

## **More information on this International Research Programme: 'Fulfilling the human rights and well-being of children and young people in alternative care: indicators for improving outcomes.'**

### **Background**

Around the world children living in alternative care are being denied their human rights. Previous research also calls attention to the poor well-being outcomes many care experienced children and young people experience. To help address this situation a project Task Force and an International Advisory Group have taken steps to initiate an international research programme.

The aim of the research is the collation of evidence that will help inform positive change in the fulfilment of human rights and optimal well-being outcomes of children who experience alternative care. In addition, we hope to bring forward research findings that will provide information in support of governmental and international efforts to prevent unnecessary placement of children in alternative care.

To date, research on the fulfilment of rights and well-being of children in alternative care has been undertaken predominantly in high income countries. This has led to a gap in applicable information that guides improvements in the attainment of optimal well-being and protection of children in alternative care across different regions and countries of the world. Although we hear many professionals speak of the harm that poor alternative care is having on the lives of children and young people around the world, we believe the contextual and rigorously documented evidence to prove to many governments that such harm is indeed occurring in their own countries and regions, is either sparse or entirely missing. Furthermore, the information governments often request in terms of how to ensure the rights of care experienced children and young people are upheld lacks clear indicators.

Most importantly, the need for this proposed research is founded on the voices of children and young people around the world. They have spoken out loud and clear about our duty to ensure their human rights are respected and met at all times.

### **To this end, the principal goals of the research project include:**

- Addressing the imbalance in empirical evidence on the impact of alternative care on children and young people and the fulfilment of their human rights across the world.

- Providing governments, and other stakeholders, with evidence that will motivate positive change and offer clearer guidance so that human rights of children in alternative care are met and each child is provided the protection and opportunities necessary to achieve best possible life outcomes.
- Recognising the utmost importance of prevention of child-family separation in the first instance by providing information that will also contribute to strategies that support such endeavours.

**These goals will be achieved by:**

- Developing and implementing innovative research that is contextualized, rigorous and incorporates a process that guarantees meaningful and creative participation of care experienced children and young people in its design and implementation.
- Adding a unique perspective to researching the impact of alternative care experience through development of methodology combining measurements of pre-care, in care, and post care experience, and well-being indicators.

**Project Phases**

The research project is being undertaken in two phases:

- Phase One: includes the development of an international research project proposal that includes formation of the research framework including questions, indicators and participatory methodology co-designed with children and young people. It also includes initial piloting of the research methods.
- Phase Two: is the implementation of an international research programme.

**Achievements to date**

To date, funding has allowed for the following activities:

- Formation of a Project Task Force comprising a partnership between UNICEF New York, the Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at the University of Strathclyde, SOS Children's Villages Denmark, and Child Identity Protection (CHIP).
- Formation and meeting of an International Advisory Group comprising academics, UN and international NGOs partners, government representatives, members of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

appearing in their own professional capacity, and care-experienced young people.

- Appointment of a Project Director and Research Associate based in the University of Strathclyde.
- Undertaking of an international literature review on measurements of well-being indicators and outcomes.
- Undertaking of an international literature review on participatory research methodology with children and young people.
- Input into an international research project utilising participatory research methodology with children and young people.

## **Next steps**

The project Task Force is now focusing on the next steps of Phase One of the international research programme. This includes the further development of innovative qualitative and participatory research methodology to be used in the measurement of human rights for children in alternative care. This will include breaking new ground in the ways evidence is collated and careful development of creative research methods. To achieve the fulfilment of this phase of the project and allow for the development of an international research programme, the project will now fulfil the following activities:

### **1. The formation of a Children and Young People's Research Advisory Group**

The full and meaningful participation of care experienced children and young people is vital to this research project. To ensure such participation in the design and implementation of the research, a Children and Young People's Research Advisory Group will be established. Members of the Group will be sought from across the world and invited to participate in a series of meetings and research co-design workshops. Preparation work will begin in the countries of participants through online meetings. This will culminate in a residential workshop focussing on design of research questions and participatory research methods that can be used with other care experienced children and young people around the world. We believe this manner of consulting and co-designing research with children and young people remains very underutilised across the world.

### **2. The formation of a Research Advisory Group**

A Research Advisory Group will be comprised of academic researchers drawn from different regions of the world. An international call is being launched to seek participation in the Group from relevant expert researchers working within

academia and other bodies. The role of the Research Advisory Group will be achieved through a series of online and in person meetings and includes:

Working together in a creative manner to help formulate a research framework that includes exploration of research questions, indicators, and methodology relevant to the measurement of human rights in alternative care. Experts will have a specific focus on child development and well-being indicators as well as participatory research methods.

Supporting the development and implementation of participatory research design workshops with care experienced children and young people focussing on the co-design of research methods and indicators relating to well-being outcomes.

### **3. Piloting of the research methodology**

Following the research co-design workshops with care experienced children and young people, it is proposed to pilot the developed research methodology in at least two countries. It is anticipated this will take the form of a series of age specific, interactive and participatory workshops with care experienced children and young people utilising the methodology developed by children young people and members of the Research Advisory Group. The research workshops will be complemented with a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with professional stakeholders working within the alternative care and child protection sector in these countries. The results will inform the final research framework to be included in an international research programme proposal.

### **4. Publication of findings**

Following all activities to develop and pilot the research methodology it is planned to publish a series of articles and/or reports based on the process and initial findings.