

Naanu Samartha (I am capable) - An Online Life Skills Program for Children in the Juvenile Justice System

Conducted by Enfold Proactive Health Trust in partnership with UNICEF office for Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana and support from Department of Women and Child Development, Karnataka

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The COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 brought Enfold's Restorative Practices team's work in two government-run Child Care Institutions (CCIs) to an abrupt and grinding halt. The Supreme Court's order directing Juvenile Justice Boards to proactively consider releasing children from CCIs resulted in many children in conflict with the law being released to their families. From May 2020, the Restorative Practices team began following up with 15 such boys and observed the severe impact of the lockdown on them and their families. It was evident that they were moving from situations of vulnerability arising from the stigma of alleged crime, the effect of institutionalization and frayed familial relationships to situations of further psycho-socio-economic risk.

During the individualized follow-up calls, the team sensed deep frustration and restlessness among the boys and felt that this was a crucial time for an intervention that would help channel their thoughts and energies in constructive ways, and provide them tools to address the challenges they faced. **To respond to this need, the team developed *Naanu Samartha (I am capable)*, an intense 8-week online program for adolescent boys (15-20 years) in the juvenile justice system, comprising 15 input and six follow-up sessions on life skills themes** such as self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, understanding and managing emotions, decision-making, problem-solving, gender sensitivity, basic communication skills, financial literacy, substance abuse, digital safety, and government schemes and vocational trainings.

Ms. Pallavi Akaruthi, Director, ICPS, Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Karnataka immediately saw the potential of the pilot and presented it to the Members of the High Court Committee on Juvenile Justice as well as the Principal Magistrates and Members of Juvenile Justice Boards. With their approval and the support of UNICEF office for Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana, and Members of Juvenile Justice Boards of Bengaluru, Kalaburgi, and Mysore, the fascinating journey of the *Naanu Samartha* Pilot Program began on 2 August 2020.

We are proud to share that of the 12 boys who participated in the online course, 10 boys completed it on 21 October 2020. They braved through technological challenges including power cuts, network issues, data problems, as well as domestic problems such as lack of privacy and gruelling work schedules. The incorporation of restorative elements, such as co-creation of values for the sessions, the use of a talking order, and using powerful reflective questions to

guide the discussions, helped create a safe space for self-reflection and enabled the boys to express themselves comfortably. **While COVID-19 has aggravated vulnerabilities, it created opportunities for us to reach adolescents in districts such as Mandya, Kalaburagi, Shivamogga, Sholapur, and Mangalore, and enable their access to an online social-emotional learning program.**

Mr. Sonykuty George, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF, shared his sheer joy at witnessing the unfolding of a **story of hope amidst COVID-19! He described Nanu Samartha as a program that brings meaning to our work and has the potential of creating a “butterfly effect!”** a term described by Andy Andrews who authored a best-selling book of the same name. He lauded the efforts of the Enfold team and stated, “You’ve travelled a path that’s going to be a road!” He acknowledged the support from the State Government as well as the High Court Committee on Juvenile Justice and the JJB members, emphasizing the need for their continued support to sustain and expand the program and ensure its wide reach.

Following the success of the pilot programme, the RP team decided to offer the *Naanu Samartha* program to girls in the juvenile justice system. The second batch began on 30 September 2020 for 22 children living in one Child Care Institution (Ashadeep), Bengaluru and the third batch began on 14 December 2020 for 11 children integrated back into the community, again with support from the Directorate of ICPS, Department of Women and Child Development and Empowerment of Differently Abled and Senior Citizens, Government of Karnataka; UNICEF Field Office for Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka and Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI). A total of 32 girls from Bengaluru and one from Kalaburagi participated and 29 completed the course.

“After hearing the girls speak, I see that they are future ready. I wish many more Homes could come under [Naanu Samartha] program.

- Mr. Gilroy, Chairman of CCOT

Their confidence level has really boomed. They are able to have a lot of insight into themselves and their relationships with each other has also improved.

- Sister Doris, Coordinator of Asha Deep

Together with members of the Enfold team and external facilitators, the girls engaged in self-reflection on various life skills such as self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, gender, and managing emotions. They also received inputs on financial literacy and learned about various Central and State level schemes and vocational training opportunities that they could access. The

use of Restorative Circle elements during the sessions enabled the co-creation of safe spaces in which the girls could comfortably share their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations.

“It gives me confidence for the future. It helps me control my anger better and I am able to express myself better. In the circle we could say whatever we wanted and felt. It helped us feel free”

“In the circles I was helped to make decisions, we shared our problems and others gave solutions to us. I am happy to have been in circles”

- Girls from Asha Deep

The Enfold Team has been truly privileged to journey together with these resilient children and youth and their families over the past few weeks. The experience has gifted us with precious glimpses into their inner worlds during the pandemic, humbling us with their courage and determination to face multifaceted challenges arising out of the inter-sectional nature of their circumstances. **The program enabled a wonderful convergence between a wide range of stakeholders in child protection - government, judiciary, UNICEF and civil society including children and families themselves. Our collective energies enabled us to feel a sense of “Nāvu samartharu” - i.e., “we are capable” - capable of working together for a common cause - reaching children and families who are truly at the last mile by breaking the digital divide even during a devastating pandemic!**