



Report

## Webinar Reintegration and Aftercare for Children Who Are Survivors of (Sexual) Exploitation

September 7th, 2023

This webinar was for partner organizations that work with children who have fallen victim to (sexual) exploitation. Reuniting these children with their families can be highly complex. Due to the intricacies of the reintegration process, these children often remain in some form of emergency shelter or care, and long-term stay might not be conducive to their overall development. However, determining when a child is ready to return home poses questions. How do you guide the family in welcoming the child back home? And how do you ensure that the home is safe - and stays that way?

### Introduction Kelly Schut

Kelly Schut gave a short introduction on Free a Girl and the Better Care Network. Kelly is the Director at Free a Girl the Netherlands. She explained the focus of the webinar: **reintegration in the context of alternative care options**. Kelly referred to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, where it is stated that "the child, ..., should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding." This does not mean that a child has an absolute right to a family. But, based on research, alternative forms of care in a family environment are preferred when a child is placed outside their home. Kelly emphasized that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each child is different, every situation is different, which is why the best care also varies for each child. With this webinar we hope to learn and find inspiration about reintegration and aftercare strategies.

### Rajiv Kumar Roy: recommendation for reintegration from survivors

The webinar started with a presentation by Rajiv Kumar Roy. Rajiv is an expert in child sexual exploitation and child trafficking at Family for Every Child. He shared insights from the research 'Hearing the Voices of Survivor - Research on Reintegration from Child Sexual Exploitation'. This research is done by researchers en peer researches who are survivors themselves, living in Nepal, Madagascar and Uganda. Rajiv shared the key findings: the impact of stigma and discrimination, support systems that are needed, and the importance of financial independence. His PowerPoint presentation, that gives clear conclusions and recommendations, can be find [here](#). Special attention is given to boys who are survivors of sexual exploitation.

In the discussion after his presentation, important points were:

- Reintegration plans are based on immediate needs. Long term planning is often difficult.
- It is important to prepare family and community, so they accept survivor in a positive way. Local leaders and religious leaders are very important to work to prevent stigma.
- Reintegration is tailor made work, depends on individual situation of the child
- Follow up after reintegration is advised during average 2-5 years. It is important that the person(s) who do the follow-up know where to start, what happened, what is needed.



- Advice of some ngo's is to start around 6-8 months after the rescue with reintegration. If children stay longer in a shelter, the reintegration becomes more difficult.

### **Rizel Ontario: aftercare at home instead of in a rescue center**

Rajiv's presentation was followed by presentation of Let's Care, a small-scale NGO working in Panay (Philippines) with girls and boys who are survivors of sexual exploitation. Rizel Ontario, program supervisor for Let's Care discussed their ongoing process of reintegrating children from their rescue center back to biological families, extended families, or foster care. Rizel also outlined their future rehabilitation program, aimed at supporting survivors within the community. Her PowerPoint presentation can be found [here](#).

### **Breakout rooms**

After the plenary presentations, the participant divided in three breakout rooms to explore specific topics related to reintegration and aftercare. The conclusions and remarks of the discussions:

#### *1. Ensuring Safety During Reintegration*

- This group discussed what the conditions are that determine that it is safe for a child to be reintegrated? We determined that this needs every stakeholder involved in child protection - parents, teachers, community leaders, child protective services, NGO workers, etc. - to step up and play their part to ensure the safety of the child. Continuous monitoring was also mentioned.
- We also went over several safety measures that need to be in place in case there is a security risk during reintegration
- Overall, we concluded that the voices of children within the reintegration process need to be prioritized and put front and centre. The child's own views and experiences are central to determining effective strategies.
- We considered the child to be successful re-integrated once they were able to live happy and healthy lives in a safe environment.

#### *2. Supporting the Child and Family Without Stigmatization*

- *Successful reintegration is to restore the survivor's dignity to as before they were trafficked'* Governments are also responsible for this; they need to develop guidelines for reintegration.
- Emphasizing the need for re-assessment of situation at home before reintegration, ensuring safety and preventing re-trafficking.
- Providing individual case management and life skill support.
- Focus on addressing parent-child interactions to change negative beliefs, also in re-assessment.
- Advocate for raising awareness and educating parents to support their children
- Encourage community support for survivors and recognize this community as part of the re-integration system.
- The importance of a 2-year follow-up process to monitor survivors' well-being.
- Urges the reporting of trafficking information to government officials for rescue operations.
- Noting the neglect of minor victims during the process of reporting information to governments and officials, emphasizing their legal rights and entitlements.



- Highlighting the importance of victim compensation support and access to FIR (First Information Report).
- Emphasizing community and home investigation reports to ensure a safe reintegration environment.
- Advocates for rehabilitation within schools and addressing the root causes of trafficking.
- Stresses the importance of access to education and proper support for victims, but also of their parents.
- Highlighting the ways in which partners can refer parents for economic opportunities to government programs, also on access to education, so root causes of trafficking are tackled.
- Empowers survivors to lead, raise their voices and share their experiences to protect potential victims and address institutional challenges.

### 3. *Implementing Effective Aftercare for Reintegrated Children*

- Some of the ngo's provide shelter again when any violence is committed to the child after reintegration. They stress the importance of having a safe place to return to if needed.
- Part of the aftercare is an allowance to help the child to with the costs for their education.
- Financial support for the family and support in how to create more income is important. One of the ngo's supports parents in improved of existing business or to start a new business. It is a small budget, given in two parts: one at the start, one some time later.
- Visiting schools, to see if any support is necessary (material or other support/counselling) is also important. Sometimes the behaviour of the child in the school is difficult, so some extra months of counselling is needed.
- Aftercare is follow-up with child, parents and the Child Welfare Committee.
- Ngo's do have the strong wish to support children that are 18plus. Young adults still need guidance, help, support with education/vocational training. Sometimes even when they are much older, something happens that triggers the difficulties they faced in the past. Guidance and support must be provided even when they are adults.
- Aftercare is more than individual and group counselling. Ngo's are offering sport, games, music lessons, art, therapeutic dance, theatre, role plays, depending on the interest of the child.
- Life skills training is important to build up their live independently, for example sessions on problem solving, decision making and positive thinking.
- Behaviour change and change in the mindset of the community is very important, especially under religious leaders and teachers: what is child protection, what is child abuse, how to deal with children who are survivors of sexual exploitation, what is positive parenting and how to refer to child helplines. Special focus must be on harmful practices as child marriage, girl discrimination. It will take time, but step by step the situation will improve.

**Recording** The link to the recording of the webinar (1,5 hrs) can be find via [this link](#).

**Questions and more information?** BCNN published an overview of relevant materials, tools, publications that are helpful in setting up reintegration programs for survivors of sexual exploitation. This paper can be found [here](#).

Any question or support needed? Please feel free to contact us at [info@bettercarenetwork.nl](mailto:info@bettercarenetwork.nl).