



# International Care Leavers Convention 2020

## Convention concept note

### Background

Care Leavers, are young people, who have lived in alternative care as children and exited from there at the age of maturity, mostly 18 years. Having lived in a highly protected and controlled environment and experiencing significant trauma during childhood, they find it difficult to transition from living in a protective child care setting to independent living. This is often accentuated due to the absence of a pivotal supportive ecosystem around them, leaving them with little confidence, low self-agency and lacking in basic life skills and limited career opportunities. Having experienced lack of permanency in their lives as children, these young people go through immense mental stress. Because of their unique situation, Care Leavers are seen as one of the most vulnerable youth in society, who needs extra care and support at the individual, collective, societal as well as national and international level.

Keeping the above in mind, a group of organizations and experts decided to come together to convene an international first ever in-person convention in India in March 2020. This **Organizing Committee** (OC) comprising of Udayan Care (India), SOS Children's Villages, University of Hildesheim (Germany), Kinderperspectief (Netherlands) and few individuals, had completed the preparations with support from various organizations, Care Leavers' networks and partners. Almost 300 participants had enrolled, out of which there were more than 100 Care Leavers from about 25 countries and some of them had got their travel plans and flight tickets booked too. Unfortunately, the exceptional situation, caused by the COVID-19, made it unsafe to congregate people from different countries under one roof. Keeping in mind the safety and health of all participants and on the basis of the advisory issued by the nodal ministries in India, the Organizing Committee had no choice but to postpone the convention temporarily.

### The sustained engagement post the postponement of the convention

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the risks of Care Leavers across globe and most of them have experienced increased risks of isolation, trauma, discontinuation or stopping of education and learning opportunities, limited livelihoods and career chances and loss of employment, for those who could find a job with difficulty. Many of them have suffered financial losses, been thrown out of their rented accommodation and their day to

day basic needs were not fulfilled because they lacked the essential legal identity papers that could link them to the social protection measures in their countries.

The OC members have been closely observing the current situation and have been meeting frequently to engage with the Care Leavers transnationally. The voices of the Care Leavers were captured through a landscape survey, and the process resulted in the development of a Declaration, which is a set of gaps which the Care Leavers perceived in their own country's policies and practices and they also highlighted a set of recommendations to mitigate these, and is now being disseminated and shared with various stakeholders. The good thing about the entire process has been that the Care Leavers from different countries shared their inputs on the Declaration, after which several networks of Care Leavers and civil society organizations have endorsed it and now Care Leavers from different parts of the world completely own it as their advocacy tool.

In the process, a group of young Care Leavers worked very closely with the OC. The biggest learning of this process has been the establishment of evidence that no matter which part of the globe the Care Leavers belong to, their challenges during the crisis are similar and their demands echo with each other.

It is evident that bringing together Care Leavers from different countries to one platform is a process full of richness and serves its objective of forming and providing safe platforms to young people to share and learn from each other. In the last few months, the need has been felt to continually engage with young people virtually and technology has also facilitated this process.

**Hence the Organizing Committee has now decided to host the International Care Leavers Convention, 2020 in a virtual format.**

## Opportunity for the virtual convention

The Declaration developed by international Care leavers with facilitation from the Organizing Committee of Convention has clearly shown that bringing them together at this time of the crisis has only become more urgent and imperative. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the vulnerabilities of Care Leavers across the globe and the isolation, separation from peers and friends, loss of jobs and educational opportunities, threat of secured and affordable homes and interruption of their skilling opportunities, as explained in the Declaration made by them and for themselves, has also meant that we need to invest in them and bring them together in the best possible way. Even during times of crisis, there are opportunities to learn and re-look at the scope of work with positivity. This has been an often shared emotion of Care Leavers. A few other things commonly heard from the Care Leavers are as follows:

- The Convention is only the starting point to come together and it is not a one-time activity but something that has to be sustained and nurtured continuously.
- The engagement plan with Care Leavers must be planned in a way that brings maximum young people together and technology can aid to this by a great extent.

- The need to come together is global and existing networks of Care Leavers are equally excited and willing to contribute and support the process
- The virtual platform provides an opportunity to expand the reach and yet achieve depth. It allows for more participation while cutting down the cost to travel and boarding lodging.
- The bringing together of Care Leavers globally will mitigate some of the emotional and connect loss they had experienced during the crisis and motivate and inspire them towards resiliency.
- The virtual Convention allows huge opportunity for media outreach and advocacy, with social media playing an enabling role.

The **objectives** for the convention are to **connect** Care Leavers internationally and provide them with spaces and tools that allow them to learn, share and exchange their experiences, knowledge and challenges on their situation. It also aims to **empower** them through various interface sessions with service providers, researchers and policy makers working with and for Care Leavers. The Convention **enables** Care Leavers to **advocate** and amplify their voices and attract the attention of decision makers to act upon their recommendations through betterment of the policy and practice related to them.

The underlying principle that informs the Convention is that of free will and respect for youth's dignity. It is underlined by the philosophy of "nothing for us without us" and is anchored and driven by the Care Leavers themselves, with the guidance from the Organizing Committee of the Convention.

### The Virtual Plan – October to December 2020

1. The event website will be set up by the end of September 2020 and will carry details of the event, speakers, organizers, sponsors, pre-events and a resource center (Articles, Blogs, Downloadable (Best practices, research content)
2. The **three-month plan from October to December 2020** has been conceptualized as a series of engagement activities and not as any one-time event. The key idea is to facilitate and offer a platform for Care Leavers from different countries to share their voices.
3. The Convention will be delivered on a virtual platform over a 3-4 days period (**November 23-25, 2020**) with sessions taking place **between 1.30 pm to 3.30pm IST**. The Convention virtual platform aim is to **design a virtual experience that is as close to being physically connected as possible** e.g. Reception and Help Desk, Expo Centre for sponsors, Networking opportunities, Breakout rooms etc.
  - a. Day 1: Context Setting and Panel discussion with sector experts
  - b. Day 2: Policy Focus, Gaps and Opportunities across the globe (Panel)
  - c. Day 3: Breakaway groups discussing personal experiences on transition
  - d. Day 4: Focused group on Way forward.
4. The four days virtual convention will be preceded by a series of engagement activities with Care Leavers across the globe such as online polls, quizzes, poster making sessions, writing contest, learning sessions and webinars.

5. Partnerships with more aftercare service providers, Care Leaver networks, research organizations, practitioners and international agencies working on aftercare and leaving care will be explored during the period leading up to the actual convention
6. Pre-recorded videos from speakers, learning sessions and lectures from experts and practitioners, if the person is not available in the time / dates
7. There will be increased focus on leveraging online forums – dedicated groups for Communication strategy, Social Media, PR team, to tap international media
8. Post the main event, the event platform will be converted into a resource portal and interactive methods will be sustained to allow the youth to continue with their interactions.

### Support sought from partners

- A. **Financial support** for the convention: Support partly the convention costs (budget can be shared on request). Needless to say, the sponsors' logos will be displayed on the convention website as well as on Convention branding and back drop.
- B. **Technical Support:** Join us in one or more ways as suggested below:
  - a. Knowledge Partner: Share database and connections with care leavers and organizations working with and for care leavers, research groups on care leaving, good models in this space
  - b. Confirm attendance of partner organizations during the 3 month engagement
  - c. Offer resource persons, speakers and facilitators, who are able to identify and prepare care leavers to speak up and share their voices at different sessions
  - d. Offer to conduct or facilitate a particular session in line with the Convention agenda and schedule
  - e. Help spread the word to encourage Care Leavers from your state/country/network as part of the convention
  - f. Submit posters on good practices and research work on care leaving

The technical partners shall also be given the opportunity to display their logos on relevant space on website and virtual platform
- C. **Support from Policy makers:**
  - a. Participate and contribute to the discussion, as a speaker / panelist
  - b. Encourage Govt. promoted CCIs and their supported Care Leavers to participate actively in the forum
  - c. Join as a partner for the Convention (official support from ministry)

The Organizing Committee (OC) looks forward to making this a collaborative journey in the best interest of Care Leavers. This is positioned as the beginning of like-minded people and organizations coming together at a global level.