

Alternative Care

(Last reviewed September 2015)

'Alternative care' describes any arrangement in which a child lives away from his or her biological parents, whether this arrangement is formal or informal, temporary or permanent. According to United Nations guidelines, alternative care should be based on:

1. **Necessity** – Children should only be placed in alternative care if it is really necessary.
2. **Appropriateness** – Children should be placed in an arrangement that suits their individual needs and situation.

One Sky's Alternative Care project focuses on:

- **Keeping families together.** In many cases alternative care is unnecessary. In particular, we promote the UN alternative care guidelines' position that poverty should never be the sole reason to justify removing a child from his/her parents; instead, poverty is a sign that the family needs other support to meet its responsibilities.

An important part of our work is to actively prevent family separation, so that children are not forced into situations where they must live away from their parents. We do this by providing food and other welfare support, education support, healthcare support, family counseling and income generation opportunities. In 2014 we worked with 110 family support cases, involving 264 children and 196 adults. We believe that, with adequate support, even in difficult circumstances most families can stay together and provide a loving, safe environment for their children.

- **Upholding international good practices for alternative care.** Where serious cases are brought to One Sky and alternative care is truly necessary, we follow international guidelines as we look for solutions. Where possible we seek out extended family members to care for children, or otherwise try to place children in other forms of family-based care e.g. foster care or adoption. Wherever possible, we try to view alternative care as a temporary solution; we review arrangements regularly and evaluate possibilities for children to return safely to their families. We will only place children in children's homes in true emergencies and when no other appropriate family-based solution is possible.

- **Family reunification and reintegration.** One Sky pursues new solutions for children in alternative care whose current arrangements are inappropriate or unnecessary. For many of the 605 children living in Sangkhlaburi children's homes, alternative care is not truly necessary and, with appropriate support, these children could be reunited with their families. In other cases, alternative care is necessary, but institutional care in a children's home is far from the most appropriate solution.

One Sky has partnered with one local children's home, with the aim of reintegrating all of the children living there with families or extended families. We hope that this model will inspire other local homes to join us, as we join a global movement aiming to make institutional care the very last option for children.

- **Local research and advocacy.** Many local organisations lack understanding of official guidelines on when alternative care is necessary and how it should be implemented. In particular, despite the UN guidelines' position that poverty should never be the sole reason for removing children from their parents, research conducted by One Sky shows that poverty is the predominant reason why children in Sangkhlaburi end up moving away from their families to live in children's homes. One Sky has discussed this research with local children's homes, aiming to promote an awareness of how current practices fail to meet international standards.
- **Advocacy to strengthen national-level alternative care policy.** One Sky is an active member of Thailand's national Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Alliance. Together with this alliance of NGOs, we are working to develop professional models of foster care and adoption in Thailand. The CRC coalition has a strong voice in national policy debates and has worked to ensure that current revisions to Thailand's 2003 Child Protection Act will fully incorporate the UN's alternative care guidelines.