

6TH BICON CONFERENCE REPORT 2025

CARE REFORM FOR
CHILDREN IN ASIA:
A movement for building
inclusive societies, resilient
families, and thriving children.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

BICON 2025 convened government leaders, care experienced advocates, child protection experts, and civil society from across Asia and beyond with a clear mandate: **no child should grow up without a safe, loving family.**

Over two days in Kuala Lumpur, we discussed challenges and advanced concrete solutions – from care reform and family strengthening to social protection, foster and kinship care, mental health, disability inclusion, and evidence driven policy change. **At the centre were leaders with lived experience**, demanding accountability and the reshaping of systems that too often fail children. This report captures that urgency. Inside are recommendations, keynote speeches, short session summaries, and – wherever possible – the unfiltered voices of care experienced speakers who are driving this movement.

Read it. Watch it. Share it. Act on it.

The report provides a taste of BICON. Please watch the session videos in full on the links provided in this report for more detail. You can join us in our mission to accelerate care reform for children in Asia – by sharing the report, the videos and by using the BICON recommendations to guide all of us in our actions along the road to care reform.

ABOUT BICON

This was the sixth BICON – the Biennial Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia. The BICON Organising Committee is made up of [Family for Every Child](#), [Forget Me Not](#), [Hope and Homes for Children](#), [SOS Children’s Villages International](#) and [Udayan Care](#) working closely with a specially convened Care Experienced Co-ordination Group with delegates from several countries. For the 2025 BICON in Kuala Lumpur, BICON was proud to welcome [UNICEF Malaysia](#) as an official partner. We wish to thank the Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia for officiating the opening of BICON, and for their support and participation in the conference. As a prelude to BICON, UNICEF Malaysia and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development co-hosted a national pre-conference dialogue on alternative care with child rights experts and national stakeholders to discuss Malaysia’s progress and challenges in strengthening families and family-based care, in light of Malaysia’s review by the Committee of the Rights of the Child in 2026.

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DISCLAIMER

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6th Biennial International Conference (BICON) on Care Reform for Children in Asia

A movement for building inclusive societies,
resilient families, and thriving children.

15 – 16 October 2025
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



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BICON 2025 – KUALA LUMPUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Moderator



Ms. Tessa Boudrie

Hope and Homes for Children

Speaker



Ms. Junu Lama

BICON Care Experienced
Reference Group, Co-founder
Shine Together (Nepal)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

Over two days in Kuala Lumpur, care experienced people, civil society, government officials and donors came together and shared their ideas and recommendations to support care experienced children, strengthen families and end institutionalisation. We consolidated these recommendations and Junu Lama, representing the BICON Care Experienced Reference Group presented these at the end of the conference on behalf of everyone. Her speech is copied below followed by the official BICON 2025 recommendations, newly edited and strengthened for this report.



JUNU LAMA

BICON Care Experienced Reference Group, Shine Together (Nepal)



BICON is not just a conference. We are a movement for care reform for children in Asia. When we last met in Kathmandu in 2023, the shadow of Covid-19 was still hanging over our world. The impact of the pandemic on care experienced young people in Asia and the organisations that work with them was huge. Now two years later, the world has become even more unstable and more uncertain. Aid cuts harm children and young people and the organisations that work with them. The financial pressure on the UN system weakens the mechanisms set up to protect the human rights of marginalised families and children, to prevent unnecessary separation and institutionalisation and, to promote progress towards care reform for children.

But. This moment will pass. We know that across Asia and the world, governments, regional agencies, NGOs and donors are coming forward with new ideas, with innovation and with action. We heard about some of these during this BICON. The beating heart behind this progress is a growing Asian movement of care experienced young people and the passionate people who work with them in communities across Asia. This is the same at BICON where care experienced young people are taking more of the space, in the room and on the stage! We have heard about innovative approaches to keep children safe and protected in families. It is our collective strength and resilience that will change things for good. Let's work together to build a future where families and communities are resilient and care protect and nurture their children, a future where no child is separated from their families, a future where child institutions are a thing of the past, a future where families are resilient and all children thrive. We are a movement building an inclusive society of resilient families and thriving children. Let's build this world together.

Let's build this world together with the government too: Government leadership is essential to lay the foundations and strengthen the systems in place to deliver care reform for children at scale. There has been significant national progress on care reform for children since the last BICON in 2023. At BICON, governments have shared many lessons learned. Examples where government leadership is essential include legislation, monitoring and gatekeeping mechanisms, national mapping and data analysis, action planning, innovative budgeting, strengthening the social service workforce for care reform, the provision of family support to prevent family separation and facilitate family reintegration, strengthening the continuation of family-based care for children in need of alternative care, public awareness campaigns among other topics.

In this spirit of coming together, we at BICON welcome the launch of the Global Charter on Care Reform for Children that was launched at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2025. It is a great opportunity for care reform.

While we say family is the foundation of society, children and young people are the foundation of a nation. These collective recommendations, from the 2 days of BICON show the pathway for the care reform we all envision. This should not be limited to reports or paper, we need action. Together let us commit to transforming these recommendations into real lasting changes that safeguard and ensure every child's right to grow up in a safe, supportive and loving family environment where adulthood is no longer about re-imagining the childhood that was once lost. Protecting childhood is building the nation.

(Junu Lama)



THEME 1

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

1. **Support children and young people's right to meaningful participation and co-leadership** in all decisions affecting them, ensuring the voices of those with care experience drive the design, governance and evaluation of policies and programmes – paying particular attention to ensuring gender inclusion.
2. **Create direct pathways between care-experienced children and young people and power holders**, ensuring meaningful participation of care leaver associations, children still in alternative care, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), and other representative groups from the earliest design stage – not just during consultation or implementation.
3. **Strengthen coordination between disability and child rights actors**, ensuring that all care reform is disability-inclusive and grounded in the social and human rights models of disability.

THEME 2

FAMILY STRENGTHENING, PREVENTING SEPARATION AND ENABLING REINTEGRATION

4. **Support and strengthen families holistically**, through positive parenting programmes, social protection, economic empowerment, mental health care, psychosocial support and community-based networks.
5. **Invest in inclusive social protection systems** that ensure the rights and entitlements of each family member, prevent family separation and reduce financial stress. Economic hardship is a major driver of family separation.
6. **Invest in kinship care as a core pillar of family strengthening and reintegration**, including financial support, mental health services, caregiving support and strong national policy frameworks.
7. **Accelerate care reform in Asia** by prioritising reintegration, kinship care and alternative family care such as foster care and adoption. These are essential parts of transforming care systems and ending institutionalisation.

THEME 3

WORKFORCE, SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING & ENABLING CONDITIONS

8. **Strengthen the child protection workforce** by expanding and training social workers and frontline professionals at all levels, especially at the community level, and investing in peer learning focused on prevention of family separation and family strengthening.
9. **Invest in enabling conditions for care reform**, including research, international learning, data systems, pilots, innovations, and digital case management platforms to ensure efficiency and accountability.
10. **Harness technology, digital tools and data tracking**, adopting digital platforms for case management to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability. Ensure access to digital literacy training for young people leaving care.
11. **Establish and sustain multi-stakeholder engagement to maintain progress**, connecting families, communities, civil society, governments, and international partners – because no actor can drive care reform alone.

THEME 4

AFTERCARE, TRANSITION & LONG TERM SUPPORT

12. **Guarantee aftercare as a RIGHT, not a favour** – including targeted social protection assistance to ensure safe transition, housing, education, health care, counselling, career guidance and employment pathways such as quotas.
13. **Ensure lifelong access to mental health and psychosocial support** for all children and young people – in care, during transition, and after leaving care. Because healing is lifelong.
14. **Provide easy and universal access to legal identity and personal records**, including birth certificates, case files and key documents – for children without parental care, children still in care and care leavers. This should be actively supported by government and local authorities.

THEME 5

LEGAL, POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORKS

15. **Strengthen and review legal and policy frameworks related to care reform** – ensuring child-centred, accountable, gender-sensitive laws and procedures on alternative care placement, adoption, aftercare and disability and gender inclusion.
16. **Strengthen and monitor foster care systems**, ensuring legal clarity, strong policies, safety standards and caregiver support – including for specialist foster care for children with disabilities, refugees, migrants, children with parents in conflict with the law and other minority groups.
17. **Build political will and embed clear accountability**, including monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of policies and budgets allocated to care systems and aftercare, to ensure long-term, sustainable care reform.

THEME 6

FINANCING, PHILANTHROPY & REGIONAL ACTION

18. **Amplify philanthropy and pooled regional funds** and build public awareness of the need for sustainable investment in child protection and care reform and of the harms of institutionalisation.
19. **Deepen regional collaboration with cross-border action** on trafficking, illegal adoption, and shared care reform challenges through ongoing partnerships and knowledge exchange.
20. **Ensure regional leadership and government commitments** – with regional bodies such as ASEAN and SAIEVAC taking action to promote and support care reform. Countries should sign the Global Charter on Care Reform, and sustain forums like BICON and establish regional care leaver forums to monitor progress and drive accountability working in close collaboration with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and other UN treaty bodies.

WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS AND KEYNOTE SPEECHES¹

WELCOME FROM THE BICON CARE EXPERIENCED REFERENCE GROUP



Dikshya Thapa

Co-ordinator of BICON Care
Experienced Reference Group,
Founder of Shine Together (Nepal)



Surja

BICON Care Experienced
Reference Group,
Udayan Care (India)



AN AUDIO VERSION OF THIS SPEECH IS AVAILABLE HERE



DIKSHYA THAPA

Founder of Shine Together Care Experienced Network (Nepal) and
Co-ordinator of the BICON Care Experienced Reference Group



Namaste! Selamat Datang!

A heartfelt welcome to everyone joining us for this year's BICON. I am Dikshya Thapa, with over 14 years of lived experience within Nepal's institutional care system.

It's truly encouraging to see so many familiar faces and new guests gathered here today.

It is both an honour and a privilege to welcome you all to this important conference. I would like to begin by extending my heartfelt gratitude to our distinguished guests – many of whom have travelled great distances to be here today. Your presence demonstrates your strong commitment to the cause we all deeply care about.

¹ These transcripts have been slightly edited for ease of reading only.

Today, I stand here as a proud representative of the Care Experienced Reference Group of BICON. I carry with me the voices, stories, and aspirations of many young people who, like me, have navigated the complexities of life in care and beyond. BICON is more than just a conference – it is a space for reflection, collaboration, and transformation. A safe space where lived experience meets leadership and where our voices shape the future of care. Together, we will explore the challenges, celebrate the resilience, and envision a future where every child and young person in care is seen, heard, and supported.

- The BICON Care Experienced Reference Group (Reference Group) officially started during 2021, with the four co – founders: Dikshya Thapa, founder of Shine Together Care Experienced Network Nepal from Nepal; Karishma Singh and Manoj Udayan, founders of the Care Leavers Association Network from India; and Nimmu Nimali Kumari, founder of the Generation Never Give Up Network from Sri Lanka.
- The Reference Group has been growing over the years with the participation of strong and inspiring young people with lived experiences participating from different parts of Asia and taking on leadership roles.
- The vision is to strengthen this group with balanced participation of diverse young people and countries in Asia.

The objective of this group is to connect with care-experienced young people in Asia.

- To provide a safe space and platform for us to amplify our voices of lived experience related to care.
- To unite and advance the rights of care-experienced children and young people through collective advocacy and movement building.

In 2023, when BICON was hosted in the vibrant city of Kathmandu, Nepal, we witnessed something powerful. Young people from across Asia came together to share their stories, their struggles and solutions. There we planted a seed of the movement. A movement rooted in compassion, equity and the belief that every child, every family, and every individual deserves to belong, to be supported to thrive. We talked about stigma, culture, identity, education and mental health. And we didn't just talk – we made recommendations.

BICON 2023 emphasised key recommendations for the major challenges we face as care-experienced young people:

- Care experienced children and young people with disabilities must never be left behind. Their special needs must be recognised and addressed.
- Invest in family support – economic upliftment, scholarships, and parenting education, so children can grow and thrive.
- Aftercare support for children and young people is a must for safer and stable reintegration.
- Strengthen the system so individuals with lived experience do not have to choose well-being over education. Start with offering emotional support.
- Reinforce quality care standards and ethical volunteering practices and regulate monitoring system.

- Do not forget about children still in care. I repeat, do not!
- Listen to care experienced youth – our voice matters. We are the truth, we are the story. And we are the evidence.

From Kathmandu to Kuala Lumpur, our mission is global. Building bridges between countries, ideas, communities, and generations. We are here to listen, learn, and to lead. Inclusive societies take courage and collaboration. Strong families are supported and empowered. Thriving children aren't a dream. They are a promise we fulfil together. That's why we are here today.

Our hope for this year's BICON is that we go even further. That we challenge systems, celebrate each other, and co-create solutions that last. I hope we leave this space not just inspired – but committed to act.

Over the next 2 days, you'll hear from incredible speakers, engage in workshops and connect with friends who share your passion. Please remember – this space belongs to you. Your voice matters. Your experience is expertise.

I would also like to take a moment to thank BICON organising committee – Family for Every Child, Forget Me Not, Hope and Homes for Children, SOS Children's Villages, Udayan Care, and UNICEF Malaysia. Thank you to the Care Experienced Reference Group, which brings together young people from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Cambodia – each with unique stories, but united by shared purpose. We also thank the Global Foundation for Care Fellows by Experience and the civil society for supporting youth to be a part of this event.

And to all the care experienced young people, we are remembering you at this moment.

(Dikshya Thapa)



SURJA

BICON Care Experienced Reference Group and Udayan Care, India



Thank you, Dikshya. And Hello everyone! My name is Surja and I am from Uttar Pradesh, India. I spent nine years in an Udayan Care children's home, and my journey as a care leaver has shaped who I am today.

In 2022, I joined the LIFT Fellowship (Learning in Fellowship Together) where I started raising awareness about care leavers through blog writing and by mobilising care leavers in Uttar Pradesh to form Care Leavers Unite, a growing state-level network.

Since BICON 2023 in Nepal, I have been a member of the BICON Reference Group, contributing my experiences and ideas to strengthen care leaver advocacy at a global level. In 2025, I also became part of the BICON Coordination Group, where I now take an active role in shaping BICON gatherings with my insights and leadership. Alongside this, I am a core member of the National Care Leavers Network in India and an active part of the Global Care Leavers Community, where I have been advocating for care leavers on national and international platforms for the last three years.

I also serve as the Programme Coordinator for LIFT, where I support care leavers in designing and implementing innovative projects. These projects aim to improve care and aftercare systems and bridge the gaps in support for young people as they transition out of care. My work is deeply rooted in building strong connections, amplifying care leavers' voices, and helping shape better aftercare policies in India and beyond.

Talking about the last BICON in Nepal. It was very special for me, as it was my first BICON and my first in-person experience. Meeting 30 care leavers face-to-face, seeing the passion in their eyes, and feeling such strong community engagement was powerful. It showed me the real strength of care leavers coming together as a global family. At the last BICON in 2023, many of us stood together and said with one voice: "No care reform without care experienced persons." Those words were not just a slogan; they were our lived truth.

Each story that was shared in that room came from deep wounds and deep hopes, children growing up in institutions, young people struggling to be heard, and care leavers who knew that without inclusion, their voices would be lost again.

We asked for something simple but powerful – key recommendations from last BICON.

- Promote meaningful inclusion and participation of all care-experienced persons, including those with disabilities, indigenous communities, and LGBTQIA+.
- Listen to those in care and those who have left care. Not as tokens, but as leaders shaping policies and programmes.
- Remove barriers for children with disabilities. Make them active participants, not silent shadows.
- Ensure access to mental health services while in care, while preparing to leave, and after leaving. Because healing is lifelong.
- Support children's right to participate in decisions affecting them, so they grow with confidence, not silence.
- Build strong systems to track and protect. Maintain information systems and monitoring mechanisms that capture every child's journey and ensure aftercare services reach them.
- Create direct pathways between care experienced young people and government. Mechanisms where we are not guests, but partners in statutory committees, audits, and reforms.

Rakesh, a care experienced leader from India, told us: "It is high time to embark on the process of socialisation rather than social isolation." His words reminded us that care is not about survival, it is about belonging.

And in the two years since, change has begun. In India, care leavers have come together to push for recognition, stronger aftercare programmes, and peer support platforms. More care-experienced voices are being included in policy spaces, and some governments are starting to open doors for dialogue and consultation. Databases are being created, services are being mapped, and systems are beginning to listen.

Tomorrow, in our 2-hour session, we will share these developments in detail. We will show how the unforgettable memories of BICON 2023 have transformed into living action, programmes launched, networks built, and voices amplified.

From that experience, I took away many key learnings. One important lesson was the value of listening to both sides – to those who receive care and support, and also to those who provide it. This helped me understand how interventions, mechanisms, and support systems are built, and what impact they truly create. Now, standing here today, I feel so excited for what the next two days will bring. This time, we bring even more energy, more unity, and more voices, 30 care-experienced young people from different countries. Our presence is not symbolic; it is powerful proof that care reform is a movement carried by lived experience.

- We will hear stories of innovation in family strengthening, foster and kinship care, disability inclusion, and mental health.
- We will see governments, policy makers, and care-experienced leaders together in one space, building pathways for systemic reform.
- We will create BICON 2025 recommendations, concrete steps shaped by both evidence and lived realities.
- And most importantly, we will listen to the voices of those 30 care-experienced speakers. Their courage and truth will guide us toward a future of resilience, dignity, and belonging.

Our hope for these two days is not only to share experiences but to spark connections, collaborations, and commitments that will carry forward into real action. We want to leave this room with impact, policies shaped, support expanded and lives uplifted. My hopes for this BICON are simple but powerful:

- To have more collaboration between us.
- To create more participation, where everyone's voice matters.
- To spend time listening deeply to one another.
- To take forward actions together that make a real difference.
- And most importantly, to make each other feel safe, supported, and protected.

Together, as care leavers, supporters, and allies, I believe we can make this BICON another memorable and impactful gathering.

So, let's make this BICON unforgettable. Let's shine together, rise together, and rebuild a future where every care experienced young person is seen, heard and empowered.

Welcome to 6th BICON 2025! Let's begin.

(Surja)



SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR BICON 2025



Dr. Kiran Modi

Founder of BICON, Founder
and Managing Trustee,
Udayan Care (India)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE



Good morning distinguished guests, colleagues, friends, and most importantly, the care-experienced young people from many countries. It is with immense pride that on behalf of the Organising Committee and our partners, I welcome you all to this Biennial International Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia, the 6th BICON.

When we first imagined BICON back in 2014, it was born out of a deep question as a practitioner: How do we ensure that every child, regardless of circumstance, grows up in a safe, nurturing, and supportive family environment? At that time, institutions were often the default option for children without parental care, and I am sorry to say that even after a decade, it remains a prevalent choice (at least of what I know in Asia). Family-based solutions remained underexplored then. With improved global awareness and advocacy at various levels, it is now being discussed, better understood and being prioritised.

Over the past decade that intent has matured into a movement: one that insists children belong with families whenever safe and possible, families and communities must be supported to take care of children, rather than abandon them to institutional care and that care systems must prepare young people to lead dignified adult lives. Over the years, it has grown into a vibrant Asian platform on care reform, thanks to the organising committee which currently consists of Hope and Homes for Children, SOS Children's Villages International, Forget Me Not, Family for Every Child and us, Udayan Care and in 2025 UNICEF Malaysia. Thanks to our supporters and friends like Martin James Foundation, Stichting Weeshuis Der Doopsgezinden and Keystone Human services international.

I am reminded of Birendra, a care-experienced leader from Nepal, talking at the 5th BICON, who said, "We are the Story. We are the Truth. We are the Evidence." This simple, powerful sentiment embodies the essence of BICON, emphasising that care reform is incomplete without the voices of those who have lived it.

At its core, BICON has stood for three things, which we have clearly spelt out in the 5th BICON report:

1. Young People as Experts – shaping agendas, conversations, and outcomes – Today, care leavers co-design programmes, speak in policy forums, and anchor peer networks, a reality that was rare in 2014.
2. Innovation and Evidence for Systems Change – moving from institutional care to family-based, nurturing alternatives.
3. Asian Perspectives for global impact – showcasing solutions that enrich global discourse.

The urgency of our mission has only intensified in the face of mounting global challenges, wars, increased inequality, climate change, pandemics, displacement, global funds cut, all of which place more children at risk of separation from families. Yet, what gives me hope is this assembly, a compelling convergence of lived expertise, practitioners, policy-shapers, and innovators, all poised to drive care reform forward in Asia.

As we know, the theme for our 6th BICON focuses on Care Reform for Children: Building inclusive societies, resilient families, and thriving children. Today as I speak, I want to do three things: celebrate measurable progress across the region, candidly name persistent gaps, share with you all the key agenda points for the 2 days and call for coordinated action, so that over the next 2 years, when the 7th BICON happens, sustainable systemic changes deepen. And in this, all of us are equal stakeholders.

Across the world, we are seeing concrete policy reforms and programming shifts that move us away from institutionalisation and toward family-based care, as envisioned in the UNCRC, the UN alternative care guidelines, the UN DGD of 2021 being dedicated to care reform, the Kigali Declaration of 2022, adopted by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Rwanda. In January 2025, the UK's FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) launched a global initiative calling for reforms so that every child has a "safe, loving family environment," and to progressively end institutional care.

We all know that Asia is home to millions of children in vulnerable situations. There are laws, progress is being made, and doors are opening for family-based alternative care, yet our journey is far from complete. Families under stress still need strengthening, foster care is still emerging, adoption remains complex, and aftercare for young adults stepping out of care demands urgent attention. Yet the past few years have seen important national level policy advances to expand non-institutional care and standardise foster care practice in several Asian countries. We have speakers from many Asian countries, who will be elaborating more on these developments. I also wish to acknowledge the initiatives by regional bodies such as ASEAN and SAIEVAC, which are integrating issues of family strengthening and alternative care in their agenda.

Progressive changes at policy level are meaningful only when it reaches the last mile. Where guidelines, laws and local action have aligned, we see stronger gatekeeping (fewer unnecessary admissions), more formalised foster and kinship pathways, and expanding family strengthening programmes along with aftercare support.

Data and visibility: Despite these advances, gaps remain and must be urgently addressed if we are to convert policy wins into life-changing outcomes. Many countries still lack a reliable mechanism to enumerate children in alternative care and care leavers in routine national data systems. Without reliable counts, policies cannot be properly sized or financed.

Aftercare and transition readiness: Also, increasingly country policies are recognising aftercare, but scale and quality vary dramatically. We must ensure guaranteed, funded aftercare pathways for education, housing, emotional well-being and employment.

Local capacity & gatekeeping: family strengthening and expanding family-based care requires trained social work capacity at local levels and robust gatekeeping to avoid inappropriate placements.

Youth participation & leadership: Care-experienced youth must be resourced to lead programmes and policy dialogues, not merely be consulted. Their lived experience is evidence and must be central to design. We have so often heard the care leavers demand a seat at the table.

To conclude, in our **vision for the future**, we want to:

1. Amplify the voices and recommendations of care-experienced young people, who are not beneficiaries, but experts who lead and define strategy.
2. Elevate Asian perspectives on care reform – rich, diverse, and deeply contextual – and in doing so enrich the global discourse.
3. Highlight innovative care approaches, scaling practices that genuinely support families and children.
4. Reinforce systems thinking – backed by evidence – so that care reform is durable, inclusive, and transformative.

BICON has always been a platform for collective leadership and is proof that reforms are possible when policymakers, practitioners and care-experienced leaders work together.

Let this BICON be the moment when our collective energy converts into measurable outcomes for children and youth across Asia. In closing, I extend my deepest gratitude – to UNICEF Malaysia as our proud partner, to the steering committee, to every organisation and individual who made this gathering possible, and especially to the care-experienced young people, whose courage and insight guide us all. Thank you and let us begin. Together, we choose care. Together, we choose family. Together, we move toward a brighter future for every child.

(Dr. Kiran Modi)



OPENING REMARKS



Mr. Robert Gass
UNICEF Malaysia Representative



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE



Good morning everybody and Salam Sejahtera. Very nice to see all of you here today and hope you've all travelled well and rested well and are all prepared for a very exciting couple days ahead.

Yang Berusaha Puan Wan Noraidah binti Wan Mohd Zain: Chairperson of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) and also Deputy Director Generals for Strategy, Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in Malaysia, Dr. Kiran Modi, Founder of BICON, Founder and Managing Trustee, Udayan Care, Ms. Mikiko Otani, President of Child Rights Connect, Dr. Rinchen Chopel, Director General of South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children, distinguished representatives of the government from Malaysia and from across Asia, the dedicated BICON organisers and partners, valued colleagues from civil society and fellow child rights protection practitioners, and above all, the inspiring 34 Care Experience young people who are at the heart of this gathering representing seven different countries.

And a very special thanks for the very inspiring message that we heard from Dikshya and Surja to start us off this morning. What a great way to start this conference. It's an honour for UNICEF to be here today with you in Kuala Lumpur for children in Malaysia and across the region.

Permit me to begin with a simple pantun or a poem, a reflection of Malaysia's spirit and JanjiKita.

*Janji kita bukan sekadar kata,
Tersulam harapan, kasih, dan erti,
Selagi wujud cinta keluarga,
Setiap anak berhak dilindungi*

So, for our non-Bahasa Melayu speakers, how that translates is that our promise is more than words. It is woven with hope, love and meaning. And so long as family love endures, every child deserves protection. And I think that that is at the heart of our conference today and I hope that it'll be something that we can stay with as we continue with our discussions.

So why are we here today? We gather at BICON around a simple yet powerful idea that every child belongs in a safe, loving family environment. I think that that is the premise of basically all of our discussions that are starting today and will continue throughout the next couple of days.

We also know that across Asia and around the world, too many children are separated from their families and that may be for due to poverty, family disruption, lack of access to inclusive services or other crises that may befall them. We've seen decades of research which have shown us a powerful truth that residential care harms children's development. It affects their well-being and affects their safety. We know that children in residential care often face lifelong consequences such as developmental delays, psychological damage and poorer education and health outcomes. The statistics globally are sobering. We know that four and five children living in residential care are in fact not orphans. Most of them have at least one living parent. Families with the right support could have kept these children at home. But this is what care reform is all about, really. To change the situation that currently exists, to create the conditions where every child can belong and where every family has the support that they need to be able to stay together.

Since 2014, BICON has brought together change makers across Asia in a growing regional movement to turn this vision into action. Reforming care systems, strengthening families, ensuring the children are raised at home with love, safety and dignity.

Here in Kuala Lumpur, we're honoured to be sort of the first expansion of this going beyond South Asia to extend into Southeast Asia. And we look for growing movement and momentum in the years ahead as this expands into other areas of the world as well. So today we renew that promise, our JanjiKita, our shared commitment to ensure that every child grows up in a family environment that reaches their full potential and is seen, heard and protected.

Ladies and gentlemen, we know what works when it comes to caring for children. This is not a big secret. This is something that we all know, but which we work towards implementing and ensuring for the safety and protection of our children.

Our first responsibility must be to support families. And we can do this through varying ways. We can do this through parenting support. We can do this through social protection. And we can do this by providing inclusive community services that prevent family separation before it even happens.

When separation is unavoidable, family-based alternatives should be the solution. And this includes various different modalities. This includes kinship care with extended family members and foster care. And that residential care should only ever be the last resort, temporary, closely monitored and focused on initial eventual family reintegration.

We also know other things. We know that strengthening families is the fiscally responsible thing to do. So not only is it a morally right thing to do, the right thing for children, but it also makes fiscal sense. And this is an important argument for governments who are looking to implement policies. We know that it is up to 10 times more costly to place a child in residential care than to support them with within their own family.

Meaningful care reform, something that all of us here are gathered to address, doesn't happen by goodwill alone. We can have all the great intentions in the world, but we really need the support. We need clear laws and policies. We need reliable data on which those laws and policies are based. We need sustainable financing and we need a skilled social service workforce.

We've seen from evidence that several countries in Asia are demonstrating that change and that that change is possible when families are supported not too far from us. In Cambodia, for instance, the number of children living in residential care has fallen by more than 70%. A massive reduction in the numbers of children who are living in residential care through investments that have taken place in family strengthening programmes and in community-based support and in the deployment of trained social workers. We look forward to hearing insights from delegates who are in this room, all of you here today, as well as from Cambodia, on how you have been able to advance care reform so that all of us can benefit as we move forward.

So, this is Malaysia's moment. Malaysia has long recognised that the family is the best environment for a child to grow, to learn and to thrive. This principle is embedded in Malaysia's Child act which undergoes the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And it is deeply rooted in Malaysian culture where family is the foundation of society. We'd like to build on this foundation and where Malaysia took an important step forward toward the family Based care Pilot launched in 2019, which was a clear sign of families. UNICEF Malaysia is proud to have supported the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in this important initiative in the early development of it and stands ready to support in its expansion.

Here in Malaysia, the situation regarding residential care remains unclear. We know that many live in unregistered or unregulated facilities where the risks of neglect and abuse are higher. And this makes the impetus for care reform in Malaysia critical and urgent. To ensure that every child is visible, that every child is protected, and that every child is surrounded by the love and support of a family. UNICEF is a proud partner of BICON in bringing together global and regional experience. All, all of you here in this room today, together we can learn from one another and scale up what we know works.

We are privileged to have members of the BICON Care Experience Reference Group with us today. This is a unique modality and one that we're very proud to see and really is something that we would like to replicate in other fora that we carry out as we move forward. Your journeys remind us why this work matters, why it's important and what is at stake when systems fail to protect or support. You are what makes BICON exemplary. It's your voices, it's your lived experiences and it's your unique insight which are centred in each of the discussions that will follow. It's you who remind us that those who know the system best are the ones who should be leading in shaping the solutions.

So, before I close, three commitments that I hope that all of us can take on as we move forward. Three steps that we must take if JanjiKita or our promise is to become a reality.

First, let us invest in the child protection system and the social service workforce so that families and children can get the support they need when they need it most.

Second, let us build systems of data and accountability so that children who are living in alternative care, especially those who are living in unregistered residential care, are not left invisible.

Third, let's commit to building strong families and expanding family-based care so that every child, every child can experience the safety and belonging that only a family can provide.

As the Malay saying goes, **Bagai aur dengan tebing** Like bamboo growing by the riverbank, children and families cannot stand alone. Our JanjiKita, our promise, the promise of us all is to stand with them. We do that because it is in this strength of families that children find their own strength. And when children are empowered, societies thrive. So let us all here today commit to protecting all our children regardless of circumstance towards a shared future that is brighter for us all. Thank you very much.

(Mr. Robert Gass)



KEYNOTE ADDRESS



Yang Berusaha Puan Wan Noraidah binti Wan Mohd Zain

Chairperson of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), Deputy Director General (Strategic), Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

“ *Assalamualaikum. Salam Malaysia Madani* and a very good morning to all of you. Mr. Robert Gass, UNICEF representative to Malaysia, Dr. Kiran Modi, Founder of BICON, Founder and Managing Trustee, Udayan Care, Dr. Rinchen Chopel, Director General of South ASEAN Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) and Ms. Mikiko Otani, President of Child Rights Connect and ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development or KPWKM, it's my honour to welcome all of you to Kuala Lumpur and to this important gathering. The 6th Biennial International Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia, Kuala Lumpur. We are truly pleased to host you here in Malaysia. Allow me to express our sincere appreciation to the BICON steering committees and organising partners, especially UNICEF, for inviting KPWKM to stand alongside you in this important movement in advancing a cause of such profound significance. Ensuring that every child in Asia grows with dignity, safety and belonging.

For KPWKM, this collaboration reinforces our commitment to strengthening the child welfare system in Malaysia and contributing meaningfully to regional progress. BICON has grown far beyond the walls of a conference since its beginning in 2014. It has become a movement, a collective voice rising from Kathmandu to Manila, Colombo to Jakarta, calling us to rethink how we care for children who cannot remain with their families. This is driven not just by policymakers or practitioners, but by the very people who lives are most affected Care experienced young people. They are not a guest in this movement; they are its leaders.

As we gather here in Asia's diverse heart, we recognise that all our countries are undergoing different stages of care reform. Some are just beginning to shift away from institutional care. Others have developed strong systems of foster and kinship care. But despite our differences, we share our common truth. Children do not belong in institutions; they belong in families and communities. This is a principle deeply rooted in our cultures, our faiths and our moral duty.

Today our region faces new pressures. Economic uncertainty, climate disasters, migration. Conflict of these forces can pull families apart and place children at risk. But these challenges also reveal something hopeful. The extraordinary resilience of families when they are supported and the perseverance of communities when they are empowered. Care reform is not only about child protection systems. It is about social protection, community investment and building societies where every child is seen and valued.

For Malaysia, hosting BICON is a moment of reflection and responsibility. KPWKM has long prioritised the protection and well-being of children through our national child policy and child protection system. Today we continue to advance the agenda with a stronger focus on family strengthening foster care support, early childhood intervention and community based social services. To prevent unnecessary separation, to enhance interagency coordination and explore reform that better support kinship care, guardianship and translation, support for young living care. We know that true reform cannot be done by one ministry alone. It must be embraced across health, education, justice, civil society and communities themselves.

I am especially moved by the young people in this room. Many of you carry lived experience of growing up without parental care. You carry memories, some heavy, some hopeful. And yet you stand here not in complaint, but in purpose. Your presence reminds us that reform must be shaped not only by data and policy, but by humanity and voice. We owe it to you not only hear your stories, but to translate them into action. National action, regional cooperations and global advocacy.

Over the next two days, BICON will not produce slogans. It will shape commitments. Commitments to support families before separation ever happens. Commitments to ensure that when children must be placed in alternative care, it is temporary, safe and rooted in community. To ensure that young people aging out of care and not abandoned at the ash of adulthood. These are not promises for tomorrow. They are imperative for today.

Asia is a home to the world's largest child populations. If we can reform care here, we can change the future for millions worldwide. But no government can do this alone.

It requires the partnership of NGOs, the guidance of researchers, the innovations of practitioners, and above all, the leadership of young people with lived experience. Let the conference be remembered not only for what we discuss, but for what we dare to imagine. A region where no child grows up without identity. Where disability is met with inclusion. Where poverty never forces separation. Where every child, regardless of circumstance, grows not only to survive, but to thrive. To all our partners, especially UNICEF Malaysia and the BICON organising committee, we offer our deepest thanks. Your dedication has brought us together. And together I believe we can bring about lasting change with great hope and determination. I look forward to the important conversation and collaborations that will take place over these two days. May this conference strengthen our shared commitment. A future where every child in Asia can grow with dignity, connection and care. Thank you, *terima kasih*. And once again, *selamat datang* to Malaysia and of course, Kuala Lumpur. Thank you.

(Yang Berusaha Puan Wan Noraidah binti Wan Mohd Zain)



SESSION SUMMARIES

BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR CARE REFORM FOR CHILDREN IN ASIA IN A CHALLENGING GLOBAL CONTEXT

Moderator



Ms. Anju Pun
Forget Me Not
(Nepal)

Speakers



Lopa Bhattacharjee
Director of Alliance
Programme, Family for
Every Child



Dr. Rinchen Chopel
Member of the UN Committee
on the Rights of the Child CRC
and Director General of
SAIEVAC (Bhutan)



**Mr. Wanchai
Roujanavong**
Former Representative of
Thailand to the ASEAN
Commission on the Promotion
and Protection of the Rights of
Women (ACWC) (Thailand)



Dir. Imelda R. Ronda
Director III, Operations and
Services, National Authority
for Child Care (NACC)
(The Philippines)



Mr. Wai-Kit Ho
Care Reform Campaign Team,
UK Foreign Commonwealth
and Development Office
(FCDO) (UK)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

In this session, speakers acknowledged the difficult global context and explored how this has impacted on families, communities and local civil society. Despite this, progress since the last BICON has been inspiring and there is genuine regional and global momentum for care reform for children. Speakers made a strong case for using regional bodies, UN mechanisms, and global charters as important accountability mechanisms to advance care reform and also to not lose sight of the importance of building the resilience of local initiatives that support families and prevent family/child separation.

Anju Pun, Forget Me Not (Nepal) and Lopa Bhattacharjee, Family for Every Child (India), both from the BICON organising committee, set the scene



ANJU PUN

Forget Me Not (Nepal), BICON Organising Committee

“ As we gather here in beautiful Malaysia, a country known for its rich cultural diversity and deep commitment to regional collaboration, I’m reminded of a Nepali proverb, ‘Sano sano dubo jodera ghan bancha’ – ‘Even small blades of grass, when joined together, form a thick mat.’ It speaks to the power of unity, and how collective action, even from the most humble beginnings, can create something strong, resilient, and lasting. Today, as we live in a world marked by conflict, climate crisis, economic instability, all these situations are creating immense pressure on our families and communities across Asia and beyond. But at the same time, we have witnessed extraordinary resilience from young people, children and communities who are still protecting their children and families in such limited resources. Since BICON 2023 that happened in Kathmandu, I have witnessed powerful moments in my country where young people with lived experience have sat down alongside the Nepal government, practitioners and experts to co design our national alternative care guidelines. These are the moments we want to see every day. Not just in one-off events like BICON.

(Anju Pun)





LOPA BHATTACHARJEE

Family for Every Child (India), BICON Organising Committee



Earlier this year, the world was still grappling with the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with marginalised children and families hit the hardest. Since then, our sector has faced growing instability and uncertainty, with increasingly severe consequences for those most marginalised. We are seeing major cuts in funding, rising attacks on child and human rights – especially around migration, diversity, equity and inclusion – growing conflicts, the worsening climate crisis, and the erosion of support systems that protect children and families. As the United Nations has observed, we are living through a true polycrisis.

At Family for Every Child, a global alliance of more than 50 locally led organisations, we are witnessing first-hand how this situation is disrupting essential services for children, families, and communities. Many local CSOs across our network are now at risk of closing their doors.

Soon after the US Government issued the USAID stop-work order, we reached out to our members and local CSOs across Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Europe, and the Americas. Survey findings showed that nearly 90% of the children and families they serve were likely to be directly affected. More than 80% of staff were also expected to be impacted – with many considering leaving the sector entirely and taking on whatever work, they could find. This represents a significant loss to the social workforce. Communities are already feeling the consequences: reduced access to healthcare, nutrition, and child protection services; disruptions in education; increases in gender-based violence; weakened families; and rising family separation.

While these immediate impacts are devastating, this moment also presents an opportunity – a chance to rethink how we work, innovate, and accelerate change for children and families. One key recommendation from the survey was the need for stronger, fairer coordination among stakeholders, with genuine respect for local knowledge and local solutions. This crisis has made it clear that we need more equitable models that directly support and invest in locally led efforts, because those closest to communities understand their needs best.

This is our opportunity, here at BICON Asia, to model equitable and inclusive collaboration – to strengthen communities so that children can grow up in resilient, caring, and safe families. It is a collaboration rooted in the voices and expertise of children and adults with lived experience.

(Lopa Bhattacharjee)





DR. RINCHEN CHOPHEL

Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC and
Director General of SAIEVAC (Bhutan)

Dr. Rinchen Chophel reflected on the evolution of BICON and the broader movement for care reform in Asia. Having participated in every BICON since 2014, he highlighted how BICON has grown organically from local efforts to a regional platform with real potential to influence global agendas – reversing the usual top-down dynamic of global policy forums.

Dr. Chophel emphasised the need to shift discussions of alternative care from a charity-based framing to a rights-based approach rooted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. He stressed that children do not merely benefit from family-based care but hold a right to grow up in caring families.

Acknowledging the current instability in the region, Dr. Chophel encouraged collective action to build a better future for children across South Asia and Asia. He called for stronger alignment between the BICON recommendations, the UN Day of General Discussion (DGD) outcomes, and the mechanisms of the UNCRC Committee. He urged BICON organisers and care-leaver networks to monitor state reporting cycles and supply questions to the Committee, ensuring governments are held accountable. He proposed exploring avenues for UNICEF-CRC Committee strategic dialogues and for governments, agencies, and care-experienced networks to jointly monitor and report on progress.

“ I am always little disturbed when this concept of alternative care and care reform is seen from a charity welfare approach. I believe we need to change that into a totally rights-based approach. It’s not that children are “best” in a family, it’s the right of children to grow up in a caring family. Just look at the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child itself from Article 1 to Article 42, there are enough articles that provide for rights for children living through care reform to be provided from a rights perspective and not just a welfare approach.

(Dr. Rinchen Chopel)





MR. WANCHAI ROUJANAVONG

Former Representative of Thailand to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women (ACWC) (Thailand)

Mr. Roujanavong outlined the role of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), a dedicated human rights body within the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, tasked with advancing and safeguarding the rights of women and children throughout the region. ACWC interprets the Convention on the Rights of the Child and translates it into regional declarations, plans of action, guidelines, and handbooks for all eleven ASEAN member states, which then adapt these standards into national policy and practice.

He stressed that the best interests of the child guide all decisions, with families given the highest priority. Institutional care should only be used in extreme cases, and governments must support families so children can return home as soon as possible. He highlighted the need for monitoring all care facilities, the importance of alternatives to detention for children in conflict with the law, and the harmful impact of forced marriage.

He also referenced the relevance of ASEAN's long-term work to eliminate violence against children, including a regional plan of action now entering its second phase. He emphasised the need for strong data, adequate funding, and effective welfare services across the region and encouraged collaboration with ASEAN's training institute for social workers to strengthen alternative care and child protection.



We should not let facilities providing care for children be unregistered because if they are unregistered, we will not be able to monitor them and we cannot ask them to follow ASEAN standards and Article 9 of CRC. Article 9 of CRC gives highest priority to the parents and family of the children and states that children shall not be separated from their parents against their will.

(Mr. Wanchai Roujanavong)





MS. IMELDA RONDA

Director III, Operations and Services, National Authority for Child Care (NACC) (The Philippines)

Ms. Imelda Ronda outlined how the Philippines is pursuing systemic care reform to ensure that children grow up in safe, loving families rather than institutions. She explained that the government has adopted major reforms, beginning with the Department of Social Welfare and Development's Child Protection Systems Strengthening Framework (2020) and continuing through national plans such as the Philippine Development Plan (2023-2028) and the Fourth National Plan of Action for Children. These frameworks promote family-based care, strengthen social services, and streamline adoption processes.

A landmark shift came with Republic Act 11642 (2022), which unified all adoption and alternative care responsibilities under the National Authority for Child Care (NACC).

Ms. Ronda reported that this reform reduced adoption processing times from 5-7 years to just 6-9 months. The NACC now leads foster care expansion, kinship care prioritisation, and development of a national digital case-management system, improving transparency and ensuring children do not fall through the cracks.

She highlighted the Philippines' commitment to regional collaboration, including exchanges with Cambodia and South Korea, and international conferences that underscore a shared belief that every child deserves to grow up in a family. Acknowledging ongoing challenges – such as capacity gaps, community perceptions, and external pressures – she stressed that these only heighten the urgency of reform.

Ms. Ronda concluded that systemic change is possible when driven by political will, vision, and partnerships. She reaffirmed NACC's mission to secure permanent, loving families for all Filipino children, reminding the audience that "every child matters" and nothing done for children is ever wasted.

“Momentum requires vision, political will and collaboration. At the NACC, we dedicate our work and our hearts to the cause of our abandoned, surrendered, neglected, orphaned, foundling, abused and exploited children. Our mission is to find them their forever loving homes because nothing we do for children is ever wasted. Every child deserves love and every child matters.

(Ms. Imelda Ronda)





MR. WAI-KIT HO

Care Reform Campaign Team – UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)

Mr. Ho introduced the United Kingdom’s Global Campaign on Children’s Care Reform, launched in January 2025 to accelerate global action toward strengthening families, expanding quality family-based alternative care, and reducing reliance on institutional care. He noted that despite widespread agreement on the harms of institutionalisation, progress remains uneven due to weak momentum and gaps between global commitments and national implementation.

Central to the campaign is the Global Charter on Children’s Care Reform, launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2025 and endorsed by over 30 countries and 115 organisations. The Charter unifies existing international commitments and calls for investment in social services, stronger data systems, accountability, and meaningful participation of children and care-experienced individuals.

Countries endorsing the Charter commit to ensuring children grow up in safe, nurturing families and to addressing the harms of institutional care. The UK emphasised the importance of sustaining global and regional momentum, highlighting platforms like BICON as essential for aligning global ambition with local action. The presentation concluded with a call for coordinated leadership, adequate funding, and community-level support to ensure every child grows up in a loving family environment.

“ By linking regions, sharing learning, and aligning priorities through the Global Charter, we can renew our collective commitment. Governments, civil society, and local communities each have a role to play. Together, we can sustain this global movement and ensure that every child grows up in a safe, loving family environment.

(Wai-Kit Ho)



PLEASE SCAN THE QR CODE TO ACCESS THE GLOBAL CHARTER ON CARE REFORM



STORIES OF INNOVATION 1: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, FAMILY STRENGTHENING AND INCLUSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

Moderator



Mr. Sachin Kumar
Hope and Homes for
Children

Speakers



Mr. Raju Ghimire
Voice of Children (VoC)
(Nepal)



Ms. Siti Masyitah Rahma
Muhammadiyah
(Indonesia)



**Ms. Juanita
Vasquez Escallon**
Chief of Social Policy,
UNICEF Malaysia



Ms. Ruma Budha Magar
Representative of the BICON
Care Experienced Reference
Group, Shine Together (Nepal)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

By supporting families in difficulty, building their resilience and addressing the needs of children at a young age, we can give children the best start in life – and prevent family separation. This session shared real life stories of innovative practices in this field and concluded with a heartfelt speech by Ruma Magar on behalf of the BICON care experienced reference group.



RAJU GHIMIRE

Voice of Children, Nepal

[Voice of Children](#) is a member of Family for Every Child Global Alliance. The organisation works especially with children who are in a street situation, or in situations of child labour and who are living in most vulnerable situations and separated from the family. A key part of their model is to get to meet and understand a child's family. Inspired by what children tell them, Voice for Children has developed an initiative called the ladder approach which works with the children on a journey from initial outreach to family. The ladder approach combines family tracing and identification, with regular visits to the family to better understand what the cause of separation was. They work with the child and the family separately, one team works with the children, another team works with the family. The aim is reintegration if the biological parents are not available or not able to keep the children, they work with the kinship family. And if the kinship family is not suitable or not available at that time, they work with a foster family and so on. This is a family strengthening model.

STORY

Sunil grew up in rural Nepal as the youngest of five children. After his father was murdered and his mother's mental health collapsed, he and his brother survived by begging on the streets. By age 10, Sunil had lost his mother too and had never been to school, facing daily abuse and rejection on the street. His turning point came when Voice of Children rescued him, provided safety, and prepared his relatives for his return. After a year in their drop-in centre, he was reunited with his sister and because he was in kinship care he could begin school, though he sometimes slipped back to street life. Voice of Children supported the family with skills training, counselling, and education. Sunil went on to complete grade 12, become a professional painter, and now serves on the Youth Advisory Committee of Voice of Children, leading a child club to support others like him. Sunil told the team at VOC,

“ **Family's love makes every child brave and confident.** ”





MS. SITI MASYITAH RAHMA
Muhammadiya (Indonesia)

Ms. Siti Masyitah Rahma of [Muhammadiya](#) (Indonesia) talked about their work in Indonesia on Early Childhood Development and the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach. An NGO with a long history, Muhammadiyah has gradually shifted its role from providing long term institutional care to facilitating family-based care whether through reunification with biological parents, placement with relative or kinship or integration into foster family. She shared a story to show how ecosystem development and multi stakeholder collaboration have contributed to enhancing children's welfare.

STORY (shared by video and speech)

A life begins at Muhammadiyah's Children's Centre (MCC) A Story of hope, compassion and a second chance. At 3am deep into the quiet hours of Ramadan, a chill hung in the air, softened by the gentle rhythm of falling rain. A faint cry pierced the silence – a newborn's voice drifting from the front door. A tiny newborn baby had been left inside a basket. The baby was covered with a thin fabric and cried louder and louder.

Bu Panty held her tightly and brought her inside, smiling gently. 'It's a baby girl. Let's call her Hanna.' Bu Panty went inside and cleaned Hanna thoroughly. 'Can you call Bu Yati the midwife to come over and check on Hanna?' Within half an hour, Bu Yati arrived and examined Hanna Alhamdulillah, Praise be to God, Hanna is in good condition. This is just one of many stories from MCC, newborn and toddler service that is located in West Java.

How can a child like Hanna have a right to learn and grow during her golden age? How will Bu Panty ensure Hanna's and other children's welfare? How can Bu Panty obtain the resources?

Bu Panty ensures that by the age of four or five Hanna and other we work together with the ICA Kindergarten known as TK Abba. After a year of searching and mediation, Pak Robi finally helped Hanna's mother prepare to reunite with her. Supervised by local authorities and signed paperwork, Hanna returned to her mother.



“The story shows the many stakeholders and relationships within the ecosystem, but not all children are this lucky to receive this. It shows how advocating for a government system that guarantees every child’s right to education and healthcare is essential. Strong collaboration between government and civil society is vital to building a sustainable support system that meets the diverse needs of children as well as strengthen the capacity of caregivers at the centre. Every child has the right to grow up with hope, dignity and the love of a family. Together we can help make that future possible.”

“Every child deserves a beginning filled with love. Not labels. Not loneliness. Not lost opportunities. Whether through family reunification, alternative care, or inclusive community support, the goal is the same: To help every child feel safe, grow strong, and know they belong. Because in those early years, what we invest – not just in food or shelter, but in connection and care – shapes not only their future, but ours as a society.

(Ms. Siti Masyitah Rahma)



MS. JUANITA VASQUEZ ESCALLON
Chief of Social Policy, UNICEF Malaysia

Ms. Juanita Vasquez Escallon: Chief of Social Policy, UNICEF Malaysia, highlighted how social protection helps prevent family separation by reducing poverty and vulnerability. Social assistance (like child benefits or school meals) and social insurance (such as health or unemployment benefits) protect families when shocks occur. Children are especially vulnerable to these shocks, and a child-centred approach is crucial when designing these programmes

Examples showed how illness, the death of a breadwinner, lack of maternity benefits, climate-related disasters, and conflict can push families into poverty without social protection. These pressures can lead to weakened families and increased risk of separation.

The presentation concluded with strong examples from Nepal, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Mongolia, demonstrating how inclusive social protection systems help keep families together and prevent children from falling into or remaining in poverty.

“Throughout the life cycle, childhood is one of the periods of biggest vulnerability and when shocks hit families, children are usually the first to be affected – and the impact to them can be lifelong. A child centred approach is key when designing social protection programmes.

(Juanita Vasquez Escallon)





RUMA BUDHA MAGAR

BICON Care Experienced Reference Group and Shine Together, Nepal

“ When families do not get support in time – whether it’s financial, emotional or social, it’s the children and young people who suffer. Sometimes it’s poverty, sometimes it’s crisis. But the result is the same – children lose their homes, their communities, and most importantly, their identity.

The most vulnerable children are the ones who end up separated.

I have seen children with and without disabilities placed in orphanages and children’s homes not because they were orphaned, but because their families could not afford education, food, rent and support. And once a child enters care, coming back and reconnecting back to their family or community is not easy.

And we are still healing through all these gaps. Still figuring out who we are and navigating life alone. And without guidance, many care-experienced youth struggle with emotional well-being, unemployment, identity crisis and isolation.

The early years of life, childhood, is the beginning of everything, and it’s crucial for every individual to grow as a healthy adult. The support system also includes the family, community, and the government as the ultimate guardian. Early childhood serves and contributes to building the foundation for healthy, functioning and thriving families, and communities.

For those of us who have lived in care, the challenges do not end when we leave care. Without proper aftercare services we are expected to survive on our own. They make laws to place a vulnerable child in care but forget to think of those who get out of care. This is the biggest gap in our system.

We just want to feel what it is to live freely where small struggles do not become a battlefield for individuals to survive and live. Everybody needs appropriate care and support through their lives – especially those of us with lived experience of care.

Like Dikshya shared this morning, we want to celebrate each other and co-create solutions that last.

In the scenario of care experienced children and young people of Nepal, we still need efficient laws, policies, and systems in the country and above all, there are structural barriers as well as emotional and mental health challenges they go through and that need to be addressed as well.

A child who grows without a safe environment and without family or community may miss the crucial developmental milestones that will later be essential in adulthood.

Without intervention, experienced individuals and their families are more likely to face complex and overlapping challenges that include high risk of social exclusion, education gaps, economic hardship, and mental health that can last a lifetime.

Without support and intervention, the effect will further develop and follow when we become adults: and this is a long-term impact. We all know the impact, have felt it, seen it and we are still dealing with it.

Which is why early and consistent right support is significant to break these cycles and enable us to thrive. And the benefits ripple across generations.

That's why interventions matter. Not just for emergencies – but for prevention. For building resilience. For building a safer community. For giving families, the tools and the dignity to raise their children in safe, nurturing environments.

SO WHAT MORE CAN WE DO?

1. We need to make sure care-experienced youth are part of the conversation, not just during events like these, not just as stories, but as decision makers.
2. Aftercare should be a RIGHT, not just a FAVOUR. Education, health, counselling and job support must be available to every care leaver/care experienced.
3. Families need continued support until they are capable – income generation, parenting guidance and emotional care – so children do not have to choose between family and education in the first place.

(Ruma Magar)



STORIES OF INNOVATION 2: KINSHIP CARE, FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

Moderator



Mr. Sachin Kumar
Hope and Homes for
Children

Speakers



Mr. Subhadeep Adhikary
Thematic Lead –
Child Protection, Child in
Need Institute (CINI) (India)



Ms. Ranjana Srivastava
Associate Director Advocacy,
Research & Training,
Udayan Care (India)



**Mr. Anderson
Selvasegaram**
Executive Director,
SUKA Society (Malaysia)



Ms. Rija Maharjan
Deputy Director,
The Himalayan Innovative
Society (Nepal)



Ms. Nimali Kumari
BICON Care Experienced
Reference Group (Sri Lanka)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE



The second of our sessions on innovative practices focused on real life stories of kinship care, foster care and adoption. It showed how compassionate families can transform children's lives and how with love, care and community support we can truly redefine what protection means for every child. This session concluded with a heartfelt speech by Nimali (Nimmu) Kumari on behalf of the BICON care experienced reference group which has been included in full.



MR. SUBHADEEP ADHIKARY

Child in Need Institute, India

Mr. Subhadeep Adhikary, [Child in Need Institute](#), India shared a story from a village in India where a community-strengthening process helped support the family and child to live a dignified life through kinship care. The story outlined how important it is to involve all stakeholders and officials in the system to achieve prevention of separation and for children to grow up in families. He highlighted the importance of empowering families – building life skills for the child and family, identifying local solutions and platforms for child participation. He reminded us that children are the agents of change who will bring to the attention of authorities any red flags.

“ Magic happens in the communities!
(*Subhadeep Adhikary*)



MS. RANJANA SRIVASTAVA

Associate Director Advocacy, Research & Training, Udayan Care, India

Ms. Ranjana Srivastava: Associate Director Advocacy, Research & Training, [Udayan Care](#), India: shared a story about an 'older' boy who grew up in care with barriers to family tracing. With the government's addition of two more categories of children eligible for adoption, the care home was able to upload his background information, and he was officially adopted (at the age of 17). This journey represents a shift in India's adoption landscape – 'older' children are no longer invisible. In-country adoptions have increased significantly in recent years. This represents an innovative approach.

“ Every child deserves not just care, but connection.
Not just a roof, but a loving family.

(*Ranjana Srivastava*)





MS. RIJA MAHARJAN

Deputy Director, The Himalayan Innovative Society, Nepal



Ms. Riya Maharjan: Deputy Director, [The Himalayan Innovative Society](#), Nepal shared a story about two children who were raised by caring neighbours, who receive support and connection to their birth mother. The Himalayan Innovative Society encouraged the neighbours to formalise the arrangement – they are now foster first responders and have received training to support others. They are working with the family and children to obtain relevant documents and continue to provide support and training.

“ Care doesn’t always come from systems; it comes from people and families who often step up quietly.

(Rija Maharjan) ”



MR. ANDERSON SELVASEGARAM

Executive Director, SUKA Society, Malaysia



Mr. Anderson Selvasegaram: Executive Director of the SUKA Society, Malaysia: [SUKA](#) is a child protection–focused organisation working with at-risk and vulnerable children. Among its key initiatives is a community-based child protection programme that protects unaccompanied children. SUKA’s work begins with receiving community referrals from focal points and community leaders, followed by a comprehensive intake and assessment to determine the child’s vulnerability and best interests. This includes ensuring that the child is placed in a suitable foster care arrangement within the community. A case manager monitors and implements the case plan, focusing on the child’s safety, wellbeing, and development while supporting the caregiver. SUKA supports foster parents by providing incentives to ensure that they are not financially burdened by caring for the child. The case manager works with the wider community in addition to foster parents and remains actively engaged in the child’s development process for one to two years in the programme. SUKA promotes child participation practices both in individual care decisions and at the programme level.

“ Many people from communities are already supporting unaccompanied children. The question is how can this support be incentivised without placing financial burden on people? How can we provide structure, leveraging this wonderful community strength?

(Anderson Selvasegaram) ”



NIMALI KUMARI (NIMMU)

Care Experienced Reference Group, Sri Lanka

“ I’m Nimmu. I want to share my thoughts with you today. I am not an adopted child, a kinship child, or a foster child. But sometimes, I wish I were. You might see me smiling and think I’m doing well in life. But if you look closely, you’ll notice something missing in my smile. That something is family.

My Personal Experiences: Many of my friends have shared their stories about different types of care. You might think I will share the same, but I want to talk about how I felt as a child who grew up in a Children’s Care Institution (CCI). I lived in three different CCIs. By some luck, I managed to stand on my own two feet. But many children like me are left behind. I’ve seen adoptions go wrong and work too and I’ve witnessed the pain and happiness of children after kinship care. I first learned about foster care in 2018 at a conference. We all believe that institutional care should be the last option. Just because I’ve found some success doesn’t mean I don’t need a family. I wish I had a family. I wish I had brothers and sisters. I wish I could have said, “They are my family.”

Children in care can feel very sad if they stay too long in a CCI. Without someone to trust, children can suffer emotional trauma. Frequent moves can hurt education, leading to poor grades and dropouts. Children without support are more at risk of exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

Without help, many children can face poverty, crime, and mental health problems as adults, which can burden society. There is a cycle of Instability: Families may keep going through care systems, creating instability and this can happen for generations.

Conclusion: From my perspective, every child deserves to live in a family, not in an institution. Alternative care must come with proper support and monitoring. I wish every child could have a loving family and live happily.

I’m grateful for where I am today, but I still wish I had had a family to hug me when I:

- Won cricket matches in school.
- Became a senior prefect.
- Got married.
- Received awards on stage.
- Gave birth to a child.
- Wrote my autobiography and touched hearts.

Most importantly, I wish I had someone to lean on when I needed comfort. This is what every child in a CCI is asking for – a loving and caring family and alternative care options. I want to thank all the foster parents and those who provide alternative care. You give hope to children in need. We, as care leavers, are here to be the voice for the voiceless because every child deserves a family. Thank you for listening.

(Nimmu Kumari)



AMPLIFYING AND NURTURING INNOVATION: WHAT ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY?

Moderator



Ms. Anju Pun
Forget Me Not
(Nepal)

Speakers



Dato' Dr. Hartini Zainudin
Co-Founder Yayasan
Chow Kit (Malaysia)



Mr. Rishad Surti
Manager, DASRA
(India)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

How do we finance and sustain innovative practices of the kind we have heard about in BICON? The examples shared today from India, Nepal and Malaysia are replicated across Asia but how can these be scaled up? This session explored the role that philanthropy can play in amplifying and nurturing innovation so that care reform grows and is sustained.





DATO' DR. HARTINI ZAINUDIN
Co-Founder of Yayasan Chow Kit, Malaysia

Dato' Dr. Hartini Zainudin, Co-Founder of [Yayasan Chow Kit](#), Malaysia: gave her perspectives on the examples of innovation that had been shared at BICON and reflected on her own experiences in the Malaysian context – particularly regarding the need for development of the foster care system, better intersectoral co-ordination and more prioritisation of family reintegration and prevention of separation.

She described philanthropy as a bridge between government frameworks, community love and NGOs' innovation. Philanthropists can be brave, they can take risks, they can move beyond the project cycle and look at the long term, so they are an essential part of reform. She gave examples of the potential of funding pilots of trauma-informed foster care, disability inclusive approaches or child-centred data monitoring. Dr. Hartini also highlighted the potential of Zakat funding to support family-based care. She also called for more collaboration and collective approaches to using revenue streams for a collective goal for greater impact.

“ Philanthropy acts as a catalyst. It is not permanent; it is not the last resort. And philanthropy should be phased out when the problem is solved. Philanthropy is just a bridge. It's just a tool. It is a way for the government and the state to take ownership of an issue because they should be funding it. The best philanthropy is not just about giving money, but it's about solving problems and then going away.

(Dato' Dr. Hartini Zainudin)





RISHAD SURTI
DASRA, India

Rishad Surti, Manager – DASRA, India: shared his perspective that philanthropy’s greatest value is its ability to enable innovation by supporting untested ideas and prevention-focused approaches before public systems can do so. In the field of child protection, philanthropic capital plays an entrepreneurial role-taking calculated risks, fostering cross-sector partnerships, and funding the learning processes needed to strengthen families and reduce harm before it occurs.

Drawing on the experience of the [Transform NEEV Collective](#) in India, supported by the UBS Optimus Foundation, he highlighted how philanthropy enabled organisations to work across the full continuum of care, gather real-time data, and test context-specific models. A strong emphasis on learning, iteration, and community feedback helped generate evidence that can inform national and regional child-wellbeing frameworks.

He suggested that successful scaling from pilot to policy requires three elements:

1. Codification of practices into clear, transferable models.
2. Credibility through robust data paired with lived experience.
3. Co-creation with governments, communities, and civil society to ensure shared ownership.

“ When philanthropy moves from being a donor to becoming an enabler of systems, early innovations can evolve into lasting, government-adopted solutions.

(Rishad Surti)



PUTTING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AT THE HEART OF CARE REFORM INITIATIVES

Moderator



Ms. Dorodi Sharma
Keystone Human Services
International

Speakers



Mr. Wang Shiou Wu
Taiwan Mad Alliance, Transforming
Communities for Inclusion (TCI) Fellow



Mr. Shakil Ahmed
BICON Care Experienced Reference
Group, CSID (Bangladesh)



Mr. Sachin Kumar
Hope and Homes for Children



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE



MS. DORODI SHARMA

Keystone Human Services International

This important session highlighted the particular experiences of children with disabilities in alternative care and what can be done to ensure that their needs and rights are centred in care reform initiatives. The session was moderated by Dorodi Sharma of [Keystone Human Services International](#). Ms. Sharma described the persistent medicalised approach to disability and the failure to view disability through a social model or human rights lens as major factors in the othering of children with disabilities. She highlighted the lack of health and education and family support in the community as a major factor leading to the institutionalisation of children with disabilities. She also echoed the comments from earlier in the day that it was essential that social protection takes a life-cycle approach to ensure that a child with disabilities is supported as they transition into adulthood, taking into account the additional costs linked to disability and that families with children with disabilities have additional financial obligations.

“ We know that children with disabilities have been historically invisible in care reform and child protection. And how do we know that? We know this because if children are unseen in data, they’re unseen in real life. So that’s speaks for itself. There are also parallel systems that work for children with disabilities and then another system that works for other children without disabilities. So, there is an institutional othering and these children are falling through the cracks. This brings us to a fundamental question. Are children with disabilities children first or not? And if they are children, then who’s responsible to work for the rights? Are these child protection actors, are these disability actors, or are these both? So, we need to ask this question because if we are not even sure where children with disabilities lie, then the invisibility gets even more exacerbated.

(Dorodi Sharma)





WANG SHIOU-WU

Taiwan Mad Alliance and Transforming Communities for Inclusion Fellow

Wang Shiou-Wu, Taiwan Mad Alliance and [Transforming Communities for Inclusion](#) Fellow: Unfortunately, due to travel complications, Mr. Wang was not able to join us on stage in BICON. However, we share the main points of his planned speech here and incorporated some of his suggestions into the BICON Recommendations.

He intended to highlight the complementary roles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Under the CRPD, all non-family-based placements – including small group homes – are considered forms of institutionalisation if they restrict autonomy, bundle housing with support, or place decision-making under provider control. The CRPD therefore requires governments to adopt time-bound deinstitutionalisation strategies and prioritise community-based supports for families. The CRC, by contrast, regulates transitional care, allowing only short-term, strictly necessary residential placements with a focus on rapid family reunification or permanent family-based solutions. The speaker intended to emphasise the essential role of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in policy co-design, budgeting, monitoring, and advocacy. Taiwan Mad Alliance (TMA), for example, demonstrates this in practice by creating participation channels for children and youth with disabilities, promoting youth-led advocacy, and supporting inclusive policy consultations.



SHAKIL AHMED

BICON Care Experienced Reference Group and CSID, Bangladesh

Shakil Ahmed, BICON Care Experienced Reference Group and [CSID](#), Bangladesh: spoke from his own personal experience as a person with a disability who had grown up in kinship care with his grandparents.

He highlighted the love and care he received from his grandparents, and he stressed that it was important for many organisations who work for and with people with disabilities to remember about kinship care and understand it better. A particular challenge that he highlighted was that many services and support for people with disabilities are in big cities along with the governments and NGOs helping children and the people with disabilities. Growing up in a rural area in kinship care, this support is not easy to get and this is a challenge for families as the need to travel to the city increases financial pressure on them and this can impact on the resilience of families. He also highlighted that kinship care as such is not officially recognised by the government of Bangladesh and he concluded by sharing some personal recommendations which we include here in full.

“ RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that children with disabilities remain in family-based care by providing targeted financial assistance, accessible healthcare services, caregiver training, and public awareness initiatives to reduce stigma and prevent institutionalisation.
2. Improve access to healthcare for children with disabilities by providing travel subsidies for hospital visits, expanding the use of digital health platforms and mobile applications for free consultations and emergency support, and ensuring that children with severe and medium disabilities receive full and free medical treatment.
3. Embed mental health support within disability care by ensuring access to counselling and therapy that help children with disabilities grow with confidence and dignity, while also providing guidance and psychological support for parents and kinship caregivers who face emotional and social pressures in raising them.
4. Provide inclusive and flexible education (technical as well) for children with disabilities by supporting children with mild and medium disabilities to attend mainstream schools with accessible facilities, assistive devices, and trained teachers, while ensuring children with severe disabilities have alternative options such as home-based learning, digital platforms, and specialised teachers so no child is left without education.
5. Establish long-term social protection for persons with disabilities by creating targeted support schemes that provide minimum financial assistance for those with severe and lifelong disabilities after they reach adulthood, while developing tailored programmes that help individuals with mild and medium disabilities transition into independent living and employment.
6. Promote community engagement in disability care by encouraging local networks, volunteer groups, and peer support initiatives so that families and children with disabilities feel supported at the community level, reducing dependence solely on government or NGOs and ensuring more effective and sustainable inclusion.
7. Reduce the gap between disability policies and their implementation by adopting a participatory model in which children with disabilities, their families, and community representatives are involved from the stage of policy formulation to monitoring and evaluation, supported by clear accountability systems and adequate resources to ensure sustainability
8. Incorporate kinship care into national child protection and disability frameworks, ensuring caregivers have access to legal rights, social protection schemes, and government support services.



9. Support the spiritual development of children with disabilities by ensuring they have equal opportunities to participate in religious education and practices, recognising that strong religious beliefs can help them build resilience, confidence, and the ability to cope with life's challenges.

(Shakil Ahmed)



SACHIN KUMAR

Hope and Homes for Children, India

Sachin Kumar, Hope and Homes for Children, India: emphasised that children with disabilities remain largely invisible within child-protection systems despite strong national and global commitments. Drawing on [Hope and Homes for Children's](#) experiences as a partner in the CAFT programme in India, he highlighted several persistent challenges: inadequate disability data, weak coordination between the disability and child-protection sectors, fragmented laws, limited opportunities for leadership from people with lived experience, and a lack of inclusive local planning. He noted that disability is still widely viewed through a charity lens rather than as a rights issue.

Mr. Kumar stressed the need for better data, tailored services, stronger cross-sector collaboration, harmonised policies, empowered lived-experience champions, and decentralised, inclusive planning.

He concluded that true inclusion is achievable when families, communities, and systems work together – and that supporting children with disabilities strengthens the entire care and protection system.



Support to children with disabilities is too often seen as an act of kindness rather than a responsibility of the state and the community. This mindset reinforces dependency instead of promoting dignity and inclusion. What's needed is a fundamental shift – from sympathy to dignity, from welfare to inclusion. In our work, we've tried to model this by supporting families and community champions to see these children not as objects of pity but as children with potential, rights, and voices that matter.

(Sachin Kumar)



CRISIS AND THE RESILIENCE OF FAMILIES AND CARE-EXPERIENCED PEOPLE

Moderator



Ms. Vuthaya Charoenpol
SOS Children's Villages
International

Speakers



Mr. Birendra Shahi
BICON Care Experienced Reference
Group, Shine Together (Nepal)



Datin Elya Lim Abdullah
Trustee, OrphanCare Foundation
(Malaysia)



Ms. Mausumi Das
Representative of the BICON Care
Experienced Reference Group (India)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

This session explored how children and families are at the frontline when it comes to navigating adversity, conflict, climate crisis, disaster, economic instabilities and health emergencies. These crises don't just disrupt daily life, but they also fracture support systems, separate families and leave lasting emotional scars. For care experienced individuals, the impact of crises is even more profound. Yet, amid these all challenges we see examples of family resilience as a lived reality where families adapt and endure and we see how care-experienced young people are finding resilience and supporting each other.

More broadly, child protection systems must help families prepare for, respond to and recover from crises and in the process prevent violence, exploitation and child / family separation. We include here the speeches in full of two care experienced young people and a summary of the speech by OrphanCare Foundation.



BIRENDRA SHAHI

BICON Care Experienced Reference Group and Shine Together, Nepal

“ Namaste and thank you. I want to start with some thoughts. Can you imagine being a child scared, alone and uncertain that where your parents and when you will meet them? This is the situation of thousands of children around the world every year. Whether because of natural disasters such as landslide, earthquake, floods or because of war or immigration or poverty. Do you want to know something? Crisis is the perfect time for children to become separated from their families. In Nepal, we lived through many crises such as earthquakes, landslide, flood, COVID pandemic and many more. These events shake families and children, and they shake the systems that support them and they leave the children's in the most vulnerable position in Nepal. After the massive earthquake 2015, many children were displaced from their families and many of them lost their contact with the families. Children were randomly placed into orphanages without a proper assessment of their families or the children.

At times of crisis everyone thinks about protection or safety first, this is natural. During the COVID 19 outbreak, Nepal faced lockdowns like elsewhere. Many children living in the care system were sent back to their homes without any proper assessment of their family, or their aftercare support needs. Other children were left behind abandoned alone in care systems. When children were left in these uncertain situations, they had to make difficult decisions themselves, and they experienced sudden transitions, isolation and insecurity. I did receive some relief from the government but many care experienced were not included in this support.

Another factor is limited access to technologies meant that for many online learning, counselling or health support was not available. A crisis like this is not just environmental it is medical, social and emotional. When a crisis strikes, children are the first ones to be forgotten.

The People of Nepal have a high resilience; they always bounce back after a tough time after having crisis. That's what I learned. Resilience is the strength within our families, our communities, and in our neighbourhood to keep things going on to heal, grow even when things are hard. Because life keeps on going. It's the way to cope up, recover and rebuild. As a care experienced individual with experiences of family separation, abuse, neglect or crisis this changes you deeply. It affects how you see the world, how you trust others and how you define yourself. The emotional pain is difficult to describe. Living with unfamiliar faces for a long time makes it hard for children to have a relationship of to trust to other people and separation impacts on our emotional and social growth. A child must start from the ground level completely in a new environment and it takes time to cope with it.



I always remember that there is a loss on both sides. When a child loses his childhood without parents, the parents also lose their parenting skills. Something precious is broken and that cannot be easily restored.

Family gives a sense of love, belongingness, safety.

I call on all practitioners to make sure that the voice of care experienced our children with and without disabilities are heard. Getting access to services when needed to them prepare and strengthen families in that way which they can face the challenges emotionally, socially and financially because of you. As we see in the Gen Z protest in Nepal, crises may shake our lives, but resilience is what helps us to rise again. The journey through crisis is never easy, especially for children. But with right support, I believe we can build a system that truly cures. Because it is always about rising stronger and shining together. In every crisis, resilience begins with connection. If we strengthen families, we strengthen society. If we protect a child today, we build a safer environment for them all tomorrow. Thank you.

(Birendra Shahi)



DATIN ELYA LIM ABDULLAH

Trustee, OrphanCare Foundation, Malaysia

Datin Elya Lim Abdullah, Trustee, [OrphanCare Foundation](#), Malaysia: reminded us that crisis is not always sudden or dramatic like a disaster or a pandemic, it can take the form of silent struggles, poverty, stigma or the painful breakdown of family bonds. She defined resilience as being more than survival – but about adapting, healing, flourishing, sometimes against extraordinary odds – something which drives the mission of OrphanCare Foundation that every child deserves to grow up in the love and stability of a family, not in an institution. She described children growing up in institutions as carrying, ‘invisible wounds’.

Her presentation shared positive examples of how families can be supported through counselling, temporary assistance, parenting guidance and community support networks even during times of crisis. Institutionalisation can be prevented and children who have been institutionalised can be reintegrated with their families.

She concluded by stressing that poverty and any crisis should never be reasons for child separation and that it is important to strengthen both the financial security and the emotional well-being of families.



The Malaysian Child Act Law 2001 [Act 611] and the Amendment Act 2016 [Act A1511] and policies all support Family Based Care and family preservation. The presentation ended with a call for government, NGOs, communities and international allies like UNICEF to stand together to ensure that no child is left behind without a family during a crisis.

“ Institutionalisation causes trauma. Trauma is not about what happens to you. It is about what happens inside you as a result of what happens to you. And for these children growing in institutions, that trauma is continued. And the impact does not disappear with age. It manifests in adulthood in countless painful and destructive ways. We must stop rationalising institutionalisation as the best available option. We must stop using the language of temporary placements when, in truth, many children are left behind, forgotten in what essentially are forever ‘temporary’ shelters.

Many people from communities are already supporting unaccompanied children. The question is how can this support be incentivised without placing financial burden on people? How can we provide structure, leveraging this wonderful community strength?

(Datin Elya Lim Abdullah)



MAUSUMI DAS

BICON Care Experienced Reference Group, India

“ Growing up in institutions has shaped my identity and my work. Today I am deeply honoured to speak on a subject that defines both my journey and the lives of millions of young people. Crisis and resilience of families and care experienced youth. Today whatever I speak on this topic will become from my own experience and observations.

Crisis comes in many forms. Financial instability, health emergencies, sudden loss or emotional breakdowns. Families face these challenges every day and somehow, they find a way to deal with them. But for care experienced youth, crisis is not occasional like this, it often feels constant. Imagine turning 18 and being told to leave the childcare institutions you grew up in with no parents to guide you. Imagine searching for housing, a job and support while also carrying so much childhood trauma. Imagine facing stigma in society because of your background. This is the reality of many care leavers. Crisis is not just one event.

Families however show us the powerful lesson in resilience. They share their burdens and adapt to a new reality. They find the strength in their existing relationships and communities. Even at times of scarcity, they provide belonging and love. But families also need help. Many collapse under poverty, migration and disaster.



Resilience is not automatic. Birenda also mentioned that they need a support system.

So let's also talk about the resilience of care experienced youth. They learn resilience differently. Without a family to fall back on, they build their own circles of belonging. Peer care leaver networks become their own family resource and mentorship and state programmes fill some of gaps. Many of those in care leaver networks or associations transform their pain into purpose by helping others. Still let us be honest resilience alone is not enough. Care leavers need structure financial independence and emotional healing.

I observe also some of the problems and we must be acknowledging these problems. Care leavers leave the institution with no housing, no sustainable job, no legal documentation and often no guidance. We know that policies do exist, but implementation is weak. Mental health support is rarely prioritised for example.

So, what can be we done for families?

- Strengthen community-based support systems.
- Provide social protection schemes, childcare support and income stability.
- Invest in mental health and family counselling.
- Invest in entrepreneurship programmes for families and for care experienced youth.
- Mandatory after care programme for at least four to five years. It needs to be 4 to 5 years for skill building and long-term mentorship and job opportunities
- Affordable housing options for young adults.
- Develop peer led networks that ensure no one face crisis alone.
- The government can create stronger laws, fund after care and ensure the accountability in civil society.
- NGOs can build safe spaces and long-term mentorship, livelihood and entrepreneurship programmes for families. These should extend beyond blood relations and involve communities and corporate sector.
- The corporate sector can offer internships, scholarships and job opportunities for vulnerable youth.
- Care leavers themselves can continue building peer support group or care leaver networks to advocate and share life experience. Resilience is a collective responsibility.

In my own life, crisis was my daily companion. Growing up in institutions, stepping into adulthood without guidance and facing uncertainty. This moment could have broken me. But resilience comes from within and from the care leavers community I built around me. Today I no longer see myself as a victim of crisis. I see myself as a builder of resilience of others. Crisis will always exist, but resilience can be great when families are supported, when care experienced youth are not left alone and when society takes shared responsibilities. I truly believe crisis may shock us, but resilience gives us the courage to rise again. Not just individually but also together as a community.

(Mausumi Das)



CLOSING SESSION OF DAY ONE

Moderator



Mr. Biranchi Upadhyaya
SOS Children's Village
International

Speakers



Dr. Rinchen Chopel
Member of the UN Committee on the Rights
of the Child CRC and Director General of
SAIEVAC (Bhutan)



Ms. Pooja Udayan
BICON Care Experienced
Reference Group (India)



Ms. Gemma Gilham
Family for Every Child



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

This session rounded off day one of BICON with some reflections and recaps of the main points. The speeches of Pooja Udayan and Dr. Rinchen Chopel have been kept here in their entirety, (slightly edited for ease of reading).

Closing Session of Day One

Moderator:

Speakers:



**Mr. Brianchi
Upadhyaya**
SOS Children's Villages International



Dr Rinchin Chopel
Member of the UN
Expert Group on
Alternative Care



Ms. Pooja Udayan
BICON Care Experienced
Reference Group



BRIANCHI UPADHYAYA
SOS Children's Villages International

Brianchi Upadhyaya, SOS Children's Villages International: the moderator of this session celebrated the strong consensus in the BICON conference hall. He highlighted that we all agree that family care is the priority and the logic of this is to stress the importance of family strengthening. He noted that there was resounding support for various forms alternative care like foster care and kinship care and 'of course a big resounding no to institutional care'. He reminded participants to talk more about the estimated 5.4 million children still in institutional care and not to lose sight of their needs. He also highlighted the strong call to focus more on children with disabilities and an acknowledgement of the link between institutions and violence against children. He also highlighted the importance of philanthropy and the value of collaboration and international evidence sharing – something which [SOS Children's Villages](https://www.soschildrensvillages.org/) International also prioritises.



POOJA UDAYAN

Care Experienced Reference Group, India

“ Thank you so much for giving me this space. I am one of the founding members and the Managing Trustee of the [Care Leavers' Advocacy Network \(CLAN\)](#) in India, established in 2017 as the first care leavers' network in South Asia. This makes me immensely proud. This is my first time at BICON, and it is truly special to be here, surrounded by friends, leaders, and care-experienced individuals from across Asia. It feels like a family; a large and united family. All of us have gathered here with a shared purpose; to ensure that every child grows up in the family environment rooted in love, safety and belonging.

Day one at BICON has been rich in learning and inspiration. Listening to young people with lived experience reaffirmed that across contexts and countries, we aspire towards the same vision - that each child should grow up in a caring family and that no one should be left behind or forgotten. We discussed care reform, the transition from a charity-based to rights-based framework, and strategies to strengthen efficient family and community-based care systems.

It was encouraging to see that many countries in Asia are working towards improving aftercare facilities, social protection and family support. It gives me hope that change is already happening and governments have started to include young people like us in decision making.

I was particular inspired by Mr. Rishad from Dasra. In his session, he emphasised that philanthropy; the power of giving, can play a transformative role in bringing innovative ideas to life. It enables experimentation, people learning from evidence, and subsequently supports governments in scaling effective solutions . He further highlighted that sustainable change is not merely about financial contribution, but also about strengthening learning ecosystems and knowledge-sharing platforms. A key insight he shared was that meaningful and lasting change occurs when philanthropy collaborates with governments and communities; creating ecosystems rather than dependencies. I found this to be an extremely powerful message.



There were many moments today that deeply moved me. One sentence from Mr. Robert Gass particularly resonated, 'When children are empowered, society thrives. When we invest in children, we make them feel safe, support their families and help them grow our entire society becomes stronger.'

Mr. Gass also outlined three critical priorities: First, invest in robust child protection systems so that families can access timely support. Second, strengthen data systems and accountability mechanisms so that no child remains invisible. Third, reinforce family-based care so that every child experiences love and belonging. His words reminded me why we all are here; to ensure that no child feels abandoned and alone.

Another moment that profoundly touched me was when Dr. Chopel said that we need to transition from a charity approach to a right based approach. I grew up in a care home in India. I received safety, education and care, however, I also understand what it feels like to grow up without parental support. When care experienced young people in India turn 18, they are expected to suddenly become independent, often without adequate preparation or continued support. For some, this transition is extremely distressing. I was fortunate to receive aftercare support, beyond the age of 18. This continuity made a significant difference in my life. It reinforces the importance of ensuring that care leavers are supported in identifying their purpose and navigating their pathways into adulthood.

I also firmly believe that including children and youth with disabilities in care reform is not merely about accessibility. It is about institutionalising inclusion, dignity, and belonging within care systems. Inclusive care reform must move beyond sympathy, which often frames disability as a limitation and instead recognise and uphold each child's strength, individuality, and potential.

We heard powerful stories today that demonstrated how a sense of belonging can heal lives. These resonated deeply with my own journey and strengthened my belief that when someone believes in you, it feels like regaining a family. I was equally inspired by the reminder that young people with lived experiences are not adversaries of the system, we are partners in strengthening and reforming it. That perspective gave me tremendous hope.

At CLAN in India, we are working closely with government and child care institutions to ensure that aftercare is recognised as right rather than a discretionary benefit. When I heard about the Global Charter for Care Reform, I felt both excited and proud. The Charter affirms that care reform is not just confined to a single country, it's a global movement. As a care leaver leading a network in India, I am eager to explore how we can advance the principles of the Global Charter within in our respective countries and collaborate governments to translate them into action.

As we move into day two, I am excited to look forward to many of you joining us tomorrow for the session led by care leavers, and I encourage all of you to engage with our stories, our struggles, our resilience, and the way in which we are driving change. You will witness how care leavers are emerging care leaders in care reform, working to ensure that future generations experience more dignified, stability and security

Thank you.

(Pooja Udayan)





DR. RINCHEN CHOPHEL

Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and Director General of SAIEVAC, Bhutan



I am reassured that the Convention on the Rights of the Child 36 years ago did capture some of the essential elements of what we are discussing here in BICON. I feel there are four fundamental dimensions which the CRC captures which is also core issues for children outside parental care:

1. Children have the right to be cared for by their parents. Parents and relatives are the first line of care for children everywhere. The CRC recognises that family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children. And then Article 7.1 further asserts that a child shall have the right as far as possible to be cared for by his or her parents. Again, I stress we need a fundamental shift in our discourse from charity to rights based, I think needs to be underlined.
2. Children have the right to grow up in a family environment. That also can be to the preamble as well as Article 5 and others
3. Institutional care is the last resort where emphasis is also there under Article 20.3.
4. All forms of alternative care should meet minimum standards.

And I think these four elements of the CRC Convention can be used in our advocacy. It should also be used in our discourses as well when the CRC Committee holds dialogues with the state parties and underline them to make sure that state parties understand them going forward.

I also felt that the discussions we had today, particularly the voices of our young people, also reflects very clearly the contribution of young people in the [DGD discourse](#). And I thought I should place them here:

1. The emphasis on prevention: Make sure that all options for supporting families to stay together are tried before alternative care is used.
2. Listening to children and young people: Too often adults do not consider children and young people's opinions in decisions being made about their lives. And this needs to be changed. I think this has been emphasised again and again by everybody.
3. Good quality care: I still remember when I was chairing the DGD Group Working Group on Quality Care. The children who contributed to that discourse kept telling us again and again that adults or service providers think that if you have good facilities, good food, children will be happy. But that's not what the children said they are looking for in a care setting. What they are looking for is security, trust and hope to move forward.
4. After care: Prepare these children in care and young people who are graduating out of care so that they can embrace the larger world. This is stressed time and time again

SO WHAT IS NEXT?

After this conference we need to try and see how best we can create strategic connection with the Global charter on Care Reform. At the UN General Assembly, UN 80 that just ended in September, I listened to many heads of state speeches and every time they spoiled my mood. The only saving grace was the Global Charter, at least there, children were remembered beyond bombs and killing and disasters and accusing each other with hatred. At least the Global Charter brought children and humanity back onto the agenda.

As we are now in the 6th BICON, it's probably time to review our progress, identify gaps and also see how best to outline implementation or mainstreaming strategies of what has happened till now or what we have agreed to do till now without reinventing the wheel again and again. Between BICON 6 and 7 let's do more to enhance the visibility and dissemination of the BICON outcome documents. Let's convene national and sub regional review and advocacy events so that governments and other interested parties can be targeted and monitored.

A regional summit of care leavers or care experienced young people would be an excellent way of moving the agenda forward and expanding the networks and partnerships and also ensuring that concrete action is taken. The BICON committee and care leaver networks should keep a watch on countries that are coming to report to the CRC Committee and provide specific recommendations and questions that the CRC committee members can address to the governments when they come to have dialogue with us. That will keep the strategic interventions rolling and give us also an opportunity to monitor as we go forward by ensuring that those things come into the concluding observations.

Now, in conclusion, one thing that I will take away is this emotional connection from all that I've heard here. Care and protection of children is not optional; it is fundamental to just peaceful and inclusive societies. It is essential to meeting any goal, whether it's global, regional or national, and to nurturing a generation that can live free from fear, abuse, exploitation and neglect to end violence against children. We need more than policies. We need awakened hearts. Hearts that will not allow war to steal a child's laughter. Hearts that understand the sacredness of every child and their right to joy. Hearts that are open to seeing every child as our child. And hearts that feel for every child as we feel for our own. I am grateful for each of you and for your hearts of love that bring us together to this very important event and the movement.

The window for action is now or rather it was yesterday or it was last year. But the fact is that we are here and we are willing to commit. I want to thank the steering committee of BICON for remembering the many committed champions who are for the cause, who are here in this hall, and also those who could not make it to this event, but send their spirit and goodwill. I also salute the 34 young champions who are here. And I believe that they are the soul of the BICON movement. And we need to invest and support these young change makers.

And finally, I express my deepest appreciation to UNICEF Malaysia for supporting my participation, guiding my participation and ensuring that I stay on the right track. Thank you very much. Till we meet again.

(Dr. Rinchen Chopel)



BICON CARE-EXPERIENCED REFERENCE GROUP TAKEOVER



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

This session is the highlight of every BICON and it keeps getting bigger and more ambitious. At the 6th BICON, over 30 care experienced people from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand came together to share their challenges, their ideas and their call to action. This report gives a flavour of their session by quoting their own words directly. We encourage you to view the video to fully appreciate the urgency of their calls to action in their own voices. (This session was moderated by Mr. Shankar Pradhan of the BICON Care Experienced Reference Group, India.)

BANGLADESH



“ ‘Children are great imitators. So, give them something great to imitate!’ This is my favourite quotation. It has a great meaning because if you give a good environment to a child, then eventually he’ll be a good human being. He will be good for society and his country.

But what happens to the others? Even if they have these kinds of capabilities, they can’t succeed because they don’t have families to motivate them. They are not motivated by society either. So that’s why even they have the great potential, they can’t use it for them as well as the society.

And here you can see some challenges faced by care leavers, especially in kinship care.

- Many kinship caregivers are elderly grandparents with no income.
- Families live in single room homes without clean water or toilets.
- Medical costs for disabled children force families into debt.
- Caregivers are sometimes forced to send children to work to survive.

When you are a care leaver living in kinship care you don’t get recognised by society and you also have to contend with social stigma and exclusion.

(Shakil Ahmed, Bangladesh) ”



INDIA



“ We want to talk about inclusion and empowerment through representation and acceptance. Inclusion begins when care leavers are not invited to speak but trusted to lead. Inclusion has made a big difference in our lives. When care leavers are accepted and represented, we don't just share our stories. We help shape the system as we walk on our journey of empowerment and growth. Care leavers are now being included in policy consultations, conferences and discussion on aftercare and disability inclusion. This inclusion has built a sense of confidence, visibility and leadership among care leavers – whose voices were earlier left unheard. Inclusion is not just about giving us space; it is about sharing power and trust. When we are truly included, we bring strong ideas and leadership and change to the system.

(Mausumi Das, India)

“ In India, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has directed District Child Protection Units to register care leavers on the Mission Vatsalya portal. This measure ensures that every care leaver transitioning out of care is formally tracked, supported, and not lost within the system. States have also begun to take ownership of drafting state-specific aftercare guidelines and integrating them into long-term action plans, with a particular focus on strengthening family-based alternative care. For instance, earlier this year, the Rajasthan High Court issued a landmark order mandating financial assistance, housing support, mental health services, legal identity documentation, and skill-based training for care leavers. In addition, designated officers were appointed in every district to monitor aftercare implementation and submit quarterly reports to the State Child Welfare Committee. Other states are progressively following similar approaches. [...]

Amid these policy reforms, the Care Leavers' Advocacy Network (CLAN) has been amplifying the lived realities behind these systems. Through the Beyond Care Conversation Podcast Series – India's first podcast conceptualised, led, and produced by care leavers – we have made the aftercare discourse public, visible, and accessible. Each episode centres authentic voices of care leavers from across states, illustrating how policies translate into lived experiences and what meaningful support truly looks like in practice. Through this work, we are actively shaping the future of aftercare in India. [...]

Every care leaver recognises that significant work remains – many reforms are yet to be realised, many systems strengthened, and many voices amplified. Our journey is not complete, and together, we continue to move forward.

(Pooja Udayan, India)



“ We still see gaps and changes we want to see in India!

There are no national level aftercare guidelines: So, let me explain this with a good example. A girl from one state is given aftercare support for three years and she can focus on her study. Meanwhile, there is a boy from another state and he also wants the same support, but there the guidelines are different and he is not given that support. If there had been national level guidelines this would have directed or guided all states to have a standard or uniform procedure and to follow and they would have monitored it.

Implementation and co-ordination challenges: In India we have initiatives like Mission Vatsalya which references the financial support that should be given to care leavers. But there is also a gap. It is on paper and it has taken time to become real. It dates from 2022 and it is now 2025. Some states have put measures into practice, but other states have not even started yet.

Advocacy and public awareness deficiency: Yesterday there was a panel on the global challenges where one of the speakers Lopa mentioned funding cuts. We cannot connect to CSR and philanthropists to support us and this impacts on our work to raise public awareness. It is hard for us to reach out to right people who are willing to support us.

Training and capacity needs: Here is an example. In 2023 a care leaver spoke at a national child rights event and their stories touched everyone. But their recommendations didn't become part of next year's programme. Why? Because there was a gap of knowledge of how to implement these recommendations. Care leavers have so many ideas. We need support and training to help us understand how to take them forward. This follow up is very important.

Limitations in research and data systems: We often rely on the little data that is available, often from NGOs. There should be a uniform standard database at the national level.

Programme coverage and support inadequacies: There are so many different programmes and sometimes these are not maintained because of funding. This means that support can drop off completely and suddenly. Support programmes should be long term, so we see real impact. It is important for example that social workers or case workers follow progress and remain a contact point during after care challenges.

(Surja, India)



MALAYSIA



“ In 2026 the government of Malaysia wants to give free varsity education to 5,800 low-income students and if they perform well then, this loan will become a scholarship. So, for children living in institutions, this means you can study whatever course that you want and if you perform well, you get a scholarship. So, I applaud the government for initiating this in the budget for next year. There are other great pilot initiatives in the country. For example, there are transitional shelters for orphans as they age out of the system, but this is not nationwide yet. It is a great idea to give temporary accommodation for six months to one year while they complete their studies and seek employment and as a country we are moving towards a family-based care system in Malaysia – we are hearing the ‘de institutionalisation’ of children concept outlined by Yayasan Hasanah. Nationwide we are striving to action this.

So, what about the challenges that we face?

1. Social, economic and financial challenges: Lack of financial stability and saving upon leaving care. Difficulty in finding stable employment due to limited job skills and qualifications and no access to financial guidance or budgeting knowledge. Because for children living in the institution, all this is being taken care of by adults, but now you are the adults. I mean, for children living with their families, the parents take over. I mean even if you go to universities or went on to live your life still you have your parents, your next of kin. But children living in institutions, you’re on your own. If you have a guardian or a mentor, that’s a plus point but unfortunately many of us don’t.
2. Education and career barriers: Lower academic achievement and limited access to tertiary education and vocational training. Children living in institutions have different capacities, some are academic, some are skilful, but what I knew is whether you were academic or not you ended up in a vocational school, you probably do not go on to enter tertiary education. So, this is very, very unfair. So, what can we do to help all the students?
3. Lack of mentorship and career guidance. Not all care leavers are blessed to have a mentor to guide them, to journey with them until they become stable. This makes it difficult to compete with peers who do have family support. Because children living with their family, always have someone to rely on to seek advice, support or counselling This is reality. This is what I’m faced with.
4. Housing and shelter issues: Sudden loss of accommodation after ageing out of the institution. Imagine your whole life you have a shelter and suddenly 18 you are out there. So, what happens next? Risk of homelessness or unstable living arrangement? Inadequate transitional housing or after care programme? Like I said, it’s not the same nationwide. Yes, there are some organisations that are providing shelter homes, transition homes, but it’s not on a large scale.



5. Mental health and emotional well-being: The feeling of loneliness, abandonment and rejection. Difficulty coping with independence and responsibility. Unresolved trauma from past abuse and neglect. Limited access to mental health services and counselling. So, after eighteen, what happens? Because in the institution itself, not all children are given counselling that they need. And I just want to emphasise more on this point. Being in the institution itself is something abnormal because one moment you are with your family and next thing you are in an institution. So that is very abnormal. So, the transition is abnormal. So please give them counselling. A question I would ask all caretakers or social workers is are all children in the institution receiving the counselling that they need?
6. Social relationship difficulties: lack of family or emotional support network. That is why we are here today. We want to reunite children who are living in institutions with their next of kin or family. We want to resolve these challenges. Difficulty following happy relationship and trust. Well, I could relate to this. Better relationship with your siblings. Relationship with your mother, with your father. If you do not introduce a family very early in their lives, these bonds will be very difficult to form. Yes, in my case, yes, I know she's my mother. Yes, I know this is my elder sister. This is my younger sister. But we don't have the bond. I know it's the relationship, but we don't have the bond. Unlike for like many of you who lived with your siblings, I'm sure even now your last WhatsApp message should be from your siblings – but not ours.
7. Social stigma and discrimination as former institutional residents: Yes, some of them even face it while they are in high school because after holidays, those living with families will come back with stories of travel, but not us as we had just stayed studying in the institution. We don't have stories to share. So, this is one of the social stigma that children in institutions face.
8. Life skills and independence: So limited experience in daily living skills. Cooking, paying bills, managing documents. Let's face it, those who live with your family, your mom and dad does that for you. You probably even at the age of 30, you don't even know that how to pay bills because your mom and dad take care of that. But not us at such a young age. We need to figure all these things out. This might seem something very basic like oh, it's just cooking but we can't afford to have takeout every day. Where are we going to get some money? We have difficulty navigating adult systems like banking, healthcare, legal services. Sometimes I wonder why they taught us algebra in school. They should be teaching us all to do accounting and all that. They should be teaching us this in our school so that we can be strong independent adults.
9. We are overwhelmed by sudden independence without guidance. I tell this to everyone. Our whole life in the institution has been like a timetable. Eight o'clock you do this. Nine o'clock you do this. Then you do this, then you do this. At the age of eighteen we give you the keys to the city and suddenly you get to decide what you can have for dinner. I had cereals for dinner. I didn't have an auntie telling me you can't have cereals for dinner. Oh, but this is very risky because you can go either way. Either you go in a proper channel, or you stray. So, who's going to guide you? What happens next?.

(Eric Sivanesh, Malaysia)



NEPAL



“ I am talking to you today about progress in Nepal

In Nepal, thanks to the ongoing campaigns there is now much broader understanding among service providers and governments about the harms of orphanages and the long term consequences of family separation. We are shifting from institutions to family with a strong emphasis of family reunification. Many care providers are now working closely with local authorities to reunite children with their biological or extended families wherever possible.

It has taken time, but the Nepal government is in the final phase of developing integrated guidelines for alternative care. For us it means a clear roadmap with a set of values for how children should be cared for when they can't live with their families. It is not just about where we live but it shows how we should be treated. In recent years Nepal has made significant progress in enhancing legal and policy framework for child protection. The government has recognised the importance of family-based care over institutional care. Local governments have already put in place guidance on foster care. Social workers, child rights experts, practitioners, development partners and civil society are coming together to make this happen.

The number of child care homes and the number of children living in institutional care have gone down that is big news for us especially for people like me. Since the last BICON, the Nepal government monitors institutional care and reports 20 institutions have closed down – over 300 children were reunited back to their families and communities. This is not just a number. These are children's lives and experiences.

The most inspiring shift has been the inclusion of care experienced youth at different levels of government decision making. Through our continuous advocacy and evidence-based lobbying, the voices of care experienced individuals are finally begun to be recognised. I thought it would take more time, but the Nepal government is listening to us. They are including us in the development of child protection guidelines with policies they are including our stories, and they are co creating programmes with us to ensure our voices are included. This partnership between the government and networks is building trust, awareness and shared accountability – we deeply appreciate this and hope to see expand in the upcoming years ahead.

Our journey is not yet complete – after care and mental health services must be expanded, family poverty must be addressed as a factor of family separation. As a care experienced person myself I know that if you listen to us you will not just build a better system you will build a more accountable and compassionate society, thank you.

(Birendra Shahi, Nepal)



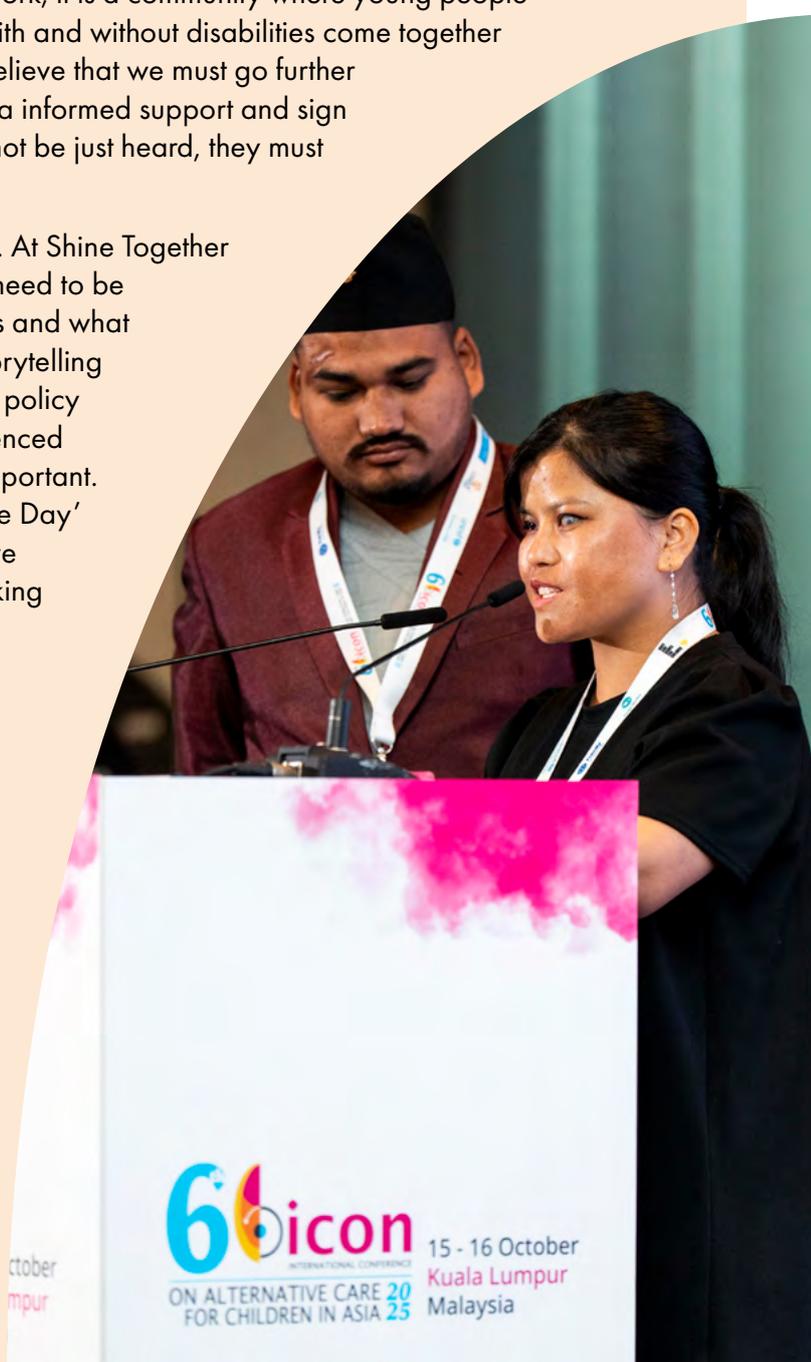
“ Thank you. Hello. I am honoured to continue this presentation not just as a care experienced youth but also as someone who believes that our lived experiences are not limitations, they are power for inclusion, evidence and action. I am speaking as part of a growing moment in Nepal acknowledging youth inclusion.

We have begun something transformative. Care experienced young people are no longer just for sympathy. We are shaping policy. When we talk about inclusion, we need to talk about systems – systems that fail to recognise our potential our dignity and our rights.

This is why the formation of the national care leaver network has been one of the most proud milestones for us. It is not just a network, it is a community where young people from diverse backgrounds, rural/urban, with and without disabilities come together to share, lead and advocate. Yet we still believe that we must go further and include gender friendly spaces, trauma informed support and sign language interpretation. Our stories must not be just heard, they must be acted upon.

Evidence based advocacy is our compass. At Shine Together we know that advocacy does not always need to be loud – we collect stories about what works and what does not work because we believe that storytelling is advocacy. Stories are powerful tools for policy change. In February this year care experienced youth came together to mark something important. The first official recognition of, ‘Care Aware Day’ – initiated by Shine Together was a massive statement that we exist. We are not just asking for change. We are showing how to make it happen. And we are growing bigger, dreaming bigger. Nepal’s care reform is still growing but it is promising because it is being shaped by those who have lived it. We are not waiting to be invited. After all, as someone said, “if they don’t give you a seat, bring your own chair!’. We are organising, advocating and leading. To all of you here: policy makers, experts and friends – join us, work with us, listen to what we have to say. Let’s keep the momentum going because every child deserves to try and every voice deserves to lead. Thank you.

(Barma Magar, Nepal)



“ Hello I have a lived care experience of around 12, 13 years in Nepal. I will talk about some challenges:

We do not have proper, reliable data of children growing up in institutions which means we are not even counted as citizens of the country which automatically creates crisis for legal and social identity. For this I myself went through a lot of struggle to get my legal documentation. I'll share my own experience in Nepal. When we are in grade 8, we must present our birth certification to attend the final examination of grade eight. I was an 'abandoned' child, so I did not even know my family name, my mother's name, my father's name. It was really difficult for us to get the birth certification. And the first thing we had to do was for me to post an advert in a government newspaper asking my family to claim me, not once but twice. I was in school and I was scared that my teacher, my fellow students would see me in the newspaper. And how would a child of grades six or seven feel seeing herself in a newspaper asking her parents to claim her which she knows that they would not? And this was done because it was a legal procedure needed for me to get my birth certification.

Did I want to do it? No! But did I have a choice? No! So, after that it took almost a year for me to get my birth certification. And I thought oh, I finally have my birth certificate now it will be much easier for me to get my citizenship. And when I was in grade 11, I applied, I started applying for my citizenship and I was wrong. It was not easy again. I had to skip classes to go to the district office because the time was scheduled and I could not miss it because it would take more longer time. And it took me over nine months of me engaging to get my citizenship, nine months. And there are still a lot of legal documentations we need like a bank account or for a passport. My story itself is a true message that how care leavers face a challenge during something so basic as legal and social identity.

We go through so much, we have mental and emotional hardship as well. Myself I feel anxious just thinking about applying for another legal documentation. Because in my mind I know that it's going to take longer time than it would for other people. It's going to cost me. The questions I do not want to answer like what is your mother's name? What is your father's name? They think it's so common, oh, everyone has it. But no, I don't. And it's not my fault. It's no child's fault that we are abandoned and yet we are the ones being questioned. So, with these issues we go through stress, anxiety, depression and some care leavers even commit suicide.



Not because they did not want to live, because we just have to face so much. Abandoned by family, not accepted by the society. Even the government does not see us, what else we can do?

And the next point is that there are no proper guidelines for after care. In the care homes we have reading time, homework time and after care we are just left with nothing. There is no proper pathway set for higher education, insurance, finance education, employment and housing. We, it's like we are pushed off the cliff and expected to fly.

And the next point is policy, practice and disconnection. As I said that we do not have proper data. The government does not even see that we exist. There are so many marginalised groups in Nepal, yet we are not one of them. I mean the government does not see us as one of the marginalised groups that needs extra care and support. This creates more challenges because there is no policy because the term 'care leaver' term does not appear in the policy of Nepal. Thank you!

(Nisha Chauhan, Nepal)



When I was in the care home we felt that there was no government representative or anybody monitoring the care. 10 years after I left care, I see it is still a problem. I don't say that nothing at all has happened, but the pace of positive change is very slow and it is frustrating for us. How is care given? Who is responsible for the care? Are there any minimum standards or criteria for care? Always the answer is, 'no'. [...]

Over the last year I have been participating in a leaving care project where the main motto was 'Nobody should ever walk alone'. The training involved children with care experience and the care practitioners all together in the same place. It is important that social workers don't just have top-down guidance – we care leavers can also explain to them the on the ground reality. We have to teach them; we have to show them. I really enjoyed this experience. One of the trainers came to me full of tears and said, 'thank you, you have been such a true motivation for us we haven't seen the children like this way before.' This gives me the feeling of, 'yes, I got to where I have to be.' I will never forget that moment. It made me realise how big the gap is between children in care, care providers and care leavers. With the right tools we can truly transform the leaving care journey for the many young people. So yes, there is a challenge but there is a hope. And that hope grows every time we bring people together to build a new community. Finally, speak for yourself, and make decisions yourself without delay, thank you!

(Binayak Manandhar, Nepal)



PAKISTAN



“ Most care institutions discharge children when they reach eighteen. No formal programme exists to teach life skills and financial literacy. There is limited or no access to vocational training, this means it is hard to get decent jobs and there are psychological and emotional challenges, legal and policy gaps. And care leavers face pressure to become economically self-sufficient while female care leavers also face risk of exploitation and early forced marriages.

(Nazakat Ali, Pakistan) ”

“ Hello. Good morning everyone. This is Rizwana Jabin from Pakistan and I'm serving as a co-ordinator of a care lever network in Pakistan – a project of the Social Research and Development Organization. [...]

One of the major milestones that we have achieved in Pakistan is related to identity and legal documentation. Children residing in care institutions had difficulties in obtaining their birth registration certificates and smart cards. The decision on this topic was taken first by the provincial government initially and it was then endorsed by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Now it is much easier for institutionalised children to secure their legal identification documents, and the heads of the care institution can register the children, and their name can be mentioned in their legal documentation as a guardian – which can be included in our national database. By adding the guardian's name to this database, they can have their all their legal documents and smart card after 18.

Another area of progress in Pakistan is the support provided after children leave the care institutions. A few organisations assist orphaned youth by covering educational expenses and providing hostel facilities after 18 years of the age including support at the university level. Other NGOs continue to offer educational assistance to children who have been reintegrated with their families, especially the female care leavers. These initiatives have actually helped children from care institutions to progress in life and become self-sufficient.

(Rizwana Jabin, Pakistan) ”



SRI LANKA



“ **Generation Never Give Up** aims to include all care leavers. We work with over 500 care leavers. With their collective voice we would like to share these changes in our country.

Alternative Care policy was approved by the cabinet of the ministry in 2019. The main objectives of this policy are to reduce institutionalisation of children and to promote reintegration and family-based care. We have already seen big changes from this policy. The number of institutionalised children has gone down from 20,000 in 2005 to 9,000 in 2025. Also they have been important legal steps: The adoption ordinance is being amended, and the foster care billing bill is being drafted. Organisations like UNICEF are helping with reintegration of children with their families and providing advocacy and technical support.

In the judicial sector there have been six judicial colloquiums with full participation of magistrates. As result, magistrates have made visits to child development centres and now recognise that institutionalisation is a last resort.

Finally, the cabinet has approved financial assistance for youth leaving institutional care, this will include support to purchase land or build a house, this is a very positive step. Thank you.

(Haritha Semasinghe, Vice President GNGN, Sri Lanka)



“ Today I will speak about the challenges faced by care leavers in Sri Lanka and how youth networks like Generation Never give up are pushing for change.

After care: In Sri Lanka when a young person turns eighteen and leaves the children’s home or institutional care. The transition is often abrupt. For many of them, leaving care does not mean freedom. It means facing the world completely alone. Many of our laws in Sri Lanka related to children are outdated. For example, the main child protection law was written in 1939 long before modern child rights principles were introduced. Laws might talk about child protection inside care, but they say very little about what happens aftercare. So, once a child leaves there’s almost no guaranteed support system. No national aftercare policy, no structured transition plan. Most care leavers have no individual care or transition plan, so no one checks whether they have housing, a job or even food.



Legal Framework: Our adoption and child care laws are based on an outdated system. They don't recognise the long-term needs of care leavers or issues like legal identity, inheritance and guardianship.

Documentation: Many children in care never receive a birth certificate or national ID. Without this they cannot open a bank account, apply for a job or even sit for national exams. Imagine growing up in your own country but not being recognised as the citizen that is the reality.

Financial support: Funds allocated for child welfare often do not directly reach the young people who need them when they leave care. Without financial support at this moment many struggle to afford food, rent or education. Post care support after care is almost non-existent. There are very few safe housing options and limited opportunities for education or vocational training. As a result, many young people end up unemployed, socially isolated or fall into cycle of poverty.

Amid these challenges there is hope. We run a resource centre which provides care guidance, care guardians and job counselling, educational support and mental health and peer support and 24 hours hotline emergencies. Every child deserves more than just survival, they deserve opportunities. If we fail to support care leavers we fail an entire generation. But when we empower them, when we give them identity, education and hope they don't just survive they grow. As the name of the Sri Lanka movement we are generation never give up. These young people refuse to surrender their dreams. The job of professionals and allies is to make sure they never have to face the world alone.

(Dhanushka Jayarathna, President GNGN, Sri Lanka)



“ Finally – the greatest gift we have as human beings is that we have power of empathy. We can all sense a piece of each other experience. So, I just want to thank each and everyone who are the members of BICON organising committee and especially Nolan, Tessa, Mark, Anju-ji and also Kiran ma'am and all the organising committee who were really supportive of us. Thank you for your support, also Mani.

I just wanted to end this saying we are not here to get the sympathy from you; we are here to be a voice for the voiceless. So, thank you all and let's make their future today and world without orphanages. Let's dream of a world without orphanages.

(Nimali Kumari (Nimmu), Co-Founder & Director GNGN, Sri Lanka)



VIETNAM



“ So, I would like to start by saying that more than basic care, children need love and belonging for their emotional and social development. And today I want to share some good practices in Vietnam that have made this possible for many children like me.

So, a little bit about the context of alternative care in Vietnam. Vietnam has about 26 million children and among them many hundreds of thousands of children are living under difficult circumstances, like maybe they lost the parents, or they have to suffer violence and some problems due to migration. Care in Vietnam comes into the main three categories. Kinship care, which is most common and very common in the rural areas. Second is the institutional care, like the SOS village and shelters. And the third is foster care, which is developing in my country. In Vietnam there is a strong commitment to child protection and family-based care. The Law on Children 2016 said that under no circumstances should children be separated from their original family unless in some emergency cases. So, the government, together with the private care organisations are investing in empowering children and young people not just through basic services, but also through opportunities like skill development, training and leaving care support programmes which give the young people a real chance to stand on their feet. Young people are supported with a lot of development opportunities. Education goes beyond classrooms and we have access to vocational training, life skills and practical knowledge to help us view our future with confidence. In our education system there is a good practice that they include the teaching about children’s rights so that they know that how they are supported by everyone and how they can speak up for themselves when something doesn’t feel right. And finally, in Vietnam we are seeing more multi stakeholder partnerships like between the government and private sector and corporate partners. They provide training, mentorship, internship opportunities for vulnerable young people. And I’ve been a part of such a meaningful programme.

However, there are also many challenges that young people in my country keep facing. Monitoring and evaluation of alternative care system are not the same across the provinces, and it creates a gap in quality and accountability. I also want to talk about the issue of the overburdened and under prepared caregivers. These workers are the core of the care system; they also need support. Sometimes they are overworked and stretched beyond their limits.



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If they are not physically and mentally well, how can they give the children the support that we need? So that's why I believe that it's important to create the space for comprehensive caregiver training and well-being programmes. They must be prepared mentally for what they are going to face when taking care of those children. And they need the right tools and knowledge and emotional support so that they can care for us better.

Leaving care is a process. It is not a one-off event. It's not like I'm walking out of the institution, and I don't need support anymore. Young people need step by step support during the transition and not to be asked to leave immediately. Well, in many cases this support is missing, and supervised independent living options are rarely available. And this makes the transition abrupt and often overwhelming. Good practices give us hope but we need to address the gap. And every child deserves not just shelter but also love and belonging and opportunities to grow. And every one of us here has the power to make that happen.

(Ngoc Anh, Vietnam)



JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CARE EXPERIENCED REFERENCE GROUP



“ We know we can't change any care leaver's past but our experiences will change their future. We have consolidated recommendations from all eight countries, here we go!

(Albert Justin, India)



“ It is high time that we shift from consultation to being co partners and to becoming co-leaders. As we all have been saying from yesterday that care leavers and care experienced individuals are the evidence in themselves and are the experts in what they need for change. These are not just our recommendations but also a change that we are jointly looking for and our voices will build this momentum.

(Junu Lama, Nepal)



Note: Following BICON – these recommendations were integrated into the official BICON Kuala Lumpur Recommendations that you can find at the start of the BICON report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Increase the number and capacity of social workers across all levels, especially at the grassroots level
2. Build networks that connect local resources, families, and community-based support systems
3. Do not forget about emotional and psychosocial support
4. Add life skills and vocational training programmes
5. Have financial and digital literacy training plans
6. Mandate adequate after-care services and inclusion in decision making
7. Mandate gender-sensitive support for everyone
8. Ensure career counselling and guidance
9. Guarantee safe transitions
10. Prioritise family-based care, institutional care should only be used as a last resort and for the shortest duration possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT

1. Ensure legal identity support
2. Develop policies and allocate budgets for care experienced
3. Mandate social protection schemes
4. Mandate disability-inclusive care
5. Start government quota and reservation system for CEYP
6. Speed up research and data collection
7. Monitor and evaluate aftercare implementation
8. Strengthen monitoring care systems
9. Ensure family strengthening programs
10. Shift from consultations to co-leadership

“ These are not just our good suggestions or recommendations. We are not just care experienced we are experts in what needs to change so...

*Let's Rise Together
Rise in the dark dwell of dreams
where hopes are born.
Awake young hearts to a new world.
New paths are worn
where young hearts are sparked
and paint the world with bright colours.
Rise up from shadows.
Cast aside all doubt.
Let your voice be clear –
let your spirit out.
There are stories waiting to be told,
to spark the change
and touch the skies.
The winds of change
are calling loud.
Believe in every strength you hold.
When shadows fall
and trails loom,
remember –
stars are born from gloom.
With every word
and every step,
you carve the way.
The future is yours –
it's never far away.
Your courage lights the way.
Face the challenge
and seize the day.
Let your spirit roar –
for every dream,
there is always more.
Under skies of endless blue,
the world awaits,
just for you.
Just for us.
Thank you.*

I would like to dedicate this poem to all the care experienced friends present here and those care experienced children who are still residing in care and all the individuals present here who are passionately and sincerely working for the change we all are looking for.

(Junu Lama, Nepal)



WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH: SUPPORTING CHILDREN IN ALTERNATIVE CARE AND CARE-EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

Moderator



Dr. Kiran Modi

Founder of BICON, Founder
and Managing Trustee,
Udayan Care (India)

Speakers



Mr. Eric Sivanesh

BICON Care Experienced
Reference Group (Malaysia)



Ms. Rashila Anisa BK

BICON Care Experienced
Reference Group (Nepal)



Mr. Shankar Pradhan

BICON Care Experienced
Reference Group (India)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

At every BICON, care experienced young people have put mental health and well-being at the very top of their concerns. This is a hugely important and sensitive topic so we were glad to give the floor to 3 eloquent care experienced people to share their personal perspectives in a 'fireside chat' format. We provide a summary here and you are encouraged to watch the session in full if you would like to hear more.



DR. KIRAN MODI

Founder of BICON, Founder and Managing Trustee, Udayan Care (India)

Moderator Dr. Kiran Modi began by highlighting that mental health and emotional well-being remain among the most overlooked aspects of care and aftercare. She shared that children and young people who grow up in alternative care often carry invisible wounds that result from separation from family, disrupted attachments, stigma, and neglect. She observed that these experiences tend to compound over time and affect a person's sense of identity, capacity to build relationships, and ability to trust. While there is growing awareness about mental health across different countries, children and young people in care still remain largely invisible within this conversation.

Kiran emphasised the need for systems that are trauma informed, rights based and grounded in dignity. She urged that mental health services for children and care leavers must be delivered by professionals who treat this not as a job but as a lifelong commitment to each child's healing and growth. She then introduced the three panellists and invited them to share their lived experiences through a fireside conversation.



FIRESIDE CHAT

1. IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Dr. Eric Sivanesh shared his journey as a care leaver who is now a medical doctor working in Sabah, Malaysia. Growing up in care taught him resilience, strength, and independence, yet he also spoke about the emotional pain that often remains unseen. He reflected that behind many smiles lies hope, uncertainty, and loss.

He explained that mental health is not only about survival but about rediscovering the ability to dream and aspire. He noted that separation from family is not a normal childhood experience and that trauma left unaddressed continues to affect many young people in care. Eric stressed that every child deserves to feel happy and supported, and that mental health care must be consistent and compassionate. He concluded that when children feel seen, heard, and believed, they gain the courage to move forward.

2. MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AND STIGMA

Shankar Pradhan described the challenges faced by care experienced youth from both personal and professional perspectives. He recalled that during his early years he once mistook a panic attack for a heart attack because he had no understanding of mental health emergencies. Later in life, he went through a severe mental health crisis and survived a suicide attempt, which transformed his understanding of what support truly means.

He explained that the behaviours of care leavers often represent survival strategies rather than rebellion. Many of them have learned to cope through silence, withdrawal, or anger. Shankar realised that care leavers often need genuine connection and empathy rather than only counselling. He shared how one young person once told him that a simple warm hug made her feel alive again. For him, this reflected the importance of presence and kindness in healing. He noted that when professionals understand the reasons behind a young person's actions, they are better able to offer real support.

3. IDENTITY AND RECONNECTION

Anisa BK, a Member of Shine Together Care Experienced Network Nepal shared that rediscovering and redefining the self is a gradual and deeply personal journey shaped by acceptance, courage, and connection. She explained that early separation and emotional wounds can make people feel like they must constantly prove their worth, saying, "It feels like we always have to earn our place in it to prove that we are worthy of love." Even with a legal identity, she reflects, "I am often lost with my individuality."

Over time, she realised that her story is not only about loss, but also about growth and strength: "I am more than that... I am the person who is learning to reconnect with my story." She emphasised that healing begins with small steps, such as feeling seen and heard, and learning to accept oneself: "You must first accept who you are. Stop trying to be who others expect you to be."

She recalled how she once defined herself by absence as, "the one who was left" or "the one who didn't belong," but she made a choice to heal: "I chose to rise. I chose to rebuild. I chose to love again even when love once meant loss." By sharing her story and connecting with others, she realised, "I am not ALONE. And I don't have to be."

She concluded that redefining identity is not about forgetting the past, but transforming it: "Redefining myself is not about forgetting what happened. It's about choosing what I do with it." Ultimately, rediscovering the self means growth and self-ownership: "Maybe that's what 'rediscovering self' truly means: not finding who you once were, but creating who you are meant to be." She leaves a powerful message: "Please do not just ask us what happened. Ask us who we are becoming."

4. BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Eric Sivanesh spoke about how resilience grows when young people feel seen and heard. He posed the reflective question of whether those working with care leavers truly see them as individuals or merely as another case in the system.

He outlined several forms of support that can help care leavers thrive. These include access to regular counselling, mentoring relationships with stable and trusted adults, and spaces where young people can speak freely without judgment. He emphasised the importance of practical life skills and aftercare programmes that include job readiness, financial literacy, and housing support. He also underlined the role of family and kinship ties, noting that grandparents and extended family members often provide valuable emotional stability. He stated that when support is consistent and genuine, young people move beyond survival and begin to thrive.

5. PEER NETWORKS AND PERSONAL STRATEGIES

Shankar Pradhan discussed the value of peer support and informal networks. He has created spaces where care leavers meet for dinner, conversation, and mutual support. He described these moments as informal therapy sessions that help individuals feel less isolated.

He spoke about forming a network that operates like a family structure, where care leavers can build trust through shared experiences such as watching movies or going on long drives. He mentioned that he and his peers are setting up the Care Leavers Buddies Initiative, which will provide peer mentorship and emergency assistance to those in need. Shankar emphasised that belonging is central to healing and that when care leavers know they have people they can return to, life's challenges become more manageable.

6. ADVOCACY AND POLICY CHANGE

When asked what message she would give to policymakers, **Anisa BK** stressed the importance of inclusion and participation. She said that care leavers must be directly involved in shaping policies and programmes that affect their lives, guided by the belief that nothing should be done about them without their involvement.

She called for justice that focuses on building a better future rather than only correcting the past. She reminded the audience that care-experienced children and young people themselves are not broken, but that the systems surrounding them often are. She urged policymakers to create environments that listen, respond, and respect young people's voices. For her, belonging should not exist only in official documents but should be experienced through genuine relationships and community support.

RAPID FIRE HIGHLIGHTS

The rapid-fire segment brought lighter reflections from the speakers. They described themselves as inspired and motivated. They agreed that one common myth to break is that care leavers are helpless or orphaned when in reality they are survivors with strength and agency.

To manage stress, they spoke about the importance of reaching out to trusted people. They shared that music, humour, and spending time with peers are their preferred ways to lift their mood. When asked to choose between tea, coffee, or therapy, Shankar responded that therapy is best enjoyed with tea, drawing laughter from the audience.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion resulted in several clear recommendations.

1. There is an urgent need for trauma-informed mental health care to begin early and continue into aftercare.
2. A national helpline should be established for care leavers with trained professionals who can address their specific concerns.
3. Counselling services should be provided free or at subsidised rates for at least two to three years after leaving care.
4. Structured life skills and resilience programmes should include financial literacy, employment readiness, and relationship building.
5. Family strengthening initiatives are necessary to prevent unnecessary institutionalisation.
6. Care-experienced young people must be meaningfully involved in all stages of decision-making and policy development.
7. Finally, there must be a shift in focus from trying to fix young people to improving the systems that fail them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

In closing, the moderator thanked the speakers for their honesty and courage in sharing their experiences. She observed that the conversation reaffirmed how resilience is not a theoretical concept, but something lived daily by care leavers who continue to turn adversity into strength.

The session concluded with a collective reflection that every young person leaving care deserves to enter a world that sees them, supports them, and believes in their ability to thrive.

THE POWER OF EVIDENCE TO UNLOCK CARE REFORM

Moderator



Ms. Ranjana Srivastava
Associate Director Advocacy,
Research & Training,
Udayan Care (India)

Speakers



Ms. Andhita Nurul Khasanah
S.Psi., M.Psi., Psikolog
Department of Psychology,
Bandung Islamic University
Research into the drivers
of family separation with
SOS CVI (Indonesia)



Mr. Prabhat Kumar
Independent Child
Protection Consultant
(India)



Ms. Khadijah Madihi
Founder, Asia Family First
& Senior Advisor on Child
Protection Issues (Asia) /
International Social Service (ISS)
Example from the Philippines
(Singapore)



Dr. Gurneet Kalra
Manager, Research and
Advocacy, Udayan Care.
Launch of ICB journal
(India)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

We have heard during BICON how the lack of evidence and data can hold back reform. This session highlights how evidence-based research can drive advocacy, inform systemic care reform and ensure sustainable progress. In particular, each of the speakers talked about the importance of understanding the very human factors that build family resilience and what are the causes of child and family separation. There was strong consensus that this was the key to preventing institutionalisation and child-family separation in the first place.



MS. ANDHITA NURUL KHASANAH
Bandung Islamic University, Indonesia

Andhita Nurul Khasanah from Bandung Islamic University, Indonesia: shared (by video) results from a [multi-country study](#) conducted with SOS Children’s Villages International on the drivers of child-parent separation. Through interviews with 159 participants – including children with and without disabilities, caregivers, community members, and government and NGO stakeholders – the study identified both family-level and structural causes. The most common drivers included parental death, disability, remarriage, violence, neglect, poverty, migration, and barriers to education. One of the most significant findings was the intergenerational transmission of violence, with children who witness violence more likely to repeat it in adulthood. Children also highlighted the importance of simple family interactions – such as shared meals and play – which foster emotional safety and strengthen family resilience.

The researcher outlined key recommendations to address these issues: invest in violence-prevention programmes for adults and children; ensure a coordinated, family-centred social protection system that reduces poverty and prevents separation; expand parenting support to address trauma and strengthen nurturing care; improve inclusion of children with disabilities in education and social protection systems; recognise play and leisure as essential for family bonding; and reinforce gatekeeping and child protection systems across government and non-government actors. Collectively, these actions aim to break harmful cycles, strengthen families, and reduce unnecessary separation.



Our research invites us to see families not as isolated units but as a living system. So we need more empathy, more protection and empowerment. Every child deserves to grow up in a family that is strong, connected and hopeful. It’s not just about more data. So let’s collaborate, innovate and advocate so that no child has no face separation when what they need most is a connection.

(Andhita Nurul Khasanah)





MR. PRABHAT KUMAR

Independent Child Protection Consultant, India

Prabhat Kumar, Independent Child Protection Consultant, India, took a similar approach and challenged the audience to think differently. He claimed that the child protection sector has a tendency to talk about difficulties after the harm has happened when children have already slipped through some of the gaps in the system or at community level. He called for a fundamental shift in focus onto family strengthening, family preservation and prevention.

Taking the example of India, where much progress has been made in deinstitutionalisation and the promotion of family-based alternative care, he made the case that more focus should be on prevention and developing the community based structure or community based mechanisms as they play an important role in identifying the family which are at risk of being separated. He highlighted the importance of building forums and mechanisms for experts to share learning and evidence about what works. These could include care leaver networks, social worker forums, civil society networks like the [India Alternative Care Network](#) or initiatives such as the NEEV collective.



Much of the progress in India was possible only because of greater convergence and collaboration between civil society partners, government and UN organisations working together. Coming together changes the mindset for a systemic shift in thinking from institutional care to family and alternative care.

(Prabhat Kumar)





MS. KHADIJAH MADIHI

Senior Advisor on Child Protection Issues in Asia at ISS

Khadijah Madihi Senior Advisor on Child Protection Issues in Asia at ISS: shared her experience working with ISS and ISS Australia together with a local NGO in Philippines, the NORFIL Foundation, to conduct a study examining how children with disabilities who are separated or at risk of separation from their families are cared for. This research looked at the continuum of care options, kinship care, foster care, residential settings and family reintegration. The study was entitled [The Philippines Towards Inclusive Care: Assessing and Enhancing Alternative Care for Children with Disabilities](#).

She delivered a passionate reminder that meaningful reform begins not with data, but with people. She emphasised that while evidence can illuminate gaps, stigma and resilience, it becomes powerful only when interpreted through local realities and grounded in community wisdom. She highlighted the importance of local partnership to enable researchers to work directly with parents, caregivers, local governments, civil society and children – ensuring findings were shaped by lived experience rather than outside assumptions.

The speaker stressed that families, caregivers, community leaders, care leavers and children themselves are not beneficiaries but experts in their own context, and that their lived experience is essential evidence for reform. She shared inspiring examples from this work in the Philippines, including long-standing parent associations and disability-led organisations that, despite limited resources, have created practical solutions, peer-designed training, and community-generated data. These, she argued, are good practices that deserve recognition, documentation and scaling.

She concluded with a powerful call to ‘move from data collection to data connection’. For reform to be lasting, she urged three actions: celebrate what is already working, engage communities as co-creators rather than informants, and design policies that fit the cultural and social fabric of each place. True reform, she insisted, is co-created.

“ Evidence only unlocks reform when it is grounded in humility, co creation and respect for local wisdom. Data may give us the map, but community gives us the compass. If we engage as humble learners, listen and adapt, then reform will not just be implemented nor imported. It will be owned, sustained and transformative.

(Khadijah Madihi)





DR. GURNEET KALRA

Manager Research and Advocacy at Udayan Care, India

Dr. Gurneet Kalra, Manager Research and Advocacy at Udayan Care, India shared Udayan Care's commitment to research and evidence-based advocacy that centres children and youth's experiences, describing a cyclical model where practice informs research, research drives advocacy and advocacy loops back to improve their practices.

With over 90 publications across journals and books and a monthly resource hub, Udayan Care has noticed critical gaps in research like the lack of longitudinal studies, the adult outcomes for children who grew up in care, limited data on disability-inclusive care reform and the need for robust outcome tracking. Their work is multidisciplinary and grounded in lived experience, it is co-authored by care experienced youth and seeks to offer international comparisons.

A RECENT STUDY FOCUSED ON MARRIAGE

“ So, with a sample of around 55 married care experienced youth, we have examined how adverse childhood experiences shape the marital outcomes, what is the role of economic and social factors post marriage? What are their perceptions of marriage and parenthood after their marriage? So some of the key findings we saw that marriage is often seen as a safety net, a way to feel socially accepted and belong. Adverse childhood experiences continue to impact adult relationships and marriage outcomes. Transition readiness predicts and impacts emotional and marital outcomes, gender dynamics and economic stress influence marriage stability. Many of them still face stigma and lack resource ownership and accommodation even post marriage.

(Dr. Gurneet Kalra)



They are currently conducting a study into children and youth with disabilities and care across three Indian states. This research aims to document the lived experiences of children and youth with disabilities, assess the transition readiness, the planning and available after care support also align the care practices with disability inclusive approaches.

In concluding this presentation, Udayan Care also launched the latest issue of [Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond \(ICB\)](#) which is a biannual academic journal published in partnership with SAGE Publications. This journal bridges a gap between policy, practice and research made by amplifying the peer experience voices and showcasing several innovative models. This journal has engaged with more than 270 authors from 20 countries over the last decade. It has a strong editorial board of 18 members from 10 different countries. Guest editors from organisations like [Martin James Foundation](#) have helped shape regional discourses through this journal. They have also amplified the voices of care experienced youth, enabling several organisations to showcase their best practice, innovative care models and policy recommendations so there is no reinventing the wheel. They have also influenced decision making and standards of care by strengthening scientific environment across the globe and the impact is significant through academic recognition at national international level, the kind of practitioner engagement and the global outreach and ownership. Some of the special issues reflect evolving priorities ranging from child sexual abuse and deinstitutionalisation to kinship care and disability inclusion. Each issue is rooted in evidence and shaped by practitioners.



DELIVERING SYSTEMIC APPROACHES TO CARE REFORM. COUNTRY EXAMPLES FROM ACROSS ASIA

Moderator



Ms. Mikiko Otani
President of Child Rights Connect and Former Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Speakers



Dr. Sopian Brahim
Director of the Department of Children's Development within Malaysia's Department of Social Welfare (Malaysia)



Mr. Md. Saidur Rahaman Khan
Director General of Social Services, Ministry of Social Welfare (Bangladesh)



Dir. Imelda R. Ronda
Director III, Operations and Services, National Authority for Child Care (NACC) (The Philippines)



Mr. Phi No
Director of Child Protection Department, Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (Cambodia)



Ms. Babita Patra
State Commission for Child Protection, Odisha (India)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE



MS. MIKIKO OTANI

President of Child Rights Connect and
Former Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

This summary gives a flavour of the presentations by government representatives from Malaysia, Bangladesh, Philippines, Cambodia and India (Odisha State). We encourage you to refer to the video to see the speeches in full.



Government leadership is essential to lay the foundation and the strengthen the system in place to deliver care reform. We have talked about and we hear again and again that we need to make a systematic change. So the government has a very important role to make sure that there is a system in place to deliver care reform for children at scale. This session at BICON provides a platform for the governments from across Asia to highlight key progress on care reform for children since the last BICON in 2023 and share lessons learned. Examples might include legislation, monitoring and gatekeeping mechanisms, national mapping and data analysis, action planning, innovative budgeting, strengthening the social service workforce for care reform, the provision of family support to prevent family separation and facilitate family reintegration, strengthening the continuum of family based care for children in need of alternative care, public awareness campaigns, among other topics.

(Mikiko Otani, Moderator)





DR. SOPIAN BRAHIM

Director of the Department of Children's Development within Malaysia's Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia



MALAYSIA: Dr. Sopian Brahim, Director of the Department of Children's Development within Malaysia's Department of Social Welfare: presented an overview of Malaysia's national progress in advancing care reform. He underscored that Malaysia's reforms are anchored in a strong legislative and policy framework, most notably the Child Act 2001, amended in 2016, which formally designates family-based care as the preferred form of alternative care. This is reinforced by the National Child Policy and National Child Protection Policy, which collectively affirm the principle that every child should grow up within a safe, nurturing and permanent family environment.

Dr. Brahim outlined the government's systematic approach to operationalising these commitments. Malaysia has adopted a gradual, phased deinstitutionalisation strategy, prioritising capacity development for social workers, strengthening kinship, foster, adoptive and reintegration pathways, and collaborating closely with UNICEF, MASW and civil society organisations. Early pilot initiatives in selected states have since expanded nationwide, supported by the establishment of Family-Based Care Guidelines and an increase in foster and kinship care placements. He also highlighted progress in strengthening case management systems, with a national digital child protection platform scheduled to go live in October.

He acknowledged that key challenges remain, including workforce shortages, entrenched social norms favouring institutional care, and the need for sustainable financing and stronger community participation. Ongoing measures – such as the training of child protectors in partnership with MASW and UNICEF – aim to address these institutional and capacity gaps.

Looking ahead, Dr. Brahim reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to scaling family-based care models nationally, enhancing data management and quality assurance mechanisms, and deepening multisectoral cooperation with civil society and private sector partners. He concluded by emphasising that care reform represents not only a structural transition but also a fundamental shift in mindset: from managing children in institutional settings to ensuring they are nurtured within families. Malaysia's trajectory remains clear – family-based care as the foundation of a child-centred protection system.

“ Every child deserves a family because care begins with connection. Care reform is not just a policy change. It is a shift in mindset from managing children in institutions to nurturing them. Malaysia journey is ongoing but our direction is clear. Family first always.

(Dr. Sopian Brahim)





MD SAIDUR RAHMAN KHAN

Director General, Department of Social Services (DSS), Ministry of Social Welfare



BANGLADESH: Md Saidur Rahman Khan Director General, Department of Social Services (DSS), Ministry of Social Welfare: described the significant progress made by Bangladesh in advancing care reform – guided by strong legal and policy frameworks such as the Children Act 2013 and the National Child Policy 2011. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Department of Social Services (DSS), the country has strengthened its alternative care system through the direct management of 85 Child Care Institutions and 6 Baby Homes. Major milestones include the establishment of Child Welfare Boards at national and local levels, the near-approval of the first National Child Protection Gatekeeping Policy, and the training of more than 8,000 social workers, with care reform training now embedded within DSS structures. These achievements reflect a clear shift toward family- and community-based care aligned with international standards such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Guidelines for Alternative Care.

Looking ahead, Bangladesh plans to deepen its reform agenda by advancing key legislative updates, including the enactment of the Abandoned Children Act and revisions to the Guardians and Wards Act of 1890. Priorities also include strengthening the social service workforce, digitalising child protection data systems, and developing a National Strategy on Alternative Care to guide long-term transformation. Ensuring sustainable financing through government commitments and partnerships will be essential. The country’s future direction reinforces a strong national commitment to expanding family-based care and contributing to regional and global learning so that every child can grow up in a safe, nurturing family environment.

“ Bangladesh’s care reform, represents a national movement toward inclusion, resilience and child well-being, with a firm commitment to strengthening family-based care so that every child can grow up in a safe, nurturing family environment.

(Md Saidur Rahman Khan)





MS. IMELDA RONDA

National Authority for Child Care (NACC), The Philippines



THE PHILIPPINES: Ms. Imelda Ronda, [National Authority for Child Care \(NACC\)](#): described how the Philippines has advanced systemic care reform through the establishment of the National Authority for Child Care (NACC), created under Republic Act 11642 in 2022. This landmark law positioned NACC as the central authority for adoption and alternative child care, marking a national shift from institutional care toward timely, family-based solutions. Since then, NACC has streamlined adoption by transforming it into an administrative rather than judicial process, significantly reducing delays and helping children join permanent families more efficiently. Alongside this, the agency has strengthened foster and kinship care, working closely with local government units to expand placements, maintain close monitoring, and ensure that children's identity, culture, and best interests are upheld – particularly in emergency situations where immediate medical and psychological support is required.

Ms. Ronda also highlighted several major reforms and innovations introduced by NACC, including nationwide partnerships, strict case monitoring systems, and hosting an upcoming Global Consultation on Adoption and Alternative Care, which promotes global learning and alignment with international standards. Looking ahead, NACC is pushing for policy reforms such as amendments to the Foster Care Act and the passage of the Administrative Inter-Country Adoption Bill to further strengthen legal safeguards and streamline processes. Support for young people leaving care has also expanded through initiatives like the KAYA KO Program, offering life skills, vocational training, and livelihood support. Programs focusing on the needs of children with disabilities, and training in trauma-informed care, have enhanced the capacity of foster and adoptive families. Central to these efforts is the professional development of social workers, who receive specialised training in case management and alternative care. Public awareness campaigns – ranging from adoption pride to anti-trafficking efforts – further reinforce the transformation. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that with strong laws, institutional commitment, and sustained collaboration, systemic and sustainable care reform is both achievable and underway in the Philippines.



The Capacity Building for Social Workers and Foster Parents in Handling Foster Children with Disabilities programme ensures that caregivers are fully equipped to address each child's unique emotional, developmental, and physical needs. Through these interventions, we aim to create nurturing, responsive, and inclusive families where every child can thrive.

(Imelda Ronda)





MR. PHI NO

Director of Child Protection Department, Ministry of Social Affairs,
Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Cambodia



CAMBODIA: Mr. Phi No, Director of Child Protection Department, Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation: highlighted Cambodia’s significant progress in transforming its alternative care system. He noted that although the country’s history of civil conflict once led to a rapid rise in residential care institutions, Cambodia has since made major strides toward family-based care through strong government leadership, targeted action plans, and extensive collaboration with partners such as UNICEF, Save the Children, USAID, and over 60 civil society organisations. Public campaigns promoting the importance of families, along with strengthened legal frameworks and sub-national monitoring, have helped communities understand why children belong in families, not institutions. As a result, the number of residential care institutions has declined, no new institutions have opened, and awareness of family-based care and prevention of unnecessary separation has grown significantly.

He emphasised key lessons learned from Cambodia’s reform journey. Policy and legislative reforms proved highly effective in improving oversight and accountability, while operational leadership at the provincial level was essential in driving change on the ground. The country also found that successful reintegration requires careful, individualised case management, strong planning, and the active involvement of all stakeholders – including residential care institutions – as partners in reform. Positive trends in family reunification and alternative family-based placements show what is possible when systems, communities, and partners work together. Cambodia’s experience demonstrates that with clear strategy, committed leadership, and supportive partners, meaningful and lasting progress toward family-based care can be achieved.

“ We see a promising trend in the number of children reunited with their families or placed into alternative family-based care in Cambodia. Smooth and safe reintegration of children – especially when RCIs self-close without government involvement – requires robust oversight mechanisms.

(Phi No)





MS. BABITA PATRA

State Commission for Child Protection, Odisha, India



INDIA (ODISHA STATE): Ms. Babita Patra, State Commission for Child Protection, Odisha: presented the state’s progress in strengthening its child care and protection system, grounded in India’s Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 and inspired by the national Mission Vatsalya initiative. She emphasised Odisha’s commitment to ensuring that every child enjoys a safe, nurturing, and family-based environment, highlighting that institutional care should remain a measure of last resort. Drawing from Mission Vatsalya’s focus on prevention and family strengthening, Odisha has adopted a systematic, integrated approach that includes state-led schemes for vulnerable children, a stand-alone child policy launched in 2022, and district action plans designed to strengthen monitoring, coordination, and accountability across government sectors.

She noted that Odisha has made significant advances, including child vulnerability mapping – through which over 100,000 children were identified in pilot districts, with half already linked to social protection support – and a statewide disability survey to ensure inclusion of children with disabilities. Odisha is also actively pursuing deinstitutionalisation, reuniting 2,315 children with families in the last year, expanding kinship and foster care, and supporting young adults transitioning out of care with education, skills training, employment, and counselling. The state continues to strengthen family-based care through digital solutions, expanded foster and kinship care, streamlined adoption processes, and strong partnerships with UNICEF, UN agencies, and civil society.

“ We are promoting family resilience and sustainable community-led approaches to prevent family separation and let us ensure that no child grows without love, no woman without dignity and no family without hope. And in closing, I wish to echo Mahatma Gandhi: ‘if we are to reach real peace in this world, we shall have to begin with the children.

(Babita Patra)



FINAL REFLECTIONS AND CLOSE

Moderator



Ms. Tessa Boudrie
Hope and Homes for
Children

Speakers



Ms. Mikiko Otani
President of Child Rights
Connect and Former Chair
of the UN Committee on the
Rights of the Child (CRC)



Mr. Albert Justin
BICON Care Experienced
Reference Group, Miracle
Foundation (India)



A VIDEO OF THIS SESSION IS AVAILABLE HERE

The BICON conference drew to a close with wonderful reflections from two distinguished speakers which we include below.





ALBERT JUSTIN

BICON Care Experienced Reference Group and Miracle Foundation, India

“ First of all I want to thank on behalf of the care experienced persons – all of the BICON Organising Committee, Family for Every Child, Forget Me Not, Hope and Homes for Children, SOS Children’s Villages, Udayan Care, UNICEF Malaysia – and also , Martin James Foundation, Keystone and Miracle Foundation India who helped some of us supporters to participate in this international platform.

At this BICON we have tabled many problems – the challenges which we faced. Since the last BICON, we have seen many improvements and good practices. We have built so much but it is still patchy. Here are a few of the gaps we still see:

Let’s help social workers so that they can be equipped to correct that patchwork and fill the gaps.

Few organisations are supporting after care – that is what happens to people at 18 when they leave the care home. There are huge gaps in education, health and housing for us – especially at this moment in our lives.

I notice the importance of peer support that people get through care leaver networks.

We have seen examples of many different care leaver networks in different countries; they are even working directly with government like in Sri Lanka.

This is good learning from BICON for all care leaver networks, that we should tie up with the government, with the CSOs so that we can scale up the impact that we have. Really, it’s very important that it is said here how important these partnerships are. We have stressed the importance of recognising and inclusion of the care leavers in policy making. And when we do this let’s also ensure we reach all care experienced people across our countries, there are different realities in remote and rural areas that need to be understood better. As we seek to build sustainable care leaver networks we should also seek to have regional and district level centres to support people with after care needs.

I would also add a recommendation to governments that they look into providing work opportunities including within the government sector. Many care leavers struggle with exams and find it hard to get a job, this could be a great way to ensure that we have stable futures.

(Albert Justin)





MS. MIKIKO OTANI

President of Child Rights Connect and
Former Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Japan



Thank you very much for giving me the privilege of speaking at the end of this conference. I am truly grateful to the organisers of BICON for inviting me to take part, and I am especially glad to be here alongside my good friend Dr. Rinchen, with whom I served on the committee.

Over the past two days, I thought carefully about what I wanted to say in this closing reflection. Instead of summarising the discussions – we have already captured these well in the recommendations – I would like to offer three personal reflections.

My first experience with BICON was in 2021, when I was invited to speak during the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference was held online, and at the time I was Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. I knew very little about BICON then; the invitation reached me through Dr. Rinchen, and I remain grateful to him for connecting me with this wonderful community. That year's BICON took place shortly after the Committee's Day of General Discussion on children's rights and alternative care, which was the focus of my keynote address. Looking back, I realise that I missed a significant opportunity. After delivering my speech, I left the meeting and did not stay to hear from the participants, including the young people and care leavers whose voices are so important. I deeply regret not being able to listen to their experiences and insights. This gathering is therefore my first time engaging with BICON in person – and I am truly honoured to be here.



So here are my three points:

1. "I was deeply moved by the strong partnership with young care leavers at the centre of BICON. Thirty-four young people from seven countries helped shape this conference, and I congratulate the organising committee for placing them at the heart of it. These two days began with a powerful opening statement from two young care leavers, and throughout the event we continued to hear their voices – clear, consistent and determined. They told us they do not want to be heard only as storytellers; they want to be part of decision-making. We take that message seriously.

I also want to share my own perspective. Your stories are inspiring, convincing and motivating for all of us who work for children. In my role as a former member and Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, I often speak about international frameworks, legal standards and global guidelines. We all know the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a legally binding document: every child has the right to grow up in a family, to an identity, to parental care, and not to be separated unless absolutely necessary. Governments are responsible for ensuring that alternative care is provided, with family-based care always the priority.

But a legal document, however powerful, needs a heart – and that is what your stories give it. Each of you has a unique experience that now lives in my mind and will shape the way I speak about these issues in the future. Your courage in sharing such personal, often painful experiences is extraordinary, and it is clear you did so not for yourselves, but for the children still living in institutions. You reminded us that while you cannot change your past, you can use your voices to change the future.

I was especially touched by your empathy and solidarity. I also appreciated your reminder that we should not expect children in institutions to become 'powerful leaders' or 'top professionals,' but simply good people and good citizens – a goal that sounds simple yet is profoundly meaningful. Your experiences show what it truly means when a child grows up without a family, how it affects life long after childhood, even across generations.

So, I offer my deepest appreciation. What you shared today is not just storytelling – it is a call to action. Your voices will help drive real policy change and reform."

2. "We all know what needs to be done – and I hope we all agree on that. We've talked at length about what is required. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989, and the Committee began its work in 1991. Over the years, the Committee has held several Days of General Discussion on important themes. In 2005, we focused on alternative care, which led to recommendations and ultimately to the UN General Assembly's Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children in 2009.

But even after that, discussions continued. In 2021, the Committee held a second Day of General Discussion on this theme, and for me, that was a moment of real change – because the care leaver community came forward and told the Committee directly what we needed to hear. It was a powerful turning point.

Today, I hear the same clear calls for action: prevent separation and support families; address the root causes of separation such as poverty; strengthen community partnerships and collaboration; ensure mental health support; support care leavers and caregivers; invest in the social service workforce and data systems; strengthen

gatekeeping and monitoring. These are calls for change, for implementation, for real action. The time for talking is over – it is time to work together. I’ve heard, again and again, the importance of co-leadership and co-partnership. You are leading, and you are calling on us to stand with you as genuine partners. It may sound obvious, but this really is the moment for implementation, action and accountability.

I also want to share a reflection on power. Governments hold power – and yes, we need laws, policies, budgets, case management systems, data collection and monitoring. But governments are not alone. Many of us hold different forms of power. As a former member of the Committee, I had the power of voice – speaking through the Convention itself. Civil society has the power of technical expertise and lived practice. Practitioners have the power of day-to-day experience. Philanthropy holds the power to resource change – not just by giving money, but by shifting social norms.

And I want to remind the young care leavers: you have power, too. As Justin said yesterday, no one can deliver this alone. Our strength lies in working together.”

3. “Thinking about the future of BICON, I checked my emails this morning to see when I first became involved. I spoke at BICON 2021, joined the Government Roundtable in 2022, and participated again in 2023 – but always online. This is my first time attending in person, and finally seeing everyone gathered here has been truly wonderful. I am amazed by how BICON has grown: a platform led by civil society, now joined by practitioners, UNICEF colleagues, government representatives, and even Committee members. My sincere congratulations to everyone who has shaped this space.”

Looking ahead, I want to reflect on how we often talk about global frameworks – like the Convention and the Alternative Care Guidelines. We tend to think only about aligning national laws and policies with these frameworks. But what matters just as much is implementation. BICON should be proud of what it has built, and I hope that future discussions become even more action-oriented.

That said, discussion still has value. It motivates us, strengthens our resolve, and reminds us of our shared belief that every child deserves a family. It sounds simple, but it is anything but easy. This is why we must continue working together – joining hands, collaborating, and ensuring BICON remains a space where young care leavers are central. They know, better than anyone, what works and what does not. I feel privileged to be part of the BICON community – or as someone said, the ‘BICON family.’

My humble suggestion is that CRC Committee members should always be invited to BICON. It is powerful for them to witness how strong and vibrant this platform has become across Asia. My hope is that this collaboration continues not only regionally but at national levels too. I am sorry that during the last session I could not take more questions, but I hope those conversations continue between governments, young people with lived experience, and civil society.

As Rinchen reminded us, we must monitor what we actually achieve from these discussions. I hope to return for the next BICON. Thank you again to the organisers, the Government of Malaysia, UNICEF Malaysia, and all partners. And especially to the young care leavers who shared such powerful stories – thank you.

(Ms. Mikiko Otani)





TESSA BOUDRIE

Hope and Homes for Children, Chair of the BICON Organising Committee

REPORT CONCLUSION – A CALL TO ACTION

“ As Chair of the BICON organising committee, it is my honour to write the conclusion to this report.

In the few months since we closed the BICON conference in October 2025, I have been reflecting on the depth, courage and clarity shared across those two days in Kuala Lumpur.

We all know what to do, we know how to do it and now we must do it – together. I have listened to young people who turned pain into purpose, to governments who recognised the urgency of care reform for children, and to practitioners, researchers and leaders who showed us that change is not only possible, it is already happening, often despite the difficult funding context. But none of this will matter if these words stay here, inside a report. None of this will matter if we don't shout about it.

So, I choose to end not by looking back at the conference with a summary, but by looking forward to actions that we can all take. Let's all challenge complacency, question systems that fail families, and to make space for and stand beside care-experienced young people as co-leaders, not afterthoughts. Let's all push for the collective and political will, the funding, the data, and the accountability that care reform demands. And this is for all of us together – whether you are a policymaker, practitioner, donor, researcher, international NGO or ally – make your own commitment too.

Because the voices we heard at BICON were clear:

- No more children growing up unseen in orphanages.
- No more families breaking from preventable crises.
- No more care experienced young people stepping into adulthood alone.

We have the evidence. We have the recommendations. But most importantly, we have the makings of a movement – one built on lived experience, shared purpose, and a belief that every child deserves a safe, loving family.

As I close this report, I ask you to join me in turning these pages into action. Read it. Share it. Use it. Challenge your institutions. Influence your leaders. Hold us all accountable. Let this not be the end of a conference, but the beginning of renewed courage. Let's also challenge ourselves and hold ourselves accountable.

The future we want for children in Asia will not be built by words alone. It will be built by what each of us chooses to do next. Together.

(Tessa Boudrie, March 2026)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank everyone who made BICON such a success:

CARE EXPERIENCED PEOPLE

BICON is committed to centring the voices of those with lived experience of care in discussions about care reform and we strive to become a mutually accountable, truly co-produced event. Care-experienced people are the beating heart of BICON and we sincerely recognise the emotional, financial and personal commitment of every young person who chooses to commit time to planning BICON and to sharing their personal stories on the stage. BICON recognises this commitment by the payment of a stipend.

GOVERNMENTS

We would also like to express our thanks to the government dignitaries from Cambodia, Philippines, India, Bangladesh, United Kingdom and of course Malaysia for your support of BICON and sharing your experiences and ideas so wholeheartedly. We all know how important governments are in ensuring that change happens and this partnership with governments is something that BICON cherishes. A special thank you to the Government of Malaysia, especially the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and the Department of Social Welfare, for their incredible support for BICON and for hosting us in Kuala Lumpur.

SPONSORS

A shout out to the Martin James Foundation who have been by our side at the last two BICONS and Het Weeshuis der Doopsgezinden who came on board to support us this year.

FRIENDS OF BICON

Those organisations who supported participation of those with lived experience of care at BICON – in particular The Global Foundation for Care Fellows by Experience and also the Miracle Foundation and Keystone Human Services International and others.

MENTORS

Dr. Rinchen Chopel and Mikiko Otani for your ongoing friendship to BICON. Your support and guidance to BICON over the years has been invaluable.

THE BICON PARTNERS

Family for Every Child, Forget Me Not, Hope and Homes for Children, SOS Children's Villages International and Udayan Care. (Joined for the 2025 BICON by UNICEF Malaysia.)

TEAM BICON

The BICON Organising Committee and the BICON care – experienced co-ordination group who worked together as one team to deliver a successful event – with different committees focusing on content, communications, logistics and fundraising.

Shebeeb Ahammed – Hope and Homes for Children

Shakil Ahmed – BICON Care-experienced co-ordination committee

Lopa Bhattacharjee – Family for Every Child

Tessa Boudrie – Hope and Homes for Children (Chair of the organising committee)

Ruma Budha Magar – BICON Care-experienced co-ordination committee

Vuthaya Charoenpol – SOS Children’s Villages International

Surja – BICON Care-experienced co-ordination committee

Severine Chevrel – Consultant for UNICEF Malaysia

Dr. Gurneet Kalra – Udayan Care

Rajeev Kumar – SOS Children’s Villages International

Sachin Kumar – Hope and Homes for Children

Nimali (Nimmu) Kumari – BICON Care-experienced co-ordination committee

Su-Anne Lee – UNICEF Malaysia

Filipe Meirelles – Family for Every Child

Dr. Kiran Modi – Udayan Care (Founder of BICON)

Andrea Nave – Forget Me Not

Shankar Pradhan – BICON Care-experienced co-ordination committee

Leena Prasad – Udayan Care

Anju Pun – Forget Me Not

Nicole Ristic – Family for Every Child

Nolan Quigley – Hope and Homes for Children

Mark Riley – Hope and Homes for Children

Haritha Semassinghe – BICON Care-experienced co-ordination committee

Ranjana Srivastava – Udayan Care

Dikshya Thapa – BICON Care-experienced co-ordination committee

Andrea Thompson – Family for Every Child

THE BICON CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE REFERENCE GROUP

The BICON Care Experienced Young People Reference Group worked alongside this team every step of the way as we planned this event together. They were joined by many more care experienced young people who took centre stage at BICON.

THANKS ALSO TO

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- Mr. Shankar Pradhan – BICON Care Experienced Reference Group, India for his excellent moderation of the care experienced takeover session.
- The dedicated team at MEP Meeting & Exhibition Planners (MEP Malaysia) our partners in delivering BICON – for their truly incredible work.
- The team at the Aloft hotel in Kuala Lumpur.
- Nolan Quigley, report author who worked as a consultant on behalf of and with the BICON Organising Committee during February 2026.

SAFEGUARDING

The safety of all participants was a top priority. A dedicated Safeguarding Team ensured that the conference environment, content, and data practices followed the updated [2025 BICON Safeguarding and Data Protection Policy](#). A safeguarding desk, dedicated email, phone number, and WhatsApp account were made available and monitored throughout the conference. Health and well-being support was provided. No serious safeguarding incidents were reported. Suggestions for strengthening future safeguarding and wellbeing measures have been documented in a safeguarding report which will be used in planning the next BICON. This report is available on the BICON web site.

6th **bicon** INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON ALTERNATIVE CARE **20**
FOR CHILDREN IN ASIA **25**

PARTNERS



Family
for every child



Forget Me Not

**HOPE
AND
HOMES
FOR
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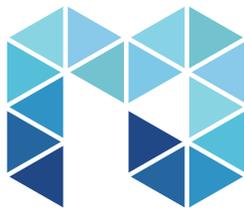


**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

A logo consisting of a cluster of colorful dots in red, yellow, green, and blue.
UDAYAN
care | Where young
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Martin James
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FRIENDS

**The Global
Foundation for
Care Fellows
by Experience**

A logo consisting of several dark blue vertical lines of varying heights, creating a stylized arch or keystone shape.
KEYSTONE

A logo featuring a stylized orange and black shape that resembles a person or a plant with arms raised.
**MIRACLE
FOUNDATION**