

Make Our Voices Count

Children and young peoples' responses
to a global survey for the Day of General
Discussion 2021 on Children's Rights
and Alternative Care

CHILD AND YOUTH FRIENDLY SUMMARY



What is this paper about?

We're sharing children and young people's responses to a global survey for the Day of General Discussion 2021.

The topic of the survey is **Children's Rights and Alternative Care**.

Alternative care is when children and young people do not live with their parents and are in the care of relatives or other adults who are not their family members.

The report has been submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child who are hosting a Day of General Discussion (DGD) on 'Children's Rights and Alternative Care' in September 2021.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child is a group of 18 experts that checks if governments around the world are helping children enjoy their rights to live well and thrive. These rights are listed in a document called the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. You can find out more about the Convention and the Committee on the Rights of the Child here:

ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/InformationForChildren.aspx

The Day of General Discussion is a public meeting that aims to gain a deeper understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and how it promotes the rights of children in alternative care and those at risk of family separation, or already separated from their families.

Letter to Members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

Dear Members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child,

We are the research group, a team of 13 members from 10 countries who represent the wider Children and Young People's Advisory Team (CAT and YAT) made up of 25 members located across 18 countries. Together, we have created this letter to you to introduce our report for the Day of General Discussion taking place in September 2021.

This report captures the views, ideas and experiences of children and young people across the world who participated in a global survey. Although every child and young person has their own unique story, we have been struck by just how many of us have similar experiences of alternative care around the world. A lot of these experiences are negatively impacting our human rights: drastic change is needed. While the report outlines the key themes to have emerged from the global survey findings, the following were particularly significant to us as the research group:

- **Listening to children and young people:** Children and young people want to be heard and listened to. All too often, adults do not consider their opinions in decisions being made about their lives and this needs to change.
- **Prevention:** Children and young people want duty bearers to focus on prevention, ensuring that alternative care is a last resort, where all other options for supporting families to stay together are exhausted first.
- **The ongoing impact of COVID-19:** A lot of children and young people have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and special attention needs to be given to this.
- **Leaving alternative care:** Children and young people must be psychologically and practically supported after life in alternative care so they can live happy lives in adulthood.

Ahead of the Day of General Discussion in September 2021, we hope that this report will help you to better understand the situation for children and young people in alternative care and consider important ways to prevent family separation. We hope it helps you to feel more aware of the issues faced by many children and young people in different countries. However, this report is not just for you. We want the views, ideas and experiences in this report to reach as many people as possible working with, and making decisions about, children and young people locally, nationally and internationally.

We need the international community to take collective action to make sure that children and young people have a safe, nurturing family environment to grow up in and to make alternative forms of care better, when children cannot live with their own families. This must involve creating accountability systems to make sure all countries create and provide high standards of alternative care which respect and protect children and young people's human rights. At the same time, we know that there needs to be targeted action towards different regions and countries; it is not a one-size-fits-all situation.

Our final message to you is that the attitude of society towards the children and young people living in alternative care must change. We are an integral part of society and we must be respected, loved and cared for, regardless of caste, ethnicity, ability, color, gender, and/or religion for our happiness, development, and development of our world as a whole.

With thanks,
Research Group of the Children and Young People's Advisory Team
July 2021

How were children and young people consulted?

Who?

1,188 children and young people aged between 5 and 25 from across the world were consulted who have experience of alternative care or the child protection system.

How?

A global online survey was carried out from April to May 2021. The survey asked questions about children and young people's experiences of alternative care such as - What makes good quality care? How can we prevent children from being separated from their families? And how has COVID-19 affected children's lives?

Why?

A young woman from Canada who responded to the survey explains why:



We have to be heard and considered experts of life in care. We so often are overlooked in the processes of case planning, case management, training for staff, and policy writing - we are the ones who live through these decisions made by adults who often only have scholarly knowledge or service provision knowledge of what we have to live every day. Ask us."

Young woman, 18-25, Canada



What did they say?

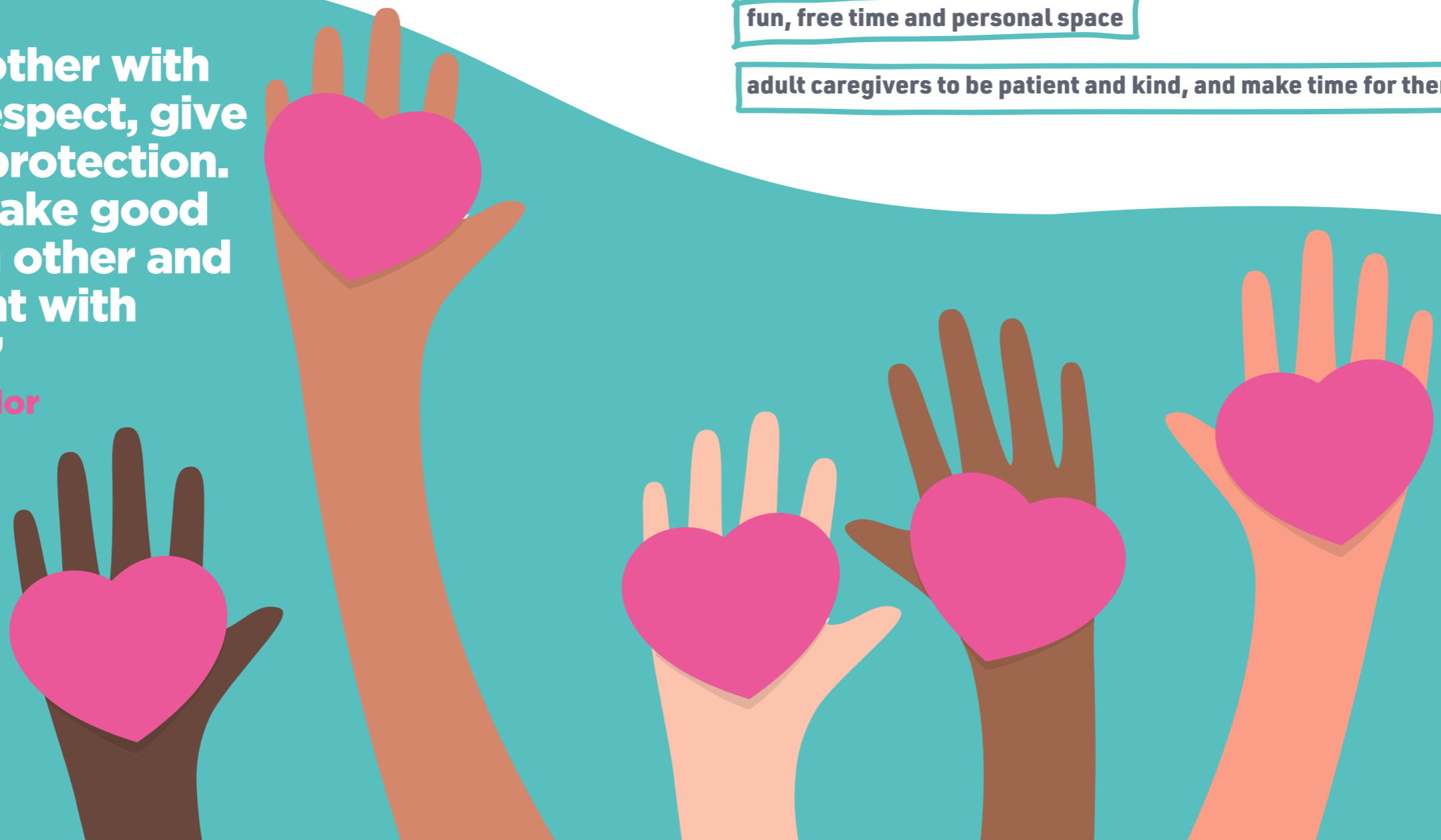
In Europe and North America

children and young people were more specific about their needs and what they thought should improve. For example, they talked about specific rights such as the right to education and the right to protection for children and young people in alternative care. And they saw themselves as having an expertise that should be listened to by adults.



Treat each other with love, with respect, give each other protection. We should take good care of each other and also not fight with each other.”

Girl, 5-10, Ecuador



Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean

children and young people were broader in their answers, talking about key themes such as love, safety, food, and medicine. They were no less passionate about their experiences of care, although they were less likely to see themselves as experts.

Similarities across the world...

Children and young people want and need:

to be listened to, respected and taken seriously by adults

fun, free time and personal space

adult caregivers to be patient and kind, and make time for them

Children and young people highlighted the importance of:

- ✓ feeling loved
- ✓ building trust and having safe, dedicated time and space to share feelings and thoughts with adult caregivers
- ✓ education, socialisation

Love was

mentioned 688 times

in the global survey responses – showing how central love is to the experiences of children and young people in care.



Groups that experience particular challenges

Children and young people with disabilities

talked about caregivers being trained on how to best support them, access to education, and the effects of poverty.

Girls and young women

mentioned the importance of being treated equally, and having the same access to their rights as boys and young men.

Young people who have left care

said how challenging it is to be on your own without financial, emotional or psychological support, and how they want help finding jobs and continuing their education.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, 2-spirited, and intersex young people

explained how they wanted to be accepted by caregivers and parents, and that they had fears about their safety.



Children and young people's ideas for change

Prevention

Make sure all other options for supporting families to stay together are tried before alternative care is used. These options include providing financial support to families, training and support programs for parents (including psychosocial support). Involve children and young people in designing and delivering these programs to make sure they include all groups of children.

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 change. Provide training and education for adults on how to meaningfully listen to and involve children and young people in decisions about their day-to-day lives. Also, provide the emotional and practical support children and young people need to have their say.



Children should receive information about their rights, making them able to report when a right is violated. In alternative care, it is important to monitor and evaluate services.”

Young man, 18-25, Moldova



Children should be made to feel at ease as if they were in their own families and to be given all the maternal and paternal love they need.”

Young man, 18-25, Haiti

Good quality alternative care

Make sure parents have access to counselling, mental health support and respite services. It should be a priority to keep siblings together. Keep children and young people connected to their culture. Keep children and young people safe from harm.

Leaving alternative care

Children and young people must be psychologically and practically supported after leaving alternative care, so they can live happy lives in adulthood. Provide the kind of support that young people ask for, including financial, emotional and psychological support.



Even if children in care don't talk about their backgrounds, the adults still have a responsibility to help them maintain their identity.”

Young woman, 18-25 New Zealand



In my view, financial support comes at the top. If there is a good flow of money, then there is less chance of dissatisfaction and frustrations in the family. After that comes emotional support. If we support our family by providing love, support, reassurance, acceptance and encouragement then we can strengthen our love bond further.”

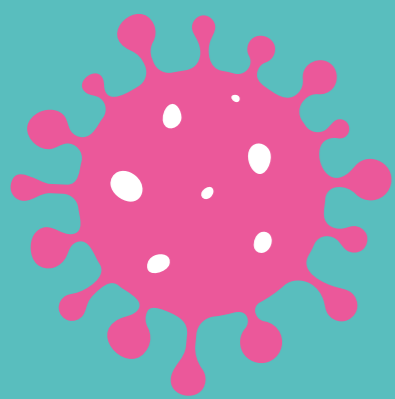
Young woman, 18-25 Nepal



The impact of COVID-19

This survey took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result children and young people described feelings of loneliness, isolation, anxiety, boredom, depression, anger, sadness and fear that the pandemic has brought into their lives.

In addition, they described situations in which parents and caregivers had died or become seriously ill from the virus, and the impact this has had on their care, wellbeing and safety - which need to be given special attention.



For me, COVID-19 has impacted all of us in the sense that it has reminded us all in a fraction of a second that we as humans cannot control everything in this life; at any moment we can pass away. We are all vulnerable and this doesn't just happen to others."

Young woman, 18-25, Benin

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For more information about the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's Day of General Discussion on Children's Rights and Alternative Care, please visit:

ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Discussion2020.aspx

See also:

childrightsconnect.org/day-of-general-discussion