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From Protection to Permanency: New Training Manual Promotes Family-Based Care for Child Survivors of Online Exploitation

MANILA, PHILIPPINES — 26 JUNE 2026 — International Justice Mission (IJM) and Global Child Advocates (GCA) have launched a groundbreaking training manual, employing brand new methodology that could potentially empower and restore thousands of children. This manual is designed to help social workers, government agencies and nonprofit partners identify safe family connections and long-term support for child survivors of online sexual abuse or exploitation.

The Framework for Family Engagement (FFE) Training Manual provides guidance for locating, assessing and engaging safe relatives or caregivers who can offer child survivors lasting care and stability. It is intended to help social workers, government and non-government leaders, and those working on cases involving online sexual abuse or exploitation of children, or OSAEC, and other forms of trafficking. Developed as a partnership between International Justice Mission (IJM) and Global Child Advocates (GCA), the FFE Manual is an adapted version of the FFE Curriculum. Developed by Ashlee Heiligman, Co-Founder and Global Director of GCA, the framework is informed by GCA's extensive work with children and families around the world since 2009.

“As a social worker and practitioner, I am deeply honored to share practical tools and resources to strengthen and empower your work on the frontlines of protecting children. While we often speak about shifting mindsets, especially around permanency, most of us already agree on a foundational truth: children need families. What is often missing is the how: how to safely identify, engage, and prepare families so that children can truly belong.

As we continue growing in our response to survivors of Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC), we are learning that even when harm has occurred within a child's family, there is often a wider network of safe, trusted relationships. Protecting children does not require severing all connections, but carefully identifying and strengthening the safe ones.” - Ashlee Heiligman, Global Director of Global Child Advocates

Heiligman trained and mentored Jessa Lazarte, a registered social worker in the Philippines, to pioneer the Family Engagement Specialist role at IJM. Lazarte led the efforts to adapt and recontextualize the framework for OSAEC. Initial tests revealed a lot of insights that informed the development of the manual.

“Across IJM's work in the Philippines, we have seen that Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) fractures trust, distorts identity, and severs children from the very relationships meant to protect them. In response, our systems have rightly prioritized safety and accountability. Yet too often, children remain in temporary care far beyond what was intended—waiting not because families do not exist, but because pathways to safe, lasting connections were



never fully explored.” remarked Atty. Nelisa Guevara-Garcia, Director of Capacity Development, IJM Philippines

Familial networks are extensive. With the right tools, safe and responsible family members can be identified and worked with. This allows survivors to build deep and permanent relationships that they can rely on for support not just in the short term, but throughout their lives.

“Contrary to the commonly held belief that survivors must either be protected from their families or returned to them with haste, the FFE Manual offers a third path: intentional and deliberate family engagement- using the FFE tools introduced in this manual, we are allowing the children and families to have the power to share and be part of the decision-making. The goal is to work *with* survivors and families, instead of just *for* them as it increases the likelihood that children will be placed in *safe* permanent care, rather than lingering in shelters longer than necessary. said Jessa Lazarte

Permanent care can take several forms and the pathway to it may sometimes involve temporary placement such as foster care. And although the journey differs among children – some family members for kinship care or adoption, the core idea does not: children must not be left with a temporary solution, and all plans for children’s wellbeing should be made with the long-term in mind.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), alongside its implementing partners under the Project Systematic Action for the Empowerment (SAFE) of OSAEC survivors are key to implementing FFE on a national scale. Their help and feedback during the pilot testing and validation of the FFE curriculum was invaluable. In November 2025, IJM and DSWD signed a Memorandum of Agreement, making the FFE as one of the core interventions in cases of OSAEC.

In 2024, IJM partnered with the DSWD through Project SAFE, alongside the Shechem Children’s Home, an assessment center that helps OSAEC survivors. Together, they analyzed the scale at which the framework could be implemented and replicated. Shechem Children’s Home is also the first assessment center to use the framework independently, having made it their core methodology for locating and evaluating familial connections.

This Framework for Family Engagement would not have been possible without Austin Ridge Bible Church. Their generous financial contributions, as well as invaluable work on the ground engaging with stakeholders and social workers were a tremendous aid in putting the manual together.

About International Justice Mission

IJM Philippines works with the Philippine government, relevant stakeholders, and survivor leaders to protect children from online sexual exploitation by empowering local communities, championing systemic change in the criminal justice system, advocating for online child protection and safety in international policies, and engaging technology and financial companies to deter and disrupt the crime.

For further inquiries, visit www.ijm.org.ph or contact Meryll Sarco at msarco@ijm.org.ph.



About Global Child Advocates

Global Child Advocates (GCA) is a dedicated team of child protection specialists whose mission is to strengthen the layers of protection around children to prevent abuse, trafficking, and exploitation. GCA's vision is to see every child thriving in a caring and protective family.

GCA developed the Framework for Family Engagement (FFE) out of a deep commitment to practical, child-centered solutions that strengthen families and protect children. Too often, social work can feel theoretical or system-driven—yet the real need is for tools that equip practitioners to act with purpose, urgency, and compassion in the lives of vulnerable children.