

Report of 4th Online Care Leavers' Café

30.05.2021

Date

30/05/2021

13:30 GMT

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ONLINE CARE LEAVERS CAFÉ

TOPIC

HOW TO BUILD A CARE
LEAVERS NETWORK?



ORGANISING NETWORKS

VEREIN CARE LEAVER OSTERREICH
ZIMBABWE CARE LEAVERS NETWORK



Section 1: Ice break



Participants were welcomed with “Would You Rather” game as online ice-break activity, organized by Gunn, Advocacy Focal Person from SOS Children’s Villages Thailand. The purpose of this game is to get to know each other in different perspectives via a list of questions which participants have to select a chose from the two options proposed e.g. would you rather lose ability to speak or lose the ability to read, etc. And then some of the participants would be selected for interview to get to understand deeper why they selected that choices.

Section 2: How to Build a Care Leaver’s Network Presentation

by Fabienne Landerer

Fabienne Landerer is Care Leaver Leader from Austria/France Care Leaver Network and also Youth Development Intern at SOS Children’s Villages International. She has been working and interviewed with several care leavers in coming up with **The 4 Pillars** of building a care leaver’s network, which comprises two important stages.

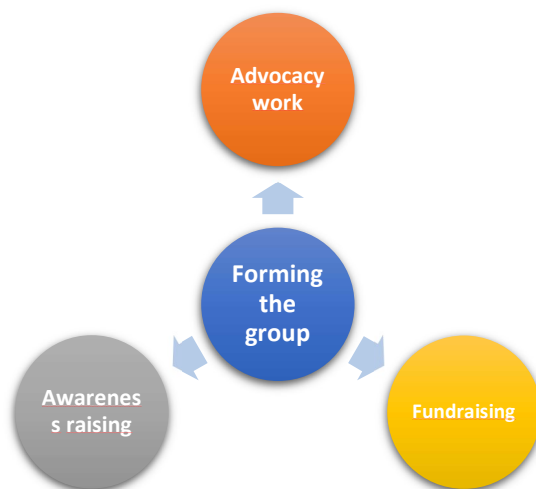


Illustration by Fabienne

Stage 1: Forming the group

Stage 2: Build the supporting systems

1. Advocacy work
2. Awareness raising
3. Fund raising

The First Pillar: Formation of the group

Why forming a network?

Here are some reasons gathered from the care leaver leaders internationally;



The reasons of forming care leaver networks diverse, e.g. some have lost some care leavers due to not having sufficient safe network, some would like to talk to government, and some want to do projects together, etc.

What skills people aim to being a part of the network?

Skill development demands are also diverse, for example, learning how to be a leader, how to use technical terms and technologies to best facilitate the communication and to advocate, how to be positive change makers, how to be mentally healthy, and most importantly, how to self-care, etc.

These skills could be so valuable to other aspects of life, e.g. self-management, strive better in own education, and pursuing occupational goals later in life.



Who could form the network?

The initiators could be any person/group/institution who wants to establish a network, have **high-level of commitment** to hold accountable in establishing the network, have willingness to accompany this process for a while, and be able to gather like-minded people together with care background.

How to start forming the group?

The most important aspect is the goal and roles. We need person to turn to in these certain topics e.g. financial aid, and the administrative skills, etc. There should be agreed at the very beginning.

The first pillar: Formation of the group - First steps

Organization of the group

- Clarify goals: « What do we want? »
- How can we reach this?
- How are we going to proceed?
- How do we organize us?
 - Regular (online) meetings?
 - Working groups?
- What do we need?
 - Financial aid
 - Support in a specific area
 - Leadership skills
 - Administration skills
 - Advocacy skills
 - IRL meetings or online to work on projects

Two main types of young people who join

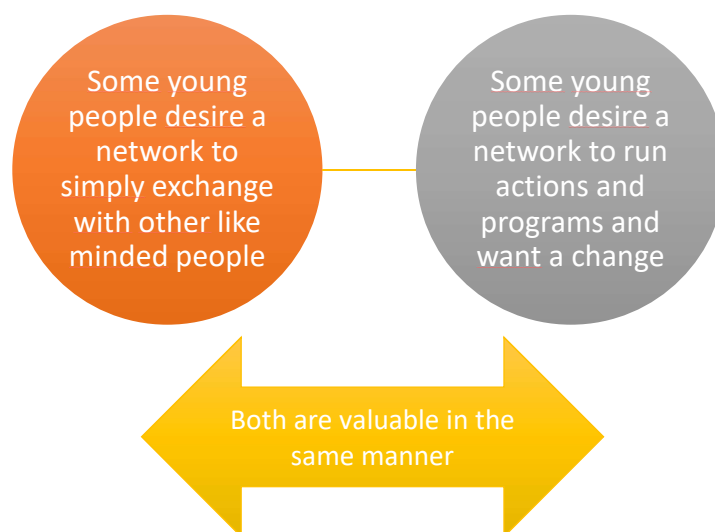


Illustration by Fabienne

The Second Pillar: Awareness Raising



Why Awareness Raising?

"If people do not know about, they could not care about. But, you need to keep your boundaries as your stories, once it goes on the internet, it is there forever."

The Third Pillar: Advocacy Work



The Fourth Pillar: Fundraising

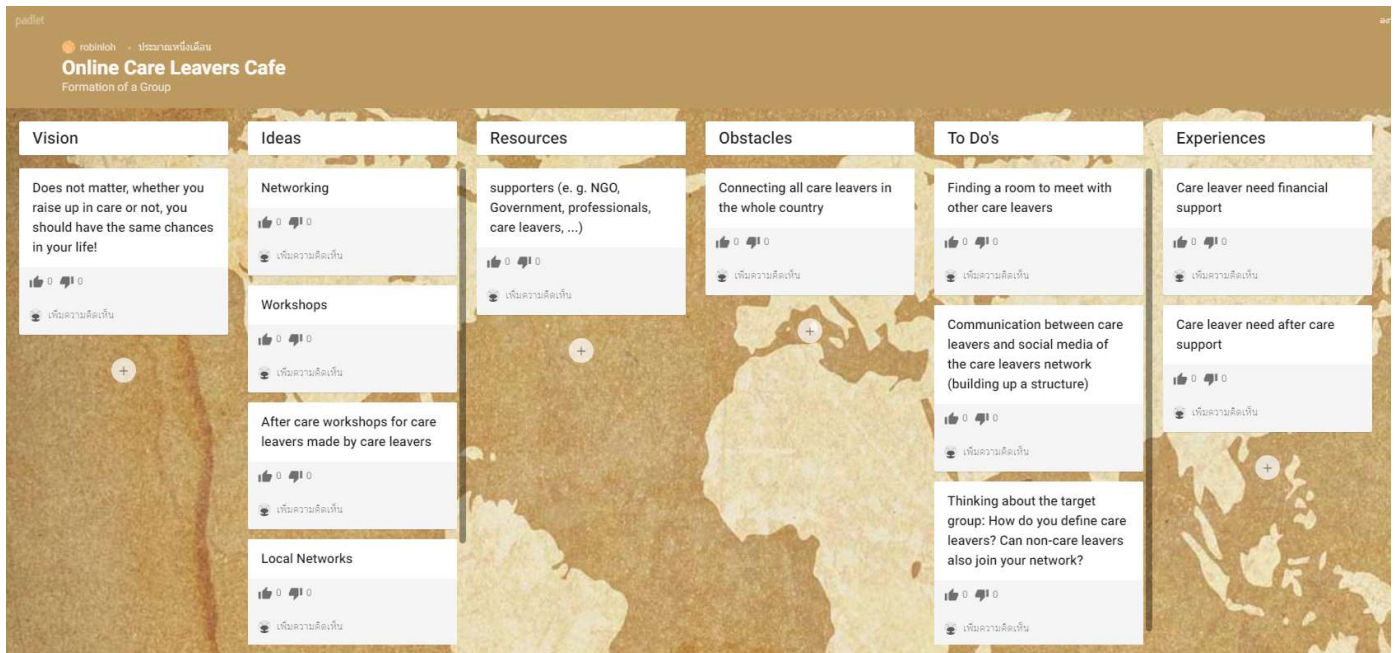
In building and running a network, spending may be required e.g. for accommodation, website building, register as an association, and making and maintaining website, etc. Thus, having a bank account may be a thing to be considered.

The sources of funding could be diverse e.g. from the local authorities, governmental level, from other organizations, or even from a person.

Section 3: Break out rooms for four pillars & care professionals

- Forming the group
- Awareness Raising
- Advocacy
- Fundraising
- Breakout Room for Professionals

a. Forming the group



Insights

- Common vision: It doesn't matter whether you raise up in care or not, you should have the same chances in your life.
- Common issues: Different demands and issues that depend on 'leaving care age defined in each country; care leavers are defined differently in terms of age, which comes along with different types of struggles in each age range e.g. care leavers at 18 may need support on financial issues more than older ages, etc.

b. Awareness Raising

Some care leavers are familiar with explaining about care leavers and sharing their stories, but for some, it's not easy.

- "There are a lot of things to share about your stories but you have to make sure that some medias are trying to make use of it."

- “It’s important to keep sharing the care leaver stories in positive light, showing others how strong we are, to fight the social stigma, but with caution.”

Things that media should keep in mind

- Do not every ask about the biological parents and the trauma. It is very disrespectful.
- The media should ask right before hand about ‘what the care leavers would like to share’ because it is the personal stories.

Things that care leavers should be aware of before sharing their own stories

- Where would the stories be? – If it would be on the internet, it would be there forever. It is where the searchers would be informed that you are a care leaver, which there are chances of being stigmatized.

c. Advocacy

Gift facilitated the sharing on how to advocate, the different scenarios in each country, how to advocate differently in each country, and went through the relevant partners and stakeholders that they could reach out and identify as advocacy opportunities.

Each country experienced different issues on advocacy, for example, India struggled with the negative impacts from Covid-19, Ghana dealt with stigmatization, and Zimbabwe dealt with after care support, government legislation and practice, etc.

Moreover, they identified that new care leaver networks could find it difficult to advocate as one unit due to that some are still concerned or skeptic about the process.

Case Study from Gift in Establishing Zimbabwe Care Leaver Network

Gift gained the support from SOS Children’s Villages Zimbabwe, and being the part of the research team. They went out to different care institutions to study about the journey of where the care leavers go in terms of education and employment. **The findings turned out that 90% of the care leavers were not employed at all, and they were not receiving any kind of social support.**

After the research, care leavers started to form the idea of creating a group. And in 2018, they did **three-day workshop with care leavers from**

different 18 institutions, and we discussed about the challenges, the solutions, and prioritizing solution. Through that meeting, the network was formed. We called out as the National Zimbabwe Care Leaver Network.

On the initial stage, the newcomers of the group started research on different examples of care leaver networks. They researched on websites of care leaver network, studying on how they formed, what were the objectives, the activities, and other relevant components.

When finished forming our organization, they presented to all care leavers in other care institutions. We were the first care leaver network that have the conference with 300 care leavers where **they met the policy makers.**

Though, there are many lessons learned as it was the first convention. For example, some of the young people still got trauma, so they were confrontation with the policy makers. But after the convention, they had turned the crisis into the advocacy opportunity where they educate the policy makers that this was the effects from lacking psycho-social supports during living in the care institutions.

Afterward, they started to conduct the meeting around, and that's how they built the care leaver network. SOS Children's Villages worked with them, in terms of financial and technical support.

In 2019, the parliament received the petition, and it appeared that **many of the policy makers didn't acknowledge the existence of care leavers and issues in alternative care. This is why advocacy is so important for sustainable change.**

At international level, there are more discussions in the care leaver level. Now, policy makers become like a friend to the network as they kept pushing their agenda. And the International Convention 2020 made clear on the commonality of the problems across countries.

There were some additional challenges e.g. strong discrimination towards care leavers with LGBT+, the sustainability on funding as in 2020, SOS Children's Villages stopped supporting funds.

In August 2020, Zimbabwe Network with the support of Udayan Care are going to publish the first care leavers research as the information on the struggles and the situation of care leavers aren't much open to public. It has to be the research that informed public and policy makers.

"We cannot stop this, as this is our family, this is our home. This is an everyday thing. **It's the same of us that we are 24-hour family as a network.**

Now we have new program called interdependent support where care leavers from different regions come to talk about challenges and life. **Sometimes they even go travelling like hiking. But this is kind of the support as by the end of the day, we all laugh and we enjoy.**

So, **forming a network for us is not about the administration, it's about belongingness.** We still have a family, brothers, and sisters. This network we are forming are slowly becoming a family, with the current number of 9,000 members." (Gift, 2021)



Gift
Care Leaver Leader
from Zimbabwe Care Leaver Network

d. Fundraising

- The number of care leavers means the need of care leavers.
- Money is crucial as in organizing events, skill development trainings, travelling costs to care leaver gathering, doing projects, especially when some projects need hired experts, and for emergency incidents, etc.

e. Professional group

What are the 'roles' of professionals in the the CL network from your point of views?

Have you seen the strong network or good practices? If yes, please share.

- Provide or connect resources for self development
- Coaching / mentoring so that CL could become independent as a person and as a self-drive group
- Dilemma**
 - Some CLs still need healing and been traumatized.
 - Without external support, it's outreach expectation to have them be on their own.
 - ***need to think about HOW LONG they are becoming independent***
 - Balance is important.
 - Need other organization to support youth leaving care as well as 'SYLC group'.
- To make them understand advocacy
- To help set them up as independent

What are the factors driven a
sustainable network?
And how do we as a
profession help support
that?

- the 4 pillars
- ownership of the care leaver themselves
 - Obstacles:
 - inexperiencedness / last priority of the life / too many things in life / employment challenges / burnt out
 - Bringing other organizations CL into other network make CL lost sense of ownership
- Should be a alumni network**
They should go beyond care leaver.

Section 4: Group Reflection

- As there were some care leavers who joined here the first time. Some has just formed the network and **they need technical supports**. And this International Care Leaver Network will support all the group.
- Researches on care leavers should be conducted more, especially on global level as many issues are common across countries and continents.
- In the future sessions, there could be some session where we organize the meeting of care leavers with the academias and policy makers for the hearing, or with the focus on publishing academic articles for further building evidence towards advocacy power of care leavers.

Report writer: Tanachaporn Putiyanun (Gunn)