

## **Reintegration of children separated from their families and living on the railways (2011-15)**

**Project Aim:** To reduce the number of children living and/ or working on platforms in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in India, to protect them from abuse and to protect their rights.

This project seeks to address a context of increasing numbers of children running away from home, travelling by rail to distant cities and surviving on railway platforms and streets, and an ineffective child protection system failing to protect even those children who are put into institutional care. The anticipated outcomes are the integration of children with their families, reduced placement of children into institutional care, the establishment of a child protection network and demonstration of home placement as best practice.

**EveryChild India experience:** EveryChild started work in India in 2005 and currently has a team of 12 local staff based in Bangalore India. Approximately 8,000-9,000 children on two platforms in Karnataka state will benefit over the life of this four year project. Indirect beneficiaries include 3,000 parents involved in pre-home placement meetings, training, counselling and follow up support to ensure the sustainable reintegration of children. Other indirect beneficiaries include government officials, the police, and other stakeholders in charge of child protection in their communities.

**EveryChild India Partner:** SATHI (the Society for Children in Difficult Situations), our key partner, has wide experience of collaborating with other NGOs to promote reintegration for children on railway platforms, and provides homeless children with essential shelter and support services. This initiative was developed by EveryChild India with SATHI in Bangalore, and EveryChild has worked with SATHI to implement this project on a small scale since January 2005.

### Current situation in the country

The number of children living and working on the street is increasing in India, many of whom leave rural homes to go to the city. Their first destination is usually the city's railway station. For example, on any given day approximately 20 to 25 children arrive at major railway stations in cities, with approximately 3,500-4,000 children arriving at the station alone every year. The situation is the same in the other big cities (Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai and Delhi) in the country, including Bangalore. In fact, only about 15% of runaway children leave home for severe reasons i.e. extreme poverty, broken home, alcoholic parents or being orphaned. In 85% of cases, the child has left because of relatively minor reasons e.g. not getting good marks at school, fighting with another child or losing something. The potential to return many of these children to their families is therefore very high.



### Main problems in the project area/ project rationale

There are 15,000 children living on the streets of Bangalore and many make the vast railway stations their home. Here, they survive by begging, working on the platform as luggage lifters, stealing and doing menial jobs such as sweeping trains and platforms. In this situation, they have no access to education, health services or support. Each day is a struggle to survive because their life on the streets means they are at risk from gangs, exploitative employers, organised traffickers, brokers (who organise syndicated begging), and pimps as well as the police.

Nearly 120 trains arrive and depart from Bangalore railway platform every day. And every day among the thousands of hopefuls, who come to the city with dreams of making it big, you will find children, arriving on the platform alone and frightened. These children travel hundreds of miles from home with no knowledge of the city they finally arrive in. Some run away from home because of violence, abuse or discrimination. Many are forced to runaway in search of

employment due to relentless poverty in their homes. They leave in the hope of a better life elsewhere, not realising that it will be almost impossible to make their way home again.

## Project Objectives and Activities

### Objective 1: To rescue and assess runaway children

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Separated children on railway platforms will be identified, provided with temporary shelter, and offered counselling and detoxification support if appropriate. Parents/extended families will be contacted to take their children back home and post-home placement follow-up support provided to ensure long term reunification with families and communities.

#### Follow-up and impact

Post-home placement follow-up support (to ensure long-term reunification with families) has been provided to the children, which revealed that **92% are continuing to live at home, 78% are studying at school** and only 1% had run away again. Furthermore, 83% of children reintegrated with their families after attending the de-addiction and home orientation camps continue to reside at home, of which 80% remain addiction free, reflecting how the camps have addressed barriers to reintegration. In addition, as a result of the project, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of children living on the railway platforms separated from their families. Moreover, the provision of access to transit shelter is preventing children from becoming trapped in street life and addiction.

**Outcome:** Children are reintegrated with their families

### Objective 2: To strengthen child protection structures

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We will work with existing child protection structures using best practice examples, as existing Child Welfare Committees vary greatly in capacity and effectiveness. We will train district CWC Members on their roles, responsibilities and legal jurisdiction, and promote their use of the home placement approach instead of putting children into institutional care. We will conduct study tours for CWC staff and publish a CWC newsletter to share new and existing best practice from other states.

#### Impact

Through the project's work with CWCs and government-run children's homes, there has been a **shift from children residing in government-run institution/ children's homes for lengthy periods to children being reunited with their families at the earliest possible point**. CWCs and government-run institutions/children's homes are increasingly drawing on the services provided by different organisations such as vocational training and counselling, in turn reducing children's residence in government-run institutions. The increase in referrals to the de-addiction camps has reduced the number and duration of children staying in government-run institutions. Approaches to counselling children and their parents have also been improved. Furthermore, as a result of joint workshops and training, there is now greater team-working between CWC members and the staff of Government-run children's homes, and a willingness to share learning. Through collaborative support from NGOs and probation officers assigned to government-run homes better care and protection for children is provided.

**Outcome:** More number of children's from institutions with families are home placed by CWC's leading to fewer children placed the institutional care

## Project Sustainability

We will reintegrate children back with their families and communities where appropriate, and explore alternatives for those children who are hard to place. We will also work with government run Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) to protect children at risk of abuse and rescue and rehabilitate those who have survived it. We will work with separated children who have left home and are either living on railway platforms or have been identified through the CWC child protection work. With our partners, we will disseminate the results of this project to mobilise support for child protection and to promote the home placement approach of reintegration with families, to ensure sustainable reunification within communities. We will call for government and NGO service providers to adopt the family reunion approach and advocate for the government to provide children and families with better, specialised services, working in partnership with local NGOs.

For the specific beneficiaries of the project, sustainability has been achieved through providing **follow-up support** post-reintegration, and through thorough preparation for returning home via **camp**s addressing barriers such as addictions and educational support. Moreover, the establishment of **child tracking systems in the railway platforms** will continue to facilitate the follow-up process.

A sustainable approach that will also aid future beneficiaries, ensuring both **earlier intervention and quicker reintegration**, has been achieved through **working with government structures at various levels**, from national through to local, and policy through to practice: the project has increased the **effectiveness of existing government structures** (CWCs and government-run children's homes) through establishing a network of CWCs and NGOs for child protection. Additionally, through workshops, training and sharing best practice, the **capacity and motivation of CWC members** has been increased. Moreover, systems have been established for the **continued sharing of best practice** through, for example, newsletters and networks. The home placement **approach of avoiding lengthy residence in government institutions and reuniting children with their families wherever possible and in the best interests of the child or seeking out alternative family home based care has been promoted among government departments and structures** such as CWCs, homes and the Department of Women and Child Development, through the dissemination of study findings and sharing best practice via workshops, newsletters and networking. This has resulted in **changed attitudes and messaging**, and set the course for sustained movement towards this approach. The engagement of the **media will help sustain pressure** for action. Furthermore, close and **collaborative working relationships** have been built with key stakeholders, notably the police (Railway Protection Force and Government Railway Police), CWCs and government departments. In addition, greater awareness and visibility have created increased potential to raise **resources** locally.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

SATHI will depute a Programme officer for Karnataka. There will be a team leader for each location in-charge for outreach on platforms and shelters. A full time counsellor will be present in each shelter. Monthly staff meetings to review will be held by the core group in each location.

As part of the internal evaluation of the programme, exchange of cluster visit of team leaders/ project-in-charge will also be arranged to share good practice and to provide feedback to team members. One of the senior staff members is nominated as the child protection officer; He/she is responsible for the effective implementation of the Child protection policy in the organisation. This will be monitored by the deputy secretary and the progress will be informed to the governing body twice a year. Programme officers who are responsible will be submitting the progress report along with utilisation statement to EveryChild every quarter.

EveryChild representatives will visit the project every quarter and conduct a progress review and support partners in programme development and effective implementation. The EveryChild finance manager will conduct a quarterly internal audit to ensure effective utilisation of project funds and compliance.

At the end of the project, an evaluation would be undertaken by the external consultant and the learnings will be shared and incorporated in to future plans.

## Stakeholder participation (children, families, communities, local government bodies, etc)

SATHI works very closely with the authorities of Railway Protection Force, Police department, railway authorities, child welfare committees, coolies and vendors to ensure more children to be rescued at the railway platforms. These key stakeholders are great help to SATHI, they themselves have worked with children on the railway platforms and referred them to SATHI. In a year approximately 200 children have been helped by these stakeholders. Additionally, as many of them are familiar to the children, they have been useful in convincing the boys and girls to work with SATHI's staff.

SATHI works in collaboration with the Department of Women and Children to ensure effective implementation of the Juvenile Justice System and to promote better functioning of Government homes for children in need of care and protection. SATHI engages with village Panchayat leaders, school teachers, village heads and extended families

and neighbours to provide post-reintegration home placement support, especially for those children living in difficult home situations (e.g. single parent households).

SATHI has regular engagement with print and visual media to raise awareness on the issues of Runaway & Missing children among the general public and raise the profile of the organisation.

Older children living on the railway platform refer younger children to SATHI and ensure that SATHI's staff are aware of any new arrivals on the platform. Each evening children are consulted both in the shelter and the camps and provide feedback about the facilities and the staff member.

### Case study

When Kamraj was 10 years old his father died and his family was left in poverty. Shortly after, Kamraj ran away to try and find a better life.

Kamraj was eventually found begging at Bangalore train station, after spending four years living on railway platforms from Dehli to Bangalore.

Due to the severity of his experiences he was sent from the EveryChild shelter to our rehabilitation camp.

After spending time at the camp, we were able to trace his family, including his mother and three sisters. Kamraj is now safely back at home, equipped with the skills to support himself, and with a more hopeful outlook for the future. "I wish other children who think they can find a better life in the big cities could know that life on the streets is frightening and hard. It is so much better at home with your family," he says.