THE POWER OF OUR CHOICES

IMPACT REPORT 2022
My Choices Foundation is committed to working with children, families and communities to end sex trafficking and stop domestic violence by providing choices to live lives free of abuse, violence and exploitation. My Choices Foundation serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

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THE POWER OF OUR CHOICES

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THE PURPOSE OF OUR EXISTENCE
It was like living in hell. My husband constantly doubted my character and even at the slightest chance, he hit me with whatever he found at home. I mean anything; belt, spatula, chair, footwear or broomstick. One day, he shaved my head stating that my long, dark hair is inviting other men.”

25-year-old woman from Telangana

My hands got badly burnt by fired bricks, and my face, hands and legs would be covered in dried mud. It was hard, but my parents’ earnings were not enough to feed us all. So, my sister, brother and I work at the brick kiln for 14-15 hours a day and get back only after it is dark.”

11-year-old boy from Karnataka

I lost count of how many times I have been raped, assaulted or almost died. All I wanted was to support my struggling parents and accepted a job at a beauty parlour in the city. Little did I know that I was expected to have sex with 12-14 men day and night. We are poor but not to the extent of standing naked in front of men to be picked for having sex.”

12-year-old girl from West Bengal

It was just one slap after I gave birth to my second child. Within the next months, I was treated for three different injuries. 18 years have passed in this married life – that is half of my life. I have accepted it and also men beating women is not something that happens only in my house.”

43-year-old woman from Maharashtra

I was waiting to start class 9 when COVID-19 struck. My school was closed and my parents lost their jobs. Even one meal a day became a huge challenge. My sisters were so young and they used to cry a lot. That was when my neighbour aunty talked about a wedding proposal for me. With our family situation, I couldn’t say no and was forced to get married at 15 years old.”

15-year-old girl from Chhattisgarh
736 million women across the world have experienced physical and sexual harassment, mostly by an intimate partner, at least once in their life.

71% of all trafficking victims worldwide are women and girls, with 94% of female victims trafficked for sexual exploitation.

1 in 3 of the world’s child brides live in India. Of the country’s 223 million child brides, 102 million were married before turning 15.

650 million women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday.

4 out of 5 trafficked women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

28 million were in forced labour in 2021, out of which 12% of are children.

1 in 3 are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner.

1 in 3 women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months (2019-2020).
MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

Right now,

- Someone decides for a 15-year-old girl to get married.
- Someone forces a woman to stay in a violent relationship for decades.
- Someone sells a young girl into sexual slavery.
- Someone takes control of a woman’s body and sexually abuses her.
- Someone abuses their spouse and children daily.

That someone could be our friend, neighbour or even our own family. That someone controls the choices of the women and children.

In these scenarios, the only choice women and girls were allowed to make was – silent cries. Their voices were silenced. Their freedom to make a choice was snatched.

And it continues to happen in millions of households, public spaces, offices, camps and many places we can’t even keep count on. There is a visible, yet invisible tight grip on the full liberation of the lives of women and children.

Meaning of ‘choice’

noun, plural noun: choices

- an act of choosing between two or more possibilities.
- “the choice between good and evil”
- the right or ability to choose.
- “I had to do it, I had no choice”
- a range of possibilities from which one or more may be chosen.
- “you can decide between a number of choices”
- “she had no choice”.

‘Choice’ is a simple word but carries a deep and powerful meaning. It can inspire us, build us, lead us as well as destroy us. The most vital power and the most fundamental thing anyone should have in life is the ability to choose.

I am writing this message because of the choice I made 11 years ago to start My Choices Foundation. If you are in a place because of the choices you made in your life – I am happy for you. You and me, both of us are truly loved and supported by people around us, who empower us to make our own choices.

This is an absurd reality in thousands of women’s and children’s lives.

The mission of My Choices Foundation is to give women, children and families choices to live lives free from abuse, violence and exploitation.

It is what keeps us up at night and carries us throughout our days. Our team has worked relentlessly – making bold, brave and determined choices individually and collectively – over the last 11 years to help women and children understand what choice means – from choosing to be brave to choosing to be determined and choosing to make decisions on what happens in their lives.

We are immensely proud and grateful for the impact we made and continue to make, which will reflect in the generations to come.

Reflecting on these words of Barack Obama, former President of the United States – I would like to say,

“We are the choices we make.”

‘Choice’ is a blessing for those of us who have the profound power to make a choice, which shouldn’t be taken for granted.

I would like to express my gratitude to all our donors, partners and supporters who have chosen to believe in our work. We wouldn’t have been able to become ‘who we are’ without your generosity. Your choice to support us in the journey brought a whole new world of choices, helping us to accelerate the progress to end the violence against women and children and create an environment that will enable them to thrive.

I invite you to take sometime to read through our Impact Report 2022: THE POWER OF OUR CHOICES – which encapsulates the impact on women and children because of the choices we made together – continue to inspire change for generations.

“Nothing is so strong as gentleness, and nothing so gentle as real strength.”

YOU - donors, partners, supporters, employees – are living proof of these words from Ralph W. Sockman. Thank you very much for making the world a better place for women and children through your gentleness and strength.

With gratitude,
If the Safe Village Program wouldn’t have happened in my village, I would have left home by trusting someone whom I met online and left home. I met this person online and he assured me of a promising job opportunity in Mumbai. He has been very kind and sweet, and I completely trusted him. Actually, I have made up my mind to leave home. That was when the Safe Village Program was held in my village and I learnt about how social media has been used for trafficking young girls. I do not have words to describe how grateful I am.”

15-year-old girl from Maharashtra

It was a hard journey and I cannot even imagine how I would have gone through without your help and support. Your legal team has supported me with protection and maintenance orders, my gold ornaments and compensation of more than eight lakhs in addition to monthly rent expenses. It is of huge help and I do not have words to explain my gratitude. I will be eternally grateful for what you have done for me and my little daughter.”

32-year-old domestic violence survivor from Telangana.
During the counselling sessions, Operation PeaceMaker staff treated us respectfully, helped us resolve the underlying insecurities and challenges, and helped my wife to navigate the fears which she was dealing with for a very long time. They did not resolve our relationship, rather they taught us to communicate openly without false words and end the frequent emotional conflicts which we both were going through.

A man with a change of heart following our counselling session

“I feel much stronger and more confident now. I will no longer remain silent to abuse. All thanks to My Choices Foundation for helping me start a new life. It’s a good feeling to know that someone is there to protect us and steer us in the right direction. In summary, My Choices Foundation has had an immense impact on my life and changed it for the best.”

Domestic violence survivor from Andhra Pradesh
I will be forever grateful for you to visit this place. You have made an effort to acknowledge our existence and talk about safety, which is so rare these days. I am going to talk about all your messages to my Mother and Father as soon as I reach home. I will also share it with my neighbours. It is highly needed to keep ourselves and other children safe from traffickers. Thank you very much. Please visit us again.”

17-year-old girl from Odisha

The Safe village program serves as amazing guidance for children and parents and helps them protect themselves and others from being trafficked. Especially, the comic book has been designed in a way to help parents, as well as children, understand the signs and consequences of sex trafficking. I wish you all the best.”

HeadMaster from Karnataka
ACCELERATING PROGRESS
OUR GOALS

Goal 1
Empower women and girls to become change agents in their own families and communities.

Goal 2
Educate women and girls who are at-risk of abuse and sexual exploitation.

Goal 3
Ensure a supportive environment for survivors and their families.
OUR MISSION
We aim to give women, children and families choices to live lives free from abuse, violence and exploitation.

OUR VALUES
Our values are the foundation of our actions and decisions. It reflects our priorities, attitudes and perspectives we bring to work.

Transformation
We believe that a better world is often a choice away.

Passion
We are kind, caring, brave and passionate.

Courage
We act with courage, ask tough questions and challenge the status quo.

Innovation
We always strive to find new and innovative ways to solve society’s tough problems.

Accountability
We do the right thing and take responsibility for our actions.

Equality
We treat all with respect, dignity and integrity.

Partnerships
We trust the power of partnerships and collaboration.
OUR OPERATIONS AND FOUR-PILLAR APPROACH

We adopt a four-pillar approach to progress towards our vision, guide our transformation and fulfil our goals.

Operation PeaceMaker (OPM) aims to reduce domestic violence by working with empowered community women, address child sexual abuse and exploitation, advance women’s empowerment and achieve gender equality.

Operation Red Alert (ORA) focuses on the prevention of sex trafficking in high-risk states by educating parents and empowering children and communities about the pathways and consequences of sex trafficking.

Pillar 1
Prevent through awareness

Pillar 1
Eradicate at grassroots levels

Pillar 2
Provide support through interventions

Pillar 2
Equip village custodians

Pillar 3
Protect survivor's safety

Pillar 3
Empower by helpline

Pillar 4
Prepare men to be allies

Pillar 4
Expose by mass media
290 PeaceMakers trained

15,284 families impacted through counselling

227 domestic violence survivors and children supported through our Lotus Safe Home

3,37,845 People (women, men and children) educated on gender-based violence

29 WOMEN 98 CHILDREN supported through the Lotus Fund
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<th>Metric</th>
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<td>Safe Village Programs conducted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grassroots’ stakeholders signed up to be volunteers</td>
<td>11,927</td>
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<tr>
<td>People educated on sex trafficking and its related factors</td>
<td>33,04,632</td>
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<td>Children reunited with their families through CHILDLINE helpdesks</td>
<td>1,301</td>
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<td>Calls received through human trafficking helpline</td>
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<td>Comic books distributed</td>
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OP E R A T I O N
PEACEMAKER
PILLAR 1: PREVENT THROUGH AWARENESS

We want to stop the violence before it occurs and that is a goal of our prevention-focused programmes. After gathering a deep understanding of a wide variety of factors that influence violence, we designed targeted prevention programmes that focused on empowering local community women to be agents of change for their communities and educating girls to challenge the cycle of various forms of violence.

Organised by local community women who are trained in professional counselling and training programmes, whom we fondly refer to as PeaceMakers, our community-level awareness sessions create awareness about domestic violence, child sexual abuse, legal rights, and mechanisms for help and support them in protecting themselves as well as their children.

12,727 community programmes

School and college programmes are aimed to teach about healthy relationships, responsible decision-making, gender stereotypes, consequences of early marriage, how to keep themselves safe and others from physical, sexual and emotional violence that occurs in their environment and the importance of gender equality among others.

1,804 school and college programmes

In partnership with Aangan Trust’s Super Smart Shakti Girls’ Network, we help girls understand the connection between empowerment, education, financial independence & keeping safe from harm like abuse, child marriage, sexual exploitation, discrimination, and isolation and connect them to peer groups and help them make safe choices for a better future.

1,879 SuperSmart Shakti Girls
PILLAR 2: PROVIDE SUPPORT THROUGH INTERVENTIONS

Through the ‘Provide support through interventions’ pillar, we ensure that survivors receive a comprehensive set of essential services such as counselling, police support, legal aid and financial help to start their lives free of abuse and violence.

Our counselling and support centres – Shah Ali Banda, Golconda, Lakkapal, Warangal and Secunderabad in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana – are safe and confidential spaces for domestic violence survivors to share their experiences, process their emotions, develop skills for recovery and heal from their past. It is important to mention that wherever appropriate, we work with the perpetrators to reduce the chances of their returning to patterns of violence and help survivors resume their familial relationships.

We also run a 24x7 telephonic counselling where people can call on our toll-free helpline at 1800 212 9131 or WhatsApp at 9333 40 4141 and receive the help they need.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TOLL-FREE HELPLINE
1800 212 9131

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WHATSAPP CHAT
9333 40 4141

1,70,504 counselling hours

We have absolute trust and confidence in the criminal justice system of India and make all efforts to make perpetrators accountable and ensure survivors are treated with compassion, respect and dignity throughout the proceedings. Our legal team comprises three advocates, who serve three districts – Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy and Warangal in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, with a total of seven courts - Warangal, Nampally, Kukatpally, Rajendra Nagar, Medchal, L.B.Nagar and Malkajigiri.

With our Lotus Fund, we provide financial support for essential items, advances in rental, and skill and vocational development. Equipping women to stand on their own feet is essential to ensure that they can support themselves and their children going forward.

166 survivors supported with legal aid

129 women and 98 children supported with our Lotus Fund
PILLAR 3: PROTECT SURVIVORS’ SAFETY

Our priority is to protect the immediate safety of the survivors and help them through recovery while responding to their needs. With a place to call their own, the Lotus Safe Home is a pathway to freedom for many of the survivors. It provides immediate safety for women and children who escape from the abuse and can stay as long as possible to transition to new abuse-free lives. During their stay, they get all the help – from counselling, legal help, food, stay, clothing, awareness sessions about their rights, educational opportunities for their children, art therapy, skill development, and vocational training - to rebuild their lives and experience a new form of freedom and independence.
PILLAR 4: PREPARE MEN AND BOYS TO BE ALLIES

Male engagement is crucial to prevent and address domestic violence as well as shake the structures of patriarchy, and social tolerance towards violence against women. We make the most efforts with our transformative behavioural interventions that engage boys and men in thoughtful ways to shift strongly entrenched social norms and intersecting inequalities that drive violence against women and girls.

In partnership with Aangan Trust’s Asli Champions Boys’ Safety Network, we connect adolescent boys to peer networks and encourage them to challenge societal norms regarding gender roles and masculinity and help them understand early warning signs of harm.

55 champions

453 Asli Champions

Through the BoyTalk Project, we organise casual meet-ups and workshops with young men about rigid gender narratives and offer a safe place to engage in conversations about what part of their masculinity they wish to embrace and which gender norms do not serve them and enable them to live fulfilled lives.
PILLAR 1: ERADICATE AT GRASSROOTS LEVEL

The core of the Operation Red Alert strategy is to prevent sex trafficking at the grassroots level where the vulnerability to trafficking is high. India is the seventh largest country in terms of total geographical area and there are more than 6,60,000 villages. So, we wanted to gather data to assess the vulnerabilities of all villages, particularly understanding the male behaviour of buying and selling girls in the human trafficking trade. Our findings were startling yet deeply insightful, which helped us to design a behaviour change intervention targeted for girls, boys, fathers, mothers and communities; the programme to eradicate human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking at the grassroots level.

Safe Village Program is a holistic intervention and adopts a novel approach: leverage data to locate at-risk villages and use the positive-messaging framework to sensitise at-risk community members about sex trafficking, create awareness about ways to prevent trafficking, sustain awareness and empower the community to prevent trafficking and child marriages in their villages. Community engagement tools for the intervention are research-informed comic books, flip charts, videos, animations and counselling to spread the messages of human trafficking and its related factors.

We continue to combine strengths and amplify collective efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking with our annual Asian Anti-Human Trafficking Forum. The purpose of the event is to spotlight strategic partnerships and cross-sectoral collaborations to address the current challenges of human trafficking, encourage coordinated action and scale up solutions for maximizing results on the ground.

Believing in the collective power, we have 87 Implementing Partners – community-based organisations – across 10 states at the country-level and expanding our reach with new ones at the global-level beginning with Nepal and Bangladesh.

87 Implementing Partners

7,827 Safe Village Programs

4 Asian Anti-Trafficking Forums
PILLAR 2: EQUIP VILLAGE CUSTODIANS

Our village custodians are the first line of defence against traffickers; they are passionate volunteers who make a commitment to My Choices Foundation to sustain the messages of the Safe Village Program, make children stay in school, stop early marriages and child labour, intervene for child abuse, report suspicious activity and ensure the safety of the villages.

- Gram Mitra (friend of a village)
- Nodal Teacher (a Protector to ensure children stay in school),
- Rakshak (a Vigilante who reports suspicious activity) and Retired Teachers
- Community Leadership (who acts as a guide)

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<th>4,736</th>
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<th>3,721</th>
<th>583</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gram Mitras</td>
<td>Nodal Teachers</td>
<td>Rakshaks</td>
<td>Community Leaders</td>
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</table>
PILLAR 3: EMPOWER BY HELPLINE

We operate 24x7 human trafficking helplines 1800 419 8588 and CHILDLINE 1098, which have saved thousands of women and girls from being trafficked, sold off into sexual slavery, caught in an early marriage, stopped going to school, toiling in the hot sun as labourers as well as rescued children and have them safely reunited with their families.

The CHILDLINE helpdesk at Nampally Railway station and Mahatma Gandhi Bus Station in Hyderabad, South India is a joint initiative of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Indian Railways.

Human trafficking helpline 1800 419 8588 is India's first National Human Trafficking Helpline, launched by a coalition of My Choices Foundation and various NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), covering various geographic zones of India.

1,301 children were reunited with their parents through CHILDLINE helpdesks

72,413 helpline calls received

PILLAR 4: EXPOSE BY MASS MEDIA

Given the disturbing data on the widespread problem of human trafficking in the country, we believe that there is an urgent need to create large-scale media campaigns that can raise awareness, build knowledge, influence attitudes and mobilise support and involvement to help prevent and combat sex trafficking.

We conceptualised and produced educational and informative videos and animations to critically engage people in understanding the meaning and impact of human trafficking.

Our community radio programmes 'Listen and Act' centred on creating awareness and instilling a deeper understanding of issues of trafficking, and empowered communities to seek help to prevent the crime and change attitudes.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING HELPLINE
1800 419 8588

CHILDLINE 1098
THE JOURNEY AHEAD
THE JOURNEY AHEAD

We are building on our strengths and experience, getting closer to the communities and listening to them and encouraging them to be a part of the solution. And what we witness every single day is beyond words – the change we envisioned to see when we began in 2012; people making bold choices – from an 8-year-old girl to an 80-year-old community leader and all age groups in between standing strong to end violence against women and girls.

We continue to work with partners around the world to advocate for collaborative solutions, amplify the voices of the communities, address gender inequalities and build meaningful movements that seek deeper and sustainable systemic changes to create a safe, fair and equal world for women and girls.

Over the next three years, My Choices Foundation will accelerate our efforts to:

• **Expand our geographical footprint**, reaching the children, women and communities in the remotest parts of India and neighbouring countries.

• **Strengthen our partnerships** with community-based organisations, government agencies and local community leaders to better identify and respond to the needs of women and children.

• **Invest in technology** and expand the use of digital platforms and tools to educate, provide counselling, education, measure progress and make informed decisions.

• **Prioritise awareness-raising initiatives** to address the root causes of violence against women and children, promote gender equality, challenge stereotypes and prejudice and involve men and boys.

• **Advocate for collaborative solutions** by working with partners worldwide multiply the voices of the communities and build meaningful movements that seek deeper and sustainable systemic changes to create a safe, fair and equal world for women and girls.
We are truly grateful and honoured to Opportunity International Australia for their continued support of the selected programmes of My Choices Foundation. From February in 2017 and became an official selection at the GSFF Film Festival where it made its world premiere.

We have partnered with Quantum Labs to build a data analytics tool, the AndHive Billing Tool, to map villages roughly prone to trafficking in various parts of India, where girls and young women are at risk of trafficking. The AndHive model includes a custom software application, AndHive, which enables communities to map their areas and identify vulnerable groups. We are thankful to receive the help of Quantum Labs in this fight against sex trafficking.

Sah is an intravenous urban women who has a received formal education in sustainable livelihoods and supports them in the education of their children through area-based community models for girls. The Sah Wali Wali program is a one-stop solution to vulnerable young girls in urban communities which is marginalized.

Sisense seeks to drive meaningful change in the world by making it easier for businesses to infuse analytical everywhere anything possible be better at the scale. Sisense provides an all-in-one platform that any company can use to drive better, faster decisions, for their businesses and their customers.

The Nest Family Foundation through NESTUPN supports My Choices Foundation initiatives to address the issue of child sexual abuse in our programmes. They have partnered with NESTUPN to support the efforts of the organization in providing legal assistance to child sexual abuse victims.

We have partnered with the Halton Police to serve as counselors in domestic violence cases. The impact made in each counselor involves informing women on all the options available to them in order to secure the best decision for their life's situation. The Halton Police also refers cases to us which require legal assistance and our legal team follows up on these cases.

Thronica is a non-governmental organization that works for the development of vulnerable girls' welfare and elderly people. We have partnered with Thronica to expand our Super-Empower Shakti Safety Network so that the women can start the legal process of fighting the injustice they endured.

We are grateful to receive the support of Amsure, for one of our programmes. We are deeply thankful for their continuous support navigating Covid, as well as crucial support for covid related activities. We are truly grateful and honoured to Opportunity International Australia for their continued support of the selected programmes of My Choices Foundation. From February in 2017 and became an official selection at the GSFF Film Festival where it made its world premiere.

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REFERENCES

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