

# UPON A BEAM OF LIGHT

HELPING GIRLS AT NIRMAL CHAYYA  
FIND THE SPARK WITHIN



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Ensuring lasting change  
for children

**HAQ** Centre  
for  
Child  
Rights



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CHILD RIGHTS AND YOU

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## HAQ on child protection

All children have the right to be protected wherever they are — at home, in school, on the streets, and at all times — in times of peace or conflict or calamity. Their right to protection is as intrinsic to their well-being, as is the right to survival, development and participation. Children deserve to live in an environment where good governance and the full enjoyment of human rights are mutually reinforcing.

In its simplest form, child protection addresses every child's right not to be subjected to harm. It thus complements other provisions that ensure that children receive all that they need in order to survive, develop and thrive. It must relate to the child's capacity for self-reliance and self-defense and to the roles and responsibilities of family, community, society and State.

Children are 'un-protected' and vulnerable due to both, acts of omissions (neglect and denial of basic rights) and commission (acts of violence, abuse and exploitation).

'Un-protectedness' as it affects children in India requires:

- acknowledgement of the real character and dimensions of the protection issue and bringing it to the fore
- correctives to address the problem through justice delivery mechanisms
- safeguards through laws, policies and programmes in place
- redressals through counselling, rehabilitation and reintegration

Through its Child Protection Programme, HAQ undertakes:

- legal aid to children in contact with law
- counselling to both child victims of abuse and those in conflict with law
- capacity building of service providers and various stakeholders such as the law enforcement officials, the judiciary, functionaries in the juvenile justice system, media and NGOs
- campaigns against child trafficking, child labour and violence and abuse of children
- visits to girls home/observation homes

## HAQ on juvenile justice

HAQ's work on juvenile justice began in 2005 by providing legal aid to the children in conflict with law. Over the years, with the Delhi State Legal Services Authority dedicating a panel of legal aid lawyers attached to the Juvenile Justice Boards, HAQ's intervention in the boards shifted to providing counselling to the children in conflict with law. The children who need counselling are marked to HAQ through orders of the Boards.

HAQ has been engaged in the process of law making on juvenile justice since 1999 to bring it in consonance with India's national and international commitments to its children. In 2006, HAQ not only engaged with the government in amending the juvenile justice law but was also part of the drafting committee set up to draft the rules for implementation of the law. Following the controversy around the Juvenile Justice Act in the country, HAQ joined hands with several organisations and individuals to lead the legal interventions in the Supreme Court, resulting in judgements upholding the law. In 2014, it represented the group of Indian organisations that received the Juvenile Justice Across Borders Award given by the International Juvenile Justice Observatory (IJJO).

HAQ has worked closely with the judicial mechanisms to monitor and implement the law, and is often called upon to develop training materials and also train judicial officers, police and other functionaries in the child protection system.

# Acknowledgements

Our deep admiration for the girls in difficult circumstances and in conflict with the law, living within the confines of the statutory home. For trying to go past their psycho-social challenges and adapt to a 'new idea of self'. And, for boldly tapping into the dormant and invisible power within to find strength to rebuild their lives and selfhood.

Our gratitude to the home staff of Nirmal Chayya, and particularly the Superintendent, who stood steadfastly behind these children. For placing their best interests first, and often going beyond the call of duty to support them with sensitivity. We also acknowledge their efforts to accommodate our core values and strategies within their own systems of working and allowing for a harmonious synergy.

Our team members and volunteers - who have spent years with these children - have provided an invaluable compass to enrich our understanding of children's needs and the battles they fight – within and without. Our gratitude for their selfless efforts (of being guides and friends), their inventiveness in taking projects ahead, and being part of the children's journey of learning.

Special thanks to Nisha, Chandni and Anuradha Masand all of whom have kept the magic and joy of life alive for the children over the last many years. We are equally indebted to them for bringing to us wondrous illuminations from the children which help us steer our efforts better.

Our biggest support has been 'Child Rights and You' (CRY) and we sincerely thank them for not only funding this project, but also giving us the valuable volunteers and resource persons – the volunteer Yoga teacher, student volunteers from different colleges who supported the girls in their educational goals and resource persons like Walter Peter who conducted the Theatre-in Education workshop and brought these girls into the beam of light during their last Summer Camp.

HAQ has always believed in opening up the institutions to well-meaning people who can contribute to the lives of children residing there and help them grow to their full potential. We were happy to have the Delhi Government and the Superintendent of the home share this vision, and that helped us partner with many more agencies and individuals, some of whom do not wish to be named.

**Bharti Ali**  
Co-Director

**Enakshi Ganguly Thukral**  
Co-Director





# INTRODUCTION

## Listening to life, learning from instabilities

“Once when I was six years old I saw a magnificent picture in a book called *True Stories from Nature* about the primeval forest. It was a picture of a boa constrictor in the act of swallowing an animal... I pondered deeply, then, over the adventures of the jungle. And after a week with a coloured pencil I succeeded in making my first drawing. My Drawing Number One. I showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups and asked them whether the drawing frightened them: But they answered: “Frighten? Why should one be frightened by a hat?”

*The Little Prince, Antoine De Saint Exupery*



Image from the Little Prince

To the untrained eye the artistic creations of the girl children, who live in the sheltering boundaries of the statutory home of *Nirmal Chayya*, might similarly come across as objects that their young creators never intended them to be.

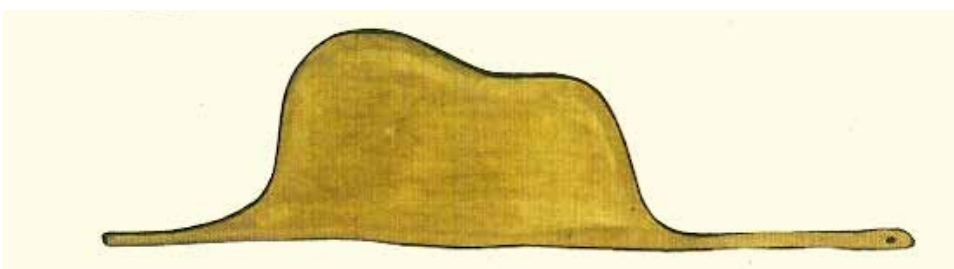


Image from the Little Prince

As Saint-Exupéry's most memorable line from *The Little Prince* says:

*“What is essential is invisible to the eye.”*



Yet if the perceiver is ready to enter into the realm of the child artist's creative processes, experience the emotions which moved the child, and piece the fragmented creations of their life's experiences into a larger whole, the exercise can serve as a seedbed for the flowering of the child's values, identity and purpose.

To let girl children, afflicted by difficult circumstances, inhabit their lives, fully, creatively and joyfully (while being fully aware of its uncertainties), and use this dynamic interaction (both with themselves and others around) to frame their futures is central to HAQ's vision and work within *Nirmal Chayya*.

This stems from its core belief that the children's journey of self-discovery – their osmotic ability to learn, distill, and evolve into their own personhood – emanates from their immediate environment and experiences.



A child's individual behaviour is after all a part of a complex web of influences, relationships, and outside forces that must be understood, negotiated and renewed on a daily basis.

So understanding the centrality of each's child experience as well as their context of their lives – recognising, realising and responding – is key.

Balancing on this beam means an emphasis on the physical, psychological and emotional safety of both providers and children, for the latter to rebuild a sense of control, resilience and empowerment.

In this case, girl children also include adolescents.

# Supporting children, stabilising their lives: understanding the larger context of institutionalisation

UNICEF estimates that 153 million children globally have lost one or both parents. Of them, 43 million live in South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka).

Besides orphans, a substantial number of children are out of the family protective net and institutionalised as orphans, abandoned, abused, runaways or children in conflict with law. These children are often exploited and pushed to the margins of society. Inhuman and violent life conditions turn many such children into law offenders, drug abusers and exploiters themselves.<sup>1</sup>

The **UN Study on Violence against Children** identified care institutions as one of the five settings where violence against children occurs. It says:

*“These children are at risk of violence from staff and officials responsible for their well-being. Corporal punishment in institutions is not explicitly prohibited in a majority of countries. Overcrowding and squalid conditions, societal stigmatisation and discrimination, and poorly trained staff heighten the risk of violence. Effective complaints, monitoring and inspection mechanisms, and adequate government regulation and oversight are frequently absent. Not all perpetrators are held accountable, creating a culture of impunity and tolerance of violence against children. The impact of institutionalisation goes beyond the experience by children of violence. Long-term effects can include severe developmental delays, disability, irreversible psychological damage, and increased rates of suicide and recidivism.”<sup>2</sup>*

The **National Policy for Children, 2013**, promises:

*“Children have the right to be protected wherever they are. The State shall create a caring, protective and safe environment for all children, to reduce their vulnerability in all situations and to keep them safe at all places, especially public spaces. A safe, secure and protective environment is a precondition for the realisation of all other rights of children. The State shall protect all children from all forms of violence and abuse, harm, neglect, stigma, discrimination, deprivation or any other activity that takes undue advantage of them, harms their personhood or affects their development. To secure the rights of children temporarily or permanently deprived of parental care, the State shall endeavour to ensure family and community-based care arrangements guaranteeing quality standards of care and protection.”*

The **Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)** was introduced in the Eleventh Five Year Plan. An important element of this scheme is the institutional care for children. It laid down some key principles that must underlie the ICPS approach:<sup>3</sup>

**(i) Child protection a shared responsibility:** The responsibility for child protection is a shared responsibility of government, family, community, professionals, and civil society. It is important that each role is articulated clearly and understood by all engaged in the effort to protect children. Government has an obligation to ensure a range of services at all levels.

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1 Institutionalised Children: Seminar On Standards Of Care And Mental Health, 14 & 15 March 2014 At Amity University, Delhi, National Capital Region (NCR), India

2 Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children. Sixty-first session Item 62 (a) of the provisional agenda\* Promotion and protection of the rights of children. A/61/299

3 Sub Group Report, Child Protection in the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007 - 2012), Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, page 174-175

- (vii) Establishing standards for care and protection:** All protection services should have prescribed standards, protocols for key actions and should be monitored regularly. Institutionalisation should be for the shortest period of time with strict criteria being established for residential placement and all cases of institutionalisation reviewed periodically.
- (viii) Building capacities:** Protection services require skilled, sensitive staff, equipped with knowledge of child rights and standards of care and protection. Capacities of all those in contact with children require strengthening on a continuing basis, including families and communities.
- (ix) Providing child protection professional services at all levels:** There is a need for varied special services for the many situations of child neglect, exploitation and abuse, including for shelter, care, psychological recovery, social reintegration, legal services etc. which have to be professional and child-focused.

**Based on this the Ministry of Women and Child Development has developed a ICPS document:<sup>4</sup>**

- (ix) Quality care, standards for care and protection:** All protection services, whether public or privately provided, should adhere to prescribed standards pertaining to physical infrastructure and human resource requirements, as well as protocols, methodological instructions and guidelines for services and operational manuals for functioning of statutory bodies. (page 10)

**D. Institutional services:** As provided by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000, the scheme shall support the creation of new institutional facilities and maintenance of existing institutional facilities for both children in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection. These include Shelter Homes, Children's Homes and Observation Homes, Special Homes, and Place of Safety. In addition, the scheme shall also provide for institutional care of children with special needs by supporting a specialised unit within the existing homes or by setting up a specialised Shelter Home for children with special needs. The statutory duties and responsibilities of the personnel will be as per the provisions of the Central Model Rules/State Rules under Juvenile Justice Act, 2000 and its Amendment Act, 2006. While selecting the staff for a girl's home, every effort shall be made to appoint female personnel, especially at leadership and decision-making levels as well as those interacting with the girl children. (page 57)

**Education.....** Every institution should periodically assess the educational status and vocational aptitude of the children/juveniles in care by conducting tests and interacting with the children/juveniles informally. Necessary linkages should also be established with educational specialists and community-based welfare agencies, psychologists, psychiatrists, child guidance clinics, hospitals and local doctors, open schools and the Jan Shikshan Sansthan, etc. to provide the children/juveniles access to value added need based services. NGOs and voluntary organisations should be invited to provide special coaching, tuition, etc. to children/juveniles when found necessary. (page 140)

**4.6 Vocational training .....** In order to prepare children/juveniles for economic independence when they are discharged from the institutions as young adults, it shall be the responsibility of every institution to provide employable, market driven, vocational training to juveniles/children when they complete their schooling or drop out of school. Every institution should tie up with local NGOs and ITI's to either provide vocational facility within the institution premises or send the children/juveniles to such NGOs or ITI's for specialised vocational training for which the child has an aptitude. (page 140)

<sup>4</sup> Revised Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), The Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) A Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Government – Civil Society Partnership [http://cara.nic.in/writereaddata/uploadedfile/NTESEL\\_635761170436561995\\_final\\_icps.pdf](http://cara.nic.in/writereaddata/uploadedfile/NTESEL_635761170436561995_final_icps.pdf)

# The moment of embarking ... for HAQ

Listening to and working with the creative impulses and courage of these girl children living within this statutory home, as the starting point, is enabling HAQ wrest values, identities and purpose for them.

Starting from the year 2009, HAQ has managed to lend sustenance to their spirit within the cordoned-off environment of the home, and helped girls of varying ages blossom into purposeful lives.

The spring boarding to self-development is happening without forcing their presence in these learning-action exercises or creating a sense of dependence. The focus is instead on self-reliance based on funneling their strengths.

Girl children at the statutory home have atypical and problematic lives in the absence of parental guidance and support and normal home environments. They cope with inhibitions, instabilities, strife, solitude, desolation, negation, mistrust of authority, a paralysing fear of abandonment, burdens of past physical and emotional abuse, and shaky futures.

And, the fact that each child's difficulty is unlike another's makes behaviour change efforts even more challenging.

Diversification options that energise the competencies of these children are adopted to handle the particular vulnerabilities of youngsters and young offenders. The aim is to channelise the girls' individual merits to avoid the 'stigma' and 'labelling' associated with staying in the home, as well as the dangers of trapping young people into a pattern of offending behaviour.

This emerges from HAQ's deep recognition that most juvenile offending is episodic and transitory and its determination to enable them to mature out of criminal behaviour.

## HAQ's optimism of faith and purpose

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.

Within the anonymity of their fenced environs, in the absence of their socio-cultural moorings and the tethering comfort of their homes, what HAQ has accomplished is giving these youngsters a sense of self-worth and belonging, and strengthening their instinctual wisdom to handle insecurities.

And, HAQ's attentive presence at the home through its many other related activities (developing life skills, offering academic support and promoting linkages through dance, art, and theatre in its summer interventions) has also let many of these girls find their element – their spark, and their inner balance. This has happened largely because of their validation of the girls' shifting complexities of personhood.

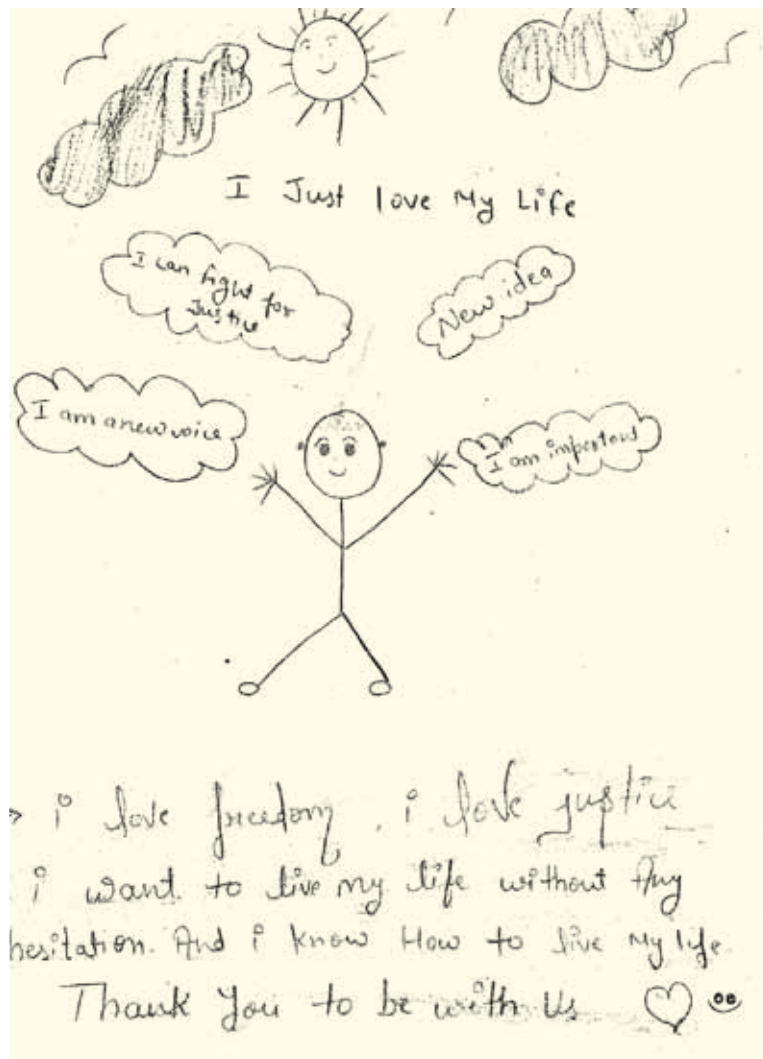
We unfold the heartening story of HAQ, its use of the glow of creativity in the children's learning-growing process, the dance of the shades as it were, to allow children to grow into their own in between their realities.





## CHAPTER ONE

# Giving children a chance to know what happy feels like



How should one begin to tell the story of *Nirmal Chayya* and its children in difficult circumstances, the subtleties and complexities of their lives? As an outsider, how is one to understand the topsy turvy landscape of this statutory home, where living free is a doubtful prospect?

And, how has HAQ found its way to these children past closed doors to realise its idea of a nurturing approach to child rights, care, and protection in synergy with the authorities? How is it bringing true change in children's lives – change within and without – past their inner struggles to help them come into their own?

Gaining topographic insights into the home, its organisation, spaces and functioning, perhaps, provides a lead into children's lives. And, also contours a nuanced understanding of the work accomplished and that which needs to be.

## HOME: roles, responsibilities, and beyond

Within the framework of the juvenile justice system, institutional care and correctional services for girls is provided by one nodal statutory home within *Nirmal Chayya*, Jail Road, New Delhi.

It falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Women and Child Development, Delhi Government, and acts as a substitute for the family and community. It is meant for girl children in difficult circumstances – those in neglect and in need – and for girl children who are, in varying degrees, involved in the violation of criminal laws (dubbed under the children in conflict with law category).

The home provides integrated, community-based institutional services for the care, protection and development of such children. Its focus is on improving well-being of children, and reducing their vulnerabilities to situations and actions that lead to neglect, abuse and exploitation.

Attempts at providing basic services (as shelter, food, clothing and medicare), skill development (to mainstream the children in society), rehabilitation (through counselling and psychological support), along with the provision of support services are key.

The statutory children's home for girls (CHG) within *Nirmal Chayya* has four sections: *Anupama* (for 12-18 year old girls), *Anukriti* (for six-12 year old girls), *Sharda Garh* (for girls up to the age of 18 years who are victims of abuse) and *Ganga Kutir* (0-five year girl children). A single four-storey building accommodates all these units. Girls' stay within each of these age-amalgamated units is guided by the provisions of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000.

The CHGs are part of a larger building cluster within the campus of *Nirmal Chayya*, that include the mental health unit for counselling of all inmates living within the homes of *Nirmal Chayya* (that was run by NGO Manas), the dispensary, staff quarters, beggars home, two women's homes, and two Child Welfare Committee offices (that fall under the Juvenile Justice Act) who place girls within the CHGs.

## Gaining entry into the home

The statutory home admits girls under the following categories at the orders of the concerned court:

- girls rescued from brothels
- girls in morale (*sic*) danger
- girls under sections 363 (kidnapped), 366 (kidnapping and abduction for marriage) and 376 (rape) of Indian Penal Code

Non-delinquents are put under home care due to reasons such as trafficking, exploitation, neglect, destitution, orphaned, runaways, forced beggary, child labour, lack of parental care or other such issues. These children are not offenders and their cases are meant to be taken up for enquiry and resolution.



They stay here pending the completion of government efforts to track down their parents, collect information on their family background, restore them to their families, or look for alternative care measures.

If the parents turn out to be dead, untraceable, unfit, or simply unwilling to take the child back, the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) ensures the government provides room, board, education, and vocational training till the age of 18 years or till they are able to fend for themselves.

Juveniles 'in conflict with the law' on the other hand are those apprehended for violating the law.

After production before the Child Welfare Committee, and admission into the home, the girl child's case history is noted by the Child Welfare Officer. The child is given an identity number, and a kit (to include clothing, bedding, utensils and other personal requirements). School uniforms and shoes are provided to girls going to schools. They are allowed to retain all that they bring at the time of admission and items given by visitors.

The average number of children in 2014-2015 was 250; the number of school-going children were 70.

## Spatial details of the home

The ground floor of the statutory home building has an open courtyard. It opens up into rooms on all sides. Each floor in this building follows this pattern. They have verandahs that are surrounded by rooms. This is what gives this barricaded building a semblance of openness. The ground floor has also rooms for the home staff, a recreational hall, kitchen and vocational classrooms.

Dormitories for the children are spread across the ground, first, second and third floors. As per the guidelines for custodial care homes, the building is barricaded by iron fences, as are their stairways.

The dormitory meant for keeping abandoned, surrendered, lost and found, and kidnapped infants (*Ganga Kutir*) is situated on the ground floor. Children of *Anupama* occupy the second and the third floor dormitories - three on each floor. *Anukriti* has three dormitories on the first floor each with 20-25 beds. *Sharda Garh* is a designated set of rooms, mostly occupied by girls rescued from brothels, some of whom may have their own babies.

The dormitories are primarily big halls with windows that open to walled courtyards. While it is sunlit in summer, it can appear dark and dismal in winter. Beds are lined on two sides. One almirah is attached to each bed. Each floor has toilets and bathrooms. The inmates are allowed to go outside the dormitories only to attend classes, or for recreation, counselling, or food.

In addition, there are dormitories earmarked for children whose cases are in the process of being heard in the Juvenile Justice Board.

## Home routines

There is a sameness to the days. The home is guarded by women in three shifts. The girls are given four meals in a day. Breakfast is served at 7am, lunch at 1pm, a glass of milk is given at 5pm, and dinner is on the table at 7pm.

The girls who go to school are expected to be at school at 9am and return by 1pm. They go by bus and are escorted back. The girls voluntarily participate in the activities organised by NGOs in the afternoon, post school hours.

They also have games like ludo, carom board, rackets for badminton to play within the courtyard and room, and access to football. Over the years, with the institution opening up to visitors, volunteers and outside support, the girls are being allowed to use the playgrounds surrounding the building.

The staff includes: Superintendent, Child Welfare Officers (CWOs), vocational trainers, instructors, class IV employees, caretakers, upper division clerks, lower division clerks, matrons, cooks, gardeners, peons, sweepers, security guards, medical officers, nurses, medical attendants, sweepers and security guards – the majority of who are women.

## Needed at the home: quiet, daily affirmations

Within the shadows of these high-walled, fenced in boundaries of the homes, these personnel are expected to raise the children, who contend with tremendous hardships and restraints, and many of them who exhibit difficult behaviours, into caring adults. And, with deep understanding, love and empathy for them to help repair disrupted lives and relationships.

Apart from facilities such as shelter, food, clothing and medicare, a disciplined and productive management of their lives needs to be ensured. This means overseeing a host of factors.

They include, at the very minimum, the ensuring of: hygiene and cleanliness of the precincts; practice of daily routines; education and attendance at schools; physical activity; personality development programmes; vocational training; attendance at counselling sessions; conflict management; attempts at reunification with their families; and social reintegration – a strenuous call by all standards.

The staff are also expected to escort the children to courts and even give evidence at times.

## Readying service systems within the home for child-informed care

There is also the tremendous challenge to ready the home to understand and deal with each child as an individual. And go past their physical, social and psychological distress to set them on a growth path of healing and resilience. The staff also need to pay heed to girls' choices and control over their lives, seen as important and as basic human rights.

This becomes important as many children suffer from physical, emotional, behavioural and cognitive problems. Physical problems manifest themselves as illness, low energy, and sleep and eating disorders; emotional disturbances come in the form of depression, anxiety, panic attacks, compulsive, obsessive behaviours and an inability to forge bonds; behavioural issues

surface through practices of self-harm, self-hate, aggression and substance abuse; and cognitive imbalances show in learning problems, memory lapse and hesitancy in making decisions.

These interfere on a deep level with their sense of self, self-efficacy and safety, and their ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships. There is also the need to cope with children with disabilities - physical and mental. And, in addition there are children with severe mental health issues.

So for the home to take the step towards child-informed approaches, its organisation, management and service delivery needs be modified to include a basic understanding of this method, as well as foster innovative, untried experiments. It essentially involves working within a wholly new framework – to better see, hear and work with the girls – an experience that needs radical changes and not altogether possible within the current functioning.

The growing number of girls in the home does not make the task easier.

## Re-directing cultural and social norms to be supportive of girls

Networks comprising families, communities and cultures are meant to protect, comfort and sustain people, and especially children living within their confines.

When a crisis occurs, the family offers a comfort zone and is the first point of approach for an affected person. The familiarity of family relationships provides great reprieve and protection in the face of danger. In crises, cultural understanding helps make sense of what's happening.

When children suffer separation from families, and are sent to the statutory home their loneliness and cultural alienation is acute. And, the social repudiation that comes from being associated with living in such homes is hard to bear.

The fact that these children are girls (whose rights will get further eroded in a society that views girls' rights to be secondary) will mean that their life choices will shrink dramatically in practically all spheres of life as a result of being in the home.

Providing girls with a family environment, redirecting cultural and social norms to be supportive of girls' equality, and aiming to get girls to see that they are of no less value than boys remain huge challenges.

Interventions that challenge cultural and social norms supportive of gender bias need to be integrated with several approaches and interventions. Inattention to this will lead to the continuance of the singular and reductionist ideas on gender identities and will deepen gender inequality.

## HAQ's point of connect

The point of connect for HAQ at *Nirmal Chayya* has been to work in partnership with the authorities, and the other NGO to help share some of these formidable responsibilities and reassemblings.

The overriding idea being to explore the benefits of synergy – to turn historic hurdles into bridges (by understanding what will work best for everybody, especially the children) for defined and sustainable outcomes.

The idea of not ploughing lonely furrows is not new. But its use in an effective combination is what is producing results and ensuring the tipping point.

The generosity of the authorities in helping to break away from the model of hierarchical insiders, and the non-entry of outsiders is what has helped. As has its decision to allow several NGOs to work with the children in specific areas of their expertise.

The pivotal point of all these joint exercises is the clear understanding that these children hold rights that must be respected at all cost. They are undertaken in a spirit of partnership and not competition. This for HAQ has been both its biggest learning and accomplishment.

Giving children a chance to know what happy feels like and help in the making the statutory home their real home, because many children may perhaps stay here till 18, has been a large part of HAQ's endeavours.

## HAQ's role in monitoring the home

HAQ has been active in monitoring the functioning of the home over the years.

While monitoring of the home is critical and must continue, HAQ realises that all accountability exercises must be backed and supported by hand holding and strengthening of capacities within institutions. This in order to help the caregivers overcome their challenges.

Two, for monitoring to be meaningful, it must be also carried over a period of time in a discreet and supportive manner. Drawing conclusions on the basis of one off flying visits can be enormously harmful.

Three, HAQ understands that institutions are constrained by systems and procedures and this must be kept in mind while monitoring. For instance, it is easy to point to the lack of diapers, or shoes, or sanitary napkins for the girls. But one must be sensitive to why this is happening. Maybe there are days assigned for distribution.

Also, when children are involved in cooking and cleaning at the home in order to give them a sense of pride and ownership over it, some inspecting authorities misconstrue it to mean that these children are being used as unpaid labour. It is important to stay clear of such misconceptions.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Shaping each other's way of seeing and being

HAQ's focus is on the young girls and adolescents in the statutory home who have the potential to overcome adversity and develop the life skills and paths.

For this, it works alongside their closest influencers, the home staff, and in tandem with several NGOs who have been working within the home with the children. As in a shared journey, each of these entities have shaped the other's way of seeing and being.

## Working in unison with the home staff

The home staff is responsible for creating and maintaining an atmosphere which is beneficial to the physical and emotional health and development of the youngsters. Child welfare, safety and needs, and ensuring minimum standards of care and protection is at the centre of their care.

They are responsible for guiding and supervising the children in care (directing them in matters of personal conduct, hygiene, appearance, social skills, behaviour management, school, routines and work habits, for instance), acting as role models (fostering the physical, spiritual and emotional growth of each child by being their guiding force), and also participating in the assessment of the progress and problem of each youngster. And, they also need to prepare youngsters and their families for their transition to the level of services recommended.

Working in tandem with the staff of all rank and manner, to elicit their continued support in each child's welfare is thus important for HAQ.

## Coming, being, and working together!

*The home staff's initial skepticism in participating in HAQ's activities for girls (viewed as burdensome and an additional task) has given way to respect for the girls' inventiveness and hard work. Personal interactions are taking precedence over strict hierarchy, schedules and responsibilities. Why? Here are a few reasons.*

- Each child should be valued as an individual and extended personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth. Home staff are pivotal to such self-development. HAQ messages on this are unequivocal, and the home staff is now convinced of the crucial roles they play in children's lives!
- Children in residential children's homes should be given the opportunity to experience a supportive family environment as far as possible. HAQ seeks to consciously involve staff of all ranks in all the girls' activities to enable their being a continued and supportive presence in their lives. Efforts are to bring the staff into the activity fold as observers, participants, and judges: this keeps them within the circle of all the girls activities

- Regular staff orientations sensitise them to children's perspective allowing for life-enhancing enterprises
- Special activities and gifts for them are organised as tokens of appreciation for their endeavours: as these efforts are spearheaded by the children, this makes the bonding with them robust

"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

## Other happy confluences and collectives

Architecture, they say, starts when you put two bricks together. And, great things are done by a series of small things put together.

HAQ works in sync with Manas, an organisation that works on mental health, Subhakshika that provides educational support, Bal Bhawan which teaches art and craft, and CRY that provides financial backing and volunteers for the academic support component of HAQ's initiatives.

HAQ supplements the efforts of these NGOs and draws lessons from their areas of expertise. They are sources of information and ideas, partners for projects, and allies of the cause.

HAQ is confident that by approaching work collaboratively there will be a broader scope of support, increased capacity, and systematic and planned initiatives. This will lead to cohesion, sustained impact and the emergence of more effective ways to tackle the underlying causes of violations of child rights.

In sum, it believes that a genuine partnership between all those involved in children's homes is essential for the National Minimum Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children. As well as to discover, dialogue, introspect, understand and implement changes.

## Finding new spaces by HAQ: around and within children

HAQ's foray into *Nirmal Chayya* began with planning 'fun days' for children in an initial two-monthly afternoon visits. It involved an array of post-school hour games and activities based on art and craft. It helped in striking a rapport with the children and staff.

It has evolved over the years into daily diversionary creative group processes with them, developing life skills, and building enduring linkages through academic support and summer intervention programmes. The activity flow greatly depends on willing and joyous participation, action learning, creative thinking, and indirect psychological counselling methods.

## HAQ: Working within the circle National Policy for Children, 2013, and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2000

- The National Charter for Children, 2003, adopted on 9th February 2004, underscored the intent to secure for every child the inherent right to be a child and enjoy a healthy and happy childhood; to address the root causes that negate the healthy growth and development of children; and to awaken the conscience of the community in the wider societal context to protect children from all forms of abuse, while strengthening the family, society and the Nation
- To affirm this commitment using a rights based approach, the government drafted the National Policy for Children, 2013. It undertakes to safeguard, inform, include, support and empower all children within its territory and jurisdiction, both in their individual situation and as a national asset. The State is committed to take affirmative measures – legislative, policy or otherwise – to promote and safeguard the right of all children to live and grow with equity, dignity, security and freedom, especially those marginalised or disadvantaged; to ensure that all children have equal opportunities; and that no custom, tradition, cultural or religious practice is allowed to violate or restrict or prevent children from enjoying their rights
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2000, (amended in 2006) adheres to the guidelines in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and aims to safeguard the rights of children in the areas of care, protection, and treatment of neglected and under-observation juveniles
- Primarily a child-centered rehabilitation and family-restoration focused system, its approach is centered on children's health care, diet, education, vocational training, recreation facilities, and personal requirements
- The Juvenile Justice Act embraces two categories of children: those who have committed offences or children in conflict with the law and runaways, orphans, and beggars who are classified as children in need of care and protection. It extends relevant guidance and then rehabilitation to both groups
- The Act has established two bodies, the Child Welfare Committee to specifically address the children in need of care and the Juvenile Justice Board to look into matters concerning those who have committed offenses

Activities are undertaken as far as possible with age-similar groups, and when not possible the assimilation is done in a way to minimise disarray. The window of opportunity for HAQ is between 11am and 3pm as the children get busy with the sundry home schedules of lunch, assembly, tea, studying/dormitory cleaning/TV watching and dinner.

HAQ has a regular team to hold the initiatives together. It coordinates with the Superintendent to have their work plans and time schedules okayed. They then have volunteers to take the planned activities ahead with the help of clearly established protocols and schedules.

Volunteers undergo an orientation. They are familiarised with the do-and don'ts within the home, are expected to take activity and learning sessions with materials they create and design, and also turn in a report after each activity they undertake. The reports now have pre-determined formats (date/name of volunteer/number of the girls present/activities conducted/findings and observations/ and follow ups needed) to make reporting easy, uniform and learnings lucid.

HAQs efforts have resulted in shared grounds for children. One child's climb out of hopelessness has inspired many others to do the same. A girl who attended a theatre-in-education workshop in June 2015 confided: *"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."*

A sense of confirmation in our purpose springs from the fact that our efforts to reach the 'last' child – children most withdrawn and withholding as a result of disturbing circumstances in their lives – has meant them being less world-weary and more expectant and respectful of the possibilities of the world, and a will to grasp them. Said another girl who attended the same theatre-in-education workshop, *"This workshop is important for me because I (k)no(w) who am I and what is my Importance."*





## CHAPTER THREE

# Seeking the balance within, fostering identity development

Working with promising techniques to help girls at the statutory home get back on a positive developmental track and find their footing and purpose began in 2009.

The initial steers prevail as core values and are still integral to its current working.

The elemental principles that guided the team and volunteers of HAQ – empathy, understanding and redress of girl children’s needs (a need for rapport, belonging, identity, values and purpose), their constraints (a restrained life, lack of stability, feeling of alienation, fears of past victimisation and abuse and poor social skills, among others), risk factors (slipping into a state of hopelessness and delinquent behaviours), and prevention techniques (by focusing on building their strengths through the use of several techniques) within a clear framework of protecting children’s rights – still apply.



Of particular consequence to HAQ is an awareness of the children’s:

- world (emotions, identities, relationships and expectations of oneself and others)
- safety and autonomy (physical and emotional)
- need for cultural competence (where staff and volunteers support children gain control over their lives while being sensitive to their backgrounds)
- need for relationship building (where children relate to each other, the home staff, and the people who work with them in mutually supportive ways), and

- need for collaboration to set them on their growth path (strength recognition and skill-resilience building so that they become change agents who transform their own lives and consciously participate in decision-making regarding their future)

## 1. Using the power of creativity, imagination and joyful learning

Rapport and connect with the children of varying ages in the early stages was formed using the power of creativity, imagination and joyful learning, in addition to allowing children choose the activities they wished to engage in.

Girls could – or choose not to – engage in the art and craft exercises held every two months on what was called ‘fun days’. They were given the liberty to indulge in the activities at a pace they were at ease with, and determine their level of participation.

This comes from HAQ’s conviction that a lifelong learning process is only possible when children have an actual interest to know and understand, are supported in the explorations of their interest, and when they are given the opportunity to learn how they wish.

The first ‘fun day’ did see 90 girls participate and partake of the games, fun, food and frolic. Of their own choice!

It must be kept in mind that these girl children have faced extenuating circumstances and are resistant to anything new, change, or activities that require social bonding. A forbearance with resistance and errors was necessary initially to pave the way for gradual acceptance. Given time, it was seen that the children gained confidence with HAQ’s activities, were keen to participate in them, and started forming bonds with the HAQ staff and volunteers.

Fortitude continues to remain necessary till date. HAQ is aware that there is no one way to understand a child’s situation or determine a child’s responses. Each child reacts differently as one child’s trauma is different from another.

Children in such homes often backtrack on changed behaviours when faced with new and unexpected hostilities or setbacks in their lives. There is always a real danger of being closed out of their lives. Also, every new entrant takes time to adapt and adjust.



Closed-mindedness among girls is hence a reality, a given in this home, and needs to be addressed on an everyday basis.

## 2. Using concrete objects to embed abstract thoughts

The principal and continued use of familiar physical objects (colouring pencils, paints, plaster of paris, cartons, thermocol sheets, chart paper, paper plates, pots, flowers, rubber bands, pins, straws, brushes, feathers, clay, bangles, flexiwire, scissors, cloth, t-shirts, gum, brooms, small mirrors, glitter, and rulers, to name a few) is deliberate.

The idea is to pique interest; foster hands on participation and learning-by-doing; identify girls' strengths and skills; and divert their attention to creative pursuits.

It is well known that children need objects to make sense of their world: its places, people and things. By interacting with others, and playing, investigating and questioning the workings of objects, they observe, experiment, create, learn, express, make judgments, refine, and produce results through their own actions.

Such learning also promotes an understanding of concepts such as matching, comparing, ordering, sorting, size, weight, height, length, capacity, and money in an enjoyable and meaningful way. It fosters cognitive growth, accentuating issues like attention, language use, memory, perception, problem solving, creativity and thinking.

Using concrete objects for instruction also trains children to think about objects apart from their physical reality so as to lay the foundation for the ability to use and understand abstract concepts. In addition, it accelerates physical agility and emotional growth, particularly because these activities nurture children's need of interaction with their peers to exchange ideas, construct new ones and form social bonds.

The exercise of painting the walls of the home with motifs and figures by the girls, undertaken with delight, is a sparkling example of the coming together of all these explorative and learning qualities.

The first area to be designed with motifs was the dining room wall, which proudly bears the motif of the treeman. It drew in colour, and a luminous sense of wonder and magic within the severe environment of the home. More significantly, it has gone a long way to enable the girls to see this as their home which they must keep a cheerful and happy place.

The girls' regular paintings of pots and paper plates similarly help in lighting up the mood and ambience of the home while nurturing their creativity with design and togetherness. These images remain enduring reminders of the infinite optimism and joy that is possible with the use of imagination.

Other instances of constructive channelisation of creative energy to radiate positivity are the painted pots with plants in them or painted *diyas* (earthen lamps) that visitors to the homes are given as gifts. These are tokens they enjoy receiving, as much as the girls enjoy making them.

## Colouring: a favourite pastime



The colouring of outlines on paper and other materials and the designing of patterns on t-shirts generate as much elation. These two adventures remain huge favourite pastimes of the children, irrespective of what age they are. Girls have been seen to run away with materials often, in order to colour and design a wee bit more when they can find time. This is particularly so as the volunteers come with enchanting and alluring figures to colour.

The adolescent girls too see this as a shiny new interest and never tire of it. In Afghanistan, adults have adult colouring books to de-stress, making less the disbelief in the adolescent fervour in colouring at this home.



Cleanliness drives (as part of the current government's much popularised *Saafai Abhiyan*) where girls are encouraged to wield brooms and clean up the premises of the home see them taking ownership over tasks like filling up water, cleaning windows and potting plants.

Hand washing as a concept and an exercise is repeatedly taken up to instill ideas of cleanliness and hygiene. While children play with soap and water and identify microbes in pictures of the hands given to them using vivid colours, they also learn about why is important to keep hands clean.



So far the children have tried their hands at making an assortment of objects: pen stands, pottery pieces, key chains, jewellery, friendship bracelets, paper bags, photo frames, masks (face and eye masks), block painted cards, greeting cards, paintings, paper dolls, purses, pouches, envelopes, wall holders, animals, flowers, and birds using glazed paper, and flower *rangolis*. Applying *mehendi* (henna) and crafting designs on their palms is an eagerly sought after activity.

## Variety: the name of the game!

The idea of varying the creations is key. This is to keep the excitement and novelty factor intact.

A design 'your own *kurta-pyjama*' exercise is a huge hit with children who come up with spanking new ideas. Art camps that encourage children to test their creativities to the fullest are hugely looked forward to and they take pleasure in the use crayons, water colours, plaster of paris, and paints.

In October 2013, an art exhibition displayed the crayon, water colour creations and lanterns made by children. The staff was invited to see them and pick out their favourites. Children

received praise, admiration and validation of their work – a huge leap of faith for them. Bonds between the two groups have been further strengthened as a result.

At one time the children even participated in a contest to design a newspaper logo and worked closely with the Superintendent's office. Tailoring and sewing classes are regular creative outlets and many girls queue up to attend these classes.

The laughter that these sessions generate is uplifting. The fact that it continues to resonate all these years lends huge hope.

“The efforts in this area have demonstrated a growing confidence in girls in being able to do things for themselves: address challenges, cope with frustrations, make decisions, and take responsibility for their own learning,” says Anuradha Masand, who is part of the HAQ-*Nirmal Chayya* team.

“Now girls feel confident that their ideas, and questions will be listened to, and be taken seriously. They act on their learnings, take risks and are open to new ideas and uncertainty,” she adds.

### 3. Giving the girls another spark: helping them be who they are and who they will become

Giving the girls another spark to run with has come in the guise of helping them be who they are and blossom into who they will become. All by finding the gladness within, and the gladness of purpose.

As the involvement of HAQ has stepped up to daily interactions with the children – reading out stories, urging children to write new ones, making them keep journals, formulating quizzes, tongue twisting exercises, and speed games – these activities have become joyous and humorous ways of partnering with them and to help them find the anchors within.

Words are used for their power, and their ability to transform both speaker and hearer. This is because they feed energy, understanding and emotion back and forth and amplify it. The idea of “*I am glad I have these things in my life*” is constantly infused.

As also extending life-skills through contextual learning in order to strengthen their existing skills, psychosocial competencies, and positive behaviours.

Life skills lessons for the young girls start from simple teachings on the significance of the golden words like ‘please’, ‘thank you’ and ‘you are welcome’ to the importance of washing hands, helping friends, and staying positive. And, for the older girls it takes the mantle of helping them understand how to work in a beauty parlour or stitch clothes to helping them negotiate emotions, make decisions regarding their lives, and handle their sexuality.

Bollywood stories, dialogues and news are often used as an entry point to grab interest, participation and understanding. Volunteers have been hugely creative in their preparations over the years and children look forward to the surprise learnings envisioned for them and to discover the latent energy within themselves.

# Competencies that have found their way into children's lives

HAQ's emphasis on the spontaneous, free-flowing concept of divergent thinking, the goal of which is to generate many different ideas about a topic in a short period of time, has created many breakthroughs.

It involves breaking a topic down into its components in order to gain insight about the various aspects of the topic. Here the ideas are generated in an unorganised fashion. It is followed by convergent thinking where the effort is to put the various ideas back together in some organised, structured way. It has helped the girls organise their thoughts and ideas.

Other competencies that have found their way into children's lives as a result of HAQ's initiatives include: decision making, taking responsibility for the decisions made, problem solving, lateral thinking, cogent communication, effective interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, even-temperedness, ability to cope with stress, resilience, diversity and to some extent disability.

Coping with the idea of disability and learning to deal with children differently abled is important as the home accommodates children who have disabilities ranging from speech and hearing impairments to neurological and developmental disorders.

## Learning: an added bonus

An added bonus of all these efforts is that learning happens as a side effect. Children have learnt a great deal on health, hygiene, menstrual hygiene, reproductive health, AIDS/HIV and road awareness (as well as several other issues) through these processes. And, of all the possibilities that await them.

The use of murals, books, videos, exhibits, posters, displays, and magazines have also allowed children a glimpse of lives from various ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, opening their minds to issues of plurality and diversity. Many books are donated to the home and the children are eager to receive them. The children in particular enjoy the stories of the whimsical character Tenali Raman.

Personal interactions organised by HAQ with girls like them (from similar backgrounds) who now run cafes and work as assistants in cyber hubs have afforded glimpses of career and vocational opportunities, planting thoughts of setting goals, acquiring training and jobs, leading independent lives, and gaining economic self-sufficiency. These ideas have been firmed up by special sessions called '*Knowing Your Calling*' that take the girls through a gamut of career options.

Girls have also been hugely influenced by volunteers and staff who serve as their role models. They keenly observe them and try and emulate their behaviour and interests.

Boy volunteers have been seen to get huge attention, and on occasions they get overwhelming. This is perhaps understandable in view of the fact that girls interact with very few persons of the opposite sex. It is hence important to be careful to ensure that men don't become power centres.

## 4. Nudging girls towards conventional learning structures

Making formal learning fun is difficult as it has to deviate from the children's happy pursuit of what interests them and stick to curriculum. The categorising of this as 'learning' as opposed to 'playing' makes bridging the divide even more difficult.

Nudging girls towards conventional learning structures has happened by making the teaching as informal as possible and blurring the distinctions between 'learning' and 'playing'. So teaching young girls '*swar*', '*vyanjan*' and '*matras*' in Hindi and alphabets in English is done using lilting songs, while new words and their spellings are taught using dialogues from Hindi films.

HAQ's academic support programme started in 2013 due to the compelling need for it. The first batch to be taught was class eight students. Now it is a continuing enterprise that takes advantage of holidays and summer breaks to ensure focus, continuity, and come up to speed with the children's school curriculum. Today, support is given to students from Class 1 to 12.

It has been amazing to see the response of the girls. Four score of them come voluntarily on holidays and learn for hours. They lay huge value to regular attendance. Assessments have shown a marked increase in language, numeracy, comprehension and problem-solving skills.

Encouraged by this volunteers spend time and effort to prepare work sheets for girls at varying class levels and ensure that feedback happens. There is a focus on mathematics and science. Volunteers also refer to sample papers, help children work on them, and make notes for each class.

## 5. Problem areas

These strides have to be pitted and balanced against problem areas. Irregularity in student attendance and the availability of volunteers threatens continuity of learning. Incomplete homework and lack of student and volunteer follow up similarly suppresses the vitality of the learning processes.

Disruption of sessions on account of children wandering in and talking to the girls in class or too much background noise around are also huge problems. Attention-seeking behaviours of some children prove disruptive as do aggressive behaviour and non-cooperation.







## CHAPTER FOUR

# Using creativity to tap the power within

HAQ uses creative pursuits to reach girls and help them recover before they touch break point. Through creativity HAQ attempts to get at the centre of their personalities, their sense of self, and to the core of all their capabilities.

An emphasis on physical exertion using yoga, art, music, theatre, dance (Indian, therapeutic), puppetry, and a variety of indoor and outdoor games and sports has been placed to encourage psychomotor learning – movement exploration and skills as well as psychosocial benefits (such as improving behaviours, general mental health, self-esteem, concentration, awareness and positive moods).

The idea is to help girls use the power of their inner reserves to find their way.

This is because such pursuits are therapeutic mediums and help resolve common and uncommon dilemmas, by serving as bridges of empathy, and helping to extend children's capabilities to understand and cope.

These indirect means, in truth, help gain direct learnings about girls' lives and allow facilitators to see what they need and how they can be helped.

### 1. Puppetry, '*theatre in education*', '*theatre for development*' and '*theatre of the oppressed*'

Here are some instances of how creative pursuits provide powerful solutions to problems:

Take puppetry. When dolls are used to communicate the emotions of girls it stimulates thoughts, conversations, and actions amongst them without the need for stern lecturing.

The dolls evoke the needs and feelings of girls be it loneliness, sense of abandonment, anger, fear, rebelliousness, cheerfulness or hope. They permit discussion of highly personal and subjective issues in an externalised, objective manner. It thus creates a safe space for dialogue and critical thinking, allows girls to come up with their own solutions and change behaviours. And, they indirectly help girls recognise and respond to the legitimate place of emotions – sad and happy – and acceptable behaviours – in daily life.

In drama, the concept of '*theatre for development*' gives the girls the power to develop and perform the plays - the opportunity to tell their own stories and look for their own solutions. The idea is not to impose ideas on a passive youth audience but to instead evoke responses, critical thinking and solutions from them.

The '*theatre of the oppressed*' technique likewise nurtures a sense of communion with others, and promotes behavioural change communication through its potent participatory tools that engages girls in structured reflection and behaviour.

*'Theatre in education'* refers to a style of theatre which brings young audiences face to face with the actors in an interactive theatre piece designed around the exploration of a particular idea. Although its themes often take on difficult subjects such as bullying, drug abuse, sexual abuse, oppression, discrimination and prejudice, theatre in education is also used to bring to life history and great literature by pulling students into the story in role.

All these methods used by HAQ makes the girls call upon their own resources – not artificial aids but real inner resources – a real biological ability to cope. And while the methods described above help them cope with what they don't have, they also teach them to recognise what they do have. It tells them that the value of ordinary routine could be extraordinary. It gives voice to the right attitude: that the big themes of life – the search for economic prosperity, happiness, and good relationships – are always grounded in the way we approach little things.

Humour is also used in a big way in theatre and as a tool to drain out emotional excess. This why such creative and therapeutic props and concepts are hugely significant.

As are techniques used to help girls – goal setting (committing to action-based targets), modelling (simulated and observational learning) and imagery and visualisation (the ability to visualise a desired outcome).

## Another language for girls, helping them explore emotions and beliefs

Nuanced and structured behavioural interventional techniques used by HAQ include:

- grounding (this technique promotes the present, here-and-now awareness so that children can connect with current resources and options)
- relaxation
- token economics (where girls are given a token for displaying appropriate behaviour)
- feelings check (following the cycle of feelings and emotions to try and control them)
- imagery (using the imagination to manage difficult experiences)
- systematic de-sensitisation (used to address a range of fears by overlaying them with relaxation techniques)
- assessment training (helps girls advance their own interests), and
- paradoxical intent (where girls are told to behave opposite to the targeted goal in order to help them change their attitude towards the behaviour)

Normally used in counselling sessions, these techniques (among several others) when used during such creative exercises for girls pull together (in the same fashion) basic elements of working with thoughts and actions together. They then aid in cognitive development of normalising, reframing, interpreting and decision-making.

Simply put, it serves as another language for girls, inherently helping them explore emotions and beliefs, reduce stress, resolve problems and conflicts, take decisions and responsibility for these decisions, and enhance their sense of well-being.

More importantly, it helps them balance their sense of entitlement with responsibility. And, be less judgmental of others and themselves.

## Handling emotions, building their ability to trust others, and helping them draw on their inner strength

Qualified resource persons specially hired to conduct these sessions undertake these sessions with a sense of continuity in summer months when the children enjoy a summer break.

Using the medium of theatre, yoga, music and dance, these resource persons also try to touch upon the concepts of the girls' mental health needs such as addiction, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and trauma relating to physical or sexual abuse, neglect, and domestic violence.

They attempt to talk about fostering positive relationships between themselves and the staff. They teach them about communication skills, assertiveness, and appropriate expression of anger. This exercise has been hugely successful as the resource persons have been able to provide an environment in which girls feel safe to share their feelings and discuss their problems.

These creative ventures also indirectly include lessons on subjects of aggression, bullying, stress, anxiety, anger management, attention seeking, self-inflicted harm, stealing, hoarding, complaining, sexual explorations, decisions on sexuality and obsessive behaviour – issues that bother many girls in the home.

## Reach girls before they reach the break point

The idea is to reach girls before they reach the break point - that stage in early adolescence when things can go wrong in the lives of girls.

The transition from childhood to adulthood is difficult and confusing. Attempts are hence being made to connect these resource persons and the students through email so that these students can keep in touch with them via the home staff. The students do have access to in-house counsellors of the home and the NGO Manas offers psychological counselling, yet there are many issues that the girls still wish to talk about.

Girls' angst normally pertain to experiencing anger, handling their sexuality, feelings of sadness, inadequacies, loneliness, rejection, and social anxieties. They voice disappointments with being scolded, put down, being served food not to their liking, and the lack of hygiene and supplies within the home.

As it is not possible to offer individual psychological support to each girl, HAQ follows the process of handling and regulating their strong emotions, releasing pent up frustrations, building their ability to trust others, and drawing on their inner strength.

## Notations of volunteers: paying heed to their disquietude

When these girls talk to volunteers and resource persons about their daily pressures, small and big hurts, their achievements, and their likes and dislikes – either directly through conversations and indirectly through such therapeutic creative pursuits – they say they feel liberated.

They talk about experiencing a sense of lightness as they unburden their feelings and feel gratified that people understand their concerns and do not dismiss them as inconsequential.

Notations in volunteer diaries show the dissonance in their lives:

*"The girls carry a sense of imprisonment within themselves, and will try and test their behaviours to the utmost limits."*

*"There is a need for girls to take whatever they can get their hands on. They use it to barter and buy other things."*

*"There is a constant tug of war between the girls and the staff, and the more defiant girls break rules without care for the consequences."*

*"There is a shared sense of sadness and longing for home and family."*

*"Many girls resent being scolded and slapped for wrongdoings."*

*"Many girls display a false sense of bravado as they are overcome with a sense of helplessness – an inability to emerge from their dark situations. In order to avoid the sense of panic, they replace it with indifference or rebelliousness."*

*"Many girls are disinclined towards studies. They would rather build relationships with boyfriends. Others yearn for families whose needs they can attend to."*

## 2. Other activities that redeem girls



Activities like the annual sports days, or playing games like dog and bone, Chinese whispers, passing the parcel and *kho-kho*, magic shows, as well as visits to Bal Bhavan (where children indulge in a day of craft and jewellery making, learning calligraphy, working with jute and even learning classical dance) help them get energised, meet new people, experience the outside world, and open up to it.

*Antaksharis* (music competitions) on the other hand help the girls to bond amongst themselves.

The idea of starting a girl band is enthusing a lot of girls and did the jazz sessions conducted by a volunteer. The girls are also always very keen to learn and experiment with dance forms.

The highlights of the creative pursuits for 2014-15 have been a dance performance of girls, the annual art exhibition in collaboration with Bal Bhavan, and a fun-filled event organised by Yamaha in January 2015 to celebrate its logo - Zippy's birthday.

### 3. Art therapy

Art therapy is based on the belief that the creative process of art is life affirming. It is physically and mentally healing, acting as a bridge between the mind and body.

Through this nonverbal communication of thoughts and feelings, girls within the home explore their life experiences using a range of colours, patterns, images and subjects. They paint their feelings, even as they paint their childhood. In these exercises, they align their deepest selves with artworks.

And, like the other forms of creative pursuits, this too has been used by HAQ to encourage personal growth, self-understanding, and emotional reparation based on psychotherapy and counselling techniques.

Art therapy pushes the belief that all individuals have the capacity to express themselves creatively and that their creations are less significant than the therapeutic process involved.

The therapist's focus is not on the aesthetic merits but on the therapeutic needs of the person to express. This is because art activity can be viewed as samples of cognitive and behavioural functioning. That is what helps the girls find meaning in their experiences and understand how to deal with them.

The girls at *Nirmal Chayya* have regular interfaces with art in the form of drawing, colouring, painting (be it on paper, cloth, thread, thumbs), and designing with paper, plaster of paris, clay, flowers, leaves and block of wood or rubber and even with waste materials.

In essence, the creative pursuits that HAQ encourages are hugely therapeutic and help girls find their inner balance and equipoise. This is because these activities acknowledge the ugly, and the complicated realities in the girls' past and present lives without discounting their harshness. And, yet these very realities are used to help girls build resilience and recover from these dark circumstances by reminding them of the neglected, inner possibilities (of self-worth and self-reliance) that can help them tide them over their current conditions.







## CHAPTER FIVE

# Discarding difficult behaviours, reclaiming the self

*Ganga Kutir* to an outsider would seem like a place of infinite delight crafted especially for toddlers and children till the age of five. Young souls who like to hide and seek, to wonder and imagine, and to play outdoors and indoors as they sing and dance.

To an outsider, these children are a happy tangle of little girls and boys, who seem to find the world a happy, spacious place, and inexhaustible in its objects of interest and sources of fascination.

Yet a closer look will show that many of these children's physical, psychological, and social development is halting in comparison to normal children who live in homes with their parents.

In the absence of their mother's and/or father's reciprocal bonding (due to their death or because they have been abandoned for a variety of reasons), and in the lack of home, family and community scaffoldings, these orphaned children have no socio-cultural touchstones or reference points.

## Dealing with maladaptive behaviours

Maladaptive behaviours are hence displayed far more in this home. Behaviours that are age and culture inappropriate, and interfere with adaptive functioning. These children show a deficiency in positive thinking and regulating behaviour. It is obvious in their habitual complaining, blaming, snatching, aggression, anxiety, and pessimism. They are, for example, disconsolate when they have to part with the toys at the homes. This behaviour was so disconcerting to the home staff that they put away the toys.

Small children who have been abandoned at the *Kutir* by families where there has been overt parental conflict, family breakdown, inconsistent or unclear discipline, and hostile and rejecting relationship display far more disruptive and anti-social behaviours.

But HAQ is firm that it is essential to keep the innocence and hope of childhood alive. The smiles of children are essential. So efforts have been made from December 2014 on to return the toys to their lives. Be they regular soft toys or even cups, mugs and cloth that substitute as playmates. More fun has come in the shape of toy tents, plastic shapes to indulge in rangometry, games on swings, and water based activities. Craft activities and colouring sessions add to the bliss.

Remedying their psychological issues is happening with the gradual rebuilding of their relationships with the staff and HAQ volunteers and by making sure that they feel safe and secure in their presence.

HAQ has been able to help the staff make inroads into children's lives and gain their trust. The process of inducting 'more caregiving' and recreating a sense of bonding for children to the home staff and the volunteers (as family and the centre of support) – has been slow but rewarding.

Concurrent attempts are being made to channelise children's insecurities and mistrust into opportunities that empower their capabilities.

It must be remembered that such young children are less able than older children to protect themselves from poor treatment, stigma, or loss of rights. And damages to their life at this stage have a lifelong impact.

Paying attention to early child development – the ordered emergence of interdependent skills of sensorimotor, cognitive-language, and social-emotional functioning – is priority for HAQ. This is because this is the period during which the brain develops most rapidly, cognitive and language skills gain ground, social and emotional patterns are formed, and both risk and opportunity for change are at their highest.

HAQ's volunteers have reinvigorated *Ganga Kutir's* spaces by igniting the children's love for song and dance, and verses. It is not uncommon to see children singing lilting verses at all times of the day and night.

Says a volunteer, *"We speak the language of love to children. We try to avoid scolding or reprimanding them. This radiates positivity and reciprocity."*

## Heeding to the needs of girls who have come in conflict with law

The needs of girls who come in conflict with the law cry for attention at the home.

Though the numbers of such girls are small, there is need for gender-specific programming that offers a way to tailor juvenile justice services specifically to the needs of such girls.

They normally have a background of acute poverty, trauma, abuse, neglect, and suffer from low self-esteem, poor educational levels, a feeling of un-skilledness, and more than normal lack of career opportunities.

They also usually come from fractured, violent environments, and their disruptive activities and confrontational behaviour within the home are triggered by their backgrounds, circumstances, and built up inadequacies.

These offense patterns indicate a need for prevention and intervention programmes rather than increased restrictions. This is because as a group they are particularly in need of care and protection.



## Removing barriers to attainment

HAQ works in a sustained manner to remove barriers to their attainment. And, make them feel included and counted by addressing and assuaging negative feelings. While there is no separation of these girls (as both categories of children end up being in close contact in the same home), a focused exposure to a series of life skills enhancement initiatives, educational inputs, physical exertion activities and behaviour management (using the methods of guidance, support and target setting) has worked to erase some of the discrimination they face.

Creating safe spaces for them has been an important part of HAQ's work. It has resulted in some girls being able to forge bonds with each other, the home staff, volunteers, family and community members, being able to observe discipline, set goals for themselves, and reclaim some lost spaces.

HAQ's approach is to engage with such girls and their past histories, acknowledge the centrality of these experiences and its effects on their lives, and explore paths of potential recovery with them.

By de-escalating conflicts, bridging gaps in services to at-risk girls and simultaneously seeking to encourage resiliency factors, HAQ in the long run hopes to empower girls make a positive transition to womanhood, gain self-reliance, and reduce recidivism.

It sees the creation of programmes for this target group that focus on: accentuating a knowledge of self and others, building an increased zest and vitality for life, defenses, a sense of self-worth, empowerment to act, and a desire for more connections, as vital.

HAQ also sees a need to build on girls' self-worth by breaking gender stereotypes.

## Being cautious not to overstep personal boundaries

In sum, these activities have widened the girls practical skills needed for successful independent living, built a sense of camaraderie with them, and expanded the boundaries of engagement.

Yet HAQ is cautious not to overstep personal boundaries. Intrusions into personal spaces (bodies, thoughts, personal belongings, privacy and roles) are strictly avoided. This is because it is important not to misguide foster girls' dependence on the staff and volunteers who may come and go but instead help the children rely on the resilience of their inner strength.

The idea is also as much to educate children on learning to set boundaries to take care of themselves and let others know how to treat them. This is because children who are aware of their personal boundaries recognise the signs of the crossovers. This reduces their risk of being victimised and increases the likelihood that they tell someone what happened. They are also sensitised on how to respect others' boundaries in addition to safeguarding theirs.



## CHAPTER SIX

# Volunteers: bright lights, brilliant minds

HAQ depends on its incredible team of youth volunteers to take its work ahead at the home. They have become anchors within the home as well as role models, adding positive learning experiences in the young girls' lives.

### **Why does HAQ depend on youth volunteers and believe in their power?**

- Youth volunteers are in a position to understand children better, given the narrow age divide between them
- The incredible energy and enthusiasm the youth come with can alight children's lives with hope for the future
- Young volunteers can serve as role models and support children's transition into adulthood, lending emphasis to both their personal development and skills enhancement
- And, this is a wonderful opportunity for youth volunteers to embed their own learning and skills into the lives of children

### **What do volunteers gain from HAQ?**

- For the young volunteers, this experience could be rewarding, fun, purposeful and increase their confidence
- It could build their sensitivity to the pressing social issues around them, help them recognise the pervading societal inequities, and open their minds to issues of child rights
- It could extend flexible opportunities in terms of time and activities, and open up new avenues for learning, honing valuable job skills, and seeking a possible career in this field
- And, most important it can kindle the happiness effect. Helping others evokes happiness, as many studies demonstrate

### **HAQ looks for certain qualities in a youth volunteer. What are they?**

- While working at the home with the children volunteers need to be: flexible, empathetic, good listeners, culturally competent (to understand the children's background and set of values and also ensure that own their biases are not communicated to children), imaginative (to open children's mind to new worlds, ideas and possibilities) yet realistic (to realise that they cannot solve all problems)
- They must be able to calm down children, create opportunities for dialogue, aid children regain a sense of control over their daily lives, build competencies to strengthen their sense of resilience, autonomy and eventually recovery and learn from children
- They must be able to also regulate their own responses. Otherwise they can succumb to physical illness, emotional exhaustion, low morale and lower productivity at work. It could even create long term impacts – subtle or marked changes in personal, political, spiritual and professional outlook
- They also need the ability to unlearn a lot, and let go of misunderstood realities

## In the words of the volunteers: we have had ‘full of rich, satisfying experiences’ at *Nirmal Chayya*

**Ashwinder:**

“I have understood the essence of child psychology. I now have learnt how to be part of a child’s world. I can relate to the fears of a new entrant into the home, the stage fright of a child pushed into speaking in public, a child’s stubbornness or defiance, and also feel the enormity of feeling that is bundled into a thank you card they give me.”

**Archana Sivan:**

“I taught children English, political science, history, mathematics, Hindi and geography. I helped them with their holiday homework and strengthened their basics in the aforementioned subjects. 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 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 theater activities. And, 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. My take away from this experience is that I have evolved as a person, become a better, more tolerant and optimistic human being, and come away with strengthened time management and organisational skills.”

**Devika:**

“I was a part of the Academic Support Team and was responsible for a group of girls in the 6th and 7th grades respectively. Our focus was on mathematics and the languages. I began to realise how many of the children had a hard time coping with basic addition and subtraction. We began working on that and moving to learning of tables and multiplication. I used a book on mental math to introduce to them learnings on pattern recognition and number system. The children benefitted a great deal from our carefully planned worksheets. Our major obstacle was getting the girls together at one place and one time. Even children who are in the same class are at different levels academically as they are admitted to classes on the basis of age and not on how much they know.”

**Apoorva:**

“I worked mostly with a group of 12-14 year olds, and with children five years of age. I taught the former group multiplication (single digit multiplication and long multiplication methods), division (single digit division and long division), least common multiple, and highest common factor. While the older children helped me discover their keenness of intellect and the extreme dedication to learning, the younger children took me by surprise with their curiosity with everything around them. Also I would add that the matron in *Ganga Kutir* is a great source of inspiration for me. She is the calmest and most composed person I have seen. She treats the 20 odd toddlers as her own kids. Her patience with them is commendable. She taught me how to keep my head and smile on even when I am irritated.”

**Kavya Khanna:**

“I was asked to take care of the art programme along with another intern. The main task that was allotted to me was to redecorate *Ganga Kutir* and other areas of the home. And also to engage the girls living there in art camps, to divert their minds and push them towards creative expressions of their feelings. This was done through art and craft. Our main resources were waste or reusable materials. It was difficult as we were allotted limited material, the girls would take away the materials, others made a lot of noise and got easily distracted, and being creative on a daily basis was harder than I expected it to be. It required me to be at the top of my game on a daily basis so that I could help the others divert their minds.”

**Dyuti Khukle:** “The experience of volunteering has made me more effective in advocating for the rights of children in poverty. By working alongside children who have been dealt with less fair hands, I have learnt about the challenges they face. We can help them better if we know better. This can help me make a difference – mostly afterward. I don’t know what impact I have made on children, but they have enabled me to realise my potential.”

**Nisha and Namita:** “We started to show children the need to go beyond physical appearance, and respect inner attributes. Henna, a child whose arms have been amputated and mentally challenged, and Usha, who is visually impaired, spoke of how they are discriminated and discounted. We then asked the children sitting around to narrate their perceptions of disability. During these discussions, each of the girls was urged to say two things they like about these two girls. This exercise made the two girls elated and feel included.

We were also involved in teaching girls to sew. Many girls were unsure about making patterns and design and took the help of other girls. Some other girls were brilliant in their workmanship.”





HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, formed in 1998, works towards the recognition, promotion and protection of rights of all children. It aims at contributing to the building of an environment where every child's rights are recognised and promoted without discrimination and in an integrated manner. HAQ believes that child rights and children's concerns have to be mainstreamed into all developmental planning and action and must also become a core development indicator.

To carry forward this mandate, HAQ undertakes research and documentation and is actively engaged in public education and advocacy. In India, HAQ pioneered the Budget for Children analysis in 2001. Over the years, it has developed skills for quick and incisive scanning of law and policy documents and commenting on them. It works with existing networks, builds alliances and partnerships with other actors/ stakeholders such as the bureaucrats, parliamentarians, judges and lawyers, police and media.

HAQ seeks to serve as a resource and support base for individuals and groups dealing with children at every level. It not only provides information and referral services but also undertakes training and capacity building for all those working with children or on issues concerning them, and for the children themselves.

HAQ works on children and governance, violence and abuse of children, child trafficking and juvenile justice. It provides legal support to children in need, particularly those who are victims of abuse and exploitation or are in conflict with the law.

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