

# Supporting Youth Leaving Care

Current Aftercare Practices (CAP) in Maharashtra

Aftercare is a measure for rehabilitation and social reintegration, applicable to youth leaving care on attaining adulthood. Apart from India's ratification of United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), national laws and policies have been formulated in India with special provisions for care and protection for out-of-home-care (OHC) children and youth leaving care. The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 and Rules, 2016, Maharashtra state Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Rules, 2018 and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) govern the provisioning of Aftercare services in Maharashtra.

## Research Overview

Udayan Care with the support of UNICEF and Tata Trusts initiated a Current Aftercare Practices (CAP) research in Maharashtra in 2018 with the aim of developing evidence-based programmes for Aftercare in the State. UNICEF Delhi and UNICEF State chapter in Maharashtra have partnered with the Udayan Care research team providing access to government, guidance on research methodology and improving the draft report for the State. The CAP study is a part of a national research and examines:

- The nature of challenges and opportunities faced by Care Leavers in Maharashtra
- The extent of existing Aftercare interventions in Maharashtra
- The gaps and promising practices within the Aftercare ecosystem
- Recommendations to develop a robust Aftercare programme in Maharashtra, and the way forward

The study was conducted with 107 care leavers as the primary stakeholders, and government functionaries, private service providers, professionals and institutional duty-bearers as key-informants'. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected by:

- An indigenously developed questionnaire for Care Leavers
- In depth interviews conducted with care providers (key Informants)
- Focus group discussions and inception consultation with all stakeholders
- Secondary data through desk research, literature review and current intervention approach documentation

## Sphere of Aftercare

Based on Udayan Care's several years of experience in service delivery, extensive secondary research, learnings from the pilot study, Udayan Care's research team developed a thematic framework that governs this study. This research puts forth the 'Sphere of Aftercare' as a comprehensive ideology of rehabilitative support and services for CLs transitioning out of care. The data has been analyzed in the backdrop of the 'Sphere of Aftercare' concept. The 'Sphere of Aftercare' framework divides the scope of Aftercare support/services into eight distinct, but interdependent domains that are essential for CLs' mainstreaming as they transition out of care. These domains are as mentioned in diagram:



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE		
GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION
Males: 74 (69%)	Below 18: 2 (~2%)	Primary School: 11
Females: 33 (31%)	18-21: 88 (~82%)	Class V – X: 37 (35%)
	Above 21: 17 (16%)	Class XII pass: 22 (21%)
		Graduation/ Diploma: 32 (30%)
CCI CATEGORY	AFTERCARE CATEGORY	NATURE OF AFTERCARE
Govt: 51 ( 48% )	Govt: 40 (37%)    Didn't Know : 1 ( 2% )	Institutional: 62 (66%)
NGO: 55 (51%)	NGO: 65 (61%)	Non-institutional: 41 (34%)

# RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



## LIFE IN CCI

- Average Age of Admission to CCI= approx. 9 years. Average age of leaving CCI= 18 years
- 44 out of 100 (44%) CLs reported being placed in more than one CCI
- 39% not consulted in Aftercare or rehabilitation planning, with a higher male skew
- 56% received no guidance regarding monetary management
- 41% never received financial literacy training
- 65% never received legal literacy training
- 25% do not have a bank account



## SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN CCI

- Skills identified under 3 broad categories: Independent Living Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Job-readiness & Vocational Skills
- Level of skill development of CLs: 39% - unsatisfactory, 36% - Neutral, 25% - satisfactory
- 55% females reported a satisfactory level of skill development vis-a-vis 12% males
- 50% voiced the need for specific activities or trainings to acquire independent living skills
- The extent of skills acquired during childhood in a CCI was found to be significantly correlated with almost all spheres of Aftercare

"A child who has not received any kind of exposure to the outside world, is completely overwhelmed with the sudden freedom they receive in Aftercare and often end up misusing it." - Key-Informant



## ACADEMICS AND CAREER

- 4% were uneducated (no schooling)
- 12% had not completed primary education (Class 5th)
- 45% had not completed higher secondary (Class 12th)
- 17% were neither in education, employment or training (NEET). This is lower than the national average of 27%, perhaps signifying CCI focus on EET
- 20% thought their education and/or skill level to be inadequate to achieve their academic and career goals.
- Some were unable to assess the adequacy of their skill level.
- Over 62% reported the need for career counselling and training
- A greater proportion of females had better educational qualifications, job readiness and vocational skills than males. This did not translate into equivalent proportion of female workforce participation.

"There is a need for internships or traineeship. Government should take responsibility for it, where they can do their internship and can stay as well under the supervision of authorities." - Key-Informant



## IDENTITY AND LEGAL AWARENESS

- 96% CLs reported having an Aadhar card
- Only 28% reported having a Voter's ID card, leading to exclusion from the governance process
- A greater proportion of females reported receiving legal literacy training. However, this knowledge did not translate into a greater number acquiring legal identity documents.

"Staff members at the district level are not aware of the Individual care Plan or how to prepare it." - Key informant



## FINANCIAL SECURITY

- Only 53 respondents reported independent sources of income. 65% males reported having their own sources of income vis a vis 27% females
- 13% indicated working part-time. Rest are receiving financial support either through Aftercare programs or from well-wishers
- Mean income of independent earners (Rs.8,017 pm) is lower than the state minimum wages for unskilled workers in most industries
- 22% reported that their income/allowance was unable to cover their cost of living
- 19% were not actively saving
- 17% do not have funds available to them in case of illness



## TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE

- 35% key-informants recognized mental/emotional distress as a core issue. In their opinion, many challenges faced in other domains, such as unwillingness to continue education, failure to hold down a job, inability to forge and maintain relationships, etc. could be partially rooted in their poor emotional health and ego-resiliency
- 49% sought assistance from non-professionals while 28% did not seek any assistance for mental health concerns
- 16% reported that they did not have someone who could care for them during illness. Those who are left without care experience heightened vulnerability and increased recuperation time
- 67% received no information regarding their legal rights and responsibilities
- The process of transition from care to Aftercare is emotionally and mentally taxing. Abrupt transition seems to have a greater negative impact on the emotional wellbeing of young adults

"Since childhood, these children grow up with the same caregivers who become their family. But suddenly at the age of 18 years, they are sent to another home. It's like breaking of their family." - Key-Informant



## HOUSING

- 60% lived in institutional housing - dedicated residential facilities that accommodate more than 8 persons. Only 1 Government Aftercare home for women in Nashik
- 40% lived in non-institutional housing - mixed residential facilities such as working-women hostels, scattered rented apartments and group-homes of up to 8 persons. Only 7 respondents in non-institutional housing were supported by an Aftercare Programme
- 65% of key-informants cited adequate and affordable housing as one of the biggest concerns for Care Leavers
- Stigma and insensitivity in the society makes it difficult to obtain rental housing for Care Leavers



## SOCIAL INTEGRATION

- 1 in every 4 males were unable to maintain meaningful or long-lasting relationships whereas a greater proportion of females were able to do so
- 90% reported difficulties in maintaining romantic relationships or considered such relationships "not applicable" to them
- 58% thought that Aftercare services should be provided in-person through a physical facility/office
- 59% shared that they did not have any formal or informal group or alumni association for peer support. Moreover, 84% reported that they would like to contribute and benefit from such a youth collective, if formulated
- 56% voiced the need for guidance to improve the quality of their relationships and establish a social support network
- A large proportion of males were unable to maintain relationships with their parents. Unexpectedly, it was also found that a large proportion of females reported that questions regarding their relationship with their parents were "not applicable". This requires further research into girl child abandonment, abuse, poverty or other factors that are resulting in their complete dissociation from families

"Since the child has not lived in a family, how would they understand the concept of familial or romantic relationships? For a happy married life, they require proper pre-marriage counselling." - Key-Informant

## Aftercare Quality Index

A composite score, comprising of the following 8 indices, was computed to create the Aftercare Quality Index: Housing Index, Independent Living Skills Index, Social Support and Interpersonal Skills Index, Emotional Wellbeing Index, Physical Healthcare Index, Financial Index, Academics and Career Skills Index, Legal Index.

- It was found a greater proportion of female respondents (55%) had better Aftercare Quality Index than their male counterparts (30%)
- CCI Life Experience Index as well as CCI Skill Development Index was found to have a strong, positive correlation with the Aftercare Quality Index. (Pearson correlation coefficient significant at alpha level= 0.05)
- Care Leavers who now lived in non-institutional housing had a better Aftercare Quality Index than those who continued to live in institutional facilities
- Better educational qualifications, job readiness and vocational skills indicate better quality of life across all Spheres of Aftercare

These findings are crucial to our understanding of Aftercare as they support the ideology of a continuum of care, where experiences, values, knowledge and skills accumulated in care and Aftercare have a direct and profound impact on experiences and outcomes in adult life.

## Discussion Points

1. Reducing the risk of social, legal, economic exclusion of Care Leavers
2. Increasing enrolment of Care Leavers in higher education, particularly males
3. Increasing Care Leavers work force participation, particularly females
4. Developing a robust tracking/follow-up mechanism for Care Leavers
5. Achieving convergence of various government schemes benefitting Care Leavers
6. Affirmative Actions such as reservations for Care Leavers



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