

Care for Children



BASELINE SURVEY VISIT & FAMILY FIRST CONFERENCE REPORT

Malaysia, November 2016

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BACKGROUND

Care for Children partners with governments in Asia to help create a positive alternative to institutional care through local family-based care for disadvantaged children.

GOVERNMENT PARTNER

Care for Children's research team worked in direct partnership with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM), Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and OrphanCare (local NGO) to plan the logistical requirements for the visit, data collection and review.

ORPHANCARE

OrphanCare is a locally-based NGO that works with the government on adoption cases and preparation of adoptive parents. They also oversee the 'baby hatch' system and are advocates for family-based care.

BASELINE SURVEY VISIT AND FAMILY FIRST CONFERENCE

In November 2016 the Care for Children team visited Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at the invitation of MWFC. The purpose of this baseline survey visit was to understand more about the child welfare system and family placement practice in Malaysia. The Family First Conference was designed to help representatives from the government, child welfare homes and NGOs to explore the concept of family placement and to understand the importance of long-term foster care and its practice.

Care for Children Team

Name	Position in Care for Children	Responsibility in team
Mr YJ SUN	Country Manager, China	Team Leader
Dr. Nina Zhang	Research Manager	Research & Training Expert
Ms Jennifer Ng	Training & Development Manager	Social Work Expert
Mr Tim Taylor	Consultant	Social Work Expert
Ms Ou LI	Assistant	Survey Assistant

SUMMARY OF BASELINE SURVEY VISIT

Data for the baseline survey was collected from a series of meetings and visits with representatives from KPWKM, DSW, NGOs, children's care homes and families.

Meetings were arranged between November 15th and November 18th 2016.

Day 1: November 15th

MEETING WITH THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (KPWKM).



The Care for Children team was welcomed by officials from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. We met with Mr Chua Choon Hwa, Deputy Undersecretary for Policy Division, and Mr Quek Kia An, Children's Division, Department of Social Welfare.

We were introduced to representatives from OrphanCare and Vivekananda Home, a private children's home.

Officials from KPWKM introduced the child welfare system in Malaysia. Particular focus was given to the main care models in Malaysia: institutional care, adoption and group homes.

MEETING WITH NGOs

Care for Children spent time with representatives from OrphanCare and Vivekananda Home. This meeting helped the Care for Children team to understand the role of NGOs in Malaysia. There are both registered and unregistered NGOs. The government is planning a national survey to screen all NGOs.

An essential part of our survey was to visit both government and private care homes. These visits were crucial to helping the team understand how the child welfare system works in practice. Details of these visits were discussed and confirmed with MWFC.

VISITING CHILDREN'S HOMES

Care for Children were hosted by representatives of KPWKM, DSW and OrphanCare on the visits to the children's homes. Care for Children visited two government-owned children's homes and two private children's homes:

1. Rumah Kanak-Kanak Tengku Budrah, Jabtan Kebajikan Masyarakat (DSW)
2. Pertubuhan Ruman Amal Cahaya, Tengku Ampuan Rahimah (RACTAR) (NGO)
3. Rumah Kanak-Kanak Rembau (DSW)
4. Vivekananda Home Rembau (NGO)



Visits to the children's homes enabled the team to understand what kind of care is currently provided to disadvantaged children. Information was gathered about the demographics, reasons children are placed in care, numbers and type of staff employed, contact with birth families (if any), health and education, counselling services and guardianship.

Day 2: November 16th**1. Rumah Kanak-Kanak Tengku Budrah, Jabtan Kebajikan Masyarakat**

Care for Children met the care home principal, care home counsellor and support staff. DSW supports families experiencing difficulties with the aim of reuniting children with their family and strengthening those families. There are extended family members that are willing to look after abandoned children, but they will need support.

Number of children & age group: 170	Infant to 12-year olds: 0-2 years old, 38; 3-5 year olds, 45; 7-12 year olds: 51boys and 36 girls (87 in total). Children 12 years and over are relocated to a boys/girls home for (13+)
Reason in care:	Neglect & abuse, family crisis (eg divorce), orphaned
Number of Staff: 71	29 caregivers, 12 social welfare officers
Care Options:	Reviewed every 3 years; shortest 1 week, longest 12 years Most babies (under E category) can be adopted but only 2 older children were adopted last year.
Education & Health:	Most of the children are physically healthy, some with learning disabilities
Parent/family contact:	Parents encouraged to visit, holidays visits to family home (2 weeks/year); parents assessed for 'fit parenting' if they have been in jail; extended family can be assessed as a care option; 300 children go back to their families (including foster families and extended families). * For children who can't be adopted, their family members bring them home for holidays (2 weeks) and home's staff do it, too.
Child Protector:	For adoption ("fostering"), child protectors do home visits. Home staff also conduct home visits and reports are provided to child protectors.
Therapeutic/counseling work:	Counselor available
Guardianship:	For "fostering", parent has the guardianship (limited guardianship; with supervision).

2. Pertubuhan Ruman Amal Cahaya, Tengku Ampuan Rahimah (RACTAR)

Care for Children met the administrator of RACTAR, a registered private home for Malay girls.

Number of children & age group: 52	4 to 17 years old; 28 girls >12 years old
Reason(s) in care:	Children are placed by court order because for abuse & neglect or orphaned; social problems
Number of staff:	9
Placement period:	Children can remain after they turn 17
Education & Health:	Education a priority; one-year sewing course available for teenagers
Parent/family contact:	All children have parents or extended family. Holiday visits. No adoption cases. All girls leave the home as they return to their own families or live independently.
Child Protector:	No social worker
Therapeutic/counseling work:	None available
Guardianship:	Held by relatives; family consents to their release from the home



Day 3: November 17th**MEETING FAMILIES**

The Department of Social Welfare arranged for us to meet four families. Three of these families have already adopted children, and one couple was waiting to adopt. Meetings with the families gave the team valuable insight into the experience of the adoption process from the viewpoint of the adopters (and would-be adopters).

Family One: adoptive mother of four children

This adoptive mother has been married for 18 years with no birth children of her own. Both she and her husband have adopted four children (2 boys and 2 girls). The boys were adopted through private contacts, and the girls were adopted from a children's home. All children went through a two-year "fostering period" prior to receiving official adoption certificates. Social workers visited her during the two years. She did not apply for the 'fostering' allowance as her husband is in a well-paid, senior position in his company.

She said she would consider fostering another child, however would not be in a position to adopt more children.

**Family Two & Three: couples who have adopted children**

We met two couples who had each adopted children – children are aged between 7 months and one year old. Both families went through the adoption process and are required to go through a two year "fostering period" prior to being issued the adoption certificate.

Family Four: Couple wishing to adopt

Applied through the DSW website and waited between 2-4 weeks before being called for an interview. Child Protector conducted an assessment in one to two sessions, and a report sent to the DSW. They are currently registered on the waiting list.

Day 4: November 18th

3. Rumah Kanak-Kanak Rembau

Key People: the principal and a district protector

Number of children & age group: 99	13-18 year old girls (97 birth families remain)
Reason(s) in care:	There are 11 girls transferred from the government home we visited on Day 2. The other girls are sent to the home by court order.
Number of staff: 62	17 social workers, 2 nurses, 1 counselor
Education & Health:	75 have documents and can attend school; the other 24 do not have documents (citizenship) and can only attend vocational training course within the home.
Parent/family contact:	For girls above 18, they will go back to original families or be taken care of by other registered NGOs. There is one case of broke-up adoption case. 13-year-old girl spent 8 months with prospective adopters.
Child Protector:	N/A
Therapeutic/counseling work:	N/A
Guardianship:	N/A

4. Vivekananda Home Rembau

Chairman, Mr.Patel Ramesh

This is a NGO owned home, registered with government and takes government grants for food to children. This home is only for Indian children

Number of children & age group: 34	14 boys and 20 girls.
Reason(s) in care:	economic difficulty
Number of staff:	10
Placement period:	indefinite
Education & Health:	One young person with cerebral palsy resides in this home, and one to two children are adopted each year.
Parent/family contact:	Unknown
Child Protector:	No, however there is a child protector in regular contact
Therapeutic/counseling work	Unknown
Guardianship	Parent retains guardianship

Support is given to single mothers who wish to stay with their children. Four single mothers are currently supported by this home (1 with 5 kids, 2 with 7 each, 1 with 3 kids). Mothers are introduced to work opportunities, provided support to find accommodation in the community, given assistance to apply for government subsidies, and access to education for their children.

The home does not place children with families in the community, however, there was one case where a 7-year-old boy was placed with his uncle, but the placement broke down after 3-4 months.

Mr. Ramesh was interested to learn about foster care, but felt it would be difficult to implement without an increase in public awareness, education and more government support.

FINDINGS

1.1 Current government structures

The Ministry for Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM) has oversight over children in care.

- The Ministry has 8,000 staff in total, and 2,600 of them are child protectors (social workers).
- The Department of Policy & Strategic Planning makes all the policy changes, and the Department of Social Welfare (JKM) implements these changes.
- An amendment was been made to the Child Act 2001, to be cited as the Child (Amendment) Act 2015. The concept of 'family-based care' will be introduced as:

The definition of this is 'the care of a child in a family environment (including):

- *the care of a child by a parent, guardian or relative;*
- *the care of a child by a foster parent or fit and proper person; or*
- *the care of a child in a centre. (this definition refers to the concept of "cottage homes" or group homes).*

This amendment promotes a different model of foster care that reconsiders the way children's homes are set up.

1.2 Models of care

In Malaysia, children in care are primarily placed in children's homes or are adopted by families. Where possible, children are reunited with their families. The government have explored the concept of "de-institutionalization" (DI) and have chosen to adopt the term "family placement" instead.

We did not observe any model of care that is family-based, apart from adoption, and where parents have been supported to care for their own children independently.

Children and young people with disabilities are primarily cared for in the community. The government has had a long standing initiative called "Community Based Rehabilitation" (CBR) which encourages and supports families to care for their children based at home.

Children's Homes

Government child welfare homes account for approximately 10% of children's homes in Malaysia.

- The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) manages 13 children's homes with a total of 1,045 children placed. Eleven of these homes have more than 30 children, and two smaller homes have less than 30 children residing there. These government homes are almost exclusively for children who have been abused and neglected, and where parents have been incarcerated for crimes.
- DSW offers grants of RM16 per day, per child head to registered homes
- DSW also manages a small number of "cottage homes" (care homes or group homes).
- DSW has implemented a "fostering program" with OrphanCare where babies who have been left in a "baby hatch" are placed directly with families who plan to adopt the child. This 'fostering period' is from 3 months to 2 years and DSW offers up to RM500/month to families for the duration of this period.
- Some homes are staffed with counselors to support children on a regular basis. Life story work is not undertaken for children who either remain in the children's home or for those who are adopted.

- There are 91 registered homes managed by NGO's that have been given grants from the Department of Social Welfare. There are approximately 4,566 children residing in these homes and children come from a variety of backgrounds (eg. orphans, children from vulnerable families, etc.).
- There are also a number of private unregistered homes. These homes are privately run and funded by donations from the public. Monitoring these homes by the Department of Social Welfare is more difficult as they are not always easily identified. It was important to be aware of these homes, however they did not form part of our survey.

Adoption

Malaysia is not party to the *Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Adoption Convention)*. Domestic adoption is a care option in Malaysia, and international adoptions are not common. There is currently a waiting list of prospective adopters. Informal adoptions are quite common in Malaysia.

- Two key categories: "Category D" which means adoption is not a care option and "Category E" meaning adoption is a care option. About 10% of children are "Category E" and a large number of children are "Category D". This was due to either birth parents/wider family being alive and not consenting to adoption or because the children were not seen as adoptable. For many of children in these homes, their childhood will primarily spent in a children's home.
- Approximately 300 babies are abandoned each year. About 30 of these 300 have no known parents. Babies who are left at the baby hatch (run by Orphan Care), the social welfare department works with Orphan Care to take orphans directly to couples who will become adoptive parents.
- There is a probationary period of "fostering" prior to adoption. This period lasts 3 months (non-Muslims) or 2 years (Muslims).
- For children who have been "fostered", the social welfare department offers RM250/month per child to foster families (with a maximum of 2 children per family).
- There are many more willing adopters than there are children available for adoption. In 2016, there were approximately 300 prospective adopters on the waiting list, and 15 children waiting to be adopted.
- Children who had been adopted having been brought up in an institution had very limited social and life skills. One adopter told us that the children she adopted were '*fearful of the outside world*'.
- The adoption selection and screening process is quite brief and informal compared to other countries where the process can take between 6-8 months (including home study & training). Interviews in Malaysia primarily cover financial security, health and home environment.
- One child protector shared that she handles 4-5 cases per month, and most of the cases are reported from the hospitals. After she receives a child protection referral, she visits the family and writes a report of the case. If a court order is made, the child protector takes the child to the welfare home.
- Adoption cases are managed by each state social welfare department. After the child is placed with a family, a local child protector (if the family is from a different state) visits the family to make sure things are going well during the two-year fostering period.

Community Based Rehabilitation

Children and young people with disabilities are supported in the community through Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR). There are 527 community-based rehabilitation centres across Malaysia. The government has enabled access to a variety of support and services to people with disabilities. People with disabilities can register for a disability card and attend CBR to access these special provisions.

The government hope to increase the number of CBR centres and will rename this initiative 'Community Based Inclusive Development'.

1.3 Child Welfare System

Child Protectors play an essential role the care system.

- There are approximately 2,600 child protectors (social workers) in Malaysia who are hired directly by the ministry.
- There 1 to 2 child protectors per district. They are responsible for approximately 100 cases each but this may vary depending on the area they oversee.
- Some internal training is required for people to become child protectors but work is ongoing in relation to developing social work as a profession.
- The DSW is working towards developing a 'Social Work' Act.
- Child protectors work from district offices, and work with children's homes in the cases of child protection and adoption.
- There is a hotline number and child protectors respond to concerns about children through this route. Reports of this nature may come from hospitals, schools or members of the public. From those we spoke to it appears that the majority of reports came from hospitals. The child protectors have a duty to respond within 12 hours of a concern being reported and their investigation will include a visit at home to the family.
- It is the responsibility of the child protector to present the written report to the Court and, if an order is made, take the child into the children's home. This would only be done if there are no family members willing or able, or any other 'fit and proper person' able to look after the child.
- If the parents have been in jail, it is the role of the child protector to assess to see if it is safe for children to be place back with their parents. Depending on the situation, the child protector works with the children's home (who know the children best), different agencies and specialists to see if the child can safely return home. This may include drug rehabilitation or mental health support for example.
- From our discussions it appears that children are rarely being returned home successfully. One child protector stated that in her 4 years of service, she has only had two cases of removing children from their biological families and placing them into a children's home.

2. KEY THEMES

- The homes we visited provided a safe and secure environment for the children to live.
- Some innovative practice within children's homes.
- The government is encouraging 'family-based' care and there is a shared understanding that the family is the best place for the child to grow up.
- There are some good systems in place such as the role of the child protector (to be developed further in social work), some joint working between agencies (to be built upon) and children where the parents are unknown are placed into family homes

- without any major delays.
- Most children are all physically healthy; many come into care because of family issues, eg. abuse and neglect.
- **Parental contact** is encouraged where parents visit the children in the home or visits are arranged for the children to return to their families over the holidays. However, this is not consistently implemented across the homes we visited. Where possible, child protectors are able to assist and monitor children to return to their parents during the holidays.
- There are some brilliant prospective adopters in Malaysia who would be able to provide a secure and loving family for children. From the people we met and the discussions we had, we felt that adoption is perhaps an increasing trend in Malaysia.

2.1 MOVING FORWARD

Long-term foster care is a positive alternative that could be introduced into Malaysia's child welfare system. Currently, the concept of "fostering" is limited to the period of time a child has contact with their prospective adoptive family prior to adoption.

The main strategies for the Malaysian social welfare system working towards achieving family-based care for more children could include the following:

- increasing early preventative work with families and for more work to focus on safely returning children back to their parents, or wider family, after a period in care
- Increasing work and focus on long-term care planning
- increasing focus on developing each child and young persons sense of identity and belonging within children's home

Increasing early preventative work with families and for more work to focus on safely returning children back to their parents, or wider family, after a period in care.

The Child Act (2001) refers to the establishment of 'Child Welfare Teams' "with the purpose of coordinating locally based services to families and children if children are suspected of being in need of protection". The new amendment addresses multi-agency teams working together (up to 7 people), supervised by the child protector. There is an opportunity for these teams to intervene more, provide greater support, counseling, parenting advice and guidance to families to stop children coming into care in the first place.

Staff within the children's homes could be trained to provide this support and guidance working with and under the leadership of the child welfare teams. Good planning, risk assessment and implementation could support the reduction of children coming into care.

The children's homes, with additional training, could work in collaboration with the 'Child Welfare Teams' to support any planned transitions back to families. Further consideration could be given to current parental contact arrangements to ensure home visits are safely monitored. Consideration could also be given to the feasibility of introducing extended visits to family to support the return of children to their parents.

Increasing work and focus on permanency planning

Many parents who are in difficult situations may favour their children being looked after in care homes. Some reasons for this could be:

- Basic care needs will be covered – food, clothing, education, compassionate care staff
- Contact with their children is possible
- Maintain their parental rights
- Children can return and look after them in their old age.

However, for children to remain long term in a children's home may not be in their best interests. Different care options need to be available and appropriate systems in place to assess the needs and best interests of the child, and subsequently, develop a permanency planning for the child. With any care option, the right skills and sensitivity are needed to address the needs of the child and the wishes of the family in order to develop the best possible plan of care.

Increasing focus on developing each child and young person's sense of identity and belonging.

Screening and training for long-term carers and adopters so that they are well prepared to cater for the emotional needs of children who have experienced loss and trauma.

Introduction of life-story work for all children, involving parents, relatives, and facilitated by staff at the children's home. This is something that could be built into the home's programme of activities.



Family First Conference

21-22 November 2016

Care for Children, in partnership with the Ministry of Women, Family & Community Development and OrphanCARE organised the Family First Conference on November 21 & 22, in Kuala Lumpur.

CONFERENCE PURPOSE

The purpose of the Family First Conference was to share the findings at a two-day conference focusing on family placement, attended by MWFC and other key government departments. Based on Care for Children's experience, the team explained the impact of institutional care on children's development and the importance of family-based care.

The conference also provided an opportunity for Care for Children to explain its [core business model and theory of change](#) and key considerations if Malaysia were to pursue a model of family-based care.

SPEAKERS & GUESTS

Mr. Azman Mohd Yusof, Deputy Secretary General (Strategic), Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development welcomed delegates and opened the conference.

Dr. Robert Glover OBE, Founder & Executive Director, Care for Children welcomed delegates and introduced Care for Children's work and theory of change.

Mr. Quek Kia An, Deputy Secretary, Department of Social Welfare, presented an overview of Malaysia's child welfare system and key developments in the area of family based care.

Dr. Ian Milligan, International Advisor, Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (CELCIS) provided a global perspective on family-based care.

Mr. Sun YuanJie, China Country Manager, Care for Children, presented on the development of foster care in China and shared Care for Children's experience of working in partnership with the Chinese government to develop foster care projects across the country.

Ms. Emma Zhang, Training Manager (China), Care for Children, presented an overview of Care for Children's training programme and shared insights into some of the challenges and successes of training up family placement workers.

Mr. Timothy Taylor, Team Manager, "Achieving Permanence Team", Southwark Council, London, and **Dr. Nina Zhang, Research Manager, Care for Children**, both presented a summary of findings and reflections on Care for Children's baseline survey visit.

Dr. Waitchalla, Undersecretary, Policy & Strategic Division, Ministry of Women, Family & Community Development, closed the conference by reinforcing the Ministry's commitment to family-based care. She thanked Care for Children and OrphanCare in her closing comments.

DELEGATES

The conference brought together over fifty delegates from a variety of contexts within the child welfare system:

- Government officers from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, and the Department of Social Welfare
- Child Protectors from the Department of Social Welfare representing districts from across the country.
- NGO's currently managing children's homes and working with children also attended the conference.

Delegates at the conference were both interested and inspired by the work that Care for Children has undertaken in China over the past 18 years. An opportunity for delegates to respond and raise their questions was presented through themed discussion groups and a Question & Answer session.

The conference provided a unique opportunity of key practitioners and leaders within the child welfare system to network, exchange experiences and ideas, to raise concerns and hold constructive dialogue on issues around family-based care.



PROGRAMME

DAY 1: 21st November, 2016		
Level 3, Banquet Room, Vistana Hotel		
8.30 - 9.00	Registration for delegates	
9.00 - 9.10	Welcome and introduction	
9.10 - 9.30	Opening Speeches	Mr. Azman Mohd Yusof , Deputy Secretary General (Strategic), Ministry of Women, Family & Community Development
9.30 - 9.50		Dr. Robert Glover OBE Executive Director <i>Care for Children</i>
9.50 - 10.00	Photo	VIPs and all delegates
10.00 - 10.20	<i>Coffee and tea break</i>	
10.20 - 10.50	Current context of child welfare in Malaysia	Mr. Quek Kia An Deputy Secretary, <i>Children Division</i> <i>Department of Social</i> <i>Welfare</i>
10.50 - 11.30	Global perspective of family placement care	Dr. Ian Milligan International Advisor <i>CELCIS</i>
11.30 - 12.00	China perspective and family placement care	Mr. YJ SUN Regional Manager, NE Asia <i>Care for Children</i>
12.00 - 12.30	Care For Children's Training Programme: An Introduction	Ms. Emma Zhang Training Manager, China <i>Care for Children</i>
12.30 - 14.00	<i>Buffet Lunch – Ground, floor, Vistana Hotel</i>	<i>VIPs and all delegates</i>
14.00 - 15.00	Summary of Baseline survey findings& Q&A <i>"Children in Care: The Malaysian Context"</i>	Dr. Nina Zhang Research Manager <i>Care for Children</i> & Mr. Tim Taylor Social Work Consultant
15.00 - 15.15	<i>Coffee and tea break</i>	
15.15-16.00	Summary of Baseline survey findings& Q&A <i>"Children in Care: The Malaysian Context"</i>	Dr. Nina Zhang Research Manager <i>Care for Children</i> & Mr. Tim Taylor Social Work Consultant
16.00	Close	

PROGRAMME

DAY 2: 22nd November, 2016		
Level 3, Banquet Room, Vistana Hotel		
9.00 - 9.20	Introduction to Day 2	All delegates
9.20 - 10:30	Themed Discussion Groups	All delegates
10.30 - 10.45	<i>Coffee and tea break</i>	
10.45 - 11.30	Panel Discussion (Q & A)	All conference speakers All delegates
11.30 - 12.00	Closing session	Mr. Robert Glover OBE Executive Director <i>Care for Children</i> Dr. Waitchalla Undersecretary, Policy & Strategic Division, Ministry of Women, Family & Community Development
12.00 -14.00	<i>Buffet Lunch – Ground floor, Vistana Hotel</i>	All delegates