

The role of research and networks for advocacy

Children in Distress Network (CINDI) - South Africa



DRA

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The foster care system in South Africa is beset by problems. The National Department of Social Development which oversees the placement of children in foster care has been significantly under capacity for many years in terms of its ability to manage the high number of children needing placements. As a result, the system experiences chronic difficulties and delays, with child grants frequently lapsing and not being renewed. In 2014, the Centre for Child Law took the Department of Social Development to court demanding that a solution be found to the foster care crisis, a process which continues to be renewed every 2 years, and in which CINDI is involved.

ABOUT CINDI

CINDI was founded in July 1996 as a multi-sectoral network of over 200 South African civil society agencies (non-governmental organisations, community based organisations, faith based organisations, local and regional government departments).

CINDI champions the rights of vulnerable children and their families by bringing together this strong, diverse network of local organisations to implement a wide range of effective and sustainable programmes for vulnerable children.

Find out more: www.cindi.org.za or contact Suzanne Glulow family@cindi.org.za

APPROACH

CINDI is a network of civil society organisations championing the rights of vulnerable children and their families in South Africa. CINDI was a founding steering committee member of Family for Every Child from 2011; at that point its advocacy efforts focused primarily on the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

In becoming a member of Family and gaining exposure to its advocacy programme, CINDI grew awareness of the importance of research and evidence for advocacy. It developed relationships with like-minded member organisations in Ghana and Rwanda, identifying common advocacy goals around social protection and children's care. Each organisation conducted its own research within this theme, which they brought together to inform both national and regional advocacy goals.

CINDI's experience demonstrates the impact that working as part of the Family for Every Child network can have on a small organisation's ability to influence policy and practice. In the 11 years since joining Family, and with consistent support from the network, there has been a transformation in how CINDI is seen in policy circles and how it engages with government. CINDI is now regularly invited by the Department for Social Development to participate in policy discussions on topics such as alternative care, child protection and social assistance, and its influence has evolved from provincial, to national, regional and even international levels.

The success of CINDI's journey means it is now in a position to carefully discern which topics to engage with at a policy level, a choice determined by the expertise and evidence held by its members.

IMPLEMENTATION

CINDI took part in Family's advocacy workshops in 2014 and was supported to develop its own advocacy strategy. Initially, advocacy around CINDI's social protection goals was focused at the local level, later growing into a regional initiative with fellow member organisations in Ghana and Rwanda.

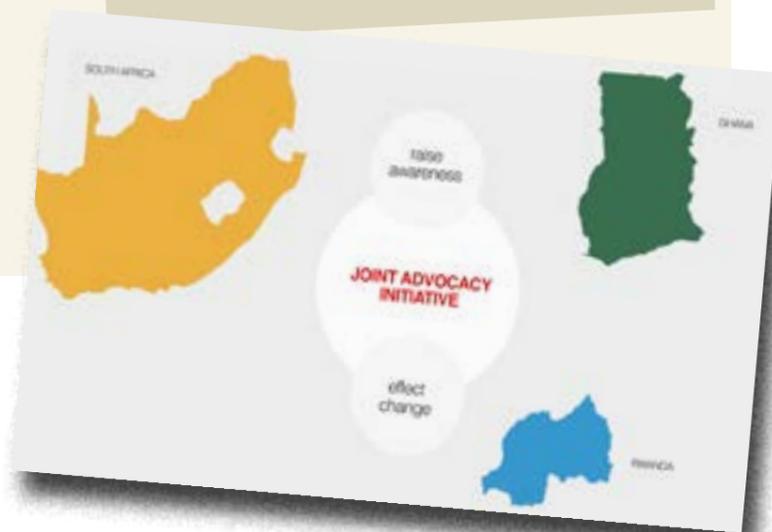
Coordinated by Family, the three organisations conducted and launched their own social protection research around family-based care of children. The launch of the research was attended by a representative of the South African Social Security Agency and was a turning point for CINDI and its reputation. Through its report [Researching the linkages between social protection and children's care in South Africa: The Child Support Grant and Foster Child Grant and their effects on child well-being and care](#) CINDI was able to influence South Africa's government, and as a group the three African member organisations were able to influence at a regional level. This research led to invitations to CINDI to attend and speak at international conferences.

IMPACT

- 1 CINDI is now considered an expert in policy circles and is consulted by the government on topics including kinship care, foster care and child social grants; this is a real success especially in a context like South Africa where it can be challenging for local CSOs to engage and collaborate with the government.
- 2 Through its advocacy journey CINDI has developed invaluable strategic relationships with professionals working in policy and practice at the national level.
- 3 The experience of giving presentations at international conferences means CINDI is now taken much more seriously in policy circles.

CHALLENGES FACED

- 1 Building momentum around advocacy requires staff who are dedicated to this purpose as success in advocacy relies heavily upon building relationships; this can be a challenge in a small organisation.
- 2 Advocacy work requires flexibility; it follows its own timeline to a large degree and there will be quiet and busy periods, which can be hard to control.



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FURTHER INFORMATION

Family for Every Child is a diverse membership network of civil society organisations based around the world.

How We Care is an innovative platform for those working with children and families, across the globe, to share their practice. Our vision is that through the exchange and learning facilitated by How We Care, organisations' family care practice and programming will be strengthened, with improved outcomes for the children they support.

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