



LEAVING CARE POLICY DEVELOPMENT “NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US”

Care Leavers spoke at the 1st Care Leavers Convention

“No matter where we live, as care leavers, each of us have different yet unique stories of life struggles. Each story has value and has power to impact society. The key is to raise our voice. So united only we can make our voice loud and clear to impact thousands like us living in this world.”

“Because being independent does not mean being left alone.”

“We need organisations to follow a user-centered approach and involve the Care Leavers in every step of the process. This ensures that the solution to be developed actually responds to the needs of the Care Leavers and solves user problems.”

“Your Job is my Life!”

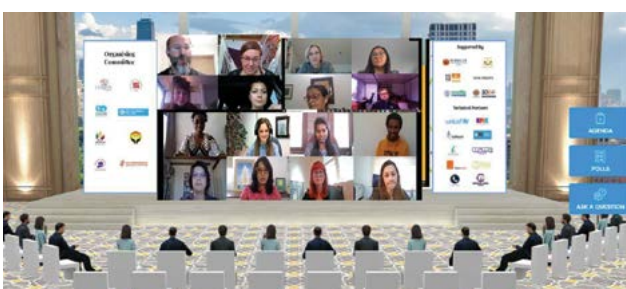
A Brief for
Practitioners

Young people transitioning from alternative care settings, often called Care Leavers, are identified globally as a vulnerable group. “Leaving Care” is globally defined as the point where the state ceases legal responsibility for a child receiving care and protection under the alternative care or juvenile justice system, generally occurring at their 18th birthday, when they are no longer deemed as a ‘child’ and hence are expected to age out of the care system. Unfortunately, most often, these young people face significant barriers during their transition to independence, the most critical being, left unprepared to leave care and not being supported after leaving care.

The process of leaving care is a transnational and global challenge. Even though there are several variations between care-leaving policies and the availability of support worldwide, the challenges faced by Care Leavers are similar everywhere.

While there is enough evidence to show that organisations that effectively engage with children and young persons in co-creating their practices are most effective, it must be ensured that such participation is true and not mere tokenistic in nature. The involvement of Care Leavers in policy making, decision taking and working for their best interest is the best way that societies can contribute towards their betterment.

This **policy brief** puts together the key guiding principles that all organisations working with and for care leavers must keep in mind, as expressed by Care Leavers themselves, during the 1st International Care Leavers Convention 2020.



International Care Leavers' Convention November 23-25, 2020

Delegates from **83** Countries including **dignitaries**, **world-reputed researchers**, **child's rights advocates**, **policy-makers** and **Care Leavers**

2500+
Participants
(50% Care Leavers)

4 Pre Events **3** Main Days **1** Café Session **1** Closure Session



Key discussion points



Better Preparation: Care Leavers must and want to be better prepared for leaving care. They need life skills training to live independently, financial skills training to be financially secure, education and vocational skills training to be employed. Also needed are emotional and interpersonal skills to navigate their way in the real world.



Participation and Inclusion: Care Leavers must be heard and allowed to participate in decisions that are made for them. Care Leavers want to be included and co-create the practice meant for them by collaborating with researchers and practitioners.



Support must be Holistic: All efforts must be made to see that Care Leavers get comprehensive support and do not sign on agreements that they do not understand and do not have to take decisions under any pressure. Support is a must for digital access, as well for their transitioning out of care especially in the troika of needs, employment, housing and education, mental health and developing relationships.



Continuity of Relationship with Caregivers: Continuity of relationship is most important when a young adult leaves care. Often Care Leavers wish to continue to keep in touch with their children's homes' social workers and other staff members but are unable to do so.



Safety Net: It is important to support the transition from care to independent living and creating a 'safety net' for Care Leavers, with focus on housing support, job opportunities, vocational training, emotional support, social relationships and mental health.



Caution and Consent: Practitioners must be careful and take consent of care leavers for use of their images and stories while using it for social media or any other publication. Use of any information without consent must be seen as exploitative and hence must be discouraged.



Respect for Privacy: All practices must ensure the right to privacy and dignity of Care Leavers and respect their decisions. Practitioners must

be mindful of not using the identity of the young person as a 'Care Leaver', because that is only an experience and the person has more aspects than just that.

A few examples of existing practices on Leaving Care presented at the Convention:

- In England and Wales, "The Every Child Matters" project helps local authorities to respond in timely and more decisively when children are in difficult circumstances by preventing the situation from escalating to an undesirable situation.
- The Warwickshire County Council provides Care Leavers with apprenticeships to work within the council.
- A dedicated housing officer for Care Leavers is appointed by the London Borough of Wandsworth to ensure that young Care Leavers have appropriate accommodation.
- In Northern Ireland, an organization "Care Matters: Building a Bridge to a Better Future" provides strategies to help children in the care system and provide a smooth transition to adulthood that encourages young people to reach their potential.
- Uganda has a National Youth Employment Action Plan (NAP), which specifically defines the strategies and actions required to engage young people in worthwhile jobs, empowering them with entrepreneurial skills and attitudes, and increasing their involvement in local government and decision-making processes.
- SOS has a strong intervention to support Care Leavers across all its country programs
- In India, Udayan Care, has a unique family environment where it supports Care Leavers not only from its own homes but also other child care institutions and has a pathway planning framework called the "Sphere of Aftercare".

Key considerations for Practitioners working on Leaving Care



All Practitioners must partner with every young person to ensure holistic preparation process towards independent life in meaningful and equitable ways. Young people must be part of the co-creation right from inception in meaningful and engaging ways.



All Practitioners must focus on quality and adequate preparation for leaving care. All staff must be trained to best support children and young people for leaving care.



All Practitioner must identify and build positive relationships and partnerships with Care Leavers and their networks.



Care Leaving practice must always be empowering so that young people in alternative care or at risk of losing parental care to become self-reliant and successfully transition from school to work.



Care Leaving practices must always include digital platforms that leverage the power of technology to support more young people towards employability.



All practices on Care Leaving must adopt a participatory model, focused on the 8 domains of interventions, being housing, education, employment, life skills, financial and legal literacy, physical and mental health care and social relationships.



Life Skills



Health



Education



Housing



Psychosocial Support



Legal Support



Relationships



Financial Management



Career



Digital access

This policy brief has been developed to serve as a guidance to practitioners while developing any practice on leaving care. It aims to stimulate further discussion amongst practitioners and reach a common professional consensus on formalised guidelines towards leaving care at global, national and local levels.

It is based on the deliberations of the “1st International Care Leavers Convention 2020” (ICLC) held from November 23-25, 2020, with a concluding session held on December 11, 2020 with policy makers from 9 countries. The ICLC also had a series of four pre-events that focused on specific themes. This brief also references the 11 gaps as outlined in the “Declaration of the Care Leavers”, a consultative advocacy tool developed by 100+ Care Leavers, from over 25 countries, over several webinars held from July 2020.

This policy brief has been developed by the Organising Committee of the 1st ICLC 2020, comprising of Care Leavers Association and Network (India), Generations Never Give Up (Sri Lanka), Kinderperspectief (Netherlands), Latin American Care Leavers Network, SOS Children’s Villages, International Office (Asia); Udayan Care (India), University of Hildesheim (Germany); Zimbabwe Care Leavers Network.

The Organizing Committee is grateful to all the Care Leavers, for their strategic inputs in framing this policy brief.



The “1st International Care Leavers Convention 2020” was a landmark event that virtually brought together the Care Leavers from across the globe, and provided an opportunity to voice their issues globally, regionally, nationally, and locally.

It is time that the care leaving policies of different nations are reviewed to recognise Care Leavers as a vulnerable population that can yield multi-fold dividends to that country and its communities, if properly supported. **“Nothing about us without us”**, must remain the key principle of policy making for Care Leavers.

Follow these links to know more _____

[The Care Leavers Declaration](#)

[The takeaways from the 1st Care Leavers Convention, 2020](#)

 www.careleaverscommunity.org

 sylc@udayancare.org

 [UC509HMTU0uz0JUSinlCINhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC509HMTU0uz0JUSinlCINhA)

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