

# IMPACT REPORT

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# FOUNDER'S MESSAGE

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I am truly honoured and grateful to share our eight-year Impact Report with you. You will get a glimpse into the hearts and work of our team, without whom none of this would have been possible. To our team: we honour and thank each one of you – you are true Dragon Slayers!

My Choices Foundation was founded in 2012, in Hyderabad India.

Every day across the globe, millions of women and girls are used, controlled and exploited for commercial or personal gain. They suffer terrible violence and are denied their basic rights and freedom.

Globally – violence against girls and women is the most widespread and destructive pandemic on Earth: one out of three women have survived sexual or physical abuse. This violence touches all of us. It touches generations of individuals, families and communities.

Pervasive gender discrimination means that girls are marginalised, treated as second-class citizens within their communities and viewed as an economic burden by their families.

For more than 8 years, our team has worked bravely to equip thousands of families, women and girls on how to live a life free from abuse and exploitation.

India can overwhelm you with her love, but she can also destroy you with her violence – especially if you are a woman or a girl. Over 40% of married Indian women face abuse and violence in the home.

Women and girls are also disproportionately affected by sex slavery, comprising over 90% of the victims around the world.

Over the last 8 years, we have built 5 Support and Counselling Centres that have served and counselled over 8,828 families, and we now work across 8 states.

It was our long-held dream to open a safe home for survivors of domestic violence to provide a loving, peaceful and safe environment for women and children. Since its opening in November 2018, the Lotus Safe Home serves as a temporary shelter that offers women much needed services such as counselling, assistance with their children, legal aid and vocational training to help them get back on their feet while residing in a safe space.

Our team has invested close to 142,500 hours of counselling into transforming the reality of families and helping them establish peace. We have trained over 140,800 young children and community members on how to keep themselves safe and their communities violence-free.

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Our sex-trafficking prevention program works through our flagship Safe Village Program. With more than 80 of our courageous frontline partners, we have conducted over 3,800 programs reaching 2,205,832 beneficiaries. Our Helpline (India's first Helpline dedicated to the prevention of trafficking) has received 36,003 calls.

While these numbers reflect the exponential growth of our programs, they are not what drive us. We are inherently driven by a deep desire - an obsession - to keep every girl child safe.

This report is filled with numbers and data that reflect the extensive reach and impact of our work. But more importantly, in the following pages, you will read about the courage and bravery of thousands of women, girls and families who have been impacted by our work.

*"Because sometimes all that's needed to lift women up, is to stop pulling them down."*

*Melinda Gates*

I have to admit, the work we do is not easy. Our work deals with immense pain and suffering. In the process our hearts are repeatedly broken and there is a grief that sits deep in our souls. It requires daily humility, moral courage, and an unwavering commitment to gender equality to make India safe for its women and girls. But doing what we do everyday also gives us courage. Courage transforms not just us but also those around us, and the good thing about courage is that it is contagious.

Courage can change families, communities and villages and cities! My team and I have been given the privilege to step into the lives and homes of thousands of families to help them slowly repair the broken pieces and replace violence with peace. Of course, none of My Choices Foundation's achievements would have been possible without the generous support of our partners, donors and supporters. To all of them, we extend our appreciation and thanks for enabling our efforts and those of our partners to thrive.

*If those who can act, remain inactive, if those who should know better, remain indifferent,  
and if the voice of justice is kept silent when it should speak up, then evil will triumph.*

*As a human race we may falter and we may fail, and we sometimes take too long to do the obvious, but  
ultimately, we do know deep inside what is right and what is wrong.*

*Let's start doing what's right!*

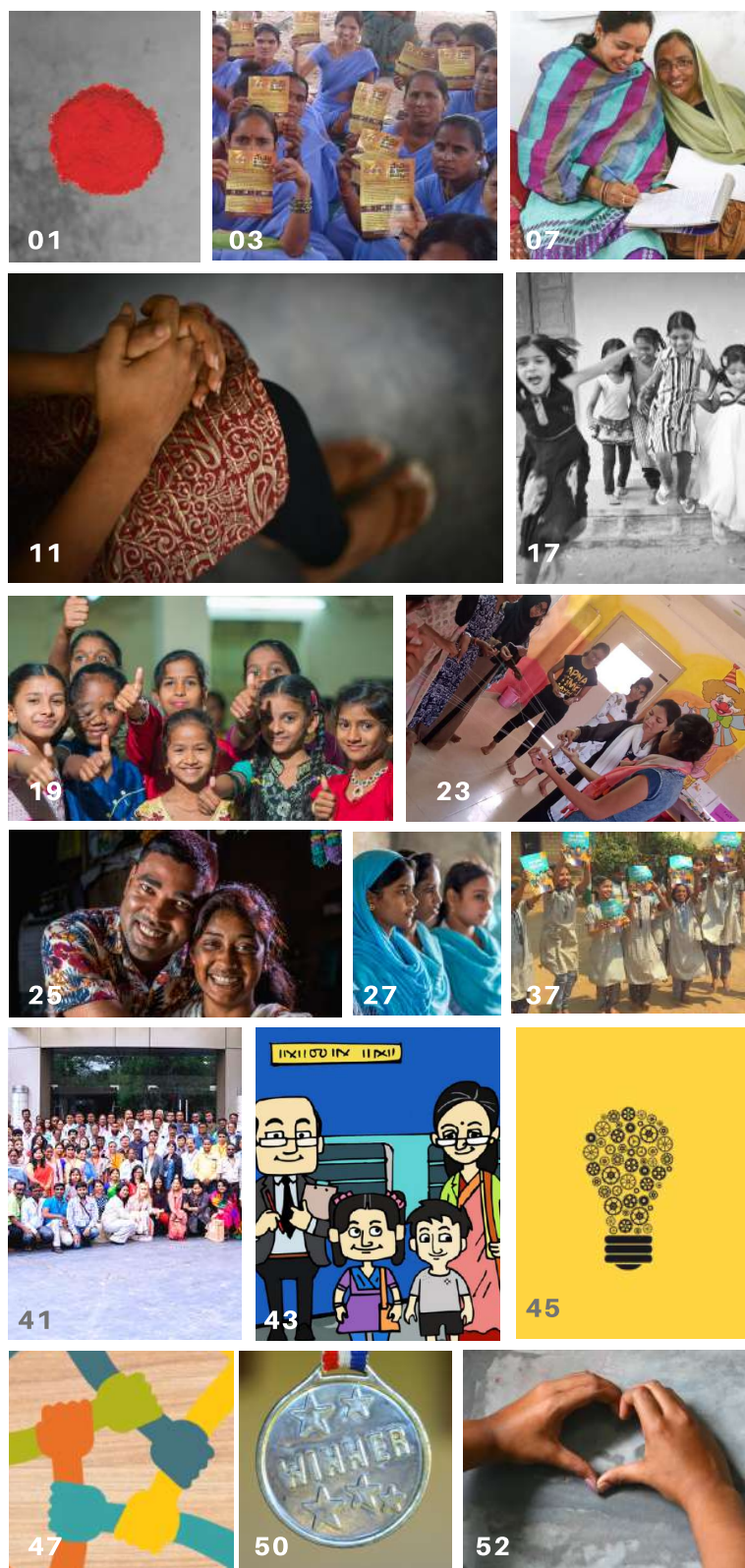
Looking ahead, we know there is still much work to do. Please join us in this fight to bring an end to gender-based violence!



**ELCA GROBLER**  
Founder and Director



# TABLE OF CONTENTS



<b>01</b>	<b>ABOUT US</b>
<b>03</b>	<b>OPERATION PEACEMAKER PREVENTION PEACEMAKER PROGRAM</b>
<b>07</b>	<b>OPERATION PEACEMAKER INTERVENTION SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING CENTRES</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>OPERATION PEACEMAKER INTERVENTION LOTUS SAFE HOME</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>OPERATION PEACEMAKER PREVENTION SCHOOL AND COLLEGE PROGRAMS</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>OPERATION PEACEMAKER PREVENTION SUPERSMART SHAKTI &amp; ASLI CHAMPION PROGRAMS</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>OPERATION PEACEMAKER PREVENTION ANOKHI PROGRAM</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>OPERATION PEACEMAKER PREVENTION PEACECHAMPION PROGRAM</b>
<b>27</b>	<b>OPERATION RED ALERT PREVENTION SAFE VILLAGE PROGRAMS</b>
<b>37</b>	<b>OPERATION RED ALERT PREVENTION SAFE URBAN PROGRAMS</b>
<b>41</b>	<b>OPERATION RED ALERT PARTNERSHIPS IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS</b>
<b>43</b>	<b>OPERATION RED ALERT PARTNERSHIPS CHILDLINE</b>
<b>45</b>	<b>INNOVATION AND THE FUTURE</b>
<b>47</b>	<b>PARTNERS AND FUNDERS</b>
<b>50</b>	<b>AWARDS AND ACCOLADES</b>
<b>52</b>	<b>SUPPORT US</b>

# ABOUT US

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## OUR MISSION

My Choices Foundation aims to give women, children and families choices to live lives free from violence, abuse and exploitation.

We aim to see the transformation of India into a safe, peaceful, and encouraging place for women and girls by empowering them with the awareness, education, and support they need to become their own change agents.

Founded in 2012, My Choices Foundation is committed to ending violence, abuse, and exploitation against women and children in India.

We address two of the most prevalent and difficult forms of abuse: domestic violence and trafficking of young girls for sexual exploitation.

Through two operations called Operation PeaceMaker (focusing on domestic violence) and Operation Red Alert (prevention of sex trafficking), we run multiple programs that are focused on these issues. We are currently active in 8 states - Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Telangana, and West Bengal.

### WE DO THIS:

- By empowering women and girls to become change agents in their own families and communities.
- By educating at-risk women and girls, families and communities.
- By providing free, grassroots support to victims and their families.

## OUR VALUES

We believe that a better world is often just one choice away.

### WE BELIEVE:

- In the beauty, value and capability of every woman and girl.
- In the ability in each person to overcome barriers to good, and make good choices.
- That mindsets can be changed, cycles can be broken, and lives can be restored.
- That when we change together, we win together. Men are at least 50% of the solution to ending violence against and exploitation of women. A world that respects women and girls is one where both men and women thrive.
- In the power of change triggered from individuals, families and society to transform India.

## WE CARE:

- About ending the abuse and exploitation of women and girls.
- About men and boys, championing them and including them in solutions.
- About empowering women and families to catalyze change in their communities.

## WE PRIZE:

- Building partnerships and coalition efforts.
- Being on the forefront of research and innovative thinking on the issues at hand.
- Providing robust data on efficacy of our work.
- Taking necessary risks to do the most challenging work.

*"Women speaking up for themselves and for those around them  
is the strongest force we have to change the world."  
Melinda Gates*

Since 2012, My Choices Foundation has impacted the lives of adults and children through multiple programs that aim to give women and girls choices to live their lives free from violence, abuse and exploitation.

## OUR IMPACT







OPERATION  
**PEACEMAKER PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

## PEACEMAKER PROGRAM

### THE ISSUE

In India, domestic violence is widespread within its varied people-groups. While official statistics point to an estimated 31.1% of women in India (i.e. over 200 million women) who have experienced domestic violence, this number is restricted to married women in the 15-49 age group only.\* The number of unreported cases of domestic violence is staggeringly higher.

*\*National Family Health Survey*

### THE PEACEMAKER PROGRAM

Through Operation PeaceMaker, our mission is to stop domestic violence by training and employing local women whom we call PeaceMakers. We have developed a training program led by professional counsellors and lawyers which aims to empower PeaceMakers with counselling skills, legal knowledge (Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 and POCSO 2012), infrastructure and processes required to be agents of change in their communities.

The PeaceMakers work within their community to create meaningful change in victims' lives. We believe that domestic violence can be stopped by healing and reconciling families in a peaceful manner and will resort to further action only when such an option is no longer available. Our PeaceMakers assist women to access their rights and protections under the Domestic Violence Act. During this mitigation process, the organization also strives to reduce the suffering of women and children as a result of other societal ills such as child marriages, infanticide, selective foeticide, sexual abuse, poor female health and sex trafficking.

In the state of Telangana, India, Operation PeaceMaker (OPM) is one of the few service providers offering free counselling, rights education and legal aid to victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse and their families.



There are certainly other service providers offering counselling, or even support to physically guard the safety of a domestic violence survivor. However, My Choices Foundation is unique in its capacity for long term, end-to-end client support and community engagement in solutions - equipping local women to become the change agents in their communities. Operation PeaceMaker's capacity for adequate relief is unique due to our strong partnerships with the local police.

OPM's counsellors and case workers are trained to counsel men with equal empathy and equal determination, knowing that if men do not become a willing part of the change, then the abuse will only continue.

## STORIES FROM THE PEACEMAKER PROGRAM

Maheshwari was only 16 years old when she got married.

*"Maheshwari discovered strength, independence and peace during her PeaceMaker training. She said that the training gave her the ability to help other women, but it also taught her how to deal with her own pain and frustration. It taught her how to be a better mother, and to communicate effectively."*

Maheshwari worked as a maid in an office building and her entire income would support herself and her two children. Maheshwari's husband rarely went to work and spent most of his time drinking and using all of the family's income on alcohol. This saddened and frustrated Maheshwari, deeply. When she raised her concerns about his actions, it would always result in fights between them, sometimes extending to physical violence against Maheshwari. Adding to her distress, her husband would often leave for days or months at a time, without disclosing where he was going or when he would be back. After a year of living in continual sadness, anger and hurt, she decided to move out and live with her parents. The situation was unbearable for her and her children. However, her husband continued to come and go as and when he liked.

*"Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."*

*Frederick Douglass*



232

PEACEMAKERS  
TRAINED



78,413

WOMEN  
REACHED



2,956

COMMUNITY  
AWARENESS PROGRAMS

Maheshwari wasn't satisfied with this life. Her husband did not value her or their children and adding to her sadness, she also felt that she was a burden to her own parents. Unable to encourage her husband to live with the family and support his children, she was left with no other options. Maheshwari decided to file a case against him under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA 2005). The court ordered that he pay Maheshwari Rs. 30,000 (\$470) compensation and Rs. 1,000 (\$16) per month in maintenance. Her husband, however, failed to follow the court order and went off to hide in his village.

At this time, Maheshwari joined a training course to become a PeaceMaker. Through the training, Maheshwari says she was transformed little by little. The training was difficult for her at first, coming to terms with everything that had happened to her. Through this process, the counsellors and the team rallied around her and supported her. She recalls one story with particular fondness. On one occasion, two of her PeaceMaker trainers travelled with her to her husband's village to find him and counsel him. They weren't able to locate him that day, but she still recalls the experience with pride and gratitude.

Maheshwari says that PeaceMaker training was challenging for her at first, because she was so focused on what she was going through. However, as soon as she started her internship, and started listening to the stories of other women, she realized how small her issues were in comparison to the difficulties that other women were facing. She realized that other women needed her help, and that she had a responsibility to use the knowledge and support that was given to her to help these women.

*"There really can be no peace without justice. There can be no justice without truth.  
And there can be no truth unless someone rises up to tell you the truth."*

Louis Farrakhan

Maheshwari discovered strength, independence, and peace during her PeaceMaker training. Her training gave her the ability to help other women, and taught her how to deal with her own pain and frustration. It helped her be a better mother, and to communicate effectively.

Through the training, Maheshwari has been able to reconcile with her husband and with her new confidence and counseling skills. Maheshwari has also been able to help guide her husband through the recovery of his alcoholism. They are now both committed to working together and have given each other a fresh start.

Maheshwari now oversees 18 bastis (communities), providing support to victims of violence and running awareness workshops. She is not only supporting and helping women from domestic violence, but actively mobilizing and working with young girls and boys. She does this through the school awareness sessions on child sexual abuse, Shakti and Asli safety/life skills programs with vulnerable community adolescent girls and boys. She takes a lot of pride in both her family and the work that she does.

*"Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable...  
Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle, the tireless  
exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."*

Martin Luther King Jr.









OPERATION  
**PEACEMAKER INTERVENTION PROGRAMS**

## **SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING CENTRES**

### **THE ISSUE**

Women and girls in both urban and rural India suffer abuse in the form of verbal, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse by men who are their spouses or biological relatives. The hesitation or reluctance to come forward with complaints of violence and abuse stems from the common belief that domestic violence is an accepted form of behaviour in a patriarchal home.

In many parts of India, women's rights are constantly attacked. It is extremely difficult for women to access justice, make use of their rights and claim the equality afforded to them under law.

The combination of educating women on their legal rights and providing legal assistance has facilitated progress in helping women take their very first steps towards justice. It is important that our solution to these problems is adaptable to the local women in the community, feasible, sustainable and relief-based while respecting religious and community sentiments. Importantly, the solution should respect the choice of the woman.

### **THE SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING CENTRES**

Operation PeaceMaker runs 5 Support and Counselling Centres in Telangana: 4 in Hyderabad and 1 in Warangal. Each centre offers resources and safe spaces for victims of violence and their family members. The services offered include:

- Counselling support
- Legal aid
- Helpline support
- and partnerships with the local police to ensure that any woman or child facing abuse is provided the resources and support to address violence - seek counselling and support, receive medical and/or legal aid and ensure they are rehabilitated.

Our trained counsellors offer counselling services to not only the women but also to their family members who are encouraged to visit the centre and seek peaceful resolution to disputes.

If our clients decide that legal action should be taken, our team provides legal support. In addition to filing cases under the PWDVA 2005, our lawyers also assist clients for cases related to any crimes committed against women and children, including molestation, harassment and child sexual abuse.

## STORIES FROM THE SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING CENTRES

*"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also  
full of the overcoming of it."*

Helen Keller

Ramya\* is a 16-year-old from Karnataka, whose father had abandoned her and her mother. Ramya's mother raised her single-handedly, instilling in her the values of independence and financial stability. While in school, Ramya was forced to elope with a man, due to an unplanned pregnancy. After the wedding, she realized she was the second wife of her husband.

Ramya had to discontinue her education due to the unplanned pregnancy and soon after the wedding, she was accused of many terrible things by his family members and his first wife. As the abuse became more prevalent and unbearable with her husband continually accusing her of infidelity, Ramya decided to stay in her marriage for the sake of her unborn child.

Ramya continuously worked hard and earned money but her husband seemed to abuse her more as she was becoming more empowered. Her husband did not support the family financially and lived off her's and her mother's income. He even prevented her from dressing up or looking after herself. On one occasion, Ramya came home after playing holi at work which made him furious - he beat her up and went on to create an uproar at her office by fighting and abusing her colleagues.

Unable to tolerate the abuse, Ramya moved out of her house and stayed in her friend's house for a few days to seek respite from her husband. When she returned, he punished her in the most humiliating way possible - by shaving her head and stripping her in front of his family members.

After this absolutely humiliating incident, Ramya decided to leave her husband for good and never come back again.



# 8,828

FAMILIES IMPACTED  
THROUGH COUNSELLING



# 10

COUNSELLORS



# 5

SUPPORT CENTRES

She was bruised, battered and shaken. When she returned to her mother's house, she received more devastating news - her husband committed suicide.

His entire family blamed her. Ramya was in a state of shock, physically injured, traumatized and thoroughly shaken. She was threatened by the local police as well as bullied by her husband. The family also claimed her mother's property. That is when she was referred to Operation PeaceMaker.

*"The glory of justice and the majesty of law are created not just by the Constitution, nor by the courts, nor by the officers of the law - nor by the lawyers - but by the men and women who constitute our society - who are the protectors of the law."*

Robert Kennedy

Having to live with all the pain she had experienced, Ramya started speaking to our counsellors every single day. Our counsellor noted that each day was different for Ramya. On some days she would feel that she could solve her problems and on other days she would slip into the depth of her pain. Our counsellors and PeaceMakers were with her every step of the way - speaking to the police, retrieving her possessions from her husband's house, giving her legal help in protecting her mother's property and helping her find a safe home for herself and her children.

Ramya's first ray of hope came when both her children got accepted into a good residential school which would ensure the wellbeing of her children. She was encouraged to find a job that could keep her occupied, help her in healing and give her economic support. Slowly, when she got the courage to face the world, she felt less and less the need to lean on our counsellor for support. She accepted her new life with gratitude, as it was finally without the threat of abuse.

*"The greatest joys in life are found not only in what we do and feel, but also in our quiet hopes and labours for others."*

With constant follow up by our PeaceMaker, she was offered our emotional support every step of the way. She started working hard and gaining trust with her employers.

Soon, in order to help her and see her happy, Ramya's employers put her profile up on a matrimonial site and a physiotherapist who is a widower responded. The employers asked him to come over to their house so that Ramya could meet him. She immediately got in touch with our counsellor and scheduled an appointment with her suitor. Our counsellor found the man to be honest, mature and well suited for Ramya. They are about to get married now and our team couldn't be happier!

Ramya is much stronger now knowing that she has a responsible man and an organisation that is always there to support her.





This photograph is for illustration purposes only.



OPERATION  
**PEACEMAKER INTERVENTION PROGRAMS**

## **LOTUS SAFE HOME**

### **THE ISSUE**

It is estimated that around 20,00,00,000 women in India suffer from violence in their homes (i.e. 31% of women in India).<sup>\*</sup> Most victims of domestic violence remain in abusive environments for the sole reason that they see no way out of the violence they are facing and do not know who to reach out to for help.

There are many reasons why victims are often left with no choice but to stay in abusive relationships: social stigma, keeping the family together, raising children, financial needs or even a reason as basic and essential as having a roof over their heads. But in some cases, women and children are faced with extreme danger and need a safe space.

*\*National Family Health Survey*

### **THE LOTUS SAFE HOME**

It was our long-held dream to open a safe home for survivors of domestic violence to provide a loving, peaceful and safe environment for women and children. Since its opening in November 2018, the Lotus Safe Home serves as a temporary shelter that offers women much needed services such as counselling, assistance with their children, legal aid and vocational training to help them get back on their feet - while residing in a safe space with their children.

Our aim with the Lotus Safe Home is to help the *victim* of domestic violence transform into a *survivor* of domestic violence. Once a survivor, the woman is empowered to re-claim her life and be capable of supporting the people who are dependant on her. Having made the choice to be free from abuse, she can follow the path that she has chosen for her life. Once at the Lotus Safe Home, the women and children are provided with therapy sessions, therapeutic activities such as gardening, and educated with important information on their legal rights.



Furthermore, we constantly provide training for the caretaker of the Lotus Safe Home on the importance of displaying patience and empathy while working with domestic violence survivors.

Through our supporters and benefactors, we have been able to make the following improvements to the Lotus Safe Home:

- Purchased basic facilities such as cots, mattresses, pillows, bedsheets and towels
- Installed CCTV cameras for the home
- Received a dining table and chairs
- Covered all the windows and doors with mosquito nets

The Lotus Safe Home can accommodate up to 12 survivors of domestic violence, along with their minor children.

### STORIES FROM THE LOTUS SAFE HOME

Gouthami\* was the first survivor to live in our Lotus Safe Home. Her stay at the shelter home helped her recover from major mental health issues and helped her lead a violence-free life.

*"I won't let pain turn my heart into something ugly.  
I will show you that surviving can be beautiful."*

*Christy An Martine*

Gouthami eloped and married her partner when she was merely 17 years old, against the wishes of her parents. She gave birth to three children in the coming years, but her husband was abusive and disloyal from the start of their marriage.

Married at a young age, she was too naive to question him about his behaviour. But as time passed, with the help of her neighbors and friends, she was able to recognise that she was being abused and treated disrespectfully. She tried to move away from her husband's toxic behaviour by taking her children and living at her parents' house, but even her parents refused to take care of them.

Gouthami had no career or income which forced her to live with her abusive husband and she often witnessed him bring multiple women to their house. This took its toll on her mental health. During this trying time, she found comfort in her brother-in-law and began to seek his support. He promised to marry her and take care of her and her children. To her shock, he did not support her, but lured her into a sexual relationship. Gouthami was abused again.



21

WOMEN  
SHELTERED



23

CHILDREN  
SHELTERED



Gouthami felt very helpless; her husband *and* the man she trusted were both abusing her. She had to focus her attention on her children and take care of them. She tried many methods - living in shelter homes, renting a home and living separately as well as getting help from her parents - but nothing worked out as she had hoped. Gouthami was always forced to go back to her husband and to the abuse that she was facing. The abuse she was undergoing took a toll on her relationship with her children as well - they felt like their mother was moving away from them and did not care enough for them.

Her situation and her helplessness to control her life drove her to become indifferent and suffer from severe anxiety. She had given up all hope when she visited our Support and Counselling Centre. During this time she was living in our Lotus Safe Home with the caretaker, Sarojini. Sarojini promised Gouthami that help will be provided to her and brought her to the centre.

In the counselling process, Gouthami was found to be emotionally cut-off, believed that her situation or life could not be changed, and that she would just have to run away from it all.

*"You are not a victim for sharing your story. You are a survivor setting the world on fire with your truth. And you never know who needs your light, your warmth, and raging courage."*

*Alex Elle*

As she was not ready to go back to her husband or to live on her own, she was provided shelter at the Lotus Safe Home for almost two weeks during which period Gouthami received continual counselling. Her behaviour of habitual escape from her home came from the high anxiety which her home environment instilled in her. Having these hopeless thoughts, she would get suicidal thoughts such as *"I could cut myself with a knife or drink some poison"*. Therapeutic healing through counselling required unconditionally accepting Gouthami and being non-judgmental to her.

It was amazing to observe the strength she possessed once she felt accepted and hopeful about the possibility of change. Her husband was also called for counselling sessions. He slowly admitted his mistakes and agreed to mend his ways. He was psycho-educated using a video on how his abuse over the years had damaged his wife so much. He realized his share of the problem and had insight on how to help his wife come back to normalcy with his changed behaviour.

As a couple in counselling, they felt safe, capable of resolving their issues and wished to give their marriage another chance. After Gouthami's husband assured her that he would care for her without abusing her, she decided to go back to live with him.

Gouthami was eventually referred to a doctor to help her deal with her anxieties and suicidal thoughts. A follow up revealed that the husband had changed his behaviour significantly and Gouthami reported to be happily living with her family.

*\*The name of the individual has been changed to protect their privacy.*

*"Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope."*

*Martin Luther King Jr.*



*This photograph is for illustration purposes only.*

**The Lotus Safe Home is the  
best place in the world.**

**I like it because it is my  
home, and it keeps me  
safe.**

*A young boy and his mother stayed at the Lotus Safe Home, our shelter for women and children seeking help from domestic violence.*

*Once they got back on their feet, the young boy drew this picture and presented it to the care taker at the Lotus Safe Home as a token of his gratitude and love.*







OPERATION  
**PEACEMAKER PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

## **SCHOOL AND COLLEGE PROGRAMS**

### **THE ISSUE**

In their schools, homes and in cyberspace, children and adolescents are a vulnerable age group. Lack of awareness or education on the realities of crimes around them such as sexual abuse, domestic violence and other forms of harassment increases the probability of children becoming victims of such crimes.

Access to awareness-education, peer groups and emergency response mechanisms (helpline numbers or a trusted adult) to discuss issues and seek help protects children and adolescents and reduces the probability of them being exploited. In a national survey, 53% of children reported experience of sexual abuse.\*

*\*Study conducted by Ministry of Women and Child Development*

### **SCHOOL AND COLLEGE PROGRAMS**

The School and College Programs aim to end current abuse and prevent future exploitation of children and young people.

For school students, we address the issue of child sexual abuse and speak to them about being aware of the signs of sexual abuse and developing the courage to speak up and seek help. We develop programs based on age group and the messages are tailor-made for both young students and older students to protect them from predators.

For college students, we have developed the College Program to educate girls and boys on ways to stay safe from sexual abuse, domestic violence, human trafficking and other forms of harassment and violence including online/cyber abuse and exploitation. The College Program promotes gender equality through simple methods which reinforce that men do not have the right to be physically, emotionally or financially aggressive towards women. The topics discussed include patriarchal customs, dowry and marrying young.

## STORIES FROM THE SCHOOL AND COLLEGE PROGRAMS

When heads of educational institutions express their appreciation for the School and College Programs, it speaks about their hope for the students' futures.

*"Talking to students about child rights and giving them guidelines on how to be safe and protected is an exercise that has positive long term impact."*

After the team held sessions on safe and un-safe touch, domestic violence and sexual abuse, the teachers and administration were grateful that the students had an opportunity to talk about issues that may be affecting many of the students under their roof.

*"This program has not only given them the opportunity to discuss the realities of these issues, but also collectively come up with ways to respond to these crises and help others cope."*

They have also been able to see a change in their students, which they attribute to the School and College Programs.

*"We cannot all succeed  
when half of us are held back.  
We call upon our sisters  
around the world to be brave -  
to embrace the strength within  
themselves and realize their  
full potential."*

**MALALA YOUSAFZAI**



**927**

**PROGRAMS  
CONDUCTED**



**59,420**

**YOUNG PEOPLE  
EDUCATED**





OPERATION  
**PEACEMAKER PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

## **SUPERSMART SHAKTI GIRLS SAFETY NETWORK AND ASLI CHAMPION BOYS SAFETY NETWORK**

### **THE ISSUE**

Young people in the adolescent age group are one of the most vulnerable groups in most societies around the world. In the course of their lives, girls face a multitude of obstacles such as a lack of access to education, rampant gender discrimination, early marriage, domestic violence and sexual abuse to name a few. Due to these barriers and more, they do not have access to equal opportunities to exercise their human rights.

One of the biggest challenges that adolescent girls face in India is early marriage. Girls who get married early are more likely to drop out of school, face domestic violence and have high-risk pregnancies. Early marriage also leaves girls unprepared for raising children and increases the chances of the next generation of females facing obstacles. Forty percent of all child marriages worldwide happen in India.

To reduce the harm and risks of harm faced by adolescent boys in high-risk locations, we train community volunteers to work with vulnerable adolescent boys to empower them to believe in gender equality and build their own idea of masculinity. We also connect them to safe people in the family or community who they can rely on. In addition, we also work to increase awareness of government child protection laws and schemes and link them to opportunities through education and training that ensure their future safety and financial security.

### **SUPERSMART SHAKTI GIRLS SAFETY NETWORK AND ASLI CHAMPION BOYS SAFETY NETWORK**

The SuperSmart Shakti Girls Safety Network and Asli Champion Boys Safety Network prioritize the safety of adolescent girls and boys. It helps them understand and access the resources and protective mechanisms that are available to them. It consists of a multifold approach to helping girls and boys: connecting them to peer network, supporting and empowering them to

recognize risks and developing strategies to resist pressures of marrying early, undertaking dangerous work and dropping out of school.

The Shakti Program empowers girls by helping them recognize signs of harm and develop strategies to deal with these issues. The program also connects the girls to a peer network whom they can rely upon for help. The Asli Program teaches boys gender equality and healthy ideas of masculinity. They are educated in child protection laws that address the needs of child labourers and those rescued from hazardous work.

We provide the girls and boys in the programs with access to services, training to negotiate for themselves, support them to articulate their aspirations and take steps towards achieving goals. The peer network that provides a safe place to talk about their lives is the foundation of the Shakti and Asli Programs.

## STORIES FROM THE SUPERSMART SHAKTI GIRLS SAFETY NETWORK AND ASLI CHAMPION BOYS SAFETY NETWORK

*"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."*  
W.B. Yeats

Lakshmi is a young, 18-year-old girl from the slums of Secunderabad who was full of hope, enthusiasm and ambition. She lives with her parents and two siblings whose lives have been very difficult because of finances. Her father's modest job did not pay enough to support the expenses of all three children.

Being the oldest child and being a girl, she was forced to discontinue her education. Lakshmi thought that her dreams of being educated and holding a job were shattered, and gave up. That was around the time Operation PeaceMaker started the Super Smart Shakti Circle at Upperguda, Secunderabad and Lakshmi started attending the Shakti classes.

Shakti is a program developed by Aangan Trust in Mumbai to help adolescent girls take control of their lives, look after their own safety, and take steps towards securing their future. It is, in essence, a long-term (12 - 15 month) mentorship program for girls journeying through adolescence.

Lakshmi was a very active learner in the SuperSmart Shakti program. One of the sessions titled "Planning" focused on identifying and understanding career building, confidence to reach goals and the importance of making decisions for oneself.



739

YOUNG PEOPLE  
EDUCATED



24

SHAKTI  
PROGRAMS



8

ASLI  
PROGRAMS

This session is strongly connected to financial independence. Lakshmi expressed her desire to continue her studies to Anna, the facilitator. The session was enriched with activities like planning and small steps towards life goals which encouraged Lakshmi to gather the courage to come forward and express her disappointment and anxiety concerning her future.

Inspired by Lakshmi's ambitions, Anna took further steps in helping Lakshmi and met with her mother who was adamant that Lakshmi should stop her education and stay at home. Anna spoke to her mother, explained the benefits of being financially independent and counselled her thoroughly, resulting in her mother's approval for letting Lakshmi pursue her dreams.

Once she had the family's consent, Anna approached Yashoda Foundation, an organization that specialises in skill-building training. Lakshmi chose to join the hospitality training for a 3-month duration, which will help her get jobs as a receptionist with a starting salary of at-least Rs. 60,000/- per annum. At present, Lakshmi is showing a lot of interest in the training course and simultaneously she is planning to apply for her intermediate education in an open university.

*"We should be respectful.  
But we must also have the courage  
to stop harmful practices that impoverish  
girls, women and their communities."*

**GRACA MACHEL**





*This photograph is for illustration purposes only.*





OPERATION  
**PEACEMAKER PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

## **ANOKHI PROGRAMS**

### **THE ISSUE**

Violence can be stopped with strategic and timely intervention through prevention and life skills programs. The fact is that 2 out of 3 women never speak up if they are facing violence. Hence, it is important to create awareness and prevention at the grassroots level and empower the young minds to bring about change in the society.

### **THE ANOKHI PROGRAM**

Anokhi is a 12-month engagement where the girls discuss and learn about issues they face such as gender and patriarchy, exploitation, violence and awareness on rights.

The goal of the program is to bring about a change in society where there is no inequality between the genders. We aim to talk about contemporary issues which will help young girls practice change on an everyday basis. Since there is a greater level of vulnerability amongst young girls, the Anokhi program will help them understand and become aware of their rights to enable them to break the cycle of violence.

Each month, we address a different topic with the girls. The program aims to build an inclusive society by upskilling and empowering the youth. The topics are:

- Understanding Human Rights
- Gender and Patriarchy
- Human Trafficking
- Prevalence of Pornography
- Violence Against Women
- Domestic Violence
- Dating Violence
- Cyber Crime

- Reproductive Health and Rights
- Laws Pertaining to Women
- Financial Management
- Life Skills (Communication, Stress Management, Self Esteem, Anger Management and Handling Emotions)

## STORIES FROM THE ANOKHI PROGRAM

The Anokhi program did more than teach young Akansha, Divya and Kavya\* about gender-based issues. Based on what they learned during their monthly programs, these three adolescent girls applied their learnings to their own lives and the lives of their peers, friends and family members.

*"These new topics we learn about - such as cyber crimes - is not just useful to build ourselves up and keep us safe but it also teaches us how to react to the pressures that society places on young girls."*

When Akansha shared these thoughts with us, she expressed that we are not standalone individuals; we exist as a part of a whole. Learning about these issues impacts not only the girls but also impacts the society with which they interact.

*"When new topics are introduced, I make sure that after I learn it, I share it with my friends."* This is a central feature of My Choices Foundation's programs. By raising awareness amongst young girls, we are empowering them to be agents of change in their classrooms, public spaces and homes.

*\*The names of the individuals have been changed to protect their privacy.*

*"No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half its citizens."*

MICHELLE OBAMA

49

PROGRAMS  
CONDUCTED



1,629

GIRLS  
REACHED





OPERATION  
**PEACEMAKER PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

## **PEACECHAMPION PROGRAM**

### **THE ISSUE**

Over the years, in-depth research on gender, power and masculinity and various programmatic efforts to engage men made it abundantly clear that men and boys must be an integral part of efforts to promote gender equality.

This is especially relevant in India, where caste, class and linguistic ethnicity have tremendous influence on how men construct their sense of masculinity and what it means to be a “real man” or what is expected of them. Recent research suggests that men’s attitudes and more broadly, masculinity, perpetuate son preference and to some extent, intimate partner violence in India.

### **PEACECHAMPION PROGRAM**

Operation PeaceMaker works alongside men as the solution rather than the problem. In addressing domestic violence, OPM has made men their allies, building a team of good men who are examples that breaking the cycle of abuse is possible.

The PeaceChampion program facilitates a process where men have a safe space to discuss, discover and rediscover their own feelings, opinions and behaviours. Through explorational and interactive sessions on self-awareness, gender roles, rules and ethics, we aim to challenge and change a society where toxic masculinity often results in the abuse of power and violence.

The PeaceChampion sessions with boys and young men include discussions, activities, individual and group reflective sessions that address gender, patriarchy, violence against women, toxic masculinity, leadership, personal effectiveness and more. In creating new mind-sets, we hope to achieve gender equality by encouraging and empowering men to become the change agents for a peaceful society for everyone. Operation PeaceMaker has partnered with Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) for the PeaceChampion program.

## STORIES FROM THE PEACECHAMPION PROGRAM

*"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak;  
courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."*

Winston Churchill

These quotes are from young men who attended the program:

Harsh: *"I used to hug my mother earlier but after the training, I realized man have emotions and we need to express that, I started hugging my father too in the morning and he is very happy. I also realized the importance of discipline. Now I don't waste my time, and after college I support my father at his shop."*

Javeed: *"After the training, for the first time in my life I realized how much my mother is burdened with work in the house. I started working with her. When she got sick, I took care of her and did all the household work. She is so happy to see this change in me."*

Vinay: *"I started working in my fields (agriculture) when I got free. Earlier I used to see this work as inferior."*

Minhaz: *"I am mindful of my words and do not participate in any kind of conversations that demean girls/women in my campus. I also firmly/confidently reject any conversation that boys have in groups where they disrespecting girls."*

Rahman: *"I am supporting my mother for her go to out by herself and not depend on male members of the family for everything. Women should go out to learn and get their confidence."*

Nikhit: *"Some of the boys in my group used to make comments about girls passing by. I took a session with them and made them understand that it is not OK behaviour. My friends are very proud of me that I took this opportunity."*

Nagesh: *"I shared the learnings with my friends. Some of them were happy and got inspired but some of them said that this new learning would not last and eventually you will be the same again. However, I am confident that I will not get trapped."*

Shekhar: *"I took a session for the girls in my college. Someone informed the teacher and she became very worried as to what I was saying. Once I explained it, she was happy and requested me to do a program for the other boys. The girls also need such programs so they understand their value and not become silent victims of abuse."*

Ruman: *"Earlier I was bothered regarding the clothing of women, but now I understand that violence and abuse has nothing to do with clothes. Like men, women also have the right to decide what to eat, what to wear, where to go."*



**TRAINING SESSION  
CONDUCTED SINCE ITS  
LAUNCH IN OCTOBER 2019**



**24**

**YOUNG PEOPLE  
PARTICIPATED**





OPERATION  
**RED ALERT PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

## **SAFE VILLAGE PROGRAM**

### **THE ISSUE**

Millions of children are trafficked in India every year. According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (GOI), children who are trafficked are used for prostitution, forced into marriage, illegally adopted, used as cheap or unpaid labour or for organ harvesting.

After being kidnapped or lured with promises of schooling, jobs or marriage, most are coerced into sexual exploitation and forced into prostitution. There are between 3 - 20 million commercial sex workers in India - and an estimated 40% of them are children. They are held captive in brothels against their will, where they are beaten and raped, suffer from communicable diseases and even death. Globally, 98% of sex slaves are women and girls; currently only 1 percent of these girls have ever be rescued.

We partnered with Quantum Analytics to develop the Vulnerability Mapping Tool which has allowed us to map the most vulnerable villages that need our anti-trafficking interventions. We put in place a snowflake model of partnership that gave us the ability to scale, to understand the linguistic and cultural contexts and deliver the programs per need of the village. Our mobile and web-based reporting facilitates timely and simplified reporting for our partners.

### **SAFE VILLAGE PROGRAM - OUR CORE FOCUS**

To initiate the discussion with children on preventing trafficking in villages, Operation Red Alert (ORA) created a comic book titled 'Light Of A Safe Village' with four main characters (Good Father, Informed Mother, Guardian Girl and the Cool Boy) who prevent traffickers from operating in their village. A picture of these four characters can be found on the next page.

The Safe Village Program has been designed based on our award-winning research findings in 2014. The comic book and other tools bring out the positive feeling of empowerment.





Sharmila Patil, a 9th standard student, said that she was very happy that Operation Red Alert spent an entire day at her school to teach her and her friends how they can keep themselves safe from trafficking. She was astounded to know that someone cared so much for them. There had never been so many fun activities and interactive messages on how to keep them safe, in her village. What they enjoyed the most was the amount of interactive activities and the wonderful comic book.

*"ORA is always there to ensure we are safe".* It is these small words that drive us at Operation Red Alert. It is always heartening to see smiling and confident girls at the end of our school programs.

*"There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice,  
but there must never be a time when we fail to protest."*

*Elie Wiesel*

Furthermore, to ensure that the children have understood the message about being alert, we scripted a play about a family affected by trafficking, which the children performed. At a Safe Village Program in the village of Pannori, near Kolhapur in Maharashtra, the children created a wonderful play as part of the school program. The staff members helped the children prepare for the drama and also helped in providing outfits, and music to set the scene. The play was so well received that it was performed twice - once for the parents and then for the children. We encourage active participation of the community in our programs. The entire leadership of the village was present at the program right from the Health Department to the Education officers.

*"Alone we can do so little;  
together we can do so much."*

*Helen Keller*

## INNOVATIVE AND FLEXIBLE

The Safe Village Program is designed so that its delivery can be tailored to fit any special gatherings without compromising on the quality of the messaging. It is easy to reach the children in schools but it is rather difficult to reach the parents. Our Implementing Partners are extremely creative and constantly look for opportunities to convey the message to as many people as possible.

It was an auspicious day for the villagers of Diggi in Rajasthan. Everyone was dressed for their respective religious ceremonies. Operation Red Alert along with on-ground partners decided to engage with people and share with them the message of the Safe Village Program. This was done at the village crossroads, the temples, and even when people were on the move. It was wonderful watching the men and women participate in an interactive session on how they can keep their children safe from trafficking and prevent child marriages, while travelling in a bus.

The local partners were excited about how this innovative plan worked. *"I never imagined that a message on a safe village could be given so effectively in a bus. The people listened and interacted very well, we shall use such opportunities in the future"* said Dinesh Puri, a field worker with the grassroots NGO.

We involve the village leadership in our programs and it is heartening to see their interest in sustaining the impact. The district leadership and Malpura High School authorities invited ORA to conduct an awareness session during the Children's Day celebrations. Malpura is an important village in the district of Tonk in Rajasthan. 2,500 children ranging from class 8 to 12 gathered for the program. The principal, Mr. Giridhar Singh, was very appreciative of the program and shared, *"I will ensure that we will regularly take the message from the comic book and ensure that the children and their families become aware of human trafficking and make the effort to be safe"*.

The Safe Village Program reached another level when an 18-year-old sex trafficking survivor, Mithali Das, joined us with great confidence and took part in the school skit and in the community programs too. This made the entire program special.

Just over two years ago, Mithali Das was returning from a computer class when a young boy befriended her. He started to meet her regularly and one day she woke up in a new place in Delhi, feeling totally bewildered. She realized that she was *sold* by her boyfriend. Meanwhile, Mithali's family attended the Safe Village Program in a village, conducted by a grassroots partner BBSS. Helped by the NGO and the police, Mithali was rescued from Delhi and was brought back home. BBSS, the grassroots organization, assisted greatly in the rehabilitation of Mithali. Mithali now takes active part in the Safe Village Programs in Canning Block, in the very area she was trafficked from.

*"A desire to resist oppression  
is implanted in the nature of man."*

*Tacitus*

## HELPLINE - A CONNECTING BRIDGE FOR SUPPORT

A recent case illustrates how ORA and our Implementing Partner empowered a group of young girls to utilize the comic book and the ORA Helpline to prevent a child marriage in their village where an SVP was held.

A 15-year-old named Rukshanra, in the 10th standard, was forced to get married against her will, despite her protests. Her parents were convinced that pulling her out of school and getting her married was the best decision for the family. She was only allowed to see a few of her female friends with whom she confided about the fear of getting married. Her friends remembered the SVP workshops and ran home, found the comic book, looked up the ORA Helpline and called us.

The wedding was scheduled for that evening. Only 2 hours were left. As soon as the ORA team received the call, they alerted the Implementing Partner working in that area and located the village. The partner immediately mobilized the officials (the local Implementing Partner, the Block Development Officer and the police) and went to Rukshanra's home to prevent the wedding. Her father showed them what appeared to be Rukshanra's birth certificate proving she was above 18, leaving the officials with no option but to leave.

When they started back, the inspector glanced at the birth certificate again and felt that there was something odd about it. Upon second inspection, they realized that the birth certificate was not Rukshanra's but that of her elder sister, Rihanara. The police turned back immediately to the home and found the real birth certificate and also a terrified Rukshanra locked away in a small room within the house.

The family was taken to the police station where they expressed their regret and provided a written statement that no child in their care will marry before the age of 18.

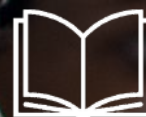
Convinced, the officials agreed to let them return to their home in the village where the Implementing Partner would continue to monitor the situation and ensure that Rukshanra could return to school and resume her studies.



**3,880**  
SVPS CONDUCTED



**2,209,175**  
PEOPLE REACHED



**1,071,008**  
COMIC BOOKS  
DISTRIBUTED



**36,003**  
HELPLINE CALLS



**252**  
HELPLINE CASES



**100 +**  
IMPLEMENTING  
PARTNERS



## RAKSHAK - THE WATCHFUL EYE OF THE VILLAGE

*"People protect what they love."*

*Jacques Yves Cousteau*

Metla Shankariah was awarded the Best Sarpanch (village leader) of the Siddipet District, by the Chief Minister of Telangana State. When the SVP was conducted by our IP SWARD in the village of Chinnakudur, he gave his full cooperation. He attended the school and the community program and actively participated to ensure that it was a success. Understanding that his village was trafficking-prone, he agreed to be the Rakshak of the village. He also promised to form a group of trusted leaders around him to help him keep the village safe. The Rakshaks keep a watchful eye on the community and report to the supporting grassroots NGOs when they see any cases of school dropouts, child abuse or suspected signs of trafficking.

Because the Rakshaks play a vital role in the sustainability of the impact, we ensure we regularly conduct upskilling workshops for them. In 2018, ORA had a training and upskilling seminar for the Rakshaks of Telangana. Metla Shankariah attended the program along with over 100 Rakshaks and their Implementing Partners. He shared, *"I am very much thankful to My Choices Foundation for arranging the SVP in our village, Chinnakudur. I will strive to be a good Rakshak. Thank you for the training. It was very informative."*

## NODAL TEACHERS - PASSIONATE AND DETERMINED VOLUNTEERS

When we conduct the Safe Village Program in schools, we always observe that there are at least one or two passionate teachers who immediately volunteer to help us and ensure that the children pay attention to the program. It is these teachers we appoint as Nodal Teachers and request to volunteer to watch over the children in the school.

*"The best way to find yourself, is to lose yourself in the service of others."*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

In the village of Mejuti, almost all of the people are farmers, and each one of the parents dream of a better life for their children. Traffickers take advantage of the parent's dream. The traffickers lure and influence the parents in a way that they agree to send their own children away, believing the children will be offered a decent job with good pay.

One such vulnerable village is Mejuti. But the children here have been very lucky. They have as their teacher, the dedicated Meena Shabab. She makes sure the children study well and are also safe from the crimes to which they are vulnerable. She ensures that the school in Mejuti is a place where the children have a safe environment to study and spend time together.

When we conducted the Safe Village Program in Mejuti, Meena Shabab expressed her thankfulness that awareness on anti-trafficking was given priority and importance. *"For long now, I have been working on providing a safe environment for the children, and the Safe Village Program has greatly boosted my effort."*

Meena Shabab was a natural choice for us as the Nodal Teacher. She agreed to keep a watch on the situation in the village and to keep the girls safe from child traffickers. We are grateful to all our Nodal Teachers who have pledged to be vigilant to the dangers in the village and are focused to keep the girls safe.

## INNOVATIONS - PART OF CULTURE

Our partners tailor the programs based on the need of the area they work in and take advantage of every opportunity to further the message and the cause. Srijan Foundation organized #Girls\_March\_To\_School\_Campaign in Murpa High School, Kujju, Ramgarh with 210 children in collaboration with Bachpana Bachao Andolan on the occasion of #International\_Girl\_Child\_Day on 11th October, 2019.

World Girl's Day was celebrated by the girls of Kasamar block of Bokaro district by Sahyogini. During this time, with an awareness of the campaign against child marriage, the teenagers pledged to support the eradication of child marriage.

Cycle rallies have been organized, drawing competitions held, and various other ideas are used to further the cause by our partners. Capturing the attention of the audience at each and every opportunity has been our strength.

## TRAINING - OUR WAY OF LIFE

Training and upskilling is a crucial part of building and sustaining the impact of the Safe Village Program. This is a critical process that ensures increased efficiency and impact in the villages. Regular upskilling training sessions are conducted to update partners with the latest happenings in the anti-trafficking sector. This is additional training, before the NGO is inducted as an Implementing Partner. We utilize these upskilling programs to discuss the observations from the programs and ways we can improve on it.

So far, in the 2018-2019 period:

- 52 training sessions have been conducted
- 1,630 participants have received training
- 692 hours were used for training partners
- 92 days of training sessions

We see that our partners enjoy these training sessions when they write to us saying *"This was one of the best trainings sessions. We had never seen such an interactive and productive sessions"*.

We use the 'Review and Reflection' meetings with our Implementing Partners to give them a space to showcase their successes and talk about their challenges. ORA's effective facilitators ensure the sessions are fruitful and informative.



1,363  
RAKSHAKS



1,281  
NODAL TEACHERS

A significant leap this year was our first international training session that was conducted in Bihar where NGOs from neighbouring Nepal joined in.

*"It was a very positive approach and will be very effective with the people of Nepal"* said Alisha from Maiti Nepal, a reputable NGO working towards the cause of anti-trafficking in Nepal.

*"I was wondering how we could intervene in the highly trafficked areas of Sindhupal Chowk, Nepal. I am confident that Operation Red Alert's efforts would work"* said Deepak Ghale from Torrent Nepal.

*"A great idea to give a positive deterrent message to the traffickers was introduced in the training. We are sure it would definitely work in changing the behaviour of the traffickers"*, Dr. Vandana from the Prayaas Team said.

*"Hope is being able to see  
that there is a light,  
despite all of the darkness."*

**ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU**



A Guardian Girl watches out for herself and for her friends. We work as a team to stay safe from trafficking.



An Informed Mother encourages children to stay in school and pursue their dreams. We will also not allow gender discrimination to ruin our daughters' futures.



A Good Father is alert so that the neighborhood will stay safe. I will ensure that our daughters are not taken from us on the promises of jobs, marriage or a "better life".



A Cool Boy has to be responsible in his thoughts, speech and actions. I will make sure I, and all of my friends, respect each and every person.



These are the 4 characters used in our Light Of A Safe Village comic book:

**Study** as much as you  
want to.

**Make your dreams**  
come true.

**I will not force you to get  
married before you are  
ready.**

*After attending the Safe Village Program, a father made this promise to his daughter. He learned about the prevalence of child trafficking in his village and vowed to do his part to keep his daughter safe and give her a good future.*

*His daughter created this illustration which depicts the crime of child marriage.*







## SAFE URBAN PROGRAM

### THE ISSUE

In the Turbhe region of Navi Mumbai, there is excessive violence and trafficking. It is also known to be the second biggest red light area after Kamatipura in Mumbai. It is a destination as well as the transit point for girls trafficked for sexual exploitation. Based on research conducted in association with our on-ground partner, we zeroed in on the Turbhe region in Mumbai as one of the most vulnerable areas.

The focus of the Safe Urban Program is on 3 clusters in Turbhe to sensitize the population on various social issues such as violence, abuse and trafficking. It focuses on prevention and educating adults and children living in urban slums on how to keep themselves safe.

In urban slums, there are many factors that create a dangerous environment for children (especially girls) such as unsafe migration, rampant sexual exploitation, illegal domestic servitude and gender-based violence. Traffickers are increasingly targeting young girls in urban slums and spending significant amounts of time winning their trust through promises of jobs, education, friendship or marriage.

Urban slums are usually located in close proximity to massive displays of wealth and materialism, which is a characteristic of any metropolitan city in India. Traffickers exploit this large gap between the rich and poor (and the perplexity it causes) by taking advantage of the eagerness that people have to earn money.

One community program and one school program is conducted every month in each of the 3 schools. We convey messages about abuse and violence, and engage with people about what it means to be a Good Father, an Informed Mother, a Cool Boy and a Guardian Girl who are empowered to speak up when they see something suspicious. The children are also taught how to be better citizens, how to understand and access the safety mechanisms available to them and how to feel empowered to speak up.

We have partnered with the organization Aangan Trust, to build a comprehensive module for the school children by incorporating the Super Smart Shakti program module to empower school girls and the Asli Champion Boys program for the school boys.

### SAFE URBAN PROGRAM - CITY SLUM FOCUSED PROGRAM

Shivashakti Nagar is one of the slums located in the Turbhe region of Mumbai, an area located a few hundred metres from Mumbai's second largest red light area, where 5,000 sex workers live. Since poverty is one of the main concerns here, the parents of these children do whatever they can to provide for their families. The parents experience enormous pressure to provide basic necessities and the children are forced to earn money and fend for themselves, making them more vulnerable to trafficking.

It is in these challenging circumstances that My Choices Foundation, in partnership with Save the Children India, initiated the Safe Urban Program to empower children and parents to keep themselves safe from being abused and trafficked.

*"We never expected that there are such good people like you. We have learned a lot about how we can keep ourselves safe"* said Sabina, a school student from Turbhe. Though the school had declared a holiday, all the children of Shivshakti Nagar gathered to hear about how we could help them be safe. Our team conveyed the message to the children about each of them having an important role in keeping everyone safe.

A few of the children were asked to stand guard around a child and their role was to prevent anyone from touching the child. One of the volunteers played the part of the person who had to infiltrate the circle to get to the child. *"Do you need more people to help you protect the child in the middle?"* the team asked. *"Yes!"* replied the children. So more children joined the circle and made it a bigger and a more protective circle, with the child in the middle. Now, no matter how much they tried, the volunteer could not reach the child because the circle was bigger and stronger, and the child was being guarded by many children.

We explained that if the Guardian Girl, the Cool Boy, the Informed Mother and the Good Father all worked together, they



326

GIRLS REACHED



293

BOYS REACHED



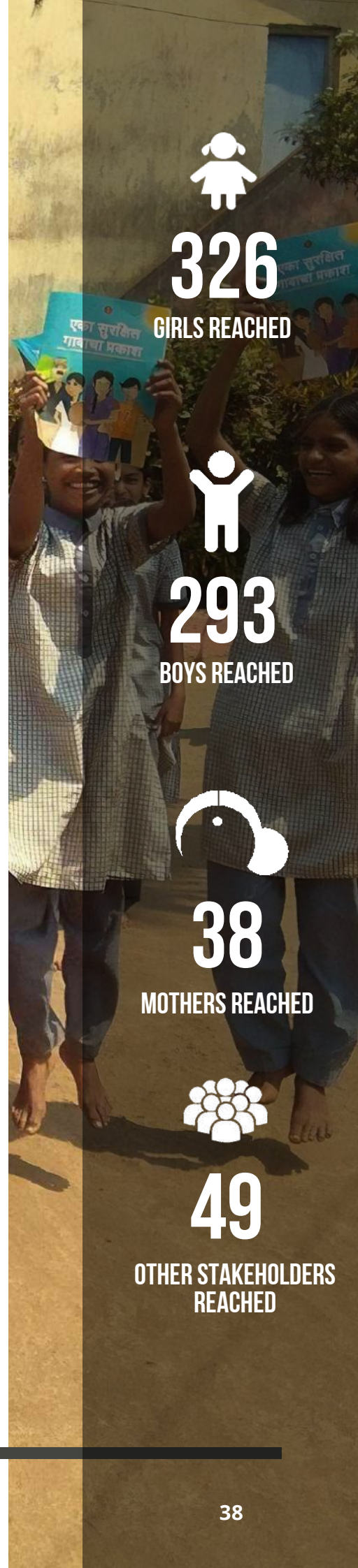
38

MOTHERS REACHED



49

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS  
REACHED



could protect all the children of the area and keep them safe from traffickers. The confidence level of the children rose and they understood what trafficking is and how they can each do their part to create a safe neighbourhood.

It is vital that the impact of the Safe Urban Program is sustainable and to ensure this, there is someone living among them to provide safety awareness, support and guidance. To achieve this purpose, a volunteer called Rakshak (translates to protector) is appointed.

Sandhya, a teacher, was very supportive and guided the adolescent children who had gathered to participate in the Safe Urban Program's discussion and activities. Sandhya encouraged the children to be attentive in the discussions. She also has a good relationship with the parents and she is well respected as an ICDS teacher. Throughout the program, Sandhya was with the children, engaging with and encouraging them to participate in the Safe Urban Program activities.

We found in her an ideal Rakshak.

*"No one is more cherished in this world  
than someone who lightens the burden  
of another."*

**AUTHOR UNKNOWN**





This photograph is for illustration purposes only.





## IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

The reach and impact we are having has been only possible because of our large Implementing Partner network. Inarguably, Operation Red Alert has the largest partnership base of NGOs working towards ending large scale sex trafficking in India.

With around 100 Implementing Partners spread across 8 states, and reaching Nepal and Bangladesh, we are able to reach the most remote vulnerable villages with messages in the language people understand and the contextualized content which they can relate to.

We train and equip the partners so that they can effectively conduct the programs. It is our aim to build a strong coalition that can thwart the efforts of the traffickers.

### OUR AIM - BUILDING A COALITION

It is our vision to bring together stakeholders working on anti-trafficking to one platform. We took a big step towards that goal and conducted our first Asian Anti-Human Trafficking Network Forum in 2018. Over 150 participants representing 100 NGOs and various government agencies came together to share their knowledge. This meeting also served as a platform for our implementing partners to understand the latest trends in the field, as well as the best practices.

In addition, we participate in various seminars and public forums. One such forum was the State Level Conference on Anti Trafficking organised by the Telangana Police Women's safety wing and supported by the Ministry of Home Affairs on 18th September 2019, at the MCRHRD. Our Program Director, Vivian Isaac, spoke at the event and discussed ways in which the police can be vigilant.







Ministry of Women &  
Child Development  
Government of India



Ministry of Railways  
Government of India



## CHILDLINE

### THE ISSUE

A large number of children who are abandoned, lost, abducted or have run away from their homes are stranded at railway stations where they fall prey to emotional, physical and sexual abuse. These children are vulnerable targets for human traffickers.

The CHILDLINE help desk at railway stations is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and Indian Railways, and provides help for children in distress. In January 2019, My Choices Foundation was selected to run the 24-hour operational CHILDLINE help desk at Nampally Railway Station, through our program Operation Red Alert. The help desk provides immediate attention to unaccompanied children found at Nampally Railway Station.

We have been allotted a prime space on platform number 4 which is 50 meters from the main entrance. It is a strategic location which gives us a good view of the entire station as well as being visible to all passengers passing through the station.

### STORIES FROM CHILDLINE

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

*Nelson Mandela*

Two young sisters, 5-year-old Priyanka and 3-year-old Madhu Priya were found by Railway Housekeeping staff sitting alone with a small bag of clothes, abandoned on the Nampally Railway Station platform in a terrible state. These young girls are orphans whose parents committed suicide a couple of years ago due to the burden of debt. The Railways housekeeping staff were aware of the presence of a CHILDLINE help desk on platform 4 of the Nampally Railway Station and approached it.

Here, the children were treated with the utmost care, and a safe environment was created for them to engage in conversation. The team provided them with food and made sure they were comfortable.

On talking to them, the team found that the children were abandoned. Not much could be learned as the children were unable to provide other details. They only that mentioned their grandmother sent them off with an unknown person who dropped them off on the platform.

The CHILDLINE team tried to look for further clues and with the help of the Railway Police Force, they searched the CCTV footage but were unable to recover any information about the person who left the children there. Announcements were also made at the Railway Station by the CHILDLINE team and a search was conducted on all the platforms and the surrounding areas for anyone that might know the children. Priyanka and Madhu Priya did not remember any phone numbers of their close relatives or guardians. All of this made it impossible for the CHILDLINE team to trace them. Added to that, there were no registered complaints about missing children.

As a part of CHILDLINE policy, Child Welfare Committee (CWC) was informed about the situation and they suggested that the children be transferred to a safe home. CHILDLINE complied with this and started the process of transferring the children to a safe home. During this time the children were kept at the CHILDLINE help desk, accompanied by a female caretaker who kept the children comfortable and engaged.

Priyanka and Madhu Priya are currently living in a safe home. The CHILDLINE team continues to follow up with the authorities at the safe home to make sure the children are safe.

*"The potential possibilities of any child are the most intriguing and stimulating in all creation."*

*Ray L. Wilbur*





# INNOVATION AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



## UP2TOM QUIZ

The first step towards a healthy relationship is self-assessment. We partner with Merlynn, an artificial intelligence technology business, who have developed for us - pro bono - a quiz using Intelligence Technologies.

By taking this quiz, it will help one identify if their relationship with their partner is healthy in 4 core areas (physical, emotional, economic and sexual).

This quiz is completely confidential.

To take the quiz, use this URL:

[www.tom.mychoicesfoundation.org](http://www.tom.mychoicesfoundation.org)

or scan the QR code:







## NETBALL TOURNAMENT

How does sport raise awareness on child trafficking? We searched to find a simple game to portray how necessary trust is, and discovered that netball was perfect to achieve this. Building trust and helping others when required was the key

aspect of this game which will then go on to enable the girls to become Guardian Girls.

Over a year ago, a Safe Village Program was conducted in Soongachi village. There was a great response from the village and the fathers and mothers were very responsive to the message being shared. Many girls wanted to be Guardian Girls, keeping not only themselves safe but their friends too. After a month of training, a tournament was conducted. We knew this worked when we saw a great sense of unity among the players, which we knew demanded great discipline. The tournament was a great success and we could see the two teams of Guardian Girls geared up to deflect the attempts of traffickers.



## RED LIST

With an aim to empower vulnerable gram panchayats and build safe panchayats, we have conceptualized the Reinforced Safe Village Program (RSVP). We select villages that are indicated as highly traffic-prone by our Implementing Partners based on

their observations during the SVP. We aim to initiate the RSVP in these areas. We also plan to enhance the role of the Rakshaks and Nodal Teachers and equip them with skills to continue keeping guard over the village and be prompt in reporting trafficking, or signs of trafficking. We plan to make the helpline more visible, bring together vigilance committees and make them more effective, sensitize the community, and involve the leadership in activities to ensure they are accountable. The RSVP will be piloted in West Bengal soon.



## PARTNERSHIP WITH GLOBAL FUND TO END MODERN SLAVERY

My Choices Foundation has been co-awarded the prestigious grant funded by Global Fund To End Modern Slavery along with Seefar. This fund will help us build an evidence-based

communications campaign implemented in West Bengal, India. This can help raise awareness and drive behaviour-change among children at risk of trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), their families and local communities and will:

- Assess community vulnerability to trafficking and CSEC and decision-making processes.
- Develop an evidence-based approach using the most effective messages and most trusted communications channels used by the target groups.
- Deploy an integrated community-based intervention that will empower children, their families and their communities to recognise, prevent and respond to trafficking and CSEC.
- Build the capacity of local community-based organizations to enable sustainable community prevention.



## PARTNERS AND FUNDERS



Australian Aid promotes prosperity, reduces poverty and enhances stability around the world. The various programs of Operation PeaceMaker and Operation Red Alert receive support from Australian Aid.



Operation PeaceMaker is a training partner for Bharosa, the Hyderabad Police support centre for women and children who are affected by violence in the family, community and the workplace.



CHILDLINE India operates the 1098 helpline for children in distress. From January 2019, My Choices Foundation was selected as the NGO to run the CHILDLINE kiosk in Nampally Railway Station.



The Freedom Collaborative fosters collaboration to promote freedom. Operation Red Alert is a regional partner helping Freedom Collaborative connect Indian NGOs with the platform and its resources.



My Choices Foundation has been co-awarded the prestigious grant funded by Global Fund To End Modern Slavery along with Seefar. This will enable us to implement the SVP in West Bengal.



Global Fund For Children transforms the lives of the world's most vulnerable children. With the support of GFC, Operation Red Alert is able to hold anti-trafficking awareness programs in West Bengal, India.



GHR Foundation creates change with partners around the world through early action and learning, paired with collaboration on every level to provide the greatest opportunity for adjustment and impact. GHR Foundation provides support to one of the counselling centres of Operation PeaceMaker.



International Justice Mission (IJM) is a global organization that protects the most vulnerable from violence and oppression irrespective of their gender, community, caste, race, and ethnicity. International Justice Mission is a strategic partner of Operation Red Alert of My Choices Foundation.



Opportunity International Australia aims to create a world in which all people have the opportunity to achieve a life free from poverty, and with dignity and purpose. Opportunity International Australia supports selected programs of Operation PeaceMaker and Operation Red Alert of My Choices Foundation.



Quantum is a data analytics company operating out of 5 countries. Quantum has partnered with My Choices Foundation to apply world class analytics to identify locations in rural India which are at the largest risk of trafficking, map these villages, and work with the team to record, upload and store data.



SAFA introduces urban women who have not received a formal education to sustainable livelihoods and supports them in the education of their children through an area-based community model. We have partnered with SAFA to operate a training centre in their community.



The Sall Family Foundation, through Namati, supports My Choices Foundation as we continue to address the issue of child sexual abuse in India. Through intervention and prevention, we achieve this by the training and capacity building of paralegals who deal with child sexual abuse issues.





Operation PeaceMaker officially partnered with the Hyderabad Police to serve as counsellors in domestic violence cases. The Hyderabad Police also refers cases to us that require legal assistance.



Operation Red Alert of My Choices Foundation routinely holds training and upskilling workshops as a part of our anti-trafficking Safe Village Program, for which we receive support from the US Consulate.



The William H. Donner Foundation, Inc. supports the Lotus Safe Home which provides shelter to victims of domestic violence. Operation PeaceMaker of My Choices Foundation opened the Lotus Safe Home in 2018 to help transform victims of domestic violence into survivors of domestic violence.



Xilinx provides funding support to our anti-trafficking initiative Operation Red Alert of My Choices Foundation. Technology company Xilinx has enabled Operation Red Alert to hold anti-trafficking awareness Save Village Programs throughout the state of Telangana, India.



Zariya is a free service that addresses survivors' legal and counseling needs. With their secure website and reputable partners, Zariya provides women with access to such provisions where they can anonymously file a report and connect with an appropriate advisor in a time-sensitive manner. Operation PeaceMaker currently handles and makes referrals on all cases that come through the Zariya system.



## AWARDS AND ACCOLADES



Our research report, 'Trafficking Trends in India' won the world's most prestigious market research award - 'Best Research Paper 2014'.



We were awarded the Grand Jury award for Women Empowerment at the Social Media for Empowerment Awards 2016 by the Digital Empowerment Foundation.



**UNSW**  
SYDNEY

Our founder Elca Grobler was honoured by UNSW for Social Impact and Public Policy. This was a selection out of 290,000 graduates from 146 countries.



Tharuni / Terre des Hommes / Girls Advocacy Alliance awarded Vivian Isaac, Program Director of Operation Red Alert with the "Balika Bandhu Award".



Elca Grobler was recognized in 2018 and 2019 as one of the 100 Most Impactful CSR Leaders, by World CSR and World Sustainability Congress and World Federation of CSR Professionals.



My Choices Foundation Founder, Elca Grobler, spoke about violence against women and the need for organizations such as My Choices Foundation at India's flagship TEDx event – TEDxHyderabad in 2017.



We partnered with Oculus and Facebook to create the world's first VR documentary on sex trafficking.

The film 'Notes To My Father' made its world premiere in 2017 at the UN Women San Francisco Film Festival.



My Choices Foundation was honoured by The Elders, an independent group founded by Nelson Mandela, with the global title of one of the 100 Sparks of Hope to continue the inspiring work of Nelson Mandela.



In 2018, Operation PeaceMaker was one of the top 5 ideas in the BridgeBuilder Challenge organized by GHR Foundation and Open IDEO, to address urgent and emergent concerns of peace and prosperity.



In 2019, Operation PeaceMaker won first prize in Opportunity International's annual WeGO Award to empower more women and girls around the world with counselling and legal support.





## SUPPORT US AND HELP US EMPOWER MORE WOMEN AND CHILDREN



ENTER THIS URL TO BROWSE THROUGH OUR PROGRAMS ON GLOBAL GIVING:

[globalgiving.org/donate/29289/my-choices](https://globalgiving.org/donate/29289/my-choices)



ENTER THIS URL TO BROWSE THROUGH OUR PROGRAMS ON GIVEINDIA:

[fundraisers.giveindia.org/nonprofits/her-choices-trust](https://fundraisers.giveindia.org/nonprofits/her-choices-trust)



ENTER THIS URL TO BROWSE THROUGH OUR PROGRAMS ON OUR WEBSITE:

[mychoicesfoundation.org/donate](https://mychoicesfoundation.org/donate)

# Thank You

My Choices Foundation thanks all of our friends and partners for their constant support towards our aim to give women and girls the choice to live lives free from violence, abuse and exploitation.

We are grateful to work with people and organizations who have made great strides in securing rights for women and girls. We have created this impact report covering our work until December 2019 to give you a glimpse of what your support has enabled us to accomplish in the lives of so many in India.



## STAY CONNECTED WITH US!



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# MY NOTES

Issues I care about:

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Steps I can take to solve this issue:

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# MY CHOICES

FOUNDATION

**GET IN TOUCH WITH US:**



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