



Photo by Premananda Hessenkamp for CRS

Changing the Way We Care in India

Introduction to Changing the Way We Care

Changing The Way We CareSM (CTWWC) is a global initiative launched in 2018 to address one of the greatest global issues – children growing up outside of and without family care. Implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in partnership with Maestral International, CTWWC seeks to promote safe and nurturing family care for children. Operating in five countries - India, Kenya, Guatemala, Moldova, and Haiti - CTWWC works to strengthen families and reform national systems of care for children through family reunification, reintegration, and alternative family-based care.

Changing the Way We Care in India

In India, CTWWC works towards care reform by promoting family strengthening and family-based care options for children who are at risk of family separation. CTWWC is currently active in two states – Odisha, with a focus on strengthening the child protection system, and Tamil Nadu, with a focus on influencing the church system.

The Issue

India has the largest number of children living in residential care in the world, with over 9,500 Child Care Institutions (CCIs), also known as orphanages, sheltering nearly 400,000 children. More than 80% of these children have at least one living parent. The loss of parents and caregivers, combined with factors like poverty, dysfunctional family dynamics, domestic violence, alcoholism, substance abuse, as well as caregivers who are incapable of providing for their children due to age, terminal illness, or disability, contribute to the staggering number of children in institutional care. The COVID-19 pandemic left at least 200,000 children in India without one or both of their primary



caregivers. Recent evidence from the Imperial College of London suggests this number could potentially be as high as 2 million. Furthermore, there is a widespread perception that CCIs can offer better care, protection, and development for children. Current policy frameworks largely prioritize reactive measures over proactive preventive actions. While there is recognition within the government that a family environment is the best place for children to grow up and institutionalization of children should be the last resort, policy provisions are skewed towards promoting reactive actions and programs. The government is now exploring preventive measures and seeking support to identify and implement best practices that have the potential to prevent children from entering institutions.

Vision and Pathways of Change

CTWWC India envisions preventing 150,000 children from institutionalization and reintegrating 150,000 children residing in childcare institutions back into their families. CTWWC will achieve this through three key pathways of change, allowing CTWWC in India to bring about lasting and scalable change:

1) Government

CTWWC India is closely collaborating with the child protection system in 10 districts of Odisha, focusing on workforce capacity strengthening, piloting family-based care models, strengthening the district planning process for alternative care, and streamlining the reintegration process of children into their families in alignment with the flagship public program, Mission Vatsalya. These are critical components that require strengthening within the child protection system to promote care reform and are thus strategic for CTWWC to engage with. More recently, CTWWC has also begun working with Gram Panchayats in these 10 districts to encourage child-friendly villages by prioritizing child protection in their development plans and leveraging 5% of untied funds from the Mission Vatsalya scheme for the same. The system strengthening work in Odisha, which initially started in one district, has successfully expanded to 10 more districts in collaboration with the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Odisha, and UNICEF Odisha.

2) Church

The Church plays a crucial role in the context of care reform in India, as many CCIs in India are managed by Church institutions. CTWWC collaborates with the Catholic Church in Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu, a state with several church-managed CCIs, to mobilize Church action to prevent the separation of children from families and to strengthen families so they can care for their children within their families. CRS India is well-positioned to build on its longstanding relationship with the Church in India to influence and catalyze change to promote family strengthening.

3) Policy Influence

Building on existing partnerships with UNICEF and the India Alternative Care Network (IACN), CTWWC seeks to advocate for public provisioning of family-based care by generating evidence on the cost of care, the impact and benefits for children in non-institutional care compared to institutional care, defining and developing a framework for family strengthening, and convening and engaging with diverse stakeholders to garner support for family strengthening and alternative care options.



Key Results

Church

- A systematic outreach effort reached 48,142 individuals through mass media, educating them on the benefits of family-based care and the adverse impact of long-term institutionalization. This led to several families voluntarily deciding not to place their children in childcare institutions.
- 10,287 caregivers received training on positive parenting, resulting in improved relationships between parents and children, enhancing family cohesiveness, and reducing the risk of institutionalization for children.



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- 306 vulnerable families were successfully linked to government and church-based schemes and services for health, education, food, and livelihood support, contributing to a reduction in the risk of institutionalization of children.
- 17 Parishes took steps to become gatekeepers for children in their communities, actively working to prevent the separation of children from families. Four Parishes made formal resolutions to mobilize resources to support children and prevent their institutionalization.
- Catholic Church actors, including 4 Diocesan partners and Parishes, collectively mobilized church resources totaling \$70,074 to address the needs of vulnerable children and families related to education, health, psychosocial support, and livelihoods, including utilizing the Church's poverty eradication funds.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, CTWWC piloted a virtual monitoring approach, identifying and supporting 793 vulnerable children with food and cash support to meet their immediate basic needs. Additionally, 63 children (from 45 families) who were sent home from CCIs during the pandemic were supported to stay with their families, and 14 families that approached Church leaders to admit their children in CCIs were supported to retain their children in their families.

A combination of interventions was undertaken to achieve the above results, including building the perspectives and capacities of church leadership, promoting and implementing Foster Care, After Care, key provisions of the flagship scheme (Mission Vatsalya) regarding the role of Gram Panchayats in utilizing the 5% untied funds for child protection at the village level, and strengthening the capacities of members of Panchayat Level Child Protection Committees in creating a protective environment for children. Additionally, the development, implementation, and regular monitoring of the DAP (District Action Plans) were key strategies. Establishing a case management mechanism at the DCPU (District Child Protection Units) level in coordination with the Child Welfare Committee and connecting vulnerable families to key social protection programs were among the other key interventions.

Government

- The number of children placed in foster care increased from none to 13 in a year and a half of implementing the District Action Plans (DAPs) in 10 districts.
- The District Collector of Ganjam district in Odisha issued a directive to 149 Gram Panchayats to allocate at least 5% of their discretionary funds towards child protection as part of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). This will create approximately \$360,000 in local resources to create a more protective environment for children who are at risk. The plan is to eventually extend this to all 30 districts across the state in the coming years.
- The process of preparing children for aftercare has been initiated in CCIs in 10 districts for children from the age of 16 years – this is a critical step that aims to ensure that young adults are psychologically and emotionally equipped to facilitate a smooth integration into the outside world.
- The development and implementation of DAPs on non-institutional care for children in 10 districts in Odisha in the past two years have made family-based care for children a top priority for the District Child Protection Units (DCPUs). This has led to the initiation of a plan for an efficient monitoring mechanism at the district level, a shared understanding of care reform, enhanced clarity on roles and responsibilities among government child protection structures, and improved knowledge and skills on alternative care.

The above-mentioned outcomes were primarily achieved by strengthening the workforce in terms of their perspectives and capacities, promoting and implementing Foster Care and After Care, addressing key provisions of the flagship scheme (Mission Vatsalya), and enhancing the role of Gram Panchayats in utilizing the 5% untied funds for child protection at the village level. Workforce strengthening also focused on building the capacities of members of Panchayat Level Child Protection Committees to create a protective environment for children. Furthermore, the development, implementation, and regular monitoring of the DAP were key intervention strategies. Establishing a case management mechanism at the DCPU level in coordination with the Child Welfare Committee and connecting vulnerable families to key social protection programs were among the other key interventions undertaken in this strand.

Way Forward

CTWWC will continue to build on its work across the three pathways of strengthening the child protection system, influencing and capacitating the church system, and policy influencing in the coming years. In the next two years, in Odisha, CTWWC will work towards scaling up its work from the existing 10 districts to the remaining 20 districts, reaching approximately 1 million children belonging to families experiencing multi-dimensional poverty in the state, thereby reducing their risk of institutionalization. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, in collaboration with the church, CRS envisions systematically engaging with leadership to influence and support the transition from managing CCIs to promoting family strengthening and community-based work. Over the next two years, CTWWC will endeavor to expand its current work in the district of Kanyakumari to ten select child care institutions from five additional districts that have a large number of child care institutions. To begin with, CTWWC will identify and engage with those Diocesan partners who demonstrate an interest and motivation to work towards transitioning to family care, gradually expanding its engagement with other church-managed institutions in these districts in the coming year.

Need to know more? Contact *Changing the Way We Care* at, info@ctwwc.org or visit changingthewaywecare.org

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