



Ensuring quality parameters in child care institutions during COVID-19 pandemic

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It is important to highlight that children living in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) as defined under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015 are the most vulnerable, as in most cases, they belong to various categories such as 'abandoned', 'living without biological parents' or 'orphan'.

Prior to the lockdown announcement in late March 2020, UNICEF worked with the State Child Protection Society (SCPS) in Assam and extended support to the State team in issuing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for CCI functionaries based on the guidelines issued by MWCD, NCPCR and other special institutions such as NDMA and NHM. Subsequently, a monitoring matrix was developed and shared with the SCPS for further collection of data on a daily basis related to the status of children in CCIs.

Since there was no physical movement due to the lockdown situation, District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) were asked to coordinate with CCI functionaries on a daily basis through online engagement and submit status reports via WhatsApp. Later these reports were compiled at the SCPS level and shared with the Social Welfare Department for further follow up action with other departments at the state level and coordination with the Deputy Commissioner's Office at the district level.

During this period, emphasis was given to ensure rations for all children in the 122-state run CCIs, regular health check-ups by district medical teams, disinfection treatment of CCI campuses and safe behavioural practices with a focus on health, hygiene and sanitation.

Outsider movement to CCIs was restricted and special emphasis was given to provide psychosocial counselling services to children and staff of CCIs. Activities like yoga and sports while following physical distancing norms were stressed upon.

A similar effort was made to reach out to children placed under various forms of alternative care arrangements such as foster

care covering both individual as well as group foster care. An attempt was made to reach out to all children and their foster families with the right information on COVID-19 and safe practices. Later tele-counselling services were extended to these families.

Online engagement was intensified with focus on role clarity of associated stakeholders in various child protection structures such as DCPUs, CWCs, JJBs, CCIs, CHILDLINE and CSOs related to COVID-19 and its impact on children in addressing the risk. A special online orientation program on 'Mental health and psychosocial services' for CCIs and CHILDLINE was organised.

This effort has benefited **1,779** children living in **122** CCIs to access quality institutional services as defined in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015 from the State.

Similarly, the program has reached out to **64** children through sponsorship and **69** children through individual (33) and group (36) foster care programs.



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