

*Aftercare*

**Facing an  
Uncertain  
Future**



**Supporting transitions for young people  
from Care to Independence**



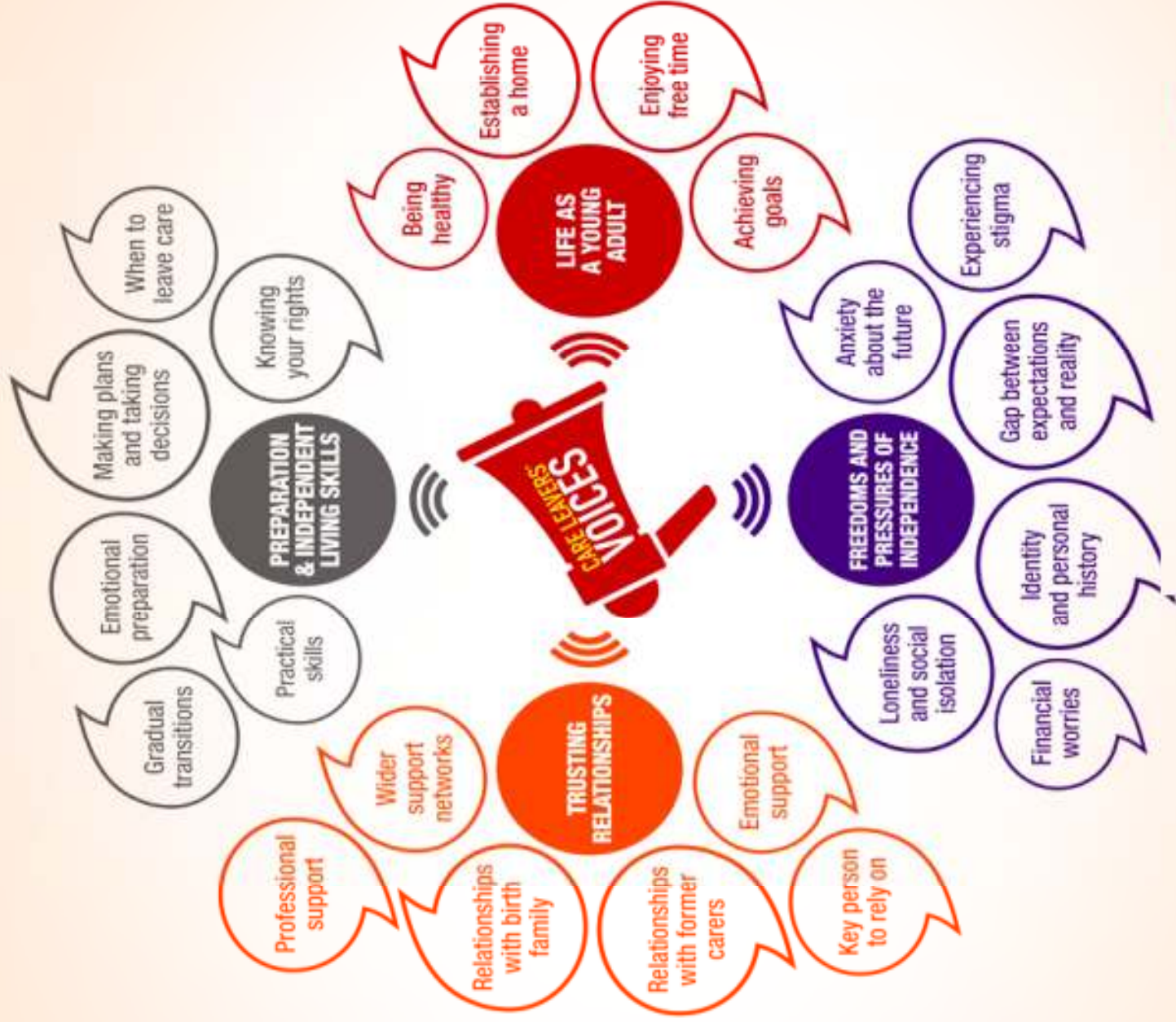
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## The Concept

Children aging out from childcare institutions are vulnerable to factors like unemployment, insecurity, low self-esteem, exploitations, psychological stress, physical and mental illness like depression and anxiety, disruption in education, homelessness, dependency and a lot of other adverse factors. These children form one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, and both government and wider society have a moral obligation to give them the support they need as they make the transition to adulthood and independent living. Children leaving care also expect the same level of care and support that other young people get from their parents and family. Research reports show that the quality of support that care leavers receive is patchy and that their journey through the first decade of adult life is often disrupted, unstable and troubled. Children leaving institutional care often struggle to cope in their new independent lives and this can lead to social exclusion and isolation, long term unemployment or involvement in crime.

Keeping the necessity of planned transitions for them for easing their mainstreaming into society, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 provides for 'Aftercare' for children without family or other support, who leave institutional care after they attain the age of 18 years, to sustain themselves during the transition to independent life beyond childcare institutions. Unless they are assisted in key matters like finance, employment, accommodation, health care, etc., the process of their transition from protected institutional care to independent adulthood and life thereafter may get derailed. It is the final stage in the continuum of care of institutionalized children. The objective of this after care program is to enable such children to adapt to the society and to encourage them to shift from an institution based life by providing appropriate measures such as handholding for career development, skill development training, financial support, assistance in job placement, and such other measures that contributes and facilitates the process of their social mainstreaming. This is to ensure that they are not left alone after completion of stay in institutions, but are helped for certain durations in order to make them reintegrated with the society.

# Perplexed World of a Care Leaver



# Understanding Issues and Expectations of Children leaving Institutional Care

## Experience of Leaving Care

- Timing, decision and circumstances to leave institutional care vary; some take it as a next positive step in life while for most others, it is independence too soon. Badly timed moves could negatively affect aspects of care leavers' lives, such as studying and education. Some feel it like an abrupt and shocking end to care while some others feel that they are too young. Most of the care leavers move to independent living at a very young age of 18 years. Decision to leave the care is primarily decided by the age factor.
- Children leaving institutional care usually feel that they have not received enough preparation support and many feel they are not ready to take on the challenges of adult life living independently.
- Too little support for them to develop practical skills, and many care leavers place high value on being well-prepared. Opportunities to learn the skills they need when they leave institutional care are very important.

## Life After Institutional Care

- Independence not always lives up to young people's hopes and plans. For many, it brings uncertainty about their future. Many consider it a stressful experience.
- For many, the best thing about leaving care is gaining independence - being able to make their own decisions, financial and social independence, get a job and their own home. In contrast, the worst thing is often the

responsibility of managing on their own and struggling on a low income.

- Children leaving institutional care often struggle to manage their income and money, and want more help regarding employment and financial security. Care leavers often struggle to make and manage their money, and this is an area where more help can be provided.

## Relationships

- Care leavers want people who cared for them in institutional life and helped them successfully move on from care, in their lives after transition too for standing by them. But not everyone finds the support they need post leaving institution care.
- Many young people feel very lonely and socially isolated after leaving care. Some reports that this affects their emotional well-being and triggers mental ill-health. They face the difficulty of navigating their way through their late teens and early twenties without a strong and stable social network to support them.
- Some care leavers struggle to trust others, because of disrupted past relationships or had previous let downs.
- Coping with transitions seems easier for care leavers, who find key persons to go to for help.
- Re-connecting with birth family leads to improved and strengthened relationships for some but for others, it triggers renewed disappointment or problems.

- Siblings and friends could be important sources of support, but many lose contact with these important people in due course of time.

### **Life as a Care Leaver**

- Young people often comments on being labelled or judged for being in care and a care leaver.
- Young people value being listened to, but their involvement is often ignored while making decisions which affect their lives and the services they receive.
- Many don't really feel part of the aftercare aftercare planning for them, and also feels it lacks connection to their lives. When pathway planning is positive, it helps young people to reflect, set targets and keep things on track.

- Children leaving institutional care are not always clear about their rights and entitlements and lack enough information. They need to be communicated adequately, properly and timely.

### **Responsibilities of Early Adulthood**

- Young people emphasize the importance of feeling safe and secure in their homes and neighbourhoods and having decent quality housing. They usually experience unsafe and poor quality accommodation. They feel living in an unsafe area is quite stressful and increases their vulnerability many fold.
- Education and/or employment can provide not only financial stability but also an alternative identity for them in society.

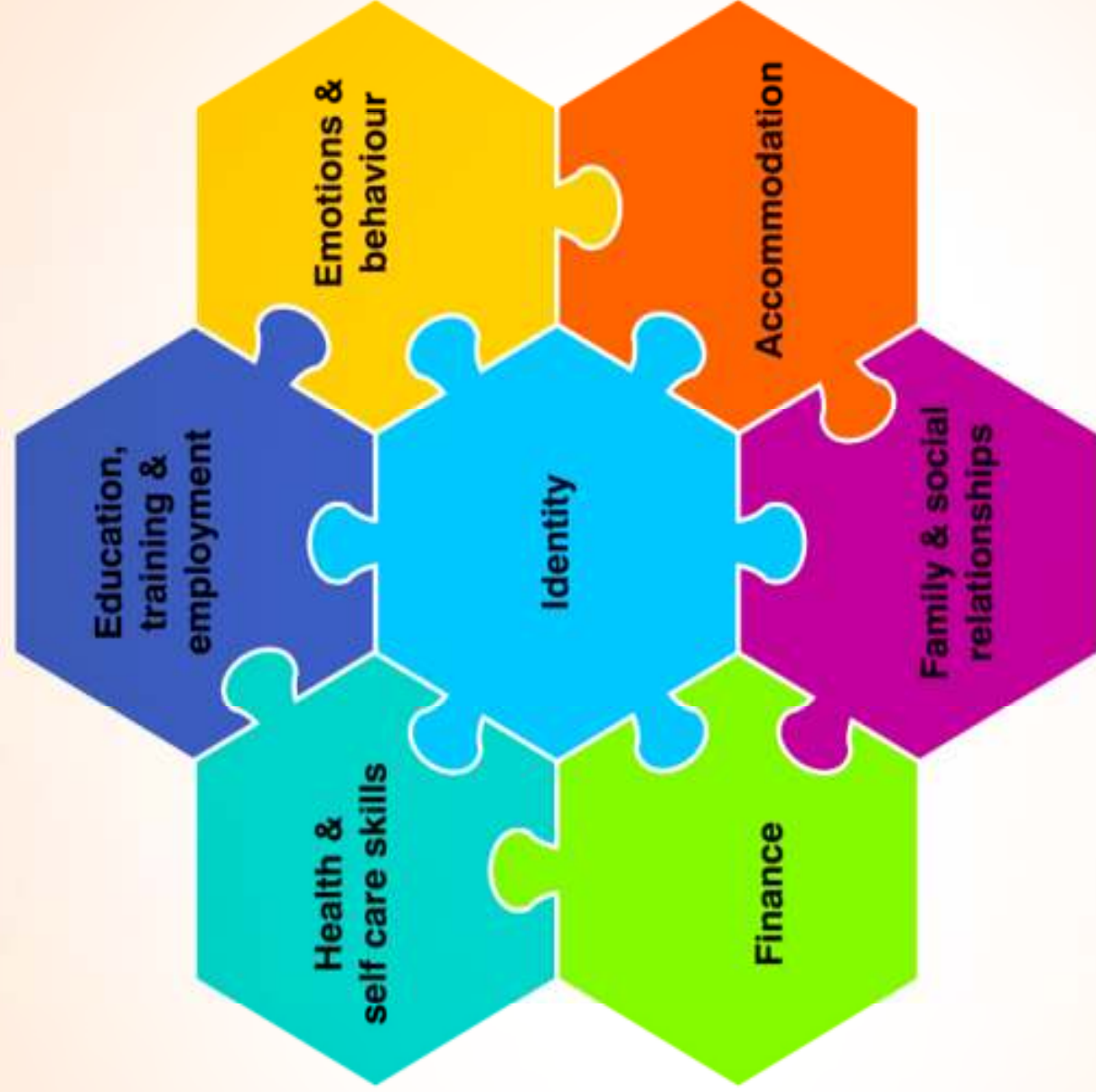
- Disrupted or negative experiences in institutions and schools; low self-esteem and confidence and changes in circumstances such as bereavement, family problems or becoming a parent could be barriers in many aspects, like education and employment.

- Young people too enjoy a range of hobbies; spending time with friends, playing sport and music but they often time, money and motivation as barriers to pursuing their personal hobbies and likings once they leave care.
- Many children leaving institutional care feels its adverse effects on their general health, which also leads to increased mental health problems.

### **Care Leavers with Additional Needs**

- Some care leavers are vulnerable to negative peer influence and financial or sexual exploitation within a short period of leaving care. Many could be dragged into the criminal justice system, and need to be guarded against these factors.
- Differently able young people feel that they deserve more attention while leaving the care but they feel of being treated differently from their peers and want the same opportunities for them as well.
- Some care leavers become parents in the early years after leaving care and many of those pregnancies are not planned, leaving them unprepared for shouldering parental responsibilities.
- Many worry about uncertain future as to what would happen next, and thus, need guidance and support to overcome these uncertainties.

# Key Focus Areas for Aftercare Plan



*The purpose of aftercare is to provide young people with a range of services to assist them with their needs as they transit into independent adult life. It is really important that assessment and care planning in consultation with a Care Leaver takes place prior to them leaving care. Children leaving care often feel like a 'cliff-edge', where they are suddenly responsible for managing budgets, running a home; and maintaining their participation in education or work on their own – with insufficient preparation for these challenges. The process of leaving care itself should not be rushed and 'aftercare planning' should start well in time. The planner must consider what the young person will need for support and how this will best be met while carefully devising Aftercare Plan. It requires advice, guidance and practical support for devising suitable Aftercare plans.*

## Legal and Policy Provisions in India/Odisha

'Aftercare' is still an emerging concept in the domain of child and youth care in India and a recent inclusion into the India's legal and policy framework. Provision for 'Aftercare' was first made under the now repealed the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, as an alternative measure for rehabilitation and social reintegration, applicable for children leaving institutional care. As far as the State of Odisha is concerned, more than 16,000 children are currently under institutional care in about 272 childcare institutions as estimated by the Government of Odisha. Presently, aftercare services are prescribed in the following legal and policy instruments.

### A) Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

*Section 2(5):* "aftercare" means making provisions of support, financial or otherwise, to persons, who have completed the age of 18 years but not have completed the age of twenty-one years, and have left institutional care to join the mainstream of the society;

*Section 46 (Aftercare of children leaving child care institution):* 'Any child leaving a child care institution on completion of 18 years age may be provided with financial support in order to facilitate child's reintegration into the mainstream of the society in the manner as may be prescribed.'

### B) Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016 as well as Odisha Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Rules, 2018

The key highlights of Section 25 under the JJ Model Rules, 2016, as well as Section 90 under Odisha JJ Rules, 2018, are as follows:

- The State government shall prepare a programme for children who have to leave child care institutions on attaining 18 years of age by providing for their education, giving them employable skills and placement. Places for stay will also be provided in order to facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration into the mainstream of the society.
- Aftercare may be provided till the age of 21 years, and in exceptional cases, two more years on completing 21 years of age.
- The District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) shall prepare a list of organizations, institutions and individuals interested for aftercare services as per their areas of interest like education, medical support, nutrition, vocational training etc.
- A post-release plan shall be prepared two months before the child is due to leave the child care institution
- Juvenile Justice Board, Child Welfare Committee or the Children's Court shall monitor and examine the effectiveness of the aftercare programme.
- Children, who are placed in aftercare programme, shall be provided funds by the State Government for their essential expenses, and such funds shall be transferred directly to their bank accounts.
- The services provided under aftercare programme may include:
  - ✓ Community group housing on temporary basis for 6 to 8 persons
  - ✓ Stipend during vocational training or scholarship for higher education and support till employment

- ✓ Arrangement for skills training and placement in commercial establishments
- ✓ Provision of a counselor to stay in regular contact with such persons to discuss their rehabilitation plans
- ✓ Provision for creative outlets for channelizing their energy and to make them face crisis situations effectively
- ✓ Arrangement of loans and subsidies for entrepreneurial activities

### C) Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)

As per provisions of ICPS, DCPU shall identify suitable voluntary organizations that will run such Aftercare programmes. These organizations shall formulate an 'aftercare' programme for these children for a period of three years. Based on the case to case basis, a Juvenile Justice Board or Child Welfare Committee can order placement of a juvenile/child in the after-care programme as per provisions laid down under JJ Act, 2000 and respective State Rules. The JJB/CWC shall mark a copy of the order to the DCPU for arranging after-care for the juvenile/child. The State Child Protection Society shall in turn release grants up to a maximum of Rs. 2000/- per child per month to the organisation running the aftercare program. This amount shall include basic needs of the child/youth including food, clothing, health care and shelter; age appropriate and need based education and vocational training; stipend; and any other requirements.

### International Legal Instrument UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2009

The prescriptions of the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children for strengthening aftercare programme are the following:

- Childcare agencies and facilities should 'systematically aim at preparing children to assume self-reliance and to integrate fully in the community.'
- The process of transition from care to aftercare should take into consideration children's gender, age, maturity and particular circumstances.
- Children leaving care should be encouraged to take part in the planning of aftercare life. Children with special needs, such as disabilities, should benefit from an appropriate support system. Both the public and the private sectors should be encouraged to employ children from different care services, particularly children with special needs.
- Special efforts should be made to allocate to each child, whenever possible, a specialized person who can facilitate the child's independence when leaving care.
- Aftercare should be prepared as early as possible, well before the child leaves the care setting.
- In order to make the young people financially independent, they should be imparted educational and vocational training. This should be considered as part of their life skills education.
- Children leaving care should have access to social, legal, health and financial services.



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