**Submission to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**

**Day of General Discussion (DGD) 2021**

**By the Global Care Leavers Community (GCLC)**

**Who we are:**

This submission is being made by the key partners who organized the [1st Care Leavers Convention](http://www.careleaverscommunity.org/convention.html) (CLC) virtually in 2020, that was attended by over 2300 persons from 83 countries over a series of webinars over three months from October to December 2020. The organizing partners were

* **Four Care Leavers Networks**, namely Care Leavers Association and Network, India, Generation Never Give Up, Sri Lanka, Latin American Network of Care Leavers and Zimbabwe Care Leavers Network, YOURE Organization Viet Nam
* **Four Civil Society Organizations,** namely Kinderperspectief (Netherlands), SOS Children’s Villages, Udayan Care (India), University of Hildesheim (Germany)

CLC was planned with the objective to connect Care Leavers internationally and enable their coming together on a common safe platform to learn, share and exchange their experiences, knowledge and challenges, especially in the context of the pandemic.

**Processes leading to the formation of the GCLC and outcomes of the CLC:**

CLC was preceded by webinars where over 100 care leavers from different countries met and developed their [“Declaration of Gaps and Demands”](http://careleaverscommunity.org/assets/files/Declaration-UC-Updated-New2.3.pdf) on a variety of domains, around the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Care Leavers presented their [seventeen outcomes](http://www.careleaverscommunity.org/assets/files/Key-takeaways11th.pdf) at the end of the convention to policy makers from 11 countries on Dec 11, 2020.

The other CLC outcomes have been the formation of the [GCLC as a global community of care leavers](http://www.careleaverscommunity.org/forums.html) and two policy briefs dedicated to guiding [practitioners](http://careleaverscommunity.org/assets/files/Practioners_Brief.pdf) and [policy makers](http://careleaverscommunity.org/assets/files/Policy_Makers_Brief.pdf) as key considerations to be kept in mind for Care Leaving processes. Most interestingly, this has led to the GCLC which is driving [monthly virtual sessions](http://www.careleaverscommunity.org/upcoming.html) on varied topics that interest them. So far 4 hugely successful cafes have been held.

**About this submission:**

DGD 2021 gives the GCLC an opportunity to share its work and concerns and it is hoped that the direct voices of care experienced persons will be counted and given priority.

Care Leavers are young people, who have lived in Alternative Care settings, either in foster care or in residential care as a child and have left them on attaining adulthood, which is mostly 18 years. Having lived in a highly protected and controlled environment till the age of 18, they find it difficult to live independently in the society later. The transition from living in a protective care facility to independent living often brings in a host of difficulties, due to the absence of a pivotal family-like ecosystem, minimal community integration, and limited ownership of essential resources, at the care setting like that of a residential care or foster care. This leaves them with no confidence in their own agency, lacking basic life skills, and disrupted education, often left with little or no job opportunities which crushes their aspirations. To settle for the early start, they are pushed to get into menial jobs and often get stigmatized in the society. Having not experienced stability in their lives, these young people go through immense mental stress and have no access to support services. The outcomes then are but logical – taking to streets, substance abuse, homelessness and unemployment, and hence pushed towards crime or not engaged in anything, often leading them towards suicidal tendencies. Their unique experiences often put them as the most vulnerable youth in society, who need extra care and support at the individual, collective, societal as well as national and international level.

Care Leavers across the globe are vulnerable and the Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated their challenges. They need to be supported not only in their smooth transitioning from child care to independent living but also need aftercare and continued support to chart their pathways for becoming mainstreamed and reintegrated into society. Despite this, not all countries in the world have laws and policies recognizing and supporting care leavers.

Care leavers experience rough times as *“people will hurt you, break you, rate you but how strong you stand, makes you”,* yet continuous efforts lead to change. 2020 actually magnified the problems of the Care Leavers and “what needs to be done is to pay attention to their needs and listen to them. They need support in the workplace and living arrangement.” The narrative to support care leaving process needs to change from “Functioning” to “Nourishing”. They should focus not only on those who are “success stories” but also “who are lost on the way”. Many care leavers had piled up a lot of debt because they lost their jobs and were unable to afford stable housing. States must consider housing for Care Leavers in their policies and these are not being made keeping Care Leavers in the centre and young people often ask “Why are others not living my life, decide my life”. Effective collaboration and partnership among various agencies for improved access to services, accurate information and data on care leavers across countries, networks and voice such as the Care Leavers Convention to support, share information, identify gaps in services and prevent institutionalization and strengthen “family based alternative care”.

As the GLCL, our key recommendations to the DGD are again mentioned below and are an iteration of what we have heard care leavers from across the world share with us during and after the CLC.

**Recommendations**

**Special attention to the rights of care leavers during emergencies such as the COVID-19**

* **Access to emergency needs-based crisis support for care leavers –** this includes access to technology and data access
* **Access to mental health and psycho-social support** as most care leavers have and continue to experience trauma, anxiety and stress due to the pandemic
* **Direct support, including cash and vouchers** and dry ration for care leavers who have lost their homes and jobs due to the pandemic
* **Access to information** for care leavers on their rights, entitlements and various policies made for them.
* **Support in their continued education and skilling** to become job ready because lockdowns and restrictions on movements have seriously impacted their opportunities

**Financial Support**

* Availability of adequate funding support: Donors and agencies must commit resources to support research, programmes and interventions on Leaving Care.

**THE CARE LEAVERS DEMANDS**

* **We should have a seat at the table at international forums, like UN and DGD**
* **We need to spread and advocate for our "Declaration by Care Leavers in times of COVID 19" among policy makers around the world.**
* We want caregivers who understand, accept and nourish us
* We need support to learn, to share our "self-story" and "story of us" in such a way that it's healing for us and beneficial for the outside world.
* We want a digital platform to be created where the children under Alternative Care can speak their minds, challenges and ideas to meet individual needs.
* We want to be better prepared for leaving care.
* 25 should be the new 18 (soft landing from planet youth care on planet earth).
* We want to be included in decision/policy making processes that affect our lives.
* We need a proactive rather than a reactive approach to mitigate the challenges and adjustment difficulties faced by Care Leavers.
* We need free and quality access to mental health services after leaving care.
* **Our network as Care Leavers is our net worth**.
* Never underestimate what we share for it is a life line impact in influencing each other to think differently, grow and be connected with our clan.
* No one should feel alone, let’s continue to reach out to each other. It is in giving that we receive. We all have something to give.
* We want to have access to the digital world so we can have access to information, education, employment and other services.
* We need to **build an International Care Leavers Network and work towards the 2nd International Care Leavers Convention 2022.**
* We want **more participatory research on our strengths, resilience and on challenges.**

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They are typically placed on the left, right, top or bottom of the page. But you can easily drag them to any position you prefer.

When you’re ready to add your content, just click here and start typing.]

* Care Leaver Networks should be well resourced and funded since these networks can provide access to services to the Care Leavers directly and also these networks amplify the collective needs and aspirations of Care Leavers.
* The pandemic has caused financial, food, housing and well-being constraints to the Care Leavers. Government must provide financial support, jobs, scholarships and reservations to Care Leavers, subsidized access to mental health services and other forms of support for a smooth transition to independent living.

**Measures to prepare those stuck in their residential care settings due to the pandemic**

* **Those stuck in care due to** lockdowns must be provided extended support in their pathway planning and years lost must not be counted
* Those care leavers who have been returned to their families must be given continued support for skilling and jobs so that they do not become homeless or liability for families
* Quality care for children and young persons is possible only if children are adequately prepared in their journey of leaving childcare and through aftercare and when all decisions taken for them are done in a participatory manner. ]

**Increased investment to enable Care Leavers Networks to become stronger**

* Governments must invest in and support existing care leavers networks so they can achieve their objectives
* Safe platforms must be promoted where care leavers can connect locally, regionally and globally
* Care Leaver networks at country, regional and global levels: which act like a family of and by the Care Leavers. These networks must be encouraged, promoted and supported by policy makers.

**Care Leavers with disabilities and female care leavers must be given special attention**

* Governments and civil society must ensure these most vulnerable care leavers are supported in their reintegration
* More campaigns must be initiated to shift social norms that enable care leavers with disabilities and female care leavers to reintegrate and live-in communities with dignity.

**Policy and Legislation on Leaving Care**

* The UN must consider making a Guideline or policy on Leaving Care that mandates each country to prioritize work to support care leavers.
* Existing national policy and laws must be effectively implemented for care leavers
* All countries must be directed to maintain database of care leavers and their adult outcomes for better programming and budgeting for them
* It is vital that all policies and laws pertaining to Care Leaving are co-created with effective participation of Care Leavers. As one of them put it” “Those who decide for us have not lived our lives, listen to us while making policies for us!”
* Each country must formulate clear policies on Leaving Care: currently, there are no major policies or laws on Leaving Care/Aftercare in many countries
* Policy makers must work with Care Leavers on enhancing their skills and leadership roles. Care Leavers must be given the space to speak out and express themselves and their issues through various methods and by abiding with proper structure and procedure.
* **International Day of Care Leavers must be declared by the UN to amplify the needs and challenges of Care Leavers globally**
* Policy makers must support Care Leavers to create their own agency and drive out dependence
* **Policies must consider the stage and not the age of a Care Leaver**. Leaving Care is a process rather than a point in time and hence it must be ensured that those who grew up in alternative care are not at disadvantage with respect to their peers who grew up in their families. The average age of People leaving their parent’s home is 25, but Care Leavers, it is the tender age of 18 in many countries.
* Policies must ensure that Care Leavers are provided an option of keeping in touch with their caregivers from the child care system, as this supports their continuum of care and emotional connect.
* The standard for operations and management of residential child care settings should always include by way of a clear policy, a pathway/reintegration plan in accordance to individual needs and interest of the child and provide opportunities, assigning clear responsibility to concerned agencies for social development, vocational training, etc., so that their employment opportunities can be increased and social protection measures be expanded.
* Policies must ensure that a safety net for supporting Care Leavers has focus on housing support, vocational training, emotional support, social relationships, health issues, legal supports and provision of mentoring as well as employability support for a decent and dignified career option.
* Policies must ensure that efforts are made to provide Care Leavers with access to the digital world so that they can have access to information, education, employment and other services including healthcare (both physical and mental), legal support and knowledge about their rights.
* All policies must always adopt a proactive rather than a reactive approach to mitigate the challenges and difficulties faced by Care Leavers.
* All policies must take extreme care and attention to issues of Care Leavers with disabilities as their needs are complex. They need better preparation in transitioning out of care and their places of accommodation, education and employment must always be safe and amenable to their unique needs.

**Conclusion:**

Care Leavers need to be recognized as a community especially the importance of love - to love and be loved, importance of being nurtured, actively listening to them and embedding Care Leavers’ views into our services is important.” The field of giving is opening up more and more to enable social movements for sustainable long-term change and donors must learn more from young people, emerging organizations and social movements and understand - what are their funding needs, skill sets, barriers they are currently facing and what can be done to invest in areas that are not apparent. For that stories are important to be told by Care Leavers.

The Global Care Leavers Community is determined to support the all care experienced persons in the world in realizing their rights to a just and equitable world. **In the words of a Care Leavers: “We are not done. We have just started”. What we feel now is a heart-to-heart connection of Care Leavers global family! No looking back and nothing about us without us”.** The need is to always ask the question of “Would you do this to your own children?” when decisions are taken for care leavers.

