

# EMPOWER

2026 SPRING IMPACT EDITION

## Telling The Truth About What Really Helps Children.

P55

Transparency  
Starts at Home

P61

Welcoming David Titus  
Musa as Director of  
the Child Reintegration  
Centre



HELPING CHILDREN  
WORLDWIDE

# Contents

- P4 Executive Director’s Letter
- P5 The Slow Work of Collaboration: How We Build With Local Partners, Not For Them
- P10 Children Are Safer in Families: Why Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Must Include Family Care
- P13 The Quiet Work Behind the Scenes: How Global Collaboration Becomes Localized Scaffolding
- P19 From Islands to Ecosystems
- P25 Radical Courage Looks Like Telling the Truth About What Really Helps Children
- P29 Trust is a Ladder: How Allyships Earn It Over Time
- P35 The Transformative Power of Global Policy
- P36 Aligning Our Giving With What Children Need Most
- P38 James 1:27 Isn’t a Slogan. It’s a Systems Diagnosis.
- P45 Partners and Allies: Why HCW Uses Two Different Words on Purpose
- P50 Truth-Telling Is a Child Protection Intervention
- P55 Transparency Starts at Home
- P61 Welcoming David Titus Musa as Director of the Child Reintegration Centre
- P63 Welcoming Ganda Bassie as Deputy Director of the Child Reintegration Centre
- P66 Connecting with Mission
- P68 A final word to readers
- 

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**HELPING CHILDREN  
WORLDWIDE**

# WHAT IF MISSION WAS LESS ABOUT GOING TO HELP AND MORE ABOUT LEARNING TO FOLLOW?

**Rising Tides 2026: Missions That Matter**  
Washington, DC | August 3–6, 2026



**Rising Tides 2026 invites churches, young adults, mission leaders, and nonprofit partners into a deeper conversation about faithful, ethical mission.**

Together, we will explore what it means to serve with humility, practice radical trust, honor local leadership, and build long-term relationships that reflect the love and justice of Christ.

Rising Tides is a conference for young adults, church leaders, nonprofit professionals, and mission advocates who want to engage in mission work that is ethical, locally led, and rooted in long-term relationship.

This year's theme, **Missions That Matter**, invites participants to examine how mission can move beyond good intentions toward deeper partnership, humility, courage, and measurable impact. Through interactive sessions, honest conversations, and practical learning, participants will explore the future of missions across global development, child welfare, public health, church engagement, and nonprofit practice.

The conference includes a young adult track beginning August 3 and a church/nonprofit leader track beginning August 5.

We are deeply grateful to our Champion Sponsor, Blueprint Financial, whose generous support makes this gathering possible and fuels our shared commitment to ethical, impactful mission.

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# From Counting Children to Changing Systems



Dear Friends,

Over the past eight and a half years, I've had the privilege of serving alongside you with Helping Children Worldwide. In my first two weeks, I immersed myself in its history.

I read everything I could find - board minutes, financial records, audits, legal agreements, strategic planning, charts, records, and correspondence from past leaders. I asked the staff "what do I need to know, what should I read, who do I need to meet, where do I need to go?" I wanted to understand not just what the organization did, who worked with it, and who funded it, but why it existed. What was it supposed to do? Why was HCW created, had it evolved, and had it remained true to its original purpose over time? What I discovered then, and was reminded of again recently, is this:

**Helping Children Worldwide has always asked itself the hard, existential questions about its purpose.**

Across decades, the answers consistently returned it to a simple but ambitious idea: to do the greatest good for the most children, in the most ways possible.

But how that mission is lived has evolved.

We have moved from counting individual children and patients served and directing care, to strengthening families and building local staff capacity, and now to strengthening systems that support the continuity of care, so that the work and the outcome is the same whether or not we are present.

Along the way, we made mistakes, we questioned ourselves, we learned better ways to work, and we learned one true thing:

**Real change is built on trusted relationships**—on adults working side by side as equals, learning from one another, dealing with the realities and struggles of children and families.

Not as substitutes for what is missing, but as allies and partners **building what should exist.**

Today, we measure impact not only by numbers, but by the strength of systems — systems that function 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, with or without us.

This work is guided by our core values: radical honesty, radical courage, radical trust, and radical collaboration.

These values shape how we show up, how we partner, and how we pursue lasting impact. In the pages of this magazine, you will see stories that reflect each of these values in action. Our values guide the mission **to help children worldwide in the best way possible.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melody Curtiss".

Dr. Melody Curtiss, JD  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



OUR FOUNDATION. OUR FUTURE.

# Four Values. One Mission.

## To Help

Every Child, Everywhere,  
In Every Way We Can.

Helping Children Worldwide was built on a simple but powerful mission: to do the most good for the most children in the most ways possible.

How we pursue that mission is shaped by four core values that guide every decision, every partnership, and every step forward.

**These values are not just words.  
They are how we work. They are who we are.**



Our mission is constant.  
Our commitment is unwavering.  
Our values keep us *rooted.*



### RADICAL HONESTY

We tell the truth—always. About our impact. About our challenges. About what is working and what is not.

Radical honesty creates clarity, builds credibility, and opens the door to real change.



### RADICAL COURAGE

We are willing to step into the hard conversations, face difficult realities, and change course when the mission demands it.

Radical courage moves us beyond comfort and into lasting impact.



### RADICAL TRUST

We believe in local leaders. We invest in their wisdom, their experience, and their ability to lead sustainable change.

Radical trust is the foundation of strong relationships and enduring impact.



### RADICAL COLLABORATION

We work alongside others—governments, communities, organizations, and donors—as equals.

Radical collaboration multiplies our efforts and creates solutions that last.



*In the pages that follow, you will see these values come to life.*



Stories of radical honesty that lead to learning and growth.



Stories of radical courage that create the space for transformation.



Stories of radical trust that empower local leaders and communities.



Stories of radical collaboration that build sustainable solutions together.

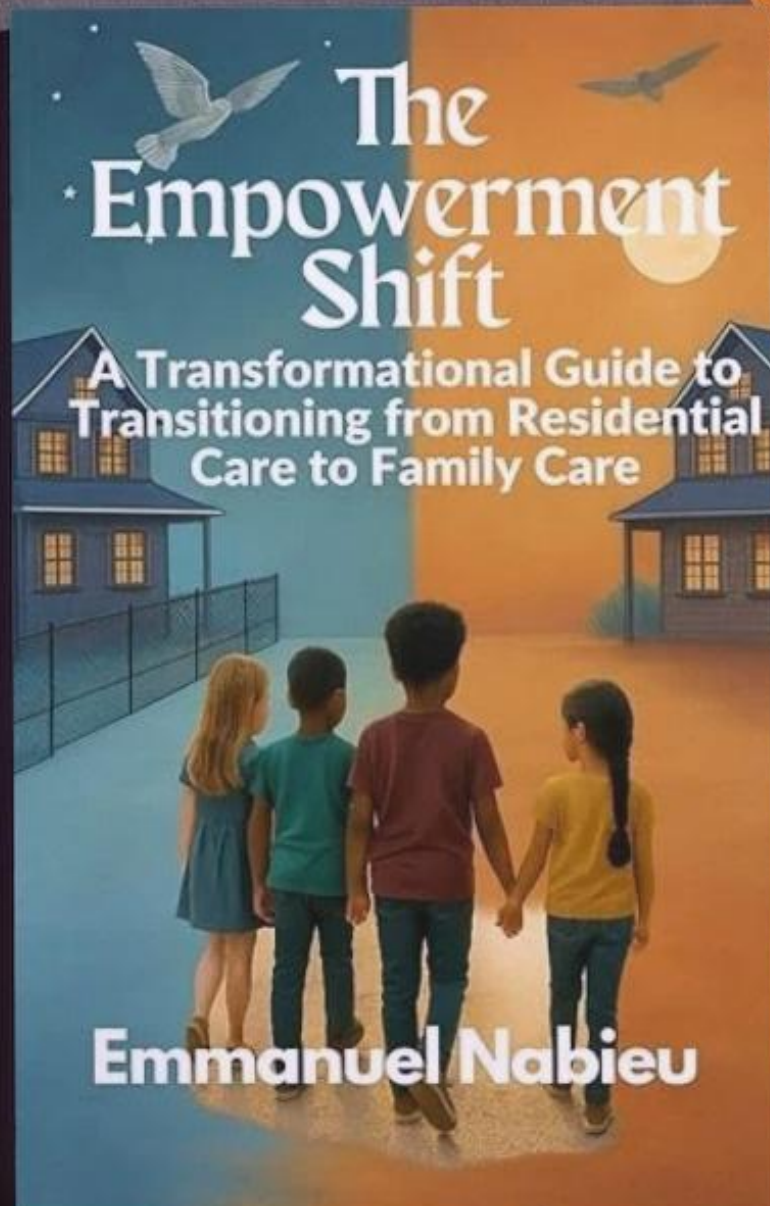
FOUR VALUES. EVERY DAY. FOR CHILDREN. FOR COMMUNITIES. FOR A BETTER WORLD.

## Partner with us

For decades, Helping Children Worldwide has had the courage to ask the hard questions—and today, we are asking one of you. At the heart of every system we build is a simple, unchanging truth: a child's best hope is a strong, supported family. We have moved past temporary fixes to focus on what matters most—ensuring children never have to face the world alone. But we cannot transform these systems without you. We are looking for advocates who believe that "helping children" means putting their families first. By donating today, you aren't just funding a program; you are joining a radical partnership that empowers parents, stabilizes homes, and creates a permanent circle of care. Join us as a family advocate and invest in a world where every child grows up exactly where they belong: in a safe, loving, and resilient family.

Scan the code and  
make lasting change:





**Order your copy today.**



# The Slow Work of Collaboration: How We Build *With* Local Partners, Not For Them



In international development, collaboration gets used as a buzzword. Everyone says “partner-led.” Everyone says “capacity building.” Everyone says “locally owned.” But when you watch the work up close - week after week - the difference between supporting local leadership and directing local leadership becomes painfully clear.

At Helping Children Worldwide (HCW), we’ve learned that the most sustainable change rarely comes from big ideas delivered quickly. It comes from patient, methodical work done with the people who will carry it long after we’re gone. One of the clearest examples of that for us this year has been a project that, on paper, sounds simple:

**Strengthen a microfinance program where repayments were starting to fall.**

In practice, it looked like something else entirely: listening, investigating, researching locally relevant best practices, drafting tools with the local team, and walking word-by-word through process drafts until they felt right in the hands of the people who would use them.

**It started the way real partnership starts: with their concern, not our idea.**

The project wasn’t born out of a Western strategy session or an outside consultant’s model. We didn’t go to them and say “your repayment rates are low, and we know how you can fix that.” It began because our local partners raised a concern: repayments in their microfinance program were slipping, and it was impacting their case management work in unexpected ways, and they wanted to address it before it became a bigger problem.

That matters. Because when the concern originates locally, ownership is already present. Our job isn’t to “fix it.” Our job is to support their leadership with questions, tools, and resources that help them strengthen what they’ve already built.



## Step one was not solutions. It was questions. Hundreds of them.

If you've ever been tempted to jump straight to a "best practice" answer, this kind of work will humble you quickly. Before we wrote a single recommendation, we asked questions - hundreds of them - about what already existed:

- What does your current SOP say?
- What are the criteria for entrance into the microfinance training program?
- How are caregivers selected, and who makes those decisions?
- What loan sizes are being offered, and why?
- What is being tracked, by whom, and how often?
- What reporting exists right now, and what's missing?
- What happens when someone misses a payment?
- What patterns are you seeing—by community, by season, by caregiver circumstances?

We privately wrestled our own 'great ideas' and 'hidden agendas' into silence (note that this is not always easy). We asked hundreds of questions (maybe thousands), but with truly open minds and sincere curiosity. The goal wasn't to interrogate. It was to understand. Because you can't strengthen what you don't fully see. And it's really hard to see from across an ocean and a culture.

## Step two was diagnosing the real issue, not just the visible symptom

"Falling repayments" is a symptom. But partnership requires us to ask: *what's underneath it?*

- Were the loans too large for the income reality? Or too small?
- Was the selection criteria unclear?
- Were expectations inconsistent?
- Did caregivers experience shocks - illness, school fees, market disruptions - without any adaptation plan?

- Was tracking happening too late to intervene early?
- Were incentives and accountability structures unclear?

We worked with the local team to identify what they believed were the underlying causes - because they're the ones closest to the caregivers, the communities, and the realities that shape repayment.


## Step three was research - but not the kind that imports a Western model

Once we understood the local team's concerns and program structure, we brought in interns to do research on successful microfinance programs. But here was another non-negotiable: the research had to be contextualized. Our partners weren't interested in importing a U.S. or Western microfinance approach and pasting it onto Sierra Leone (and frankly, neither were we). We all wanted to learn from models that had proven effective in Sub-Saharan Africa - and Sierra Leone in particular - because sustainability isn't about what looks good in theory. It's about what works in context.

So the research was targeted:

- What models have succeeded in similar economic and cultural environments?
- What selection criteria and training approaches are common in effective programs?
- What repayment structures and tracking systems support accountability without shame?
- What safeguards help programs stay healthy over time?

Then we held that research lightly - never as a prescription, always as a resource.



**“ Our partners weren’t interested in importing a U.S. or Western microfinance approach and pasting it onto Sierra Leone (and frankly, neither were we). We all wanted to learn from models that had proven effective in Sub-Saharan Africa - and Sierra Leone in particular - because sustainability isn’t about what looks good in theory. It’s about what works in context.”**



## Step four was drafting tools for their review - not delivering a finished product

With two streams of information in hand - (1) what we learned from the local team and (2) what the research revealed - we drafted a revised SOP and tracking forms - not as "the answer." As a draft. We watermark it just to make it 100% clear that it is changeable, and that watermark stays until they tell us that they're happy with where it is. Because ownership doesn't come from being handed a polished document. Ownership comes from being part of building it.

So we shared the draft back to the local team and invited critique with even more questions:

- What feels realistic?
- What feels unnecessary?
- What language needs to change?
- What steps don't match your workflows?
- What data do you actually want to track?
- What will be too burdensome for staff?
- What will strengthen follow-up and accountability?

## Step five happened in person: word-by-word work, not top-down training

In October, a team traveled to Sierra Leone - not to announce a new system, but to sit at the table and go through the documents word by word with the local team. This is the part people don't see when they imagine "capacity building." It wasn't flashy. It was tedious. It was painstaking. It was slow.



It looked like:

- reading the SOP line by line
- pausing for questions
- rewriting sections in real time
- clarifying intent and responsibilities
- ensuring every step matched what the local team wanted and could implement
- adjusting forms so they were actually usable in the field
- aligning language with local practice, not outside jargon

That kind of work is time-consuming. It's truthfully a little tedious. But it is also deeply respectful. Because it communicates: *your understanding matters. Your ownership matters. This has to live in your hands, not ours.*



## And then the local team did what partnership is supposed to produce: they led it

By December, the local team had a final SOP and forms to use. They used the new criteria to identify a cohort, trained 30 caregivers, and began preparing to award loans.

They weren't "complying with an HCW system." They were implementing a process they helped create. And they're excited about the new criteria and forms for a simple reason: they recognize themselves in the work. That's the difference between "guidance" and "support." We didn't come in as experts with answers. We provided data, asked questions, organized learning, and helped translate their insights into practical tools they could own.

## Why we choose the slow way

This kind of collaboration is not fast. It's not efficient in the way donor culture often defines efficiency. It's methodical. It's relational. It requires humility. It requires revision. It requires patience.

But we believe it honors local leadership in at least three ways:

1. **It allows deep contextualization.** Programs aren't strengthened by importing solutions - they're strengthened by adapting tools to real community conditions and local contexts.
2. **It builds lasting capacity, not dependency.** When local teams shape the system, they can improve it over time without waiting for outside direction.
3. **It increases sustainability.** The strongest programs are the ones the local team understands, believes in, and can carry forward.

This is what collaboration looks like when it's real: not "we brought a model," but "we built a process together." And when the work is child welfare - when families and children are depending on the strength of local systems - we're willing to do it the slow way. Because the slow way is often the way that lasts.





# Children Are Safer in Families: Why Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Must Include Family Care

On World Day for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, Healing & Justice (April 25), we paused to reflect on the prevention of child sexual abuse, healing for survivors, and the pursuit of justice. We know we need to be willing to tell the truth about risk.

Children who are separated from family care are often placed in circumstances that make them more vulnerable, not less. When children are disconnected from the daily protection of safe, loving family relationships, they can become more exposed to exploitation, abuse, neglect, and systems that are harder to monitor and easier for offenders to manipulate.

That is one reason Helping Children Worldwide believes so deeply in family care, family strengthening, and the careful, professional work of preventing unnecessary separation whenever possible. This is not a sentimental claim. It is a child protection claim.

UNICEF states clearly that children who are deprived of parental care and isolated from family and community are at greater risk of violence, abuse, and neglect. It also notes that the harmful effects of family separation and inappropriate alternative care are well documented.

That does not mean every family home is safe. Some children face real danger in their families, and protecting them may require removal. Child safety must always come first. But in general, the evidence points in the same direction: children do best, and are usually safer, in family care than in residential institutions or other forms of impersonal group care.

Residential care settings can create the very conditions in which abuse thrives. Children in institutions are often more isolated from the broader community, more dependent on adults who control access to food, movement, affection, and information, and less likely to have a consistent protective adult whose first loyalty is to them. UNICEF has warned that children in institutions are vulnerable to violence, neglect, and abuse, and has repeatedly called for stronger investment in family-based alternatives.

Research on child sexual abuse in institutional contexts adds to that concern. The UK Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse has identified common dynamics in institutional abuse, including power imbalances, grooming, isolation, dependency, and institutional tendencies toward denial or concealment. In other words, the problem is not only the offender. Sometimes the setting itself helps hide the harm.

Reviews of out-of-home care have also found troubling rates of abuse. Literature examining residential and congregate care has reported higher levels of sexual abuse and other maltreatment than in family-based settings, with residential environments often carrying particular risk.

Why are families so important to prevention?

Because prevention is not only about screening bad actors. It is also about making sure children are surrounded by protective relationships. A safe, engaged caregiver is often the first person to notice a child's fear, behavioral change, withdrawal, or signs of grooming. A child who has secure attachment to a trusted adult is more likely to disclose harm. A family that is supported rather than fractured is better able to protect.



That is why child sexual abuse prevention and family care reform belong in the same conversation.

If we are serious about prevention, we have to be serious about reducing unnecessary family-child separation. We have to strengthen families under stress. We have to invest in social workers, case management, kinship care, foster care, trauma-informed support, and community-based protection systems. We have to stop treating institutional placement as a protective default when, too often, it introduces a new set of dangers.

For the global child welfare sector, this matters deeply. Children do not become safer simply because they are removed from poverty, placed in a building, or absorbed into a program. Safety is not created by distance from family alone. Safety is created by stable, loving, accountable relationships and by systems that know how to protect children well.

That is why HCW continues to advocate for family-based care. Not because families are perfect. Not because reunification is simple. Not because every child can safely remain at home without support. But because, in general, children are safer when they are known, loved, and protected in families — and because the alternatives too often carry risks of their own that the child welfare world can no longer ignore.

If we want prevention, healing, and justice, then we must build child protection systems that do more than respond after harm is done. We must build systems that reduce children's exposure to harm in the first place.

And that means keeping children in safe families whenever possible, and moving heaven and earth to help make those families strong enough to care well.





## The Quiet Work Behind the Scenes: How Global Collaboration Becomes Localized Scaffolding

Some partnerships look impressive from the outside. Big announcements. New logos on a slide. A flurry of photos. A ribbon cutting. A statement that says “we’re collaborating” and a neat list of outcomes. But the radical collaborations that really change the story for children usually don’t look like that. To be honest, they don’t look very radical at all.

They look like Zoom calls with lots of questions.

Long pauses while people think.

Stacks and stacks of scribbled-on flipchart paper. Words rewritten until they fit the context.

Local leaders naming what they want to build - and outside partners resisting the urge to rush, rescue, or steer.



At Helping Children Worldwide (HCW), we've learned that some of the most important work we do is not "leading" at all. It's connecting and then getting out of the way. It's aligning. It's scaffolding - quiet support that strengthens local leadership until they no longer need the scaffolding.

This is the story of one of those collaborations: how a global relationship is leading to growing local capacity, and how slow, steady, contextualized support is helping local leaders climb into bigger and bigger roles - on their own terms.

## A bridge between networks and the field

HCW is connected to a global alliance of thought leaders, practitioners, and advocates in care reform - people and organizations who have spent years learning what works (and what harms) when it comes to child protection, family-based care, and the transition away from institutional models. But that connection to global expertise only matters if it becomes locally useful.

So when we saw an opportunity to connect one of those trusted organizations - Strengthening Families and Children (SFAC) - with our local allies' case management teams on the ground in Sierra Leone, we didn't approach it as "outside experts coming to train the local teams."

We approached it as a bridge: A relational pathway between teams doing the daily, gritty work of child welfare in a tough context - home visits, family tracing, safety planning, reunification support, reintegration follow-up - and an organization that specializes in something rare and deeply needed: *building capacity slowly, collaboratively, and contextually, with the local team leading.*

## SFAC's approach: slow, steady, collaborative - and deeply contextualized

SFAC's way of working is not flashy. It is not quick. It is not "one size fits all." It is not prescriptive. It's built around a simple but powerful posture:



**Listen first. Ask questions. Follow local leadership.  
Build what fits.**

For more than three years, SFAC has worked with the local teams at three program allies of HCW in Sierra Leone through Zoom sessions and in-person engagement. And what's striking is not just what they've taught - but how they've taught it:

- They take time to understand the local teams' strengths, passions, interests and priorities.
- They pay attention to the context and climate the teams work within - social norms, resource constraints, community pressures, and system realities.
- They shape support around the needs of the families and children being served, guided by the local teams - not around imported frameworks.
- They keep asking: "What do YOU want to focus on? What do YOU need? What do YOU believe will move the work forward for your programs, in your context?"

SFAC works from the sidelines while the local teams lead. Their support doesn't replace local decision-making - it strengthens it. And over time, that changes everything.

**Capacity building isn't a moment.  
It's a ladder.**

We often talk about "training" as if it's an event. A workshop. A handout. A certificate. But the kind of growth required for sustainable care reform doesn't happen in a single training. It happens through repeated practice, mentoring, reflection, and real-world application; over time. That's what SFAC has helped cultivate: a ladder of capacity that local leaders can climb up - step by step.





Over these years, the local teams of all three programs have strengthened skills in:

- Social work principles and professional practice
- Case management frameworks and decision-making
- Family strengthening and prevention approaches
- Safe reintegration processes and follow-up
- The language and architecture of care reform - locally and globally

And here's the crucial part: this growth has not been about local leaders becoming better at executing someone else's vision. It has been about local leaders becoming equipped to articulate and advance *their own vision* - in their own context - with increasing confidence and competence.

### **The outcome we care most about: local leaders stepping beyond us**

One of the clearest signs a partnership is healthy is this: Local partners don't become dependent on external expertise. They become more free.

- Free to lead meetings.
- Free to design systems.
- Free to engage government stakeholders.
- Free to contribute to national discussions.
- Free to step into global spaces as peers and experts - not as "beneficiaries."

This is what we mean by scaffolding. Scaffolding exists to support growth—temporarily. It provides structure while something is being built. And then, when the structure is strong, the scaffolding comes down. Goes away.

Both SFAC and HCW are committed to this kind of scaffolding work - not because we want to disappear, but because we want local leadership to expand beyond us.



We want our local allies to become stronger, more confident, and more resourced in ways that last. We want them to step into bigger roles in Sierra Leone's child welfare ecosystem, and we want global care reform to be informed not just by theory - but by the lived expertise of practitioners doing this work on the ground.

### Why this matters for global care reform

There is a quiet injustice in the global care reform space that we have to keep naming: too often, Global South leaders are expected to implement reform - but not shape it. They're asked to adopt frameworks, report into donor systems, and meet international standards - without being fully supported to build the professional skills, systems confidence, and platform needed to lead reform conversations themselves.

Radical collaboration pushes against that, because when local teams are equipped over time - when they are mentored, supported, and resourced in ways that honor context - they don't just improve their own programs. They become contributors to the wider field. They gain language. They gain confidence. They gain credibility. They gain influence.

And that makes the entire movement stronger.

### The kind of collaboration we believe in

At HCW, we don't measure collaboration by how many organizations are connected. We measure it by what the collaboration produces:

- Does it strengthen local leadership?
- Does it increase long-term sustainability?



- Does it build skills, tools, and confidence that remain after the collaboration ends?
- Does it expand the ability of local practitioners to shape systems and policy?
- Does it create space for local expertise to influence global practice?

This is the kind of collaboration we believe in: the kind that looks slow from the outside but builds strength on the inside. The kind that doesn't center the outside partner. The kind that does not create dependence. The kind that builds a ladder - and then celebrates when local leaders climb beyond us.

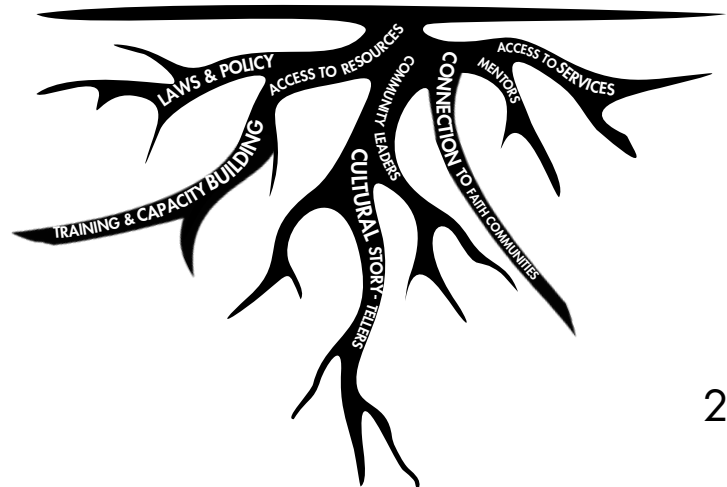
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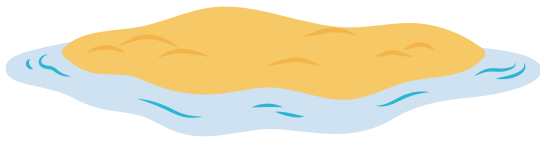
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**“We want our local allies to become stronger, more confident, and more resourced in ways that last.”**



### THE ROOTS OF FAMILY EMPOWERMENT





## From Islands to Ecosystems

### How coalitions move child welfare from a compound story to a country story.

When I first got my start in this work, the orphanage felt like an island.

Not an “institution” in the way we talk about it now - more like a small, brave outpost in a sea of chaos. The roads were hard. The needs were endless. Families were stretched thin. And the government systems we assumed would be “in charge” often weren’t resourced - or trained - or equipped - to be what we needed them to be. Oversight was minimal. Capacity was limited. Sometimes it felt like there wasn’t even a map of who was doing what, where. We didn’t know who else might be working in child protection in the country - let alone beyond it.

So we did what made sense at the time: we built something we could control.

Within those four walls, we could feed children. We could keep them safe (or so we believed). We could make school fees happen.

We could tell a clean story with clear outcomes. We raised money. We wrote newsletters. We took photos that proved the difference was real. And in many ways, it was real - there were children who ate because people gave. There were kids who learned because someone paid attention. There were staff who loved fiercely and did the best they knew. But the truth I couldn’t see then - because I was living metaphorically inside the “box” - is that we weren’t changing the story for children so much as managing a small chapter of it.

We weren’t reaching the families *outside* the gate who were one crisis away from separation. We weren’t strengthening the systems that would still be here long after our funding cycle ended. We weren’t building pathways that helped communities keep children safe without needing an institution to absorb them. We were doing good work... but never very far beyond our four walls and the children inside them.



Getting out of the box was the first step. Transitioning the model - moving from institutional care toward family-based care - was the next step. But taking the next step after that - building a network, linking arms, forming coalitions with others doing adjacent work - was what we needed if we were really going to change the story for children across a country, not just within a compound.

Because children don't live inside programs. They live inside communities. And communities don't change because one organization becomes exceptional. They change when organizations stop operating like islands and start operating like a system.

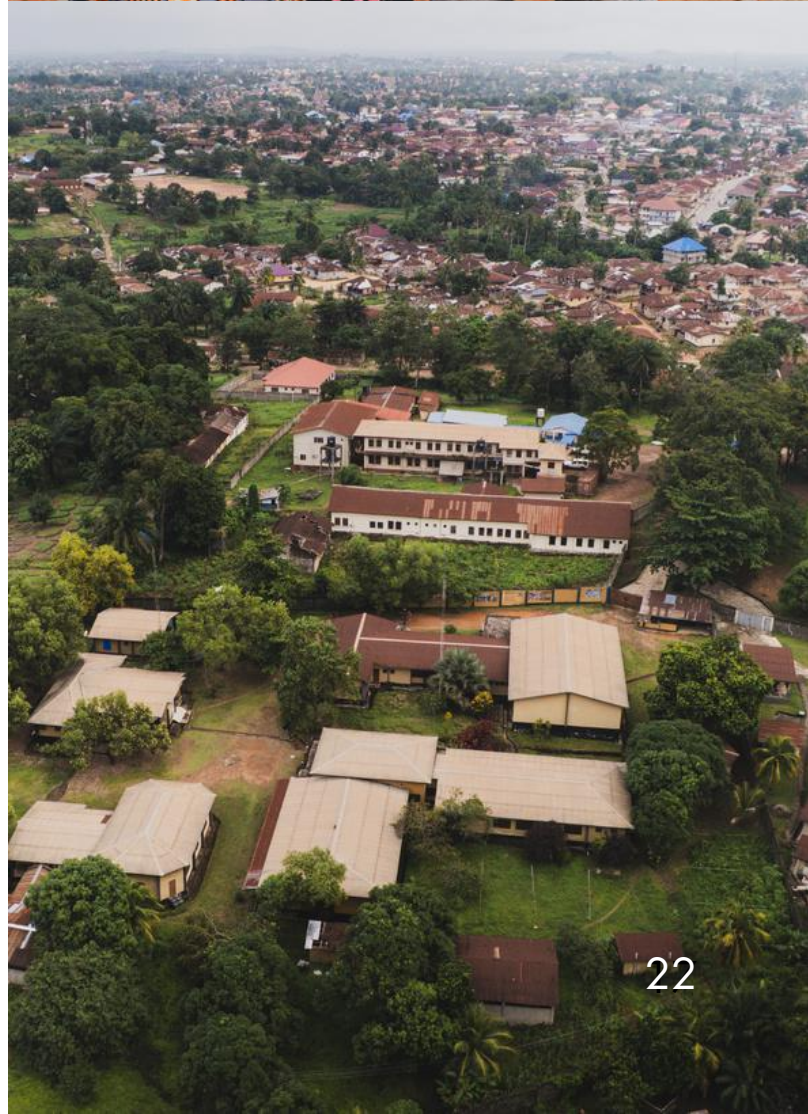
## The truth: no single organization can hold the whole story

Child welfare isn't one problem. It's a layered reality.

- Poverty and economic instability
- Family breakdown and violence
- Social norms that shape who is protected (and who is blamed)
- Weak or under-resourced systems
- Trafficking vulnerabilities
- Institutional models that separate children "for their own good"
- Emergency situations that overwhelm families and communities
- Donor pressures that reward what photographs well

So it's no surprise that different organizations end up holding different pieces of the work:

- One focuses on **anti-trafficking** and survivor support.
- One specializes in **transitioning orphanages** to family-based care.
- One is doing **family strengthening** to prevent separation before it happens.
- One trains and supports **kinship and foster care**.
- One builds **case management and reintegration** systems.
- One leads **advocacy and policy** work.
- One provides **research and best practice** technical support.





If each organization stands alone, each one is trying to shout its piece of truth into the wind - hoping someone hears it, hoping it's enough. But when those same organizations link arms - when they form a coalition, a best-practice network, a collaboration with shared standards - the wind changes.

## Coalitions create a rising tide - and the platform gets bigger for everyone

There's a reason the phrase "a rising tide lifts all boats" shows up so often in collaboration conversations: it's one of the rare clichés that's actually true. When organizations band together, three things happen immediately:

1) Each organization stands on a larger platform.

Individually, your organization might have a strong voice in one community, one district, one donor base, one network - how far you can realistically reach. Together, you become a shared platform - wider, higher, harder to ignore.

2) Your collective voice gets louder and travels farther.

A single organization can publish a position paper or host a training. A coalition can shape the public narrative, educate whole sectors, and shift what becomes "normal" practice across an entire region. Or country.

3) Your work becomes harder to dismiss as a one-off opinion.

Government stakeholders (and donors, and communities) can brush off one NGO as "their approach." But a coalition creates a field voice. It signals: "This isn't just one organization's preference - this is what best practice looks like."

That shift matters. Because the biggest barriers to better care are rarely a lack of compassion.

*They're a lack of alignment.*

## Collaboration does something else too: it keeps us honest

This is where the story gets tender - and important. Coalitions aren't only about volume. They're about accountability. When organizations commit to best practice together, they create a culture where:

- harmful practices are named (even when they're popular)

- shortcuts become harder to justify
- “we’ve always done it this way” loses its power
- outcomes matter more than optics
- data and evidence have somewhere to land
- children are protected from our blind spots

A coalition of best practice becomes a kind of shared mirror. Not a mirror that shames—but one that clarifies. Because the truth is: in child welfare, good intentions are not enough. We all need guardrails. We all need peers who can say, lovingly and firmly, “That approach is risking harm,” or “There’s a better way,” or “Let’s align what we’re doing with what we say we believe.” When that happens, resources get used better. Expertise gets shared faster. Training becomes consistent. Referral systems tighten. Duplications shrink. Gaps get identified. Learning accelerates. A kind of “coopertition” is created, and everyone is gently forced to level up.

And the child - the one living inside all our programs and strategies - stops being passed around like a case file in a fragmented system.

## The part we don’t talk about enough: coalitions can empower government

Here’s one of the most important (and often overlooked) gifts of coalition work:

**A coalition can become a tool that strengthens the government’s ability to lead.**

If we’re serious about locally led, sustainable systems - if we truly want government stakeholders to carry child protection long after any one NGO’s funding cycle ends - then we have to face this: Many government agencies are trying to lead with limited staff, limited training, limited resources, and enormous public expectations. They often don’t need NGOs to replace them.

They need NGOs to equip them.

**“If each organization stands alone, each one is trying to shout its piece of truth into the wind - hoping someone hears it, hoping it’s enough. But when those same organizations link arms - when they form a coalition, a best-practice network, a collaboration with shared standards - the wind changes.”**

Coalitions can help do that in powerful, respectful ways:

- Providing best-practice expertise grounded in field experience
- Supporting training and workforce development (social work practice, case management, standards of care)
- Creating shared tools (referral pathways, SOPs, assessment instruments, care plan templates)
- Coordinating advocacy and education so messaging isn’t fragmented
- Helping develop policy that matches reality on the ground, and is not just theory on paper
- Offering technical working groups where government can convene and lead a shared agenda
- Modeling collaboration across civil society so the government doesn’t have to manage a thousand competing voices



This is the difference between “partnering with government” as a slogan and partnering in a way that actually increases government decision-making power. In other words: coalitions can help shift the dynamic from NGOs as heroes to NGOs as scaffolding - temporary support structures that strengthen what should hold long-term.

## When the work expands beyond any one organization’s reach, the story changes

This kind of collaboration changes the story on three levels:

### For children:

Because services become coordinated, standards improve, prevention gets stronger, and fewer children fall through cracks created by fragmentation.

### For families:

Because family strengthening, reintegration, alternative care, and protection services stop functioning like separate silos - and start functioning like a pathway that supports belonging, stability, and safety.

### For communities:

Because when systems align, communities begin to trust them. People learn where to go for help. Leaders begin to see protection as shared responsibility. And the narrative shifts from “children without families” to “families with support.”

Most importantly, coalitions help move child welfare out of the realm of charity projects and into the realm of systems. And systems are what hold children - not headlines.

## The temptation: we want to be the one

Let’s be honest about the resistance we feel. Collaboration costs. It costs time. It costs credit. It costs control. It costs the satisfaction of being the organization with the cleanest story and the clearest brand.

It asks us to trade being impressive for being effective. To loosen our grip on “our program” long enough to ask: “What would it look like if the whole ecosystem worked?” And what small role could we play in seeing that happen?

Coalition work is slower than lone-ranger work. It’s messier. It requires humility. It requires shared language, shared definitions, shared standards - and sometimes shared repentance when we realize what we’ve funded or normalized in the past. It’s the hard, messy, ongoing work of long-term relationship. But it’s also the work that actually scales what matters.

## Linked arms don’t just lift organizations. They lift outcomes.

A coalition doesn’t exist to make organizations look better (although that does happen). A coalition exists because children need more than a patchwork of good efforts. They need a coordinated story - one where prevention is real, protection is consistent, alternative care is safe, reintegration is supported, trafficking vulnerabilities are addressed, and government leadership is strengthened. A coordinated network is a method of protection.

**Because the story doesn’t change when one organization gets stronger - it changes when the whole ecosystem does**

## From lone rangers to linked arms

This is the pivot we’re trying to make: from isolated excellence to shared responsibility. From organizations competing for impact to networks collaborating for outcomes. From “our lane” to the whole road children are walking. From NGO-centered stories to government-empowering systems. From lone rangers to linked arms - so children don’t just survive the gaps between our programs, but grow up surrounded by a community that knows how to keep families together and keep children safe.

**PERFECT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:**



## **Rescuing Princess A Hero Speaks Up**

**Optimistic Voices – A Child's View Storybook  
presented by Helping Children Worldwide, Inc.**



**Read Rescuing Princess**



**Read Mojnama's Journey**

**These read-to-me storybooks are true stories from our Optimistic Voices: *Child's View* podcast series. Download free digital copies of all 8 stories!**

# Radical Courage Looks Like Telling the Truth About What Really Helps Children

At Helping Children Worldwide, we have been learning an important lesson over many years of walking alongside children and families: the things that make donors feel most connected are not always the things that help families heal and grow strongest. That is not easy to admit.

Traditional child sponsorship has long been one of the most familiar and emotionally compelling ways for people to support children. It offers a simple, personal connection. A donor sees a child, learns a name, gives faithfully, and feels linked to that child's future. For many people, it has been a meaningful expression of compassion and commitment.

But as HCW has grown in our understanding of child welfare, family strengthening, and what it really takes to help children thrive, we have also had to face a harder truth: the most effective help is not usually delivered through a long-term financial relationship between one donor and one child.

Real, lasting change rarely happens because a child remains tied to outside support year after year after year. Real change happens when families are strengthened, risks are reduced, protective adults are equipped, and skilled professionals walk with families toward stability, healing, and independence.

That is why HCW has been courageously pivoting away from a traditional sponsorship model and toward a Family Empowerment Advocacy approach. This shift is not cosmetic. It is not a rebrand of the same old idea. It is a deeper alignment between what we know and how we invite donors to participate.

And now, HCW is continuing to refine that model even further. Rather than linking dedicated Advocate donors to a specific family, we are moving toward linking Advocates to the work of skilled social workers and case managers who are directly serving children and families. We believe this is the most appropriate, honest, and child-centered way to connect dedicated donor support to the kind of work that truly changes lives.

Why?

Because children do not thrive in isolation. Children thrive in families that are growing stronger, safer, and more capable of caring for them well. A child's needs are rarely just about school fees, uniforms, food, or one visible material gap. Those needs are often connected to a much larger picture: family stress, poverty, trauma, illness, unstable caregiving, lack of income, unresolved conflict, grief, weak support systems, or child protection concerns. Meeting one material need can be helpful. But meeting one material need is not the same thing as strengthening a family.



That is where skilled social work is critical.

A trained local case manager does much more than identify a need and help fill it. A good case manager learns the full story of a child and family. They assess risk. They listen. They identify strengths. They help families make plans. They connect them to resources. They walk with them through setbacks. They monitor safety. They support reunification where appropriate. They help families build capacity over time so that the goal is not endless dependence, but increasing stability moving toward independence. In other words, case managers do the work that actually helps children and families move forward.

That is why HCW believes our Advocate donors deserve to be connected not to a simplified sponsorship story, but to the truth. Advocates deserve to know that helping a child well often looks less like paying the same school bill every year and more like supporting the skilled local professional who is helping a family solve the deeper issues that put that child at risk in the first place. They deserve a window into the real work of care: the wisdom, persistence, and dedication of local case managers who are serving children and families every day.

They deserve to see the kind of support that protects family dignity instead of quietly undermining it. Traditional sponsorship models can unintentionally keep the focus too narrow. They can train everyone involved to think in terms of maintaining support to one child rather than strengthening the whole family system around that child. They can also create a pattern where support must remain visible and ongoing in order for the relationship to continue. Over time, that can make dependency feel normal. It can make it harder to celebrate when a family grows stronger and needs less outside help. And it can place subtle pressure on programs to preserve the sponsorship connection rather than help a family build toward independence.

That is not what HCW wants for children and families. We want children to grow up in families that are able to care for them. We want caregivers to gain strength, stability, and confidence. We want support to be meaningful, targeted, and responsive to what is actually needed.

We want local professionals to have the tools and backing they need to do their work well. And we want families, over time, to need *less* outside intervention because they are standing stronger on their own.

That is the heart of Family Empowerment Advocacy.

It is a model that honors donors by inviting them into something more truthful and more transformational. It says: your generosity matters deeply, and here is how it can matter in the way that is best for children. It says: your role is not to sustain dependency, but to help make stability possible. It says: the real heroes of this story are not distant sponsors, but children, families, and the skilled local professionals who walk with them toward healing and strength.



This is where HCW's value of radical courage becomes so important. It takes courage to move away from a model that is familiar, marketable, and emotionally satisfying. It takes courage to tell supporters that what feels personal is not always what is most helpful. It takes courage to redesign donor engagement around what truly serves the best interests of children and families rather than around what has traditionally been easiest to explain. And it takes courage to trust that donors can handle the truth. At HCW, we believe our Advocate donors are capable of more than sentimental connection. We believe they want to invest in what truly works. We believe they can appreciate the professionalism of local case managers, the complexity of family strengthening, and the dignity of a model that does not keep a child's hardship on display year after year to sustain support. Most of all, we believe children and families deserve that honesty from us.

If our goal is not just to relieve hardship for a moment but to help families become stronger, safer, and more self-sustaining, then our funding model should reflect that goal. Our donor engagement should reflect that goal. Our storytelling should reflect that goal.

That is what HCW is choosing. Not because it is easier, but because it is truer.

And because radical courage means being willing to leave behind what is familiar in order to build something more faithful, more dignifying, and more aligned with what actually helps children and families thrive. HCW's Family Empowerment Advocacy model is an invitation to do just that. It is an invitation to support the work that really changes lives. It is an invitation to honor families by preserving their dignity. It is an invitation to stand behind local skilled professionals whose casework helps children not only meet today's needs, but move toward a stronger tomorrow. And it is an invitation to believe that the best support is not support that lasts forever, but support that helps a family one day no longer need it at all.



"The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin."

Psalm 146:8-9



# Trust is a Ladder: How Allyships Earn It Over Time

**Trust isn't a switch you can just flip on. It's a ladder.**

In global child welfare allyships, that distinction matters, because when we *act* like we're already at "full trust" before we've earned it, everyone knows the truth. Local allies can feel abandoned or second-guessed. Global allies can feel anxious or in the dark. And when expectations are unclear, it's often staff and children (and their families) who end up carrying the weight.

At Helping Children Worldwide, we talk about **radical trust** as one of our core values. But radical trust doesn't mean "hands off." It doesn't mean "no oversight." And it definitely doesn't mean "we never ask hard questions." Quite the contrary. Radical trust means we are committed to building the kind of relationship that can hold both deep respect and clear accountability - without shame, without power plays, and without surprises.

I think of this as a **trust ladder**.

## Why this matters

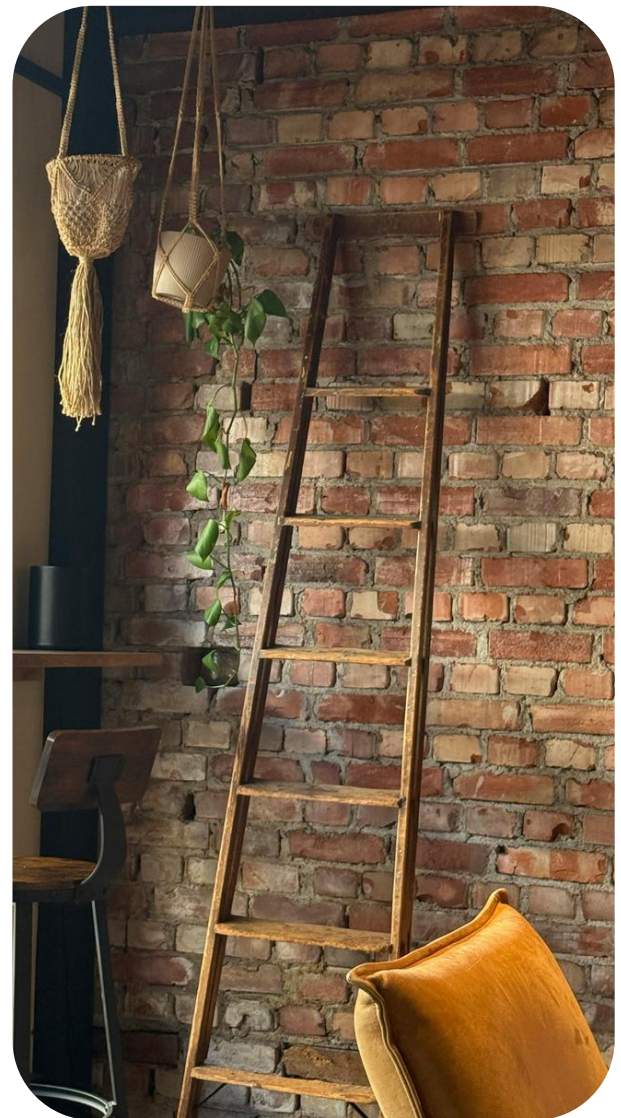
Let's say that our allyship is humming along. The relationship is warm. The mission is shared. Everyone's intentions are good. Then a monthly report comes in late. Or the numbers don't reconcile. Or a program metric dips and no one mentioned it until the quarter ended.

And suddenly, two different fears wake up in the room:

- The local leadership and staff worries: "If we tell the whole truth, will we be judged? Will they pull support? Will we lose face?"
- The global ally worries: "If we don't ask questions, are we enabling harm? Are we being naïve? Are we failing our responsibility?"

That's the moment where people start confusing oversight with distrust, and confusing autonomy with absence.

What's usually happening isn't that trust is broken. It's that the relationship is trying to live on a rung it hasn't built yet.





## Radical trust: what it is (and what it isn't)

Radical trust is:

- A commitment to long-term relationship, not short-term performance
- A bias toward assuming good intent while insisting on shared standards
- Clear agreements about roles, decision rights, and responsibilities
- The ability to tell the truth early, and especially when it's hard
- Accountability that strengthens leadership instead of bypassing it

Radical trust is not:

- "No questions asked"
- "Do whatever you want because you're local"
- Avoiding difficult conversations to keep the peace
- Ignoring red flags in the name of respect
- Oversight that only flows one direction (from funder to ally)

Radical trust is not fragile. Real trust can handle clarity. Real trust requires it.

## The Trust Ladder: five rungs that build real partnership

### Rung 1: Orientation

*Shared purpose, roles, and decision rights*

Orientation is where many allyships think they're aligned... until real decisions start showing up. This rung is about getting specific before the pressure hits:

- What are we trying to accomplish together (not just in theory, but in reality - this year)?
- Who is responsible for what?
- Who decides what?
- What information must be shared regularly, and in what format?
- What does "success" look like: programmatically and ethically?

In child welfare work, this is not bureaucracy. It's protection of children and their vulnerable families.

A sign you're solid on this rung: Both partners can explain the relationship the same way, and more importantly, can name who decides what without guessing.



## Rung 2: Reliability

*Doing what you said you'd do (small things first)*

Reliability is where trust becomes real. It isn't built through speeches. It's built through follow-through:

- Reports submitted when promised
- Meetings held consistently
- Deliverables completed
- Commitments kept - or renegotiated quickly when circumstances change

This is also why we start small on purpose. If an allyship can't reliably do the basics, scaling up money, responsibility, or autonomy it isn't radical trust; it's risk.

A sign you're solid on this rung: You don't have to chase each other. You can count on each other.

## Rung 3: Transparency

*"Here's what went wrong" without fear.*

This is where allyships either deepen or start to fracture. Transparency means bad news isn't hidden.

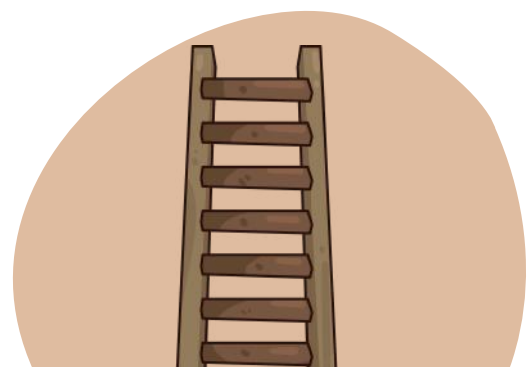
Mistakes aren't managed through silence. Challenges are named early, while there's still time to respond well.

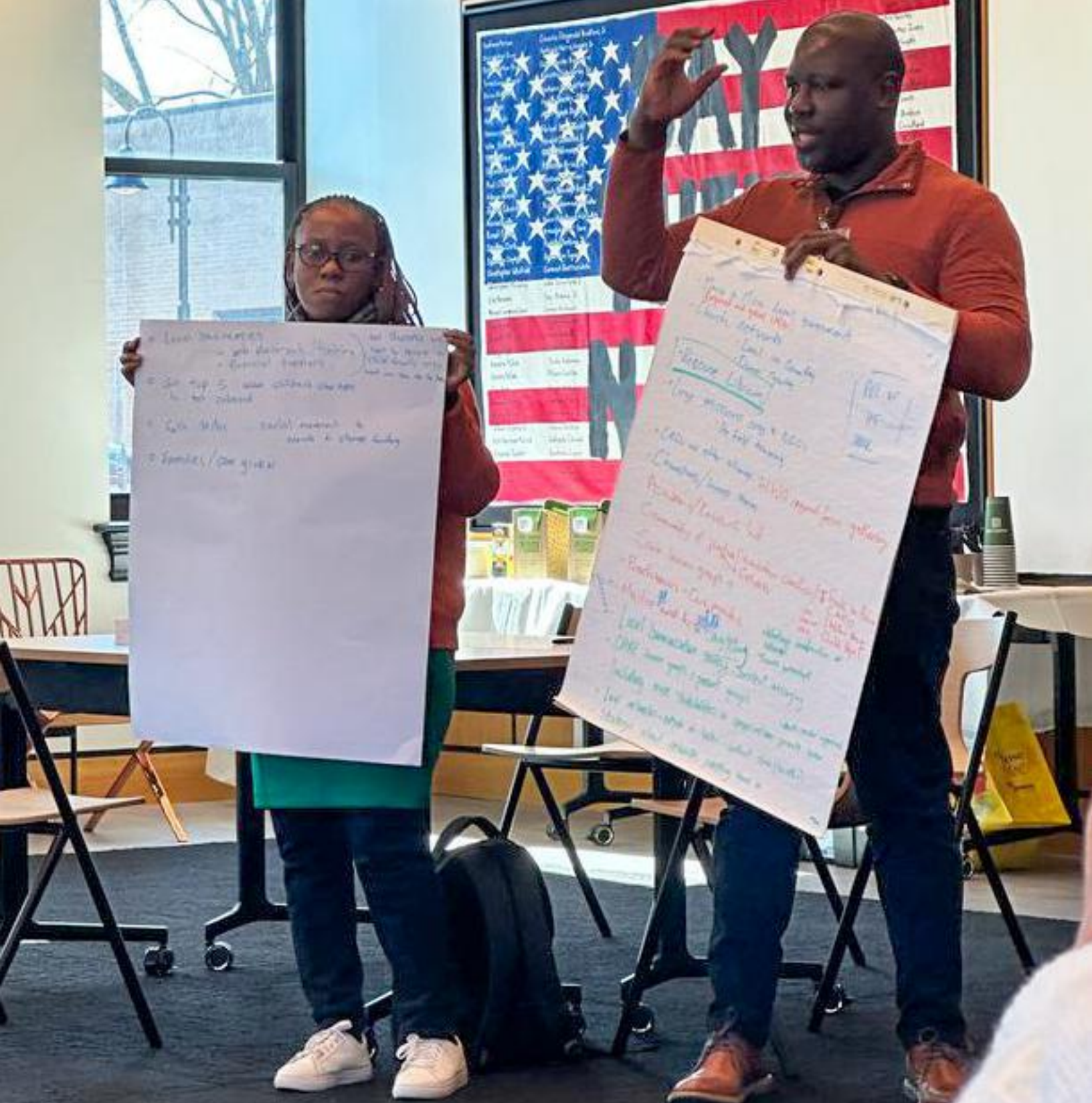
But we have to name the reality: transparency is harder when one partner holds the resources. If local leaders fear punishment, humiliation, or sudden withdrawal of support, the incentive becomes performance instead of honesty. So transparency isn't just something we "require." It's a climate we build together.

Transparency sounds like:

- "We missed this deadline and here's why."
- "These numbers don't reconcile yet, but here's how we're working on it."
- "A staff issue surfaced and we need help navigating it."
- "We tried this and it didn't work, and here's what we're learning."

A sign you're solid on this rung: Problems come to the table early and without blame, and both sides treat the truth as a gift, not a threat.





**“Radical trust means we are committed to building the kind of relationship that can hold both deep respect and clear accountability - without shame, without power plays, and without surprises.”**

## Rung 4: Shared Power

*Local leadership leads; global ally supports and learns*

Shared power is the rung most people say they want (until it costs something). This rung means local leaders aren't just consulted; they are trusted to lead decisions that shape programs, priorities, staffing, and strategy. And global allies practice the discipline of supporting without steering.

Shared power does not mean the global ally disappears. It means they show up differently:

- As a thought partner, not a boss
- As a capacity-builder, not a controller
- As a learner, not "the expert"
- As an ally who respects the reality local teams live inside every day

And shared power goes hand-in-hand with the systems that make leadership sustainable: clear documentation, strong financial controls, transparent reporting, and healthy internal governance.

A sign you're solid on this rung: Local leadership makes key calls, and can also explain the "why," while the global ally resists the urge to override when anxious.

## Rung 5: Mutual Accountability

*Both sides are coachable; both can say "no"*

This is the top rung, and it's rare. Mutual accountability means neither ally is above feedback.

- Local allies can name when global support is confusing, slow, or misaligned.
- Global allies can name when expectations are not being met.

- Both can challenge each other respectfully.
- Both can say "no" when something threatens mission integrity, child safety, or ethical practice.

This rung is where radical trust matures into something steady: not dependent on personalities, not easily shaken by a hard season.

A sign you're solid on this rung: Hard conversations happen directly, kindly, and quickly, and the relationship gets stronger as a result.

## Three practices we use at HCW to climb one rung at a time

Here are three simple habits that help trust become real, without sliding into either control or chaos.

### 1) A "no surprises" rhythm

We set a consistent cadence where both sides share:

- what's going well,
- what's stuck,
- what changed,
- and what support is needed.



Not to interrogate, but so we can respond early, together.

## 2) Clear decision rights (written down)

We name who owns which decisions: program, finance, HR, safeguarding, communications, so we don't rely on assumptions or personalities. When decision rights are unclear, people start reacting emotionally. When they're clear, people can collaborate.

## 3) Truth-telling scripts that protect dignity

We practice direct communication that is kind and specific, using a simple frame:

**What I'm seeing → Why it matters → What I need → What do you think is the best next step?**

This keeps hard conversations from becoming personal, and keeps "respect" from turning into silence.

## Where are you on the ladder?

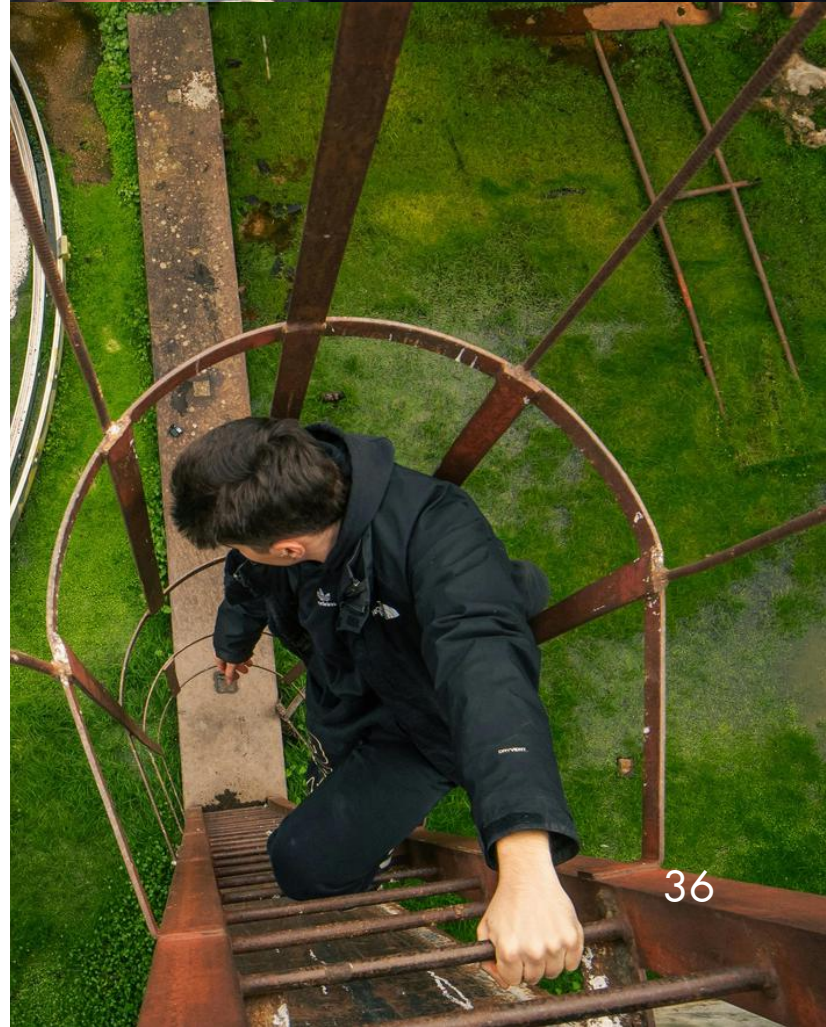
This isn't a test. It's a tool. If you think of trust as a ladder, you realize that you're climbing toward radical trust, but you get there one rung at a time. And just like a real ladder, you can't (or shouldn't) skip a rung.

If your partnership is building Orientation and Reliability, that's not failure. That's reality. The danger isn't that you're on rung two. The danger is pretending you're on rung five, and resenting each other when the allyship can't carry that weight yet.

Radical trust doesn't ask us to skip steps. It asks us to commit to the long work:

- relationship that lasts,
- communication that stays honest,
- truth told in love,
- and the humility to keep climbing.

Because child welfare is too important for pretend trust. And we owe it to the children we serve to keep climbing that ladder.



# The Transformative Power of Global Policy

My experience as an intern with Helping Children Worldwide working on child welfare policy for Sierra Leone has been one of the most meaningful and professionally enriching journeys I have had. Coming into this role as a former foster care case manager with four years of experience, I expected to build on my knowledge but I did not expect to grow in the ways that I have.

Working in foster care taught me the importance of advocacy, structure, and consistency in protecting vulnerable children. However, this internship has expanded my perspective to a global level. Contributing to child welfare policy in Sierra Leone has challenged me to think beyond the systems I am used to and to consider cultural, economic, and social factors that impact children and families in entirely different ways. It has deepened my understanding of what it truly means to serve children ethically and sustainably.

One of the most unique aspects of this internship is its virtual format. At first, I wondered if working remotely would make it difficult to feel connected but it has been the complete opposite. The flexibility of being virtual has allowed me to balance my responsibilities while still being fully engaged, and I have consistently felt included, supported, and valued as part of the team.

Every Tuesday, we come together for staff meetings that bring all departments into one space. These meetings are incredibly insightful because each department provides updates on what they are working on, which helps me understand how every piece contributes to the larger mission. What stands out the most is that interns are not just observers, we are active participants. We are encouraged to speak, share updates on our projects, ask questions, and contribute ideas. That level of inclusion has made me feel respected and empowered in my role.

In addition to staff meetings, our Thursday cohort meetings have been a safe and supportive space to connect on a deeper level. These sessions allow us to debrief, reflect on our work, and openly discuss challenges we may be facing. Being able to talk through our projects, ask for help when needed, and hear from others who are going through similar experiences has been incredibly grounding. It reminds me that I am not alone in this process and that growth often comes through collaboration and shared learning.

I cannot speak about this experience without acknowledging the incredible support from Ms. Laura, Ms. Yasmine, and Ms. Reyanda. Their guidance, encouragement, and willingness to pour into us as interns have made a lasting impact on me. They have created an environment where learning is prioritized, questions are welcomed, and growth is intentional. Their leadership has not only helped me develop professionally but has also strengthened my confidence in my abilities.

Overall, this internship has been more than just a learning experience, it has been transformative. It has allowed me to merge my background in foster care with a broader, global perspective on child welfare. It has shown me the power of collaboration, the importance of inclusive spaces, and the impact of strong, supportive leadership. I can confidently say that this has been one of the best experiences of my professional journey, and it has further solidified my passion for advocating for children, no matter where they are in the world.

*Amillion Johnson*  
**INTERN,  
HELPING CHILDREN WORLDWIDE**



# Aligning Our Giving With What Children Need Most



Recently, I read the new Barna research commissioned by Faith to Action, and one finding stayed with me: 90% of U.S. Christians agree that children thrive best in families. At the same time, more than one in four Christians, 28%, still report financially supporting an orphanage, children's home, or residential care program, representing an estimated \$4.5 billion in annual giving.

That matters, even for those of us who have already made the shift.

At Helping Children Worldwide, we have worked hard to align our ministry, our partnerships, and our giving with what is best for children. We believe children belong in families, and we have committed ourselves to supporting family strengthening, reintegration, prevention, and community-based care. For many in our HCW community, that conviction is already settled. But the Barna findings remind us that this is not yet the norm in the broader U.S. church.

Many Christians and churches across the United States are still giving to institutional models of care, even while saying they believe families are best for children. That does not mean they do not care. In most cases, it means the opposite. Barna found that 81% of those who support residential care say it is the most important cause they support, and the most common motivation is the emotional reward of helping children. But in child welfare, good intentions are not always enough. Compassion matters, but compassion also needs wisdom.

For many years, those of us in care reform assumed the biggest challenge was awareness. We believed that once people understood that many children are separated from family not because they have no one, but because their families are facing poverty, crisis, or lack of support, giving would naturally begin to change.

There has been progress in understanding: 72% of U.S. Christians now say they are aware that poverty is a major driver of orphanage placement, and Barna reports that understanding of poverty as the primary driver increased by 26 percentage points since 2020. And yet, the same study shows how incomplete that understanding still is. Only 23% correctly identify poverty as the most common reason children are placed in residential care. Many still assume the main reasons are abuse, neglect, or parental death.



What that tells us is important. This is not only an awareness problem. It is also a habit problem. A story problem. Institutional care remains familiar and visible. It offers simple ways to help and easy ways to measure generosity. A building can be visited. A bed can be funded. A child can be sponsored. Donors can feel connected right away. That pattern is reinforced by the church itself: 40% of donors say they first learned about the orphanage they support through their church, and 68% of mission trips to orphanages are organized by churches.

Family strengthening work is different. It is often slower, quieter, and harder to communicate. It may look like a trained social worker helping a grandmother keep children in school. It may look like family tracing, kinship care, trauma-informed case management, crisis support, or helping a family stabilize before separation happens. It is deeply meaningful work, but it does not always fit the models many churches and donors have been taught to recognize. That is why this moment matters.

For those of us who have already made this shift, the Barna research is a reminder that our work is not only to fund differently. It is also to help others see differently. Even though attitudes are moving, behavior has not changed nearly as fast. Barna found that while positive views of orphanages have declined and belief in their essential role has dropped, engagement with residential care has remained largely unchanged. In fact, compared with 2020, 9% more Christians now report financially supporting residential care programs like orphanages and children's homes.

The church still plays a major role here. For many people, the church is the front door into missions, child sponsorship, and global engagement. Churches help shape the stories people hear, the responses they trust, and the actions that feel faithful. So this is not only about nonprofit strategy. It is also about discipleship. About teaching. About helping people understand that supporting families, strengthening communities, and funding skilled local care is not a lesser response. It is indeed, the better one. This is not about shame. It is about clarity, courage, and continued witness.

If we truly believe children belong in families, then we cannot stop at changing our own budgets. We also need to help make family-based care more visible to others. We need to tell clearer stories about reunification, prevention, kinship care, and the daily work that helps children remain where they belong. We need to keep building better invitations for churches and donors who want to help, but may not yet know how.

The Barna research suggests that many hearts may already be moving in the right direction. But hearts alone are not enough. Budgets, habits, and church practices must move too. Because children do not just need our compassion. They need our courage to keep leading the change.



# James 1:27 Isn't a Slogan. It's a Systems Diagnosis.

**What "pure and faultless religion" looks like when you've learned better; and chosen to change.**

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:27)

If you grew up around church, or around Christian nonprofit culture, you've heard James 1:27 so many times it can start to feel like a banner.

A mission statement.  
A fundraising tagline.

A verse we quote when we want to prove we're serious about compassion.

At Helping Children Worldwide, we know this verse well. And we also need to say something out loud that many organizations avoid saying: we once helped create and support an orphanage model. We believed we were living James 1:27. We meant love. We meant protection. We meant faithfulness.

And then we learned better. Not all at once. Not painlessly. Not without grief. But through years of relationship, listening, evidence, and hard conversations with local leaders and child welfare experts, we started to face a truth that changed us: sometimes the thing you're doing for "orphans"... can unintentionally be part of what keeps children separated from family.

That realization doesn't erase the love that motivated us. But it does demand something of us. Because James 1:27 doesn't just name *who* to care about. It exposes *how* we care - and what counts as "pure and faultless" in God's eyes. And that "how" becomes deeply inconvenient the moment you bump into real child welfare.

Not "children are cute" child welfare. Not "Christmas gifts for the kids in the orphanage" child welfare.

I mean the messy, high-stakes, systems-level work of keeping children safe without stealing their childhood, their identity, their family, or their belonging.

So let's roll up our sleeves and talk about James 1:27 the way it actually works: not like a bumper sticker, but more like a mirror.



## The Verse Names Two Groups for a Reason

**James says: orphans *and* widows.**

In the ancient world, those weren't just "sad categories." They were people with the same underlying reality: They were vulnerable because they were disconnected from protection, provision, and power. They lacked the social scaffolding that makes survival possible.

James is basically saying: If your faith is real, it will show up where the scaffolding is missing. Not with sentiment. With action that actually protects.

And here's where the verse becomes a systems diagnosis: sometimes our most passionate "orphan care" efforts have been built around replacing scaffolding with an institution instead of strengthening families and communities so kids don't have to lose everything in the first place.

That's not a small difference. That's the difference between relief and repair.

### **"Look After" Doesn't Mean "Take Over"**

We read "look after" and assume it means:

- bring them into our program
- put them under our control
- surround them with our money
- measure success by our photos and reports

But in child welfare, the instinct to "take over" can be one of the easiest ways to accidentally cause harm. Because children aren't problems to solve. They are people with histories, attachments, identities, grandparents, aunts, neighbors, teachers, pastors, social workers, and community leaders: an entire ecosystem that either gets strengthened... or replaced.

So here's the sleeves-rolled-up translation: Pure religion does not require being the hero. It requires being faithful. And faithfulness in child welfare often looks like choosing the slower, less glamorous work that keeps children rooted.

That's the shift HCW has been making: moving from an orphanage-centered model toward family-based care, prevention, and stronger local child protection systems.

It's not a rebrand. It's repentance with a work plan.



## Radical Trust Isn't Naïve. It's Disciplined Faith.

At HCW, we talk about radical trust because we believe partnership can be both humble and responsible.

But let's be honest: "trust" gets abused. Some people use trust as a spiritualized excuse to avoid oversight: "We just trust our partners. God will handle the details." Others use control as a spiritualized way to avoid vulnerability: "We can't release funds unless we approve every decision." Neither is faith. One is negligence in church clothes. The other is fear in a blazer.

Radical trust (real trust) is disciplined faith. It's built over time. It's tested. It tells the truth. It stays accountable. It looks like:

- Clarity: Who decides what? Who owns what? What happens if something goes wrong?
- Transparency: "Here's what we tried, here's what failed, here's what we learned."
- Mutual accountability: Local partners can say "no" to donors. Donors can ask hard questions without punishment.
- Shared power: The people closest to children have real authority, not just performative input.
- Protection of relationships: We don't weaponize funding to force agreement or compliance.

Radical trust isn't "hands off." It's hands open: open to listening, open to learning, open to being wrong, open to letting leadership come from places we weren't trained to respect.

And yes: open to the discomfort of not being the center of the story.

## "Keep Yourself From Being Polluted" Might Mean: Stop Letting the System Use Kids

We tend to like the first half of James 1:27 better. "Look after orphans and widows" - yes, and amen.

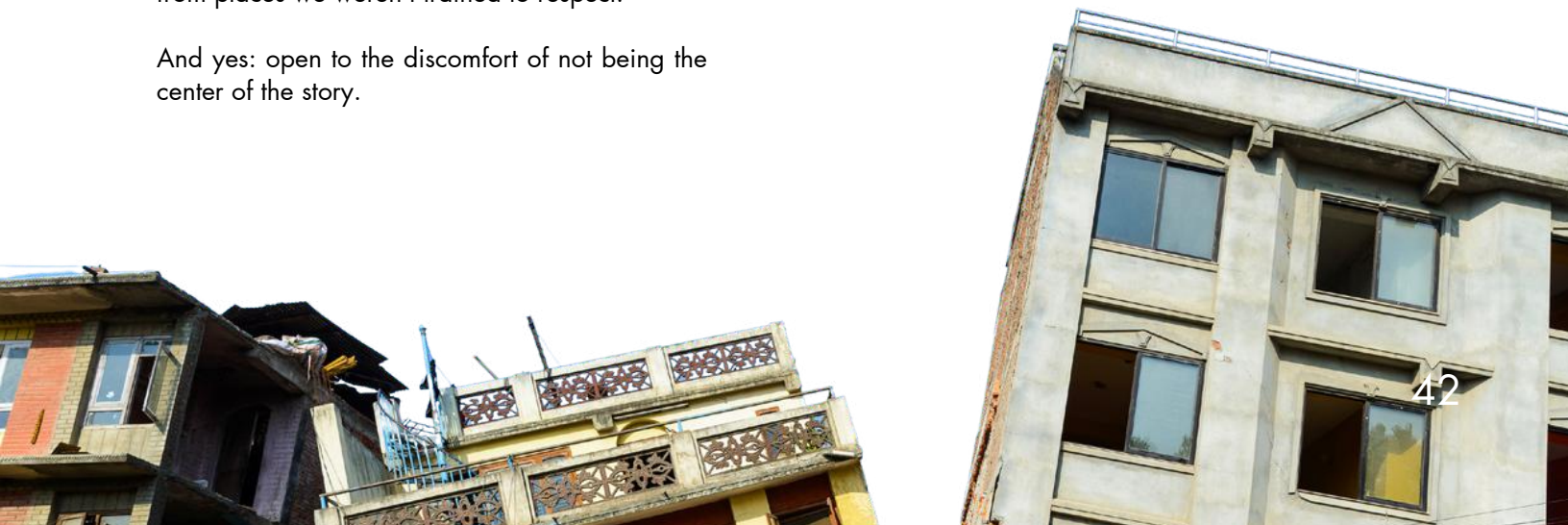
But the verse keeps going: "...and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." We often reduce that to personal morality, and of course that matters a great deal.

But what if James is also warning us about how power works? Because in modern child welfare, "the world" has a script:

- children become instruments for fundraising
- trauma becomes marketing
- poverty becomes a brand
- institutions become proof of impact
- Western donors become the "solution"
- local families become suspicious by default
- local leaders become "allies" only as long as they comply

That's pollution, and it doesn't always look evil. Sometimes it looks like efficiency. Sometimes it looks like excellence. Sometimes it looks like "we built something so good."

But if the system requires children to remain separated in order to keep the funding flowing, James 1:27 demands the courage to ask: Who is this really serving? The verse won't let us hide behind good intentions. It's a verse about outcomes: about what actually protects the most vulnerable.



## What Does “Pure Religion” Look Like in Care Reform?

Here’s what it looks like when faith grows up, and also keeps its nerve:

### 1) Prevention becomes holy work

Not because it’s trendy. Because it keeps children from losing their people. Prevention looks like:

- helping a grandmother access food support so she can keep her grandchild
- building strong case management so risk is identified early
- strengthening livelihoods so poverty doesn’t become a pipeline into separation
- investing in community-based services so families aren’t alone

It’s not flashy. It’s radical faithfulness.

### 2) Family-based care becomes the goal, not the exception

Not every home is safe, we know that. But the answer to unsafe family care is not automatically institutional care. The answer is a functioning protection system:

- kinship assessment and support
- supported reunification when possible
- emergency foster care when needed
- supervised reintegration
- long-term follow-up
- trained social workers and clear decision pathways

This is the unglamorous infrastructure of real love.

### 3) We stop confusing buildings with belonging

If your “orphan care” strategy is primarily bricks, beds, and branding, you might be funding the very thing that keeps children from going home. Care reform asks a brutally honest question: Are we funding separation or strengthening connection?

### 4) Donors practice repentance, not defensiveness

If you’ve supported an orphanage in the past, hear this:

You needn’t feel ashamed. You were doing the best you knew how to do. A holy regret enables us to say “I would do it differently now.” And repentance requires the next faithful step. That faith looks like:

- telling the truth about what we didn’t know
- grieving what we meant to do
- changing what we do next
- refusing to double down just to protect our identity as “helpers”

That’s not a betrayal of the past. That’s sanctification.



## Radical Faithfulness Looks Like Courageous, Accountable Love

Here's the through-line: James 1:27 calls us to show up where protection is missing.

Radical trust calls us to show up without grabbing the steering wheel. Care reform calls us to show up for children in a way that doesn't cost them their belonging. And real faith means we don't need to be the hero to be obedient.

We can fund systems that work. We can tell the truth even when it complicates the story.

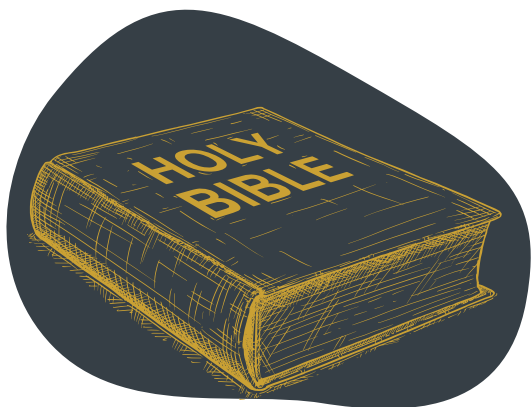
We can shift power to where it belongs and where it can do the most good. We can build the capacity of local leadership instead of importing control. Because pure religion isn't measured by how moved we feel. It's measured by whether the most vulnerable are actually safer... and more connected... and more free.

So yes: care about orphans. But let's stop supporting the systems that create them. Let's do the kind of child welfare work that makes orphanhood rarer: by strengthening families, building protection, and practicing a faith brave enough to change.

That's a 'sleeves-rolled-up' religion.

And honestly?

That might be one of the most "pure and faultless" gifts the church can offer the world right now.



# JAMES 1:27

*Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.*



**ONE  
TWENTY  
SEVEN**

**THE WIDOW AND  
THE ORPHAN**

Scan the QR code  
for downloading  
the Bible Study:



# Partners and Allies: Why HCW Uses Two Different Words on Purpose



If you follow our communications, you may have noticed that HCW uses two different words to describe the relationships that govern our work. We use two specific terms on purpose: **partnerships** with the organizations that join with us in supporting others, (ie., U.S. churches, volunteers, and donors) and **allyships** (with local and community-driven organizations that we support). That distinction isn't semantic. It's a guardrail.

Because if we talk about these relationships as if they're the same, we quietly import expectations that don't belong, and we can unintentionally recreate power dynamics we're trying to undo.

Someday we may again be comfortable in using the same term to speak of both, but that will come after people have fully embraced global development models that don't tend to infect the relationship with dependency and counterproductive power dynamics.





## Two relationships. Two kinds of responsibility.

HCW's work sits in the middle of a triangle:

- Churches, volunteers, organizations, and donors who contribute resources, prayer, and advocacy
- HCW as a connector, steward, and technical partner
- Local organizations doing the daily work with children and families, inside their own systems and communities

All three matter. But the relationships are not interchangeable, and each has a specific role and responsibility.

### Partnerships: shared mission, shared stewardship

When we say "partnership" in describing a relationship, we're naming something with defined expectations:

- You are investing in a mission you believe in.
- We owe you **transparent stewardship** of that investment.
- You should expect **clear reporting**, honest updates, and responsible oversight.
- You have a role in the work: through giving, learning, praying, advocating, and staying engaged with integrity.
- You should expect we will listen respectfully and take your feedback seriously.
- We are engaged in an agreed upon joint undertaking.
- We are each investing in something together.

Partnership is a mutual commitment where **resources and accountability** are central, because stewardship matters. When people give sacrificially, they deserve clarity about what their gift is doing, and what it's not doing.

### Allyship: local leadership leads, outsiders support

When we say "allyship" with local organizations, we're naming a different posture:

- Local organizations are not "our field." They are not "our projects."
- They are leaders and experts in their own context.
- Our job is not to direct them. Our job is to support, strengthen, and walk alongside them.
- Our investment is in their ventures.
- When that investment includes building capacity, maintaining a firm boundary between those roles is essential for success.

Allyship is often a relationship where one party could yield disproportionate power and exert control (usually resources, access, global voice), but instead intentionally chooses to use that power carefully to avoid destruction of sustained progress.

Allyship means we show up with humility and seriousness:

- We listen first.
- We invest in capacity, not dependency.
- We share decision-making, not just tasks.
- We tell the truth, even when it's uncomfortable.
- We stay committed for the long haul.

Allyship isn't charity with a nicer label. It's solidarity, skill, and accountability.



## Why the power distinction matters

### 1) Because money changes the room

Let's be honest: when one side controls the funding, it's easy for the other side to feel pressure to perform, to please, or to stay quiet.

If we don't name the power imbalance, it will still shape the relationship in unspoken ways:

- people avoid hard conversations
- problems get hidden until they become crises
- reporting becomes storytelling
- decisions drift toward "what donors want" instead of "what children need"

Using different language helps us stay awake to what money does to trust.

### 2) Because "partnership" can imply control of program decisions and more

In the U.S., we often use "partner" to mean, "We're in this together, so we get a vote. That makes sense with donors and churches, because you're investing in HCW's mission, and HCW owes you stewardship of the gifts you've given

But applying that same "vote" logic to local organizations can become harmful fast:

- outsiders start setting priorities
- local leaders become implementers instead of owners
- contextual nuance gets flattened
- community accountability gets replaced by donor accountability

Local organizations should not have to "earn" their leadership of their own programs in their own country.

### 3) Accountability is real, but it's not the same thing as dominance

Some people hear "allyship" and think it means: *No expectations. No oversight. Just trust them.*

Real allyship includes:

- clear agreements
- transparent reporting
- shared goals and metrics
- boundaries and decision-rights
- mutual accountability

Trust isn't a blank check. Trust is built through reliability, transparency, and truth-telling over time.

The difference is this: accountability in allyship is collaborative - not controlling. It's about strengthening systems, not managing people.

### 4) The goal is locally led change, not internationally managed programs

HCW's north star is not "successful projects." It's stronger local systems that protect children and keep families together - and this is the most important part: whether or not HCW is in the room.

That requires local ownership:

- local strategies
- local leadership development
- local coordination with government and community structures
- local learning loops that don't depend on outside validation

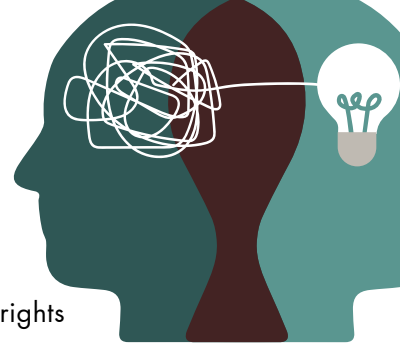
Allyship keeps us oriented to the right outcome: long-term, locally sustained protection for children that doesn't need our support forever.

## What this looks like in practice

Here's what we try to do, consistently:

With churches and donors (partnership):

- Provide clear expectations and regular communication
- Give you honest reporting (including challenges, not just wins)
- Demonstrate good stewardship of gifts and responsible financial controls
- Share opportunities to learn, engage, and advocate without romanticizing poverty or vulnerability



With local organizations (allyship):

- Co-created plans for application of support that reflect local priorities and constraints
- Capacity-building that strengthens leadership, systems, and accountability
- Technical support that is requested, contextualized, and teachable
- Shared truth-telling: “Here’s what’s working,” and “Here’s what isn’t,” without shame

And in the middle, HCW’s role is to hold the center with integrity:

- honoring donors with transparency
- honoring local leaders with respect and shared power
- protecting children by refusing shortcuts that feel good but harm long-term outcomes

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- protecting children by refusing shortcuts that feel good but harm long-term outcomes

## A word to our supporters: this is your lane too

If you’re a donor or church partner, this distinction is good news.

It means HCW won’t use your generosity to create dependency or to override local leadership.

It means you’re not funding an image, you’re funding an empowerment shift:

- from external control to local ownership
- from quick fixes to durable systems that protect children for the long haul


That shift is slower. It’s messier. It requires more radical honesty. In the context of care reform, we’ve seen it’s the only way real change happens.

## The bottom line

We call churches and donors partners because stewardship and shared mission matter.

We call local organizations allies because local leadership, power-awareness, and long-term capacity matter.

Different words. Different responsibilities. Same goal.



**“Allyship keeps us oriented to the right outcome: long-term, locally sustained protection for children that doesn’t need our support forever.”**

# Truth-Telling Is a Child Protection Intervention



**Why honesty is harder than strategy - and why reintegration and family strengthening depends on it.**

In global child welfare, we talk a lot about best practice. We talk about case management, safeguarding, gatekeeping, family strengthening, follow-up, and reintegration plans. We build tools and frameworks and training manuals. We host webinars. We write policies that sound solid and clean. And all of that matters. But there is one intervention underneath every other intervention - one ingredient without which all the rest becomes fragile, performative, or easily reversed:

Truth-telling.

Not the “carefully worded” kind. Not the donor-safe kind. Not the kind that keeps everyone calm and the funding steady.

The kind of truth that tells the real story of why children are separated, what institutions create in a community, what foreign money incentivizes, and what it actually costs to reunify a child with family, and stay reunified. Because reintegration is not primarily a logistics problem. It is a reality problem. And reality is expensive.

Why truth-telling is so hard in orphan care?

Most people did not get involved in “orphan care” because they wanted power or control. They got involved because they saw a child. They saw a need. They saw vulnerability. They saw a story that made compassion feel like urgency. And then they responded, often with real sacrifice.

So when the sector begins to say, “Some of our well-intended responses unintentionally contributed to family separation,” it doesn’t land like a neutral program evaluation. It lands like an accusation. Truth-telling threatens something deeper than a model. It threatens identity:

- If the orphanage wasn’t the best answer, what does that say about the years I gave to support it?
- If the child had family, what does that say about the story I told my church?
- If we missed harm, what does that say about my discernment, my theology, my integrity?

This is why institutional change is rarely defeated by lack of evidence. It’s defeated by unprocessed grief.

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**“It is often easier to fund a building, a bed, and a child’s “before-and-after” story than it is to fund social work, prevention, and slow family strengthening.”**



## The truths we tend to avoid

There are certain sentences that feel almost too sharp to say out loud, especially in Christian mission contexts where we've been trained to "speak graciously," protect unity, and avoid discouraging supporters. But if we won't say them, we can't address the system that keeps children separated.

Here are a few truths the global child welfare community regularly runs into:

**1) Most children in residential care are separated because of poverty and crisis, not because they have no family.**

That doesn't mean the hardship isn't real. It means the solution should be *family stabilization*, not family replacement.

## 2) Institutions create pull factors.

When a residential facility exists, especially one supported by foreign donors, it becomes a magnet for families in desperation, for community referrals, for local leaders trying to solve visible needs with limited options, and sometimes for people who benefit from keeping beds full.

## 3) "Rescue" language can erase families.

If our story requires a villain or a void, we will unconsciously narrate caregivers as absent, irresponsible, or dangerous. And then we build programs that treat them like problems to manage rather than people to strengthen.

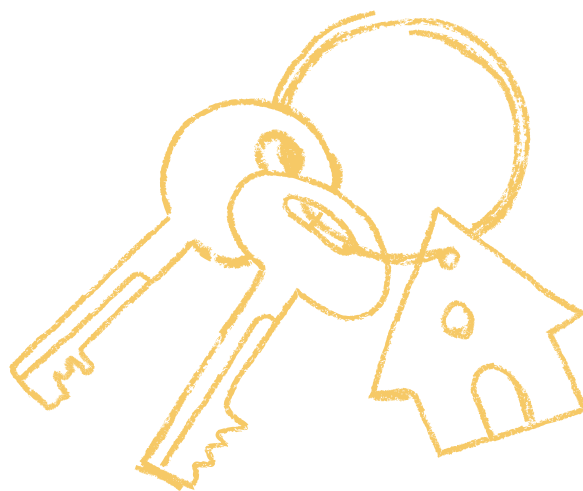
## 4) Reintegration is not a ceremony. It's a long-term commitment.

The day a child goes home is not the "happy ending." It's the beginning of the hard part: economic stabilization, parenting support, school continuity, trauma-informed follow-up, and community-based protection.

## 5) The sector has sometimes rewarded separation more than prevention.

It is often easier to fund a building, a bed, and a child's "before-and-after" story than it is to fund social work, prevention, and slow family strengthening.

Truth-telling means admitting these dynamics without blaming the people who were caught inside them. Because the world is broken, and systems can be harmful even when the people in them are kind.



## What truth-telling threatens (and why we still need it)

Truth-telling threatens:

- Funding streams built on simple narratives
- Legacy projects built on sunk costs
- Power structures that rely on information asymmetry
- Partnership dynamics where one side controls the story
- Board confidence when the “wins” become more complex
- Public reputation when certainty gives way to humility

So it makes sense that leaders avoid it. Not because they are evil, but because the cost feels enormous. But here’s the catch:

*The cost of avoiding truth is paid by children and families.*

When we protect the story, we prolong the system. When we refuse to name incentives, we keep funding the wrong outcomes. When we avoid discomfort, we choose institutional stability over family belonging. Truth-telling is not a communications strategy. It’s child protection.

## Reintegration depends on truth in three directions

When children have been separated from family, whether through institutionalization, informal fostering arrangements, crisis migration, or poverty-driven placement, reintegration requires honesty in at least three directions.

### 1) Truth with donors

Donors deserve better than a sentimental narrative. They deserve reality. That means saying things like:

- “This child has family.”
- “The need is real, but the solution is different than we once assumed.”

- “Your support will look less dramatic and more systemic now.”
- “Success will be measured in stability and prevention, not in how many children we can show you.”

This is hard because truth with donors sometimes means fewer “easy wins.” But it also means donors become partners in maturity instead of consumers of inspiration.

### 2) Truth with communities

Communities know what’s happening. They know why children come into care. They know which families are desperate and which local leaders are overwhelmed. Truth-telling here means:

- acknowledging the pressures that drive separation
- refusing to pretend institutions are neutral
- naming the “bed-filling” economy that can form around residential care
- building gatekeeping that is collaborative, not punitive

It means we stop pretending that a residential home is simply a benevolent service and admit it can become a gravitational center that distorts everything around it.

### 3) Truth within our own organizations

This might be the hardest one. Truth-telling inside organizations requires asking:

- Are we willing to measure outcomes that might expose our own weaknesses?
- Are we willing to change what we fund, even if it’s less “marketable”?
- Are we willing to admit when we don’t know?
- Are we willing to learn publicly?
- Are we willing to shift power toward local decision-makers, even when that means we lose control of the narrative?

Sometimes the thing blocking reintegration isn’t the family’s capacity. It’s our organization’s fear.

## Truth-telling without shame

One of the greatest risks in this space is that truth becomes a weapon. People hear the critique of orphanages and assume the point is to humiliate past donors, missionaries, founders, or local staff who served with genuine love. That kind of truth-telling burns bridges and creates defensiveness. But truth that heals does something different:

- It distinguishes intent from impact.
- It honors compassion without canonizing the model.
- It invites people into repair instead of exile.

The goal is not to punish the past. The goal is to protect children now.

## What it looks like when truth becomes practice

In our work at Helping Children Worldwide, we've learned that truth-telling isn't a single brave conversation. It's a discipline: built into decisions, messaging, budgets, and metrics.

It looks like:

- Funding social work as the engine, not the "administrative overhead"
- Helping to build gatekeeping systems so families are strengthened before separation happens
- Co-creating reintegration plans with real follow-up, not just reunification events
- Measuring stability, not just placement numbers
- Equipping staff to speak with clarity, even when the story is complicated
- Helping donors grieve and stay, instead of shaming them into silence or letting them drift away

Because "truth" without shepherding becomes abandonment. But truth within relationship becomes transformation.



## The invitation: courage over comfort

If you are a donor, a church partner, a volunteer, a board member, or a supporter who has loved children through an orphanage model, I hope you hear this clearly: Your compassion was not wasted. But compassion that refuses to mature can unintentionally become harm. The next faithful step is not denial. It's courage.

Courage to listen when the story changes. Courage to fund what works, even when it isn't cinematic. Courage to trade rescue narratives for family-strengthening realities.

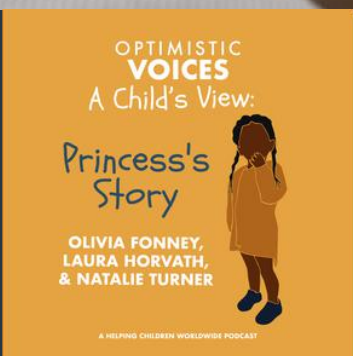
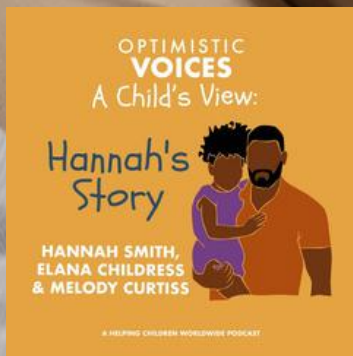
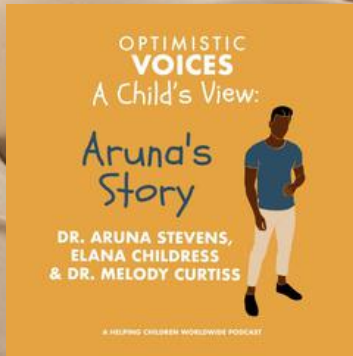
Courage to tell the truth, so children can belong.

Because in global child welfare, truth is not an optional value. It is a pathway home.



# OPTIMISTIC VOICES

A HELPING CHILDREN WORLDWIDE PODCAST



## Have you listened to our newest podcast series **Optimistic Voices: A Child's View** yet?

Hear real stories of perils and mission impact through a child's eyes, with commentary from a young person. Stories guaranteed to change your perspective!



# Transparency Starts at Home

## Reflections on what we've learned and how we're strengthening our own operations

In global child welfare work, we often talk about transparency as something we ask of others: clear reporting, honest communication, clean documentation, safeguarding standards, accountable decision-making. And we should. Children's lives are too precious for vagueness, back-channel confusion, or "just trust us" leadership.

But we make it a point to turn that transparency in both directions. Because if we want transparency in the field, we have to practice it at home. Not as a slogan. As an operating system. Transparency isn't only a value. It's a discipline. It's the daily work of making sure our internal processes are clear enough to sustain trust, especially when things are complex, cross-cultural, and carried by many hands.

Here are a few things we've learned as we've looked closely at our own operations.

### 1) Transparency is not the same thing as "sharing everything"

At Helping Children Worldwide, we've learned that transparency doesn't mean dumping information or forwarding every message to everyone. It means something more mature:

- sharing the *right* information
- with the *right* people
- in the *right* way
- at the *right* time
- so that decisions are grounded, aligned, and accountable

True transparency isn't chaotic. It's structured, disciplined. It reduces confusion. It prevents mixed messages. It creates a shared reality, especially across time zones, cultures, and roles.

And it requires a commitment to healthy communication loops: not one-off conversations that leave others guessing, but clear channels where the right stakeholders can hear the same message and respond from the same set of facts.


### 2) When processes are unclear, relationships carry too much weight

In many mission-founded nonprofits (including ours), people are deeply relational. That's a strength. But we've also learned that when policies, workflows, and decision rights are fuzzy, the organization becomes dependent on personalities. And that's risky. When clarity is missing, the system starts to rely on:

- who is closest to the decision-maker
- who has access to private (back channel) conversations
- who "heard it first"
- who has the strongest voice, or the most history

That kind of setup quietly undermines trust, even when nobody intends harm. It can also create unnecessary tension, especially when one group of stakeholders is operating with information others have not seen, or when key decisions are discussed in ways that bypass approved organizational feedback loops. So we work to reduce personality-dependence by strengthening the basics:

- clearer workflows
- consistent documentation
- defined decision roles
- shared access to key files and reporting
- predictable review processes

A young girl with a ponytail, wearing a grey sweater, is holding the hand of an adult wearing a white shirt and a black watch. They are walking on wooden stairs. The background is blurred greenery.

**Humility is what makes  
transparency safe.  
Without humility,  
transparency becomes  
either performative  
("look how good we  
are") or weaponized  
("gotcha").**

**But with humility,  
transparency becomes  
what it's meant to be: a  
pathway to trust.**

Because children and partners deserve systems that don't wobble when one person is stressed, unavailable, or left out of a loop they belong in.

### 3) Transparency protects people, not just budgets

It's easy to think of transparency mainly as a financial practice: clean books, clear receipts, proper approvals. And yes, of course those matter tremendously. Donors and partners have a right to know how resources are stewarded. But we've learned that transparency is also about protecting people:

- staff who need clarity to do their jobs well
- partners who deserve consistent expectations
- communities that should not be whiplashed by shifting messages
- and most of all, children, whose safety depends on clear standards and enforceable safeguards

When communication is unclear, supervision weakens. When documentation is inconsistent, accountability becomes impossible. When decisions aren't traceable, they become vulnerable to "interpretation." Transparency makes it harder for problems to hide. That's part of the point. And when questions arise - about logistics, timelines, or how a project is handled, transparency also means we keep the conversation in the open channels where appropriate oversight and shared understanding can be maintained.

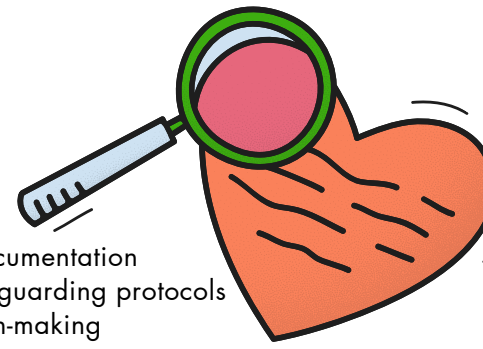
### 4) We can't ask for accountability that we don't model

One of the most important lessons for us has been this: It is not fair, or wise, to require high accountability from partners while letting our own systems stay informal.



If we expect:

- on-time reporting
- clean budgets
- clear program documentation
- adherence to safeguarding protocols
- thoughtful decision-making



Then we need to hold ourselves to the same standard.

That means we're doing our own internal work:

- strengthening our review and approval processes
- clarifying how information flows internally
- documenting expectations before a project launches (not after)
- being honest when we need to slow down and tighten things up
- addressing inconsistencies instead of explaining them away

It also means we protect organizational integrity by keeping key communication in the proper loop - especially when multiple teams, partners or donor groups are involved. Not because we don't value relationships, but because strong relationships are strengthened (not threatened) by clarity.

### 5) Transparency requires humility

This might be the most important reflection of all.

Transparency is not just a technical practice. It's a posture. It's the willingness to say:

- "We didn't communicate that well."
- "That expectation wasn't clear."
- "We need to correct this."
- "We made a decision that created confusion, and we're learning from it."

Humility is what makes transparency safe. Without humility, transparency becomes either performative ("look how good we are") or weaponized ("gotcha"). But with humility, transparency becomes what it's meant to be: a pathway to trust.



## What we're committed to

We're committed to continuing this work, not just in programming, but in all of our operations.

That includes efforts to:

- document processes clearly and keep them current
- align internal communication so partners receive one clear message
- strengthen financial and reporting systems that are easy to understand and verify
- build decision-making structures that are transparent and consistent
- name issues early, kindly and clearly, before confusion grows
- keep child safeguarding and duty-of-care standards at the center

Because we believe this: Transparency is not a PR value. It's a child protection value.

It's a partnership value. It's a stewardship value. And it's part of our discipleship.

## A final word

If you support Helping Children Worldwide, through prayer, giving, advocacy, or partnership, we want you to know we take this seriously.

We won't always get it perfect. But we are committed to being the kind of organization that tells the truth, learns in public when needed, and keeps strengthening the operational backbone that makes our mission sustainable. Not because optics matter. Because children do.

And the work of keeping children safe, keeping families together when possible, and building ethical systems of care when not, requires a foundation of trust.

Transparency starts at home. And we're committed to doing that work.

# Welcoming David Titus Musa as Director of the Child Reintegration Centre

Helping Children Worldwide is pleased to congratulate David Titus Musa as he takes up the mantle of leadership as Director of the Child Reintegration Centre on May 1, 2026.

We also want to take a moment to thank Rev. Olivia Fonnies for her years of service at the helm of CRC. We are grateful for the leadership she has offered in a significant season of CRC's history, and we wish her all the best as she steps into her new role leading Charles Davis UMC in Freetown. Transitions like this mark both an ending and a beginning, and we honor the work that has brought CRC to this point.

This is an important moment for CRC. Leadership matters in any organization, but it matters especially in child welfare services, where the stakes are high and the work demands both courage and care. As Bishop Boye-Caulker has emphasized, the UMC in Sierra Leone is not only continuing its work on behalf of children and families during 2026, but stepping more fully into national and global conversations about care reform under the leadership of someone already recognized as a strong voice in that space.

David comes into this role with more than a decade of progressive experience in child protection, reintegration, program management, training, monitoring and evaluation, and partnership engagement. His work has consistently focused on advancing safer, stronger, family-based solutions for children, reflecting the kind of practical, field-tested leadership this season requires.

He recently completed a Master of Public Administration and a Post Graduate Certificate in Care Transition Acceleration through the Christian Alliance for Orphans Care Transition Accelerator Academy. His training in child protection and safeguarding, case management, emergency foster care, and transition frameworks demonstrates a clear commitment to continued growth.

Because of his long role welcoming mission allies and taking on leadership roles and planning the future of the CRC, David understands both the day-to-day realities on the ground and the broader vision needed to lead the Child Reintegration Centre into the future of national and global care reform. Over many years at CRC, he has served in key roles, including Co-leader to manage programs in the absence of the CRC Director, the Child Support Program Manager and, more recently, Senior Reintegration Consultant in the Transition Coaching and Mentoring Department.





In these positions, he has developed operational tools and case management systems, established SOPs aligned with international child-rights frameworks, trained social workers and frontline staff, coached and mentored institutions in safe reintegration planning, and worked alongside government ministries to strengthen national care reform efforts.

He also brings credibility beyond CRC itself. David has represented CRC in the Sierra Leone Coalition for Family Care, engaging government ministries at regional and national levels as well as international partners, including the UK High Commission and Irish Embassy. He is connected to broader networks shaping care reform through both the 1MILLIONHOME and Rising Tides communities of practice, the Christian Alliance for Orphans, the Better Care Network, and Transform Alliance Africa. He has contributed to key global conversations through presentations at the CAFO Summit in 2024 and 2025, work on issues related to orphan trafficking with World Hope International, and co-hosting an international convening of care reform experts at the 2025 Helping Children Worldwide Rising Tides conference. He also serves as the featured lead in the forthcoming documentary *Firmly Rooted*.

If you have traveled to Sierra Leone to the CRC, you will recognize David Musa and the impact of his quiet and thoughtful leadership over the years. What encourages us most is not simply the breadth of David's experience, but the kind of leader it reflects.

His work demonstrates a consistent pattern of strengthening systems, building capacity, and supporting institutions as they move from outdated models toward more effective, family-based approaches. He operates at the intersection of policy and practice; training teams, improving documentation, and helping create the pathways that make sustainable care reform possible.

We are grateful for David's willingness to lead in this season and encouraged by the expertise and respected voice he brings to CRC. We look ahead with confidence that, under his leadership, CRC will continue to grow as an organization committed to protecting children, strengthening families, and advancing thoughtful, locally grounded care reform in Sierra Leone, while contributing to the broader national and global movement for change.

Please join us in congratulating David Titus Musa and praying for wisdom, strength, and steady leadership as he begins this new chapter.

# Welcoming Ganda Bassie as Deputy Director of the Child Reintegration Centre

Helping Children Worldwide is delighted to join as committed allies of UMC SLAC and the Child Reintegration Centre (CRC) to welcome Mr. Ganda Bassie as their CRC Deputy Director, marking a deeply meaningful and full-circle moment in the life of the organization.

Ganda's story is not only one of professional growth, but one that is deeply connected to the early history of the CRC. As one of the first children welcomed into the Centre in 2000, he spent part of his childhood in residential care during a time when systems for supporting children within families and communities were still developing. His journey reflects both the realities of that period and the progress that has since been made toward promoting and strengthening family-based care.

During his time at CRC, Ganda demonstrated early leadership and a strong sense of responsibility, serving as Children's Voice President and advocating for the well-being and representation of his peers. These early experiences helped shape his lifelong commitment to service and to improving the lives of children.

Today, he returns not as a child in care but as a leader committed to ensuring that children are supported within families and communities whenever possible. His work reflects a clear belief that children thrive best in safe, stable, and nurturing family environments, and that systems must be designed to support and strengthen those families.





Ganda holds both a Diploma and a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Development Studies. Following his university education, he founded the Child Welfare and Development Project, an initiative dedicated to supporting vulnerable children with access to education. He has also volunteered alongside mission teams at the CRC and served with the United Methodist Missions and Development Office (UMDO) as a Community Facilitator on a three-year pilot project focused on strengthening gender-based violence prevention and response in Moyamba District, working closely with the communities of Mokorewa and Foya Lappia.

His leadership extends beyond individual programs. Ganda currently serves as President of the Child Reintegration Centre Alumni Association and leads the Sierra Leone Network of Care Leavers (SLNCL). Through this work, he champions the rights and voices of care-experienced individuals, including children who have grown up in residential care or without adequate parental care. His efforts focus on strengthening family-based solutions, preventing unnecessary family separation, improving policies and services, and ensuring that children are supported to grow up in safe, loving families within their communities.

He is also committed to ensuring that individuals with lived experience play a meaningful role in shaping the systems and reforms that affect their lives.

In 2025, Ganda's leadership was recognized on a global stage when he was selected for the highly competitive Community Solutions Program, emerging as one of just 65 participants chosen from more than 12,600 applicants worldwide. As part of the program, he traveled to the United States, where he completed a three-month practicum with the Youth Advocate Program in Houston, Texas, demonstrating exceptional performance and deepening his experience in community-based approaches to child welfare.

What stands out most about Ganda is not simply his accomplishments, but the perspective he brings. He understands the CRC not only as an institution, but as part of a broader journey of transformation—from a time when residential care was more common, to a future firmly focused on strengthening families and communities.

His leadership reflects this shift. While his own life was shaped in part by time spent in care, his vision is rooted in ensuring that children today grow up in families, not institutions.

As Scripture reminds us, “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Ganda lives out this calling through his unwavering commitment to improving the lives of children and families.

As Deputy Director, Ganda will play a critical role in advancing CRC’s mission to protect children, strengthen families, and promote sustainable, family-based care solutions. His appointment represents not only continuity but progress, demonstrating what is possible when families are strengthened, communities are supported, and children are able to grow up in safe and loving homes.

We are encouraged by the passion, lived experience, and servant leadership he brings to this role. His journey is a powerful reminder that the goal is not institutional care, but transformed lives and strengthened families.

Please join us in welcoming Ganda Bassie and praying for wisdom, strength, and continued impact as he steps into this important leadership role.

**“Freely you have received;  
freely give” (Matthew 10:8)**



# Connecting with Mission

Helping Children Worldwide (HCW) is committed to strengthening families and communities, recognizing that a strong family is the foundation for a child to not only live but thrive. When you strengthen families, communities and nations are likewise strengthened, and the need for orphanages disappears. By addressing the root causes of vulnerability, we aim to build resilient communities where children can thrive. We empower local social workers, child protection and child welfare specialists and support their work, collaborating to strengthen national child welfare systems and ensure that every child is able to find permanency in a family. We believe that by investing in sustainable community-led solutions, we can create lasting change and break the cycle of poverty and despair.

Sierra Leone's current child protection landscape underscores an urgent need for stronger, family-oriented solutions. Despite recent legal reforms—such as the 2024 ban on child marriage and growing advocacy against Female Genital Mutilation, and the passing of the Child's Rights Act which enshrines (among many things) a child's right to family —poverty remains pervasive, with nearly 60% of the population living below the national poverty line and staggering levels of malnutrition among children. Around 27% of the 2.7 million children are considered vulnerable and often lack a primary caregiver, while formal protection systems like police units and Child Welfare Committees remain under-resourced and limited in scope and reach. Many children face abuse, trafficking, child labor, early marriage, or placement into orphanages, frequently driven by economic desperation and weak social structures. In this context, institutional or crisis models like orphanages fall short—they can't heal deep family separation, attachment disorders, or social stigma. Instead, the expansion of family-strengthening programs with social support, positive parenting training, and community-based case management is essential to keep children safe, supported, and thriving right where they belong: within loving families and resilient communities.





Helping Children Worldwide’s approach to child welfare is grounded in the belief that sustainable change must be locally led and contextually relevant. Rather than importing external solutions, HCW invests in building the capacity of local leaders—like those at the Child Reintegration Centre—to design, implement, and adapt strategies that reflect the realities of their communities. This includes technical support for developing case management systems, linking our allies to training in trauma-informed care, and providing ongoing mentorship in strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation. By equipping local partners with the skills, tools, and confidence to lead their own reform efforts, HCW helps ensure that solutions are not only effective but also culturally appropriate and sustainable over time.

This capacity-building model also extends to HCW’s support of coalition-building, peer learning, and cross-sector collaboration. Through initiatives like the Rising Tides Conference and its connection to global leaders in care reform, and HCW’s involvement as the secretariat to the Sierra Leone Coalition for Family Care, HCW fosters opportunities for local leaders to share knowledge, shape policy, and amplify best practices on both national and global stages. The result is a growing network of empowered practitioners who are transforming child welfare from the inside out—anchored in local expertise, strengthened by global collaboration, and focused on ensuring that every child has the opportunity to grow up in a safe, loving family.

*Please support our work:*  
[www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org](http://www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org)



# A final word to readers.

Empower magazine is a vehicle for sharing stories of impact with you, our loyal readers, and introducing the depth of the work to new people. This issue focuses on one of our key mission initiatives and allies we support and with whom we collaborate. It is our hope that you will find the stories informative and the people we introduce to you inspiring.

Each article also highlights the influence of a core value that inspires, constrains, and grounds our work. Our 5 mission anchors keep us aligned with the purpose of Helping Children Worldwide - tackling the root causes of childhood vulnerabilities with sustainability and impact in mind. We talk a lot about those anchors. But our 4 core values are the ideals that fuel and guide us, the guardrails that tie us to right action.

This issue presents stories of communities, organizations, and individuals in the field of child protection, child welfare, and family strengthening, and shares insights on the influence of radical honesty, radical courage, radical trust, and radical collaboration in the approaches that were taken.

Our next issue will focus on global health initiatives, maternal and infant health, and orphan prevention health strategies. Many of the people introduced in Empower magazine are also optimistic voices you can hear featured on our podcast. We invite you to tune in and listen - wherever you get your podcasts.

Other great stories and announcements - [helpingchildrenworldwide.org/latestnews](https://helpingchildrenworldwide.org/latestnews)

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