

# Meri Abhilasha

Community Support Centers (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: October - December 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 and across all spheres of their lives, supporting individual and collective action for change and enabling institutional accountability to enable access to rights, entitlements and resources.

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

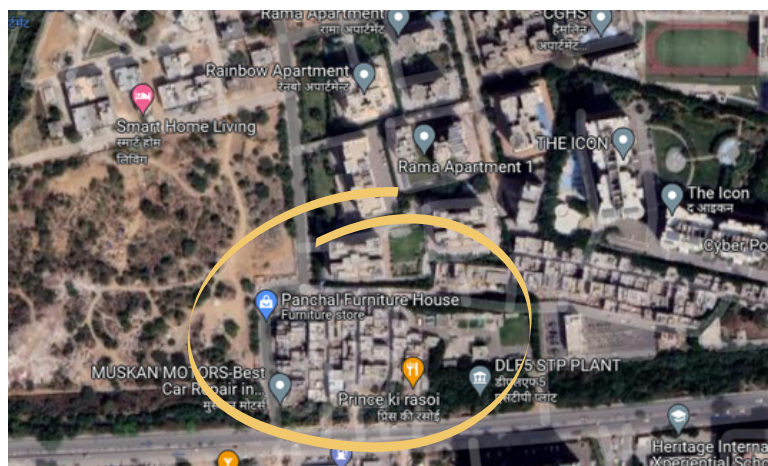
# Program Locations:

## 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

October - December 2022

Since Program Inception



## Number of Adolescents Collectivised under the Program

October - December 2022

Since Program Inception



# Highlights: Initiatives with Domestic Workers

## Training on Rights and Entitlements: Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Beema Yojana (PMSBY).

- 30 women domestic workers participated in an orientation session on PMSBY in the Swabhiman Kendra in Gurgaon. Health insurance is a critical entitlement for the women, as most of them are migrants and have meagre family incomes.
- A study conducted with 144 domestic workers in Gurgaon in 2021 found that 97% were unaware of insurance available to them under Government sponsored schemes.
- **13 participants applied for insurance benefits under the PMSBY after the session**

## Training on Gender-Based Violence and Safety.

- 25 women domestic workers participated in a training session on sexual and gender-based violence in the Swabhiman Kendra in Gautampuri. As women, participants had all experienced gender-based violence in their lives, be it in the home, the workplace or in the public sphere.
- Participants shared how the issue impacts their choices, freedom, mental health, ability to work in safe conditions.
- Participants were introduced to a Safety App that they could download on their smartphones.
- **Participants reflected that such knowledge and tools are critical in increasing confidence, sense of empowerment.**

## Training on Financial Literacy.

- Financial literacy training was facilitated with 25 women domestic workers in Gurgaon and 25 of their counterparts in Gautampuri on two separate dates.
- Participants were oriented on basic concepts of savings, budgeting and planning expenditure based on income.
- Participants were encouraged to download an App with information and learning tools to enhance financial literacy.
- **Participants reflected that such information and tools are crucial for their self-development and financial security.**



Training on PMSBY



Training on SGBV and Safety



Training on Financial Literacy

### Movie Screening Sessions to Understand Gender-Based Violence

- 60 women domestic workers affiliated with the Swabhiman Kendra in Gurgaon and Gautampuri, attended a short film screening on themes of building self-confidence, assertiveness and various forms of gender-based violence.
- Participants reflected on how gender roles played out in their own lives, and how such discrimination and violence need not always be evident or visible. Several such forms of discrimination and violence are invisible yet prevalent and deep-rooted in their lived realities.
- **Participants reflected that to change the status quo, they will take a stand and begin questioning such violence, and question unfair norms and practices that are unjust.**

### Training on Fundamental Rights

- 18 women domestic workers participated in a training session on Fundamental Rights under the Constitution of India, in the Swabhiman Kendra in Gurgaon.
- Participants were also briefed about their Constitutional Duties as citizens of India.
- **Participants learned through case studies that violations of these Fundamental Rights is unconstitutional, be it in the public, private or professional spheres.**

### Ongoing Sessions on Making Mental Health Matter

- Women domestic workers in Gurgaon and Gautampuri are participating in periodic, ongoing sessions on mental health at their Swabhiman Kendra. 4 sessions have been conducted so far.
- An external expert facilitator has been facilitating sessions, linking mental health with issues of discrimination, and derogatory or discriminatory language. Participants are learning the importance of prioritising and caring for their mental health, as much as their physical health.
- **A participant reflected: "The session was very useful, because now I will start prioritising myself."**



### Training on Right to Information Act (RTI Act)

- 20 women domestic workers participated in a session on the RTI Act
- An external resource person, who has filed and helped others file nearly 1000 RTI queries based on their rights and entitlements facilitated the session
- **Participants used their learnings to draft an RTI query about the role of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi in maintaining health, hygiene and sanitation, and why their community spaces remain unclean and drains unsanitary.**

### Swabhiman Stall at 6th Annual Martha Farrell Award, 2022

- Women domestic workers who have set up their own enterprise - 'Swabhiman' - using their learnings from sessions in the Swabhiman Kendra, Gurgaon, set up a sales stall at the 6th Annual Martha Farrell Awards, 2022.
- By the close of the ceremony, they had sold almost all the products they had made in the Center, including tote bags, wallets, bookmarks, scrunchies, among many other products.
- In the last six months, their earnings from making and selling products has crossed INR 9000. They have further received large orders for producing more such material from MFF's partner organisation, due to be fulfilled in the coming months.

### Focus Group Discussions with Women's Informal Self Help Groups\*

- Under a project in partnership with the World Food Program, Martha Farrell Foundation was able to facilitate Focus Group Discussions with six women led informal Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the Swabhiman Kendra in Gautampuri and Gurgaon
- The Focus Group Discussions are being used to inform contextualised training manuals on digital and financial literacy for the SHGs, which will then be facilitated in the coming months.
- Trained trainers will also facilitate sessions with larger groups of informal workers associated with both Centers, strengthening financial and digital literacy among women in the community spaces.



Swabhiman Stall at Martha Farrell Awards



FGD with Self Help Group - Gurgaon



FGD with Self Help Group - Gautampuri

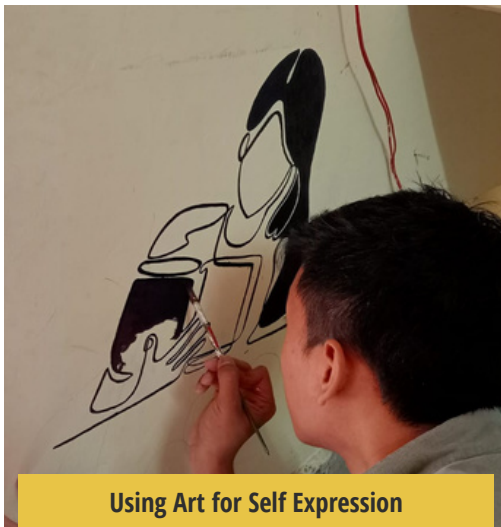
*\*FGDs and training of SHG groups are a part of a separate MFF project and not included in the budget of Meri Abhilasha program. These collaborations are possible because of the Meri Abhilasha program, and the Swabhiman Kendra, and organised at the request of or in response to conversations and needs presented in the Meri Abhilasha program.*



# Highlights: Initiatives with Adolescents

## Using Art for Self-Expression

- Adolescents in both Centers used art as a form of self-expression and integrated it into their Swabhiman Kendra, by painting their art work on the Centers' walls.
- Facilitated by an expert external artist, the sessions with adolescents gave them an opportunity to explore themes that they most closely associated themselves with, as individuals, as well as a group.
- Adolescents painted visual representations expressing community solidarity, the importance of having safe spaces for learning and development, and their collective strength and dignity.
- Through the session, which drew participation from adolescents of all genders, adolescents also challenged through their actions the stereotype that painting is a 'girl's hobby'.



## Using Theatre to Create Awareness on Gender-Based Violence on International Girl Child Day

- International Day of the Girl Child is observed globally on October 11, to empower girls, amplify their voices and create awareness of gender-based issues specifically faced by girls. Adolescents in Gautampuri, who have been participating in training sessions on gender, gender discrimination and gender-based violence used this occasion to take their learnings to the larger public.
- Adolescents prepared a Nukkad Naatak (street play), that highlights the different stages of a girl/woman's life and how violence manifests in various forms in every stage of her life, even today.
- Participants put up two productions, one with students of Sushant University in Gurgaon and one with community members in Harijan Basti, Gurgaon.
- The Nukkad Naatak was well received by audiences for its messaging. A woman domestic worker from Harijan Basti reflected: "Yeh har mahine ek baar hona chahiye. Iss gali mein jo ladke hain, unko bhi yeh sab patah lage (This production should be put up every month. The boys living on this street should be aware of this issue)."

### Workshop on Challenging Gender Discrimination

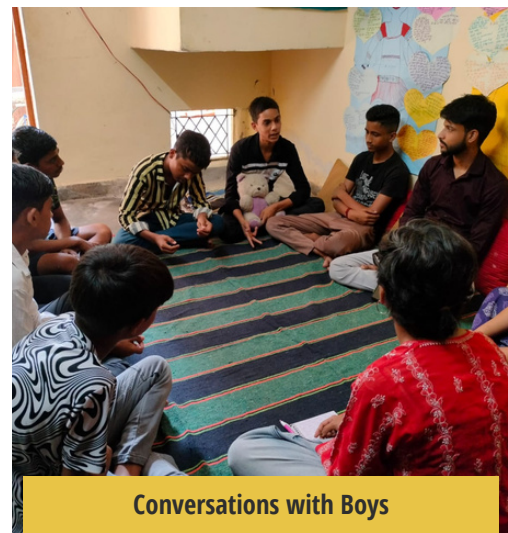
- 42 adolescents affiliated with the Swabhiman Kendra in Gautampuri and Gurgaon participated in a workshop on challenging gender discrimination at the MFF offices.
- The activity-based, participatory session focused on themes of power, patriarchy, gender discrimination and how such discrimination often results in violence against women and girls, contextualised to the lived realities of adolescents in the two communities.
- **Participants reflected that understanding the root causes of such discrimination and violence is a critical step towards challenging its prevalence and unlearning one's own biases and belief systems that may perpetrate such violence.**



**Challenging Gender Discrimination**



**Prioritising Mental Health**



**Conversations with Boys**

### Prioritising Mental Health

- 60 adolescents from both Swabhiman Kendra participated in ongoing sessions on prioritising one's mental health and wellness.
- An external expert facilitator was engaged to facilitate sessions, who linked mental health challenges to everyday instances of violence, discrimination and lack of safety in the lives of adolescents.
- Participants learned that mental health is closely linked with one's emotional health and wellness, and how prioritising one's mental health is essential to manage and overcome anxiety and depression.
- **A participant reflected that stress and mental health challenges must be destigmatised, and one must stop suppressing such feelings to avoid further harm to health.**

### Conversations with Adolescent Boys on Ego, Friendship and Vulnerability

- Adolescent boys from both Centers participated in Global Guy Talk: conversations on themes of ego, vulnerability, friendship and love, an MFF initiative in partnership with the Swedish Embassy in India and IM Swedish Development Partner.
- The conversations are designed to understand processes of socialisation that shape boys, and manualise the findings to facilitate training on challenging masculinity norms. Art and poetry-based sessions were facilitated to open up conversations.
- Adolescent boys from both Centers were selected to participate in a dance installation at an exhibition hosted in the Swedish Embassy of India as a part of the project. Further, their art work was displayed at the exhibition and they were given the opportunity to read their poetry, gaining appreciation and recognition from civil society, government and media actors who attended.
- **Participants reflected that they had never had such a safe, conducive space for speaking about their vulnerabilities, relationships and personalities.**
- Findings from their contributions in these conversations will be manualised to hold such conversations with boys in schools systems, creating many more such safe spaces, and building sensitive allyship.

### Career Planning

- Adolescents in both centers participated in a visioning exercise towards planning their futures and careers.
- Participants mapped their aspirations and **began reflecting on the kind of support they require to pursue their aspirations**, be it becoming engineers, doctors, teachers, or pursuing any other profession.
- Reflections from the session will guide careers consultations with external consultants in both Swabhiman Kendra, to support adolescents in achieving their aspirations.

### Learning to Trust my Voice: A Session with Adolescent Boys

- New adolescent boys collectivised in the Swabhiman Kendra participated in a session on recognising their own personal strengths and aspirations using art.
- Participants also identified their weaknesses, recognising through the process that being vulnerable in front of one another did not make them weak.
- Participants reflected that they had never engaged in such introspection, or spoken about their fears and vulnerabilities in front of others. However, having had such an opportunity in a safe, judgement free space, gave them a sense of solidarity with one another, and the will to help one another achieve their potential and work to overcome their weaknesses.
- **A participant reflected that participating in this collective exercise was cathartic, it also helped him to learn that he was not the only individual in the group who had weaknesses, fears and vulnerabilities.**

### Linkage Building with One Stop Crisis Center in South East Delhi

- Through the efforts of the project Field Officer, Nidhi, and a group of women domestic workers and adolescents, multiple meetings were facilitated with the One Stop Crisis Center of South East Delhi District, a key institution responsible for the safety of community members from sexual and gender-based violence.
- Upon hearing that community members in Gautampuri were not aware of the One Stop Crisis Center, an informal collaborative plan was created in bridging this information gap: members of the One Stop Crisis Center have co-facilitated training sessions with Suraksha Mitras (Community Safety Officers), sharing crucial information about women's rights, gender-based violence and how they can be contacted.
- **Suraksha Mitras of Gautampuri will further take this information to women and girls across the community and support them in reaching out to the One Stop Crisis Center with their challenges. Further, a draft action plan was co-created during the meetings, to organise more interactions between One Stop Crisis Center members and community members.**



Career Planning



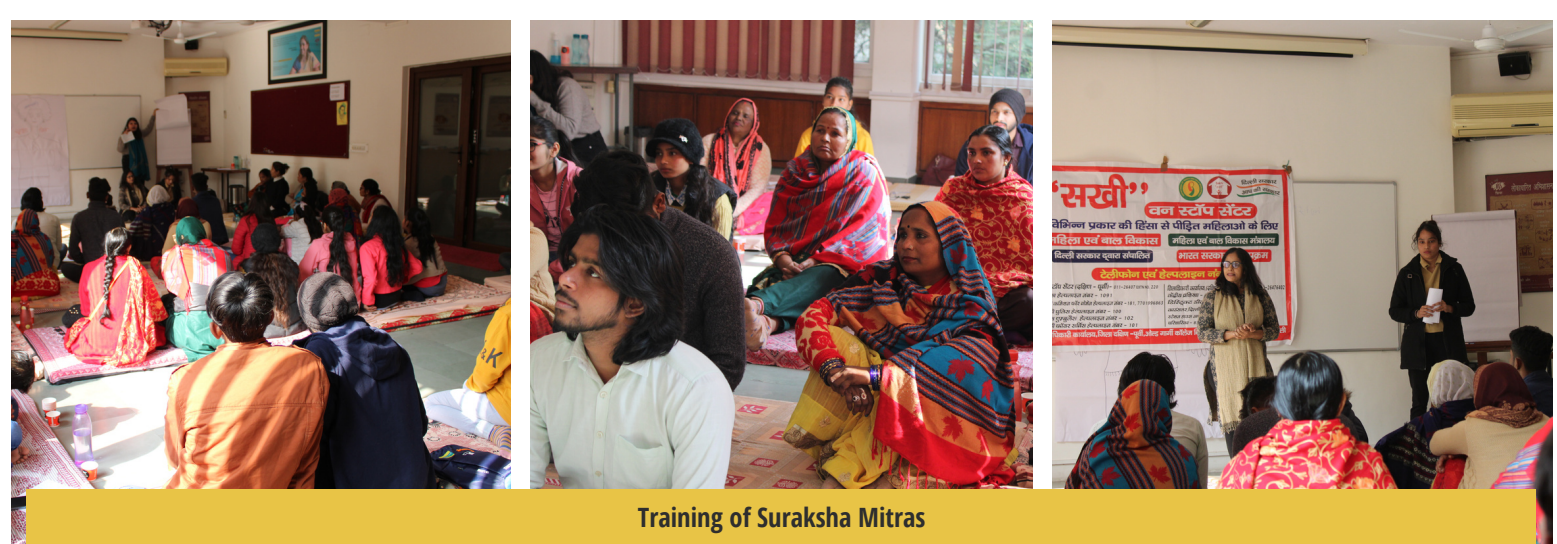
Learning to Trust My Voice



Linkages with One Stop Crisis Center

# Highlights: Training of Suraksha Mitras (Safety Officers)

- 40 Suraksha Mitras (Community Safety Officers) from among adolescents and women domestic workers from both Swabhiman Kendra have been selected to undergo rigorous training on providing first response to instances of gender-based violence within the community, as well as sharing crucial information on the issue with community members. On 22 November, the 40 selected Suraksha Mitras participated in the first of a planned series of training sessions to prepare them to perform their role effectively.
- Participants gained a deeper understanding of issues of gender-based violence and its root causes, concepts of safety and safe spaces, and laws for protection of women and children from gender-based violence including the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, Domestic Violence Act (DV Act), Protection of Children from Sexual Offence Act (POCSO Act).
- Members of the One Stop Crisis Center of South East Delhi co-facilitated the workshop, delivering a powerful session on the processes involved in filing an F.I.R. for cases of gender-based violence.
- Participants also brainstormed approaches through which they are approachable to and trusted by community members. Listening without judgement, being considerate, trusting aggrieved persons, and having a strong foundational knowledge of laws emerged as strong approaches, among others.



Training of Suraksha Mitras