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.

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.

Facilitating dialogue between vulnerable families and government over child safety issues

47% of girls in India are married off before the age of 18. A recent Government of India audit found that Maharashtra, one of the worst states with regard to child marriage, has been concealing the true number of child marriage cases occurring in the state. It reported only 45 cases of child marriages between 2010 and 2013. In reality, more than 1,000 girls between 10 and 14 years, and 23,000 boys and girls between 15 and 19 years, got married in Maharashtra between 2012 and 2014.¹

1. “Govt is under-reporting child marriages in Maharashtra” Times of India, April 14, 2015
In Wadala, Mumbai, PACT workers invited the Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO) for Mumbai district to their parents circle – a monthly meeting where PACT workers share information and spread awareness on community issues with community adults, especially those regarding child safety. The CMPO spoke to community members about the laws pertaining to child marriage, the safety of children, especially young girls and unsupervised children, and about the risks of early marriage.

She also shared her phone number with the community adults and asked them to get in touch with her if they found out about any child marriages.

In Wadala, child marriage is one of the main protection issues in the community. Many families force young daughters to drop out of school and stay at home to do household chores and take care of their siblings. Since Wadala is a migrant community, many girls are often taken back to their native villages to be married off. Moreover, Wadala is a trafficking hotspot, and trafficking under the guise of marriage is another major risk.

The issue of child marriage was also discussed by PACT workers in a parent circle conducted in Hasnabad, West Bengal. Of the 59 community adults who attended the circle, 24 people (15 mother and 9 fathers) attended for the first time.

According to the Dasra-USAID 2014 report, West Bengal is one of India’s seven worst states for child marriage, where over 50% of girls are married off before the age of 18. Hasnabad is a rural community in North 24 Parganas district and is located at the international border with Bangladesh. This increases the risk of being trafficked, with trafficking under the guise of marriage being a major concern here.

Through efforts such as these, PACT workers are building alert and aware communities that are able to identify risk and stand up on behalf of children.

In July, 331 new girls who joined the Shakti program and 26 new boys who joined Chauraha across 6 states have been identified as being at risk of early marriage, based on our vulnerability assessment tool.

Recognising risk and promoting safety of vulnerable families during monsoon

The monsoon is a difficult time for most communities. The cramped state of the bastis, the presence of garbage dumping grounds, and the lack of services such as water or sufficient drainage means they have to survive in particularly unsanitary conditions. Moreover, apart from hygiene and flooding, there is also a higher risk of diseases.

In Adalatgunj and Kaushal Nagar in Patna, Bihar, PACT workers, Shakti girls and Chauraha boys worked to spread awareness in their communities about the precautions people should take during the rains.

As part of their community project, Shakti girls and Chauraha boys from Kaushal Nagar conducted a signature campaign to get the nala in their community cleaned. They also spoke to people, advising them to drink only boiled water and to keep their surroundings free of garbage so that they are safe from the threat of disease. The community projects are a way for adolescent boys and girls learn to build their negotiation skills and confidence, along with being a means of increasing interaction between the community and the government. In the process, the children look to find solutions to issues that affect their safety or their community.
In Kaushal Nagar, PACT workers invited a doctor from the community for a parent circle to speak to community members about the precautions to take during the monsoons. The doctor stressed on cleanliness and hygiene in order to prevent diseases such as cholera, jaundice, malaria and chikungunya, apart from common cough, cold and flu.

In Adalatgunj, 85 community members signed an application to the ward member, requesting regular cleaning of sewerage canals in their community and the provision of safe drinking water. The ward member has assured all cooperation and help on these fronts, apart from support in case of flooding.

Across 6 states, PACT workers conducted 33 parent circles in July, which were attended by 1,267 community adults. Additionally, Shakti girls and Chauraha boys worked on 20 community projects across the six states.

WORK WITH CHILDREN
Programs: Shakti and Chauraha

Through the Shakti program, adolescent girls are connected to girl safety networks, and are encouraged to articulate their aspirations, supported to recognise risk, empowered to negotiate for their rights and entitlements, and chart steps for a secure future.

Empowering young girls

In July, over 900 girls aged 8-12 years in communities and schools across the six states that Aangan works in joined the newly started Junior Shakti program. Like its counterpart for older girls, this program aims to make girls aged below 12 aware of the issues and risks they are likely to face in the future, and to prepare them to be able to deal with these issues. This is done through 10 stories (one introduced every month) that deal with topics such as identifying risks to their safety and standing up for their rights.

For instance, Ruby Bridges Goes to School is the true story of a black girl in the United States who goes to a school meant for white children, and how she braves adversity in order to study. Childline’s animation video, Komal, deals with child sexual abuse, and girls learn how to recognise and differentiate between good touch and bad touch. Through the story of Ruru the rooster, who is upset because he can sing but can’t crow like other roosters, girls learn that they don’t have to conform to stereotypes imposed by society.

Junior Shakti aims to be part of a preventive solution, i.e. if young girls are aware from an early age of the nature of risk they may face when they become adolescents, they will be able to negotiate for themselves more successfully.

In July, 918 girls aged between 8 and 12 years joined the Junior Shakti program being held in communities and schools across 6 states.
What makes it possible for adolescent Shakti girls to achieve their goals? It is the mentoring from their Shakti activators — young adult women who are working to support and stand up for them.

Twenty-three-year-old Sarita started as a Shakti activator in Chandauli, Uttar Pradesh, soon after Aangan began working there in 2014. One of the few women who was able to access education, she crossed six kilometres of hills and a valley on foot every day to reach a neighbouring village to conduct Shakti sessions and run non-formal education classes with children.

Preetpur Kodaniya in Chandauli is a cluster of small, impoverished hamlets, comprising mud houses with thatched roofs, accessible only by dirt roads. Identified as one of the most backward districts by the Ministry of Rural Development, Chandauli has deeply entrenched poverty and there is a complete absence of basic services. In this Naxalite area, there are no employment opportunities, and a majority of the families subsist on the meagre amount they earn by selling wood collected from the forests. Many families often have to survive on one meal a day. These straitened circumstances, exacerbated by stringent caste divisions, make families and children highly vulnerable to abuse and trafficking.

At first, Sarita only worked with the girls in her Shakti group, working to build their alertness to risk and to learn to negotiate for themselves. But gradually, she began volunteering to help adult women to learn how to read and write. With her help, two of the five PACT workers in the community learnt how to sign their names.

Sarita firmly believes that in order to progress, the community needs to be alert, aware and educated. This is why she also spends a part of her day in the school established by M.S.E.M.V.S. (Manav Sansadhan Evam Mahila Vikas Sansthan), a partner organisation in the community, interacting and helping students in their lessons.

In the past year, Sarita has played a huge role in stopping four early marriages in the community. She regrets that she could not stop a fifth child marriage, but that only motivates her to work even harder for the girls of Chandauli. It is no wonder that the girls in her Shakti group look up to her and want to grow up to be like her.

Sarita is currently studying in her second year of her MA in sociology. But her college is in a city 40 kilometres away, and attending classes regularly is difficult. So she studies by herself, and selflessly gives as much time as she can to the community.
“At first, I didn’t think that what Sarita was doing was proper,” Sarita’s mother told the Aangan facilitator in Chandauli. But now, she says she is proud that her daughter is doing something good, and her family supports her to continue doing her work.

### Across 6 states in July, 307 hours were spent in training 137 Shakti activators to support them in their work with young and adolescent girls.

Also, 977 new girls aged between 12 and 18 years joined the Shakti program in July. 150 Shakti circles were conducted, and 274 girls completed their safety plan books. Additionally, 138 new girls joined the Shakti program being conducted in schools across 6 states.

### Training Chauraha activators

Chauraha aims to build resilience in adolescent boys, connect them to mentors and a positive peer group, help them challenge traditional notions of masculinity, and support them to identify protection risks such as violence, abuse and hazardous work.

In July, Aangan facilitators held a training session for eight Chauraha activators from five communities across Bihar – Deegha, Lohanipur, Kaushal Nagar, Mothari, and Muzzafarpur – so that they can start conducting Chauraha circles in their communities by themselves.

Six of the eight activators are graduates of the Chauraha program, which means they are not only aware of the challenges faced by adolescent boys living in the bastis, but they also have in-depth knowledge of the issues of their community, and personally know many of the boys who they will be mentoring in their bi-monthly circles.

The activators were trained in how to conduct circles using the resiliency tools and Promundo sessions. They also discussed child rights and the four major risk factors affecting children’s safety in the communities: early marriage, child labour, trafficking, and violence and harm. Child labour is an especially significant factor affecting adolescent boys in communities, because many of them are expected or forced to drop out of school and work to support their families.

### In July, 349 new boys joined the Chauraha program across 6 states. 50 Chauraha circles were held, and 146 boys completed their Chauraha Go books.
WORK WITH GOVERNMENT
Programs: PACT, Shakti and Chauraha

Working with the government to ensure safety of vulnerable children

In July, the Uttar Pradesh government decided to run Operation Smile, a month-long campaign that aims to identify, trace, locate, rescue and rehabilitate children who were either kidnapped, have run away from home, have gone missing or are vulnerable to serious circumstances such as like abuse, exploitation, child labour, hazardous work and trafficking. According to National Crime Records Bureau, around one lakh children go missing in India every year. Additionally, the US State Department’s 2015 report on Trafficking in Persons states that 90% of all trafficking in India is internal.

The Varanasi Police held a planning meet with several relevant stakeholders, including the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), Childline, the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU), the missing children cell, and the labour department. Aangan staff were also invited. This was done to discuss and decide on how best to conduct the drive, and how respond to and tackle the rescue of missing children.

A nodal team comprising the AHTU and the missing children cell would cover the serious cases. Apart from maintaining a database of the entire operation, regular meetings would also be held to discuss cases and the progress of the operation.

Following the planning meeting, PACT workers in four communities in Varanasi – Koniya, Rajghat, Kazzakpura and Lahartaara – discussed and explained the details of Operation Smile to community adults through parent circles. At community help desks, 18 cases were registered across these three communities, including those of missing, kidnapped, and orphaned children and those working in hazardous environments.

2. “Over 130 children reported missing every day this year, NCRB data shows” Times of India, July 24, 2015

Accessing social protection schemes

Straitened financial circumstances can force vulnerable families to make decisions that adversely impact their children’s safety and security. They might be forced to drop out of school, work in unsafe environments and jobs to support their families, or be married off early to reduce the financial pressure. This puts children at further risk of harm and abuse. Through monthly community help desks, PACT works to support families by helping them access government social protection schemes and services.
In **Deegha**, Bihar, PACT workers organised a community help desk where 67 families from the community were linked to different government insurance and pension schemes, including the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (which provides insurance cover of Rs 2 lakhs in the case of accidental death for a yearly premium of Rs. 12), the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana (which provides life insurance cover of Rs. 2 lakhs for a yearly premium of Rs. 330), and the Atal Pension Scheme (which provides a pension of up to Rs. 5,000 per month).

In addition, four girls were registered under the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, a special high interest rate deposit scheme for the girl child, where funds can be accessed for education or for her marriage when she turns 18 years old. 35 girls from the community have been registered under this scheme ever since it began.

In **Bhagwangola and Hasnabad** communities in West Bengal, PACT workers supported families and children to access various government services including birth certificates, ration cards, job cards and schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana. Three girls were registered for the Kanyashree scheme, similar to the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana.

In Hasnabad, 95 adults and children registered for “beedi binding” identity cards. Beedi-rolling is the major occupation and involves nearly the entire community, including the children. Apart from working as proof of identity, these cards will also enable families to avail of government services such as scholarships and free medical check-ups for children, medicines, etc.

Access to financial support, both for the present and for the future, reduces the pressure on children to work to support their families. They can focus on their education, and work towards creating a secure future for themselves.

### Building resilience and finding solutions for themselves

With the growing use of internet in daily life, an increasing number of services, especially educational and financial services, are nowadays accessed online. In Bharlai, Varanasi, PACT workers recognised the need for families in their community to be computer and digitally literate, so that they are able to access these services, find information and be able to register for government social protection schemes online.

To this end, they organised a community help desk with a nearby computer centre to link 16 boys and four girls to the Digital Literacy Mission. The objective is to ensure that at least one member of every household is computer literate enough to support his/her family to access government schemes and services, such as Aadhar cards, online.

The PACT workers are looking to work on this project for the next two months as well, aiming to have at least 150 people, including themselves, digitally literate.
Linking children to education

Children who are forced to drop out of school, or those who have never been to one, either end up isolated at home, cut off from any social interaction, or are sent out to work to support their families. Both situations put these children at risk of child marriage, trafficking, violence and abuse. The longer a child stays in school, the lower these risks. When they are linked to peers and teachers, children are better placed to negotiate for themselves, enabling them to plan for a better future.

Recognising this, PACT workers in eight communities in Odisha – Baaurisahi, Buddhanagar, Chunokoli, Niladri Vihar, Pattharbandh, Saliasahi, Shantipalli and Telugu Basti – continued their work of enrolling out-of-school children back into school. Through monthly community help desks (held so that community members can directly interface with government authorities to facilitate access to services), 112 children were enrolled into school.

Across 6 states in July, PACT workers organised 42 community help desks, which were attended by 974 community adults. 1,409 children and 268 families either registered for or accessed benefits from government social protection schemes.