

# FOSTER CARE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT



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# I. INTRODUCTION

The UN guidelines on Alternative Care of Children are a non-binding international instrument. Its main thrust is to reinforce the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the relevance of other international instruments regarding protection and well-being of children without family care, and to promote alternative care options for them. The guidelines on Alternative Care provide definitions on parental care, the child's family environment, goals for alternative care, and the criteria to decide alternative care placements.

The main purpose of the guidelines is to support the efforts of stakeholders to ensure children live with their families, reunite with them, or live in family-like relationships. It places the responsibility to create the necessary infrastructure to promote family care with the State. The government has the primary obligation to adhere to the provisions of this agreement. It is expected to frame policies and appropriate programme interventions for the social protection and nurturing of families. However, these efforts towards non-institutional care should in no way minimise the need and importance of institutional care

The directions to the Government are very clear:

“State must provide alternative care to children in need of care and protection and ensure they enjoy their right to a family. Institutions run under the guidance of the state shall offer best possible care and rehabilitation opportunities to the most vulnerable groups of children in need of care and protection”.

In India, alternative care options for children were included in the JJ Act 2015. The three major alternative forms of care in the JJ Act, 2015 are Adoption, Sponsorship, and Foster Care.

Adoption is an old custom firmly rooted in the cultural beliefs of the Hindu community to fulfil the needs of adults. Children, especially boys, were taken in adoption by childless couples so that the boy may perform the last rites of the parents and inherit their property. These adoptions were promoted by the family. With time, this understanding changed and adoption was made possible to all who wished to take care of children who were not their biological children. Adoption in India is governed by the guidelines of CARA.

Sponsorship or financial assistance was earlier incorporated as an incentive through the Department of Education. It was also offered through various other departments like the SC/ST/MBC welfare and Sports and Youth Welfare. Today, it is covered under the JJ Act to prevent institutionalisation of children due to poverty or lack of financial resources in the family.



Foster Care is a relatively new concept in India. In the joint family system prevalent earlier children were taken care of by relatives in the absence of their parents. However, the shift to the nuclear family system has reduced the importance of this traditional system. The increase in CCIs can also be a reason.

While the Act directs authorities to implement foster care, it has proved difficult to introduce it in reality. Bringing up children in a family not related to the child, by foster parents, for a temporary period of time is a great challenge. The concept is new, and adequate efforts were not taken to convey the idea to the public, or equip child protection functionaries with the knowledge required to implement it.

It is the need of the hour to understand and analyse existing resources, in terms of manpower and knowledge, related to Foster Care. To facilitate foster care placement it is essential to identify a mechanism which can promote placement and address impediments in the process.

It is in this context, the ICCW-TN proposed to build a model for Foster Care in Tiruvannamalai District in 2019. The district was selected based on two factors – one that it is a socially and economically backward district, and the other being the high rates of seasonal migration. The district also has considerable ST population. Given these factors, it was felt that children here were exposed to several vulnerabilities that the foster care model would benefit both parents and the children. Hence, Tiruvannamalai district was selected for creating a model on foster care. The project included introduction of child-friendly procedures in implementing foster care and creating a resource base in Tamil to sensitize and educate officials at various levels to promote foster care.

Adhering to the guidelines, the model project in Tiruvannamalai was to demonstrate foster care placements of 10-15 children and study best practices and challenges. The two major setbacks for the implementation of the project were the parliamentary elections in 2019 and the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. The original plan to launch the project in March, 2019 was postponed to July, 2019 due to the elections. The pandemic and lockdown which followed reduced the time spent by the team on field. Despite meticulous planning and implementation by ICCW-TN, field realities posed a lot of challenges which resulted in placement of not even one child by February 2020. Fortunately, it was possible to place two children in March. Some of the challenges were:

1. Lack of community awareness
2. Low level of knowledge among the functionaries on procedures and nuances involved in placing children in foster care
3. Lack of sensitivity and involvement of NGOs working with children
4. Caste and religious bias



## II. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNTS

### 2.1 AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL:

- Prospective parents who express interest to foster a child often request for a child below 3 years. The reason for this demand is that they feel that children below the age of 3 years can be groomed easily in their family rather than taking the responsibility to rear a child with already set habits or practices. Most of these parents are childless couples who were rejected as prospective adoptive parents as they could not conform to the conditions prescribed by the Adoption Regulations. They look at foster care as the next choice.
- There is a provision in foster care where biological parents can retain contact with the child during the stay with foster parents. This is unacceptable to some foster parents, as they do not feel comfortable with the fact that the child will stay connected to their biological parents and will not bond with them while under their care. They fear being disturbed by the members of the biological family while the child stays with them. For childless parents who wish to eventually enter into a guardianship agreement later in life, this becomes very threatening and discouraging.
- Finding parents from the same district (Tiruvannamalai) is difficult as most of them are financially backward and may not come forward to foster a child. The question is whether this restriction is really needed? Based on field experience, it is better to permit inter-district placements.
- Economic and educational status of people can act as a drawback to place children in foster care in a backward district like Tiruvannamalai.
- Lack of awareness among the public about foster care is a very big challenge. Dissemination of information about foster care is very poor. It is felt that the government must adopt suitable campaigns to sensitize people about foster care.
- Parents feel CCIs are better as the child will be constantly under their view. They look at CCIs as a hostel facility. They do not want their children growing up in another family. A large measure of social pride and ownership of the child seems to be operating in the parents minds.
- Fear of safety and security of a child in foster care is present in the minds of people. Foster care seems new to them and the level of acceptability is very low.

### 2.2 AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL:

- CCIs may be unwilling to place children in foster care as these institutions are being funded by external funders (particularly foreign funds) and the fund is usually received based on the number of children and reducing the number of children may affect them financially.



- During the weekly follow up, most CCIs reply that they are trying to place children in foster care, but convincing their parents/guardians is a difficult task. CCIs find it hard to place even orphans in foster care as there is resistance from the child's relatives/guardians. It was learned that, when the representatives of the CCIs talk about placing a child in foster care, it gives a notion to the parents/guardians that the CCIs have become incompetent and hence they try to place the children elsewhere. Apparently, the parents/guardians think that the CCI is trying to sell the child.
- DCPUs have designated monthly targets and find it difficult to find extra time to sensitize the VLCPCs about foster care. The Government fails to appreciate the psychological and legal issues involved in foster care. It is difficult for functionaries involved in promoting foster care as social/behavioral change cannot be brought overnight.

### 2.3 AT THE STATE LEVEL (ADMINISTRATIVE LEVEL):

- During trainings with DCPU staff, some of the staff did not have experience of working in a children-related sector. Their lack of knowledge and experience was a hindrance in implementing the Foster Care program at the district level.
- There are 860 VLCPCs in 18 blocks in Tiruvannamalai but it was observed that the VLCPCs were not aware of foster care. So their participation was not possible. The VLCPCs in Tiruvannamalai were inactive and lacked training. In one of the attempts which were made to explain the concept of foster care to 5 VLCPCs by the Program Coordinator, and Non-Institutional Care Protection Officer, and Social worker, it was difficult to even convene them together for a meeting. Many meetings were called off as the members of the VLCPCs were uncooperative and lacked understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the community. Their co-operation is much needed as they are the leaders in their community and can identify and rehabilitate the children in their community. VLCPC represents a huge social machinery that can bring in social change.
- A SAA (Specialized Adoption Agency) was opened recently in Tiruvannamalai. There were only three children between 0-3 years available.
- The duration of financial support to the foster family is restricted by the government to 3 years. The financial support is given only for those who are really in need and to provide better provisions for the foster child. So when the financial support is withdrawn after three years and what will happen to the child if the child continues to stay in the foster family. This is a challenge.
- There are many questions that persist at the field level among the staff. A comprehensive Workers' manual that includes an SOP and roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders must be prepared in consultation with trained social workers, psychologists, and legal experts. Some of the commonly asked questions include:
  - Can a child be placed in a different district?
  - How frequently can a child meet his/her biological family in a month?
  - What is the age criterion for parents and children? What is the justification for the age criteria?
  - During follow up, if the child and parents give contradictory statements of abuse, who should be trust?
  - If the child is in a private school, who should pay the child's school fee?
  - A child who has been victim of the sexual abuse be placed in foster care?
  - What if the child wants to return after 2 or 3 months? Who will take care of the school joining process?



## 2.4 OPINIONS/MYTHS AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Only children below 5 years will be able to bond with a foster family.
- Foster care may be difficult in villages.
- Foster system will suit only affluent families.
- Sending a foster child to higher education is impossible.
- Parents who are poor/ seriously ill may send their children into foster care.

An interested adult who wishes to foster may be asked to visit the CCIs, build rapport with the children, and then may choose to accept a child in foster care.



*“Foster Care is not a marathon... it is a sprint” (UNICEF)*



## III. LARGER CHALLENGES

1. Under the JJ Act, adoption is linked with foster care and the rule says that only children above 6 years can be sent to foster care. The younger children must be given in adoption. This has placed a limitation on the implementation of foster care.
2. Foster Care is a short term alternative care option. According to the rule, the order for maximum period of stay under foster care is not more than one year. In practice, however, children are with foster families for a period of 3 years. After the successful stay of the child with the foster family the CWC can renew the foster placement order for another 3 years. The questions that come up are:
  - How many years can the child stay in the foster family?
  - What is the legal status of the foster parents? This is an important area that needs clarification. Neither the Act nor the rules have clear cut guidelines. In reality, foster care is a viable alternative child care method. Foster care needs to be promoted as an individual care option. Legal clarification in simple English or in the vernacular language need to be prepared and circulated.
  - Following placement in foster care who will sign for admission in school, progress reports, or in the case of medical emergencies?
  - At present there are no guidelines which define the legal rights of foster parents.
3. Lack of role clarification- The stakeholders involved in the process of foster care are CCI, DCPU and CWC.
  - The children are with CCI
  - DCPU is the mechanism vested with the authority to implement FC
  - CWC is the approval authority for FC. They have to clear the request for FC at every stage and approve the selection of both the child and parents and issue the order for FC.



Hence it is essential to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all the three functionaries. The cooperation among the three authorities ultimately determines the success of the program.



## IV. KEY LEARNINGS

1. Tiruvannamalai, one of the most economically backward districts, was chosen for piloting this project considering factors such as migration and economic backwardness. However, finding suitable foster families became a challenging task. Foster parents needed to belong to a socio-economic profile where they could provide the needs of the children. Poverty is the major reason for institutionalising children in the district and is also a deterrent to place children in foster care. A district with a better socio-economic profile could have been selected for foster care placements.
2. Current practices involve connecting foster care with the adoption process. Pre-adoptive foster care is not the same as foster care. Foster care and Adoption need to be considered as two different entities of Alternative Care. This concept is not clear even among the stakeholders in spite of trainings. Thus, basic understanding of the difference between foster care and adoption must be reiterated in every capacity building activity. Foster care needs to be delinked from adoption, in order to promote it.
3. Prospective parents who express their interest to foster a child often request for children of lesser age. The reason for this demand is because they feel children who are younger can be groomed easily in their family rather than taking the responsibility to rear a child with already set habits or practices. The misconception that fostering children who are above three or four years is difficult and problematic needs to be challenged. This belief needs to be replaced with a positive attitude from the community. Older children can be taken care of with appropriate parenting knowledge and skills.
4. Waiting for six years hoping that the child will be adopted has proved to be not in the interests of the child. If children are offered immediately, within 6 to 8 months, to the foster families they will be able to bond with the family better. Discussions with the team helped to clarify the differences between abandoned and surrendered children.

(a) An abandoned child has never enjoyed the care of the mother. If and when they are taken into a loving family, the child will blossom, the developmental deficits due to lack of care can be reduced and a natural bonding emerges. (b) If the child is surrendered, they would have seen the parents and enjoyed their love and care. These children are greatly affected when they are surrendered. They slowly overcome their situation and try to develop a loving and caring relationship with either one or more of the children or caregivers in the institutions. When these children are separated from the CCI, they again face separation anxiety. For some reason, when the foster care placement fails and the children are surrendered back to CWC/CCI by the foster parents. The child experiences anxiety again. This is a psychological set back where the child's trust in the adult is completely broken. This can lead to severe psychological issues. It is the duty of the CCI staff, social workers, DCPU and CWC to protect the child from these types of circumstances.
5. Training for both children and foster parents are essential:
  - Trainings must be delivered in a professional manner. The parents must be helped to develop an objective and positive attitude.
  - Simulating sessions need to be organised focussing on how to respond to the child and engage them in meaningful activities on a day-to-day basis.



- High expectations from the parents for the child can go against the child and lead to a judgemental attitude towards the behaviour of the child. Change in behaviour does not happen immediately. It happens gradually in a constant supportive environment.
  - The training given to the parents should include essentials of child development theories, parenting skills and coping strategies.
  - Many times the social worker was emotionally involved started to sympathize with the parents. This in turn reflects in their relationship with the child. The staff engaged in foster care placements need to have emotional intelligence to handle the situation and use appropriate language to convey their thoughts to the parents.
  - Adults need to look from the child's perspective. Acceptance of the child's idea is essential
6. There is a provision in the Foster Care arrangement where the biological parents can retain their contacts with the child. This is unacceptable to most foster parents. They do not feel comfortable with the fact that the child can connect with the biological parents while under their care. Foster parents fear being disturbed by the members of the biological family while the child stays with them.
  7. During our interactions with the DCPU and CCI teams, they noted that placing older children in foster care was problematic.

It can be explained on the basis of "Attachment theory". Children tend to form an "attachment relationship" with the care giver, staff member, or an older child in the CCI. This can be handled in two ways: one is to place the child in foster care before they form any attachment relationship with others in the institution and the other is placing them young. Children become attached to adults who are sensitive and responsive in social interactions with them, and who remain as consistent caregivers. The earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact on them and it continues throughout their life (John Bowlby).

8. Continuum of care: All child care programs are a continuum - starting from pregnancy, health, education, family, alternative care and so on. Different aspects of care cannot be divided based on administrative convenience. Foster care is a temporary form of alternative care for families going through a crisis or a placement of a child without parental care in a caring family
9. "Preparing the child is of utmost importance. The Project team learnt it the hard way.

A 10 yr old child was willing to go with his foster parents, when produced before the CWC. They had to wait for the order till the next day. When they returned to the hotel room in the evening,, the child wanted to return to the CCI. He was pacified with ice cream and chocolates. However, within two days he wanted to return to the CCI to meet his friends and the "Anna", the warden. No amount of counselling was helpful and the parents returned the child to CCI with a heavy heart. Sometimes, parents can decide to return the child to the CCI and this can cause stress to the child and the parent. Our social worker was upset. This experience taught the importance of developing a warm but objective state of mind. : It is essential to develop a neutral and non-judgemental attitude towards children.

10. Based on the field experiences, it was learnt that parents see CCIs as an option to share their responsibility of rearing children. CCIs were related to a place for providing better education to the children; they were referred as hostel instead of a home by the parents. Further, many parents who were daily wage labourers or migrant workers, preferred to leave their children in CCIs for better protection while they are away. In addition. Placing the child in CCIs was found to be cost-effective. So, parents felt that CCIs are a better place for children to get education and safety. Foster Care was not welcomed by the parents as they felt that the children may lose their bonding with them. They were also concerned about caste and religious factors. They feared their extended family and neighbors will not approve of it. Children with parents/guardians show reluctance to place their children in foster care. Hence, Orphans need to be prioritised in the alternative care pyramid. Children, who donot have both their parents, need to be given preference.
11. Training modules on foster care must be devised. While a lot of training was conducted for various stakeholders, they were just for information dissemination. The next step would be to offer trainings to build



their perspective, attitude and skills. The team members shared with us the beneficial effect of the materials prepared by the Council.

12. Legal Issues:

Strict guidelines and SOPs on legal implications must be designed. These guidelines need to be reviewed or changed every 3 years. There is no clear demarcation between roles pertaining to Guardianship vs. Fit person.

13. While foster care is mentioned as temporary care, there needs to be clarity on the nature and term of foster care as well as how frequently children in foster care can contact their biological families.

14. All decisions must be based on the best interest principle.

A family wanted to foster a child as they were disqualified to adopt as per CARA rules. The family owned lot of properties and the other close relatives were hoping that they would inherit the property. At the time of home-visit for assessing the family, details of this was revealed. The suspicion that the child could be affected emerged. The placement was deferred in the interest of the child. A guideline need to be prepared to help the concerned authorities to make a fair decision.

15. CCI related issues

- The role of the CCI is essential to look at. CCIs which function with a charitable attitude that they are doing the best possible services by “looking after and educating the poor children” must be relooked. A Rights based approach needs to be inculcated. At present, CCIs consider foster care as an intrusion in their daily affairs and resist the idea. CCI staff are not keen about Alternative Care options and do not attend trainings wholeheartedly. There is a need to apply concepts of Alternative Care in their institutions. During our training, CCIs were requested to depute one person as a key contact for all foster care training and process. However, this was not followed by any of the NGO/ CCIs in the district.

- CCIs are at times funded by external funders such as foreign donors who give money based on the number of children in the institution. Placing children in foster care may reduce the number of children and affect them financially.

- Most CCIs, when approached about foster care, replied that it was difficult to convince parents. They noted that parents felt that the CCIs were incompetent and could not take care of their children, and were trying to place them elsewhere. Some parents/guardians entertained the idea that the CCIs were trying to sell their child.

16. Roles of several staff members in the DCPU are not clear. The Program officers in charge of non-institutional Care need to be trained to implement foster care. Members lack necessary information, skill, or are disinterested due to lack of a clear role. Identifying and supporting one member in the DCPU, will help create a cadre of officers who can monitor and take forward the implementation of foster care.

17. Foster care requires a multifaceted approach involving children, parents, community and relevant professionals. A change in attitude must be worked upon in the community through repeated awareness/ sensitization mechanisms in the form of regular discussions in the village Panchayat and village level child protection committees. Strategies like reaching the communities through street plays, media exposure and IEC materials would help promote foster care. Successful foster care stories can be made available in the form of videos which can be played in the community structure meetings (like the VLCPC) to enable homogenous, efficient and quality reach of information (upto outreach areas).

18. VLCPC – There are 860 VLCPCs in 18 blocks in Tiruvannamalai but it was observed that the VLCPCs in general lacked motivation. The VLCPCs in Tiruvannamalai are inactive and disorganized. Attempts were made to explain about the concept of foster care to five VLCPCs with the support of the DCPU but it was difficult even to convene them. Hence the meeting was called off several times. VLCPCs are an important stake holder. It is essential to devise a strategy to involve them in all issues relating to children.

19. Ensuring safe physical environment: Even in developed countries foster care is associated with child abuse. Therefore robust procedures and scrutiny of the documents must be ensured to prevent such adverse situations by matching the children with the right foster family.



## V. EXPERIENCES OF TEAM MEMBERS



**Mrs. Girija Kumarbabu, Senior Consultant** – “Foster care is an emotionally charged concept. We need to take utmost care to protect the children from emotional trauma while placing them in foster care. It is a huge responsibility given to us as duty bearers to carry out this process. We should carefully adhere to the principle of best interest to the child”.



**Dr. Ishwarya Rajan, Integrated Child Protection Scheme-State Consultant UNICEF** – “Foster care may be more successful if children are directly placed in foster families instead of keeping them in CCIs temporarily until a suitable foster care family is found. If a child is left to stay in the CCIs for a significant amount of time the children might have already got accustomed to the advantage of being in the CCIs and may show reluctance/ aversion/ adjustment issues to cope in a family environment. Whereas if a child(in need) from a family is quickly placed into another family, adjustment issues may be minimal. To achieve this, maintaining a database of potential foster care families is important.



**Dr. G. Neathravathi, Reintegration Specialist, ICCW-TN** – “One of the major challenges was to identify potential foster parents. The field level functionaries such as Anganwadi workers, ANMs, SHGs, Local School Teacher, VLCPC and Local panchayat members should be sensitized to identify suitable families and to create a list of potential and willing foster parents at every panchayat level. So if any child is been identified in distressed family situations, they can be easily placed in a suitable alternative family within their familiar and known social circle. It is akin to kinship care”.



**Sonal .P, Reintegration Officer, ICCW-TN** – “This project helped me to understand the psychological and social barriers of parents to accept a child under foster care. The social stigma and culture attached with caste has significant impact on the parents’ attitude towards foster care. So it is very important to bring about a social commitment among the general community to promote foster care. Further there is lack of clarity among the DCPU team on their role towards foster care. The DCPU team has to be equipped with adequate knowledge and role clarity for better delivery of foster care services in the district”.



**Alstin Francis Evanisevick .P, Reintegration Officer, ICCW-TN** – “This project made me understand that family is the most significant influence in a child’s life. Every child has different needs and personalized care with due attention is possible only in a family like setting. Hence foster care can be a better alternative for institutionalization and help every child to experience living in an family environment”.



## VI. ISSUES AND CONCERNS TO BE ADDRESSED WITH THE SUPPORT OF DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEFENCE

### i. Process-related challenges:

- a. How to make foster care acceptable as an important measure for deinstitutionalisation?
- b. How to identify, build, and sustain the enthusiasm of selected foster parents?
- c. How to maintain a community-owned effort?
- d. How to increase the role of VLCPC?
- e. How to overcome the religious, social and economic barriers?
- f. How to bring in other stake holders?

### ii. Funding challenges:

- a. How to allocate and manage the funds in a better way - Not as an amount of Rs.4000 per month for a family for 3 years- but a holistic plan outlay with appropriate funds from the ICPS and contribution from the state Government.

### iii. Human Resource:

1. How to build and implement target and sector specific perspectives/skills etc.?
2. Build a team specialised in works related to alternative care.

### iv. Prevention services:

1. Tiruvannamalai- Migration is a huge problem. It is one of the most backward districts in the state. Due to scarce livelihood opportunities, seasonal migration is common. Available resources from civil society organisations and state welfare measures should be made accessible to poverty-stricken families to help them retain children in their families. Poverty can never be a reason for institutionalisation of children.
2. Identify suitable single women candidates in every block, including widows, single women, and train them as foster parents. They can be guided by the DCPO.
3. Role of VLCPC - The VLCPCs in Tiruvannamalai are inactive and disorganized. It is very important to strengthen the VLCPC so they can act as gate keepers to prevent unnecessary admission of children in CCIs as well as strengthen the family in times of emergencies and difficulties.
4. CWC: The functioning of the CWCs needs to improve. Issuing the legally free certificate for adoption must be issued by the CWC. The reports from the DCPU are open for discussion by the CWC. They may call for another report from P.O. Too many people are involved in the process and there is constant struggle to prove their power. The power play between the DCPU (DCPO), the CWC, the P.O. and the NGO/CCI does not help the children. It only delays the placement.
5. No effort has been taken for preventing family disintegration so far by the Govt.



## VII. IMPEDIMENTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT

1. The strategy adopted was narrow. The council had to work with the government's top down approach which was not suitable for ushering in changes in perspectives/behaviour.
2. The reasons for choosing alternative care has not been presented in a convincing manner. It is essential to develop a convincing document for describing the negative impacts of institutional care and the benefits of growing in a loving family. This is essential. It can be an important tool for advocacy.
3. The council could not take up community based work for an entire year due to COVID-19.
4. The model rules and the state rules do not specify the process for Foster Care. It is being looked at from an administrative angle. The Council had to working within this frame work. SOP in an easily understandable manner needs to be prepared. This problem was faced while inducting new staff members.
5. The NGO's were dependent on the government order that specified the number of children they could admit in their institution to receive the grant amount. This interdependence could not be broken.



## VIII. WAY FORWARD

Recommendations: These recommendations are the result of our understanding and our experiences gathered during the implementation of the model project on Foster Care in Thiruvannamalai. We request the Govt. to review the suggestions seriously. The Council has always been focussed on the effectiveness of service delivery so that the positive programmes announced by the Govt. reaches the most vulnerable groups of children.

1. There is an urgent need for a well-defined policy on Alternative Care for children. At present, all the officials engaged in child protection services in DCPU and members of CWC believe that Foster Care is related to Adoption. Adoption can continue to be the first line of choice for placing the child in a family. But in reality, foster care is a temporary placement of a child in another family and hence more suitable for protecting the child during an individual crisis in the family. Foster care includes Kinship care, group care etc. The DCPO and the members of CWC need to remember this while taking a decision about a child in need of care and protection.
2. This thematic understanding is not there among the stake holders. According to the Guideline for Alternative care it is the responsibility of the Govt. to ensure that all steps are taken by the State to fulfil the right of all children to family care. A well thought out policy statement will give directions to the State to adhere to the Guidelines.
3. The policy needs to be comprehensive, empowering all parts of the system of child protection. Foster Care is a special form of child care that needs to be widely promoted with the government. It is essential that the Department of Education, Social Welfare, Rural development and other such departments that offer services to families are involved in the process of developing the policy and programmes. The state can convene a consultative group with legal experts, Psychologists and social workers to address the gaps in the present form of implementing the foster care programme. Alternative care reforms need to be monitored by a high level committee to improve Inter departmental co-ordination at all levels.
4. The Finances and funding is an important area for ushering in changes. The Govt. should announce a healthy budget for implementing alternate care programmes. The support announced in the ICPS scheme is minimal. More importantly, it is not being paid to the foster parents regularly on a monthly basis. There are no known special benefits for foster families at present. The government can announce special benefits and incentives for foster families.
5. The Government has to relook at the grant pattern and incentivise promotion of Foster Care by CCIs. These benefits can be extended to all institutions, not only to government CCIs but also to private institutions for the promotion of foster care. All institutions can be motivated by incentives / recognition etc., for supporting foster care placements.



6. Effort to enhance reintegration need to be accelerated so that the probability of children growing up in families can increase. Reintegration is possible only when it emerges as a priority for the Govt. A strict adherence to gatekeeping policy needs to become a prerequisite for CCIs to get recognition from the Govt.
7. The VLCPCs are to be considered as a grassroot vehicle for promoting alternative care programmes for child care as well as effectively preventing family disintegration. These committees are in a position to link the family to access already existing Govt. Schemes and programmes. It is essential to launch a well-designed training programme for the members of VLCPCs
8. The time is ripe for launching a multi-sectoral, multi media campaign for promoting foster care as a child friendly method of providing a child with a family. This can be part of nation building effort appealing to the younger generation as a way of contributing back to the society..
9. The Govt. should take responsibility for building the capacities of all the persons working in the field of child care. This is an important area of operation. A well-defined curriculum on child protection needs to be prepared and the necessary resource materials have to be prepared in vernacular language. A process of certification needs to be introduced. Well informed and effectively trained personnel are the back bone of child protection services.
10. The relationship among the DCPU, CWC and CCI needs to be improved. It is necessary to prepare a detailed SOP giving clear directions for working together as a team. The roles and responsibilities of the various members of the child protection system need to be clearly defined.

The CWC members will change once in three years whereas the team of professional staff members at the DCPU are likely to continue to work for a long time. Hence efforts will be directed towards building an amicable and positive relationship among the three wings namely, CWC, CCI and DCPU.

11. The state must convene a consultative group with legal experts, Psychologists and social workers to address the gaps in the present form of implementing the foster care programme.
12. The interests of children need to be protected at every level and utmost care to be taken to prevent failure of placement. Psychological support and counselling facilities must be available to children, whenever they are in need of it. The best interest of the child should be the guiding principle for all decisions.
13. Roles of several staff members in the DCPU are not clear. The Program officers in charge of non-institutional Care can be trained to implement foster care. Members lack necessary information, skill, or are disinterested due to lack of a clear role. Identifying and supporting one member in the DCPU will help create a cadre of officers who can monitor and take forward the implementation of foster care.
14. A state-level network of CCIs who are interested in implementing foster care can be created. The government can support them for promoting and implementing foster care.
15. Foster parents' forum: It is important to establish a communication platform for foster care parents to share their experiences and knowledge on rearing foster children. This way, peer knowledge sharing can be promoted which can result in reduction of failures associated with foster care.

