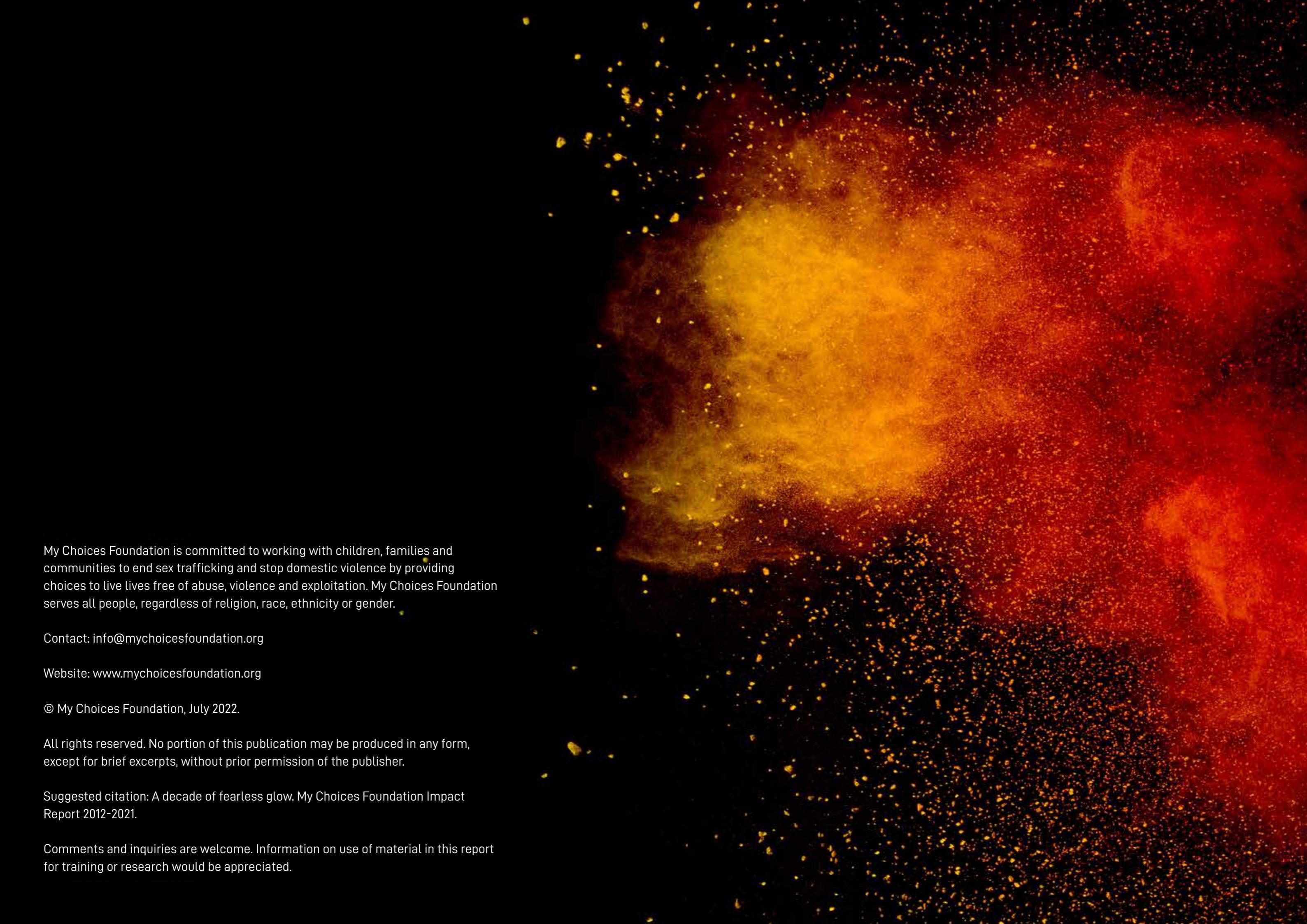




A DECADE OF
FEARLESS GLOW

Impact Report 2012-2021





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.

Contact: info@mychoicesfoundation.org

Website: www.mychoicesfoundation.org

© My Choices Foundation, July 2022.

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be produced in any form, except for brief excerpts, without prior permission of the publisher.

Suggested citation: A decade of fearless glow. My Choices Foundation Impact Report 2012-2021.

Comments and inquiries are welcome. Information on use of material in this report for training or research would be appreciated.

“

We, at My Choices Foundation, call ourselves 'Dragon Slayers' - a metaphor for our people who go out there every day, slaying dragons in the field. They are the strongest people you will ever meet, with a caring attitude and true grit. When we see real pain up close, it shatters us into pieces and at the same time gives us tremendous strength. Pain and sorrow become a force that drives us and continue to remind us to move forward with sheer determination and immense passion every single day - a day we dream the world is a safe place for every girl and woman to live and thrive.”

Elca Grobler,
Founder, My Choices Foundation

Young girl, who attended our Safe Village Program in West Bengal.



CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER	8
MY CHOICES FOUNDATION AT A GLANCE	12
SECTION 1: THE JOURNEY OF MY CHOICES FOUNDATION	14
10 years and counting	16
Delivering on our strategic plan and next steps	18
A decade of fearless and unstoppable journey	20
Our impact in a decade	26
SECTION 2: MY CHOICES FOUNDATION IN ACTION	30
The reality	32
The disturbing data	34
Our programmes	38
Operation PeaceMaker in action	40
Operation Red Alert in action	74
The fearless and unstoppable glow	110
SECTION 3: THE WAY FORWARD	112
A look into the future	114
WE ARE HUMBLED AND GRATEFUL	116

MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER



Words have the magical power to refine our thinking, alter our approach and inspire us to move forward with strong faith.

**"Risk more than some think is safe.
Care more than others think is wise.
Dream more than others think is practical.
Expect more than others think is possible."**

These words of Claude T. Bissel reflect the profound reality that if we want to do something truly meaningful, something absolutely magical, something utterly transformative, we must break free of our comfort zones, firmly believe that our dreams are achievable and be all the more kind in the journey.

I am privileged and honoured to share our Impact Report with you – and this moment is infinitely special for each one of us at My Choices Foundation and our supporters worldwide as we celebrate our 10-year anniversary.

Impact Report 2012-2021: The decade of a fearless journey. This is a moment to celebrate, to take stock of things we have done and consider where we are going.

First, I would like to take this moment to extend my deepest gratitude and warmest appreciation to everyone at My Choices Foundation. Our decade-long journey stands the test of time, and was made possible by the courage, passion and commitment of our team, and through a strong belief that our dream of creating a safer India for women and girls is possible.

We absolutely couldn't have done it without our partners, donors and supporters nor can we take the next steps without your help.

We are amazed by how far we have come and how many lives we have touched. Since our humble beginnings in 2012, we have had the joy of seeing My Choices Foundation grow into what we are today – from an unnamed grassroots organisation to a globally recognised NGO that fights gender-based violence and in particular, sex trafficking and domestic violence.

Kindly take a pause in 2022 and travel with me to 2012. I would like to share our important moments with you.

It feels like only yesterday I was navigating through the narrow, bustling lanes in the old city of Hyderabad. I can vividly remember the taste of chai at the local tea shop, the colourful glass bangles, the glowing pearls. But hidden underneath all this vibrancy and colour was a chilling truth – the brutal violence against women and children that occur quietly inside their homes and move silently within the hearts of women who are the most affected.

With the choices we make, we have the power to change our lives and the lives of those around us.

We made the choice to believe that women and girls can become the change agents in their communities to fight domestic violence and sex trafficking. We believed they have the courage, the remarkable commitment and the loving-kindness to do this.

Yes, we believed in them.

This gave birth to the My Choices Foundation. We started with a firm belief that giving women and girls the power to make their own choices to live lives free of abuse, violence and exploitation is an immense step forward. Those choices have the power to change their future and the future of other women and girls in their communities.

Over the last 10 years, we have witnessed that it is definitely possible – if only we dare to be bold and dream big enough.

"Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous or honest"

These words of Maya Angelou are a true reflection of our journey.

We have come a long way since training our first group of PeaceMakers – community women who are the facilitators of change in their communities. We realised our ambition of creating our own Safe Home, a place of refuge and hope for new beginnings for women and children.

There is a beautiful quote by Victor Hugo: "Those who do not weep, do not see."

As we have always said and lived by the words, courage is contagious and courage carries and encourages us to get up everyday and slay dragons.

With our work and reach in Domestic Violence growing and expanding, we started getting calls on our helpline of missing children or young girls that have been trafficked.



Graduation ceremony of PeaceMakers at Warangal

The true scale of children and young girls that went missing or being trafficked was astronomical. We couldn't keep quiet.

We stepped into the unknown waters, but we had the grit, spirit and courage – the work of Operation Red Alert began in 2014.

Braving the long and rocky roads, we travelled thousands of miles to reach the farthest parts of the country to educate families about the importance of protecting their children, women and communities from traffickers. Fast forward to the present, we have grown into one of India's largest NGOs focused on the prevention of sex trafficking.

Our days are long, the journey is hard. We deal with a lot of pain, grief and sorrow, and this grief sometimes sinks deep into our bones. It breaks us but makes us stronger, tougher and fiercer.



A group of smiling school children after receiving our comic books

We, at My Choices Foundation, are warriors and survivors. We have shown and proved that when a group of committed and passionate people come together, we can make a lasting difference.

Going forward, I am very much aware that our journey is not going to be easy, but it will be filled with relentless passions, strong perseverance, unconventional thinking and unwavering commitment. We will continue to believe that the impossible is possible – just as we believed a decade ago.

We might not have every step planned out, but that is the best part of My Choices Foundation's incredible journey. That is what has made us so successful. We are adaptable and flexible, and always striving to do better. This courage has led us on a path we could have never planned ourselves. A path in which we are changing the lives of millions of families and their children.

The fire within us is burning bright; a steady radiance of fearless, unstoppable and powerful glow. We know who we are and what needs to be done. We have done it before. We will do it again for the next decade and many more decades down the line. We will continue to plan, refine our thinking and build on our vision to give every woman and girl the choices to live a life free from abuse, violence and exploitation. We are determined to make it happen.

"Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in the darkness for the light that is you."

These words of L.R. Knost are the state of being of each of us at My Choices Foundation. Everyone wants to make a difference in the world, but only a few people want to be different from the world. My heartfelt thanks to each of the dragonslayers in our team who are different from the world and who are making the world a different place.

As I draw this moment of reflection to a close, I know the best years are still ahead of us. Kindly remember:

**Hope matters.
Optimism is priceless.
Bravery is a choice.
Dragonslayers truly exist.**

With deepest gratitude and appreciation,

Elca Grobler



MY CHOICES FOUNDATION AT A GLANCE



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.



A smiling young girl from our Shakti Programme

Section 1

THE JOURNEY OF MY CHOICES FOUNDATION



Empowered school girls after the awareness session
on human trafficking and domestic violence.

10 YEARS AND COUNTING...

10C

We have so much to celebrate!

This year, My Choices Foundation marks its 10-year anniversary. We are proud of our progress and grateful to have come so far since our humble beginnings in 2012. Over the years, our programmes evolved, our knowledge expanded, our team grew and we were able to reach thousands of people. With the uncertainties of the pandemic still in sight and the scale and complexity of challenges in fighting sex trafficking and domestic violence remaining high, our focus is on the future. We are determined to march on for the next 10 years and beyond.

From 2012 to 2021, My Choices Foundation has empowered millions of children, women, families and communities to make transformative choices to live lives free from abuse, violence and sexual exploitation in ten states – Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Telangana and West Bengal – in more than 6,500 locations across the nation of India.

We have engaged with partners around the globe and fought against gender-based violence, prevented sexual exploitation of women and girls, supported domestic violence survivors to overcome obstacles and provided a safe home to

start afresh, along with psychological and legal support, protected children from getting married early or being put to work and ensured that they remain in school, reunited missing or runaway children with their families and prepared men as allies to address harmful gender norms.

Women, across the world, faced a pandemic within a pandemic; there were only two possibilities - they go on the street and face the virus or stay home and face the abuse. When the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the deep inequalities with the worst consequences on women and children, we accelerated our efforts with a heightened focus on digital and telecommunication channels, essential supplies, new partnerships and strategic collaborations. We provided essential supplies, increased our capacity for telephone counselling, delivered online educational sessions with engaging animations and participatory conversations, and strengthened community leadership knowledge to keep their villages safe from traffickers.

Behind all of My Choices Foundation's accomplishments was the fearless courage and unstoppable passion of over 190 employees spread across the country, living up to the organisational values of transformation, passion, courage, innovation, accountability, equality and partnerships.



A child with a comic book during the Safe Village Program in West Bengal.

DELIVERING ON OUR STRATEGIC PLAN AND NEXT STEPS



Early in 2012, we put together an outline for our journey which eventually evolved as the My Choices Foundation Strategic Plan. We have made many advances and brought glowing smiles to many children, women, families and communities with an ever-growing circle of action and impact.

Drawing parallels between Operation PeaceMaker (anti-domestic violence wing) and Operation Red Alert (anti-sex trafficking wing), the first-ever My Choices Foundation Strategic Plan was adopted at the Leadership Forum in mid-2012 and refined at subsequent Leadership Forums. The bold, ambitious plan identified three goals and provided a clear framework for where we needed to head.



Goal 1

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



Goal 2

Educate at-risk women, girls, families and communities.



Goal 3

Ensure a supportive environment for survivors and their families.



Two colleagues renew their commitment to end gender-based violence at International Women's Day celebrations.



We have an absolute clarity around our vision and unstoppable commitment to what should be possible."

**Elca Grobler,
Founder, My Choices Foundation**

We are thoroughly excited to step into the next decade of our journey, and our leadership together with employees and Implementing Partners are drawing up the next 10-year Strategic Plan to advance our agenda in empowering and supporting women, girls, families and communities to make safe choices and live a life free of abuse, violence and exploitation. It will be built on our vision, recognizing that real change requires decisive and collective commitment.

TRANSFORMATIVE FOUR-PILLAR APPROACH



We have progressed well on our strategic plan by adopting a four-pillar approach that is grounded on the theory of change and guides transformation. Yet, we realize that acceleration and prioritization of efforts are needed to achieve the targets we set for ourselves.



OPERATION PEACEMAKER



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



OPERATION RED ALERT

A DECADE OF FEARLESS AND UNSTOPPABLE JOURNEY

2012 >

Birth of My Choices Foundation



Following her calling to work in women's empowerment, Elca Grobler founded My Choices Foundation in Hyderabad, India. My Choices Foundation aims to stop domestic violence and prevent sex trafficking in India.

We held the first of many PeaceMakers training in May and December, and they were trained in family and marriage counselling and all legal aspects of domestic violence.



We opened our first Operation PeaceMaker counselling centre to support women survivors of domestic violence at Falaknuma, Hyderabad, South India.



2013 >

Counselling centres open doors



We began grassroots awareness programmes to create community-level transformation that supports intervention at an individual level.




We opened two counselling centres for domestic violence survivors at Lakdikapul and Golconda, Hyderabad.

2014 >

Anti-sex trafficking work begins



We launched our anti-sex trafficking wing, Operation Red Alert to sensitise at-risk communities about sex trafficking and prevent it once and for all.



RESULTS

We partnered with Final Mile Consulting, a behavioural-research agency to understand contextual factors that enable men to sell/force a girl into trafficking or buy girls for sexual exploitation (rape).



2015 >

Safe Village Programs launched



Drawing on the best evidence, we designed a groundbreaking anti-trafficking intervention initiative - Safe Village Program to create awareness about ways to prevent trafficking from ever occurring in their villages and communities.



Led by the Indian cricketers, we launched the Respect2Protect mass media campaign to encourage men and boys to respect women and girls and, to protect them. MS Dhoni, Virat Kohli and other members of the then Indian Cricket Team pledged their solidarity.

We opened counselling centres at Secunderabad and Warangal for domestic violence survivors.



We launched India's first national anti-human trafficking toll-free helpline 1800 419 8588.

 **CALL 1800 419 8588**



2016 >

Accelerating on our ambition



We launched a long-term mentorship programme for adolescent girls in partnership with Aangan Trust, the Shakti Program which aims to empower girls with knowledge and resources to make safe choices and secure futures.



We won the most prestigious market research award by the ESOMAR Foundation for our report on understanding how to address men's behaviour to buy and sell girls and help prevent the trafficking of girls for sexual exploitation.

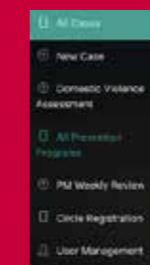


2017 >

Leveraging technology



We launched a 'Good Father' mass media campaign. Notes to My Father, the world's first live capture virtual reality (VR) documentary on sex trafficking was created in partnership with Oculus' Facebook initiative VR for Good. Notes to My Father has been screened in more than 30 festivals worldwide, including the Sundance Film Festival and SXSW Film Festival.



We built a custom data management system, PeaceTracker to capture all information pertaining to the work and clients of Operation PeaceMaker and help track the progress of individual team members and Counselling Centers.



Ensuring the sustainability of the Safe Village Programme, we introduced 'Rakshak' - the vigilante of the village. Rakshak has the potential to spot suspicious events and provide crucial information to My Choices Foundation about various factors that can lead to trafficking.



2018 >

Our Safe Home opens doors



We opened 'Lotus Safe Home' to provide immediate safety for women and children who escape from the abuse and have no place to go. It is a place for new beginnings with hope and courage, where women are provided counselling, legal aid and vocational training to help them get back on their feet.



Our Founder, Elca Grobler spoke about an 'Army of Good Fathers' at India's largest TedX Event held in Hyderabad. She shared about My Choices Foundation journey and emphasised the importance of ending domestic violence and preventing sex trafficking.



2019 > Joining forces



We held our first Asian Anti-Trafficking Forum and strengthened our partnerships with our Implementing Partners, government officials, law enforcement agencies, strategic partners and other stakeholders. It served as a platform to discuss various factors related to human trafficking and bring significant change through education, empowerment and policy change.

My Choices Foundation was chosen by CHILDLINE India Foundation to run the 24-hour operational CHILDLINE 1098 help desk at Nampally Railway Station, Hyderabad. Through the helpdesk, we were able to rescue more than 900 children to date and have them safely reunited with their families.



We launched domestic violence helpline number 9333 40 4141 for women to seek help for counselling and report domestic violence via Whatsapp.



2020 > Our response to COVID-19



We provided essential supplies to more than 13,000 people, impacting 5,169 families hit by COVID-19.



Our Safe Village Program has been strengthened with the launch of Nodal Teachers and Gram Mitras to act as sustainability pillars and prevent sex trafficking in villages.



We launched a domestic violence helpline number 1800 212 9131 for women to seek help or counselling and report domestic violence.



Operation PeaceMaker programmes expanded into the states of Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and West Bengal.



We launched e-learning modules to empower the general population about human trafficking. The courses are available on popular e-learning platforms - Udemy, ChalkLit and many platforms are to follow.



2021 > Strengthening partnerships



We launched the BoyTalk project to guide boys through gender and masculinity



We held our first Safe Village Program in Chattisgarh and Odisha, making us active in 10 states.



In partnership with the State of Telangana Police Women Safety Wing, we developed online counselling protocols for survivors of domestic violence on Dial 100 and launched Empowerment Programmes for Anti-Human Trafficking Units.

ENTERING A NEW DECADE WITH PASSION AND GRIT >>>

OUR IMPACT IN A DECADE

232 
PEACEMAKERS
TRAINED

2,34,443 
WOMEN AND GIRLS
EDUCATED

90  DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS
SUPPORTED THROUGH OUR
LOTUS SAFE HOME
AND LOTUS FUND

 **12,786**
FAMILIES
IMPACTED THROUGH
COUNSELLING

 **22,964**
MEN AND BOYS
EDUCATED

ABOUT GENDER-BASED STEREOTYPES AND TOXIC MASCULINITY



OPERATION
PEACEMAKER

 **28,44,646**
PEOPLE EDUCATED
ON SEX TRAFFICKING
AND ITS RELATED FACTORS

14,83,199 
COMIC BOOKS
DISTRITUBED



OPERATION
RED ALERT

 **6,090**
SAFE VILLAGE
PROGRAMS
CONDUCTED

 **59,454**
CALLS RECEIVED THROUGH
ANTI-SEX TRAFFICKING
HELPLINE

 **900**
CHILDREN REUNITED
WITH THEIR FAMILIES



MY CHOICES
FOUNDATION

105

Partnerships signed with community-based organisations across India

3,928

trainings, webinars and learning sessions held for the public

140

educational videos and animations in five languages released

4,080

hours of airtime (radio programmes) broadcasted reaching over 10,560,607 people

13,062

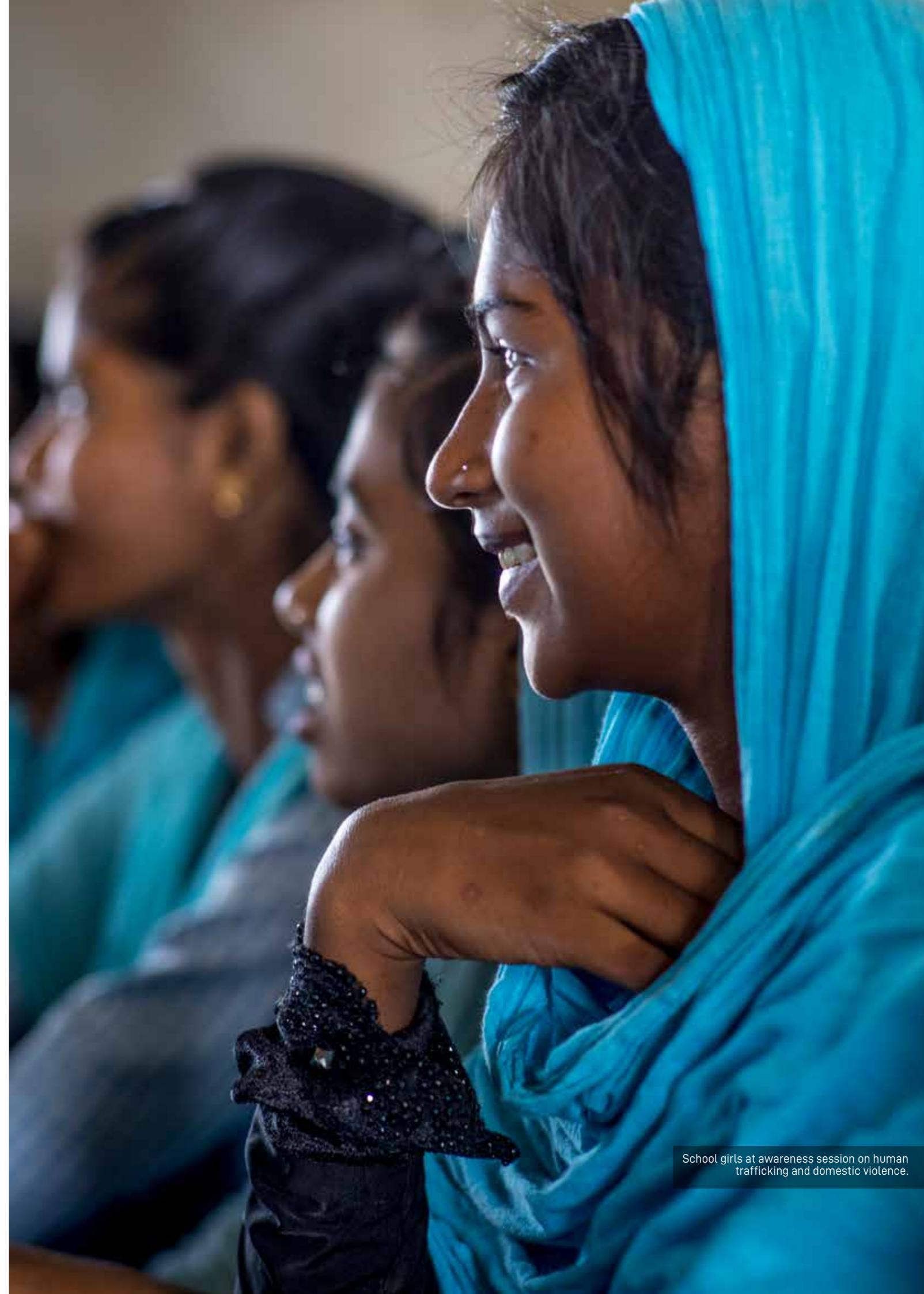
packets of essential supplies distributed in response to COVID-19

1,962

school and college programmes conducted

>1,51,000

of counselling hours to help domestic violence survivors get back on life



School girls at awareness session on human trafficking and domestic violence.

Section 2

MY CHOICES FOUNDATION IN ACTION



Father and daughter met with our team and learnt about the importance of education and consequences of an early marriage.

THE REALITY

Sunday, 4:45 am, Hyderabad, India: 31-year-old Latha was in deep sleep when her husband kicked her stomach. She felt acute pain. It was not something new in her four years of married life; she covered her bruises and bottled up her emotions and continue to carry on. This time, it was not only her intestines that were badly injured, she lost her 10-week baby in her womb and was at the edge of losing her life.

Wednesday, 10:53 pm, Kolkata, India: 12-year-old Piyali woke up in a tiny, dark room. There were no windows and nothing was visible. All she can feel was a rope tied to her left leg. Her eyes were swollen after endless hours of crying. The silence was screaming until she heard the violent beatings and a cry of a young girl from the next room. Within a few days, she would get lost in the maze of a thriving red-light district and join hundreds of other children, getting raped up to 30 times a day.

“

Domestic violence and the trafficking of young girls are uncomfortable to talk about. But if we don't talk about it and if we don't confront the issue, how can we start to do something about the reality?"

**Elca Grobler,
Founder, My Choices Foundation**

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviours that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorise, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure or wound someone.



Domestic violence and sex trafficking are manifestations of power and control. It occurs on a continuum of violence; the dynamics are interwoven and the patterns of behaviours of abusers and traffickers overlap – it is the deliberate and concerted deployment of tactics of power and control over their victims.

The tactics are remarkably consistent, including psychological manipulation, physical abuse, financial control, substance abuse, coercion, sexual violence, mental isolation, restricted movement, name-calling and threats of harm.

Rooted in the abuse of power and controlling behaviour, domestic violence and sex trafficking are the world's most prevalent human rights violations. Millions of children and women like Piyali and Latha are caught in the web of violence, live in shadows, breathe fear and fight for their survival every single day in every corner of India and across the globe. They are left voiceless and remain unseen by society.

The historic normalization of violence against women and girls has exacerbated the violations into insurmountable proportions, and the vehemence patches parallel with the COVID-19 pandemic situation. It is important to recognize that these two issues deeply impact men and boys as well. A large number of studies have proven that boys who grow up in a home where domestic violence is prevalent are 5x more likely to become perpetrators of abuse in their lives.

At the core of domestic violence and sex trafficking is exploitation. Domestic violence occurs at home, the place that ideally should be a haven, while sex trafficking infects the world at large, feeding crime and corruption and taking advantage of a vulnerable population, especially children.

The business of human trafficking globally generates an estimated USD 150 billion in profits, according to the International Labour Organization. Traffickers see victims as just a commodity to be used or sold for financial gain. Most women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation while boys and men are trafficked for domestic or industrial servitude as bonded labourers and organ harvesting. Of an estimated 20 million people involved in the flesh trade in India, 16 million women and girls are victims of sex trafficking. Thousands of children, largely from poor economic backgrounds are lured or abducted by traffickers every day and sold on to brothels that force them into sexual slavery.

The National Family Health Survey – 5 echoed the stark reality of domestic violence with 44% of women respondents in Karnataka having experienced spousal violence, followed by Bihar (40%), Manipur. (39.6%) and Telangana (36.9%). It has been observed that cultural, economic and social factors determine the perpetuation of domestic violence. Most of them do not report abuse and do not seek help because they feel ashamed of what people might think or say.

Sex trafficking is the act of recruitment, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving a person through the use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception or other means, for sexual exploitation. It is the abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust to profit monetarily, socially or politically from the labour or commercial sex work of another.

THE DISTURBING DATA



Worldwide, **1 in 3 women** - an estimated **736 million women** - have been subjected to physical and/or sexual partner violence, non-partner violence or both.

In India, **30 percent of women** have experienced domestic violence atleast once from when they were aged 15.

India has the highest rate of domestic violence among married women who were married by 18, with a rate of **67 percent**.

49 percent of married women aged **15-49 years** experience intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifeline.

20 women die everyday as a result of harassment over a dowry - either murdered or compelled to commit suicide.

27.5 million Indian women have been victims of physical and verbal abuse.

Almost **50 percent of girls** in India are married under the legal age, a rate higher than even other poorer countries in Asia or Africa. Because they are children, these girls are also most at risk for domestic and sexual violence.

It has been estimated that there are over **40 million people** are enslaved around the world, with **99 percent** of victims were women and children.

In India, it is estimated that **16 million women** are victims of sex trafficking annually and 40% of them are adolescents and children, some as young as nine years old.

Only 1 percent of the enslaved girls get rescued.

95% of trafficking victims are forced into sexual slavery in India.

Approximately seven out of ten victims of modern slavery are female. **99% of reported victims** of commercial sexual exploitation are women and girls.

The majority of the approximately **one million child victims** of commercial sexual exploitation are girls under the age of 18.

One in three of world's child brides live in India. Of the country's **223 million child brides**, 102 million were married before turning 15.



Domestic Violence

terrified
abuse
violent
psychological
bruise
threat
sex
victim
partner
trapped
bullying
anger
trade
cohabitation
illegal
crime
emotional
aggression

Sex Trafficking

abuse
violence
pornography
kidnap
coerced
brothels
captive
sex
victim
slavery
trapped
forced
trade
slave
crime
prostitution
hostage

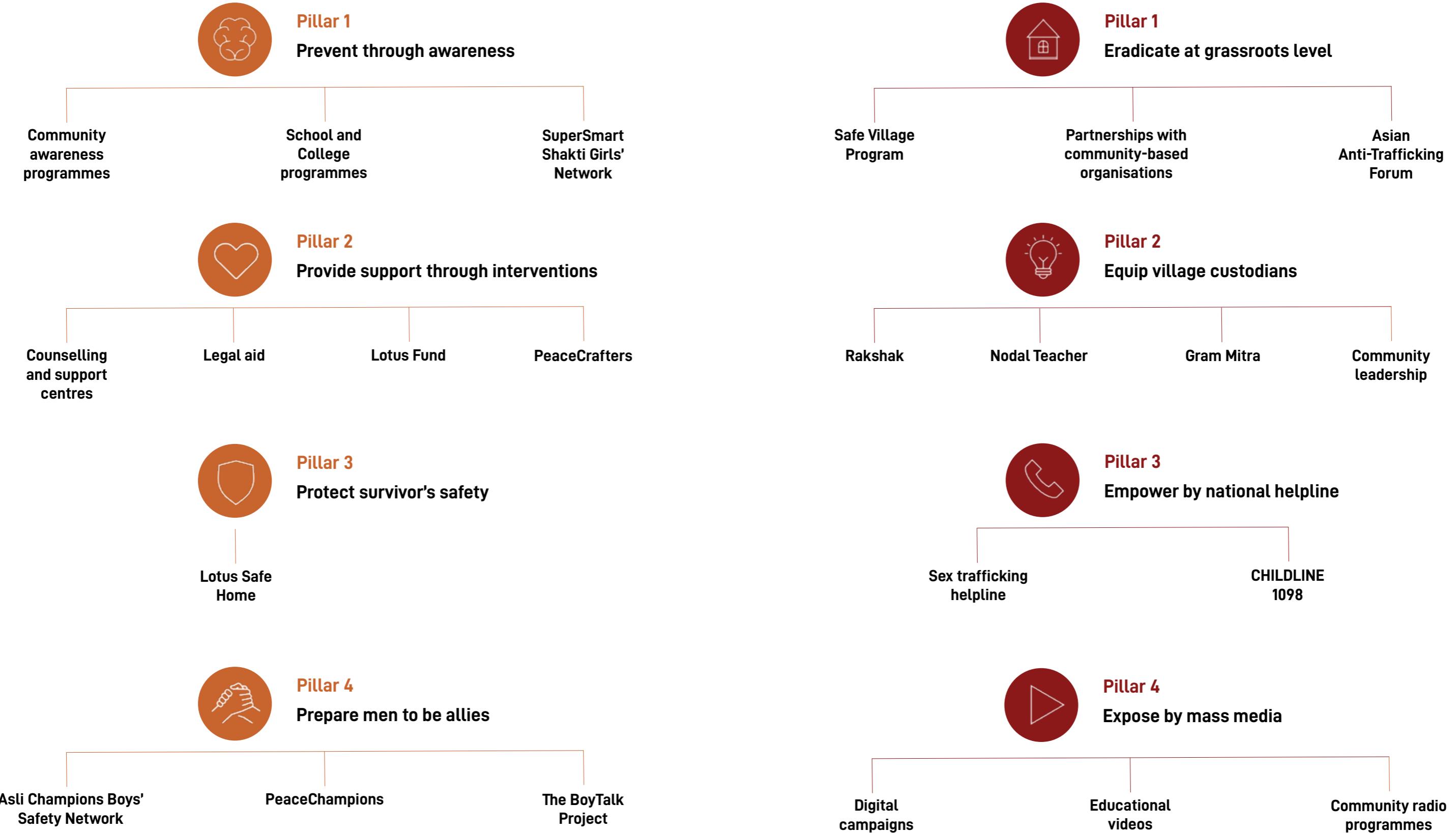


We cannot lose sight of the sheer scale of injustice pervading women's and girls' lives today. It is deeply entrenched in societal, cultural and religious norms – we are determined to bring change and we are deeply optimistic to create a better world for all women, girls, families and communities.

The time is now and we need to act fearlessly!

Team renews their commitment to end gender-based violence at International Women's Day celebrations.

OUR PROGRAMMES





OPERATION
PEACEMAKER





PILLAR 1: PREVENT THROUGH AWARENESS

Rooted in a persistent unequal balance between men and women, boys and girls, historically women and girls have been taught to accept, tolerate and even rationalize domestic violence and to remain silent about such experiences. We recognize the need for comprehensive and multi-layered approaches to this complex social problem that targets whole populations, with prevention-focused awareness programmes having a crucial role to play.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

After having spent months talking with women living in the narrow lanes of Hyderabad and learning about their challenges, we conducted our first community awareness programme in early 2012. It touched upon varied aspects of domestic violence – from what is domestic violence to child sexual abuse, their legal rights and mechanisms to help and support them in protecting themselves as well as their children. It is still vivid in our minds where women from low literacy, economic and social backgrounds asked questions about healthy, respectful and non-violent relationships. That's how we conceptualized Operation PeaceMaker.

PeaceMakers are local community women who want to be the facilitators of change in their own communities. We train and prepare them to be at the forefront in challenging gender-based violence and creating meaningful change. We held our first PeaceMakers training in 2012 and trained them in family and marriage counselling and all legal aspects of domestic violence. Between 2012-2021, we have trained 13 batches of PeaceMakers and equipped **232 PeaceMakers** and impacted **12,786 families**. The initiative has proven to be effective in changing the perspective of violence and sustains a long-term impact in the community.

“

Violence against women is rooted in a patriarchal mindset which believes in power and control over women and girls. Prevention plays a vital role in stopping violence before it occurs. It addresses the structural causes and prepares the community for change. At My Choices Foundation, we believe in early prevention and are trying to put young boys and girls at the heart of prevention to break the cycle of violence.”



Farzana Khan,
Head of Prevention
Operation PeaceMaker



FATIMA CHARTS HER PATH AS A PASSIONATE PEACEMAKER AND COURAGEOUS MOTHER

38-year-old Fatima was married at the age of 18. With bright eyes full of hope and a heart full of dreams, she stepped into her husband's home. But what awaited her was something devastating. She was sexually abused from the very next day of her marriage.

She eventually resigned herself to the belief that it was the fate of every married woman to obey the demands of her husband at any time. If she refused or resisted her husband for any reason, she was badly beaten. There were times the brutality happened in front of her children.

Fatima was embarrassed by the bruises yet she would put up with it for the sake of her children and keeping the family together. She was forced to do all the work at home, catering to her in-laws and her alcoholic husband. Yet her husband and in-laws refused to provide her or her children with basic needs. She was barely given food and her children got used to sharing one bowl of rice. Fatima's family and neighbours cared about her but did not have the resources to help her live on her own.

Finally, Fatima took a bold step to come out of the abusive relationship. Though she came to Operation PeaceMaker counselling centre to seek help, it was hard for her to open up. Our counsellor sat with her for almost an hour and tears began to roll down her cheeks. Then, she opened up.

After hours of counselling, she realized that she has a right to her own body and violence is not justified. She gained confidence and made a conscious decision not to suffer and left her husband.

Now, as a single mother, she is taking small steps towards growing in her role as a provider. She works as a tailor and her dream of living peacefully with her three children has finally come true. She is very firm that she will give a good education to her two daughters and one son.

Her elder daughter is 17 now, and everybody in the community is trying to force her to get married. However, Fatima is clear that she will educate her daughter first, and only get her married when she is ready. Every day, she educates her son not to violate anybody and to respect all women, and to educate her daughters to never be silent victims of abuse.

Determined to help other women who are caught in the abusive relationships, she works as a PeaceMaker as well. She actively engages in awareness programmes and engage in meaningful dialogue with all women for a better and safe future of the women and girls living in the community.



Community awareness programmes
at various locations



At the graduation ceremony of
PeaceMakers at Golconda, Hyderabad.



OUR PEACEMAKERS WENT ABOVE AND BEYOND TO HELP WOMEN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Shahjahan,
PeaceMaker



Anees,
PeaceMaker

With years of experience and loaded with passion, our PeaceMakers Anees and Shah Jahan got together to chart out a plan on how to reach the community women when all doors were locked during the COVID-19. The plan took shape in a few hours and they called each and every woman in the community to understand their situation and what they need. They knocked on the doors when women weren't reachable on their cellphones. They pooled in money and brought essential supplies, cooked food and even provided financial support to families in need.

Our PeaceMaker training programme aims to empower women in the community and the fact that Anees and Shah Jahan organised these activities on their own is a testament to our well-crafted training programme.

Anees and Shah Jahan weren't alone, most of our PeaceMakers across the five centres joined them. Through their assistance, all our beneficiaries, including pregnant women and families living in difficult situations were identified and essential supplies were distributed - with the help of generous support from COVID-19 relief donors.

In 2020, by the end of the first wave, our PeaceMakers started entering the field with full precautions to conduct door-to-door awareness about domestic violence and our helpline service. Some of our PeaceMakers who are also ASHA Workers (primary health care workers) and Anganwadi (community creche') Teachers played a crucial role in reaching out to women in the community. While everyone's movement was limited during the pandemic, our PeaceMakers team was well-active in the community.



Community awareness programmes
at various locations during COVID-19

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE PROGRAMMES



Each year, there are millions of children that experience some form of physical, sexual or psychological violence that leaves a lifelong impact on their education, health and well-being. Several lines of evidence indicate that exposure to violence can lead to education underachievement, misuse of alcohol and drugs, engaging in high-risk sexual behaviour and suffering depression. They don't deserve to have their lives left in ruins before they have even truly begun.

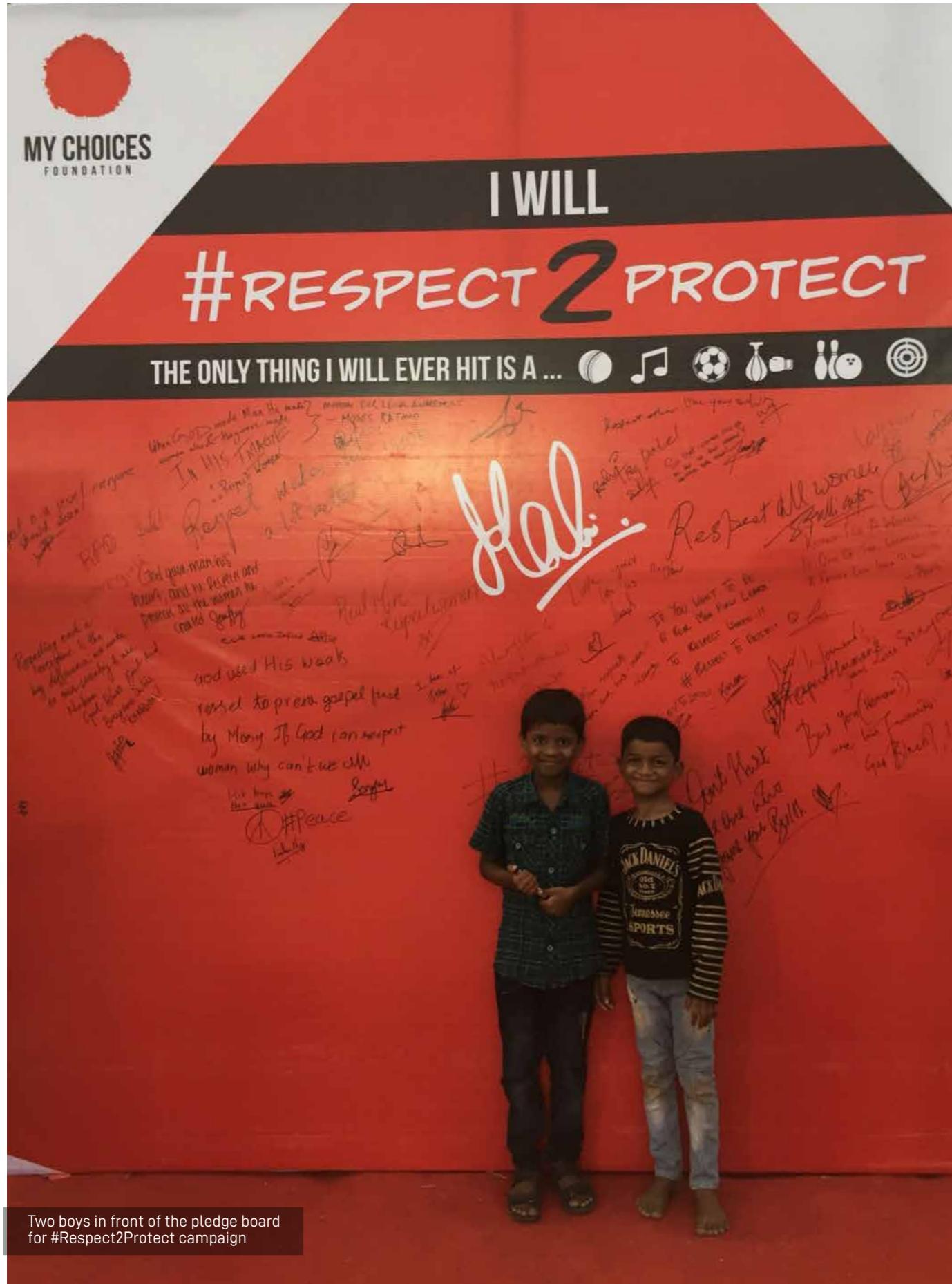
Schools and colleges are important settings for conducting domestic violence prevention efforts. These are the perfect places to shape attitudes and empower them to lead a dignified life as well as help their loved ones if they are caught in the clutches of domestic violence. Our tailor-made framework to raise awareness about various issues helps children to understand different aspects of gender-based violence and break free from stereotypes.

With encouraging support from teachers, school administrators and principals, we have conducted **1,926 school and college programmes**, impacting **95,603 students** across four states in India, encouraging them to stand up for themselves and make choices to lead healthy and safe lives.



School awareness programmes at various locations

MASS MEDIA CAMPAIGNS



RESPECT2PROTECT



My Choices Foundation has become a nationally significant voice in the conversation between men and women on gender equity and women's right to safety. Led by the Indian cricketers, we launched the Respect2Protect mass media campaign to encourage men and boys to respect women and girls to protect them. MS Dhoni, Virat Kohli and other members of the then Indian Cricket Team pledged their solidarity.

The campaign garnered **64 million impressions** and became an organically viral campaign, televised locally and nationally, and debated throughout the country. It started a national conversation on the role of men and boys in ending violence against women and girls, placing them at the centre of the solution, rather than the problem.

We bagged two international awards for the campaign:

Grand Jury Award for Women Empowerment at the Social Media for Empowerment Awards, 2016. There were 266 entries made by the best of corporate, government and civil society campaigns from eight countries, narrowed down to 66 finalists in 10 categories.

Special Mention Award at the eNGO South Asia Awards in 2015, recognising the 'Tech for Good among civil society organisations in South Asia.'



MOTHERS' WITHOUT A CHOICE

“

Mothers' without a choice video, from the opening, makes anyone who watches it feel unsettled. The agonizing voice of the victims sends chills down one's spine, and it evokes a sense of torment. It is brilliant in capturing the intensity of the affliction brought onto the victims by their abusers. This leaves one infuriated and with a feeling of disgust at what vulnerable women have to endure. Although it is extremely difficult to fully know the pain that these women go through, it sends across an immensely strong message – let us not be silent! We feel fortunate to be able to help victims by providing access to our national toll-free helpline number. Each one who reaches out to us, will be referred to one of our counsellors to assist and intervene in the sexual abuse, as well as connect them with the nearest police station.”



Elca Grobler,
Founder,
My Choices Foundation

Drawing attention to the increasing cases of domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown, we released 'Mothers without a choice' with Dentsu Aegis Network India. A digital video that puts the spotlight on one of the biggest and yet, least understood causalities of this COVID pandemic lockdown. We aimed to make people aware of the fear with which women live and provide them with a choice to live life on their terms.



Still from Mothers' without a choice video

SUPERSMART SHAKTI NETWORK

'Shakti' means 'feminine strength and power' and our SuperSmart Shakti Network is a long-term mentorship programme for adolescent girls in partnership with Aangan Trust, NGO for child protection to empower girls with knowledge and resources and connect them with peer networks to make choices that keep them safe and secure their futures. It helps girls to understand their rights, access available services, feel empowered by group support, and raise their aspirations to pursue educational and employment opportunities.

We have SuperSmart Shakti Networks in three locations - Hyderabad, Warangal and Ibrahimpatnam and impacted **1,285 girls** since we launched the programme in March 2016.



Graduation ceremony of Shakti Girls



PILLAR 2: PROVIDE SUPPORT THROUGH INTERVENTIONS

It is important to note that respect and dignity should never be underestimated in the family. Thousands of women and children suffer unspeakable and unthinkable things and a chance for healthy and happy lives continue to remain out of reach. We provide a confidential setting to share their experiences through five counselling centres and support them with legal proceedings, financial security and livelihood to start afresh, free from violence and abuse.

COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT CENTRES

Working through the hurt is not an easy process and the approach needs to be tailored to each client's experiences and symptoms. Our professionally-trained counsellors talk to them to work through the feeling and emotions of being victimised and help them to overcome the fear, shame and guilt.

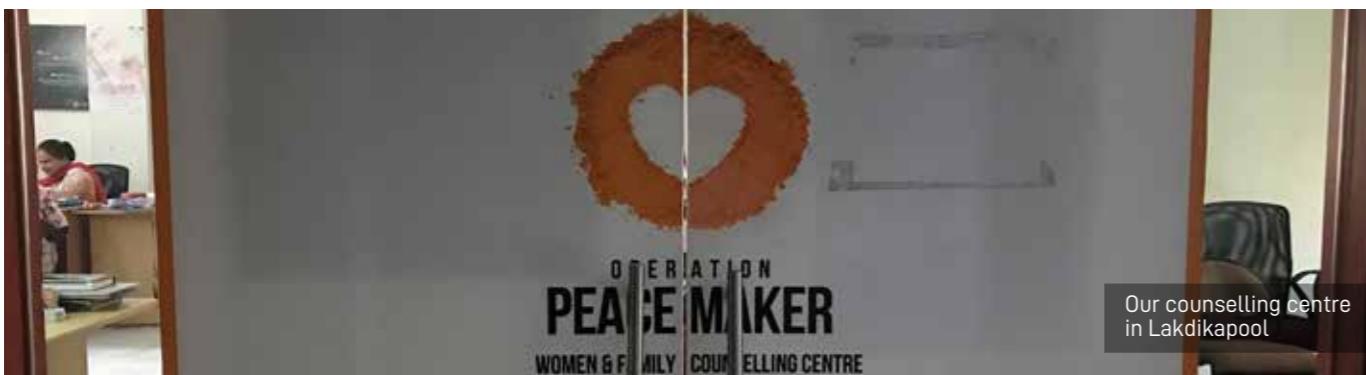
We offer help to focus on developing strong coping skills and support them to make informed choices to take their lives forward. We run five counselling and support centres – Shah Ali Banda, Golconda, Lakdikapul, Warangal and Secunderabad – where people can visit us in person while our telephonic counsellors are available 24x7 throughout the year on toll-free helpline 1800 212 9131 and Whatsapp 9333 40 4141.

Our counselling also focuses on perpetrators – when people come to us as a family; we help the perpetrators gain insight into why they behave the way they do, talk through the emotions they

feel before, during, and after they inflict pain on others, and learn how to build positive relationships with others. With this approach, we have helped men change their mindsets and attitudes towards women.

When the pandemic hit, we ramped up our efforts and tweaked our strategy. With the lockdown, staying home with the abuser has become a battle and sometimes, one just to stay alive. The constant closeness of the abuser made it harder for victims to reach out for help at a time when their need for help was greater than ever. Our counsellors telephoned each of the clients to enquire about the situation at home and ensured they received help if needed.

Recognising the increasing need for domestic violence prevention services during the pandemic, we expanded our services beyond Telangana and into Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and West Bengal.



Our counselling centre in Lakdikapul



Our counselling centre in Golconda



Our team of counsellors



OUR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HELPLINE BECOMES A GUIDING LIGHT TO DIGNIFIED LIFE FOR RESHMI

56-year old Reshma works as a teacher for the past 18 years. She lives with her husband and two children. As soon as Reshma finished her studies, her parents got her married. Her husband was from a reputed family and had a government job. She was happily married and dreamt of a life of comfort and respect.

Her dreams were shattered when her husband became abusive within a few weeks of their marriage. She suffered severe sexual and physical abuse. She did not want to trouble her parents and so she suffered in silence. Her husband 'allowed' her to work on the condition that her salary will directly be given to her husband.

Years rolled on and her children grew up. Though she tried to hide the abuse from her children, it didn't last. They began to enquire about the injuries. Reshma wasn't sure what to answer, but her children sensed that things weren't alright. They empathised with her and supported her completely. Her son and daughter encouraged her to file a complaint and get help.

But Reshma's self-esteem and confidence were severely damaged. She was lost and had no hope of getting out. She was ashamed.

That's when her brother contacted the My Choices Foundation Domestic Violence helpline and our counsellors encouraged Reshma to open up and attend counselling. She was afraid of how society would treat her kids if she protested.

Her husband constantly threatened her that if she makes the abuse public, it would be her fault for spoiling the reputation of their family.

After six months, Reshma mustered up the courage and came to our counselling centre. It wasn't easy for her to talk initially and so our counsellors worked alongside her. They explained everything about what domestic abuse is, why it isn't right for her to allow it to happen to her and the consequences it has on her children.

With the support from our counsellors and armed with knowledge, she grew stronger by the day with her grit and determination. She left the house and moved in with her mother without buckling down under any pressure from relatives or extended family.

Her son and daughter supported her in her move. With the help of OPM's legal team, Reshma filed a case of domestic violence and felt empowered enough to want to put an end to the relationship.

Reshma wants to help other women now, breaking the clutches of domestic violence and living life with dignity and self-respect. She is determined to carve an identity for herself in this world and provide a good life for her children.

We wouldn't have been able to help Reshma without the donors like you. You are the ones who keep our helpline alive and a source of strength to find their path to a free and dignified life.



THE EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF POLICE PERSONNEL DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Rachakonda Commissionerate (Hyderabad, Telangana), under the leadership of the Rachakonda Commissioner of Police Mr. Mahesh Bhagwath, the Indian Police Service initiated a quarantine follow-up for the staff of the Commissionerate who were tested positive for COVID-19 (mild and moderate cases). My Choices Foundation was brought on board to conduct counselling sessions, along with the routine medical team group consultations. The purpose of the counselling sessions was to help the staff navigate through anxiety or serious health situations during this difficult time.

These calls focused on encouraging the staff and their family members to watch out for any COVID-19 related symptoms, referring them to an isolation facility opened exclusively for the Rachakonda Police Personnel and their families. We also encouraged them to consult the Department Doctor regularly, seek any referrals from Covid Control Room, reach out to their Senior Officers if they are in any need and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Our team spoke and listened in a very empathetic manner. Loneliness, fear of family members contracting the virus, fear of being hospitalized, hopelessness, uncertainty about their future, fear of losing their loved ones and the handling of the grief after losing their loved ones are some of the many things discussed and addressed during the calls. Some personnel were very deeply disappointed when they tested positive again after their quarantine.

Our team of experts gently encouraged them to handle the disappointment till they tested negative. With time, the Personnel started looking forward to our calls as they enjoyed conversing with our team. It gave them an outlet to share their joys and sorrows.

Our team conducted follow-up calls to 330 Police Personnel daily until all of them tested negative. We conducted 3,013 sessions from 26 May to 20 July 2021 to help them through these uncertain times.

The uncertainty and worries related to the spreading of infection to other family members, especially elderly parents, pregnant staff or family members of the infected staff and disruption of routines, and our lifestyles can impact our mental health. The uncertainty about the future, the ceaseless news coverage and the constant social media-driven flood of messages can increase our sense of anxiety. Stress is a normal response in these situations. Stress disturbs our sleeping and eating patterns and leads to irritability or emotional outbursts and low motivation.

The Commissioner arranged for regular group consultations with the Medical team over Zoom call along with doctors and senior officials to encourage the COVID-19 affected personnel through this difficult time. Alongside the group consultations, individual follow-up calls were also conducted.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TOLL-FREE HELPLINE

1800 212 9131

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WHATSAPP CHAT

9333 40 4141

LEGAL AID

The vast majority of women dream of escaping their violent homes, but their lack of knowledge and awareness about domestic violence and gender equality laws and the fear of approaching the justice system have stopped them from doing so. When these women approach us, we ensure that they have the best legal guidance from our well-experienced advocates.

Our legal team helps them at every stage of the legal proceedings and guide them through the final judgement. Our legal team comprises of three advocates, who serve three districts – Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy and Warangal – Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, with a total of seven courts – Warangal, Nampally, Kukatpally, Rajendra Nagar, Medchal, L.B.Nagar and Malkajgiri.

We equip women with knowledge and courage to be change agents and make a choice on their own to live violence and abuse-free lives. Once they decide to speak up and break the chains of abuse, we provide them with complete legal support through our Operation PeaceMaker program. Since the inception of My Choices Foundation, we have helped **131 women** with legal help and get back on their lives.



Our legal expert is having a conversation with a client

MY CHOICES FOUNDATION'S LEGAL TEAM'S EFFORTS TO BRING PERPETRATOR TO JUSTICE CONTINUES

Growing up pampered, Sumathi was unaware of life's struggles. She married a charming young man at the age of 19 and entered the life of marriage full of dreams. She had no idea that they would never find equal footing, not on financial grounds because of her husband's criminal background and greed for money.

After a few months into her married life, Sumathi's husband Srinivas' real face began to show. Srinivas took control of all Sumathi and her mother's property and finances and threatened them. Unable to bear the brunt of her only daughter's suffering, she passed away. Sumathi lost her father at a young age and her mother's passing was a heavy blow. She resigned to her husband's abuse and exploitation.

Years rolled on. She had three children. Her husband provided them with a good life, but the abuse never stopped. She bottled up all her emotions and lived a lifeless life for the sake of her children to have a family. One day, when she was cooking in the kitchen, her youngest daughter came and grabbed her hand. Soon, the oldest son and daughter followed. Sumathi understood something was wrong and bent down to look them eye-to-eye. They showed a picture of their father with another woman. Though she was shattered inside, she assured them that nothing would go wrong.

That's when she came into contact with one of the PeaceMakers in the community. After hours and days of counselling, she understood the negative impacts of domestic violence – it was a journey of discovery as well as a ray of hope for her. She found herself as well as the courage to break from the abusive relationship. With continuous efforts from our counsellors and the help of OPM's legal team, Sumathi filed a case of

domestic violence and felt empowered enough to want to put an end to the relationship. She moved to a different city, got herself a job and admitted her children to a new school.

When Sumathi is all set to start a new life free from violence, abuse and exploitation, her husband showed up at their doorstep. He forcibly brought her and the children back to the city where he was and as always, got her to close the legal case. Sumathi's husband manipulated their children's thoughts, they became estranged from their mother. While her husband's affair continued, she was severely beaten during the COVID-19 lockdown. She managed to borrow a mobile from her neighbour and called the police. Police came to her rescue, yet again her husband brainwashed her as well as threatened to commit suicide – so, she stayed.

She experienced a few quiet moments and some calm days during the following days. It wasn't for long. Her husband punched her in the face and stomach. Years of marital life came flashing in front of her eyes as she hit the pillar in the house. She fainted and her husband left the house.

Her neighbours helped her to get up. A stream of emotions was gushing inside her heart and her eyes were filled with tears. She had enough and complain to the local women's police station. The long battle to bring the abuser to justice and take custody of her children is ongoing and My Choices Foundation's legal team continue to help her.

Without the supporters like you, Sumathi and the legal team of My Choices Foundation wouldn't have been able to come this far. We continue to need your help to ensure that Sumathi and her children lead a peaceful life.

LOTUS FUND

“

Many women continue with abusive relationships because they see it as a choice between violent homes and homelessness. Our Lotus Home offers a temporary shelter once they made a brave decision to leave their abusive relationships and through the Lotus Fund helps us to offer critical and holistic support to start their lives, we are able to offer critical and holistic support to start their lives afresh which is an important step to end violence against women and children. Since we initiated in 2017, the Lotus Home has helped 90 women to live lives free of abuse, violence and exploitation.”

A little financial help can go a long way for a domestic violence survivor to start living free from abuse and violence. The Lotus Fund is a start-up fund for women who have chosen to start a new life free from an abusive relationship. We provide financial support for essential items, advances on rental, and skill and vocational development. Through the Lotus Fund, we have supported **90 women** to stand on their own feet is essential to ensure that they can support themselves and their children.

The Lotus Fund supports emergency needs within the first year of recovering from abuse including:

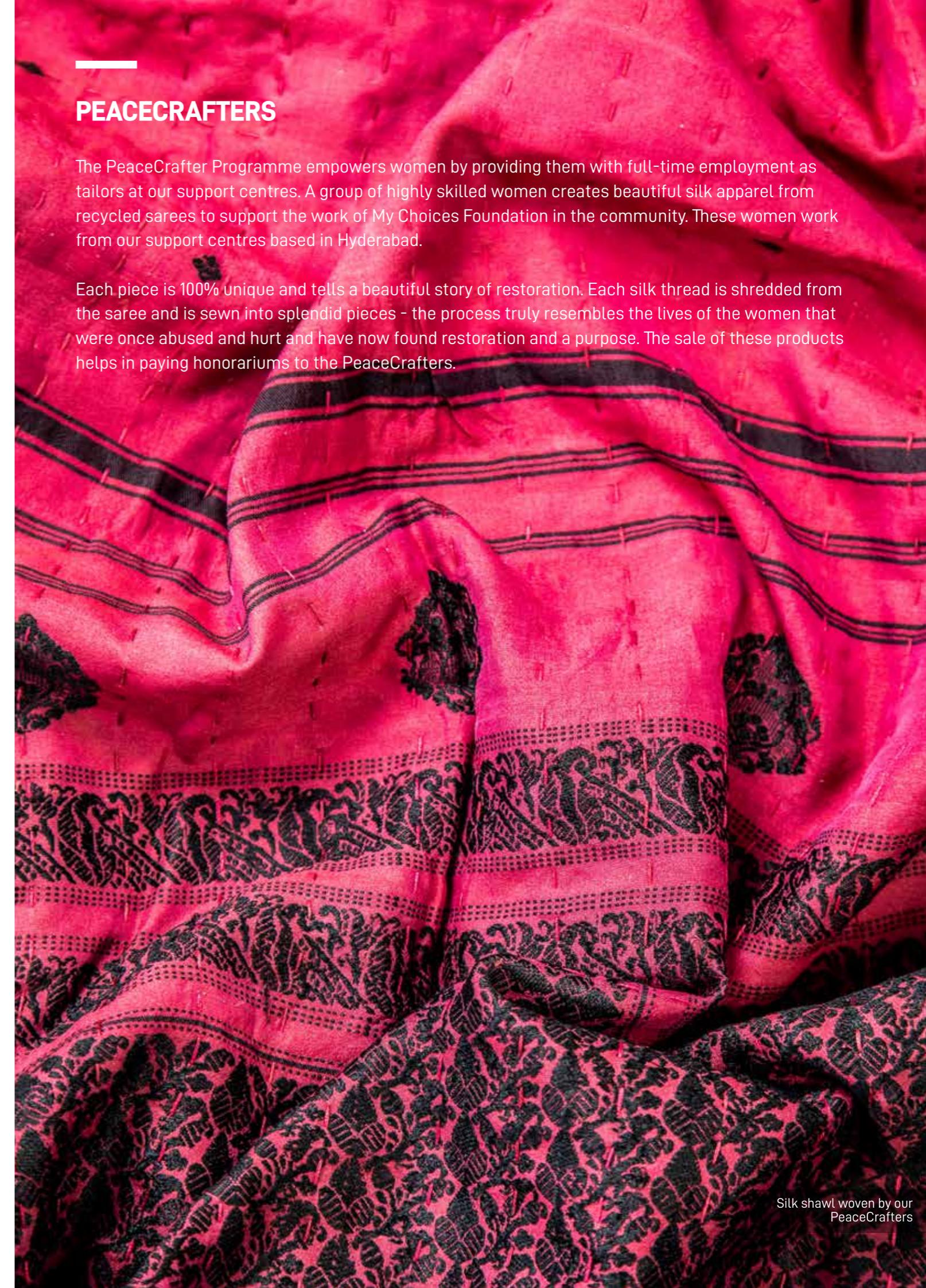
- **Tuition fees for children of survivors**
- **Essential school-related costs (like textbooks and uniforms) for children of survivors**
- **Short term, emergency needs like food or emergency medical attention for survivors and their children**
- **First-month rent for independent accommodation for survivor**
- **Basic kitchen utensils for a survivor who is moving from a safe home to her own home**
- **Partial support for vocation initiation, like a sewing machine or set of work clothes**



PEACECRAFTERS

The PeaceCrafter Programme empowers women by providing them with full-time employment as tailors at our support centres. A group of highly skilled women creates beautiful silk apparel from recycled sarees to support the work of My Choices Foundation in the community. These women work from our support centres based in Hyderabad.

Each piece is 100% unique and tells a beautiful story of restoration. Each silk thread is shredded from the saree and is sewn into splendid pieces - the process truly resembles the lives of the women that were once abused and hurt and have now found restoration and a purpose. The sale of these products helps in paying honorariums to the PeaceCrafters.



Silk shawl woven by our PeaceCrafters



PILLAR 3: PROTECT SURVIVORS' SAFETY

Data from several sources, including research papers, case studies, and anecdotal information from survivors and advocates indicate that there is a clear link between domestic violence and homelessness.

Pallavi* left her abusive husband late one night with her two children. She just began walking to go somewhere else, anywhere else, to find safety for herself and her children. When she found herself late at night on a busy street renowned for prostitution, she realised she had nowhere to go, so she turned back.

LOTUS SAFE HOME

Pallavi isn't alone. We have heard similar stories and have seen how difficult it can be for some survivors to find a safe place to stay – and we opened doors for a safe and new beginnings, Lotus Safe Home in 2018. It wasn't just a beautiful haven but a place for a fresh start with hope and courage, where women are provided counselling, legal aid and vocational training to help them get back on their feet. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when many government shelters were not fully functional and closed due to the coronavirus, we were fully operational during this challenging time.

The Lotus Safe Home has been a turning point and a light of hope in many women's and children's lives. It helped them to gain a sense of self-identity and hit the road ahead with courage and determination – the Lotus Safe Home has been a pathway for many to start to feel truly alive.



Our passionate team members arriving for the ceremony



Paintings by the children who stayed at Lotus Safe Home



Inauguration ceremony of Lotus Safe Home



A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY TOWARDS A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP FOR SUNITA AND RAJA

Sunita is a loving and kind woman and does everything to keep her family together. Sadly, this meant being trapped in an emotionally abusive relationship with her husband.

12 years ago, she married Raja and moved to Raja's home with a heart full of love and hope. It was sheer marital bliss for the first few months and Sunita was grateful for the life. As months passed by, the relationship began to deteriorate between Sunita and Raja - there were arguments, abuse and violence. It went on to a point that their living environment became too toxic for both of them. Though the elders and family members tried to mediate and resolve the issue, they couldn't provide the essential support and guidance to make Sunita and Raja understand the harsh reality of abuse in the home environment. They needed professional help!

One day, Sunita was shattered and heartbroken after a harsh exchange of words. After her husband left for work, Sunita left home and wandered on the streets aimlessly for hours. She had nowhere to go and that's when she came across information about Lotus Safe Home, run by Operation PeaceMaker. She started walking in the direction of the Lotus Safe Home with no hope of whether they would be someone to guide or accommodate her in the middle of the night.

When the clock struck 12:16 am, Sunita rang the calling bell at Lotus Safe Home and our counsellors welcomed her with open arms. She

cried badly and began to talk after a few hours. Once we learnt about her situation, our counsellors approached Raja and her family about Sunita's stay at Lotus Safe Home. Raja visited the Safe Home the next day.

After hours of counselling, Sunita and Raja gained the strength to work on their relationship and resolve many of their challenges. Sunita stayed at Lotus Home for 15 days and our team of counsellors assisted her and her husband with the much-needed professional counselling and guidance to look at their lives from a fresh perspective. They began to communicate clearly and allowed each other the opportunity to speak, without harsh words and any conflict.

Raja said, "Seeking professional help supported me realize the pain and trauma my wife was going through that affected her emotionally". He added, "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."

Lotus Safe Home and the time with our counsellors were a journey of discovery of a healthy relationship for Sunita and Raja.



Drawings by the children who lived in the Lotus Safe Home



PILLAR 4: ENGAGE BOYS AND MEN TO BE ALLIES

Engaging boys and men as anti-violence allies is one of the fundamental elements to stop violence against girls and women. Since our childhood, we are conditioned to think about masculinity and femininity in a certain way and dismantling those patriarchal mindsets and attitudes requires honest efforts from men. They can play an active role in improving the situation by examining their own attitudes, behaviours and attachments to masculine expectations and encouraging others to do so.

My Choices Foundation has made several efforts to involve men in preventing violence against women, including Asli Champions Boys' Safety Network, The BoyTalk project, PeaceChampions and Respect2Protect Campaign. It comprises public education campaigns and mobilising communities to encourage men and boys to work as allies with women and girls to prevent sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking.

ASLI CHAMPIONS BOYS' SAFETY NETWORK

The aim of the Asli Champions Boys' Safety Network is to educate adolescent boys about gender equality, healthy ideas of masculinity and child protection laws for child labour. They are connected to a peer network, where they can have open and honest conversations about their lives, problems and dreams. There are **265 boys** in the Asli Champions Boys' Safety Network and mentors are available to answer their questions and guide them to lead healthy and happy lives..



We believe that children and young people must be listened to. For that, they need to believe that it is a safe place to share their views. SuperSmart Shakti Girls' Network and Asli Boys Champion Network are all about that. Once provided an opportunity and understand what's best for them, they amaze us with their thoughts and decision-making skills. Since the launch of these networks in 2016, we have seen how the active participation of children and young people can play a crucial role in bringing transformative change in the community. They are the future and it is our responsibility to create platforms and make them feel safe."



Archana Brian,
Head of Operations
Operation PeaceMaker

PEACECHAMPION

The vast majority of studies, including the My Choices Foundation report on understanding the behaviours of men, indicate that men are receptive to the positive messaging approach. We developed a framework to engage men and boys to change their perceptions and attitudes towards women and girls and play an active role in putting an end to violence against women and girls.

The PeaceChampion programme is a safe space to discuss, discover and rediscover their feelings, opinions and behaviours. Through our explorational and interactive sessions, we have prepared more than **23 men and boys** to be PeaceChampions for creating a safe living environment for their mothers, sisters, friends and communities.



Conversing with these young boys for the first time and connecting with them could be challenging but as we (myself and Rahat, Program Assistant) went on with it, it was clear that these kids were curious too. It was encouraging to get inspiring feedback and that gave me a lot of confidence in the work that we are doing. It was our first time with the kids but they sure looked like they want more of us, which was the best part."

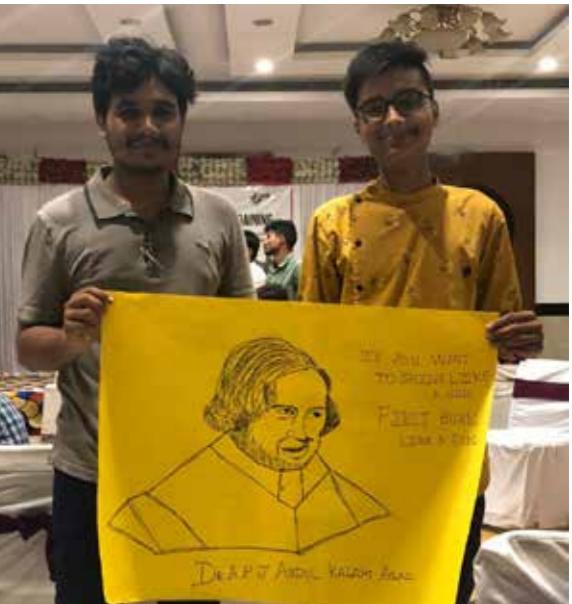
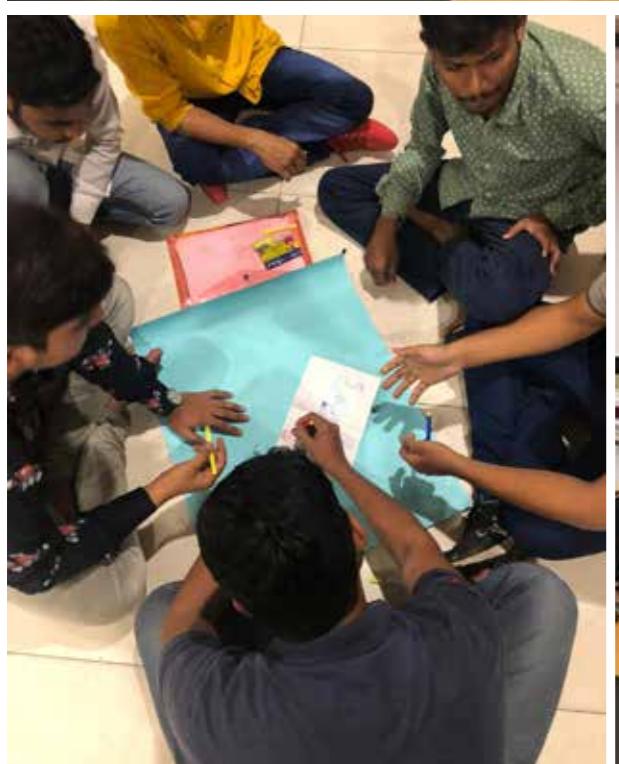
Manmeet Singh,
Youth Host



THE BOYTALK PROJECT

Launched in 2021 in partnership with Aangan Trust, we organise casual meet-ups and workshops with young men about rigid gender narratives and offer a safe place to engage in critical and self-reflective 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.

Through this programme, we have prepared **10 Youth Hosts** who want to change the perception of what it means to be a man and have deeper conversations about boys' safety and gender roles.



PeaceChampion sessions



OPERATION RED ALERT





PILLAR 1: ERADICATE AT GRASSROOTS LEVEL

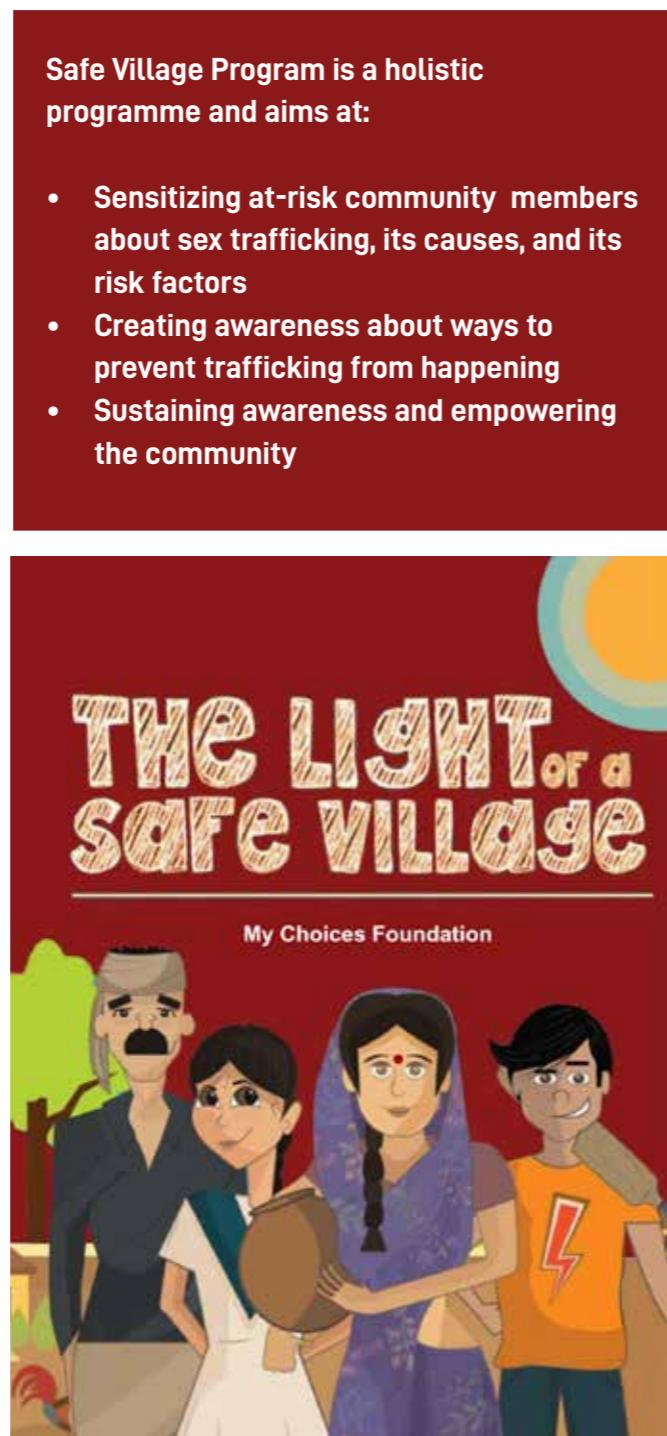
Sex trafficking has many root causes – such as lack of awareness, poverty, corruption and gender inequality. Grounded in the belief that creating knowledge, changing perceptions and influencing attitudes at the community level is essential in removing all possible pathways and preventing traffickers from entering villages..

SAFE VILLAGE PROGRAM

Armed with a passion in plain clothes, braving bumpy roads and challenging conventional thinking, we launched a groundbreaking anti-sex trafficking intervention initiative to create awareness about ways to prevent trafficking from ever occurring in their villages and communities. The Safe Village Program was launched in 2015.

The genesis of that Safe Village Program was in-depth research to understand the determinants of male behaviours in the buying and selling of girls in the human trafficking trade. We commissioned Final Mile Consulting, a behavioural-research agency to research high-risk communities in the rural parts of India. The results pointed to the benefit of engaging men and boys with positive messaging framework, highlighting the benefits of educating girls and encouraging affection and protection for girls.

Drawing from the evidence, we developed a comic book that illustrates the story of a young girl who fights sex trafficking with strong support from her father.



“

Child trafficking is a tough topic and our comic book is an effective means to communicate the dangers of trafficking in a way that is empowering, thoughtful and educational. It is resonant with readers of all ages and hugely popular among children. During our field visit, each participant is handed over a copy to take it back home. It stays with them and proves to be a reinforcing tool as the conversation about various characters continue to take place in their homes.”



Vivian Isaac,
Program Director
Operation Red Alert

The main characters of the book are:



Good Father

He cares for his family and ensures that his children enjoy their childhood. He protects them and emerges 'victorious' against all odds that threaten his family and village.



Informed Mother

She is an Informed Mother. She knows what's best for her children and understands that knowledge is a pathway to victory to maintain peace in her family and village.



Guardian Girl

She is a Guardian Girl. She is on a mission to stay alert and be the voice to keep girls safe.



Smart Boy

He is a Smart Boy. He is smart, bold, respects girls and always fights for justice.

The Comic book has been translated into **five languages**. During each Safe Village Program, the Comic Book is distributed to everyone who attends the program. Having their own copy leads them to continue the conversations around trafficking with their friends, family and community.

Between 2015 and 2021, we have conducted **6,257 Safe Village Programs** and impacted **29,00,037 people**. We have distributed **15,20,482 comic books** across India.

Located at a height of 3500 feet above sea level and nestled in the lap of the Eastern Ghats of India, Koraput district in the state of Odisha is a spectacular place with lush greenery, majestic mountains, fast-flowing rivers and all the more lovely, hospitable and down-to-earth people – the Bondas, a vulnerable tribal group known for their secluded lives away from the mainstream.

The lack of access has not prevented young Bondas from leaving their homes in search of a better life, even low-paid jobs in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and other states. The COVID-19 pandemic further threw their lives out of gear and forced them to cross borders to put food on the table. Mounting economic pressures have triggered the disturbing trend of young Bondas leaving their education and entering into a very high-risk labour market.

It was a long journey and when we reached the place to conduct our first Safe Village Program in the Hanumal village in the state of Odisha in India. The hospitable villagers treated us with a warm cup of tea and their lovely smiles. In partnership with our Implementing Partner, we made efforts to gather people from the surrounding villages. It wasn't an easy walking journey on the hilly terrain, but 60 people – fathers, mothers, boys, girls and even grandfathers and grandmothers showed up.

With the help of the translator from our Implementing Partner organisation, we introduced the My Choices Foundation and our vision to be there in the village. They listened attentively and asked questions. It showed the curiosity and interest of people who want to protect their children from any harm. Comic books were distributed and story narration took place with engaging flip charts in the local language.

17-year-old Malati who trekked eight kilometres along the muddy roads and bumpy hills to attend our Safe Village Program said:

“

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 kind of 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 our children safe from traffickers. Thank you very much. Please visit us again.”



Safe Village Program held in the state of Odisha



ARMED WITH KNOWLEDGE, SUSHILA BECOMES A GUARDIAN GIRL TO MAKE HER VILLAGE SAFE

16-year-old Sushila lives in a remote village, Kuldiha in the district of Bardhaman, West Bengal. Given the poor economic conditions and limited access to education, Kuldiha is an opportune ground for child trafficking agents. Traffickers prey on parents poor economic situation, giving false promises of a brighter future for their children – the misguided hope that their children will escape poverty and have a better life. Little did they know, they are pushing their children into a world that breaks people.

It was late in the afternoon when My Choices Foundation team met Sushila in a place of worship in her village. The innocent teenager was seated at the staircase, deep in her thoughts. Her face was laden with sadness. She got to know that another child has gone missing from her village and wondered where the missing children would end up. She wanted to help, but she had no idea how to go about it.

That was when the My Choices Foundation team visited Sushila's village to conduct Safe Village Program.

As Sushila narrates:

When Safe Village Program was held in our village and the way the team explained it, I understood the seriousness of child trafficking issues. During the programme, I was also given a comic book that helped me to grasp the concepts of child trafficking and child marriage easily. The comic book had the characters – the Good Father, the Informed Mother, the Guardian Girl and the Smart Boy.

My friends and I learnt about the good and bad effects of social media and ill effects with the excessive usage of online platforms. It was an eye-opening conversation with My Choices didi (she fondly refers the team member as a big sister). She mentioned about an anonymous call or a message on our mobile. The caller usually compliments us and within a few days, we would be offered a good job or even receive a marriage proposal. She also mentioned that similar things can happen on Facebook and we should believe none of it. It is all false promises.

The anti-child trafficking helpline 1800 419 8588 is a godsend to our village. I memorised the helpline number because it is the number that I would call to prevent child trafficking and child marriage in my village and I encouraged my friends to do so as well.

I am truly happy that you have come all the way to help us. I loved the program and continue to tell my friends that no one should get married or go to work before 18 years of age. I don't want a single child to go missing from my village. As I read in the Comic book, I will be the voice of Surokhito Gram Karyakrom's message and be a 'Guardian' for this village.



Safe Village Program held at various locations



EACH NETBALL GOAL IS A HEAVY BLOW AT THE HEART AND HEAD OF THE TRAFFICKERS

We, My Choices Foundation turned 10 this year and we have come a long way in harnessing the power of sports to increase awareness about child trafficking and prevent abuse and exploitation of children.

It was a mid-afternoon. We were awestruck by the energy and enthusiasm displayed by young girl Netball players in the remotest parts of West Bengal. These young girls are the daughters of tea plantation workers (tea pickers, weed removers, cleaners and factory workers) who hardly make enough money to put food on the table. With the mounting financial pressures of COVID-19 and school closures, most of the young girls joined their parents in tea plantation work to add to their family income. They have tiring routines; working at tea gardens, caring for their younger siblings and doing other household chores. But that didn't deter them when our Guardian Girls invited them to join the playing field.

As beautiful friendships blossom on the playing field, Guardian Girls pass on the inspiring messages of the Safe Village Program and encourage the girls to get back to school. The Nodal Teacher and Gram Mitra meet these girls along with their parents to educate them about the factors of child trafficking and help them understand the importance of education for young girls.

In partnership with the local Implementing Partner, we organised our first Netball tournament in West Bengal in 2019 and used this meetup to create awareness about child trafficking and its consequences. Today, we have eight teams with more than 80 girls across four villages who are empowered to be Guardian Girls and use their

voices to ensure girls stay in school and experience the innocence of childhood and enjoy the power of youth through NetBall.

As part of our reinforcing efforts, we organised the NetBall tournament with four teams from high-trafficking-prone villages. Guardian Girls renewed their commitment while new young girls joined in for the pledge.

15-year-old Arunima is a true example of a brave Guardian girl. She renewed her commitment and expressed her heartfelt thanks for rescuing her friend from the clutches of child labour.

“

I will not keep myself safe but also my friends. I am extremely happy that you took my call to your helpline seriously. My friend struggled a lot at work and she had barely time to eat and sleep. You helped her. Now, she is back home and at school. Thank God, I memorised the helpline number from the comic book.”

We are equally grateful to Arunima because it was her phone call that changed her friend's life. That's the power and bravery of our Guardian Girl.

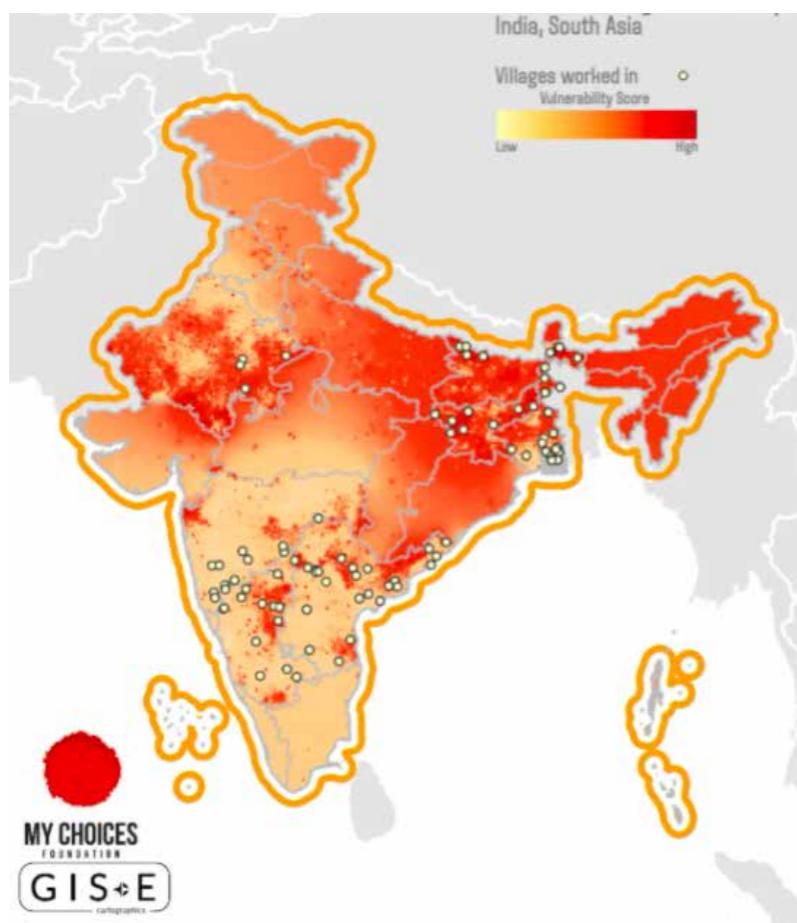
Young girls' lives are at high stake. We cannot let this happen. Our Guardian Girls realise this and are out on the field. We aren't giving up either. We will continue to use NetBall to educate young girls on how to recognise the signs of trafficking, what to do when they see them and how to keep their villages and communities safe.



Netball tournament held by My Choices Foundation

VULNERABILITY MAPPING OF VILLAGES

We partnered with Quantum, an Australian data analytics company to identify villages that are at-risk for sex trafficking in India. We developed the 'Vulnerability Mapping Tool', a big data solution that analyses India's census data, government education data and other factors such as natural calamities, poverty level, access to transportation, educational opportunities, population and distance to the highways and the nearest police station to identify the villages that are most at risk of human trafficking. The tool went live in early 2016 and our Implementing Partners targeted the specific village with our prevention-focused Safe Village Program where it matters the most.



My Choices Foundation partnered with the Traffik Analysis Hub, the leading global technology platform and a collaborative initiative across multiple sectors to prevent human trafficking. We share our intelligence with the Traffik Analysis Hub and help all stakeholders to build a more complete picture of trafficking based on up-to-date, reliable and standardised data on human trafficking.

GIS+E, a non-profit harnessing the power of maps to drive positive change has depicted our work by the spatial overlap between our Safe Village Program locations and the village vulnerability dataset. Such visualisation of our work helps us understand our reach and impact. It also helps identify hotspots and blindspots to focus our efforts in regions that are most vulnerable to sex trafficking.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS



Community-based/grassroots organisations are born within the communities. Usually led by locals with a passion to address the pressing needs in their communities, grassroots organisations are an important element for sustainable social change. They have deep knowledge about the people, culture and environments to take our Safe Village Program to at-risk villages and better implement it on the ground.

Partnerships are absolutely essential to our work; when we have a shared vision, values and commitment, we can create a lasting change and improve the living environment of each girl, boy, man and woman in the village. We have

developed broad and deep networks and signed partnerships with 100 community-based organisations, whom we call Implementing Partners across 10 states in India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Our combined knowledge and expertise support us in contextualising the messaging framework of our Safe Village Program that caters to the local population and deliver it in their native languages. We support them with effective communication strategies and train them to improve their organisational capacity to inspire active involvement for change in their communities.



A group of girls smiling for a photograph
after our Safe Village Program

ASIAN ANTI-TRAFFICKING FORUM

Marking UN World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, we organise the Asian Anti-Trafficking Forum to raise awareness and abolish human trafficking for sexual exploitation in India and internationally. With representation from over 100 NGOs, government officials, law enforcement agencies, strategic partners and other stakeholders, the Forum is an opportunity to network, collaborate, share knowledge and best practices.

The theme-based event has been held annually for the last three years.

2019: COUNTERING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Our 2019 Forum focused on countering human trafficking through the prevention, rescue and rehabilitation of human trafficking victims. Bringing our stakeholders together, we discussed convergent strategies and shared knowledge to develop solutions and support effective actions to combat sex trafficking.

“



Elca Grobler, Founder, My Choices Foundation at the opening session of our 2019 Asian Anti-Trafficking Forum

There is a saying that you cannot kindle a fire in another until it is burning within yourself. Thank you very much for the fire that is in the team and within each of our Implementing Partners. The fire within each one of us keeps us going. We have come to state that we can no longer stay quiet or we can no longer be silent. The silence about the abuse of women and children has gone on for too long and it is the time to be broken. And there is no better time for us to stand together and come together in collaboration to end sex trafficking."



Group photograph with participants from the 1st Asian Anti-Trafficking Forum held in Hyderabad, July 2019

2020: COVID-19 AND THE AMPLIFIED IMPACT OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed as well as exacerbated inequities and vulnerable populations, especially children continue to bear the brunt of its impact and are at-risk of being trafficked. We have gathered to discuss the importance of tailored strategies to meet the needs of the at-risk population.

“

Traffickers are preying on vulnerable communities and they are looking for major ways to exploit the vulnerable and the poor. As NGOs, it is our responsibility to give awareness to all these communities to build the communities more stronger. During this COVID season, online crimes have increased and child pornography has increased. I would like all of you to take an oath, 'Say no to child pornography'. Our women, children and families are not for sale and abuse."



Joby Yesudas
Law Enforcement Development,
International Justice Mission at the
2020 Asian Anti-Trafficking Forum

2021: STRENGTHENING GRASSROOTS' STAKEHOLDERS

Trafficking in Persons affects not only individuals, but entire communities. The poor and vulnerable are the most susceptible and COVID-19 only reaffirmed this severe tragedy. Our 3rd Asian Anti-Trafficking Forum focused on equipping, strengthening and encouraging our grassroots' stakeholders who work in the villages to keep the villages safe, encourage children and raise awareness of trafficking in persons.

At this Forum, we launched handbooks for our grassroots' stakeholders which will serve as a tool to help them engage in informative and thoughtful conversations with children, women, men and community leaders at their villages and ensure that it is trafficking-free.



SAVE
THE
DATE

3RD ASIAN ANTI-TRAFFICKING FORUM

28
JULY
2021

Watch the live stream on YouTube.
Subscribe to our YouTube channel today!

#ENDHUMANTRAFFICKING





PILLAR 2: EQUIP VILLAGE CUSTODIANS

Activating people within communities is essential for the sustainability of our Safe Village Program, which aims to prevent the trafficking of children, women and men through sensitisation and vulnerability identification workshops on human trafficking and related factors. Our unique model of equipping village custodians – Rakshak, the Vigilante – Nodal Teacher, the Protector – Gram Mitra, the Friend – and Community Leadership, the guide have resonated with many communities across India. They are active participants and passionate about taking every step to keep their villages safe.

RAKSHAK, A VIGILANTE

Rakshak has the potential to spot suspicious events and provide crucial information to the Implementing Partners and My Choices Foundation team about cases of missing children, school dropouts, and child marriage, that can lead to trafficking. Rakshaks remain anonymous and do not take active action in any suspected case. The responsibility of the Rakshak is to protect the young girls in the village from being trafficked into the sex trade.

“

Some people were harassing a young girl by eve-teasing her and sending obscene messages. One day, they went to her school and asked the teacher to send the girl along with her saying that her father had sent them. The teacher believed them and sent the girl. As soon as, we got to know about the incident, we immediately alerted the people in the village and informed the police about the kidnap. We were able to rescue the girl because of our timely action and got the accused arrested as well. I am proud about what I am doing and have become even more vigilant to keep my community safe.”



Rakshak
from a village in Karnataka

NODAL TEACHER, A PROTECTOR

A Nodal Teacher is a determined volunteer and has a passion for the safety of the children. S/he is identified by our Implementing Partner (local NGO) during the pre-visit of the Safe Village Program. Nodal Teachers are identified from the community. S/he could be a:

- Head Master/Mistress
- Teachers from private or government schools
- Anganwadi Teachers
- Retired Teachers
- Tuition Teachers

GRAM MITRA, A FRIEND

Gram Mitra is passionate about keeping their village safe. S/he is a passionate volunteer, who shares the values of My Choices Foundation to ensure a safe living environment for children and women and works to make the village trafficking-free. S/he is identified by our Implementing Partner (local NGO) during the pre-visit of the Safe Village Program. Anyone in the community, irrespective of age, sex and background can be a Gram Mitra.



2,480
Rakshaks



1,862
Nodal Teachers



2,217
Gram Mitras



52
Community Leadership



Village women reading
our comic book



IT'S ALL ABOUT BURNING PASSION! FROM YOUNG MEMBERS OF THE MY CHOICES FOUNDATION TEAM TO NODAL TEACHERS IN MIDDLE-AGE

I was a little hesitant when I met the My Choices Foundation team for the first time. They were young and energetic but I wasn't sure about their approach to creating awareness about child trafficking. When I began to listen to them, it made a lot of sense. They were knowledgeable and well-trained to communicate the seriousness of child trafficking. Equally, they had the drive that each member of the community should be aware of the factors and pathways that lead to child trafficking and work together to create a safe village.

Most of the villagers work as daily wage labourers and live on a hand-to-mouth income. So, girls are married off early while boys are sent to cities to work as labourers. We don't get to hear back from them. I wouldn't blame parents since they try to do their best for their children – but they lack knowledge of what happens to their children once they leave the village. The COVID-19 pandemic further threw their lives out of gear and the numbers of children leaving the village spiked.

I was extremely happy when My Choices Foundation team conducted the Safe Village Programme. No one had come to our village before with such high-value messages about child trafficking. Flipcharts and comic books have helped immensely to communicate the message and the consultants were always available for counselling. All the more, the helpline number assured us that people are looking after us.

Safe Village Program messages made a deep impact on me and instilled a lot of confidence and hope for the children of our village. I am very much encouraged and inspired by your visit and that's why I have signed up to be a Nodal Teacher for my village. When you have come all the way to help us, I must do something for my village children. Your programme made us believe we matter; our children matter to you.

I will continue to spread the messages of the Safe Village Program and ensure that our community leaders do too. When we work together, we can create a safe living environment for our children and protect children from being trafficked.



Rakshaks, Nodal Teachers, Gram Mitras and Community Leadership are actively present in the community to ensure no child is left behind when it comes to getting an education. They are the eyes and ears of the community who work to ensure no girl loses her childhood by marrying at a young age.



VILLAGE CUSTODIANS PREVENT CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE NICK OF TIME

Karishma, aged 16 wanted to study but was being forced into getting married by her parents. With support from our active network of grassroots leaders, we stopped the child marriage and ensured her safety.

Karishma's father lost his first wife. He remarried and that resulted in family disputes among his four daughters and their stepmother. Due to the crippling financial burden of raising his family, he decided to marry one of his daughters with minimal expenditure during the pandemic. Karishma was forced by her father to marry at a young age.

To combat the rise of child marriage and sex trafficking in villages, we actively engaged in training and enlisting grassroots volunteers after conducting our awareness program – Safe Village Program. Our grassroots volunteers – Rakshaks, Nodal Teachers and Gram Mitras – are trained and equipped with tools and resources to report child marriage and sex trafficking and get the right support to prevent these crimes.

This training was helpful for our Rakshak when she became aware of Karishma's wedding arrangements. She called our anti-trafficking helpline 1800 419 8588 and informed us about the marriage that is about to occur in the district of Vijayanagar, Karnataka.

Once we received the call, our team sprang into action by alerting our Implementing Partner closest to the district, People NGO to take action. They took assistance from the Gram Panchayat, Asha Workers, Rakshak and Nodal Teacher who arrived at the venue of the engagement to rescue the child.

Once the child marriage was stopped, our Implementing Partner explained the consequences of getting married early and how it impacts girls physically and emotionally, including that girls who enter child marriages are more likely to experience domestic violence and are at a risk of early and unplanned pregnancy which increases the risk of maternal complications and mortality and are likely to remain out of school.

After explaining the risks of child marriage, Karishma's parents were made to sign a letter to ensure that Karishma would continue her studies and would not be forced to marry before she turns 18. Karishma's parents assured us that they would not make decisions that would negatively impact their children again. Today, Karishma is happy and is continuing her education.





PILLAR 3: EMPOWER BY HELPLINE

Aimed at at-risk communities and vulnerable populations, our anti-human trafficking helpline 1800 419 8588 and CHILDLINE 1098 operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and all around the year. Often in distress or crises, people tend to lose sight of things and become lost and confused about what to do next. These helplines are handy tools and a single telephone call can help save a child from being trafficked.

ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING HELPLINE 1800 419 8588

Launched in 2015, our anti-human trafficking toll-free helpline 1800 419 8588 has received **59,454 calls** till December 2021. We have received tips from all members of the public – from a 12-year-old girl to an 84-year-old man – who has spotted suspicious activity. The number of calls indicates the scale of the problem where millions of women and children are affected.



A woman dialing sex trafficking helpline number to understand how it works

SEX TRAFFICKING HELPLINE
1800 419 8588



TIMELY CALL TO OUR HELPLINE AND INTERVENTION PREVENTED CHILD MARRIAGE

15-year-old Latha dreams of becoming a teacher so that she can "guide children" to make the right choices. Her father passed away a few years ago, and ever since that time, Latha's mother, elder sister, and brother-in-law pressured her to get married.

When Latha finished Grade 10, her family forced her to end her education and began to look for suitors. She persistently denied the idea of getting married, but no one gave much thought to her feelings. No one listened to her. They were more concerned with finding Latha a husband who could take care of her.

Latha's friend Usha has attended the Safe Village Program (SVP) and had learnt about how to be a Guardian Girl. Guardian Girls look out for other girls and make sure they stay in school. She knew what to do if a girl in her village was forced to get married instead of going to school.

Usha promised she would help her to stop the forced marriage, knowing that My Choices Foundation is always available for help through the National anti-trafficking helpline number 1800 419 8588.

Usha built up the courage to call the Red Alert Helpline. The call was directed to the local Implementing Partner and they showed up in Usha's village, intervened and stopped the marriage. They made sure that Latha was admitted back into school, starting her new year in Grade 11 (called college in India). They counselled Latha's family and made them aware that marrying Latha at the age of 15 would not only limit her options in life but would also be breaking the law. Her family knows that if Latha is forced to quit school to get married, they will be reported to the police.

With sparkling eyes and a heart full of hope, Latha said:

“

Now, my dreams of becoming a teacher will come true thanks to my friend Usha, who is my Guardian Girl. I am grateful for all the people who have helped to stop the marriage.”



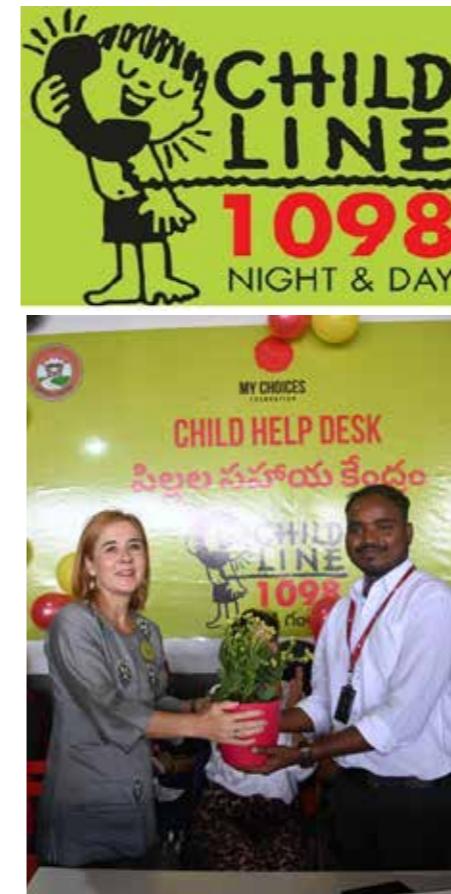
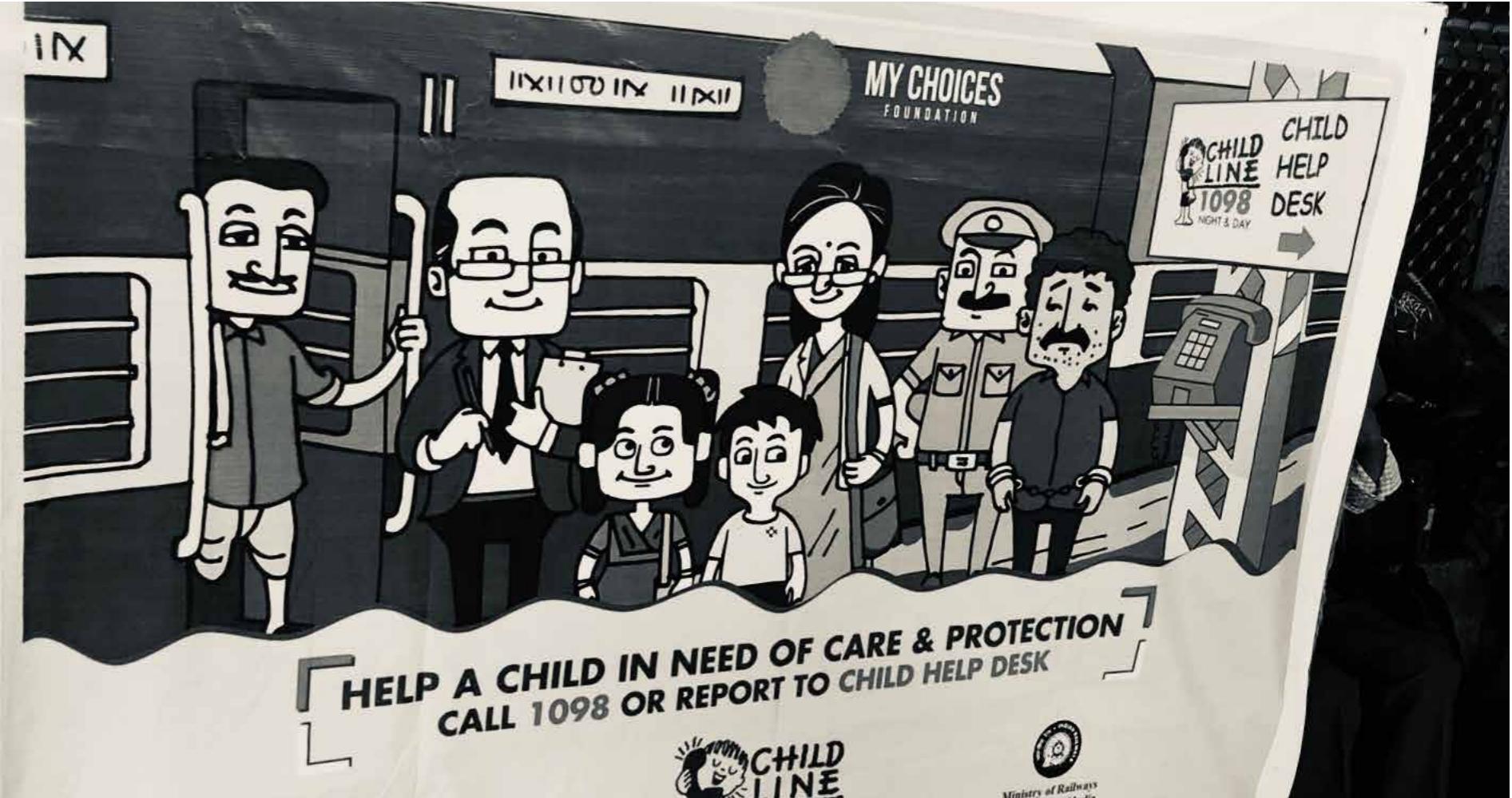
School girls at Safe Village Program

CHILDLINE 1098

In late 2018, My Choices Foundation was chosen to run the 24-hour operational help desk at Nampally Railway Station in Hyderabad by CHILDLINE India Foundation and the helpdesk was inaugurated in January 2019. The helpdesk is a joint initiative of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Indian Railways, along with the CHILDLINE India Foundation. We respond to children's emergency needs and link them to relevant services for their long-term care and rehabilitation. Through the helpdesk, we were able to rescue more than **900 children** and have them safely reunited with their families. We marked the first anniversary in 2020 and then we are proud to be chosen again as a partner to run the helpdesk at Mahatma Gandhi Bus Station, Hyderabad.



Inauguration event of CHILDLINE helpdesk at Nampally Railway station, Hyderabad



Inauguration event of CHILDLINE helpdesk at Mahatma Gandhi Bus station, Hyderabad



CHILDLINE 1098



AUTO DRIVER'S KINDNESS AT THE BUS STATION GOES A LONG WAY TO PREVENT CHILD TRAFFICKING AND MY CHOICES FOUNDATION EFFORTS MADE IT POSSIBLE

50-year-old, Narayana drives an Auto at the Mahatma Gandhi Bus Station, Hyderabad. He is known for his kind nature amongst his fellow-men; he offers free rides for hospital visits and is always on the watch-out to help innocent children wandering alone in the bus stations – runaway children from homes, children separated from families and children who came to the city in search for a better life, but found none.

It was a chilly December night and the clock hit 9:00 pm. Narayana noticed a young girl, sitting on a stone bench. He started wondering about her and thought – maybe she would be waiting to be picked up by her family. His trail of thought was broken by a man in his late 30s. He has just arrived from the village in the remotest part of Telangana along with his parents, for medical treatment for his 65-year-old father. The man wanted to hire an auto to get dropped at the hospital. After a few seconds, the three-wheeled motorcycle sputtered tuk...tuk...tuk...

It was around 10:30 pm when he got back to his auto stand at the MGBS. He noticed the stone bench again and the girl was still there. He realised something was wrong and rushed to enquire about her situation. When he spoke to her, the girl burst into tears. She mentioned that she had run away from her native place in the rural parts of Telangana to make a living in Hyderabad. She had no idea what to do or where to go. She felt lonely and scared and had been sitting on the stone bench for the last three hours.

Having helped many children in the past, he knew exactly what to do. He spoke to her calmly and escorted her to the 24-hour CHILDLINE Helpdesk, run by My Choices Foundation. Our counsellors



calmed her and assured her of hope. Looking at her fragile nature and tiredness, our counsellors offered her water, tea and biscuits. After she finished eating, she identified herself as Revathi and 17-years old.

Narayana said 'Goodbye' to Revathi and left with confidence that Revathi is in a safe place and the counsellors would figure out a way to provide her with a good life and keep her away from the prying eyes of a trafficker. Our counsellors got into work. As per the procedure, the Child Welfare Committee was contacted and under their guidance, Revathi's parents were telephoned. They got on to the earliest train from their home town and reached Hyderabad the next day early morning – while Revathi was peacefully sleeping. She was happy to see her parents and her parents' face expressed huge gratefulness and relief to have found their little girl.

Thanks to the selfless efforts of Narayana and the CHILDLINE Help Desk team, Revathi is safely reunited with her family.

We need people like Narayana – Rakshak (vigilante) – to save girls from being trafficked. We met Narayana personally to understand his thoughts about trafficking. He said:

“

She is a little girl and what would I have done if she is my daughter. There might be difficulties in our lives, but when we see the smiles on the children – even if they aren't our own – our hearts are filled with happiness. We share that moment with them. That's the life to live for.

My Choices Foundation, along with CHILDLINE is doing an amazing job. A 24-hour Help desk is not an easy thing and your counsellors knew exactly what to say to provide hope for children. All auto drivers at MGBS are always ready to lend a hand in any way possible," Narayana said with a smiling face."

We need people like Narayana – Rakshak (vigilante) – to save girls from being trafficked. Narayana leads the Auto Drivers Unions and guides many auto drivers to help children in need. Along with his friends, he has helped many children and is always available to help My Choices Foundation's efforts. Our conversation ended on a mutual gratitude note, but a beginning of a beautiful partnership with Auto Drivers who are on the frontlines to help young girls like Revathi at Bus and Railway stations.





PILLAR 4: EXPOSE BY MASS MEDIA

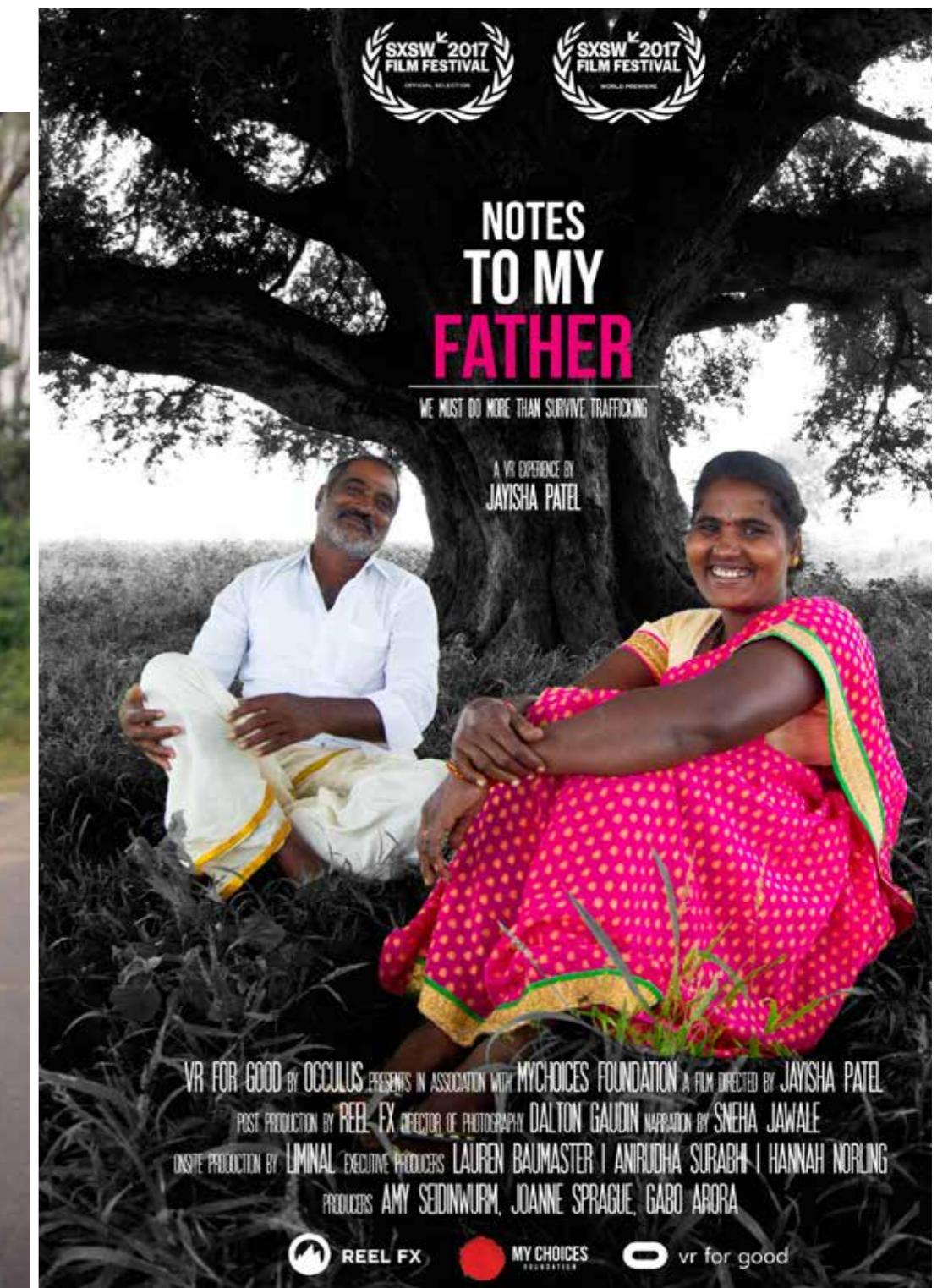
Building a sustainable and vibrant movement requires visibility and mass media are powerful tools to create that. It can penetrate into every segment of society and raise awareness, shape opinions and mobilize the public about issues that matter the most. Drawing attention to sex trafficking, we developed videos, animations, celebrity-endorsed campaigns and radio spots that engaged people to make them understand the impact of sex trafficking.

DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS



NOTES TO MY FATHER - VIRTUAL REALITY DOCUMENTARY

In partnership with Oculus' Facebook initiative VR for Good, we launched 'Notes to My Father', the world's first live capture virtual reality (VR) documentary on sex trafficking. It narrated the story of Ramadevi, a sex trafficking survivor. The virtual reality experience captured the attention of the viewer effectively and helped them to emotionally connect with Ramadevi's story on a deeper level. Notes to My Father has been screened in more than 30 festivals worldwide, including the Sundance Film Festival and SXSW Film Festival.



#CHOTUKACHILDHOOD - VIDEO CAMPAIGN



Still from the
#chotukachildhood film

We co-launched a powerful film #ChotuKaChildhood in partnership with Dentsu Aegis Network, to initiate a powerful battle in the fight against child labour and abuse on Children's Day. It exposes the harsh truths of child labour in the country and encourages everyone to report the crime if they witness it. This film garnered more than **94,000 views** on Instagram which is one of the many elements of our work to see the transformation of India into a safe place for children.

The film bagged three international awards for #ChotuKaChildhood:

- **Bronze at the 2021 London International Awards**, one of the world's leading award shows that honour creativity in the advertising and brand communications space.
- **Bronze at the Spikes Asia 2021**, the benchmark for creative excellence since 1986 and the region's most prestigious award for creative advertising
- **Bronze One Club for Creativity Award 2021**, The One Club for Creativity is an international nonprofit organization seeking to inspire, encourage, and develop creative excellence in advertising and design.

UNERASE POETRY

Unerase poetry, Bollywood actor and crowdfunding platform, Ketto co-founder Kunal Kapoor wrote a spoken word poem on sex trafficking and used it as the campaign video for fundraising for Operation Red Alert. The video was unequivocally well received. Crucially, the video succeeded in confronting passive acceptance of commercial sexual exploitation by spurring empathy for the hidden pain of lost innocence, and severed family bonds. The campaign was an exciting example of how we are working to put India on Red Alert to end sex trafficking.

#SOLDBODIES BY KUNAL KAPOOR

You see faces but no identity
You see bodies without a destiny
Cars slow down their pace
Men look out to their windows to see
Every night when you drive back home
You cross that road, where love is sold
You have seen the night sell her own beauty
You have seen the darkest of nights,
Eventually turn into mornings
You have seen corpses within these humans
You have seen emotions being auctioned for just a few rupees
But tonight, when you cross that road
And they look at you, as your car slows down
Don't slow down to gaze and stare
Instead take a moment and smile gently
Just to show that you care
Because if you look carefully, at those girls in dresses
You might notice something which nobody addresses
Behind those shiny sarees and makeup so wild
You'll see a compassionate mother, desperate to earn for her child
You will see them burn helplessly in the midst of need and desperation
While their kids grow up, outside those shut doors
You will see fingers of the rich shamelessly playing around poor Lali's body
While her parents anxiously await her return back home
She was just 16 when she went missing from her home town
She reached the city, amidst slaughter
She never saw her family again
She was sold, while still a daughter
Sarita lies down on the beds of tyrants while she is still dressed as a bride
How do you cremate a body that has constantly been cremated within?



- Kunal Kapoor, Actor and Co-Founder of Ketto

SUROKHITO GRAM KARYAKROM - FACEBOOK CAMPAIGN



In partnership with Global Fund to End Modern Slavery and Seefar, we ran a behavioural change campaign in three districts of West Bengal, namely Birbhum, Banker and Bardhaman. The primary objective of the campaign was to promote knowledge, attitude and practices among 12-18-year-olds that can prevent child trafficking (CT) and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in their communities. Considering the age group of our target audience, we developed a dedicated Facebook page, Surokhito Gram Karyakrom where we adopted a mix of testimonies, infographics, photography and other engaging visual elements to empower 12-18-year-olds to convey the warning signs of child trafficking and the realities for children, particularly girls, moving away from home at an early age for employment or marriage. Within a span of eight months and 150 posts, the page reached 1 million people while the posts reached **6.4 million**.



DELICACY POEM

I have no brothers, sisters,
cousins, neighbours, teachers.
I am no daughter, sister!

I tie no friendship bands,
yet I am wanted - by men.
Was born naked but wrapped
in clothes to deceive me.
My pictures in the natal
form on each laptop.
Me moved from lap to lap,
a dressed chicken,
they go straight for my legs.
Love chocolates, lollipops,
ice creams, but they come as
a package deal.

My mom too graduated
in complete silence from
innocence to guilt.
Her mom
I'll never know.

My story grows with
each pat,
my baby smell lost
to the stench of adulthood.

Hear other children laugh,
but I make the Kookaburra cry.
Alzheimer's cannot erase the
invasion of a thousand fingers,
I cannot lift even one.

The world is divided
into men and women.
Men whose delicacy
is baby women.

- Author unknown



EDUCATIONAL AND INFORMATIONAL VIDEOS

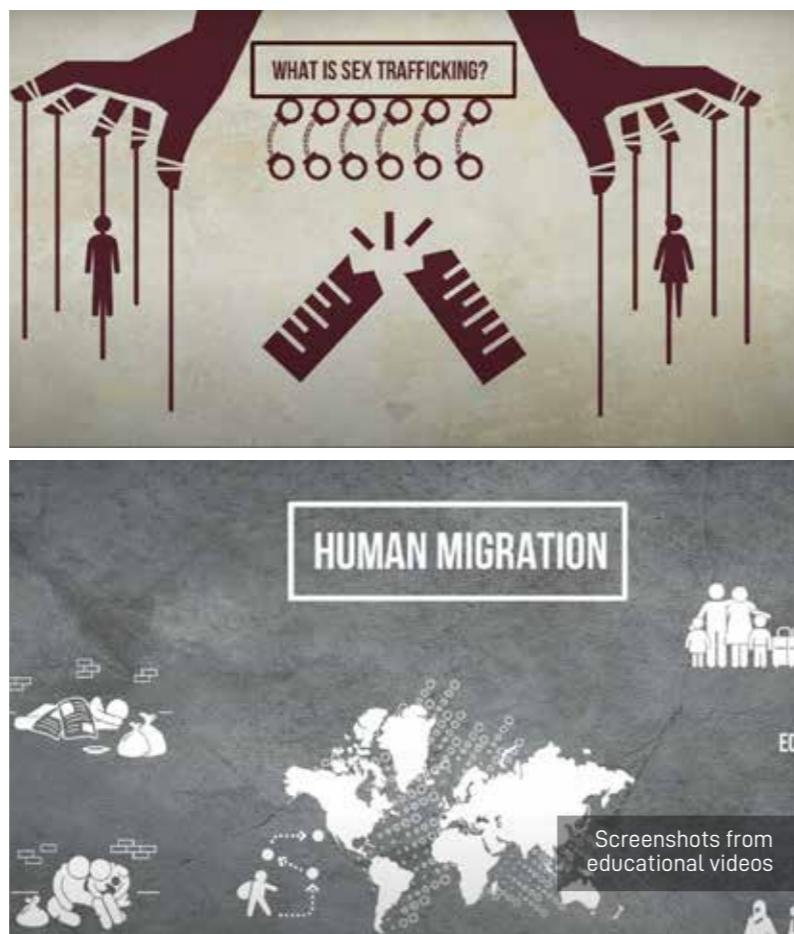
“

Hidden in plain sight is the crime of sex trafficking, now commonly referred to as modern slavery. It is widespread in various forms but is seldom spoken about within the community because of the taboo associated with it. Millions are enslaved throughout the world and exploited. We aim to expose this through a powerful tool, mass media, that provides us with a great opportunity to communicate with large numbers of people across India.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we expanded our outreach through community radio, e-learning modules and social media campaigns to sensitise and educate people of all ages about sex trafficking, child sexual abuse, and child marriage. Empirical evidence from our field surveys indicates that there has been a change in behaviour amongst our target audience and that our programs have aided in them identifying and mitigating risks leading to trafficking.”

We conceptualised and produced educational and informative videos to help people understand the impact of human trafficking. Three modules – Anti-Human Trafficking 101, Allied Laws and Safe Village Program (our initiative that aims to keep villages and communities safe and unviable for traffickers) - comprise 26 videos that were released on YouTube in five languages – English, Hindi, Telugu, Kannada and Assamese.

Our Anti-Human Trafficking 101 has been made available for the general population to learn free of cost on Udemy, an online learning platform. We are working on releasing the videos on other platforms.



COMMUNITY RADIO PROGRAMMES

Community radio stations play an instrumental role to keep the remote population informed and encourage active participation and decision-making to prevent sex trafficking in their villages and communities. Our engaging storytelling programme, 'Listen and Act' focused on instilling a deeper understanding of issues of trafficking. With **4,080 hours** of programming time, we reached **10,50,607 people** across **100 villages**. Our listenership surveys indicated that messages well-resonated with the target audience increased their awareness about trafficking and showed a greater commitment to act to combat sex trafficking in their villages/communities.





THE FEARLESS AND UNSTOPPABLE GLOW

10 YEARS
ANNIVERSARY
2012-2021



Section 3

THE WAY FORWARD



A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE



10 years on, My Choices Foundation is needed more than ever. The momentum behind our four-pillar approach is stronger than ever. We are more fearless and unstoppable than ever – as our challenges become even greater.

The last 10-years have been emotionally demanding, soulfully fulfilling as well as extraordinarily insightful in so many ways. All our knowledge and experience have been well-fed into our next strategic plan and charted down into key priorities to be implemented in the years ahead.



We are currently present in 10 states in India, but we want to reach the farthest and the furthest in India and across the globe.



Strengthen the sustainability of our Safe Village Program by establishing strong alliances and engaging stakeholders at village and community levels.



Expand the Implementing Partner – Counsellor model to address the issues of gender-based violence and domestic abuse.



Build a strong base of Peace Ambassadors, the local community women to act as first responders to domestic violence and advocate for human rights and dignity.



Use mass media as a catalyst to improve the lives of children and women by increasing awareness to gathering views and introducing informative digital modules.



Harness the power of technology to end sex trafficking and stop domestic violence.

At the heart of our work are the smiles of the little children, the assured confidence of young girls and incredibly strong women who are making their choices to live their lives free of abuse, violence and exploitation.

We will continue to shout the message that domestic violence and sex trafficking are human rights violations and to protect each and every girl by raising awareness, shifting perspectives, influencing attitudes and cultivating behaviours and ultimately to the extent where every girl and woman can live and thrive.





WE ARE HUMBLED AND GRATEFUL



My Choices Foundation has partnered with Alliance 8.7, a global partnership committed to achieving Target 8.7 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals: take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of all forms of child labour to achieve decent work for all and sustained economic growth.



We are grateful to receive the support of AmSure, for one of our counselling centres and the Lotus Safe Home, which helps domestic violence survivors.



Aangan Trust build and strengthen child protection systems to ensure that the most vulnerable children are safe, supported, in school, and assured of childhoods free from trafficking, child marriage, hazardous work, violence, and exploitation. We partner with Aangan trust on variety of awareness projects on domestic violence and abuse.



Australian Aid is an international aid organisation of the Australian Government that aims to promote prosperity and enhance stability around the world. We are thankful for their generous support to various programmes of Operation PeaceMaker and Operation Red Alert.



Breakthrough's 'Bell Bajao!' launched in India in 2008. It is a cultural and media campaign that calls on men and boys to take a stand against domestic violence. We have partnered with Breakthrough to translate the advertisements into 17 different Indian languages and distribute them across the country through our grassroots programmes, social media and television.



Operation PeaceMaker of My Choices Foundation 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.



My Choices Foundation has partnered with CHILDLINE 1098 to run the 24-hour operational help desk at Nampally Railway Station in Hyderabad through our Anti-trafficking arm, Operation Red Alert. The CHILDLINE helpdesk is a joint initiative of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Indian Railways.



Dentsu Impact (A dentsuMB Company), a creative arm of the Dentsu is led by experts in creative, strategic planning and account management with a single-minded objective of creating impact. We partner with Dentsu to launch creative multimedia campaigns to create awareness on child labour, sex trafficking and domestic violence.



Final Mile is a knowledge-intensive organization, but with the clear intent of applying knowledge to solve real-world problems by developing an integrated understanding of several related fields, including cognitive neuroscience, psychology, classical economics, and design.



The Freedom Collaborative is a platform for and by the global anti-trafficking community to connect partners, provide information and share knowledge. My Choices Foundation is proud to be a regional partner, supporting Freedom Collaborative to connect Indian NGOs with the platform and all the resources it offers.



Genpact drives digital-led innovation and digitally-enabled intelligent operations to solve problems with data and analytics. We are happy to partner with Genpact to build the Train the Trainer model to facilitate the entire training lifecycle - from selection to deployment and continuous monitoring and upskilling.



GHR Foundation aims to create lasting 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 My Choices Foundation.



Global Fund for Children has been a great supporter of the Safe Village Program. With their help and support, we activated Safe Village Programs in West Bengal through four implementing partners. GFC has always been available with bridge funds for additional requirements. We are grateful for their adaptability and generosity to sponsor the COVID-19 relief initiative, organisational development and wellness programmes.



Our Safe Village Program, developed based on behavioural research findings to educate and empower rural communities has been awarded a prestigious grant by the Global Fund to End Slavery. The fund helped us to build anti-trafficking behavioural change communications campaigns in 28 villages across three locations in the state of West Bengal.



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



Invisible Scars is a collaborative venture of two NGOs - SAMVAD Advocacy (Samvad Society for Advocacy & Development) and Good Universe. We have partnered with Invisible Scars to help women and men facing abuse.



With the support and contributions of the Netherlands Embassy, we worked to deal with vulnerability and misinformation during the COVID-19 lockdown. The three types of interventions are providing essential food supplies to vulnerable communities, providing assistance and support for domestic and sexual abuse victims and raising awareness on COVID19 safety.



Hatch has partnered with My Choices Foundation in 2021 to provide financial support for the Lotus Safe Home and The Safe Village Program, as well as crucial support for covid related activities. We are deeply thankful for their continuous support navigating Covid, as well as support of our programs.



NILA is committed to providing underserved women and children with expert legal aid, counsel and action at rates affordable to each client. Operation PeaceMaker partners with NILA to provide professional legal support to Operation PeaceMaker cases with specialised needs. NILA helps Operation PeaceMakers allocate lawyers on a basis to specific cases, utilising their network of pro-bono lawyers.



We worked with Oculus to create a Virtual Reality film on human trafficking in India. The film was showcased at the Sundance Film Festival in 2017 and became an official selection at the SXSW Film Festival where it made its world premiere.

We are incredibly grateful to our donors, partners and supporters - because of your help, we are continuously able to touch millions of girls and women who are now living their lives free of abuse, violence and exploitation.



We are truly grateful and honoured to Opportunity International Australia for their continued support of the selected programmes of My Choices Foundation. Film Festival in 2017 and became an official selection at the SXSW Film Festival where it made its world premiere.



The Macquarie Group Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the Macquarie Group and provides support to hundreds of community organisations globally each year through financial support, volunteering and skills sharing. Macquarie provides specific support to two counselling centres of My Choices Foundation.



In partnership with the US Consulate, we aim to raise awareness on human trafficking in the South Indian states, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, using community radio stations.



Vihaan works at the grassroots to fight human trafficking and provides survivors access to legal support leading to justice. My Choices Foundation refers survivors of trafficking, violence and exploitation to Vihaan to start the legal procedure of fighting the injustice they endured.



Wandé is an ethical fashion brand, revolutionizing the fashion industry beginning with the supply chain, and setting a standard for ethical and sustainable fashion. They believe that the fashion industry and the tourism industry involve exploitative labor and unsustainable practices, and working to change that.



Women's Education Project equips young and vulnerable women with skills to discover their voice and thrive in rewarding careers. My Choices Foundation with the Women's Education Project since 2016 to expand our Shakti and Asli programs to empower adolescent girls and boys.



Xilinx, a semiconductor manufacturing company provides support to our antitrafficking arm, Operation Red Alert of My Choices Foundation. Through their continuous support, we are able to conduct Safe Village Programs in the state of Telangana, India.



Zariya is a free service that addresses survivors' legal and counselling needs. With their secure website and reputable partners, Zariya provides women with access to such provisions where they can relatively 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.



REFERENCES

- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2020.
- International Labour Organisation. Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: forced labour and forced marriage, 2016.
- United Nations Children's Fund. Ending Child Marriage. A profile of progress in India, UNICEF, New York, 2019.
- UN Women. Facts and figures: Ending violence against women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>
- UN Women. <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/violenceagainstwomen/en/index.html>
- UN Women. Progress of the World's Women 2000.
- Jaffer Latief Najar, Human Trafficking in India: How the colonial legacy of the anti-human trafficking regime undermines migrant and worker agency, 2021.
- Dasra. Zero Traffick: Eliminating sex trafficking in India, 2014.
- Freedom Fund. Impact Report 2018.
- Shoba Suri, Mona Debosmita Sarkar, Domestic violence and women's health in India, 2022.
- International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF, 2021.
- Government of India. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019-21.
- Grose RG et al., Sexual and reproductive health outcomes of violence against women and girls in lower-income countries: a review of reviews. The Journal of Sex Research. 2021.

PHOTOGRAPHY, ILLUSTRATION AND POEM CREDITS

My Choices Foundation Team
Implementing Partners
Anurag Bose
Arushi Shukla
Dalton Gaudin
Kamal Kiran Photography
Luckin Torato
Mehreen Kaur
Nikki Denholm
Thariq Husaain

CONCEPT, COPY, DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Kaliru Communications

CONTACT

My Choices Foundation (Her Choices Trust)
H. No. 6-2-39, Flat No. 301, A-Block,
Third Floor, A.C. Guards,
Lakdikapul, Hyderabad 500004.
Telangana, India.

WEBSITE

www.mychoicesfoundation.org

SOCIAL MEDIA

-  <https://www.facebook.com/MyChoicesFoundation>
-  <https://twitter.com/MyChoicesFDN>
-  <https://in.linkedin.com/company/my-choices>
-  <https://www.instagram.com/mychoicesfoundation/>
-  <https://www.youtube.com/c/MyChoicesFoundation>

MY CHOICES FOUNDATION - AN AWAKENING!

It is an awakening
dares to be bold
challenges conventions
wishes good
shows the way
gives the courage

My Choices Foundation!

As a companion and as a shadow
it stands for us as a safe shelter
at our homes, on the streets,
in the villages and the communities

Operation Peacemaker
for the family's peace
Operation Red Alert
for the safety of the young girls

It brings the change
moves forward with great aspiration
works day and night
for those who need help

People of My Choices Foundation
are an army fighting for the freedom of girls and women
to live lives free of abuse, violence and exploitation

My Choices Foundation
It is an awakening!



A DECADE OF
FEARLESS GLOW

Impact Report 2012-2021