

SOS Children's Villages of India Creates Outdoor Learning Spaces for Children in Faridabad

05 January, 2022, Faridabad - SOS Children's Villages of India, India's largest self-implementing child-care NGO, created child-friendly outdoor learning spaces for children from underserved communities in Faridabad to support continuity of education, and enhance awareness on health and hygiene.

Nationwide closure of schools had disrupted the education of children. With the intent of encouraging the continuity of education, the organisation painted five walls of the Shivaji Nagar slum in Faridabad, with information related to Child Protection, Education, Health and Hygiene. One of the walls was, in fact, turned into a blackboard, to encourage consistent learning at the community level, while schools were shut. This was an initiative under the Family Strengthening Programme Shivaji Nagar-Auto Pin.

Shivaji Nagar is a slum settlement in Faridabad. The population consists of migrant labourers from nearby states. The location is home to a population of approximately 10,000-12,000 individuals. The families are engaged in low-paying jobs in nearby factories or are dependent on daily minimal earnings.

Life in slums is challenging because of the lack of basic facilities such as water, toilets and fresh air. Most houses have just one room with no ventilation, but serve as home for families with 5-10 members. Families cook, eat and sleep in one room. These resource and infrastructure constraints adversely impact the holistic development of children growing up in slums.

In his comments, **Mr Sumanta Kar, Secretary General, SOS Children's Villages of India**, said, "Children, especially those living in slums, have seen their education being majorly disrupted by the pandemic, especially since they did not have access to the internet and/or smart phones to continue their schooling remotely. A significant number of children, especially girls, from vulnerable settings, who have been out of school for long, may never return when schools reopen. This initiative helped reiterate important aspects such as health, hygiene, education et cetera. We wanted to provide children with some semblance of learning, even when they were not attending schools."

"The closing of schools due to the pandemic has caused major disruptions in our lives, leaving us confined within our homes and little outdoor time. The lack of social exposure was affecting our interactive skills. The learning walls of our locality have helped us a lot. We all like coming to the space since the walls were painted which has allowed us to learn, play and engage. It has helped us make new friends, enhancing our interactive skills. These paintings have brought liveliness to the usual dull walls of our locality, giving us a comforting and hopeful feeling in such trying times, while spreading important messages," says **Reena***, member, **Bal Panchayat**.

Physical environment plays an important role in creating an enabling space for children. The pandemic was tough on everyone but children suffered even more.

*Name has been changed to maintain privacy

Lockdowns confined children to the four walls of their homes. It took away the only learning and engagement time that they had with their peers in schools. Reports suggest that the prolonged confinement of children in their homes affects the overall well-being of children and can hamper their growth. With the current scenario, there's a high risk of increase in the number of drop-outs among school going children.

The initiative by SOS Children's Villages of India is aimed at generating discussion around important topics such as education, health and child protection, affecting the community. Today, the community blackboard is being used for various awareness programmes and remedial classes functioning in the community. It has also become a space for the Bal Panchayat (children's parliament) for their day-to-day activities.

About SOS Children's Villages of India

Established in 1964, SOS Children's Villages of India provides children without parental care or at the risk of losing it, a value chain of quality care services that goes beyond childcare alone, to ensuring comprehensive child development. Our customized care interventions such as, Family Like Care, Family Strengthening, Kinship Care, Short Stay Homes, Foster Care, Youth Skilling, Emergency Childcare and Special Needs Childcare are aimed at transforming lives and developing children under our care into self-reliant and contributing members of society. We empower vulnerable families in communities to become financially independent, thereby enabling them to create safe and nurturing spaces for children under their care. Today, over 6,500 children live in 440 family homes inside 32 SOS Villages in 22 States/UTs, from Srinagar to Kochi and Bhuj to Shillong. They are lovingly cared for and nurtured by 600 SOS mothers and aunts. As India's largest self-implementing childcare NGO, SOS Children's Villages directly touches the lives of around 28,500 children every year.

For more information, please visit <https://www.soschildrensvillages.in>