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UNIQUE NEWSPAPER FOR AND BY STREET CONNECTED CHILDREN

Balaknama is the newspaper presented by Street and Working children themselves to fight for their own rights and problems because they are being completely ignored.

STEPS TOWARDS CHANGE : STREET CHILDREN DISCOVERING THEIR RIGHTS AND FINDING THEIR VOICE

Balaknama Reporter: Preeti, Jahana, Asif, Nitin

When a child in a community faces difficulties attending school, a girl is pressured into early marriage, or a child experiences inappropriate treatment, children are often the ones who witness these problems most closely. But do they know what to do in such situations? Whom should they approach? And if no one listens to them, how can they make their voices heard?

These were some of the questions children explored during the Badhte Kadam Leaders' Train-ings organised in Delhi, Gurugram and Jaipur. A total of 109 children—50 boys and 59 girls—participated in the three trainings. Of these, 45 children attended in Delhi, 34 in Gurugram and 30 in Jaipur.

Through these trainings, children learned about child rights, leadership, writing news stories for Balaknama, expressing their views and approaching the appropriate authorities to address prob-lems in their communities. For them, these were not merely opportunities to attend training ses-sions; they were also opportunities to understand the role they could play in shaping their own lives and responding to issues affecting their surroundings.

Children face numerous challenges in their daily lives that they may find difficult to discuss openly. Sometimes, a family's financial circumstances become a barrier to education, while household responsibilities force children to put their own needs aside. Some witness child labour, child marriage, violence and unsafe situations in their communities. Often, they do not even know where to seek help.

In such circumstances, simply informing children about their rights is not enough. It is equally important to build their confidence and reassure them that their concerns matter and that they can share their difficulties in a safe environment.

Delhi: Developing Leadership and Strengthening Children's Voices Through Balaknama

The Badhte Kadam Leaders' Training in Delhi focused on developing leadership qualities, un-derstanding the role of the Badhte Kadam Federation and learning about the responsibilities of Balaknama reporters.

Through interactive activities, children learned that



a good leader is not someone who simply gives instructions. A good leader listens to others, takes responsibility, supports peers and brings people together to find solutions to problems.

Children were introduced to the Badhte Kadam Federation and learned how it provides a plat-form to raise community issues and encourage other children to become aware of their rights. They also understood that identifying a problem and talking about it are only the first steps. It is equally important to consider possible solutions and identify the individuals or departments that can provide assistance.

A special discussion during the Delhi training focused on Balaknama reporting. Children learned how to identify newsworthy issues, gather information, interview people and verify facts before writing a story. They also understood why it is inappropriate to report an incident solely on the basis of personal assumptions or hearsay. Verifying information and protecting children's identi-ties and personal details are equally important responsibilities.

This learning is particularly significant because children often witness incidents that directly af-fect their lives. However, witnessing a problem and reporting it responsibly are two different things. Through Balaknama, children can bring attention to issues in their communities, provided they gather accurate information and practise responsible journalism.

During the training, children also practised writing formal letters to government officials. Through the activity "My Voice, My Right," they identified problems in their communities and explored which authorities could be approached for support. They learned that school-related concerns could be raised with the principal, while issues concerning local facilities could be brought to the attention of the relevant departments or elected representatives.

Children realised that expressing their concerns clearly in writing and requesting appropriate ac-tion is itself an important step towards change.

Thirteen-year-old Priya (name changed), who participated in the training, shared that she had previously lacked a clear understanding of the responsibilities of a Balaknama reporter and the weekly reporting plan. After the training, she understood the process of preparing a news story better and felt more confident about reporting issues affecting her community.

Twelve-year-old Pritam

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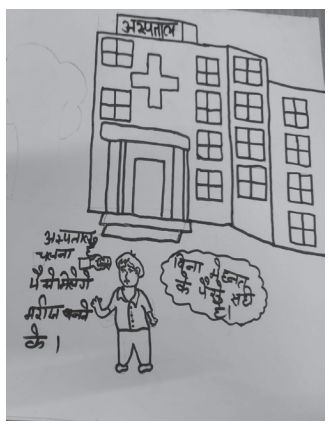
NOT SICK, YET PAID TO POSE AS PATIENTS

Balaknama Reporter: Damini

A shocking account from the Muhavana settlement in Jaipur has raised questions about the healthcare system and the difficult economic circumstances faced by vulnerable families. Ac-cording to 13-year-old Radhika (name changed), some people are reportedly paid to go to a hos-pital and stay there as patients even though they are not actually ill. The girl said that this practice has allegedly been continuing for some time. People from the settlement are reportedly taken to the hospital in groups. Before reaching the hospital, they are sometimes made to look like sick patients by having a bandage placed on their arm or leg or by using other methods to make them appear unwell. They are then reportedly made to lie on hospital beds like patients. According to 14-year-old Kirti (name changed), around 60–70 people from the settlement are taken to the hos-pital at a time, including children. It is reported that after staying at the hospital for some time, they are given around ₹400 to ₹500 in return. Many families in the settlement face financial hard-ship, and even after working as daily-wage labourers throughout the day, they may not always earn as much as they are reportedly offered for spending a few hours in the hospital. This finan-cial pressure may be one reason why some people agree to participate. Kirti said, "Even after working all day, we sometimes cannot earn ₹500. If we can get that much money just by lying on a hospital bed without working, why would anyone refuse?" Her statement reflects not only the financial difficulties faced by families but also how vulnerable people may be exposed to exploi-tation because of their circumstances. The most concerning aspect of the account is the reported involvement of children. Children should be able to study, play and understand healthcare ser-vices in a safe environment, and their involvement in such activities could raise serious concerns regarding their education, safety and rights. If healthy people are being presented as patients to artificially increase the number of patients in a hospital or for some other financial benefit, this would raise concerns not only about the possible exploitation of vulnerable families but also about transparency and public trust in the healthcare system. Balaknama does not intend to make allegations against any individual or organization. Our aim is to



responsibly report concerning in-formation emerging from children and communities. Such allegations should be independently and fairly investigated, children's safety should be ensured, and vulnerable families should have access to dignified livelihood opportunities.

Balaknama has taken permission from children for their pictures. Names are changed.

"LITTLE HANDS, BIG GRATITUDE: A CREATIVE TRIBUTE TO TEACHERS"

Balaknama Reporter: Deepak
Talkative Reporter: Mohit



On the occasion of Teachers' Day, children associated with CHETNA's alternative education centres in Jaipur celebrated the day with teachers at various government schools. With the sup-port of educators, the programmes gave children an opportunity to express their respect and grati-tude towards their teachers through creative activities. During the celebrations, children present-ed handmade greeting cards and beautiful paper bouquets to their teachers. The children and teachers also cut a cake together and shared the joy of Teachers' Day. In addition, the children created attractive photo frames through craft activities and gifted them to their teachers. The selfie booth became a special attraction for both children and teachers, with teachers taking selfies with the children and making the occasion memorable. During the activities, children also discussed the role teachers play in their lives and how teachers guide them, encourage them to learn and support them in building a better future. The children enthusiastically shared their expe-riences and feelings through drawings, crafts and conversations. Anita Manana, Principal of Bagrana School, said, "CHETNA Ngo" continuously organises interesting and creative activities for children. These activities help children stay connected with education and motivate them to learn. This is an important effort towards their overall development." Teacher Geeta Goyal also shared her experience of the selfie booth, saying, "Taking photographs with children through the selfie booth at the field level was a very joyful and memorable experience for me. Seeing the children's enthusiasm and happiness brought a smile to my face. Being connected with such en-ergetic children and encouraging their activities while bringing smiles to their faces is a very spe-cial experience." Twelve-year-old Rohit (name changed) said, "I really enjoyed making a photo frame through the craft activity. I made one for my teacher. I also took a photograph with Sir at the selfie booth. This was a very memorable day for me." The Teachers' Day celebration gave children an opportunity to express their respect and gratitude towards their teachers while also strengthening their creativity, communication skills and connection with education.

WHEN RAIN BECOMES A THREAT TO CHILDHOOD

Balaknama Reporter: Deepak
Talkative Reporter: Alina



Heavy monsoon rain and strong winds in Jaipur have increased the difficulties faced by many families living in informal settlements. Several huts were damaged due to the strong winds and rainfall, with wooden poles, bamboo structures and tarpaulins breaking apart and being scattered. This has created serious difficulties for children and their families in finding a safe place to stay. During the rain, Talkative Reporter Alina from the Premnagar informal settlement said that fami-lies were facing a lot of trouble because water had entered their huts and strong winds had blown away tarpaulins and other belongings. Essential household items were soaked by the rain and scattered around. Many families were trying to protect their belongings, as well as their children's books and notebooks, by covering them with plastic sheets and sacks. The damage to the huts and continuous rainfall are also directly affecting children's education. Without a dry and safe place inside their homes, children are unable to keep their books and notebooks properly. The constant entry of rainwater and the weak structures of the huts also leave children feeling fright-ened and unsafe. Families in the settlement said that their biggest concerns during the rainy sea-son are the safety and health of their children. Living in fragile huts becomes a new challenge for them every time it rains. Families want their children to have a safe environment where they can live without fear and continue their education. Rain may be enjoyable for some people, but for children living in damaged huts, the same rain brings worries about their homes, safety and edu-cation.

STEPS TOWARDS CHANGE : STREET CHILDREN DISCOVERING THEIR RIGHTS AND FINDING THEIR VOICE

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(name changed) highlighted that he had learned how to write formal let-ters. Fourteen-year-old Raha (name changed) shared that she now understood that children, too, could write to elected representatives and government officials to seek solutions to community problems.

Their experiences demonstrate that when children receive appropriate information and opportuni-ties to practise, they can develop new ways to express their concerns and make their voices heard.

Gurugram: Understanding Child Rights, Safety and Collective Responsibility

The training in Gurugram helped children understand child rights, the role of the Badhte Kadam Federation and the work of Balaknama.

Discussions covered issues such as child marriage, child labour, violence against children and pro-tection from child sexual abuse. Children were encouraged to understand that they do not have to remain silent when they face difficulties or experience inappropriate behaviour. They can ap-proach a trusted person and seek assistance whenever necessary.

The training also highlighted the importance of listening to peers and taking their concerns seri-ously. When a child shares a problem, others should listen without making fun of them or blam-ing them. Sometimes, a child simply needs the reassurance that someone will listen and offer support when needed.

Leadership also means being sensitive to the needs of others and ensuring that peers do not feel isolated or alone when facing difficulties.

Children in Gurugram also learned about news writing and identifying community issues. They understood the importance of gathering relevant information and verifying facts before turning an incident into a news story. These skills can help children present community problems accu-rately and responsibly.

Through Balaknama, their voices can reach other children, families and relevant stakeholders, helping draw attention to issues that might otherwise remain unnoticed.

Jaipur: Building Confidence, Concentration and Leadership Through Activities

Under the Chamakate Sitare project, the Badhte Kadam Leaders' Training was organised at the Bani Park office in Jaipur.

The training began with an introduction activity, followed by a game in which children, while blindfolded, had to place a dot in the correct position on a picture. The children participated en-thusiastically. The activity helped them practise listening carefully, making estimates and taking decisions based on their understanding.

Children were then divided into groups for discussions on child rights. They prepared questions related to the rights to survival, development and participation and shared their responses with one another. Working in groups gave them opportunities to listen to different perspectives and express their own views.

They learned that child rights are not merely concepts found in books. Every child has the right to survive, learn, remain safe and express their views. Understanding these rights is an important step towards enabling children to speak up for themselves and others.

Leadership qualities were also discussed during the Jaipur training. Children learned that a good leader takes responsibility, strives to make appropriate decisions, helps others and works collabo-ratively.

They were also asked why they came to the office when called from their education centres. Through this discussion, they were encouraged to understand that they could approach their teachers whenever necessary and communicate their concerns. Becoming gradually self-reliant, expressing oneself clearly and making appropriate decisions when required are also important as-pects of leadership.

Three Cities, One Shared Vision

Although the activities differed across the three cities, the learning objectives were closely con-nected.

In Delhi, children practised writing news stories and formal letters to authorities. In Gurugram, they explored child rights, safety and the importance of supporting their peers. In Jaipur, interac-tive games and group discussions helped them develop concentration, confidence and leadership skills.

Together, these experiences provided children with opportunities to recognise their abilities, ex-press their opinions and understand how they could contribute to addressing issues affecting their lives and communities.

However, learning during a training session is not the final step. Meaningful change will become visible when children begin applying these lessons in their everyday lives.

When a child identifies a problem in the community, gathers accurate information and brings it to the attention of the appropriate person, they are putting their learning into practice. When a Ba-laknama reporter responsibly reports an important issue, they help draw public attention to the problem. Similarly, when a child listens to a peer experiencing difficulties and guides them to-wards seeking help, leadership begins to take shape.

For this to happen, children need continued opportunities, guidance and support. When families, teachers and community members listen to children and encourage them to express their views safely, their confidence can grow.

Developing children as leaders does not mean placing adult responsibilities on their shoulders. Rather, it means giving them age-appropriate opportunities to learn, ask questions, make deci-sions and express themselves.

The trainings in Delhi, Gurugram and Jaipur conveyed a clear message: children are not merely recipients of support; they can also become active participants in bringing about change in their own lives and communities. They need accurate information, guidance and opportunities to un-derstand their rights and raise their voices whenever necessary. Change does not always begin on a large platform. Sometimes, it begins with a question, a letter written to an official or a news story that draws attention to a problem affecting children.

When children gain the confidence to express themselves, their voices can become more than their own. They can also represent the voices of other children who have not yet had the oppor-tunity to speak up.

Because every child deserves to be heard, and every child deserves the opportunity to become an agent of change.

Balaknama has taken permission from children for their pictures. Names are changed.

PLAYING FOR MONEY, RISKING CHILDHOOD DREAMS



Balaknama Reporter: Deepak
Talkative Reporter: Kajal

Talkative Reporter Kajal has shared information about a concerning trend among children in Bagrana settlement in Jaipur, where a game is gradually taking the form of gambling. Kajal re-ported that some children in the settlement are playing a game using playing cards and poster-cards featuring pictures of film actors. The game begins as a form of entertainment, with children taking turns drawing cards and determining the winner or loser based on the card they pick. Dur-ing the game, each child places a small amount of money, usually ₹2–₹3, as a bet. The winner then collects the agreed amount from the loser, and gradually the amount can increase to ₹5–₹10. Although the game may appear harmless at first, it can encourage children to develop an interest in money, become accustomed to winning and losing, and take unnecessary risks. The most con-cerning aspect is that some children are gradually developing a habit of playing for money. Some children reportedly ask their parents for money saying that they need to buy notebooks, books or pens, but instead use the money to play cards. This can also lead to habits such as lying and hid-ing money from their parents. The activity is beginning to affect their education as well, as some children are spending hours playing instead of focusing on their studies and activities at the edu-cation centre.

Disagreements and arguments among children over winning and losing have also started to emerge. Understanding the seriousness of the situation, Kajal and three to four other children were spoken to individually. Instead of scolding them, they were gently explained that playing for money can become a harmful habit and may lead to more serious problems in the fu-ture. They were told that a habit beginning with ₹2–₹5 could eventually lead to financial difficul-ties, lying and negative peer influence. The children's parents were also spoken to and informed about the situation. They were encouraged to keep an eye on how their children use the money given to them and to regularly ask them where money provided for school or the education cen-tre has been spent. It was also suggested that children be encouraged to spend their free time on studies, drawing, sports and other creative activities. The parents took the issue seriously and as-sured that they would regularly monitor the children and help keep them away from such activi-ties. Harmful habits cannot always be stopped simply through scolding or punishment. Children need understanding, open communication, care and positive alternatives to help them move away from such behaviours.



A BADGE OF HOPE: STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN MEET THE SHO

Balaknama Reporter: Asif

CHETNA Ngo organised a police interface programme for working children from Kamla Nehru Camp in Delhi. The programme gave several children from the settlement an opportunity to meet police officers and learn more about their work. The children visited the police station, where they met the Station House Officer and learned about how the police work and serve the com-munity. During the interaction, the Station House Officer spoke with the children and encour-aged them to move forward in life with hard work, determination and dedication. He explained that no matter how difficult their circumstances may be, hard work and the right direction can help them achieve their goals. He also told the children that being born into a financially disad-vantaged family should not be seen as a misfortune, but as a circumstance from which they can still move forward and achieve something meaningful in life. He encouraged the children not to give up because of their circumstances and to focus on their education. Speaking to the Ba-laknama Reporter, 14-year-old Salil (name changed), who attended the programme, said, "The Station House Officer Sir told us many good things. He said that we should not be afraid of our circumstances and should continue working hard. Listening to him motivated me to continue my studies and do something good in the future." During the programme, the Station House Officer also gave gifts to the children, bringing smiles to their faces. The children interacted with the po-lice officers and asked questions about things they were curious to know. The programme organ-ised by CHETNA Ngo provided the children with an opportunity to learn, interact and feel in-spired. Direct interaction with police officers helped the children develop a better understanding of police work and strengthened their sense of trust. The children also received the message that their present circumstances do not have to determine their future. The programme encouraged them to move forward with education, hard work and self-confidence. The children described the interaction as a memorable experience and expressed their determination to continue working hard towards their goals.

CHILDREN CELEBRATE TEACHERS' DAY IN THEIR OWN SPECIAL WAY AND GIFT THEIR TEACHERS

Balaknama Reporter: Jeet

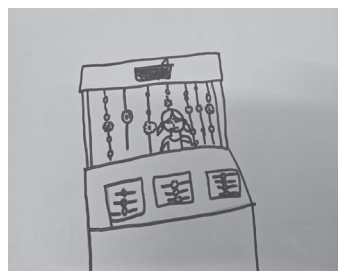


On September 5, children at the education centre in ~~Chakkarpur, Gurugram,~~ celebrated Teachers' Day with great enthusiasm and happiness. The children organised the celebration with their teachers and had prepared in advance to make the day special. On Teachers' Day, the children arrived at the education centre dressed differently from their usual attire. Several girls came dressed in sarees, while the boys wore shirts and trousers. Their preparations created a festive at-mosphere at the centre. All the children were excited to celebrate the special day with their teachers. The programme began with the children and teachers cutting a cake together. They shared the celebration and happiness with one another. The children then wished their teachers a Happy Teachers' Day. The children had also prepared gifts for their teachers. They gifted choco-lates and pens as a gesture of their love and respect. Some children gave chocolates, while others presented pens to their teachers.

The children shared that their teachers are not just people who teach them lessons. Their teachers also help them learn discipline, responsibility and good behaviour. Whenever they do not know the answer to a question or face difficulties with their studies, the teachers at the education cen-tre help and guide them. On Teachers' Day, the children also reflected on the importance of teachers in their lives. They understood that a teacher does more than provide knowledge from books. Teachers also help children prepare for their future and encourage them to move forward. The happiness among the children during the celebration was clearly visible. The girls dressed in sarees and the boys in shirts and trousers participated in the programme with great enthusiasm. From cutting the cake to presenting chocolates and pens, the children spent memorable moments with their teachers. The celebration was especially meaningful because the children themselves had taken the initiative to prepare for the occasion. Their thoughtful preparations and small gifts clearly reflected the respect and affection they have for their teachers. The Teachers' Day cele-bration at the Chakkarpur education centre became a special occasion that highlighted the bond of love, respect and belonging between the children and their teachers.

YOUNG BOY SELLS RAKHIS TO SUPPORT HIS FAMILY

Balaknama Reporter: Damini
Talkative Reporter: Sameer



During a visit to different informal settlements in Jaipur, the Balaknama Reporter met 13-year-old Meer (name changed). Around Raksha Bandhan, Meer was going from house to house in the settlement selling rakhis. During the conversation, he explained that he buys rakhis at low prices from Nahargarh Market with his mother and then sells them by moving around the settlement. Meer said that he does not work only during Raksha Bandhan but also takes up different small jobs depending on the season and the availability of work. Due to his family's difficult financial situation, he has had to start contributing to the household at a young age. According to Meer, his father consumes alcohol, while his mother supports the family financially through begging. The money Meer earns from selling rakhis is also used to meet the family's everyday needs. As a result, family responsibilities have come onto his shoulders at a very young age. When the report-er asked him what he would like to do if given the opportunity, Meer said that he wants to go to school, study and build a better future for himself. However, he has been unable to enrol in school because he does not have essential documents, including an Aadhaar card. Meer dreams of studying and moving forward in life. His story highlights how financial difficulties and the lack of essential documents can keep children away from education and push them into work at an early age.

Balaknama has taken permission from children for their pictures. Names are changed.



IN THE SEARCH FOR LIVELIHOOD, DISHIKA MOVES AWAY FROM SCHOOL

Balaknama Reporter: Damini
Talkative Reporter: Khanak

During a visit to the Kirti Nagar informal settlement in Jaipur, Talkative Reporter Khanak met 12-year-old Dishika (name changed). During the conversation, it emerged that some time ago, handcarts and other manually operated equipment had been provided to families living in the set-tlement to help them find livelihood opportunities. The aim was to increase household income and support families in becoming financially self-reliant. Dishika's grandmother was also given a handcart for this purpose. Along with the cart, the Seva Sangh provided items such as bindis, kajal, rubber bands and lipstick for sale. However, the responsibility of selling these items gradu-ally fell on Dishika. After the cosmetic items ran out, Dishika began selling roasted corn with her grandmother. Dishika told the Talkative Reporter, "My grandmother brings the corn from Mu-hana Mandi. I roast it and sell it to people. We sell each corn for around ₹20, and I sell about 50 to 60 pieces in a day. This helps with our household expenses." Dishika said that she wants to attend school and play with other children, but because of her family's financial needs, she has to sit and sell the corn. She said, "If I go to school, who will sell the corn? Our household income will also decrease." Although children can currently be enrolled in schools even without docu-ments, the family's financial circumstances remain a major barrier to her education. During the conversation, Dishika said that she does not enjoy selling things. She wants to spend her time at school like other children, study and participate in sports and other activities. However, consider-ing her family's needs, she has had to put her own wishes aside. Dishika's story raises an im-portant question about how livelihood initiatives can ensure that the responsibility of earning does not shift onto children. A livelihood initiative can truly achieve its purpose only when it im-proves a family's income while also ensuring that children's education, play and childhood re-main protected.

CHILDREN LEFT ALONE AT HOME FACE INCREASED RISK OF ACCIDENTS

Talkative Reporter: Karan Kumar



In Nathupur, Gurugram, many children are sometimes left alone at home when their parents go out to work. Some children play outside, and minor disagreements during play can sometimes turn into fights. Balaknama Reporter Karan Kumar spoke to 9-year-old Kapil (name changed), who attends the CHETNA Education Centre in Nathupur. A few days ago, Kapil suffered an injury to his head. He shared that he was riding a bicycle with his friend when they had an argu-ment over who would ride it. His friend refused to give him the bicycle, and the disagreement soon turned into an argument involving abusive language. Kapil said that his friend then hit him on the head with the bicycle, causing an injury. Kapil's brother took him to a doctor for treat-ment, where his head was bandaged. Kapil explained that when parents go to work, children are sometimes left alone, which can increase the chances of fights and accidents. He also said that children can sometimes fall from rooftops or get hit by vehicles on the road. Highlighting con-cerns about children's safety, reporter Karan said that when parents go to work, children should be left in the care of a trusted adult. Leaving children alone can increase the risk of accidents and injuries, making it important to ensure proper supervision and safety.

"PICKING WASTE, CARRYING DREAMS: A CHILDHOOD CAUGHT BETWEEN ADDICTION AND SURVIVAL"

Talkative Reporter: Punit
Reporter: Amrit

Punit, who lives in the settlements around Lawrence Road in Delhi, shared information about a 13-year-old boy, Sonu (name changed), who lives near his home and has been struggling with substance use. Punit visited Sonu's home and spoke with him about his life. Sonu shared that his mother no longer lives with him and that he stays with his father. Although his father works, he does not give Sonu money, so the boy has to work himself to meet his basic needs and support himself. When asked about his work, Sonu said that he cleans at a factory and sometimes collects waste. The money he earns from working throughout the day is used to meet his daily needs. When asked why he uses substances, Sonu said that he fell into bad company



and gradually de-veloped an addiction to substance use and gambling. Spending money on these habits further increased his difficulties. When asked what happens to the money he earns, he said that his fa-ther takes it from him. Sonu also shared that his father uses his own earnings to consume sub-stances. He said that his father's addiction often led to conflicts between his parents at home, and these frequent disputes eventually resulted in his mother leaving the family. Sonu now lives with his father and works to meet his own needs. Sonu's story shows how deeply substance use within a family can affect a child's life. Without adequate family support and after becoming ex-posed to harmful influences, children can become vulnerable to labour, waste picking and sub-stance use at a very young age. Instead of blaming or distancing such children, it is important to understand their circumstances and connect them with appropriate support, protection and a safe environment.

CHILDREN'S VOICES BRING CHANGE AS TOILETS BEGIN TO BE BUILT IN THE COMMUNITY

Balaknama Reporter: Damini
Talkative Reporter: Varun

A significant change is now taking place in the Lakhesra community of Jaipur, where families have been waiting for better sanitation facilities for a long time. The construction of household toilets has now begun in the community, and the voices and continued efforts of the children have played an important role in bringing about this change. Around 80–90 families live in the community, but only 5–6 houses had toilets, and several of these were damaged or unusable. In the absence of toilets, women, adolescent girls and young children had to go outside the commu-nity to relieve themselves, often early in the morning or after dark. The children regularly attend the Chetna education centre, where they receive not only educational support but also infor-mation about their rights, health and safety. During a discussion on health and safety at the cen-tre, the children raised the issue of the lack of toilets in their community. Following this, 15–20 children decided to speak with their parents and other community members about the problem. They explained to their parents why having a toilet at home is important for every family. The



children also informed them about the toilet construction scheme being implemented through the municipal corporation. Under the scheme, families are required to contribute ₹2,000 towards toi-let construction, while the remaining construction cost is covered by the municipal corporation. The children encouraged their parents to participate in the scheme and provide the necessary sup-port so that toilets could be constructed in as many homes as possible. Fourteen-year-old Ruksar (name changed) shared, "We had to wake up at 5 in the morning. We had to go towards the fields with our mothers and aunts in the dark. During the rainy season, we were also afraid of mud, snakes and scorpions." With the construction of toilets now beginning in the community, residents hope that women, adolescent girls and children will be relieved of these difficulties. The small initiative taken by the children of Lakhesra demonstrates that children can understand problems in their surroundings and play an active role in bringing positive change to their com-munities.

CHILDREN'S HELP LINE NUMBERS

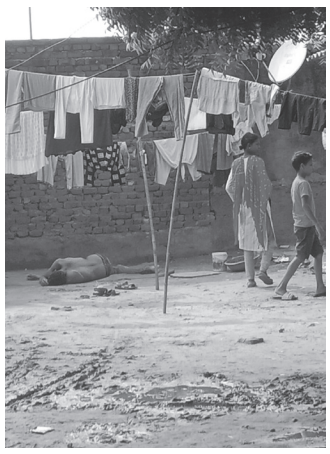
CONTACT THESE TOLL FREE NUMBERS IF YOU FACE ANY PROBLEM.

Child line Number
1098
Police Helpline Number
100

Balaknama has taken permission from children for their pictures. Names are changed.

WHEN ADDICTION CASTS A SHADOW OVER CHILDREN'S SMILES

Balaknama Reporter: Divyanshi



The home environment of 13-year-old Satyam (name changed), who lives in the MR Tower community in Gurugram, is sometimes filled with tension and fear because of his father's alcohol use. During a visit to the community, Balaknama Reporter Divyanshi learned about Satyam and his family's situation. Satyam attends CHETNA's education centre. According to Satyam, his father physically assaults his mother after consuming alcohol. Recently, his father had left home in the morning for work, but the family later learned that he was lying intoxicated at Vatika Chowk. Family members brought him home, but he was unconscious. They tried to revive him by splashing water on his face, but he did not regain consciousness. Some time later, when Satyam's mother tried to wake him, he physically assaulted her while still intoxicated. Such incidents with-in a family can create fear and emotional stress for children. Home should be a safe place for eve-ry child, but when repeated arguments and violence occur because of alcohol use, children can also be deeply affected. Living in such an environment can make it difficult for children to feel safe and secure. The situation faced by Satyam's family raises an important concern about chil-dren's safety and rights. Children need to be protected from violence and fear at home and pro-vided with a safe environment, which is a shared responsibility of families and society. The ef-fects of substance use and domestic violence do not remain limited to adults; children can also be affected by them. Ensuring that children grow up in a safe, caring and violence-free environment is essential for their well-being and future.

"CAUGHT BETWEEN FAMILY CONFLICTS AND CLASSROOM DREAMS"

Talkative Reporter: Divya
Reporter: Amrit



The impact of alcohol addiction is not limited to the person who consumes alcohol. It can also affect children's lives and education. A similar situation is being faced by 13-year-old Divya (name changed), who lives in the Shakurpur area of Delhi.

Divya is studying in Class 8. During a conversation with Balaknama reporter Amrit, she shared that her father drinks alcohol and often comes home intoxicated and starts arguments. When her father returns home after drinking, the atmosphere in the house becomes tense. The conflicts at home make her very upset, and at times she is unable to attend school because of these situations.

Divya said that she wants to study and attend school regularly. However, the conflicts at home are affecting her education. Because she has been unable to attend school, she has also missed several examinations. This has made her worried about her studies.

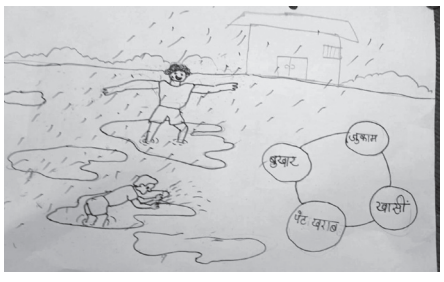
During the conversation, Divya shared that her mother is no longer with her. As a result, she fac-es several difficulties when her father drinks and creates conflicts at home. She wants the situa-tion at home to improve so that she can attend school without difficulty and continue her educa-tion.

Because of her prolonged absence from school, Divya is falling behind in her studies. While her classmates attend school, study and take examinations, she is sometimes unable to reach school because of the situation at home. Missing several examinations has further affected her educa-tion.

Divya's experience shows how deeply the home environment can affect a child's education and emotional well-being. Children need a safe and peaceful environment at home. A child's educa-tion should not be disrupted because of conflicts within the family. In such situations, it is im-portant to prioritise the child's safety and education so that difficult circumstances at home do not affect her future.

WATERLOGGING AND FILTH DURING THE RAINS INCREASE HEALTH RISKS FOR CHILDREN

Balaknama Reporter: Tanmoy Singh Talkative Reporter: Rehmat Ali



After the rains, stagnant water, open drains and piles of garbage can be seen at several places in the communities. This has increased the risk of unhygienic conditions and mosquitoes around children. During a community visit, Balaknama reporter Tanmoy Singh observed these problems.

In many areas, stagnant rainwater is creating conditions that can encourage mosquito breeding. In such environments, the risk of mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue, malaria and chikungunya may increase. At the same time, contact with dirty water and unhygienic surroundings can in-crease the risk of diarrhoea, vomiting, skin problems and other infections among children. According to the reporter, maintaining cleanliness in the communities has become difficult be-cause of open drains and garbage lying in several places. Waterlogging also increases the possibil-ity of mosquitoes breeding around children's living areas.

Community members said that regular cleaning of drains, proper disposal of garbage and the timely removal of stagnant water are essential during the rainy season. Children were also en-couraged to drink clean water, wash their hands before eating and stay away from dirty or stag-nant water. The rainy season can bring happiness to children, but poor sanitation in the communities can also increase their difficulties. Timely cleaning and removal of stagnant water are therefore important to help keep children safe and healthy.

"A CERTIFICATE IN HIS HANDS, BIGGER DREAMS IN HIS EYES"

Balaknama Reporter: Omansh



When Balaknama reporter met 12-year-old Rakib from Ghata, Gurugram, he noticed a certificate in his hands and asked him how he had received it. Rakib shared that he had received the certifi-cate after participating in a recently held sports competition. He was very happy to receive it, and the recognition further encouraged him to participate in sports.

According to Rakib, the competition was organised by Middle School, Ghata. A group of 11 children from Ghata participated in the competition held at Shri Swaminarayan Gurukul Interna-tional School. The children took part in sports such as kabaddi and kho-kho. Rakib actively par-ticipated in both games.

For Rakib, participating in the competition was not just about receiving a certificate. It also gave him an opportunity to play with new children, interact with them and explore his sporting abili-ties. Receiving the certificate made him feel that his hard work had been recognised. Rakib shared that he would like to participate in more sports competitions in the future and con-tinue improving his skills through sports. For him, the sports field has become more than just a place to play. The competition gave him a new opportunity to showcase his talent and develop greater confidence in himself.

"FOLDING PAPER, UNFOLDING DREAMS: STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN EXPRESS THEIR CREATIVI-TY"

Balaknama Reporter: Jeet

At the education centre in Chakkarpur, Gurugram, the children's curiosity was evident when col-ourful sheets of paper were placed in front of them. They were told that these simple sheets could be folded and transformed into different shapes. The children then created beautiful paper artworks with their own hands. A special art and craft activity was organised for the children at the education centre. During the activity, they were taught how to create different shapes using origami paper. The children carefully followed the instructions and tried each step themselves. Whenever a child faced difficulty, they were provided with support and guidance.Using orange and green coloured paper, the children created carrot-shaped figures. Folding the paper correctly, shaping it and adding green leaves on top was a new and enjoyable experience for them. The children were delighted to see the carrots they had made and proudly showed their creations to their friends. Through this activity, the children not only learned how to create shapes from paper but also practised patience, concentration, hand coordination and creative thinking. Some chil-dren were able to create the shape on their first attempt, while others tried again and improved their work. The children were also encouraged to use their imagination and create things in their own way. One child shared that they enjoyed folding the paper and turning it into something new. Other children said that they had initially thought that nothing special could be made from an ordinary sheet of paper, but the activity helped them understand that with a little effort and imagination, even a simple piece of paper can be transformed into beautiful art. Such activities at the education centre give children an opportunity to explore their talents and imagination along-side their studies. Through art and craft, children learn new things in an enjoyable way and dis-cover the creativity within themselves. The children's artworks were displayed and appreciated during the activity. They also enthusiastically posed for photographs with their creations. At the end of the activity, their faces reflected happiness and a sense of pride in their artwork.

Balaknama has taken permission from children for their pictures. Names are changed.

CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT DR. RADHAKRISHNAN'S LIFE, EDUCATION AND CHILD RIGHTS ON TEACH-ERS' DAY



Balaknama Reporter: Jahanara

Children at CHETNA's Education Centre in the Shakur Basti community of Delhi celebrated Teachers' Day with enthusiasm. On this occasion, the children learned about the importance of Teachers' Day and the life of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a renowned teacher and former Pres-ident of India. A teacher from a government school was invited as a guest for the programme. The teacher interacted with the children and shared important information about education and school admissions. The children were told that if they face any difficulty in getting admission to a school, they can approach him for support. He encouraged the children to study with hard work and dedication and work towards building a better future. The children listened attentively and also asked questions related to education. The children were then introduced to Balaknama and explained how child reporters use their reports to highlight issues affecting children and their communities. During the programme, the children also presented a song on the POCSO Act and child safety, which conveyed the message that children should remain aware of their rights and safety. Their performance was appreciated, and they were encouraged to continue participating actively in such activities. The Teachers' Day programme therefore became more than just a cele-bration; it provided children with an opportunity to learn about education, school admissions, child rights, child protection and child journalism, while also giving them a platform to express themselves and build confidence.

OPEN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT PERIODS: ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND WOMEN LEARN ESSENTIAL HEALTH INFORMATION



Balaknama Reporter: Jahana

Balaknama reporter Jahana participated in a special menstrual health awareness session organised by CHETNA in the Shakur Basti community of West Delhi on 17 September 2026. A total of 120 women and adolescent girls from the community participated in the session. The objective was to provide accurate and essential information about menstruation, reduce hesitation and em-barrassment surrounding the topic, and encourage girls and women to become more aware of their menstrual health. The session also provided participants with an opportunity to share their concerns and ask questions about menstruation. At the beginning of the session, the adolescent girls were informed that menstruation is a natural biological process and that there is no need to feel ashamed when talking about it. They were en-couraged to discuss any menstrual health-related problems, questions, or concerns openly with a trusted person, family member, or healthcare professional rather than keeping them to themselves. The session highlighted that access to accurate information helps adolescent girls understand their bodies better and seek appropriate support whenever needed. The session also focused on the importance of menstrual hygiene, personal cleanliness, and nutri-tious food during menstruation. The girls were informed that their bodies need adequate nutrition during this time and that consuming a balanced and nutritious diet is essential. They were also encouraged to drink sufficient water and maintain proper hygiene. During the session, the adolescent girls actively shared their questions and concerns about men-struation. Through these discussions, they learned that asking questions and expressing concerns about periods is completely normal. The session helped build their confidence to speak openly about issues related to their health. Following the awareness session, Balaknama reporter Jahanah interacted with some of the adolescent girls to understand what they found most useful and meaningful.

During the interaction, one adolescent girl shared, "I really liked learning about the 7-2-1 formula for periods during this session. Learning about this formula helped me understand many new things related to menstruation."

She further explained that she had previously been unclear about certain aspects of menstruation. However, after receiving information during the session, she felt more confident in understand-ing the subject and expressing her thoughts. Neelam from Samagra Shiksha also interacted with the adolescent girls during the awareness ses-sion and shared important information about menstruation. She encouraged them to take care of their health, maintain personal hygiene, and speak to a trusted person whenever they faced any difficulties instead of hiding their concerns. Neelam also emphasised that accurate information and open conversations are essential to over-coming the hesitation, stigma, and misconceptions surrounding menstruation in society. The participating women and adolescent girls also shared their experiences and perspectives. The discussions highlighted that when adolescent girls receive age-appropriate and relevant infor-mation, their fears and hesitation decrease, helping them become more aware and confident about their health.

The menstrual health awareness session organised by CHETNA went beyond simply providing information about periods. It created a supportive space for adolescent girls to understand their health, ask questions, and express themselves with confidence. The session conveyed an important message: menstruation is natural, talking about it is normal, and being aware of one's health is essential. With accurate information and greater awareness, adolescent girls can take better care of their present health and move towards a healthier and bet-ter future.

This initiative by CHETNA was an important step towards increasing menstrual health awareness among women and adolescent girls in the community and creating an environment where men-struation can be discussed openly and without hesitation.P

CELEBRATING RAKSHA BANDHAN BY MAKING COLOURFUL RAKHIS

Balaknama Reporter: Jeet



Children at CHETNA's Education Centre in Chakkarpur, Gurugram, celebrated Raksha Bandhan with enthusiasm and happiness. On the occasion, the children were taught how to make rakhis at the education centre, and they prepared all the rakhis themselves. Using colourful threads, beads and decorative materials, the children created beautiful rakhis of their choice. Once the rakhis were ready, the children tied them on one another's wrists. The girls tied rakhis on their brothers' wrists and expressed their love and best wishes, while the brothers promised to always treat their sisters with love and respect. The children shared the joy of Raksha Bandhan and also created a poster at the education centre highlighting the bond between brothers and sis-ters and the significance of the festival. The organisation's social worker explained to the chil-dren that Raksha Bandhan is not only a festival of tying rakhis but also conveys a message of love, trust, respect and mutual support. The children were encouraged to understand that both brothers and sisters should care for each other's safety and respect. Making rakhis with their own hands was a special part of the celebration. The children selected their preferred colours and de-signs, made their rakhis and then used them to celebrate Raksha Bandhan. The activity encour-aged creativity as well as a spirit of celebrating together. Happiness was clearly visible on the children's faces throughout the celebration. The children shared that making a rakhi themselves and tying it on their sibling's wrist was a special experience for them. The Raksha Bandhan cele-bration at the education centre brought the children not only joy but also a meaningful message about love, respect and supporting one another.



CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY LIVE AMID GARBAGE AND MOSQUITOES

Talkative Reporter: Pinku

The continuous accumulation of garbage outside a slum community in Noida is increasing the difficulties faced by families living there. Garbage piles have accumulated at several places around the community, causing a strong foul smell. The waste has also led to an increase in mos-quitoes, making it increasingly difficult for residents to live comfortably around their homes. Lo-cal residents said that some people and companies from outside the community dump waste in the open around the settlement. Over time, the amount of garbage has increased and reached very close to people's homes. Families whose houses are located near the garbage piles face the greatest difficulty. During hot and humid weather, the foul smell and mosquito problem become even worse. According to residents, the smell can sometimes become so strong that it is difficult to stay inside their homes or even eat comfortably. The unhygienic surroundings are also affect-ing children. Children play nearby and pass the garbage piles every day. Parents are concerned that constant exposure to mosquitoes and unhygienic surroundings could affect their children's health. In such an environment, it is also difficult for children to study and play safely. Commu-nity members said that basic facilities are already limited in the area, and the continuous accumu-lation of garbage around their homes has made their problems worse. Residents have requested the concerned departments and administration to remove the garbage as soon as possible and en-sure regular cleaning. They have also demanded designated waste disposal points so that garbage is not dumped in the open around the community. Residents said that removing the garbage just once will not solve the problem; regular cleaning and waste collection are necessary. They also want steps to be taken to ensure that no individual or organisation dumps waste in the open out-side the community. Residents question why they should be forced to live among garbage, foul smells and mosquitoes when living in a clean and safe environment is a basic right.

Balaknama has taken permission from children for their pictures. Names are changed.

CHILDREN REWARDED FOR THEIR CONSISTENT ATTENDANCE AT THE EDUCATION CENTRE

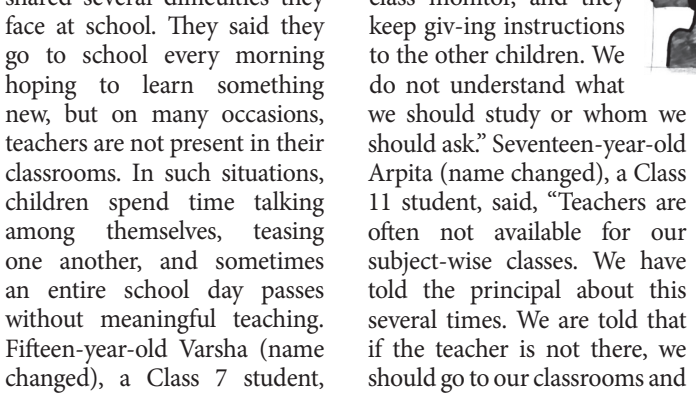
Balaknama Reporter: Jeet

Every day, many children come to CHETNA's Education Centre to study and learn new things. Some children attend the centre after school, while others come regularly for their daily learning. Along with education, children are also encouraged to learn about cleanliness, discipline and helping one another. They are regularly reminded that attending the centre consistently and stud-ying with interest is important. To encourage regular attendance, the attendance register was reviewed to identify children who were coming to the centre every day and those who had maintained 100 percent attendance. The register showed that some children had not taken a single day off and had maintained full attendance. Seeing their consistent effort, the social worker decided to encourage them with a small gift. When the children were told that they would receive a gift for their regular attendance, they were very happy. They were given drawing sheets, which brought smiles to their faces. The children said they would use the sheets to create drawings of



things they liked, such as trees, flowers, houses and butterflies. For them, the drawing sheets were not just gifts but a small reward for their hard work and regular attendance. Seeing their friends receive the drawing sheets also motivated other children to attend the centre regularly. Some children said they would try to maintain 100 percent attendance in the future. The children also understood that attending the centre regularly would help them keep up with their studies and learn something new every day. The social worker explained that receiving a gift is less im-portant than attending the centre regularly and continuing their education. Children may take leave when they are unwell or have an important family reason, but taking frequent leave without a reason can affect their learning. Therefore, children were encouraged to come to the centre on time every day and continue their studies.

DREAMS AND FUTURES OF CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTAL CARE DISCUSSED AT SWAPNA SAMMELAN 2026



Balaknama Reporter: Preeti

For 14-year-old Roshni (name changed), who lives in the N-86 community in Delhi, a ten-day National Cadet Corps (NCC) training camp was an experience that boosted her confidence and helped her understand the importance of discipline and responsibility. Roshni studies in Class 10 at Government Sarvodaya Co-Educational School, Keshavpuram. She got the opportunity to par-ticipate in a ten-day NCC camp organised at Delhi Cantonment through her school. Several other students from her school also participated in the camp. A fixed daily routine was followed dur-ing the camp. The children woke up at 7 a.m., got ready on time and reached the training area. Throughout the day, they participated in various activities and training sessions. They were taught drill, physical exercises, discipline and teamwork, along with leadership skills. The trainers guided the children on how to perform each activity correctly and encouraged them throughout the training. Roshni shared that some activities felt difficult at first, but with regular practice and support from the trainers, she gradually became comfortable with them. The camp also had a pos-itive impact on her confidence. Earlier, she felt hesitant to speak in front of others, but continu-ously participating in group activities and training helped reduce her hesitation. She now express-es her views more confidently and tries to complete every task responsibly. Roshni also learned how important it is to complete tasks on time and with responsibility. She learned to work as part of a team, help others and remain patient in difficult situations. After returning from the camp, she has also been trying to complete her daily responsibilities on time. For Roshni, the NCC camp was not just a physical training programme. It gave her an opportunity to meet new people, work with them and learn new things. She particularly enjoyed the drills, group activities and follow-ing a structured daily routine. She would like to participate in more NCC activities in the future.

Roshni believes that providing children and adolescents with such opportunities can help develop qualities such as discipline, confidence, teamwork, leadership and responsibility. These skills can support them in their education, future work and in facing other challenges in life.

CAUGHT BETWEEN THE DESIRE TO STUDY AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES, A CHILD SELLS FRUITS



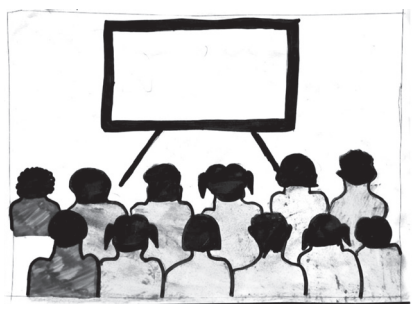
Balaknama Reporter: Damini
Talkative Reporter: Akash

Balaknama Reporter visited Kali Ka Bhatta Basti, where the reporter noticed a boy of around 13 years selling fruits from a cart. During the conversation, the reporter learned about his experienc-es and daily life. It emerged that the boy had started working at a young age to support his fami-ly responsibilities. Pravesh (name changed) lives in a rented house in the Ajmeri Gate area with his three sisters. After the death of his father, much of the responsibility for the family fell on his young shoulders. Pravesh strongly wishes to study. He wants to attend school, continue his edu-cation and build a better future, but his family's financial situation remains a major challenge. To support his sisters and contribute towards household expenses, Pravesh spends his days selling fruits in different areas. He said, "I travel to different places throughout the day to sell fruits. Sometimes the work goes well and sometimes it doesn't. This is how we manage our household expenses." At an age when children should have books and schoolbags in their hands, Pravesh is working every day to help his family meet their basic needs. Despite these difficulties, he contin-ues to dream of studying and moving forward in life. The Balaknama Reporter informed Pravesh about CHETNA's Alternative Education Centre operating in the community and encouraged him to enrol and attend regularly so that he could restart his education.

CHILDREN GO TO SCHOOL HOPING TO LEARN, BUT TEACHERS ARE OFTEN MISSING FROM CLASS

Balaknama Reporter: Damini

Balaknama Reporter spoke to children studying in different government schools in Jaipur to un-derstand their experiences related to education. The children shared several difficulties they face at school. They said they go to school every morning hoping to learn something new, but on many occasions, teachers are not present in their classrooms. In such situations, children spend time talking among themselves, teasing one another, and sometimes an entire school day passes without meaningful teaching. Fifteen-year-old Varsha (name changed), a Class 7 student, said, "I wake up early and come to school because I hope to learn something new. But many times, there is no teacher in the classroom. A student is made to stand as the class monitor, and they keep giv-ing instructions to the other children. We do not understand what we should study or whom we should ask." Seventeen-year-old Arpita (name changed), a Class 11 student, said, "Teachers are often not available for our subject-wise classes. We have told the principal about this several times. We are told that if the teacher is not there, we should go to our classrooms and



study on our own." According to the children, the situation has become more difficult when teachers are assigned BLO (Booth Level Officer) duties. They said that even when teachers return to school for a day or two after their BLO duties, much of their time is spent completing pending online work. As a result, regular classes are affected and their studies fall behind. A child named Vishal said, "This problem has continued for a long time. When teachers go for BLO duty, we often re-turn home without learning anything. We are unable to study for long periods and later have to appear for examinations without completing the entire syllabus." The children's experiences show that they want to study and come to school with the expectation of learning, but the absence of regular classes and teachers is affecting their education. The children say they want a school where teachers attend classes regularly, teach them properly and answer their questions.

Balaknama has taken permission from children for their pictures. Names are changed.

COMMUNITIES DEMAND A BETTER ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

Reporter: Amrit

A concerning situation has emerged from a community in Delhi, where young children are re-portedly being asked to bring alcohol for adults. Local residents said that some people in the area lure children with money, food and other items and send them to purchase alcohol. According to residents, this is gradually exposing children to an inappropriate environment and is beginning to affect their education and behaviour.

Ten-year-old Pintu (name changed), who lives in the community, shared that some adults often send children to bring alcohol for them. He said that initially, children agree to do the work for ₹10 or ₹20, but later they are repeatedly called to do it. According to Pintu, some children begin spending more time with such people and gradually lose interest in their studies.

Twelve-year-old Chintu (name changed) said that after school, some children spend time with people who consume alcohol regularly. He shared that children are sometimes sent several times a day to bring alcohol from different places. Some children said they are initially told that they need to do it "just once", but later it becomes a regular activity.

Some children also reported that after bringing alcohol, they are sometimes asked to stay there and are given other small tasks. Gradually, children begin spending more time in the same envi-ronment.

Local residents said that this is affecting children's studies, tuition and participation in sports. Some parents reported that children returning home late, losing interest in studies and using inap-propriate language have also become concerns.



Women in the community have expressed concern over the situation. They said that exposing young children to an alcohol-related environment can negatively affect their mental and social development. One local woman said that children learn a great deal from their surroundings, and if they regularly spend time in an unhealthy environment from a young age, it can influence their behaviour and thinking.

Some residents said that children may not always tell their families about such activities because of fear or the lure of money. Parents expressed concern that negative peer groups and exposure to alcohol-related environments could affect children's future. They believe that financial hardship, unemployment and lack of awareness may also contribute to the problem.

Social workers said that involving children in such activities is a serious concern. They have urged the administration to identify people who send children to purchase alcohol and take ap-propriate action. They also called for more education, sports and awareness programmes in com-munities so that children have access to a safe and positive environment.

Teachers have also expressed concern about changes in children's behaviour. According to them, some children are paying less attention to their studies and spending more time in inappropriate company after school. In such circumstances, families, schools and the wider community need to work together to support and protect children.

Local residents have urged the administration to conduct awareness campaigns in communities, strengthen monitoring of illegal alcohol-related activities and ensure children's safety. Keeping children away from alcohol and harmful influences is essential for protecting their childhood. En-suring that children have access to education, sports and a safe environment is a shared responsi-bility of the entire community.

A CHILD'S CHILDHOOD BURIED UNDER A HEAP OF SCRAP



Balaknama Reporter: Damini
Talkative Reporter: Monu

During a visit to various informal settlements in Jaipur, Balaknama reporter Damini noticed sev-eral children collecting scrap in the Agra Road settlement. During a conversation with the chil-dren, it was found that many of them were engaged in scrap collection instead of attending school because of poverty and their families' difficult financial circumstances. Eleven-year-old Monu (name changed) is one of these children. Monu lives with his parents in the settlement. His parents do not have permanent employment. To meet their daily needs, they collect plastic, bot-tles, metal and cardboard from waste and sell them. Due to the family's financial difficulties, Monu also began accompanying them for this work at a young age. Monu shared that he leaves home at around 7 a.m. carrying a sack and a weighing scale used for collecting scrap. After spending the entire day collecting scrap, he is able to sell materials worth around ₹200–300. While searching through heaps of waste, he sometimes gets injuries to his hands and feet. Despite this, he has to continue the work because of his family's financial needs. Monu said that he is un-able to attend school and also finds reading and writing difficult. When he sees other children going to school in their uniforms, he also wishes to go to school. However, his family's financial situation forces him to collect scrap instead. Balaknama reporter Damini encouraged Monu to join the Chetna Alternative Education Centre operating in the community, where he can receive educational support and the necessary learning materials. There are many children in informal set-tlements who are deprived of education and begin working at a young age because of poverty, financial hardship within their families and a lack of awareness. Connecting such children with education and appropriate support is essential to help them move towards a safer and better fu-ture.

LITTLE HANDS SELLING PAPADS, BIG DREAMS WAITING FOR SCHOOL

Balaknama Reporter: Damini

During a visit to Chetna Basti in Jaisinghpura Khor, Jaipur, the Balaknama reporter noticed a young girl standing by the roadside with a basket of papads instead of books in her hands. She was selling papads to people passing by. When the reporter spoke to her, 12-year-old Shimla (name changed) shared that she is currently not attending school. She said that she wants to study, but the documents required for her school admission have not yet been prepared. Because of the lack of these documents, she could not enrol in school and gradually dropped out of edu-cation. Shimla said that she does not remain idle at home. Due to her family's difficult financial situation, she goes out every day to sell papads and support her mother. Her mother goes beg-ging, but this does not provide a regular or sufficient income. As the family struggles to meet its



basic needs, Shimla also wants to contribute to the household. She said that one papad is sold for ₹5 and she earns around ₹60–70 in a day. Her mother purchases raw papads at low prices and prepares them by frying them. Shimla then takes them around the community and nearby areas to sell. For Shimla, selling papads is not simply a way to earn money. She works every day to sup-port her family, but she still has a strong desire to return to school and continue her education. Children like Shimla need timely support to obtain essential documents and reconnect with edu-cation. Identifying such children and providing them with documentation and access to school can help them move away from the compulsion to work at a young age and move towards their dreams.

OPEN PITS ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL PUT CHILDREN AT RISK

Balaknama Reporter: Damini
Talkative Reporter: Bheem

Balaknama Reporter visited different communities in Jaipur to learn about children's problems and experiences. During the visit, children from Vasundhara Kachchi Basti, located near the Jai-pur-Agra Road, shared that they are currently facing difficulties while going to school. Their school is around 4 kilometres from the settlement, and most children walk to school every day. However, sewer lines and pipelines are currently being laid along the route. Large pits have been dug at several places, and piles of soil have been left along the road. In some areas, the path has become so narrow that children have to take longer alternative routes to reach school. The chil-dren said that there are no barricades, bamboo poles or other safety measures around many of the open pits. As a result, they have to be extremely careful while walking to school. Thirteen-year-old Rahim (name changed) said, "Earlier, we used to take the direct route to school, but now the road has been dug up. We have to take longer routes in several places. Sometimes I am scared that my foot might fall into a pit. A few days ago, two children almost fell while walking along the road." The children and community members have requested that the sewer line work be completed as soon as possible. Until the work is completed, they have urged that barricades or bamboo poles be placed around the open pits, adequate lighting be provided and water collected in the pits be removed to prevent accidents involving children and other community members.

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