Aangan does prevention and response work in 6 states to promote safe communities for children. Across 300 households each in 39 communities, Aangan works with children who are vulnerable to hazardous or exploitative work, trafficking, early marriage, violence and abuse. They live in migrant communities, by garbage dumping grounds, railway tracks, and have little or no access to services like education and health. Aangan also works in 57 government shelter homes across these 6 states with children who have been rescued from serious harm.

Through its PACT program, Aangan trains volunteer barefoot community child protection workers to recognize, prevent and respond to harm. They work on issues such as early marriage, trafficking, violence and abuse, and hazardous work. They share information with adults in their community and mobilize support for action, and activate government systems and services to promote children’s safety and protection.

Shakti is Aangan’s program for adolescent girls. It aims to build resilience and knowledge, improve negotiation skills and link these girls to community and government.

Chauraha, Aangan’s program for adolescent boys, aims to build their resilience, challenge perceptions of manhood, create and implement life plans, and strengthen their relationships with adults, community and government.

Combating Child Labour

According to the 2011 UNICEF report on the Situation of Children in India, an estimated 28 million children in the age-group 5-14 years in India are engaged in work.* Many are trapped in some of the worst forms of child labour, such as work in hazardous environments like garbage dumping grounds and brick kilns, illegal and criminal activities, and bonded labour.

The ILO’s 2015 World Report on Child Labour, has found that 20% of working children aged between 15 and 17 years in India are employed in hazardous work. This not only deprives children of an education and chances of gainful employment as adults, but perpetuates the cycle of poverty. It also forces children to shoulder the burden of an adult’s responsibilities and increases vulnerability to violence and abuse.

Child labour is a high-risk factor in many of the communities that Aangan works in, with children working as rag pickers, on looms to weave sarees, in brick kilns, rolling bidis, and in the catering industry.

In June, children and adults in communities across the six states that Aangan works in were part of activities organised for World Day against Child Labour, held every year on June 12. Through parent circles (monthly meetings of community adults where PACT workers share information and spread awareness on community issues, especially those regarding child safety), help desks (monthly meetings where community members can directly interface with and access government services) and community projects, PACT workers, Shakti girls and Chauraha boys raised awareness about the risks of child labour.

In Uttar Pradesh,

PACT workers from five communities – Kazzakpura, Lahartara, Raighat, Koniya, Bharlai – organised stakeholder meetings and held rallies to spread awareness on child labour.

*Unicef defines child labour as a situation where a) children aged 5–11 years are involved in at least 1 hour of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week, or b) children aged 12–14 years are involved in at least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week.
They invited child protection officers, principals and teachers of local schools, community leaders and owners of small home-based businesses to jointly discuss how child labour deprives children of education, opportunities for development and puts them at risk. 29 working children were identified, 17 of whom are being linked to education through bridge courses. Chauraha boys identified 13 of these 17 children as part of their community project, and convinced their parents to send them to school, by sharing their own experiences.

In Odisha,

the assistant labour officer and assistant labour commissioner attended parent circles or community help desks in eight communities – Bauri Sahi, Buddhaganag, Chunokoli, Niladri Vihar, Patharbanda, Saliasahi, Santipalli, and Telugu Basti – and discussed the situation of working children, encouraging parents to send their children to school. PACT workers have begun identifying working children in their communities so that they can be linked to education and protection schemes. About 50 children from five communities have already been identified, and PACT workers are looking to enrol them in school.

In Jehangirpura, Madhya Pradesh,

PACT workers held a parent circle with the sarpanch, chairperson, aanganwadi workers and community members on how to link working children to education and government social protection schemes. Child labour is a pressing issue in this community, exacerbated by the fact that the local school is only up to Class 8. Very few children are able to travel to the nearest town to study, as a result of which many boys begin working by the age of 13 or 14, and girls are confined and isolated at home.

In West Bengal’s Hasnabad

community, Shakti girls took up the issue of child labour as part of their community project. Hasnabad is a rural community in North 24 Parganas district, where bidi-rolling is the major occupation, involving nearly the entire community, including children.

A group of girls visited Purba Guni and Barunhat villages, where they went door to door and spoke to adults about the harmful consequences of child labour, focussing on how it affected children’s education. They also discussed the dangers faced by children working in brick kilns, and how a hazardous work environment is responsible for health problems.

In Mumbai’s Govandi, Reay Road and Wadala

In Govandi and Wadala, Aangan facilitators helped 40 working children make life plans so that they had a means to come out of their situation and work towards their goals. These plans included identifying a support person, and determining different options for education like night schools or bridge courses, along with vocational training so that the children learn a skill that will enable them to support themselves and their families while still being able to study. Govandi is located next to a vast garbage dumping ground where most of the children of that community work, while a majority of working children in Wadala are employed in the catering industry. The families of these children will be involved in supporting them in implementing the plan and enabling them to take significant steps.

In Reay Road, 55 working children interacted with two Probation Officers from the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), who explained how child labour was linked to crime, substance abuse, illiteracy and poverty, and encouraged them to study instead of working.

In June, 25 new girls who joined the Shakti program and 108 new boys who joined Chauraha across 6 states have been identified as being at risk of hazardous work, based on our vulnerability assessment tool.

WORK WITH PARENTS

Program: PACT

As primary caregivers, parents are best placed to support their children. If they are trained to be alert to the risks posed to children, and are able to access government schemes and services, communities become safer. Moreover, because of their own experiences, they are highly motivated to work on child protection issues. Those who have faced early marriage, worked in hazardous conditions, or been through abuse and violence feel strongly about ensuring that their children don’t have the same experiences.

How alert PACT workers stopped a child marriage

According to the 2012 UNICEF report on child marriage in India, Bihar has the highest incidence of child marriage in the country at 68%. PACT empowers adult women to be alert and aware of child protection issues, and to act to keep children in their community safe from harm. Working with government authorities to access rights and services is a key aspect of creating a safety network for children.
Alert and resourceful PACT workers prevented 17-year-old Aakash’s father from marrying him off.

The eldest of four siblings, Aakash is in Class 12, and doing well at school. The family survives on a small income from his father's thela selling pani-puri and chaat. Aakash supports his family by working with his father after school.

In March, Aakash’s mother Kanchan Devi, who is a volunteer child protection worker and part of Aangan’s PACT program, shared with her fellow PACT members that her husband was determined to arrange Aakash’s wedding as soon as possible. Despite Kanchan’s persuasion, her husband refused to change his decision.

Kanchan had been unable to prevent the child marriage of one of her daughters the year before, and did not want another of her children to go through it. Moreover, Aakash had examinations coming up, but the tension at home because of his father’s decision was impacting his studies. He was increasingly spending time away from home, at gambling “addas”.

When they learnt of Aakash’s situation, the PACT workers knew they could not let his early marriage go ahead. Not only was a child’s future at stake, but as one of the PACT workers put it, “Agar hamare ghar mein hi aisa ho jayega toh aur logon ko kaise rok sakenge, aur aware karenge? (If this goes through in one of our homes, how will we be able to spread awareness about child marriage and stop other people from doing so?)”

In Lohanipur, Bihar, Aakash is also part of the Chauraha program for adolescent boys. Part of this boy safety network, he was encouraged by his mentor and peers to focus on his goals and the life plan that he had made, and to concentrate on his examinations.

Meanwhile, PACT workers met Aakash’s father and began negotiating with him to cancel marriage plans. They spoke to him about the risks early marriage posed for Aakash, and how an education would help him get a good job and better support his family.

After several meetings, Aakash’s father was convinced and agreed not to fix his son’s marriage till he turned 21 and had a good job. Aakash scored 62% in his examinations, and has now applied for admission for a graduation course.

Across 6 states, 99 new girls who joined the Shakti program and 9 new boys who joined Chauraha in June have been identified as being at risk of child marriage, based on our vulnerability assessment tool.

In June, 137 PACT core group meetings were held in 39 communities across the six states where the program has been implemented.

WORK WITH CHILDREN
Programs: SHAKTI and CHAURAHA

Recognising risk and preventing trafficking and abuse

In Koniya, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh,
an alert and resourceful Shakti activator played a crucial role in ensuring that a nine-year old girl was protected from the risk of being trafficked or abused.

Koniya is an illegal community of about 30,000 people located by the banks of the river in Varanasi. Bordered by a garbage dumping ground on one side, the community has no proper toilets, forcing women and children to use open spaces, raising their risk of being abused or taken away and trafficked.

Nisha, 9, was found wandering unaccompanied in Koniya late one evening. Community members who spotted her tried to find out where she had come from, but the child was too frightened to say anything. Concerned for her safety, they took the girl to Annu, an activator working with Aangan’s Shakti program for adolescent girls in the community.
Annu assured her of her safety, and gently earning her trust. Nisha told Annu that she was from Mughalsarai, about 10 km away from Varanasi in Chandauli district, and that her parents were dead. As she grew more comfortable, she admitted that her parents were not dead, and that she had run away from home because of physical abuse at home. Nisha said she did not want to go back to live with them.

Annu realised that Nisha had nowhere to go, and that this made her extremely vulnerable to being trafficked. On the Aangan facilitators’ advice, Annu called Childline and the police. An official from the NGO came to the community. He wanted to take Nisha to the police station. Since Nisha was not comfortable going with them by herself, Annu accompanied them as her support person.

A missing child case was registered at the police station, after which Nisha was taken to the Childline shelter home. A follow up of her case is being done, where Aangan and Childline are trying to find out more details and background about Nisha, to ensure her safety.

159 hours were spent in training Shakti activators to support them in working with young and adolescent girls.

Negotiating for rights and entitlements

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation 2012 report on children in India, Uttar Pradesh accounted for the highest share of child labour in the country at 15%.

Kazzakpura, Uttar Pradesh

13-year-old Hussain is from the Kazzakpura community in Uttar Pradesh and has never been to school. Instead, like most of the adolescent boys from his community, Hussain has worked on the power loom for the past four years.

The Rs. 50 Hussain earns every week contributes to his family’s income. But the work is hard and monotonous, with boys working 14-18 hours everyday. The power loom is extremely noisy, and there is also a high risk of injuries, making it a hazardous work environment. Some of the boys Aangan has worked with through the Chauraha program have spoken about how they want to run away from the loom or even commit suicide to escape working there.

Hussain has always wanted to go to school and study, but his parents needed him to contribute to the family’s finances. If he worked, he could marry and support his own household. In the face of his father’s diktat, he suppressed his wishes.

A few months ago, encouraged by an older peer, Hussain joined the Chauraha program for adolescent boys. He started attending group sessions, where he began learning how to identify risk, articulate his aspirations, and make plans for the future.

Encouraged by his mentor, Hussain expressed his desire to go to school and study instead of working. The Aangan facilitator met Hussain’s father and discussed the importance of educating his son. He explained how going to school and studying would give Hussain a chance at making a better future for himself, and he would have better employment opportunities and prospects when he becomes an adult.

At first, Hussain’s father refused to consider sending his son to school. However, he was slowly convinced of the advantages of an education, and saw how much Hussain wanted to study. He finally agreed to send his son to school.

Hussain has been linked to the local school, where the principal has agreed to give him admission for a bridge course. Hussain attends Chauraha sessions, where he is working with his mentor to create a life plan for his future and work towards his goals.

In June, 228 new boys joined Chauraha across 6 states. 45 Chauraha circles were conducted, and 93 boys completed the Chauraha Go Book. 119 boys also graduated from the Chauraha programme in June.

Empowering adolescent girls to recognise risk and find safe solutions

Shakti empowers adolescent girls to recognise risk, links them to girl safety networks and empowers them to negotiate for themselves. Through community projects, girls take up issues that affect their safety and wellbeing, and that of the community as a whole. They learn to negotiate with government authorities, access services, mobilise the community, and activate social protection systems to bring about positive change.
In Piyali, West Bengal,

the road from Piyali station to the community has no street lights. This is the main route used by most people in the community. However, the lack of lighting makes it unsafe for the girls and women of the community after dark, increasing the risk of harassment and violence.

Recognising this risk, Shakti girls from the community decided to tackle the issue. They went door-to-door and visited 50 households, explaining the problem. Each family donated something towards addressing the issue, and the girls bought 11 bulbs, and approached an electrician to fix them on the street lamps.

Their project earned the Shakti girls praise from the entire community. Encouraged by the success, they have now decided to work with the panchayat to put up lights on the platform in Piyali station, which is unsafe because of the lack of proper lighting.

Chunokoli, Odisha

A similar community project was taken up by Shakti girls in Chunokoli, Odisha. Chunokoli is a rural community without a proper supply of electricity. While some of the homes have unauthorised electrical connections, the streets outside have no lights. Moreover, the area is known for its local country liquor, and men returning from work in the evenings or outsiders coming into the community are often drunk. Afraid for their safety, most women and girls in the community preferred to stay indoors after sunset.

Recognising the severe safety risk this posed for the female residents of Chunokoli, Shakti activators Minati and Chhabi, accompanied by the community’s PACT workers, met the ward officer and requested that the street lights in the community be repaired.

Immediately grasping the gravity of the situation, the ward member had two temporary street lights installed in the community, and promised to follow up and get street lights in the entire community repaired as soon as possible.

Across 6 states, 674 new girls joined Shakti in June. 121 Shakti circles were held, and 361 girls completed their personal safety plan books. In addition, 24 community projects were initiated in June, in which 368 girls were involved.

WORK WITH GOVERNMENT

Programs: PACT, SHAKTI and CHAURAHA

Accessing government services and social protection schemes

In Bihar,

PACT members’ work in spreading awareness about child marriage and the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana has resulted in an increased number of applications for birth certificates.

Child marriage is one of the most pressing problems in Bihar. According to the UNICEF 2012 report on child marriage in India, Bihar has the highest incidence of child marriages in the country at over 68%. Girls are especially vulnerable to early marriage and the consequent risks to their health from unsafe sex, early pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, violence and sexual abuse at the hands of their partner, and trafficking under the guise of marriage.

The Sukanya Samridhi Yojana is a special deposit scheme for girl children, where funds can be accessed for higher education or marriage when a girl turns 18. It is especially aimed at tackling child marriage, and securing a good education for the girl child.
In June, PACT workers in five communities – Deegha, Lohanipur, Kaushal Nagar, Kothiya and Adalatgunj – organised help desks where 107 girls registered for birth certificates, and 28 girls applied for an account under the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana. In addition, 13 boys from two communities also registered for birth certificates.

A birth certificate is an extremely vital document. Since it is proof of a child’s identification and age, it ensures that s/he is not prematurely deprived of the protection the law entitles him/her to in areas such as marriage, sexual exploitation, work and criminal justice. It also enables access to government social protection schemes. Additionally, it helps safeguard children from trafficking and abduction, and is a critical document while filing a missing complaint.

Linking vulnerable children to safe spaces

With the new academic year beginning in June, PACT workers, Shakti girls and Chauraha boys in the three communities in Mumbai identified 117 children who are dropouts, unsupervised or working as child labour, to enrol in school. Children who are not in school – locked up at home or forced to work to support their families – are cut off from their peers and socially isolated, making them vulnerable to early marriage, trafficking, abuse and violence.

Through parent circles, community projects and help desks, PACT workers, Shakti girls and Chauraha boys spread awareness about the Right to Education Act, explained the benefits of education to parents and convinced them to send their children to school.

In Wadala, the principal of the Sardar Nagar School-2 attended a parent circle, where she spoke to parents about admission procedures and facilities available for children, and to encourage children to attend school. Similarly, in Reay Road, the principal is personally following up on children from the community to ensure that each child is enrolled in this academic session.

Supporting caregivers

Dongri children’s home, Mumbai

In June, training sessions were held at the Dongri children’s home, Mumbai, for new Probation Officers (POs) on working with children who have experienced trauma, violence and harm, to make care plans to prevent a recurrence of harm. Supporting and equipping staff to work with children is a critical step in ensuring that children are safer. 10 staff from the Dongri home, including six new POs and the chief probation officer, attended the training.

The Dongri home receives children from various parts of the country, and is one of the largest in terms of the sheer number of children coming in every year. Therefore, it is extremely important that Probation Officers who handle cases are able to understand the circumstances that put the child at risk, so that a specific care plan can be made for each child according to their needs.

The training included discussions on the roles and responsibilities of the PO, the importance of interactions between the PO and the child, the journey and background of the child and the role of the PO in gleaning this information, and the subsequent planning necessary to ensure that there is psycho-social rehabilitation for the child.

In June, 35 parents circles were held across 39 communities in 6 states, which were attended by 1,358 adults. 33 community help desks were also organised, which were attended by 1,438 adults. Additionally, 175 PACT activation meetings were also conducted, where PACT workers met with government officials to activate government schemes and services.

In June, 112 hours were spent in training and meetings with institution staff to support them in executing their role as child protection workers. 39 wellbeing sessions were also conducted with institution staff. In addition, 212 care plans were started, 154 care plans were completed, and 20 care plans were presented before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC).