

FIGHTING the GOOD FIGHT



**Inspiring stories of braving the odds
during the pandemic.**

2020 is a year that will leave an indelible mark on history and stay in our memories forever. Apart from the severe socio-economic damage inflicted by the pandemic and the countless personal struggles each one of us have borne in the midst of this lockdown, one thing stands out.

The human quality to keep fighting even in the face of adversity.

It's what inspired this short anthology - stories of children from marginalized communities in the remotest corners of India and those who work tirelessly for their welfare. Stories of those who braved the odds and went the extra mile to help others around them. Their will to keep going even in the face of challenges has been an inspiration for us and we hope that it will be so for you too. Because at the end of the day, none of this would have been possible without your support. Your contribution has empowered us to keep fighting the good fight and it's because of you, that our children continue to dream of a brighter future.

From us to you, a BIG thankyou!



**With Gratitude,
The CRY Team**

A STORY OF IMMENSE COURAGE



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Everyone has a lockdown story. For many of us, it involves anecdotes about losing sleep over empty grocery aisles and panicking about the uncertainty that surrounds us.

However, for one truly remarkable person we know, it was a story that personified that good ol' saying - when the going gets tough, the tough get going! The hero of our story - Parvati bai - is not just a hero for us but also for the families in the remote tribal area of Jalna in Maharashtra. Parvati Bai works as a community organizer with CRY project Sankalp Manav Vikas Sanstha in Parbhani, Maharashtra. Even as the lockdown struck unexpectedly and wreaked havoc with the loss of livelihoods, Parvati bai was not deterred. She worked with the project team to figure out how children and their families even in the remotest corners of the area could get access to relief materials like food grains and hygiene materials. Some of these families are completely cut off from civilization due to lack of infrastructure and transportation facilities. But she wasn't going to let that come in the way of her work. With no way of transporting relief materials, she actually walked 5 kms on foot carrying all the relief material on her head - so that children and their families residing in the interior areas could be taken care of and given what they critically needed to survive.

Parvati Bai's story serves not just as an inspiration but also proof to the fact that the work of taking care of India's children is in the right hands!



A STORY OF RESILIENT BELIEF



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When you think of teenagers, the word resilience may not be the first one that pops up in our heads. But this story will definitely change your mind.

The country was in the midst of a pandemic but to 14 year old Viji*, it was an opportunity to be with her family. As Viji was returning home from the welfare hostel she would stay at to be able to attend school, she was overjoyed at the thought of spending time with her mother. But when she reached her home in Bathinaiah Colony, things took a sharp turn.

Having lost her father a couple of years ago, Viji's mother Munemma worked as a daily wage labourer to make ends meet. But when the government imposed the nationwide lockdown, she only got 4 days of work as opposed to the usual 20 days; which left the family penniless. That's when a relative suggested to Munemma that she get Viji married to a 26-year-old man who was intellectually disabled – owing to which, the man's family was ready to forego the common practice of dowry and also foot all the wedding expenses. When Munemma resisted the proposal, the relative reminded her that at least Viji would be “settled”. Unable to think of any other solution, Munemma obliged and started with the preparations for her wedding.

It would have been easy to just accept one's fate and not relent but our protagonist wasn't going to back down here. When Viji came to know of this, she vehemently opposed the idea but her pleas fell on deaf ears.

Around the same time, an Anganwadi worker in the village noticed Munemma having discussions with the groom's family and conducting small shopping trips to the nearby town. It aroused her suspicion and she secretly got in touch with Viji who confirmed that she was to get married. An active member of the CRY children's collective, Viji was well aware that what was happening with her was illegal and could be stopped with the right support. She requested that the Anganwadi worker get in touch with the team at CRY project Pragathi.

As soon as they came to know of Viji's plight, the project team travelled to her village, mobilized the police and community-based organization (CBO) members and counselled Munemma about the consequences of her actions and took a written agreement from her which stated that she would not attempt to get Viji married till she attained legal age. They also contacted the groom's family and threatened them with stringent actions as per the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.

Viji is extremely relieved at the turn of events. "Being a member of the CRY children's collective, I knew my rights and the consequences of child marriage. I therefore rejected the marriage proposal, but my mother and relatives were forcing me into it. When I reached out to CRY, the project team didn't fail me".

Viji's story is not an anomaly. Millions of girls across this country are constantly battling the threat of child marriage in India. But given the right support at the right time, these girls are geared to fight for the future they deserve and become the leaders of tomorrow!



A STORY OF UNWAVERING DETERMINATION



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Education, as we've known it, has gone through a complete overhaul during the lockdown. From the implementation of online classes to coping with screen fatigue, we've seen the children in our lives rise to the challenge of keeping up with an evolving medium of instruction.

But within CRY's areas of intervention, the problems were quite different altogether. With just a marginal section having access to the internet, CRY project DEEP in West Champaran, Bihar knew that their consistent efforts over the years to encourage education would be futile if they didn't quickly come up with a plan.

With a strong presence in 24 villages in the area, the team got together to think of various strategies that they could implement to make up for the closure of schools and the lack of online access. To get a better perspective, the team identified all the teachers who resided in the villages and involved them into the brainstorming discussion as well. Being well versed with DEEP's work, the teachers readily liaised with the team and came to a consensus that a field worker should go around the village with a teacher and provide each child with individual educational support. The plan was to conduct door-to-door visits, teach the children, provide assignments and check them the very next day. Having enrolled 11 teachers into this project, the team has been able to motivate children to keep up with their education, even in the absence of formal schooling.

While schools remain shut, the army of teachers and field workers march ahead with the students, ensuring that every child in their neighbourhood has access to an education and not become vulnerable to child labour and marriage.

The grit and dedication of these teachers and field workers gives us hope that no matter what, our children truly have a fighting chance to chase their dreams!



A STORY OF INDOMITABLE SPIRIT



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There is so much power in collectives. But the real magic happens when children come together and stand up for themselves and the ones around them.

Essentially formed as clubs that encourage dialogue amongst children, our partners across the country bring children together to discuss their rights, the issues they face and empower them to stand up for themselves.

This is the story of one such collective - the CRY Kishori Club in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh which comprises 28 adolescent girls. The Kishori Club is an adolescent girls' collective where issues related to menstrual hygiene, life-skills and safety are discussed.

When news about the pandemic began doing the rounds, the group immediately got together and started researching and discussing methods of prevention. Khajuraho being a popular tourist destination meant that the community is used to the influx of tourists. The girls decided that in order to protect themselves and their community, they would need masks.

But an enquiry in the local market made them realize that even the cheapest masks were Rs. 30-40 and these were disposable. This meant that they would have to spend that amount every day if they were to use them. That was money that they didn't have.

After much thought, the girls found a solution. They were going to make masks themselves! The girls collected unstitched good quality cotton that was available in their own homes and came up with a work plan. They divided themselves into 4 groups as per the number of available sewing machines and also to ensure social distancing and within a week, this group of earnest adolescents made 750 masks that they distributed to their community for free!

Even in distribution, the girls ensured that children and the elderly were catered to first as they are considered more vulnerable. The girls also visited every house in their community spreading awareness to families.

With children being over 40% of the country's population, imagine what we could do if we empower them all!



A STORY OF UNDAUNTED PERSEVERANCE



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In Bandipora, Jammu & Kashmir, 12 year old Sameera Bano was just one of the many children who never went to school. With her family barely making ends meet, Sameera had been working in the shawl industry from the time she was a little girl.

In 2018, when CRY's project Jammu Kashmir Association of Social Workers (JKASW) became aware of Sameera through their home visits, they convinced her family of the importance of her being in school and enrolled her in remedial classes to prepare her for enrolment.

With sustained efforts over the course of 2 years, Sameera was deemed fit to be mainstreamed into her local government school. Excited at the thought of going to school for the first time ever, Sameera started her journey in March 2020 and it had been less than a month before the COVID-19 lockdown was announced in the country.

CRY realized that children who were recently enrolled in schools were in the danger of losing their enthusiasm for studies due to the closure of schools. The challenge would be even greater for those who had never attended school before and were involved in child labour. The steady demand for labour in these communities and the fact that children are seen as a cheaper option were also looming threats.

Sameera, who had worn her uniform only a few times, found it lying untouched in her house. Sitting idle at home was not an option and so, during the lockdown, she was made to go back to shawl making – with no guarantee of ever returning to school.

Well aware that Sameera was just one of the many children who would go back to labour, JKASW decided to take things into their own hands. Even if the internet is choppy, the one thing that most families have access to is WhatsApp. The team at JKASW coordinated with families in the region and began WhatsApp classes! Structured classes would start at 10:30 am every day with mentoring, videos, reading material and assignments with the entire community rallying behind the idea. Sameera's family was contacted again and counselled against sending her to work. Today, even though her uniform is still hanging untouched in her house, Sameera knows that she is going to wear it as soon as schools reopen again.

Jammu & Kashmir has recently seen some particularly tough times. With the pandemic adding onto existing problems, stories like these are what reinforce our belief in the sense of possibility. That there will be a day when every child in our country is in school and has a happy, healthy childhood!





About CRY

Recognized as India's most trusted NGO, Child Rights and You (CRY) works tirelessly to ensure happier and healthier childhoods for India's underprivileged children. We address children's critical needs by working with parents, teachers, Anganwadi workers, communities, district and state level governments as well as the children themselves. Over the last 4 decades, we have impacted the lives of over 3 million children across 19 states in India.