

1st International Careleavers Convention Pre-Convention Preparation by Wataneya Society

Date: 1st of February 2020 (Saturday)

Venue: Wataneya Society for the Development of Orphanages (Training Room)

List of participants

- 14 youth
 - 5 living independently, 7 living in homes and 2 semi-independent
 - 7 females and 7 males
 - from 3 Egyptian governorates (Cairo, Giza, Mansoura)
 - Ages ranging from 19 - 36 years
- The workshop was conducted in Arabic as all participants are native Arabic speakers

Agenda points

- Icebreaker game: Find Your Pair
- Our global responsibility: Introduction to 1st Careleavers Convention by Udayan Care
- Wataneya's Aftercare Project baseline study summarized
- Group Work: throughout your childhood
 - Challenges, good practices and recommendations for improvement
- Focus group: throughout the transition and in aftercare
 - Challenges, support in smooth transitions and recommendations
- Wrap up, next steps and meditation

Brief discussion points

- Group Work: throughout your childhood
 - What challenges did you face and what recommended solution would you suggest?
 - What good practices did you experience and how would you recommend to continue these practices or develop them
- Focus group: throughout the transition and in aftercare
 - What challenges could be faced and what recommended solutions can we all suggest?
- What has helped those who are living independently, transition smoothly?

Youth Experiences in Care

The youth shared their in care experience, they indicated that they were exposed to abuse in childhood from the caregivers and from the teachers at school. One of the male youth stated ***“the caregiver would sometimes hit the child in front of his schoolmates and humiliate him”***. They also confirmed that the caregivers would compare children to one another which created tension.

Social stigma was another challenge that was highlighted, they stated that even at school the teacher would announce that the child is without parental care ***“He is an orphan”*** in front of the whole class, additionally they were often asked by their schoolmates about their father’s occupation or where their mothers were, and that created great discomfort to the children. The youth added that they always felt alienated, one of the male youth said, ***“we used to feel that we were less than everyone else, that we were afraid to deal with anyone, because they will find out that we are living in an institution”***. The youth stated that another aspect to the feelings of alienation is accepting who they are as children without parental care, one of the male youth declared that when one reaches the acceptance of ***“yes I am an orphan and I don’t have a problem with that”*** they will cope better with the world outside the institution. One of the male youth said, ***“their identity should be a source of pride not shame”***. The youth thought that making peace with their identity would allow them to connect with their schoolmates and integrate into their communities.

The institutional home’s management and caregivers added to this social stigma by dressing the children in the same way when they go out which according to the youth identified that they lived in an institutional home and caused people to treat them differently. Finally, a group of youth declared that the bus that they used to take to school was written on it the name of the institution, one of the females in the workshops said ***“we used to get off the institution’s bus a few blocks before the school, because the institution’s name was written on the bus!”***.

Another challenge was the way the caregivers treated the children, they encouraged the children who did well at school while the students who were struggling at school were often given chores around the house and were not motivated to work harder, one of the female youth stated, ***“the good students are encouraged to study harder while the struggling students are encouraged to help in cleaning and helping around the institution”***.

Additionally, a topic that the youth discussed greatly was how the caregivers and management did not include them in making decisions that involved them. They discussed simple things from choosing their clothes till choosing their education path. One of the male youth clarified, ***“if the boy sees himself in vocational education so be it, he will become the best carpenter there is, he doesn’t have to become an engineer, it really depends on what the boy wants”***.

Many of the youth also said that they were not given roles or responsibilities when they were children and no one explained to them the meaning of independence and self-reliance.

The youth suggested the below recommendations to provide a healthy care experience for children and ease the transition to independence and adulthood.

Recommendations moving forward

Criteria for hiring caregiver

- Properly choosing the caregiver based on clear criteria and standards including but not limited to
 - Psychological stability (assessment)
 - Understanding of modern developmental and pedagogical practices
 - Age range
 - Minimum level of education (highschool)

Training Caregivers

- Provide mandatory trainings to caregivers on a regular basis so they could be able to provide quality care (no hitting, talking to the child, taking the child’s opinion)
- Provide training to discuss identity with children
- Train and prepare caregivers for applying correct pedagogical practices and attachment styles (finding the right balance)
- Clarify the roles that the institution’s management and the caregiver play in the child’s life to avoid role confusion which in turn leads to a lot of confusion in the child’s life
- Provide learning and development sessions on developmental stages of the child and problem solving skills
- Train caregivers to prepare children for independence and self-reliance since childhood
- Pay attention to gender differences while raising children

- o Prepare boys for the transition from a female caregiver to a male caregiver, since by a certain age the female caregivers have to change to male caregivers which causes anxiety to children
- o Prepare girls for culturally appropriate future roles (as mothers and wives)
- Train a youth worker to become an aftercare specialist, as well as preparing them for individual differences and the differences between female and male care leavers

Combating high turnover rate of caregivers

- Prepare children that the caregiver is eventually going to leave, since they leave very frequently
- Provide caregivers with trainings on attachments styles and supporting them attain a healthy attachment balance (for themselves and for the children)
- Provide dignified salaries for all caregivers

Case management and follow ups

- Develop a case management systems for all children and youth (including tracking progress of youth who leave care)
- Create a development program in participation with each child that includes all the aspects related to the child; health, activities, needs, training attended, academic and recreational achievements (it should be confidential, only the child and the caregiver/social worker are allowed to view it). The caregiver and the child should go back to the program periodically to identify the needs and the areas of development.
- Develop a folder that includes a child's background information (how the child was found-police reports if available-living relatives if available) this folder shall be confidential and be given to the person when they are ready to transition from care
- Develop a folder that includes developmental and behavioral challenges that a child is experiencing, to be able to intervene appropriately. The folder should be confidential and can only be viewed by the caregiver or social worker, the reports should be written using an unbiased language.

Health and well-being

- Have a medical record and medical history for each child
- Provide constant follow ups / medical check ups
- Make available a pharmacy (kit) in the institutional home
- Provide first aid training for children, youth and caregivers
- Provide a trustworthy psychologist who would listen to the child and help them deal with arising issues while abiding by a Code of Ethics

Development Programs for children and youth

- Give children roles and responsibilities around the institutional home from an early age to prepare them for independence
 - Home management
 - Cooking
- Provide activities to build a bond between the children
- Provide the option of a religious/spiritual reference point for consultation
- Introduce the topic of identify from an early age, and explain it based on each age and help the child feel that it's special and be proud of it.
- Implement communication skills activities and trainings for children and youth
- Plan external activities for exposure especially relating to each child's hobbies/preferences
- Inclusion and participation of child with the outside community
- Provide life skill and psychological readiness trainings for youth transitioning from care to independence
- Provide financial literacy training for youth
- Provide guidance and support in regards to choosing career path
- Provide employability trainings
 - various handcrafts for those interested
 - English courses
- Prepare youth for marriage through awareness sessions (roles, responsibilities, rights)
- Provide special support for children and youth with disabilities and make sure they do not leave the care system until they are physically and mentally ready to do so

Education

- Provide scholarships for higher education institutions
- Provide quality vocational training for youth interested in the vocational path

Policies

- Children and youth in care as well as care leavers need know their rights and be informed
- Youth need to be familiar with their responsibilities and duties as citizens so that they do not run into conflict with the law
- Revisiting Aftercare age to be 26 years
- Employees of the ministry need to be qualified to understand the situation and challenges of care leavers
- Various ministries to provide support to care leavers through health insurance and housing for subsidized price
- Establish a one-stop-shop inside the Ministry of Social Solidarity to provide and facilitate the care leavers services (housing, work, identification papers, ration, health services, legal support, financial support ...etc.)

- Have a database of all care leavers

- Raise awareness amongst police officials to treat care leavers in a respectful manner (not as criminals)

Aftercare

- Institutional home to providing for youth a reasonable place to live together after they leave care
- Provide all legal papers and identification document available to youth when they leave the institutional home
- Provide stipends by institutional homes to support careleaver after they leave care
- Provide a safe space for care leavers in the institutional home that they can return to after they leave (home)
- Follow up after the youth leave care for a specified amount of time
- Provide an option for care leavers to be supported by an older figure when getting married (parent like figure) and make sure youth are informed that this is an option available for them to support them





