

The Better Care Network Guiding Principles and Procedures

1. Founding and Purpose of the Better Care Network

Children need and have a right to be cared for by their parents and to grow up in a family environment. This has been recognized through years of experience and research as well as formally recognized under national and international laws, including the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. Yet millions of children live in residential institutions; no one knows just how many. Around the world, over one million children have been orphaned or separated due to armed conflict, and 15 million children under the age of 15 years of age have lost one or both parents to AIDS. In many countries, institutions remain a major care response to poverty or family breakdown. In many more, few or no mechanism exist to ensure the most appropriate placements, encourage and support guardianship and adoption arrangements, and to provide support and monitoring for foster families.

Recognizing the urgent need for concerted action, a group of organizations concerned about children without adequate care came together to form the Better Care Network (BCN) in 2003. The purpose of the BCN is to facilitate active information exchange and collaboration on these issues and advocate for technically sound policy and programmatic action on global, regional, and national levels in order to:

- Reduce instances of separation and abandonment of children;
- Reunite children outside family care with their families, wherever possible and appropriate;
- Increase, strengthen and support family and community-based care options for children who cannot be cared for by their parents;
- Establish international and national standards for all forms of care for children without adequate family care and mechanisms for ensuring compliance; and
- Ensure that residential institutions are used in a very limited manner and only when appropriate.

The BCN is guided by the UNCRC and the 2003 Stockholm Conference on Residential Care Declaration. The BCN is *not a legal entity* but an interagency consortium.

2. The Better Care Network Resources

The activities of the BCN are undertaken with the financial and technical resources of the organizations that are members of the Steering Committee, as well as additional resources that they are able to secure for the BCN.

3. The Better Care Network Steering Committee

(1) Membership: The members of the Steering Committee, as of January 2009, are: Bernard van Leer Foundation, Cooperative Relief and Assistance Everywhere (CARE USA), Firelight

Foundation, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) and the Office of HIV/AIDS (OHA) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

(2) Consideration for Membership

(a) Steering Committee membership is by invitation of the current members.

(b) The decision to admit a new member belongs to the Steering Committee, which makes this decision by consensus.

(c) Each member of the Steering Committee is expected to:

- Have demonstrated commitment to the purposes of the BCN listed above;
- Be prepared to commit the time of a staff member who can consistently represent the member organization in the BCN meetings and periodic consultations where a Steering Committee decision must be made; and
- Provide a minimum annual financial contribution to the budget of the Secretariat of USD 5,000 or an equivalent in-kind contribution (this may be waived for organizations based in the developing world able to make a significant technical contribution to the BCN).

(3) Primary responsibilities and obligations of the BCN Steering Committee members are to:

Responsibilities of individual members are to:

- Designate an individual to act as its representative on the Steering Committee;
- Designate an individual to act as a secondary point of contact;
- Ensure participation in the Annual Meeting, in person or by phone and in periodic requests for guidance to the Steering Committee from the Secretariat;
- Participate as an active member of the BCN Advisory Group; and
- Take responsibility for leading activities around at least one of area of work in the Secretariat's annual work plan.

Collectively, the members of the Steering Committee will:

- Coordinate and collaborate with the Secretariat in the attainment of BCN objectives and the implementation of activities;
- Approve the annual work plan of the BCN Secretariat and, as appropriate, provide guidance regarding its implementation;
- Provide guidance on matters of BCN policy;
- Review annual and periodic progress reports submitted by the Secretariat; and
- Provide guidance and support on funding proposals prepared by the BCN Secretariat.

(4) Annual Meeting

(a) The Annual Meeting requires a majority of all the BCN Steering Committee members who are represented in person or by phone (including valid proxies of the same organization).

(b) The Steering Committee meets at least two times per year. The Annual Meeting is held once a year, and an additional meeting is held once a year, normally by conference call.

- (c) The Annual Meeting is hosted by one of its members, as agreed by the Steering Committee and is facilitated by the BCN Secretariat. The Secretariat prepares the agenda and supporting documents and, in advance, submits these to members for review.
- (d) Responsibilities of the Annual Meeting:
- Consider and approve the agenda of the Annual Meeting;
 - Review the annual report and financial statement submitted by the BCN Secretariat;
 - Review and assess the work of the BCN;
 - Define the BCN's strategic priorities and adopt the annual strategic plan;
 - Review the Secretariat's annual work plan; and
 - Set the date and location of next Annual Meeting.
- (e) The minutes of the Annual Meeting are prepared by the Secretariat and sent to the Committee members for review and approval.

4. The Better Care Network Secretariat

- (1) As agreed at the meeting of the Steering Committee members in New York in August 2005, the BCN established a Secretariat, which operates with the guidance and direction of the Steering Committee.
- (2) The BCN Secretariat, which is composed of a Senior Coordinator and an Assistant Coordinator, is responsible for implementation of the BCN's activities.
- (3) One to two BCN Steering Committee member(s) manage the supervision of and human resources for the BCN Secretariat. At present, CARE USA, is the host organization responsible for the human resource activities related to the BCN Secretariat. The BCN Secretariat is based at BCN Steering Committee member office, UNICEF Headquarters in New York, which provides day-to-day supervision of the members of the Secretariat.
- (4) The Secretariat's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:
- Facilitating the development and implementation of a work plan in accordance with the BCN and Steering Committees objectives and strategic plan;
 - Managing and updating the BCN website and listserv;
 - Coordinating the sharing of information between BCN Steering Committee and Advisory Group members;
 - Preparing materials and presentations describing the work of the BCN;
 - Communicating the work of the BCN and its achievements to donors, partners, and stakeholders at meetings and conferences;
 - Coordinating the representation of the BCN at key events;
 - Identifying experts in the field of child protection and alternative care and inviting them to join the listserv and/or Advisory Group;
 - Facilitating and coordinating technical inputs from Advisory Group members and coordinating the involvement of the Advisory Group as a whole;
 - Organizing the Steering Committee Annual Meeting, Advisory Group meetings, and other events of the BCN;

- In consultation with Steering Committee members, identifying possible sources of funding and preparing funding proposals for donors;
 - Coordinating development and printing of BCN publications;
 - Producing regular narrative and financial reports to be submitted to BCN Steering Committee members and donors when necessary; and
 - Producing the annual report and financial statement to be approved by BCN Steering Committee members at the Annual Meeting.
- (5) Financial responsibility and accounting for the BCN Secretariat rests with the organization(s) that manages the BCN funds. With the support of the organizations finance section, the BCN Secretariat will produce the annual report and financial statements to be submitted to Steering Committee members in advance of the Annual Meeting.
- (6) The BCN Secretariat work and its fulfilment of the objectives are evaluated by the BCN Steering Committee, and, when financially possible, commission objective assessments of the BCN's impact.

5. Better Care Network Advisory Group

(1) The BCN Advisory Group is illustrative of BCN's strong technical capacity in advising on protection and care issues. Currently, there are 44 members worldwide from multilateral agencies, academic institutions, international and local non-governmental organizations, local organizations and networks, foundations, and donor agencies.

(2) Consideration for Membership

(a) BCN Advisory Group membership is by invitation of the BCN Secretariat, which may consult the BCN Steering Committee members.

(b) For an individual to become a member of the BCN Advisory Group she or he must:

- Have the experience and technical capacity and credibility to substantially contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the BCN;
- Have the ability to influence a broader range of actors within his or her sphere; and
- Have demonstrated commitment to the purposes of the BCN, as listed above.

(3) Each member participates in his or her individual capacity. The primary responsibilities and obligations of the BCN Advisory Group members are to:

- Advise on strategic priorities and the work plan of the BCN Secretariat;
- Propose joint initiatives (where appropriate) that could take place within the Advisory Group membership;
- Lead or contribute, as appropriate, to initiatives;
- Provide technical assistance, advise, and expertise on protection and care issues to the BCN Secretariat as needed; and
- Promote the aims and activities of the BCN in appropriate forums.

(4) The BCN Advisory Group members contribute individually at the request of the Secretariat and meet together as a group, as needed.

6. Better Care Network Country and Regional Chapters

(1) Affiliation with the BCN as a national or regional chapter and the use of the BCN logo and name requires the approval of the BCN Secretariat and Steering Committee.

(2) Based on discussions with the BCN Secretariat and Steering Committee, the first national chapter, the Better Care Network Netherlands Chapter, opened in November 2007.

(3) A BCN country or regional chapter should derive from strong initiatives, networks, and commitments within the relevant geographic area and the need for such a network. It requires strong technical and financial support and sustainability beyond that of the BCN (although there may be opportunities for the BCN Steering Committee to provide a small amount of seed money for a chapter).

(4) Prior to beginning its work, a BCN country or regional chapter is expected to:

- Develop a clear statement of purpose in keeping with that of BCN and a strategy to address it;
- Form a Core Group to provide technical guidance and financial and/or in-kind support;
- Prepare guiding principles of the chapter in keeping with the BCN principles listed above;
- Prepare a 2-3 year strategic work plan and budget; and
- Secure sufficient financial and in-kind support to cover minimum of 2 years of operational costs.

(5) A national or regional chapter's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Serving as a platform for and facilitating active information exchange on alternative care at country and/or regional level;
- Advocating for technically sound policy and programmatic action on these issues with local government bodies, donors, and local organizations;
- Communicating the work of the chapter to donors, partners, and stakeholders at country-level and regional meetings and conferences;
- Providing technical assistance and support to country and regional-level partners as needed;
- Working towards establishing national standards for all forms of care for children without adequate family care and mechanisms for ensuring compliance; and
- Communicating and collaborating with the global BCN Secretariat on a regular basis.

(6) A BCN chapter must adhere to and uphold the BCN principles listed at the beginning of this document. In order to ensure this commitment, strong relations between the BCN national chapter and the global BCN Secretariat are needed (e.g. quarterly conference calls, ongoing information sharing, linking to BCN website). *If at any time, the global BCN Steering Committee and Secretariat finds that the chapter is not adhering to the overarching principles and standards, all support and assistance will be revoked, including withdrawing the use of the BCN logo, website, and available resources.*