



# The Status of Child Protection & Foster Care In Guyana

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Presenter

Ann Greene

Head of the Child Care & Protection Agency,  
Ministry of Labour, Human Services & Social Security

With Assistance from Doors Roos, UNICEF

# Snapshot of Guyana

## Map, flag and coat-of-arms of Guyana



# Snapshot of Guyana (cont'd)

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- **Full Name:** The Co-operative Republic Of Guyana
- **Population:** 749,190  
305,618 are children under the age of 18 –just over 40% of the population (2002 census)
- **Capital:** Georgetown
- **Area:** 214,969 sq km (83,00 sq ml)  
**Divided into 10 Administrative Regions each of which is administered by a Regional Democratic Council**
- **Major Language:** English (official) & Creole  
Indigenous languages are also used in the hinterland.



# Snapshot of Guyana (cont'd)

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- Guyana is situated on the northern coast of South America. It is bordered by Venezuela on the west, Suriname on the east, Brazil on the south and the Atlantic Ocean on the north.
- The Name Guyana is an Amerindian word meaning Land of many waters.
- Guyana has a multi-ethnic population of Indians, Africans, Amerindians, Chinese, Portuguese and persons of mixed ethnicity
- Africans and East Indians are the two predominant groups





# Overview of Orphans & Vulnerable Children in Guyana

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## **Orphans:**

- Children under the age of 18 years, or whom at least one or both of their biological parents have died through causes such as HIV/AIDS, other illnesses, suicide, violence etc.

## **Vulnerable children:**

- Those children under the age of 18 who, due to social and economic circumstances are at high risk with respect to health, well being, safety and development. Their very survival is at grave risk.



## Overview of Orphans & Vulnerable Children in Guyana (cont'd)

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### **In Guyana vulnerable children may be found existing in a number of situations, including:**

- Children without one or both parents because of medium/long term or permanent (national or international) migration or other forms of separation
- Children with one or both parents who are chronically ill
- Children without caregivers
- Children spending most of their time on the streets
- Children in orphanages or other residential institutions
- Children who are survivors of various forms of violence and abuse
- Children with special needs and disabilities
- Children with parents who are institutionalized
- Children In conflict with the law or deprived of their liberty



## Overview of Orphans & Vulnerable Children in Guyana (cont'd)

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- By 2003 there were already estimated 22,000 orphans in Guyana with an estimated 7000 due to HIV/AIDS. This number was projected to 23,000 in 2010 with 9,000 due to HIV/AIDS ( "Children on the Brink")
- **One of Government `s initial response:** "A Rapid Assessment on the situation of Orphans & Vulnerable Children." This was conducted in all the 10 Regions of Guyana



## Overview of Orphans & Vulnerable Children in Guyana (cont'd)

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### **Assessment findings:**

- The highest contributor to children vulnerability is the loss of one or both parents
- The death of a parent often results in a deficiency in the attention, care, love and affection of the child
- Physical and psychological trauma often not acknowledged or dealt with resulting in children dropping out of school, attending school irregularly or establishing a delinquent life-style





## Overview of Orphans & Vulnerable Children in Guyana (cont'd)

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- Children who have lost protection are also opened to all forms of abuse and exploitation, including sexual and physical abuse and child labour.
- Institutional care being utilized as a first option for vulnerable children and that children are staying in these institutions well beyond temporary stay and that standards within these facilities are generally absent or not in compliance with the Rights of the Child
- The impact of poverty and HIV/AIDS on the vulnerability of children was also highlighted including the stigma and discrimination affecting children especially related to HIV/AIDS



## Overview of Orphans & Vulnerable Children in Guyana (cont'd)

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- The Assessment highlighted the necessity of having a national framework to guide appropriate strategies, activities and legislation for orphans and vulnerable children regardless of the cause or the factors that contributed to the orphaning or vulnerability.
- It was in this context that the national comprehensive and inter-sectoral policy is drafted to guide the development and strengthening of existing plans, law enforcement for orphans and other vulnerable children.



# Priority Policy Area

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## **SHELTER & CARE**

One of the actions in support of OVC identified for priority attention was the establishment and monitoring of enforceable standards for the operation of residential institutions caring for children. With UNICEF's assistance a partnership was established between the Ministry of Labour, Human Services & Social Security and the residential children's institutions to examine the level of care and come-up with best practices.



## Shelter & Care (Cont'd)

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- The project commenced with a research to find out the number of children in residential care and the status of these children: It concluded that 600+ children were in residential care with very little social work intervention and contact with biological parents among other issues



## Establishment of Standards for Residential Care Institutions of children

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### The Approach

- The process was a consultative one to initiate change instead of change being imposed.
- This entailed extensive collaboration with the Administrators and Heads of the child care residential institutions and key Non-Governmental Organizations getting their ideas and suggestions and working with them to establish best practices for children in institutions.
- The plan was to get them all involved in the process ending with their commitment to achieving the standards, which will allow for the voluntary introduction of the standards until legislation could be passed.



## Establishment of Standards for Residential Care Institutions of children cont'd)

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### Outcomes:

- An official document outlining standards and regulations for children's Homes in Guyana.
- The establishment of a special Unit in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services & Social Security : The Child Care & Protection Agency with a mandate to implement the policy and decisions in relation to the laws governing children



# Functions of the Child Care & Protection Agency includes

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- To provide and maintain child care centres and facilities for children in need of care & protection
- To place children in foster homes or orphanages or other places of care where protection of the children can be obtained
- To supervise foster children and foster parents
- To provide counselling and other services for the children taken into care and for their parents/guardians with the view of re-unification where possible
- To provide training for persons engaged in the care and protection of children
- To coordinate and monitor the activities of other persons including non-governmental organizations engaged in the management of cases of child abuse and neglect
- To license and register private childcare facilities and to ensure their compliance with the standards and regulations
- To liaise with regional and international organization in matters relating to the welfare of children



## Implementation of the Standards

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- Individual Assessment and Care plans developed for all the children in children's homes and facilitate reintegration where possible.
- The establishment of a visiting committee and inspectorate body to first, provide technical support to assist the homes in reaching the required standard and then to ensure that the standards are adhered to.





## Implementation of the Standards (cont'd)

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- Capacity building of all the care givers with special training to meet the needs of children infected with HIV/AIDS
- No one home for HIV/AIDS children  
This is in an effort to deal with stigmatization. Children living with HIV or AIDS are not to be separated from other children. All the homes to have sick-bays to accommodate the children when they are ill.



## Implementation of the Standards (cont'd)

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- Each home to adopt a universal approach to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in dealing with the children.
- HIV/AIDS awareness programmes for the Children in the Homes



## Implementation of the Standards (cont'd)

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- HIV testing of all the children in residential institutions (to ensure more timely treatment of infected children)

Pediatric ART is available



## Challenges

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- Getting resources for the Homes that are at the bottom of the scale to achieve the desired standards.
- Employment of caregivers with the right level of commitment and attitude to child care



# Our Partners

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- UNICEF
- USAID: GHARP (*Guyana HIV/AIDS Reduction and Prevention Project*)
- EveryChild Guyana – local NGO



## The actual Foster Care Programme

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- The Government of Guyana has just launched the first structured Foster care Programme: Advertisement was done in the media for potential foster parent (looking for persons with hearts that feel and minds that think) a number of persons responded they are now being trained and screened, which includes the relevant police and community checks etc.,
- Then the selection and bonding process. It is hoped that by June/July the first 40 children will go into Foster Care



- The End
- Thank you for listening