



COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S HOMES FOR ORPHANS AND CHILDREN ALONE

NIGERIA RED CROSS

CASE STUDY

Photo description: Nigeria Red Cross personnel feeding a child at a Nigeria Red Cross Children's Home
Photo credit: Nigeria Red Cross

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Background

The Nigeria Red Cross manages several Community Children's Homes, also known as Motherless and Abandoned Babies Homes, for children who are alone.

In Anambra State the Community Children's Home was established in April 1964 to provide protection, shelter, and holistic care to children who are unable to live with their biological families due to orphanhood, abandonment, neglect, abuse, poverty, or other social challenges.

In Enugu a Community Children's Home was established in April 1969. It was established mainly to cater for children who missed their parents during the Nigerian / Biafra Civil War as well as children who were abandoned by their teenage mothers who were raped by armed forces during the war. Today babies, ages 0-2, are mainly those whose mother died during birth, those from very poor backgrounds, and abandoned babies. After the age of two, children are placed into foster care or put into the care of family by the Government of Nigeria.

In Lagos the Community Children's Home was the first orphanage home established in Nigeria. It is located inside Lagos, Makoko. The children in the home are referred by the Juvenile Welfare Care (JWC) police station, through the Ministry of Youth and Social Development Centre, Alausa, Ikeja.

In Imo State the Community Children's Home support infants and young children, although in exceptional cases, older children may be supported depending on their protection needs and circumstances. Children are referred primarily through government authorities and relevant child protection structures; these include the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, social welfare departments, healthcare facilities, law enforcement agencies, and the family courts. Children admitted into the Community Children's Home often come from families facing severe challenges, including poverty, parental illness, substance abuse, disability, or social instability. Some children have experienced neglect, physical or sexual abuse, while others have been abandoned or orphaned.

The Community Children's Homes are funded through local public support.

Who was Supported and How

In Anambra State the Community Children's Home has 24 staff which includes matrons, cooks, nurses, nannies, care givers, housekeepers, counsellors, drivers, and security personnel. In Enugu there are 18 staff.

Through the Community Children's Homes, the Nigeria Red Cross works closely with families, communities, government agencies, and other stakeholders to promote child protection, reintegration back to families where possible, and long-term solutions that ensure the best interests of the child. Through these efforts, the Community Children's Homes contribute to reducing child vulnerability.

Shelter and Care:

The children are supported through the provision of safe accommodation within the homes. They are housed in a clean, secure, and child-friendly environments where daily supervision and caregiving are ensured by trained caregivers.

Feeding and Nutrition:

Children receive regular, balanced meals prepared to meet their nutritional needs. Special dietary support is provided to infants and children with health conditions.

Education Support:

School-age children are supported through enrollment in formal schools. Educational materials such as school uniforms, textbooks, exercise books, bags, and writing materials are provided. School fees and related expenses are also covered to ensure uninterrupted learning and academic development.

Healthcare Support:

Children are supported with access to basic healthcare services, including routine medical check-ups, treatment of illnesses, immunizations, and medications when required. In Anambra State, this is achieved through a partnership with the Anambra State Health Insurance Agency (ASHIA).

Psychosocial and Emotional Support:

Children receive emotional care, counseling, guidance, and moral instruction to help them cope with trauma, loss, and emotional distress. Recreational activities, play, and mentoring are used as tools to promote emotional healing and positive social behavior.

Skills Development:

For older children, skill acquisition programs are organized ranging from creation of liquid soap production, Dettol and izal production, tailoring, computer training, barbing, and bead/hair making.

Successes

Through the Community Children's Homes, the Nigerian Red Cross supports over 200 children each year. These are mainly females but also male infants and young. Since the start of this work, over 4,000 children have been supported by the Nigerian Red Cross.

A key to the success has been partnerships with local authorities to ensure coordination around needs, legal standards, and so only children identified by authorities are supported.

Challenges and Difficulties

Financial Constraints:

One of the major challenges is inadequate and irregular funding. The cost of feeding, education, utilities, staff salaries, and maintenance is high, while donations and support are often inconsistent and at risk of reductions. This makes long-term planning and sustainability difficult. Healthcare is a particular challenge because free universal healthcare is not available in Nigeria for children. As such, the Community Children's Homes rely on volunteer time from doctors and nurses and can only access fee-based healthcare when there are serious health concerns.

Complexity and diversity of children's needs,

The complexity and diversity of children's needs often requires intensive, multidisciplinary, and resource-demanding interventions.

Educational Support:

Meeting educational needs, including school fees, uniforms, books, and extra lessons, is often difficult. Some children also require remedial education due to past disruptions in schooling, which increases the demand for learning support.

Shelter:

The facility in Enugu in particular has challenges around infrastructure and will benefit from modern upgrades.

Staffing and Capacity Challenges:

Recruiting and retaining qualified staff and volunteer caregivers, especially for any length of duration, is very difficult due to limited funds and high workloads.

In Enugu a lack of salary support for the caregivers who run three shift duties a day to ensure that the babies are well is a significant risk.

Lessons Learned

1. **Sustainable funding, qualified caregivers, and strong child safeguarding systems** are essential for consistent and high-quality service delivery.
2. **Collaboration with communities and stakeholders enhances impact**, while effective monitoring, documentation, and aftercare are necessary to ensure long-term success beyond the home.
3. Caring for children within the home is only part of the solution. Without proper preparation for **family reintegration or independent living, some children struggle** after leaving the home. This highlights the need for structured aftercare and follow-up support.
4. **Mainstreaming the IFRC Network approach to Protection, Gender, and Inclusion** across all activities has proven to be essential in achieving stronger outcomes.
5. **Child safeguarding requires multiple layers of protection**, including volunteer and staff screening, clear codes of conduct, controlled access to facilities, supervision, and adherence to child protection policies and standards.
6. **A cross-departmental approach within the Red Cross strengthens programme delivery**, drawing on expertise from health, psychosocial support, youth, and volunteer management structures.