

(Ensuring high-retention rate of street-connected children in Government school)

Adapting new ways of learning during the pandemic

The street to School project was initiated in 2015 to admit and retain street-connected children in local government schools in the West Delhi with the support of Toybox. Consisting of a combined package of activities such as home visits, school visits, teachers' training, parents' meetings, providing remedial education and life skills workshops to children, this model has emerged as a huge success and is observing the exponential increase in the number of beneficiaries every year. In 2020, Street to School reached out to 527 (M-277, F-250) beneficiaries in the district of East Delhi. The project's prime objective is to maximize the retention of children in Government schools and with pride, the Street to School Project has been able to give its maximum output year after year. Presently, the project encompasses 16 Government schools, 10 communities, and 10

education clubs.

The world experienced the most terrific pandemic of all times which led to a huge transformation in each area. From working sitting into cubicles to managing home and work simultaneously everything changed in a blink of an eye. Digitalization took over a lead in our lives. With these significant changes, the working of our project Street to School also transformed. Both the organizations CHETNA and Toybox laid out innovative and creative strategies for continuing the project without changing the project's core objectives.

CHETNA equipped its educators by imparting training to them for conducting online classes and preparing teaching-learning materials. Our educators put forth all their efforts in staying in touch with children and shared videos of general knowledge, maths, quizzes, and English

with the children.

Since the majority of our beneficiaries did not have enough money to get their phones recharged; CHETNA helped them by getting their phones recharged so that they can have a hassle-free education. Children's issues and problems were also taken into consideration and immediate support and solutions were provided to them. CHETNA provided a platform for the children where they can showcase their hidden talent and keep their spirits high during the crisis by organizing "Cheer volunteers" programs every month.

The year has been a rollercoaster ride for everyone associated with us, our beneficiaries, our educators, and their parents but it was the combined efforts of all the stakeholders that helped in smooth implementation of the project even during times of crisis.

Street children determine to study even after all odds

Children, who earlier spent their lives under great difficulty, were pushed into more miserable conditions due to the coronavirus. Children and families living on the streets of East Delhi were struggling to meet their basic needs during COVID but even in these uncertain times they did not leave studying. There were different ways and methods in which these children stayed connected with education and our team members put forth their efforts in imparting education to these children even in odd circumstances.

Children continued their studies even from keypad phones. Families who starve for food cannot afford to buy smartphones. Most children residing in East Delhi have keypad phones. Our educators gave work and taught to the children through call. Children who had access to smartphones stayed connected with the educators through WhatsApp group, video calls, and conference calls. Some children do not have access to either smartphones or keypad phones but still, they

continued their studies with the help of their friend's phone.

During the span of lockdown, our team members made innovative learning materials. They made videos on various topics like general knowledge, maths, Hindi, and English and sent them to children. Children were able to access these videos anytime and were able to gain a lot of knowledge from it. COVID took a heavy toll on the mental and physical well being of the children, our team members focused on teaching them through recreational activities. Our team members made learning fun through games, stories, and poems to lift children's mood and keep their spirits alive.

To keep children connected with studies and boost their confidence, team members also narrated stories, showed acts of puppets and shared videos of poems, etc to maintain the mental and physical well-being of the children. They also provide counseling to the children regularly.



Benefitting children: Unique identification Number

Aadhar Card (Unique Identification Number) is a 12-digit unique identification number that is mandatory for Indian residents. Aadhaar is the world's largest biometric ID system. For availing of any Government facilities and getting enrolled in the Government school, it is advised to have an Aadhar card. Considering this and the importance of Aadhar cards, our team members collected Aadhar Cards of all the beneficiaries. Few beneficiaries did not have Aadhar Cards; our team members took the initiative and responsibility of getting the Aadhar cards of children made from the Government offices. Our team members passed out with flying colors and were successful in getting the Aadhar card made of more than 200 children (male, female) in last six months. It was the combined efforts of our beneficiaries, their parents, and our team members in getting the Aadhar cards updated. With these cards, our beneficiaries can easily avail the benefits offered by Government, and most importantly it is mandatory to link the bank account with Aadhar Cards for availing bank services.



Building alliance even during the pandemic



School visits are an integral part of the street to school project. A child is nurtured and equipped through various stakeholders in their growing years. School, teachers, and principals play an important role in shaping the lives of children. Our educators go on school visits to check the progress of children and their retention in schools. During COVID, this became a strenuous task for our educators to stay connected with the

school authorities and children. Our team members acted as a bridge between schools and children in overcoming the gaps in several ways. As the world is moving towards digitalization, our school visits also transformed and were conducted remotely. Our team members stayed in contact with school teachers throughout the lockdown through the phone. They retrieved information about food

distribution and transfer of money in bank accounts from teachers and informed to children. Children were benefitted from such support systems provided by the schools.

Online stakeholder meetings were organized with teachers and other concerned authorities for discussing the various challenges faced in imparting education online and also some mitigation plans were discussed to make online learning fun and easy for children.

Team members also gathered information about how the exams will be conducted and how children will get promoted from class 5th to class 6th. This information was passed on to the children and team members guided them for their exams. Children who do not have access to smartphones received worksheets from schools and our educators helped them in completing the worksheets. Through phones, video calls and zoom meetings our educators stayed in contact with the school authorities and children.

Developing leaders of tomorrow

Badhtekadam is a federation of street-connected children that focuses on empowering these children. From each education club, a badhtekadam leader is chosen who put forward the problems of their community. Core Committee Meetings are held monthly in which these leaders represent their education clubs and discuss their problems and also give their valuable feedbacks in the areas where improvements are needed.

The core committee meeting was held with 20 leaders of different education club. The meeting was initiated by playing some ice breaker games to familiarize children with each other. The agendas of the meeting were to discuss the problems and issues of the community, responsibilities of a leader, discussion on the news of balaknama, discussion on schools and studies, and discussion on the child rights.

The leaders discussed their problems like



the place where they sit and study is full of garbage because of which children are unable to concentrate on their studies, the educators were asked to change the place of teaching immediately. Leaders also discussed their responsibilities that they had learned in the residential workshop held in the year 2019 in Jaipur. Leaders discussed the studies and schools; they brought many issues in front of us like how

teachers are not paying much attention to children, how teachers often do discriminate between students, and how students bunk classes after lunchtime. These are some major discussions that were held in the core committee meeting. Leaders were given refreshments and shoes for doing commendable work and motivating them to keep doing good work in the future.

Change is a necessity



Parents are the foundational pillar for children, their concerns and insecurities are important to address. Parent's meetings are conducted monthly under the street to school project to discuss the issues of parents, to know their economic condition, and to discuss children's progress. Due to COVID, there was a drastic change in the ways of conducting parents

meeting. As children's education was suffering, parents took initiative and supported their children in continuing their education.

During the span of COVID, the agendas of parent's meetings were modified according to the current situation. The team members discussed the online education of children, discussed the

worksheets provided by schools, and discussion on the economic condition of the people. The parent's meetings were conducted online through WhatsApp calls, videos, and conference calls in which a lot of parents participated and put forward their concerns and issues. Parents discussed the challenges they faced during the COVID, CHETNA team members tried to solve their problems. Many families faced scarcity of food and ration, our team members informed them about the E-ration coupon cards through which they were able to avail themselves free food from the schools.

Our team members spread awareness about COVID to the parents and made them aware of the preventive measures that they should use to avoid getting affected by the coronavirus. They also made them realize the importance of education and added children into the WhatsApp group created by the teachers. Initially, parents were reluctant to join parents meeting online but gradually they understood the importance of it, and the outcomes of the meeting help in resolving many issues of the parents.

A sigh of relief during the crisis

When the whole world was fighting to win a battle against COVID, street-connected families and children were fighting two battles, one of COVID and the other battle was of survival. As the days passed their situation got terrible, they did not have food to eat, clothes to wear and a shelter to live in. Looking at their miserable condition, CHETNA NGO extended its helping hands by providing emergency support to the street-connected families in alliance with Toybox.

Children were starving for food; CHETNA helped these children and their families by providing them dry ration packets that contained pulses, wheat, rice, and some spices. Under street to school projects, it became difficult to teach these children. The children were also losing their interest in studies as they did not have notebooks, pens, and pencils. CHETNA distributed stationery kits to these children so that they can continue their studies smoothly.



The stationery kits contained pencils, pens, notebooks, drawing sheets, and sketch pens for children. Children were encouraged to study and they took interest in studying. Parents also felt motivated and encouraged their children to study. During these uncertain times, children were also provided with health and hygiene kits. The kits contained materials

like sanitizers, soaps, masks, and toothbrushes. Children were able to maintain hygiene and protect themselves from COVID. During winters, children face a lot of difficulties as they do not have warm clothes. CHETNA distributed jackets, a pair of socks, body warmers, and lowers to the children so that they can protect themselves from the cold breeze.

CHETNA also addressed the concerns of adolescent girls by distributing sanitary napkins. Due to financial constraints, families did not have sufficient amount to buy pads for their adolescent girls and they were forced to use old clothes and sometimes they did not even have clothes so they used to just sit in one place for hours. Trampolines were also distributed during the rainy season to the families.

These distributions were held to support these families during times of crisis and also to encourage and motivate children to do not lose hope even during difficult times.

Where there is a will, there is a way

COVID-19 was extremely harsh on the street connected families. Their survival was at stake and their children's education was on the verge of getting ruined. Our educators worked hard all day and night and faced many challenges in getting in contact with parents and children. Due to the financial crisis faced by the parents, they were unable to get their phones recharged and a few families left for their native place. It became a strenuous task for our educators to get in touch with the children as either their phones were not reachable or they changed their numbers.

COVID brought a lot of unemployment to the country. The daily wage earners were severely impacted by the lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of COVID. These families did not have sufficient money to buy food, they couldn't get their phones recharged for the online learning of their children. Due to lockdown, there were strict regulations on the movement because of which parents were unable to work anywhere and earn money.

Our educators courageously overcame all the hurdles and passed out with flying colors. They ensured to stay in contact with beneficiaries who did not have access to smartphones by contacting them on their neighbor's phone, relative's phone, or friend's phone. Our educators also spread awareness to the parents about the importance of education. They ensured that the

parents bring worksheets from the school and submit it back to the school on time.

To provide immediate relief and solutions to the problems, under the street to school project, phones of children were recharged so that they can get in contact with their educators and continue their studies without any obstacles. The team also

helped the parents in getting ration by informing them about the E ration coupons and also giving them information about the ration distributed freely in the school. We did not leave the hands of the street-connected families during the darkest hours; in fact, we tried to find out alternatives to making things easier for them.



Education breeds compassion

13 years old Sunny [name changed] lives in the slums of East Delhi. There are 7 members in his family including him, his parents, and 4 sisters. His father's poor health doesn't allow him to work, whereas his mother works in a factory and his sister makes bindis (a small red holy dot worn by Indian married women). Since the moment lockdown began, his family has fallen on hard times. Before lockdown, his father was not working anywhere and after the lockdown, his mother's work was also put on hold because of which there was adversity of ration and money in the family. Gradually as the days



passed they consumed the entire stored ration and after a few weeks, his mother had to borrow the ration from his neighbors. There was hand to mouth situation. The situation became so worse, that his family had to yearn for a one day meal. He had to stand in long queues under the scorching heat for food, at times he got half filled vessels and at times they served half-cooked food. On some days, he slept empty stomach and gave the food to his siblings and family. His education can be best complimented for his compassion towards his family members and his sensible act.

Self-Awareness Leads to Prosperity

Residing in the slums of East Delhi, nine years old Rakhi [name changed] lives with her six family members her parents, and 3 siblings. Her father drives a rickshaw and her mother works as domestic help for meeting the needs of the family. Prior to her intervention with the street to school project, she used to look after her siblings and did household chores. After meeting the educator of the street to school she showed her inclination toward studies and she was enrolled in a Government school. The coronavirus outbreak has created havoc in street-connected families. One such family Rakhi, due to the lack of financial resources there was adversity of food and ration. Her mother had to stand in long

queues under the scorching heat to avail free food that was distributed in schools through Government. They were somehow managing their survival when Rakhi fell sick. The family was anxious about bearing the medical expenses. But Rakhi did not lose hope and she did not want to be a burden on her family. So she along with her friend went to a Government dispensary and bought free medicines for herself. After a few weeks, her health started to recover and she was able to help her mother. Her parents were glad to see, Rakhi became an independent and responsible person. Her concern towards her parents shows her maturity and potential of understanding her parent's situation.



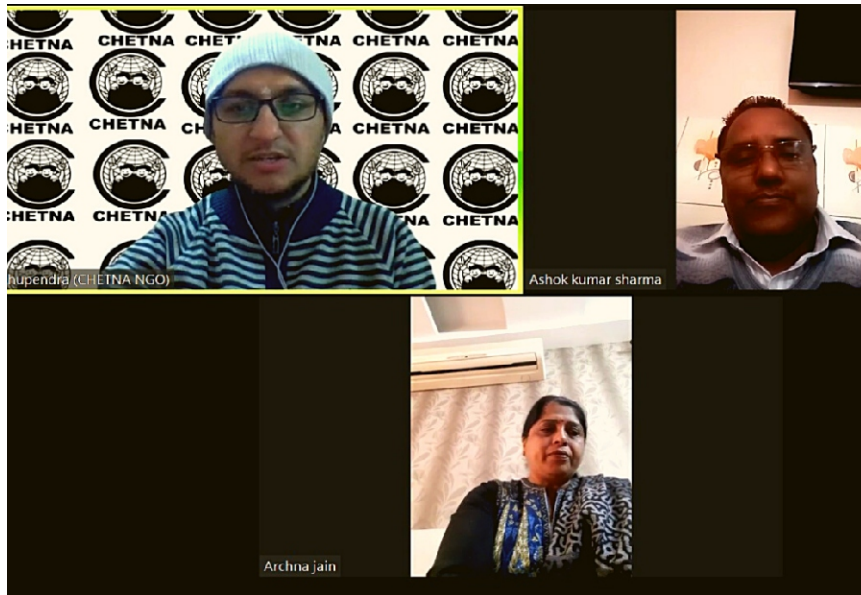
Liberating the young minds



The early and long-term closure of schools has severely impacted the education of senior children. Their studies have been hampered and there was a big question mark on their progress. In this regard, CHETNA and our team members came up with innovative and interesting techniques of teaching senior children while keeping their interest in studies by encouraging and motivating them. Several different methods were used to teach these children. Our team members made videos and quizzes for these children.

Children who had normal keypad phones were given work over call. To keep children in constant contact with the school, they were asked to bring worksheets, and then our educator made them understand those worksheets through video calls and conference calls. Children showed great progress in reading English and Sanskrit which is a great achievement for our educators. Children were kept engrossed in studies by sending them videos and fun learning materials. To stop child labor it is important to keep these children engaged in their studies.

Strengthening the intervention: Online Stakeholder Meeting



Stakeholder meetings are conducted every year to strengthen our interventions and to address the issues and concerns of our children. This year due to the outbreak of COVID, stakeholder meeting was conducted online in which parents; teachers, reputed authorities from DCPCR, DCPU, and CWC, children, and all the CHETNA staff members participated to discuss some pristine issues of children regarding their studies.

The problems faced during online learning were put forward by the principal of EDMC

School. The children lack interest in online learning and their performance has declined. Children collect worksheets from the school but since the parents are illiterate they face a lot of difficulties in completing them. To resolve this problem, it was proposed that a seminar should be conducted for the parents to make them understand the worksheets so that they can help their children. From time to time parents meeting should be conducted, so that the parents can check the progress of their child, and also there should not be any

time limit on collecting and submitting the worksheets. Children should regularly collect the worksheets and submit them on time.

The benefits availed by children before the COVID was also taken into consideration. The children can avail all the benefits from Government school like Kanya Sumangal Yojana and instead of mid-day meals they are provided with dry ration packets to satisfy their starving. To continue a hassle-free education the Government is trying to distribute tablets to the children who lack access to smartphones; this was also discussed in the meeting by the principal.

The Indian Government has made Aadhar Cards mandatory for availing many benefits. The children need to have Aadhar cards, in the meeting it was discussed that a list of children who do not have Aadhar cards should be made and the process should be initiated. CHETNA team members also raised some queries and clarified their doubts.

Parents and children also expressed their views. They praised CHETNA for their efforts in teaching their children even during the time of COVID. The meeting was closed by discussing the action plans that were proposed during the discussions and with a vote of thanks to all the participants.

Spreading happiness is the essence of festivity

Festivals bring cheerfulness and merriness all around. It's a reason to get along with family members and spread happiness everywhere. The season of festivals is the time when everyone's heart is filled with joy, but this year due to COVID, the festivals were not celebrated on a large scale. CHETNA believes in bringing a smile to the faces of our little children especially during festivals, so even in these unprecedented times, we did not leave any stone unturned in making our children smile and enjoy the festive spirits.

This year CHETNA celebrated all the festivals virtually. Badhtekadam which is a federation of street-connected children, its foundation day was celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm. The program was celebrated virtually where Badhtekadam leaders narrated their journey and encouraged and



welcomed new leaders. Children showed their happiness by singing songs, dancing, and reciting poems.

Independence Day was celebrated virtually in which children showcased their talent and remembered the sacrifice of our freedom fighters. On the occasion of children's day, children were given goody bags which contained drawing sheets,



sketch pens, pencils, and some eatable items which brought a huge smile on the faces of our children. The festival of lights Diwali was celebrated virtually with all the team members of CHETNA and our beneficiaries. Children performed dance, sang songs, and recited poems.

To strengthen the voice of children: Support Group Meetings



Support Group Meetings are an essential part of our Street to School project. These meetings are conducted monthly

to discuss the issues of children and make them self-reliant so that they can raise their voice against injustice and take a

stand for themselves. Earlier these meetings were conducted on the education club, where children enthusiastically participated and raised their issues. As COVID turned everything upside down and moved the world into an era of digitalization, our ways of working also transformed.

At present these SGM are conducted over video calls and conference calls where children are asked to participate and discuss their problems with our educators. Our team members try to resolve these issues and give moral support to the children. Children are made aware of their rights in these meetings. After unlock, our team members started visiting on the field and conducted these meetings on-field by following all the norms of social distancing and wearing a mask. Children are divided into smaller groups and then sessions are held to maintaining social distancing.

Prevention is better than cure

Before the spread of the pandemic, our educators went to the education clubs regularly to teach children. The educators developed a bonding with the children by meeting with them regularly. As the Nationwide lockdown was imposed, this bond of the educators and children was at a stake and it was difficult for our educators to get in contact with these children regularly.

As soon as the lockdown uplifted, our educators started going to the field regularly to meet and teach children. Their safety is our utmost priority. We believe in protecting and keeping our team members safe so that they can work hard and teach children. Considering the situation and risk of COVID, our team members were given hand sanitizers, masks, disposable hand gloves, and PPE kits for taking all the precautions and maintaining safety.



The team members are advised to use these safety measures whenever they go on the field and also spread awareness amongst children about the prevention of COVID. Our team members are our real warriors who go to the field every day to educate children and give them counseling. We respect their efforts and proud of their hard work.

Regular Monitoring: A key to success



monthly meetings to review the team's work. As everything is getting digitalized our meetings were held through zoom application. All the team members must participate in these online meetings.

The agenda of the meetings was to review the previous work of the team members, to discuss the action plans for the next month, and to discuss various field observations. These meetings give a platform for the team members to learn and grow from each other. The various field observations shared in the meetings were paid attention and their immediate solutions were found.

It is truly said that the knowledge increases by sharing and these meetings are just not only the platform to monitor and evaluate the team's work rather it is also meant for increasing knowledge and adapting other's ways and techniques of teaching children and handling situations.

With the changes that the pandemic put before us, our ways of working and monitoring the project changed. Our team members work hard all day and

night, to give maximum output. To monitor their output and motivate them towards achieving better results the project coordinators conducted

Providing psychological support and mental well being

The Nationwide lockdown has severely impacted the mental well being of everyone. The street connected families and children were highly impacted by it as there was a challenge of survival in front of them, their condition devastated day by day as the lockdown progressed. The street-connected children were under a lot of stress and pressure. There was a big question mark on their mental well-being and education.

During these uncertain times, it was vital to provide mental and psychological support to these children. In this regard CHETNA provided counseling to the children over calls; they made videos and prepared to teach learning materials, daily online and offline yoga classes to keep up with the mental well-being of the children. These children were also provided with dry ration packs, stationery kits, and health and hygiene kits so that they can sustain themselves even during this difficult time.

