

# HOME REDISCOVERED

The Story of Vatsalya's Crusade to Empower Street Children

By Neela Shroff



अंक - तेसरा

अंक-१९/सुन-१५

# नन्हे लिखान

[वात्सल्य बच्चों की पत्रिका]

## शिक्षा [पढ़ाई]

सड़क बस  
घर नल



- नरसिंह बंसर  
अध्यक्ष-वात्सल्य

अंक चौदहवाँ

अगस्त से  
अक्टूबर  
१९९५.

# नन्हे लिखान

- शरीर की गिनतनी, अंग
- इसारी सजिल



'वात्सल्य' बच्चों की पत्रिका

अंक : छठवाँ

सितम्बर - नवम्बर ९३

# नन्हे लिखान

[वात्सल्य बच्चों की पत्रिका]



"बम्बई शहर"

# **HOME** **REDISCOVERED**

The Story of Vatsalya's Crusade to Empower Street Children

By Neela Shroff

## HOME REDISCOVERED

The Story of Vatsalya's Crusade to Empower Street Children

**By Neela Shroff**

**Edited by Pallavi Varma-Patil**

First Publication Copyright ©2011, Neela Shroff

Photo Credit: The Vatsalya Foundation, Mumbai

Designed by: Alaka Khairmoday at Mohor, Mumbai, India

Typeset by: Amit Shetye

Photo correction: Kiran Pansare

Printed and bound at: Vyoma Graphics, Pune, India

Part of this publication may be used in research, advocacy and education by acknowledging the source. To reproduce its content for any other purpose, prior permission of the author should be taken.

This publication has been supported by Neela Shroff.

Contributions received for this book will go to support 'The Vatsalya Foundation' for the cause of vulnerable children.

### **The Vatsalya Foundation**

Anand Niketan, King George V Memorial,

Dr. E. Moses Road, Mahalaxmi (W), Mumbai, 400 011

Phone: +91 22 24962115, + 91 22 24912352

Email: [thevatsalyafoundation@gmail.com](mailto:thevatsalyafoundation@gmail.com), [vatsalyafdn@vsnl.com](mailto:vatsalyafdn@vsnl.com)

Website: [www.thevatsalyafoundation.org](http://www.thevatsalyafoundation.org)

## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to the hundreds of children that Vatsalya is striving every day to provide a better future to... and to the countless other street children who still await the next ray of hope and affection, a kind smile, a loving touch...



“**N**amaste! I am Ramnaresh Ramlakhan Jaiswal, known as ‘Pappu’ to family and friends. Today I am 28 years old and I run a successful courier business in Mumbai.

Fourteen years ago, I ran away from my home, a village in Uttar Pradesh, to Mumbai. To survive, I worked as a *coolie* (porter) at the Mumbai Central Station. I was lucky to meet a Vatsalya team member one day who encouraged me to visit the Vatsalya centre. That visit changed my life and my view of the world. I had been a Class 5 school drop out. At the Vatsalya centre, I was encouraged to study. I went on to study till Class 10 and cleared the National Open School examination. I was then offered part time work at a Vatsalya centre. Vatsalya also helped me with housing and located a 'group home' for me. It was a rented room which I shared with four other boys like myself. The 'group home' helped me move away from the streets and avoid the constant harassment by the police.

I continued to work as a *coolie* along with the new job at the Vatsalya centre. The savings I earned from having two jobs helped me in sending money to my family in the village. I got married and, soon after, I set up my own courier company. My business is now fairly established and expanding. At present, I live a happy and contented life with my family. I live in my own house in Virar with my wife and three children. We have two boys of our own and a girl I found abandoned at a railway station and later adopted.

I believe Vatsalya made my life as to what it is today. Had it not been for Vatsalya, I would have still been a *coolie*. My association with Vatsalya remains strong and I like to contribute to the cause of street children in different ways. I employ former street children in my company to give them a chance for a better future in life. I am also part of a street theatre group, 'Dosti' that conducts street plays to create HIV/ AIDS awareness among street children.

I make efforts to reach out to other children on the streets because I cannot forget that I was once like them.”



## Contents

	Page
Abbreviations	IX
Foreword	XI
Author's Acknowledgments	XV
Note on Author	XVII
Preface	XIX
Chapter 1: Children of a Lesser God?	1
Chapter 2: Vatsalya's Story	25
Chapter 3: A Rights Based Approach	35
Chapter 4: Right to Protection	41
Chapter 5: Right to Development	91
Chapter 6: Right to Survival	119
Chapter 7: Right to Participation	127
Chapter 8: Rural Development	137
Chapter 9: Partners in Change	143
Chapter 10: Recommendations	151
References	156
Annexure 1	159
Annexure 2	164



## Abbreviations

- AIDS  
Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
- AIS  
Antwerp International School
- BSW  
Bachelor of Social Work
- CCVC  
Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children
- CSW  
College of Social Work
- GoI  
Government of India
- ICDS  
Integrated Child Development Scheme
- ICPS  
Integrated Child Protection Scheme
- JAPU  
Juvenile Aid Police Unit
- NFE  
Non Formal Education
- NGO  
Non Government Organisation
- NNF  
National NGO Forum
- RBA  
Rights Based Approach
- STD  
Sexually Transmitted Disease
- UNCRC  
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- UNDP  
United Nations Development Programme
- UNICEF  
United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
- UNODC  
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

X | HOME REDISCOVERED

## Foreword

By **Professor Armaity S. Desai**

Former Chairperson University Grants Commission, New Delhi

Former Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Former Principal, College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan (affiliated to the University of Mumbai)

**N**eela Shroff's book, 'Home Rediscovered: The Story of Vatsalya's Crusade to Empower Street Children', comes like a ray of light at a time when there is concern about the sprouting of many non-governmental organisations, and their credibility. The book shows the steady, committed and long term work done by Vatsalya to provide an alternative to children for whom the street is their home and also to undertake activities that prevent destitution, neglect and crisis in families 'at-risk'.

Neela Shroff was my colleague at the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, affiliated to the University of Mumbai. I vividly remember to this day one of the regular Tuesday meetings of the Faculty, when she spoke about the fieldwork placement of the students in the homes run by the juvenile justice system in the city and the uphill task she had faced over the years in attempting to influence change towards a more child friendly environment, without much success. She looked definitely despondent! I suddenly felt an urge to share my concern for the children I encountered on the streets – particularly, the ones at our neighbouring Churchgate Station and the local trains with whom I would strike up a conversation – and the difficulties encountered in all my attempts to reach out to them individually for rehabilitation. I suggested that we change our strategy and move towards work to prevent these children from going into these institutions in the first place and to do so by respecting their control over their own lives, while helping them towards a better future. Neela's face lit up and there was a full-scale discussion on starting a project with street children. She offered to start it by placing a group of students, including

the BSW students under her, for fieldwork. That was the start of an adventure against odds, but many degrees of fulfilment and later the establishment of Vatsalya. It became a full-fledged registered organisation from being a field action project of the College where the philosophy has been to take up projects which pave the way for new practices and new models of service. Vatsalya was among the earliest street children projects in Mumbai.

The book provides the reader with an analysis and understanding of the lives of street children through innumerable case studies. Likewise, through case studies, it takes us through the process of working with street children and their ultimate rehabilitation according to the child's perceived goal. The work shows a high degree of professionalism in practice based on a social work value framework emphasising the right to a life of dignity and self-worth, self-determination in decision-making, potential for growth and change and equality in opportunities. The philosophy of the organisation has undergone change from its initial phase to become aligned with the U. N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the Government of India in 1992. It emphasises the child's right to survival, development, protection and participation. While the Government of India and the various state governments have been emphasising child survival of those less than six years of age through the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), and the educational system has been making attempts for development of children through free education and school meals, it has left out of its ambit the large number of children who are above the age of five to the age of 18 and not in school due to their circumstances.

The facts are well known, but little has been initiated. Child protection has been the most neglected of the four major areas of emphasis in the U.N. Convention. In that respect, the project for street children, the Government of India's funding for such projects and the need to sustain the forums for street children at local, state and national levels are well brought out in the book. It discusses the platform mounted by these organisations forming the Coordination Council to help children's voices to be heard, and the problems of the very survival of some of these organisations that are focusing on children surviving on the streets. There are several such

contributions to fill the gaps in services for vulnerable groups by Faculty Members, supported by the policies, vision and mission of the two institutions for social work education in Mumbai – the College of Social Work and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Perhaps a key element in the child rights charter is the emphasis on participation of the child in decision making which affects her/his life. The book shows the way, a key element in working with children in several organisations for whom children are their concern, like Vatsalya. This element is missing in many non-governmental organisations that are not tuned in to children's voices and certainly not the governmental organisations, particularly in the manner of service delivery in the juvenile justice system.

Possibly the preventive thrust experimented with Vatsalya will one day show the fall in numbers of children who may be either street children, children suffering from physical and sexual abuse, child labour and trafficked children, among others, who need rescue and a protective environment which ensures that their childhood years are spent in doing what children in advantaged situations do – education, stimulation through recreation and creative activities, exposure to new experiences, learning life skills and, most of all, love from caring adults, which is something that percolates throughout the book. The author is not shy in stating this most important ingredient in the development of children from a secure childhood to active and valued citizens. Professional social workers must not forget this very valuable factor in relationship when working with children, although some children might reject it at the outset because of the failure of adults in their lives to nurture an affectionate environment.

Neela Shroff, the Founder of Vatsalya, tends to be a very unassuming and low-key person, but her accomplishments can be seen in building an organisation with a devoted team of colleagues that has functioned for almost three decades since the first steps it took in 1982, and from which we can draw many lessons. This book is not a pedantic analysis of facts, figures or exposition of theories. It is a book that comes alive with the children whose stories and voices form its backbone, with pictures of their activities reflecting the many years of arduous work put in to gain

the trust of youngsters who have been let down by significant adults in their lives. It is truly a story from darkness to sunshine.

I hope that, besides the professional community of social workers and non-governmental organisations that read this book, it also leads to raising the conscience of the advantaged sections of civil society all over India, and even of Indians living abroad, to become the voices of these children and to engage in programmes for the protection of young people marginalised by their circumstances, to foster child survival and development with the participation of the children in deciding the course of their lives.

## Author's Acknowledgements

There are many who deserve credit for their contributions at various stages of Vatsalya's success with the rehabilitation of street children, and those who brought together this compilation.

I must thank the late Dr Dorothy Baker, Dr Armaity Desai and Dr Hazel D'Lima, the former Directors of the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai, for believing in and supporting the beginning steps of Vatsalya's formation, which started as a college project. Scores of college students contributed immensely to this.

I would like to especially thank Mr Freddy Martis, Trustee and Ms Swati Mukherjee, Director and our entire team at Vatsalya comprising its Trustees, staff, students, social workers and our well-wishers for their constant support and enthusiasm and Vatsalya's collaborators, Anand Niketan King George V Memorial for the shelter project, all of whom have contributed to the continued growth of Vatsalya over the last twenty-five years.

Also, my heartfelt thanks to Mr Rajendra Abhyankar and Dr Safala Shroff for their support and suggestions and Ms Pallavi Varma-Patil and Mr Ivor Vaz, for their immense editorial contributions.

I express my deepest appreciation to Ms Alaka Khairmoday, Mr Amit Shetye and Mr Kiran Pansare for their tireless technical assistance and Ms. Sunita Alva for her help in the initial phase of the book.

I finally thank my family, who shared my passion with this book: my husband Dr Ashok Shroff, my sons Rahul and Anand, and my daughter-in-law Abha.

And finally, my sweet children at Vatsalya for being my biggest inspiration.



## A Note on the Author



To describe Neela Shroff as the author of this book would not be enough. Besides being the founder of the Vatsalya Foundation, Mumbai, she was a reputed educator and faculty member at the College of Social Work Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai, for over twenty-five years. She has always taken an active interest in the cause of vulnerable and underprivileged children.

Home Rediscovered - The Story of Vatsalya's Crusade to Empower Street Children marks the fulfilment of her long-cherished dream to compile the work done by all those involved with Vatsalya.

Neela Shroff received her Bachelor's degree in Economics and Sociology at the Elphinstone College, Mumbai, and did her post-graduation from Tata Institute of Social Science, with a specialisation in medical and psychiatric social work. She worked as a medical social worker at the J.B. Wadia children's hospital and at the Family Service Centre before she joined Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai.

She was invited to participate in the Cleveland International Programme for Social Workers and Youth Leaders in 1962 in the U.S.A. She attended theory courses at Western Reserve University, Cleveland, and gained invaluable work experience at a rehabilitation centre in Pittsburgh.

She has participated and presented papers in several workshops and conferences at city, state, national and international levels. Among these were some organised by the Government of India, various state governments and the local self government, UNICEF, TISS, CANSAVE and College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan. She has also presented a paper at the World Conference for Social Workers in Sri Lanka. Her articles have been published in various professional journals.

Neela Shroff was appointed as a Member of the Commission on 'Working of Beggars Home' by the High Court, Mumbai and was the Executive Chairperson of the Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children (CCVC) and Convener of the National NGO Forum for Street and Working Children. She was also a member of the Child Welfare Committee of the Juvenile Justice System.

Currently, she is the President of the Vatsalya Foundation and is still as passionate about the cause of street children.



## Preface

It was around the early '80s that the phenomenon of street children was acquiring global attention, especially in the developing countries. Migration from rural to urban areas was on the increase and a large number of children could be seen living and working on the streets without family support.

Around this time, as a faculty member at the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, I was supervising a field placement at the government-run institutional home for children in need of care and protection in Mumbai, which was part of the Juvenile Justice Act<sup>1</sup>. While these homes aimed to provide for the needs of children such as food, shelter and education, they had very limited impact on the well-being of these children. It was not uncommon to find many children returning to the streets, having run away from these institutions, citing abuse and neglect. Children viewed it as a jail. The living conditions were indeed appalling and there was no therapeutic environment that allowed children to deal with neglect or abuse in their lives. Specifically, there was no individual attention given to the child who needed care and protection.

Having identified this major gap in the institutional approach of the government run homes for children, I, along with my small team of social work students decided to experiment with an alternate, non-institutional approach – that of providing special, focused individual attention to each

---

<sup>1</sup> The provisions contained in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 apply to two categories of children: those defined as juvenile 'in conflict with the law', and those considered as children 'in need of care and protection'. Virtually all street children fall into the latter category. The children are first sent to observation homes which serve as temporary holding facilities for juveniles who are arrested by the police or found to be living in neglect. Juveniles 'in conflict with the law' remain there awaiting trial; if convicted, they are institutionalised in Special Homes. Children 'in need of care and protection' stay there pending the completion of a government investigation aiming to track down their parents and collect information on their family background. If the parents turn out to be dead, untraceable, unfit, or simply unwilling to take the child back, the Child Welfare Committee arranges for the child's placement in a children's home or a shelter home till suitable rehabilitation is found (Ferrara and Ferrara 2005).

child who needs care and protection. This was the genesis of Vatsalya<sup>2</sup> – a non-governmental organisation set up in 1982, that aimed to specifically address the issues faced by street children in Mumbai in a child-centric manner. In the first year itself Vatsalya reached out to 600 children living on the streets.

It started by working at the grassroots level with street children and actively networked with government and non-government agencies for issue-based interventions. Soon after, in 1989, Vatsalya helped set up and lead a network of children's NGOs in Mumbai, called the Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children (CCVC). The network acted as a NGO forum and a platform to promote co-ordinated efforts in providing child protection services<sup>3</sup> to vulnerable children (mostly street and working children).

Today Vatsalya reaches out to nearly 4,000 vulnerable children every year. It provides care, protection and support to these children and advocates for their basic rights. In recent years, Vatsalya has also initiated development work with rural communities. Vatsalya's interventions focus on preventing distress migration of rural communities to urban areas in search of work, thereby preventing children of such families from living and working under vulnerable conditions on the streets.

Street children live on the streets for various reasons – while some choose the streets for the exciting prospect of being independent, others are driven there by despair. In most cases, they simply have nowhere else to go. What distinguishes these children from others is not only their difficult circumstances, but also their sense of adventure, their determination to take control of their own lives, and their strong sense of independence.

Personally, I don't like to use the term 'street children'. I feel that it stereotypes these children and stigmatises them further. However, for

---

<sup>2</sup> In this book, Vatsalya and The Vatsalya Foundation are used interchangeably. They refer to the same organisation.

<sup>3</sup> 'Child Protection' is about protecting children from or against any perceived or real danger or risk to their life, their personhood and childhood. Child protection incorporates both prevention and care and recovery aspects. (Definition adapted from the 'Draft Integrated Child Protection Scheme, ICPS', Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India 2006)

want of a better word to portray the difficult circumstances of children who live and work on the streets, I have continued to use the term 'street children' in this publication. No other word or term resonates with their reality better.

The journey that began in 1982 has been a long one. Having been associated with the organisation since its inception – for over 25 years now – I felt the need to put together the experiences of working with street children in the hope that it will bring home to readers the difficult realities faced by millions of street children in India every single day.

This book showcases the exemplary work done by Vatsalya in the field of child protection. It also documents the collaborative efforts behind a national level campaign for securing the rights of the street child, in which Vatsalya played a key role. Twenty five years ago it was one of the first agencies that adopted a non-institutional approach to provide for the well-being of street children. This approach has proved conducive towards reuniting scores of children with their families. Vatsalya was also one of the first to implement an outreach programme for children on the streets in Mumbai.

As a child rights focused organisation, Vatsalya has effectively networked with UNICEF, the state government (Government of Maharashtra) and the central government (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India) to improve services and build constructive awareness about the issues concerning street children. Vatsalya, through various forums, has engaged with the government to advocate for child rights. In 1993, Vatsalya was amongst the first few NGOs in India to be supported by a grant-in-aid scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India: 'The Integrated Programme for Street Children'. Vatsalya continues to receive financial support under this scheme. Vatsalya also helped set up the government-sponsored child helpline service, CHILDLINE, in its first city of operation, Mumbai and continues to serve children referred through the helpline. Many students of social work who have interned with Vatsalya have gone on to set up other non-profit organisations dedicated to the cause of street children.

Over the years, Vatsalya, like many other non-profits, has faced several challenges related to space, funds and personnel. In a city like Mumbai, where every square inch is at a premium, availability of space to run its centres and shelters has been a primary challenge. This, combined with the fact that Vatsalya receives limited government funding, makes sustainability of its programmes a prime concern. The one solution to this, I believe, is a co-ordinated response. It is only by working together as a government body, as a NGO, as a concerned citizen, as an academic organisation and even as a profit making organisation that we can achieve the goal of reaching out and caring for every single child who is on the streets. I hope this book serves to remind us that together all of us can make a positive difference in the grim lives of these youngsters.

Many of us go through our lives without realising our many blessings, unmindful that there are so many others less fortunate. This book speaks to the reader in the voices of street children. All of these are true stories of Mumbai's street children, whose names have been changed to protect their identity. Each story is unique and tells a tale of struggle, success and hope for both the child and the organisation in seeking and providing care, protection and future options. I sincerely hope that this book touches a chord in every reader's heart and is an inspiration to contribute in whatever way they best can to make a difference to the life of the street child.

Vatsalya is into its Silver Jubilee year and that is reason enough to celebrate. Even so, let me say this: The only true rejoicing for us is when we see the smiles on the faces of these street children... these sweet children.

– **Neela Shroff**

President

The Vatsalya Foundation

Mumbai

# ONE

---

## Children of a Lesser God?

**S**ince 1982, Vatsalya – which means 'love or affection'– has been working closely with street children and youth in the city of Mumbai to help them discover options for a better future. Based on 25 years of participatory interventions with the street children/youth of Mumbai, the organisation has come to a real understanding of the phenomenon of street children and youth in the city, their specific issues and has evolved unique solutions for their rehabilitation.

*This chapter provides a descriptive account of issues faced by street children and youth of Mumbai. It aims to provide useful insights into their lives. These insights have led Vatsalya to design and implement innovative, child friendly, community based interventions for 'at-risk' children and youth. The interventions, both preventive and protective, have helped in securing a better future for several thousands of children and youth who were on the streets.*

*The account presented here relies on methods such as interviews, case studies, face to face discussions, meetings, observations and in-house studies conducted by Vatsalya.*

### **Definition of a 'Street Child'**

The question has been asked a million times over. And there continues to be no single definition of who really belongs to the category of 'street children'. Does it mean orphans who have no one to look after them? Or simply children who have run away from home and perform various odd tasks to keep themselves fed? Or the ones who find city streets a safer haven than their homes? Are these children maladjusted or actually vagrant? It is the UNICEF definition that seems the most appropriate in defining this heterogeneous group: "Street children are those for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) more than their family, has become their real home, a situation where there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults" (Reddy 1992, p: 2).

In this book the term 'street children' is used to refer to children who work and/or sleep on the streets. Such children can be categorised as 'children on the street' and 'children of the street' on the basis of their contact with the family (UNICEF Zimbabwe 2001). 'Children on the street' maintain regular contact with their families. They may earn their living on the street and return home at night. 'Children of the street' have little or no contact with their families. They are often homeless children who live and sleep on the streets in urban areas. They are on their own, or live with other street children or youth.

This kind of distinction helps to understand the role of parenting in the lives of street children – 'children on the street' have families around, whereas 'children of the street' live on the streets and most likely lack parental support. However, not all street children can be neatly classified in this manner. There are 'children of the street' who may maintain links with family members as occasional visits home to meet their parents or siblings. In some cases, they may have been abandoned by their families, while in other situations the children may have left on their own. Some children may stray and become involved in street activities with other children. Similarly, in the category of 'children on the street', there may be children staying with distant relatives and those who stay with their employers.

Consensus on the definition and categories may not be universal, but it is common understanding that the term 'street child' and its earlier variants – 'juvenile delinquent', 'destitute', 'vagrant', 'maladjusted', 'child without a family', to the most recently in use – 'a child in need of care and protection' or a child 'at-risk' – refers to a complex social phenomenon.

### **The Phenomenon of Street Children**

Rapid industrialisation has accelerated the migration of thousands of families from rural areas to the cities. The imbalance of development has created a concentration of economic activity in the cities, luring a large number of people to urban areas. Generally unskilled, they earn little in the unorganised sector. Due to enormous housing problems in large cities like Mumbai, a major proportion of this migrant population is compelled

to live in slums, in shanties, or right on the streets and forms a significant part of the homeless urban poor.

In India, traditionally, the child in need of care and protection has been looked after in the joint family, caste group, village community or a religious institution. With the spread of industrialisation and urbanisation and the breakdown of the joint family system, the condition of children, in particular has deteriorated. Other factors aiding the neglect of children have been poverty, increasing disparities in wealth, population explosion, high unemployment rates, armed conflict, distress migration from rural to urban areas, natural and man-made disasters resulting in migration, as well as the prospects of adventure and excitement in cities.

Consider this: Most Indian cities and towns have a vast transient population of families that live on the streets. According to the UNDP's 'Urban Poverty Report', there are over 80 million poor people living in the cities and towns of India (UNDP 2009). Urban poverty poses the problems of inadequate housing and shelter compounded by lack of access to basic services and poor urban governance. With most slums being of an unauthorised or 'illegal' nature, slum and street families are under constant fear and feel the anxiety of eviction and demolition of their homes, which causes serious family disruption. A child who is born and brought up within such an environment faces risk to his or her wellbeing – life, health, growth and development.

In such a scenario the most neglected component of the family is the child. Such a child, more often than not, breaks away from a family unit to seek survival alone on the streets. The child either grows up on the streets, or comes there in search of an opportunity, or leaves home due to family crises, economic pressures, or even psychological problems.

### **Street Children in India**

The International Year of the Child, 1979, brought into focus the plight of street children in developing countries. In response to the increasing attention on the street child, several situational analysis of the lives of street children in select Indian cities and a few empirical studies were carried out in the early 1990s (Kombarakaran, 2004). The Ministry of

*The footpath is their home*

Social Justice and Empowerment (formerly known as Ministry of Welfare), Government of India and UNICEF, along with various research institutes, conducted studies from 1991 to 1993 that focused on the situational analysis of street children in select cities of India. While no study managed to accurately determine the number of street children, owing to the factors of high mobility and lack of clarity in defining this heterogeneous group, guestimates pegged this number to be between 11 million to 18 million in India.

The UNDP Human Development Report, 1993, cited that India had the largest population of street children in the world, with at least an estimated 18 million children living or working on the streets of urban India<sup>4</sup>. In 1994, a UNICEF study estimated (conservatively) 11 million street children in India and 100,000 – 125,000 street children in each city of Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi alone<sup>5,6</sup>. These estimated figures are most commonly accepted by policy makers and practitioners alike.

<sup>4</sup> Bajpai A. 2003. p:277

<sup>5</sup> D'Lima and Gosalia, 1992

<sup>6</sup> Railway Children (<http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/asia.asp>)

## **National Legislation and Policies Related to Children**

"India is home to almost 19 percent of the world's children. More than one third of the country's population, around 440 million, is below 18 years. According to one assumption, 40 percent of these children are in need of care and protection" (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India 2007).

The Constitution of India recognises the vulnerable position of children and their right to protection. It guarantees (in Article 15), special attention to children through necessary and special laws and policies that safeguard their rights. The right to equality, protection of life and personal liberty and the right against exploitation is enshrined in Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 19(1) (a), 21, 21(a), 23, 24, 39(e) 39(f) and reiterates India's commitment to the protection, safety, security and well-being of all its people, including children.

Over the last two decades, the Indian government has adopted a more child-centred stance in its policies and programmes in light of the global climate of child friendly policies set in motion by the 1989 convention known as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). India ratified the convention in 1992. By doing so, the Indian government committed itself to protecting and ensuring children's rights and agreed to hold itself accountable for this commitment in the international community.

Among the steps taken by the Indian government to ensure and promote the best interests of the child was the amendment to the Juvenile Justice Act of 1986. It came to be known as the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2000. It was further amended as the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act 2006. The new act incorporated a more child-centred approach and provided a rights-based legal framework for children in need of care and protection. Further initiatives by the Indian government have included the Universal Primary Education scheme in 2002, the formulation of the National Charter for Children 2003, the National Plan of Action for Children 2005 and the enforcement of the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights

Act 2006. In 2005, the Indian government also signed and ratified the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and children involved in armed conflict.

Despite the legislations and the new climate of policy changes, current data about the status of children in India continues to indicate a wide gap between policies and practice. A large number of children are still underprivileged and deprived. They are seen roaming the streets, begging, not attending school and deprived of access to basic healthcare. While there has been a major improvement in literacy rates during the 1990s, the number of children who are not in school remains high. Gender disparities in education persist, with more girls than boys failing to complete primary school. Children's protection rights are routinely violated and seen in many forms ranging from child labour and child trafficking, to commercial sexual exploitation and other forms of violence and abuse. India has the highest number of working children, with many children engaged in hazardous occupations.

### **National Programmes for Street Children**

The child protection programme in India is spread across various ministries which have been implementing the schemes and programmes to reach out to varied groups of vulnerable children with complex and diverse needs. The important schemes and programmes for such children include Programme for Juvenile Justice, Integrated Programme for Street Children, Shishu Grih Scheme, Scheme for Working Children in Need of Care and Protection, CHILDLINE Service and the Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for the children of working mothers. For the Eleventh Five Year Plan period the Ministry of Women and Child Development has proposed an umbrella scheme titled the 'Integrated Child Protection Scheme', (ICPS), in an attempt to combine all existing child protection schemes in India (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India 2007).

While these policies, schemes and legislations provide a more protective and affirmative environment for the child in need of care and protection,

the challenge continues to be effective implementation, sufficient funds and evidence of impact.

### **Statistics on Children of India**

- India has the largest young population below 18 years of age
- One of every 3 malnourished children lives in India
- Of every 100 children, 19 continue to be out of school
- Of every 100 children enrolled in schools, 90 percent drop out by secondary level
- Of every 100 children who drop out, 66 are girls
- India has the highest number of child labourers in the world
- There are 111 million child labourers in India or every one out of 3 children is a child labourer
- Over 44,000 children go missing every year
- India has the highest number of sexually abused children in the world (HAQ: Centre for Child Rights 2005)<sup>7</sup>

### **Street Children and Society**

There exists a wide social gap between the street children and the rest of society. Assumed to be lazy, deviant, easy prey to criminal activities and with vices such as smoking, drugs or illegal sex, street children are labelled in many negative ways. These perceptions do not help their public image, as they have to deal with the stigma and the labelling, nor do they inspire confidence of the general public in these children.

On the other hand, Non Government Organisations (NGOs), through their work with the street children and youth, have found these children and youth to be resilient, of indomitable spirit, with the ability to survive against all odds. These children, like all others, have the potential and the ability to improve their lives, provided they are trusted and cared for and accepted by their immediate families as well as by society. The stories that are highlighted in this book are a testimony of this belief.

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.haqcrc.org/>

## **Broad Description of the Lives of Children on the Streets of Mumbai**

Children who turn to the streets for survival for varied reasons, are very much in need of care and protection. They are most at risk of being sexually exploited, pushed into forced labour, at risk of contracting HIV and developing addictions to drugs. Almost all street children are severely deprived and have to fend for their own economic and psychological survival. Street children lack the support structures that other children and youth have – a stable shelter, family and peer support and, most importantly, financial support. This in turn limits their avenues for growth and opportunities.

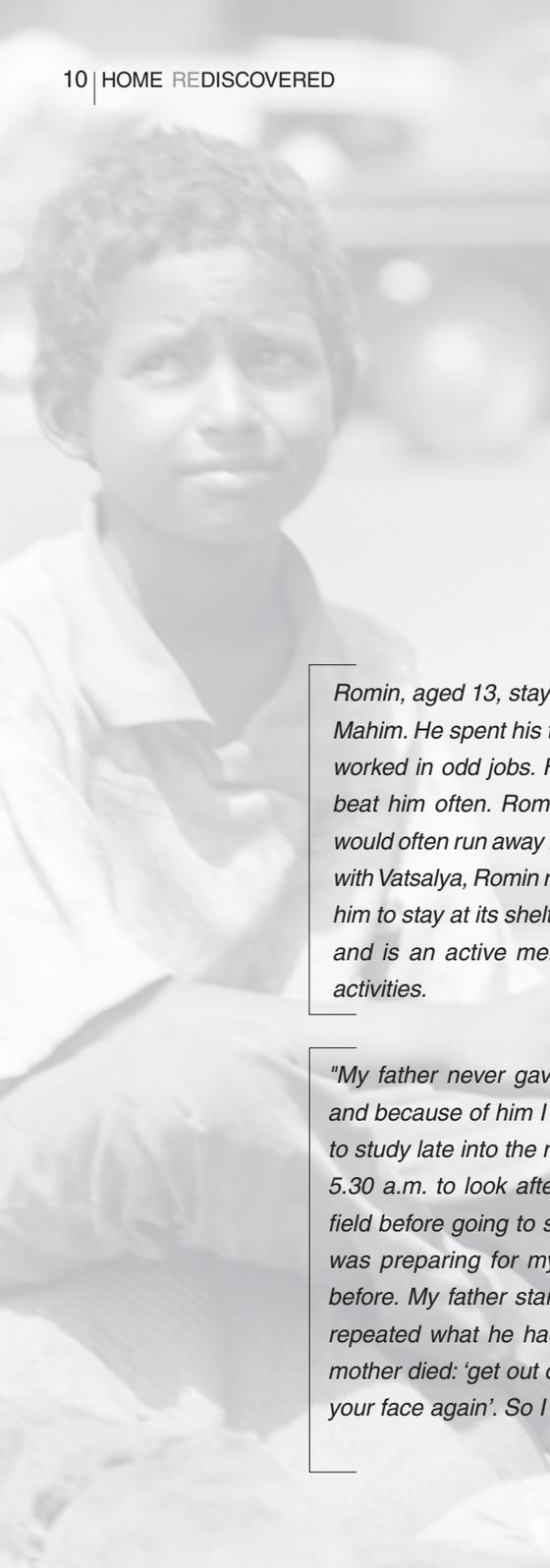
In order to design and implement interventions targeting protection, care and rehabilitation of such street children, it is important to gain a better understanding of their social and family background, the reasons that forced them to leave their homes, the context in which they live, and their lifestyle that has been shaped by the street. The following section highlights different aspects of the lives of street children based on Vatsalya's experience with such youngsters in Mumbai.

### **Profile of a Street Child**

Children who live on the streets inhabit public spaces such as railway stations, under-bridges, playgrounds, pavements or bus stops. These are children, both boys and girls in the age group of 6-18 years, who are on the streets in search of work, to while away time or to find shelter. Among them are also runaway children from the same or different city, with different religious, social and cultural backgrounds, and speaking different languages.

### **Types of Street Children**

**1. Children on the street who live with their families.** They spend most of their time on their own on the streets. They return to be with their families/caregivers at the end of the day. These are families who are at risk of homelessness – forced to live on the streets or in shanties or slums because of factors that include unemployment, debt, poverty, family breakdown, domestic violence and physical and mental health problems.



*Romin, aged 13, stayed with his father on the streets of Mahim. He spent his time on the streets while his father worked in odd jobs. His father was abusive and would beat him often. Romin detested staying with him and would often run away from home. After coming in contact with Vatsalya, Romin requested the social worker to allow him to stay at its shelter home. Today he attends school and is an active member of Vatsalya's shelter home activities.*

*"My father never gave any importance to my studies and because of him I had already lost one year. I used to study late into the night and get up in the morning at 5.30 a.m. to look after the cattle. I had to work in the field before going to school. One day I got up late as I was preparing for my examinations till late the night before. My father started beating me like a beast and repeated what he had been telling me ever since my mother died: 'get out of the house and do not show me your face again'. So I left home".*

*– Krishna, 11 years*

**2. Abandoned or orphaned children** who live alone on the streets and are most vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and neglect. They tend to seek shelter, food and a sense of belonging among their companions.

**3. Runaway children** who live by themselves. Like abandoned or orphaned children, they rely on their peers for support and care. Many of them do not maintain any contact with their families. If they do, these contacts are remote, as visits to or from the family are rare.

The children who make the streets their home have to fend for their economic and psychological survival. They are very much in need of support, care and protection from neglect, abuse and violence. These are the children Vatsalya reaches out to, as they usually do not seek help on their own.

### **Why Children Leave Home**

The reasons why children migrate to the streets can be summarised as a series of push and pull factors.

- **Push factors:** owing to unpleasant or traumatic home environments and family problems that children are unable to resolve e.g. alcoholism, ill-treatment by step-parents, unemployment, acute poverty, abuse and neglect. These experiences when intolerable or stressful for children, can prompt them to leave home.
- **Pull factors:** owing to a perceived sense of freedom, the hope of better opportunities and attraction towards the glamour of city life, as portrayed in popular Indian cinema.

### **Initial Life on the Streets**

Many children on the streets face the prospect of inadequate shelter, food and funds. They look for free food distributed at religious places or collect discarded food from hotels. To earn money barely enough for survival – they do odd jobs like cleaning cars, hawking wares, collecting trash and selling scrap.

It is common to find these youngsters living in groups. Children and youth in similar circumstances tend to help one another. These peer groups fill the deficit of a family and provide much-needed emotional support. The

group is a strong influence on the behaviour of its members. It has a leader who is often the oldest, the strongest and the most capable of defending and helping the others. For most children, the support of peers is crucial to survival in terms of seeking food, work, shelter and medical care.

*A typical pavement home on the streets of Mumbai*



### **Living Conditions**

Street children look for shelter in public spaces. These places cannot provide stable shelter, security, privacy, or any sort of hygiene. The children and youth spend nights sleeping out in the open, in parks, at railway stations or under railway bridges. This is true even for those who live with their families in shanties or in small, congested slum spaces. Their housing is temporary and surroundings squalid, with no sanitary facilities. These children and youth have limited resources, at times not even a change of clothes, often because they do not have a place to keep them safely.

Children with or without families alike frequent religious places for free food; other times, they pick up food from the daily spill at markets. Children also buy cheap meals if they have money. The food consumed almost always lacks nutrition, especially protein and vitamins.

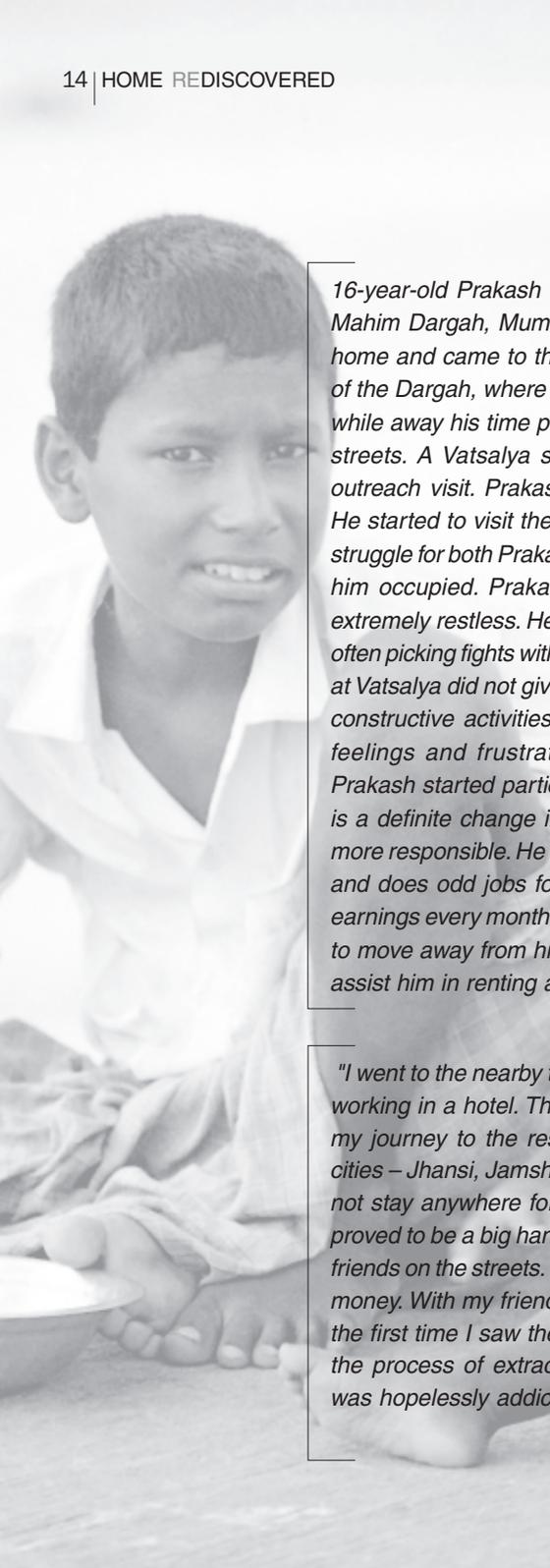
### **Psychosocial Characteristics**

Street children have been through the pressures of poverty and crises in their families or in their environment. Such experiences in the lives of street children can be extremely detrimental to their long term well-being and development. The children grow up in an environment of neglect, lacking parental care and affection. Consciously or unconsciously they suffer from emotional starvation. In addition, the street children face serious risks of physical and sexual assaults and cruelty that gives them a sense of inferiority and insecurity. Their psychosocial development is affected due to the deprivation and the situations of risk they have to constantly deal with. The insecurity creates in them fear, anxiety and guilt, which affects their mental health and wellbeing. This affects their self esteem and self confidence; often they seem incapable of trusting others or making rational judgments. As a result, they can be easily tempted towards delinquent behaviour.

It is not uncommon to see street children shun authority, perhaps due to previous unpleasant experiences in their lives with parents, teachers, police or other authority figures. Due to this, they tend to keep away from these individuals, often hiding and living alone on the streets to keep their freedom at any cost.

*Gambling is one way street children idle away their time*





*16-year-old Prakash has been living on the streets of Mahim Dargah, Mumbai, ever since he ran away from home and came to the city. He survived on the charity of the Dargah, where he received free food. He used to while away his time playing with friends like him on the streets. A Vatsalya social worker met him during an outreach visit. Prakash was curious about the centre. He started to visit the centre regularly. Initially, it was a struggle for both Prakash and the centre workers to keep him occupied. Prakash would not clean up and was extremely restless. He was also aggressive and violent, often picking fights with other boys. But the social workers at Vatsalya did not give up on him. They engaged him in constructive activities and allowed him to express his feelings and frustrations. It has been a year since Prakash started participating in centre activities. There is a definite change in him. He is less aggressive and more responsible. He relies less on charity and free food and does odd jobs for a living. He saves a part of his earnings every month with Vatsalya. Prakash now wants to move away from his street life. He wants Vatsalya to assist him in renting a group home.*

*"I went to the nearby town of Chidambaram and started working in a hotel. Then I went to Chennai and started my journey to the rest of India. I visited all the major cities – Jhansi, Jamshedpur, Lucknow and Kolkata. I did not stay anywhere for long. I knew little Hindi and that proved to be a big handicap. But I still managed to make friends on the streets. I worked in hotels and saved some money. With my friends I went to Lumbini in Nepal. For the first time I saw the plants of bhang, ganja and also the process of extracting charas. Three weeks later I was hopelessly addicted."*

*– Subba, 15 years*

It is common for children living on the streets to drop out of school. High mobility due to lack of stable housing, household responsibilities (more for the girl child), or burden of working to earn a living leaves little scope for these children to acquire mainstream education. By virtue of their situation they are denied the right to education, which in turn renders them more vulnerable and unable to take advantage of opportunities to realise their potential.

By virtue of living on the streets, street children compete for limited resources and often exhibit opportunistic behaviour. They live for the moment, want to fulfil their needs instantly and are constantly thinking of survival. A desire for short term gain and instant gratification influences their choices and behaviour. They can turn aggressive and violent to get what they want; they often abuse drugs, exhibit mood disorders and see all relationships as a give and take.

### **Physical Development**

Nutrition is the most important factor in the physical growth and development of a child. Economically and socially marginalised children do not have the means to buy nutritious food. They are often not aware of what could constitute a balanced diet and is available within their limited means.

They are also deprived of opportunities for vigorous, active and organised play which can provide a natural outlet for their excess energy. They are not allowed to use recreational facilities like public parks because of their unclean, shabby appearance. They generally play games possible in the open spaces available to them and not requiring any special equipment.

### **Intellectual Development / Educational Status**

As noted earlier, children on the street are deprived of educational and intellectual development. Even if they have received some education, they lapse into illiteracy, having been 'school dropouts' over a long period of time. Lack of education ensures that these children remain unskilled, which in turn deprives them of an opportunity for upward mobility and advancement in their adult life.

## Health Status

Street children look for odd jobs to earn money. Rag picking, selling wares at traffic lights, helping in small shops and stalls, or working as construction labour are some of the jobs they do. However, such jobs expose them to risks that include low pay, long work hours and accidents at work sites, extreme weather conditions and traffic hazards. Children who are not self employed are often required to work long and demanding hours, with physically tiring labour.

*Street children live in unhygienic conditions*



Worse still are the children who work in sweat shops for zari work (intricate work of embroidery on garments), jewellery, mud bricks, or leather. They are exposed to filthy, unhygienic environments with poor ventilation, bad lighting and small spaces. In a very short time their hands and fingers are badly damaged due to the intricate work required and their eyesight becomes weak from long hours of tedious work in dark rooms. Child labourers are susceptible to infectious diseases, gastro-intestinal problems, scabies, fever, jaundice and tuberculosis. Their growth is often stunted by years of sitting in uncomfortable, hunched positions at their workstations. As their diet is insufficient and unbalanced, almost all of them suffer from malnutrition, vitamin deficiencies and anaemia. Abuse is commonplace, as owners pay inadequately and use violent methods on children to ensure compliance.

### **Recreational Status**

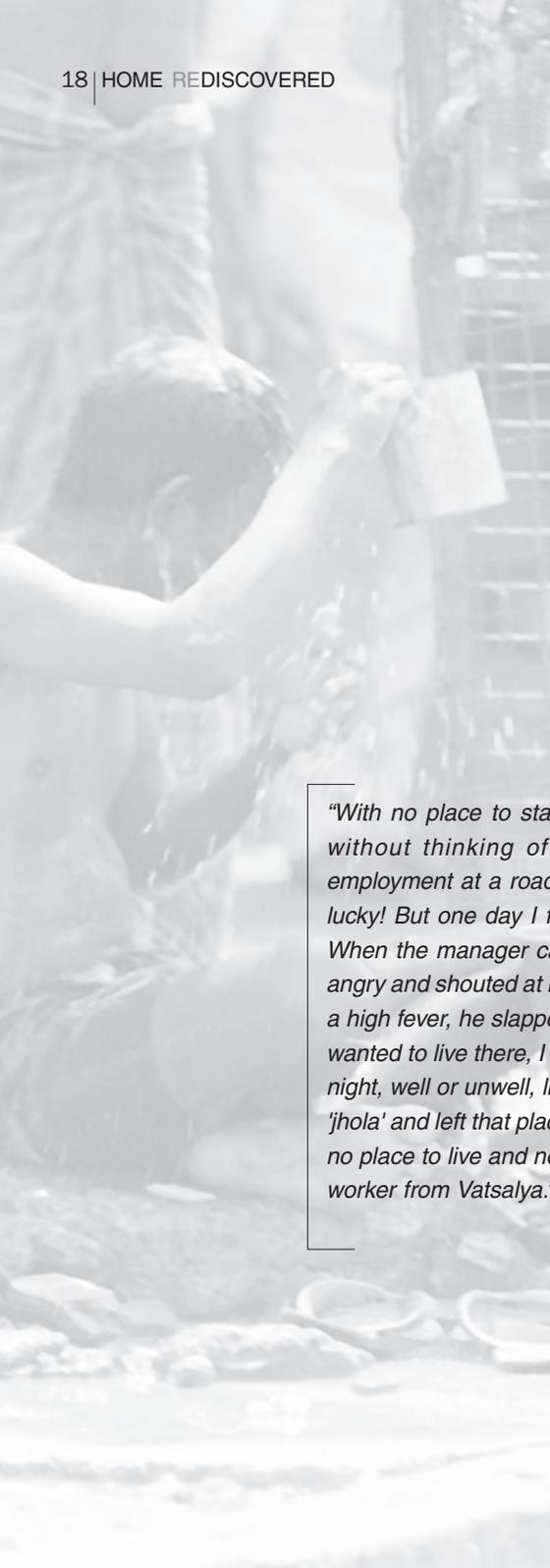
Many street children who work may earn enough to buy their own food and entertainment. They often spend their idle time watching films. It is not uncommon for these children to smoke, gamble, or take drugs for recreation. Being deprived of healthy alternatives, they find satisfaction in hedonistic pleasures, seeking excitement and gratification.

### **Work Status**

A street child who lives alone has to work to survive. Many such children start with collecting and selling scrap. They collect waste paper, old clothes, plastic pieces and iron from waste to sell them to traders who buy the scrap for recycling. 'Rag picking', as it is known, is a preferred occupation for such children – it is easily available and does not require much skill, investment, or dependence on others. Rag picking allows them to be self employed and gives them a sense of 'freedom' which they value. But rag picking is demanding work. The children have to work in the most degrading of conditions – working in all kinds of weather; sifting through garbage dumps with their bare hands; barefoot and ill clad and dragging huge sacks of scrap on their small shoulders.

*Rag-picking is a common form of livelihood*





*“With no place to stay, I would roam here and there, without thinking of tomorrow. And then I found employment at a roadside 'lassi' shop. I thought I was lucky! But one day I fell ill and did not report to work. When the manager came to know of this, he got very angry and shouted at me. When I told him I was running a high fever, he slapped me and kicked me. He said if I wanted to live there, I had to work every single day and night, well or unwell, living or dying. I just picked up my 'jhola' and left that place. For two weeks after that, I had no place to live and no food to eat until I met the social worker from Vatsalya.”*

*– Mohammad Ashraf, 14 years*

*Some street children resort to shoe-shining to earn money*



Street children also take up other odd jobs like polishing shoes, cleaning cars, hawking odd wares, working at tea stalls and small hotels, working as helpers to wedding caterers ('wadi work' in street parlance).

The street child is paid much less than what an adult earns for the same work. Many street children resort to begging, stealing, or engaging in criminal activities such as selling cinema tickets on the black market to survive.

Ostensibly, child labour legislation exists in terms of assuring rights concerning minimum age, maximum hours of work, prohibiting certain types of work and providing medical examination of all working children. However, legislation covers the child force employed in the organised sector alone, whereas a majority of child labour is engaged in the unorganised sector. Rights through legislative intervention do not, therefore, reach the working street child and he/she becomes the victim of child abuse and exploitation.

## Specific Categories of Street Children and Youth

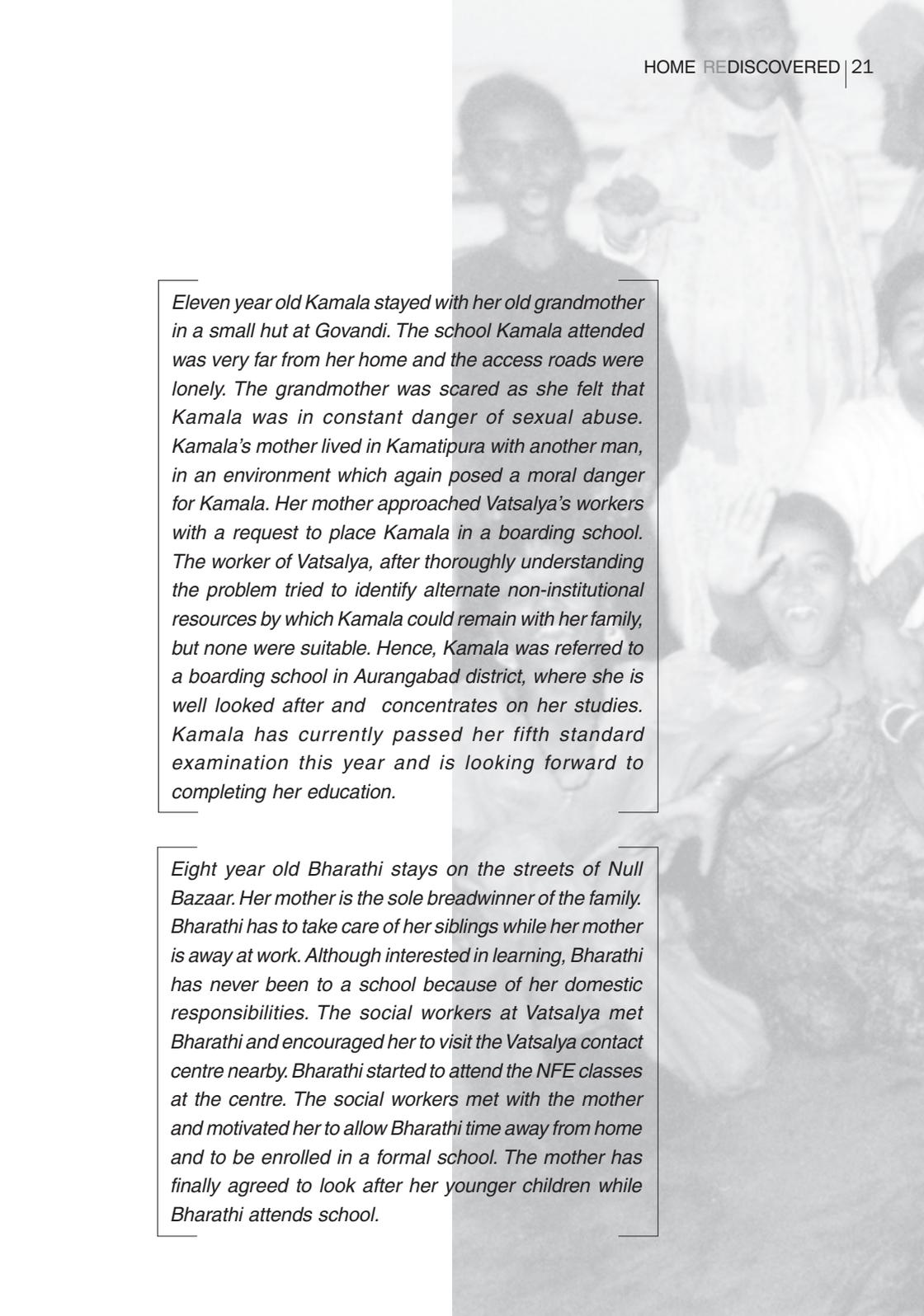
Girls, youth and children of 'at-risk' families who live and work on the streets have individual characteristics that require targeted interventions. These characteristics are explained:

### 1. Street Girls

Street girls usually stay on the streets with their parents, single parent, siblings, or relatives. The girl children living on the streets take on adult roles at a very young age. They have limited opportunities to attend school and are usually early dropouts. They have to stay at their homes (on streets and pavements) and look after the household belongings and their siblings. Even a girl as young as maybe six years of age is often seen caring for her younger siblings. They cook, clean and wash, while the older family members are out at work. Often they are sent to beg for money or food by the family they live with. Older street girls find work as domestic workers.

*The girl child needs special attention*





*Eleven year old Kamala stayed with her old grandmother in a small hut at Govandi. The school Kamala attended was very far from her home and the access roads were lonely. The grandmother was scared as she felt that Kamala was in constant danger of sexual abuse. Kamala's mother lived in Kamatipura with another man, in an environment which again posed a moral danger for Kamala. Her mother approached Vatsalya's workers with a request to place Kamala in a boarding school. The worker of Vatsalya, after thoroughly understanding the problem tried to identify alternate non-institutional resources by which Kamala could remain with her family, but none were suitable. Hence, Kamala was referred to a boarding school in Aurangabad district, where she is well looked after and concentrates on her studies. Kamala has currently passed her fifth standard examination this year and is looking forward to completing her education.*

*Eight year old Bharathi stays on the streets of Null Bazaar. Her mother is the sole breadwinner of the family. Bharathi has to take care of her siblings while her mother is away at work. Although interested in learning, Bharathi has never been to a school because of her domestic responsibilities. The social workers at Vatsalya met Bharathi and encouraged her to visit the Vatsalya contact centre nearby. Bharathi started to attend the NFE classes at the centre. The social workers met with the mother and motivated her to allow Bharathi time away from home and to be enrolled in a formal school. The mother has finally agreed to look after her younger children while Bharathi attends school.*

The girl child living on the streets has no avenue for recreation, education, or stimulation in such an environment. Living unprotected as she does, she is at a high risk of sexual exploitation and violence. Marriage at a young age is common amongst street girls. Some, in worst cases, are even forced into the sex trade. Living in constant fear and insecurity affects these girl children mentally and emotionally.

## **2. Street Youth**

Street youth are in the age group from 18 to 25 years. Many land up on the streets after having left their homes because of unpleasant familial or economic circumstances. Included in this group are those who have spent their childhood on the streets.

Since they are usually unskilled and under educated, these youth face a lot of frustration as they have no opportunity to find satisfying or secure jobs. Public perceptions of street youth are generally negative and the stigma attached to them for 'being from the streets' creates a lack of credibility in the eyes of potential employers. The only jobs available to them are those in the unorganised sector which are not very challenging and rarely provide them an opportunity to use their talents.

Saving money is next to impossible while living on the streets, as it invariably gets stolen. This makes the youth prefer spending it all – on food, movies and recreation that often involves commercial sex and drugs. Street youth often report being harassed by the police who treat them as suspects and criminals.

*Drug addiction is a stark reality*



*Omprakash, aged 17 years, belongs to the village Madhubani, in Bihar. He came to work as a child labourer in Mumbai at a small scale industry of 'zari' embroidery. It was a difficult time for him as he was exploited and abused physically. Many a days he had to go without food and he was often beaten with a stick.*

*One day, Omprakash ran away to come and live on the streets. It was then that he met a Vatsalya social worker who was on his outreach rounds.*

*Life on the streets wasn't easy either. Once, when it was raining, he was looking for a safe and dry shelter to sleep and finally found a place small enough to squat. However, a stray dog came and occupied it. It was then that he realised the value of having a home. He decided to give up his street life and return to his family. He sought assistance from Vatsalya which helped him contact his parents and provide for travel money.*

*Today, Omprakash is happy and working in a bag-making factory in his hometown.*



As a result of negative life experiences, these youth often lack confidence in themselves. They usually find it difficult to live in groups, hold on to a regular job, save money or work towards improving their future. Many develop a negative attitude towards life and live to survive one day at a time. They lose interest in bringing about any positive change in their lives or in thinking about their long-term future.

Street youth face health problems such as skin infections, respiratory tract disorders, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

### **3. Children of 'At-risk' Families**

Unlike other street children living alone, children of 'at-risk' families live with their parents or caregivers either on the streets or on the pavements, in shanties, or in slums. Their parents work as unskilled daily-wage labourers such as domestic workers, construction workers, porters and rag pickers. Some also work as sex workers, drug dealers, or as beggars. The home environment is often marked by neglect and abuse most commonly by an alcoholic parent or a step parent. Domestic violence is also commonly reported. To avoid the unpleasant environment of home, children of 'at-risk' families try to stay away and live on the streets.

Many of these children are engaged in some kind of economic activity ranging from begging to hawking wares. Most retain a sense of belonging to their family. They go home at the end of the day and contribute their earnings to their family. They may also attend a school regularly. However, these children lack basic facilities and live a life of insecurity. Many of them roam the streets aimlessly and tend to get involved in criminal activities or substance abuse. Because of the economic and social fragility of the family, some of these children may ultimately opt for a permanent life on the streets.

# TWO

---

## Vatsalya's Story

*Between 1974 and 2000 there was a gradual paradigm shift from 'welfare' and 'needs and development' to 'rights' in the national planning for child development in India. This was in tune with the international climate of a Rights Based Approach towards child and youth development.*

Viewed from the child rights perspective, the existing approach of institutionalising street children was proving to be inadequate and not in the best interests of the child. It was increasingly becoming apparent that any intervention aiming at amelioration of street children's problems would have to take stock of the reality that street children have a strong sense of independence. It was this empathetic understanding that prompted Vatsalya, as a child rights agency, to evolve an alternative and unique approach in rehabilitating street children. It involved working closely with street children to understand their concerns, allowing them to participate in their own decisions and providing suitable opportunities for their development. Over time, Vatsalya evolved from an experimental field action project to an independent child protection organisation. This chapter documents Vatsalya's journey and its key milestones.

### **Origin of Vatsalya**

In 1982, the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai, initiated Vatsalya as a field action project to reach out in a participatory manner to the children who lived or worked on the streets of Mumbai. It was initially called the 'Vagrant Children's Project', borrowing the term 'vagrant' from the legal terminology of juvenile delinquency. The project attempted to reach out to those children who were found on the streets without any family support. It was a pioneering social work effort – it aimed to meet the emotional needs of street children by being child friendly, non-judgmental and non-threatening, with love and full acceptance of their life situations and experiences.

*Vatsalya's children*



### **First Steps - Reaching Out to Children on the Streets**

The key phase involved getting to know the children, finding out why they had left their homes and at the same time searching for care and protection measures instead of institutionalising them against their wish. The guiding principle was to respect the child's views and to provide space for his/her participation in decisions that involved his/her future life. The initial strategy developed was that of outreach – reaching out to children in their spaces; be it public parks, beaches, railway stations or the streets. The outreach model has proved to be a successful intervention strategy of Vatsalya. It has also been adopted by several other NGOs who work with street children.

The international aid agency **Misereor**, Germany, helped provide much needed start up funds in 1985 and went on to support the organisation in all its various phases as it grew in the first 13 years.

### **Getting to Know Them Better**

In 1985, after two years of forging close relationships with street children the project decided to set up a contact centre at Marine Lines in collaboration with Jain Mahila Samaj. The centre provided a space where children could easily walk in to meet social workers, discuss their issues and avail of the centre's services. By 1990, two more such centres were established in collaboration with St. Michael's Church, Mahim and at Sir J.J Dharamshala, Nagpada. The centres organised developmental activities, offered basic services and set rules that introduced discipline and structure into the lives of the children. Children of pavement dwellers who lived in the vicinity also began visiting these centres. The social workers, through focused counselling and guidance, were able to start the rehabilitation process for children who had undergone family crises and difficult situations. The centres provided non-residential services and were the first of their kind to do so in the city of Mumbai.

As the project expanded its scope of activities, a strong philosophy took root – that of providing total acceptance, love and care to these children who live without adequate family support; just as a parent would do in a family environment. ***This prompted the project to change its name from the Vagrant Children's project to 'Vatsalya' – a word of Sanskrit origin that means 'parental love', in 1988.***

### **Joining Hands to Make an Impact**

In order to share its experiences and to set up a network of NGOs working for street children in Mumbai, the College of Social Work along with UNICEF convened a city-level NGO meet in 1986. As a result, a task force was set up on 'children in difficult circumstances'. Vatsalya conducted a quick survey on street children in Mumbai and promoted an exchange of ideas and awareness on the issue. In 1988, the then Ministry of Welfare, Government of India (now part of the Ministry of Women and Child Development) organised a national-level workshop on street and working children and Vatsalya shared its experiences of working with street children in Mumbai. Vatsalya also played a key role in the taskforce which later became an independent NGO networking forum in 1989, called the Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children (CCVC). Similar city level

forums were created in other cities with the support of UNICEF. These forums converged to form a National NGO Forum (NNF) in 1989, involving NGOs working with street children in 13 cities. Together, the NGO forums led a national campaign to promote the rights of the street and working child in 1994. Annexure 1 lists the phases and objectives of this campaign in detail.

### **Expansion**

Over the next three years, by 1993, Vatsalya had opened two more contact centres in South Mumbai – at Masjid Bunder and at Grant Road – and had introduced targeted interventions with street youth, street girls and children of 'at-risk' families. Vatsalya also decided to set up its own shelter home to provide street children and youth a loving, friendly and accepting environment. It was not only meant to be a refuge, but also a vibrant, active, developmental centre focusing on the needs and potential of each child and young adult. The shelter home was started in collaboration with Anand Niketan, Mahalaxmi.

Advocacy and awareness regarding issues facing street children was another key activity of Vatsalya in this phase. Strategic partnerships were forged with the local government agencies that were important stakeholders for street children and their problems, such as the local police units, the housing authorities, the municipal corporation, the education department and the health department.

Vatsalya effectively used the UNCRC as a guiding principle for all its activities. It organised children's clubs, children's meets, events and conferences that involved street children. These included the Children's Meet in 1991, the Greater Bombay Street Children Conference in 1992 and the All Indian Street children's conference in 1994. In all its interventions, Vatsalya consciously involved the children and encouraged them to participate in decisions affecting them. Further, demonstrating its commitment to child participation, Vatsalya supported the formation of a grassroots level organisation formed by street boys called UDAAN that worked ostensibly for restoring the rights of street children and youth in Mumbai. With the lobbying efforts of UDAAN, NGO run shelter homes for

street boys were offered public spaces – under the railway bridges at several railway stations in Mumbai.

In 1994, Vatsalya de-linked from the College of Social Work and became an independent organisation called, 'The Vatsalya Foundation'. Around that time, the Ministry of Welfare, Government of India, initiated a child protection scheme<sup>8</sup> for street children titled 'Street and working children scheme', wherein NGOs working with street children were given government support through a grant-in aid. Vatsalya was one of the first NGOs to receive the grant and continues to receive aid under this scheme.

As the organisation gained credibility and recognition for its efforts in child protection and advocating for the rights of street children, it was also able to secure funding from various trusts and other institutional as well as individual donors. Several NGOs wanting to work on issues of street children approached Vatsalya to learn about its child-centric, rights based approach towards rehabilitating street children.

### **Consolidation and Growth**

Vatsalya, after it became an independent organisation, continued to provide non-institutional, community based services for street children and youth through outreach and contact centres. In addition, Vatsalya offered secure and child friendly shelter services to vulnerable children through its shelter home. However, Vatsalya was aware of the challenges faced by young adults, especially those in the age group of 18-22 years, who lived on the streets and did not qualify for admissions to any of the shelter homes meant exclusively for children less than 18 years of age. This led Vatsalya to set up a night shelter for youth in 1996.

Vatsalya also helped set up India's first child helpline service, CHILDLINE, initiated by Tata Institute of Social Sciences as a collaborative agency in South Mumbai in 1996. Vatsalya collaborated with other organisations like detoxification centres, boarding schools, hospitals and child guidance clinics for various services for children. It also participated in campaigns

---

<sup>8</sup> It later came to be known as the 'Integrated Programme for Street Children' under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India.

at the national level for securing the rights of children, such as the 'Campaign Against Child Labour' (CACL).

Over time, Vatsalya evolved into a significant change agent in the field of child protection and decided to identify critically important priorities to improve the effectiveness of its programmes. In 1999, Vatsalya undertook a vision planning exercise. It reformulated its vision and reaffirmed its goals and objectives based on its learnings and insights about working with children 'at risk'. The following section details the strategic vision, mission, beliefs and objectives reaffirmed through this exercise.

### **The Philosophy**

*"Each and every child gains in Vatsalya."*

The philosophy of Vatsalya is to enable street children to transcend the streets of darkness to sunshine and success. It is the organisation's firm conviction that every street child possesses inner strength and potential which must find expression.

Vatsalya provides children love, respect, support and encouragement, with an opportunity to become successful adults. Its programmes are based on the belief that the child is an equal partner of his/her own development. She/he is no longer a beneficiary, but has every right to seek protection, education and an environment of development.

### **The Vision**

*"We encourage children to love living."*

Vatsalya visualises a world which provides every child an enabling environment to develop their full potential as individuals without any discrimination, ensuring their basic rights.

### **The Mission**

*"At Vatsalya underprivileged children get a chance to build their future."*

Vatsalya dedicates itself to empower vulnerable children to be responsible citizens in the mainstream society, instil in them the value of love, equality and justice and ensure a better future for them so that they become contributing members of society.

It believes that every child is born with an inherent capacity to grow and develop as a responsible individual in the mainstream society. Vatsalya ensures that their potential is tapped and channelled to the optimum extent.

### **The Objectives**

*"We feel we are getting more than giving"*

- To understand and analyse the social, economic, physical and emotional needs of vulnerable children and related issues
- To address children's needs through counselling, by providing education healthcare, vocational training, employment and recreation, for growth and development
- To create awareness among street children about their life and work situation and motivate them to help themselves
- To reunite children with their families, wherever possible
- To empower street children to raise their voices towards the fulfilment of their rights
- To liaise with key stakeholders and to mobilise community resources, address issues and bring about policy changes
- To advocate for progressive and child-friendly changes within the juvenile justice system
- To create awareness on issues affecting child protection and sensitise the public towards the problems of vulnerable children
- To conduct research studies and document and disseminate information for developmental work with street and working children
- To establish rural development projects to empower rural communities to be self-reliant, thus preventing families from migrating to cities in search of opportunities

### **The Principles**

- Vatsalya is deeply committed to the social work value framework and to principles underlying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Every child has the potential for growth and change
- Every child has a right to a life of dignity and self-worth
- Unconditional love, acceptance and individual attention will make a significant impact on the growth and development of children

- Self determination in decision making and children's participation are central to all activities

### **Target Groups**

*"There is no discrimination at Vatsalya – all children get equal opportunities"*

Vatsalya reaches out to street boys and girls between the age group of 5 to 18 years; street youth ranging in the age group from 18 to 25 years; and children of 'at-risk' families. Vatsalya works closely with the children and youth to understand their issues and their aspirations. The evolution of the organisation and its programmes (described in subsequent chapters of this book) are a testimony to its belief that children are at the core of all its strategies.

### **Intervention Strategies**

*"All activities of Vatsalya have a definite purpose"*

A strong principle underlying Vatsalya's intervention strategies is one of individual attention, unconditional love and acceptance. Vatsalya believes that despite the negative influences and experiences in a street child's life, a loving therapeutic environment contributes significantly towards

*Children at Vatsalya's shelter home*



the child's growth and development. Street children in particular are exceptionally resilient and adaptable, and find innovative ways to ensure their survival on the streets. They also have a strong sense of independence and are averse to any kind of institutionalisation that restricts their freedom.

Each intervention of Vatsalya is designed to suit the child's needs, aspirations and readiness to work out solutions. For instance, while rehabilitating a runaway street child, a social worker assesses the family situation, understands the child's concerns and his/her willingness to return home. Some children may opt to be reunited with their families sooner than others. Other children may not want to go home, preferring instead to integrate into mainstream society.

Vatsalya strives to provide developmental opportunities and a supportive environment to street children. It emphasises building a child's self esteem in order to develop a positive view of life. Vatsalya encourages street children to participate in their own development. Each of its programmes is designed as a therapeutic intervention that allows the children to realise their capacity and potential, and develop the necessary coping skills. Vatsalya motivates street children to dissociate from the social stigma and find an identity that they can be proud of. The children not only enjoy participating in Vatsalya's programmes, and feel free, safe and secure to share their problems.

Vatsalya is deeply committed being a child-centric organisation, and believes that children are powerful agents of social and economic change. Empowering children to make this change and break the cycle of poverty means making them aware of their rights and responsibilities and equipping them with the tools to put those rights into practice.

# THREE

---

## A Rights Based Approach

**T***his chapter describes the Rights Based Approach (wherein the child is treated as a subject entitled to basic rights) as opposed to the Needs Based Approach (wherein the child is treated as a beneficiary whose basic needs are to be met). It locates Vatsalya's interventions in the context of child rights as per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).*

In recent years, the international development community has moved towards viewing development as a process of realising people's rights rather than the distribution of welfare. Many international covenants and legal instruments have emerged which commit their signatories to realising human rights. They include the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women, amongst others.

In particular, the UNCRC has played a vital role in shaping a change in attitude towards children as both bearers and claimants of rights. The convention unites the familiar view of a child as a vulnerable being requiring protection and assistance, with the concept that the child is also a thinking, acting individual, with views and opinions, able to participate in decision-making processes and act as a partner in the process of social change.

Every 'right' spelt out in the Convention is inherent to human dignity and harmonious development of every child. The UNCRC moves away from the perception of children as passive recipients of services to a rights-based view. It considers the child as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. According to the UNCRC, children have a right to express their views and a responsibility to respect the rights of others. They should also be given decision-making powers according to their age and maturity.

The UNCRC also emphasises that everyone has a role to play in the development of a child: parents, family, community, NGOs, schools, child care service providers, legislative bodies and government agencies.

The Rights Based Approach (RBA), therefore, enhances self-reliance, self-confidence, self-respect and positive self-concept. It encourages the ability in a child to express itself freely, listen carefully and find solutions leading towards empowerment. The Rights Based Approach means that children are considered as equal partners with a say in the planning, decision-making and implementation of all programmes and activities.

### **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The Preamble of UNCRC recognises that in all countries in the world there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions and that such children need special consideration. It also recognises that the child, for full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

### **The 54 articles of UNCRC on child rights are set under four broad categories:**

- 1. Protection** – It includes protection of all children from discrimination, abuse, neglect; protection for children without families; and protection for refugee children.
- 2. Development** – It includes all kinds of education (formal and non-formal) and the right to a standard of living which is adequate for the child's physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development.
- 3. Survival** – It covers the right to life and the right to the highest standard of health and medical care attainable. The child has the right of survival through the provision of adequate food, shelter, clean water and health care.
- 4. Participation** – It covers the right of a child to express her/his views in all matters affecting that child. It provides the opportunity for the child to participate in social, economic, cultural, religious and political life, free from discrimination.

The four categories serve as a useful framework for understanding and analysing the effectiveness of Vatsalya's child protection programmes.

### A Paradigm Shift

Needs/Welfare Based Approach	Rights Based Approach
Children deserve help	Children are entitled to help
Government ought to do something but no one has definite obligations	Governments have legal and moral bindings
Child is a passive recipient of services	Child is an active participant
Needs can be met without sustainability	Rights must be met with sustainability
Given scarce resources, some children may have to be left out	All children have the same rights to fulfil their potential
Needs can be ranked in a hierarchy	Rights cannot be hierarchically organised
Needs do not necessarily imply duties	Rights imply duties
Needs vary across cultures and settings	Rights are universal
Needs can be met through charity	Rights are met through entitlements
Satisfaction of needs through charity makes recipient dependent	Satisfaction of needs as entitlements makes one self-reliant. Her/his self respect is enhanced

Kapadia, G. *Child's Right to Participation. Why, What and How? State Level Workshop: A Report*. Ahmedabad: CHETNA, 2005.

### The Rights Based Approach to Child Protection

Children living or working on the streets are denied their basic right to development, protection, survival and participation. They do not have

access to basic amenities, health care or schooling and have restricted use of public spaces. In addition, they are at risk of exploitation, violence and abuse. This essentially means that they are deprived of the right to education, proper nutrition, clothing, a residential home and even freedom to play.

*Children creating awareness about their rights*



Vatsalya works at four different levels to implement its Rights Based Approach to child protection:

- A.** With children and youth on the street to ensure they have adequate access to minimum basic services considered necessary for their healthy growth and development. Vatsalya also helps these children and youth find an identity, create a supportive environment and meet their psychological needs for realising their potential.
- B.** With Urban 'at-risk' families to prevent children from opting for a life on the streets and risk coming to harm. Vatsalya believes that children who live in families that are economically and socially vulnerable are more likely to be neglected and left on the streets as destitutes.

- C.**With rural communities to empower them to demand their rights; provide economic empowerment through micro enterprises and provide educational opportunities to marginalised groups. Vatsalya also works with grassroots groups to consolidate their strength towards community development.
- D.**With policy makers to bring about policy level changes through coordinated efforts at the city, state and national level that facilitate the fulfilment of the rights of the child.

Vatsalya advocates and explains the importance of the CRC to children, parents, teachers and community members. All its programmes are for children and conceptualised with their help, Vatsalya ensures equal rights for boys and girls which are embedded in their programme design. It explains to children their rights to protection from discrimination, sexual abuse and exploitation. It emphasises the importance of education by using formal and informal education systems. In chapters 4-7, the programmes and services of Vatsalya are explained in the framework laid out by the four pillars of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

# FOUR

---

## Right to Protection

*Protection from neglect, abuse, exploitation and discrimination*

**V**atsalya works primarily with 'at-risk' street children and youth with limited or no parental contact. Therefore their right to protection becomes its prime concern. Vatsalya would like to ensure that every street child and youth is safe and supported in the long term. Towards this, Vatsalya has built a comprehensive mechanism for child protection through services such as outreach, contact centres, referrals, shelter homes, group homes and reunification with families. Due attention is given to the objective of rehabilitating the street child, facilitating his/her reunion with the family and providing assistance in mainstreaming the child.

This chapter lists the various services Vatsalya has to offer for children and youth 'at-risk', with a child-centred approach. All these services have evolved on a sound understanding of street children's lives and coping strategies. Further, street children and youth have been actively involved in formulating these services, thereby ensuring a very participatory approach to child protection.

### **I. Community Based Outreach Programme**

The Community Based Outreach Programme – simply called the outreach – is the first step of intervention in the rehabilitation process of a street child. In order to understand and penetrate their world, Vatsalya approaches children in their own territory i.e. their place of living, work or leisure. These may be railway platforms, market places, theatres, religious places, tourist spots, or beaches.

The objective of the outreach programme is to prevent children from getting exposed and influenced by street culture, protect them from abuse and exploitation and engage them in the problem solving process. The overall strategy of the outreach is twofold: one, on a **curative basis**, where the focus is to work with children who have runaway from their homes and two, on a **preventive basis**, where the focus is on children who live with

their families/caregivers but spend their time on the streets due to lack of supervision or adequate housing.

Outreach is an important intervention step for Vatsalya, as it enables social workers to reach out to more children living on the streets. *In 2009-10, through outreach alone, Vatsalya contacted over 1,800 children living in different areas of Mumbai.* The outreach workers try to pass on information to these children living on the streets to keep them safe and healthy and show them ways to improve their circumstances. They link street children with medical facilities, education opportunities, counselling and other resources and try to bring some into centres and shelters for more intensive help.

### **Initial Phase in Outreach**

'Outreach' as an intervention strategy was formulated in the organisation's initial phase, when Vatsalya was establishing its presence amongst street children and youth of Mumbai. It was initially a challenge just to talk with the children. They were not used to someone being concerned about them and suspected the social worker to be either from the police force or someone interested in exploiting them. It was therefore important to visit the street children regularly over a period of time, until they got to know the worker better and accepted him/her. The initial approach towards

#### *Outreach in the community*



street children and youth had to be non-threatening, where they could participate without any compulsion of sharing their life experiences. Gradually the street children/youth developed confidence in the social worker. Their participation became more spontaneous. As the organisation grew larger, outreach remained its core programme that helped the social workers keep in touch with new children and those who had moved to new places.

An outreach social worker needs to be:

- Comfortable with street children and accepting of them as they are.
- Respectful towards children
- Aware that the children have a right to participate in their own problem solving.
- Available and approachable to children.
- Non-judgmental about street children and their life choices.

### **Outreach Activities:**

- **Education** – by enrolling children in schools and helping school dropouts go back to school.

*Vatsalya's social worker helps children in their own environment*



- **Health Services** – by assessing and understanding the health requirements of street children and providing adequate healthcare to them. Vatsalya trains older children and young adults living on the streets to administer basic first aid and to refer serious health cases to hospitals and other social services.

*Doctor's health check-up*



- **Awareness and information** – on issues related to the life on the streets such as substance abuse, importance of good health and hygiene, awareness about AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, information on educational opportunities and livelihood training along with awareness about their rights as a street and working child.
- **Motivation and Direction** – to attend contact centres and shelter homes so that they can use their time constructively and stay away from the risks posed by the street environment.
- **Safety** – by reducing the vulnerability of children by re-uniting them with their families or arranging their stay at a shelter home. For children of pavement dwellers and at-risk families, outreach enables regular contact between social workers and street children and offers assistance in times of crisis.

- **Networking** – by building a support network of local community, government agencies and NGOs. These stakeholders help in identifying children and youth 'at-risk' and in referring them to social services.

### **Advantages of Outreach**

- It is not always possible to find an appropriate place or time to approach children on the streets. Outreach allows social workers to take advantage of any situation where these children can be found.
- Children feel safe in familiar surroundings and so it is easier to build a rapport with them in their space, thus gaining their trust.
- Outreach has a crucial role to play in rehabilitating street children. It facilitates participatory analysis of the social, economic and psychological issues affecting them. This in turn helps design robust and effective interventions and programmes.
- Outreach helps in motivating street children to attend the contact centre or shelter home.
- The social workers get an opportunity to interact with various other persons who are significant for the children/youth in their environment. This may include the parent, the caregiver, employer, a neighbour or an extended family member.
- Outreach links street children with any emergency care required.
- Outreach helps in reaching out to children who are new to life on the streets. This may include recent runaways. It has been Vatsalya's experience that offering early support to such children has helped protect them from risks of any harm and increased their chances of reuniting with their families.

### **Child-to-Child Contact in Outreach**

As mentioned earlier, street children like to live in groups. The group bond among street children is very strong and so is peer group influence. Therefore, Vatsalya encourages street children who visit the centres and also those who meet social workers during outreach to provide information about Vatsalya and its services to other children on the streets. Vatsalya also encourages children to be change agents and influence their groups to live a more positive life.

*Salman is a street youth living in a group at Mahim Durgah / Reti Bunder. He is also the leader of a group of 5-6 street youths. Most of them experienced different types of intoxicants such as heroin, ganja and alcohol. However, ever since Vatsalya entered the picture, none of them go beyond an occasional beedi or a little chewing tobacco.*

*Mazhar, another street youth and a habitual abuser of heroin and ganja, met and joined Salman's group. In next to no time, Salman and his group members learnt of Mazhar's habit and came together to talk him out of his addiction. "If you want to live with us, you will have to refrain from using drugs," they told Mazhar. He agreed to their terms, but continued using drugs without the knowledge of the group. However, he was soon caught by Salman and his friends.*

*Says Iqbal, a member of the group: "To make Mazhar understand, we told him about our experiences with drugs – the harmful effects on our system, how people were always suspicious and wary of us, how people called us names like 'charsi' and generally tried avoiding us. But Mazhar paid no heed to us and kept taking drugs whenever he thought we were not looking. But we had promised ourselves that we would fight to the very end to rid him of his addiction, no matter what. And a promise is a promise."*

*"So we would fight with his suppliers; we would take away Mazhar's money so that he could not buy drugs; we tried to ensure that he was never alone, we would always eat and sleep together. A couple of times we even had to be rough with him. After one and a half months of uninterrupted effort, Mazhar finally gave up heroin and ganja. Today he is a 'regular' group member, like each of us. All of us made an active effort to help Mazhar come out of his dependence on drugs. And would you believe it, he tries to help out other kids to give up their addictions!"*

This kind of child-to-child contact plays an important role in changing attitudes and motivating children to work towards their own growth and development. Children feel highly motivated when their own peers talk about their life experiences and the changes that have taken place in their lifestyle. Former street children become role models, referring other children to the centre. They motivate them to get educated, give up smoking, drug abuse, or other harmful habits. Vatsalya, therefore, invests in training former street children to pass on the inputs they have received from Vatsalya to other children on the streets.

Child-to-child contact is also used to encourage street children to help or refer other street children in times of crisis. It has turned out to be a very successful strategy of reaching out to children who do not seek help on their own. *A significant 34 percent of the total street children population that attends Vatsalya's centres are here because other children already with the organisation introduced them to Vatsalya and its services.*

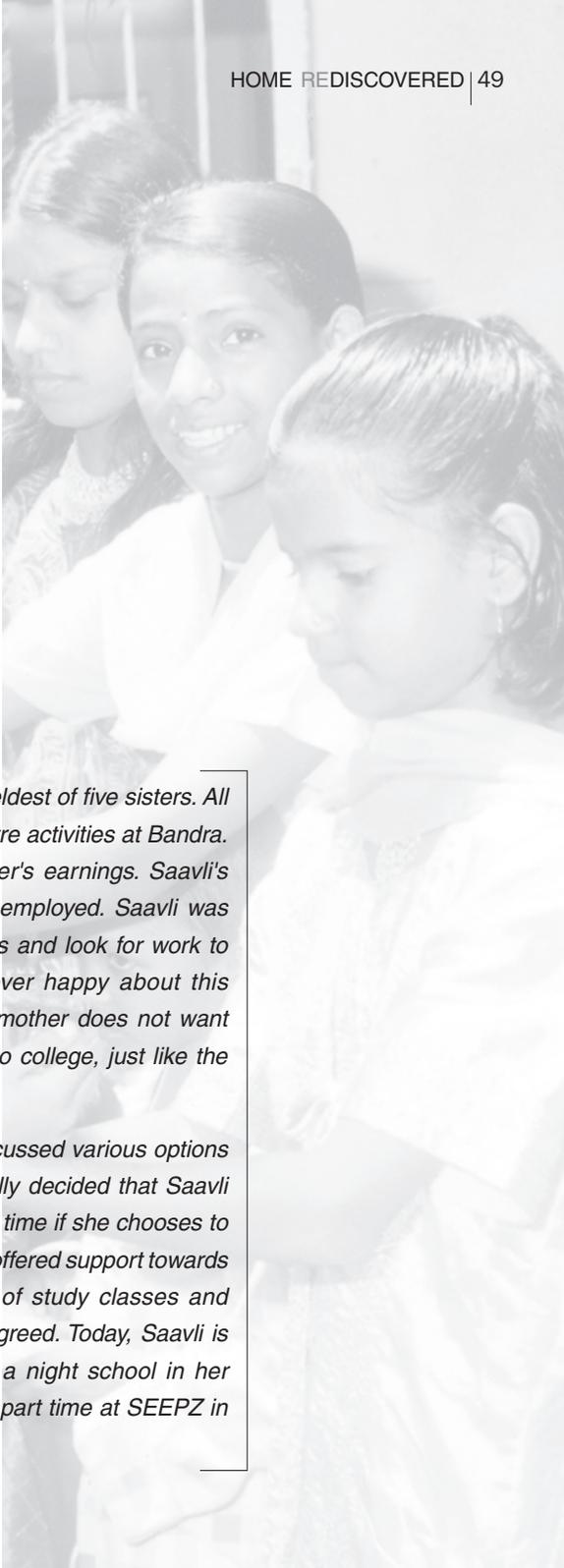
## II. Contact Centres

A contact centre serves as a walk-in centre for street children and youth. It is a place which is close to the child's place of work or stay. It is where a child can come for a few hours to be with a social worker, to avail of the facilities offered and to participate in the activities of the centre.

A contact centre that is not too far from the children's place of stay encourages self-referral. These are spaces that offer educational, health, nutritional, recreational and developmental programmes to street children

*A child participates in 'kite-making' at the contact centre*





*Saavli, a 18 year old girl, is the eldest of five sisters. All of them regularly attend the centre activities at Bandra. Their family relies on her mother's earnings. Saavli's father is an alcoholic and is unemployed. Saavli was forced to discontinue her studies and look for work to support her mother. "I was never happy about this decision. Sometimes I feel my mother does not want me to study. I would like to go to college, just like the other girls".*

*The Vatsalya social workers discussed various options with Saavli's mother. It was finally decided that Saavli can work and study at the same time if she chooses to study at a night school. Vatsalya offered support towards Saavli's education in the form of study classes and tutions. Saavli's mother finally agreed. Today, Saavli is happy because she studies at a night school in her neighbourhood. She also works part time at SEEPZ in Andheri to support her family.*

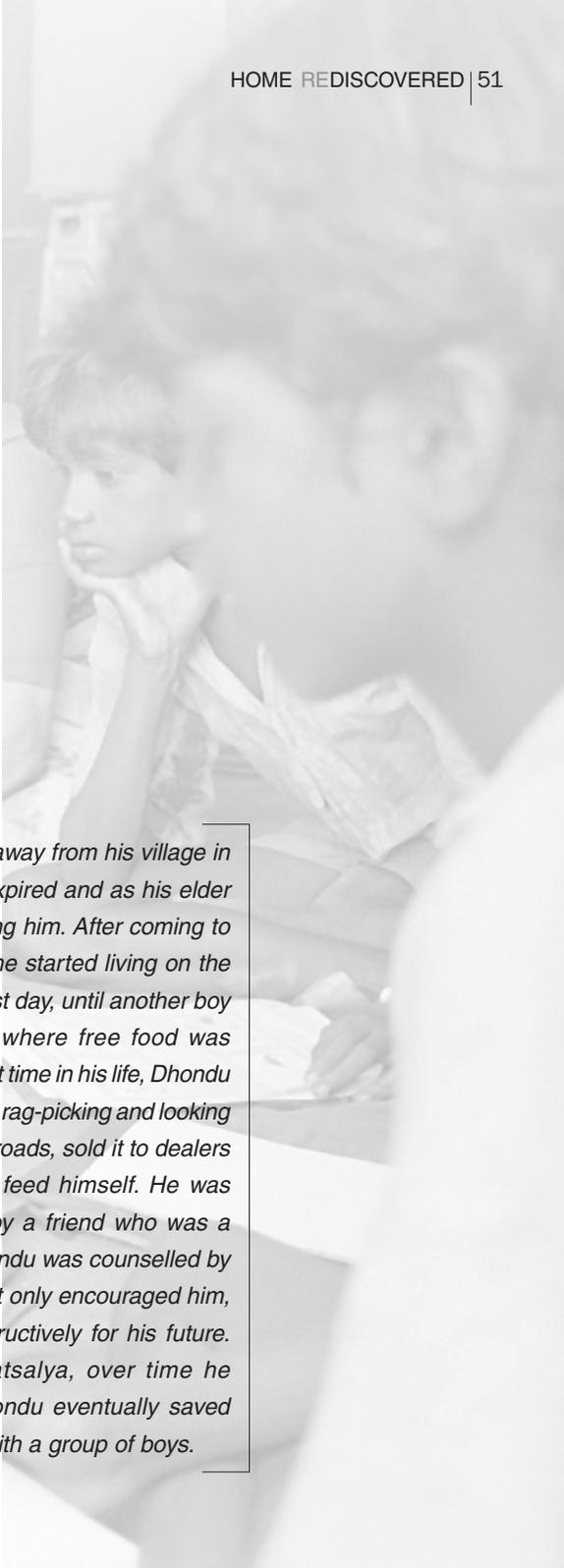
and youth. They help in reducing the time spent by children on the streets. Street children identify themselves with other children attending the centre and feel a sense of belonging.

The centres offer basic services such as food, bathing facilities, clothing and medical assistance in a child centred environment to street children and youth. Each centre has teachers who look after the educational needs of children. It also has a social worker who is trained in individual and group counselling to assist children in dealing with their stresses. The centre workers actively work towards reuniting runaway children coming to the centre, with their families when possible and appropriate. In cases where runaway children do not wish to go back to their homes, they are assisted with services such as a shelter home or a group home. At the centre, 'at-risk' children and their families are identified and provided with various options that include facilities and support towards shelter, education, sponsorship, housing or employment for children and youth.

Vatsalya started six contact centres in Mumbai, of which three are currently in operation, spanning the southern, central and northern regions of Mumbai. *Together they serve nearly 3,500 street children and youth every year who live or work on the streets of Mumbai.*

*Bathing is encouraged in contact centres*





*Dhondu, a 17 year old boy, ran away from his village in Maharashtra after his parents expired and as his elder brother started physically abusing him. After coming to Mumbai, with nowhere to stay, he started living on the street. He went hungry on his first day, until another boy like him showed him a place where free food was distributed to the poor. For the first time in his life, Dhondu felt like a beggar! He soon started rag-picking and looking for scraps in gutters and on the roads, sold it to dealers and earned enough money to feed himself. He was brought to the contact centre by a friend who was a regular visitor to the centre. Dhondu was counselled by a Vatsalya social worker who not only encouraged him, but also helped him plan constructively for his future. Doing tasks and duties at Vatsalya, over time he enhanced his self-esteem. Dhondu eventually saved enough money to rent a room with a group of boys.*

*Prayers are a common practice before all meals*



These centres are situated in places where there is a high concentration of children living on the streets and pavements, in conditions that are dangerous to their well being.

While all centres have facilities for education, counselling, food and clothing along with health inputs and awareness, each is unique in terms of specific intervention strategies. These are based on the profile of the area in which the centre is located and the needs of street children and their families who live/work nearby.

The next section provides a brief account of the specific interventions that have been made available by the Vatsalya contact centres.

### **Marine Lines**

The first centre set up by Vatsalya in 1985; it reached out to the street children (mostly adolescent boys) living near the Marine Lines *dargah*. The boys lived off the free food distributed at the *dargah* or were involved in *wadi-work* working as helpers to wedding caterers. Outreach workers were in touch with a large number of street children and youth in this area. Non-formal education, counselling, cultural activities, recreation and

*Abbas and his two younger brothers lived on the streets near Kurla station in Mumbai. Their father was an alcoholic who had abandoned them and their mother on the streets. Their mother begged for money and food to survive, but soon she too left the children to survive on their own.*

*Abbas was a 14 year old homeless child when the Vatsalya worker first met him. He would do odd jobs to survive, mostly 'wadi work' – being a helper to a wedding contractor.*

*The Vatsalya team found Abbas to be hardworking and eager to learn. He regularly visited the contact centre and used its inputs to achieve a better future. Vatsalya assisted him in gaining a foothold in the catering industry. Today Abbas is a young entrepreneur at the age of 22. He is a 'mukadam' ( a contractor) who takes wedding and party orders. He has rented a house in Mumbai, has his own savings bank account and is supporting his brothers.*

*Children getting ready for a game of cricket*



outings were the main activities in the initial phase. A network of health services was established to provide awareness on HIV, AIDS and drug abuse.

Despite its popularity, with nearly 200 children attending the centre every year, the Marine Lines centre was forced to close down its operations in 2003. The collaborating agency which was providing its space to run this centre expressed its inability to continue doing so. The high property rentals in South Mumbai have made it impossible for a non-profit organisation like Vatsalya to own or rent space for running the centre. Vatsalya has kept in touch with the children through outreach, but a child friendly space providing developmental activities is sorely missed by the youth of the area.

### **Nagpada**

The youngsters attending the Nagpada centre started in 1990 were children of pavement dwellers, living on the streets (in huts or in the open) of Kamathipura, Nagpada and Belassis Road. This centre was located in the 'red light district' of Mumbai. The age group of the children was from

6-15 years, including both boys and girls. The children in this area were constantly exposed to the commercial sex trade in their environment and also aware of their own parents' actual involvement in it. Many children reported parental abuse under the influence of alcohol or drugs. There was lack of adequate housing; sanitation or hygiene, educational opportunities and stimulation in the environment. They often relied on gambling and watching films to take their mind off their reality. Girls had the added burden of looking after their siblings and belongings at home while their parents went to work.

Thus the focus of the Vatsalya centre at Nagpada became health and education services for these children as well as prevention of neglect and abuse. Vatsalya explored the possibilities of improving the children's situation and provided them with optimal opportunities for growth and development. Through individual attention and group involvement, the children were made to feel loved and cared for and encouraged to discover strengths within themselves to deal with problem situations. Apart from working with the children, the centre also involved their families. Regular home visits were conducted by Vatsalya social workers and regular parents meetings were held.

*Skill training for girls – painting*



A girls' group, 'Saheli', was formed for pre-adolescent and adolescent girls attending the Nagpada and Masjid Bunder centres. 'Saheli' continues to give these girls a platform to discuss their issues and concerns.

This centre, like the Marine Lines one, also had to close its operations as the collaborative agency expressed its inability to continue providing its premises. The closure in 1996 has meant that the street children who are at risk in this area have had no safe place provided by Vatsalya where they can access a caring social worker and share their problems.

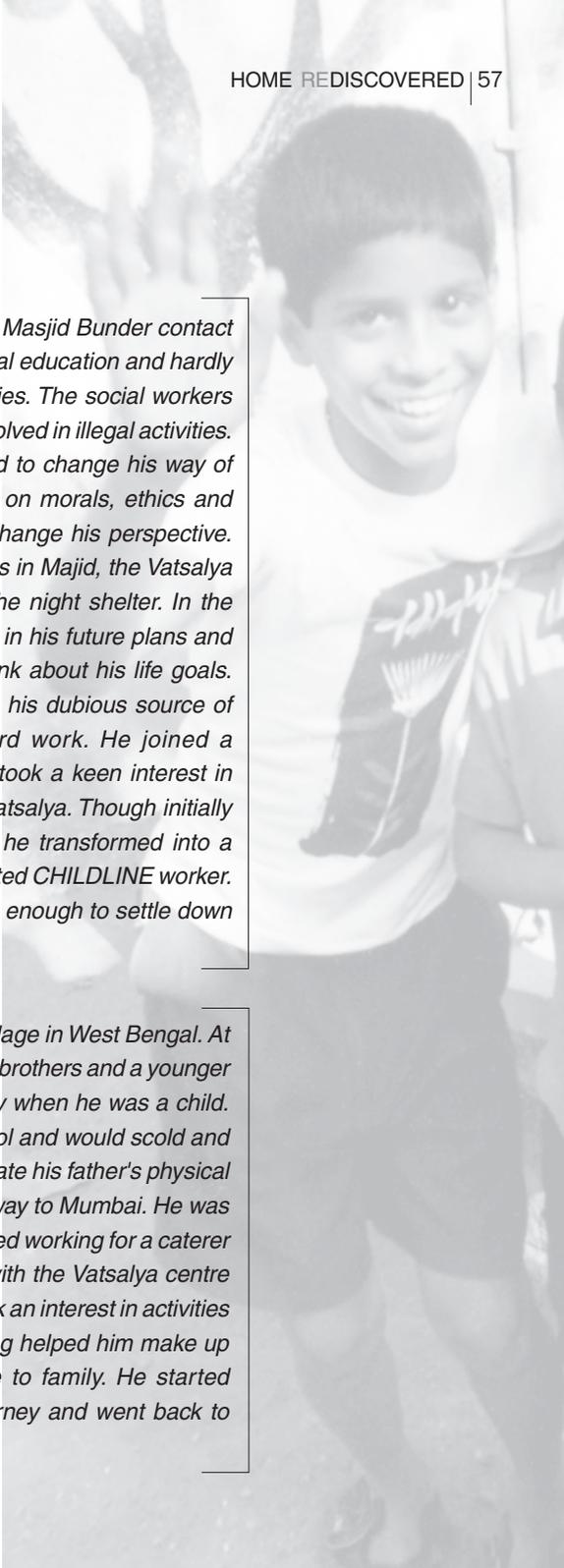
### **Masjid Bunder**

Vatsalya started its contact centre in the rented premises of a municipal school in 1992. The centre was attended by street children, pavement dwellers' children and street youth from the areas of Crawford Market, GT Hospital and Carnac Bunder.

Crawford Market is a prominent wholesale market in Mumbai and offers plenty of job opportunities to unskilled workers such as street children for

*Love and care bring happiness*



A young boy with dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt with a graphic, is smiling and waving his right hand towards the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an outdoor setting with trees.

*Majid, 18, was in touch with the Masjid Bunder contact centre. He had received no formal education and hardly participated in the centre activities. The social workers found out that Majid was also involved in illegal activities. Initially, Majid was not interested to change his way of living. But counselling sessions on morals, ethics and planning for the future helped change his perspective. After seeing the gradual changes in Majid, the Vatsalya social worker, referred him to the night shelter. In the admission form, Majid had to fill in his future plans and goals. This motivated him to think about his life goals. Soon after, he decided to leave his dubious source of income and earn through hard work. He joined a workshop on catering. He also took a keen interest in the CHILDLINE centre run by Vatsalya. Though initially unsure of his own capabilities, he transformed into a responsible, efficient and dedicated CHILDLINE worker. He now plans to study and save enough to settle down to a family life.*

*Akhtar, 17 years old, is from a village in West Bengal. At home he has his father, two elder brothers and a younger brother. His mother passed away when he was a child. His father was addicted to alcohol and would scold and beat the children. Unable to tolerate his father's physical and mental abuse, Akhtar ran away to Mumbai. He was about 14 years old then. He started working for a caterer at Mahim. He came in contact with the Vatsalya centre through friends. Gradually he took an interest in activities at the centre. Regular counselling helped him make up his mind about returning home to family. He started saving money for his return journey and went back to his family a year later.*

vending fruits and vegetables, loading and unloading trucks and cooking and serving food and tea to other labourers in the market. A restaurant known as the 'Kaka Hotel' in this area distributes free food to destitutes. The job opportunities and free food distribution are the reasons why the area attracts numerous street children and homeless families.

The Masjid Bunder centre dealt with different target groups – street children, street youth and children of 'at-risk' families. With street children, the focus of work was on building relationships with the children, understanding their problems and collectively finding solutions for them. For this it was necessary to build an atmosphere of trust and sharing. Awareness programmes relevant to their life situation were also conducted.

With regard to the children of 'at-risk' families, the focus was on the issue of education. They were enrolled in the municipal school. Vatsalya followed up on the enrolment of these children through regular school visits and study classes. Its social workers contacted parents to ensure that they were involved in their child's education. Through counselling and group work, the children were motivated to maintain closer links with their families. In addition, sessions of self awareness and self protection were organised for the girls who lived and worked on the streets.

With street youth, the social workers acted as mentors and suggested alternate strategies to cope with their life situations. Vatsalya organised awareness programmes on health issues such as information on HIV AIDS or substance abuse. It also motivated the street youth to live a positive lifestyle.

A special group of children in this area was the large number of children under 14 years working in tea stalls. They worked long hours in the most dismal conditions, with little or no time for education, rest or recreation. A survey was done of the background, working conditions and needs of these children. Based on the findings, social workers initiated a dialogue with the employers of the children to allow them some time away from work where they could avail of the centre's facilities and meet their own needs.

It was noticed that many street children at Crawford Market were runaways from Govandi. Keeping this in mind, the workers of Vatsalya organised an awareness programme for the community youth of the Govandi area. The youth were informed about issues facing street children and how the local community could help prevent children from breaking away from their families in the neighbourhood.

The Masjid Bunder centre closed its operations in 1998. Once again the space was made unavailable to Vatsalya for running such activities for street children and youth. While Vatsalya has accommodated many of the 900 plus children and youth attending this centre in its other contact centres and the shelter home, lack of available space in the area has meant that children and youth of 'at-risk' families living in this area no longer have this facility in their neighbourhood.

*Vatsalya children on an enjoyable outing*



## **Mahim**

This centre initiated in 1990 continues to be a vibrant and active space for children. It primarily caters to street children and children of pavement dwellers living in and around Mahim. Free food and alms distributed at the Mahim *dargah* is the reason for a large number of children to come and live the area. Unfortunately, it is also a reason why the children find it difficult to give up this seemingly easy life for rehabilitation. Continuously being at the receiving end of charity develops a low self-esteem and helplessness. Some of the boys work in flower shops or in tea stalls. Some take to rag-picking, begging and vending. The children are often seen wandering around, watching films and playing on the seashore.

The Mahim centre provides various educational activities, fun and games to engage the children. Over the years, the centre has established itself with the local community and receives its support. It offers medical assistance, food and clothes to children in need. In addition, it assists children to study in formal schools. *In 2009-10 alone, a total of 369 children from in and around Mahim attended the centre programmes. In addition, 644 other children on the streets were contacted through outreach.* The social workers report a marked positive difference in the appearance and behaviour of all the children visiting the centre after they participated in the centre's programmes. The centre has also made a positive impact on the overall growth and development of these children.

## **Bandra**

Vatsalya noticed that many children attending the Vatsalya centre at Mahim actually came from Bandra. There are several busy traffic junctions between Bandra and Mahim and children would walk all the way only because they wanted to be part of the centre. This prompted Vatsalya to start a separate centre for children who lived in and around Bandra in 2008. The enthusiasm of these children to attend the centre activities encouraged Vatsalya to rent premises in Bandra. Whenever there is a shortage of space, the community pitches in by providing temporary space in their houses or in the community centre. Almost all the children that attend the centre live with their families in nearby slums or shanties.

*A social worker from Vatsalya met 12-year-old Vishal who had runaway from home and was living on the streets. The worker encouraged him to visit the Vatsalya contact centre at Mahim.*

*Over time, Vishal involved himself in the various activities at the centre. He especially liked creative activities such as art and craft. At the centre, the social workers discussed with him the importance of family and the risks on the street. They also offered support to Vishal to explore alternative possibilities for a positive future. After a few sessions of individual and group counselling, Vishal became amenable to leaving his life on the streets. He agreed to return to his family, but he wanted Vatsalya's support in doing so as he was apprehensive about his family's reaction. The social worker agreed to accompany him to his home. The worker talked to the family about welcoming Vishal unconditionally. Vishal was happy to be reunited with his family and his parents were happy to have him back.*

*Rounak is 12 years old. His mother is mentally ill. His father works in a neighbourhood cycle shop. His family is very poor. His father barely earns enough to take care of Rounak, his mother and his younger sister. At a very young age, Rounak had to look after his family and support his father. He had to drop out of school after Class 6. Rounak and his sister would visit the Vatsalya centre at Bandra regularly and take an active interest in all the programmes. Rounak expressed a keen interest in going back to school. The Vatsalya social worker met his father and convinced him to send Rounak to school. Vatsalya also offered support towards his education. Rounak is now back in school and is now enrolled in Class 7.*

A significant number of children belong to homeless families who live on the pavements or streets. The Bandra centre social workers report malnourishment, abuse and neglect in the majority of children who visit the centre. Therefore the centre, in addition to child protection services, focuses on working with the family – especially women – and providing them with necessary support. Today, it is a popular centre amongst children and youth on the streets of Bandra. *In the year 2009-10, a total of 428 children in the age group of 5-18 years participated in the Bandra centre activities. The social workers also kept in contact with 634 children and their families through outreach in 2009-10.*

### **Grant Road**

Vatsalya started its contact centre in Gant Road (South Mumbai) in 1993 due to a large presence of street children and youth in and around the area. This may be attributed to reasons such as:

- The existence of a scrap market where street children who work as rag pickers come to sell their daily collection of scrap.
- The red light district in the neighbourhood which is frequented by older boys.
- The various cinema theatres located in the area. Street children and youth are often seen spending their time watching movies.

Vatsalya set up its contact centre inside a municipal school. Ever since, the centre has reached out to thousands of street children and youth requiring care and protection. *In 2009-10 alone, Vatsalya social workers contacted 749 boys and girls living in and around the area through outreach. The Grant Road centre was visited by 391 boys, girls and street youth to avail of its facilities and programmes.*

The street youth living in this area are a special focus for Vatsalya. Key interventions include outreach and on-the-street counselling for youth. Outreach workers provide first aid and medical assistance when required. First aid kits are also distributed to street youth who take up the responsibility of looking after other street children. Street contact points are identified to hold regular meetings between the Vatsalya staff and street youth. The youth look forward to meeting the social workers and

sharing their feelings, hopes, desires and problems. Through group discussions, these young people are encouraged to explore solutions to their problems. Individual counselling supplements the process initiated through group work.

Vatsalya provides a savings scheme for working youth that enables them to save money at the centre. Wherever possible, the youth are encouraged to get in touch with their families. Vatsalya also provides assistance for affordable housing to street youth through group homes.

A significant number of street children and youth attending the Grant Road centre have been drug addicts. These children and youth admit to abusing drugs such as *charas*, *ganja* and *brown sugar*, as well as easily available substances such as '*solution*' and '*petrol*'. To help such children to get over drug and substance abuse, Vatsalya collaborates with de-addiction organisations in Mumbai. In house, Vatsalya arranges for regular awareness sessions about the harmful effects of substance abuse and offers alternatives to children to channel their energy and time.

The social workers network with the police personnel of the nearby Grant Road, Lamington Road and Nagpada police stations. Such contacts have made it possible for the workers to intervene in cases where street youth have been rounded up by the police merely on grounds of suspicion. In 1992-93, Vatsalya and CCVC lobbied for identity cards for street children. They were issued to street children who were in contact with NGOs by the Juvenile Aid Police Unit (JAPU) for their protection.

The Vatsalya workers also regularly meet and explain the issues and services concerning street children and youth to the members of the local community. This has resulted in public awareness, understanding and cooperation from the community.

### **Activities, Programmes and Facilities at the Contact Centres**

- Regular counselling sessions to either repatriate the children or to rehabilitate them by making them aware of the need of education, development of skills and livelihood training.

- Forging street level contacts to build effective relationships with street children.
- Providing health care – medical aid, nutrition and immunisation.
- Providing facilities for toilet, bathing, washing clothes and lockers.
- Offering non-formal education (NFE) to out-of-school children.

*Children enjoy participating on stage performances*



- Conducting recreational and cultural activities for street children. Celebration of events, festivals and important days like the *Ganapati* and *Navaratri* festivals, as well as days of national importance such as Independence day or Republic day help in sustaining interest of the children at centres and foster a feeling of togetherness. Such activities have great therapeutic value in rehabilitating children.
- Providing financial education to children by encouraging them to save money and resources.
- Providing awareness on health and hygiene, drug abuse, effects of smoking, HIV/AIDS and family life education.
- Organising educational visits and camps for street children.

- Establishing contacts with the families of the children. Meetings are held regularly where parents are counselled and encouraged to take care of their children and motivated to send them to school. They are also made aware of their child's progress and development.

*Learning blockprinting – a vocational activity*



- Arranging for livelihood and skills training – various skills are taught for self employment and income generation like beadwork, candle making, pottery, block printing, embroidery and handicrafts. These opportunities enhance creative abilities in children and provide them a sense of achievement.

The Vatsalya contact centres provide an environment of care, guidance and protection. They serve as a safe place where street children and youth can talk about their problems. Not only do street children access help and support from the centres, they also participate in several activities of therapeutic value.

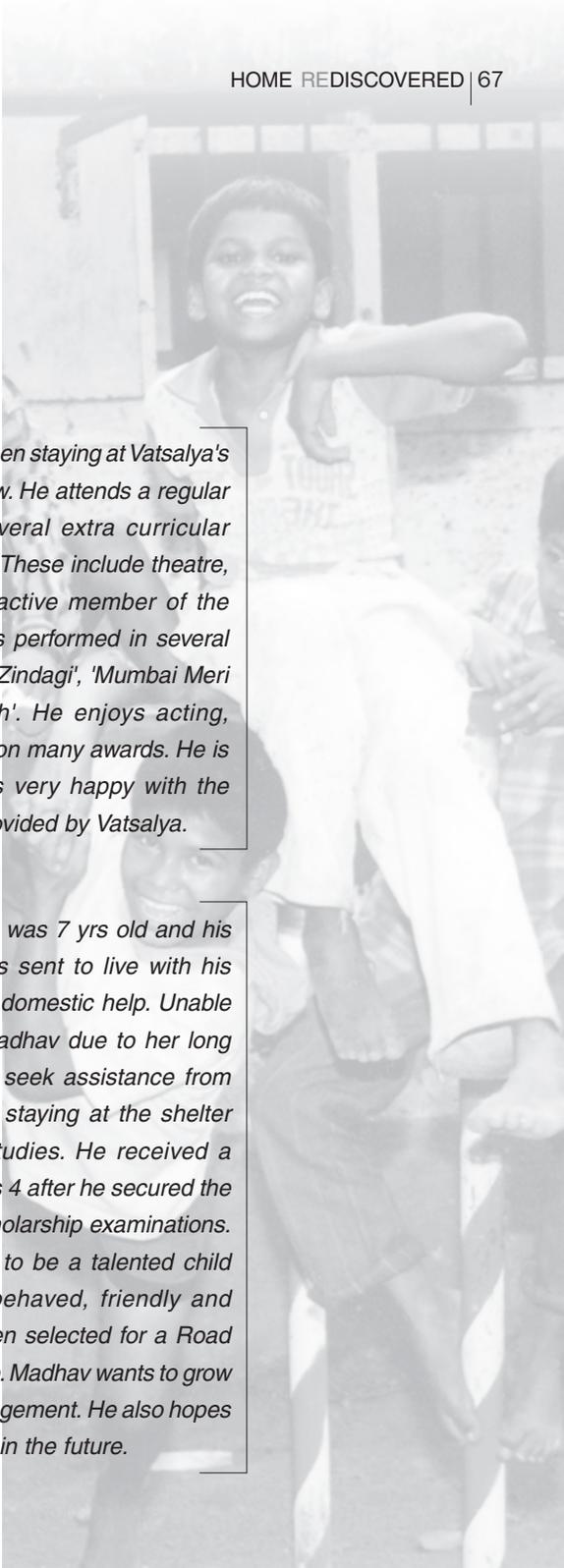
The centre activities are an integral component of rehabilitating street children and youth. Setting up contact centres has proved to be a very successful strategy towards taking children off the streets in a participatory and child friendly manner.

However, sustaining these centres over time has been Vatsalya's biggest challenge. As stated, of the six centres initially established by Vatsalya, only three are operational at present. The centres that are now closed were operating in collaboration with other organisations, on their premises. When these organisations were unable to continue providing space, Vatsalya was forced to shut down its facilities, primarily because of lack of available space in Mumbai to run such activities.

While Vatsalya has continued to be in touch with the children who attended these centres, in reality, opportunities to work closely with street children have been reduced. To run such centres and reach out to more vulnerable children living on the streets, Vatsalya strongly advocates for government support in terms of reserving spaces for community based contact centres.

*Children learn various skills – here they are being trained in karate*





*Ganesh, a 13 year old boy, has been staying at Vatsalya's shelter home for some years now. He attends a regular school and participates in several extra curricular activities organised by Vatsalya. These include theatre, dance and art. Ganesh is an active member of the Vatsalya Theatre Group. He has performed in several plays like 'Indradhanush', 'Hello Zindagi', 'Mumbai Meri Jaan', 'Pathik' and 'Sangharsh'. He enjoys acting, dancing and drawing and has won many awards. He is now studying in Class 8. He is very happy with the opportunities that have been provided by Vatsalya.*

*Madhav lost his father when he was 7 yrs old and his mother remarried. Madhav was sent to live with his grandmother, who worked as a domestic help. Unable to pay adequate attention to Madhav due to her long working hours, she decided to seek assistance from Vatsalya's shelter home. While staying at the shelter home, Madhav pursued his studies. He received a government scholarship in Class 4 after he secured the third rank in the merit based scholarship examinations. The shelter staff finds Madhav to be a talented child who enjoys dancing; is well behaved, friendly and disciplined. He has recently been selected for a Road Safety Patrol [RSP] training camp. Madhav wants to grow up and do a course in hotel management. He also hopes to pursue his passion for dance in the future.*

### III. The Shelter Home

The shelter home of Vatsalya was conceptualised as a secure space for street children that allows them to grow, away from the fear of life on the streets. It was started in 1991 in collaboration with Anand Niketan at the King George V Memorial Complex at Mahalaxmi. It offered day and night shelter to street children and street youth. In 1992, during the communal riots in Mumbai, the shelter served as a safe refuge to over 85 street boys – irrespective of their religion.

At present, the facility accommodates up to 70 street boys in the age group of 5 -18 years. As the older children get rehabilitated, newer children are enrolled. These children are either runaways, abandoned or orphan children, or belong to families who are 'at-risk' and therefore unable to take care of their children. The shelter aims to provide a stimulating and nurturing environment for children who have run away due to an oppressive home environment; who are at-risk due to the surroundings they are in or have threatening relationships with adults.

#### **Children come to the shelter home through different ways:**

- Referral by Vatsalya social workers: who identify 'at-risk' children in their interactions with them during outreach or centre programmes.

*The shelter home offers a stimulating and nurturing environment*



- Referral by other welfare agencies, individuals or through CHILDLINE.
- Referral by other street children – through child to child level contact
- Referral by parents/caregivers who are aware of the shelter facilities at Vatsalya

The Vatsalya shelter home offers a broad array of services – food, clothing, education, secure space, livelihood training, health care and counselling, but most of all it provides love and affection. Due to the affection received at the shelter, the children feel wanted and cared for. The environment of security at the shelter home helps the child leave behind any trauma of abuse or insecurity.

*Older children are taught catering skills*



Through its various programmes, the shelter meets the basic needs of the child necessary for physical and mental growth and development. In addition, the child is introduced to different avenues and opportunities for growth. These include formal and non-formal education, livelihood training and activities related to promoting art, music and other talent. The shelter home staff also organises outdoor activities for children such as camps, picnics and educational visits that aid in overall personality development.

The shelter home acclimatises the children to a structured and disciplined life through a positive group-living experience. The older children take responsibility for younger ones and assist them in studies and other developmental activities. The children are treated as partners in their own development process by being encouraged to take responsibility for various activities. A weekly meeting that the children have named 'Sandesh' is held, where all the children at the shelter discuss the week's major happenings. At these meetings, the children take collective decisions and lay down norms for the running of the shelter home.

At the shelter home various Indian festivals like Diwali, Christmas, Ganapati and Raksha Bandhan are celebrated. Such activities help children develop bonds with others at the shelter home. The celebrations also help rekindle their desire to return home. Other events like Vatsalya's annual day (*Sneha Milan*) and a common birthday party on February 14 are also celebrated. These occasions also give the children an opportunity to interact with other people, thus helping them in the process of self-development. Street children who attend the contact centres and meet social workers during outreach are also invited. In this way, street children get a glimpse of life at the shelter home and often some are motivated to opt for living in the shelter instead of on the streets.

*'Sandesh' meeting at the shelter home*



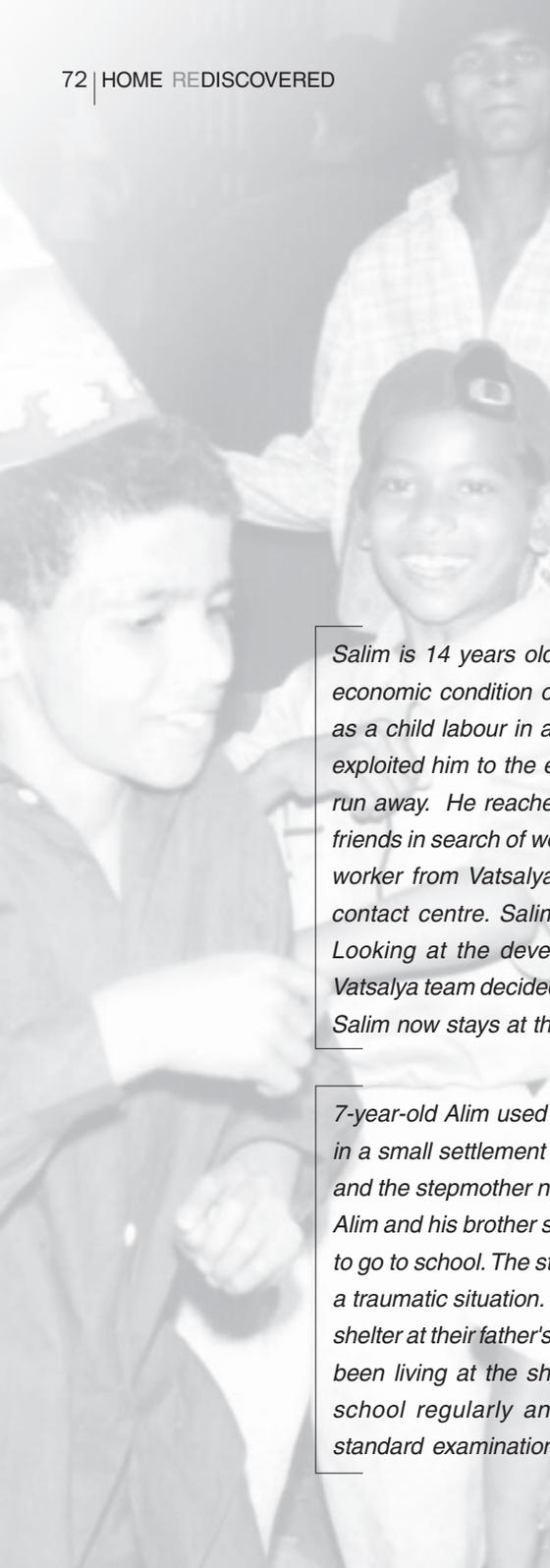
*Shelter home boys celebrate 'Rakshabandhan' with the contact centre girls*



Vatsalya social workers counsel and motivate older children at the shelter home to become independent. Vatsalya supports street youth by providing them with livelihood training, encouraging savings and exploring group home facilities for living once they leave the shelter home.

Vatsalya motivates runaway children to reunite with their families, if they are willing. Vatsalya helps contact their families and counsels the child as well as the family before reuniting them.

The shelter home offers a safe and caring place for street children and children of 'at-risk' families. It is a child friendly place where attention is given to the concerns of each child. Together the social workers and the children create a stable and enabling environment. There is a bona fide need to establish many such shelter homes to care for and protect all those children who would like to move away from the rough life of the streets.



*Salim is 14 years old. His family is in Bihar. The poor economic condition of his family forced Salim to work as a child labour in a zari unit. However, his employer exploited him to the extent that one day he decided to run away. He reached Mumbai with one of his village friends in search of work. In Mumbai, Salim met a social worker from Vatsalya who motivated him to attend a contact centre. Salim enjoyed the centre's activities. Looking at the development and potential in Salim, Vatsalya team decided to refer Salim to its shelter home. Salim now stays at the shelter and goes to school.*

*7-year-old Alim used to live with his brother and father in a small settlement on Atop Hill. The father remarried and the stepmother neglected the children. As a result, Alim and his brother stayed at home all day and refused to go to school. The stepmother beat the children. It was a traumatic situation. The children came to the Vatsalya shelter at their father's request. Alim and his brother have been living at the shelter for a year now. Both attend school regularly and have appeared for their first standard examinations.*

*"My mother works as a fruit vendor at the local market of Dadar. As a child, I would often skip school and wander aimlessly on the streets. My mother would search for me and beat me up. I refused to give up my ways until I met a 'didi' of Vatsalya. With my mother's permission, the didi encouraged me to join the Vatsalya Shelter Home. Initially, I found it quite difficult to adjust to the life at the shelter. But slowly, I began going to school and enjoying the different activities at the shelter. More importantly I imbibed the values and life skills which I believe laid the foundation for my future life. I gained confidence and learnt how to interact with others. I also learnt the importance of respect, cleanliness, and discipline. I think the most important part of my experience with Vatsalya was the way they completely accepted me and gave me love and affection. I completed my studies till Class 8. I worked with my brothers in a shop at Crawford Market for two years. A Vatsalya volunteer encouraged me to start my own shop along with my four brothers. We were very enthusiastic and she loaned us money to rent a shop. Today our small business is doing well. We have bought our own house and are steadily paying back the loan aunty gave us. When I was living in the Vatsalya shelter home, I always thought of having my own business. I feel now I have achieved that dream. I would like to be more successful. I would like to own my own shop and I have the confidence to do so. I would like to thank Vatsalya for helping me believe in myself and for giving me the courage to dream for bigger things in life."*

*– Chetan, 17 years*

*Baban, a 12-year-old, was shy when he joined Vatsalya. He was very quiet and had no friends, indicating fears or trauma. However he adjusted to the warm and cheerful atmosphere of the shelter home. He amazed teachers with his clay work and kept making new objects. He is an expert on the potters wheel. This activity has helped him overcome his shyness, make friends and participate in various activities with enthusiasm. The clay work has worked as therapy for him. He is also enjoying his studies and attends school regularly.*

#### **IV. Night Shelter**

In 1996, Vatsalya set up its first night shelter for street boys 18-25 years of age. This facility was offered to many street boys attending the centre who expressed a need to stay away from the streets in order to secure their future. These were youths who had either grown-up on the street or had run away from traumatic home environments in the recent past.

Street youth often do not qualify for services meant for children by NGOs or the government agencies. Many can no longer live in shelter homes/boarding schools that expect them to become independent after a certain age, usually 18. Those who have continued living on the street find it tougher to save their earnings or avoid police harassment.

At the night shelter started by Vatsalya street youth in regular contact with the organisation's workers could stay for a time-bound period. Each came with a clear understanding that within a determined period of time he had to achieve any one of the goals – to rent a group home with other boys, or take up a job, or start a small business, or return to his home and family.

A total of 32 street boys availed of this service. These youths worked in small companies, as security guards, gardeners, wedding party caterers

*Youth residing at Vatsalya's night shelter*



and decorators, even theatre artists. Some were self employed, running their own small enterprises. They would come to the shelter to spend nights away from the streets. They learnt to adjust and live together. During moments of crisis they provided support to each other. They looked after the management of the shelter and were made responsible for all its operations. They took up duties, responsibilities and leadership roles that helped them to prepare for a future life of independence and integration with society. The feeling of safety and security that the night shelter provided greatly enhanced the self esteem of the street youth.

The night shelter had a mandatory savings programme which was often channelled towards the youth taking up a group home where they could live in dignity once they left the night shelter. The youth had the option to save money in individual lockers or in a bank. The lockers were also used to keep their belongings safe. Vatsalya encouraged the youth to take up a job or get trained in a livelihood programme to improve their job prospects. The shelter staff also organised group meetings, exposure visits, training sessions and camps for these youngsters.

Street youth require time to learn the skills of group living. A conflict among the night shelter boys, once led to a crisis situation. The Vatsalya night shelter was being run in collaboration with a welfare organisation. The partner organisation expressed its inability to continue with the collaboration and, as a result, the night shelter was discontinued despite a very successful run, in 2000. At the time of shutting the night shelter, 14 boys were making use of its services. Closing the night shelter forced them to return to the streets, vulnerable to substance abuse, violence and poverty.

Programmes such as night shelters allow youth who have been on the street for some time to gain access to shelter care. More such programmes are imperative. And they can only be sustained if there is a surety of resources; in this case, a surety of space to run a shelter. Therefore, Vatsalya strongly advocates for sustainable measures, especially reserving government property to run programmes and services such as the night shelter for vulnerable groups.

*"When I came to Mumbai for the first time, I had to face a lot of problems. First of all I had to think of earning some money, as I had to eat. Then I needed a place to stay. Initially I did not even know that a place like the contact centre even existed. The children with whom I lived on the streets introduced me to Vatsalya. Then I started visiting the Grant Road centre. Initially I used the bathing facilities where I could wash and rest and keep my belongings in a locker. Later I took up 'wadi work' and on my days off I would come to the centre.*

*However, the nights posed a problem. I could easily spend my days at Chowpatty, but to spend the nights there meant police harassment, losing my belongings and spending the nights in the rain. That's when two of my friends and I approached the centre for solving this problem and, very soon, we were allowed to stay at the night shelter in Charni Road.*

*We were now in a position to look for better jobs. Here in the shelter we could sleep in peace. All things considered, it was just like home. I am happy to say that while we were at the night shelter, we were able to save enough to afford a room on rent and were ready to move. We are now living at a group home at Vile Parle, where we have rented a place of our own. I am full of hope and optimism. I have still to do so many things in the future."*

*– Rakesh, 16 years*

*Ravi is 17 years old. He had been on the streets for over five years. Living in a night shelter made Ravi realise that structured group living can be a positive experience. When Ravi's father asked him to return to his family, he was for the first time receptive to the idea. Counselling and motivation by Vatsalya social workers helped Ravi to finally decide on returning to his family.*

*Jamal, 19 years old, was in touch with Vatsalya's Grant Road Contact Centre. He hailed from a village in Assam and had left home because of unpleasant relations with his parents. He came to Mumbai with the hope of earning a livelihood. Soon he realised that getting a job in the city was not easy. He started working with caterers to earn enough to feed himself, but had no intention of continuing with the job. He expressed a desire to start a small-scale business and was supported by Vatsalya for it. He was admitted to the Youth Night Shelter and started making a good amount of money from his business, but he had to discontinue his business as he did not have a license from the Municipal Corporation. This was also the period during which, after counselling at the shelter, he initiated contact with his family. He wanted to return home, but only after proving his abilities to his family. He did go home to meet his parents and also get his important certificates. He came back to Mumbai and got a job as a Security Guard. This job provided him confidence and increased his self-esteem. Not only did he work, but also attended Driving School. After completion of his driving course, he expressed his desire to join his family, as he had enough money in his savings. Soon after, he was reunited with his family.*

## V. Repatriation

Repatriation is the process of reuniting a child with his/her family. It can happen at any phase of Vatsalya's contact with the child. But it is initiated only when the child or the youth clearly expresses his/her wish to be reunited with his/her family.

*A street child is re-united with his family*

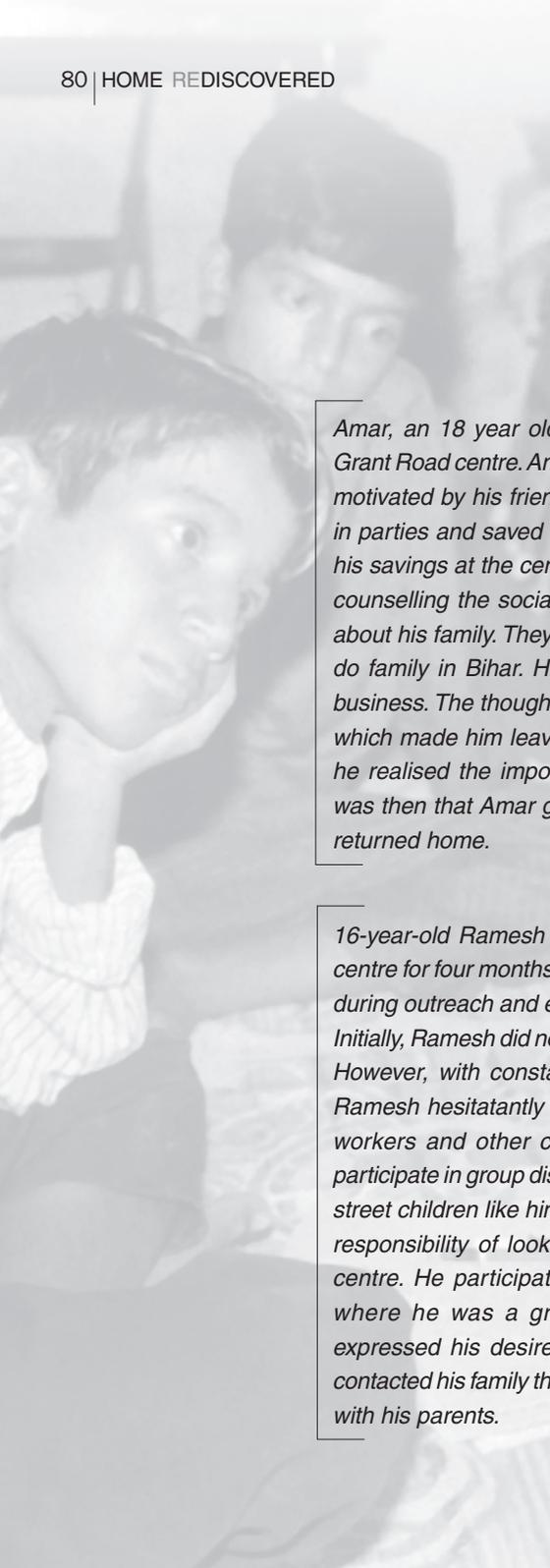


Vatsalya believes that no organisation can replace the family's role in the holistic development of a child. The family provides protection, emotional support, adult care, security and overall development to the child. However, in families where there is violence, breakdown, abuse or neglect, the children end up feeling unwanted. The trauma and stress of a family breakdown become unbearable. This prompts them to run away from their homes. There are also children who run away on an impulse, or for the glitz and glamour of city life, or under peer influence.

In most cases, children regret leaving home once the reality of living rough and living alone on the streets sinks in. But they do not return home on their own, especially if they have become used to their street life, or are hesitant or fearful of the consequences. When confronted, the children often provide incorrect information about their family in order to avoid returning home. Children who stay longer on their own and on the streets of a city often find it difficult to adjust to the lifestyle of their villages and smaller towns. These children require intensive support from social workers during repatriation, to help them readjust and prevent further running away.

*Mumbai, the city of dreams, attracted Munna, a 15 year old from Kolkata. He thought he could earn money in Mumbai, so he ran away from home. Unfortunately for Munna, he landed on the streets and had to face a lot of trouble. Subsequently, Munna learnt about the Vatsalya centre operating nearby and started attending it regularly. His friendly and helpful nature found him participating in all the activities of the centre. One day, when the children were being shown a short film on the importance of family life, Munna was very emotional. He realised the importance of a family and decided to return home. He had saved some money during his stay in Mumbai which he used to finance his return journey.*

*Ram Rane, 14 years old, came to Mumbai from a small village near Aurangabad when he was eight. He belonged to a poor family. He had lost his mother and his father was unemployed. He came to Mumbai in search of work. In Mumbai, he wandered on the streets and was approached by one of the Vatsalya staff and brought him to the shelter home. Initially, Ram hesitated in participating in any activity. He did not enjoy his studies either. Gradually, through regular interaction, he started to mix with others and gained confidence. He was provided non-formal and then formal education at the shelter home. When the staff motivated him to go back home, he agreed. One of the team members took him to his village, but he was not able to find his house. Since Ram had left his house 6 years earlier, he had forgotten the actual address of his family. Disappointed, Ram had to come back to Mumbai. However, the Vatsalya team finally managed to track down his family. They sent a letter to his house and his father wrote back. Ram's brother came to the shelter to take him back to his village. The joy in Ram's eyes shone out and is still fresh for those who saw him going back home.*



*Amar, an 18 year old, stayed on the streets near the Grant Road centre. Amar often visited the contact centre, motivated by his friends. He worked as a waiter/helper in parties and saved some money. He decided to keep his savings at the centre. Through individual and group counselling the social workers encouraged him to talk about his family. They learnt that he was from a well-to-do family in Bihar. His family was running a jewellery business. The thought of living in Mumbai attracted him which made him leave home. Talking with the workers, he realised the importance of a family atmosphere. It was then that Amar got in touch with his family and he returned home.*

*16-year-old Ramesh had been attending the Vatsalya centre for four months. A Vatsalya social worker met him during outreach and encouraged him to visit the centre. Initially, Ramesh did not participate in any of the activities. However, with constant support and encouragement, Ramesh hesitantly started to interact with the centre workers and other children. Gradually, he started to participate in group discussions about issues concerning street children like him, and his future. He also took the responsibility of looking after younger children at the centre. He participated in a camp for street children where he was a group leader. One day, Ramesh expressed his desire to return to his family. Ramesh contacted his family through Vatsalya and is now reunited with his parents.*

*Asif Siddiqui, a tall thin boy aged 13 and the only child of his parents, was found by the Vatsalya team members on a railway platform in Borivali, where he was engaged in polishing shoes. He had run away from home and started life on a railway platform. The railway police wanted to send him to the Remand Home in Dongri. Vatsalya counsellors intervened and spoke to the Senior Inspector of Railway Police. When Asif expressed his desire to continue his studies, the team decided to refer him to Vatsalya's residential home. Initially he did not reveal correct information about his parents, as he was angry with them. Intelligent, talented and outgoing, Asif managed to make friends with many other boys. Gradually, when he developed trust in the Vatsalya Shelter Home staff, he revealed that his father was working for Tata Power at Boisar. He wrote a letter to his parents, who were overjoyed at knowing the whereabouts of their only son. They asked him to come back home. Asif visited his parents, along with a staff member from the shelter. He then decided on his own to go back home and was happily reunited with his parents.*

*Fareed, Tarik, Azhar and Basant were living on the streets of Crawford Market. Fareed, 20, worked in a cutlery shop and earned about Rs 1,700 a month. Tarik, 15, did 'wadi work' and managed to earn enough to meet his expenses. Azhar, 15, and Basant, 14, were also involved in 'wadi work'. Vatsalya offered to provide a group home to these youth. They all liked the idea very much, as this would help them move away from the streets. A suitable one-room house was found within their budget. Vatsalya helped them with the formalities. Living in a group home has helped these youth find a new sense of confidence and independence. Today they are confident when they visit their families and feel a sense of pride in their success in leaving behind their street existence.*

Vatsalya believes in working with runaway children to find a solution to their concerns in a non-judgemental manner. In the process of reuniting children with their families, due attention is given to the willingness of the child in reuniting with the family, the concerns of the child, the reason for leaving home and the duration of stay on the streets. The social workers counsel the children about the importance of family in their lives. Only after the child desires to return home, is he/she reunited with his/her family. The Vatsalya team locates the family, assesses the home environment and accompanies the child home. The team also follows up on the children who have returned home through regular contact via letters or home visits. If for any reason a child expresses the desire to return to Vatsalya, the child is warmly welcomed back.

## **VI. After-care Group Home**

Vatsalya conceptualised an after-care group home programme for street youth in its care. It is a transitional living arrangement aimed at achieving self-sufficiency. It has proven to be a very effective strategy in rehabilitating street youth who are unwilling or unable to return to their families. The group home helps integrate the street youth with mainstream society. It not only provides a safe and stable place to stay, but also helps in providing a family-like environment. The youth also receive emotional support from each other. At the same time, the group home helps them to be independent and live harmoniously in a community, teaching them about sharing of responsibility and handling issues related to day-to-day living.

Vatsalya plays the role of a facilitator in motivating street youth to leave the streets and explore living in a group home. Vatsalya helps form a group of 3-6 street youth who are financially independent and supports them in searching for affordable housing. Usually it is a rented room and the youths share the cost of the rent and other expenses. Vatsalya also assists in handling paperwork such as signing documents and contracts, obtaining a ration card or starting a savings bank account. *In 2009-10, Vatsalya helped 15 young adults to find suitable group homes for themselves, aiding them become more independent.*

## VII. Working with the Girl Child

Of the children who attend Vatsalya's contact centres, there is a significant presence of girls who live on the streets with their parents/ caregivers. *In 2009-10 alone, almost half of the children coming into the centres were girls.*

These girl children belong to 'at-risk' families characterised by unemployment, poverty, family crises and inadequate housing. Their parents look for unskilled work in the unorganised sector as construction workers, domestic workers, beggars, rag pickers and even as commercial sex workers. Needless to say, these children are neglected, left alone to fend for themselves. The risks that these girls face are similar to street boys: malnutrition, psychological disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, physical assault and disruption of education, but they are also at a higher risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.

At Vatsalya, there is a special focus on the girl child within its child protection programmes. Vatsalya does preventive work with the girl child and their families. The social workers identify girls who are at risk through outreach and contact centres. Their families are motivated to take interest in all aspects of the girl child's life and encouraged to participate and

*A Yoga class in session*



*Mealtime at Vatsalya*

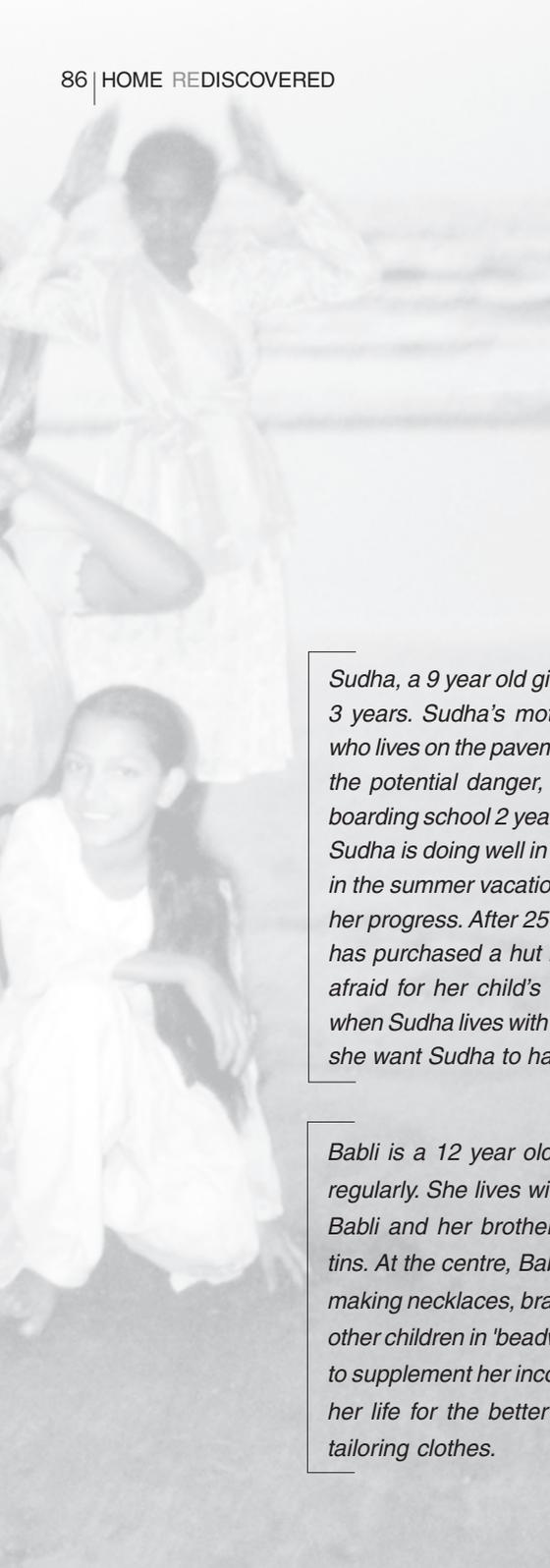
utilise Vatsalya's programmes for education, health and overall development. The social workers at Vatsalya work closely with the parents or caregivers of girls to ensure that all girls go to school and learn well. The Vatsalya team maintains a close follow up on these girl children to prevent school drop outs. Since Vatsalya does not have its own shelter facility for girl children, it enlists support from other social organisations and residential schools meant for girls. Girl children who are at-risk within their surroundings are referred to other shelter homes for a safe place to stay. In addition, Vatsalya social workers actively intervene in cases of abuse and neglect of girl children, such as preventing early marriages or resolving conflict situations within families.

Girl children who attend Vatsalya's centres are provided with educational inputs, skill development, basic health care and hygiene awareness. They are also counselled about their feelings, anxieties and future options.

Vatsalya encourages young girls to participate in the activities of a Vatsalya led group called '**Saheli**'. At the Saheli group meetings, girl children are encouraged to talk about their feelings, issues and concerns. They are also provided with creative activities to mobilise their energy and potential.

*Farida is a 7 year old orphan. Her parents passed away in an accident when she was only three years old. She had a brother too. Both of them moved in with one of her mother's friends. Her brother left home after some time. Her caretaker also wanted to admit Farida in any residential home, as they did not have the means to support her. Farida had never been to school. In course of time she came in contact with the North Mumbai centre and started attending it. After attending NFE classes she was able to read and write. Later on, Vatsalya referred Farida to a residential school for girls "Divya Prabha". Farida is now staying in the residential home.*

*Surekha, a 14 year old girl, stays at Fatakwadi, Mumbai. Her father is a rag-picker and an alcoholic. He gets violent and abusive when drunk. Her family is very poor. Surekha stays with her uncle and studies in a nearby school. Surekha attends the Vatsalya centre regularly. She wanted to work and assist her family financially. Surekha discussed her options with a Vatsalya worker and decided to learn sewing and tailoring. The social workers at Vatsalya contacted Surekha's mother and motivated her to allow Surekha to learn tailoring with Vatsalya's support. At present, Surekha learns tailoring during the day and attends a night school to complete her studies. "I would not like to spend my life in poverty like my mother did. I will work and contribute to my family earnings", says Surekha confidently.*



*Sudha, a 9 year old girl, was in contact with Vatsalya for 3 years. Sudha's mother is a commercial sex worker who lives on the pavement near Crawford market. Seeing the potential danger, Vatsalya had placed Sudha in a boarding school 2 years ago. Naturally bright and active, Sudha is doing well in school. She returns to her "home" in the summer vacations. Sudha's mother is thrilled with her progress. After 25 years of living on the streets, she has purchased a hut in a slum in Cuffe Parade. She is afraid for her child's safety during the short vacation when Sudha lives with her. Under no circumstances does she want Sudha to have the same fate as her.*

*Babli is a 12 year old girl who visits Vatsalya's centre regularly. She lives with her father, who is an alcoholic. Babli and her brother make a living selling empty oil tins. At the centre, Babli learnt the craft of stringing and making necklaces, bracelets and rings. Today, she trains other children in 'beadwork'. Babli wants to learn tailoring to supplement her income. She is determined to change her life for the better and wants to set a business in tailoring clothes.*

*Bhuvanewari is a charming and energetic 6 year old girl. She lived with her parents and three siblings at Khetwadi. Her father runs a petty shop near the school. He is an alcoholic and all his earnings are spent on drinks. Her mother has resorted to prostitution to manage the household. Frequent quarrels between Bhuvanewari's parents have destroyed the environment at home. Bhuvanewari's mother was worried about her daughters. Being in a red light area, the place was also not safe for girl children. Incidents of sexual abuse were a regular feature. Following the mother into the flesh trade was natural for girl children. Bringing up the children in a family atmosphere beset by domestic violence was also a concern. After judging the whole situation and its vulnerability, Bhuvanewari's mother contacted Vatsalya and sought help to get her admitted in a boarding school or shelter, that would offer a better environment to grow. Initially Bhuvanewari was reluctant to stay away from her parents. It took some time to convince her. She was sent to Maria Sharan Shelter, Pune. She now studies in Class 1.*

*"I live with my mother who works as a domestic worker. Against all odds, my mother educated me up to Class 12. During my studies, I would assist my mother by doing odd jobs at a call centre, at a garment manufacturing unit, and at a school as a teacher. However, I wanted to give more attention to my studies. When I learnt about Vatsalya and visited their centre, I was delighted that the social worker there offered me a place to study. I was also helped in my studies by a 'Teach India' volunteer. Vatsalya has now offered me a position of a teacher at their centre. I am very happy to take up this offer and to use this as an opportunity for utilising my skills learnt at Vatsalya."*

*Ameena, 20 years*

*I have lived with my family on the streets for all my childhood years. My father was an alcoholic and would physically abuse my mother and all of us. As children we regularly visited the Vatsalya contact centre nearby. The social workers at Vatsalya helped in getting us admitted in the neighbourhood English medium school. We enjoyed going to school and the Vatsalya staff helped us with our studies. After I completed my Class 10, I was unable to continue my studies due to family problems. However, I wanted to work as a nurse. With guidance and encouragement from the Vatsalya staff as well as their efforts in identifying a suitable course for me, I did a six month training course in nursing at a local hospital. Now I work at the same hospital and have been there for the past five years. I enjoy my work and, more importantly, ever since my father's death, I have been the main breadwinner of my family. We no longer live on the streets; we have a house, and my earnings have helped in marrying off two of my four sisters. This is my success story and none of this would have been possible without Vatsalya.*

– Sabina, 22 years

*11 year old Alma migrated with her family from a village in Uttar Pradesh to Mumbai some years ago. Her family lived on the streets of Crawford market. She soon lost her father to tuberculosis, leaving her mother and two siblings. Alma was forced to beg for her family's survival. Alma often met the social workers of Vatsalya during outreach. She also attended the Vatsalya centre, though she was not very regular. The social workers decided to speak with Alma's mother. After several days of counselling, they successfully motivated Alma's mother to give up her street life and return to her village where she had a home and some farmland.*

*Lathabai, a 34 year old mother of three children, is appreciative of the support given to women like her from Vatsalya. "I sent my children to the Vatsalya centre. They helped my children to study at a regular school. My daughter now studies at a boarding school recommended by Vatsalya. She is really happy. I want my younger son to also study there. That way they can receive far better opportunities; away from the life on the streets. My elder son continues to attend the Vatsalya centre. Every time my son and I argue or fight, the social worker talks to both of us patiently."*

*"Earlier, we were only doing household chores, but now we have the time and space to be ourselves and to think about our lives and our future",* says a Saheli group member.

The group meets every month at the centre. *In 2009-10, a total of 41 Saheli group meetings were held at all the three centres of Vatsalya. About 160 girls participated in these meetings.* At the meetings, the girls received information about necessary life skills from Vatsalya social workers and awareness about varied issues. The girls also discussed opportunities for their education, career and future.

### **VIII. Work with 'At-risk' Families and Communities**

*A family is the best safety net for any child. However, under the pressures of poverty coupled with disease, ill health, violence or abuse within the family, this safety net crumbles, giving rise to an increasing number of vulnerable children who often take to the streets as runaways or abandoned children. Preventing a child to get on the streets is much more effective than trying to rehabilitate a street child later. This is the reason why Vatsalya proactively works with 'at-risk' families and communities to strengthen their capacity to protect, care for and work towards the healthy development of their children.*

While children 'at-risk' are Vatsalya's primary target group, the organisation also works with their care givers, to help them better protect and care for their children. These families belong to poor socio-economic backgrounds, living in inadequate housing and experiencing conflicts within the family. The focus is to develop non-institutional programmes that strengthen family support for children. These include:

- Empowering women to take decisions affecting their children.
- Counselling families and providing psychosocial support.
- Providing educational sponsorships to keep the child in school and within the family.
- Facilitating adoption and foster care for destitute children.

In cases where the children live with their parents, there is a need to have an on-going dialogue to see that the parents contribute to the

meaningful growth and development of their children. Vatsalya has intervened in many cases of family abuse, where the child suffered either physically or emotionally. Intervention is also sought in cases where the parents knowingly or in ignorance keep the child away from opportunities of education, health and recreation.

The Vatsalya social workers not only meet with the children's families during home visits, but also encourage parents to visit the centres. Vatsalya holds monthly meetings with parents to orient them about the centre, its activities and the child's progress at the centre. The parents are often surprised to hear about their children's talents and accomplishments. If the Vatsalya social workers observe behavioural traits in the child that are symptomatic of a problem, they bring them to the parent's notice. The parents find these meetings a good platform to air their fears, problems and frustrations in bringing up their children. The social workers of Vatsalya help the parents identify the cause of their problems and search for alternative ways of solving them.

*In 2009-10, Vatsalya intervened with over 700 families of poor economic background who lived on the streets, on pavements and in slums. A majority of these families experienced conflicts due to unemployment, debt, physical impairment, mental illness, death of a parent, or alcohol or drug abuse by parent/s.*

# FIVE

---

## Right to Development

Development in a safe environment, through the provision of education, constructive play and adequate standard of living

**T**he Right to Development includes "all kinds of education (formal and non-formal) and the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development" (UNCRC). Vatsalya takes the right to development very seriously and aims to provide for the holistic development of all the children and youth it reaches out to. Through education, skill development and assistance in increasing employability of street children and youth, Vatsalya attempts to reduce their vulnerability and give them a sense of purpose and a life of dignity. The impact of Vatsalya's developmental programmes can be best explained in the words of a Vatsalya social worker: "**Vatsalya never gives up on its children. It provides all its children with education and skill training and later with career options; this way Vatsalya helps these children all the way, giving a secure start to their future**".

*Creative activities at the shelter*



*Vatsalya's children are encouraged to study*



*This chapter explains the different programmes and services offered by Vatsalya towards securing the right to development for street children.*

## **I. Education**

Education facilitates physical, intellectual and psychological growth of an individual. The Indian constitution recognises education as a fundamental right for every child. The recent Right to Education act notified on April 1, 2010 by the Government of India ensures free and compulsory education for all children.

While this is a welcome step, the constitutional enactment alone cannot ensure that every child will attend school and receive an education. Most street children are deprived of their right to education or to learn skills, which makes them vulnerable and unable to take advantage of opportunities to realise and achieve their potential. The children and their families need to be motivated to enrol in schools.

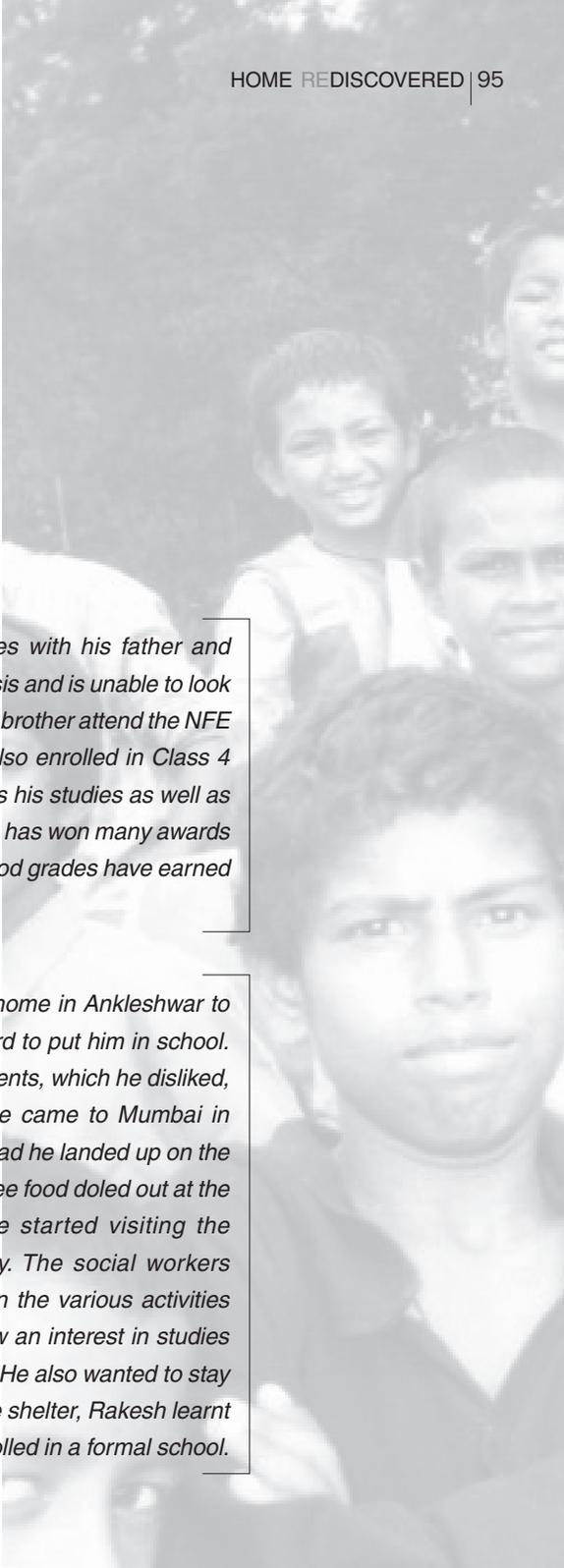
Vatsalya sees education as a prime means of effectively bringing street children into mainstream society. However, there are some very real

*Children participating in a programme on 'Literacy Day'*



challenges in getting these children into schools. Most have no permanent place to stay; they live in temporary spaces on the streets, on pavements, in shanties and slums. They are forced to move within a city or even to other cities in search of shelter and employment. Many are school dropouts or have never been to school. Therefore it becomes difficult for these children to adjust to the requirements of formal schooling.

In order to ensure that all street children learn well at schools, Vatsalya has adopted a two-fold strategy towards their education: providing non - formal education (NFE) and supporting children to receive formal education. The NFE strategy focuses on 'individualised education' through activity - based learning. The formal education strategy focuses on ensuring that all children who are in contact with Vatsalya enrol in formal schools. It also supports the children academically as well as financially so that they do not drop out of school. These strategies are explained further.



*Suresh is 10 years old. He lives with his father and brother. His father has tuberculosis and is unable to look after his children. Suresh and his brother attend the NFE classes at Vatsalya. Suresh is also enrolled in Class 4 in a formal school. Suresh enjoys his studies as well as the art activities at the centre. He has won many awards for his art in competitions. His good grades have earned him a scholarship at the school.*

*Rakesh, 12, ran away from his home in Ankleshwar to Mumbai. His family couldn't afford to put him in school. He had to work hard with his parents, which he disliked, and so decided to run away. He came to Mumbai in search of well paying work. Instead he landed up on the streets. For survival he ate the free food doled out at the Mahim 'dargah'. Eventually he started visiting the Vatsalya contact centre nearby. The social workers encouraged him to participate in the various activities of the centre. He started to show an interest in studies after attending the NFE classes. He also wanted to stay at Vatsalya's shelter home. At the shelter, Rakesh learnt to read and write. He is now enrolled in a formal school.*

### **a. Non-Formal Education**

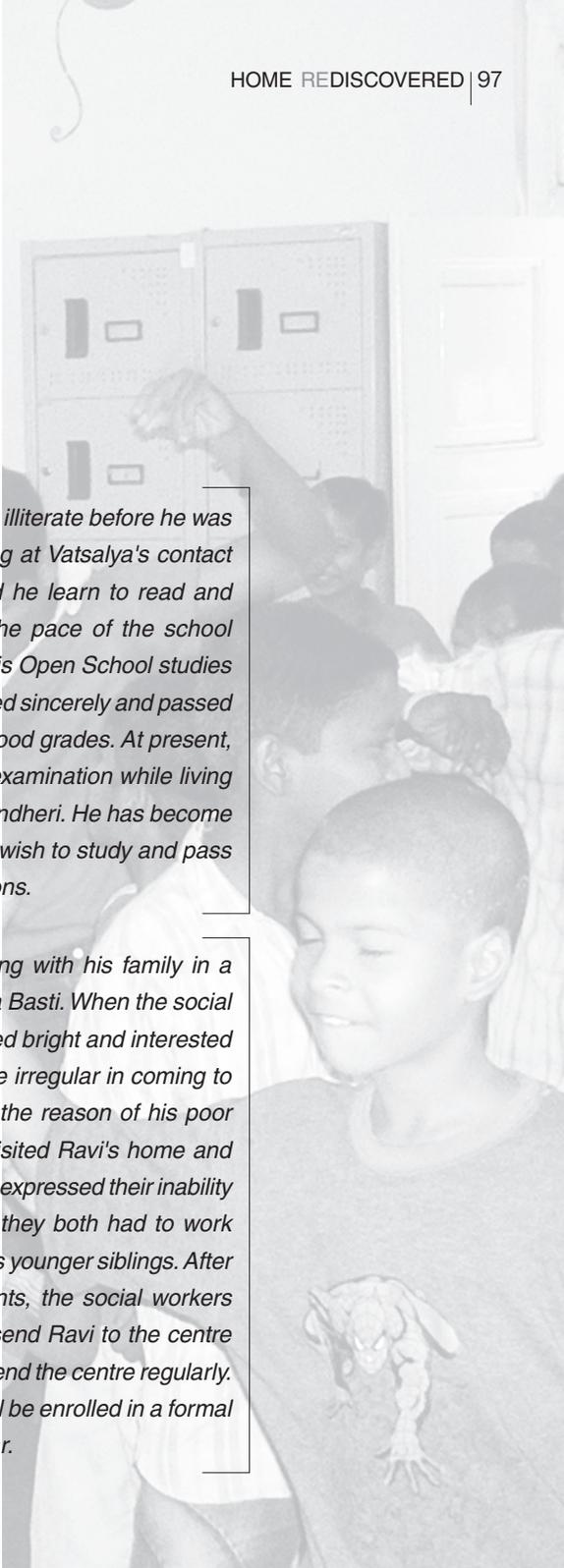
Street children often do not understand the importance of education in their lives. Understandably so, as when sustenance is uncertain, education seems meaningless. There are practical difficulties too – many do not have the time to attend school due to household responsibilities or burden of work. Many have never been to school or have been early dropouts. These children require motivation and assistance to attend school regularly.

*Children pursue various hobbies including photography*



Through NFE, the children are prepared for entry to formal schools. The NFE programme motivates children to study and take schooling seriously, as it could be the difference between having a good future and a life on the streets. NFE therefore acts as a bridge between out of school children and a formal schooling. Since it is child centred, it allows the child to learn at his/her own pace.

The primary aim of NFE is to get children interested in learning by engaging them constructively. Towards this, the NFE programme uses various creative teaching methods such as story telling sessions, discussions, audio-visual aids (films, songs, posters, picture aids), role-plays and educational visits. It also encourages children to participate in theatre, quiz competitions, games, art, craft and other hobby classes.



*Santosh 18 year old, was a near illiterate before he was introduced to the joys of learning at Vatsalya's contact centre and shelter. Not only did he learn to read and write, but quickly adjusted to the pace of the school curriculum. He was tutored for his Open School studies by a Vatsalya volunteer. He studied sincerely and passed the Class 10 examination with good grades. At present, Santosh is taking his Class 12 examination while living in an after care group home in Andheri. He has become a role model for other boys who wish to study and pass their Class 10 Board examinations.*

*Ravi is a 12 year old boy staying with his family in a slum near Bandra called Banjara Basti. When the social workers first met Ravi, he seemed bright and interested in studies. However he was quite irregular in coming to the Vatsalya centre. To find out the reason of his poor attendance, the social worker visited Ravi's home and met with his parents. The parents expressed their inability to spare Ravi for studies since they both had to work and required Ravi to look after his younger siblings. After several meetings with the parents, the social workers were able to convince them to send Ravi to the centre for a few hours. Ravi began to attend the centre regularly. He shows good progress and will be enrolled in a formal school in the next academic year.*

The NFE curriculum is designed to focus on the holistic development of a child. It has four levels – preparatory, elementary, advanced and skill development. Children are made aware of topics that include health and hygiene, nutrition, discipline, leadership and moral values. All the learning modules, the teaching learning material and the teachers' handbook are developed in-house.

NFE is an integral and ongoing activity at all Vatsalya's contact centres and at the shelter home. *Over 250 boys and girls of varying age groups attend the NFE classes for 2-4 hours at the contact centres.*

### **b. Formal Education**

Vatsalya ensures that all the street children visiting its centres and living at the shelter home receive a formal schooling. *In 2009-10, a total of 576 children were assisted towards enrolment in formal government and private schools. Moreover, study classes to provide additional academic inputs were provided to over 700 school students.*

To ensure that every child is in school and learning well, Vatsalya employs the following methods:

- Working with parents of street children, wherever possible, to motivate them towards seeking formal education for their children.

*Vatsalya's 'Little Masters' going to school*

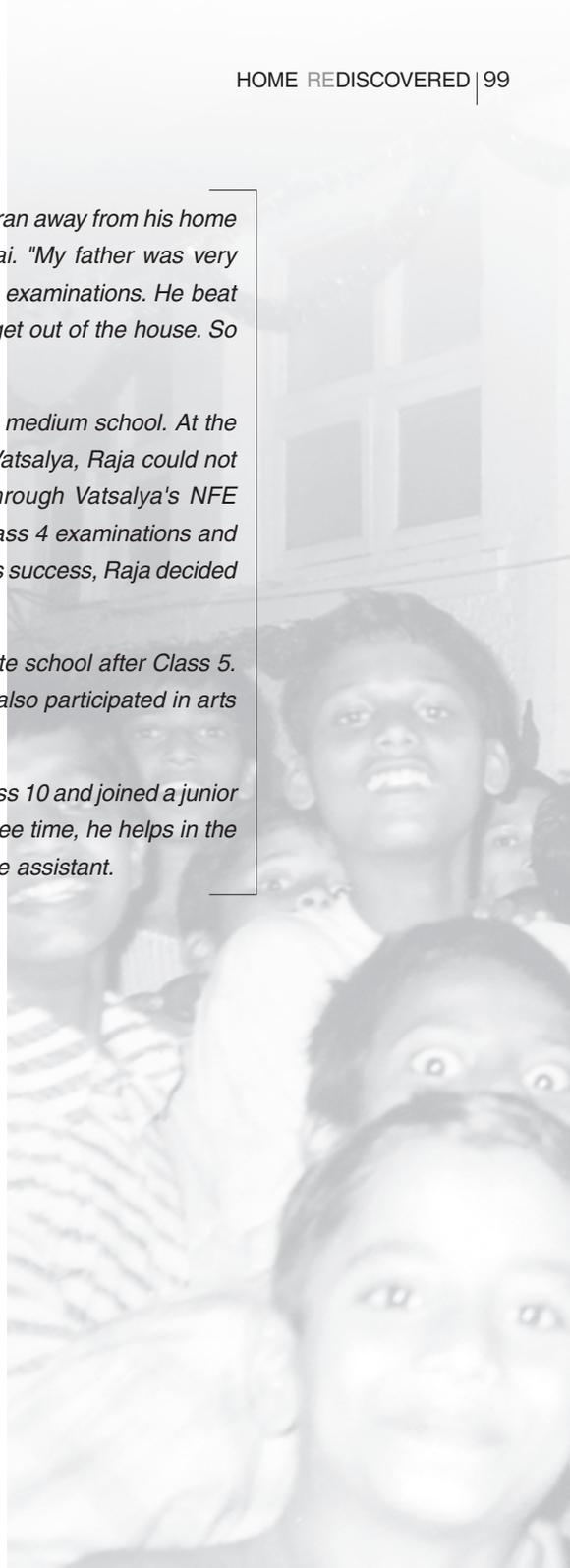


*Raja was 12 years old when he ran away from his home in Kolkata and came to Mumbai. "My father was very angry when I failed my Class 6 examinations. He beat me mercilessly and told me to get out of the house. So I decided to run away".*

*Raja used to study in a Bengali medium school. At the time of coming in contact with Vatsalya, Raja could not read or write Hindi fluently. Through Vatsalya's NFE classes, Raja studied for his Class 4 examinations and cleared them. Encouraged by his success, Raja decided to join a formal school.*

*Vatsalya enrolled him in a private school after Class 5. Raja did well in his studies. He also participated in arts and drama competitions.*

*Raja has now completed his Class 10 and joined a junior college in Mumbai. During his free time, he helps in the activities of Vatsalya as an office assistant.*



- Encouraging children to deal with their psychological fears about school, authorities and learning, through individual and group counselling and exposure visits to schools.
- Enlisting peer support to motivate out of school children to attend school.
- Providing options of medium of instruction and public or private schooling to children and their parents.
- Providing financial support to children who want to pursue studies but are unable to afford the costs.
- Following up on enrolled children through interactions with teachers, school administration and the child.
- Providing academic assistance in the form of study classes to reduce the tendency to drop out due to poor academic performance.
- Offering support to students who appear for the National Open School examinations for Class 10 studies.

## II. Educational Visits, Camps and Outings

Regular educational visits and exposure visits act as a medium for socialisation and learning and are very much part of a child's life at

*Vatsalya organises adventure camps regularly for their children*



Vatsalya. These outings also provide an opportunity for the children to come together as a group, take responsibility and explore the joys of human relationships. They provide an opportunity for them to interact with other people and exhibit their strengths.

Vatsalya organises regular educational visits for children. Children get an opportunity to visit the Planetarium, the city science centre, the General Post Office and the city museums and many other such places. They are also exposed to different vocations and trades. In the past Vatsalya has arranged visits to the Haffkine Institute (a bio-medical research institute), Shramik Vidyapeeth, the Weaver's Service Centre and the Civil Defence Training Centre, to name a few. *In 2009-10 alone, Vatsalya organised 17 educational visits for the children and youth from the contact centres and the shelter home.*

### **III. Livelihood Training**

In Vatsalya's experience, street children and youth possess inherent qualities to become entrepreneurs – they are risk takers with survival skills who are determined to survive against all odds. Given the right opportunity, these children and youth have the potential to help themselves and come out of poverty.

Vatsalya aims to provide street youth with the necessary skills and support that will enable them to seek employment or become self employed. Its livelihood training, therefore, is an integral component of the rehabilitation programme for street youth.

Livelihood training at Vatsalya is designed to explore the aspirations of street youth and at the same time assist them in developing marketable occupational skills. The journey from motivating a street youth for learning a vocation to actual employment sees the young adult undergo several changes in his/her attitude and behaviour.

The livelihood training programme of Vatsalya not only helps the youth in acquiring skills towards employment opportunities, but also keeps them engaged constructively. It diverts their mind from their unpleasant past. The trainings give a sense of purpose to the youth and empowers them

to set goals. The youth who have attended livelihood training at Vatsalya have expressed feeling more responsible and confident about their future. Thus, the livelihood training plays an important therapeutic role in the lives of street youth.

*Computer training is very popular amongst the children*



Under the livelihood training programme, young adults can benefit from either in-house training or training with other vocational institutes. Learning computers, motor driving, glass painting, fabric painting, screen printing, block printing, stencil designing, nursing, automobile repairs, cooking, embroidery and gardening are some of the courses offered to the youth.

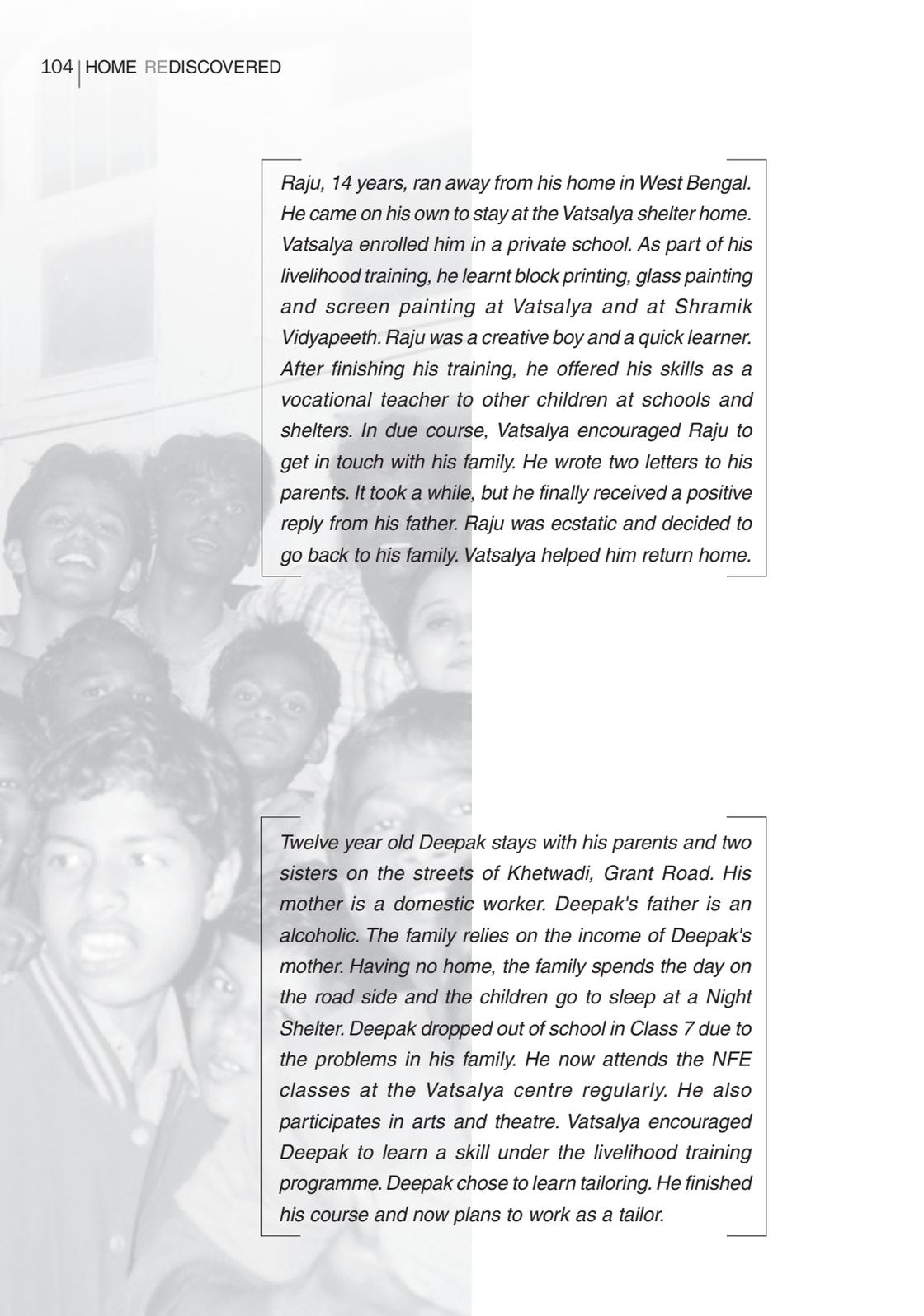
For youth who are interested in a specific career choice, Vatsalya provides assistance in the form of job placements. In the past, Vatsalya has partnered with the corporate sector (e.g. the Four Seasons Hotel, the Taj Group, Voltas Limited) to provide internship opportunities to street youth. Vatsalya and its partner NGOs also offer training and placements to interested street youth to work as para professional workers. *Every year, on an average, nearly 50 young boys and girls in the age group of 16-22 benefit from the livelihood training programme of Vatsalya.*

*Vocational training – cooking*



*Vocational training – tailoring*





*Raju, 14 years, ran away from his home in West Bengal. He came on his own to stay at the Vatsalya shelter home. Vatsalya enrolled him in a private school. As part of his livelihood training, he learnt block printing, glass painting and screen painting at Vatsalya and at Shramik Vidyapeeth. Raju was a creative boy and a quick learner. After finishing his training, he offered his skills as a vocational teacher to other children at schools and shelters. In due course, Vatsalya encouraged Raju to get in touch with his family. He wrote two letters to his parents. It took a while, but he finally received a positive reply from his father. Raju was ecstatic and decided to go back to his family. Vatsalya helped him return home.*

*Twelve year old Deepak stays with his parents and two sisters on the streets of Khetwadi, Grant Road. His mother is a domestic worker. Deepak's father is an alcoholic. The family relies on the income of Deepak's mother. Having no home, the family spends the day on the road side and the children go to sleep at a Night Shelter. Deepak dropped out of school in Class 7 due to the problems in his family. He now attends the NFE classes at the Vatsalya centre regularly. He also participates in arts and theatre. Vatsalya encouraged Deepak to learn a skill under the livelihood training programme. Deepak chose to learn tailoring. He finished his course and now plans to work as a tailor.*

*“I came to visit Mumbai with some village members when I was 16 years old. I got separated from the others and decided to survive on my own in Mumbai. I would roam the streets, beg for food, and sleep on the footpaths. I often slept outside the CST train station, where I made friends with other boys like me. Often we were rounded up by the police and put into the lock-up for no fault of ours. Gradually, I fell into bad company and took to petty crimes like pick-pocketing. One day, a friend took me to Vatsalya’s C.P.Tank contact centre where I had a long discussion with the social worker about my life and future plans. He encouraged me to participate in the centre activities and also explained the facilities and the rules of the centre. I began visiting the centre every day. Slowly I became more involved and started taking on certain responsibilities at the centre. Subsequently, after training as a para-professional social worker, Vatsalya offered me a job in this field. I have been working with them since 1996. I am now married, with two children. I have also bought a house for myself. I work with the children at Vatsalya, as well as teach them. I would like to pursue the career of a social worker and join a course in social work.”*

*– Ravi Kumar, 31 years*

*“I ran away from home and came to Mumbai, but had no clue what I wanted to do in life. I am glad that I came into contact with Vatsalya. I attended school and learnt many skills through the livelihood training programme of Vatsalya. Later, Vatsalya encouraged me to work as a para-professional social worker. Today it gives me great satisfaction to work with children who are like I was at one point in time. I have been involved in repatriating and reuniting many children with their families in remote villages. When I meet these families, all I ask the grateful parents for is their blessings. Today I am married, with two children and a house of my own in Mumbai. When I think about my life, I feel grateful to Vatsalya for providing me with the right opportunities.”*

*– Tariq, 28 years*

*Shiva is 15 years old. He ran away from his home in Nanded fearing his father's wrath. "I used to hate going to school and would often skip classes and wander in the village. One day my teacher complained about me to my father. I was so scared about his reaction that I didn't return home. I decided to run away to Mumbai instead." Shiva landed up living on the streets of Mahim. He came in contact with Vatsalya and attended the NFE classes at the centre. Slowly he began to get interested in studies. He decided to learn a vocation instead of enrolling for higher studies. Vatsalya referred him to Don Bosco's vocational training centre, where Shiva is now learning to be a wireman. Shiva plans to go back to his village after the completion of his course, to teach electrical work in the vocational training centre of his village.*

*Rajan, 9 years, is from Nanded. Before coming to Mumbai he stayed with his father and stepmother. His stepmother's ill-treatment and his father's apathy pushed him to leave home and come to Mumbai. He learnt how to read and write through the NFE classes and agreed to attend a formal school. He also participates actively in livelihood training classes. He is good at clay work and also loves knitting 'torans' and telephone covers. Within a year, he seems like a transformed child. He has left his turbulent past behind and looks forward to a future.*

*"I ran away from home when I was eight years old and made platform no. 13 at Mumbai CST station my home. One day, I met a Vatsalya social worker who encouraged me to attend the contact centre. I liked the centre and thereafter attended it regularly. After about two months, Vatsalya enrolled me in its shelter home. While I was happy with its facilities, I felt I was missing out on the freedom I had when I was living on my own on the streets. So I left the shelter home. About a year later, I met another Vatsalya social worker who encouraged me to return to Vatsalya and study. I agreed and began attending school. I also learnt various arts and crafts at Vatsalya. I learnt painting and drama and participated in the gardening project. As part of the theatre group, I was taken on a flight to Delhi to perform there. It was a wonderful and dream like experience! After spending eight years at Vatsalya, I decided to live independently once again. However, it was tougher than I had imagined. A few months later, Vatsalya's 'didi' invited me to play cricket for Vatsalya. She also offered me a job with Vatsalya. Once again I became a part of Vatsalya, helping with the gardening project. Soon after, I was selected to be an intern at the Four Seasons Hotel for a two year apprenticeship in food and beverages. I am undergoing training at the hotel and have also managed to take my Class 10 exams from the National Open School. I have rented a flat and my mother is now living with me, which has been my greatest joy and a dream come true. I am proud of my achievements and I will be eternally grateful to Vatsalya for all they have done for me. I also believe that my mother's blessings have brought me this success.*

*– Laxman, 19 years*

#### IV. Balkruti

'Balkruti' is the creativity development programme of Vatsalya. It aims at promoting creativity in children by exposing them to various expressions of creative arts. As part of the programme, children are taught various arts and crafts. Children are encouraged to use recycled material to make purses, bags, candles, *rakhis*, baskets, necklaces, bangles, bookmarks, greeting cards, files and *diyas*. These articles are displayed events and exhibitions to encourage children to pursue their creativity. They have expressed a sense of pride in displaying their craft and talent. *Every year, close to 100 boys and girls in the age group of 10-17 years participate in Balkruti activities.*

*Vatsalya's children making paper flowers*



*Children at the shelter love to take care of their garden*



#### **V. 'Manmohi'**

'Manmohi' is the gardening project of the Vatsalya shelter home. Gardening serves both as a hobby and therapy for the children. It teaches them to care for the environment and helps them attain a state of peace and calm.

#### **VI. Lajawab**

Lajawab is the in-house catering service of Vatsalya which is managed by the older shelter home boys and the staff. It provides free and nutritious food for all children at the shelter home and at the three centres. It also serves as a training ground for children who are interested in making a career with the catering and the hospitality industry. A few young boys living in Vatsalya's shelter home, trained under Vatsalya's Lajawab programme, have gone on to do internships with luxury hotels in Mumbai.

## VII. Recreation and Celebration of events

Recreation is a significant aspect of an individual's life. Children, especially, need time for recreation and leisure for their physical, emotional and mental development. At Vatsalya, programmes are designed to provide opportunities for structured and unstructured recreational activities. Children are encouraged to participate in indoor and outdoor sports, arts and crafts and dance and music. Yoga classes and Shiamak Davar dance classes are held regularly for the children. They also get regular opportunities to perform on stage with the Shiamak Davar group.

Vatsalya also celebrates cultural programmes and festivals that provide a sense of togetherness and a feeling of family to all children and youth associated with Vatsalya. The annual day of Vatsalya, termed as 'Sneh Milan', is a popular event. It is celebrated on a big scale with dance, theatre and songs. Children staying away from home miss celebrating birthdays. Many do not even remember their actual birth date. Every year, therefore, on 14<sup>th</sup> of February, Vatsalya celebrates love and sharing by throwing a grand birthday party for all the children from the centres and the shelter home. Well designed activities help the children channel their intense emotions and energy in creative ways and discover their talents.

*A 'Sneh Milan' annual day programme performance*



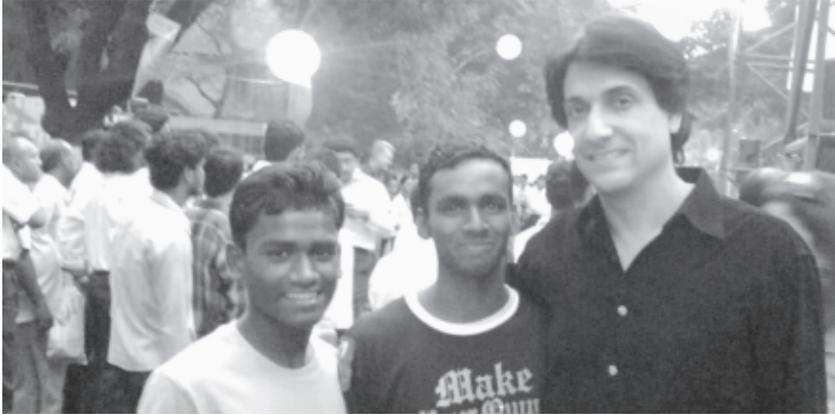
*Birthdays are celebrated for all on February 14<sup>th</sup> – Valentine's Day*



*Singer Abhijeet Sawant sang and entertained the children*



*Vatsalya children participate in Shiamak Davar's stage performances*



### **VIII. Interaction Programmes**

The only effective way to break down social barriers is through interaction and communication. Vatsalya encourages collaborative and interactive programmes where children living and working on the streets have a chance to meet and interact with other children, celebrities and society at large. These have included meetings with other school children, college students, senior citizens residing at old age homes and children who are differently abled. Interactions are also organised with members of charity clubs such as the Inner Wheel Club and the Rotary Club.

Vatsalya organises these social interactions to dispel stereotypes about street children. It allows various members of the society a chance to see the street children as how Vatsalya sees them – vulnerable, yet fun-loving, caring, independent and resourceful, with great untapped potential. Similarly, when street children meet other vulnerable or differently abled groups, they realise that others too face problems. They learn from the resilience of these people. By participating in such interactive programmes, street children go through a process of self awareness where they see themselves through the eyes of society. They become more conscious of their lives, their appearance and behaviour and try to adopt a more socially acceptable attitude. Many individuals and donors like to celebrate birthdays and other events with the children of Vatsalya. Children take pride in showing visitors around the shelter home and it's activities.

*Martin Luther King III interacted directly with Vatsalya's children*



*Actor Salman Khan meets Vatsalya's children*



*"I lived in the slums of Mumbai with my father and stepmother. My father worked as a plumber, with a limited income. Although I went to school, I also collected garbage and sold plastic for money after school hours to help supplement the family income.*

*A social worker from Vatsalya met my father and suggested that I be enrolled in a boarding school for a better study environment. My father agreed and I studied in a boarding school for the next few years. I returned to Mumbai and stayed at the Vatsalya shelter home. At the shelter, I learnt good values, the importance of cleanliness, hygiene and discipline, and also picked up conversational skills in English. I trained for one year in desktop publishing and worked for a few months in a printing unit. I also performed in a few plays, which I enjoyed thoroughly.*

*In 2001, I was selected to be part of an exchange programme for children and visited the Antwerp International School in Belgium. It was the first time in my life that I went abroad. I felt extremely fortunate to learn about different cultures and lifestyles. This wonderful experience gave me tremendous confidence and motivated me to achieve something in life. Soon after, I got another opportunity to attend a short term training course at the Taj President hotel. This was another great learning experience. Subsequently, the hotel selected me for a three-year training programme in hotel management. While I was in my first year of apprenticeship, I completed my Class 12 studies.*

*Now my life has a direction and I look forward to a career in catering. I also want to study further. I am happy that today I am respected and people don't look down upon me. But I know I have to work very hard and am ready to do so."*

*– Amit, 20 years*

### **A Student Exchange Programme at Antwerp, Belgium**

A noteworthy experience of interactions with society was the visit of three children from Vatsalya to the Antwerp International School (AIS), Antwerp, Belgium, in September 2002.

The AIS children had been visiting Vatsalya since 2001 as part of their school curriculum under their school's CAS (Creativity Action Service) programme. AIS invited Vatsalya and its children to visit them in Belgium. A team of five, including three children and two staff members, visited AIS. The children from Vatsalya spoke about their life in India and about Vatsalya. They also performed a dance and put on a short play. In turn, the school invited the Vatsalya team to attend school activities like the drama class and IT class. The Vatsalya team got an opportunity to learn some words in French, Dutch and Spanish. In return, they taught the AIS school children conversational Hindi.

The AIS school teacher who planned, coordinated and made this trip possible, summarises the benefits of this interaction:

*"What was most pleasing about the visit of the three children to Antwerp was the evidence of their growth during the week. In the beginning they were a little hesitant and unsure, but as the days went by, they began to display their own inner confidence and unique personalities. It was especially encouraging for me to see that the students of AIS responded with warmth and friendliness. I believe that our students were very impressed with the talent the boys showed in their drama and dance."*

*'Saving Scheme' at Vatsalya encourages children to look after their money*



### **IX. Savings Scheme**

Street children find it difficult to save money not only because saving for the future is an unknown concept, but also because they have no means of keeping their money safe. For fear of losing their money they resort to spending all of it at once.

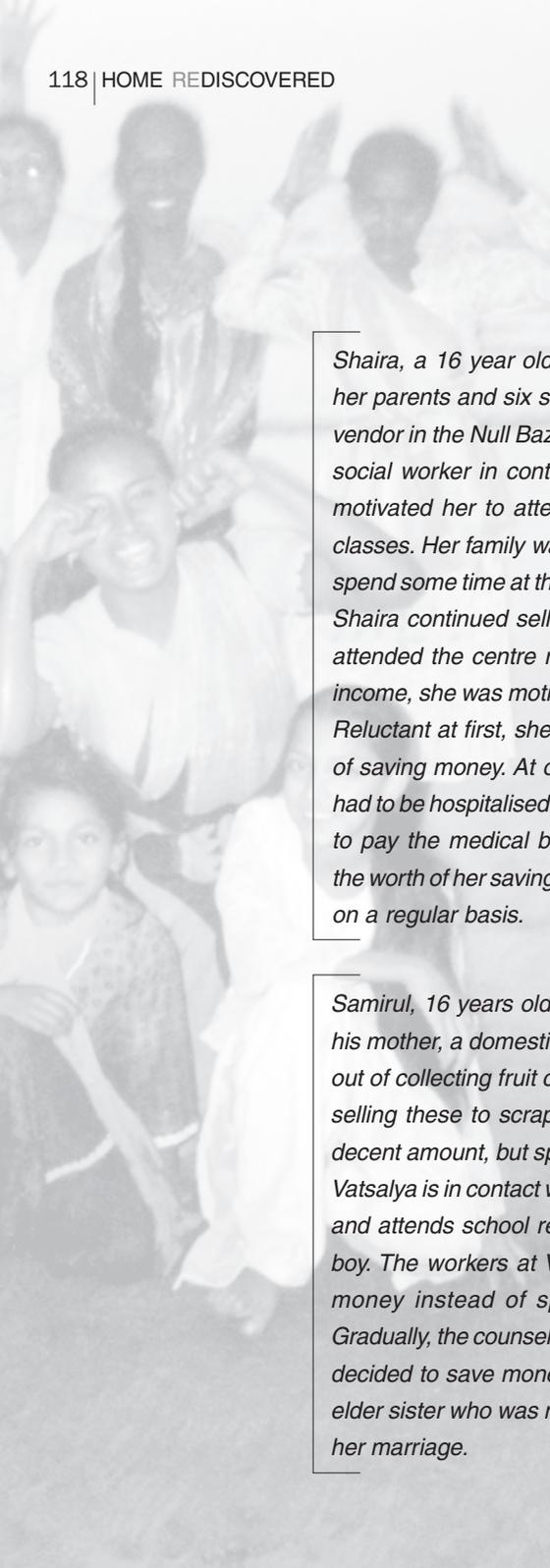
Vatsalya introduces the concept of saving in children and youth between ages 6-18 years. Children utilise the cash boxes available at the centre/shelter to keep their money safe. Vatsalya also assists interested young adults to open their own savings bank accounts. With encouragement and guidance, youngsters learn to save money. It is Vatsalya's belief that children, when taught the value of saving resources and planning for the future, make a positive contribution to the wellbeing of their family.

The children and youth saving money at Vatsalya come from poor economic backgrounds. Experience has shown that many, even from very poor households, get small sums of money from their parents as pocket money, on festivals from friends and relatives, as scholarships and prizes

or from after-school jobs. They are encouraged to save even little amounts, such as a rupee, every day. The children use the savings in emergencies, when there is insufficient income, or to buy things for themselves. Some use their savings to buy food or clothes, to celebrate a festival, for a movie ticket and even for the medical expenses of their parents. The experience of saving money at Vatsalya has encouraged many street children to open their own savings accounts in banks.

Vatsalya also has the facility of making available loans to children and youth towards planning their future – e.g. loans for group homes, or for starting small business ventures and even in emergency situations.

By ensuring that street children learn by attending schools and non formal educational methods, by ensuring that they get a sense of identity, by ensuring that the children and youth have different avenues to choose from that allow for their growth and by facilitating it through livelihood training, job placements and facilities like a savings scheme, Vatsalya reaffirms its commitment towards the right of development for children and youth at-risk.



*Shaira, a 16 year old girl from Null Bazaar, stays with her parents and six siblings. She works as a vegetable vendor in the Null Bazaar Market in Mumbai. A Vatsalya social worker in contact with Shaira through outreach motivated her to attend a Vatsalya centre for its NFE classes. Her family was cooperative and allowed her to spend some time at the centre to learn to read and write. Shaira continued selling vegetables at the market and attended the centre regularly. Since Shaira earned an income, she was motivated to start saving at the centre. Reluctant at first, she soon understood the importance of saving money. At one point of time, Shaira's mother had to be hospitalised. Shaira decided to use her savings to pay the medical bills. That is when Shaira realised the worth of her savings. Today she willingly saves money on a regular basis.*

*Samirul, 16 years old, resides at Crawford Market with his mother, a domestic worker. Samirul makes his living out of collecting fruit cartons from Crawford Market and selling these to scrap dealers. He manages to earn a decent amount, but spends all of it on watching movies. Vatsalya is in contact with him. He is regular at the centre and attends school regularly. He is a sharp and smart boy. The workers at Vatsalya encouraged him to save money instead of spending everything he earned. Gradually, the counselling began to show results. Samirul decided to save money and buy some jewellery for his elder sister who was not given any money at the time of her marriage.*

# SIX

---

## Right to Survival

*Survival through the provision of adequate food, shelter and health care*

**A**s per the UNCRRC, the Right to Survival covers 'the right to life and the right to the highest standard of health and medical care attainable'. Vatsalya is committed to ensuring this right for all the children it reaches out to. Poor economic conditions, a hazardous working environment, lack of basic nutrition, lack of basic amenities like toilets, bath, clean water and exposure to the vagaries of weather make street children and youth vulnerable to various diseases and health problems. Lack of awareness and medical facilities for street children makes their situation worse.

Considering all these factors, Vatsalya provides primary health care services – both preventive and curative – to street children during outreach, at contact centres and at its shelter home. It also advocates free access to health care for street children and youth. Further, Vatsalya conducts sensitisation sessions for doctors, nurses and para-medical health care staff to make them aware of issues related to street children and youth, so that they are treated with dignity and care. Vatsalya co-ordinates with public hospitals in Mumbai to ensure that each street child and youth in contact with Vatsalya has the right to health care.

*Play contributes to overall healthy development*



*Through its shelter facilities, Vatsalya provides a safe, clean and adequate home to children who would otherwise have lived on the street. Focusing on the special health needs of street children and youth, Vatsalya conducts several health and hygiene related programmes. This chapter elaborates on these efforts by Vatsalya.*

### **I. Health Checkups**

Regular health checkups of the children are done at the contact centres and at the shelter. This helps in early detection and treatment of illness among children. Health records of each child are maintained for follow up and necessary action. The medical teams of Preventive and Social Medicine (PSM) department of municipal hospitals visit the centres and shelters for health checkups and treatment.

### **II. Nutrition and Immunisation**

Almost all street children are diagnosed as malnourished at the time of their first health check-up at Vatsalya. Therefore, Vatsalya has designed a special nutrition programme where supplementary nutrition is provided at the centres and a balanced diet is available at the shelter home. Immunisation programmes are also initiated. This has had a positive impact on the children's physical and intellectual growth.

### **III. Provision of Sanitation Facilities**

In order to inculcate personal hygiene, children are provided facilities such as toilets, wash rooms and bathrooms at the centres and the shelter. Bathing and wearing clean clothes is not only important from the point of view of health and hygiene, but greatly improves the child's self image.

### **IV. Provision of First Aid**

Children are provided with basic first aid at the shelter home, contact centres and outreach contact points. A first aid kit is available at all the centres and common ailments like fever, headache, minor injuries, cold and cough are treated. Information is also given to the children on healthy practices. Some of the older children and youth have also been trained in administering first aid at the outreach contact points.

*Drug abuse awareness rally***V. Health awareness**

Regular health awareness sessions are organised by Vatsalya for street children and youth. Most of the health problems the children face are due to a lack of health awareness. Special emphasis is placed on imparting awareness on personal health and hygiene, first aid, skin diseases, addictions, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Health experts are invited to talk with children about good health and living. Various methodologies are used to make the awareness programmes interesting, like audio visuals, posters, puppets, role-play and question-answer sessions.

**VI. Referral services**

Vatsalya coordinates with the government and private hospitals/dispensaries for referral and treatment of street children. Due to regular interaction and awareness about Vatsalya's focus area, sensitivity among medical professionals has increased. This has resulted in easier access to medical assistance for children. Timely referrals have helped many children in improving their health status.

*Six year old Hira stays with his mother and sister on the streets near the CST railway station. His mother works as domestic help. Hira attends Vatsalya's contact centre regularly and participates in all its activities. On one occasion, the social worker noticed that Hira was suffering from high fever and frequent chills. The social worker took Hira to the nearby dispensary where he was diagnosed with malaria. After two weeks he also contracted typhoid. Vatsalya assisted in getting Hira admitted to a government hospital for specialised care. Vatsalya also recommended Hira's case to the medical social worker of the hospital, who waived all medical bills.*

*"In a slum near Santacruz domestic airport, you can see a hut where two goats are tied. That is my home and my mother lives there." Sanket, 10 years old, enthusiastically describes his house to Vatsalya social workers. Sanket was not so cheerful some time ago. He was suffering from tuberculosis and his family was under immense stress to take care of his medical needs. Seeing his condition, as well as his family's poor financial status, he was referred to Vatsalya by a NGO. Vatsalya admitted Sanket to a local city hospital for treatment. After the treatment, Sanket decided to stay on at the Vatsalya shelter instead of staying with his mother, as she was unable to look after him. Sanket is in good health now and wants to study further. He has joined a formal school. He is good in academics and also participates in extra-curricular activities and sports. Sanket is also in regular contact with his mother. Lack of access to adequate health care could have cost Sanket his life. He now has a better chance of finding opportunities for growth in the future.*

## VII. De-Addiction

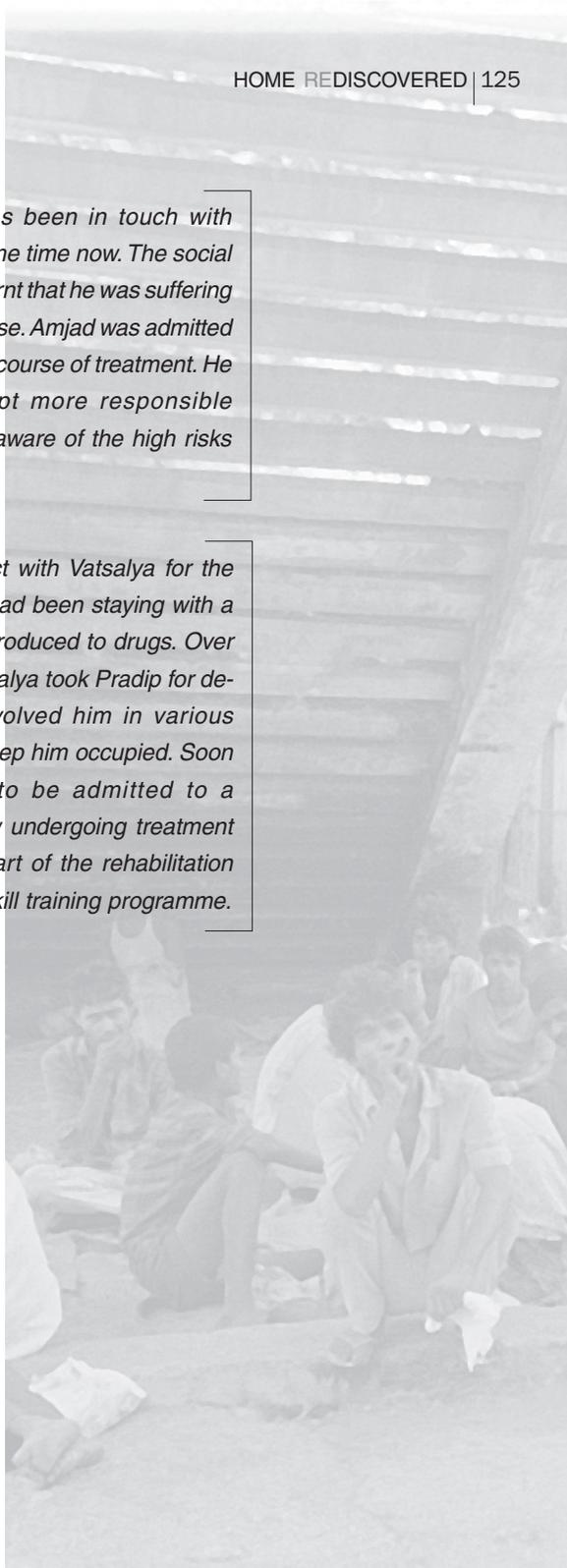
Street children and youth often take to drugs to escape from their harsh lives on the streets. What starts out as an occasional activity often turns into a life-threatening habit. Children/youth addicted to drugs are counselled individually and in groups to motivate them to join for de-addiction programmes. Those who show willingness are referred to detoxification centres. Vatsalya supports these children until they are rehabilitated. Ongoing awareness programmes regarding drug de-addiction are held in order to reach out to as many street children and youth, to prevent drug abuse.

*Drug addiction is common amongst street youth*



*Amjad, a 14 year old boy, has been in touch with Vatsalya's contact centre for some time now. The social worker responsible for Amjad learnt that he was suffering from a sexually transmitted disease. Amjad was admitted to the Sion hospital for a 15-day course of treatment. He was also counselled to adopt more responsible behaviour towards sex and be aware of the high risks involved.*

*Pradip, 18, has been in contact with Vatsalya for the past two years. In Mumbai he had been staying with a group of rag-pickers and got introduced to drugs. Over time he became an addict. Vatsalya took Pradip for de-addiction counselling and involved him in various activities and programmes to keep him occupied. Soon afterwards, Pradip agreed to be admitted to a detoxification centre. He is now undergoing treatment at a rehabilitation centre. As part of the rehabilitation process, he will also attend a skill training programme.*



*Girish, aged 17, stayed with his mother and siblings on the street near G.T. hospital. He was a very active boy and participated in various activities at the centre. He was happy living with his family, but felt deserted when he found out that his mother had remarried. He ran away from his family and started living with a group of boys on the street, earning money by working with catering contractors and at construction sites. The environment of neglect and peer pressure forced him to consume drugs. His health condition started deteriorating when he started consuming brown sugar. After counselling and participation in awareness sessions on the consequences of drug addiction at the centre, he was motivated to undergo treatment for his addiction. He was admitted in Nair Hospital for detoxification and has completed his treatment. He is now staying with his elder sister and is working as a construction worker.*

*Roshan, 16, lives alone on the streets of Crawford Market. His mother and three brothers live nearby. Roshan does not like to stay with his mother, as she thinks he is old enough to take care of himself. His mother sells vegetables for her livelihood and earns very little, which is not sufficient to take care of the family. Roshan is in contact with the outreach workers. He comes to the centre after his work at a chicken slaughterhouse is over. He regularly takes 'solution' (industrial glue). The social workers tried to convince him to give up his addiction. During dance practice for Sneh Milan, he was not able to dance due to fatigue. That was when he realised he had lost his strength and stamina because of drugs. The social workers used this opportunity to explain to him the negative effects drugs have on his health and body. They convinced him towards de-addiction. Today Roshan is earning his livelihood doing a new job selling compact discs at Crawford Market. He stays away from drugs completely. Did we forget to mention that everyone appreciated his dance performance the following year at Sneh Milan?*

# SEVEN

---

## Right to Participation

### ***Participation in social, economic, cultural, religious and political life, free from discrimination***

**A**rticle 12 of the UNCRC specifically articulates a child's right to participation in society. In addition, Article 31 of the UNCRC states, "State parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities for the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts."

*Child participation is at the core of all the programmes of Vatsalya. Participation empowers children and helps contribute to sustainable development. Vatsalya views child participation in terms of providing avenues to participate towards his/her development. Not only are the children involved in all decisions affecting them, they are also involved in developing programmes, mentoring other children and acting as agents of change. Vatsalya firmly believes that the goal of child participation is not only an end in itself, but also a mechanism by which children's rights may be realised.*

*In this chapter, programmes and events of Vatsalya that contribute to the idea of child participation are described. Many of its programmes, such as camps, workshops, street plays and media events, provide opportunities for children to express themselves creatively.*

### **I. Children's Publications**

Street children and youth form the poor and marginalised section of society and are largely excluded from the mainstream. Vatsalya aims to promote their social inclusion by empowering them and giving them opportunities to express themselves in a positive manner without fear or discrimination. An effective method of children's expression was the publication *Nanhe Likhan*, edited and authored by children of Vatsalya's centres and shelter home. *Nanhe Likhan* provided a platform for these children and youth to express their views, feelings and experiences through writing and drawings about their lives, problems, hopes and aspirations.

*Editorial committee of 'Nanhe Likhan'*



At present, Vatsalya also publishes a children's newsletter named *Dhwani* ('the inner voice'), that covers different writings by children on their experiences. The newsletter is widely circulated amongst Vatsalya's partner organisations in Mumbai.

## **II. Leadership Training Programmes**

Vatsalya empowers children to be leaders. They are encouraged to plan, decide and lead various activities held at the centre and the shelter home. Vatsalya also organises leadership training workshops for the children. Carrying out tasks effectively and regularly gives them a feeling of achievement and helps them get more disciplined and responsible. They feel important, useful and confident, which in turn builds self-esteem. By involving themselves in Vatsalya's programmes, children and youth are also able to explore their talents and interests.

## **III. Camps**

Vatsalya organises overnight camps for its children and youth to provide a stimulating, democratic and guided group living experience for the

*Picnics and outings are looked forward to*



otherwise disbanded group of street children. The objective is also to involve children in socially constructive and physically motivating activities such as nature walks, treks, mountaineering, etc. Often these camps are organised outside Mumbai, giving children a chance to have a vacation and develop a sense of bonding with other children in the group. In Vatsalya's experience, camps have helped promote greater socialisation and cooperation among children. Such an environment removes fears, insecurities and intense feelings of anger and frustration, commonly felt by children on the streets and mobilises their energy into constructive thinking.

#### **IV. Empowerment and Advocacy through Media**

Vatsalya has effectively used mechanisms and opportunities offered by the media to work on empowerment and advocacy for issues related to the rights of disadvantaged children such as street children. For instance, the Times of India, a leading national daily, provides regular coverage of Vatsalya's events and carries articles advocating protection and promotion of child rights. Issues addressed in television broadcasts with Vatsalya's

participation include child labour, girl child, drug abuse and illiteracy. Popular television channels such as Sony, Zee TV, Zoom, NDTV India, Sahara Samay and India Today attend Vatsalya events such as the birthday party or the annual day as special invitees. Recently, the Vatsalya shelter home was shown on the Discovery Channel's 'Lonely Planet' programme. Because of the telecast, many tourists have visited the Vatsalya shelter home, appreciating its programmes.

Vatsalya specifically encourages children to participate in broadcasting opportunities. The children get an opportunity to display their talents at larger platforms, with some children getting opportunities to be part of films, television serials and advertisements. A child from the shelter home was chosen by UTV for an advertisement of the Sahara World Cup and another was selected for a role in a Hindi film. Twelve children took part in a children's film titled '*Baaja*', nominated for the International Children's Festival. One of the Vatsalya supported children was a lead actor in the film *Chakachak*, while another acted in the popular Hindi film *Lage Raho Munnabhai*. It has been seen that opportunities to participate in media has led to vast improvements in the confidence of these children. The children are more optimistic about their future, more aware of their rights

*Vatsalya's children performance at Prithvi Theatre, Juhu, Mumbai*



and, most importantly, there is improved communication between them and their families.

### **V. Children's Theatre and Street Play**

Vatsalya promotes and supports a children theatre group called 'Darshan Theatre Group'. This group endeavours to bring forth the acting, writing and other stage related talents of the children by presenting plays based on various issues affecting them. The children have had the opportunity to perform plays on different occasions and platforms. Some stage plays that have been performed by the children include *Mumbai Meri Jaan*, *Hello Zindagi*, *Pathik*, *Ladki Teri Kahani*, *'Stories from Chiller Room'* and *Jeevan Ek Sangharsh*. The children enjoy performing, express themselves and find meaning in their lives. They write their own scripts and include messages of different values. At the same time, they themselves learn values through plays. Aalam, from Vatsalya's shelter home, directed a play entitled *Hello Zindagi* for the Bal Natya Utsav at the Prithvi Theatre some years ago. This maiden venture was highly appreciated by the audience and the media.

The street theatre is a powerful and attractive communication medium. It has its own style and language and is an effective medium to bring awareness to children and the public on the problems that affect and threaten society. It is inexpensive, easy to enact and can be performed at

*Street plays are regularly conducted to raise awareness on social issues*



*"My name is Yusuf. I lived in a small village at Kazirat in West Bengal with my uncle. My parents passed away in my childhood. I was an avid movie watcher and I did not mind spending money to watch a film. After all, it was my passion. At that time I used to wonder if I could be an actor. This made me leave my village and run away to Mumbai. But street life was tough. One day, CHILDLINE referred me to the Vatsalya shelter home. Initially, I missed my home, my village. Gradually, over the years, I started to enjoy my life at the shelter. I started participating in dance events. I cannot forget the day when I performed on the stage for the first time. That was at Sneh Milan. I was terribly scared before the event. But the performance went well. I felt very happy and was proud that I had performed on stage in front of so many people. All the guests appreciated my performance.*

*But more surprises followed. I was chosen to act in a film, which was always my dream! It was an important role. That was the greatest day in my life. When the shooting started, I was very nervous. One question that crept into my mind was whether I would be able to perform. I prayed to God to help me and I managed to perform well. The directors were happy with my performance. It took some time to finish shooting. Then I dubbed for my role. After a few months, the film was released.*

*I went with my friends to the premiere show. My joy knew no bounds when I was watching the movie. I was happy to see people coming for my movie. I remembered how I used to pay and watch films of other actors and now people were paying to watch my film.*

*For me, Vatsalya is like my mother as well as my God. I am indebted to the staff at Vatsalya who understood my dream, gave me the opportunity to dance, act and move further in my life.*

*Even now, I cannot believe that I am working in films!"*

*– Yusuf, 18 years*

any place. It is an educative process to create awareness on issues like child labour, smoking, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, among others. When street children act out a message, their thinking too undergoes a change.

## VI. Participation in Social Issues

The children are encouraged to be involved in issues that affect them as well as society at large. For instance, they observed Anti-Child Labour Day at Vatsalya by enacting a play entitled *Mera Bachpan*. Children from other NGOs were invited to participate in the programme. The play was aimed at making children aware of their rights and responsibilities. After the play the children presented their views about child labour. Similarly, 'World Literacy Day' is celebrated by Vatsalya on September 8 every year. Students of the Vatsalya centres and the shelter home, who have completed their higher education, are felicitated.

Other events celebrated at Vatsalya include 'Peace for World Day', where kites are used for spreading the message of peace, World AIDS Day and Human Rights Day. The children also participate in various issue-based awareness rallies. Recently, in April 2010, the children of Vatsalya actively

### *Awareness on Anti-Child Labour Day*



participated in the children's parliament as part of the Global Consultation of Child's Right to Play, organised by the International Play Association. Such events allow the children to participate meaningfully and express their views on a larger platform.

The programmes of Vatsalya have a long tradition of participatory approaches in their work. Vatsalya takes pride in developing each of its programmes through consultations and discussions with its target group – the children and youth of the streets – and take forward their suggestions in improving its services. By providing various avenues of creative expression, Vatsalya encourages social inclusion and child participation free from any kind of discrimination.



# EIGHT

---

## Rural Development

*In 2008, Vatsalya expanded its focus from urban child protection to rural livelihood development. Years of experience and interaction with children on the streets has shown that a majority of them are migrants from rural areas. In order to prevent children from migrating to cities to live under appalling conditions on the streets without any opportunities for education, growth and development, Vatsalya initiated its rural development programme at Shahapur and Murbad talukas in Thane district, Maharashtra. The prime objective of the programme is upgrading the quality of life and developing work opportunities in the selected rural areas.*

Rural development is the pilot programme of Vatsalya based on the belief that making a positive impact on rural poverty can help stem distress migration from rural to urban areas, leaving fewer children vulnerable and on their own in the cities. Rural poverty is bad enough, but its problems are compounded when families leave their rural homes to seek a livelihood in overcrowded city slums, leaving behind deep-rooted traditions and ties to the extended family and the village community. The most helpless victims of this situation are children, many of whom end up working and living in the streets.

The aim of Vatsalya's rural development project is to create development and livelihood opportunities in villages by implementing existing development schemes and creating new services to upgrade the lives of the poor in the villages. In 2008, Vatsalya began its work in Shahapur and Murbad talukas – chosen for their proximity to the city of Mumbai, as well as their large tribal population who migrate seasonally in search of work.

At present, Vatsalya works in 28 tribal hamlets and 10 villages in Shahapur taluka and 22 tribal hamlets in Murbad taluka. The Vatsalya team conducted a community-needs assessment for both Shahapur and Murbad, based on which it decided to focus on early childhood education, primary education and economic empowerment as key areas of intervention. Towards this, Vatsalya works with children of school going

age, women and youth in the villages. These interventions and programmes are explained further.

### **I. Education of Every Child**

Vatsalya's education programme includes pre-primary education, enrolment of out-of-school children and working in partnership with the local government to provide quality education in the village government schools.

At present, Vatsalya facilitates nine community based learning centres in Shahapur for children aged 3-6 years. A total of 227 children participate in these centres. They are also provided with nutritious food and basic health care. Each centre has a teacher trained by Vatsalya. The all-woman staff of the learning centres is selected from the villages and trained in areas of early childhood education and child development by the Vatsalya team.

Vatsalya works in close partnership with different stakeholders such as the primary health centre, the Zila Parishad (Z.P), Ashram school authorities and panchayat members to improve the school and classroom environment in the village government schools. Vatsalya provides educational material free of cost to school students. This includes notebooks, stationery and computers in the government schools.

*The school adopted in Shahapur has a good attendance by the village children*



Further, Vatsalya organises fun filled learning activities in classrooms to promote joyful learning. The Z.P schools in Shahapur and Murbad taluka have invited Vatsalya on several occasions to conduct regular awareness workshops on value education and life skills. At present, Vatsalya is exploring corporate partnerships for upgrading infrastructure in Z.P and Ashram schools.

## **II. Empowerment of Families for Sustainable Development**

Vatsalya believes in involving women and youth in community development, thereby empowering them towards securing their right to development. Its work involves:

- Organising Self Help Groups (SHGs) for women: The SHGs encourage entrepreneurship amongst women and, more importantly, pave a way for women's empowerment. In 2009, a total of 170 women were part of 13 income generating SHGs that manufactured and marketed products ranging through papads, plates made from dry leaves, locally made cold drinks, incense sticks, perfumes and even a fabrication unit. Vatsalya trains these women on marketable skills and capacity building skills, and guides them towards potential business opportunities. All the SHGs are linked to micro finance schemes and eight women in Shahapur have already started generating their own income through their micro enterprises.
- Organising SHGs for youth: At present, Vatsalya facilitates three SHGs for 41 youths in the two talukas. Vatsalya has conducted livelihood related training for 25 youths in the two talukas in the areas of goat keeping, poultry farming, rain harvesting and water shed development. Sixteen of these SHG members have set up their own tailoring units.
- Organising an 'Adivasi Dance Festival' – to inculcate a sense of pride and dignity towards their tribal community. It is an annual festival in which 22 villages of Murbad taluka participate with enthusiasm.
- Organising community events: such as the women's day programme on March 8. A total of 518 women from 12 villages of Shahapur taluka participated in this event in the year 2010.
- Generating awareness about alcoholism: Vatsalya encourages and helps villages free themselves from the problem of alcoholism. Many villages have taken a proactive stand in removing liquor shops from

their community to gain support from Vatsalya. Some villages have started '*satsangs*' and other religious activities to support their people and prevent them from relapsing into alcoholism.

- Setting up a multi purpose community space for various activities.
- Organising youth groups for community action and livelihood training. At present, Vatsalya facilitates 35 youth groups for nearly 200 youth from Shahapur and Murbad talukas.
- Investing in community bore wells with an aim to improve basic infrastructure in villages. Till date, Vatsalya has sponsored the drilling of four bore wells in Shahapur taluka.

The rural community at Shahapur is very cooperative and enthusiastic. Nine community based learning centres are up and running with 50 of its students already enrolled in Class I of the primary school. Teachers training programmes are regularly held. Self Help Groups have started micro finance schemes and entrepreneurial women and youth are building their own income by generating activities through loans.

Women and youth of these villages participating in Vatsalya's programmes have expressed an increase in confidence, change in status within the household, economic empowerment through increased earnings and a sense of purpose due to their involvement in the community development programmes of Vatsalya.

The goal of Vatsalya's rural development programme is to consolidate the strengths of grassroots groups so that they can address the issues affecting them. They can network with similar rural groups and NGOs and liaison with government agencies for better services and better implementation of existing rural development schemes of the government. A better standard of living for all village communities will eventually prevent families and children from migrating to cities in search of economic opportunities.



# NINE

---

## Partners in Change

*Vatsalya firmly believes that each child deserves the right to develop his or her potential and grow into an independent, self-sufficient adult. It also believes that in order to protect the rights of each and every child and youth in need, it is important to work closely with a variety of stakeholders. Therefore, Vatsalya actively engages in forging effective partnerships with like-minded organisations from different sectors – the academic, the business, the government, the voluntary and civil society alike. Most importantly, Vatsalya reaches out to work closely with the children themselves who are the key partners in all activities of Vatsalya.*

Vatsalya works in close collaboration with various stakeholders to reach out to street children and youth, leverage resources and initiate policy level changes. These partners include:

- I. Academic organisations
- II. Business organisations
- III. Voluntary organisations
- IV. Government organisations
- V. Children and youth

### **I. Academic Organisations**

Social development institutes and colleges of social work have a key role in contextualising life situations of marginalised groups, theorising field level work and critically assessing policies and programmes available for them. Their analysis on development informs future policies for disadvantaged groups. Academic organisations in the development sector also play the role of watchdog to identify gaps in services, thereby enabling better formulation of social policies.

Colleges of social work, in particular, help train students to become professional social workers. The students learn specialised skills in order to work with marginalised and vulnerable groups. Professional social workers and trained para professionals are an asset to NGOs like Vatsalya,

for they work with empathy, tolerance and total acceptance of these disadvantaged groups such as street children and youth.

One of the key partnerships valued by Vatsalya is that of the College of Social Work (CSW), Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai. Not only did it initiate Vatsalya as a field action project in 1982, it also supported a climate of developing an intervention model for street and working children at that time. Some of its valuable support since the initiation of Vatsalya has translated into:

- Creating a field placement for social work students at Vatsalya to provide them with a learning experience of working directly with street children.
- Training paraprofessionals and field level workers for skills and attitudes required to work closely with 'at-risk' communities.
- Developing and promoting the 'community based contact programme' – an intervention model for field level agencies working with street children.
- Documenting experiences of working with street children.
- Curriculum development focusing on issues of street children and other children in difficult situations.
- Conducting and promoting research on street children. A research study on the 'Situational Analysis of Street Children in Bombay' sponsored by the Ministry of Social welfare and UNICEF was done by the CSW in 1989.
- Contributing to research on street children in developing countries through contributions in peer reviewed journal papers and various national and international conferences.
- Developing media content on the work with street children for creating awareness amongst the general public, public bodies, funding agencies, welfare organisations and school children.
- Facilitating a NGO network for street children in 1989 known as CCVC.

## **II. Business Organisations**

Even before 'Corporate Social Responsibility' became the buzzword, Vatsalya partnered with the private sector in a manner that went far beyond funding. Its corporate partners have always been invited to experience the reward of helping others using their skills and expertise in ensuring

that each child gets his or her right to develop to full potential. In the past Vatsalya has partnered with Cadbury India Ltd., Larsen and Toubro, Novartis, Voltas Limited, The Great Eastern Shipping Co. Ltd, Four Seasons Hotel, Franco India Pharmaceuticals Pvt. Ltd. and Taj President to name a few. Resources leveraged from business organisations have helped in vocational skills and education programmes for street youth and children. Further, financial support is also extended to the rural development programmes. Vatsalya initiated its rural development programme at Shahapur and Murbad talukas in Thane district, Maharashtra, with the support of organisations like Chance of Life e.V. Germany and Moneygram International, United Way Worldwide.

Vatsalya is constantly seeking partnerships with business organisations that are mutually rewarding. While Vatsalya benefits in terms of resources in the form of funds, volunteers and opportunities for training and placements of its street youth, the corporates benefit in contributing to a social cause that benefits the society. By their involvement corporate organisations working with Vatsalya can provide a bridge to cover the distance between aspirations and realisations of these street children.

Today, several corporate organisations and NGOs, both Indian and international, contribute to Vatsalya in various ways. And every contribution big or small, monetary or by service, is always appreciated and welcomed.

**However, given the enormity of the situation, newer partnerships need to evolve... the world is not enough!**

### **III. Voluntary Organisations**

In order to promote and protect the rights and interests of street children and make a positive difference in their lives, Vatsalya partners with voluntary organisations and civil society at various levels. The main objective of such collaborations has been to accelerate progress on issues affecting street children through collective lobbying.

Vatsalya played a key role in forming a unique city level NGO forum called the Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children (CCVC) in 1989. CCVC brought together different NGOs working for street children in Mumbai under one umbrella. Its primary aim was to promote and

strengthen a network of services for street children in Mumbai. Member NGOs of CCVC promoted awareness on issues related to street children; acted as a watch dog on government policies of child protection, identified non formal education and vocational training opportunities in the city, organised popular child participation events like *Chacha Ka Mela*, provided integral services like a mobile medical van for health checkups and advocated for more number of shelters and contact centres for street children in the city.

Vatsalya has continued to play an active role in all CCVC activities. In addition, it is actively involved in networking with various organisations to increase awareness among the public on the issues of street children and influence policy making. Vatsalya conducts awareness campaigns across various schools, colleges and institutions to inform students and public about the issues of street children.

The media plays a significant role in bringing these issues to the general public and to sensitise them. Media advocacy has been used as a planned strategy by Vatsalya to raise awareness of the situation of children and their rights. Collaboration with the media also provides opportunities to children to articulate their views about situations.

Vatsalya runs its child protection services of shelter and contact centres in collaboration with Anand Niketan and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). Vatsalya has also been a collaborating agency of CHILDLINE Mumbai and has responded to the emergency needs of several street children calling the helpline in distress.

Vatsalya is an active member of city level advocacy groups and forums such as the:

- Bal Hakk Abhiyan (BHA)
- Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL)
- Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children (CCVC)
- Child Rights for World Social Forum (CR4WSF)
- Forum Against Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (FACSAE)
- Forum Against HIV/AIDS

Vatsalya participates in activities organised by these forums to take up the issues of street children and youth in Mumbai.

#### **IV. Government Organisations**

Several stakeholders from government agencies make an impact on the life of a street child. These include the police department, the municipal corporation, the education department, municipal schools, the child welfare committee and juvenile institutions, to name a few. The recent Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) launched in 2009 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, stresses the importance of NGO-government partnerships. The scheme document acknowledges the role played by NGO-government collaboration towards convergence of services from various departments for effective interventions on child protection.

NGO networks, like CCVC, should closely work with government agencies. The NGO networks can play an important role in sensitising government functionaries about the issues affecting street children. They are also in a position to inform policy makers about the ground realities – the real concerns of street children and the status of services made available to them. This will help in creating vibrant and child friendly services for disadvantaged children.

#### **V. Children and Youth**

Vatsalya has always believed in taking children along as key partners in all its activities. Vatsalya strives to empower children by involving them in planning and decision making and providing space for them to express themselves. At Vatsalya, the children are encouraged to think critically and investigate their own reality. Vatsalya motivates children to become change agents, demand their rights and work together as 'one voice' to influence policy making.

In the past, Vatsalya has facilitated youth groups and children's movements. From 1990 to 1994, Vatsalya, along with CCVC and the National NGO Forum (NNF), initiated a national campaign on the rights of a street and working child. The aim was to provide a platform to street and working children for their voices to be heard. The aim was also to

empower these children to be able to mobilise their own potential to help themselves. The campaign that presented the reality in children's voices assumed significance at that time because the Government of India had ratified the UNCRC in 1992. Annexure 1 presents the steps involved in the campaign process in detail. At the end of the campaign, a Memorandum prepared by the participating street children and supporting NGOs was submitted to the President of India. Annexure 2 showcases the "Voices of Children" at the All India Street Children Conference, 1994, (Taken from the Memorandum presented to the President of India by the National NGO Forum for Street and Working Children, 1994).

Putting children's rights at the centre of country-level policy requires a collaborative effort on the part of all those who care to provide vulnerable children with a better future. Vatsalya believes that all its partnerships have helped combine resources in innovative ways to reach out to more number of 'at-risk' children and create long lasting rehabilitation measures. These effective partnerships have made a significant contribution to the advancement of children's rights in India.



TEN

---

## Recommendations

**I**ndia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, thereby committing to securing rights for all children as laid down in the convention. This is not an easy task, given its enormity and complexity. It requires a coordinated effort from each one of us – only when we work together can we ensure that all children in our country receive their full rights.

In its 25 years of working with street children, street youth and with other children 'at-risk', Vatsalya has realised that efforts by the government, corporate sector, media, civil society, concerned citizens, NGOs and children themselves need to converge in order to build a robust child protection approach in India. Vatsalya has the following recommendations to make in this regard:

- **Providing a safety net to all children and youth who are 'at-risk'**
1. Establish children and youth centres at the community level where the children are referred to by their families, police, children's agencies, helpline, or where they can come in to seek help by themselves. The centre and its activities should engage the children constructively in ways that will help keep them away from deviant and destructive behaviour. The services at the centre should be preventive, problem solving and developmental, so that every child has access to the services important for his/her healthy growth and development. Therefore the centre should provide facilities for counselling, health, education, recreation and personality development programmes.
  2. Establish shelter homes for those who are most vulnerable and at risk of neglect and abuse. These shelter homes should provide counselling services and aim to rehabilitate each child.
  3. The centres and shelters for children should be co-managed by NGOs and the government. Support from the government in the form of funds and space is crucial to ensure sustainability.
  4. The centres and shelters for children should also get support from the community through varied resources. **Media** can help bring awareness about street children and street youth and participate in advocating

better services for them. **Corporate organisations** can lend support by way of funds, volunteers and work opportunities to the youth of the shelters and centres. **Funding agencies** and **donors** can provide sustained funding to programmes that prove to be effective in rehabilitating street children. Other community resources such as **teachers** in schools can assist in ensuring all children attend schools. They can also help in identifying children who are victims of abuse or neglect and referring them to appropriate agencies. **Lawyers** can help by providing pro bono legal support to NGOs to deal with legal situations when protecting children from violence and abuse. **Police** can help by being sensitive to children's issues, understand their trauma of living on the streets and assist them in seeking help by referring them to children's organisations.

▪ **Preventing street children and youth from leaving their homes in the first place**

1. Lobby for long-term effective policies to deal with problems related to urban poverty and carry out effective rural development programmes to decrease the rate of rural-urban migration. Assess community needs to highlight the issues and concerns of children in rural areas and migrant children living alone in urban areas. Findings from these experiences should inform government polices of child protection.
2. Strengthen urban families and communities 'at risk' by upgrading the quality of life and creating a healthy environment by getting more civic amenities such as better sanitation, safe drinking water, better housing, better schools, adequate healthcare, public recreation facilities, street lighting and police services.

▪ **Ensuring quality care and development for street children, youth and other children 'at-risk'**

1. Tie up each state run home for street children with a NGO that works with street children on issues of their protection, development and rehabilitation. NGOs will be able to assist towards therapy, designing curriculum and implementing child development activities within these homes. NGOs will also be able to assist in conducting sensitisation

and training programmes about child protection for police officers, social workers, staff of juvenile homes and shelter homes.

2. Provide free and compulsory education for all street and working children in the light of the recent Right to Education Act notified on April 1, 2010, by Government of India.
3. Develop effective policies to help school drop-outs come back to school.
4. Develop child-centred education curriculum for children who are school drop-outs or have never been to school.
5. Provide street children and youth with free access to basic health care.
6. Prevent over the counter drugs and addictive solvents being easily available to children.

▪ **Networking at city, state and national levels to help secure the rights of street children and youth as follows:**

1. Strengthen coordinated efforts at the **city level through NGO forums** or coordination committees that are represented by NGOs responsible for protecting and caring for vulnerable children in the city. By sharing experiences, ideas, approaches and strategies related to vulnerable children, such forums should aim for a positive impact on the lives of children. The forums should bring together various micro interventions in the city that address the concerns of the street child. It should also involve children to be active participants in shaping future policies and programmes.
2. Establish **ward level area councils** to plan and implement services for street children and youth in a given municipal ward with inputs from the city level NGO forums. This council should consist of the senior police inspector, the ward officer, representatives of the NGOs, local leaders and concerned citizens. It should also seek inputs from the street children and youth. This will facilitate child-friendly changes keeping in mind the best interests of the child. The ward level area council should:
  - a. bring together agencies on matters of mutual interest and coordination of services in the area.
  - b. identify duplication and gaps in available services.
  - c. mobilise resources for effective intervention with vulnerable children in the area by networking with all the services available like civic

amenities, education, health, manpower development, recreation and social services, including preventive programmes.

3. Provide avenues for effective interactions between national and state level **Child Protection Commissions** and city level NGO forums to form appropriate child protection policies that reflect the real issues and concerns of street children and youth.

### **The Way Forward**

There needs to be a strong will from all the concerned parties to bring about the winds of change. Only then will there be a new dawn, a new chapter, a new beginning in the lives of street children.

Over half of India's population is young people. Underprivileged children form a vast majority of this population. Rather than see youngsters merely as a passive recipients of services, it is important to recognise them as 'young entrepreneurs' who have the energy, passion and creativity to bring about a significant change to society while also building their skilfulness for the future. I believe many street children who have lived in difficult circumstances because of their life situations possess the grit, the resolve, the resilience and the survival instinct that can qualify as essential qualities in an entrepreneur. These qualities, if channelled effectively, can go a long way in improving their future.

Our country's strength is indeed its young people. Unless we implement effective policies that protect children from risks of abuse, violence and neglect, ensure that each child goes to school and receives good and quality education, ensures that each child has access to health care – only then will we be able to harness the potential of our young human capital.

Hence, it is more important than ever that we start working towards preparing the children and youth of our country to lead meaningful and successful lives.

All said and done, it will be these amazing children, an integral part of our nation, who will shape our fortunes and destinies in the years to come.

## References

- Bajpai, Asha. *Child Rights in India: Law, Policy and Practice*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press , 2003.
- College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan. *Vatsalya Case Narrative, Evaluation of Social Development Projects*. Evaluation Report, Mumbai: Research Unit, College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, 2003.
- Department of Women and Child Development Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India. *The Indian Child : A Profile 2002*. September 01, 2003. <http://wcd.nic.in/indianchild/index.htm> (accessed April 29, 2010).
- D'Lima, H. and Gosalia R. *Street Children of Bombay: A Situational Analysis*. Noida: Child Labour Cell, National labour Institute, 1992.
- Ferrara, Federico and Valentina. *The Children's Prison: Street Children and India's Juvenile Justice System*. Vijaywada: Care & Share Charitable Trust (India), 2005.
- HAQ: Centre for Child Rights. "Publications: Status of Children in India Inc. (Year of Publication 2005) ." *HAQ: Centre for Child Rights Website*. <http://www.haqcrc.org/about-us/publication/status-of-indias-children/2005-report.html> (accessed April 30, 2010).
- Kapadia, Gahver. *Child's Right to Participation. Why, What and How? State Level Workshop: A Report*. Ahmedabad: CHETNA, 2005.
- Kombarakaran, Francis A. "Street children of Bombay: their stresses and strategies of coping." *Children and Youth Services Review* 26, no. 9 (2004): 853-871.
- Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. "*Child Protection*." *Ministry of Women and Child Development Website*. November 29, 2006. [wcd.nic.in/childprot/icps.pdf](http://wcd.nic.in/childprot/icps.pdf) (accessed April 25, 2010).

- Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. *National Report on "A World Fit for Children."* New Delhi: Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2007.
- Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. "Study on Child Abuse: India 2007." *Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India: Publications/Reports*. November 29, 2006. <http://www.wcd.nic.in/childabuse.pdf> (accessed April 29, 2010).
- Railway Children. *Beyond Survival: Status of Livelihood Programmes for Street Youth in India*. Mumbai: Railway Children, 2008.
- Railway Children. *What we do: In India*. April 30, 2010. <http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/asia.asp> (accessed April 30, 2010).
- Reddy, Nandana. *Street Children of Bangalore: A Situational Analysis*. Noida: National Labour Institute, 1992.
- Shroff, Neela. "Empowering Street Children Towards Human Rights." *Social Workers World Conference*. Colombo, 1994.
- Shroff, Neela. "Street Children in Mumbai." *Planned Restructuring of Bombay's Urban Growth*. Mumbai: Centre for Urban Studies, Wilson College, 1993.
- Shroff, Neela. "Recommendations for the future: Lessons from a successful experience." *Perspectives in Social Work* V, no. 1 (Jan-June 1990).
- Shroff, Neela. "They are our children too." *Perspectives in Social Work* III, no. 1 and 2 (July-Dec 1987).
- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). "Working with vulnerable children." *The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Website*. March 5, 2008. [http://www.unodc.org/india/womensday\\_08\\_4th\\_work.html](http://www.unodc.org/india/womensday_08_4th_work.html) (accessed April 30, 2010).

- UNDP, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. *India: Urban Poverty Report 2009*. New-Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009. [http://old.undp.org.in/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=540&Itemid=646](http://old.undp.org.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=540&Itemid=646) (accessed April 29, 2010).
- UNICEF Zimbabwe. *A Study on Street Children in Zimbabwe*. Evaluation report, ESARO: UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2001. [http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_14411.html](http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_14411.html). (accessed April 29, 2010).
- UNICEF. [http://www.unicef.org/worldfitforchildren/files/India\\_WFFC5\\_Report.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/worldfitforchildren/files/India_WFFC5_Report.pdf).
- <http://wcd.nic.in/indianchild/Children.13.htm> (accessed April 24, 2010).
- "World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children." *UN Documents Cooperation Circles Website*. January 28, 2008. <http://www.un-documents.net/wsc-dec.htm> (accessed May 13, 2010).

## Annexure 1

### **The Campaign for the Rights of the Child, 1990-94**

At the World Summit for Children on September 30<sup>th</sup> 1990, the nations of the world decided to undertake a joint commitment to *give every child a better future*. It was stated that "Among the partnerships we seek, we turn especially to children themselves, we appeal to them to participate in this effort."

Based on the same commitment and philosophy, CCVC organised a National Campaign on the Rights of the Child for Survival, Protection, Development and Participation vis-à-vis street and working children. Vatsalya was the lead NGO that conceptualised this project which was then conducted under the auspices of the CCVC and the NNF. The ultimate objective of the campaign was to "make the children aware of themselves, their problems, their rights, thus mobilising their potential to help themselves".

The campaign was organised by NGO forums at the city and national level **with children as participating delegates**. In the form of fun fairs, cultural programmes, rallies, exhibitions, sports and other similar events organised regularly at the city NGO Forum level, children were provided opportunities to come together and develop a feeling of 'ONENESS'. A series of workshops/camps were organised for children of different organisations to involve them in all the thoughts and actions of the NGOs so that a meaningful strategy could be planned by the children themselves for their own rehabilitation.

The campaign was planned in **four** phases; beginning with children's workshops called Bal Milan (**Phase I and II**), leading to city level conferences (**Phase III**) and culminating with the All India Street Children's Conference (**Phase IV**). A continuous communication was maintained with the city forums to ensure their participation at the city level.

**Phase I – Interaction amongst the children of NGOs of participating city forums:** Three groups of children were formed to develop better interaction among these children. These three groups were identified as street children, pavement children and girl children. Three-day overnight camps were organised for each of these groups in Phases I and II.

**Objectives of Phase 1:**

- To develop healthy interaction among the children of different NGOs in the city
- To create awareness in terms of self as an independent responsible child playing an adult role for survival of the self and the family
- To create sensitivity among them towards the sufferings of fellow street children in spite of location/occupational differences

**Phase II – Leadership Training and Awareness of their Rights**

**Objectives of Phase II**

- Develop meaningful leadership among street children
- Identify means and ways of involving children in respective NGO activities
- Analyse the problems encountered, living conditions, response and attitude of system components in their lives (police, Municipal Corporation)
- Informal interaction among children from different organisations to create a common platform to discuss:
  - Rights of the child to survival, protection, development and participation
  - Violation of basic rights in the context of street and working children

As an outcome of the children's workshops in Phase I & II, children became aware of the self and developed sensitivity towards fellow street children. The children developed self confidence and an improved self concept. In addition, the NGOs working with street children developed healthy communication among themselves. The children identified with the NGO forums formed at the city level and participated actively in all the forums' activities.

### **Phase III: City level conference for Street and Working Children, of the children and by the children with children as participating delegates**

#### **Objectives**

- To initiate the process of bringing children to a common platform and develop the capability of street children to articulate and communicate problems, needs, concerns and issues that affect them
- To prepare children for the national level 'All India Street Children's Conference'

The 1st 'Greater Bombay Street Children's Conference' was held in February 1992 in Mumbai. The 'Bal Milan' workshops initiated the process of bringing children to a common platform and created awareness about the problem and issues related to their life situation. The conference focused its discussions on issues of protection, shelter, health and education.

The street children of Mumbai talked, questioned and presented their problems to the authorities from the education department, police department, health department and the housing sector. They interacted directly with the officials and communicated their needs, aspirations and problems to the invited panelists and demanded facilities for realisation of their rights for survival, protection, development and participation for the first time. The children were able to talk to them about their exploitation and demanded a strengthening of alternative services. They got promises for their demands. Based on the discussions, proposals were sent to the education, health, and police departments, and follow ups were maintained.

Similar city level conferences were organised in 13 cities where the NGO Forum existed and a continuous communication was maintained with them. This programme culminated as an All India Street Children's Conference in February 1994.

### **Phase IV – All India Street Children's Conference (AISCC)**

AISCC was organised in 1994 under the aegis of the National NGO Forum (NNF) for Street and Working children. Three planning meetings were held in different cities attended by the representative children from all the participating cities. The conference provided a platform for children to express themselves at the national level and their right to be heard was recognised. It was a conference by the children, of the children and for the children, with support from the NGOs.

#### **Objectives:**

- To facilitate interaction among street and working children at the national level and to join hands in working for a change
- To create awareness about the problems and issues related to street and working children among the concerned authorities and citizens by the children themselves through their own voice at the national level
- To demand their rights and appeal for a plan of action for implementation of the UN convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by India in 1993
- To take action to arrest the growing phenomenon of street and working children

The four day national conference focused on the issues of shelter, health, education, exploitation and protection, prevention, recreation and special issues related to girl child, drug abuse and AIDS. Every session began with a dramatised presentation by children about their lifestyle, plight, problems, needs, aspirations, emotions, exploitation and their rights which developed a sensitive understanding of the issues and enhanced participation. Three languages; Hindi, Tamil and Bengali were identified as the official languages of the conference and translations were done simultaneously and continuously. Press conferences were called by the children prior to the conference and at the end of the conference. The press conference was entirely conducted by the children themselves. Wide coverage was given by the newspapers and TV, thus creating public awareness and concern. At the end of the conference a Memorandum was prepared by the group leaders of the participating street children and the supporting NGOs and submitted to the President of India.

The entire campaign on the rights of the child assumed immense relevance as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the 44th UN General Assembly in 1989 followed by a positive Plan of Action for implementing the world declaration on the Survival, Protection, Development and Participation of children on 30th September 1990. The Government of India ratified the Convention in 1993 and the state governments were given the responsibility of preparing a plan of action for the rights of the child. The 'Children's voices' (Annexure 2) documented in the Memorandum was to provide a sensitive and deeper understanding of the realities faced by street children every day.

The nationwide campaign on the rights of the child generated mass public awareness to the plight of street and working children, leading to some significant policy changes. The municipal corporations began providing space for night shelters and contact centres. Street children had better access to educational and health facilities. There was a change in the attitude of the police towards the children. The citizens, officials and school children became aware of the plight of these marginalised youngsters and began to develop an accepting attitude towards them. It also helped NGOs and street children to build their own solidarity. Such campaigns should be conducted periodically to sustain these kinds of changes.

## Annexure 2

**Voices of Children at the All India Street Children Conference, 1994**  
(Taken from the Memorandum presented to the President of India by the National NGO Forum for Street and Working Children, 1994)

### ***The Right to Shelter***

"Municipal authorities are always trying to evict us. We need a place to stay"

– From Mumbai

---

### ***The Right to Education***

"The whole day we work to survive. How can we find time to study?"

– From Hyderabad

---

"If we had education, would we be beaten up by policemen?"

– From a skit by the Madras Forum

---

### ***The Right to Protection***

"We sweat through the day. At night the police demand "*hafta*" (extortion) from us. They force us to reserve seats on trains. Who can we complaint to?"

– From Mumbai

---

"The police harass us even when we are earning a living as rag pickers. They lock us up; kick us with their iron-soled boots. They break our ankles and knuckles. At night when we return from the cinema, we are taken to the police stations and thrashed. What crime have we committed?"

– From Chennai

---

"When we go to the police station to make a complaint, nobody listens to us. If we go with a social worker, policemen later beat us up, saying why did you complain?"

– From Delhi

---

"We are caught and taken to the police station when anything is stolen in that area. They don't catch the real criminals because they take *hafta* from them."

– From Delhi

---

"Have you ever seen the inside of a remand home, madam? Of course not, you have a big post. Therefore you do not have to. These remand homes have no use for us. Outside, four people beat us up. Inside, ten people beat us up. If you can't run them properly, please shut them."

– From Hyderabad

---

"Before you take us to remand homes, take us to any NGO (Non-Government Organisation)"

– From Hyderabad

---

"There are millions of children living in the streets with no contact with social workers. What will happen to them? Are they to die if they don't have a *"didi"* or "uncle" to help them?"

– From Mumbai

---

### ***The Right to Health***

"Why are they demanding money from us for government hospitals? Is it not supposed to be free?"

– From Cochin

---

"Please provide health information in the TV sets we watch at railway stations. We can learn from them."

– From Hyderabad

---

### ***The Right to Play and Recreation***

"We want a separate playground for street children. The rich children do not allow us to play in the public playgrounds."

– From Chennai

---

"We don't want separate playgrounds for rich and poor children. After all, we are children and we must play together."

– From Delhi

---

### ***Issue of Girl Child***

"Girls who wanted to come for this conference could not come because their parents and neighbours thought they are going to Mumbai for prostitution."

– From Chennai

---

"Are we meant only to be housewives? If we want to study, the elders tell us to do house work."

– From Kolkatta

---

"Girls sleeping in the pavements are raped by policemen and *goondas*. Even fathers rape their own daughters. Why?"

– From Bangalore

---

"When we go home without enough earnings, our parents beat us. But if we don't go home regularly, they suspect our morality."

– From Delhi

---

"When we girls go to the police station, policemen insult us, physically abuse us. Only policewomen should handle women's cases."

– From Chennai

---

***Problem of Addiction***

"We are forced to peddle drugs. We are harassed by both drug peddlers and the police."

– From Tamil Nadu

---

"Is government aware or not aware of drugs being sold on the streets? If they are aware, why don't they stop it?"

– From Chennai

---

"There are very few places that treat drug addicts and even these places refuse to treat street children. If the government cannot stop drugs spreading in the streets, can they at least help treat drug addicts?"

– From Mumbai

---





### **The *Vatsalya* Foundation**

was initiated as the field action project of College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan in 1982 and registered under the Bombay Public Trust Act in 1994.

It also comes under the Income Tax Exemption Act, 1961 and Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 1976.

The years gone by have seen the consolidation of *Vatsalya's* activities towards the development of the child, thanks to the cooperation and collaboration of various groups, non-governmental organisations and funding organisations.

### **Mission Statement**

#### **From the Street of Darkness towards Sunshine and Success**

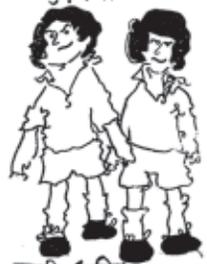
*Vatsalya* dedicates itself to empower the vulnerable children to be responsible citizens in mainstream society, instill in them the value of love, equality and justice, and ensure a better future for them so that they become contributing members of society.



# नन्हे लिखान

जून १३ - अगस्त १३  
पैंचावा अंक

## दोस्ती



सुखली (मखि)  
वात्सल्य बच्चों की पत्रिका

अंक दसवाँ

अगस्त-अक्टूबर ६४

# नन्हे लिखान

## "हमारी मजबूरी"

वात्सल्य के बच्चों की पत्रिका



अंक- बारवाँ

फरवरी-११-अप्रैल ६४

# नन्हे लिखान

वात्सल्य के बच्चों की पत्रिका



कवि: S. Jha  
24/11/64  
23/11

## "हमारा घर-परिवार"



**The Vatsalya Foundation**

Anand Niketan, King George V Memorial,  
Dr. E. Moses Road, Mahalaxmi (W), Mumbai : 400 011  
Phone : +91 22 24962115, + 91 22 24912352

