



Declaration on Responding to the transnational needs of Care Leavers amidst COVID-19 & beyond!



Preamble:

We, the young people with care experience (aka Care Leavers /Care experienced youth), came together on a webinar on June 6, 2020, under the guidance of the organising committee of the 1st International Care Leavers convention. The webinar saw participation from over 100 Care Leavers from about 25 countries to explore and discuss the challenges faced by Care Leavers globally and how the current covid-19 outbreak has enhanced their vulnerabilities and suggest solutions/recommendations to ensure Care Leavers feel supported.

We expanded on the existing international and national framework of support for children and youth from Alternative Care settings and developed the following commitments and recommendations specific to the issues affecting children and youth from Alternative Care Settings globally.



Financial Security

Gap 1: Mobility has been completely halted or restricted due to the nationwide lockdowns, this has resulted in loss of jobs and income for Care Leavers. Financial crisis of Care Leavers ends up in food crisis and crisis of wellbeing. This results in stress among Care Leavers.

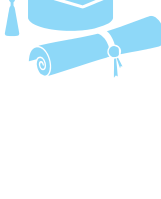
Recommendation 1: Care Leavers should be provided financial assistance as well as support with jobs in the post covid-19 situation.



Housing

Gap 2: Housing support is a key concern for Care Leavers. The ones who have exited care depend on their incomes or savings to secure housing. However, the loss of job or income due to covid-19 has led to many of them exhausting their savings. This has resulted in many worrying about not having access to a place for shelter or safety.

Recommendation 2: All Care Leavers should have the right on guidance and financial support for housing after they leave care. A place to sleep is a basic need and very important. It is important to learn how to find a house/flat/room and how to keep it.



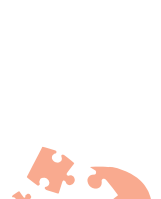
Education

Gap 3: Many care Leavers saved money from their first jobs for their higher education but are now forced to use this savings to meet their basic needs, in the absence of any support received from government on supply of essential groceries during the Covid-19 crisis. They expressed that this way their savings will exhaust and see their future being at risk!

Recommendation 3: There should always be financial support/scholarships for Care Leavers because right now a lot of them are sacrificing their dreams because they are forced to start working at a young age due to financial reasons.

Gap 4: In times of COVID accessibility is a key point.

Recommendation 4: Provide extra support to Care Leavers to access materials/electronic devices so young people can follow school/broadcast school tv on national tv and start with small classes with kids who are at risk/in need.



Career support/Employability

Gap 5: Every child or youth exiting care does not leave with an action plan for the long-term including a plan for career development and employment.

Recommendation 5: Organise Aftercare and assign a dedicated person who will help the child/youth in this difficult transition period.



Psycho social support

Gap 6: For many care leavers, who have limited social networks, the ongoing and increasing social distancing measures will mean social isolation, which will in turn increase their vulnerability. The impact of social isolation and the understandable increased levels of anxiety surrounding the virus will exacerbate care leavers' vulnerability to mental-health difficulties. Many of them already struggle to access the vital yet limited mental health support; and for those that do, this crisis will no doubt mean their support will be interrupted.

Recommendation 6a: Free counselling services must be available to all Care Leavers.

Recommendation 6b: Facilitate setting up of peer to peer network and support groups.



Health, nutrition and hygiene (Physical Health)

Gap 7: Care Leavers are in a growing phase of their lives which means healthy food is important. Due to covid there is an extra need for hygiene products while prices are high.

Recommendation 7: Thorough mapping of needs of Care Leavers and ensuring they have access to essential services especially nutritious food, hygiene related items and access to health services.



Legislative/policy reforms, awareness and Identity

Gap 8: There is no clear guidance/advisories before, during covid-19 and beyond for the specific group of Care Leavers. Care authorities are accessible only remotely which is not enough. Lots of Care Leavers moved to rural areas after they lost their jobs. Most Care Leavers are unable to access benefits of social protection schemes because they do not have legal identity documents with them and this adversely impacts their educational and employment attainments.

Recommendation 8a: The government should come out with specific guidelines for children and youth from Alternative Care settings. There is also a need to ensure access to remote learning for Care Leavers especially the ones from rural settings and without access to internet and laptop/mobile.

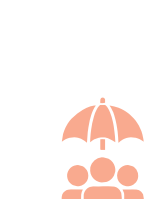
Recommendation 8b: Authorities must ensure that every Care Leaver is given his basic set of legal documents such as passport, identity cards, disability and other caste certificates and other legal documents as appropriate that allows them to avail of the existing youth and social protection measures provided by state.



Participation

Gap 9: Care Leavers have a lot of potential and can become resources to the system if their potential is fully explored and utilized through effective and meaningful participation.

Recommendation 9: They should be included in decision making on local, regional, national and international levels especially when it comes to the following topics: peer groups, advocacy with authorities and public campaigns.



Social network

Gap 10: There is an absence of robust data on young people leaving care. This makes it difficult to reach out to them in situations wherein they might require support. Besides, it also becomes difficult to bring them together in the form of a peer support group.

Recommendation 10.a: A thorough mapping of children and youth leaving care and robust data management is required.

Recommendation 10.b: Social workers and Youth workers should stay in touch with children and young people (online, by visiting them and keeping distance). If the social workers lose contact with the children and young people then they should reconnect.



Inclusion and social protection

Gap 11: The situation of young persons with special needs are usually unaddressed which results in their further exclusion. Similarly, female Care Leavers face increased gender based discrimination, including domestic violence, desertion or abuse and require immediate support at different levels.

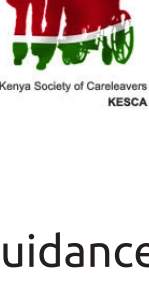
Recommendation 11: Consider the special circumstances of these young people and address their concerns through dedicated social protection measures for Care Leavers with a gender and ability friendly approach.

Final Remark

Think about social distancing. It actually means physical distancing which is terrible for Care Leavers because they often don't belong to a household so they are very isolated. We hope that the authorities will take note of our unique circumstances and keep these recommendations in mind while formulating policies and programmes. We hope that our collective voices will not go unheard.!

Note: This declaration has been supported and signed by Care Leavers from over 25 countries and the same has also been endorsed by the Care Leaver networks/organisations from different countries as mentioned below.

Care Leavers Network Partners



Under the guidance of



For more information on the convention, please visit www.careleaversconvention.udajancare.in