


# Child Protection and Restoring Lost Childhoods: The HAQ Experience



Strengthening Restoration of Children under the JJ System  
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# Child Protection and Restoring Lost Childhoods: The Guiding Philosophy for HAQ

- While children who have offended must be held accountable for their action, every child has the capacity to change for the better and must have a second chance - a right to a fresh start.
- At the same time all the children who have experienced abuse and exploitation too deserve a fresh start so that they can move on.
- It is this philosophy that has guided HAQ's child protection interventions with children who have come in contact with the law either as victims of crime or as alleged offenders.
- **HAQ's role is to facilitate the government system and at best support it, not replace it.**
- So HAQ works closely with the Police and the Administration, JJBs, CWCs, State and District Legal Services Authorities, the Juvenile Justice Committee of the Delhi High Court, Judicial Academies and other government and non-governmental agencies to address the gaps in law, policy and action and strive for a better world for children.



*"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children"*

-Nelson Mandela

# What do we do...

Through its Child Protection Programme, HAQ provides:

- ***Free Legal aid*** to children who come in contact with the law
- ***Psychosocial rehabilitation*** to both child victims of abuse and those in conflict with the law
- ***Capacity building*** of service providers and various stakeholders such as law enforcement officials, judiciary, functionaries in the child protection and juvenile justice system across the country, media and NGOs.
- ***Campaigns*** against various forms of exploitation and abuse of children
- ***Partnering with child care institutions*** to support children with life skill education, strengthen capacity of the institution to deliver and also hold them accountable.

### Did you know?

According to the NCRB, recidivism among juveniles in Delhi has gone down drastically from 9.53% in 2013 to 5.41% in 2014.

## Strategic Partnership is the Key...

### Counselling children in conflict with the law –

- In the last 10 years, 901 boys and 19 girls in conflict with the law have received counselling support through HAQ.
- Three Counsellors from HAQ are currently working at two JJBs, each giving one day a week in both the places.
- Counselling sessions take place at a room specifically provided for this purpose in the JJBs, or at the Observation Homes and sometimes in the HAQ office as well, depending on the convenience of children and their families.
- If needed, home visits are made.
- Based on the nature of the case, family counselling is also undertaken.

### Some results worth replicating –

- On an average, between 2009 and 2014 recidivism among CICLs at the national level was 11.10%. In Delhi, it was 10.14%. In the case of 624 CICLs who received counselling from HAQ during the same period, recidivism was less than half the national and state average, coming to a figure of about 3.85%.

# Our Learning: Follow-up is important to measure impact

**In 2012, HAQ decided to follow up on some of the children who had received counselling in the past and had supposedly been rehabilitated. This was just to check and assess if counselling has any lasting impact. Here is what we found...**

- 48 children agreed to talk to the HAQ team.
- Broken families, violence in family and community, peer influence, drugs and alcohol, love affair were the main causes of their coming in conflict with the law.
- In all, 21 children continued education after disposition of their case. Those who did not continue their education were either children who had never been to a school or had dropped out very early in life and did not see relevance in getting back to school.
- 20 out of these 48 were working in the unorganised sector on a regular basis, and another 9 were both working and studying and 12 were going to a school or college. 1 was helping mother in domestic chores, 2 were in jail for committing another offence after crossing the age of 18 years, and another 4 were sitting idle.
- 35 of the 48 children did not go back to drugs, alcohol or smoking after counselling, while 10 continued to take drugs and 3 refused to share any information in this regard.

## Counselling helps ...

Ramesh (name changed), was apprehended for murder of a police constable along with 2 adults. He pleaded guilty before the Board and shared that he was forced to follow the instructions of his two adult co-accused.

Ramesh had dropped out of school after he failed in class VI. He then decided not to study any further and started working with his father. Subsequently, he started working as a helper on the three-wheeled Gramin Sewa and earned nearly 200 rupees per day. This is where he came in contact with some older boys who were into illegal activities. He would sleep with them in the vehicle, or in parks, and his contact with his family became minimalistic. He soon turned into an addict.

Through regular counselling, his relationship with his family improved and the subsequent supportive home environment equipped him emotionally with a reason and the tools to stop taking drugs, and lead to a functional and productive life.

He now has his own cycle repairing shop from which he earns enough money to take care of self and support his family financially. He also re-started his education. When the counsellor last spoke with him, he was in class X. Although he got a compartment, he was quite determined to complete his class X.

## **What should be the immediate focus of counselling?**

- To help the child and the family re-bond
- To help the child regain his sense of self-worth
- To help the child decide his own future

## **Things to remember...**

- Every child in the JJ system does not have a mental illness.
- Hence, subjecting them all to rigorous psychological assessments does not help meet the immediate emotional, social and psychological needs.
- Children and their families do not have the means to sustain long drawn psychological treatment. Daily life struggles take over everything else.
- Even if a child's case is disposed of, follow-up is essential and should be done in a manner that does not lead to stigmatisation.

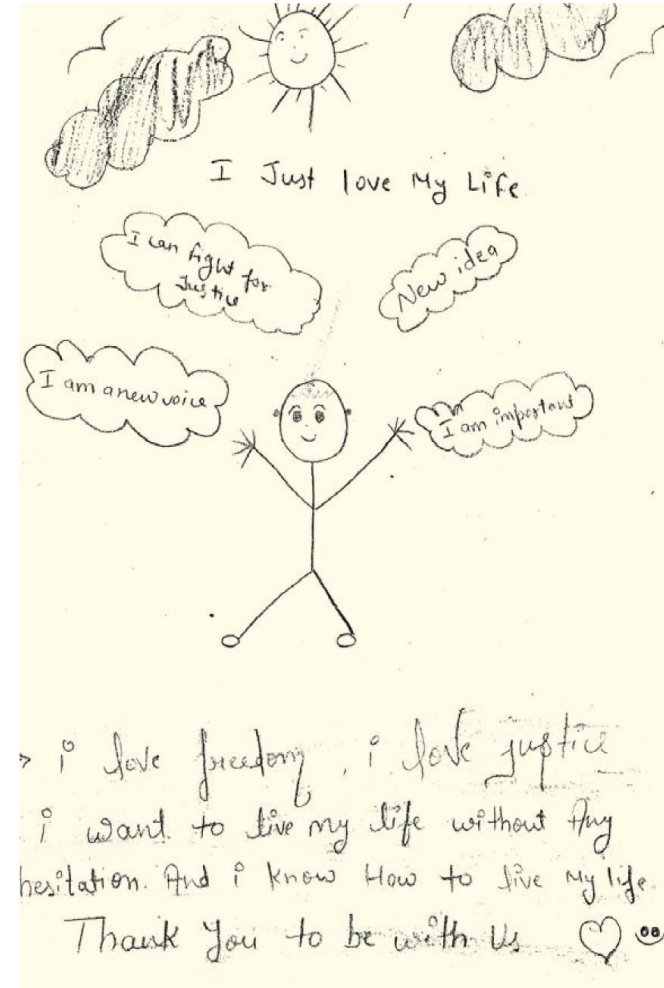


# Life Skill Education for Girls at CHG – I and II: Helping them find the Spark Within

When we first  
began working with  
the girls...



And  
Now ...





## Life Skill Education for Girls at CHG –I and II: Helping them find the Spark Within

Even though institutionalisation of children in difficult circumstances should be a measure of last resort, there always will be some children in institutional care.

Understanding the centrality of each child's experience as well as the context of their lives – recognising, realising and responding – is key to ensuring quality care and rehabilitation of children in institutional care.

Institutions must be held accountable, but what when they lack in perspective, motivation, skills and other capacities to deliver?

This is where opening up the institutions to strategic partnerships with actors outside the institutions can bring a change.

# Life Skill Education for Girls at CHG –I and II: Helping them find the Spark Within

- Developing life skills, offering academic support and promoting linkages through dance, art, and theatre have been some of HAQ's activities with the girls.
- Reading out stories, urging children to write new ones, making them keep journals, formulating quizzes, tongue twisting exercises, and speed games – these activities are joyous and humorous ways of partnering with the girls and helping them find the anchors within.
- Life skills lessons for the young girls start from simple teachings on the significance of the golden words like 'please', 'thank you', 'sorry' and 'you are welcome' to the importance of washing hands, helping friends, and staying positive.
- The idea of "*I am glad I have these things in my life*" is constantly infused.

# Life Skill Education for Girls at CHG –I and II: Helping them find the Spark Within

**Meeting reality on its own terms (however unfavourable and without diminishing it) and still letting the girls find the light that shines through is no small achievement. What has been accomplished is ...**

- Giving the youngsters in the institution a sense of self-worth and belonging, and strengthening their instinctual wisdom to handle insecurities.
- Creating shared grounds for children where one child's climb out of hopelessness has inspired many others to do the same.

**As a bonus we got ...**

- Involvement of the staff in all these activities and increased motivation levels. Working in tandem with the staff of all rank and manner and elicit their continued support in each child's welfare is important for HAQ.
- A spirit of partnership with other actors in the institution, and not competition now stands established as a norm.

# These voices speak volumes...

## What the girls have to say...

"I liked the workshop. I learnt many good things. I made many friends - girls with whom I have never spoken. They are now my friends. This workshop allowed me think of moving ahead in my life and achieve something. Now I have both courage and strength, thanks to you."

"Why do we fight in the name of religion. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, we all belong to the same soil. It is our duty to show others the right direction. We should live happily together. I am very happy to be here and would like to attend the session every Thursday to share my feelings and learn good things"

## From the Staff...

"Our children are emotionally drained....they need a perspective for their future," says a concerned Welfare Officer.

"Your work recognises the inner strength of the girls," says Head Cook Laxmi.

"If I don't laugh with the children my day remains incomplete," says Consultant and Administration Head Sunita.

## From the Volunteers...

"I was overjoyed with the aspirations of the children. I learnt through my interactions with teachers about pregnant girls of the age of 13, of girls who became so aggressive due to their tragedies that they started injuring themselves and of some other girls who had diverted their energies to other terrible things, a reality that was too hard to handle.

A happier note crept in again when I saw the amazing responses of girls at the art day, quiz competitions and theatre activities.

For me the most brilliant moment was to hear the worldview of a child who said that she would not miss me after I left because she would remember my teachings".

# Supporting child victims of sexual abuse

**In the last 10 years, 205 girls and 95 boys who have been victims of abuse and exploitation have been supported by HAQ.**

- Since 2002, HAQ began supporting individual cases of child abuse and exploitation when called upon by the concerned authorities or NGOs.
- However, not many cases would get reported until in 2012, children of the country got a new law to help them break the silence around sexual abuse and seek justice.
- HAQ has since actively engaged with the implementation of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) and has intensified its initiatives against child sexual abuse.
- **We are currently providing the services of a support person in 46 POCSO cases, largely from South and South-East districts of NCT Delhi, on orders of the concerned Child Welfare Committees.**

# What does it mean to be a support person to a victim of sexual abuse...

- **Carrying out a needs assessment** for the affected child and the family.
- **Being with the child at every stage of proceedings** before the Child Welfare Committee and the concerned Court.
- **Providing psycho-social care directly or by referring them to therapists if needed.** HAQ has its own in-house counsellors and psychologists and has also recently entered into a tie up with a psychologist in the Psychiatry Department at AIIMS.
- **Providing or arranging for educational support or medical care and treatment** either by working with the schools or arranging tuition support through volunteers. HAQ has a tie-up with a private hospital (that does not wish to be named), located in South Delhi.
- **Providing or finding legal support for the child.** We do this through our in-house or retainer lawyers who either work with the Special Public Prosecutors or represent the children themselves.
- **Helping children access their victim compensation,** including opening their bank accounts if required and follow-up with the concerned legal services authority.
- **Group healing and support for families of victims.** HAQ has started a support group of parents of survivors of child sexual abuse. The group meets once a month and acts as a forum where parents can share their fears and apprehensions, their struggles and concerns about their children, and also learn from the success stories of those who have been able to deal with stigma and fear to move forward in life.

# THANK YOU!



**HAQ: Centre for Child Rights**

B-1/2 Malviya Nagar (GF)

New Delhi – 110017

Tel: +91-11-26677412 / 26673599

Fax: +91-11-26674688

Email: [info@haqcrc.org](mailto:info@haqcrc.org)

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/HaqCentreForChildRights/>