



10 Ten Things to Know About Jamaica's System of State Care for Children

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The Child Protection & Family Services Agency (CPFSA) is responsible for the care and protection of 4,875 children between the ages of 0-18 in state care in Jamaica. The conditions in too many of Jamaica's residential facilities are sub-standard and are not serving the best interests of the children.

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The best place for a child is with his or her biological family. If that is not possible, foster care and adoption are the best options for children in need of care and protection. For every three months spent in institutional care, between the ages of 0 - 3 years, a month of development is lost. Children in long-term institutional care suffer from poorer physical and cognitive development as well as psychological difficulties, and poorer educational and health outcomes.

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The CPFSA is under-resourced and its mandate impossible to fulfill with its current inadequate capacity, staff, and funding. The international standard of recommended caseload sizes per social worker working with children and families ranges from 20 to 30 cases for low intensity services, 10 to 20 cases for moderately intensive services, and five to 10 cases for highly intensive services. In Jamaica, social workers have an average case load of about 150 children, with some managing as many as 200 children.

4



Foster care in Jamaica is not legislated or governed by any statute. There is no legal framework nor guidelines for placement in foster care. A parliamentary joint select committee proposed in 2019 that foster care regulations should be developed, including a foster parent registration system, standards and protocols for children in foster care, and reporting mechanisms for breaches of standards.

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Adoption is the least employed approach to placing children into a family environment. Less than one percent of children in state care are adopted each year, though there are over 100 approved adopters, some approved as far back as 2011, waiting for a child.

Yet babies who are relinquished at birth are in facilities for, on average, 18 months before being placed with an approved adoptive parent.

8



The legislative framework is outdated. The law that governs the child care system is the Child Care and Protection Act (2004). There are several aspects that need to be updated. A review exercise was completed in 2014. A parliamentary joint select committee proposed changes to the Act in 2019.

No further action has been taken. It is a similar story for the Adoption Act (1958).

6



A weak governance structure is at the core of Jamaica's child care system. It lacks administrative capacity, compounded by the limited strategic involvement and collaboration across stakeholders. Consequently, policies are not designed or implemented in

a way that is consistent with the context-specific needs of Jamaican children.

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Policies and plans for children are made without consideration of evidence-based approaches to state care. There is no systematic data collection and analysis, ranging from not having accurate numbers of children in care, to not monitoring their quality of life, no trend analysis of precipitating factors

for entering state care, nor data gathering on how children fare in different state care settings.

7



Accountability and oversight throughout the state childcare system are poor. The CPFSA is an executive agency that does not have a board of directors, is funded directly by the Ministry of Finance, and its personnel is appointed by the Services Commission. Further, the CPFSA is

the regulator of all children's homes, at the same time that it owns and operates 10 percent of all the child care facilities in Jamaica. There is no independent oversight body that monitors consistently or has any power to take legal action in case of a breach.

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The voices of children and people who have lived the experience of being a ward of the state are underrepresented in decisions about children in state care. Their views, perspectives, stories, and aspirations are essential in the formulation of policies to meet the needs of children in need of care and protection, and to serve their best interests.

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