

# MAKING FAMILIES STRONGER

**Family strengthening** is about keeping children in their families and preventing them from being placed in residential care. Different families will have different needs, and many will need a combination of approaches.

When an orphanage is phased out, it can use its buildings and resources to provide services for the community. Your church or community group can get involved and play an important role in supporting families. Here are some ideas...



## COUNSELLING

Counselling can help families and parents experiencing difficulties such as marriage breakdown or substance abuse. Check whether someone in your church or community is qualified and willing to provide this service. If not, find a counsellor from elsewhere who could visit regularly to offer appointments.

## PARENTING SUPPORT

Provide training for parents and caregivers in topics such as parenting skills, budgeting, good nutrition, child development and child protection. This will help strengthen families and increase their confidence in caring for children.



## FREE OR LOW-COST DAY CARE

Offer child care services during the day. This will allow parents or caregivers to go out to work and support their families. Provide the children with meals, stimulating activities and play time during the day. Offer respite care for children with disabilities to help refresh and re-energise their parents.



## EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

Poor families often struggle with the costs of school fees, books and uniforms. They may think a child will have a better chance of an education in residential care. Supporting families with these costs can make a real difference. Try negotiating with schools so they reduce or remove fees for vulnerable children. Use your community centre to provide extra tuition or learning opportunities for children who are struggling with school.



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

Train volunteers to visit vulnerable families in their homes and offer appropriate support. This can include practical help with food preparation and household tasks, as well as emotional and spiritual support.



## ADVOCACY AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Support orphans and their caregivers to access the benefits they are entitled to, such as government grants and services. Sometimes this may be as simple as letting them know what is available. Orphaned children may also need support with securing inheritance rights, accessing school or getting identity documents. Nominate representatives from your community group to speak up for vulnerable children's needs at school board meetings and local councils.



## INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES

Poverty is often the main reason families place children in orphanages. Helping families find ways of earning enough income can make a huge difference. Consider offering vocational training, such as tailoring, carpentry, metalwork, baking, hairdressing or computer skills. The training should be relevant to local needs and opportunities. Offer people help with starting small businesses, and start saving and loan schemes.

## ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Through your community centre, help families access health care, including HIV testing and counselling. Train volunteers to deliver home-based care for sick relatives so that children can attend school. Provide support for those with disabilities, eg access to physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy.



## WOMEN'S, MEN'S AND CHILDREN'S CLUBS

Women's clubs allow women to come together and talk about their experiences and challenges. Children's clubs help children to support one another and have their voices heard. Set up and facilitate these clubs – and consider setting up a men's group, too, focusing on what makes a good father.

