



International
Care Leavers Convention
2020



FIRST INTERNATIONAL CARE LEAVERS CONVENTION, 2020

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"I would like to live in a world where investments are made to ensure those from public care and others affected by adversity, everywhere can reconnect, build and heal, free from shame and public stigma. This would be socially just, fiscally prudent and frankly just plain easier and better for the whole of society." - A Care Leaver as cited in a speaker's presentation at the convention

Context

Care Leavers are young people, who have lived in Alternative Care settings, either in foster care or in residential care as a child and have left them on attaining adulthood, which is mostly 18 years. Having lived in a highly protected and controlled environment till the age of 18, they find it difficult to live independently in the society later. The transition from living in a protective care facility to independent living often brings in a host of difficulties, due to the absence of a pivotal family-like ecosystem, minimal community integration, and limited ownership of essential resources, at the care setting like that of a residential care or foster care. This leaves them with no confidence in their own agency, lacking basic life skills, and disrupted education, or no job opportunities which crushes their aspirations. To settle for the early start, they are pushed to get into menial jobs and often get stigmatized in the society. Having not experienced stability in their lives, these young people go through immense mental stress and have no access to support services. The outcomes then are but logical – taking to streets, substance abuse, homelessness and unemployment, and hence pushed towards crime or not engaged in anything, often leading them towards suicidal tendencies. Their unique experiences often put them as the most vulnerable youth in society, who need extra care and support at the individual, collective, societal as well as national and international level.



The Convention

The "1st International Care Leavers Convention 2020" (virtual) was organized in 2020, with the very aim to deliberate with and hear the Care Leavers themselves, along with practitioners and policy makers. The event comprised of four pre-events, 3 days of main event and a post closure event, all of which span over October to December 2020. It was preceded by two virtual webinars held in Sept 2020 when over 100 care

leavers from different countries met together over a series of webinars and developed their "Declaration of Gaps and Demands" on a variety of domains, numbering...11... around the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond; download the Declaration..... Over the series of the care conversations, a wide array of speakers from across the globe participated and shared their insights and valuable suggestions.



The convention platform was developed keeping in mind challenges with connectivity and required only an email ID. It provided a near live experience of a physical conference with a range of engagements such as poster booths, welcome videos, selfie corner, networking lounge, auditorium, helpdesk as well as various kinds of resources available at different booths. People from more than 85 countries participated in the convention. Over 2300 delegates from more than 80 countries with diverse expertise and experience participated in the convention. The closing session of the convention was a platform that brought care leavers talk to policy makers and share the collective takeaways from the convention.

Care Leavers were at the front seat of the entire planning and execution and prepared the key takeaways that can be found at [Microsoft PowerPoint - Key take aways11th \(careleaverscommunity.org\)](#). They committed to forming a heart family of Global Care Leavers Community and resonated their demand of "**Nothing about us without us.**" As an outcome of the convention, a digital space has been curated in the form of a resource and community website at www.careleaverscommunity.org.

About The Organising Committee

The Convention was organized by four Care Leavers Networks: CLAN India, GNG Network, Sri-Lanka, Zimbabwe care leavers network and the Latin American care leavers association along with four organizations from different parts of the world: Udayan Care (India), SOS Children's Villages, University of Hildesheim (Germany) and Kinderperspectief (Netherlands). The convention was financially supported by SOS Children's Villages, Tata Trusts India and a host of other partners. Almost twenty global organisations joined to support as technical partners, a few being UNICEF, Eurochild, FICE international, Epic, Wataneya Society and many others. Speakers were carefully chosen, for their expertise and interest in the topic and included care leavers themselves along with practitioners, policy makers, researchers, and members of international NGOs, UN bodies and government bodies.



A few pertinent mentions during the convention were as follows:

The convention is only the starting point to come together and it is not a one-time activity but something that had to be sustained and nurtured continuously.

The engagement plan with Care Leavers must be planned in a way that brings in maximum young people together and technology can aid in this initiative to a great extent.

The need to come together is global and existing networks of care leavers are equally excited and willing to contribute and support the process of building a global care leavers network as a heart family.

The coming together of care leavers globally can mitigate some of the emotional and connection loss they had experienced during the COVID-19 crisis and inspire them towards a journey of resilience.

Detailed pre-event reports can be seen at <http://bit.ly/PreEvent1Report>, and

There are several challenges that Care Leavers face in the world and it is important to highlight them with the intention to find a solution and reaching out to decision makers.

Care leavers experience rough times as

"people will hurt you, break you, rate you but how strong you stand, makes you", yet continuous efforts lead to change.

2020 actually magnified the problems of the Care Leavers

and "What needs to be done is to extend the age of the Care Leavers leaving care from 18 to 25. They need support in the workplace and living arrangement." The narrative needs to change from "Functioning" to "Nourishing". They should focus not only on those who are "success stories" but also "who are lost on the way".

Many care leavers had piled up a lot of debt

because they lost their jobs and were unable to afford stable housing. States must consider housing for Care Leavers in their policies

Policies were not being made keeping Care Leavers in the centre

and young people often ask "Why are others not living my life, decide my life".

Effective collaboration and partnership among various agencies

for improved access to services, accurate information and data on Care Leavers across countries, networks and voice such as the Care Leavers Convention to support, share information, identify gaps in services and prevent institutionalization and strengthen "family based alternative care".

FBCYICN (Federation of British Columbia Youth in Care Networks) includes "Dream fund"

to fund their dreams and "one to one" care support. There are 5 principles of youth led development which must be customized to the cause of Care Leavers: (a) Youth should define their development goals and objectives, (b) They must have a safe and generative physical space, (c) There should be adult and peer-peer mentorship, (d) Youth should act as models for other youth, (e) Youth are integrated into local and national development policies and programs

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed people into a trilemma- 1)

Disrupted education and training, (2) Increased difficulties for young jobseekers to transition to decent jobs, (3) Job and income losses for young workers. Some solutions include supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes, protecting workers in the workplace, relying on social dialogue for solutions, stimulating the economy and employment. Digital access and support with technology became a necessity during this crisis period for most of them.

Care Leavers need to be recognised as a community especially the importance of love -

to love and be loved, importance of being nurtured, actively listening to them and embedding Care Leavers' views into our services is important."

The field of giving is opening up more and more to enable social movements

for sustainable long-term change and donors must learn more from young people, emerging organisations and social movements and understand - what are their funding needs, skill sets, barriers they are currently facing and what can be done to invest in areas that are not apparent. For that stories are important to be told by Care Leavers.

Key Outcomes

- Importance of Care Leaver Networks: Care Leaver networks work like a safety net or a fallback mechanism for most Care Leavers, besides being the platform to amplify their voices to take it to those who can make a difference. The Global Care Leavers Community will be formed as a platform to advocate collectively because alone even if you have the right message, you do not have the right audience for it.
- Need to Communicate Effectively for Voices to be heard: Power of Storytelling: "Storytelling is a fantastic avenue for Care Leavers to bring about policy change and also for onboarding other people to their issues. A story links their heart and emotions with their minds and ultimately when the heart and the mind are connected, then only we are led into action." According to her, lived experience need not just be part of participatory research but also can be pivoted to lead and inform policies and services.
- Research in the Domain of Care Leaving: Leaving Care is a transnational challenge. There are issues with discrepancies in legal entitlements and implementation in practice. There have been a few global comparative studies in the domain of Care Leaving. These researches deal with frameworks, challenges and solutions for Care Leavers.

The final outcomes of the convention as collated by the care leavers were:

- We need to build an International Care Leavers Network and work towards the 2nd International Care Leavers Convention, 2022.
- We need to spread and advocate for our Declaration by Care Leavers in times of COVID-19.
- We should have a seat at the table at the national and international forums.
- We need free and quality access to mental health services after leaving care.
- We need proactive rather than a reactive approach to mitigate challenges and adjustment difficulties faced by Care Leavers. Implementation is the key.
- 25 should be the new 18(soft landing from planet Youth Care to Planet Earth).
- We want caregivers who understand, accept and nourish us. We want to be better prepared for leaving Care.
- We want more participatory research on our strengths, resilience and challenges.

Conclusion

The Care Leaver Convention brought about vast amount of insights from researchers, Care Leaver practitioners, policy makers and Care Leavers themselves. All the participants who engaged witnessed the beginning of a social movement of collectivising Care Leavers for structural changes en masse. The 17 key takeaways would ensure the snowball effect taking place in the coming future including in the upcoming DGD (Day of General Discussion) and in the individual Care Leaver networks in the respective countries. The pre events and the 3-day First International Care Leavers Convention 2020 was a tour de force into the lives and world of Care Leavers.

In the words of a **Care Leavers**: "We are not done. We have just started". What we feel now is a heart to heart connection of Care Leavers global family! No looking back and nothing about us without 2us".