



RESIDENTIAL CARE TRANSITION MESSAGING

GUIDELINES ON COMMUNICATING WITH
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

Recommendations from Care Experienced Persons



**Better
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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
INTRODUCTION	5
Background to the Transition Messaging Guidelines	5
How the Guidelines were Developed	6
How to Use the Guidelines	7
A Note on Families, Communities, and Residential Care	11
GUIDELINES	12
Part A: Introducing Transition to Children and Young People	12
GUIDELINE 1: Developing a comprehensive communications plan	13
GUIDELINE 2: Supporting children and young people to process change	19
GUIDELINE 3: Providing reassurance of post-placement support	24
GUIDELINE 4: Setting realistic expectations and demonstrating transparency	28
GUIDELINE 5: Using visual tools to showcase placement options	31
Part B: Exploring Transition with Children and Young People	33
GUIDELINE 6: Identifying trusted individuals to deliver messaging	34
GUIDELINE 7: Facilitating interactive exploration of transition	35
Part C: Preparing Children and Young People to Leave Residential Care	38
GUIDELINE 8: Creating a safe environment for assessments	39
GUIDELINE 9: Validating and supporting the grief process	41
GUIDELINE 10: Establishing mentoring and peer support system	44
GUIDELINE 11: Co-creating a monitoring plan	46
GUIDELINE 12: Organizing farewell and reunion activities	49
CONCLUSION	52
ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY	54
Data Collection	54
Data Analysis	55
Limitations	55
Questionnaires	55
ANNEX 2: RESOURCES	56

FOREWORD

As a care experienced youth, having lived in the care system and coming this far, I have realized that this is the time to rethink the care reform strategy for transition and alternative care. We know that transition is very challenging and risky, and at the same time, we are impacting a child's life through our actions.

These newly drafted guidelines are for professionals, stakeholders, and concerned authorities who are concentrating on the transition of children in care, with the aim of preventing the possible risks and significant negative impacts on children's mental well-being, that they can carry into their adulthood.

The process for developing these guidelines has given me a chance to come forward and speak about the challenges for children still in care and for care experienced young adults. It has given me an opportunity to discuss what we can do better in the coming days.

The things that we went through cannot be undone, but together hand in hand we can change the future and reform the transition of children in the safest way, considering the best interests of children.

I would like to thank Shine Together – Care Experienced Network Nepal and others involved in this project for this opportunity to share my experience and raise my voice. If my story or experience can help to change the life of any child or care experienced youth, I am always ready to come forward and be the voice for unheard children and care experienced youth everywhere.

Junu Lama

Co-Founder, Shine Together – Care Experienced Network Nepal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The guidelines were developed under the Transforming Children's Care Global Collaborative Platform and co-coordinated by Better Care Network, ACC International Relief – Kinnected, Chan Sinet at Khmeng Onka Cambodia Care Leavers, and Mai Nambooze at Uganda Care Leavers. The guidelines were written by Hannah Won.

We would like to acknowledge the following individuals from Possibilities World for their professionalism and support of care experienced persons during the facilitation of focus group discussions: Has Piseth and Khen Sroem, with support from Son Sokunthea, Nicky Tom, and Michelle Morin.

Special thanks go to Seung Koy and Lem Sopha for their leadership and coordination of the focus groups.

We wish to thank the following individuals who generously volunteered their time outside of working hours to share their practitioner learning: Dy Noeut, Hok Va, Kim Malin, Mak Chenda, Novella Mori, Noun Ranny, and Soy Socheat.

We would like to express our gratitude to the following individuals who facilitated engagement with care experienced persons and provided valuable feedback on the guidelines: Florence Martin at Better Care Network, Pat Tho and Nou Dalin at Cambodian Children's Trust, Peter Kamau Muthui at Child in Family Focus – Kenya, David Adoke at Child's-I Foundation, Andrea Nave at Forget Me Not Australia, Anju Pun at Forget Me Not Nepal, Laura Horvath and Emmanuel Nabieu at Helping Children Worldwide, Joney Thawng Hup at Kinnected Myanmar, Anne Wanjiru Kinuthia at Kivuli Project, and Anamika Viswanath (Lead, Youth Program) and Sandhyaa Mishra (Senior Director, Government Partnership & Strategic Alliance) at Miracle Foundation India.

Special thanks go to Stephen Ucembe, Founder of Kenya Society of Care Leavers; Christopher Muwanguzi, CEO of Child's-I Foundation; and Rebecca Nhep, Senior Technical Advisor at Better Care Network; for their additional guidance and engagement.

The development of the guidelines would not have been possible without the critical insights of the reference group: Sandra Acio, Junu Lama, Lem Sopha, Caroline Nabuuma, Anne Njeri, Rahab Nyawira, and Dikshya Thapa.

We would also like to thank the individuals who wished to remain anonymous for their contributions.

Finally, we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all of the young people around the world who shared their experiences of transition and brought the guidelines to life.

INTRODUCTION

*For the purpose of these guidelines, the term ‘transition’ refers to the process of a residential care facility fully phasing out and permanently terminating the provision of residential care services. It does not refer to the movement of children and young people out of care in situations where the residential care facility is continuing to provide residential care as an ongoing service. In these guidelines, the term ‘transition’ can also be used interchangeably with the process of safe and planned closure of residential care facilities. For more details on the specific transition and closure settings for which the guidelines have been designed, refer to **How to Use the Guidelines: Target Context**.*

Background to the Transition Messaging Guidelines

An important aspect of a residential care service transition is the development of messaging for children and young people in care. Such messaging should clearly communicate an organization’s intention to transition or close and provide an explanation of the implications for children and young people. Investing adequate resources into this process can help ensure that children and young people are appropriately informed and consulted throughout the process, as well as increase the likelihood of a safe and successful transition or closure. However, practitioners implementing and supporting transition have identified a shortage of guidance on the development of such messaging.

Developing concrete messaging that spells out how to communicate with children and young people about transition can pose challenges for several reasons. Reassurances that everyone will have somewhere to live when they leave residential care can come across as vague and unconvincing when assessments that determine their placement options have yet to take place. Bringing consistency to messaging about the areas and levels of support that will be provided post-placement can be difficult when there is likely to be wide variance in individual cases. Estimating a timeframe for the reintegration process can feel virtually impossible but children and young people frequently ask how long it will take.

Although children and young people are the individuals whose lives are most impacted by transition, they are often rendered bystanders to a process imposed upon them. They may be left to wonder what is happening to them, with little agency to exercise their right to meaningful participation. This has been observed even in cases where practitioners implementing transition took great care to tailor messaging for children and young people, provided multiple avenues for them to ask questions and express concerns, and invested significant effort into facilitating their input over long periods of time.

In other cases, transition messaging may be inadvertently overlooked in the enthusiasm to commence the reintegration process, or it can be rushed in response to financial pressures or deadlines set for the completion of transition. In cases where residential care directors, donors, or staff have not been adequately engaged in preparation for transition, their own emotions and reactions can result in mixed messaging for children and young people. In more limited cases, transition messaging can be intentionally sabotaged and used to turn children and young people against transition.



Purpose of the Guidelines

The purpose of the guidelines is to support practitioners to develop messaging for children and young people that clearly communicates the intention to transition and the implications for children and young people in care. The guidelines seek to address challenges, such as those highlighted above, so that children and young people can fully understand the implications of transition and be granted opportunities to genuinely and appropriately participate in making decisions about their lives.

How the Guidelines were Developed

Recognizing that individuals with first-hand experience of transition are perhaps best placed to speak on transition messaging, care experienced persons (CEPs) whose residential care facilities (RCFs) underwent transition or closure were engaged as key informants in the development of these guidelines. The guidelines were shaped by their experiences of what was helpful, unclear, or problematic in the messaging they received, and their recommendations as a result.

Practitioners with direct experience of developing and delivering transition messaging were identified as secondary informants, for the purpose of analyzing any overlap or potential discrepancies between their goals for messaging and the actual outcomes experienced by the children and young people who received such messaging while in their care.

Through a highly participatory process, a leadership group of young people and practitioners with lived experience of care co-designed the methodology and questionnaires for data collection. Care experienced persons led the planning of focus groups and facilitated the engagement of care leaver networks and their peers in accessing and completing an online survey. Both CEPs and local practitioners working closely with CEPs nominated reference group members to input into the guidelines.

The reference group was established comprising care experienced individuals of varying ages and with transition and closure experience from different contexts and countries. Reference group members were heavily involved in analyzing and interpreting the findings and provided several rounds of verbal and written feedback on the draft guidelines.

Informed consent was secured from all informants and data was de-identified and anonymized during the analysis process to protect the confidentiality of informants. Financial and logistical support was offered to focus group participants to access private counseling and care leaver support services.

How to Use the Guidelines

Target Audience

The primary target audience for the guidelines is practitioners, whether in government or civil society organizations, who are implementing, overseeing, or providing technical support to residential care services undergoing transition or closure. This can include residential care directors with oversight over the transition of their own residential care service.

It bears noting that those responsible for developing transition messaging may not necessarily be the same people who implement a communications plan and communicate directly with the children and young people in care about transition. Ideally, the individuals delivering transition messaging would be skilled and experienced professionals who already have existing positive relationships with the children and young people in care. However, it is important to recognize that this is not always possible, and sometimes it is necessary to identify and bring in skilled practitioners for this purpose, as well as for the ensuing reintegration stage. Such an investment can be critical to the long-term stability of the children's placements and the success of the overall transition process.

Target Context

While some of these guidelines may be applicable to a wide range of contexts, this resource has been primarily developed for voluntary transitions and closures with flexible timeframes. This includes self-initiated transitions and cases where RCFs are complying with government mandates or action plans to shift to family-based care.

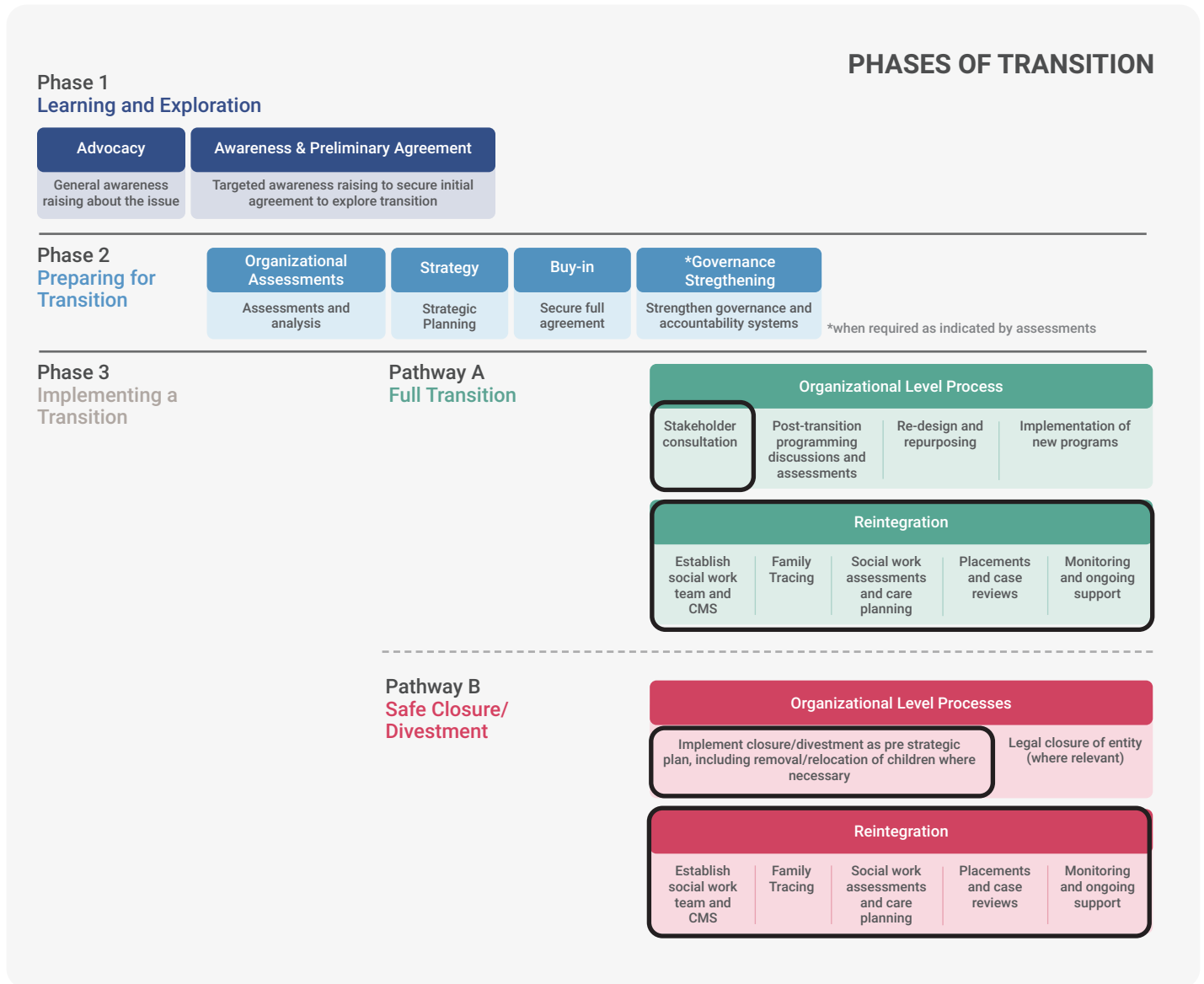
The underlying assumption in these scenarios is that:

- the transition process will be primarily driven by the best interests of children;
- the budget is not severely restricted; and
- there is no immediate or acute risk of harm posed to children and young people by taking the time to adequately develop and deliver a comprehensive communications plan.

Conversely, these guidelines would not be suited for most rapid or emergency closure contexts, where moving children and young people out of a harmful situation is of the utmost urgency. While messaging is equally critical in such contexts, the content and delivery would be starkly different to what is recommended in these guidelines.

Situating the Guidelines within the Broader Transition Process

Before delving into the guidelines, it is important to locate them within the broader process of transition. As outlined in the following diagram, transition entails the following three phases:



The guidelines are designed to be used in **Phase 3: Implementing a Transition**, within the stages indicated in the diagram above.

The [Phases of Transition Interactive Diagram](#) details each of the phases of transition, the stages that comprise each phase, and the key aims, actions, and milestones of each stage. The diagram below outlines the stages of **Phase 3: Implementing a Transition** and indicates the stages where the guidelines should be used.

IMPLEMENTING A TRANSITION

Phase 3 offers two pathways, guiding either full transition to other non-residential services, or facilitating safe closure and reintegration of children.

PATHWAY A

Full Transition to Other Non-Residential Services

Organisational Change Process

- ▶ Stakeholder Communication and Engagement
- ▶ Leadership and Staff Training and Capacity Building
- ▶ Exploring and Designing New Services/Programs
- ▶ New Program Implementation

Social Work and Reintegration Processes

- ▶ Establishing the Social Work Framework
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Family Tracing
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Family Assessments and Case Planning
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Case Planning Implementation and Placement
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Monitoring, Ongoing Support and Placement Review

PATHWAY B

Safe Closure and Reintegration or Divestment of the Residential Care Facility

Organisational Change Process

- ▶ Implementing Closure or Divestment Plan (as per Strategic Plan)
- ▶ Dissolving or Concluding the Entity (Where Necessary)

Social Work and Reintegration Processes

- ▶ Establishing the Social Work Framework
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Family Tracing
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Family Assessments and Case Planning
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Case Planning Implementation and Placement
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Monitoring, Ongoing Support and Placement Review

For practitioners using these guidelines as part of providing technical assistance to third-party residential care services undergoing transition, these guidelines should be used after a thorough risk and readiness assessment has been conducted. The [Transitioning Models of Care Assessment Tool](#) is designed to guide technical support practitioners through a process of identifying both positive indicators and risk indicators that can predict the feasibility of a successful transition, and using that information to develop a [strategic plan for transition](#). The transition strategy can then determine the most appropriate pathway towards full transition or closure and divestment, as described in Phase 3. It can also indicate the degree to which residential care service providers should autonomously implement a transition and how much oversight or technical support may be required.

Practitioners should take all of these factors into account when determining the most appropriate usage of the transition messaging guidelines within the broader context of their overall transition strategy and process.

Structure of the Guidelines

The findings from CEPs and practitioners and the analysis by reference group members informed the development of 12 guidelines, divided into the following three chronological sections:

Part A: Introducing Transition to Children and Young People

- Guideline 1: Developing a comprehensive communications plan
- Guideline 2: Supporting children and young people to process change
- Guideline 3: Providing reassurance of post-placement support
- Guideline 4: Setting realistic expectations and demonstrating transparency
- Guideline 5: Using visual tools to showcase placement options

Part B: Exploring Transition with Children and Young People

- Guideline 6: Identifying trusted individuals to deliver messaging
- Guideline 7: Facilitating interactive exploration of transition

Part C: Preparing Children and Young People to Leave Residential Care

- Guideline 8: Creating a safe environment for assessments
- Guideline 9: Validating and supporting the grief process
- Guideline 10: Establishing a mentoring and peer support system
- Guideline 11: Co-creating a monitoring plan
- Guideline 12: Organizing farewell and reunion activities

The guidelines in Part C converge with the implementation of case management for reintegration and they sit squarely within the social work process. Nevertheless, they have been included as components of the communications plan because they emerged as strong themes from the findings and were explicitly highlighted by CEPs as critical gap areas.

Each guideline includes:

- a map marker indicating the corresponding stage in the Phases of Transition Diagram;
- a description of the guideline;
- a summary of the findings and analysis that informed the guideline, with key findings highlighted in text boxes;
- quotes from care experienced persons (unless indicated otherwise) that illustrate the findings; and
- a list of concrete suggestions on how to implement the guideline.

A Note on Families, Communities, and Residential Care

It was beyond the scope of this project to develop specific guidelines to communicate the intention to transition or close a residential care service to the following critical stakeholder groups:

- Residential care staff
- Families of children and young people in care
- Older siblings of children in care who are also care leavers
- Communities where children might be returning to, following their exit from residential care

As all of these stakeholder groups can strongly influence the stability and permanency of children and young people's placements outside of the residential care facility, it is essential to develop dedicated messaging for each target group and integrate them into a comprehensive [stakeholder communications and engagement strategy](#).

GUIDELINES

Part A: Introducing Transition to Children and Young People

The overall objective of Part A is to clearly communicate the intention to transition and respond appropriately to the immediate reactions of children and young people. The guidelines in Part A relate to:

1. planning the content, delivery, and timing of transition messaging, including who will be involved and when; and
2. providing emotional support for children and young people as they process the news of transition.

Part A should take place during the first stage of the Organizational Change Processes under both pathways. Under Pathway A for full transition, the guidelines fall under the **Stakeholder Communications and Engagement Strategy** stage, as part of a broader stakeholder communications and engagement strategy for all other relevant stakeholders. Under Pathway B for safe closure, the guidelines fall under the **Implementing Closure or Divestment Plan** stage.

IMPLEMENTING A TRANSITION

Phase 3 offers two pathways, guiding either full transition to other non-residential services, or facilitating safe closure and reintegration of children.

PATHWAY A

Full Transition to Other Non-Residential Services

Organisational Change Process

- ▶ Stakeholder Communication and Engagement
- ▶ Leadership and Staff Training and Capacity Building
- ▶ Exploring and Designing New Services/Programs
- ▶ New Program Implementation

PATHWAY B

Safe Closure and Reintegration or Divestment of the Residential Care Facility

Organisational Change Process

- ▶ Implementing Closure or Divestment Plan (as per Strategic Plan)
- ▶ Dissolving or Concluding the Entity (Where Necessary)

GUIDELINE 1: Developing a comprehensive communications plan



*Pathway A:
Stakeholder Communications
and Engagement Strategy*



*Pathway B:
Implementing Closure or
Divestment Plan*

Description

A comprehensive communications plan is critical to providing clarity and appropriate support when announcing what will be a life-altering change for children and young people. Determining who will be involved in developing the plan, and when they are involved, can ensure that all relevant stakeholders, such as directors, principal donors, and staff, have had multiple opportunities to be orientated to the messaging and ask questions or raise concerns. Outlining and documenting what will be communicated to children and young people can ensure that there is consistency in messaging over time, regardless of whom is delivering it. Detailing how the messaging will be delivered to children and young people can facilitate their understanding and prevent confusion. Reviewing the plan to factor in participation and disability inclusion can ensure that all children and young people can meaningfully engage with the transition process.

Findings

Reports from CEPs pointed to an overall lack of clarity and consistency in the messaging children and young people received. They did not understand how they would be impacted by transition, although they expressed this as one of their foremost concerns. They were not aware of the plan for transition, nor did they understand why transition was occurring. In many cases, children and young people were not sufficiently consulted and the messaging was not made accessible to children with disabilities.

The vast majority of CEPs reported that they first heard about transition directly from residential care staff and directors. Most were able to recall some of the reasons given by staff for the transition, despite many noting that they neither fully understood nor believed the reasons. However, when asked to share the questions and concerns they had at that time, the overwhelming response from CEPs demonstrated that they did not understand how they would be impacted by transition.

“ *Will I continue my schooling?*”

“ *How will I cope in the community?*”

“ *Will the donors continue to fund us?*”

“ *If I don't have a job, will the center support me?*”

While a small group of CEPs reported that they had highly positive experiences of transition, many reported receiving mixed messaging from staff or hearing rumors from other children about transition.

“ Frankly [I did not understand] as in why it had to be closed, though there were several explanations [given].”

“ [They should] openly tell the children [about] what is happening.”

Some practitioners reported having to clarify rumors by staff and former directors, while some CEPs expressed skepticism of anything directly communicated by staff and drew their own conclusions.

“ I think maybe the center ran out of budget to continue the activities.”

In some cases, CEPs indicated that there were aspects of transition that were never made clear to them, while others noted that residential care staff also seemed to be unaware of the plan for transition.

“ We asked the [caregivers] but it seemed like they were not clear about it also.”

Some CEPs reported that messaging changed over time and that they noticed a disparity in the levels of support provided to different groups of children and young people. In cases where transition entailed a change in management, or where transition was disrupted and new leadership was put into place partway through the process, CEPs identified inconsistencies in the approach to transition.

“ There were challenges when the new staff came and they did things differently to the old staff.”

Many CEPs expressed discontent with their placements and their lack of participation in the process.

“ I just followed the center rules that everyone had to go back to their family.”

“ But I [didn't] want to live with my aunty. I [didn't] want to [but] they forced me to go. All my aunt's family [were] wealthy, but I [was] not willing to live there with them.”

“ [My questions] were never addressed or given any attention. The focus was to get it done.”

“ I [was] also concerned about being reintegrated because I [was] not sure who I [was] going to live with, since the staff center did not clarify this. After that, I [found out] I had to move to live with my aunt’s family. Living with them [was] not easy because they also [had] a large family and they were not really friendly with me. Later on, I decided to leave that family and live on my own, even though I knew it would be hard and full of challenges.”

Others shared that, although they were told they could make choices about where they would be placed upon exiting residential care, they were eventually forced to go where staff decided. The offer of participation was either not fully thought through or disingenuous.

“ For me, they explained more times, even though I refused. But they still followed up and tried to connect us with family. They explained that we can choose but they forced us to move. We had to move.”

“ People’s concerns and voices [were] disregarded and hence many ended up in placements that did not suit or meet their needs.”

“ I beg that before transitioning children, the authorities should note the young people’s desires and inspirations.”

“ We are not charitable objects, we have needs and our concerns are valid.”

Many CEPs shared that messaging was not adapted for children with disabilities or that they were unaware of whether communications had been tailored for children with disabilities who were living in separate quarters or facilities.

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ Allocate sufficient human and financial resources to engaging and communicating with children and young people in care, proportionate to the resources allocated to director and donor engagement and messaging. Add the expenses related to developing and delivering the communications plan into the transition budget developed during Phase 1, if they are not already included. See the [Transitioning Residential Care Cost Estimation Tool](#) for more details on developing a budget as part of a transition strategy.
- ▶ Identify the stakeholders who are best positioned to contribute to and deliver a communications plan for children and young people. This can be informed by the findings of the risk and readiness assessment conducted in Phase 2 to ascertain:

- who is most likely to contribute positively and productively to the communications plan;
 - who possesses the relevant skills and experience to provide professional input into the well-being of children and young people;
 - who may have vested interests in transition and the communications plan;
 - who may be resistant to transition and hinder the process of developing the plan; and
 - the appropriate levels of involvement of stakeholders in each of the above categories.
- ▶ For CSO practitioners, consider whether it could be appropriate to work together with select government officials to develop and deliver components of the initial messaging. By analyzing the specific context, determine whether this could help instill in children and young people a sense of confidence and finality in the decision to transition and the provision of post-placement support, or whether the presence of an authority figure might be generally counterproductive and instead instill fear or mistrust.
 - ▶ Guide the identified stakeholders through a process of discussing what should be communicated to children and young people regarding:
 - the intention and decision to transition;
 - what the transition process may entail;
 - the reason for transition;
 - the placement options available to them;
 - how they will be supported, pre- and post-placement (see the next suggestion for more details);
 - how they can ask questions and raise any concerns;
 - how and when they can expect to participate in decision-making; and
 - what may happen to the RCF and the staff.

See the remaining guidelines for more suggestions on the above points.

- ▶ Refer to the transition budget developed during Phase 1 to determine what financial commitments can be made to supporting children and young people, and their families. Engage in discussions with relevant stakeholders to clearly outline what will be provided to children and young people in general areas and terms of support. Individual levels of support should be determined as part of the case management process in Part C of the communications plan; however, it is necessary to have a high-level understanding of the plans for providing support for the purpose of communicating with children and young people when introducing transition. See the [Transitioning Residential Care Cost Estimation Tool](#) for more details on developing a budget as part of a transition strategy.
- ▶ For stakeholders who may not be best placed to contribute to the communications plan, create multiple opportunities for them to be updated on the plan as it is developed, taking note of their feedback and incorporating it where appropriate.

- ▶ Ensure that all relevant stakeholders, such as the families of the children and young people, as well as staff and board members of the RCF and the donor organization, are informed of the existence and details of the plan, as and when appropriate. The extent to which these stakeholders are made aware of the plan or involved in its delivery is dependent upon the overall transition strategy developed in Phase 2 and the broader stakeholder engagement strategy developed in Phase 3.
- ▶ Present the communications plan to all relevant stakeholders prior to delivering it to the children and young people in care. Addressing any questions or concerns from other critical stakeholder groups ahead of time can reduce the likelihood that they will be raised in front of the children and young people and cause mixed messaging.
- ▶ In cases where those responsible for delivering components of the messaging to children and young people may have vested interests, and that responsibility cannot be naturally shifted to other stakeholders, designate an influential stakeholder to oversee the delivery to ensure clear messaging. It may be necessary to intervene, reassign the role, and/or arrange for additional sensitization for the communicator about the upcoming changes.

Example: *A long-time RCF staff member has held the dual role of being both a counselor and a caregiver to a small group of children, prior to the commencement of transition. While she is clear on the messaging plan and sees the need for transition, the strong bonds that she has developed with the children over the past several years make it difficult for her to always stick to the plan, especially when she thinks about how much she will miss them when they return to their families. Upon realizing this, the RCF organizes for the staff member to participate in counseling sessions herself to unpack how she is feeling about the upcoming changes, while messaging duties are temporarily reassigned to another staff member.*

- ▶ Expect that children and young people may prematurely hear about the decision and plan for transition, whether from RCF staff or other stakeholders. Depending on the impact this may be having on them, it may be beneficial to arrange a meeting to address any rumors or clarify any confusion before moving ahead with the communications plan.
- ▶ Document all components of the communications plan, including any supporting documentation such as booklets for children and young people. As transition entails organizational changes at every level, there can often be turnover in key leadership positions, as well as social workers and caregivers. In these situations, new staff may not be aware of messaging plans that have already been put in place. Keep them on file with case management records or in another safe place to prevent the loss of the plan in the case of staff turnover.
- ▶ As much as possible, there should be consistency in messaging. Where that is not possible because of changing circumstances, keep children and young people informed and updated.

- ▶ Review the communications plan through the lenses of authentic participatory processes and disability inclusion. Determine which areas children and young people can genuinely participate in decision-making. Consider circumstances that may limit child participation. Identify ways to make information accessible to children and young people with physical and intellectual disabilities.
- ▶ Throughout the process of developing each component of the communications plan, make a habit of asking whether and how children and young people can participate in decision-making. This will particularly be relevant for Parts B and C. Ask the same question regarding children with disabilities.
- ▶ Clarify the areas in which children and young people will be allowed to make decisions versus the areas in which they will have no choice at all, and the areas in between. Consider not only the developmental age of children and young people but also be mindful of resource limitations.

Example: *Young people over the age of 18 years may choose to live alone or with roommates when moving into independent living outside of the RCF. They will not be allowed to choose to remain in the RCF if they oppose the idea of independent living.*

Example: *As all young people will receive the same amount of rent stipend from the RCF, those choosing to live with roommates can pool their stipends together to cover the cost of their housing. However, those who choose to live alone must find supplemental income to cover their full rent.*

- ▶ Engage specialists with disabilities to advise on how to make the communications plan inclusive of and accessible to children and young people with disabilities.
- ▶ Consider whether children with disabilities will be able to engage with the information in the way it will be presented and whether they will be able to participate in the planned activities.

GUIDELINE 2: Supporting children and young people to process change



*Pathway A:
Stakeholder Communications
and Engagement Strategy*



*Pathway B:
Implementing Closure or
Divestment Plan*

Description

Within any setting, a typical reaction to change includes shock, fear, anger, confusion, and resistance. Understandably, the announcement of transition can and often does elicit all of these reactions in children and young people in care. However, this can be overlooked by practitioners, or they may not respond in appropriate ways. When children and young people react with strong emotions to the news of transition, practitioners tend to respond with technical or procedural explanations of case management, in an effort to reassure them. In such cases, children and young people may not be offered the time and support most people require to emotionally process change, leaving them caught in the state of their initial reaction to the news of transition.

Findings

Across the board, CEPs reported having a strong emotional reaction to the news that their RCF would be transitioning or closing. A few CEPs shared that they felt excitement about leaving their RCF but the overwhelming response from CEPs was that they felt shock and fear. Practitioners shared that their standard responses to such reactions from children and young people were primarily to outline step-by-step explanations of the case management process for reintegration and re-emphasize the benefits of family-based care.

Although the aim of practitioners was to provide reassurance that children and young people would not be placed in situations of harm, responses from CEPs strongly indicated that they drew no comfort whatsoever from such technical and abstract explanations. Instead, CEPs reported that what they needed most was time. They identified their need to gradually process the change and requested that staff engage in multiple discussions with them over time and provide reassurance that they would be ok.

While some CEPs indicated that they were excited to return to their families or leave their RCFs, most shared a common list of fears and concerns about what might happen to them.

“ Why are they taking us away?”

“ How will I survive?”

“ Was excited to leave the center”

“ Where will I stay?”

“ How will my life be in a new environment?”

“ No idea about the future. It seemed dark. Nobody to go to, neither any relatives cared about us.”

“ How will I eat?”

“ Life ended”

“ Better opportunities. Connection with families and community.”

“ I was excited and very happy that finally we were getting out of such a nasty place.”

Perhaps explained by the nature of their role, technical support practitioners and, in particular, social workers reported a tendency to provide procedural explanations of reintegration and case management practice to children and young people’s emotional reactions to the news of transition.

“ The children were having an emotional reaction and we were talking about process, process, process.” - Technical Support Consultant

Some practitioners demonstrated difficulty with distinguishing the process of transition from elements of the case management process. When social workers were asked about the activities they undertook with children to help them understand transition, they responded that they conducted child assessments and reconnected children with their families.



Key Finding

Most practitioners did not develop tailored messaging for children and young people in care, and they relied on the same arguments typically used to make the case for transition with RCF directors and donors. When children informed them that they did not want to return to their families, some social workers responded by explaining that residential care should be the last option for alternative care because of the negative effects of family separation. Many practitioners reported

that they repeatedly explained the social work process for reintegration whenever children and young people expressed doubts about returning to their families.

This likely reflects a practitioner bias towards relying on a default approach of providing a step-by-step explanation of how the case management process can protect against risk. Although it is a common technique utilized to reassure RCF directors and donors who are concerned about potentially harmful placements, such technical information is unlikely to comfort children and young people while they are experiencing a highly visceral reaction to news that will drastically impact their lives. Despite repeated explanations of the case management process, most CEPs confirmed that they did not understand the process, nor did such explanations sufficiently address their immediate concerns about how they would cope with life outside of the RCF.

Many CEPs reported that they felt transition happened too quickly and that there should have been more time given to the process.

“ *[I wanted] guidance on how to cope really since it was sudden. it just happened.*”

“ *[There should be] slow speed during transition process.*”

Some CEPs indicated that when they were given time and support to process the news of transition, their thoughts and feelings towards transition often changed for the better. Meeting frequently with staff over extended periods of time gave children and young people the opportunity to think and reflect on what they had been told about transition.

“ *The negative thoughts and expectations changed and become positive.*”

“ *The feeling gradually changed over time as a result of discussion with staffs and advice.*”

“ *At first I felt like I would not study any more but after further elucidation, I resumed the hope of schooling.*”

“ *They very often provided the information in general about which date or months to meet. The staff told us [in advance] and often had meetings.*”

“ *They talked to me and assured me that I would not lose my education.*”

“ I was worried about my placement but now I have a family.”

Other CEPs recognized the impact it could have had on them and other children and young people.

“ Staffs responsible for this transition should take their time to impact children with positive thoughts and expectations about the transition.”

“ It is good to inform them earlier to help them become aware for them to gradually change.”

“ Children should be prepared for transition beforehand so that they won't have any issue during transition and adjustments.”

“ Children/young people should be given enough time to understand.”

“ Maybe we need one year to prepare ourselves and be ready.”

Some practitioners also recognized that children and young people needed to be given time to process the news of transition. Many shared that there was initially no reaction at all from children and young people when they were informed of the decision to transition. They were met with silence and no one asked questions when offered the opportunity. Some practitioners shared that while children and young people first gave many justifications as to why they could not return to their families, time spent in individual meetings with staff changed their perspective and they eventually asked repeatedly when they could go home. One practitioner shared:

“ It takes time. At the beginning they didn't understand the [transition] program at all. Then after one or two weeks they started to ask us questions.” – RCF Director

A final finding revealed that CEPs felt it was important for staff to provide reassurance to children and young people.

“ Engage the children in discussion for this greatly expels fear. It is also good to assure them that that is not the end of [a] better life.”

“ [Staff] need to reassure them of hope.”

In some cases, CEPs shared that it was important to provide reassurance during this initial stage of communications, even if it was not clear whether the commitments made by staff could be fulfilled.

“ Give some hope instead of just saying no. Better to reassure that [the RCF] won't close but focus on solutions and helping children adapt if the situation changes.”

One practitioner confirmed these sentiments:

“ Their main concern seemed to be that they feared being alone because they had always been with lots of people. They had a constant feeling of abandonment. So our constant messaging was: 'You are not alone. You are not abandoned. We are not closing immediately.'” – RCF Director

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ Expect that children and young people may react with shock and fear or other strong emotions to the initial announcement of the intention to transition. Be mindful that this is a normal human reaction to any news of change and that they must be given time to process the information before being able to fully engage with it.
- ▶ Provide reassurances to children and young people that they will be supported and that they are cared for.
- ▶ Patiently repeat the same information to children and young people over the course of several meetings and be prepared to answer the same questions multiple times. Those who are processing new information in this state are likely to require repeated engagement at various intervals to be able to make sense of it.
- ▶ Provide children and young people with the time and space to absorb the news of transition. Create safe and supportive environments where they can engage when they are ready. Understand that they are facing a scenario that perhaps many of them never thought would be possible. Show them empathy and kindness and allow them ample time to process their emotions before moving onto Part B of the communications plan.
- ▶ Recognize that technical explanations of reintegration processes are unlikely to provide reassurance to children and young people at this stage. Focus instead on letting them know that it is understandable that they may be feeling shocked and that there will be many opportunities for them to ask questions. Designate individuals they can approach should they have any questions and ensure those individuals are thoroughly familiar with the communications plan.
- ▶ Break down the initial communications across several meetings, rather than attempting to address too many topics at one time.
- ▶ Be mindful of who is in the room when the initial announcement of transition is made and consider their potential influence on children and young people. An absence of questions from children and young people may not necessarily indicate that they have understood

and accepted the news; rather, they may not feel comfortable to openly engage on the subject in the presence of authority figures.

- ▶ Create opportunities for children and young people to meet in a variety of settings throughout the initial communications period to accommodate different learning styles and comfort levels. Tailor messaging to older and younger audiences, ensure messaging is made accessible to children with disabilities, and arrange meetings for smaller groups and individuals. See [Guideline 8](#) for more suggestions on how to break down a large group setting into smaller groups.

GUIDELINE 3: Providing reassurance of post-placement support



*Pathway A:
Stakeholder Communications
and Engagement Strategy*



*Pathway B:
Implementing Closure or
Divestment Plan*

Description

When encountering any type of change, it is normal for an individual to have concerns about how they will be impacted by that change. It is unreasonable to expect that they should accept the change and be prepared to move on before they have been given an explanation as to what will happen to them. This is no less the case in residential care, when children and young people are introduced to the concept of transition. Without explaining to children and young people in concrete terms how their lives will be impacted, it is neither realistic nor advisable to commence with the next stages of transition, as the process may be highly compromised by their inability to understand what is happening to them.

Findings

When interviewed about their approaches to transition messaging for children and young people, practitioners were in strong agreement that it was critical to first and foremost explain why their RCF would be transitioning. They recommended citing global trends towards family-based care, providing examples of transition from the region as evidence of changing practice, and comparing life in the RCF with the benefits of life in the family and community.

In contrast, when CEPs were asked to share the questions they had at the time the intention to transition was first communicated to them, very few reported having asked for an explanation of why it was happening. Instead, the predominant focus was on how transition would impact them, as described in the findings in [Guideline 1](#). Their primary concerns were regarding whether they would be able to continue their education and whether they would still receive support from the RCF.

“ What is happening to me?”

“ I thought I would lose my education.”

“ My fear was: How will life be outside?”

“ Will my family be supported?”

“ Will I study again or will it end here?”

“ I was only concerned on how to cope with the new situation.”

“ I thought support would be cut off.”

“ If I don't have a job, will the center support me?”

“ I worried because most of the kids [had] not completed their studies yet.”

“ What if our businesses fail - is there a second chance?”

“ Who will I speak to about any concerns I have outside of the orphanage?”

“ I was wondering if the center would continue with the support.”

“ How will I get support/help after this?”



Key Finding

The area of greatest divergence between what practitioners and CEPs reported throughout this study was regarding whether it was important to provide justification for transition. Practitioners believed it was essential to transition messaging but most CEPs showed little interest in the reason for transition; overwhelmingly, they wanted to know what would happen to them.

When asked why the reason was important or not, the responses from CEPs were unclear. It may perhaps be the case that when children and young people recognize that they do not have the power to reverse the decision to transition, they deem the reason for that decision irrelevant and turn their attention to the next critical piece of information, i.e., how they will be impacted by the decision.

“ I don’t care why the orphanage is closing. I do not really agree on the reason. We don’t know about the minds of management and people who run the orphanage. We have no idea. What I cared about was my brothers, my friends, how do I find a job - the kind of things I was afraid of for myself. We have no one to rely on.”

Considering that engagement with directors and principal donors in the earlier phases of transition focuses heavily on making the case for transition, practitioners may automatically assume that the same should be done for children and young people. They may not even be aware of their own bias and they may push the rationale for family-based care as a default, rather than listening for clues as to what children and young people might actually be interested in hearing about at this stage. This likely reflects a bias similar to the one seen in Guideline 2, where practitioners employ the same approach they took with directors and donors, to communicate with children and young people.

The exception to this finding was a handful of cases where there were high levels of trust established between RCF directors/donors and the children and young people in care. In such cases, CEPs reported that it was important for them to know why transition was occurring. However, despite stating that the reason was important, most could not recall the exact reason given for transition.

“ The reason was something to do with government. The government said... Or because it was more beneficial to be in the community.”

In other similar cases, despite having invested 12-18 months of messaging to children and young people on the reasons for transition, practitioners reported that they were repeatedly asked why it was happening.

This may indicate that when children and young people have strong relationships with their directors/donors, they may be seeking to understand whether transition signals that they are being personally rejected by the adults they trust. If they can determine that not to be the case, they perhaps do not retain a sharp memory of the reason given for transition because it may no longer be relevant to them. Or in cases where that rejection is not addressed by staff, children and young people may continue to struggle with it.

It may also indicate that the reason for transition is important in these situations because children and young people are more likely to believe the justifications offered to them when the relationships are based on trust. On the contrary, perhaps the reason for transition is less important for children and young people who do not trust the adults communicating with them, as they may be skeptical of any reasons provided to them.

While the majority of CEPs reported that the reason provided to them for their transition was government policy or directives, many of them believed that the actual reason was a lack of funds or decreasing financial support from donors. Some CEPs wanted to see proof from the government, while others indicated that they initially believed the reasons given to them but later suspected otherwise.

“ From my idea, I think that time it was also lacking sponsors, so they had to remove some kids.”

“ I realized at that time, the center was also having a hard time with not enough support from the donors.”

The findings overwhelmingly pointed to a need to provide detailed explanations of how children and young people would be supported post-placement, as evidenced by the foremost concerns shared by CEPs. Given that there seemed to be little interest and confidence in the justifications provided for transition, or poor recollection of the reasons when requested, devoting more time and attention to explaining the impacts of transition may prove to be a wiser investment of resources at this early stage of communications.

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ Provide concrete details on how children and young people will be supported post-placement, as determined in [Guideline 1](#) as part of the development of the communications plan. Ensure that children and young people are explicitly informed if there are changes to the plan for support.
- ▶ Briefly summarize the reasons for transition but postpone detailed discussions on the merits of family-based care until the immediate questions of children and young people have been largely addressed. Recognize that belaboring the rationale for family-based care is unlikely to sway children and young people towards embracing transition when they are preoccupied by other more pressing concerns. Justifications for transition may also be wasted on children and young people who are uninterested in the reason for transition.
- ▶ Analyze the nature of the relationship between children and young people and their directors/donors. If the relationship is close and based on trust, consider explicitly communicating that transition does not signal personal rejection of the children and young people and reassure them that they are still cared for. Emphasize that they will continue to receive support after leaving the RCF and honor that commitment.

GUIDELINE 4: Setting realistic expectations and demonstrating transparency



*Pathway A:
Stakeholder Communications
and Engagement Strategy*



*Pathway B:
Implementing Closure or
Divestment Plan*

Description

Delivering the announcement of transition can be a difficult task, especially when there is an expectation that the reaction may be negative. The instinct to rush to provide reassurances to children and young people is understandable. However, it is important to remain realistic about the process and outcomes of transition, particularly where it concerns commitments of support to children and young people. Failing to uphold such commitments can result in losing their trust and confidence in the entire transition process. As transition can unfold in ways that are often unexpected, even when there is a solid transition strategy in place, it is also crucial to keep children and young people regularly informed of significant changes. Adopting transparency and accountability as key principles throughout the transition can instill trust in both the process and the adults who are implementing it.

Findings

Reports from CEPs identified a significant failure by residential care providers to fulfill the commitments they had made to children and young people during the transition process. While some CEPs reported that the commitments made to them were fulfilled, many others reported instances indicating the opposite.

“ *I loved being with my family but I was angry about [being] promised a support project and it did not happen at all.*”

“ *Some were not fulfilled and we were told that the time period of doing the transitioning had expired... that there were no more funds to run the project and those that had not yet got [support] were left out.*”

“ *That the transition was going to be less stressful, was a lie. They separated children who had grown up together for almost all their lives and took them to other children’s homes. They were never consulted, it just had to happen. They were going to follow up and check up on them but nothing of the sort, they were just disposed of and left on their own with strangers in the new orphanages, which made it hard for them to adjust in the new environment.*”

Practitioners echoed the importance of honoring any commitments made to children and young people:

“ *Make sure you do what you say you will do because the kids are looking at us. It’s about your promise.*” – RCF Manager



Key Finding

Many CEPs shared that the decision to transition was the first broken promise, in that it was renegeing on the agreement of them being cared for when they were first admitted into the RCF.

“ *When they took us into the center, they promised to support us. Actually, they have not.*”

“ *You helped us from living a trauma life with our family and let us adjust to the new environment here at the center. Yet at the end you sent us back to our family. To us, it seems you guys lied about looking after us until we are mature enough. Instead, we had to leave at a young age. No child should ever feel like this.*”

“ *I think this program makes children lose hope for their future. Before they take the children to the center, they have to be responsible for their lives.*”

“ *If you can’t afford to [operate]... please don’t play with young children’s lives.*”

Practitioners confirmed this sentiment:

“ *The kids had huge expectations for funding to be there to support them forever.*” – RCF Director

When asked to share their recommendations to RCF stakeholders about transition, transparency and accountability emerged as common themes.

“ *Look at the budget to know what you can do. I prefer to know the truth.*”

“ *They should not promise what they can’t fulfill because it’s heart breaking.*”

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ Carefully consider the commitments made to children and young people about the processes and outcomes of transition. Avoid the temptation to overpromise in response to their emotional reactions. As transition can unfold in ways that are often unexpected, be transparent with children and young people about what is unknown, rather than casting predictions that may be unrealistic. When there are significant changes to what has already been communicated to children and young people, keep them informed of what has changed.
- ▶ Avoid making absolute commitments about the future status of the RCF, such as plans for repurposing the facility or whether it will remain open for children and young people to visit any time they would like. These topics can be communicated in accordance with the communications plan developed in [Guideline 1](#), but are best framed as organizational goals. See [Guideline 9: Validating and Supporting the Grief Process](#) for more information on the significance of the connection between children and young people and the RCFs.
- ▶ Explicitly acknowledge to children and young people that the decision to transition reverses the commitment made to them that they could live in the RCF until certain milestones were met, such as turning 18 years old or graduating from secondary school, if that is indeed the case. If it becomes clear that children and young people did not realize or were never informed that there would eventually be an end to the support provided by the RCF, make that clarification explicit. Organize and offer a genuine apology on behalf of the RCF and be cognizant that children and young people are likely to be grappling with the unexpected reality that their future has suddenly and drastically changed. Demonstrating accountability to children and young people can help establish their trust in the transition process.
- ▶ Address any questions about the terms of post-placement support by referring to the communications plan developed in [Guideline 1](#).

GUIDELINE 5: Using visual tools to showcase placement options



*Pathway A:
Stakeholder Communications
and Engagement Strategy*



*Pathway B:
Implementing Closure or
Divestment Plan*

Description

In contexts where residential care is the predominant mechanism by which vulnerable children and families access support for their needs, other forms of support are likely to be unfamiliar to children and young people. The concept of providing support to families to resume the care of their children, or the various forms of family-based alternative care, may be difficult to comprehend when examples of it in practice are not commonplace. Technical terminology used by practitioners is unlikely to clarify these concepts, and matters may be further complicated by mixed messaging from staff who may be just as unfamiliar with reintegration and alternative care as the children and young people are. Using visual tools to introduce the continuum of care in simple language designed for children and young people can greatly enhance their understanding of the options available to them. Recognizing that children and young people may still be reeling from the news of transition, providing them with tangible resources that they can refer to in their own time can allow them to absorb the information when they are ready.

Findings

Many CEPs expressed acute concern for their fellow children and young people living in their RCFs who did not have families to return to. They shared that a resource presenting a concrete explanation of the options available would have addressed their concern that those children and young people would have nowhere to go or that they would simply be transferred to another RCF and left on their own.

“ I was worried about the young kids who had no family. Where will they go?”

“ What about the kids with no family? If they go to another center, what if that center closes?”

“ What to do if they have no family at all?”

“ And I think, where [will] all those kids live? I worry about the new place that kids have to live.”

“ I am worried about those who have no family.”

“ I think, what is going to happen if children are transferred to another center and that center does not provide enough support?”

“ I was not understanding the word ‘reintegrate’ yet. I did not understand everything.”

Practitioners reported having to repeatedly clarify to children and young people, in some cases over periods of 12-18 months, that they would not simply be sent home to their birth parents or placed into other care arrangements without support. Practitioners shared the following quotes:

“ I estimate 10% understanding [by children and young people]. We explained it many times but they could not get it.” - RCF Director

“ We need to simplify language around reintegration. It doesn't mean they only have to return home.” - RCF Manager

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ Discussions with relevant stakeholders regarding the placement options available for children and young people should already have been determined prior to this stage, as part of Phase 2: Preparing for Transition. If they have not, see [Making Links to the National Child Protection and Care System](#) in the Phases of Transition Diagram to assess the types of alternative care arrangements that can be accessed within the national and local context. Ensure that plans and budgets are in place to develop and fund these arrangements where they are unavailable, if that is part of the overall transition strategy.
- ▶ Prepare a short booklet of illustrations outlining simplified definitions of the alternative care and independent living arrangements available to children and young people. Explain the decision-making process for such arrangements through visuals and short phrases. Where possible, note how children and young people will have opportunities to participate in the decision-making process, and how adaptations will be made for children with disabilities.
- ▶ Adapt the handouts to align with the developmental capacity and maturity of a younger age group and an older age group. Provide a copy to every child and young person so they can refer to it and ask questions in their own time.
- ▶ Briefly present the booklet during Part A of the communications plan but be mindful that it may be too much information to take in at once. Return to the booklet in ongoing communications and during deeper exploration of transition in Part B to explain the concepts again and to answer any questions children and young people may have.
- ▶ Devote time to highlighting that there are options available to children who do not have families and encourage children and young people to ask questions and express their concerns.

Part B: Exploring Transition with Children and Young People

The overall objective of Part B is to facilitate in-depth understanding of transition by phasing out of the delivery of messaging and moving into the interactive exploration of transition. The guidelines in Part B relate to consulting with children's committees and young people for the dual purposes of:

1. identifying and relying on existing relationships of trust to facilitate effective communications; and
2. arranging a wide range of activities to suit the various learning needs of all children and young people.

Part B should take place during the first stage of the Organizational Change Processes under both pathways. Under Pathway A for full transition, the guidelines fall under the **Stakeholder Communications and Engagement Strategy** stage, as part of a broader stakeholder communications and engagement strategy for all other relevant stakeholders. Under Pathway B for safe closure, the guidelines fall under the **Implementing Closure or Divestment Plan** stage.

IMPLEMENTING A TRANSITION

Phase 3 offers two pathways, guiding either full transition to other non-residential services, or facilitating safe closure and reintegration of children.

PATHWAY A

Full Transition to Other Non-Residential Services

Organisational Change Process

- ▶ Stakeholder Communication and Engagement
- ▶ Leadership and Staff Training and Capacity Building
- ▶ Exploring and Designing New Services/Programs
- ▶ New Program Implementation

PATHWAY B

Safe Closure and Reintegration or Divestment of the Residential Care Facility

Organisational Change Process

- ▶ Implementing Closure or Divestment Plan (as per Strategic Plan)
- ▶ Dissolving or Concluding the Entity (Where Necessary)

GUIDELINE 6: Identifying trusted individuals to deliver messaging



*Pathway A:
Stakeholder Communications
and Engagement Strategy*



*Pathway B:
Implementing Closure or
Divestment Plan*

Description

Following the delivery of transition messaging, the communications plan can move into the in-depth exploration stage. Once the news of transition has been announced and the relevant information has been clearly presented, children and young people should be given multiple and varied opportunities to explore and wrestle with what they have been told. However, it is important to set the stage by considering additional individuals to fulfill the role of messenger. In cases of weak or compromised relationships with the adults who have delivered the messaging thus far, young people or other trusted adults can be identified and appointed to take over the task of delivering the pre-determined messaging at this stage. Relying on existing relationships with trusted individuals can significantly increase the likelihood of children and young people choosing to actively engage with transition and learning to trust the process.

Findings

A significant theme emerging from CEP reports highlighted the need to consider identifying and appointing additional individuals to be involved in the delivery of transition messaging. While some CEPs reported highly positive experiences with transition messaging and indicated they had close relationships with the adults who had communicated with them, many others shared their dislike, mistrust, and skepticism of directors/donors and expressed that they did not believe what they were told about transition.

“ Tell the truth about what’s going to happen in the center.”

“ I think the center tried their best. If you tell [the children] you are going to run out of money, they will worry. It sounds better to say, you [should] go back to your family.”

“ Doesn’t make any sense to make a plan [with staff] because we don’t like the staff who are forcing us to leave the center.”

Some CEPs shared that the long-standing relationships and shared experiences of care that they held with their peers in their RCFs allowed them to be the individuals

children trusted when discussing transition. Their relationships were the mechanisms through which children and young people were able to feel safe and understand what was happening to them.

“ Use the trusted relationships with the elder sisters to help as messengers.”

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ In scenarios where residential care directors, donors, and staff are fully bought into transition, consider inviting young people and children’s committees to identify one or two of their trusted older peers to collaborate with staff in the delivery of transition messaging. Care leavers who have entered the field of social work upon exiting the RCF may be well placed to return to participate in the delivery of the messaging.
- ▶ Distribute copies of the relevant sections of the documented communications plan to the appointed individual(s) and arrange orientation sessions to address any questions they may have about the messaging.
- ▶ Oversee practice runs to ensure that the messaging remains clear. Recognize that involving young people in the delivery of messaging, especially where underlying issues or concerns have not been surfaced or addressed, may inadvertently cause further confusion and misunderstanding. Remain vigilant in identifying any possibility of mixed messaging and provide clarification as needed.

GUIDELINE 7: Facilitating interactive exploration of transition



*Pathway A:
Stakeholder Communications
and Engagement Strategy*



*Pathway B:
Implementing Closure or
Divestment Plan*

Description

Just as it is important to vary who is delivering the messaging during the exploration stage, it can also be helpful to vary how children and young people engage with the topic of transition. Children’s committees, young people, and disability specialists can be mobilized and consulted to plan a wide range of activities designed to facilitate in-depth exploration and understanding of transition. As the messaging tactics employed by practitioners and other adults may reflect a bias towards their own communications preferences, children and young people, including those with disabilities, may be better placed to suggest and devise methods of communications for themselves and their

peers. In contrast to the stand-and-deliver technique frequently employed by adults, children and young people may develop creative and interactive approaches to discussing transition, sustaining their engagement through the process.

Findings

Both CEPs and practitioners reported a wide variety of activities that were organized to engage children and young people in the exploration of transition. CEPs cited role plays, skits, and mock debates as effective ways they were able to compare the benefits and challenges of life outside of the RCF.

“ We were involved in plays that elaborate the entire process and how our families would react to our returning home.”

“ Show, don't tell, the information.”

An area of discrepancy between practitioner and CEP reports was regarding other common methods of communicating with children and young people. While the majority of practitioners cited question boxes as useful ways to encourage children and young people to ask questions in confidence, notably, there was no mention of question boxes when CEPs listed the activities they found helpful in their understanding of transition. One CEP offered a potential explanation, while cautioning that it came down to personal preference:

“ The question box is boring because people don't like to write and surveys can make people feel forced, it is a lot to read. Role play and playing games and asking questions is more happy.”

Concerningly, there were reports from some CEPs that staff members had violated their confidentiality when they communicated negative thoughts through such channels. Others shared that they did not wish to express themselves in the ways that RCF staff expected of them.

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ Consult with children's committees, young people, and disability specialists to collaboratively design a range of activities to facilitate children and young people's in-depth exploration of transition. Provide guidance where needed but strive to allow as much freedom and creativity in the development of activities, as long as it does not compromise the content of the messaging.
- ▶ Be explicit in communicating with those involved in planning the activities that the messaging is non-negotiable and must remain in alignment with the communications

plan developed in [Guideline 1](#). Clarify that they will have input into the methodology and delivery of the messaging but that the content has already been pre-determined and cannot be changed. This is critical to preventing confusion and misunderstanding of the commitments made to children and young people.

- ▶ Distribute copies of the relevant sections of the documented communications plan to those involved and arrange orientation sessions to address any questions they may have about the messaging.
- ▶ Oversee practice runs to ensure that the messaging remains clear throughout the implementation of the activities. Carefully vet the topics presented for mock debates to avoid children and young people arguing on the issue of whether the RCF should or should not transition. This can lead to confusion about whether the children are being given permission to influence that decision.
- ▶ For younger children, and older children or young people choosing to participate, provide a variety of games, activities, and tools that can be utilized as conversation starters about transition. There are endless tools available but some examples include wooden figures in dollhouses, photos of daily life in a rural village, and flashcards depicting animals demonstrating various emotions. As they can prompt discussions of how children and young people might be feeling about the idea of returning to their families, these tools often serve as a natural segue into individual assessments and the commencement of the social work process for reintegration.
- ▶ For an example, see Anne Wanjiru Kinuthia at Kivuli Project describe how she used tools to communicate with children about transition in Better Care Network's Practitioner Learning Video Series: [The Importance of Processing Stakeholder Emotions in Transition](#).

Part C: Preparing Children and Young People to Leave Residential Care

The overall objective of Part C is to provide emotional and logistical support to children and young people as they prepare to leave residential care. The guidelines in Part C relate to:

1. creating a safe environment for children and young people to grieve the loss of relationships they have developed during their time at the RCF; and
2. establishing systems to offer sustained support prior to and following their exit from residential care

Part C should take place throughout the various stages of the Social Work and Reintegration Processes under both pathways. At this juncture, the guidelines converge with the implementation of case management for reintegration and they sit squarely within the social work process. Nevertheless, they have been included as components of the communications plan because they emerged as strong themes from the findings and were explicitly highlighted by CEPs as critical gap areas.

IMPLEMENTING A TRANSITION

Phase 3 offers two pathways, guiding either full transition to other non-residential services, or facilitating safe closure and reintegration of children.

PATHWAY A

Full Transition to Other Non-Residential Services

Organisational Change Process

- ▶ Stakeholder Communication and Engagement
- ▶ Leadership and Staff Training and Capacity Building
- ▶ Exploring and Designing New Services/Programs
- ▶ New Program Implementation

Social Work and Reintegration Processes

- ▶ Establishing the Social Work Framework
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Family Tracing
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Family Assessments and Case Planning
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Case Planning Implementation and Placement
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Monitoring, Ongoing Support and Placement Review

PATHWAY B

Safe Closure and Reintegration or Divestment of the Residential Care Facility

Organisational Change Process

- ▶ Implementing Closure or Divestment Plan (as per Strategic Plan)
- ▶ Dissolving or Concluding the Entity (Where Necessary)

Social Work and Reintegration Processes

- ▶ Establishing the Social Work Framework
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Family Tracing
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Family Assessments and Case Planning
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Case Planning Implementation and Placement
- ▶ Implementing Case Management: Monitoring, Ongoing Support and Placement Review

GUIDELINE 8: Creating a safe environment for assessments

Pathways A and B:



Establishing the Social Work Framework



Implementing Case Management: Family Tracing



Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Family Assessments and Case Planning

Description

Following the in-depth exploration of transition in the previous guidelines, the communications plan can move out of the messaging stage and naturally segue into the social work process for reintegration. Assuming that children and young people have sufficiently engaged with the topic of transition, attention can be shifted to the individual case level at this stage. As establishing trust between children and young people and their social workers is essential to implementing case management, one of the first steps in the process should be to create an environment conducive for initial discussions. Similar to the guidelines in Part B, it is important to consult with children and young people to arrange a wide variety of settings that caters to their communication preferences and learning needs. This can help support all children and young people to feel safe and comfortable to express themselves and actively participate in the process.

Findings

Both CEPs and practitioners reported the need to arrange a wide variety of settings for children and young people to feel comfortable to discuss transition and individual case work. They noted that individuals process new information in different ways and at different rates, and that individual personalities and learning styles influence preferences for meeting formats.

“ They [organized] a small group and individual to make sure everyone understands.”

One CEP shared that she preferred meeting in large groups because she was not afraid to speak up and was interested to hear what her peers had to say, while she noted that some of her friends were shy and would never feel comfortable to ask questions in that setting.

While meeting with children and young people in a large group can be necessary, particularly when first introducing transition, it can be an uncomfortable or intimidating setting for some children and young people. Practitioners and CEPs indicated that older children and young people tended to feel more comfortable to ask questions in the group setting, whereas younger children tended to approach social workers and staff individually and more spontaneously outside of the group setting.

Practitioners who created a safe and inviting environment to encourage open communications noted that some of the youngest children in their care would approach them on a daily basis to ask when they could go home. Other children would ask multiple times if social workers had found their parents yet and inquire about when social workers would go to find their families. One practitioner shared:

“ We always had communication so the kids knew and understood what was happening. The kids would ask to go home every day.” – RCF Manager

The large group setting may also not be conducive to addressing the individual needs of children and young people. Discussions may often remain in abstract and general terms for the purpose of keeping them applicable to everyone present. Meeting with children and young people individually and in smaller groups can thus allow for discussions about their specific circumstances, facilitate their participation, and protect their confidentiality. While less than half of CEPs reported having met in smaller groups throughout their transition, many of them expressed a desire to have been given that opportunity.

“ Then you can feel more comfortable to share in individual meetings because it is private and I wouldn't fear that my friends would hear.”

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ If social workers have not been involved thus far in transition messaging, they should be brought in at this stage to commence the case management process for children and young people.
- ▶ Consider dividing children and young people into groups across the following characteristics:
 - Age groups
 - Developmental capacity and maturity
 - Sibling groups
 - Assigned groups for day-to-day care (in cases where children live in small groups in a children's village style of RCF)
 - Communication abilities, including children with disabilities
 - School/work schedules of children and young people
 - Type of placement
- ▶ As children and young people feel comfortable, arrange individual meetings with social workers and counselors.
- ▶ Meet frequently over time so children and young people have time to reflect on smaller chunks of information before feeling prepared to process more.

- ▶ Create space for children and young people to enter into spontaneous and informal conversations with staff, recognizing that a formal meeting setting may not suit some children and young people. Allow them the freedom to express themselves honestly without fear of reprisal and to surface all of their thoughts and concerns.
- ▶ Encourage children and young people to broach a wide range of questions and be prepared to delve further into them as they are raised. At this stage, they may still be heavily focused on what will happen to them after they leave the RCF so it is critical to answer their questions repeatedly and as concretely as possible and explore any areas of concern they may have.
- ▶ Consider inviting older siblings who have left the RCF to return to join meetings with their younger siblings who are still in care, to consult them and discuss their options and opinions together. While care leavers are one of the stakeholder groups that should be included in the broader [stakeholder communications and engagement strategy](#), they are sometimes overlooked but should be involved in decisions around their younger siblings, as appropriate.
- ▶ Occasionally change the composition of groups that may regularly meet to account for any group dynamics that may be restrict an individual's willingness to openly participate. If this results in more active engagement by anyone, consider making a permanent change to the groupings.

GUIDELINE 9: Validating and supporting the grief process



*Pathways A and B:
Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Family Case Plan
Implementation and Placement*

Description

A critical component of supporting children and young people as they prepare to move into a new placement, whether that is entering into or leaving alternative care, is to acknowledge the grief and loss they are likely to be experiencing as part of that process. For children and young people who are preparing to leave residential care, it is equally important to recognize that they may be grieving the upcoming loss of the relationships they have formed during their time in care. This can include relationships with their peers who live at the RCF, caregivers and staff of the RCF, and members of the community, such as friends and teachers at school or in religious institutions. By using tools designed to help children and young people process their emotions as they prepare to leave residential care, such as life story books, practitioners can acknowledge and honor the loss they may be feeling, which in turn can promote healing and positively influence the new placement.

Findings

Although validation of the grief process is a crucial part of preparing children and young people to leave residential care, many CEPs reported that they did not receive this type of support. Some indicated that they wished they could have made life story books by which to remember their friends at the RCF.

“ *It’s helpful to have this when you leave the center because [you] have some memories together.*”

“ *We feel like we will lose our friends.*”

Others shared that they had independently created memory books of their own accord because it was important for them to have memories of their life at the RCF.

Some CEPs expressed concerns about whether staff would become unemployed and asked questions about what would happen to the facilities. In addition to their relationships with staff and others, CEPs wondered what would become of the place where many had spent their childhoods.

“ *I didn’t know what our center was going to be used for if we all left.*”

“ *What will happen to the facilities?*”

“ *Would we still visit the center after the transition?*”

“ *Home [RCF] is closing and there is no coming back.*”



Key Finding

Many CEPs expressed that they worried about the children and young people who were left behind in the RCF as others were progressively leaving residential care. While those who were leaving had new placements awaiting them, CEPs reported their concerns about the impact of their departures on the children with no families. Notably, none of the practitioners reported this concern, perhaps providing further evidence of the importance of validating the grief process for all children and young people.

Although CEPs were divided on how to best support their peers to cope with their loss, they recognized that there was an unmet need and offered some suggestions:

“ *Take them on outings and treat them with love.*”

“ *They have to be exposed to the world. Bring them to football games and go for a walk, let them interact with other people.*”

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ If professional counselors or psychologists can only be engaged for a single component of the communications plan (barring situations where the engagement of professionals should be prioritized to address any evidenced risk of harm to children), consider bringing them in for this activity. It is critical for children and young people to be supported through the process of grieving their life in the RCF and emotionally preparing for life outside of it.
- ▶ Professionals with lived experience of care may be well placed to undertake this task, if it is feasible to engage them.
- ▶ Guide children and young people through the use of tools, such as life story books, to prepare for their upcoming departure from the RCF. Ensure that:
 - their privacy is strictly upheld;
 - each child or young person is the only one with access to their own information, unless they choose to share it with others; and
 - staff are not exempt from this and they must not be given access unless permission is granted by individual children and young people.
- ▶ Support children and young people to document their lives at the RCF with photos of them when they were younger, photos with their friends, caregivers, and schoolteachers, and any memories they would like to write or draw about. If available, include photos and drawings of family members from their time before residential care, or from previous placements, and the placements where they are going. It is also important to recognize any attachment to the physical buildings or facilities they have considered home.
- ▶ Frequently check in on the remaining children and young people as the numbers of those in care decrease. Consider repeating some of the components of messaging in Part A of the communications plan to ensure they still understand that there are options available for them.
- ▶ Openly acknowledge that children and young people are leaving the RCF. Provide ongoing opportunities for children and young people to raise any new questions or concerns.
- ▶ Engage counselors to offer their services to children and young people who might benefit from additional emotional support.

GUIDELINE 10: Establishing mentoring and peer support system



*Pathways A and B:
Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Family Case Plan
Implementation and Placement*

Description

The relationships that children and young people establish with each other during their time in residential care is often stronger than those they may have with social workers, RCF staff, and other adults. The bonds that were initially formed through their shared experience of living in the RCF can carry over into their shared experience of life outside the RCF. Although it is necessary to have professional support from social workers, establishing a mentoring and peer support system with care leavers can help children and young people both before and after they leave residential care.

Findings



Key Finding

A clear trend emerged from CEP reports regarding the importance of remaining connected to young people who had already left the care of the RCF. Many CEPs shared that they wished they could have heard from their peers about the challenges they faced, prior to leaving residential care.

“ Invite kids who left the center already to share what struggles and solutions they faced. This can help their fears.”

Several practitioners, some with their own lived experience of care, reported observing similar trends amongst the CEPs they worked with, stating that it was critical for young people who had recently left care to have access to a mentor or peer who would understand their struggles.

Some CEPs emphasized the importance of trusted relationships with peers as the foundation for communications regarding transition, especially in cases where relationships with staff were new or weak. There were also reports of care leavers who had entered the social work profession upon leaving residential care and subsequently returned to their RCFs to work with staff to deliver transition messaging to the younger children in care.

When CEPs were asked whether they would have wanted to return to their RCF in a mentor or peer support position, the response was positive. They offered the following advice to their peers:

“ Don’t feel worried to be alone in the society because anyway, now or later you will be on your own and you have to learn how to be independent and be ready for it.”

“ Try not to scare their feelings. I’m ok so you will be ok.”

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ Engage professionals with lived experienced of care for this activity, if possible.
- ▶ If care leavers have not already been included in transition messaging through the broader communications plan for other stakeholder groups, arrange in-depth discussions with them prior to their return to ensure that they understand the messaging that has already been delivered to their peers. Provide them with copies of the relevant sections of the documented communications plan and address any questions they may have about the messaging.
- ▶ For sessions where young people may return to the RCF to share their experiences of leaving care with children and young people, consult with the care leavers and other relevant individuals, whether that is the children’s committee or young people, in planning the sessions.
- ▶ Consider the level of structure that may be needed in such sessions or determine whether the introduction of structure might hamper discussion. Ask children and young people if they might have specific questions for care leavers they would like to prepare in advance. Plan to cover any transportation costs for the CEP’s travel and offer to cover any loss of wage if they missed work to return to the RCF.
- ▶ Be mindful that there is an element of unpredictability in the discussions that might ensue between young people and their peers in the RCF. Ensure that appropriately designated staff are present for the discussions so that they can step in if anyone is becoming distressed and may need additional support.
- ▶ Develop a response plan for situations where young people might share messaging that confuses the issue of whether they will leave the RCF and renews fear and uncertainty for children and young people still living in the RCF.
- ▶ Engage care leavers and young people who are preparing to enter into independent living to discuss the idea of setting up mentorship relationships. If there is interest from both sides, consult professionals or resources to provide guidance in developing the program.
- ▶ Recognize that mentorship relationships often come about organically, with a natural leader emerging amongst a group of young people who have left the care of the same RCF. If this happens, it may be more sustainable to restrict practitioner involvement and keep it informal.

GUIDELINE 11: Co-creating a monitoring plan

Pathways A and B:



Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Family Case Plan Implementation and Placement



Implementing Case Management: Monitoring, Ongoing Support, and Placement Review

Description

While it is standard procedure to monitor children and young people in their new placements following their exit from residential care, it is typically something that is developed without their participation and imposed upon them. Although young people may be involved in their own case planning, it is perhaps less common for them to have had input into their monitoring plan. Social workers often face considerable obstacles to monitoring children and young people as frequently as they might like, including restricted financial, human, and logistical resources. However, considering that many young people experience anxiety and fear when contemplating life outside of residential care, creating a participatory monitoring plan with them could allow them to exercise some degree of control over the process.

Findings

The majority of CEPs shared strong views on the importance of monitoring following their exit from residential care. They reported the concerns they had prior to their departure from the RCF and the challenges they faced after placement. Most struggled with the lack of structure they were accustomed to within residential care and cited ongoing follow-up of their academic progress as critical to their ability to complete their education.

As indicated throughout the guidelines, CEPs overwhelmingly expressed a general fear of life outside of residential care and worried about how they would cope.

“ *Getting used to the outside life is one of the most difficult challenges we face when we leave our [RCF] and if you just drop us into society, what will happen to us?*”

“ *I was worried - what would happen if I returned home?*”

Many CEPs expressed that they wished they had had more monitoring from RCF staff or visits from their friends from the RCF. Some said that they would have liked to decide how frequently they were monitored post-placement. Others indicated that they wanted to be able to request and access material support outside of standard reintegration packages, such as money for lunch, underwear garments, and feminine hygiene products.

“ From the outside it looks really small but we don’t know who to ask for these things.”

This was especially the case where the bonds between children and young people and their families, whether birth or kinship, had not been adequately strengthened prior to placement. Some CEPs shared that they felt they could not express these needs to their families.



Key Finding

Most CEPs shared that post-placement support for education should not only include the financial aspects but that it was critical to receive follow-up support from RCF staff or social workers to encourage and support their school attendance and academic progress.

“ The push for education is so important. At home it’s just about finishing Grade 6. I don’t feel the urge to learn.”

“ It’s not about education support but it’s about having structure and motivation from the teachers at the center that we don’t have in the family. But it should be the responsibility of the family, [monitoring staff] should work with families to keep pushing for education.”

“ All of it was scary to me because I knew this was the only place where I had [the] chance to go to school and get [a] better future. My family was humble so I didn’t expect any much help from them. So I was really scared.”

“ Staff [should] come and do follow-up because kids will work harder. Because no one in the community will put much attention on education, we need someone to check in on us.”

“ I thought I wouldn’t be able to concentrate well on studies like the way I did when I was still in the organization.”

“ As I know, there are 90% who dropped their studies after being reintegrated into the family. They don’t have any support and their family can’t make an effort for that.”

Even in cases where children and young people had undergone intensive life skills training curriculum and practice, most CEPs indicated that they did not feel adequately prepared to face the realities of life outside of the RCF. Some said it was impossible for

them to have known what they would have needed before leaving the RCF, and that it was only after they had experienced their post-placement challenges firsthand, that they realized what kind of support they needed.

When CEPs were asked to indicate what they would like to share about any aspect of transition, many of them spoke about the importance of monitoring.

“ *To always make follow up to children after transition.*”

“ *When reintegrating children, please keep providing the same support and follow up about the children’s situation living outside.*”

“ *To care about the leavers even after transition process is done and always make follow up of care leavers.*”

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ Before initiating conversations with children and young people, draft a sample monitoring plan for the purpose of costing out travel expenses and staff time. Understand the budget constraints going into the conversation so that their expectations are not wildly out of alignment with the budget and human resources capacity. Be realistic in how often staff will be able to conduct in-person monitoring and consider travel time, expenses, and other work duties staff may have.
- ▶ For young people moving into independent living and older children moving into family placements, ask them how often they would like to communicate and be monitored during their first weeks. Give them a range of options that have been deemed feasible from a budget and human resources perspective, including in-person visits and writing letters or diaries to social workers.
- ▶ Create a participatory post-placement monitoring plan together with children and young people, to the extent possible. Divide the task across two distinct stages and work with them to:
 - develop an initial draft of the monitoring plan while they are still in care, and
 - revise the draft immediately after they have exited from care.
- ▶ Use this process to gauge and discuss how children and young people may be feeling about the upcoming changes and to determine what support they require before and after experiencing post-placement life.
- ▶ For situations where there is limited or no access to a phone, consider providing to the young person a phone, phone credit/air time bundles, and/or the contact of a friend or neighbor who could help with phone connection.

- ▶ During the initial post-placement monitoring visits, check in with children and young people about whether they would like to make any changes to the monitoring plan.
- ▶ For younger children who may not yet have a strong sense of time, and if it is feasible for them to have a choice, ask them whom they would like to have visit them for monitoring. This not only gives them a choice, it provides information on whom they trust to check on them and to whom they may feel comfortable to express their concerns.
- ▶ If there is a respite family in place, include plans to visit them together with children and young people.

GUIDELINE 12: Organizing farewell and reunion activities



*Pathways A and B:
Implementing Case Management: Child/Youth and Family Case Plan
Implementation and Placement*

Description

The bonds formed amongst children and young people living in residential care are often overlooked or underestimated. As discussed in [Guideline 9: Validating and Supporting the Grief Process](#), the same can be true of relationships between children and young people and their caregivers, other staff members of the RCF, and community members such as friends and teachers at school or in religious institutions. Acknowledging the significance of such bonds and relationships through dedicated ceremonies and activities can help bring closure to the end of one chapter and emotionally prepare children and young people for the beginning of the next. The difficulty of farewells may also be somewhat eased through the knowledge that there are plans in place for reunions that can help sustain ongoing relationships.

Findings

When asked about whether farewell activities had been organized for children and young people prior to their exit from residential care, responses were divided.

“ [Farewell activity was] good because I felt comforted before I left. They checked my feelings from time to time.”

“ Oh, we would have loved them! [Because we could have] interacted with others before leaving. We're no longer in touch.”

“ I prepared my own card to share with my friends but [did] not celebrate any party. The feeling when I left [the] center: the last night I didn't sleep.”



Key Finding

For CEPs who did participate in farewell activities, a clear trend emerged from many reports that the farewell activities visibly decreased with each group of children and young people departing from the RCF. In many cases, there were lavish celebrations for the first group of children but none for the final groups of children.

There was consensus from CEPs who spoke of these discrepancies and shared their recommendations.

“ It made me feel like we were not loved equally, that I was less loved than the others.”

“ [There were celebrations] for those who left the center at first, but after that, they didn't celebrate any party. And for me, there was not any party.”

“ What I think is, the first time, you have to make it look perfect. The kids can see everything, they saw what happened to the other kids. If you do it, you should do it the same.”

“ They should treat kids the same because those who left first got more support and had a party, but for those who left after, [there was] not any support nor any party.”

“ The support was different. Some children were favored more.”

Many practitioners reported that they organize and pay for annual reunions for children and young people on an ongoing basis, and CEPs confirmed that it would be difficult to meet with their peers otherwise. In some cases, the costs of transportation were an obstacle, whereas in other cases, they preferred not to socialize publicly because of the stigma attached to having grown up in residential care. Some focus group participants indicated that they had not had any contact with their peers since leaving the RCF, while others reported that they wished to see each other more often but only communicated online.

Suggestions for Implementing the Guideline

- ▶ Acknowledge the departure of every individual child and young person, regardless of the order or circumstances in which they leave the institution. Recognize their relationships with their caregivers and the other children in care. Consult with children and young people in planning the farewell activities. Work collaboratively with them and ensure consistency in celebrations across the groups if departures are staggered over time.
- ▶ Avoid going overboard with planning farewell activities for the first group leaving the RCF. It may not be possible to sustain the same level of planning and expenses. Keep it simple and sustainable and ensure it is covered in the budget.
- ▶ Consider inviting everyone and their families to return to the RCF for a final celebration after transition or closure has been completed.
- ▶ In cases where the organization will continue to run programming beyond their termination of residential care, explore whether it is feasible to arrange an annual reunion for children and young people to return and reconnect with each other. This could be an annual Christmas celebration or a graduation ceremony to celebrate case closures.
- ▶ If they have not already been included in the overall transition budget, allocate expenses for farewell activities and include transportation for children, young people, and families if they will be returning for a final celebration or annual reunion. For day laborers, consider covering the wages lost by young people and family members attending.
- ▶ Consider pitching farewell activities as a fundraising package as donors may gravitate towards funding such efforts.
- ▶ Consider having children and young people choose a friend from the RCF to accompany them to their placement. Consider the impact on both children, whether that increases their sense of security during travel to their placement or whether it increases the trauma of separation.

CONCLUSION

The development of the guidelines provided a critical opportunity to listen to young people as they shared their lived experiences of the transition or closure of their RCFs. The findings from the process of engaging with CEPs and practitioners led to the creation of 12 guidelines to support the development and delivery of transition messaging to children and young people living in residential care.

Many of the trends and patterns emerging from the findings were consistent across a wide range of countries and contexts. The findings highlighted areas where more resources are required to strengthen both transition and reintegration processes throughout the stages of transition messaging and case management. There were two major points of disconnect between the perspectives of CEPs and practitioners on transition messaging. The first related to the practitioner assumption that the reason for transition should be communicated as a priority, whereas CEPs indicated a much greater need to understand the impacts of transition. The second related to practitioners providing technical responses misaligned to the emotional needs of CEPs. Recommendations from CEPs emphasized the importance of relying on existing relationships of trust with their RCF peers for pre- and post-placement support.

Much of what CEPs shared went beyond transition messaging and related to their general experiences of exiting care. While a few spoke very positively of the reintegration process and of returning to their families, many indicated that their families had not been adequately prepared to receive them, or that their bonds with relatives in kinship care placements had not been sufficiently strengthened prior to placement. Many relayed stories of how they adjusted to life outside of the RCFs and learned to survive on their own, with little to no support. Some spoke of facing discrimination for having grown up in residential care, and of learning to hide their history, even from their closest friends and colleagues.

“

Be kind to care leavers. They have been through a lot at a young age.”

- Care Experienced Person

The overwhelming majority voiced the need for financial literacy training and access to mental health support services. Some of them shared that they had never had an opportunity to discuss or process the trauma of their exit out of residential care, while many others expressed a desire to connect with other care experienced persons so that they could share their challenges with others who would understand.

The privilege of listening to care experienced persons comes with a responsibility to act upon what they have shared, and those involved in the transition of residential care services

should commit to ongoing engagement with them. Donors and service providers can direct resources to funding and coordinating the critical areas of support identified by CEPs. Practitioners can further explore the impacts of transition and improve their practice by consulting with the individuals who possess expertise on the matter, with the ultimate aim of positively influencing outcomes for children and young people in care.

ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected through practitioner interviews, focus group discussions, and an online survey.

Practitioner Interviews

In-depth interviews were held with 9 practitioners from 3 RCFs, including technical support practitioners, residential care directors or managers, and social workers who supported and/or implemented the transition of RCFs in Cambodia. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to inform the interviews. Practitioners were asked questions regarding how they developed and delivered transition messaging to children and young people in care. Test interviews were first conducted with 2 practitioners to refine the tool prior to all interviews taking place. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. An information letter was provided to all participants. All participants provided written consent.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups were conducted in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, Cambodia, with 12 participants (5 female, 7 male) from 3 RCFs. The 3 RCFs were the same RCFs where the interviewed practitioners had developed and delivered transition messaging. In-person meetings were held with groups of CEPs and practitioners one month in advance to explain the purpose of the project. Those expressing interest in joining the focus groups were invited, either directly by the project coordinator or through practitioners who had contact with CEPs. A focus group planning committee composed of 3 CEPs coordinated the planning and logistics of the focus groups. Facilitators of the focus groups incorporated questions from an interview guide into interactive games and activities. An information letter was provided and read out loud to all participants. All participants provided written consent.

Online Survey

An online survey was developed using a combination of questions developed from the interview guide and the focus group discussions. The survey was disseminated through care leaver networks and associations, and through civil society organizations (CSOs) who work with CEPs. For CEPs with limited access to devices or Internet, CSOs provided logistical support for CEPs to be able to access and complete surveys. The survey was anonymous and captured data from 26 CEPs whose RCFs were located in the following countries: Uganda, Nepal, Kenya, India, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, and Peru. All CEPs approached for participation were provided

with an information letter. All participants who participated in the survey provided written informed consent.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. 12 themes were identified and shared with the reference group. There was broad consensus on these themes. Themes were then developed and written findings shared with the reference group for further input and sense-checking. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved at this stage and the 12 guidelines were subsequently drafted to reflect the findings. Two more feedback rounds with the reference group further refined the guidelines. Practitioners representing the target audience of the guidelines also provided their feedback by sense-checking the resource, after which the guidelines were finalized.

Limitations

Data collection and analysis was subject to the following limitations:

- There was significant variance in usage of the term ‘transition’ across different contexts. Many CEPs referred to transition as the movement of individual young people out of care, while others referred to it as the transfer of a child from one RCF to another RCF. Some practitioners conflated transition with the reintegration process. This led to confusion about the purpose of the guidelines when engaging with CEPs and practitioners who were referring to their experiences with the various definitions of transition.
- For CEPs participating in the focus group discussions, many revealed that they had never spoken with anyone about their experience with transition since having left their RCF. This meant that they needed time to process their general experience of leaving before being able to speak to the topic of transition messaging, thus limiting the data that was captured in the remaining time.
- The anonymous nature of the online survey restricted follow-up with respondents for clarification on the data they provided. There were also challenges with accessing the survey for CEPs who did not own phones or other electronic devices required to access the survey. Many CEPs did not have Internet access or phone credit and were unable to independently complete the survey.

Questionnaires

[Questionnaire for Practitioners](#)

[Questionnaire for Care Experienced Young People](#)

[Questionnaire for Online Survey](#)

ANNEX 2: RESOURCES

[Phases of Transition Interactive Diagram](#)

[Transitioning Models of Care Assessment Tool – digital tool](#)

[Transitioning Models of Care Assessment Tool – PDF version](#)

[Transitioning Residential Care Cost Estimation Tool](#)