

# *Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World: Volume 4 – African Perspectives*, edited by Tuhinul Islam and Leon Fulcher

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Africa is renowned for its beauty, its natural heritage and prolific resources – but equally, the image of its suffering children haunts the conscience of our Continent and the world. (Nelson Mandela, 2 August 1996)

Residential child and youth care is the cornerstone of services to vulnerable children and youths at risk of homelessness and requiring professional support in their formative years. Before residential care became popular in countries across the world, it was the onus of local communities collectively to raise their children to become responsible citizens. These communities employed indigenous and traditional means and values handed down from one generation to the next. Inadvertently practising the spirit of ubuntu, these communities took on the responsibility of raising a child with the understanding that every child belonged to the whole village.

This text, *Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World*, provides practitioners working in the field of childcare with evidence-based information about the challenges and opportunities that are prevalent in 19 countries in Africa when working in residential child and youth care. The likely audiences of this book are child and youth care practitioners, and also every person with a vested interest in the care and protection of young people. This text is strategically presented as an offering to Africa. This fourth volume features 19 of the 54 countries from a continent that is embedded in the Global South and recognised as integral to the developing world.

This text seeks to analyse some of the challenges and barriers that exist within each country's unique structures and service delivery implementation. Having been reliant on texts from the West for my own studies in child and youth care, I was curious to read the contributions from colleagues on the African continent. At first glance, I was confident that this offering would provide much-needed insights and analyses into



country-specific initiatives and practices in Africa. I was not disappointed. This book was easy to read, and provided well-thought-out arguments and insights, research and reflections into child and youth care in developing countries in Africa. This text traverses countries from the north of Africa to sub-Saharan Africa. It deftly brings to the fore initiatives from governments and civil society in focusing on childcare and protection.

Researcher and manager Noha Emam Hassanim and senior child and youth care consultant Yosr Koth provide insights into child and youth care practices in Egypt (Chapter 1), a country that is situated in the north-east of Africa and links Africa with the south-western corner of Asia. A predominantly Muslim country, Egypt supports, among other services, a system of “kafala families” which promotes long-term or permanent foster care within families, thus preserving the child’s identity and family lineage. However, as Hassanim and Koth argue, the Egyptian government has for the last two decades developed policies and activism to improve their alternative care system, yet have not regulated its care system for its children and youths.

In Chapter 2, we are introduced to the care of young people in institutions in the country of Sudan, where Islamic laws and teachings shape the culture of its society in caring for and sponsoring children and young people in need of care. Academic Saleh Mussa Abbakar Matar and doctoral candidate Muawia Hussein Mohamed provide an insightful review of the state’s interests in caring for and preparing young people to enter education and employment.

Chapter 3 provides insight into the oldest non-colonised east African country of Ethiopia. Academic and civil activist Hussein Seid Hassen reviews formal and residential care practices and provides a deeper understanding of practical experiences of childcare institutions. Interestingly, this chapter also provides the reader with an understanding of ethnocentric practices that support a decolonial culturally diverse society.

In Chapter 4, we are introduced to childcare practices in one of the richest countries in Africa, namely Nigeria. Lecturer Hannah Olubunmi Ajayi and Christian religious leader Isaac Adeyemo discuss the care experiences of children and care leavers pre- and post-colonisation, and highlights key protection policies and their implications for informal care facilities. Ajayi and Adeyemo provide the example of Almajiri Homes, a system of residential care embedded in the Muslim faith where children are taught the policies and principles of Islam.

Chapter 5 highlights residential care in Ghana. Kwaneba Frimpong-Manso, a widely published academic in child welfare, argues that the demand for state places of safety care was heightened by the over 200 000 child survivors of HIV-AIDS. He highlights homes for abandoned and orphaned children, shelters for trafficked and abused children,

and correctional (borstal) centres for young people in trouble with the law, as three key residential sectors for children and youths in Ghana.

In Chapter 6, the reader is introduced to child and youth care practices in Malawi. Social worker Thandiwe Tambala-Kaliati and community development specialist Yobbe Lungu argue that with the proliferation of residential care facilities in Malawi, children have better access to food, education, security, and spiritual and psychological care. However, Tambala-Kaliati and Lungu also bring to the fore the harsh treatment of young people in care, particularly within the foster care system.

One of the most insightful chapters in this text is probably that by Stephen Ucembe, a care leaver turned social worker. In Chapter 7, Ucembe provides personal experiences of his 13 years of childhood experience in care. His personal and professional insights into Kenya's residential institutions provide much food for thought into Kenya's overuse of the residential care model, and the need to transform from using this as a default model to a last-resort approach.

In Chapter 8, academic Willy Lawunda Mbalanda and social workers Fanny Matiaba Muaka and Yannick Mubakilay Tshinkola provide glimpses into residential child and youth care in key urban centres of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This chapter highlights issues on children in difficult circumstances (children who do not have access to health services, housing, food and education), children with disabilities, the high numbers of children orphaned as a result of armed conflict, and the high rate of teenage unmarried mothers.

In Chapter 9, lecturer Emmanuel Hakizimana, focuses on Rwanda where government policies on childcare promote children remaining in the care of their families. Hakizimana offers insights into the role of youth transit centres for young people who exhibit abnormal or delinquent behaviour. Inspired by the cultural belief that a child is better cared for in the family environment, Hakizimana highlights key Rwandan government strategies to close down care institutions and return children to their families or place in adoption.

In Chapter 10, Jacqueline Murekasenge, Joyce Kedemi and Susan Wanjiku Muchiri underline the effects of the political turbulence and violence of Burundi on its orphaned and economically impoverished children and youths. They argue that residential care gives children of Burundi a second chance of access to social and healthcare, education and peer interactions, where they would otherwise have been left on the streets. This chapter also reflects on those previously in care who return as caregivers.

Child rights activist Anna Mubukwanu-Sibanze takes us through the residential care system in Zambia in Chapter 11. She highlights the influence of tribal activities and family care practices that were altered through European colonisation, urbanisation and rural–urban migration. This chapter is one of the few research reports on childcare in

Zambia and will surely be the source of further research and debates about the various stages of care in this central African country.

In Chapter 12, the reader is introduced to the system of alternate care in Tanzania. In this chapter, assistant lecturer on social work Meinrad Lembuka provides an overview of the history and development of child and youth care practices, traditional systems of care, and the ubuntu ideal of traditional mutual aid and protection for children and youths. Lembuka highlights the commitment by the post-colonial government of Tanzania to uplift the plight of vulnerable children and young people, and the development of private alternative care services for children in response to increased demand.

In Chapter 13, we are introduced to the system of residential child and youth care through the lens of a team of writers from the SOS Children's Villages in Uganda, namely, Ronald Ssentuuwa, Lillian Ssengooba Mpabulungi, Agnes Kyamulabi, Irene Nsangi and Moses Maanyi. They argue that although the Ugandan government had hastily expanded residential care facilities in the country, there is now a change towards de-institutionalisation and an emphasis on supporting and strengthening families. They also argue that youth work is likely to make a major shift to community youth development programmes.

As we go deeper into sub-Saharan Africa, Chapter 14 introduces us to Botswana by Poloko Nuggert Ntshwarang and Tapologo Maundeni, both lecturers at the Department of Social Work at the University of Botswana. They argue that there is a lack of research into best care practices in Botswana. However, of significance is the Botswana government's establishment of a Children's Council in 2010 to co-ordinate, support and ensure implementation of activities related to children at ministerial levels.

In Chapter 15, we are provided with insights into residential care in Zimbabwe by a lecturer at the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe, Emely Muguwe. Muguwe emphasises the roots of child and youth care services in colonial Rhodesia, which were closely aligned with the British care system. She also provides insight into the reasons for children being in care which she attributes to abandonment, a parent is imprisoned, experiences of destitution, abusive parents, parental conflicts that led to divorce, mental or physical disability, and separation from family.

Chapter 16 provides insights into out-of-home care placements in landlocked Lesotho, a country bordered by South Africa. University of Lesotho lecturers Simbai Mushonga, Phumela Mamahao Mahoa and Katiso Sehlabane reveal that residential care in Lesotho is a fairly new practice dating to the early 1990s as a result of orphaned children and youths arising from the impact of HIV and AIDS. They highlight the rapid rise of residential institutions with services implemented by the non-governmental and faith-based sectors.

In Chapter 17, lecturers Jotham Demba and Prudence Hlatshwayo and SOS Children's Villages' director Thokozani Maphalala discuss residential care in Eswatini. Eswatini, like Lesotho (Chapter 16), has a recent history of residential care facilities as it was always the long-standing tradition of the extended family caring for its own. As in Lesotho, the sharp rise in residential care in Eswatini is also attributed to the rise in orphans from HIV- and Aids-related causes, advanced poverty levels and the high unemployment rate. Although residential care is a last resort, it is inevitable and thus the country has more than 45 registered residential care homes for children and young people.

In Chapter 18, social worker Brigitte Nshimiyimana and US lecturer Eveline Kalomo draw upon their professional practice in social work to review the residential care system in Namibia. This chapter argues why a country with sound childcare policies has a rising number of children and youths in need of care facilities. The reasons why children are placed in care and the types of care offered in this south-western country of Africa are highlighted. Finally, this chapter draws attention to implications for continuing development of services for Namibia's children and youths.

The penultimate chapter in this text (Chapter 19) is provided by Sultan Khan, a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Khan draws on his 16 years of experience as a childcare worker and principal of a children's home to highlight the South African government's commitment to care for its vulnerable children, the levels of underdevelopment in infrastructure and service delivery issues that compound the problem of children and young people in need of care. Khan also highlights the concepts of family-centred care, family reintegration services and diversion programmes for youths in conflict with the law for minor offences.

This text would not be complete if it lacked a chapter on the Covid-19 pandemic that is prevailing not just in Africa, but also in the entire world. This concluding chapter (Chapter 20) is brilliantly written by Lee Loynes, the CEO of Girls and Boys Town in South Africa. Experienced and established in the field of residential care, Loynes skilfully crafts the impact of the pandemic on residential care and the responses of management and care workers to what she termed the "Covid-19 reign of terror". Loynes reflects on staying relational amidst the chaos that encapsulated the world, the limited notice before the national lockdown occurred, and insufficient time to prepare children in residential settings, their families, and care workers. She also highlights relational child and youth care philosophies and adjustments made by the child and youth care sector in response to constant changes in the national lockdown requirements.

One of the book's strengths is that it provides a spectrum of policies and services on the care of children in 19 individual countries in Africa and thereby provides 19 individual insights into these countries' care policies and practices. Another strength is that most contributors to each chapter are from that country and therefore can understand the

context of residential care as it applies to their country. Again I must give credit to Chapter 7 of this book, written by one who lived in care for over 13 years, and thus provides both an experiential and professional account of residential care.

An outstanding feature of this book is the insightful questions posed at the end of each chapter. These questions assist with guided reflections and small group discussions, and are invaluable for educators, training providers and students.

Historically, the care of children was the responsibility of every adult in pre-colonial Africa. The practice of ubuntu is the foundation of traditional indigenous societies in Africa and elsewhere. This ideal was well captured by icon and former president of South Africa Nelson Mandela in May 1995: “There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

In all chapters of this book, there is a strong culture of care and support for children in need of help. We are cognisant that every ethnic group has its own traditions of supporting vulnerable, abandoned, and orphaned children. Yet the overarching message of this text is that we have failed our children. As Stephen Ucembe (Chapter 7), a care leaver turned social worker, wrote of his personal experiences: “I could never have foreseen spending almost my entire childhood going round in circles within such a cold and callous place, separated from the rest of the world by concrete walls, barbed wire and tall thorny bushes.”

This text provides much food for thought for child and youth care specialists. Many concerns are raised: of the future of the care of children, of the rise in the demand for care, of the lack of preparation of children in care for the real world, of the lack of facilities for children transitioning out of care, of the poor care received in residential facilities, and of the focus on monetary gain of care facilities. These are some of the imperatives for world leaders, policymakers and practitioners alike.

*Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World: Volume 4 – African Perspectives* provides an evidence-based assessment of services offered in 19 countries in Africa. It is a good resource for academics, students and practitioners wanting to understand the experience of children and youths across Africa. This is an insightful and informative book. It is well-written and provides in one place an analysis of past and current policies on childcare services from 19 countries in Africa. It joins the call for further debate regionally and internationally on childcare policies.

I recommend this book as a valuable resource for all students; from auxiliary to professional levels of studies in child and youth care, and from certification- to degree-level students in all spheres of child and youth protection. May this text, as an offering from the African continent, provide you with deeper insights into indigenised practices that you may take into your own environments. I recommend this book to future

generations of childcare practitioners so that they may draw from ideas in similar situations to effectively support those in need.