

Recommendations of The First Arab Conference on Aftercare
in partnership with the Ministry of Social Solidarity
and under the auspices of the League of Arab States

Cairo - Egypt
2019 April 8-7



Introduction

Being raised without parental support throughout childhood requires a well-planned after care system within care homes, from a very early stage, to ensure a smooth transition to independence. Furthermore, it is fundamental to qualify professional caregivers and youth workers to facilitate the children transition towards independent living and to ensure after-care sustainability socially, psychologically and financially. This in turn guarantees care leavers' future stability. **Research shows that the successful transition of youth from care is dependent on their care experience and on the support, they get during the transition period.** The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children asserts on the importance of preparing children to become independent and integrated in their communities while still in care.

In this regard, Wataneya Society for the Development of Orphanages organized Sanad conference on alternative care in collaboration with the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity and under the support of the League of Arab States. The conference aimed to enhance aftercare policies and care homes practices through connecting alternative care stakeholders and setting a platform for learning and collaboration among Arab nations to overcome the challenges of "Aftercare".

The conference was started by an opening speech by Her Excellency Ms. Ghada Wali, the Minister of Social Solidarity in Egypt, and the Ambassador Dr. Hayfaa Abu Ghazala, the Assistant Secretary General, Head of Social Affairs in the League of Arab States. Dr. Wessam Al Beih, the country director of Drosos Egypt and Watanya Society's strategic partner also gave a speech as well as Ms. Azza Abdel Hamid, the Founder & Chairperson of Wataneya Society. The conference was held over 2 days and a media session took place at the end of the second day in the presence of media professionals, representatives of care leavers, and representatives of Arab Countries.

The conference included 55 speakers in 16 sessions who discussed the following pillars:

- Care homes' best practices in the field of aftercare
- Youth participation in the development of the aftercare system
- Private sector's role in supporting care leaver's integration into society
- Legislations and governmental policies for aftercare
- Role of the media in supporting the social inclusion of orphaned youth

The conference was attended by 450 participants from 15 different countries: Egypt, United Arab Emirates, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, India, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland. The participants included 50 care leavers from Egypt, from Arab Countries and from Germany.

The conference was attended by:

- Experts in policies and legislations from Egypt and from the Arab Region
- Representatives from the Ministry of Social Solidarity
- Local and international researches from the civil society
- NGOs, INGOs and donor organizations
- Representatives from care homes

Conference Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the conference's sessions and the media session that took place at the end of the second day of the conference. It should be noted that care leavers participated in all of the sessions.

The First Pillar

Care Homes' Best Practices in the Field of Aftercare

First: building the capacity of care homes

- A. Qualifying calibers that are able to work with children and youth without parental care through the concerted effort of the government, civil society, the private sector and educational institutes, so they could be able to offer children a healthy environment that promotes a feeling of safety, security and love.
 - a. Providing vocational qualification to graduates of faculties of social services, psychology, education and similar faculties by offering them hands on practice to qualify them to deal with children without parental care.
 - b. Allocating an amount from the care home's budget to qualify and build the capacities of caregivers.
 - c. Developing criteria for selecting caregivers which include; personality tests, community services, vocational certificates and ensuring that they are licensed caregivers.
 - d. Allocating some of the care homes' resources to provide adequate salaries that would attract and sustain decent calibers.
 - e.

- f. Developing the internal labor laws and regulations and the working conditions of caregivers inside the care homes in terms of; (salaries, vacations, psychological support, working hours, career progression, sustainability of the caregiver) which would ensure that the child inside the care home is provided with a family like setting that would maintain the child's psychological well-being.
- B. Providing adequate housing arrangements under the supervision of the care home, for youth during the transition period from care to independence.
- C. Developing a communication mechanism that would sustain the human connection between the care home and the care leavers, so they would feel a sense of emotional stability and security by having care leavers attend (gatherings in feasts and special occasions, wedding ceremonies, weekly/monthly activities).
- D. Providing psychological support and counseling to youth after they transition to independence so they would have a safe place to go back to for counseling and advice.

“The objectives of the care homes should be based on providing a quality of life for every orphan in care and preparing them to independence and self-reliance”

Ms. Zeina Alloush- Senior international consultant in alternative care

Second: Preparing children from a young age for independence and self-reliance

- A. Integrating children in their communities through participating in community services, so they could be able to adopt and belong to society and learn how to face difficulties and how to effectively communicate with others through:
 - a. Equipping children with life and social skills.

- b. Promoting a sense of belonging through; having pride in one's identity, developing empathy, sense of responsibility, volunteer work, participating in activities (sports, student activities).
- c. Discovering and promoting abilities and talents.
- d. Promoting self-esteem.
- e. Learning teamwork skills, effective communication, learning how to build healthy relationships.
- f. Involving children in decision making through effective communication.
- g. Developing a detailed plan from childhood for each individual, that is adjusted as they grow up to prepare them to transition from care which includes their needs (appropriate housing, health services, financial support, psychological support, legal support, educational & vocational support... etc.).
- h. Ensuring the readiness of youth to transition from care, regardless of reaching the legal age, as the maturity and readiness of each youth differs.

"We have a program called openness and another one called reconciliation, the first one is about being honest with the child about their true identity and revealing it by the help of the caregiver in an appropriate age under the supervision of the care home. The reconciliation program aims to help children and youth accept their reality and in turn develop healthy social interactions"

Ms. Amena Ali Abeid Al Shamely-Head of program development section Dar Zayed for family care.

The Second Pillar

Youth Participation in the Development of the Aftercare System

- A. Developing an inclusive preparation and development plan in collaboration with the youth and the care homes officials that includes their (academic or vocational training, community services, professional development.....etc.) to ensure their smooth transition to independence.
- B. Including care leavers in designing and implementing the programs that are offered to them by the care homes or by the Ministries concerned.
- C. Including care leavers in developing and amending the laws related to alternative care.
- D. Preparing care leavers to participate in monitoring and evaluating the performance of the care homes.
- E. Representing youth without parental care in legislative assemblies like; the Parliament and the People's Assembly to be able to voice their opinions and be included in the decision making.
- F. Establishing an Arab youth forum so they could support one another and exchange experiences.
- G. Enabling and empowering youth to participate in a high committee specialized in care leavers affairs (under the umbrella of the appropriate administrative authority, that constitutes of representatives from the civil society, appropriate ministries, and care leavers).

"It's important to have a care leaver that represents children and youth without parental care in the Parliament"

Mr. Badr Mabrouk- care leavers representative

The Third Pillar

Private Sector's Role in Supporting Care Leaver's

Integration into Society

- A. Raising the civil society and the private sector's awareness of the needs of youth without parental care and including them in the programs that target youth (vocational qualifications programs, trainings...etc.)
- B. Mapping the private sector's business requirements and network, collaborate and coordinate with the care homes to qualify their youth through technical and vocational qualification, and providing career counseling and planning for getting suitable employment opportunities.
- C. Directing the civil society and the private sector to provide new and creative services that meets the needs of care leavers and supports their independence in the context of not having a family to support them, like for instance; providing psychological, career, and legal counseling, group housing services, marriage preparation ...etc.
- D. Utilizing technology through using the internet and mobile applications to empower and introduce youth with their rights and duties and the services that are provided to them from the country, the civil society and the private sector like for instance; the places that offer training programs, job market qualification, available jobs.
- E. Obligating the companies with non-discrimination policies against youth without parental care in employability and giving them equal opportunities when applying for a job.
- F. Supporting the private sector to qualify youth on different job skills through;
 - a. Measuring and developing their interests and vocational capabilities, teaching them how to conduct job interviews, writing a resume, teaching them about work ethics.
 - b. Providing programs that qualifies youth without parental care with suitable job skills that would qualify them for the job market

- c. Informing them of the available job opportunities and their requirements.
- G. Forming a network or an association between civil society organizations and the private sector to serve care leavers to sustain the collaboration and the coordination of the provided services from the network's members to enhance the quality of the provided services and to facilitate its delivery to the youth.

“The importance of the participation of the private sector in after care and how to train the youth on the skills that would meet the needs of the civil society and the employability sector and give the youth without parental care the opportunity to get hired and not be discriminated against”

Eng. Shehab A Nawawy, Chief Executive officer of Giza System and Giza for Educational Systems

“Obligating the caregivers to have an accredited license that includes and implies that the caregiver has been trained, has adequate experience, and is qualified to work in the field of alternative care”

Ms. Nahla El Nemr, care leavers representative-Egypt

Fourth Pillar

Legislations and Governmental Policies for Aftercare

Alternative care:

- A. Developing the laws and regulations to activate other forms of alternative care like alternative families while placing the standards and the requirements that would guarantee the safety and the child's best interest through assessing the families applying for fostering a child psychologically and socially and through enrolling them in training programs that would qualify them to foster the child.
- B. Including the UN guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children in all the laws concerning the children and youth without parental care, and confirming that the laws are interrelated, uniform and have no discrepancy.
- C. Developing a comparative study between the alternative care laws in Arab countries and identifying the best practices and points for improvement.
- D. Avoiding discrimination against children and youth from unknown family lineage like; (in the national ID, name, family name) because it hinders their social inclusion.
- E. Revising the definition of "the orphan" in the laws to include the children without parental care, it was suggested to use "orphans without family support" or "orphans in special circumstances".
- F. Allocating judges especially for the children and youth without parental care cases.
- G. Training and qualifying the calibers working at the regulatory agencies concerned with monitoring and evaluating the quality of the care offered in the care homes, and confirming that the alternative care laws and regulations are activated.
- H. Developing the laws and the working conditions of the caregivers, and accrediting a license that would be renewed periodically and making it mandatory to be hired in the field of caring for children without parental care.

After care:

- A. Reviewing the aftercare definition and identifying the deserving age group for it while considering the individual differences.
- B. Including care leavers amongst the deserving of social welfare which includes; education, health insurance, ration card, housing, etc. based on specific standards and conditions.
- C. Establishing a central database that would be periodically updated by the competent administrative authority to assess, monitor and assist care leavers and provide them with the needed support.
- D. Legislating to specialize a donation box under the supervision of the country to serve care leavers, and also include care leavers in the already present donation boxes that support youth to (provide scholarships, training programs to qualify youth for the job market, health care and living expenses.....etc.)
- E. Establishing a (one window) unit inside the competent ministry to provide and facilitate the care leavers services (housing, work, identification papers, ration, health services, legal support, financial support ...etc.).
- F. Forming a higher committee to monitor care leavers affairs, under the umbrella of the competent administrative authority composed of representatives from civil society, concerned ministries and care leavers.

“The age of 18 is a terrifying age for youth residing in care homes because their future is unknown, today we support them and empower them with education and skills to make them capable of fairly competing with their colleagues who were cared for by their parents”

Ibrahim El Ahmad, General Manager of Al Amaan Fund, Jordan

The Fifth Pillar

Role of the Media in Supporting the Social Inclusion of Youth Without Parental Care

- A. Promoting the role of enlightened media through raising the awareness of the media outlets on how to professionally address the issues related to children and youth without parental care, by using positive language and avoiding stigmatization.
- B. Raising social awareness about children and youth without parental care and representing them in a positive way through:
 - Encouraging drama and cinema producers to produce series, movies and programs addressing the cause of children and youth without parental care and representing them in a positive way.
 - Encouraging writers and journalists to write children's books and publish reports and articles to raise social awareness about children and youth without parental care.
 - Publishing and disseminating care leavers success stories through different outlets; (reportages, newspaper articles, television programs, radio interviews) to promote a positive view on care leavers and appreciate their struggle to reach a dignified life while being deprived of familial support.
- C. Raising social awareness on the importance of the caregiver profession and their duty towards the cause of children and youth without parental care, through developing the caregiver profession to become an attractive, prestigious and accredited profession.

“The media needs to change society’s view by displaying orphan’s success stories”

Dr. Mervat Abu Oaf- Professor of Practice, Chair of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, The American University in Cairo