

Yusuf

A journey away from the garbage dumps of Mumbai



The Situation

Govandi, a suburb of Mumbai, is home to the Deonar waste dumping ground. It poses a huge risk to the safety and health of children and their families for whom it is a source of livelihood.

The Solution

Aangan's *Chauraha* programme works with boys in dangerous situations, like hazardous working environment, violence and abuse. By creating community support systems and supporting and mentoring adolescent boys through individual and group life skills training, the boys are empowered to plan for a safer future.

Every morning at 4am, 16-year old Yusuf would wake up and go to the gates of the Deonar dumping ground in Govandi, a suburb of Mumbai. That's when the garbage trucks began rolling in, slowly making their way to the top of the *kachre ka pahaad* (mountain of garbage). For 20 rupees, Yusuf would ride up at the back of one of the trucks. Others made their way on foot on the makeshift path created by the dump trucks. Getting to the top early meant having the most to choose from, to collect whatever was fetching the highest price in the scrap market: plastic bags, bottles, iron bolts, hospital syringes.

The oldest of five siblings, Yusuf began working to support his family when his father, a tailor, was unable to pay off his debts. "My parents didn't see any value in getting an education, so they told me to go to work instead," he says.

The majority of children in the community start working at the dumping ground by the age of 10. "I used to get many diseases—malaria, body ache, my feet would get cut by shards of glass, nails would pierce through and I would get pricked by needles. But now that has changed," Yusuf says.

Yusuf began coming to the Aangan community centre a year ago, where he found a mentor in the centre coordinator. At group sessions, he began having conversations about peer pressure, drug abuse and its risks, and anger management. "I used to spend my evenings getting into fights and following girls. That's what the other boys in my group were doing, so I would too. Now I don't anymore," Yusuf declares.

The Aangan centre coordinator, Deepak, also began family visits to talk to his parents about the importance of Yusuf going back to school. After eight months of weekly visits and inviting his parents to community meetings on child protection issues, Yusuf's parents have come to believe that if he studies, he can have a better life and future.

Yusuf has now made a life plan with Deepak, identifying his goals and dreams. "Now I spend less time at the dumping ground and more time studying," he says. Yusuf has enrolled in school again, has found a positive peer support group through Chauraha group sessions and is imagining a different life for himself, away from the garbage dump.