

# Meri Abhilasha

Community Support Center (Swabhiman Kendra)  
for Women Domestic Workers and their Adolescent  
Children: Building Resilience in the Pandemic

An initiative supported by DSP Investment Managers Pvt. Ltd.



Activities Report: April - September 2022  
Martha Farrell Foundation

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# Meri Abhilasha:

## Reclaiming Voice, Agency, Space

Meri Abhilasha: Reclaiming Voice, Agency, Space, supported by DSP Investment Managers Pvt. Ltd., is a holistic recovery and rebuilding program for women domestic workers and their adolescent children, particularly girls, who are at a heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), in the aftermath of the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keeping lived experiences of women and children front and centre in its strategy, design and implementation, this unique program seeks to implement a robust and sustainable model of recovery and development co-created, co-owned and co-developed with the communities that are an active and integral part of it.

Through the setup of two Community Support Centers (Swabhiman Kendra) in Gautampuri, Delhi and Harijan Basti, Gurugram, Meri Abhilasha seeks to empower women domestic workers and their adolescent children with space, voice and agency, empowering them to counter discrimination and SGBV in different spheres of their lives, using individual and collective action and enabling institutional accountability.

The two Centers provide:

- Access to a safe space, information and support for survivors of SGBV
- Access to information about health related services
- Access to entitlements and services as citizens, as women, as workers and students
- Linkage building with relevant institutions to access rights and entitlements
- Capacity building on digital and financial literacy, leadership, advocacy, and more
- Support to rebuild livelihood through skilling to overcome loss of earnings

In the first three months of the project, a total of **134 adolescents** and **141 women domestic workers** were collectivised in both Centers. The initial growth, change and impact through the project:

- Centers grew in reputation as safe and empowering spaces for women and their adolescent children
- Women and adolescent children began vocalising challenges to one another, reforming trustful relationships with each other, and between parent and child
- They began to exercise critical thinking and problem solving skills, exploring their leadership potential, as self-confidence and trust in one another grew
- Two survivor centric, trauma-informed safety maps of Gautampuri and Harijan Basti were prepared by adolescents, and presentations made to government and police representatives in both districts, drawing commitment to address the safety challenge from the Station Head Officer, Gurugram and Municipal Councillor, Gautampuri. Street lights were repaired in the Gautampuri, as a direct result
- Women domestic workers in Gurugram presented their safety challenges and recommendations to the Chairperson of the Haryana State Commission for Women, drawing commitment to address the issue of sexual harassment in their world of work
- 265 (200 in Gautampuri and 65 in Gurugram) women were registered in e-shram portal, 30 women's health cards were made in Gurugram
- Financial and digital literacy sessions were hosted in the Centers
- Adolescents began to use Centers to study and do homework together

Building on this momentum, adolescents and women domestic workers collaboratively planned more interventions and activities, based on need and aspirations, and designed to build their own leadership, in the next six months of the project. This report captures the journey and growth of women domestic workers and adolescents in both Centers over a period of six months, between April - September 2022.

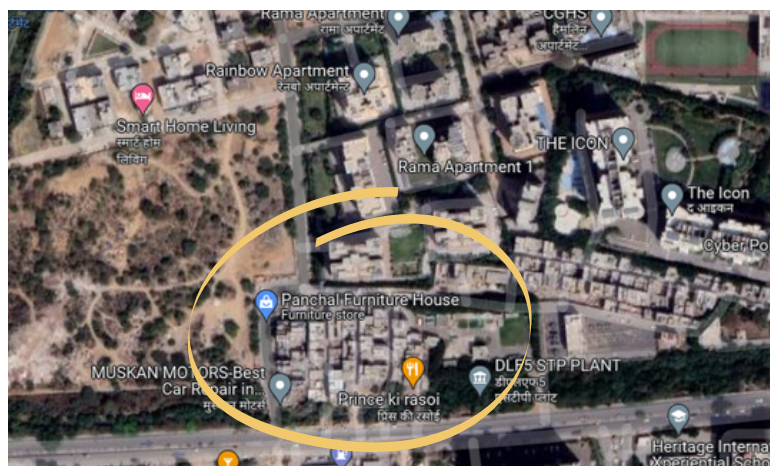
# Program Locations:

## Gautampuri, Delhi



Gautampuri has an estimated population of 1 lakh. It is estimated that 15000 families, largely migrants from North Indian states, live in the settlement. Almost all women work as domestic workers. The area is considered an 'unauthorized colony', and gets little attention from authorities, therefore challenges to safety, poor sanitation, healthcare, hygiene and education, among others, are major issues in the community.

## Harijan Basti, Gurugram



Harijan Basti is situated amidst posh high rises, just off Gurugram's Golf Course Road. Almost all women living in this colony work as domestic workers in the societies surrounding the colony. Lack of safety, high crime rates, lack of schools and affordable healthcare, water and sanitation issues have severe impacts on the well-being and development of residents of the Basti.

# Outreach

## Number of Domestic Workers Collectivised under the Program

April - September 2022

Since Program Inception



## Number of Adolescents Collectivised under the Program

April - September 2022

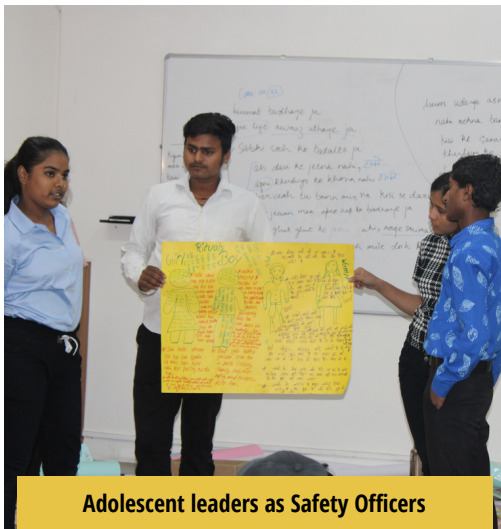
Since Program Inception



# Highlights: Initiatives with Adolescents

## My Body, My Rights: A Conversation on Adolescent Health Rights

- On International Health Day (April 7, 2022), adolescents in Gautampuri participated in a discussion on the importance of health and wellbeing, and the physiological and psychological changes they were undergoing
- Adolescents discussed menstruation, myths surrounding menstruation, and best practices to maintain menstrual hygiene and wellness, many for the first time in their lives
- Adolescents also learned about the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), the National Adolescent Health Program of the Government of India
- On learning that the program mandates the presence of Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics (AFHC), adolescents took a decision to try and find their local AFHC and seek support and advice from the doctors there.



**Adolescent leaders as Safety Officers**



**Adolescent leaders presenting their PSA findings to the SHO of Badarpur**



**Adolescent leaders participating in a capacity building session on My Body My Rights**

## My Fundamental Rights: A Conversation on Adolescent Rights

- Adolescents in Gautampuri and Gurugram participated in a discussion on their Fundamental Rights and Child Rights
- Conversations focused on the Right to Equality, Right to freedom, Right against Exploitation, Right to freedom of Religion, Cultural and Educational Rights and Right to constitutional Remedies
- Adolescents learned about their rights as children, including the right to education, right to good health, right to play and the right to protection from neglect, exploitation and abuse
- Adolescents were able to identify the rights they observe being violated among their own community members, and resolved to work together to ensure members of their community were able to access these rights

### Mapping Aspirations Using Art: River of My Life

Adolescents in Gautampuri participated in an art-based session and discussion to map their aspirations by gaining a deeper understanding of their own identity, interests and emotions. Using art, they mapped the 'river of their life', discussed the exacerbated challenges of the pandemic on their education and career goals, and deliberated strategies to overcome these challenges towards achieving their aspirations.



**Adolescent leaders of Gurugram and Gautampuri distributing 'Laal Paani' and leading a campaign for World Menstrual Hygiene Day, 2022**

### Unlearning and Co-Learning: Capacity Building Session on Menstruation

Adolescents in Gautampuri and Gurugram participated in a session on busting myths around menstruation, best practices for menstrual hygiene and wellness. Through the session, adolescents unlearned these myths, and challenged their own stereotypes, as well as those of their mothers and families.

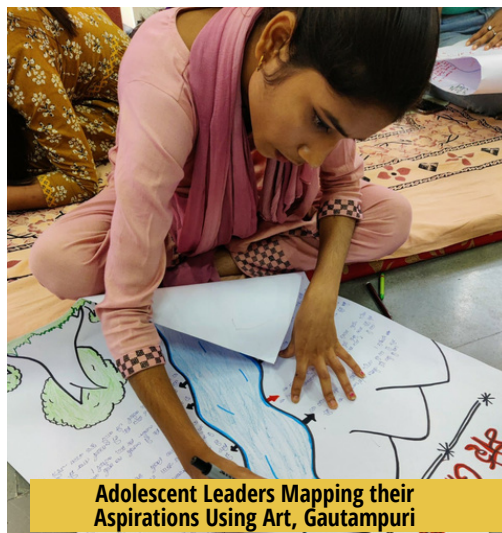
### Adolescent-Led Campaigns on World Menstrual Hygiene Day, 2022

- On World Menstrual Hygiene Day (28 May, 2022), adolescents in Harijan Basti, Gurugram and Gautampuri, Delhi, planned and led a series of activities to create awareness about menstruation
- In Gautampuri, adolescents led a week-long campaign on social media and on-the-ground, taking forward their learnings from the sessions on Fundamental Rights and Adolescent Rights. They created posters, participated in pad making sessions, and held conversations with members of their family about menstrual hygiene products.
- Adolescents also conducted an audit of the local Mohalla Clinics in Gautampuri and used their social media page (Chalo Sawaal Uthaye) to bring the dilapidated conditions of the Clinic in the public eye.
- When they looked for an Adolescent Friendly Health Clinic (a mandate under the RSKS scheme), adolescents were unable to find one in their locality.
- Adolescents in Gurugram and Gautampuri also conceptualised and played a game with members of the community, designed to bust myths around menstruation, helping them break the silence on an otherwise 'taboo' subject.
- They hosted conversations on menstruation with members of the community by offering a red coloured beverage ('laal paani'), and using the beverage to open up the conversation on menstruation.

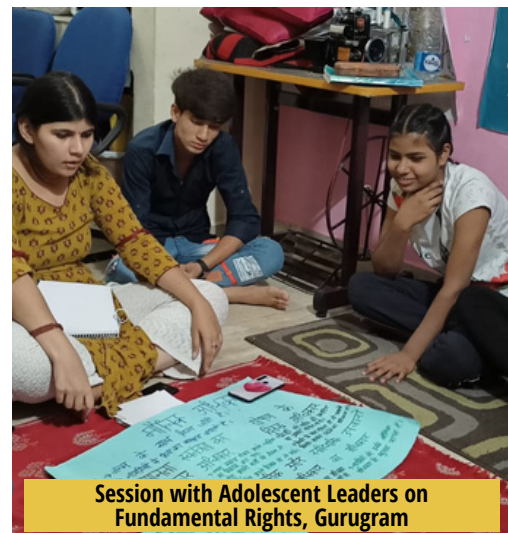




**Session with Adolescent Leaders on Gender Stereotypes, Gautampuri**



**Adolescent Leaders Mapping their Aspirations Using Art, Gautampuri**



**Session with Adolescent Leaders on Fundamental Rights, Gurugram**

### Understanding Gender and Sex

Adolescents in Gurugram and Gautampuri participated in a session to on the fundamentals of sex and gender, developing a foundational understanding of the root causes of gender-based violence.

### Linking of Adolescent Leaders with the Kadam Badhate Chalo Program

- Adolescents who emerged leaders from among their peers in both communities, were selected to become a part of MFF's flagship Fellowship program, Kadam Badhate Chalo
- They attended a two-day workshop at the MFF office to kickstart their Fellowship and their journey as adolescent leaders in their community, and participated in sessions on:
  - gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination, socialisation processes, and linking these concepts to what they observe and experience in their daily lives
  - leadership building exercises that enabled them to identify their own strengths and potential to facilitate change.
  - advocacy and learning to use social media as a tool for changemaking. Adolescents from Gautampuri, who had already been using social media (an Instagram page) as an advocacy tool, shared their experiences with their peers, facilitating collaborative, peer-led learning.

### Unlearning and Relearning through Self Reflection: Addressing One's Own Gender Biases

As a follow up to the workshops on gender and gender-based discrimination, adolescents in Gautampuri and Gurugram participated in a game-based activity designed to enable them to address their own gender biases and the stereotypes they believe in. Through the session, such a safe and empowering space had been created, adolescents were freely able to express their own biases without fear of judgement and work with one another to unlearn these biases.

### Summer School

During conversations with adolescents on their aspirations and careers, adolescents expressed a need for supplementary training on Math, Science, English and sports, as well as additional skills such as spoken English and other basic interview and writing skills. In response to their ask, MFF supported a Summer School in both Centers for a period of ten days during adolescents' summer holidays, led by interns from University of Petroleum and Energy Studies.

### Reimagining Safety and Mobility: Urban Planning with Interns from Sushant University.

- Mobility of adolescents within and around their community spaces is severely restricted for multiple reasons, including time constraints and lack of safety in public spaces
- Adolescents in Gurugram and Gautampuri, in partnership with interns from Sushant University, undertook collaborative research to understand the challenges to mobility in more detail, re-imagine safety in existing public spaces such as the park and the road to their schools and community areas with poor infrastructure
- Through the research, adolescents' (in)ability to access public spaces and the reasons behind them became more evident, and informed their advocacy initiatives.

### Meeting with the Station Head Officer, Badarpur Police Station

- Using their learnings from the mobility mapping exercise and their Participatory Safety Map, adolescents led a meeting with their Ward Councilor, seeking support to improve safety in the community
- With his help, they, along with women domestic workers from the community, held a longer meeting with the Station Head Officer of Badarpur Police Station, presented their research and their map
- Their united voices were so powerful, that the SHO immediately directed police personnel to increase patrolling in the community spaces, particularly at the high risk timings that the adolescents highlighted

### Health Camp

- Based on the needs presented during various conversations on health with adolescents and domestic workers, MFF set up a health camp in Gautampuri, Delhi, to support adolescents and their mothers (domestic workers) to take a step towards tackle the healthcare challenges prevalent in the community
- Two doctors facilitated sessions at the Health Camp, which were attended by more than 200 women and children from the community.
- The doctors spoke about nutrition, wellness, menstrual hygiene and safe pregnancies. They also busted several myths around menstruation and pregnancy, prevalent among residents in the community
- The sessions were so powerful, that women and adolescents sought private discussions with the doctors in the aftermath, to clarify doubts around many issues that they were uncomfortable speaking about openly

### Additional Initiatives

- In Gautampuri, 20 adolescent girls were supported in creating their Gmail account and creating folders with their important documents
- In Gautampuri, 2 groups of adolescent boys of different age groups have been formed, one 13-18 years, and the other 18-23 years. The groups come to use the Center for learning and understanding self and gender. They also had a conversation on toxic masculinity, friendship and other issues

# Highlights: Initiatives with Domestic Workers

## Ongoing Sessions on Sexual Harassment at Workplace and Laws for Protection of Women in Workplace

- 150 domestic workers in Gautampuri and 200 in Gurugram have attended sessions on sexual harassment and learned about the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and redressal) Act, 2013.
- The sessions focused on building understanding on what constitutes sexual harassment at the workplace, what are their rights as women and workers under this Act and how to file complaint in case they experience sexual harassment at the workplace

## Discussions on Financial and Social Security

- In Gautampuri, a Focus Group Discussion on financial and social security revealed domestic workers have set up two informal self-help groups in the Swabhiman Kendra Gautampuri
- Participants shared that they lack awareness of government schemes and support systems for their financial and social security
- As a result, women domestic workers lean on one another and provide loans to each other through the Self Help Groups
- Women domestic workers are strategizing ways to access government schemes to take this initiative further

## Session on Fundamental Rights

- Women domestic workers in Gautampuri participated in a session on their fundamental rights and the Constitution
- Discussions revealed that gaps continue to exist for women informal workers to be able to access information about their own citizenship in the world's largest democracy
- Through the Swabhiman Kendra, women are now taking their learnings to more women informal workers

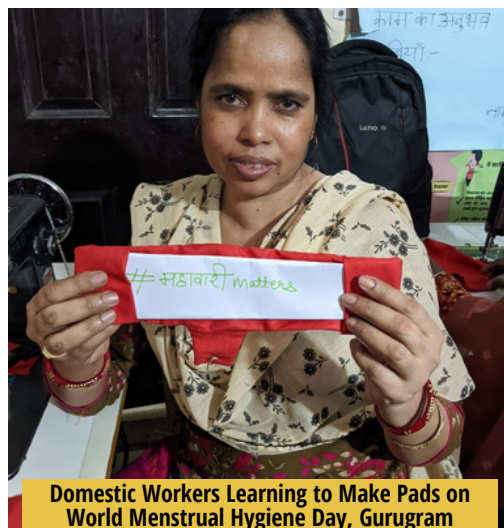


### Session on Planning Alternative Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities

- A visioning exercise was organised with women domestic workers to discuss their aspirations and desires to start small businesses to ensure economic stability and what that would entail
- A session on mapping of interest areas in business development was also initiated to discuss possible opportunities for women based on their individual skill set and knowledge

### Training of women domestic workers as Suraksha Mitras

- 20 women domestic workers in Gautampuri and 20 in Gurugram were trained as Community Safety Leaders (Suraksha Mitras)
- In both locations, women domestic workers conducted a Participatory Safety Audit of their community spaces, which mapped issues of safety/unsafety
- Suraksha Mitras facilitated discussions on the issue of safety, and linkages were built between issues of safety and lack of access to services and systemic disempowerment of women, who have no information about their rights and entitlements
- Suraksha Mitras were trained as First Responders to instances of violence in the community. They learned about the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, and about different avenues and helplines to direct survivors of sexual violence to
- Suraksha Mitras also take forward advocacy initiatives with local authorities including the Ward Councillor and police personnel to enhance safety in community spaces
- A safety app, MyAmbar, was introduced to Suraksha Mitras. Suraksha Mitras are facilitating App awareness and downloads among community members, to enable them to access these mechanisms



### Learning about Government Schemes

- Seven sessions on different government schemes that women domestic workers can access have been organised in Gautampuri, with 80 participants in all
- Participants learned about the Laadli Yojna, Sukanya Samridhi Yojna, old age pension, widow pension, health card and how to update Aadhaar Cards
- 60 women domestic workers were also supported in the past few months in updating their Aadhaar card, making health cards, opening bank accounts and accessing social security schemes such as the Sukanya Samridhi Yojna.

### Lessons in Literacy

- Both Swabhiman Kendras are being used as sites for women domestic workers to learn how to read and write
- 10 participants in Gautampuri and 13 in Gurugram are learning to read and write in Hindi
- Sessions are conducted twice a week. Reading stories is encouraged to foster greater learning

### Redefining Rakshabandhan

- Women domestic workers of Gurugram celebrated Rakshabandhan with each other in the Swabhiman Kendra
- They made Rakhis for one another using thread, needles, flowers and beads to make rakhis
- They said they wanted to overturn the idea that males are protectors of females through this simple act



**Women Domestic Workers Redefining and Celebrating Rakshabandhan, Gurugram**

### Home Visits

- A total of 55 home visits were organised in Gautampuri and Gurugram for women domestic workers who could not attend the Swabhiman Kendra
- The objective of these visits was to create a safe space for women to share experiences and engage in conversations on gender based violence and sexual harassment at workplace
- Information was also shared on government schemes, fundamental rights and laws

### Skilling with Stitching

- 34 women domestic workers in Gurugram are using the Swabhiman Kendra to learn stitching
- Women intend to use this skill to supplement their income and start small entrepreneurial ventures from the Swabhiman Kendra
- Apart from stitching, they are also learning about budgeting, pricing of products and how to purchase and ration raw materials for maximum outputs

### Independence Day in Harijan Basti

- Women domestic workers of Gurugram celebrated Independence Day in their community by making flags with their children
- They marked this day of freedom by walking around in the community in groups with posters on freedom of expression and speech, to underscore the importance of having a safe and free spaces for all

### Additional initiatives/impacts

- Three women domestic workers in Gautampuri were supported by the Field Facilitator and Suraksha Mitra to file FIRs with the local police for their experiences of domestic violence. One of the survivors was able to use the Swabhiman Kendra as a safe space and stay there while filing the complaint
- 22 women domestic workers have been supported to make their CVs in Gautampuri and 45 in Gurugram
- Two health camps were organised in partnership with ASHA workers by women domestic workers themselves in Gurugram. In the first, seven children of domestic workers were given polio vaccination, and in the second, five members of the community received COVID-19 booster shots

