

SAFP Work on Aftercare adding value to current discourse

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Care of individuals is done both by family and society. When both these institutions devalue individuals due to their disability or misdeed, then State plays a role by offering institutional support to protect life. SAFP has understood this safeguarding role of the stakeholders including the State for “Care and Aftercare” of children and vulnerable adults in terms of life long relationship of the wards of the State. This calls for defining roles for the stakeholders including the wards of the State and the State differently than before.

1. Need to revise perspective: Current work in Aftercare of Children living in Child Care Institutions (CCI) has upheld the need to address the skill and services gap for youth leaving care in India. Addressing skill gap to earn money is not sustainable solution as care managers need to provide social network and political engagement for overall developmental right of the vulnerable segregated with the stamp of being devalued. This is true for all who are disabled, excluded and poor. To pull the devalued out of the deficit the CCIs have to agree to prepare themselves for an expansive perspective that situates the person in State Care in the role of the inheritor of State assets and resources. Instead of living a segregated life in an institution, this person would then be valued and get trained with access to prime State premises to be with managers of State properties and campuses as intern inheritors. They can live in organisational premises with the organisation managers. These managers will have additional role as Care Takers of these “wards of the state”. The Indian Administrative Services probationers under the ‘Nurture the Future’ government programme are to mentor youth from underprovided backgrounds. Mentoring is a skill to realize the role as the guardian of all who the family cannot provide. However the perspective needs to be developed after redefining basic terms related to social valuation of the excluded and stages of their development into undertaking valued positions in the economy of the country.
2. Developing capacity to increase equal contribution of all in nation building : The Government officers and other stakeholders will require orientation and training to safeguard not just the right to life and livelihood but the wellbeing of each individual as their primary duty. With poverty and unemployment indices rising more children and vulnerable are going to be abandoned but providing them an institutionalised life is a crime as it leads to exclusion and devalued life. A structural change based on Social Role Theory (SRT) and Social Role Valorisation (SRV) fostering person centred mainstreaming plan is the need of the hour. SRV training is meant for the vulnerable too. The perpetrators of abuse and harm, State and NGO actors should also be trained to make the vulnerable functional within the mainstream structure.
3. Safeguarding role of the State and non state actors: Adaptation and adjustment will be needed to strengthen social systems to prevent abuse, violence and abandonment of the children and the vulnerable. To safeguard children and vulnerable adults the State has to prevent, protect and promote well being and development of the agency of those at risk, the vulnerable to harm and abused. Systems to develop the harmed into contributing adults have to be developed with the mainstream not by excluding them into institutions that segregate them as excluded to be mainstreamed eventually.

4. Gap in the strategy of developing skills sans socio-political empowerment: The Indian government response has been to mainstream skill development. This has not worked the provision of skills and services had to precede the empowerment of the agency of the vulnerable person and link the skill development to work plans of the institutions and employment providers. Thus an autonomous care leavers organisation and their mentors need to be in relationship with the agencies that are resourced enough to accommodate and adapt their work to needs and rights of the people they must serve along with delivering their contribution to socio economic growth. The Care Leavers Association has to take responsibility of developing the socio economic base to set themselves a role of a political agent that has the role safeguarding assets and properties owned by the State.

Alternate Care Network in India is taking off in 2020. This is an opportunity to develop the autonomous care leavers organisations. Towards this a discourse has to be created. SAFP plans that this discourse be voiced by Care Leavers. A process for this has been rolled out by

1. Supporting Aditya Yatri as the honorary coordinator to lead the establishment of the autonomous care leavers networks.
2. Circulating concept notes to CCI to raise resources to get stakeholders together to discuss how the above can be possible.
3. Advocating that Care leavers can be supported to develop their network and get mentors to guide them.

The process planned for the next year is :

1. Getting CCIs thinking on the need to set up district base care leavers network and state level associations.
2. Training Care Leavers to understand the strength of autonomous existence as wards of the state to develop their neighbourhood collectives and corresponding support networks.
3. Developing person centred planning and strengthen the Social Role Valorisation for the wards of the state.

Coordinator of the above process experienced the following

1. Openness from stakeholders to listen to the perspective from Care Leavers.
2. The listening process does not necessarily lead to action towards realising the next years plan.
3. Each CCI is busy in meeting their on commitments and it disappoints Aditya by not changing track of their current thinking to understand how roles of child ren in care and those out of care can be enhanced to make them socially productive.

Challenges face by Care leavers in social Integration

1. Socio- eco devaluation that gives them no political recognition
2. Non belongingness to community base resulting in invisibility
3. Unable to access protection without their CCI or mentors

Policy changes expected in future

Current policy recognition is welcome. It must be recognised that the basis of policy discourse is to increase provisions and reservations. These are needed as Care Standards are too low in most CCIs. The current discourse does not integrate or mainstream youth with socio - political inclusion as it only ensures preparedness to earn.

The policy framework developed by an SOS care leaver Aditya Yatri in Maharashtra is within the truncated frame that is present within the JJ Act. The JJ Act is written in a way that it clearly implicates the State as responsible for its wards until the age of 23. This has not translated into organised aftercare for all in India and there is no punitive action that is

The framework of wardship to belong to state requires different learning child when they reach the CCI. While in an institution the child has to be prepared to be responsible to manage state resources and be an important governance actor. The change of paradigm will take place from the writings of the Care Leavers. The Care Leavers have to strengthen their platform first.

CCIs can be useful by supporting Care Leavers in

1. Developing a 5-year strategy to set up and nurture the Autonomous Care Leavers Network as a membership-based organisation.
2. The strategy has to be developed by Care Leavers along with their mentors at a five-day retreat where they can plan together the vision and mission for the Care Leaver Network to partner with the Alternate Care Network of India.
3. Funding for Care Leavers enterprises that get the constituency together.
4. Mentors and exposure programmes for Care leavers to learn how to establish the district based units.
5. Fund raising for Care Leavers Autonomous entity.