

JORDAN

Foster Care situation analysis in Jordan (JRF)

Introduction :

The family forms a field that requires search and concern from all sociologists due to its importance. The family is the first main unit in the community, and further it is the first social unit that aims to maintain the human race.

Foster Care (FC) is a form of care for orphans, children of unknown parentage or children whose parents are unable to care for them due to their sickness or being sentenced by imprisonment. This type of care arises instead of placing the child in an institution. Such method helped in caring of disadvantaged children from their parents care instead of raising the child inside residential institutions which affect the child future life.

The alternative or foster family is one of the alternative care forms for disadvantaged children when natural family care is not possible. This aims to supply social, psychological, health and vocational care for children who were deprived from growing up within their natural families; in other words the aim of alternative care is " recompensing the child for his natural family which he was deprived from in order to acquire necessary and individual needs in his social and psychological components, and also draw religious and family principles as well as the social general concepts, which he can acquire in the residential institution."

The alternative family is considered of vital importance for the child who lost their natural families, as its offers him help in establishing his personality receiving the family values and community general concepts. This shall continue until his personality becomes stable and fit in all aspects. Depositing the child, who lost his natural family, in the residential institutions is not the alternative solution, in case there is not suitable family that can adopt the child. Nobody can allege that the residential institutions may meet the child necessary needs even small part thereof against his attendance inside alternative family, which represents as his natural family that may make most of needs available for him.

Alternative or foster family program is considered one of the most important programs in terms of unknown parentage child care (illegal) through supplying

similar environment as to natural family environment which they were deprived from. Also it offers them protection from being humiliated and marginalization which many children are suffering thereof. On the other hand achieving the expected outcomes and desired goals is not available, save through the families' awareness as to difficulties they shall face. The subject does not end once receiving placement of a child from this category. Whereas the foster family shall face such difficulties, the respective child shall face another type of problems and complications, which the family shall deal with in high care and wisdom in order that attempts to foster him within the community do not fail.

The foster families program aims to offer community service based on family care to be alternative as to institutional care, which offers the needy children, who need protection and care, an opportunity to live within family suitable environment. The foregoing shall work to enhance their growth and development in all psychological, social, educational and health trends, in addition to reducing the number of children in the social care institutions and limiting their entry in such institutions to achieve their best interests. Besides the program offers opportunity to the community to participate, contribute and maintain its responsibility to offer social care to disadvantaged children, and the families who are interested in taking care of the child to meet the motherhood and fatherhood feelings and for Allah reward. Families who are deprived from children are willing to care of a child to enhance the motherhood and fatherhood feelings. The foregoing contributes in loving the child and offer him all means to ensure his rest and safety as well as family environment which he is deprived from. Family of great number of kids wishes always to have award and even merge a child with their children to offer them care and protection which they need for human reasons and further religious ones.

The alternative care program, including foster care, started in Jordan in 2011 and took place under support from the UNICEF organization and ministry of social development, and such program includes children ranged one month – 5 years who are of unknown parented category.

Religious and social view in terms of alternative care

Children are gift from Allah, having children is human & instinctive demand. Islamic law offers more care and interest to be paid to children. Among

children we can find disadvantaged ones who came to this life deprived of love, children born in difference environment that legal ones, not delivered within happy and cheer as legal ones are, father commits a passing fancy and escaped from responsibility, while the mother seeks to get ride of shame via various means.

Islam declares that human holds his own acts responsibility, while the child does not hold the indecent responsibility of his parents. He is not to be blamed, as he is a victim of illegal relationship between a man and woman outside marriage. So it is not fair to punish the child for such fault committed by his natural parents neither through marginalization, ostracism nor any mode of oppression nor reducing his human value.

Islam prevents adoption, but it does not prevent the illegitimate child from affiliation to alternative family. In order to reconcile between both issues it creates one of the following solutions to enable the child to have suitable care without infringing the religion and mixing kinships; i.e.:

- Breastfeeding whether by the foster caring mother or any of the foster family relatives which provide the child food and love as well as parented growth. It works to create family connections between the child and his family from breastfeeding.
- Treating: Treating the child as a son and enjoy all rights which the normal child enjoys with simple distinction not to offer him the real kinship of caring family.

By this means fostering illegitimate children in the community accrue and avoiding them from marginalization, humiliation and shame due to their social status. We notice in most of Islamic countries laws which do not treat the status of illegal children rights, especially what relates to custodianship or care of them or encourage family to foster a child. The results came in a way that the community did not accept alternative care thought of such child as (Illegal), but this does not prevent some from accepting the idea and welcomed it on the light of the fact that such child is not responsible for his status and he has the right to live with a father and mother and family that offer his good living means even though such family is alternative family.

Alternative families program is equivalent to 'kafalah' (custodianship program - adoption under the Islamic Rules) in the Ministry of social development and complementary thereto, but there are differences such as:

- Foster care program's conditions; the foster family shall have no children. Children who lose the family are put under foster care within certain conditions. While alternative caring families program offers the opportunity for all categories of children who lack care: orphan, disjointed families, unknown families, to live in suitable family environment until their natural families straighten up their status in a way to guarantee the children best interests, subject to maintain the child relationship to its biological family.

Also, the foster care term with the alternative caring families is not limited and depends on the child biological family stand, and based on the child best interest requirements. It is worth mentioning herein that the child shall be handed over to the alternative caring family, under the court's decision. Such family shall be visited on weekly basis during the first four months to offer for the purpose of offering interventions, psychological and social supports to the alternative caring family, and further to facilitate the child engagement within the new family. Periodical follow ups continue on monthly basis and once needed after prior coordination with the caring family on prior agreed upon times.

- Alternative care foster care of the child is not limited by term, and depends on the Biological family status and the child best interest

Alternative care conditions:

The priority is offered to alternative families whose members are stabled and relatives to respective child, if not available then family, lady or miss is selected which meet the following conditions:

- Adopt Islam: unless the child is not Muslim then he shall be offered to a family that adopts his religion.
- The family must be consisted of matured husband and wife; we could say widow, divorced or maiden.

- To be socially & psychologically stabled and has the efficiency and applicability to meet all the child needs.
- The Health and body status is suitable via medical reports.
- To have fixed income source that covers all living costs of the family
- All family members have clean criminal record.
- The family domicile shall be suitable; all safety and health conditions are available.
- Written approval to abide by attending training sessions and applying the interventions, activities which shall be agreed upon with the program team.
- Committing to facilitate visitations and follow ups, pursuant to Juveniles Court judge conditions.
- Signing on an undertaking form issued by the program; abiding by program conditions, cooperating with biological family of the child and returning the child to his biological family once the courts decides such issue to achieve the child interests.

Procedures followed for fostering a child within the alternative care program

There are some procedures which the alternative family shall adopt in caring of the child within its members. Such conditions are summarized by:

- The caring family shall apply for fostering.
- Performing habilitation test through meetings with center specialist, who shall assess family acceptance as to fostering a child, as well as assessing the family's educational level, income and its house. Also to identify the surrounding environment and make sure that parents have clean criminal record and this could be achieved via form filled by the specialist.
- After the above study concluded by the program management, house visit shall be conducted with the behavior controller delegated by the Ministry of Social Development and program team to assess the house and the family. The team shall fill certain forms including its social and psychological assessment as to the family, house and surrounding environment.
- After the housing visit is made, the program team meets with clinical supervisor and discusses visit details and assessing thereof to identify weakness and strength points.
- Applying some psychological standards on the family such as; parental control, psychological pressure and religious trend.. And else.
- The family shall be informed of approval to care of the child, and further to bring probative documents, non conviction certificate, free

of diseases cert., passport, lease contract or ownership deed, salary slip and detailed report shall be issued on the family including the husband and wife names, National Number, Date of Birth and all family personal data.

- Satisfaction of the family specifications with the child shall be made, and then witnessing issue shall be performed between the family and the child.
- Program team shall issue reports to the institution management including the caring family name and shall be signed by the management.
- All reports and probative documents shall be served to the development directorate who shall issue a covering letter served to the Minister of Social development.
- The family shall check up with development directorate to receive the letter after being signed by the Minister and shall be served to civil status directorate to issue birth certificate and family book to the child family.
- After (48) hours the family and child shall pay a visit to the Juveniles court judge to hand over the child. Handing over decision shall be issued including the term which the child shall remain with the family; initially one year.
- In the first four months the program team shall pay visits to the family; once/week for one hour. They shall assess the care skills as to the family and prepare the family and child. In the second four months the visit shall be adjusted to be once / month for one hour to offer help to the family in:
 1. Parental control skills
 2. Psychological culture skills
 3. Intervention skills based on duties.
- After one year elapses the Juveniles Court judge shall be reported by recommendation offered by the behavior controller about child status with his new family, and recommend either to renew the verdict or cancelling thereof depending on the child status.
- After renewing the judgment the child & family file shall be sent to development directorate to follow up the caring family by behavior controller in the directorate.

Strong points in the alternative care (Foster Care) program

- Alternative care program shall be applied under legal and organized procedures and standards.
- The presence of vocational trend in the procedures followed with families to bring the program into success.
- Good selection through the program team and Ministry of Social development.
- There would be no difficult or complicated conditions that rule out selecting the foster care family.
- Legal and official welcome for alternative care.
- Assisting the program of foster care families to offer social and psychological education as well as parental care.

Weaknesses and disadvantages in alternative (FC) program

- Absence of enough employees in the program.
- Minority of rehabilitation as to the program personnel due to the least rehabilitation program training.
- Ambiguity of specialist assigned duties due to the fact that he is not subject to rehabilitation training.
- Difficulty in dealing with program forms as translation thereof is made in literal mode, and thus it works to limit the ideas which the specialist tackles.
- Official long routine and the absence of official director thereto.
- No enough promotion is available as to the program.

We have faced many problems and obstacles as to the child; i.e.:

- Bringing to the child's attention that the foster family is not his biological family, but it is caring family, which works to increase the fear from reporting this fact to the child. But in turn we have received consultations and pieces of advice from specialists in the program which enabled some to overcome such problems.
- The family and child face problems in terms of schools, as the child is not registered in his birth certificate except in the first name of the caring father, which causes discomfiture to him before his peers and school. Also his national number differs than his Peers National numbers in the school.

- Travel problem which was forbidden in the first time but it is now allowed under certain conditions under guarantees set out by the family before travel to ensure the child to return within time limits.

Cases where the child is withdrawn from the foster family:

- Family unification; bringing the child back to his biological family consisting of his real father and mother or his extended family to maintain the best interests of the child.
- The child is being subject to abuse or bad treatment by the caring family. This trend could be noticed during scheduled visits by the specialist and behavior controller
- The caring family retreat in terms of child care and bring him back to the social institutions where he was before due to reasons which could be psychological, divorce or other causes.

Story of Success

The program specialist gave the example of a family who cared for a baby

Impossible Dream: The lady applied for the foster family program after long waiting period via communication with the Ministry of Social development to inquire about the program for the divorced wives after marriage lasted for ten years and inability to join another man after unsuccessful marriage. After communicating for four years with the Ministry they told her that there is new program which applies to her. She attended to the program and her particulars were taken. She was very happy as she has motherhood feelings and wishes to care of a baby. The team visited her in her house to apply standards and tests and she was with her month.

Her application was approved by the program team, due to her high culture and strong personality. She was successfully in her practical career and we fixed an appointment for her to see the child as she asked to care of male child and offer him human service and she said that the child is to call her Mama.

First time she saw the child he was crying and catching my hand strongly, and then he stopped crying whereas she felt strange feeling of happiness and motherhood ...

Her first meeting with the child she felt that she owned the whole world and showed love and happiness towards the child and thus she selected him.

Once the child is handed over to her she said: as if my soul is returned to me and the child grants her happiness and motherhood feeling which I dream since two years.

Her mother was supportive and undertook to support her daughter in caring of the child.

Then the psychological interventions started by specialists in the program with the lady and the child.

First week she did not know what to do and how to deal with the child, as to care of his health, feeding, growth.. etc... Second stage started to fulfill the child needs and method of dealing with him, follow him up. The lady was cooperative with us and applies all what discussed with her about the child education.

Her mother shared in raising the child as the mother has been trained for four months on weekly basis in addition to telephone calls with her and thus the mother felt great challenge to deal with the child as interventions stage ended and follow ups started on periodical basis. Each visit I noticed development in the child life and he showed happiness and ability to respond and interact with his caring mother and others as well.

The Mother worked to merge him with the family and friends and transfer her experience to others and friends and every matter belong to the child.

The child spend one year the care term was extended and such lady becomes one of the best examples in the first experience of the foster family program.

This lady was selected to represent the program and talk about her experience in terms of foster care before international organizations; UNICEF's Turkish delegates visited the lady to witness her experience, and I was accompanying them, I sat beside her and started talking about her experience and program and interventions, goals and outcomes. She was proud of the program and the outcomes she gained from her experience. The delegates were satisfied completely and reacted with her and started crying.

The team felt proud and happiness for such lady and her experience as well as the program importance in all its tests and standards and the work they offer to guarantee the child interests.

Working with this family was new development as to the program, me and my work as well as my expertise has been increased and I started looking to some matters in another way and started to believe that dreams could be achieved and there is nothing impossible. I directed my efforts as specialist and mother, there were time which I could not forget and phrases she stated and I thanked Allah for the program success and such opportunity which changed the lady life.

She said:

Child - he made my life bright and filled me with hope, every thing is possible.

Child - he granted me new spheres and made me see the live in another shape.

My experience in the program caused me to feel that nobody can prevent any other body from depriving a female from her motherhood feelings.