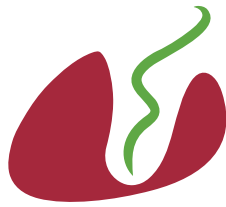


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Focused on the South Asian Region



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Editorial

The September, 2018, issue of this journal follows on the heels of a very successful third Biennial International Conference (BICON) on ‘Evolving Trends in Alternative Care for Children in South Asia’, held in New Delhi, in March 2018. This was the third Biennial (BICON) conference organised by our supporting institution, Udayan Care, along with support and financial aid from various organisations, devoted to children in need of care and protection. The conference highlighted the regional work in South Asia, in keeping with the global push, to move orphaned and vulnerable children away from institutionalised settings and into family settings, family strengthening, foster care placements and/or adoption. From a stimulating and informative key note speech by a leading authority on this subject, Dr Delia Pop, who was interviewed in a previous issue, to a lively debate presenting opposing viewpoints on this topic, the conference, one could say, was a resounding success.

In keeping with the global initiatives and the energy reflected in many of it is over 300 participants, this issue of the journal is a special edition on the Aftercare concerns of young adults who leave the care of agencies and embark on a journey of their own. This transition, while acknowledged, has not been adequately researched or understood in the SAARC region. We hope that the compilation of papers in this issue will shed some light on the concerns of this transitional group and space and generate ideas for further investigation and exploration. While we continue to maintain the original structure of the journal, we have added another section titled ‘Opinion Piece’. This section will capture commentaries and private opinions (perhaps substantiated by research and literary inquiry) of individuals who work in government settings and NGOs, that concern themselves with children and adolescents in need of care and protection. This is a rapidly expanding group of individuals and the rich assortment of ideas and personal reflections are often not captured by our current format. We extend an invitation to all individuals who work in such settings to submit their ideas to enhance care, improve policy, and further the cause of dissemination of knowledge that we are all committed to as professionals.

Once again, I am extremely thankful to my editorial committee for the guidance and hard work that they put in behind the scenes and of course to our esteemed reviewers

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who assisted us in the review and ultimate selection of the papers presented in this issue. I hope that as you peruse through this issue, you will feel encouraged and motivated to be part of our growing team of contributors and reviewers.

I begin the issue with a short foreword on leaving home. A developmental task during the adolescent phase, leaving home is complicated and emotionally turbulent time for most young adults. For orphaned individuals, this transition is far more complex. I present the complexities of issues that plague the care leavers, as they move on in their journey in life.

This is followed by our standard and well-established format. Our leading articles are two separate interviews. The first is an interview of Nimmu Kumari, a 28-year-old care leaver from Sri Lanka. Ms Kumari, like many care leavers, has a traumatic childhood history. She grew up in three children's homes, shuffled from one institution to another, as she attempted to work through her deep-rooted emotional wounds. Her last admission to Sarvodaya Home changed the trajectory of her life. Ms Chathuri Jayasooriya, an independent psychosocial practitioner and consultant, who works on assignments, with both government and non-governmental organisations, conducted the interview. Her interview captures the raw and painful emotions of someone, who has gone through the system and survived.

Our second leading article is an interview of Professor Mike Stein conducted by Dr Kakul Hai, a psychologist by training who is currently employed as a Manager for Advocacy at Udayan Care. Professor Mike Stein is Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at the University of York in the UK and the Joint Coordinator of the 'Transitions from Care to Adulthood International Research Group', which focuses on research on youth leaving care. Dr Hai divides the interview into four sections. These focus on Professor Stein's academic and research interests, his experience with legislation and policy making, his research work on youth leaving care and finally his vision for South Asia. It is rare that we have two rich interviews in one issue but we could not pass up this opportunity to bring these contributions to your attention.

This theme of survival despite great odds is reflected in the following research papers. From SOS Children's Villages, Sri Lanka, Perera examines how young adults leaving institutional care face challenges during the time of transition. These are often age-based transitions, which, according to Perera, pose several challenges for the young adult as they coincide with several life skills learning programmes that are simultaneously being pursued. The confluence of challenging emotions makes the young adult more vulnerable to stress thereby leading to a poorer outcome in independent living.

Saif Khan, who elaborates further, explores the legal framework that often surrounds the transition of a young adult from institutional care to independent living, on international and national laws, primarily within the Indian legal system. The paper enhances our understanding of the complex relationship between legal provisions, aftercare solutions and age-based transitions.

We continue to explore aftercare experiences in the next paper which focuses on the role of aftercare support and services for young adults transitioning from institutional care to independent living. The paper co-authored by Rini Bhargava, Riti Chandrashekar, Shivangi Kansal and Dr Kiran Modi, present findings from a study conducted on 47 young adults between the ages of 17 and 29 years, in Delhi. Their findings revealed that existing aftercare programmes are ill-equipped to prepare youth raised in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) to transition from alternative care to independent living. Furthermore, a gender-gap was observed with females having a lower education level than males. Mental health concerns continue to be present, reflecting the inability of a system to adequately address the emotional vulnerabilities of this population.

We are no strangers to our team of interns from Duke University and once again they do not disappoint us with a rich and informative paper on the mental and emotional health needs of OSCs during their transition into adulthood. Under the tutelage of Dr Sumedha Gupta and with the support of Dr Kiran Modi, these students provide us with another stellar contribution. Rich with data and analysis they remind us of the imperative need for ongoing studies related to long-term care, with special attention to mental health and emotional needs.

Continuing along the lines of developing paradigms for care leavers to reintegrate into society, Sarita Shankaran, a Child Rights Consultant, working at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, provides a comprehensive and insightful review of the skills required for a healthy reintegration of care leavers into society. In her paper, she explores the leaving care experiences of two youths from Kamathipura. What makes this unique is that they come from the most famous red light area in India. The paper highlights the vulnerability of these children to both abuse and exploitation.

An empowerment programme for young women survivors of sexual violence is a valuable contribution to our section on good models of care. This programme, operating in Sri Lanka and known as the Emerge Centre for Reintegration, stresses the development of life skills, which include self-defence, as well as skills that strengthen one's ability to make a living.

For our international section, we present a rich account of youth leaving alternative care in Serbia. Authors Anita Isakov and Jasna Hrcic use a quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine the preparedness of youth leaving care settings. They broaden our understanding of this concept by examining whether the type of placement, as in kinship, foster or residential, makes a difference. Their findings give overwhelming support for addressing the emotional and mental health issues in these young adults in their preparation for independent living.

For our movie review, Kavita Nayar introduces us to a documentary, yet to be released. The documentary, 'Voices beyond the Wall: Twelve Love Poems from the Murder Capital of the World (2017)', explores the journey of a priest/poet who spends a year in a Honduran orphanage for girls. His work with young adults reveals the painful emotional life of a child who has lost contact with her family of origin, has dreams for her future, and experiences the joys and sorrows of growing up in an orphanage, with others, like her. The bonds of love and friendship, that form and endure over time, are a ray of sunshine in a life that has been truncated in matters of the heart.

For our book review section, we are delighted to present two reviews. Aashita Galundia gives a comprehensive review of 'Beyond the Foster Care System: The Future of Teens' by Betsy Krebs. The reviewer captures the author's keen intent to provide a framework in which one could begin to understand the plight of these young adults. By following the journey of five individual and their stories, an understanding of what an individual needs to participate and compete in this world begins to emerge. Leena Prasad, our very own editorial board member, provides us with a review of the book, 'Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World: Volume 2' by Tuhinul Islam and Leon Fulcher. In their book, these authors concentrate on Asian and Middle East Perspectives. Ms Prasad highlights the cultural and semantic trends that have emerged in the literature and are represented in the book.

For our opinion piece, we present a brief paper by Shivani Bhardwaj. Ms Bhardwaj introduces the idea of State sponsored empowerment programs for women, especially those that are disadvantaged and likely to end up homeless and abandoned. Their children also often suffer similarly. State sponsored programmes can be considered to be a basic right, a sort of inheritance that all individuals should be able to access. A novel idea, it calls for more State sponsorship and awareness in addressing these problems and proposes that by building initial and lifelong skills we can avert long term disasters and social problems.

The journal concludes with a section on Brief Communications and Upcoming Events to inform the reader about research efforts and to keep us abreast of the significant programmatic and clinical advances in the care of institutionalised children and adolescents in the region.

It is my sincere hope that you will become a member of our growing family and join us as a contributor, reviewer and perhaps even both.

Monisha C. Nayar-Akhtar, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief