Twelve-year-old Reshma’s parents are ragpickers, and she contributed to her family’s income by working with them to sort through garbage. None of Reshma’s three older sisters have ever gone to school – all of them were married as children to ease the financial pressure on their household. It looked as if the same fate awaited Reshma as well.

When Reshma joined Shakti, it was the first time she was connected to a supportive network of peers. There, she began to engage in discussions on risks girls in her community face, like child marriage and hazardous work, and shared her own experiences of working at the dumping ground.

Reshma also learnt about laws and her right to a free education under the Right to Education Act. At group meetings, she saw that other girls could read and write, and realised that this exposed them to new ideas and allowed them to express their experiences in a way that she couldn’t. She realised that being educated would enable her to have a better future. This motivated her to go to school, something her Shakti group encouraged her to do.

However, when Reshma spoke to her parents about her aspirations, she was discouraged. She returned to her Shakti group to strategize on another way to go back to school. She identified one of her sisters as a support person, and together, the girls went to school where Reshma got herself enrolled. She now attends classes regularly, and is crafting a safer life for herself.

Reshma’s journey is an example and a source of motivation for other girls in her community.