

Changing THE WAY WE care™

LEARNING BRIEF: The Importance of Integrating Family Strengthening, Reunification, Case Management and Workforce Strengthening

Supporting families at risk of separation and reunifying families who have been separated are at the core of CTWWC's work. Over the past year in which the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many challenges, our thoughts about how families are supported and by whom has been validated. The symbiotic relationship between family strengthening, reunification, case management and workforce strengthening has been illuminated. Each area of work must be done well for the other to be successful. Reintegration can be safe, sustained and nurturing if the reunification is well planned, the family is strengthened, and a quality case management process is followed. Each area requires trained, supervised, resourced and accountable workers and meaningful engagement with the family.

CTWWC has successes, challenges and lessons to showcase in each area, yet the overall take away is a reminder of how inter-related these four areas are and how CTWWC and others must be intentional in strengthening and integrating them in a holistic approach to best serve children and families.

Strengthening the workforce during COVID-19

The workforce engaged in care is broad and includes formal and informal actors, practitioners and policy makers. During the past year, CTWWC has engaged in activities aimed at building the capacity and competence of national government agencies, sub-regional government actors and practitioners working within residential care facilities or local non-governmental organizations in topics from case management to child and family participation, family strengthening, child protection and safeguarding, to disability inclusion and alternative care.

Executing the work of the social service workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic has required innovation, creativity and adaptation. Trainings were designed and delivered virtually, which

Definitions and Insights

Reunification is the reuniting of a child and a parent or caregiver; **reintegration** is a process of a child making a permanent transition back to family and community. We reunify but children and families do the hard work of reintegrating safely and with a sense of belonging and purpose. Defining the difference and interconnectedness of these two practices was key in promoting good practice.

Family strengthening can benefit all families and refers to programs, approaches and processes that empower and connect them to opportunities, networks, relationships and services and resources. CTWWC's framework promotes resilience and active engagement of parents, caregivers, children, youth and other family members in decision-making both around preventing separation and supporting reintegration.

Case management is needed for some families, such as those reunified and those at high risk of separation, whereby a case worker helps to identify, register/enroll, assess, case plan, deliver or refer to services, and monitor progress. Case management that promotes working *with* rather than *doing to* strengthens and empowers the family.

Strengthening the workforce must include those at all levels, practitioners up to national level decision-makers; those working with children and families and those who manage programs. Building a shared language around the family care and supporting them are essential to their success.

brought new access challenges, “zoom burn-out” and timing and learning around cost-effective delivery. The loss of face-to-face time was felt by all.



After being reunited with her children, Josefina was looking for ways to generate income to support her family. She was supported by CTWWC to start selling her homemade bread in the market, following COVID-19 protocols. Soon she will participate in bakery training.

The critical role of supervision, mentoring and on-the-job training were identified as essential to workforce strengthening by enabling technical content to link with practical application. In Moldova, COVID-19 restrictions required a new approach to conducting child assessments of children in residential care, resulting in virtual training for six institutions followed by over 120 hours of one-to-one mentoring to the staff undertaking assessments. One staff person commented, “We were guided very well; our mentor was permanently with us, and our work together was very productive.”

Despite the many successes, there were moments that highlighted the workforce is still not fully understood nor appreciated. In Guatemala, a judge dismissed the recommendations of social workers by reunifying children with birth families who were not ready - three cases resulted in secondary separations. This illustrates the continued need to sensitize key actors, including the judiciary, on the role and capacity of social workers and the wider social service workforce.

“I could not believe that I would be able to harvest such a huge harvest from my farm. This is something I could only dream of as I helped my neighbors harvest from their farms.” This is what Josephine told us just after harvesting maize and beans from her first season of planting. As a widowed mother of four, she needed income to reunite with one of her children who was living in a Kenyan residential care center. A cash transfer helped her start maize and beans, which sold and when combined with a second cash transfer, enabled her to make much-needed home improvements. With a third transfer, Josephine leased more farm space and with support from her local chief and case worker, Josephine was linked to a school in need of maize where she could be part of a community and earn regular income. “With the amount I received from the school, I saw myself building a better house for my family and found my desire to farm more to benefit others”



IN THE NEWS: Influencing Beyond the Borders of Demonstration

- Agreement with the Pan American University of Guatemala to promote workforce strengthening.
- Three presentations at 2021 International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect International Congress.
- Expertise shared through webinars with government and non-governmental actors across regional and global groups.
- New global disability in care reform community of practice had over 30 participants at the first meeting.
- Regional Workshop *Good Practices in Child Care Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean* attended by more than 100 people.
- At least seven countries learned from CTWWC in the East and Southern Africa Regional Learning platform.
- One article on case management in reintegration accepted for peer-reviewed journal.
- Guatemala case management tools inform development of Colombia’s National Guidelines for Case Management

Strengthening the family

Family strengthening is about addressing risk and building protective factors with families at-risk of separation or reparation. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed many families to the edge due to rapid and unplanned reunifications, increased stress, loss of family income and school closures. It also made it harder for the social service workforce to reach families with interventions. CTWWC focused on strengthening families with economic support such as referrals to government social protection schemes, direct cash transfers, food packages and funds for small income generating activities. For many of the reunified families across CTWWC programs, this meant the difference between staying together and reparation.

In Guatemala, the Child and Adolescent Unit of the Prosecutors General Office stated that the intersectoral and collaborative processes to prevent separation *“is an effective exercise, evidenced by the positive change in the condition of children and adolescents and their families in the urban areas.”* In Kenya, the CTWWC team focused on working in collaboration with government, UNICEF and others to provide cash assistance for the neediest families, while completing revisions and a disability inclusion review of the *Families Together* parenting program to be delivered by case workers during home visits once restrictions were lifted.

“In addition to the on-the-job trainings, the supportive supervision was an eye-opener for me... I am better prepared and equipped to organize and provide structured home visits to the families,am better in managing my caseloads and who to reach out for support, hence managing work-related stress for quality support services to the caregivers and children...” Social Worker from Kenya

Supporting reunification

Following an April 2020 government directive in Kenya, due to COVID-19, nearly 20,000 children were *rapidly reunified* from residential care with little to no preparation. This has led to a challenging period where the social service workforce traced these children and families to ensure they had access to resources and support for successful reintegration. CTWWC supported 104 case workers with virtual monitoring tools and training, who in turn, supported 942 children in 650 families. Not all have remained together, but CTWWC evidence does show that family strengthening interventions, monitoring and the support of a case worker can make a big difference. Success was achieved in the collaboration of different actors to help families stay together under extraordinary circumstances.

Quality and Consistent Monitoring Contributes to Positive Change in the Family

Filpa went into a residential care facility when she was two because of her disability. Her mum felt she would receive better food, shelter, clothing and medical services there. She started schooling when she was five, but the facility decided they could not meet her educational needs and later enrolled her in a special school in a different county. Filpa would return to residential care during holidays. In 2018, the manager of the residential care facility attended a family care sensitization and case management training. Because of the training and the manager’s actions, Filpa was identified for reunification and through tracing, found her grandmother. On learning that her granddaughter was alive, she started visiting. The neighbors and village elders were supportive of the reunification. A case worker prepared a plan, which included monitoring the family after reunification by the social worker and a Department of Children’s Service’s worker so they could see the family more often. Seeing how to do this monitoring and, more so, seeing the child thriving, led to an additional 18 reunifications of children from the same residential care facility.

The closure of 21 cases of reintegration in Guatemala during fiscal year 21 highlighted learning around sustainable or successful reintegration. Coupled with achievement and successes were

many challenges, the main challenge being COVID-19. CTWWC's reunification work required the ability to pivot and innovate to ensure the monitoring of children in their family placements, as well as to prevent separations. Many lessons have been learned about the importance of preparation of children and families for successful reunification and longer-term reintegration. It is also clear that other actors, such as courts and gatekeeping mechanisms, need more training on family care and their role in safe and sustained reintegration.

All the CTWWC demonstration countries saw the critical role that kin play in providing care for many children, supporting parents and each other in the reintegration process. When it comes to case management, reflections by case workers showed that working together with family fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment in parents, caregivers, and children and contributes to reintegration success.

Utilizing case management throughout reintegration

One of the most important tools for the social service workforce working in reintegration and family strengthening is case management. CTWWC has been building on global best practices with the development of a case management package that was adopted and officially launched by the Kenyan government and highlighted in the March 2021 [Better Care Network newsletter](#). The [case workers guidebook](#) was downloaded 45 times in the first 3 months. The version adapted for Guatemala informed the review of the Moldova national case management guidelines and tools. The package has informed the development of guidelines for case management in several other countries. A [Case Worker's Handbook](#) was developed to provide a simplified, user-friendly version. The [virtual monitoring tool](#), designed in 2020 and with over 100 downloads over the first year, continues to support case management as the pandemic continues. As more than 20 reintegration cases are closed in Guatemala, benchmarks and the participatory approach were noted as especially important when engaging families and providing opportunities for their empowerment and resilience. Despite the positive outcomes, there are still challenges in terms of the time a case management process can take and the human resources involved. Despite this, it has been illustrated many times that the investment of time, especially post-placement, is critical and can make the biggest difference to whether a reintegration is successful or not.

CTWWC LEARNING PRODUCTS

- [Kenya Case Management for Reintegration of Children into Family or Community Based Care Package \(Guidebook, Toolkit, Facilitator's Guide\)](#)
- [Guatemala Case Management Procedures for Reunification and Reintegration of Children and Adolescents into Family and Community-based Care \(ENG & ESP\)](#)
- [Moldova research summaries \(in Romanian\) Social Service Assessment, Case Management Review & Workforce Training Review \(Full reports and English summary coming soon\)](#)
- [Promoting Resilience Informed Care: a practical guidance resource for frontline workers in family-based care](#)
- [Guatemalan Coordination Mechanism to Prevent Separation](#)
- [Toolkit for Disability Inclusion in Care Reform](#)
- [Gatekeeping: A Global Fact Sheet](#)
- [CTWWC Family Strengthening Framework](#)

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