LEARNING BRIEF
APPLYING THE COLLABORATING, LEARNING & ADAPTING (CLA) FRAMEWORK

Diagram from USAID, located at https://usaidlearninglab.org/community/blog/theres-no-money-three-ways-resource-collaborating-learning-and-adapting.

> *Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) is a set of practices that help improve development effectiveness; a way of approaching work, making it as effective as possible and maximizing impact. CLA is about thinking critically about our work, who we collaborate with, what we are learning and how we adapt.[2]*

Changing The Way We Care[SM] (CTWWC) is an initiative designed to promote safe, nurturing family care for children in residential care or at risk of child-family separation. This is achieved through strengthening national care systems, which include family strengthening, reintegration, and development of alternative family-based care. CTWWC began in 2018 and is implemented by Catholic Relief Services, Maestral International, and several global, national and local partners, and is funded in part by USAID, MacArthur Foundation and GHR Foundation.

CTWWC operates in a context of growing interest in care reform[1] because of a growing understanding that residential care is a significant problem that is best addressed through collaboration between local, national, regional and global stakeholders. CTWWC's work is grounded in demonstration countries (mainly Guatemala,

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[1] Care reform refers to the changes to the systems and mechanisms that promote and strengthen the capacity of families and communities to care for their children, address the care and protection needs of vulnerable or at-risk children to prevent separation from their families, decrease reliance on residential care and promote reintegration of children and ensure appropriate family-based alternative care options are available.

Kenya and Moldova) where we seek to demonstrate service provision, build broad collaboration and coordination, and influence care system reforms through government and civil society partnerships. A key part of CTWWC's theory of change is a flow of learning out from demonstration efforts to influence change in other actors nationally, regionally and globally.

CTWWC was conceived as a design-build initiative, firmly set within a collaborate, learn, adapt (CLA) framework. The initiative understands that care reform is a long and complex process, requiring collaboration between many diverse actors, and that change pathways would likely differ between contexts. CTWWC is anchored in a belief that by capturing the process of change and learning from different countries, the global knowledge base around care reform globally would be built, and therefore be able to inform and reinforce the global momentum for family care. CLA is at the heart of CTWWC's vision – and we have been on an amazing CLA journey over the past four years. This learning brief describes some of that journey.

CONTEXT

Since care reform is a long and complex process, requiring collaboration between many diverse actors, with different change pathways in diverse contexts, the initiative set out to learn from different demonstration countries, build national and regional knowledge, and reinforce global momentum for family care.

A key component of any care system is the social service workforce, and one of their most important tools is case management: enabling workers to deliver tailor-made support to each child and family. Case management became a focus of learning and adaptation across CTWWC demonstration countries, with packages collaboratively developed in one country informing adaptation and uptake in other countries, eventually leading to sharing out of good practices nationally, regionally and globally.

In addition to training hundreds of social service workers and directly supporting hundreds of families, we have witnessed how a collaborative and learning-oriented approach to developing case management resources and training of local workforce can trigger a much larger, national engagement in the whole care reform process across a wide array of actors. And have seen how openness to sharing learning and tools can promote global good practice.

APPLYING CLA[2]

A key component of any care system is the social service workforce, and one of their most important tools is case management: enabling workers to deliver tailor-made support to each child and family. From the start of CTWWC in Kenya in 2018, CTWWC prioritized the development of a case management package to support reintegration of children from residential care back to family care. This began by reviewing global best practices and regional models (*Learning: Technical Evidence)* and collaborating with the Department for Children's Services, National Council for Children's Services and other civil society agencies (*Collaboration: External)* to develop a new case management toolkit which was officially adopted by the government in 2021. During 2019, lessons learned were transferred to Guatemala through sharing of documentation and experiences (*Collaboration: Internal*). The package was adapted and utilized to support residential care case workers in one location where two CTWWC team members partnered directly with two local government case workers to jointly undertake assessments and care plans. Following initial use, the package was further adapted by integrating a series of benchmarks to assess families' strengths and needs reflecting the Guatemalan context. The experience was shared with the Secretariat for Social Welfare to gain government buy-in and foster continued use.

In addition to these two main steps, additional learning and adaptation has included:

- A rapid adaptation during the early stage of COVID-19 pandemic through country teams sharing ideas

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[2] USAID. Collaborating, Learning and Adapting Framework & Key Concepts.
https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/keyconcepts_twopager_8.5x11_v7_20160907_0.pdf

(*Collaboration: Internal*) and experiences on reaching families with virtual support, leading to the development of new guidance that was widely shared.

- Further adaptation in Guatemala to serve a new location where child and family migration is prevalent.

- The review of existing packages by a multi-actor working group in Moldova (*Collaboration: Internal* and *Learning: Technical Evidence*). where adapted case management benchmarks eventually adapted.

- Sharing of documentation and technical assistance to Colombia, India and Haiti where case management packages have also been adapted and put to use in.

CTWWC has benefited from having local experts who could engage across the initiative to learn from others, drive national and sub-national government engagement, and directly support case managers working closely with children and families. This breadth of involvement at multiple levels has shown to be key to promoting learning, building commitment and capacity, and creating reliable contextualized tools. Case management was also reflected within CTWWC's monitoring plan, showing the progress of children through the case management process from initial assessment to the final step of case closure. Data was also drawn from the review of case files, embedded with supportive supervision practices, which allowed a view of the quality of implementation (*Learning: Scenario Planning*). We encouraged a practice of quarterly and annual reporting and reflections to ensure that teams were aware of progress and could reflect on the patterns in data to inform discussions on adaptation.
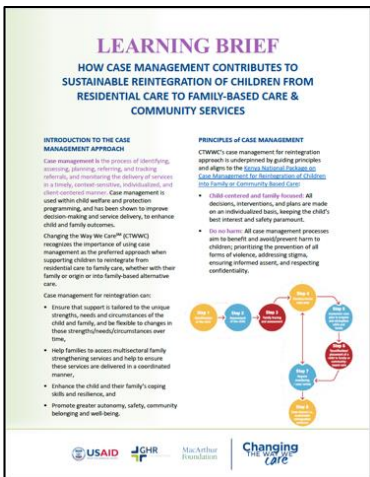

We included case management as a priority topic in our learning agenda to create space for reflection on experiences of doing case management and building the capacity of others so that promising practices could be shared with others (*Learning: Technical Evidence)*. A particularly successful example included the use of Most Significant Change stories amongst case workers in Kenya who shared their experiences of how the use of case management supported families as their children moved out of residential care. Through a process of storytelling and discussion around common and differing experiences it was possible to distil important points for practice guidance, which were then taken up to make adjustments to tools and process.

All of the case management packages and learning products have been shared freely and openly via the online library of our knowledge partner, Better Care Network, and via engagement in the Transforming Children's Care Global Collaborative Platform (*Processes: Knowledge Management*).

RESULTS

Over five years CTWWC's case management materials have been used to train over 1,200 members of the social service workforce in Guatemala, Haiti, India, Kenya and Moldova and to directly support reintegration of 392 children from residential care to family care, and provided after care support to 1,245 children and care leavers. In Guatemala, demonstration efforts led to a 100% case closure rate, with 65% of cases meeting the benchmarks for stability, whilst 21% were transferred for further support and 14% closed for other reasons. In Kenya, the collaboration on designing the case management toolkit and making training widely available has contributed to numerous outcomes, identified through change monitoring Outcome Harvesting methodology. Of the 100 outcomes that CTWWC Kenya contributed to, nearly 40% came about partly as a result of the training in case management. The potential for case management capacity building to be catalyst for wider change was a key finding
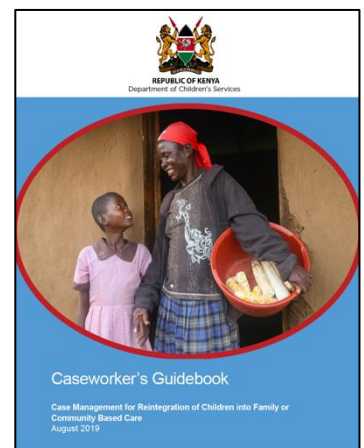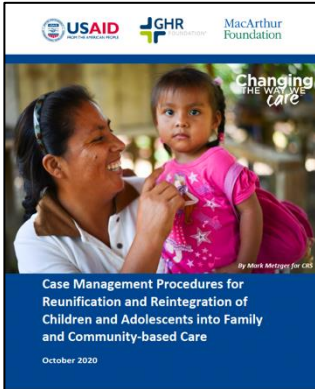
in the CTWWC evaluation in 2021. The evaluation report states: *"While many organizations use case management, CTWWC has been somewhat unique in ensuring national level government actors are deeply involved in contextualizing, branding, and approving the care reform case management approach. CTWWC has used case management as a way to move interdependent systems from the grassroots to the national policy level."*[3]

CTWWC has made nearly 40 resources on case management (in English, Spanish, Romanian and Russian) available through the Better Care Network online library and supported their uptake through webinars and technical assistance. These resources have been downloaded over 4,600 times, with the [Kenya Caseworker Guidebook: Case Management for Reintegration of Children into Family or Community Based Care](#) alone being downloaded 794 times. Feedback indicates that these resources are informing policies, programming and capacity building approaches in many external organizations and that the resources are appreciated for being presented in ways that are practical, easy to understand, and applicable in different contexts.

Organizations need both integrated CLA practices appropriate for their context and conducive enabling conditions to become stronger learning organizations capable of managing adaptively. The framework stresses the holistic and integrated nature of the various components of CLA to reinforce the principle that CLA is not a separate workstream—it should be integrated into existing processes to strengthen the discipline of development and improve aid effectiveness

ENABLING CONDITIONS

As a global initiative CTWWC has faced challenges due to the range of time zones, contexts, and languages of operation and the increasing need to do more virtually (especially during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic). This has been partially addressed through resourcing translation of documents and interpretation during meetings, and through embracing online collaborative tools like [Miro](#) and [Microsoft Teams](#).

Along the way, CTWWC endeavored to create space for open conversations on successes and failure, both within and between different teams. This has been encouraged through commitment to quarterly reflections, with clear guiding questions (including one on failures). In annual convenings, whether virtual or in person, discussions around failures and what can be learned from them have been included, with leaders modeling the reflective CLA practices. Nonetheless, it can be counterintuitive and hard to identify failures constructively. CTWWC has tried to make a point of celebrating what was learned when colleagues do so.

CTWWC had an objective of making learning a goal for everyone, experimenting with a variety of learning agenda formats and monitoring of learning activities over the years. Clear guidance on how to plan learning questions and activities was provided and technical assistance for learning activities and learning product development was invested in. After facing significant delays, CTWWC learned that accountability mechanisms, such as standing agenda items during staff meetings, are helpful to keep learning activities moving. The dual nature of learning within CTWWC – to inform initiative/program adaptation and to influence others – has often caused tensions and brought a lack of clarity around the learning agenda and responsibilities. Having roles that require team members to both deliver demonstration activities and look for ways to facilitate learning and influence others is hard. Inevitably the more immediate demonstration activities, especially around the needs of children, families and communities, feel more pressing. Moving forward work to adjust focus resources on learning, sharing, influencing and building capacity of others, and roles to better balance these needs, will continue to require conscious work supported by CLA.

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[3] Picture Impact. (2021). Changing the Way We Care, Year Three Evaluation. Internal document.