections from care-experienced children and youth moved this volume's conversation from testimony toward genuine participation in decisions that shape their own lives.

The volume is organized around four themes that trace a child's own journey: how the systems meant to protect them are built and activated, how families are kept together before separation becomes necessary, how young people leave institutional care and find their footing after, and how the sector's own thinking, evidence, and voice are maturing. Read together, they point to one conclusion, put plainly at our tenth and closing Leadership Dialogue: what gets measured gets managed, but not everything that is counted, counts. We are learning, as a sector, to ask not just what we did, but whether it changed a family's life.

My gratitude goes to the Governments, at the central and state levels, who gave their time, and shared experiences and practices across our Leadership Dialogues this year. To every civil society partner who shared their field models with us, and to the networks we are proud to stand alongside, the India Alternative Care Network, the Transform NEEV Collective, and the Care Collective. To our Miracle India team, who turned two years of conversations into the volume you now hold. And to our Board, for continuing to back work that measures itself by what changes in a family's life.

The task ahead is to keep this momentum going: to close the gaps this volume names as clearly as it names the progress, and to keep every family at the centre of that effort.

With gratitude and continued commitment,
Kusum Mohapatra
CEO, Miracle Foundation India

Introduction

The second volume of the ‘Supporting, Nurturing & Enabling Happy Families (SNEH) Compendium’ was released at the National Conference on Family Strengthening and Family-Based Care, held from September 23 to September 25, 2026, in New Delhi. The SNEH Compendium was conceptualized by Miracle Foundation India in 2025 as an annual compilation of the reflections and learnings generated through its platform of Leadership Dialogues, aimed at:

- Amplifying narratives, influencing the ecosystem, and deepening the impact of work done in the area of Family Strengthening (FS) and Family-Based Alternative Care (F-BAC) in India.
- Fostering collaboration among government bodies, civil society organizations, experts, and youth with lived experiences, while facilitating the exchange of best practices and recognition and celebration of the contributions of the child protection and allied workforce.

SNEH takes stock, objectively and constructively, of the strides the child protection sector is taking and the areas of opportunity that remain, and carries the discourse forward, sharpening the shared vocabulary, evidence base, and questions that will guide our next phase of work.

Volume 1 of SNEH was anchored in the first five Leadership Dialogues (October 2023-September 2024), as well as what the legislative, policy, and practice architecture says. It was launched at the 1st National Family Summit in February 2025.

SNEH Volume 2 carries that intent forward and chronicles the growing momentum around FS and F-BAC since then. It is a compilation of key policy dialogues, government notifications and initiatives, promising practices, measurement tools, expert perspectives, and learnings from the Leadership Dialogue Series (July 2025-March 2026). Also woven in is the wider body of knowledge generated over the last couple of years: directives and guidelines from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, and the learnings of major sector convenings. Together, these sources span government, judiciary, parliament, civil society, and international practice.

Volume 1 Summary

The first volume of the SNEH Compendium, launched at Miracle Foundation India's inaugural National Family Summit in February 2025, took stock of India's child protection landscape across the four years spanning the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Its starting point was Miracle Foundation India's own Leadership Dialogue platform — a series that began informally as a year-long webinar series in December 2020 and was formalized into five structured dialogues held between October 2023 and September 2024, each bringing together government officials, practitioners, and care-experienced young people around a specific theme in the shift from institutional to family-based care.

The volume traced two parallel threads. The first was a landscape review of India's legislative and policy architecture over this period: the 2021 amendment to the Juvenile Justice Act and its 2022 Model Rules, the 2022 Adoption Regulations, the Mission Vatsalya guidelines (2022) that placed family preservation ahead of institutionalization, the integration of CHILDLINE 1098 into the national 112 emergency response system, the 2024 Foster Care Guidelines, and amendments strengthening protections under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act. Alongside this, it documented the civil society response across eight areas of practice: building child-centric ecosystems, capacity-building the social workforce, data-driven decision-making, amplifying children's and care-leavers' voices, collective action, public awareness, technology as an enabler, and funding support.

The second thread followed the five Leadership Dialogues themselves, each built around a distinct question: gatekeeping at the level of the Child Welfare Committee (Dialogue 1, October 2023); the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in prevention (Dialogues 2 and 3, February and May 2024); demystifying what family strengthening actually means in practice (Dialogue 4, July 2024); and linking family strengthening to social protection schemes for children transitioning out of institutional care (Dialogue 5, September 2024).

What synthesizing these two threads revealed

Taken separately, a law, a guideline, and a dialogue transcript are discrete records. Taken together, the volume pointed to findings that recur across all of them. The first was diagnostic, and it reframed the sector's own starting assumption: most children in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) were not orphans. They had living parents or extended families, and were separated by poverty, lack of support, and systemic gaps rather than the absence of anyone to raise them — a finding that turned the sector's attention from institutional-care quality toward family strengthening as prevention.

The second was a trajectory visible across the five dialogues themselves, moving steadily closer to the family with each conversation: Dialogue 1 located gatekeeping at the level of the Child Welfare Committee, a statutory body; Dialogues 2 and 3 moved that responsibility down to Panchayati Raj Institutions, the local governance layer closest to the family; Dialogue 4 pressed the sector to define what family strengthening substantively requires, beyond the phrase itself; and Dialogue 5 connected that definition to the social protection schemes that make it financially real. Read in sequence, the five dialogues trace prevention's descent from statutory office to Panchayat to household economy.

The third was a persistent gap between legislative intent and last-mile delivery. Foster care had been part of the Juvenile Justice framework since 2000, yet had not gained public traction two decades on — held back by low awareness, uncertainty about post-placement support, fear among foster families of a biological parent reclaiming the child, and restrictive state-specific eligibility criteria. A study of children reintegrated with families in Madhya Pradesh found the same pattern from the other direction: de-institutionalization served children well only when matched with a robust reintegration process and sustained post-placement support, not as a one-time transition. And even as the legislative architecture matured, the share of the Union Budget reaching child protection had fallen to its lowest point in over a decade — naming a resourcing gap alongside the policy one.

The fourth was a shift in what “family strengthening” was understood to require: not a uniform intervention, but case-specific support built on mapping each family’s particular vulnerability — and, running through the aftercare discussion in particular, a call to build that support with care-experienced young people as authors of their own plans, not only recipients of them.

Volume 1’s closing synthesis distilled these findings into seven priorities for the sector’s next phase — spanning systems convergence, data-driven case management, family-based and inclusive care models, reintegration support, localized prevention, the role of village-level committees, and capacity-building — setting the agenda that Volume 2 now carries forward.

Following the Child: An Inquiry into the Journey Towards Stronger Families & Family-Based Alternative Care in India

Over the past years, the sector's collective attention has moved through a set of consultations, webinars, and reports — the Leadership Dialogue series, the Biennial International Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia (BICON), state-level summits and learning circles, judicial rulings, and formal government guidance and directives, among the sources this volume draws on. Read individually, these are separate events; read together, they trace where the sector's own thinking is currently headed. This chapter follows that thread and organizes it into four themes and a complete set of questions: how the systems around a child are being strengthened and made to work together (Theme I); how families are being kept together in the first place (Theme II); how the journey out of institutional care is being made safer and more supported (Theme III); and how the sector's own evidence, voice, and emerging priorities are evolving (Theme IV).

The four themes, and the questions within them, are as follows:

Theme I — Strengthening the Systems Around the Child

1. How is India's multi-tier child protection architecture being built and activated toward full functionality?
2. Where is inter-departmental and inter-sectoral convergence working, and where are the opportunities to deepen it?
3. What do CSO field models reveal about scalable practice?

Theme II — Keeping Families Together

1. What does the evidence show about Family-Based Care, and how is gatekeeping being strengthened to prevent unnecessary separation?
2. How does family-level economic and livelihood strengthening function as a prevention mechanism?

Theme III — Journeying Out of Care

1. How is the system managing transition of care-experienced youth out of institutional care, and sustaining support after placement?
2. How are education-to-employability pathways supporting young people transitioning out of care?
3. How are youth with lived experience moving from receiving support to shaping it?

Theme IV — Deepening the Discourse on FS and F-BAC

1. How are the evidence base and discourse on FS and F-BAC evolving?
2. How is the child and care-leaver voice moving from symbolic presence to substantive participation in governance?
3. How are emerging cross-cutting priorities — mental health, disability, and AI safeguarding — reshaping the protection agenda?

Theme I – Strengthening the Systems Around the Child

Mission Vatsalya's own guidelines name two of its six core components as foundational to everything else the scheme does: improving the functioning of statutory bodies — Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), Juvenile Justice Boards, District Child Protection Units (DCPU) — and strengthening the service delivery structures that connect them to the family. A child protection system is only as strong as this architecture, and only as effective as the coordination among the many departments, tiers of government, and civil society actors that must act on the same family rather than in separate silos.

The three questions in this theme trace that architecture in practice: how it is being built and activated across India's states, where inter-departmental convergence is working and where it still needs to deepen, and what civil society's own field models reveal about what makes this architecture function on the ground.

Question 1: How is India's multi-tier child protection architecture being built and activated toward full functionality?

Panchayati Raj Institutions — Building and Activating the Child Protection Architecture

A PRI-partner perspective shared at the 10th Leadership Dialogue offered an encouraging corrective to the assumption that funds are the binding constraint. One district was able to allocate ₹79 lakhs for child protection once formal Panchayat, block, and district resolutions were enabled — demonstrating that institutional clarity and authorization can unlock resources that already exist. Panchayat spending analysis shows that untied-fund resources under priority themes currently flow largely to infrastructure and repair; an explicit child protection mandate helps Panchayats recognize this as their responsibility and direct funds accordingly. A further structural insight with direct design value: Panchayat funds are best suited to short-term emergency stabilization, while long-term rehabilitation and care benefit from linkage to broader schemes and systems. Once built into planning, this distinction ensures funds are both utilized and well-targeted.

Ground-level experience offers clear guidance on what activation requires. In Odisha, field research identified orientation of PRI members on Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) planning processes, on the Child Welfare and Protection Committee (CWPC) provisions under Mission Vatsalya, and on the untied funds available to them as the key enabler for the committee architecture to deliver its potential. Elected local representatives can only activate mechanisms they know exist.

Field experience in Gadchiroli and Chandrapur reinforced that one-time formation of committees is a starting point, with continuous handholding the ingredient that converts formation into functionality. Leher's experience shows what activation looks like when ownership is embedded from inception: 83% of its Child Protection Committees (CPCs) actively participate in Gram Sabha discussions, the village general assembly where local plans and priorities are decided. This is a rare quantified activation-rate benchmark for the sector to aspire to.

Jharkhand offers a clean, dated example of architecture maturing over roughly two and a half years. A 2023 circular from the state's Panchayati Raj Directorate established a functional mandate for CWPCs — the committees that Mission Vatsalya envisages at every tier of local governance to anchor child protection locally.

Karnataka illustrates both the strength of a fully built architecture and the opportunity of the next mile. A documentation survey across 609 villages, reported by the Panchayati Raj Commissionerate at the Karnataka State Family Summit, identified more than 3,600 children without birth certificates and over 1,800 without Aadhaar. This enabled targeted documentation drives to connect these children with the schemes designed for them, since both documents are gateway requirements for most entitlements.

Disability Inclusion in Case Management

India's national household-level disability data stems from the 2011 Census, predating the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act; 2.21% of India's population (26.8 million people) was recorded as Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Of these, 7.62% (2.04 million) were Children with Disabilities (CwDs). The Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Committee consultation in 2024 recommended immediate health, mental health, and disability screening for every child at entry into the system, developed into a national Standard Operating Procedure so screening is consistent regardless of which state or tier a child enters through; and a statutory grid harmonizing the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (JJ Act), the POCSO Act, the RPwD Act, and the Mental Healthcare Act, so that disability status, once identified, actually changes how a case is handled. Judges and officials also called for a single-window system consolidating legal protections, services, and entitlements for children with disability.

A tool-level response to exactly this gap now exists, even if unfinished. Between 2023 and early 2025, the erstwhile Children And Families Together-India (CAFT-India) consortium reviewed and adapted three JJ Act case-management tools — Form 22 (Social Investigation Report), Form 7 (Individual Care Plan), and Form 43 (Case History Form) — replacing their medicalized, impairment-focused categories with the RPwD Act's rights-based framework: disability recognition moved to the start of each form, outdated terms like “mental handicap” and “differently abled” replaced with the RPwD Schedule's eight functional categories, and new questions capturing assistive-device use, family disability history, and the “reasonable accommodation” a child needs to access education, health, and institutional spaces on equal terms.

The adapted Social Investigation Report (SIR) puts this recognition into practice at the level of individual questions. It asks the case worker, directly, whether the parent or caregiver understands the child's condition and how to build the child's abilities, whether they have been linked to a nearby rehabilitation facility or District Early Intervention Centre, whether they have the support of family and community, and — pointedly — whether the family has faced discrimination because of the child's disability. None of this exists in the current SIR. Built into the very first conversation a family has with the child protection system, questions like these could catch a family's awareness gap before it hardens into institutional placement as the only visible option — which the report names as one of the most persistent reasons families give up children with disability in the first place.

The report is candid that this is a starting point, not a solution. It leaves open the harder systems questions this compendium's own architecture analysis raises: how frontline functionaries, who are not disability specialists, will reliably identify disability at all; whether every DCPU can be linked to a referral team of rehabilitation professionals, mental health experts, and sign-language interpreters; and whether a dedicated cadre of support persons — on the model already built for POCSO cases — is needed to help CwDs and their families actually exercise the

entitlements a better-designed form would surface. CAFT-India's own funding concluded in February 2025, before this work could be taken to completion. Keystone Human Services India Association and Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST) are continuing this work, and the publication is offered to keep the conversation and the momentum toward a completed national tool alive.

Question 2: Where is inter-departmental and inter-sectoral convergence working, and where are the opportunities to deepen it?

Convergence is the era's defining concept — and the sector's shared next step. Mission Vatsalya itself is built as a convergence mandate, envisaging Panchayati Raj Institutions, Women and Child Development functionaries, and allied departments acting on the same family rather than in separate silos. The Government, oversight bodies, and field organizations alike are converging on the same conclusion: the initiatives are in place, and deepening their on-ground coordination is where the next gain lies.

Convergence in Practice

Ministry of WCD and Ministry of Education

The September 2025 guidelines on co-location of Anganwadi Centres with schools, issued jointly by MWCD and the Ministry of Education under the banner 'From Anganwadi to School — One Campus, One Vision', report over 2.9 lakh Anganwadi Centres already co-located on school campuses. Co-location places the early-childhood center and the primary school on one site, easing the child's transition between the two. It also integrates the foundational literacy and numeracy goals of NIPUN Bharat (the national foundational-learning mission) with Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi (the MWCD program that pairs nutrition with early learning at the Anganwadi).

Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Ministry of WCD

CSO field experience independently confirms where the sector's collective attention should now focus. The Transform NEEV Collective's Learning Circle synthesis identified deepening convergence among PRIs, the Women and Child Development machinery, and child protection systems as the common priority across nearly every model presented — Catholic Relief Services, Rupantaran Foundation, Leher, Vipra Foundation, and the Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi alike. The consistency of this finding across so many independent organizations is itself valuable: it gives the sector an unusually clear, shared agenda for the coming period.

The Department of Rural Development and the Department of Panchayati Raj

Karnataka offers convergence working from rural development infrastructure toward child and family welfare. More than 4,000 crèches have been established under NREGS — the rural employment guarantee scheme, here used to build and run child care facilities to support working women. This has contributed to a rise in women's workforce participation from roughly 43% to 54% — a concrete convergence outcome reported by the Panchayati Raj Commissionerate at the Karnataka State Family Summit. The Department of Rural Development and the Department of Panchayati Raj are increasingly working in tandem on child care and women's welfare within a joint mandate. Gram Sabhas are being encouraged to take active ownership of identifying child-related risks at the panchayat level — prevention reframed as a community responsibility, not only a departmental one. CSOs already partnering with the two departments were seen as working models for closer department-CSO collaboration.

The Ministry of Rural Development and the Child Protection Ecosystem

Convergence with the livelihoods architecture is convergence at the largest scale in the ecosystem. The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) is the world's largest rural livelihood program — 35 states, 600 districts, 7,000 blocks, 10 crore families, 50 crore people reached — built around women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and their federations. NRLM 2.0's four pillars — Social Mobilization, Financial Inclusion, Skill Development, and Convergence/Partnerships — explicitly position the program as a family empowerment mission, not solely a livelihood scheme, giving child protection a genuine convergence partner at national scale. MGNREGA, the national rural employment guarantee, assuring rural households 100 days of paid work a year, converges further still, specifically reducing distress migration and supporting household asset creation, such as kitchen gardens and livestock sheds, that feed directly into child nutrition.

State variants show how this convergence is being built out further. Jharkhand's scheme portfolio includes Birsa Harit Kranti and the Timber Farming Scheme (tree-based livelihood schemes), Mukhya Mantri Pashu Dhan Yojana (livestock support), and the Upar/Samaveshi Ajeevika Yojana for ultra-poor families, using the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)¹ graduation model of sequenced asset transfer and handholding.

Kerala's Kudumbashree offers the most structurally sophisticated convergence model: a state-wide women's collective organized in three tiers — Neighbourhood Groups of 10-20 women feeding into Area Development Societies at ward level and Community Development Societies at panchayat level — reaching 3.17 lakh Neighbourhood Groups and approximately 48 lakh women. It identifies at-risk families using a non-income, nine-point deprivation-based indicator system rather than a single income threshold, avoiding the exclusion errors common to income-cutoff targeting. Weekly Neighbourhood Group meetings feed directly into annual plans submitted to local self-government for inclusion in GPDP — a working, community-led convergence loop.

The Multi-tier PRI Convergence

Two state models presented at the 6th Leadership Dialogue demonstrate convergence built from opposite ends. Uttar Pradesh has constructed a four-tier model from the top down: a State-level Committee chaired by the Chief Secretary covering Rural Development, Urban Development, Panchayati Raj, and Skill Development holds monthly meetings with all Principal Secretaries; District Child Protection Committees are chaired by District Magistrates; Block-level Committees sit under Block Development Officers; and functional Village-Level and Ward-Level Child Protection Committees operate at village and ward level. Against a population of 27 crore including an estimated 5-7 crore children — across 75 districts, the state currently sponsors 6,236 children under family-based alternative care. Its own state scheme, Mukhyamantri Bal Seva Yojana, supports 82,000 children at ₹2,500 per month (with Below Poverty Line eligibility and a ₹3 lakh annual income ceiling). It runs alongside a directive to all 58,000 PRIs and Gram Panchayats to earmark 5% of their untied funds for child-related work, and the integration of child protection indicators into Gram Panchayat Development Plans.

Odisha, by contrast, has built from the bottom up through phased PRI activation: 100 Gram Panchayats covered in Year 1 and the remaining 217 in Year 2, full state-program coverage of 317 Gram Panchayats across 14 blocks. This was achieved through structured orientation at the Block Development Officer level and direct mentoring of Sarpanches (elected village heads) on conducting Bal Sabhas (children's assemblies), Mahila Sabhas (women's assemblies), and Gram Sabhas. The work is funded through the same 5% untied allocation under the Gram Swaraj framework. Set side by side, the two models suggest that top-down convergence from Chief Secretary level and

1. BRAC originated the "Graduation Approach," built around a sequenced combination of asset transfer, skills training, consumption support, savings, and regular home-visit coaching ("handholding"), designed specifically to move ultra-poor households out of poverty.

bottom-up convergence through mentored Panchayat activation are distinct but complementary strategies.

The Government and CSOs' Convergence

The NITI Aayog-UNICEF India Statement of Intent (March 2026) commits to nutrition convergence in Aspirational Districts and Blocks, the districts and blocks the government has identified as most developmentally underserved. It explicitly names 'convergence, collaboration and data-driven governance' as the operating methodology.

The KAWACH Learning Series, a British Asian Trust initiative with Karmayogi Bharat, folds child protection convergence training into iGOT-Karmayogi, the national online training platform for civil servants. This brings WCD, Panchayati Raj, Education, Health, Police, and the Justice system into one capacity-building architecture, so that officials across departments learn from the same child protection resource material. The modules are designed to build a shared understanding of child protection across departments, clarify the roles and responsibilities of duty bearers, and strengthen coordination for prevention and early action, moving the conversation decisively from policy intent to implementation practice. The British Asian Trust's KAWACH is a ten-year child protection systems-strengthening initiative aligned with all three MWCD missions (Vatsalya, Shakti, and Poshan).

Question 3: What do CSO field models reveal about scalable practice?

This question draws principally on the Transform NEEV Collective, a collective impact program in Maharashtra bringing together partner CSOs around prevention and family-based alternative care. The Collective's Learning Circle of January 2026 enabled a side-by-side comparison of field models.

Field Models — Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms

The Transform NEEV Collective's Learning Circle in Maharashtra brought together seven organizations' community-based child protection models:

Organization	Geography	Core Approach	Distinctive Feature	Challenge Faced	Notable Metric
CRS/ PARIVAR+	Odisha	PRI-anchored planning and financing via GPDP; monitors 5% untied fund utilization; multi-tiered capacity building from district to frontline PRI members	Anchors child protection in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment's Gram Panchayat social-justice mandate	Weak PRI-WCD coordination; no clear GP-level SOPs; low PRI access to GPDP planning tools	2023 survey (with Aruna) found low PRI awareness of GPDP/CWPC/untied funds; response produced district resolutions + large-scale PRI orientation
Rupantaran Foundation	Sundarbans/ Kolkata	Participatory, child-centred community engagement; VCPC formation linked to Panchayat funding	Shishu Gram Sabha — children's own platform feeding directly into GPDP discussions; Village-Level Action Plan (VLAP) copies routed to panchayat, block, DCPU, and WBCPCR	PRI-authorized funds hard to access/utilize at GP level; children face social/cultural barriers to voicing concerns	Children's collectives function as an effective bridge to VCPCs

Organization	Geography	Core Approach	Distinctive Feature	Challenge Faced	Notable Metric
Vipla Foundation	Amravati/Akola	Family strengthening + CWC gatekeeping + CCI-to-family transitions; strong DCPU/DWCD/health/education/legal convergence	Combines rural GP and urban ward coverage	Seasonal migration; urban documentation gaps; election-cycle disruption	Zero out-of-school children in intervention villages; child-marriage prevention; regularly functioning CPCs
AAAs	Gadchiroli/Chandrapur	“Piggybacks” on existing ICDS/NRLM structures rather than building parallel ones	Mock elections and scenario-based discussions to build children’s leadership	Migration, livelihood pressure, adult-centric norms, limited psycho-social capacity	Insight: one-time formation ≠ functionality; continuous handholding required
Leher	Multi-district	Strict facilitator role; community ownership of CPCs/children’s groups embedded from inception	Committees coached to independently identify issues and engage formal systems, not just report through Leher	Sustaining independence without ongoing facilitator support	83% of CPCs active in Gram Sabha discussions
ECHO (Centre for Juvenile Justice)	Bengaluru (urban)	Urban crime-prevention model: education re-enrolment, counselling, community vigilance/crime mapping, family assessment, vocational training	Only strong urban model in the set; runs the ECHO Happy Kids Centre in a crime-prone setting	Not specified in source	Creates safe, nurturing spaces for children in high-risk urban contexts
New Vision	Pune/Kolhapur	Community-level child protection, gatekeeping, family strengthening	Bal Panchayats used as children’s voice platforms; regular CPC meetings for early risk ID	Not specified in source	Improved response/follow-up through stakeholder coordination

Partner organizations are also using a set of named, practical tools:

- **ThriveWell by Miracle Foundation®** — tracks caseworker-visible family well-being across five areas (Family & Social Relationships, Household Economy, Living Conditions, Education, Health & Mental Health), each rated Crisis/Vulnerable/Safe/Thriving across 45 milestones. Role-based access and encryption protect family data; only program managers see aggregated dashboards. Designed to support, not replace, caseworker judgment, relevant given that social workers often manage fifty-plus families each.
- **Leher’s Bal Suraksha Hubs** — 111 community child-safety hubs across 5 districts, marking a strategic shift from forming new VCPCs to activating existing ones.
- **Prerana’s Transition Supports** — Aashiyana, a Transition Support Tool, and a Child-Friendly Legal Aid Clinic; its Mumbai CWC-based clinic supported 36 families in six months with on-the-spot legal navigation.

- **UNICEF's Foster-Care Training Curriculum** (with Catalysts for Social Action and TISS) — a full foster-care training curriculum covering identification of prospective foster families, counseling, placement, and monitoring.
- **Children Speak Initiative** — grown from pilot to 11 organizations; channels issues identified by children's groups directly into GPDPs.

Asia-wide Model Examples from the 6th BICON

The 6th Biennial International Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia (BICON), held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2025, placed India's own system-building alongside a set of national examples worth reading against this theme. The Philippines' Republic Act 11642 (2022) unified all adoption and alternative-care functions under a single National Authority for Child Care, cutting adoption processing time from five-to-seven years to six-to-nine months while building a national digital case-management system in the process. India is moving in the same direction: CARINGS, the national adoption workflow portal, has itself been folded into the Mission Vatsalya Portal, and Rajasthan's Palanhar Dashboard already lets families upload documents and track applications without repeated office visits, reflecting the same single-window, digitally consolidated logic, even if India's version remains a work in progress rather than a completed unification.

Malaysia's Department of Social Welfare is running its own phased deinstitutionalization strategy behind a national digital child protection platform, alongside new Family-Based Care Guidelines and expanded foster and kinship pathways. Cambodia offered the sharpest outcome data point of all: residential-care numbers there have fallen by more than 70% through sustained investment in family strengthening and trained social-work deployment, a scale of shift the architecture-activation work described above is still building toward.

The conference's own response was the Global Charter on Care Reform, launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2025 and endorsed by more than 30 countries and 115 organizations, committing signatories to sustained investment in social services, data systems, and accountability — an international accountability architecture India's own convergence work can measure itself against.

The CCI-to-Family Resource Centre Pilot Question — A Forward-looking Idea

A forward-looking idea is emerging: District-Level Family Resource Centres (FRCs) — community hubs offering gatekeeping, counseling, parenting support, and scheme access under one roof — as the next institutional form for family strengthening. The reference point is the Family Resource Center model documented by the International Association of Family Support Networks (IAFSN) in the US and UK, which reports a social return of \$4.93 per \$1 invested, a 63% reduction in maltreatment cases, and a 50% reduction in child removal, a prevention-infrastructure benchmark India does not yet have a domestic equivalent of.

Three design questions stand open for piloting. First, physical infrastructure repurposing: how a CCI building can be given a fresh community-facing identity. Second, the staffing and skill transition: building community outreach and case-navigation skills onto existing institutional childcare experience. Third, the funding-model evolution from per-child-in-care to per-family-served, a structural design question that, resolved well, would align financial incentives

fully with Family-Based Care. The evidence opportunity is equally clear: India-specific social-return and outcome data for a CCI-origin family resource center does not yet exist — a genuine data-generation opportunity for the sector's research agenda.

Theme II – Keeping Families Together

At the heart of Mission Vatsalya's design is a single operating principle: institutionalization of a child is to be a measure of last resort, with family-based, non-institutional care the default wherever a family can be supported to stay together. Making that principle a reality requires two things working in tandem — catching families before separation becomes necessary, and strengthening their capacity to stay together in the first place. The two questions in this theme examine exactly these levers: what the evidence shows about Family-Based Care and how gatekeeping is being strengthened to prevent unnecessary separation, and how family-level economic and livelihood strengthening itself functions as a prevention mechanism.

Question 1: What does the evidence show about Family-Based Care, and how is gatekeeping being strengthened to prevent unnecessary separation?

The Evidence Case for Keeping Families Together

The evidence for Family-Based Care has continued to strengthen since Volume 1. A landmark meta-analysis published in *The Lancet* drew on more than 300 studies spanning 65 years, over 1,00,000 children, and 60 countries. It found that outcomes in Family-Based Care consistently surpass those in institutional settings of any size, including small group homes. The analysis was presented at the 5th BICON (2023), held that year in Kathmandu. The same convening widened the understanding of why family matters beyond the clinical dimensions — highlighting the importance of preserving a child's identity, language, and cultural belonging. It also reinforced the economic case: institutional care was found to cost roughly three times as much as foster care, with international data points showing per-child institutional costs exceeding average household incomes.

The 6th BICON (Kuala Lumpur, October 2025) carried this evidence forward two years on, opening with a global reminder worth holding alongside India's own gatekeeping data: an estimated four in five children living in residential care worldwide are not orphans — most have at least one living parent, and families with the right support could have kept them at home. UNICEF Malaysia's contribution sharpened the prevention mechanism itself, tracing how social assistance (child benefits, school meals) and social insurance (health and unemployment cover) protect families against the shocks — illness, the death of a breadwinner, climate disaster, conflict — that push them toward separation, with examples drawn from Nepal, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Mongolia showing what inclusive social protection design looks like in practice.

Voice of Children, Nepal, offered a concrete field model for the same principle: its 'ladder approach' combines family tracing with regular visits to understand the specific cause of separation, working with the child and the family through parallel teams, and stepping down through kinship and then foster care only if biological reunification is not possible. One case followed the model's full arc — a boy who lost both parents and survived by

begging was traced to his sister, supported through kinship care, skills training, and counseling, and now leads a youth group of his own.

Gatekeeping Taking Shape as a Discrete Mechanism

Gatekeeping is increasingly taking shape as a distinct, discrete mechanism rather than remaining a general principle of ‘preventing unnecessary separation’. Regionally, the mechanism is acquiring explicit legal form: Bangladesh’s draft national policy on alternative care names gatekeeping as a required function of the system. Nepal’s Children’s Act 2018 goes a step further, making the unnecessary admission of a child into institutional care an offense in itself. Within India, Vipra Foundation and New Vision, Prerna, working in Maharashtra, presented explicit gatekeeping practice at the level of the CWC, combined with CCI-to-family transition work. This was shared at the Transform NEEV Collective’s Learning Circle in January 2026.

Gatekeeping works in both directions: it prevents unnecessary entry into care, and it also ensures the system engages only where genuinely needed. A December 2025 ruling of the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh High Court clarified that the presence of a capable parent excludes a child from classification as a Child in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) under the JJ Act. The ruling delineates the jurisdictional boundaries within which CWCs operate. The ruling’s timing is significant: as the institutional architecture expands — more committees, more case-identification mandates — judicial guidance of this kind helps the system focus its energies where they are most needed. It protects family autonomy alongside child safety.

Beyond the legal and judicial layers, gatekeeping’s practical strength depends on how smoothly its financial delivery mechanisms work on the ground. Bal Sangopan Yojana, Maharashtra’s flagship non-institutional care scheme, provides monthly financial support to vulnerable families, including extended family carers, so that children can be cared for within families rather than institutions. A review of the scheme identifies where delivery can be smoothed: simplification of documentation requirements; resolution of the ‘NIL income’ certification requirement, under which families with no income at all must still obtain formal certification of that fact; and sensitive handling to reduce stigma in the application process.

Across Maharashtra districts, available data from 2019-2023 indicates that the scheme has evolved primarily as a cash-transfer and extended care-support mechanism, highlighting an opportunity to strengthen social protection through more holistic support, early identification of families from vulnerable communities, and stronger linkages to relevant services and entitlements. The digital models already operating elsewhere offer ready templates: Rajasthan’s Palanhar Dashboard and Kerala’s Suneethi Portal — single-window systems through which families can upload documents and track application status without repeated office visits.

Widening the Frame — Who Prevention Must Reach, and What Drives Separation

What actually pushes children out of families is rarely a single event. The Ministry of Women and Child Development’s 2015-16 Annual Report estimated that around 170 million children — 40% of India’s children — are “vulnerable or experiencing difficult circumstances characterized by their specific social, economic and geopolitical situations,” and that all these children need special attention. The Transform NEEV Collective’s 2026

report, *A World Worth Building*, frames the mechanics behind that scale: separation risk clusters around five structural conditions —

- **Access** (funding shortfalls, service silos, gaps for migrant families),
- **Exposure** (climate displacement, unsafe transport, distress migration),
- **Equity** (gender, caste, disability, language),
- **Accountability** (weak case management, poor data integration), and
- **Trust** (the gap between communities and the state, fear of reporting).

The same report illustrates how these compound in practice through a composite, evidence-based case: a family's debt burden combines with a daughter's unpaid domestic-care load, climate-driven migration, and the social normalization of child marriage — each factor alone survivable, together a pathway toward separation. National figures bear this out: reported crimes against children have risen even as overall crime rates have fallen, and India accounts for one in three of the world's child brides.

The sector's attention is also widening to children who have not yet come into contact with the child protection system at all — an estimated 3 to 5 million children living on the margins. Field accounts shared at the 3rd Hridaya Dialogue (December 2025) illustrated how children in the most acute circumstances of deprivation can remain invisible to formal mechanisms. This underscores why community-level prevention, rather than system entry alone, must remain the sector's first line of response.

A dedicated discussion at the Karnataka State Family Summit brought Children in Conflict with the Law into the prevention conversation with fresh clarity. A significant number of these children have themselves been affected first — coerced or exploited into activity that brings them into contact with the law. The system's response is strongest when it recognizes that reality, rather than treating every case alike. This is a gatekeeping insight in the deepest sense: reading a child's circumstances accurately at the point of first contact shapes everything that follows.

Question 2: How does family-level economic and livelihood strengthening function as a prevention mechanism?

This question emerged most strongly from the 8th and 10th Leadership Dialogues. The focus here is the family's own economic position as a direct lever of prevention: the proposition, repeated across every speaker in this thread, that economic resilience is not adjacent to child protection but foundational to it.

Economic Security as Key Foundation of Child Protection

Field evidence framed the connection in plain terms: among other factors, a family's economic security shapes whether a child stays in school, whether a girl exercises agency over her own life choices, and whether a child remains safe at home. The figures behind the framing are compelling. Bihar alone accounts for nearly 11% of all rescued child laborers; over 40% of young women in Bihar are married before 18; one in four children in migrant urban-slum families receives no schooling; and the states with the highest poverty are also the largest source regions for child trafficking. The 8th Leadership Dialogue report cited a field example from a Jaipur rescue

operation that made the mechanism concrete: of the trafficked children found working in bangle-making units, 96% came from families below the poverty line. The implication is equally direct: strengthen the household economy, and the protective environment strengthens with it.

What Economic Strengthening Delivers When It Works

The evidence bears this out. In Rajasthan, women organized into SHGs — small community savings-and-credit collectives, typically of ten to twenty women — were earning even ₹2,000-4,000 a month. With that income, they actively prevented child marriages and kept children in school. In Bihar, agricultural interventions did the same work through the household economy. Vegetable intercropping, goat-shed upgrading, and support from Pashu Sakhis, trained community-level livestock resource persons who help families keep animals healthy and productive, together reduced distress migration and returned children to school.

SSEVS, a grassroots organization, presented its work in Bihar's ultra-poor landless communities — 90% landless, dependent on daily wage labor and seasonal migration. It combined community-level land leasing, collective farming, tool-sharing, and SHG-linked small loans and insurance. The results: a significant reduction in distress migration, sustained school attendance, improved nutrition, and a documented identity shift: families began identifying as farmers rather than laborers.

Sustainability is designed in rather than hoped for. SSEVS described livelihood interventions deliberately cycled over three years — or nine crop cycles — with families retaining 60–70% of gains, followed by two further years of handholding. The result is a five-year self-reliance pathway, with early linkage to government schemes ensuring families exit fully resourced rather than dependent.

Monitoring Tools Purpose-built for Economic Vulnerability Tracking

Two monitoring tools purpose-built for economic vulnerability tracking accompany these models. The Kisan Diary is a financial-literacy passbook in which farming households record their crop cycles, input costs, and sales, doubling as informal financial education for SHG and farming families who may never have kept accounts before.

The Baseline Vulnerability Mapping records a family's starting position across economic and social indicators and tracks progress against it over time. It is paired with a memorable qualitative reminder from the field: 'the presence of children in the village — laughing, smiling, going to school — is the strongest indicator of positive change.' Economic data finds its full meaning alongside child well-being data.

Children with Disabilities and Family-level Economic Strengthening — A Gap Still to Close

Children with disabilities are a recurring thread across this volume, from the Adoption Awareness Month 2025 theme on non-institutionalized rehabilitation of children with special needs to the Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Committee's national consultation on disability-inclusive case management, discussed in full under Theme I, Question 1. This question's own contribution is narrower and specifically family-facing: what the evidence shows about reaching families raising a child with disability with the same economic and awareness support this theme documents for families generally.

A formative study conducted with parents across three states set the tone: only 5% of families raising a child with disability knew about their entitlements under the RPwD Act, 2016 — even though the same study found mothers, as primary caregivers, holding the most positive attitudes of any respondent group surveyed. The gap, in other words, is not one of parental will but of information reaching families early enough to use it. The parental journey the study traced — initial denial, family pressure to act, the Anganwadi Worker as first point of contact, and comparatively little forward planning for the child's future — offers a concrete narrative alongside the other family journeys this compendium documents.

The livelihood and economic-strengthening models described earlier in this theme do not yet report separately on whether they reach families raising a child with disability, even though these families typically carry a compounded economic burden. This remains a visible gap in the sector's own data, and a natural next step for the vulnerability-mapping and monitoring tools already in use.

Theme III – Journeying Out of Care

Mission Vatsalya names Adoption, Sponsorship & Foster Care, and After Care together as its core non-institutional service offering, the pathways through which a child already in the system moves toward a permanent family, or into supported independence. For the child already in institutional care, this is the system's most delicate work: getting a placement right, and staying present long enough afterward that the placement holds. The two questions in this theme follow that arc: how the system is managing the transition of care-experienced youth out of institutional care and sustaining support after placement, and how education-to-employability pathways carry care-experienced young people into stable, independent adult lives.

Question 1: How is the system managing transition of care-experienced youth out of institutional care, and sustaining support after placement?

Strengthening Case Management and Placement Pathways

The Ministry of Women and Child Development's October 2025 letter on Individual Care Plans (ICPs) marks a significant step forward. An ICP is the case-management document at the heart of the JJ framework: a child-specific plan recording the child's needs, the interventions planned, and the follow-up schedule. Historically prepared mainly for children in institutions, ICPs are now mandated for non-institutional placements as well, prepared through the DCPU. The Ministry's language is explicit, urging the system to 'move beyond mere placement of children.' The directive brings to family-based placements the same individualized case-planning rigour that institutional care has long received. It follows the Ministry's December 2023 After Care/Care Leaver directive. That directive established a verified care-experienced children and youth's database; a DCPU address-proof provision enabling care-experienced children and youth to build an identity independent of the CCI; temporary shelter mapping that prioritizes female care-experienced children and youth; and tracking through the Mission Vatsalya Portal.

Reform of the placement pathways themselves has continued. Foster care-to-adoption eligibility has been cut from five years to two, meaning a foster family may now apply to adopt the child in their care after two years rather than five, shortening the child's wait for permanency. CARINGS — the Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System, the national adoption workflow portal has been integrated into the Mission Vatsalya Portal. This brings adoption into the same digital environment as the rest of child protection case management.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee has recommended a standardized Post-Adoption Counselling Module under the two-year mandatory follow-up, full medical disclosure to Prospective Adoptive Parents before final acceptance, and a real-time transparency dashboard for the adoptive-parent waiting list. The theme of Adoption Awareness Month 2025 — ‘Promoting Non-Institutionalized Rehabilitation of Children having Special Needs’ is itself a notable discourse marker, bringing into mainstream F-BAC discourse a population that deserves its fullest attention.

The Karnataka Summit's World Café track on Aftercare and Youth Transitions identified where the next investment can yield the most. The legal framework for aftercare already exists; the opportunity now is a coordinated delivery system spanning housing, employment, health, documentation, and social connection. The care-experienced youth's perspective on the keynote panel reinforced the direction: participants proposed a minimum of two years of structured post-exit tracking as a baseline, building on the current norm of one to two years. For children leaving CCIs and observation homes, including Children in Conflict with the Law — participants converged on one clear design principle: a pre-integration plan in place before release, for every child, every time.

What Youth with Lived Experience and Youth Ambassadors Are Seeing from Inside the System

Much of what sustains a young person after placement happens informally, before it ever reaches a case file. Across several states, young people themselves — many of them youth with lived experience, working as peer Youth Ambassadors within community-based youth engagement programmes — are functioning as the aftercare system's actual first point of contact: one-to-one check-ins, follow-up visits, and what several of them describe simply as “listening spaces” for young people navigating life after a CCI. In at least one state, no formal channel existed for youth with lived experience to stay connected with one another at all; a peer network was built from scratch, over WhatsApp, because the system had not provided one.

One young person with lived experience described room rent and travel support that had been promised — by both government and NGO sources — never actually materializing, forcing them into part-time work alongside their studies. The youth ambassadors describe this as the single sharpest gap they encounter: not an absence of policy, but a gap between a promise made and a promise kept. The abrupt transition at 18 recurs as a theme across their reports — sudden independence without the emotional or financial safety net a young person still needs, with structured aftercare and employment linkage flagged repeatedly as missing at exactly the moment they matter most.

Not every story is one of gaps. The youth ambassadors also track continuity that works: young people with lived experience followed into college and settled there; one CCI alumna, now a qualified nurse, returned on her own initiative to run a health and hygiene session for the children still in the institution she once left. What their field

notes² suggest, taken together, is that aftercare's most reliable infrastructure right now may not be a scheme or a database, but a peer relationship — precisely the kind of relationship this theme's other findings argue the formal system still needs to build a structured place for.

Question 2: How are education-to-employability pathways supporting young people transitioning out of care?

Building Education-to-Employability Pathways for Care-experienced Youth

The national scale frames the opportunity: 24.2% of Indian youth aged 15-24 are NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), rising to approximately 35% among young women. This gender disparity reflects structural and social barriers rather than individual capability. The Dialogue's central insight is about where leverage lies: the greatest risk points are the transition stages — after Grade 10 or 12, when a young person must choose and fund a next step, not the starting point. And job placement alone is not the finish line: sustainable employment requires two to three or more years of retention in work. Retention, in turn, depends on post-placement mentorship and realistic expectation-setting alongside training and placement numbers. Programmes designed around these two insights — protecting the transition points, and supporting retention multiply the value of every training rupee spent.

The care-leaver-specific application came from the aftercare programme of Catalysts for Social Action (CSA): early transition planning begins well before a young person exits care, mapping education and skilling pathways and co-creating a career plan with the young person before exit. This is paired with strong convergence among child protection systems, skilling partners, and employers, so that documentation, eligibility, enrolment, and placement function as one continuum rather than fragmented steps.

For PwDs, a dedicated Sector Skill Council — the industry body that sets skill standards and curricula for this population exists and mandates inclusive training design. The next opportunity is on the demand side: active industry engagement and positive measures that convert inclusive training into inclusive placement, so that inclusive curricula translate into young people with disabilities actually being hired, not only trained. And one state innovation stands out for embedding livelihood thinking into education itself: Meghalaya's School Education Department resolution on community-integrated skill learning, under which every child learns at least one skill from a parent or community occupation. This strengthens the school-livelihood-family linkage directly within the curriculum.

Question 3 — How are youth with lived experience moving from receiving support to shaping it?

A Progression from Beneficiary to System-Builder

A quieter finding running through youth-engagement fieldwork³ across several states is a progression that current aftercare frameworks do not yet formally recognize: young people who once received support are, in growing numbers, becoming the ones who design and deliver it. The pattern moves through recognizable stages. Youth with

2. Taken from the learning insights from the engagement and interventions with children and youth as part of Miracle Foundation India's program implementation across states

3. Taken from the learning insights from the engagement and interventions with children and youth as part of Miracle Foundation India's program implementation across states

lived experience who came through CCI and community programmes begin as participants; several are now the facilitators independently designing and running sessions in their own communities, on subjects from child rights and child labour to mental health, bullying, and career anxiety, with one youth-engagement cycle reporting over 60 children and young people reached this way in community sessions alone. From there, some move into sustained engagement with the statutory structures that once decided their own cases: CPC and Bal Panchayat meetings, direct conversations with CWC Chairpersons, District Child Protection Officers, and institutional staff, and — in one documented instance — supporting the onboarding of the next tier of youth representatives coming up behind them.

At its furthest point, this progression becomes genuine system influence. In one tribal community, a youth-led diagnosis identified a specific, previously undocumented cause behind a dropout rate approaching 90% a language barrier between teachers and students that no prior intervention had named. That finding was carried into formal engagement with the Education, Women & Child Welfare, and Local Administration departments. Elsewhere, youth flagged discriminatory classroom seating practices — high performers seated at the front, low performers pushed to the back — and recommended staff sensitization and monitoring in response. At an International Youth Day event held with a child rights organization and the ILO, young people presented their own Bal Panchayat work directly to government officials and NGO representatives — youth voice reaching a policy audience directly, not through an adult intermediary summarising it on their behalf.

Where the Ladder Still Breaks

This progression is real, but it is not yet structural, and the fieldwork is candid about where it breaks. Institutional access remains inconsistent: some regions report no stakeholder engagement at all, while others have collaborations still stuck at a preliminary stage, their momentum dependent on formalities that may or may not be completed. Mobilizing young people at any scale still depends on the availability of volunteers and existing Bal Panchayat support, which is not reliably present everywhere. A young person's voice currently travels as far as an individual official's willingness to listen, not as far as a system designed to require it.

Theme IV – Deepening the Discourse on FS and F-BAC

Mission Vatsalya's guidelines call for continuous evidence-building and encourage innovative, context-based solutions, a recognition that the sector's practice can only be as strong as the thinking, coordination, and accountability behind it. This theme turns to that thinking directly: the three questions examine how the evidence base and vocabulary of FS and F-BAC are themselves maturing, how the voices of children and care-experienced youth are moving from testimony to genuine influence in governance, and which emerging priorities — mental health and AI safeguarding — are now reshaping the protection agenda.

Question 1: How are the evidence base and discourse on family strengthening and family-based alternative care evolving?

Sharpening Definitions and Shared Vocabulary

There is a growing recognition that family strengthening as a critical intervention benefits from clearer, shared definitions and understanding, a recognition that is itself driving the field's conceptual work forward. Reflections across the sector have challenged it constructively on two fronts: to build broader allyship, solidarity, and alliances beyond funder-driven structures, and to ensure its questions remain self-directed, asking what families need, rather than what fits established log frames.

Against that backdrop, the field's vocabulary is visibly sharpening. The Transform NEEV Collective/Dasra body of work offers two paired frameworks. The Five Levers Diagnostic Framework identifies five dimensions along which any local child protection response can be assessed:

- Proximity of Response (how close to the family the first response sits),
- Coordination,
- Case Management,
- Community Visibility,
- Data Use.

The Five Pillars Design Framework identifies what family strengthening programs should build: Parental Resilience, Parenting Knowledge, Social Connections, Concrete Support, and Child & Family Competence — pillars that map directly onto the internationally used Protective Factors Framework.

The UNICEF/UBS Optimus National Consultation on Family-Based Care (Pune, February 2025) contributed conceptual advances with practical bite.

- The first is the insight that family is not static but relational, evolving, and culturally contextual — a valuable counter to any fit/unfit binary in assessing families.
- The second is the reframing of foster care as a relationship needing emotional, legal, and financial scaffolding, not just service delivery.
- The third is the consolidation of ‘cash-plus’ — financial sponsorship combined with parenting, psycho-social, and livelihood support — on the evidence that cash alone rarely changes a family's trajectory, as a recurring cross-sector consensus term. Alongside it sits ‘money follows the child’: an outcome-based financing concept under which funding attaches to the child's placement rather than to an institution.

Sharpening the Discourse on Children with Disabilities

The discourse on children with disabilities is sharpening in step. The Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Committee's national consultation with UNICEF India argued explicitly for a shift from a welfare lens to a rights-based one — “children with disabilities are children first,” as UNICEF India's Country Representative put it, and for empathy rather than compassion as the operating stance, a distinction one presiding judge drew sharply: what children

with disabilities need is not sympathy from a distance, but empathy that closes it. This reinforces that family strengthening for children with disabilities is a matter of entitlement, not charity.

International Evidence and Rights-Framing

The contributions from the 6th BICON sharpen this theme's evidence-and-discourse thread. Udayan Care's research program, with over 90 publications and a monthly resource hub, called out a lack of longitudinal studies on adult outcomes for children who grew up in care, and limited data on disability-inclusive care reform specifically. Its own study of married care-experienced youth is a direct example of the outcome-tracking work this question calls for: it found that adverse childhood experiences continue to shape adult relationship and marriage outcomes, and that transition readiness before leaving care predicts emotional and marital stability years later.

On rights-framing, Dr. Rinchen Chopel of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child argued for retiring the language of charity from alternative-care discourse altogether, insisting it is the right of children to grow up in a caring family, not merely their best option — grounding the claim directly in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, from Article 1 to Article 42, rather than in welfare logic. A complementary framing, prepared for the conference by Taiwan Mad Alliance's Wang Shiou-Wu, distinguished how the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and CRC treat institutionalization differently: the CRPD classifies any non-family placement — including small group homes — as institutionalization if it restricts autonomy or places decision-making under provider control, requiring a time-bound deinstitutionalization strategy, while the CRC permits only strictly necessary, short-term residential placement focused on rapid reunification. Read together, the two conventions set a more exacting bar for disability-inclusive care reform than either does alone.

Discourse Maturing into Practice — Trust and Measurement

A candid and constructive insight from the government perspective at the Karnataka State Family Summit's keynote panel identified a 'trust gap'. Institutional care is still sometimes perceived as more reliable than family strengthening, largely because of the operational uncertainty that can surround newer alternatives. Naming the gap is the first step to closing it, through the consistent funding and operational predictability that give families, functionaries, and communities confidence in Family-Based Care options. The CSO perspective on the same panel captured how far the discourse has already traveled: Family-Based Care is no longer a question of "if," but "how to scale effectively." A complementary insight from the CSR perspective points to a practical opportunity: developing measurement approaches that make family strengthening outcomes as visible and demonstrable as infrastructure, opening the door to broader CSR participation.

The 10th Leadership Dialogue — the dialogue that completed the series — carried the discourse one step further, from implementation to measurement. Its framing insight: 'what gets measured gets managed' — but 'not everything that is counted, counts.' Two decades of field experience show that child protection intentions are strong; the opportunity now is to track the right indicators, outcomes in children's and families' lives alongside activities completed. The Dialogue developed the point structurally: systems are well practiced at measuring outputs — beneficiaries reached, funds disbursed — and the next maturity step is measuring whether interventions changed lives. Outcome measurement carries a powerful bonus for the convergence agenda: families

experience government support as improved stability, not as separate departmental outputs. Measuring shared family-level outcomes therefore naturally draws departments into working together.

Question 2: How is the child and care-experienced youth voice moving from symbolic presence to substantive participation in governance?

From Testimony to Institutionalized Representation

The regional architecture of care-experienced youth voice is moving from testimony toward structured representation. The BICON 2023 documented care-experienced youth collectives forming across the region — the Care Leavers Association Network in India, Shine Together in Nepal — with movement toward a National Care Leavers Network and calls for care-experienced youth involvement in the statutory committees that monitor the care system itself. At the community level, Rupantaran Foundation's Shishu Gram Sabha — literally a 'children's village assembly', presented at the Transform NEEV Collective's Learning Circle — is a formal children's platform whose deliberations feed directly into GPDP discussions. These are children's collectives as governance inputs, not consultation exercises. Bal Panchayats — children's panchayats, elected bodies of children mirroring the adult panchayat structure across multiple CSO models, including Vipla, the AAAs, and New Vision — function as children's voice platforms feeding into local planning processes in the same way.

Maharashtra supplied a concrete political-engagement example: CPC members presented a community-level child protection manifesto to all political parties during Zilla Parishad (district council) elections, placing child protection on local political agendas and creating cross-party accountability.

Moving from Presence to Influence

A care-experienced youth speaking on the keynote panel of Karnataka State Family Summit observed that participation in influential events can remain symbolic rather than substantive when voices are invited for storytelling rather than decision-making. The opportunity now is to build care-experienced perspectives into the shaping of conversations and outcomes themselves. A child's own voice and consent should be a formal part of every placement decision — 'not an afterthought.' Together, these carry the testimony-to-representation journey documented since BICON 2023 to its natural next stage.

The regional architecture named at BICON 2023 has itself matured by the 6th BICON, offering a concrete answer to the very gap the Karnataka Keynote Panel named. A standing Care-Experienced Reference Group with named coordinators, country representatives, and a formal 'takeover' session of the conference program now closes each BICON with its own consolidated recommendations to government, presented on behalf of the movement rather than gathered as testimony from the floor. Its ten recommendations move well past participation as a standalone ask: legal identity support, budgeted policy for care-experienced children and youth, mandated social protection and disability-inclusive care, government quotas and reservations for care-experienced young people, faster research and data collection, and the recommendation that frames all the others — a shift 'from consultations to co-leadership.' The model shows what participation that shapes outcomes, not only testimony that accompanies them, looks like in practice.

Question 3: How are emerging cross-cutting priorities — mental health and AI safeguarding — reshaping the protection agenda?

Mental Health As a Systemic, Integral Priority

The 7th Leadership Dialogue signaled the enormous headroom for Family-Based Care options to grow. The evidence reinforces why that growth matters: children raised in institutions face two to three times higher risk of depression, anxiety, and developmental challenges compared to children in family care. With the Mental Healthcare Act (2017) and the National Mental Health Policy already recognizing every child's right to accessible care, the policy foundation is in place; the opportunity is deeper integration of mental health within child protection systems, and expanded caregiver and foster-parent support.

The Child Mental Health Foundation (CMHF) Conclave 2026 — a national convening on child and adolescent mental health — framed the stakes directly: a significant number of children carry invisible emotional burdens rooted in family and social realities. Strengthening frontline workers, while linking community systems with mental health services, is essential to respond effectively.

Resilience was reframed as systemic rather than individual, built by the systems around a child, not demanded of the child alone. Prevention was tiered as universal (for all children), selective (for groups at elevated risk), and individualized (for children already affected). And trauma-informed care, a practice that recognizes how past adversity shapes a child's present behavior and responds without re-traumatizing — was positioned as a non-negotiable design layer.

Caregiver and community mental health literacy was identified as the key access enabler, with de-stigmatization recognized as central to help-seeking. A dedicated discussion at the Karnataka State Family Summit extended the same principle to children in institutional settings — including Children in Conflict with the Law. Participants converged on trauma-informed care as the baseline standard in every facility, not a specialized add-on. What consistently worked in participants' experience required no complex infrastructure: counseling that includes parents, sustained follow-up, and a real mentoring relationship.

Scaling the Response — Two Approaches to Task-Sharing, Validated by Lived Experience

Two distinct approaches to closing the mental health workforce gap emerged from the 7th Leadership Dialogue, both built on task-sharing — training non-specialists to deliver structured psychosocial support under professional supervision, so that scarce specialists supervise many frontline responders rather than seeing every case themselves.

The first approach embeds trained community volunteers within existing family and kinship networks. UNICEF's Kinship (extended family care) Support Model in Jalna, Maharashtra, responds to children of migrant families left with grandparents and relatives: Balmitras — trained youth volunteers, literally 'friends of children' — identify children needing care, facilitate kinship arrangements, and run after-school socio-emotional sessions, with families linked to social protection schemes in coordination with CWCs and DCPUs.

The second approach trains frontline and lay workers to deliver structured, supervised psycho-social support directly. Sangath, one of India's leading mental health research organizations — trains and mentors lay counselors, often educated only to 10th or 12th standard, to deliver structured psychosocial support under professional supervision. SCARF (the Schizophrenia Research Foundation, Chennai) similarly trains Anganwadi and ASHA workers and NGO partners in early identification and psycho-social first aid — embedded directly into ICPS and Mission Vatsalya training modules rather than run as a parallel service. SCARF's tele-psychiatry offers stigma-free, geography-independent follow-up, including for migrant families and post-reintegration monitoring.

International lived-experience testimony reinforces why both approaches must be relational, not transactional. A fireside conversation at the 6th BICON surfaced that mental health support in care and aftercare remains inconsistent and often invisible. A Malaysian doctor and former care-experienced youth described mental health as being 'not only about survival but about rediscovering the ability to dream and aspire'; an Indian care-experienced professional who survived a suicide attempt reframed the behaviors frontline workers often read as defiance as survival strategies — silence, withdrawal, anger — that respond better to genuine connection than to counseling alone; and a Nepali care-experienced advocate spoke to the identity work aftercare rarely funds: *"Please do not just ask us what happened. Ask us who we are becoming"*. Systems built to be trauma-informed and rights-based only succeed if they also treat healing as described here, not a service delivered once, but a lifelong relationship.

AI, Technology, and Child Safeguarding

In one recent survey of 13-18-year-olds, 88% reported speaking to AI when experiencing mental disturbance. Globally, one in four teens turn to AI chatbots for mental health support, and a substantial share of young people affected by violence approach AI as a first point of contact. These figures present the sector with both a responsibility and an opportunity: to meet children where they increasingly are.

But the same proximity that makes AI a channel for support also makes it a channel for harm, and the safeguarding evidence is now catching up to the usage evidence. UNICEF's June 2026 policy brief on AI chatbots and companions found that at least 20 million children across ten countries have already adopted the technology — faster than adults have — and identified emotional dependence, harmful advice, data elicitation, and sexualized role-play as the core risks specific to children. Reported cases have included a widely used chatbot permitted by design to hold inappropriate conversations with minors, and instances where harmful chatbot interactions have been linked to teen mental health crises, including suicide in extreme cases. These are structural risks built into how conversational AI is designed to sustain engagement and emotional attachment — in precisely the demographic, children whose critical-thinking and emotional-regulation skills are still developing, least equipped to recognize that design for what it is.

Three design priorities follow from this evidence.

- First, the DPDP Act's requirement of verifiable parental consent before processing a child's data will deliver its full protective value as parental digital literacy grows — but consent architecture built for data processing was not designed for the relational and emotional risks of companion AI, and will need to extend further to keep pace. This points to digital-literacy programming for parents as a natural complement to the law.

- Second, AI systems used by or with children need clear escalation pathways back into the human child protection ecosystem: when an AI interaction surfaces a genuine crisis, the child should be routed to a helpline, a CWC, or a trained counselor, not left with the AI as the endpoint of care.
- Third, with 7% of the child population being deaf, developing AI support for Indian Sign Language input and output is an accessibility opportunity with real safeguarding significance, reaching a population current systems underserve.

A System in Motion

Read end to end, the four themes trace a single continuum rather than four separate inquiries.

- Theme I asked whether the systems around a child function as one coordinated architecture or as disconnected parts, and found both at once: Panchayats now write child protection into their own development plans in states like Jharkhand and Odisha, and civil society field models are showing government what scalable practice can look like, even as convergence across departments remains uneven.
- Theme II asked what it takes to keep a family together before separation becomes the only visible option, and traced two levers now working in tandem: gatekeeping hardening into a named, bounded mechanism at the point of first contact, and household economic strengthening reaching families early enough that crisis never gets the chance to become inevitable.
- Theme III followed the child already in institutional care back toward a family, or into independent adulthood, and found a system finally building the individualized, family-linked case management that transition and aftercare have long lacked.
- Theme IV turned the lens onto the sector itself, tracing how its own evidence, language, and the voices it centers are all still evolving — from sharper shared definitions to care-experienced young people moving from testimony toward genuine influence in governance.

What emerges from reading them together is a shift already underway, not one still to be argued for. Architecture is being activated, not merely legislated: mandates on paper are being tested against whether Panchayats, committees, and caseworkers actually use them. Prevention is moving closer to the family, measured now in untied Panchayat funds and household income alongside committee case files. Transition out of care is being designed with the same rigor once reserved for entry into it, individualized plans and post-placement follow-up finally catching up to the attention institutional admission has always received. And the sector's own vocabulary — family strengthening, gatekeeping, disability inclusion — is being sharpened and rebuilt even as this volume goes to print, the mark of a field still actively thinking rather than repeating settled formulas.

None of this is to suggest the work is complete. Each theme closes with its own unfinished business named plainly rather than glossed over: convergence that works in pockets but not yet at scale; gatekeeping still finding its bounds; aftercare that reaches some children and not nearly enough; and a discourse on disability, mental health, and AI safeguarding racing to keep pace with a fast-changing landscape. Naming these gaps openly is itself part of what this compendium set out to do — to take stock objectively of both the strides made and the distance still to travel.

None of this took shape on paper alone; behind every finding gathered thematically in this chapter sits a room full of people arguing, disagreeing, and slowly converging, across 5 Leadership Dialogues held between July 2025 and March 2026. This chapter has drawn on all five together, weaving their evidence into the questions each theme asked. The chapter that follows does the opposite: it steps back from the themes and returns to the five conversations whole, one at a time, to see what each dialogue argued in its own right — and what the five, taken together, reveal about the direction the sector's thinking has moved over the better part of a year.

The Arc of Leadership Dialogues - 6 to 10

The preceding chapter traveled across the five Leadership Dialogues thematically, following the child's journey along the continuum of care and asking of the collective record what it tells us about the questions this compendium set out to examine. This chapter changes the lens. It reads each dialogue whole, as a discourse with its own center of gravity, and asks three questions of the series itself: what was the essence of each conversation, what did each establish, and how do the five dialogues together compose a single argument. Where the previous chapter assembled evidence, this one traces an arc.

Read in sequence, the dialogues form something close to an anatomy of family strengthening: where it must be governed, what it must heal, what it must secure, whom it must carry forward, and how it must be known. That shape was not scripted in advance. It emerged — which is perhaps the strongest evidence that the sector's own thinking is converging on a common architecture.

Leadership Dialogue 6: Family Strengthening at the Last Mile

Prevention is decided closest to the family, and the closest arm of the state is the Panchayat.

The 6th dialogue opened the series' second volume by quietly relocating the center of gravity of child protection. For decades, the sector's reflexive address for a child in difficulty has been the district — the Committee, the Unit, the institution. This conversation argued that by the time a family's distress becomes visible at the district level, prevention has already failed. The real perimeter of protection is the village and the ward, and the institutions that hold it are those of local self-government.

The discourse assembled, from state administration, district governance, and civil society alike, a picture of what it takes for that relocation to become real rather than rhetorical: a mandate, explicitly written into national policy through Mission Vatsalya's recognition of PRIs and urban local bodies; money, in the form of untied local funds that can be turned toward children and families; a method, through child protection priorities embedded within the GPDP; and a chain of convergence running from state-level committees through district and block structures down to Village-Level Child Protection Committees, so that the last mile is never left holding responsibility without support.

The dialogue was equally honest about the distance still to travel. The gap between the number of children who are vulnerable and the number the formal system currently reaches is not marginal; it is structural, rooted in thin human resources and narrow scheme eligibility. Precisely for that reason, the dialogue established its central proposition: decentralized, locally owned family strengthening is not an administrative preference but the only credible route to children the system has so far been unable to see.

Leadership Dialogue 7: Mental Health and Psycho-social Support for Families and Children

A family can be materially supported and still be emotionally unheld; strengthening must reach the inner life.

If the 6th dialogue asked where family strengthening must be governed, the 7th asked what it must actually mend. Mental health, the conversation observed, is the most consistently overlooked dimension of child protection — present in nearly every case file, named in almost none. Children carry the imprint of separation, neglect, and institutional living in their bodies and behavior; caregivers carry stress, grief, and fatigue that no scheme entitlement addresses; and the system's functionaries carry secondary trauma of their own.

The dialogue's decisive move was to reject the idea of mental health as a parallel, specialist service to which families are referred outward. Psycho-social support, it argued, must be embedded within the child protection system itself, present at every touchpoint, from the frontline worker's home visit to the care planning process to the moment of reintegration. Because specialist professionals will never exist in the numbers required, the conversation placed its confidence in task-sharing: trained and supervised lay counselors, frontline functionaries equipped for early identification and first-line support, and community-based models that use everyday, non-stigmatizing language. Equally, it insisted that caregiver well-being is not a courtesy but protective infrastructure; a stressed, unsupported caregiver is a placement at risk.

A case narrative examined in the dialogue gave the argument its sharpest edge: a child reintegrated without the family's inner environment being addressed will return to harm, however procedurally correct the reintegration. What the dialogue established is that the durability of every Family-Based Care arrangement rests on emotional and relational repair, and that this repair is deeply entangled with the family's social and economic realities. In saying so, it opened the door through which the 8th dialogue walked.

Leadership Dialogue 8: Economic Resilience for Families

Economic security is not adjacent to child protection; it is the ground on which every other protection stands.

The 8th dialogue completed the pairing. Where the 7th addressed the inner conditions of family resilience, the 8th addressed the material ones and refused to treat them as background. The conversation traced, with field evidence and lived testimony, how the great risks the sector organizes itself against — separation, child labor, early marriage, unsafe migration, trafficking — are so often downstream of household economics. Poverty, as the dialogue puts it, does not merely push children toward risk; it drags them into it. It follows that economic strengthening is not a welfare activity that sits beside child protection, but prevention in its most concrete form.

The discourse then turned from diagnosis to architecture. India already possesses, in its national livelihood missions and their women's collectives, the largest community-based economic platform in the world; the task is to point it deliberately at family vulnerability. Convergence — between livelihood missions, wage employment guarantees, social protection departments, and child protection structures — emerged as the mechanism by which a scheme becomes resilient. The dialogue was candid about what obstructs this at the last mile: the hardest-to-reach families are precisely those most likely to be left out, and inclusion of the ultra-poor requires targeted, patient models rather than open enrollment.

Two threads gave the conversation its lasting force. The first was proof from lived experience: the testimony of a mother whose modest, supported rise in income translated directly into her children's continued education and her own standing in the community — economics becoming a caregiving capacity before the audience's eyes. The second was the insistence that livelihood gains must be designed to outlive projects: time-bound handholding, early linkage to entitlements, and community institutions that remain when programs end. What the dialogue established is that family strengthening without economic strengthening is sentiment; with it, it is strategy.

Leadership Dialogue 9: Education and Employability

The continuum of care does not end at reunification; it ends at a young person standing steadily in the world.

The 9th dialogue extended the series' field of vision in time. Family strengthening, it argued, must be judged not only by whether a child remains safely at home today, but by whether that child crosses safely into adulthood tomorrow, and it is at the crossings that young people facing challenging circumstances are lost. The conversation kept returning to the junction points: the years after Classes 10 and 12, the exit from alternative care, the first months in a first job. Risk concentrates at transitions, not at starting points, and the system's support is thinnest exactly there.

Against the celebratory language of the demographic dividend, the dialogue set a harder question: whether the young population is being made genuinely employable, or whether the dividend is quietly becoming a liability. Its answer reframed employability itself. Qualifications alone do not carry a young person into stable work; readiness does — career awareness, life skills, communication, confidence, exposure, mentorship, and support that continues after placement rather than ending with it. Placement, the conversation insisted, is not success; retention and growth are. And the scarcest resource among youth facing challenging circumstances is not talent, which the dialogue's own lived-experience testimony demonstrated in abundance, but timely information and structured guidance.

What the dialogue established is a mindset shift the sector cannot postpone: from a deficit lens that treats young people facing challenging circumstances as short-term beneficiaries to an asset lens that treats them as long-term contributors, and a systems corollary that education, skilling, welfare, and child protection must hand young people over to one another at each transition, rather than drop them between mandates. Convergence, once again, but now stretched across a young person's life course.

Leadership Dialogue 10: Family Strengthening: Measuring What Matters

What we choose to measure is, in the end, what we choose to do.

The closing dialogue turned the series' gaze inward, onto the sector's own habits of evidence. Systems, it observed, are fluent in outputs — funds disbursed, beneficiaries covered, trainings conducted — and this fluency produces a recurring false sense of achievement: programs that look successful on paper while families cycle back into crisis beneath them. The discipline the dialogue argued for is outcome measurement: asking not what was done, but whether it mattered, whether livelihoods actually stabilized, whether education actually continued, whether families actually stayed together and coped without repeated rescue.

The conversation offered two demonstrations that this discipline is practicable at scale. The first was a community-owned model in which vulnerability is identified not by income alone but through a simple, transparent set of deprivation indicators applied by women’s neighborhood collectives — identification, planning, follow-up, and even graduation out of the at-risk category all held by the community itself. The second was a digital casework platform that standardizes well-being assessment across domains and milestones, turns caseworker observation into visual, decision-ready insight, and does so within privacy-by-design safeguards — technology as the backbone of the social workforce, never its replacement. In both, measurement appeared in an unfamiliar role: not as a reporting burden but as a convergence device, a shared language that lets departments, partners, and communities act on the same families with the same understanding.

Fittingly, the final dialogue also named the thread that had run beneath the whole series. Parental resilience, it distilled, rests on two pillars — financial stability and strong social connection. One dialogue had been devoted to each without either announcing it. What the 10th dialogue established is the series’ own accountability clause: none of the preceding arguments count unless the sector learns to count the right things.

Reading the Five as One

Set side by side, the five dialogues compose a single, cumulative argument. The 6th locates family strengthening — in the village, under local self-government, funded and planned where families live. The 7th and 8th together define what a strengthened family actually is: emotionally held and economically secure, the twin pillars the series would later name aloud. The 9th extends the obligation across time, insisting that the continuum of care is only complete when a young person crosses into stable adulthood. And the 10th binds the whole with evidence, demanding that every claim the sector makes about families be answerable to outcomes in their lives.

Certain motifs recur so consistently that they read as the grammar of the series. Convergence appears in all five dialogues, each time with sharper resolution: as interdepartmental coordination chaired from the top; as psycho-social support embedded in existing touchpoints rather than referred outward; as livelihood missions and protection systems acting on the same households; as institutional handoffs at each transition in a young person's journey; and finally as shared measurement frameworks that make collaboration legible. The lesson accumulates across the series: convergence is not a coordination meeting; it is the operating system of family strengthening.

A second motif is the community as protagonist. Village-Level Protection Committees, trained lay counselors, women's self-help collectives, peer mentors and community libraries, neighborhood groups conducting their own vulnerability mapping — five dialogues, five community architectures, one insight: the state cannot be everywhere, but communities already are. The task of policy is not to substitute for this presence but to mandate, resource, and trust it.

The third motif is a steady movement from provision to ownership. The series' earlier conversations asked what services and schemes exist for families; its later ones asked who owns the outcome, which institution answers for whether a family, once supported, actually stays together and thrives. That migration of the question, from inputs to accountability, may be the series' most important contribution to the sector's discourse, and it is the standard against which the chapters that follow examine practice, policy, and the road ahead.

Notes from the Speakers of Leadership Dialogues

Leadership Dialogue 6: Family Strengthening at the Last Mile



Mr. Puneet Kumar Mishra

Deputy Director,
Women and Child Development Department,
Meerut Division and Kanpur Division,
Uttar Pradesh



On inter-sectoral coordination:

“Mission Vatsalya is built on convergence — from the State down to the Panchayat — bringing every line department to the same table. NGOs are the extended hands of government in this framework; they reach the last mile where our own outreach falls short, identify vulnerable families, and make sure referrals happen on time. To strengthen this further, I believe we need the Child-Friendly Panchayat model in every Panchayat, with real engagement down to the ward level, and convergence meetings that happen regularly — not just on paper. When there are lapses, they need to be flagged and escalated quickly. We also can’t lose sight of families migrating from rural to urban areas; their support shouldn’t break just because they’ve moved. And through the Zero Poverty–UP Campaign, our doors are open — to the private sector, CSR, financial institutions, and civil society — to partner with us in whatever way they can.”

On the role of Panchayats:

“Panchayats can genuinely transform children’s welfare if they adopt the Child-Friendly Village approach, using the Panchayat Advancement Index to track their own progress. This means working on child marriage, child labor, nutrition, education, and protection, all under one dedicated child protection plan at the Panchayat level, something we still see far less of in urban areas than in rural ones. With at least 5% of the Panchayat budget set aside for children, and by tapping into the 26 government schemes already available, we can reach even the most vulnerable — children with disabilities, or those living with parents affected by HIV — and connect them to the right entitlements. None of this works without active Village Child Protection Committees and consistent monitoring. It comes down to three things: knowing what’s urgent, building the capacity of our PRI members and VCPCs to act on it, and linking families to the schemes that already exist for them. It takes time, but it’s how we build something that lasts.”



Mr. Pramod Kumar Mishra

District Panchayat Officer, Panchayati Raj,
Balangir, Odisha



“In Odisha, we took a phased approach to bring child protection to every corner of our 317 Gram Panchayats across 14 blocks. In the first year, we covered 100 Gram Panchayats, and by the second year, we’d brought the remaining 217 under coverage as well. This didn’t happen on its own — we organized meetings with Block Development Officers at both district and block levels, brought in key officers and stakeholders, and oriented them on government schemes and directives. We also gave direct mentoring support to the heads of Panchayats on running an effective Bal Sabha, Mahila Sabha, and Gram Sabha, along with the various child protection and welfare schemes available to them. Sarpanchs and ward-level leaders were trained and mobilized through monthly meetings, and one of our biggest enablers was using the 5% untied funding under Gram Swaraj to support child protection, prevent child marriage, push back against child trafficking, and fund career counseling for our youth. What struck me most was how much interest and commitment our Sarpanch leaders showed — that leadership at the local level is what visibly transformed all 317 participating Panchayats, and to me, it’s a real demonstration of how community responsibility strengthens families.

We took the same intentional approach with the e-GramSwaraj Portal. Our process is simple but effective: first, the Gram Panchayat Standing Committee identifies and prioritizes child welfare activities and builds them into the Annual GPDP; then, these activities are uploaded on the portal under Theme 3 — Child-Friendly Gram Panchayat. In Balangir district alone, 200 Gram Panchayats have already uploaded activities focused on preventing child labor, preventing child marriage, and career counseling, with the Women & Child Development, Health, and Education Departments coordinating together to make sure implementation actually happens on the ground.

And running through all of this is the Bal Sabha because no child protection system works without the voices of children themselves. To activate a Bal Sabha, you simply need to create a structured, regular platform — often through meetings in schools or villages where children can voice their opinions, discuss issues that matter to them, and contribute to their own community. It lets them plan activities, raise concerns, and showcase their talents. This, to me, is what real convergence looks like — a chain of leadership, funding, and platforms that starts at the block level and ends with a child’s own voice being heard in their village.”



Mr. Lokanath Misra

Member Secretary,
ARUNA, Odisha



“Mission Vatsalya’s vision is built on non-institutional, Family-Based Care, and its 11th objective makes PRIs and ULBs central to child protection — every state has signed on to deliver this. But the gap between vision and ground reality is real. In Ganjam district, our pre-COVID survey found 1,728 orphaned children and over 22,000 with a single parent — and that didn’t even capture children with HIV or disabilities. Yet in FY 2024-25, only about 500 children were reached through sponsorship and non-institutional care under the JJ system. That gap comes down to limited resources, thin human capacity at the DCPU level, and narrow scheme eligibility. This is exactly why I believe PRIs must be activated as the missing link. Through the 5% untied PRI funds, Panchayats can coordinate with WCD departments, secure District Magistrate orders, and route real resources to families. This needs to be backed by trained Panchayat Child Welfare and Protection Committees, regular vulnerability assessments, and active Bal Sabhas, all feeding into a proper Panchayat Child Protection Plan with tagged budget lines in the GPDP. On the ground, this means sensitizing communities on child marriage, labor, and abuse; identifying and supporting distressed families early; and linking children — orphaned, disabled, HIV-affected, or at risk — to sponsorship, foster care, and aftercare. Progress should be tracked through the PAI dashboard and reviewed through social audits, with what works documented and shared for others to adopt. For children who’ve been excluded so far, decentralized, PRI-driven support isn’t just an add-on; it’s the ray of hope that finally closes that coverage gap.”

Leadership Dialogue 7: Mental Health and Psycho-social Support for Families and Children



Mr. Deepak Tugnawat

Director of Projects,
Sangath Bhopal Hub



“The mental health ecosystem for children and families, particularly in low-resource settings, remains underdeveloped, with limited professional capacity and fragmented services. We are increasingly recognizing that mental health care cannot depend only on clinical professionals; it needs to be community-driven, inclusive, and integrated into existing systems. One promising approach is task-sharing, where trained community-based lay counselors provide structured psycho-social support under the mentoring and supervision of mental health professionals. Frontline providers can also be equipped to identify common mental health concerns, offer basic support, and follow clear referral pathways for specialized care. Our experience with health missions and international partners has shown that integrating mental health into existing public systems can make support more accessible, affordable, and sustainable.

Community engagement is equally important. Using relatable, non-stigmatizing language and listening to children, families, and communities can help build trust and encourage help-seeking. Within District Child Protection systems, these approaches can strengthen the capacity of child protection and frontline workers to recognize early signs of emotional distress, provide first-line psycho-social support, and connect families with appropriate services. A layered model combining community-based support, professional supervision, and clear referral pathways can help ensure that children and families receive timely and appropriate care.

Ultimately, strengthening mental health and psycho-social support requires sustained collaboration across government, health and child protection systems, NGOs, communities, and local leaders. By building capacity within existing systems and enabling communities to play an active role, we can create more accessible and sustainable pathways to support, helping every child and family thrive.”



Dr. Shiva Prakash Srinivasan

Head, Department of Youth Mental Health,
Schizophrenia Research Foundation (India),
Chennai

“At SCARF, our experience has shown that integrating psycho-social support within the child welfare system should not be seen as a parallel service, but as an embedded component of holistic child protection. Many mental health challenges emerge within families and communities, where poverty, parental conflict, substance use, and trauma can go unnoticed. Families are often the first responders, but may lack the support and skills to respond effectively. Early intervention at the community level is key. Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, and NGO partners can be trained to identify early signs of emotional distress, provide basic psycho-social first aid, and use structured referral pathways. Embedding these practices within Mission Vatsalya and existing child protection structures can ensure that mental health needs are addressed across CCLs, DCPUs, and outreach services.

SCARF’s experience with tele-psychiatry shows how technology can provide timely and continuous mental health care despite geographical barriers, including follow-up after reintegration and counseling for caregivers. The Individual Care Plan Cell complements this by keeping care planning structured, child-centered, and risk-informed, with attention to emotional needs, family risks, caregiver involvement, and readiness for reintegration.

Together, these approaches can make mental health central to child protection, support safer and more sustainable reintegration, and help families create stable, nurturing environments for children.”



Mr. B. S. Nabi

Counselling Psychotherapist,
CWC Member,
Hyderabad, Telangana State



“Children in foster and alternative care may carry complex emotional and behavioral needs linked to trauma, neglect, or previous experiences of instability. Supporting them requires more than addressing the child’s needs alone; caregivers also need guidance to understand these behaviors, manage their own stress, and provide consistent emotional reassurance.

Among many cases we witnessed, sustained counseling for both the child and her parents helped the family understand how conflict, alcohol misuse, and instability were affecting the child. The experience also showed us that reintegration cannot be treated as the end of support. When difficulties resurfaced, continued mental health support, parental counseling, and work on alcohol misuse and conflict resolution were essential in creating a safer and more stable family environment. They were also referred to an Alcoholics Anonymous group for long-term support.

This is why foster and Family-Based Care needs a trauma-informed (addressing issues like loneliness, feeling aloof despite being around people, or insomnia) and family-strengthening approach, with psychological support before and after placement, regular follow-up, trained counselors, and support networks for caregivers. When children and caregivers receive the right support over time, families are better equipped to provide a stable, nurturing, and safe environment for children.”

Leadership Dialogue 8: Economic Resilience for Families

**Mr. Bishnu Charan Parida**

Chief Operating Officer,
Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society,
Rural Development Department,
Government of Jharkhand



“When we talk about livelihoods, we must look beyond income generation. For economically vulnerable families, livelihoods are closely linked to their ability to withstand shocks, access essential services, and create a more secure future for their children.

Through the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana (DAY), particularly DAY-NRLM, we have seen how women’s collectives can become an important foundation for strengthening families. By bringing women together through Self-Help Groups and federations, we are creating pathways for financial inclusion, access to credit, entrepreneurship, and livelihood opportunities. These collectives also help families absorb financial shocks and strengthen women’s agency and role in household decision-making.

However, livelihood support cannot work in isolation. The real impact comes through convergence. When we connect families with employment opportunities, agriculture, horticulture, livestock development, health, nutrition, and social welfare schemes, we create a stronger ecosystem of support around them.

At the same time, we must recognize that access does not automatically translate into meaningful income or inclusion. Families living in remote and forested areas, ultra-poor households, and those with limited access to markets, value chains, and credit are often left behind. Many people may also hesitate to take loans because of concerns around repayment. This is why targeted approaches are essential. We need to identify who is being left out, strengthen community institutions, build better market linkages, and ensure that departments work together through regular planning, accountability, and follow-up.

For me, NRLM is not just a livelihood program. It is a family empowerment mission. The challenge now is to ensure that every family, especially those at the last mile, can translate available opportunities into sustainable income, resilience, and long-term well-being.”



Mr. Siddharth Kumar

Secretary and Head of Programs,
Samagra Sikchhan Evam Vikas Sansthan (SSEVS)

“In my experience, economic strengthening is an important part of child protection. In SSEVS’s work with ultra-poor, landless communities in Bihar, we saw how families dependent on daily wage labor and seasonal migration faced challenges that directly affected children’s education, nutrition, and family stability. Limited access to land, tools, irrigation, training, finance, and markets made it difficult for families to build sustainable incomes.

We therefore focused on creating opportunities for families to move toward more secure livelihoods through community-level land leasing, collective farming, agricultural training, access to tools and quality inputs, SHG-based loans and insurance, and stronger market linkages. These interventions helped reduce distress migration, keep children in school, improve household nutrition, and strengthen women’s leadership. Families also began identifying themselves as farmers rather than laborers, restoring a sense of dignity and hope.

At the same time, we need to recognize that the most marginalized families are often the hardest to reach. Remote communities, ultra-poor households, and families with limited access to credit and markets require targeted support. Strong convergence with government schemes and sustained coordination are essential to ensure that livelihood opportunities translate into lasting income. We also need to measure progress beyond income. The Kisan Diary helps families track their investments, production, sales, and earnings, while vulnerability mapping helps us understand their progress. But the strongest indicator is the well-being of children, whether they are in school, healthy, happy, and able to remain within their families and communities.

Family strengthening needs to continue beyond project timelines. Our approach combines a three-year livelihood cycle with up to two years of handholding, alongside early government linkages to help families sustain their gains. Ultimately, the goal is not simply to increase household income, but to build resilient families that can provide children with a safe, stable, and nurturing future.”



Ms. Shahida

Member,
Craft Women Producer Company Limited

“After losing my husband, I had to find a way to support my four children. I started with limited stitching skills and an income of just ₹ 1,500 a month, but with training and the support of my SHG, I was able to increase my income to ₹ 5,000 and support my children's education and needs. Today, I have started my own business and feel more confident and independent. I received a lot of support from fellow women, and now I want to be that support for other mothers in my community and explore livelihood opportunities for a better future for themselves and their children.”



Leadership Dialogue 9: Education and Employability

**Dr. Subhomoy Bhaduri**

Director,
Capacity Building and Collaborations,
Magic Bus India Foundation



“From our experience across frameworks such as Samagra Shiksha, Skill India, and Mission Vatsalya, we have learned that access to education is not enough. We need to focus on retention, relevance, and readiness intentionally. Young people, particularly young women, continue to face barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, safety concerns, social norms, migration, and limited career guidance. India’s diversity also requires locally relevant solutions that respond to why young people disengage. The National Education Policy 2020 has strengthened the focus on vocational and experiential learning, but scaling these approaches requires teacher capacity and flexible implementation.

Education must prepare young people for the future of work, not just examinations. Alongside academics, they need communication, teamwork, problem-solving, digital and AI awareness, green skills, and an entrepreneurial mindset. Career guidance, mentorship, exposure visits, internships, and apprenticeships can help young people understand pathways and gain practical experience. We also need to shift from seeing disadvantaged youth as beneficiaries to recognizing them as assets with aspirations and capabilities. Parents play an important role too by creating safe spaces where children can make choices, build confidence, and develop life skills.

Ultimately, we need stronger convergence between education, skilling, and industry, with updated curricula, greater industry participation, practical exposure, structured career guidance, and continued mentoring. Success should not be measured only through examination results or immediate placements, but through skills for life that can enable them to navigate any situation going forward. The goal is helping young people to thrive in every aspect of their lives.”



Ms. Nidhi Kumari

Youth Ambassador,
Bihar



“One of the biggest challenges I faced after Class 10 was not knowing what options were available to me. I had little information about academic streams, vocational courses, scholarships, entrance pathways, or how to plan for a career. Financial constraints, documentation challenges, and limited access to career and subject guidance made these transitions even harder.

Joining Sanjhe Sapne was a turning point. Through mentoring, exposure visits, and peer learning, I began understanding different education and career pathways. The Aavishkaar Primary Math Educator program and two-year fellowship further strengthened my academic foundation, communication, and confidence, while helping me discover my interest in education. Financial support and guidance also helped me pursue opportunities I may not otherwise have known about, including my M.Ed. at Azim Premji University and scholarship opportunities.

I also realized that preparing young people for employment requires more than academic or technical knowledge. Communication, problem-solving, teamwork, confidence, workplace etiquette, and managing responsibilities are equally important, but these skills are often not taught in schools.

If we want young people from rural and economically constrained backgrounds to move successfully into higher education and stable employment, career awareness needs to start early. Schools should provide information on academic and vocational options, government schemes, scholarships, eligibility, and entrance processes, along with short career counseling and support with documentation and applications. Talent is everywhere, but information about opportunities is not. Timely information, mentorship, exposure, life skills, and structured guidance can turn uncertainty into informed choices and aspiration into opportunity.”



Mr. Sanjay Kumar (Kabir)

State Project Manager,
Pedagogy and Learning Management,
JEEViKA (BRLPS), Government of Bihar

“When we speak about India’s demographic dividend, we must also ask whether our young people are employable. If young people lack foundational learning, relevant skills, and opportunities, the demographic dividend can become a demographic liability. We need to look beyond higher education and invest equally in foundational learning, practical skills, counseling, exposure, and transition support, particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Skilling cannot be treated only as a post-school intervention; it needs to be connected to education and the wider livelihood ecosystem.

Schemes such as DDU-GKY and PMKVY, along with the Skill India Digital Hub, provide important pathways, but schemes alone are not enough. Young people also need mentorship, peer learning, workplace exposure, and realistic understanding of employment opportunities. Our experience has also shown that placement numbers alone do not define success. Pre-training counseling, soft-skills preparation, realistic expectations, and post-placement mentoring are essential for young people to sustain employment.

Convergence is therefore critical. Community institutions such as JEEViKA can help identify young people early and connect them to appropriate education, skilling, and livelihood opportunities. The goal should be to create a seamless pathway from education to skills to sustainable and dignified employment.

For persons with disabilities, inclusive skilling is important, but training must translate into actual employment. Stronger industry engagement, workplace sensitization, and proactive inclusion are needed to create meaningful opportunities. Ultimately, employability is not just about training someone for a job. It is about building their skills, confidence, exposure, and support systems so they can transition into dignified and sustainable work.”

Leadership Dialogue 10: Family Strengthening: Measuring What Matters



Mr. Lokanath Misra

Member Secretary,
ARUNA, Odisha



“From where I sit, child protection in India still runs largely on jugaad — improvisation — rather than a fully resourced system. Policy prioritizes it, but children with the highest vulnerabilities — those living with HIV, survivors of abuse, children with disabilities, orphaned or in bonded labor — still fall through fragmented, delayed support and end up entering the Juvenile Justice system. India has strong universal schemes — RTE, immunization, nutrition, health — but vulnerability emerges precisely where systems, families, and communities fail to converge. At the heart of prevention are two things: financial stability and strong social connections. When either collapses, children become vulnerable.

Mechanisms like foster care, sponsorship, and aftercare remain limited in reach. Mission Vatsalya, launched in 2022, pushes convergence to close this gap, but four years in, the last mile remains hardest. This is where Gram Panchayats matter most — closest to families, able to spot early vulnerability and respond in real time. District mechanisms like CWCs or the 1098 helpline are essential but often too slow for emergencies; Panchayats, when empowered, can act with zero response time. The real problem is that most Panchayats still treat child protection as peripheral welfare, not core development.

A functional prevention system needs coordination at every level — Village Child Welfare and Protection Committees for identification, block-level convergence, and district leadership through the DM, DCPO, and Zilla Parishads. Two mechanisms make this real: vulnerability mapping at the Panchayat level, and Panchayat Child Protection Plans folded into the GPDP, backed by at least 5% of untied funds. Done well, Panchayats can invest directly in families and catch risk before it becomes a JJ case — though leadership capacity and administrative follow-through remain real challenges.

On structures — the issue isn't that institutions don't exist; it's clarity, ownership, and authorization to act. Most Panchayat spending still goes to infrastructure, not child protection, because it isn't seen as their mandate. But where formal resolutions exist, results follow — several Gram Panchayats in a particular district provisioned ₹ 79 lakhs for child protection. Panchayat funds are best used for immediate stabilization, while long-term care must link to broader systems — without that clarity, funds go unused or get diverted. CWCs must take ownership of cases and issue formal directions so Panchayats can act, and DCPUs must coordinate — bridging Panchayats with the wider child protection system, tracking budgets, CWC orders, and case follow-up through regular block and district review. The gap isn't a lack of structures — it's a lack of clarity, coordination, and ownership. Strong convergence between DCPUs, Panchayats, CWCs, and district leadership is what finally turns intent into timely action for children and families.”



Ms. Hemalatha CK

Deputy Secretary,
Government Secretariat, Kerala



“Kudumbashree offers a powerful example of what community-driven monitoring can achieve. It runs on a dual structure — a women-led community network working alongside the local self-government system, organized in three tiers: Neighborhood Groups at the grassroots, Area Development Societies at the ward level, and Community Development Societies at the Panchayat level. One woman per family can join, and today this reaches over 3.17 lakh neighborhood groups and nearly 48 lakh women — almost half of Kerala’s women. The work spans economic empowerment through microfinance and livelihoods, social development through initiatives like Destitute-Free Kerala and Baal Sabha, and women’s empowerment through leadership and political participation.

What makes the monitoring work is its regularity — Neighborhood Groups meet weekly, each covering 10–20 families, discussing issues, spotting emerging vulnerabilities, and feeding annual plans into local government’s own yearly planning. And rather than relying on income alone, Kudumbashree uses a nine-point, deprivation-based risk framework — four or more indicators mark a family ‘at-risk,’ all nine mark them ‘highly vulnerable’— with 382 possible combinations, entirely community-identified. This keeps things transparent and reduces exclusion errors. Monitoring doesn’t stop at identification: families are tracked through periodic visits, moved out of the at-risk category once stable, and informally watched even after exit. The focus throughout is family stability, not temporary relief — moving families from vulnerability to self-reliance, from exclusion to participation.

That brings me to something I feel strongly about: governments are good at measuring output — funds spent, people reached — but output doesn’t tell us whether anything actually changed for a family. A program can look successful on paper while families quietly cycle back into crisis. Outcome measurement asks the harder question — did this actually help? It also exposes a real problem: departments work in silos, often serving the same households without ever checking whether their combined effort added up to something meaningful. When we measure outcomes instead, departments are pushed to align around the same families, coordinate rather than duplicate, and focus on cumulative impact. Families don’t experience government as schemes or departments — they experience it as either stability or struggle. That’s ultimately what outcome measurement respects, and why it must replace output as our real measure of success.”



Mr. Pritam Prasun

Director,
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning,
Miracle Foundation India



“Digital tools like ThriveWell don’t replace our social workforce — they’re the backbone that strengthens it. Our caseworkers often manage 50 or more families at a time, each with a different mix of challenges, and traditionally had to rely on memory and handwritten notes to decide who needed attention first. ThriveWell closes that gap by standardizing assessments in one place, used across prevention, reintegration, risk management, and foster care and independent living. It tracks families across five well-being domains — relationships, economy, living conditions, education, and health — through 45 milestones rated from crisis to thriving, turning this into visual outputs like spider charts that show us exactly where to focus. It’s mobile-based, reduces administrative load significantly, and helps link families to the right services at the right time, based on need rather than assumption.

None of this works without trust, so safeguarding is built in by design, aligned with the DPDP Act — caseworkers see only their own families, managers see only aggregated data, and everything sensitive is encrypted.

On scale — India’s diversity means vulnerability looks different everywhere, and ThriveWell gives us a shared framework across geographies and partners so assessments stay consistent as we grow. It saves time for caseworkers and supervisors alike, ensures continuity even when staff change, and when multiple organizations use the same tool, training becomes faster and reporting becomes comparable — helping us see where to direct resources next.

But technology does not replace relationships. The heart of this work remains the trust between a social worker and a family; tools like ThriveWell simply help us prioritize, stay focused, and intervene at the right moment. That’s how we scale with quality and accountability, without losing the human connection at the center of it all.”

The Ground Gained, The Road Ahead

This volume opened by asking readers to follow the child — through the systems built to protect her, the families working to stay together, the journey back from institutional care, and the child protection sector’s own evolving understanding of what all of this actually requires. Read across all three chapters, a single answer keeps surfacing in different registers: this sector is learning to work as one system rather than many separate ones, and that shift — not any single scheme or intervention — is the real story of this volume.

Chapter 1 traced it thematically: architecture activating at the Panchayat level, gatekeeping hardening into named practice, case management extending from entry into care through to exit from it. Chapter 2’s five Leadership Dialogues, read together, named the same shift from a different angle and gave it sharper edges. Convergence recurred in every single dialogue — as inter-departmental coordination, as psycho-social support folded into existing touchpoints rather than referred outward, as livelihood missions and protection systems acting on the same households, as institutional handoffs across a young person’s transitions, as shared measurement that makes collaboration legible — until it stopped looking like a coordination challenge and started looking like family strengthening’s actual operating system.

Alongside it, the dialogues kept returning to the same discovery in five different settings: the state cannot be everywhere, but communities already are, and policy’s task is to mandate, resource, and trust what is already present rather than build around it. And running beneath both was a quieter but equally consequential shift, from a sector that once asked what services exist for families to one now asking who owns the outcome — which institution, which platform, which community structure answers for whether a family, once supported, actually stays together.

What makes this more than aspiration is that the two years behind this volume show the shift already operating at scale, through mechanisms built to outlast any one project or person.

- A Panchayati Raj official in Odisha did not simply advocate for convergence between departments; he helped build the district-level coordination chain — untied funds, Gram Panchayat Development Plans, Village-Level Committees — through which convergence now happens whether or not he personally is in the room.
- A livelihoods practitioner working with Jharkhand’s State Livelihood Promotion Society did not simply care about ultra-poor families; he helped design the sequenced, time-bound handholding model built specifically so that economic gains outlive the program itself.
- A mental health professional at Sangath did not simply counsel children himself; he helped build the task-sharing model that trains and supervises lay counselors precisely because specialist professionals will never exist in the numbers this sector needs.
- And a self-help group member in Bihar and a young care leader now guiding others through the transitions she once faced alone.

These are not beneficiaries whose stories illustrate the system’s success from the outside — they are, increasingly, the system itself, holding roles that policy is only now catching up to formalizing. What these examples share is not personal virtue, real as that virtue is, but a common instinct: build the mechanism, not just the moment, so that the work survives any single person’s presence in it.

There is, of course, real distance still ahead: convergence that works in pockets rather than at scale, gatekeeping still finding its full bounds, aftercare that reaches some children and not nearly enough, and a discourse on disability, mental health, and AI safeguarding racing to keep pace with a world that will not slow down to wait for policy. But a sector that has learned to build convergence, trust communities, and demand accountability for outcomes rather than outputs is a sector with the actual tools to close those gaps — not just the intention to. That is a meaningfully different and more hopeful place to stand than this compendium’s first volume found the sector in.

The child this volume set out to follow is, in the end, not a subject of study but the reason any of this work exists. Every mechanism built to outlast its builder, every family kept whole, every young person carried into stable adulthood, is that child’s world made a little safer, a little more her own.

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