Rapid Assessment of careleavers' perception around Networks and Networking

Aide et Action

Changing the world through Education

September 2023

I am pleased to present this rapid assessment study to not only inform the structure and functions of the National Careleavers Network but also to resonate with care-leavers experiences and expectations. It was thought imperative to conduct a rapid assessment around perceptions of care-leavers around networks and its perceived or experienced utility. By delving into their perceptions and insights, this study seeks to guide the development of the NCLN, making it a relevant and effective support system for care-leavers in their unique journey. Additionally, the study is poised to uncover key insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with ensuring the NCLN's sustainability over time. In particular, the study aims to shed light on how care-leavers establish connections among themselves, the specific benefits they derive or aspire to obtain from formal networks, and the immediate needs they face as they navigate the transition into adulthood. The study's reach extends across nine diverse states - Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan It is expected that findings from this study will be informative for care-leavers, development practitioners and CSOs that are working with care-leavers and /or care-leavers network.

Aide et Action is co-ordinating to accelerate the on-going work with care-leavers (children who leave orphanages/shelter homes/other institutions on turning 18-years) and facilitate the formation of a Network for themselves.

Sincerely,
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Regional Manager, Guwahati Regional Office
Aide et Action

The journey from institutional care to independent living is particularly challenging for children without family support. Recognizing this, the Government of India, through initiatives like Mission Vatsalaya, is committed to supporting care-leavers. This report presents a rapid assessment conducted by Aide et Action, aiming to inform the development of a National Care-leavers Network (NCLN) that effectively addresses the needs of care-leavers across India. The objectives of conducting this study were to understand formal and informal networking among care-leavers and to analyze the variance between perceived and experienced utility of care leaver networks.

The study covered nine diverse states (Assam, J&K, Karnataka, Bihar, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan), employing a modified stratified random sampling approach due to field challenges. A well-crafted questionnaire, refined through collaboration with care-leavers, was utilized for data collection, both online and offline. FGDs explored care-leavers' perspectives on NCLN membership criteria, contributions, and outreach to remote care-leavers. Key findings underscore the significance of engagement, communication skills, and leadership qualities. Care-leavers expressed commitment to mutual support, advocacy, and representing state-specific needs.

The key recommendations from the study are to define clear selection criteria for membership of NCLN emphasising engagement, representation, and commitment, to strengthen communication channels, to advocate for policy support through empowerment of care-leavers to influence policies supporting their well-being and to foster a collective voice. Apart from this a major need is to develop a clear vision and support that can be offered through NCLN for clear benefits of joining NCLN.

As per responses, one can observe that majority of care-leavers fall within the 18 to 25 age group and all the responses are gender balanced irrespective of diverse backgrounds. The major challenge faced by care-leavers as per this study is uncertainty about their housing post-institutional care . The study provides valuable insights into care-leavers' experiences, guiding the development of the NCLN. Recommendations aim to create a self-sustaining and impactful national network tailored to the unique needs of care-leavers in India. The NCLN, with a well-defined vision and service offerings, has the potential to be a transformative force in supporting care-leavers on their journey to independent living.

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1. BACKGROUND:

Children with experience of institutionalisation struggle during their transition to independent living because of the adverse effects of institutionalisation and the lack of social, emotional, and financial support systems necessary for a safe transition. They also often lack the safety net and buffer that a supportive family offers, which puts them at a high risk of falling back into the vicious cycle of poverty. GOI has also outlined support for rehabilitation of Care-leavers under many policies and schemes. Care-leavers is a term which is being used to categorise youths or children who have lived in Child Care Institutions. The Mission Vatsalaya outlines After-care with aim to support the children who are leaving a childcare institution on completion of 18 years of age by providing them with financial support to facilitate their re-integration into mainstream of society. Such support may be given from the age of 18 years up to 21 years, extendable up to 23 years of age to help her/him become self-dependent.

In spirit of the above, many states have formal or informal networks of care-leavers. Many NGOs are working with children and young people without parental support, they have developed their care leaver associations. The networks are essentially involved in supporting care-leavers with legal identity documents, housing, job placement and mental-emotional support for their overall wellbeing. Many networks are still at a developing stage and progressing towards being self-reliant and sustainable. The informal networks here refer to those groups/associations/networks that act as platform for youths to come together either because they are from same CCI or some agency has brought them together or some youths have come together on their own to support each other. The formal networks are those that are registered with the state, for example Assam, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Aide et Action is facilitating the on-going work with care-leavers (children who leave orphanages/shelter homes/other institutions on turning 18-year-old) and towards the formation of National Care-leavers Network. It is being proposed to form a national network of care-leavers who may or may not be members of state level care-leavers networks. It is envisaged that the National Care-leavers network will be of care-leavers and being run by care-leavers. For NCLN to be self-sustained it is very important that NCLN caters the services/support that is in accordance to need and demand of care leaders. Thus, during first phase of this project, it was thought imperative to conduct a rapid assessment around perceptions of care-leavers around networks and its perceived or experienced utility. This rapid assessment is meticulously designed to not only inform the structure and functions of the NCLN but also to resonate with care-leavers' experiences and expectations. By delving into their perceptions and insights, this study seeks to guide the development of the NCLN, making it a relevant and effective support system for care-leavers in their unique journey. Additionally, the study is poised to uncover key insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with ensuring the NCLN's sustainability over time. In particular, the

study aims to shed light on how care-leavers establish connections among themselves, the specific benefits they derive or aspire to obtain from formal networks, and the immediate needs they face as they navigate their transition into adulthood. By integrating care-leavers' perspectives, the NCLN aims to become a self-help and self-sustaining body. The findings from this rapid assessment will lay the foundation for strategic planning, enabling the NCLN to effectively empower care-leavers and support their successful transition to independent living across India.

2. OBJECTIVE:

The overarching objectives of the study are as below:

- To bring clarity on how do care-leavers network formally and informally
- To bring out the difference between perceived and experienced utility of networks

3. METHODOLOGY:

The assessment has covered 9 states (Assam, J&K, Karnataka, Bihar, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan). A stratified random sampling was planned at the time of study design. In each state, the aim was to cover 40 care-leavers. Twenty care-leavers from Pvt/NGO run homes and twenty care-leavers from Govt. run homes. Out of each category of 20 care-leavers, further segregation was into 10 males and 10 females.

State	Private/NGO run homes		State run homes	
(40 respondents per state)	M	F	M	F
Assam	10	10	10	10
Bihar	10	10	10	10
Delhi	10	10	10	10
J &K	10	10	10	10
Karnataka	10	10	10	10
Madhya Pradesh	10	10	10	10
Maharashtra	10	10	10	10
Odisha	10	10	10	10
Rajasthan	10	10	10	10
Total (360)	**80**	**80**	**80**	**80**

However, due to various limitations at the end of organisations and field realities, for smoothening the data collection process, the sampling plan was revised during the course of data collection and only two groups were kept for random sampling. Twenty random respondents from Male and Female groups each. The total data collected from each of the state has been as following:

State (40 respondents per state)	M	F
Assam	20	20
Bihar	09	20
Delhi	20	20
J &K	16	09
Karnataka	20	20
Madhya Pradesh	20	20
Maharashtra	20	20
Odisha	20	20
Rajasthan	20	20
Total (334)	165	169

A questionnaire was developed around perceptions and understanding of care-leavers about NCLN and current access to services through state networks. The questionnaire was developed and shared with the working committee[1] members for their inputs. Suggested changes were incorporated. The questionnaire was translated in Hindi and pilot tested in Jaipur with care-leavers. Post the pilot, the questionnaire was further updated and finalised..

The final questionnaire was translated into Odiya, English, Kannada, and Assamese for reaching out to all selected states. The questionnaire was then coded and uploaded on online survey tool-Google forms. The link was then shared with point person/agency at each of the state for further sharing and data collection.

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[1]

Data Collection and limitations:

The data collection was done online through sharing of form links to point persons and data was gathered through agencies that are directly working with care-leavers and care leaver networks.

Assam	Assam Care-leavers Association
Bihar	UNICEF state office through Udayan Care
Delhi	MAD and care-leavers
J&K	UNICEF state office
Karnataka	UNICEF state office
Maharashtra	CSA, Vinimay, care-leavers network and Sanaath
Madhya Pradesh	UNICEF state office through YSS/Udayan
Odisha	YCDA
Rajasthan	Care Leavers Inner Circle Forum and Positive network with support from UNICEF state office

Meanwhile, a Focus Group Discussion was also held during the Udayan ' Care event of LIFT fellowship in Jaipur where care-leavers from all over India were present. The FGD report is embedded in this document separately.

The assessment strategy was developed on notion that care-leavers will be readily available for data collection, also, since the sample size was not very large, it was assumed that collection will be timely , however, there were many changes that came forward in data collection, in few states the quorum could not be completed. The data collection started in June and finally 30th September was kept as last date for data collection. Apart from this, one more limitation that was noticed in between of data collection was that care-leavers from organisation specific networks had similar responses on utility of networks, akin to motive of network irrespective of their access or utilisation of services that are supposed to be offered through network.

The responses are exclusively from those care-leavers who have access to internet and own a smartphone, thus, responses are also limited to this category. None of the findings represent the majority of care-leavers that may not own smartphones or are living in more vulnerable and excluded situations.

4. FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION REPORT

4.1 INTRODUCTION: Aide et Action with support from UNICEF conducted a rapid assessment to gain insight into care-leavers' perception of the National Care-leavers Network (NCLN) in India. The study aimed to inform the design of the NCLN framework and make it relevant for care-leavers, while also identifying opportunities and risks for their sustenance. Two primary methodologies were employed: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and rapid assessment questionnaires. FGDs facilitated open and candid discussions, uncovering care-leavers' experiences, challenges, and expectations related to existing state networks and groups. Rapid assessment questionnaires provided structured data to understand the designing NCLN framework and making it relevant to the care-leavers The information gathered will guide the development of the NCLN, ensuring it aligns with care-leavers' specific needs and aspirations.

4.2 OBJECTIVE: The objective of the FGD is to gather care-leavers' perspectives on selection criteria, contributions, and ensuring the inclusion of remote care-leavers in the National Care-leavers Network.

4.3 METHODOLOGY: A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted During the induction event of Learning in Fellowship Together (LIFT) in Jaipur, Rajasthan, facilitated by Udayan Care, on May 11th and 12th, 2023. The FGD had participation of eighteen care-leavers representing twelve states. To facilitate the discussion, the care-leavers were divided into three groups, with each group provided with three pre-developed questions   A concise presentation was delivered to ensure that the care-leavers comprehended and interpreted the questionnaires in their intended spirit. Each group was supported throughout the process, guiding them on how to discuss and consolidate their findings. Subsequently, the findings were presented to the larger group for further discussion and analysis.

THREE QUESTIONS WERE

- What should be selection criteria to be a member in NCLN ?
- How would you contribute or see your participation at national level ?
- How to reach out to remote/excluded care-leavers

4.4 FINDINGS:

4.a: What should be selection criteria to be a member in NCLN ?

Care-leavers emphasized several key selection criteria for becoming a member of the National Care-leavers Network (NCLN). Active engagement with their state care-leavers network is crucial, as it ensures familiarity with local situations, challenges and available support services. This involvement enables effective representation of care-leavers' voices and needs on a national scale. Personal attributes are also significant factors in NCLN membership. Strong communication skills allow members to clearly and persuasively articulate care-leavers' concerns and demands. Leadership qualities are valued, as NCLN members are expected to lead and guide the network, fostering collaboration and mobilizing resources. A strong commitment to the network's development and sustainability was highly regarded, ensuring continued advocacy for care-leavers' rights and well-being. Good etiquette supports effective networking Additionally, an impressive background performance in their respective Child Care Institutions (CCIs) can also be considered.

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR MEMBER OF NCLN

- Active engagement with their state care-leavers network
- Strong communication skills
- Leadership qualities
- strong commitment to the network's development and sustainability

By considering these criteria, the NCLN can ensure that its members possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and attributes to effectively represent care-leavers, advocate for their rights, and empower them for a successful transition into independent lives.

Contribution to NCLN by Care-Leaver

- Mentoring support to other care-leavers
- Representing the needs and priorities of the care-leavers of their respective states
- Dissemination of and awareness on NCLN in various platforms and social media
- Advocacy, influencing policies, legal support, and providing solutions.
- Collective voices to address the issues and wellbeing of Care-leaver

4.b. How would you contribute or see your participation at national level ?

During the FGD, centred around care-leavers' contributions to the National Care-leavers Network (NCLN), several significant areas were identified. Care-leavers expressed their strong commitment to supporting and mentoring one another, thereby fortifying the NCLN as a self-sustaining entity. They emphasized the crucial role of representing the unique needs of care-leavers from their respective

states and mobilizing support to help them successfully integrate into society. Recognizing the power of communication, care-leavers stressed the importance of disseminating information about the NCLN and its work through various social media platforms. Moreover, care-leavers highlighted their role as advocates, actively representing the agenda of the NCLN across different platforms.

By influencing policies and advocating for the implementation of programs and schemes that address the well-being of care-leavers. Care-leavers also emphasized the significance of a collective voice at the national level, empowering them to champion local care leaver issues and advocate for necessary changes. In addition, they offered their expertise in providing advisory and legal support to the NCLN, contributing to effective solutions and positive outcomes for care-leavers. Furthermore, care-leavers expressed in sharing impactful stories of personal transformation and case studies that serve as exemplars for replication and upscaling within the national network.

Overall, care-leavers demonstrated their unwavering dedication to actively contribute to the NCLN's mission, leveraging their collective strength to drive positive change and improve the lives of care-leavers nationwide

4.c How to reach out to remote/excluded care-leavers ?

During the FGD, care-leavers shared insightful ideas on how to effectively reach out and support even more vulnerable care-leavers in their transition to independent life. They emphasized the need for multiple communication sources. Strategies discussed included conducting awareness campaigns, channelizing information, and services from care-leavers to care-leavers, utilizing local and social media platforms, implementing dedicated outreach programs, and utilizing advertisements as effective tools. Furthermore, care-leavers emphasized the importance of establishing networks with various local entities such as PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions), organizations/CSOs (Civil Society Organizations), Child Care Institutions (CCIs), State Child Protection Society (SCPS), and District Child Protection Unit (DCPU). These organizations and agencies can play a pivotal role in reaching out to remote care-leavers and providing them with the

Ideas to reach out the remote care-leavers

- Activating multiple communication sources
- Linkages and networking with agencies & local bodies.
- Dedicated outreach program for care-leavers
- Use of social media and database of care-leavers

necessary support and resource. To ensure effective outreach, care-leavers suggested the development and maintenance of a comprehensive database specifically focused on care-leavers. Additionally, regular In-person visits to different areas were considered as a potential method.

By implementing these strategies and maintaining effective communication channels, the NCLN can proactively support and empower remote care-leavers, ensuring their smooth transition into independent life and providing them with the necessary resources to thrive.

4.5 Key Recommendations:

1. Define Clear Selection Criteria: Establish specific criteria for NCLN membership, including active engagement with state care-leavers networks, awareness of local care-leavers' situations, and effective representation of their needs on a national level thus promoting Inclusion. The selection criteria came out from FGD :
    a. Active engagement with their state care-leavers network
    b. Good communication skills
    c. Leadership qualities
    d. strong commitment to the network's development and sustainability
    e. Good etiquette
    f. Background performance in their respective CCIs

    g. Willing to invest time
    h. Should be at least VIII std pass and preferably XII std pass
    i. Should hold team work as a practicing value
    j. Be vocal about cause of care-leavers
    k. Should have leadership qualities that also include empathy and putting others' needs ahead
    l. The member should be Preferably below 26 years of age
    m. Equal representation of gender and institutional type like Govt. or Non- Govt.

2. Strengthen Communication Channels: Utilize social media, campaigns, and advertisements to reach remote care-leavers. Establish networks with PRIs, organizations/CSOs, CCIs, SCPS, and DCPU for effective outreach. Disseminate information about the NCLN to generate awareness and mobilize resources.

3. Advocate for Policy Support: Empower care-leavers to influence policies and programs that support their well-being and successful transition to independent life. Development of database.

4. Foster a Collective Voice: Encourage care-leavers to advocate for their needs and priorities at the national level. Share impactful stories and case studies to inspire others and showcase the NCLN's impact.

5. DATA ANALYSIS:

The questionnaire is attached as Annexure. The responses collected through vernacular questionnaire were translated into English. Data cleaning was done and then the data was analysed through excel. Here , data results are presented first as per questions and later through cross tabulation.

Q2. You belong to which age group?(choose 1)
335 responses
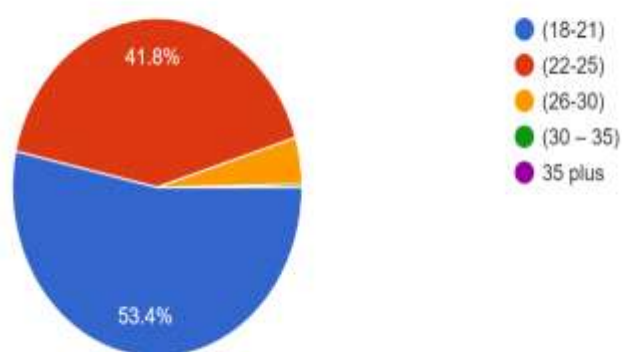
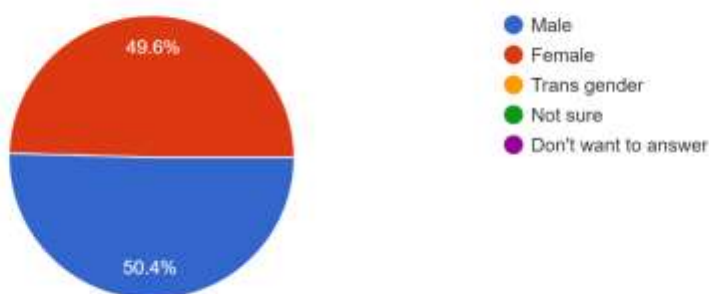Majority of respondents are from age group 18 to 21, implying those who are freshly out of CCI, second set of majority respondents are from age group 22 to 25 . The work with care-leavers is relatively new, this is why target beneficiaries are in a young age group.
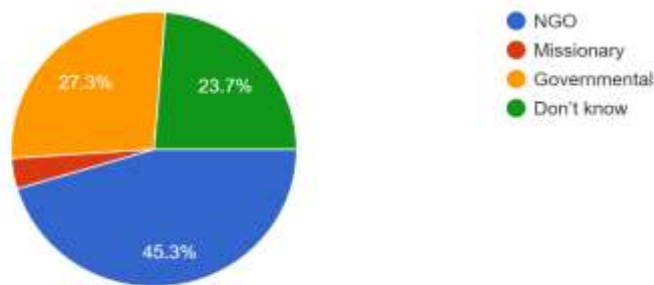
Q3. You identify yourself as:
335 responses

The respondents are almost gender balanced with 165 male respondents and 164 female respondents.

Q4. Do you know, if your Home/Child Care Institution/ Shelter Home was run by :
333 responses

- NGO
- Missionary
- Governmental
- Don't know

27.3% 23.7%

45.3%

Maximum of respondents are from NGO run CCIs while almost one third are not aware about type of CCI they grew in. However, certain states like Odisha and Assam, where questionnaires were filled in-person, it was observed that there was no or less understanding about what is NGO run CCI and what is government home etc. This may also indicate that structure of CCI and its running is of no importance to the care-leavers even after they leave it.

Q5. Where do you stay now:
335 responses

- With your family or relatives
- On rent with your fellow friends from y...
- On rent with friends whom you met ou...
- In extended foster care
- In a hostel run by non-government ag...
- In a hostel run by government for care...
- Alone on-rent
- With someone without paying rent

⏶ 1/2 ⏷

20.3%

9%

8.1%

16.1%

31.6%

Almost 32% care-leavers went back to their families after leaving CCIs followed by 20.3% who stayed alone on-rent and 16.1% with friends as a group on rent. A tiny percentage of 3.3% have made friends outside CCIs and are living with them.9% are in aftercare hostels run by NGOs, while 6.9% in those run by government. 1.5% are still not in any fixed stay option but keep on shifting from place to place. It was a possibility to restore 32% of respondents back to immediate or extended families earlier itself.

Gender wise distribution of current place of stay

| Category	Female	Male
In extended foster care	6	0
With someone without paying rent	1	4
On rent with outside CCI friends	2	7
Govt aftercare hostel	14	10
No fixed arrangement	1	4
Alone on-rent	38	30
With your family or relatives	52	55
On rent with CCI friends	26	28
Employer provided place to stay	19	9
Non-Govt aftercare hostel	11	18
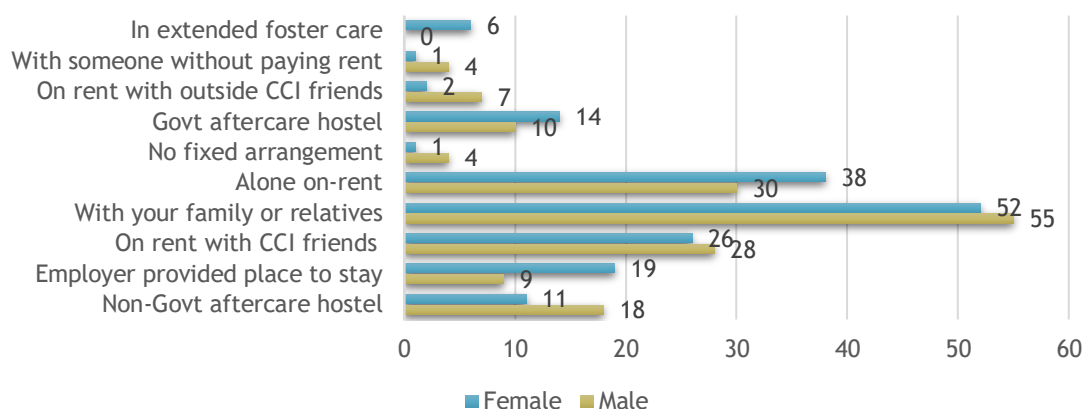
Almost 35% children didn't know where they will get shelter after leaving CCI. The level of difficulty for young youths freshly out in world is not difficult to imagine. It should be mandatory to include housing in Aftercare plan for children.

Q6. Did you know where will you stay just after leaving the institution/shelter home?
335 responses

- 65.4% — Yes, I knew where I have to go before leaving the institution/shelter home
- 34.6% — No, I arranged after leaving the institution/shelter home
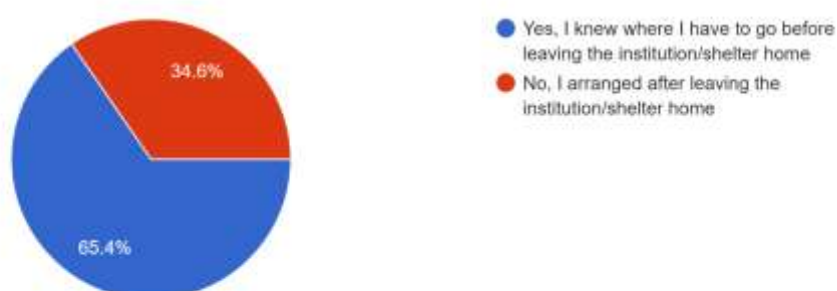
I knew where to go after CCI

- 71.01 — % of Female respondents
- 72.7 — % of Male respondents
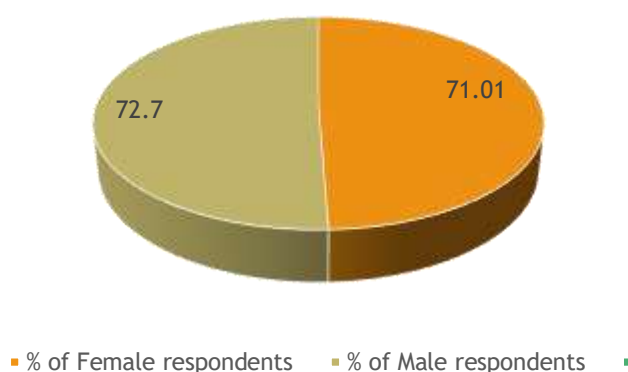
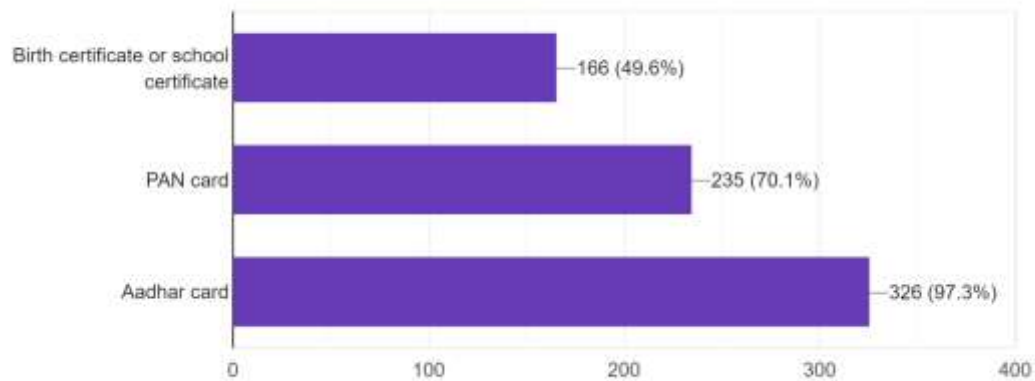Equal percentage of male and female respondents were aware about their next stay place after leaving CCI.

Q7. Which identity card do you hold right now? (choose as many)
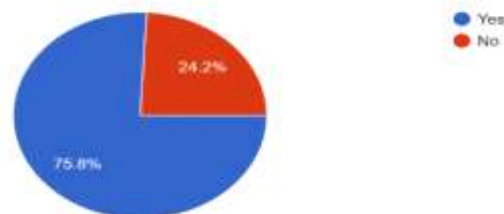335 responses

It is optimistic to note that more than 97% of respondents have Aadhar card while 70.1% have PAN CARD too. This also implies that 28% do not have any bank account or linkages with financial institutions which is an indication of more vulnerability. If respondent has just turned 18 year old, even then they will not have Pan CARD.

Q8. Are you connected with other care leavers?
335 responses

Q9. Why : (You can choose more than one option also)
81 responses
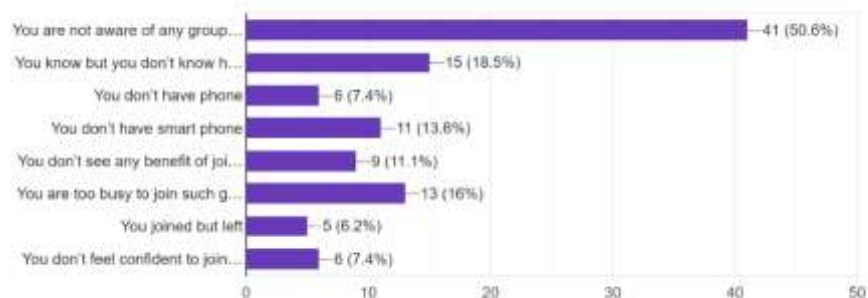
This question indicates connection with state networks or groups with which care-leavers are connected, 75.8% are members of one or other platform. Those who are not have cited reasons like being unaware(50.6%), knowing but do not know how to join (18.5%) and do not see any advantage in joining such networks (27%).These 27%

comprise those who don't see benefit, those who left and those who find it not worth their time.

Q10. How are you connected with fellow care leavers: (Choose as many)
254 responses

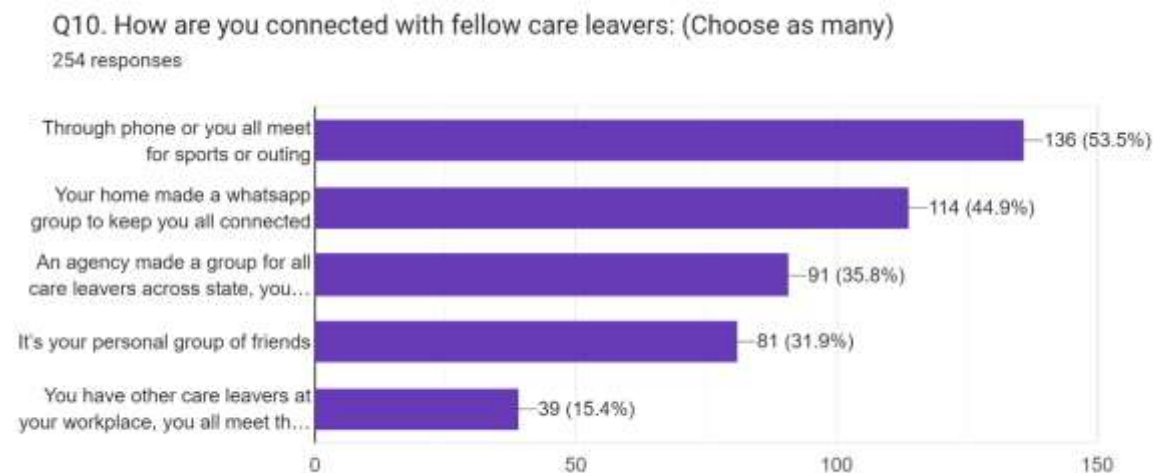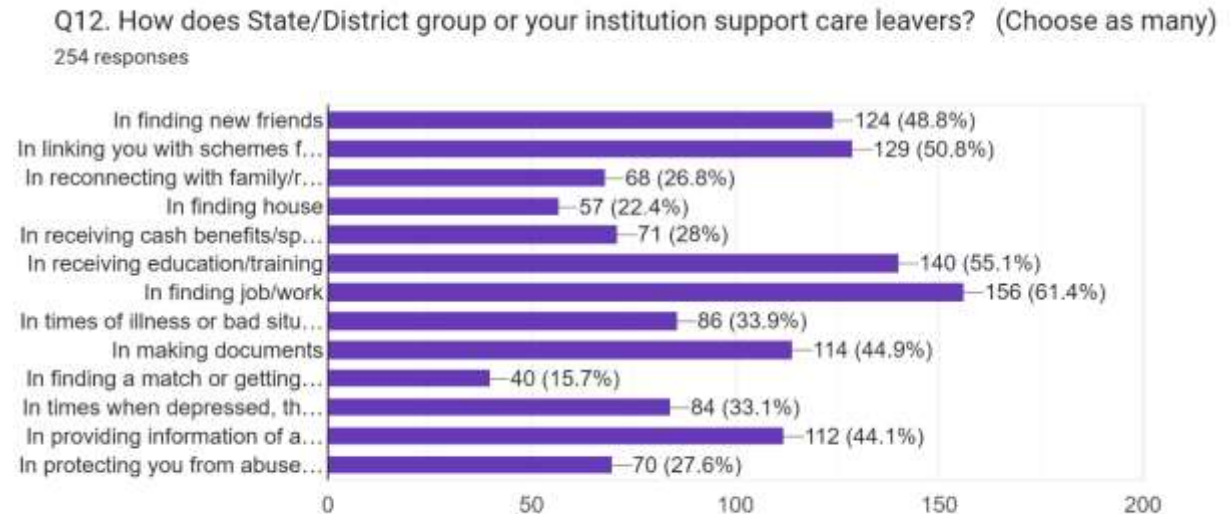| Category	Value
Through phone or you all meet for sports or outing	136 (53.5%)
Your home made a whatsapp group to keep you all connected	114 (44.9%)
An agency made a group for all care leavers across state, you...	91 (35.8%)
It's your personal group of friends	81 (31.9%)
You have other care leavers at your workplace, you all meet th...	39 (15.4%)

The majority of care-leavers interact with each other through informal settings and personal preferences like sports, outings and even through groups made by their CCI agencies. Only 35.8% are on-board with formal state network. These are overlapping percentage.

Q12. How does State/District group or your institution support care leavers? (Choose as many)
254 responses

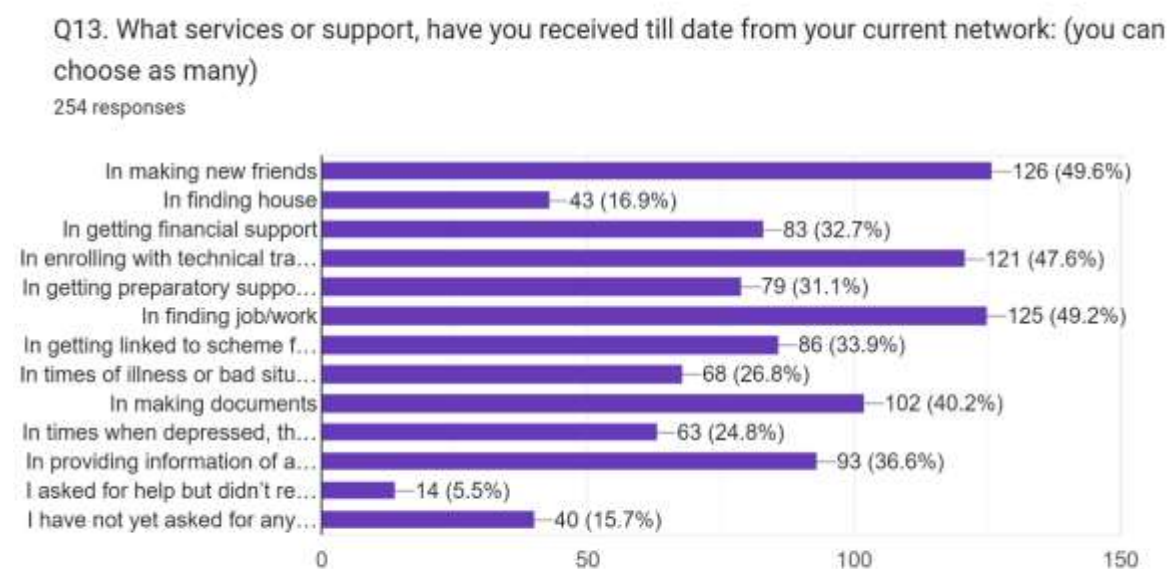| Category	Value
In finding new friends	124 (48.8%)
In linking you with schemes f...	129 (50.8%)
In reconnecting with family/r...	68 (26.8%)
In finding house	57 (22.4%)
In receiving cash benefits/sp...	71 (28%)
In receiving education/training	140 (55.1%)
In finding job/work	156 (61.4%)
In times of illness or bad situ...	86 (33.9%)
In making documents	114 (44.9%)
In finding a match or getting...	40 (15.7%)
In times when depressed, th...	84 (33.1%)
In providing information of a...	112 (44.1%)
In protecting you from abuse...	70 (27.6%)

Most of the support that care-leaver networks provide(as per understanding of respondents) is in area of finding job, or vocational training and linking with relevant schemes. Almost 48.8% find networks utility in finding new friends also. Next highest utility is in getting legal documents and providing information about events meant for care-leavers. The excess percentile response towards finding job and educational training could also be due to fact that in certain states the agencies that are hosting

care-leavers networks (and supported in data collection through their groups) are primarily into providing them job and job-oriented trainings.

However, a great deal of respondents also find networks as support systems, this is where the real utility lies, 33.9% and 27.6% have responded that network helps them when they are physically and emotionally sick respectively. Respondents also find it as a medium to protect them from abuse. An equal percentage (26.8%)
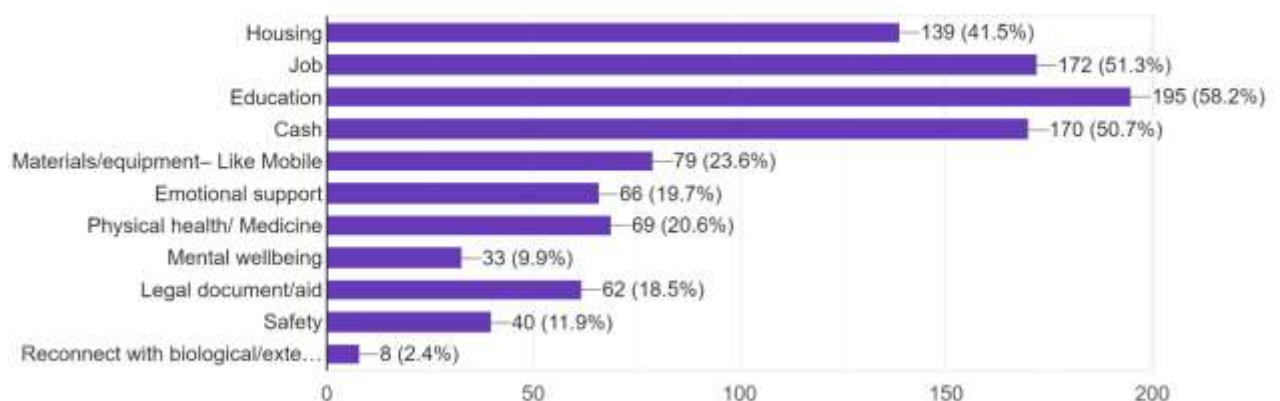
However, while responding to services they have received till date(refer Q13, below), majority is still of those who have received support in finding job/work(49.2%) and technical training(47.6%) while maximum percentage (49.6%) found new friends through care-leavers network. A great majority has received support in legal documentation (40.2%),getting linked to govt. schemes (33.9%), financial support (32.7%) and being informed about programs or events for care-leavers (36.6%). A relatively less percentage of respondents (16.9%) received help in housing while almost equal (15.7%) never really asked for any support. Very small percentage 5.5% asked but didn't receive any help.

Q13. What services or support, have you received till date from your current network: (you can choose as many)

254 responses

In making new friends	126 (49.6%)
In finding house	43 (16.9%)
In getting financial support	83 (32.7%)
In enrolling with technical tra...	121 (47.6%)
In getting preparatory suppo...	79 (31.1%)
In finding job/work	125 (49.2%)
In getting linked to scheme f...	86 (33.9%)
In times of illness or bad situ...	68 (26.8%)
In making documents	102 (40.2%)
In times when depressed, th...	63 (24.8%)
In providing information of a...	93 (36.6%)
I asked for help but didn't re...	14 (5.5%)
I have not yet asked for any...	40 (15.7%)

The three highest responded needs are Education(58.2%), Job(51.3%) and Cash(50.7%) followed by Housing(41.5%).Less but significant number has also shown need for emotional support (19.7%), physical health(20.6%), mental wellbeing(9.9%), safety (11.9%)and reconnecting with biological family(2.4%).

Q14. Please share your three most urgent needs, right now?
335 responses

Need	Count (%)
Housing	139 (41.5%)
Job	172 (51.3%)
Education	195 (58.2%)
Cash	170 (50.7%)
Materials/equipment– Like Mobile	79 (23.6%)
Emotional support	66 (19.7%)
Physical health/ Medicine	69 (20.6%)
Mental wellbeing	33 (9.9%)
Legal document/aid	62 (18.5%)
Safety	40 (11.9%)
Reconnect with biological/exte…	8 (2.4%)

Q15. It is being discussed to form a national level platform for care leavers, which will act as a coordinator to link pan India care leavers with avai…portunities and schemes. Do you think it is needed?
335 responses

- Yes — 76.1%
- No
- It is needed but not sure if it will help me — 13.1%
- Don't know — 8.7%
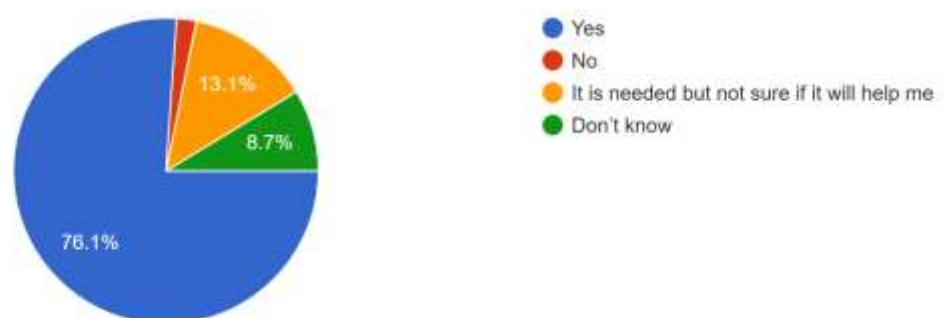
An optimistic number of respondents (76.1%) feel a need of collectivising at National level, (13.1%) find it as good but cannot find individual benefit of it. Rest are either unsure(8.7%) or not in favour (2.9%)of NCLN.

Many cross tabulations were applied but no clear trend came forward on basis of age or type of CCI or gender. Possibly because this group has similar exposure and linkages. The study could not reach out to beyond those who are in contact with agencies and have smart phones with internet connectivity.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The study was conducted to understand the perceptions of care-leavers around need and utility of networks. The provided responses in the questionnaire gave options that referred National, State and formal or informal networks. The study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities faced by care-leavers during their transition to independent living. It emphasizes the importance of networks, both formal and informal, in providing crucial support such as legal identity documents, housing, job placement, and mental-emotional well-being. The research focuses on the formation of a National Care-leavers Network (NCLN) to address these needs at a broader level.

- The data collection was done from nine states, though original study plan intended random stratified sampling of 20 male and 20 female respondents from strata of care experienced youths from Government run and Non-Government run CCIs but due to less or non-availability of required number of care-leavers from planned strata, sampling was changed in middle of data collection. For ease of data collection, only random sampling was followed from groups of male and females irrespective of the nature of their CCIs. This has been one of the most limiting aspects towards cross tabulation analysis of data.

- Despite following male female stratification for random sampling, no pattern or trend has appeared that can be owed to the gender, the responses for all the questions have been equally distributed among both the genders. Safety has been selected as one of the urgent needs by 25 males and 15 females. Though factors making them feel unsafe might differ in certain aspects owing to their biological sex or gender roles. All in all, responses show that challenges faced by care-leavers are similar irrespective of their gender and type of CCI wherein they experienced care.

- The findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) reveal key insights into the selection criteria for NCLN membership. Active engagement with state care-leavers networks, communication skills, leadership qualities, commitment to sustainability, and good etiquette are highlighted as crucial attributes. Care-leavers express a strong commitment to contributing to the NCLN, emphasizing the importance of mutual support, representation of unique state needs, and active advocacy through various platforms.

- The FGDs provide valuable recommendations on reaching and supporting remote care-leavers. Strategies include leveraging multiple communication sources, conducting awareness campaigns, utilizing local and social media, establishing networks with local entities, and maintaining a comprehensive database. The emphasis is on proactive

outreach and effective communication channels to ensure a smooth transition for remote care-leavers.

- All care-leavers understand and accept the need of staying connected though their number of connections fall as they grow in age.

- The perception of types of services being provided by formal networks is much higher than actual services being received. Implying that they see state networks as platforms with high support provisioning. Thus, services is one of the key binding factor for care-leavers to the state network.

- It is clearly visible that all care-leavers from age group 18 to 26 are more concerned about higher education, vocational skills and finding job. This is also an age of settling down and finding a promising career. It is advisable to state networks that they should also work towards skill assessment and matching profiles with capacities and interests rather then availability of job offers.

- Most of the respondents are connected with formal or informal groups if not both. Their responses regarding approximate number of care-leavers that they are connected with ranges from one to 400 plus. It also shows variance in their understanding of term connection, some are members of formal groups but still they find themselves connected with only one to ten other care-leavers. Some of them have preferred quality of connection over number of group members. However, where an agency has formally built a network, the responses are more likely to be equal to number of total members in the network. This may indicate that members of agency formed networks are more exposed and aware about the network related parlances and objectivity of joining a platform with service provisioning.

- A common definition of network will be very useful across the states to help care-leavers differentiate between their informal group of friends and State network.

- Many care-leavers do not know about their own CCI which also indicate less awareness about systems that are mandated to help them. It is very important to make children in CCIs aware about their rights, entitlements and accountability alongwith mandated state agencies and structures for their protection and rehabilitation.

- Majority of respondents knew where they will go after leaving CCI and majority of respondents returned to their families or relatives, this may also imply that neither CCI nor any of the agency that was involved in bringing the child to CCI made any or optimal effort to rehabilitate the child back to community. This again indicates need of

awareness generation of child around rights and entitlements, by CWC and/or CCI as soon as he/she come in contact with them.

- All care-leavers find the need for National Care-leavers Network; however, some are not sure about how it will help them. One reason could be that as of now, there is no clear service model attached with NCLN, thus service-oriented demand is non-existent. It is imperative for NCLN to develop at least few services that can act as pull factor for care-leavers to join and sustain the NCLN.

Key Recommendations for NCLN development:

- **Define Clear selection criteria:** Establish specific criteria for NCLN membership to ensure active engagement, representation, and commitment
- **Strengthen Communication Channels:** Utilize social media, campaigns, and advertisements for effective outreach. Establish networks with local entities for better communication
- **Advocate for Policy support:** Empower care-leavers to influence policies and programs that support their well-being. Develop a comprehensive database for better planning
- **Foster a collective voice:** Encourage care-leavers to actively advocate for their needs at the national level. Share impactful stories to showcase the NCLN's impact.
- **Define clear outcomes for NCLN:** Develop a clear vision of NCLN and accordingly decide on what NCLN can offer care-leavers to establish its importance among them.

In conclusion, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of care-leavers' perspectives, experiences, and expectations, guiding the development of the NCLN to be a relevant and effective support system. The recommendations offer a roadmap for creating a self-sustaining and impactful national network for care-leavers in India.

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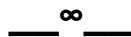
ANNEXURE:

Questionnaire

Hello,

I am working with an agency, Aide et Action, it is coordinating the formation of NCLN (National Care-leavers Network) in partnership with UNICEF and many other NGOs who work with care-leavers. Care-leavers means those who have completed 18 years of age and have moved out from any types of residential facility except family. By term Network, we mean care-leavers brought together as a group by an agency or state. The state level network means a group or association of care-leavers representing all care-leavers of state. Similarly, National Network mean a national level association of care-leavers representing respective state networks.

In this questionnaire, we are asking you few quick queries that will help us in understanding your access to various/any network and your perception about utility or need of NCLN. There is no attempt to collect your personal information and your individual response will be kept confidential. In case, you have any query regarding use of your responses or objection to any of the questions, please mail: nupur.pande@action-education.org

Thanks for your time and support.

Q1. Name of your Home (Institution) that you left when you became 18 years old? Its address (village/town, city,district,state)?

Q2. Choose your age group?

- (18-21)
- (22-25)
- (26-30)
- (30 – 35)
- 35 plus

Q3. You identify yourself as:

- Male
- Female
- Trans gender
- Not sure
- Don't want to answer

Q4. Do you know, if your Home/Child Care Institution/ Shelter Home was run by :

- NGO

- Missionary run
- Governmental
- Don't know

Q5. Where do you stay now:

- With your family or relatives
- On rent with your fellow friends from your institution
- On rent with friends whom you met outside institution
- In extended foster care
- In a hostel run by non-government agency for care-leavers
- In a hostel run by government for care-leavers
- Alone on-rent
- With someone without paying rent
- Your employee has provided you a place to stay
- You are always shifting from here to there, no fixed arrangement

Q6. Did you know where will you stay just after leaving the institution/shelter home?

- Yes, I knew where I have to go before leaving the institution/shelter home
- No, I arranged after leaving the institution/shelter home

Q7. Which identity card do you hold right now? (choose as many)

- Birth certificate or school certificate
- PAN card
- Aadhar card

Q8. Are you connected with other care-leavers?

- Yes
- No

If No:

Q 9. Why : (You can choose more than one option also)

- You are not aware of any group where care-leavers meet
- You know but you don't know how to join
- You don't have phone
- You don't have smart phone
- You don't see any benefit of joining such group
- You are too busy to join such group
- You joined but left
- You don't feel confident to join a group

Jump to Q 14

If Yes:

Q10. How are you connected with fellow care-leavers: (Choose as many)

- Through phone or you all meet for sports or outing
- Your home made a whatsapp group to keep you all connected
- An agency made a group for all care-leavers across state, you are its member
- It's your personal group of friends
- You have other care-leavers at your workplace, you all meet there

Q11. You are connected with total how many care-leavers though groups or networks or work or whatsapp groups? (give approx number)?

- _____

Q12. How does State/District group or your institution support care-leavers?   (Choose as many)

- In finding new friends
- In linking you with schemes for care-leavers
- In reconnecting with family/relatives
- In finding house
- In receiving cash benefits/sponsorship
- In receiving education/training
- In finding job/work
- In times of illness or bad situation
- In making documents
- In finding a match or getting married
- In times when depressed, they provide counselling or therapist support
- In providing information of any event or program for care-leavers
- In protecting you from abuse , exploitation and substance abuse

Q13. What services or support, have you received till date from your current network: (choose as many)

- In making new friends
- In finding house
- In getting financial support
- In enrolling with technical training or education
- In getting preparatory support for job placement – career counselling, communication/language training/socialization or life skills.
- In finding job/work
- In getting linked to scheme for care-leavers
- In times of illness or bad situation
- In making documents

- In times when depressed, they provide counselling or therapist support
- In providing information of any event or program for care-leavers
- I asked for help but didn't receive
- I have not yet asked for any help

Q14. Please share your three most urgent needs, right now?

- Housing
- Job
- Education
- Cash
- Materials/equipment– Like Mobile
- Emotional support
- Physical health/ Medicine
- Mental wellbeing
- Legal document/aid
- Safety
- Reconnect with biological/extended family

Q15. It is being discussed to form a national level platform for care-leavers, which will act as a coordinator to link pan India care-leavers with available opportunities and schemes. Do you think it is needed?

- Yes
- No
- It is needed but not sure if it will be of help to you
- Don't know

Q16. If there is anything that you think we need to know or you wish to share, you may please write here, or if you wish us to contact you then please leave your contact number here. Remember your responses are confidential.

 (open ended)