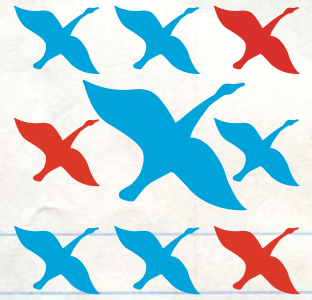


WILDE GANZEN



ONTWIKKELINGSSAMENWERKING

PI-DOC 8: CARE
FOR ORPHANS
AND CHILDREN
ON THE STREET



Inhoud

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PI-Doc 8: Care for orphans and children on the street

Worldwide, millions of children grow up without their parents. They became orphans due to HIV/AIDS, or war, or other reasons. Other children cannot grow up with their parents because they are not sufficiently able to care for them. Some children live elsewhere because their parents work abroad. When these children cannot stay with relatives they may be placed in children homes or foster care. Many other children live on the streets or are fugitives from violence in their region or country . This document focuses on what is important in providing care for children and what tools can be used to determine the best type of care.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) determines that children have a right to care and protection in their own family and their own culture. A child that is temporarily or permanently deprived of its own family has a right to special protection. The State where the child resides has the obligation, according to article 20 of the UNCRC, to provide for alternative care, such as a foster family or when appropriate, a children's home. Governments do not always provide sufficient resources for this alternative care. That is why private initiatives and NGOs often take up the task of providing alternative care services. In doing this they have to stay within the legislation and the regulations and standards of the country where they work.

The importance of caring for children in their own environment and in a family based setting

Every child has the right to grow up within a loving family environment or in a family based alternative care setting. Governments have the duty to provide for this. Children without parents should preferably grow up in another family where they are loved and cared for. Research shows that long term institutional care can have a negative impact on the development of children. Living in groups with many different caregivers makes it difficult to give individual attention to a child. This also hinders the development of attachment. Attachment promotes safety and healthy social development in children. This development is essential for other developmental aspects, like locomotion development, the ability to learn and to benefit from education, as well as the ability to engage in healthy social relationships.

Residential care also reduces children's ability to cope. From the age of 18 they have to cope for themselves in their society at large. They have seldom learned to be alone and to care for themselves. Easily, these young adults become victims of exploitation and abuse. Many end up in criminal activities and/or prostitution. They have lost contact with their family network, their original environment, culture and language.

Providing care for a child in a family (within its own network or with foster parents), with additional early external support, it is possible to prevent children ending up in the streets. Children that can no longer grow up with their parents are often traumatized. Many have seen their parents die, are

abused or exploited, have experienced terrible war crimes, family violence or substance abuse of their parents. These children have specific problems they need help with. This is only possible when they receive individual attention, with regular caregivers. Just like good parents who are available to their own children 24 hours a day.

When a family in Cambodia is affected by aids, it is often the father who is infected first and dies. When also the mother gets ill and dies, there is nobody left to care for the children. Over 100 volunteers of a support organization visit the patients at home and provide support where they can. They provide food parcels and medication. They also offer emotional support.

Mothers are often very concerned what will happen with their children after they passed away. The support organization takes this worry away by seeking, in close consultation with the mother, an appropriate foster family for her children. Often the grandparents or other relatives, or friends in the community. If at all possible, brothers and sisters are kept together in one family and if possible in their own village.

Contract

Because the NGO provides support and supervision for the caregivers, also poor families can offer their assistance in taking in orphans. Foster parents sign a contract in which they promise to love and care for the children, to send them to school and not to sell them. In short, to treat them like their own children. Also the village head and the headmaster of the school sign the contract. Of course, compliance with all this is checked when the NGO brings material assistance and assists the foster parents with caring for the children.

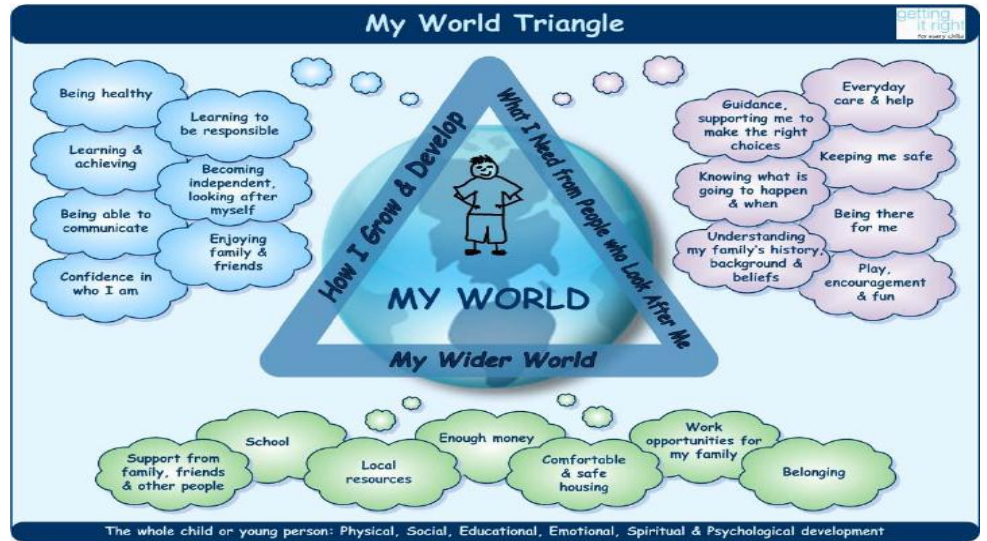
Child care, tailor made

Every child is unique and every family also. This means that there is no standard solution for all children with problems. It doesn't help to put up a children home whenever a disaster occurs or to look for one-type-fits-all foster families. It is important to have a range of care options available so that every child can receive a suitable solution for its specific needs. And of course it is important to figure out what the best individual solution is for each and every child.

THE MY WORLD TRIANGLE: AN INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

The My World Triangle (also called *assessment triangle*) is a good tool to assess a child's needs. The starting points are the developmental tasks and needs a child has. The child always occupies center stage. (S)he needs safety and security; a healthy environment and the knowledge how to stay healthy. The child must develop independent living skills, learn how to take responsibilities and how to communicate effectively.

A child needs people who will stand up for him/her and to become attached to. This feeling of security and safety is important to the development of a positive self-esteem and is essential for a healthy social, cognitive and locomotive development. An insecure child will develop less successfully in other aspects too.



CAREGIVER TASKS

Caregivers must ensure that children feel safe and that they understand what is going to happen with them. They have to give the children adequate care, assist them in their development, and teach them how to make the right choices. Caregivers must also help children to learn the history of their original family and of their culture, send them to school and let them play and have fun.

Children need to know that there are always adults on which they can fall back on. This is the only way a child can feel secure; this is a prerequisite for a successful attachment. Above all it is essential that caregivers should protect children.

After these tasks have become clear, you can map out what problems the parent(s) or caregiver(s) have in taking care of their children, but also the things that go well. In this way you can provide tailor made assistance, to prevent children being placed in care, and you can make good use of the strengths of parents or caretakers. In many countries in the world there are strong family and community bonds, with people coming forward to care for the children of diseased or dysfunctional parents.

In your assessment you should identify other factors too. If parents have no income or poor housing, this can be reasons to place their children in a children's home. Such parents could be helped in providing a good home for their children. May be there are local resources that can support parents in their task, like school meals or after school programs, or help from neighbors or relatives.

A care plan for every child

After the strong and weak points of the situation of a child are assessed and mapped out, working goals can be set on the domains *child, care takers* and *environment*. You can also define what care parents or relatives themselves can provide and what assistance they need.

The plan also defines whether a child should be placed in foster care or whether other types of care, like a short term shelter or treatment center is needed.

In Kwazulu Natal, a region in South Africa where HIV/AIDS has orphaned many children and where sexual abuse is high, a shelter is set up for abused children. The outcomes for children who stayed there long term were not positive. After the organisation started with individual assessments of each and every child and reintegration program in the community the outcomes have improved. The children are placed in the shelter in order to do a thorough assessment. Following the assessment an individual plan is made for every child leading to reintegration in the extended family or community of origin. If this proves impossible children are placed with trained foster parents of a similar cultural background. They are successful to find a family for most children within six months after placement. Good support programs for the foster parents have lead to sufficient foster parents, even in this poor region.

An appropriate plan for a child mentions the needs, but also the goals which should tried to be achieved. For instance that a child should get education or physiotherapy, or psychological trauma therapy. Care and shelter alone are not enough. Professional material and emotional assistance are needed for both children and caretakers. As well as regular evaluations, based on the plan.

STREET CHILDREN

A special category are the children who have lived in the street and then enter into a home. These children cannot directly be placed in the care of an alternative family, unless they have only lived on the streets for a very short period. For them a shelter as described above could be a good solution as a first intervention. But children should not stay there. Also for them a new life in a family or family-type group should be made possible.

In India many children are found at the railway or bus stations. An NGO visits them twice a week. New children found are spoken with. The NGO offers them shelter and young children are taken to the shelter immediately. The NGO assesses the situation of the children and tries to find their families and community members, often in the rural areas. If possible reunification is supported with aid from the NGO. Failing this reunification, children can be integrated into so-called Mogga's, family-type groups with a couple or mother figure who lives with five to eight children in a normal house like a family. One boy testified: "we have parents where we lost ours before, we see that they love us"

More information

Visit the website: www.bettercarenetwork.org for the online library. Some important documents:

- Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (UN, 20 November 2009)
- Toolkit for Child Care Practitioners (Better Care Network)
- Families, Not orphanages. (John Williamsen and Aaron Greenberg, September 2010)





Wilde Ganzen
Heuvellaan 36
1217 JN Hilversum
The Netherlands
t 035 - 625 10 30
f 035 - 624 66 77
rekening 40 000
info@wildeganzen.nl
www.wildeganzen.nl