

RISING TIDES
CONFERENCE
SERIES



CATALYZING TRANSITION TO BROADEN THE IMPACT

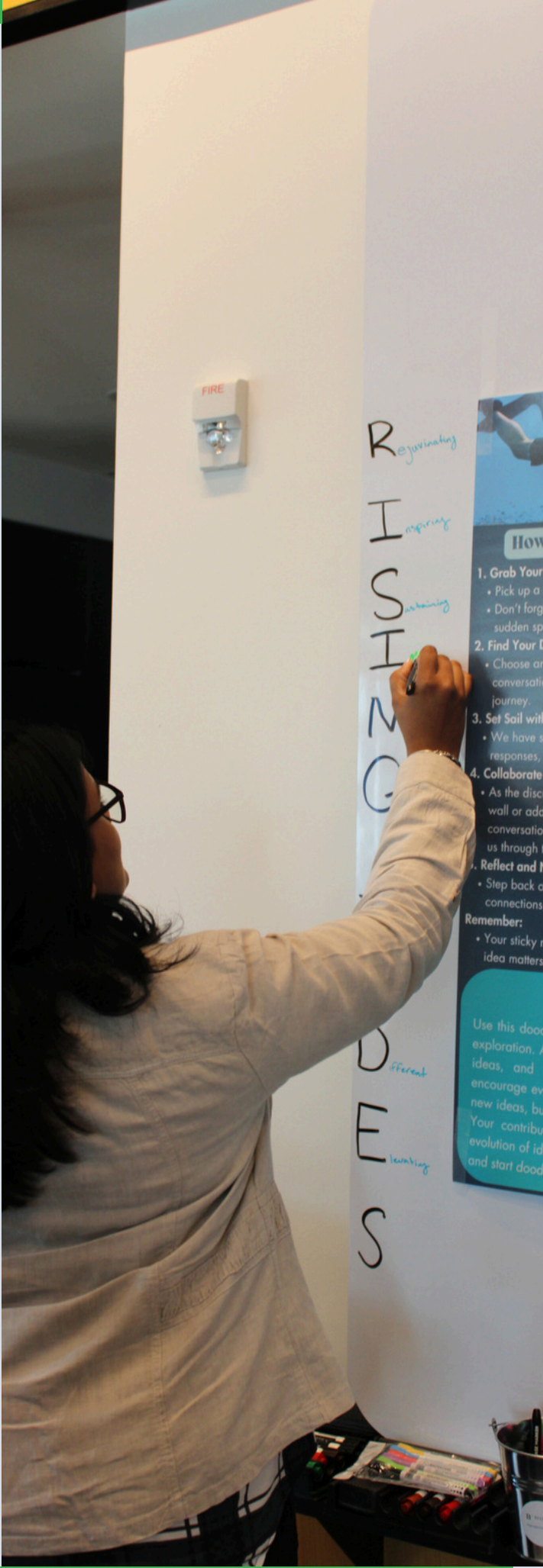
2025

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Rising Tides 2025: A Catalyst for Global Collaboration and Innovation



In September 2019, Helping Children Worldwide (HCW) launched its inaugural policy conference, Rising Tides, inspired by President John F. Kennedy's timeless assertion that "a rising tide lifts all boats."

Since its inception, Rising Tides has evolved into a dynamic and influential convening of global thought leaders, practitioners, and policymakers committed to tackling some of the most pressing challenges in global public health, family reunification, international development, and short-term missions. Because Rising Tides is as much of a think-tank roundtable as it is a policy conference, global experts are granted space to take a uniquely deep view of emerging issues and consider best practices with renowned peers and colleagues.

Over the past six years, the conference has been hosted in diverse locations, including Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Freetown, Sierra Leone, reflecting its international scope and commitment to local engagement.

The format of Rising Tides is intentionally flexible, with events ranging from multi-hour virtual sessions necessitated by the pandemic, to intensive multi-day workshops, including a two-day hybrid session focused on global public health, and one notable five-day session hosted in Sierra Leone for orphanage leaders and members of government focused on child protection and welfare. Despite its varied format, the conference remains steadfast in its core mission: to foster meaningful dialogue, build authentic partnerships, and generate sustainable solutions to shared global challenges.

Rising Tides 2025: A Catalyst for Global Collaboration and Innovation (Cont.)



What sets Rising Tides apart from other conferences is its deliberate design as a collaborative forum where thought leaders engage in deep, critical discussions that challenge assumptions, surface innovative ideas, identify challenges and seek solutions, and inspire collective action. The goal is not to achieve consensus, but rather to catalyze change through coordination, partnership, and ongoing engagement that continues well beyond the closing session, in collaborations that sometimes include HCW, and sometimes not. The staff at Helping Children Worldwide take great pride in the fact that they consider Rising Tides their opportunity to offer a collaborative platform and space to bring the leaders in global public health, child welfare, short term missions and international development together not to drive a specific, HCW agenda, but to promote true and open dialogue and collaboration to thought leaders in these fields from all over the world.

At its heart, Rising Tides is more than a conference—it is a movement. It brings together diverse voices and perspectives to co-create solutions that uplift entire communities and advance the well-being of children and families around the world. The relationships forged and ideas born at Rising Tides have gone on to spark initiatives, influence policy, and fuel collaborations that endure long after the final deep dive discussion or fishbowl conversation.

As Rising Tides continues to grow, it remains a vital platform for transformational dialogue and lasting impact—where every participant plays a role in lifting the tide for children worldwide.

Dr. Laura Horvath, Senior Technical Advisor for Global Programs



Dr. Laura Horvath serves as the Senior Technical Advisor for Global Programs at Helping Children Worldwide (HCW), a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering vulnerable children and families through education, public health, and sustainable community development. With a doctorate in curriculum and instruction and a master's degree in English education, as well as 23 years of experience working in global care reform for orphans and vulnerable children, Dr. Horvath brings extensive expertise and a deep commitment to global child welfare.

Dr. Horvath is a prominent advocate for transitioning from institutional orphan care to family-based models. She co-hosts HCW's "Optimistic Voices" podcast, where she discusses topics related to child welfare and sustainable development. Her thought leadership extends to publications and interviews focusing on best practices in international development, ethical missions and the reintegration of children separated from family back into family settings.

Dr. Laura Horvath co-designed and launched the HCW Rising Tides Policy Conference Series in 2019, along with Dr. Melody Curtiss, Executive Director for HCW. Dr. Horvath has planned, executed and hosted the majority of the conferences since their inauguration. She has been the program development lead whenever the conference topic included discussions in child welfare, including orphan and vulnerable child care reform. Topics addressed by Rising Tides conferences are directly related to Dr. Horvath's role with HCW and HCW's mission to serve children in poverty and peril, including global public health, child welfare and ethical missions.

Special Thanks to Rising Tides Sponsors

Helping Children Worldwide and the entire Rising Tides crew would like to extend a special thank you to our 2025 Rising Tides supporters—Alliance for Children Everywhere, the United Methodist Church - General Board for Global Ministries, and Buckner International—for their generous support and shared commitment to improving the lives of children and families around the world. Their contributions were instrumental in helping our crew to bring this important event to life, creating a space for deep collaboration, innovative thinking, and cross-sector dialogue. Because of their partnership, Rising Tides 2025 was not only possible, but impactful—advancing vital conversations and forging pathways toward sustainable, child-centered care solutions.



Executive Summary:

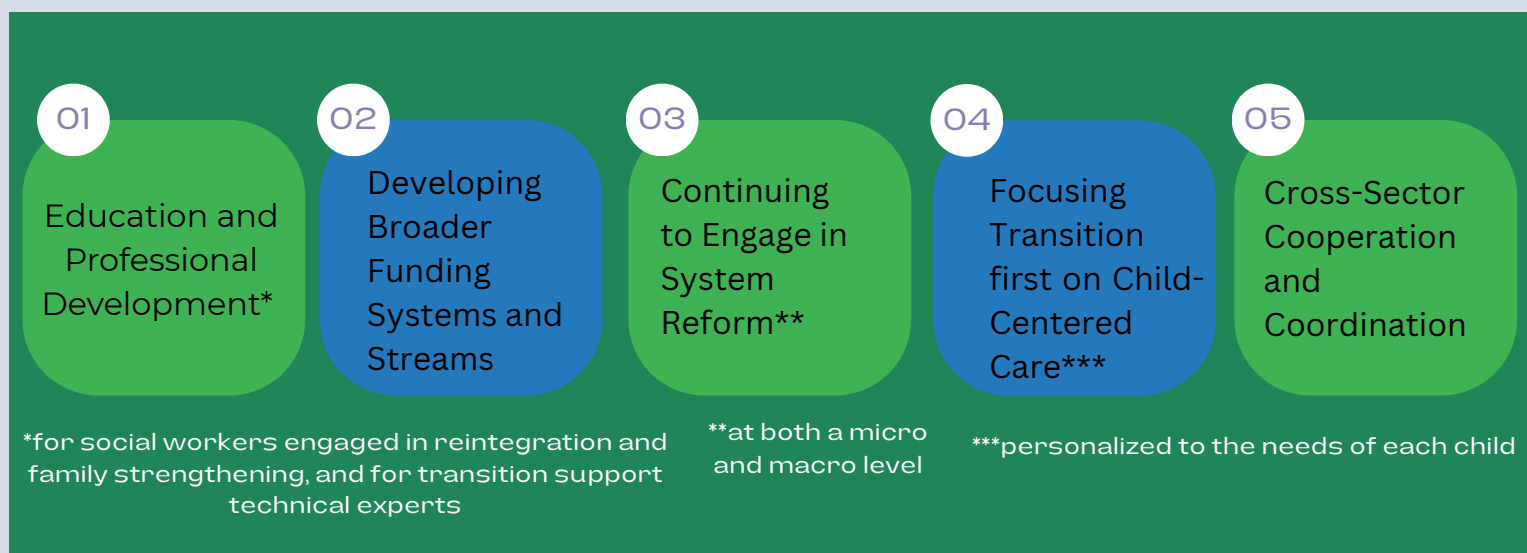
RIISING TIDES 2025 AFTER ACTION REPORT

The 2025 Rising Tides Conference served as a vital convening of global thought leaders, practitioners, advocates, and policymakers committed to advancing child-centered care reform by broadening the impact of transition as a critical component. Over two days of rich dialogue and collaboration, participants engaged in deep dives, interactive fishbowl sessions, and cross-sector discussions aimed at surfacing challenges, identifying scalable solutions, and forging stronger partnerships across the landscape of global care reform for children.

Key themes that emerged from the conference included:

- The critical need for holistic education and training across all stakeholders - including hiring and training of skilled social workers to ensure safe reintegration of children,
- The need for professional development for transition support technical experts guiding other orphanage directors through the process,
- The importance of building more sustainable and inclusive funding systems and mechanisms,
- The value of individualized, child-centered approaches that guide this work,
- The importance of avoiding 'one-size-fits-all' solutions to transition support services,
- The transformative power of cross-sector collaboration and coordination.

Five foundational components for successful transition were identified:



Executive Summary (Cont.)

RIISING TIDES 2025 AFTER ACTION REPORT

The success of Rising Tides 2025 was made possible through the generous support of Alliance for Children Everywhere, the United Methodist Church General Board for Global Ministries, and Buckner International. HCW expresses profound gratitude to all participants and partners whose presence and contributions enriched the event.



However, it is important to acknowledge those who were unable to attend due to financial, visa, or logistical barriers. Although HCW committed to ensure that 50% of those in attendance were local experts from the Global South, funding, logistical and travel challenges prevented us from achieving this goal. Many of these individuals, particularly from the Global South, are directly engaged in the critical work of transition on the ground. Their voices are essential to the conversation. As we look ahead, HCW is committed to working alongside our partners to break down these barriers and ensure equitable access and representation at future convenings. The momentum generated at Rising Tides 2025 must continue with an even broader and more inclusive global chorus guiding the way forward in care reform.



Background

THE LANDSCAPE OF GLOBAL CARE REFORM FOR CHILDREN AND THE ROLE OF ORPHANAGE TRANSITION

For more than 50 years, the global landscape of child care reform has been undergoing significant transformation, with an increasing focus on family and community-based care as alternatives to residential child care institutions, orphanages, and children's homes. This shift is driven by research highlighting the negative long-term effects of institutionalization on children's development and well-being. Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies such as UNICEF, World Without Orphans, the Better Care Network, Christian Alliance for Orphans, Faith to Action, and the United Nations have been actively advocating for policies and programs that prioritize family-based care solutions.



Key Trends in Global Care Reform

1. Shift from Institutional to Family-Based Care:

- Research indicates that children raised in institutions often suffer from developmental delays, attachment issues, and social integration challenges.
- Governments are increasingly implementing policies that prioritize reintegration into biological families, foster care, and adoption.

2. Legal and Policy Reforms:

- Many countries are revising child protection laws to align with international standards, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.
- Efforts include deinstitutionalization strategies, capacity-building for social workers, and financial support for family-based alternatives.

3. Strengthening Community-Based Support Systems:

- Investment in social services, education, and economic support for vulnerable families is crucial to preventing unnecessary child separation.
- NGOs play a key role in providing family-strengthening programs, mentorship, and advocacy.

Background (Cont.)

THE LANDSCAPE OF GLOBAL CARE REFORM FOR CHILDREN AND THE ROLE OF ORPHANAGE TRANSITION

The Role of Orphanage Transition

1. Reintegration of Children into Families:

- Orphanages are increasingly working with child welfare authorities to trace and reunite children with biological or extended families.
- Support services such as counseling, parenting education, and financial aid help ensure sustainable reintegration.

2. Development of Alternative Care Models:

- Many orphanages are transforming into community-based resource centers offering foster care, kinship care, and transitional support services.
- Some institutions repurpose their facilities into emergency shelters, rehabilitation centers, or educational hubs.

3. Capacity Building and Advocacy:

- Training caregivers and social workers in family-based care methodologies is essential.
- Public awareness campaigns help shift societal perceptions and encourage community involvement in child welfare.



Challenges and Considerations

- Resistance to Change: Some orphanage operators and donors remain skeptical about transitioning away from institutional care.
- Lack of Infrastructure: Many countries lack sufficient foster care systems and social services to support deinstitutionalization.
- Financial Constraints: Ensuring sustainable funding for alternative care programs remains a challenge.

Conclusion

The global movement toward care reform for children emphasizes the importance of family-based solutions over institutional care. The transition of orphanages plays a crucial role in this reform, acting as a bridge to more sustainable and child-friendly care alternatives. Continued collaboration between governments, NGOs, and communities is vital to ensuring the success of this transition and the well-being of children worldwide.

Vision and 2024 Planning Session Summary

VISION FOR RISING TIDES 2025: CATALYZING TRANSITION TO BROADEN THE IMPACT

The theme for Rising Tides 2025 emerged as a response to the urgent global need to transition from orphanage-based care to family-based systems. Anchored in equity, dignity, and sustainability, the conference was designed to mobilize cross-sector collaboration to strengthen family care globally—especially in contexts where institutional care has long been the norm. The initiative prioritizes localized leadership, child and family voice, and systems-level transformation.

The vision articulated through the planning session underscored a world without orphanages, where children grow up in families supported by robust, locally led family welfare systems, and where cross-sectoral partnerships—including governments, NGOs, and donors—collaborate to drive generational progress. A commitment to trauma-informed social work, community-based care, and inclusion—especially for children with disabilities—are central to this vision. So too is the importance of disrupting silos, ensuring that care reform efforts are integrated, contextualized, and inclusive of diverse voices.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2024 PLANNING SESSION

The 2024 Planning Session, held virtually in September, provided an invaluable foundation for the conference. Through large group dialogue, Mentimeter feedback, and breakout sessions, several shared priorities and emerging insights were identified. These included ranked priority themes, Common Vision and Promising Practices, Key Conditions for Success, and Identification of Current Challenges.

TOP-RANKED PRIORITY THEMES:

- | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| 1. Collaboration and Cooperation | 2. Government Relations and Legal Support | 3. Trauma-Informed Care and Social Work | 4. Funding and Donor Engagement | 5. Child Engagement and Amplifying Children's Voices |
|---|--|--|--|---|

Vision and 2024 Planning Session Summary (Cont.)

COMMON VISION AND PROMISING PRACTICES:

- A world without orphanages, where children are safe and thriving in family-based settings.
- Cross-sectoral cooperation—especially between governments and NGOs—was seen as critical to achieving systemic reform.
- Trauma-informed care training, peer learning networks, and the empowerment of local practitioners and caregivers.
- Curricula such as the Mother Me initiative and family-strengthening programs were highlighted as examples of upstream solutions creating resilient, nurturing environments.

KEY CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS:

- Strong government engagement and policy alignment, with adequately funded and integrated transition plans.
- Breaking down silos across organizations and sectors, replacing isolation with strategic collaboration.
- Increased donor education and flexibility to support transition-focused innovation.
- A shift in mindset and language to reflect regional and cultural realities, moving away from Westernized models toward locally contextualized care reform.

CURRENT CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED:

- Transition efforts are **uneven globally**, with many countries lacking practical implementation despite policy progress.
- Silos and duplication of advocacy efforts were seen as barriers to unified progress.
- Resource constraints, inadequate donor understanding, and limited support for post-transition family care were cited as major obstacles.
- Certain unhelpful practices—including continued support of institutional models, generalizations about local contexts, and misaligned funding—need to be phased out to realize the conference's long-term vision.

The session also offered regional insights—from Latin America's resource gaps despite progressive laws, to mixed progress in East Africa, and stalled transitions in West Africa—and underscored the necessity of localized strategies rooted in shared learning across geographies.

Vision and 2024 Planning Session Summary (Cont.)

Summary

The Planning Session was instrumental in clarifying the shared vision for Rising Tides 2025: Catalyzing Transition to Broaden the Impact: a coordinated, child-centered, and sustainable movement toward family-based care. It reinforced the need to ground future action in evidence, local leadership, and community empowerment, while calling for the development of global standards, more effective donor partnerships, and a unified framework for care reform. This foundational meeting set the tone for a collaborative, solutions-driven conference year ahead.



Designing Deep-Dive Conversations and Fishbowls: Intentional Planning for Meaningful Dialogue

A core element of the Rising Tides conference was the creation of deep-dive conversations and fishbowl sessions—interactive formats designed not only to surface knowledge and experience but to build trust, catalyze collaboration, and break down silos. These sessions were not incidental to the event’s flow; they were the heartbeat of the two-day gathering.

INTENTIONAL DESIGN ROOTED IN THE PLANNING SESSION



Drawing directly from the 2024 Planning Session and its clear thematic takeaways—collaboration, government integration, trauma-informed care, funding and donor engagement, and engaging care leavers’ and children’s voices—the February conference was structured to allow space for **bold, honest, and cross-sectoral discussion**. Each deep-dive and fishbowl was crafted to:

- **Elevate collective wisdom over individual presentations**, shifting from a “sage on the stage” model to a dynamic of shared exploration.
- **Create psychological safety**, where practitioners, policymakers, donors, and individuals with lived experience could engage authentically.
- **Model inclusive practice**, by designing discussions that intentionally brought Global South and Global North perspectives into the same space—without hierarchy.



Designing Deep-Dive Conversations and Fishbowls: Intentional Planning for Meaningful Dialogue (Cont.)

THE PURPOSE BEHIND EACH FORMAT



DEEP-DIVE CONVERSATIONS

These smaller, highly participatory sessions were meant to explore complex issues from multiple angles. Efforts were made to ensure that each deep dive 'shuffled' participants to keep the conversations fresh and encouraged engagement in different groupings each time. Planning for these sessions was guided by the need to:

- **Unpack persistent barriers**, such as legal gaps, funding constraints, or donor misalignment;
- **Highlight emerging practices**, like upstream parenting support or the integration of social work systems;
- **Encourage peer learning**, drawing from the strengths of attendees across geographic and professional boundaries.

Topics were selected based on ranked priorities from the Planning Session (e.g., government relations, trauma-informed practice, child engagement) and tailored to reflect **real-time challenges and questions** participants brought to the table.

FISHBOWLS

HCW's goal for Rising Tides included the desire to ensure that at least 50% of the participants were technical practitioners engaged in local transition support work in the Global South. Due to various factors including funding and visa challenges, we were not successful in achieving this goal. Noting that this resulted in an imbalance of more Global North voices present at the event, the Rising Tides crew sought ways to give these Global South voices opportunity to lead conversations. Fishbowl sessions were chosen as a tool to **disrupt traditional power dynamics** and elevate voices that are often sidelined. The planning team emphasized:

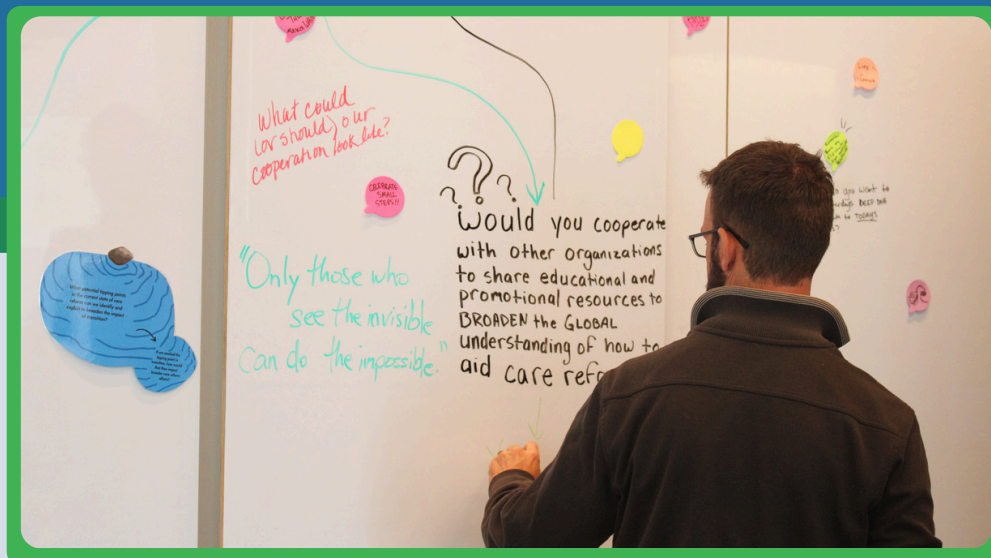
- **Rotating participation**, allowing observing audience members to enter the circle and contribute organically for brief interactions before relinquishing the space to others who wished to join;
- **Positioning people with lived experience, Transition Support Technical Experts, and Global South leaders** as the fishbowl speakers in the center;
- **Curating prompts** that invited vulnerability, challenged assumptions, and pushed conversations beyond surface-level agreement.

Designing Deep-Dive Conversations and Fishbowls: Intentional Planning for Meaningful Dialogue (Cont.)

THEMATIC THREADS ACROSS SESSIONS

Whether in a deep-dive or fishbowl, the sessions consistently returned to foundational questions that aligned with the Rising Tides vision:

- What is standing in the way of true systems change and how does transition fit into this?
- What does meaningful collaboration really look like—and how do we get there?
- How can we build solutions that are not just effective, but equitable and sustainable?



Through careful facilitation, thoughtful participant selection, and a strong grounding in values articulated during the planning session, these formats became more than conversations—they became **collective commitments**.

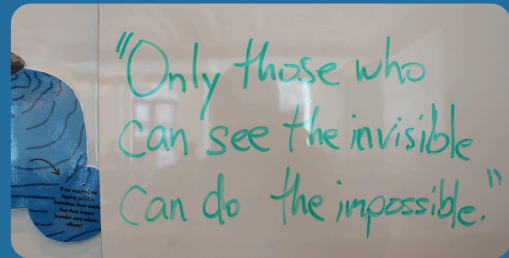
Rising Tides Results

DEEP DIVES AND FISHBOWL DISCUSSIONS: ADVANCING GLOBAL CARE REFORM THROUGH TRANSITION

Throughout the Rising Tides 2025 Conference, a series of deep dive sessions and interactive fishbowl discussions provided a dynamic platform for participants to engage in critical dialogue focused on strengthening transition support for children moving from residential care models to family-based care, and the organizational shift of orphanages to family-care models around the world. These sessions were intentionally designed to foster cross-sector collaboration, surface practical challenges, and provide space for thought leaders to collaboratively explore solutions that can broaden the global impact of transition as a critical component of care reform.



“



Only those who can see the invisible can do the impossible

”

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED:

- **Opening Session:** Defining “Quality” in Transition Support
- **Deep Dive:** Identifying Components for Success
- **Fishbowl:** Barriers to Quality Transition
- **Deep Dive:** Scaling Transition Support – What Is Working and What Is Missing?
- **Fishbowl:** Innovative Models for Expansion
- **Deep Dive:** Government and Funding Systems

Rising Tides Results (Cont.)

From these in-depth discussions, five foundational components emerged as essential for successful transitions in care systems:

1. Education and Training of Practitioners
2. Increased and Sustainable Funding for Transition Support
3. Ongoing Systems Reform
4. Transition as a Core Component of Child-Centered Care Reform
5. Collaboration and Cross-Sector Understanding

EDUCATION TRAINING OF PRACTITIONERS

- Invest in ongoing training and professional development for social workers to ensure the safe and permanent reintegration of children into families, and to support vulnerable families before, during, and after the reintegration.
- Ensure that social workers and case managers are equipped to support and empower families to actively engage in the care and reintegration process.
- Increase education and advocacy efforts directed toward (primarily Western) donors to foster long-term, informed support for the transition of residential care facilities as part of broader global care reform.
- Provide continuous professional development for technical experts in transition support, while cultivating a growing community of trained professionals to expand global capacity.
- Standardize and disseminate best practices for safe reintegration, organizational change management, and child-centered reintegration and transition services.

- Promote global knowledge-sharing among organizations engaged in child welfare and care reform.

INCREASED AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR TRANSITION SUPPORT

- Develop sustainable, equitable funding models to support transition-focused organizations at every level.
- Create a collaborative, non-branded education and advocacy campaign aimed at encouraging donors to:
 - Promote family-based care models over institutional care.
 - Recognize transition and reintegration as essential steps in effective care reform for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC).
 - Support preventative approaches that keep children from entering institutions in the first place.
 - Understand and embrace their role in supporting this global shift toward family-based care.
- Explore new funding mechanisms, including greater involvement from community stakeholders such as:
 - Local faith-based institutions
 - National and sub-national government bodies

Rising Tides Results (Cont.)

ONGOING SYSTEMS REFORM

- Critically re-evaluate outdated practices and integrate lessons learned from past successes and failures into current strategies.
 - Improve collaboration and coordination between transition support providers and allied organizations to avoid siloed and/or duplicative efforts and encourage collective impact.
 - Implement system-wide improvements that address both local needs and broader policy or infrastructure challenges.
 - Align tools, standards, and resources across all actors within the care reform and transition system for a more cohesive and efficient reform process.
 - Pursue both micro (community-level) and macro (national and global-level) solutions to enable systemic change that is both grounded and scalable.
- Recognize the historical mistake of applying a uniform solution (i.e., orphanages) to complex issues of child separation. Similarly, we must avoid applying a single model of deinstitutionalization without considering each organization's unique needs.
 - Ensure that transition efforts remain truly child-centered by including the development of individualized care and reintegration plans as a key components of the transition process (focused on the reintegration phase) that respond to the diverse needs and contexts of each child.

COLLABORATION AND CROSS-SECTOR UNDERSTANDING

- Strengthen relationships and coordination among organizations involved in care reform and transition support.
- Promote mutual awareness of available tools, expertise, and best practices to support effective collaboration and coordination.
- Encourage open dialogue and shared learning across sectors to enhance impact, prevent duplication of efforts, and accelerate progress toward systemic reform.

TRANSITION AS A CORE COMPONENT OF CHILD-CENTERED CARE REFORM

- Acknowledge that transition is more than organizational change—it involves real children and families. Therefore, a “one-size-fits-all” approach must be avoided.

These insights and recommendations underscore the importance of unified global action, centered always on the child, and driven by informed collaboration, innovation, and shared accountability.

Next Steps

The Rising Tides 2025 Conference surfaced critical insights and reaffirmed the importance of transition support as a core pillar of global care reform. As we move forward, the focus must shift toward deepening collaboration, engaging new voices, and enhancing alignment with existing efforts already underway. Many cross-sector working groups, coalitions, and initiatives are actively addressing elements of transition and care reform; the next phase is not about duplication, but about plugging in, contributing meaningfully, and fostering more connected, informed action.

1. MAP AND ENGAGE EXISTING WORKING GROUPS AND NETWORKS

A priority next step is to identify and connect with established working groups (Better Care Network, CAFO, and various existing Communities of Practice), coalitions of technical transition experts, and practitioner networks already engaged in aspects of transition support. This includes:

- Clarifying which groups are working on education and training, funding, government engagement, and reintegration models
- Understanding their current focus areas, key participants, and opportunities for collaboration
- Identifying where Rising Tides participants and organizations can contribute knowledge, elevate gaps, or align strategies

This mapping process will help avoid siloed efforts and promote more coherent global action.



2. STRENGTHEN CHANNELS FOR ONGOING DIALOGUE ACROSS STAKEHOLDERS

To ensure continued cross-sector dialogue, we must:

- Support existing convening platforms while creating new entry points for underrepresented voices—particularly youth with lived experience, frontline practitioners, and community-based organizations
- Facilitate regular information-sharing across donor, NGO, government, and academic communities to support alignment and reduce duplication
- Promote a culture of open exchange between organizations navigating transition firsthand and those shaping systems-level policy
- Enhance efforts to ensure inclusion of transition experts from the Global South
- Find ways to add new stakeholders into the dialogue, including those with expertise in research, marketing and advocacy, and new funding streams

Special emphasis should be placed on creating inclusive, accessible spaces for dialogue, especially in regional and local contexts.

Next Steps (Cont.)

3. COLLABORATE ON A GLOBAL INFORMATION-GATHERING INITIATIVE

While valuable knowledge already exists, information gaps remain, some resources and tools are duplicative, and others may need contextualization to be more effectively deployed. A coordinated, collaborative effort is needed to:

- Collect and synthesize existing resources, toolkits, and transition models across regions
- Document and analyze emerging practices, including innovative approaches in funding, reintegration, and capacity-building
- Identify gaps in data, research, and practical guidance, and develop a shared agenda for addressing them

This effort should involve researchers, practitioners, and those with lived experience (including care leavers and frontline transition experts working directly with clients) to ensure both rigor and relevance.

4. SUPPORT PEER-LEARNING AND REGIONAL EXCHANGE

To build on momentum and facilitate real-time learning:

- Organize regional or thematic exchanges that allow practitioners, funders, and policymakers to learn from one another's experiences with transition
- Prioritize regions where care reform is actively underway or facing critical inflection points
- Enable informal peer connections and mentoring relationships between organizations at different stages of transition
- Explore options for professional development of transition practitioners

These exchanges should be rooted in mutual learning and adapted to local realities.

5. PLAN FOR A FOLLOW-UP TOUCHPOINT IN 2026

To maintain accountability and shared progress, a desire to continue the dialogue was strongly expressed. While HCW may not focus subsequent Rising Tides on this particular topic, we would be supportive of other organizations stepping in to take the conversation to the next level. As a part of that:

- HCW has submitted a proposal to CAFO Summit 2025, to bring Rising Tides participants and other key stakeholders and thought leaders together to review the outcomes of this report and explore next steps. Organizations will be invited to reflect on and share how they have engaged with or influenced existing working groups and transition strategies
- If CAFO does not accept the proposal, HCW will work with other organization leaders to identify a guest list inclusive of Rising Tides participants and other critical stakeholders in attendance at the September event, determine an agenda, and host or co-host a meeting.

These next steps are designed not to reinvent existing efforts but to strengthen collective impact through better connection, more inclusive participation, and shared learning—ensuring that the movement toward family-based care remains coordinated, grounded, and child-centered.

Next Steps (Cont.)

PEER COMMUNITY COORDINATION MEETING HELD IN MARCH

After Rising Tides participants requested the formation of a Rising Tides Community of Practice, and knowing that there are existing and forming COPs related to transition hosted by several organizations, a follow-up Peer Community Coordination meeting was held on Tuesday, March 11. The meeting focused on collaboration and coordination among various groups involved in transition work, particularly in the context of child welfare and care.

Key topics discussed include:

- **Coordination and Collaboration:** The need for mapping of existing groups, collaboration and coordination of collaborative efforts to avoid overlap and fragmentation.
- **Existing Groups:** Discussion of various existing groups like the newly formed CAFO Care Reform Community, The Better Care Network Transition Working Group, and various existing communities of practice.
- **Rising Tides:** The after-action report from "Rising Tides" revealed a strong emphasis on collaboration, but also highlighted the need for intentionality and coordination.
- **Fragmentation:** Concerns about potential fragmentation and the need for transparency and communication between groups.
- **Global North/South Representation:** Issues related to representation and voice, particularly for global south partners.
- **Faith-Based vs. Secular Groups:** Discussion of the differences and potential barriers between faith-based and secular groups.
- **Accessibility:** Ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for diverse audiences.
- **Next Steps:** The group agreed to create a shared Google Doc to list existing groups, their focus, activities, and intended audience to improve transparency and coordination.

The speakers discussed the challenges of overlapping efforts, the need for clear communication, and the importance of creating spaces where all voices can be heard. They also explored the differences between various types of groups, such as formal working groups, informal communities of practice, and affinity groups.



Impact Stories

A CHILD'S HOPE FOUNDATION: CATCHING THE VISION FOR FAMILY-BASED CARE

When Cam Outlaw, Director of Global Partnerships, and new Board Chair, Marshall Dahneke from A Child's Hope Foundation attended the 2025 Rising Tides conference, they came away energized and newly inspired by the collective vision for transforming child welfare systems around the globe. The conference catalyzed meaningful reflection and dialogue within the organization, culminating in a pivotal March meeting between the Board and Program Directors. It was there that a renewed commitment was made to fully align the organization's work with the global movement from institutional care toward family-based care for all children.

In addition, the organization is undertaking a major revision of its Thrive Assessment tool—originally developed to help orphanages improve their facilities, programs, and processes. Inspired by the deep dive and fishbowl conversations of Rising Tides, the team recognized the need for a more nuanced approach to care reform—one that puts the needs of each child first and makes family a priority.

"Thrive is on the operating table," says Cam, as the team reimagines the tool to spur orphanage leaders to consider and embark on their own transitions to family-based care. Planned updates include the addition of new assessment questions focused on family placement options, local social services resources, and the capacity needed to upskill staff for post-transition roles. The goal is to guide orphanages not just toward better institutional care, but toward meaningful pathways that lead children into safe, nurturing families.

Attending Rising Tides didn't just influence their strategy—it reignited their purpose and refined their focus. Now, A Child's Hope Foundation stands as a stronger advocate and active champion for care reform, helping lead the way toward a future where every child grows up in a family.



Impact Stories (Cont.)

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND CHILDREN: ADVANCING COLLABORATION AND PRACTICE THROUGH SHARED RESOURCES

Asked to reflect on the impact of Rising Tides on their organization, Mick Pease shared that over the course of two days, he and Dan Hope found inspiration in intensive collaboration with a diverse group of organizations—some familiar, others newly introduced. They found the opportunity to connect, share expertise, and co-develop strategies for supporting orphans and vulnerable children was both energizing and constructive.

A key highlight for SFAC was the opportunity to collaborate with peers and organizations across the sector to exchange ideas, review existing tools and resources, and begin mapping additional materials. This collective process also helped identify gaps in current resources, providing valuable direction for next steps in aiding access, contextualizing existing tools, identifying gaps and ensuring tools and resources are used to best purposes.

SFAC also noted that Rising Tides reflected the growing momentum in the field, as more organizations engage in the transition from residential to family-based care. As we think about what comes next in supporting the work of transition globally, they reflect that with this growth comes an increasing need for quality technical support, particularly in social work and mental health. Too often, organizations operate with minimal formal training, relying largely on lived experience. SFAC emphasized that while lived experience is valuable, it must be supported by professional expertise to ensure that the safety and well-being of children remain central in all program decisions.



Impact Stories (Cont.)

RAILWAY CHILDREN: CONNECTION, CLARITY, AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

For Rose Kagoro of Railway Children, participating in the 2025 Rising Tides conference was a meaningful and affirming experience. Rising Tides provided a space of shared purpose, where practitioners from around the globe gathered with a unified commitment to children, families, and systemic change.

One of the most significant impacts for Rose was the sense of connection and clarity the conference fostered. Being surrounded by like-minded professionals—each bringing unique perspectives but working toward a common goal—was energizing. It served as a powerful reminder that the work of care reform is not done in isolation. Rising Tides gave voice to a growing global movement and helped align it with a shared sense of direction.

The sessions encouraged both reflection and action, offering opportunities to challenge assumptions, refine strategies, and generate new ideas. Rose shares that she came away with a deeper understanding of the importance of embedding children's rights and voices at the center of all transition efforts, as well as the need to integrate these efforts into national systems reform, rather than treating them as standalone projects. What stood out most to her was the spirit of collaboration in discussions that were honest, forward-looking, and filled with practical insights. She was particularly encouraged by the openness with which participants shared tools, resources, and lessons learned—recognizing that such transparency and partnership will be critical in turning ideas into impactful action.

Rising Tides reaffirmed the urgency of the work ahead and the importance of collective effort. Rose looks forward to building on the momentum and relationships sparked by the conference in the months to come.

RAILWAY
children
No child lost to the streets

Impact Stories (Cont.)

THE COST OF ABSENCE—NAVIGATING FORWARD WITHOUT BEING IN THE ROOM

Though unable to attend the 2025 Rising Tides conference due to sudden and unexpected funding constraints, both Elli Oswald of the Faith to Action Initiative and Rebecca Nhep of the Better Care Network reflected on the significance of this missed opportunity—not only for themselves, but for the wider global care reform movement.

Both had hoped to engage in critical discussions around two of the most pressing issues facing the sector: the urgent challenge of funding transition support services, and the importance of integrating transition more deeply into broader systems reform at the national level. In addition, they were eager to help strengthen the connection between the Rising Tides forum and Better Care Network's Transition Working Group (TWG), reinforcing global collaboration and coherence across initiatives.

Their inability to attend, while disappointing, was also one of the first signs of a much deeper and rapidly unfolding crisis with sector-wide implications. As Rebecca described, “it was a very unusual and unprecedented situation” that marked the beginning of a period of deep uncertainty—affecting funding streams, shuttering programs, and leading to the loss of personnel and services. For many, it wasn't just missing a conference; it was part of a much broader disruption that continues to challenge the field.

Despite not being in the room, both leaders expressed their hope and confidence that those who did attend were able to engage meaningfully, share insights, and generate momentum. Now, the challenge is ensuring that those insights extend beyond the event itself. Elli and Rebecca both underscored the importance of integrating the outcomes of Rising Tides into the wider global effort—particularly through platforms like the Global Collaborative Platform and TWG.

Impact Stories (Cont.)

THE COST OF ABSENCE—NAVIGATING FORWARD WITHOUT BEING IN THE ROOM

Elli noted that follow-up conversations, updates, and high-level takeaways will be essential to keeping those who couldn't attend connected and contributing. Rebecca added that the sector's strategy and direction—like the TWG's work plan—must now be reconsidered in light of a drastically changed and changing environment. Rather than jumping into implementation, the sector is being called to pause, recalibrate, and adapt to a landscape marked by funding losses, shifting priorities, and new uncertainties.

Ultimately, both voices call for deeper engagement and more intentional collaboration going forward. For those who couldn't be there, the question is not “what was missed?” but “what now?” The answer lies in collectively revisiting the Rising Tides outcomes with fresh eyes, understanding their relevance in this new context, and ensuring that every stakeholder—regardless of whether they were in the room—has a voice in shaping the path ahead.

Rising Tides may have been a missed moment for some, but it can still become a shared turning point for all—if we commit to inclusive dialogue, coordinated action, and unwavering focus on the children and families at the heart of this work.

FAITH
ACTION
INITIATIVE



Better
Care
Network

The Global Impact of the Rising Tides 2025 Conference



The Rising Tides 2025 conference brought together an extraordinary group of global thought leaders for two days of collaboration, insight, and shared purpose. With a focus on transition as a vital component of global care reform, attendees engaged in meaningful conversations, tackled complex challenges, and offered innovative solutions grounded in their diverse experiences. The presence of such a wide range of expertise underscored the power of collective thinking and the urgency of scaling transition from residential to family care models through funding support, systems change and broader education and advocacy efforts all over the world.

The point of Rising Tides is never what happens during the conference, but what actions are catalyzed following the conference. One necessary action agreed to be undertaken by all participants was to bring balance between the voices and opinions of Global North leaders with those of Global South leaders. It was acknowledged that leaders from the Global North have access to resources which enable their voices to reach more listeners and their opinions seem most valid. Likewise, it was agreed that the most nuanced and valid opinions often come from the Global South, and the leaders who are both closest to the problems being experienced and the practitioners managing transitions directly.

Helping Children Worldwide (HCW) extends our deepest gratitude to all who attended and contributed to this transformative event. Your presence, insights, and commitment helped move the conversation forward in significant ways. However, we must also acknowledge those who were unable to be with us due to financial limitations, visa challenges, or other barriers. Their absence was deeply felt. We recognize that many of the most critical voices—particularly those from the Global South who are leading the direct transition and client-facing work—must be centered in these ongoing conversations. As a community, we must commit to doing more to remove systemic obstacles, find ways we can provide support, and ensure that those who need to be in the room are not only invited, but fully supported and empowered to be present. This is essential if we are to build truly inclusive, effective, and equitable care reform systems.



Dive Deeper into the Development and Outcome of Rising Tides 2025: Catalyzing Transition to Broaden the Impact



David Titus Musa

Guest Host

Senior Consultant of the Transition, Coaching and Mentoring Department at CRC

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Stephen Uscembe

Featured Guest

Regional Advocacy Manager
Hope and Homes for Children



Philip Aspergen

Featured Guest

Executive Director
Casa Viva

Appendix A

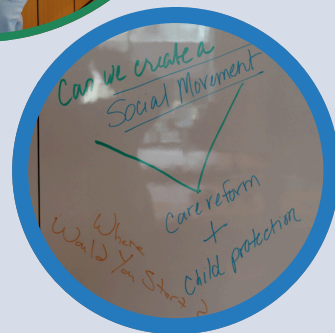
THE DOODLE WALL: A CANVAS FOR CONNECTION AND CREATIVITY

The Doodle Wall at the 2025 Rising Tides conference served as a dynamic and interactive installation aimed at fostering creativity, collaboration, and informal expression among participants. Functioning as a communal canvas, it invited attendees to visually engage with key conference themes by sketching ideas, leaving messages, or responding to thought-provoking prompts. This initiative was designed to encourage spontaneous dialogue, spark visual storytelling, and promote the exchange of diverse perspectives in an open and accessible format.

Three guiding questions were featured on the Doodle Wall:

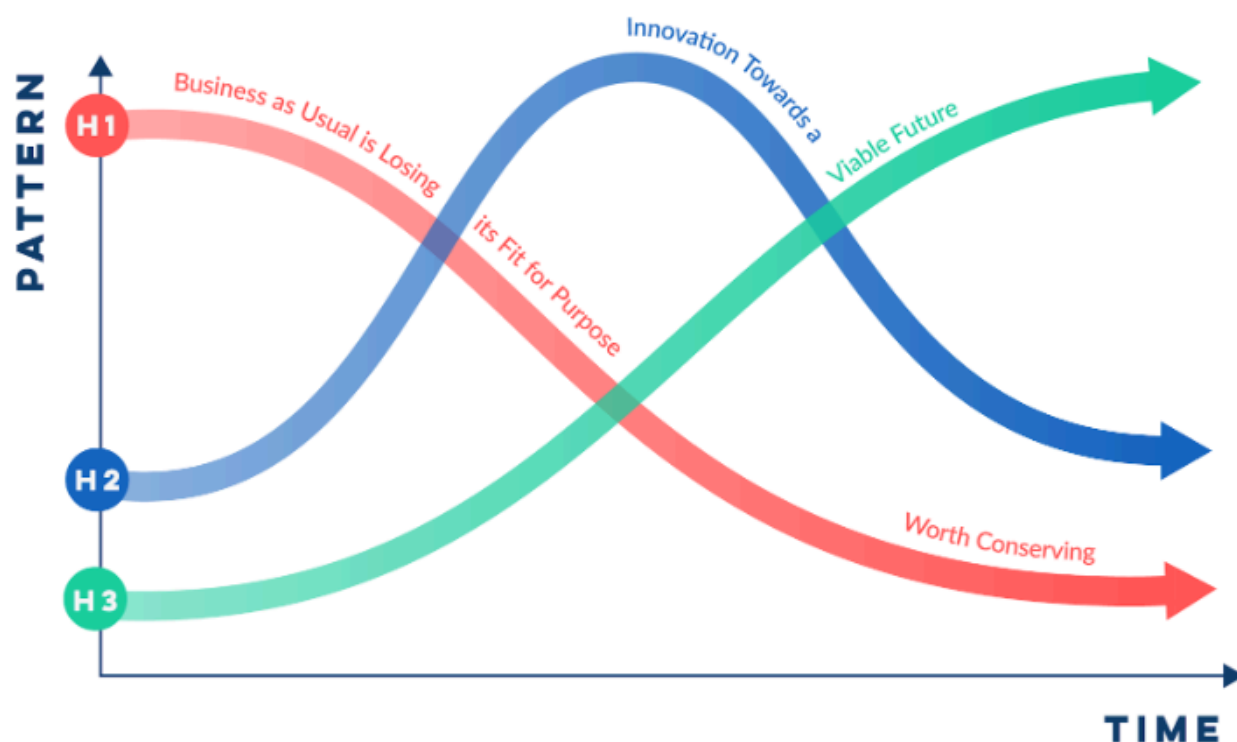
1. In what ways can collaboration between those engaged in direct transition support services at the country level and those working on global systems reform further scale up transition efforts?
2. How can cross-sectoral partnerships transform the impact of transition in the Global South?
3. What potential tipping points in the current state of care reform can we identify and leverage to broaden the impact of transition?
 - a. If we were to reach such a tipping point, how might this influence wider care reform efforts?

As a space for connection and reflection, the Doodle Wall played a pivotal role in breaking down barriers between participants, creating opportunities for cross-sector engagement, and documenting the evolving conversation throughout the event. Ultimately, it became a living artifact of the conference—capturing its energy, imagination, and collective insights.



Appendix B

NAVIGATING CHANGE: USING THE THREE HORIZONS FRAMEWORK TO PLAN THE RISING TIDES WORKSHOP



The Three Horizons framework is a strategic planning model used to manage and visualize growth and innovation over time. Horizon 1 represents the current state of systems—in this case, traditional models of institutional care that still dominate in many parts of the world. Horizon 2 captures transitional efforts already in motion, such as pilot programs, policy shifts, and new models of care that are beginning to challenge and replace the status quo. Horizon 3 allows us to look toward a bold future vision of fully realized family- and community-based care systems.

In the context of global care reform and the movement to transition orphanages, this framework helps us recognize that we are at a critical inflection point. The current moment is ripe with potential to seize emerging opportunities, align efforts, and catalyze broader systemic change. We used the Three Horizons model during our Rising Tides planning sessions to shape the content and structure of the two-day conference—ensuring that discussions were grounded in the present, energized by innovation, and oriented toward the transformative future we’re striving to create.

Appendix C

RESOURCE COMPILATION AND GUIDANCE FROM RISING TIDES WORKSHOP

During the Rising Tides workshop, participants began compiling a list of existing resources and tools that support care transition, particularly those currently utilized and recommended by transition technical experts. In support of this effort, Cam Outlaw (A Child's Hope Foundation) volunteered to create a shared spreadsheet to centralize this information. HCW has since refined and reformatted the content for clarity, accessibility and focus on transition.



Resource QR

The spreadsheet is a simple tool intended to map existing resources. However, preliminary discussions at Rising Tides also sought to illuminate gaps, challenges and barriers in the use of existing tools and to begin a broader dialogue about how these resources are applied in practice. A key next step is to continue this deeper conversation: exploring how tools are currently being used, how they may be contextualized or adapted for greater impact, and how to ensure that Global South practitioners are actively involved in both the development and contextual adaptation of these resources.

This collaborative [resource](#) is free and open-use. Contributions are welcomed; however, contributors are kindly asked to include only those tools and resources that are directly relevant to the transition process. As of this publication, included materials are focused on social work and trauma-informed practices essential to the safe and permanent reunification of children and the support of families—critical elements of transitioning from institutional care to family- and community-based care models.

Key Guidance from Rising Tides Participants:

- **Map Existing Resources:** Identify and document in-country, context-specific tools currently in use to enhance collaboration and coordination within national care systems.
- **Align with Government Standards:** Determine and utilize government-supported, recommended, or mandated case management guidelines and standards.
- **Understand the Legal Framework:** Familiarize yourself with all relevant national legislation, policies, and government strategies related to child welfare and protection.
- **Leverage Local Knowledge:** Research country-specific tools and case studies to inform the contextualization of transition efforts.
- **Conduct Community Mapping:** Assess the actual needs within each context and ensure the engagement of community members and key stakeholders throughout the transition process.
- **Promote Local Solutions:** Explore and prioritize local approaches, ensuring that transition efforts are appropriately contextualized at both national and community levels.
- **Adapt Tools to the Context:** Modify existing tools as needed to align with local realities and cultural norms.

Appendix D

DEEP DIVE AND FISHBOWL SESSIONS AT THE RISING TIDES CONFERENCE

The Deep Dive and Fishbowl sessions at the Rising Tides Conference served as the foundational structure for fostering collaboration, promoting education, and facilitating the exchange of critical information. Each session was designed to explore key aspects of transition within the child care and family support sectors, offering participants opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue and propose actionable solutions.

DEEP DIVE 1: TRANSITION COMPONENTS AND INTERSECTIONS

This session focused on understanding the significance of each component involved in the transition process. Participants identified key challenges and opportunities, examined how these components interact with one another, and developed actionable recommendations.

Discussion topics included:

- Social work capacity and the broader social work community
- Training and capacity building
- Collaboration and partnership frameworks
- Financial support and funding mechanisms
- Systems-based approaches

DEEP DIVE 2: BARRIERS TO QUALITY (FISHBOWL SESSION)

The first Fishbowl session focused on identifying and unpacking barriers to quality within the system. We intentionally selected five “fish” with direct, on-the-ground technical expertise in transition work, prioritizing practitioners from the Global South. This deliberate choice was made to help balance the power dynamics in a space where the majority of participants were from the Global North. By centering the voices of Global South practitioners, the session created a more equitable platform for sharing lived experiences, local knowledge, and context-specific insights. The open chair format allowed additional participants to join the conversation fluidly, contributing to a dynamic and inclusive exchange of perspectives.

DEEP DIVE 3: RECONSTRUCTING FAMILY AND CHILD CARE

This session examined four core areas critical to improving family and child care systems:

- Successful strategies
- Effective tools and practices
- Gaps in current systems
- Opportunities for partnerships and resource sharing

The discussion centered on ways to strengthen family care through the sharing of knowledge and practical resources.

Appendix D (Cont.)

DEEP DIVE AND FISHBOWL SESSIONS AT THE RISING TIDES CONFERENCE

DEEP DIVE 4: INNOVATIVE MODELS FOR EXPANSION (FISHBOWL SESSION)

Mirroring the format of Deep Dive 2, this Fishbowl session explored innovative models for expanding support systems. Participants shared emerging practices, pilot programs, and scalable initiatives aimed at enhancing the reach and effectiveness of services.



DEEP DIVE 5: GOVERNMENT AND FUNDING SYSTEMS

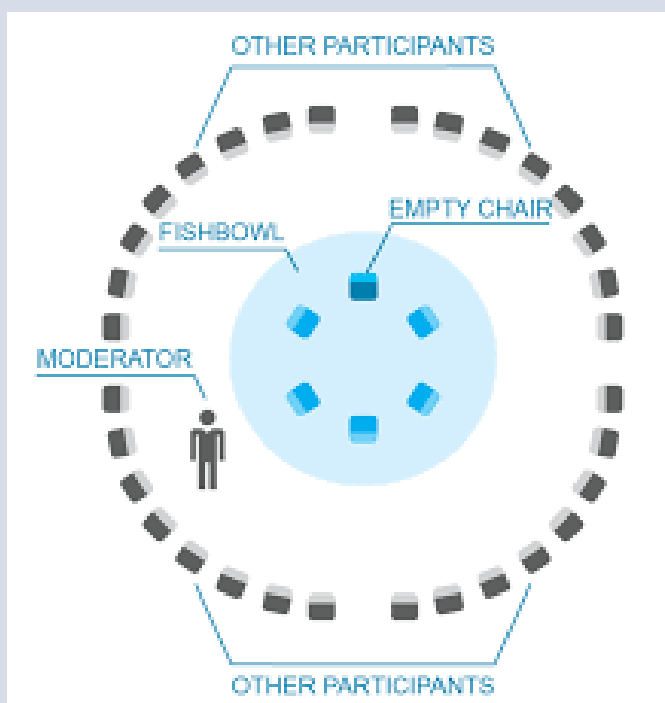
This session explored both the strengths and shortcomings of existing government engagement and funding systems. Attendees were divided into two groups to discuss:

- Government policy, involvement, and influence
- Funding structures and financial sustainability

Through these parallel conversations, participants examined how these elements support or hinder progress and proposed strategies for reform.

REFLECTIONS AND OUTCOMES

Collectively, the Deep Dive sessions created a space for critical reflection and forward-thinking collaboration. By openly addressing existing tools, international models, and the gaps within current systems, participants worked together to envision a more effective and equitable future for child care and family support. These structured discussions were essential in surfacing the issues that matter most. Without engaging in honest conversations about what is working and what needs to change, progress remains stagnant. Child care will continue to evolve, but meaningful improvement can only occur when stakeholders come together to evaluate, challenge, and innovate existing systems.



Appendix E

TOWARD ONE VOICE: A COLLABORATIVE VISION FOR GLOBAL FAMILY CARE ADVOCACY

One informal but energizing discussion thread that emerged at Rising Tides 2025 was the idea of collaboratively developing a global education and advocacy campaign—one that would be unbranded by any single organization and designed for collective use across the entire sector. The vision was a coordinated media effort to disseminate a clear, unified message in support of transitioning from orphanage-based care to family-based solutions as a critical pillar of global care reform. While this concept echoes earlier sector efforts like the "Orphan Myth" campaign, the consensus was that what's needed now is a simpler, sharper, and more focused message—something accessible, compelling, and aligned with the shared goal of seeing every child in a safe, loving family.

ANALYSIS OF THE ORPHAN MYTH CAMPAIGN: STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Orphan Myth campaign was a well-intentioned initiative aimed at changing public perceptions around orphanages and advocating for the transition to family-based care as part of broader child care reform.

While the campaign successfully raised awareness among professionals and stakeholders in the child welfare sector, it struggled to reach a wide and diverse audience of the general public. As a result, it did not fully succeed in convincing people that orphanages are problematic, that their transition is necessary, and that individuals have a role to play in this reform.

STRENGTHS OF THE ORPHAN MYTH CAMPAIGN

- 1. Clear Messaging on Orphanage Realities:**
 - The campaign effectively highlighted the issue of "paper orphans" and the fact that most children in orphanages have living family members.
 - It leveraged research demonstrating the harmful effects of institutional care on child development.
- 2. Engagement with Child Welfare Experts:**
 - The initiative successfully engaged child protection professionals, NGOs, and policymakers, fostering important discussions on systemic change.
 - It aligned with international frameworks, such as the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.
- 3. Efforts to Mobilize Support:**
 - Orphan Myth aimed to connect donors and volunteers with ethical and impactful ways to support family-based care rather than institutionalization.
 - The campaign utilized storytelling and case studies to humanize the issue and present tangible solutions.

Appendix E (Cont.)

CHALLENGES IN REACHING A BROAD AUDIENCE

1. **Limited Public Engagement and Awareness:**

- The campaign struggled to penetrate mainstream public discourse, where many still view orphanages as a benevolent and necessary solution for vulnerable children.
- Public misconceptions about orphanages being the best form of care persisted due to deeply ingrained cultural and religious beliefs.

2. **Failure to Present a Clear Call to Action for the General Public:**

- While the campaign provided valuable information, it lacked a strong, actionable pathway for individuals who wanted to contribute to the transition process.
- Many potential supporters did not see how they could directly play a role in the solution beyond donating.

3. **Competition with Traditional Orphanage Support Narratives:**

- The emotional appeal of supporting orphanages—particularly among faith-based donors and international volunteers—remained strong.
- The campaign faced difficulty in shifting deeply held philanthropic habits and volunteer tourism practices that fuel orphanage reliance.

CONCLUSION

While the Orphan Myth campaign made valuable contributions to the discourse on child care reform, it fell short of reaching and mobilizing a broad public audience. To drive greater impact, future efforts must focus on making the transition message more relatable, actionable, and compelling for the general public. Stronger storytelling, strategic partnerships with influential voices, and clearer avenues for public engagement will be key in overcoming barriers and shifting societal perceptions on orphan care.

RISING TIDES
CONFERENCE
SERIES



CATALYZING TRANSITION TO BROADEN THE IMPACT

2025

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