

Moving on with Education

The Mobile Learning Center Initiative



Save the Children®



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FOREWORD



The National Policy for Children 2013 reaffirms that every child is unique and a supremely important national asset. This national asset however would depreciate without regular maintenance and upkeep. For protection of this asset the State stands committed to *'safeguard, inform, include, support and empower all children'*. While India has taken large strides, there still remain pockets where this national commitment has yet to be redeemed. A large percentage of this untouched group comprise children in difficult circumstances including street children, children with disabilities, children from marginalised and disadvantaged communities, and child victims.

Save the Children is part of the national commitment to reach out to every child and Mobile Learning Center (MLC) project is a stride towards that direction. The MLC takes education and child protection to the door step of such children through what is popularly known as the Blue Bus. The paradigm shifts from a school waiting for children to a school reaching the child. Suddenly a boy generally found loitering in a slum colony or a little girl cloistered at home with household chores are seen with books and a teacher at the MLC. With this comes hope, knowledge, friends and dreams.

In this journey we have been fortunate to have as our partner Itouchu Corporation, who has provided resources, volunteers and ideas for making MLC the success that it has been.

Children are humankind's greatest asset, while they may be one third of our present, they are all of our future.

Thomas Chandy - CEO, Save the Children



Save the Children works in 120 countries globally and across 17 states in India for children's rights - to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. It is determined to build a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. We deliver immediate and lasting improvement to children's lives worldwide.

Save the Children works for :

A world which respects and values each child.

A world which listens to children and learns.

A world where all children have hope and opportunity.

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Photo: Mayank Soni/ Photographer



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Project Performance Overview

When John Kenneth Galbriath patronisingly described India as a '*functioning anarchy*', he well could have specifically meant Mumbai. The city signifies the best and the worst the nation has to offer. Its best is in terms of its resilience, its innovation and its world view. The worst gets embodied in its indifference and impersonality. Of the things Mumbai turns its head away from is the thousands of children in difficult circumstances living on her pavements, alleyways, slums and railway stations.

As per the 2004-05 survey carried out by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in Mumbai it was found that 78,000 children did not attend school. Nearly 50% of the children were from just five wards, including M-East (Govandi/Mankhurd), K-East (Andheri-East) and H (Bandra). The issue is pressing and a risk that the promise made by the nation that every child will be in school might never be redeemed.

1. Mobile Learning Centre Project

Save the Children and ITOCHU Japan together launched a Mobile Learning Centre targeting out of school children around the Deonar dumping ground area in Mumbai. The bus mounted classroom has helped children to reconnect with the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) schools in the vicinity through non – formal education to help bridge the learning gap and cope with the curriculum at school. The project has been supported for a period of two years (Nov 2013 – Oct 2015).

2. Project Area

The MLC project is run in the 'M' East ward. The ward has a slum population of 77.5 percent and a Human Development Index of 0.05. M East ward ranked lowest in the Mumbai Human Development Report 2009. M East ward comprises of 256 slum settlements and 13 large resettlement colonies.

PARAMETERS	MUMBAI CITY	M/EAST WARD
Literacy Rate	89.2%	66%
Employment Rate	17.8%	51.8%
Median Income	Rs 20,000	Rs 8,000

Baseline Assessment in Project Area

- Of all the children between 3-5 years, only 54% attend preschool.
- Educational enrolment in schools is 92 %.
- 37 % of 15-18 year olds were found to be out of school, indicating problem in retention of students in schools.
- Highest household borrowing and spending of savings is on education related expenses.
- Muslims have a lower enrolment rate compared to other religious groups.
- While Trombay's Cheeta camp reports highest enrolment rates in schooling and higher education, enrolment rates for Baigan and Govandi are the lowest.

Source: TISS Baseline Survey of M-East Ward, 2011

3. Interventions Strategy

The project has four key drivers:

i. Accelerated learning for Out of School Children :

To create access to education at the doorsteps of 1,200 hard-to-reach and out-of-school children (in the age group of 3-14 years) per year and engage them in learning.

ii. Child Protection: To protect and prevent vulnerable children from being forced into exploitative labour through engaging with communities, parents, employers and municipal government and increasing their awareness of children's right to education.

iii. Mainstreaming of Out of School Children: To ensure the gradual withdrawal of 100 (in year one) – 200 (in year two) children from their current engagement in unsafe and exploitative work by integrating them into formal education.

iv. Informing Policy: To design, develop and advocate for municipal government and other key stakeholders to take up a replicable model of education for hard-to-reach children, across cities which have a high concentration of street and working children in the country

4. Achievements of the MLC Project

The project progress span from November 2013 to August 2015

Objective 1: Accelerated Learning For Out of School Children

Activity 1.1: Conduct a baseline of hard to reach working children across ten squatter settlements, railway station market places and bus stands.

A baseline survey was done in the project area. It had a qualitative and a quantitative component. For qualitative study the information was sought from children and their families using a structured interview schedule which was administered through a door to door household survey. The qualitative component

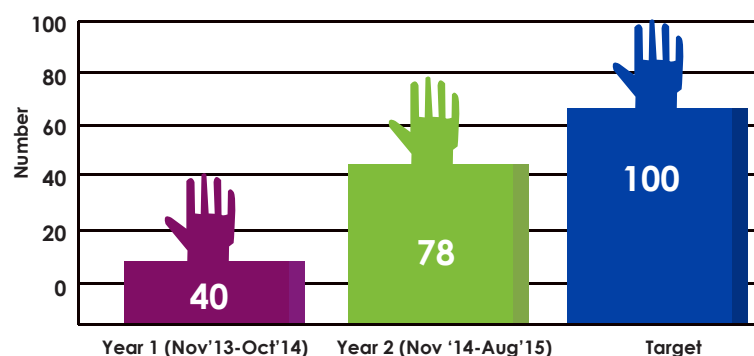
comprised focus group discussions (FGD) with children (both going to school and dropouts) as well as their parents. In the quantitative survey, information of 1282 children was collected. The survey sample was selected from two areas - Nirankari Nagar and Sanjay Nagar II in Shivaji Nagar, Govandi.

Activity 1.2: Identify 100 volunteers of students from university and social work colleges to help teach in the Mobile Learning Centres.

The project has been able to get into its fold 118 volunteers against a target of 100 for the project period. Year 1 achievement was 40 and year 2 is 78. Participating institutions include Department of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work, IGNOU and other individual colleges. The volunteers conducted activities on child rights, took remedial classes (math, science, Marathi, Urdu, English basics), storytelling, and street plays etc. Employees from ITOCHU, our project partner, also volunteered.

**118%
of target
achieved**

Fig1: Volunteers enrolled



Activity 1.3: Orientation of the volunteers on a quarterly basis, on the reasons and methodology for teaching and interacting with working children

All volunteers were oriented on Save the Children's child safeguarding policy, code of conduct and worked in consultation with the educators for preparing the session plans.

Activity 1.4: Procure, equip and brand one mobile unit and staff appropriately.

The project has procured a bus which has been refurbished into a mobile learning centre. The bus is a child friendly space with requisite audio visual material, books and seating spaces. The interiors are brightly coloured.

**100%
of target
achieved**

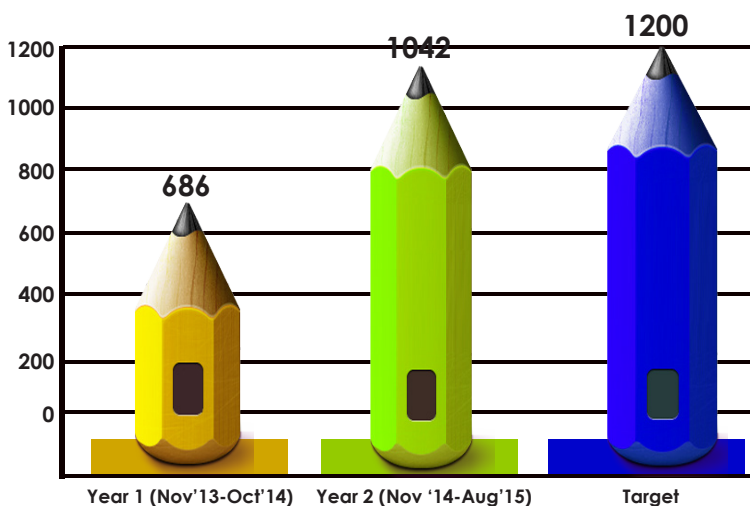
Activity 1.5: Introduce early reading & writing to 1,200 children (600 children per year) through the mobile unit and link children below 14 years to centres for transitional education with a view to being mainstreamed into formal schools.

The project has delivered much above the set targets for transitional and accelerated learning. 1728 children have benefitted from MLC against the target of 1200 children.

This is an indicator of extensive field presence, engaging teaching methodology and conducive environment at MLC.

**114%
of target
achieved**

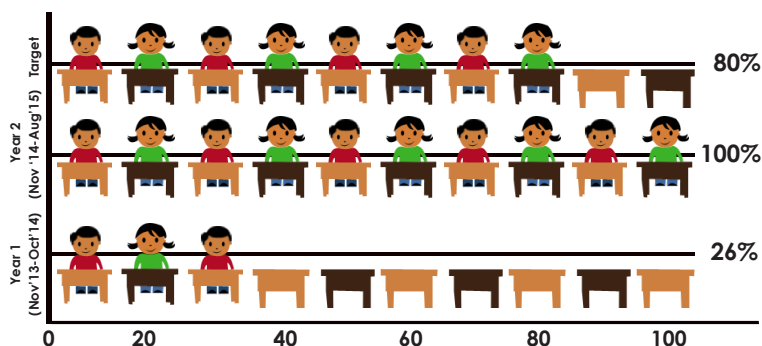
Fig 2: Enrollment in transitional education



The project has not only brought children to the MLC; it has also succeeded in retaining them. In Year 1 the attendance rate was 26%, in the Year 2 the same im-

proved to 100%. as against a target of 80%. As the MLC project took roots in the community, the attendance rose.

Fig 3: Attendance of enrolled students in MLC



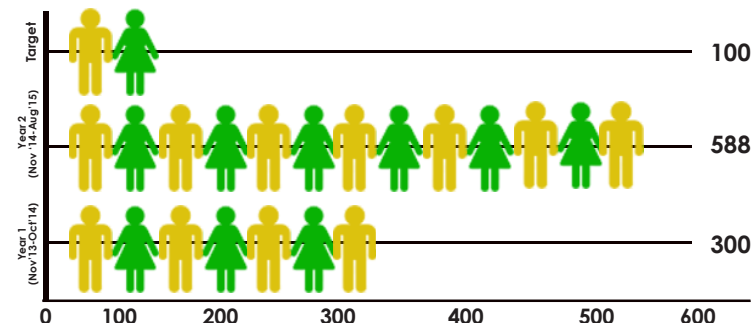
Objective 2: Child Protection

Activity 2.1: Train 5-10 children's group members per year as 'Change Makers' to protect themselves and their peers from being harassed by police or drawn into substance abuse, through life-skills and training.

MLC has created children's groups who advocate the importance of personal safety amongst their peers. These groups advise children in the project area to carry ID in person; taking food from strangers, knowing where to report child abuse etc. The number of children reached by the project is 588 against the target of 100 children.

**588%
of target
achieved**

Fig 4 : Volunteers enrolled

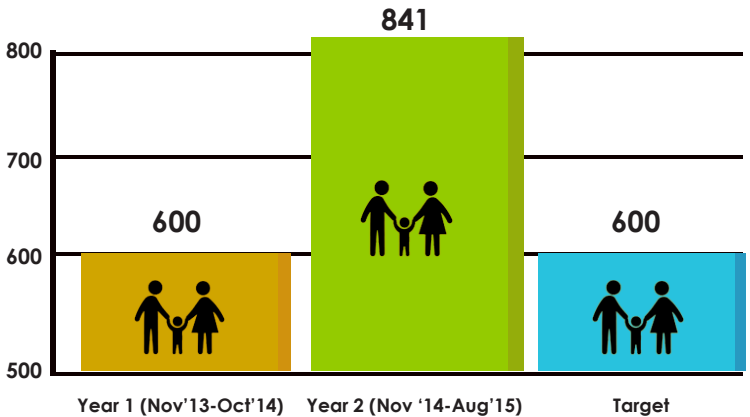


Activity 2.2: Counsel the families of approximately 600 children (300 children per year) for enrolment in Anganwadi Centres/ school.

The baseline figures indicated that only 53% of the children in 3-5 age group attended pre-school. It was the conscious decision of the project to increase the AWC enrolment through sensitizing families on importance of preschool. 1441 families were counselled against the target of 600. Door to door visits were conducted by MLC volunteers along with the Anganwadi Workers

**240%
of target
achieved**

Fig 5 : Families counselled towards AWC

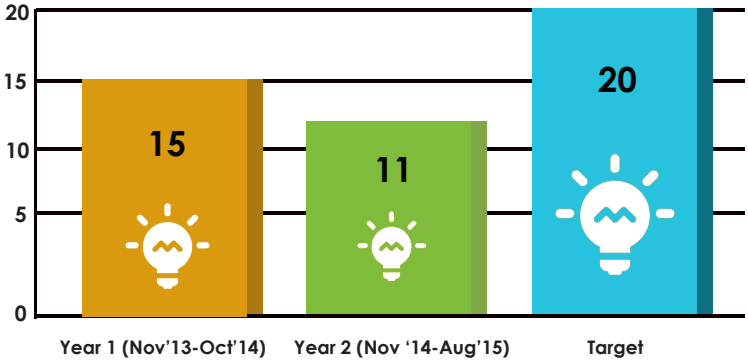


Activity 2.3: Raise awareness amongst community members on the issues of working children,through holding events and consultations.

Taking Right to Education provisions to the children in difficult circumstances is one of the major objectives of the project. Concurrent with direct intervention it is critical that the community and employers of children be sensitized about the guarantee under the law that every child has the right to receive education. Of the target of holding 20 sensitization activities, the project organised 23 street plays and 3 puppet workshops.

**115%
of target
achieved**

Fig 6 : Sensitization activities for employers



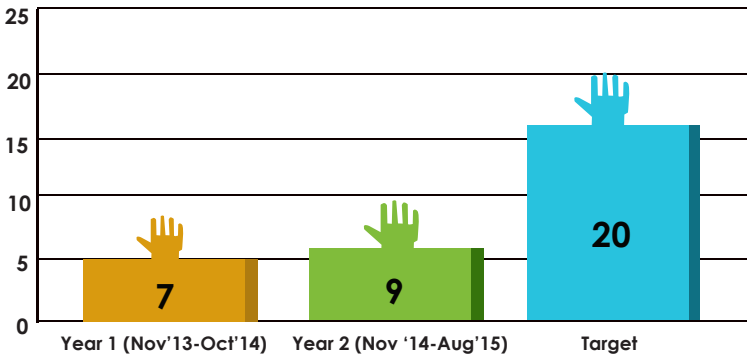
Activity 2.4: Engage with local high schools and colleges to recruit volunteers who help children to study and to become role models for children.

The project encouraged responsible action from youth by giving college students opportunity to teach out of school children. 16 teacher- volunteers were engaged in teaching children in the project area. Participating institutions included Jaffri School, American School of Bombay, Jamnabai School, Niramala Niketan College of Social Work, Wilson College and Yashwantrao Chavan Open University.

**80%
of target
achieved**

The volunteers conducted activities with the children such as drawing, art and craft, life skill activities, skits on child protection, developing leadership skills, counselling and helping in academic studies.

Fig 7: Teacher-volunteers engaged

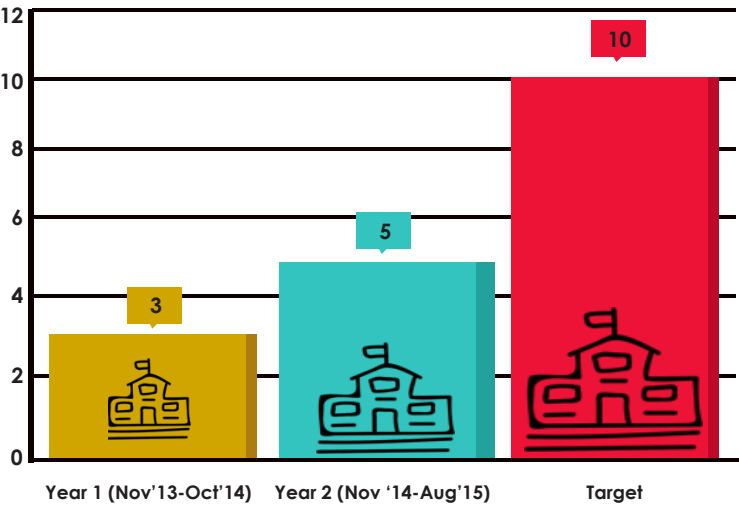


Activity 2.5: Support identified children and their families to access institutions for rehabilitation protection (depending on cases)

This primarily entails identification of special children and making arrangements for such children to be enrolled in state run special schools. Till date 8 such children have been enrolled.

80%
of target
achieved

Fig 8: Special children mainstreamed

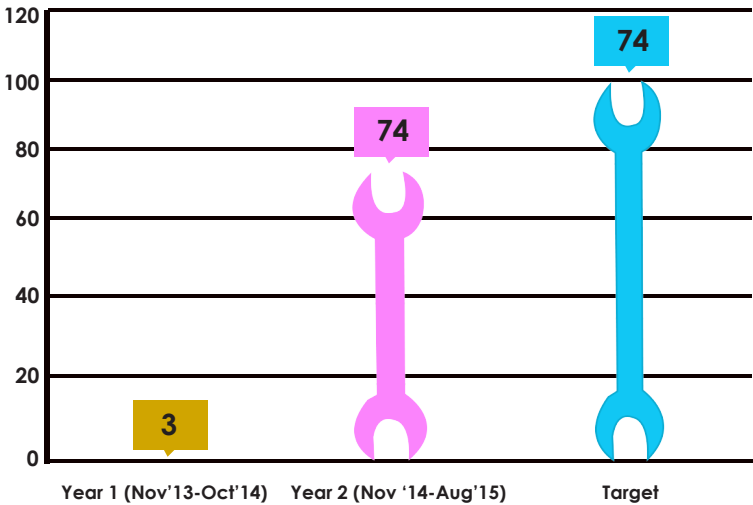


Activity 2.6: Identify work places (shops, slum communities, households, bus terminals, etc) of working children and support employers to make these work places safe.

The Child Labour (Protection & Regulation) Act 1986 mandates health and safety of children at the workplace. Under the project, workshops have been organised for employers and parents on need to make workplace safer and importance of education for children. Street plays and distribution of pamphlets also formed part of the sensitization effort. The project has set the target for 100 employer engagement of which 74 employers could be engaged.

74%
of target
achieved

Fig 9: Employer engagement

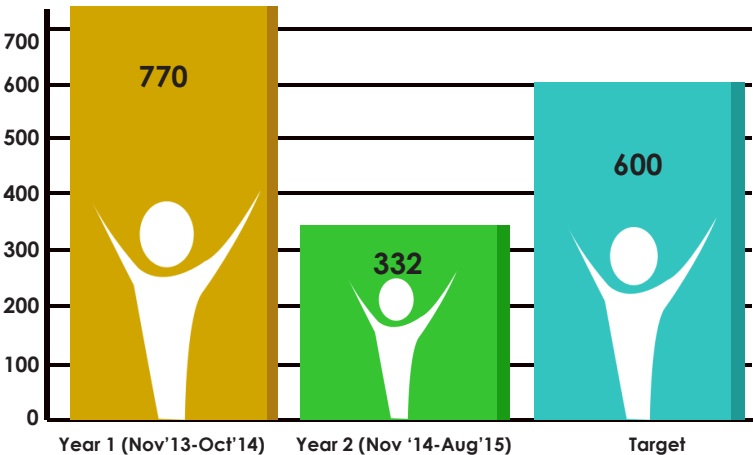


Activity 2.7: Support 20 Anganwadi centres (AWC) and parents in enrolment of 600 children (300 children per year) to AWCs/ schools.

The project made a significant push for enrolment in Anganwadies. Against the target of enrolling 600 children the project achieved enrolment of 1102 children. Getting children into AWC is a significant step in catching them young for mainstreaming in formal education system.

184%
of target
achieved

Fig 10: Enrollment of children in AWC



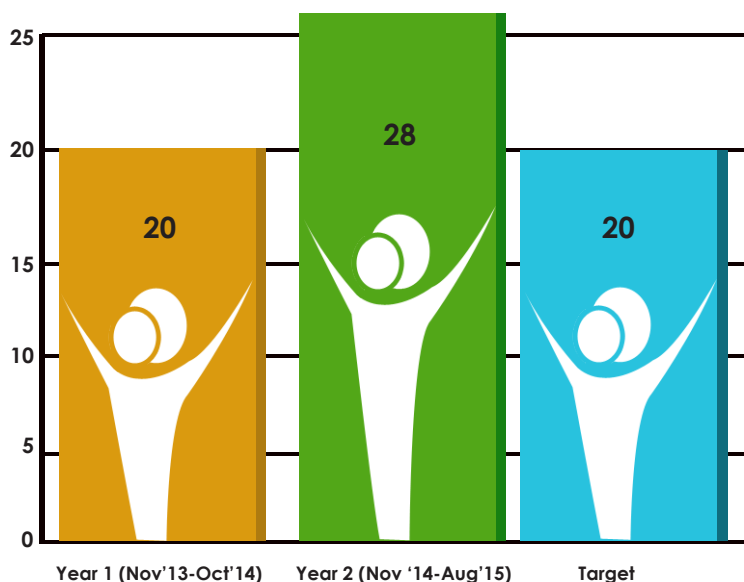
Activity 2.8: Sensitize 20 Anganwadi workers and education workers.

It is critical to retain 3-5 age group children in AWC. The Anganwadi workers are well positioned to make the AWC engaging for the children and also push for higher enrolment.

To provide the required impetus, the project held 4 KSA (knowledge, skills and attitude) workshops for Anganwadi workers. 48 Anganwadi workers were covered through these workshops against a target of 20 workers.

**240%
of target
achieved**

Fig 11: Number of Anganwadi workers who attended workshops.



Objective 3: Mainstreaming Out of School Children

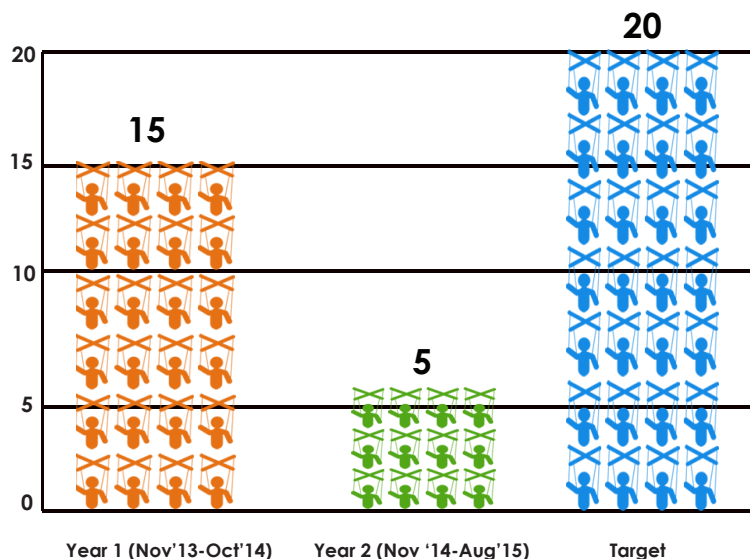
Activity 3.1: Engage 20 settlements (10 per year) with puppet shows and street plays awareness on the right to education of street and working children.

To mainstream the thought process into the community that education for children is critical for their future, a number of events like street plays and puppet shows were organised.

**100%
of target
achieved**

Issues pertaining to Right to Education, personal health and hygiene and back to school initiatives etc were highlighted. Of the targeted 20 settlements, all targeted settlements were covered by the project for sensitization.

Fig 12 : Settlements sensitized on RTE



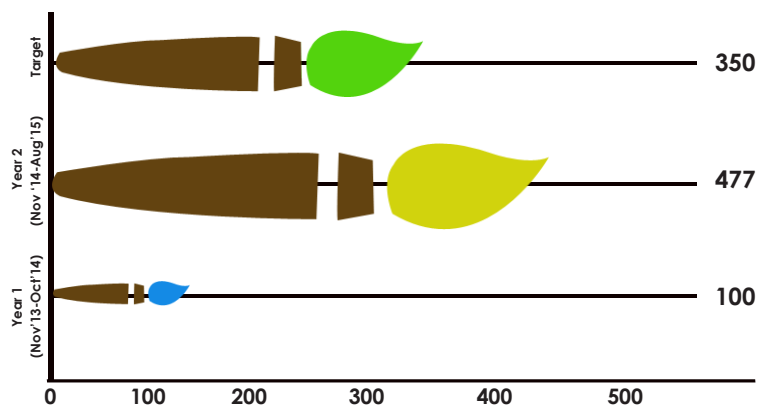
Activity 3.2: Organise interest based activities, such as painting/drawing events to motivate the children and ensure their interest in the entire process.

To get the children positively inclined towards education and schooling, the project has organised a number of activity based initiatives like painting and drawing events for children.

Topics included painting my ideal colony, dream school etc. To sensitize children they were also asked to draw children begging on the streets, working children etc, which was followed up by the educators explaining the issues of child labour and how it can be prevented. Of the targeted 350 children to be covered by the project, 577 children have been covered. Such events create a conducive social ecology for education/learning to thrive.

**164%
of target
achieved**

Fig 13: Extra curricular activities organised

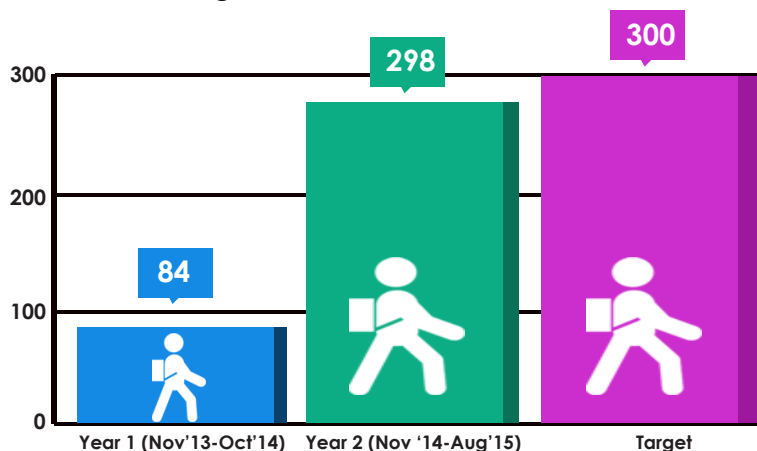


Activity 3.3: Mainstream 100 (year one) - 200 (year two) out of school children into formal schools.

The flagship interventions of the project is to get out of school children into formal schooling. This is in conjunction with the spirit of the Right to Education Act which envisages that no child should be out of school. Project achieves this through transition and accelerated learning at its MLC and assist parents to negotiate with the municipal schools for admitting their child. Under the project 382 children were admitted into the formal school education system against the target of 300 admissions.

112% of target achieved

Fig 14: Children mainstreamed



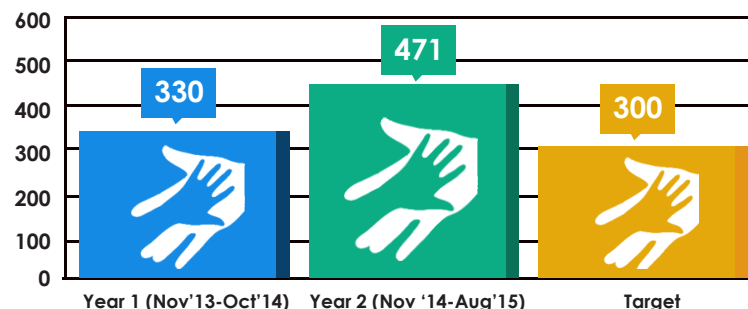
It is not enough to get out of school children into schools, it is equally important that such children become proficient in grade specific reading, writing and numeracy skills. Of the children mainstreamed children almost the entire batch showed improvement in 3R proficiency which is much higher than the target of 50%.

Activity 3.4: Impart life skills education to 300 children.

Other than scholastic proficiency, MLC also imparts skills which are critical for full participation in everyday life which include thinking and emotional skills. 801 children have been covered against the target of 300 children.

374% of target achieved

Fig 15: Children Receiving Life Skills.



Objective 4: Inform Policy

Activity 4.1: Conduct two community led campaigns/workshops on violence against working children and education of working children at the municipal ward level.

Two Community led workshops were conducted where authorities from education department, 48 teachers and around 86 community members participated. In the workshop community members decided that girls will Travel to school in groups to avoid eve teasing. Workshop deliberations also included issues pertaining to working children.

Activity 4.2: Conduct 2 workshops (1 per year) with government officials, school teachers, parents and media to raise awareness of the model followed by the project and increase understanding of its replicability.

On 3rd September 15, Save the Children, Maharashtra, team and Assistant Municipal Commissioner, M-East Ward (Mumbai) organized a multi-stakeholders engagement meeting at Shivaji Nagar School No 2, M-East Ward, Mumbai. The Purpose of the workshop was to prepare a joint 'Plan Of Action' for addressing the issue of the large number of school drop-outs in M-East Ward. Ms Sandhya Krishnan, State Programme Manager, Mr. V P Raman, Country Head (Administration), Itochu India Pvt. Ltd., Mr. Hiko-ri Mori, Vice President (Administration and Finance), Itochu India Pvt. Ltd., Mr. Kiran Dighavkar, Asst. Commissioner, M-East Ward, MCGM, Mr Rais Shaikh, Local Corporator, M-East Ward, Mr Vani, Education Officer, M-East Ward, MCGM, parents and teachers attended the workshop. The contribution of MLC initiative in making visible change was acknowledged by the participants.

Activity 4.3: Develop and implement a tracking system to track the progress of the beneficiaries.

MLC project has developed a robust tracking and monitoring mechanism which enables project managers to have a day to day update on the project activities. This has helped in making course corrections as the project unfolded both at strategic and implementation levels. The tracking system has helped in project assessment, keep track of input, process and output indicators and helped educators and counsellors to provide referral services for children in difficult circumstances.

Activity 4.4: Develop report on project outcome, best practice and lesson learned and use the information for advocacy to the government.

'Moving On With Education' a case story booklet

published highlights the project performance and documents 14 success stories.

Activity 4.5: Share project outcome, best practice (Case studies) and lesson learned with INGOs and NGOs, to jointly advocate to the government at state level.

At the project level we have conducted meetings with the local NGO's (Apnalaya, Karunya trust, Pratham and Vision rescue) and shared out best practices during the implementation phase. The project documentation will be shared widely amongst media and development practitioners for dissemination of project learnings.

We started this chapter with the term '*functioning anarchy*', to describe Mumbai. As the project progressed we did see hope. We got extraordinary support from city's citizens, public servants, community leaders, volunteers and the beneficiaries themselves. In these two years we have been able to put a significant number of out of school children back into formal education, been able to upgrade the priority of education in family decision making, sensitized public institutions like schools and AWC to be in sync with RTE obligations and created a facility in the project area where education is available on demand. With each child we are able to put back into school, we believe it to be a reinforcement for a stronger India. For Mumbai to cross from '*functioning anarchy*' to a '*functioning algorithm*', it takes a few thoughts for change!





A close-up portrait of a young boy with dark skin and short, dark hair. He is smiling warmly at the camera, showing his teeth. He is holding a thick, light-colored wooden stick with both hands, positioned horizontally in front of his chest. He is wearing a white tank top. The background is a blurred green corrugated metal wall. The lighting is natural, highlighting his face.

Photo: Rupali Goswami/ Save the Children

Stories From the Field



Story 01 Getting Every Child to School, Even if it is One at a Time

“
Education is a better safeguard of
liberty than a standing army.”
”

Edward Everett



I felt amazed to step inside school. I always used to think that we cannot afford school. I still can't believe that I have got admission.

Wajida

Wajida, Shabir, Aarifa and the MLC Blue Bus have something in common. All the four started attending school together. The three children were the part of the inaugural batch of first time learners to the Save the Children Mobile Learning Center (Blue Bus) at M-East ward.

Khurshida and her husband, Mohammed Afzal, hail from Jodhpur in Rajasthan. They came to Mumbai six years ago in search of work. Mohammed managed to fetch a job in a furniture shop, whereas Khurshida remained a homemaker. Their three children, Wajida (10), Shabir (12) and Aarifa (11) were studying at a Madrasa (religious school) in Rajasthan. However, after reaching Mumbai, the family could not enrol them in school due to want of required identity documentation.

Wajida, Shabir and Arifa would be seen loitering around the whole day, when they should ideally be studying their lessons in a school. The national effort towards universalizing education in the country was bypassing these three children.

Things turned for the better when Save the Children's MLC Blue Bus project started in M-East Ward slum pockets. The MLC volunteers identified Wajida, Shabir, Aarifa to be out of school. Kurshida, mother of the children, told us how daunting it was to traverse the school admission red tape. MLC decided to facilitate the process.

These children have never ever got any formal education. Mainstreaming them to formal education meant getting them up to speed with their grade specific learning levels through a bridge course. The children did not disappoint, they were eager and fast learners.

It was soon time for the children to be inducted into the formal education system. The MLC volunteers brokered the admission process. This meant citing the relevant sections of the Right to Education Act to the school authorities which has made it mandatory for the schools to provide admission to every child to his/her age specific grade.

Today Wajida is in fourth, Shabir in sixth and Aarifa in fifth grade respectively. Khurshida came down to the MLC center to personally thank the coordinator. As she thanked, we could see tears of joy trickle from the corner of her eyes. The tears were the receipt of an initiative well delivered.



Story 02

Sifa Gets a Head Start

“

The problem is not how to wipe out the differences but how to unite with the differences intact. ”

Rabindranath Tagore



It's tough to find a safe place where i can leave my child to learn basic life skills. Today, I feel MLC is one of the safest places where I find my child is not only smiling or happy but also learning.

Sifa's Mother

Sifa is a five year old child with special needs. She like any other normal child smiles, claps, observes, explores and has doting parents. However her ability to learn new skills is slower than other children. Such children require special schools.

However despite their wish Sifa's parents could ill afford sending her to a special school. No such special school is located in the vicinity of Adarshnagar area in Baiganwadi locality, Govandi where the family lives. Any alternative arrangement was beyond the means of the family which struggled to keep the hearth burning.

Sifa's innocent smiles would bring tears to her mother's eyes. Will she never get an opportunity to play with other children, sing songs, listen to stories from a teacher or have her own school bag? Will Sifa ever have a normal childhood and more importantly how will the little girl manage as she grew older? These thoughts haunted Sifa's mother.

Experts advise that if a child is a slow learner, he/she simply has to start earlier. In case of Sifa the time was running out. It was time for Sifa to be introduced to cognitive, social, language, motor and self-help skills. The question was who and where. India guarantees that every child including those with special needs have Right to Education. We as a collective were failing Sifa.

Hope came when the MLC volunteers during their d-

oor to door survey identified Sifa to be out of school. The project team held information and counselling session as how the family and MLC could work together in bringing Sifa into an inclusive learning environment.

Sifa started to attend the MLC Blue Bus. The colourful interiors, the hustle of children and welcoming teachers had Sifa beaming. Now every morning Sifa can be seen viewing the audio-visual films and pouring over colourful children books kept in the Blue Bus.

As Sifa learns at her own pace in the Blue Bus, it can be expected that she will one day be going to a special school for more specialised instructions from trained educators. Till that happens Sifa is with her Blue Bus friends. For the MLC team there is so much joy that a simple smile from Sifa brings.





Story 03

Special Child, Special Effort

“

There is a plan and a purpose, a value to every life, no matter what its location, age, gender or disability. ”

Sharron Angle



I feel good when I come to our Blue Bus. My teacher has taught me some discipline. Now I manage other children in the bus with proper sitting arrangement and keep silence during story telling session.

Salimuddin

Salimuddin would every morning wave goodbye to his six siblings, who would leave for either the balwadi or municipal school. However Salimuddin himself had nowhere to go.

Salimuddin is a child with special needs. His IQ of 50-70 suggests mild retardation. With his condition, he can learn academic skills up to 6th grade of formal schooling and function adequately in the society. However to achieve this, training during the learning years is very crucial.

Salimuddin lives with his family in the slum pocket at Shivajinagar, Govandi. It is not that Salimuddin never attended school, but his slow learning abilities would get him regular rebukes from the teacher and taunts from his classmates. The insensitivity of the formal education system made Salimuddin quit the local municipal school.

When the MLC project started his family brought him to the Blue Bus. The MLC coordinator identified his needs for specialised guidance and located a special school at Kurla about 30 minutes travel time from Govandi, where Salimuddin stays.

The distance meant a dedicated arrangement for transport for Salimuddin from Govandi to Kurla and back. His parents expressed concern on their ability to manage and afford such an arrangement. The MLC coordinators made repeated attempts to convince the parents that while Salimuddin might be a

slow learner he was a keen learner. She stressed that early intervention will help integrate Salimuddin into mainstream society and make him independent in his later life. The parents reluctantly agreed to take Salimuddin to the Kurla school.

However during a follow up visit to Salimuddin's house we found he had dropped out again. His mother expressed her inability to take Salimuddin to school every day, given she had her other six children to look after. MLC coordinator was not ready to give up and the extended counselling sessions started again.

The effort has paid off, and Salimuddin now attends the Kurla School regularly. And whenever he gets a chance he is at the Blue Bus, narrating to the coordinator what all new things he has learned at his special school. His speech has shown a remarkable improvement and he is a much confident child.





Story 04

It Had to be Now or Never

“

Ambition is the path to success. Persistence is the vehicle you arrive in.”

Bill Bradley



I still can't believe that I am back in school. I always wanted to go to school with my friends. I love to wear my uniform because it gives me an identity that I am a student like many others.

Hadunissa

Hadunnisa is part of the uncomfortable story of millions of girls in our country who drop out of school every year to help with domestic work at home.

Hadunnisa was a good and diligent student and wished to be a teacher when she grew up. She was a student of IV standard at Rafinanagar BMC School when her mother died. Her world and her ambition came crashing down. The entire responsibility of looking after the household fell on Hadunnisa and she was forced to quit school. Hadunissa has four elder brothers and her father works as a driver in the local municipality. The family lives in the Babanagar slum pocket in M-East Ward.

At home Hadunissa would do the entire domestic chores. Whatever little time she could spare from household work was spent in learning Urdu. Her favourite subjects- history and mathematics would beckon her. School was now just a memory to be treasured and not experienced. Hadunissa would feel sad, but she knew there was no option. Given the circumstances education for Hadunissa was not a right, but a luxury.

Hadunissa was resigned to her fate. It had been one year since her mother had died. It was around this time that the MLC counsellor met her and discussed about the possibility of her continuing education. Hadunissa was ever so willing to restart her education, but expressed her doubts regarding the possibility given her family circumstances. It seemed to be a

dead end.

The project counsellor persisted and made repeated visits to convince Hadunissa's father to send her to the MLC. Counselling took time, but the effort paid, and Hadunissa started attending the MLC. There was a one year gap by the time she was introduced to books again. The MLC helped bridge the learning gap and got her up to steam with the year lost. Soon the MLC counsellor managed something which few months back seemed impossible, they got Hadunissa mainstreamed into the formal education system by getting her admitted to standard V of the same school from where she had dropped out.

Many years from now, when you come across a first rate teacher teaching at a school, it could well be Hadunissa. MLC would have played a small part.



Story 05

Ishtiyaakh Personifies His Name

“

*Full many a flower is born to blush
unseen, And waste its sweetness on
the desert air. ”*

Thomas Gray



Blue Bus didi helped me in getting the admission done. I feel happy as I have also started to go to school.

Ishtiyaakh

Ishtiyaakh in Arabic means longing or craving, and that is what characterizes the 14 year old rag picker Ishtiyaakh Badre Alam Ansari. Ishtiyaakh while sorting garbage at the dumping ground every morning would watch children smartly dressed in their school uniforms going to school. He felt a longing to join them, but his family circumstances had willed otherwise. Ishtiyaakh would question “why not me?”

Family circumstances for Ishtiyaakh turned for the worst when his father in their native Uttar Pradesh remarried and deserted Ishtiyaakh's mother and his siblings. Suddenly a relatively well off family was on the streets, with no livelihood option. Ishtiyaakh's mother along with her children migrated to Mumbai and settled in the Rafinagar locality of the Shivajinagar slum. The only work the family could muster was rag picking at the nearby dumping ground. For Ishtiyaakh it was a tough trade off- going to school meant economic hardships at home. Before coming to Mumbai Ishtiyaakh used to go to school but not anymore.

It was during door to door survey that MLC educators identified Ishtiyaakh to be out of school child. The MLC counsellor got in touch with his mother. Ishtiyaakh's mother was very forthcoming but the specter of poverty stared at the family with menacing eyes. The counsellor worked on a via media, she suggested that Ishtiyaakh may attend MLC after his daily rag picking work was over.

MLC was ready to be flexible to accommodate Ishti-

aakh. This middle path was probably the most suitable under the circumstances. Ishtiyaakh started to come to the Blue Bus. The colorful interiors, books and audio visual material brought colour to the child's drab world of the dumping ground. The MLC educators put in the effort required to get Ishtiyaakh school ready. There was lot of catching up to do and Ishtiyaakh did not disappoint.

In next 6 months the MLC educators were able to mainstream Ishtiyaakh into the formal school system. Ishtiyaakh now studies in the local municipal school and also does his daily rag picking rounds after school hours to help his family financially. He always seems to find time to visit the Blue Bus for it is from here that the journey of challenging destiny started.



Story 06

I Will Fight for My Children because They Can't

“

Storm Makes Trees Take Deeper Roots. ”

Dolly Parton



I felt the confidence in putting my children back in school due to the MLC educator who was always behind me. She directed me how to go about it. Otherwise getting admissions in school would have been a dream only .

Gulnaaz

Gulnaaz Bano told us “I will fight for my children because they can’t”. Her husband deserted her and her two children some time back. Since then Gulnaaz along with her children, Shaliya (6) and Awaiez (9) shifted to the slum pocket in Padma Nagar, Govandi into a rented hutment. The feisty mother would work from dawn to dusk as a domestic help which she coupled with embroidery work to meet the needs of her family. Never did it ever cross her mind to get her children to work. Instead she wanted to ensure that her two children went to the nearby municipal school and got education.

However the school refused admission citing that they had no vacant seats for the two children despite the Right to Education Act enshrining that no child can be refused admission. The intent of the State in this case was not translating to a school admission for Gulnaaz’s children.

For about nine months Gulnaz would make repeated rounds to the school, requesting for her children to be admitted. This would many a times mean sacrificing the day’s wage. It was during one of her rounds to the municipal school that MLC counsellor met Gulnaaz. The zeal of this woman to get her children educated despite very precarious financial condition of the household was indeed inspiring.

The MLC educator swung into action and met the principal. The relevant sections of the Right to Education Act were quoted and it was emphasized that un-

der the law of the land the school was obligated to provide admission to Shaliya and Awaiez. The Sanjay Nagar BMC school had no choice and Shaliya and Awaiez were admitted to I and III standard respectively.

Something which Gulnaaz had been striving for last nine months came to fruition with a little help from the MLC. It is said if you persist long enough you will win, Gulnaaz personifies that. Gulnaaz asked us “hum tumhe kya dein” (what can I give you), we replied “aap hamey dua dein” (give us your blessings).



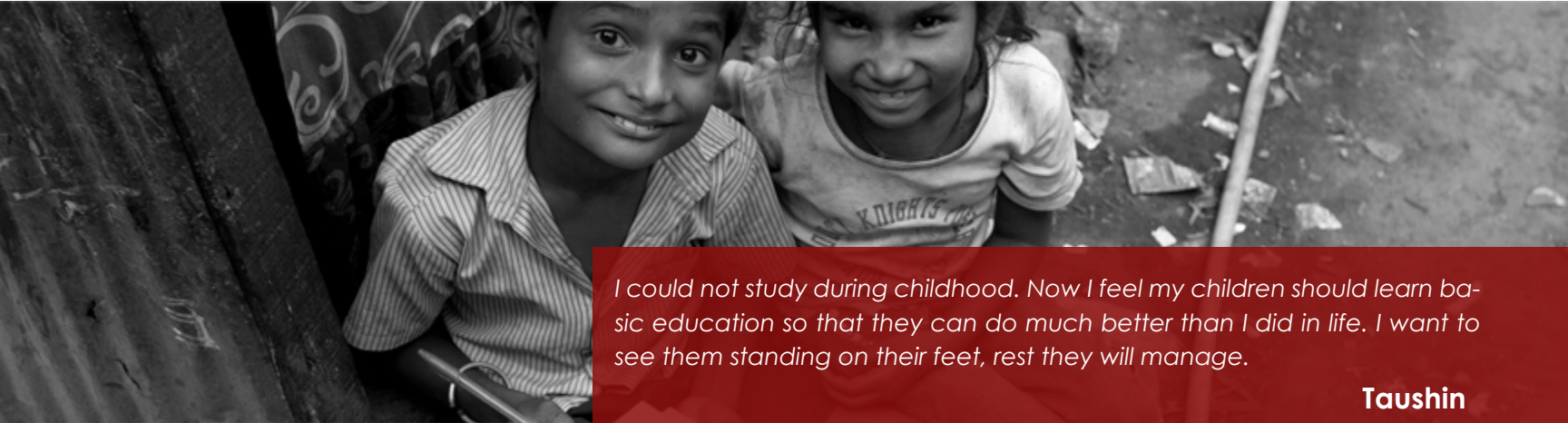
Story 07

MLC and Tuashin Stitch A Better Tomorrow

“

You have to dream before your dreams can come true.”

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam



I could not study during childhood. Now I feel my children should learn basic education so that they can do much better than I did in life. I want to see them standing on their feet, rest they will manage.

Taushin

Taushin Khan has not had an easy life, there had been struggles and disappointments. What kept him going was the hope for a better future for his children. Twenty six years back Taushin Khan migrated from his native village in Uttar Pradesh to Mumbai. His first job was at a tea stall which he continued for fourteen years. At that time his priority was to get his sister back home married. When money had been saved, he married off his sister, only to get the news of her death in a few months. She was burnt to death by her in laws for dowry. Taushin grapples with the trauma even today.

Taushin is married and has six children (4 girls and 2 boys). As far as the city is concerned, Taushin does not exist. He does not have a ration card or any other papers as a proof of address or identity. He works whole day in his dingy room doing embroidery job work. It is a daily wage work, the family lives one day at a time.

However there is something in Taushin which makes him different. He is ready to put in extra hours, but not send his children for work, his wish is to see them in school. When Taushin approached the local municipal school for admitting his children, he was told that for want of proper identity documentation the door of the school was closed for his children. When we came to know of this, the MLC educator stepped in. The MLC educator met the school authorities and spoke about Right to Education Act provision which

prohibits refusal of admission to any student. The argument was sound; it echoed of the promise which the nation has made to each child.

Today the children go to school every day. As Taushin works long hours pouring over the embroidery work, the needle moves a bit faster, the fingers display a bit more dexterity and there is a little more urgency to get the work completed. The energy comes from contemplating of a better life for his children which education has the potential to bring.



Story 08


Compassion in Uniform



“

For You, With You, Always ”

Police Slogan



It is our responsibility to create awareness on the laws and provisions that can prevent a child from getting into a crime. Today's children, even parents are not aware of the right information. With Save The Children, we have been trying to create awareness in the community.

Sr Police Inspector

The nation would be failing in its constitutional and international commitments if it falls short in protecting children from issues such as violence in schools, child labour, child marriage, child abuse, absence of parental care and commercial sexual exploitation amongst others.

Responsibility for child protection falls to a significant extent on the police force. Not only do the policemen (women) have to be proactive, their constituency has to perceive them likewise. Culturally children are taught to fear the policeman, this has to be change – policewala has to become police uncle/aunty. We at MLC do understand that it is important for children to consider the police to be approachable. Towards this we regularly invite police offers to our Blue Bus to interact with the children.

On 20/Feb/2015 MLC invited police officers from the Shivajinagar police station for an interactive session with our children. Special child protection officers under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme - PI Gaikwad, PI Kedari and PI Maane were more than happy to visit our Blue Bus. As they stepped in, the officers in their khakhi uniforms appeared a bit out of sync with the brightly coloured child friendly interiors of the bus. The children had expected stern policemen (women), but to their surprise the officers were extremely friendly- smiling, cracking jokes and giving sound advice.

The officers introduced themselves and proceeded to enquire about the whereabouts of each child. They gave practical advice on how to act in case they ever get lost. The children were also cautioned to keep away from strangers and refuse food and drinks from unknown persons. They assured the children that police are their friend.

The officers encouraged the children to ask questions and patiently answered to the query of each child. The question that took the cake came from a 7 years old child who asked “uncle what do I have to do to become a good policeman like you”. The officers were moved. There could not have been a better gift for them.





Story 09 Making Religious and Secular Education Walk in Tandem

“

Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.”

Albert Einstein



I believe each and every child should get basic education, at least up to 10th Std. I wish to see the integration of madarsa study and mainstream schooling so that not a single child is deprived of any opportunities as received by a child passing out from Government school.

Mohd Israil Siddiqui

Mohd Israil Siddiqui is a soft spoken person with a genial smile. He is a religious teacher and a leading voice in the community. His opinion on various matters is sought and respected.

Mohd Siddiqui is well versed in Islamic theology and for last 25 years has been running the Madarsa Islahul Ulom, a residential facility which imparts knowledge largely on Islamic theism. Subjects related to the sciences and language at present do not form part of the Madarssa curriculum. Currently the Madarsa has seventy five students on its rolls.

For Mohd Siddiqui religious education and modern secular education are not in contradiction but are complimentary to each other. His point is that while science leads to discoveries and inventions, how best human beings apply the outputs of science for human welfare is tempered by religion.

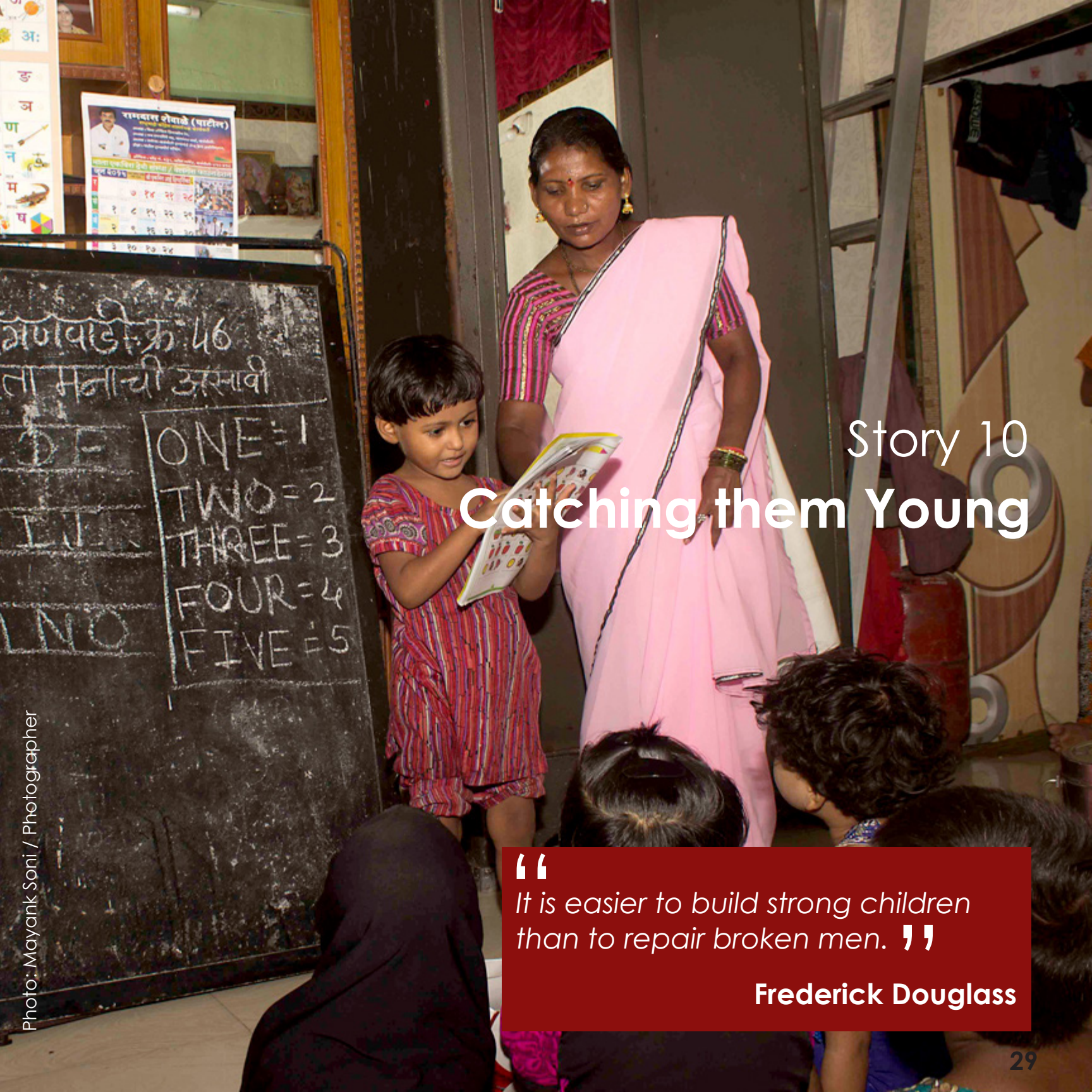
When MLC first started its work in M- East Ward, it engaged the stakeholders and opinion makers in the community. We got enthusiastic support from Mohd Siddiqui, and he became a champion for the cause. He over the project period has helped bring more than 50 children into the MLC fold. His enthusiasm for religious and scientific education to move in tandem predates MLC intervention in the project area. He has always been a strong votary that Madarssa curriculum needs to be revised so as to make space for more conventional subjects as well. Till that does not happen Mohd Siddiqui encourages students who at-

tend the Madarssa to also take admission in mainstream schools as well.

Mohd Siddique has not missed a single stakeholder meeting which MLC organises every month. He has cogent ideas and believes in the MLC cause. Being from the community he has helped us identify out of school children. He has personally helped the MLC educators persuade the parents to send their wards to MLC and subsequently be mainstreamed into formal education system.

It is said that 'where science stops religion begins', people like Mohd Israil Siddiqui believe in making spirituality and scientific thought walk in tandem.





Story 10 Catching them Young

“

*It is easier to build strong children
than to repair broken men.* ”

Frederick Douglass



It becomes very easy when we work in collaboration. There is no overlap in service delivery by us and MLC. They have bridged the gap through their continuous monitoring and field visits. In my area, every child is registered. I have 50 children enrolled in my centre. MLC helps us in retaining these children throughout the year.

Sangeeta Kewat, ICDS Worker

Sangeeta Kewat is one of the million strong Anganwadi Workers who have the onerous responsibility of taking care of the nations' toddlers. Everyday across the country at 13.3 lakh Anganwadi centres the Anganwadi Worker provide six basic services to 3-5 year age group children- supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up, referral services, pre-school non-formal education and nutrition & health education. These women hold the hand of the next generation of Indians as they take their first step towards education.

Sangeeta for the last 13 years has been running the Anganwadi center from her home in Rafiqnagar locality in the project area. Despite all her efforts, the attendance to her centre had remained static. The parents were not sensitive to pre-schooling. For most of the parent's partaking of the mid day meal by the children at the center was the only motivation if at all.

It was about two years back that MLC coordinator contacted Sangeeta. For MLC, the project activity included encouraging families to send their toddlers to pre-school. The collaboration was a win-win. MLC through door to door meetings and counselling would encourage attendance to the Anganwadi. In turn Sangeeta would encourage the 5+ age group children at her center to attend MLC. MLC would then take up mainstreaming of these children to the formal school system. Generating demand for Anganwadi would ensure supply of children to MLC who

could then be charted to formal schooling.

While the average attendance to the Anganwadi center was 35, this has risen to 50 due to intensive door to door campaigning by MLC volunteers. Much that Sangeeta would have liked to increase the off take of Anganwadi services, singlehandedly this was proving to be difficult. A small help from the MLC has catalysed the turnaround.

MLC would also provide inputs towards making the Anganwadi Center experience for the children worthwhile. A workshop for Anganwadi workers from the project area has been held and tips shared on early childhood education. MLC workshop for the Anganwadi workers would start with a quote from Bill Gates "the first 5 years have so much to do with how the next 80 turn out". We can assure that the children at the Rafiqnagar Anganwadi Center are in trained hands.





Story 11 Jayatuneesa's Smile Just Got Brighter

“

*One child, one teacher, one book,
one pen can change the world.”*

Malala Yousafzai



Today, I am lucky that I am going to school again and whatever I learnt at MLC is helping me cope with the lessons in my school.

Jayatuneesa

Jayatuneesa could well have come out of the lines from the Maya Angelou poem “A Bird does not sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song”. This 6 year old girl never forgets to smile. The difficult family circumstances have not broken her spirit or dimmed the brightness of her eyes. As is for every child, in a rather grey firmament Jayatuneesa manages to find bright spots.

Jayatuneesa's family shifted to Mumbai so that they could seek better treatment for her mother who suffered from chronic ill health. The family settled down in the slum pocket of Shivaji Nagar in a rented dwelling. Her father works as a labourer at a construction site. At home, Jayatuneesa being the eldest, the onus of looking after her ailing mother and her younger siblings is on the tender shoulders of this 6 year old girl. Jayatuneesa did dream of school but never would grudge the work at home and never did she forget her smile.

The MLC team identified Jayatuneesa to be out of school during their door to door survey. When the team explained to Jayatuneesa's mother that her daughter be sent to school, one could see Jayatuneesa's face intently anticipating a “yes”. Her mother agreed to allow Jayatuneesa to attend MLC, which was not far from her home. The Blue Bus became her world. The educators at MLC graded Jayatuneesa as having exceptional scholastic abilities. At MLC she was a very enthusiastic learner, participating with gu-

sto in art and craft, child right sessions and life skill education. Jayatuneesa was headed for bigger things, only if she was allowed to study.

MLC counsellor again visited her mother and shared Jayatuneesa's extraordinary performance at MLC and that she be allowed to attend mainstream school. Her mother was visibly proud and instantly agreed to the suggestion. Her only concern was how the family would afford the school fee. The MLC counsellors laid these doubts to rest by explaining that under the Right to Education, the State has promised to provide every child free elementary education.

Today Jayatuneesa attends school regularly, and is a star student in her class. Her teachers and classmates love her because she never forgets to smile.



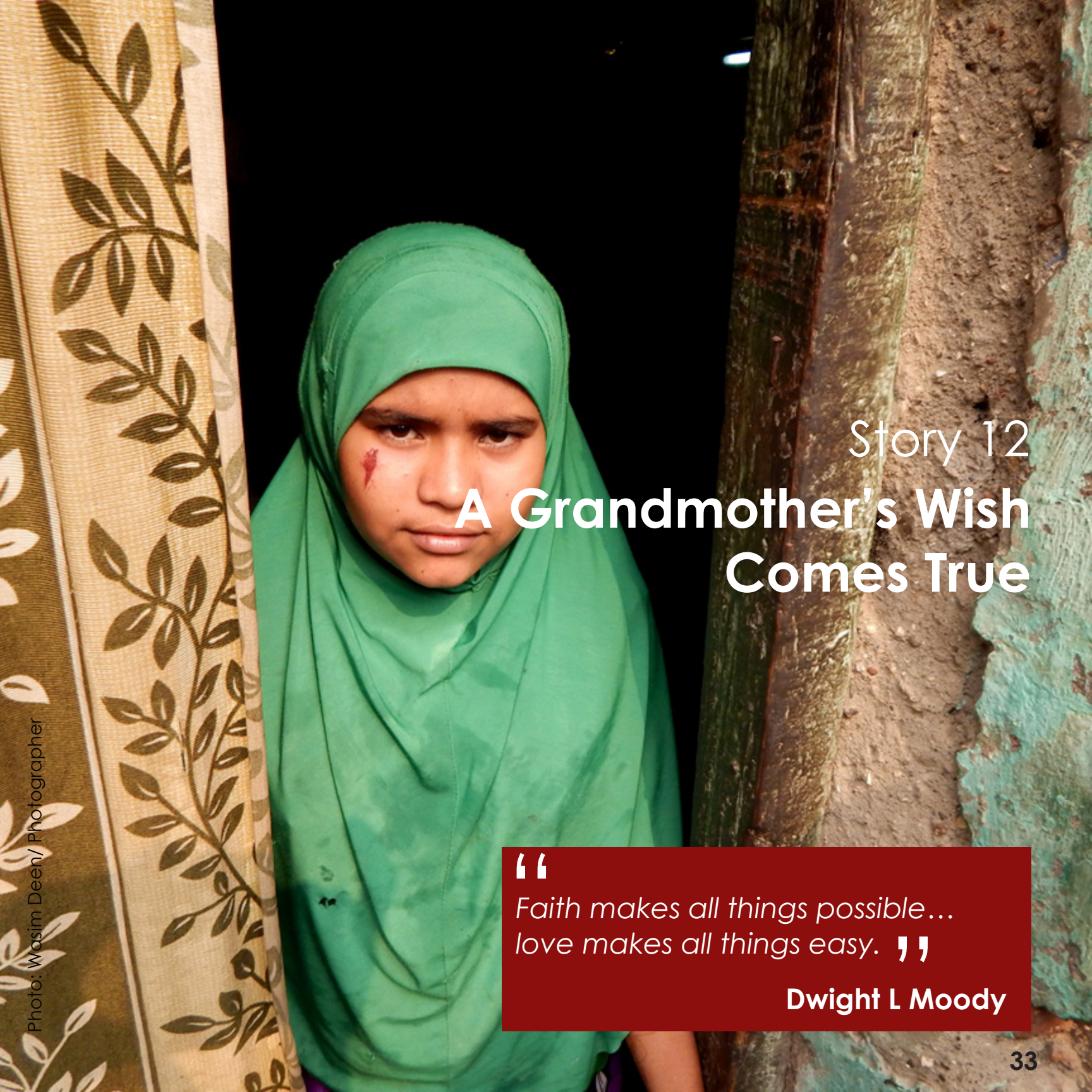


Photo: Wasim Deen/ Photographer

Story 12 A Grandmother's Wish Comes True

“

*Faith makes all things possible...
love makes all things easy. ”*

Dwight L Moody



My grandmother would always tell me that one day I would go to school. I have waited for that day, and today I go to school. My grandmother has kept her promise.

Rubina

This is the story of Khatun Neesa, grandmother of 12 year old Rubina, who despite the odds managed to give to her granddaughter gift of a lifetime- Education.

Khatun Neesa was a helpless spectator to daily shouting match in the joint family over money matters. Things came to such a pass that her son, daughter in law and their five children vacated the family homestead.

At that time Rubina was in II standard and became the casualty of the family discord. Her parents out of desperate economic situation were forced to put her into child labour. However Khatun Neesa though herself illiterate could not reconcile to the fact that her granddaughter was condemned to toil when she should be going to school.

Desperate times lead to desperate measures. Khatun Neesa knew that difficult family circumstances in the village would never allow Rubina to go to school. Khatun Neesa along with Rubina migrated to Mumbai and took up work as domestic help to eke out a livelihood. However back of the mind Rubina's schooling remained alive. Three years passed, Khatun Neesa bided her time.

It was during the door to door survey that MLC volunteers met Khatun Neesa. Her zeal to get Rubina into school was palpable. MLC volunteers got into action. Luckily Khatun Neesa had carried the birth certificate

of Rubina to Mumbai and it came in handy to get Rubina admitted to the local municipal school.

The school was reluctant to give Rubina admission to class II, since she was not up to the grade specific level. MLC played a crucial role in providing the bridge learning to get Rubina up to steam with the required standards. Rubina would attend the MLC and was an enthusiastic learner. Khatun Neesa would often come to MLC and watch her granddaughter study. Rubina and the MLC educators worked in tandem to get Rubina up to steam. The dream which had brought the duo to Mumbai appeared within reach. Today Rubina goes to school and also makes it a point to visit the MLC whenever possible. Khatun Neesa has given the wings of education to Rubina to fly with.





Story 13 Ramzan's Dream Finds Wings

“

A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work. ”

Colin Powell



Bus didi tells me that I am good at studies and can do big things. I will become a big man one day.

Ramzan

At the MLC it is not only that the children learn from us, many a times we learn from children. One such “student teacher” (that is what we call them) is the seven year old Ramzan. He gave us a life lesson on what it takes to reach for the dreams.

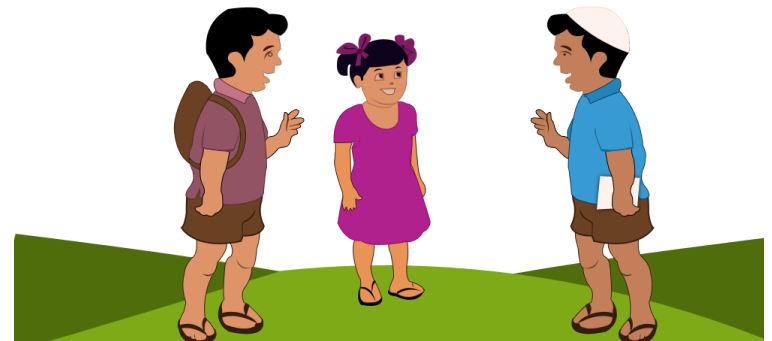
Ramzan like many a boys of his age in Sanjaynagar slum locality would play and loiter on the streets. However there was one difference. Ramzan would keep an eye for the MLC Blue Bus. He would look at the MLC Blue Bus in awe. He wished to step in, he wished to learn.

Dreams to reality do not come easy. After the death of his father, Ramzan's mother remarried. He was left in the care of his maternal grandmother. The duo migrated from Guwahati to Mumbai and took up a small dwelling on rent in Sanjaynagar slum. Ramzan's grandmother would make their ends meet by doing domestic household work. Ramzan would loiter on the streets.

With no one to take the initiative, little Ramzan took the onus. He approached the MLC coordinator and started to attend classes. This was not all, he arranged for a school bag and few books from his friends. On his way home Ramzan would hide the bag in a near-by shop. His tryst with education was hidden from his grandmother lest she stopped Ramzan from attending MLC.

Ramzan's enthusiasm was infectious; it instilled a new sense of vigour at the Blue Bus. He was one of the best students in his batch. The coordinators contacted Ramzan's grandmother and told her that she should be proud of her grandson. Tears rolled down the eyes of Ramzan's grandmother as she heard the story.

MLC educators have taken it as a personal challenge to get Ramzan ready for school. Ramzan now attends his classes at MLC regularly. His red school bag now travels with him to his home. Ramzan's grandmother has made a special place in their small one room dwelling for Ramzan's school bag and books to be kept. It has made their dwelling a bit more cramped but no one is complaining, Ramzan's world is broadening.





Story 14

We Won an Argument Fatima Won Her Education

“

For Good Ideas and True Innovation, You Need Human Interaction, Conflict, Argument, Debate ”

Margaret Heffernan



My mother was concerned about my siblings. Today I go to school as well as I take care of my siblings.

Fatima

Few months back the MLC coordinator could be seen regularly at Fatima's doorstep having a conversation with Fatima's mother. For a bystander it was an interesting sight- there would be flaying of hands, posturing of voice, a quick huddle and urgency in demeanour. It was obvious that two persons were arguing, and none wanted to lose. Fatima's mother wanted Fatima to stay at home and take care of the siblings, while the MLC coordinator wished Fatima could attend school.

Fatima Wasim Sheikh suddenly grew up when her father left her mother and the four children to start another family. Fatima's mother took up full time work as a domestic help. With the head of the household deserting, the family roles changed. Fatima's mother was the bread winner and Fatima the care giver for her three younger siblings. Fatima's childhood was not to be spent in the playground but within the confines of the four walls of her house.

Never did Fatima complain, but the child in her did yearn for her childhood. Things started to change when the MLC volunteers came knocking at Fatima's door. The MLC counsellor met Fatima's mother and discussed the possible options for getting Fatima to school. Fatima's mother was reluctant, the argument being that there was no one else other than Fatima to look after her younger siblings. It could not be denied that Fatima's mother had a point. MLC coordinator had to come up with a powerful counter-

point. The argument had to be won; Fatima had to get into school.

So started the marathon counselling sessions, the counsellor cited examples of other girls whom MLC had mainstreamed and how they were able to balance between demands of school work and domestic chores. These practical examples convinced Fatima's mother and she relented.

MLC educators through a bridge course brought Fatima up to grade specific standard. Today Fatima attends the local municipal school. She is good in her studies and is an excellent painter. After school hours she not only looks after her siblings but has also started teaching them alphabets. Fatima has plans of bringing her siblings to MLC. For us this is a welcome bonus, and as for Fatima's mother, she is thankful that the argument was lost.



Testimonials

Hiroya Ono

General Manager,
CSR Promotion & Global
Environment Department,
ITOCHU Corporation



“

While India is attracting international attention with its recent rapid economic growth, the number of street children is estimated to reach 18 million, and tackling this social issue is an utmost requirement. Having operated in India since 1918, we, at ITOCHU Corporation, consider contributions to the local community are indispensable as a member of Indian society and have to do something about it.

Having formulated “growth of future generations” as one of the ITOCHU’s Activity Guidelines on Social Contribution, we decided to support this Mobile Learning Center (MLC) project and work with the reliable partners, Save the Children Japan and Save the Children India, with the cooperation from ITOCHU India Pvt. Ltd.

This project enables us to take advantage of many years of experience to support children’s reading through ITOCHU Foundation both in Japan and abroad. Since “books” and “reading activity” is essential for children’s growth and development, we strive to extend such support further to the children in streets and slums in India who otherwise cannot access mainstream education. We believe that supporting this project will contribute to rights of children, mainly rights to education, one of the universal human rights that no one should be denied. ”

Kiran Dighavkar

Assistant Commissioner,
M-East ward



“

Innovation is something we need to bring in to make sure each and every child goes to school. Looking at the profile of M-East Ward, we need to provide skill based education that will help them engage into income generation activities. Infrastructural development is another area that needs to be done to attract parents to send their children in school. The MLC programme is doing well in terms of bringing difficult children back in school. ”

Kartik Shandilya

Volunteer



“

It has been a great experience interacting with the children as a part of Save the Children’s project in Gowandi. The children are really eager to learn and they made efforts of specially coming on a holiday just to attend my teaching sessions. You get an opportunity to really make a difference to the lives of these children. I would recommend the program to anyone who is keen to make a positive social impact. Save the children is doing a commendable job. Hats off to them. ”



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