

# Mountain Children's Foundation



Annual Report 2019-2020

***Change a child: change a community, empower  
the future.***



## A letter from Aditi Kaur, President MCF

Dear Friends,

What a difference a year makes! The year 19-20 will be defined as the year of the Coronavirus and the lockdown that followed. For us at the MCF, it has been a year of learning how to deal with sudden upheavals and unpredictability. It was also an opportunity to find new and creative ways to continue and improve on our work with children. We have had to put a pause on many programs and postpone many visits to the children, but the year has been full of innovation, good programs and positive steps forward.



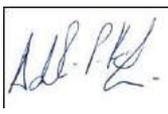
We are deeply grateful to all our partners — SOIR-IM, Indians for Collective Action, CHILDLINE India Foundation, IRIS KPO Resourcing (I) Pvt. Ltd, Nucleus Software Foundation, Lisle International, Himmotthan (an initiative of Tata Trusts) and several individual donors — who have stood by us, the children and the communities we serve in this hour of need.

Through lockdown after lockdown, the MCF had to expand its initial effort to support families that required food rations. We saw the need to reach out to our communities, to give our children and their families much needed information, mental health solace, and a sense of stability and direction. It was a steep learning curve for our team and the children as well. First, we reached out to our staff, connecting with them on the phone, giving them a sense of purpose and belonging. They formed an important platform to connect with the community and explore and respond to some of the anxiety and personal questions this new pandemic was raising.

Post COVID, MCF will go back into our communities having learned valuable lessons. We have strengthened our belief that this world needs healing, needs collective thinking, needs people to care for each other. That is what we are doing. The children in the Bal Sangathans (children's groups) showed us how they were thinking of others in the time of need.

This is the social fabric that we are helping to stitch back together. If, as seems likely, our world will see more global and local upheavals, we must find strategies to continue to build community, trust and social bonds even when we have to be physically distant.

Please think of us as we continue this important work in difficult times and join us in any way that you can. The children of the mountains and the entire MCF team thank you deeply for all you do.

Aditi P. Kaur, President  
Mountain Children's Foundation

## OUR VISION

To empower children through knowledge, training, and the power of collective action to change their communities from the ground up.



Village Balluwalla, Vikas Nagar Dehradun – After a Bal Sangathan Meeting

## OUR APPROACH

The idealism and energy of youth is the best antidote to the forces of marginalization, corruption, helplessness, and apathy under which most rural communities struggle to survive.

We tap that energy to help young people create a better world for themselves and all around them. It is nothing less than a revolution in how the people—especially young people—of the mountains perceive themselves and how they address problems in their communities.

## OUR MISSION

- To enable children to become committed, effective citizens who are empowered through collective action to build a foundation of trust and respect for one another and become agents of change in their communities.
- To create spaces for child participation wherein the individuality and rights of the child are respected:
  - By working closely with government systems to make programs more efficient, effective and responsive to the needs of children.
  - By nurturing communities that give children the opportunity to develop their full potential.
  - By identifying and solving the challenges to a child's full growth and potential.

## Annual Report Executive Summary

The pandemic caused a sudden break in our community and outreach activities at our time when several of our programs were already underway. We had to cancel several activities and could not conduct final workshops, or wrap up the IRIS program and the NSF classes. We could not travel to our Bandal Ghati community to fully initiate our new program there.

We renewed our relationship with Himmotthan in Dehradun. We also reconnected with Lisle, which allowed for us to continue our work in some of the villages in Ghat Chamoli. This was exciting for us as we were brokenhearted when lack of funding forced us to withdraw from the communities we had served for the past three years in Ghat Chamoli.

Our environment program has grown, introducing the children to environmental issues which they were able to link to concerns in their villages, demonstrating how they, the young people of the community, could work to change them. Through these activities, our team has begun to design a structured manual on climate change for the children and their communities.

We were particularly excited about being able to hold job and education counseling sessions for 100 children for the first time:

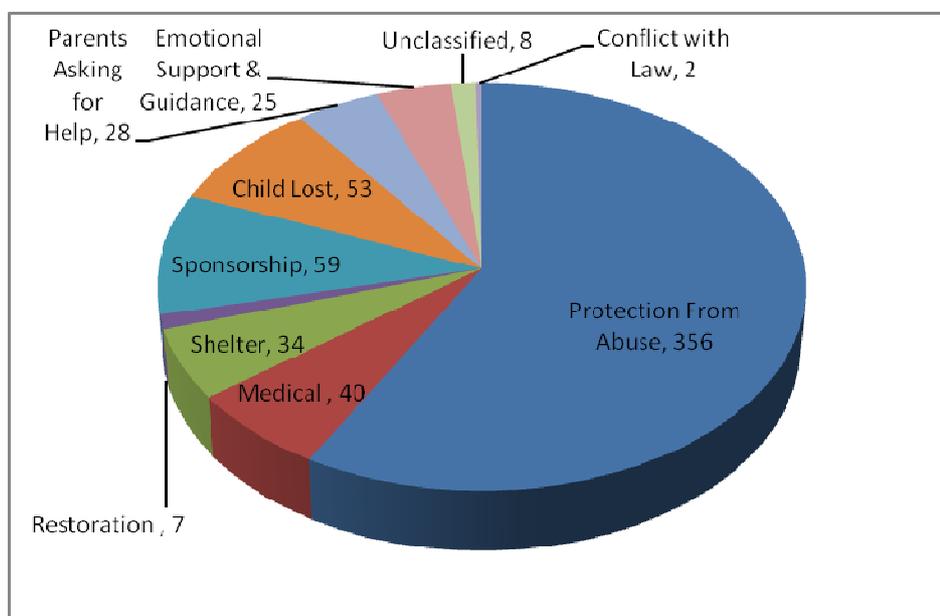
Our SOIR IM program continues to have an ever-stronger impact in the community, which was evident during the lockdown when several families contacted our facilitators for help. Our team linked the families with the village government and MCF CHILDLINE team to ensure their urgent needs were met. We were encouraged to see that the relationships that have been created with the school management committees, the *mata samitis* (women's groups) and the panchayats enabled us to work collaboratively with them to help those in need. Our CHILDLINE program continues to do its critical work even during the lockdown. This work is even more important now, with the added strain of pandemic anxiety on children and their families.

The MCF NSF program, which supplements primary school education, was further strengthened by continuous training and visits from consultants.

We arranged for the Chairperson from the State commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) to visit a little Gujjar school and its community in Vikas Nagar, bringing a forgotten community to the attention of the government. *(Please see page 14 for more information.)* It is a wonderful example of our team's hard work to facilitate positive change.

Through all our programs we have directly interacted and impacted 1,714 infants; 8,541 adults and 9,341 children. We have indirectly impacted a population of 30,753 people.

**MCF CHILDLINE: A 24x7 emergency helpline for children in need**  
**Partner: CHILDLINE India Foundation**



Our CHILDLINE team directly helped a total of 612 children in 2019-20 through the 1098 Emergency helpline. Our team responds to any call about a child in distress. This can range from cases of abuse to child labor to children who have run away from home or to children who just want someone to talk to. The bulk of our cases were in the category of “Protection from Abuse” and included the following:

No. of Cases	Case Type	No. of Cases	Case Type
125	Child labour	9	Child marriage
57	Physical abuse	4	Child trafficking
36	Child Begging	4	Bullying in school
34	Domestic violence	3	Corporal punishment
29	Right to Education violations	3	Drug addiction
28	Emotional abuse	2	Gender discrimination
21	Sexual abuse	1	Kidnapping

Combating child labor is a major area of emphasis with the help of the child labour task force, which includes police, the labour department, two NGOs, and MCF CHILDLINE. Our team also stepped up to provide food and other essential supplies for 46 families in March after the COVID-19 lockdown had begun.

## MCF CHILDLINE Outreach programs

Through our outreach programs we reached 6398 children and 9156 adults



Rally - Prevention of Child Labour with Circle Officer (City) Dehradun

- Internships: In Jan 2019, three interns from NMIMS School of Business Management (Mumbai) joined our team for a month in all our outreach activities.
- Street plays and rallies:
  - On sanitation and hygiene, child labour, substance abuse, preventing child begging. Children staged a play on child labour in their slum. MCF CHILDLINE presented a play on child begging and substance abuse, child labour, drug abuse and the role of CHILDLINE.
  - Rallies with police, the Anti Human Trafficking Unit and the District Child protection Unit against begging.
  - An awareness rally on sanitation and hygiene with the children from the Shastri Nagar Government Primary School
  - Swatch Bharat (Sanitation) Mission program featured 'Nukkad Natak' (Community Play) on cleanliness for the children, who also presented various cultural programs.
- Education and Awareness:
  - World Day against Child Labour was celebrated at Gandhi Park with a signature campaign.
  - MCF CHILDLINE is the member of District Task Force to Prevent Child Labour. Child labourers and plans to rescue them are discussed in meetings chaired by the District Collector.
  - Education activities conducted for children in partnership with Room to Read. Screening of 'Komal,' a film designed to prevent child sexual abuse by teaching children about "safe" and "unsafe" touch. Discussion of female empowerment by MCF CHILDLINEs team members.
  - Conducted a resource organization meeting to discuss the formation of a child protection committee at the urban level.
  - District collector issued a circular to all Resident Welfare Associations to prevent children working in homes in all registered colonies on the request of the MCF CHILDLINE team.
  - Education sessions on protection and sanitation during COVID-19; the importance of social distancing, washing hands and using masks

## Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education for Children Partner: SOIR IM



Meeting of a Mata Samiti, or mother's group, which is empowered to oversee the preprimary anganwadis

The Mountain Children's Foundation in partnership with SOIR IM is working with children in 16 villages in the Vikas Nagar Block of Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

This project aims to change existing education inequities through interventions and the inclusion of community institutions. Engaging communities in meaningful dialogue have helped our team to participate significantly in the program. The interventions done in the past two years have created a strong foundation to achieve equitable and inclusive education.

The program has revived the 16 School Management Committees, 29 Mata Samitis (mothers groups, responsibly for oversight of preprimary anganwadis) and 10 Village Education Committees and enabled them to become functional in the real sense. The meetings, training sessions and individual interactions conducted with these groups has helped them understand their roles and responsibilities: there is now a renewed focus on reducing the number of children dropping out of school, ensuring that schools have teachers in accordance Right to Education Act, improving education quality, and providing basics — such as mats, furniture, drinking water and water in the bathrooms, a boundary wall — to schools. They were also empowered to reflect on the question of why the quality of education was degrading in their communities. In our work we found:

***This program mobilized communities to understand their strength and take collective action despite resistance to oversight by teachers and government officials.*** Continuous monitoring of the program shows considerable progress towards the objective of strengthening stakeholder participation for ensuring quality education for all children in the community. While community participation has always been emphasized in education-related policy documents in India, it has not been fully extended systematically to a wider practice and still is at a nascent stage. The gap

between written documents and ground realities is usually attributed to lack of awareness among the community. But while working in the villages, we realized that the government officials themselves were resistant to have aware communities because they do not want to be accountable to the community or be forced to address the concerns they raise. For example, we encountered school teachers not wanting School Management Committee meetings to be held in their schools or wanting to share information. As a result, our team found that holding School Management Committee meetings outside the schools was more effective. More than 1,489 people have attended our shikshan sabhas (meetings on education), resulting in significant improvements, such as water tanks being repaired, boundary walls being built around schools, better quality assurance for the midday meal, and getting children who had dropped out to start attending school again.

***Women are capable of taking the lead.*** During our work with the communities, we realized that the main reason behind poorly run and poorly equipped anganwadi centres and primary schools is a lack of awareness. Empowering the women in the community by making them aware of existing inequitable structures, facilities, acts and policies enabled them to make tangible improvements to the schools and anganwadis. Women are marginalized simply by a lack of information. The first step towards empowerment is to equip them with information and make them aware of the policies and requirements that exist and help them realize they have a legal right to demand change. We reached out to 466 women in this process.

***Children are powerful agents of change if they can share information and raise their concerns with their communities and leaders of their community.***

Through their children's groups, young people have conducted various activities in their villages. This year Uttarakhand is conducting panchayat elections. The village panchayat is the government closest to the village. To ensure that the panchayats are aware of the issues of their village, the children, with the help of MCF SOIR IM and in partnership with NACG EVAC India, created a memorandum for the candidates standing for elections to the post of pradhan (village head) in 16 villages. Each candidate signed the memorandum and promised that they would take steps to mitigate the issues raised by the children.

In the 16 villages, children's petitions to the pradhans asked them to:

1. Ensure there is water in the primary school during summer.
2. Repair the panchayat building and providing electricity so children can hold their meetings and other activities there.
3. Repair the road to the primary school from the main road.
4. Provide a mat on the floor so the children have something to sit on between them and the cement floor when they meet.
5. Provide water filters to ensure safe drinking water in the primary school.
6. Provide separate toilets for both boys and girls and having someone to clean the toilets.
7. Support and actively participate in all activities organized by the Bal Sangathan.
8. Provide the Bal Sangathan members with sports and activities at the village level.
9. Create a child protection committee in the village and to ensure that the children's concerns are addressed

In this way, children from 16 Bal Sangathans met with 38 candidates from 10 Panchayats. Where there was more than one village under the panchayat, the children from each village met with the candidates and presented their specific memorandum. All the villages wanted the creation of Child Protections Committees at the village level.

## Digital Learning for Quality Education

Partner: Nucleus Software Foundation



**Nucleus Software Foundation Team with Ms Madhu Dusad and Facilitators – Kheda Pachua Vikas Nagar**

The Nucleus Software Foundation has supported the Mountain Children’s Foundation in 16 villages of the Vikasnagar block of the Dehradun District. In 2019-20, the program was not just expanded to reach a greater number of children but it also started focusing specifically on slow learners through remedial teaching. This helped children who were not at grade level catch up. The following story is exemplary:

### **Kanika’s Story: confidence and a love of learning**

Kanika lives in a village called Balluwalla in Vikas Nagar, Dehradun, with her mother, sister and grandfather. Her father left them a year ago. Her grandfather is retired and stays at home. Her mother has been supporting the family with the small earnings she makes from sewing clothes. Kanika’s mother told us that she didn’t have money to pay for Kanika’s tuition. Kanika found it difficult to go to school regularly and was behind in her studies. She lacked confidence and was struggling.

Things changed for Kanika when she joined the MCF NSF classes a year ago, while in class 3. Initially she could not recognize all the letters from A to Z and she could only count till 20. Arjun, our facilitator, paid special attention to Kanika and made sure that she took part in all the activities. He sometimes helped her after class. The change in Kanika was profound: she now recognizes all her letters and can even read three-letter words. She can count to 100, and count backwards from 100 as well. She can now do simple addition and subtraction sums. When she goes home, she shares with her mother all she has learnt and then teaches her younger sister Aarushi. Kanika is now a confident 9-year old. She can’t wait to go home from school to do her homework, and is so excited about learning. Kanika’s mother, Meena Devi, is very grateful for the MCF NSF classes and what Kanika has achieved through them.

The NSF program has reached 292 students studying in grade 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. The technical support and the teaching and learning materials provided by the partner organization have helped in smooth implementation of the program along with making a significant difference in the lives of these children. Evaluations conducted during 2019 showed significant improvement in foundational literacy and numeracy skills of the targeted children.

In Maths Level 1 – 86.2 % Students have achieved their goal and at Level 2 - 85.2% have achieved their goal. In 2019-20, most of the children have completed levels 1 and 2 in maths.

Most children have also completed Level 1 and 2 in English for classes 3, 4 and 5, except for some very slow learners.

Our community outreach has ensured that the children come to class regularly and student dropout rate has fallen.

The MCF team's skills have also grown. They understand the techniques better and are able to support and augment the children's learning through the tablets. NSF consultants Manoj Prasad and Shantanu Tandon continue to support the MCF team in building their skills for teaching maths and English.

### **Direct educational support for children**



**Boys with their chemistry coach Ms Preeti Kulshrestha**

NSF also supported 8 boys to study in grade 11 and grade 12. The MCF team identified the students, who came from families that could not support their education. Some of them were at risk of dropping out.

The MCF/NSF program provided funding for tuition and travel to their classes. The students found their own tutors.

The MCF field facilitators and coordinator regularly followed up with the students to address any problems and ensure they knew that someone was looking out for them

During January and February 2020, the NSF made it possible for the children to make 4 trips to Dehradun to study chemistry, physics and maths with reputed teachers in the city. (The teachers were Mr. Preeti Kulshrestha for chemistry, Mr. Rahul Walia and Mr. Rashid for maths.) This was important as the students were struggling in their studies, and the extra coaching helped them improve. On each trip they were accompanied by the MCF field coordinator to ensure that the children were safe during their journey to and from their villages.

**Climate Change and Environmental Awareness  
Partner: IRIS KPO Resourcing (I) Pvt. Ltd**



**Visiting the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology in Dehradun**

Children are the least responsible for causing climate change but are likely to suffer most from its impacts. With shifting weather patterns and rising temperature leading to environmental instability, the basic rights of children are at risk of being undermined and their future compromised. It is therefore the responsibility of adults to better equip children to respond to the climate-related challenges ahead. Along with providing them with skills and capacities necessary to mitigate and adapt to climate change, there is also an urgent need to shape their values, attitudes and behaviors to put them on a sustainable path. MCF believes that children should have fun and be engaged as they internalize these skills. To meet climate challenges, MCF works with children to:

- *Help them understand the impact people have on the climate*
- *Prepare them to become resilient*
- *Prepare them to be able to live more sustainable lives*
- *Enable the younger generation to think of locally appropriate adaptation actions*

With funding support from IRIS KPO Resourcing, MCF initiated a series of programs focused on child-centered environmental awareness and preparedness in 12 villages in Vikasnagar, Dehradun. In addition to regular meetings and workshops, children participated in tree planting drives and drawing competitions with an environmental focus.

**Earth Day**

Two primary schools participated in Earth Day 2019 through a drawing competition for students. Around the “Protect our Species” theme for Earth Day, the children were asked to draw their favorite flower, tree, bird or animal with a message to protect that species.

**International Day for Preservation of the Ozone layer**

The International day for Preservation of the ozone layer was celebrated on the 16th of September 2019 through drawing competitions. Children made drawings on how the ozone layer can be protected and what we can do to ensure the change. The children also held a quiz program on the ozone layer, how it protects the earth, and what measures they can take to preserve it.

**Wildlife Week**

Children in another two Bal Sangathans illustrated what they do to protect wildlife near their village.

### **Learning about “Environment”**

Our field team conducted sessions on “what is environment” and “components of environment.” Visual Cards were used to facilitate the discussion. The children played games that showed the connections between each organism. Through the game they also received information about producers, consumers, scavengers and decomposers of our ecosystem and their importance.

### **Global Warming and Climate Change**

Our field team conducted sessions on the greenhouse effect, greenhouse gasses, global warming and climate change with 12 Bal Sangathans. They also played the puzzle game: “Why is our earth getting sick?”

### **Air Pollution and Paper Bags**

MCF worked with Bal Sangathans to make them aware of the causes and consequences of air pollution. The children learned how to make paper bags to replace plastic ones, a skill they shared with their elders. For example, on weekends, one MCF member, Aastha, taught her grandfather, a shopkeeper, to make paper bags and also helped him make paper bags in order to reduce plastic pollution. He now only uses paper bags in his shop.

### **Climate Change and Children’s Rights**

Our team facilitated a discussion on climate change using pictorial cards and charts. The children first discussed what changes they had implemented in their homes and community to mitigate climate change. They learned about Greta Thunberg and advocacy against climate change and also about their own peers who had made a change in their lives and had also changed other people’s perceptions and attitudes on how to protect our world through small steps.

### **Traditional Knowledge and Practices on Water, Forests and Agriculture**

Children’s groups conducted research and workshops in their respective villages on traditional approaches to the environment. On speaking with the older generation, the children found that their ancestors ensured food security and helped maintaining ecological balance through different methods such as:

- Organic farming
- Sustainable water harvesting and conservation
- The agriculture was manual and was in harmony with nature
- The tradition of mixed, diversified farming

### ***MCF facilitated an extensive series of programs covering a range of topics:***

Environment and ecosystem, exploring climate change and its impact on children's rights, global warming and climate change, exploring the causes of air pollution, tree plantation drive, traditional knowledge to build a climate resilient future, exploring climate change and its impact on children's rights, wildlife week & understanding the ozone layer.

### ***MCF conducted and facilitated several environmental days of celebration:***

World Water Day (22<sup>nd</sup> March) with village adults to explore traditional methods of water and forest conservation, World Environment Day (5<sup>th</sup> June): Air Pollution International Day for Preservation of the Ozone Layer (16<sup>th</sup> September), World Environment Day (22<sup>nd</sup> April).

### ***MCF conducted A field visit to the WADIA Institute of Himalayan Geology in Dehradun:***

We took 24 children from 12 villages to learn about the area they live in. The children saw fossils, including that of a giraffe type of animal, hippopotamus, turtle and even a tooth of the Ramapithecus (a precursor of Homosapians) found in the Shivalik region 14 million years ago. They learned that all these life forms became extinct due to climate change.

## **Bridging the Generation Divide**

### **Partner: Lisle**

Lisle International awarded us a grant through its Global Seed Fund. The project seeks to bridge the divide between the youngest and oldest members of the community by bringing them together to work jointly on a project to rediscover and reclaim elements of their forgotten cultural heritage.

Activities include a series of workshops in the village, with discussions and games to bring young people and the village seniors together. The generations will learn to listen to one another, recover forgotten songs, stories, dances and the artwork of their village. In the process, the children will collectively learn about their heritage and rediscover and rebuild bonds of affection and empathy towards the elderly with a renewed commitment to caring for them.



**Village Sung**

The project will culminate with a community fair in each village, put on by the children and seniors, where all the villagers as well as residents of neighboring communities will be invited to join and hear the songs and stories the children and their elders have gathered. We believe this will be a powerful engine to help restore a sense of community and interconnectedness among the people.

This program involves 5 villages of Ghat in Chamoli: Sung, Lwani, Charbang, Bijar and Kurud.

We launched the project in January 2020 and have had a few interactions with the children and the seniors but had to suspend activities due to the coronavirus lockdown. However, the community has expressed an eagerness to see this initiative resume:

*“Children nowadays have time to play with their mobiles or their bat and ball. All day and all night all they want is either the TV or the phone. In the olden days we used to sit with each other and talk.”*– Maggi Devi of Lwani



**Village LwaniGhat Chamoli**

*“I am very happy MCF has come back to the village in the past. You have done a lot of good work with our children and the women and for the little children in the Anganwadis. A lot of change has taken place in our village because of your work.”* – Neema Devi of Sung

We were also fortunate to have a visit from Lisle members Mark Kinney, Nancy Kinney and Sharada Nayak, our mentor for this project. Time did not permit us to take them to the interior where these activities will take place, but they were able to visit our villages closer to Dehradun and interact with the seniors and the children here.

## MCF: Education Sports Initiative in the Himmothan, Uttarakhand.



**BandaGhati Dehradun**

MCF signed a contract with the Himmothan Society in February 2020 to work in 15 villages and their anganwadis and with 15 Bal sangathans in the Banda Ghati region of Dehradun for 1 year. Through the first quarter, the MCF team visited the proposed field area. They made contact with preprimary anganwadi education centers and their workers. Initial relations were built with the pradhans (village leaders) and administrators of the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) program.

A training program was organized for the team in March, but was postponed due to COVID-19 concerns. We took the opportunity to have a first team meeting and to visit two villages to generate awareness about COVID-19, the need for sanitation and hygiene and physical distancing.

Since all activities were suspended after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March, the team took to calling the community and finding out how they were. They made a connection with the children they had met and spoke to them about the need to wash hands regularly and stay home, as well as making sure the children felt that they were important and someone was concerned about them. This went a long way in helping the children deal with the anxiety surrounding the pandemic lockdown and helped with their mental wellbeing.

## MCF Education: A School in the Forest



The Gujjar School - Mengwalla Vikas Nagar Dehradun

Gujjars are a migrant community who travel with their families and livestock to the high mountains in the summer and back to the plains in the winter. If you were a child living in the small Gujjar village in Vikas Nagar Dehradun, you would have to walk 4 kilometers to the nearest school. The MCF campaigned hard for a school to be opened in the village for the 24 children who lived there. Finally, in 2019 the education department complied. Now the children of Gujjar village can attend a non-residential special training center, a school for migrants.

These children are slowly overcoming the challenge of being out of school, with extra learning activities and support material from the MCF. The school provides the children with a midday meal, uniforms, some books and a teacher. MCF was able to add one more teacher to meet the learning needs of all the children. This was made possible with support from donor Samir Shah and others.

MCF believes it takes more than government compliance to make a school into a safe learning space. A school in a forest has unique needs: The school was a thatched shelter, and every time it rained, the little structure would be flooded and the children would have nowhere to sit or study. MCF helped by attaching large plastic sheets to the roof to keep the children dry.

MCF believes in empowering children and that education goes beyond the classroom. In this spirit, our facilitator helped the parents open bank accounts so that their children could access government scholarships, money for uniforms, and so on. Our team also taught them personal hygiene and caring for their surroundings.

The children of Gujjar village have now made a small fence for their school and planted flowers within it and are taking pride in coming to school clean. They are very proud of their school in the forest.

In early March 2020 we arranged for the Chairperson from the SCPCR (State commission for Protection of Child Rights) to visit a little Gujjar school and its community in Vikas Nagar. This brought this forgotten community to the attention of the different government departments at the district and block level.

## **MCF Education: Choosing for the Right Career**

### **Partner: Small Change**

On the 12th of January, 2020, MCF facilitated a special program on career counseling for the youth in Vikas Nagar, Dehradun. This two-day event was the very first of its kind for the children and was made possible through Small Change, a crowdfunding platform.

This unique session was created to address a community need: government schools in the villages are not able to help the children identify their learning styles or their interests. For the very first time, children were excited to learn about the different career pathways that they could choose from. We also had several first-generations learners who were quite amazed at the possibility of what they could achieve.

Through the excellent guidance of Mr. Vinod Nayak, our counselor from Mumbai, the children learned that to choose a career they had to think of much more than just a job but focus on the things they enjoy doing, and envision building a career in that area. The fact that both boys and girls were given an equal opportunity was also eye-opening for them. The girls, too, were able to explore their learning styles and interests in ways they could not before.

Follow up: After the session, the children told us they had actually understood the process, and are able to make informed decisions about the subjects they should choose in school in order to make the working years of their lives worthwhile and effective. To this end, they have been making timetables and plans to begin their courses of study.

Reaching out to these students has been groundbreaking as they now have options they can consider pursuing based on their interests. As never before, they can also understand their own learning styles and put them into practice so that learning for them will be easier, more effective and a more pleasant experience.



**Vinod Nayak and 50 children at the Kheda Pachua Center Vikas Nagar Dehradun**

## 'PABAM' A HINDI MONTHLY MAGAZINE FOR CHILDREN

Since 2003, our monthly Hindi-language magazine, PABAM, has served as a platform for children to exchange ideas and share their experiences while also acting as a vehicle to disseminate information into remote regions, in a language they understand, can relate to and can express themselves in.

PABAM is a tool to help children understand the importance of their children's groups and the strength they have when they work together. Children enthusiastically share their experiences, success and drawings through the magazine. The magazine equally interests the children's parents (especially when they see their child's name in the magazine). This year in January we printed our 200<sup>th</sup> issue. Through the years each issue of the magazine has been printed with children's letters and drawings, general knowledge quizzes, and articles about major activities held throughout the year.



Our 200<sup>th</sup> PABAM Magazine

This magazine would not have been possible without the heart and soul of Anil Maikhuri who has been our editor for the past 18 years. He has kept the spirit of the magazine alive and has ensured that we talk on new and different issues in each edition.

## OUR PARTNERS. THE DIFFERENCE YOU MAKE IS CRITICAL

General operating support from **Indians For Collective Action (US)** has helped us fill gaps between projects and enhance several of our projects. For example, it is helping to strengthen our child protection team and outreach efforts. ICA funding also enabled us to continue our work in Ghat Chamoli when the previous project ended, allowing us to keep a small team active in the area to continue the essential work we have been doing there. ICA has also helped strengthen our CHILDLINE team by enabling us to augment the salaries of some of our key staff. CHILDLINE salaries are extremely low compared to prevailing wages in the city of Dehradun and the level of dedication and knowledge needed for the job. As a result, turnover is high. We have used our funding from ICA to support four of our most experienced CHILDLINE team members to insure the quality and continuity of our work to protect and rescue vulnerable children.

We are very grateful to **Macalester College's Dewitt Wallace Library, Visiting Assistant Professor Sonia Mehta and the students of Macalester College's Education Studies** who have been working with our team to design new pedagogies in after school learning programs, and is helping us raise our global visibility and outreach. It has widened our perspective and added great depth to our work.

[We are also deeply grateful to all our individual donors and sponsors who have helped us go that extra mile:](#)

**India:** Rishabh Joshi, Comd. Narayan Rao, Mamta and Chetan Sharma, Mrs. H Dugal, Vineet Arneja, Vabhaiv Kumar, Nivedita & Vivek Sharma, Commodor Sureshwar D. Sinha, Apala Lahiri- HFI, Aseem & Neetu Verma, Vandana Kothari Badruka, Eshita Sran, Vivek Sanjwan, Rajeev Mehra, Ms Kiran Ghosh, Mr. Om Malik, Ram Kumar and Ashish Kumar -Hotel Vishnu Palace, Samir Shah, Puru Indu Upadhaya Foundation, Aishwaria Raj, Maranalini Jain, Madhu Pathania, Pushpinder & Neelu Singh, Sumit Rai, Rishi Puri

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## Meet the Team

Team MCF SOIR IM



Sudhir Bhatt, Ravindra Chauhan, Ashok Bisht, Pritam Panwar, Arti Devi, Satyabala Devi, Shakuntala Devi and Dilferoz



Team MCF IRIS



Sudhir Bhatt, Pritam Panwar, Kavita Devi and Manisha

Team MCF CHIDLIN



Deepika Panwar, Ravindra Chauhan, Deepa Sharma, Hemant Dhiman, Jasbeer Rawat, Ritik Vishwakarma, Geeta Bisht, Amit Chauhan, Neelam and Rashmi Rawat

Team MCF ESI and LISLE



Dwarika Pr Nauri, Deeksha Rana, Anchal Chetty, Rakhi , Sheetal Nautiya, Birendra S Negi

Team MCF NSF



Ashok Bisht, Aruna , Beena , Deepika, Rehnuma, Arjun, Neelam, Nisha and Kavita

## Fighting COVID-19 the MCF Way



Dealing with a pandemic is particularly challenging in mountainous and rural regions. We face the challenge of trying to dispense critical information and quickly reach children and their families who need us in scattered villages that are difficult to reach, are sometimes cut off from each other, and are usually not equipped with reliable access to communications technology.

On the other hand, the MCF has deep roots in our communities and we have unique strengths: we know our people, we know the region and we know how to communicate in relevant ways. Apart from disseminating information and getting much needed food and medical resources to families, we are also working to calm the fears and anxieties that accompany the spread of COVID-19.

In March when the news of the COVID-19 was just gathering steam, the MCF team was out in the community sharing information about the virus and why hygiene was necessary to prevent its spread. Our PABAM Magazine featured coverage about COVID-19: how we can keep ourselves safe, what social / physical distancing means, the importance of correct hand-washing and why it was necessary to follow recommended health guidelines.

We also reminded the children of what they had already learned about hygiene a few years ago (in different WaSH programs) and encouraged them to teach their parents and grandparents what they had learned. In this way, once again, children were the most informed agents of change and improvement for their families during the pandemic.

The first few days of the lockdown were spent in understanding the demands of our new reality. Then our team rose to the occasion. Our facilitators out in the field reached out to the villages they worked in, where they knew which families were likely to suffer most. They made lists of families in need and connected them with other members of the community and with the village *Pradhan*, or headman, so they could access available government aid and resources.

We aided more than 50 families by connecting them resources within their own villages. Our CHILDLINE program was able to facilitate support for more than 45 additional families, providing dry rations and by further connecting them with governmental resources within their village. In fact, the *pradhan* of Prithvipur was so impressed with Arti, our facilitator in her village, that she wrote a letter to the Sub Divisional Magistrate, Block Officer and the Head of the Police Station in Vikas Nagar, praising Arti and the MCF for the work she had done for the community.

We had 6 children who were in the process of being linked to the Government Sponsorship Scheme, a government program to support children and their families so that they will not be separated and institutionalized due to lack of monetary support. The lockdown prevented the process from being completed. We knew these families were in distress and, through our CHILDLINE program, we reached out to them and were able to help them.

*In the two weeks of March 2020 we have reached over 102 families and over 450 people.*

Our best story happened in our Unnati Bal Sangthan in Rudrapur.

The group helped a member of the Sanaya Bal Sangthan Muslim Basti Rudrapur by giving her rations worth Rs 500/-. This money had been awarded to them by the Pradhan for work they had done in the village. It is particularly notable that at a time when communal tensions in most of India are rising, children from a predominantly Hindu village reached out to support a child in a Muslim community.



File Photo: Unnati BalSangathan

We are also actively dealing with the anxiety that some children feel because of the loss of a school schedule. Those appearing for class 10 and 12 exams have had their exams halted in the middle causing fears for their futures. While most children initially enjoyed the fact that they didn't have school or homework, they soon began missing school and their friends. Some of the older children were concerned about their parents not being able to work and earn. During the lockdown, the MCF team members have been reaching out to the children and their communities via telephone. Our team is also working to provide information, reassurance and resources to the children, as well as helping them to understand the need for physical distancing and hygiene, while cultivating positive mental health. Among many activities, we encourage the children to express their emotions through drawing, painting, and letter writing.

The parents and children appreciate this connection with our team. Because we reach out to them, they have felt connected, motivated to keep going, and empowered with information that can help them be protected and secure. There is so much more to be done, and we are striving to reach every child and help every community as soon as we can.



## Annex

### PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

To abide by the guidelines put down by the Supreme Court and to ensure a healthy working environment that enables employees, contract workers, part-time staff or volunteers to work without fear of prejudice, gender bias and sexual harassment, MCF has adopted a policy on prevention of sexual harassment. An Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) has been formed for redressal of grievances related to sexual harassment. The committee includes:

1. Deepika Panwar - Chairperson
2. Himani Chandola Chhimwal - Member
3. Ravindra Singh Chauhan - Member
4. Ranu Bisht – External Member

The MCF staff has been trained on POSH. It has been made mandatory to inform the newly appointed staff about the policy.

The following report has been submitted by the committee.

S.No	Particulars	# cases/activities
1	Number of complaints of sexual harassment received in a year	Nil
2	Number of complaints disposed of during the year	Nil
3	Number of cases pending for more than 90 days	Nil
4	Nature of action taken by the employer	NA
	Number of workshops or awareness programs conducted by the organization	Four awareness meetings were held with the team

## MCF Governing Board Members 2018-19

NAME	ADDRESS	NAME OF FATHER/HUSBAND	GENDER	OCCUPATION	DESIGNATION
Ms. Aditi P Kaur	63- A VyomPrasth, G.M.S Road, Dehradun, U.K.	D/o Capt. Joginder Singh	F	Gender Specialist/ Social Worker	President
Mr. Sunjoy Joshi	C II – 81 First Floor South Extension Part II New Delhi	S/o Late R.L. Joshi	M	Director Observer Research Foundation	Vice President
Ms. KhilaBisht	62, GF, A Block Greenwood City Gurugram Haryana	D/o Late S.S. Bisht	F	Writer/ Social Worker	Secretary
Mr. Sudhir Bhatt	63- A VyomPrasth, G.M.S Road Dehradun, U.K.	S/o Late Govind Ram Bhatt	M	Social worker	Treasurer
Ms. Kiran Ghosh	24 Rajender Nagar Kaulagarh Road Dehradun, U.K.	W/o Late Manus Ghosh	F	Teacher	Member
Mr. Cyril R Raphael	12/26 Ashirwad Enclave, Dehradun, U.K.	S/o Late Dr. Stephen C. Raphael	M	Secretary, THT and Chief Advisor-SBMA	Patron
Ms. Shalini Sinha	12 AWHO flats Indira Nagar, Dehradun, U.K.	D/O Late Ranvir Sinha	F	Artist	Member

## **MCF Case Studies and Success Stories**

The following are some of the stories that have most inspired our work this year.

### **Alisha's Story: Succeeding through mental health challenges**

Alisha is a 12 year old girl from the village Kedarawalla who has mental health issues. She studied until class 5 in the government school and then dropped out. She has been out of school for 2 years and did not want to go back. The MCF SOIR IM Facilitator, Dilferoz spoke to the headmaster of the junior high school and asked if they could accommodate Alisha, as it is every child's right to have an education, who agreed to reenroll her. But Alisha was afraid to go to school. To soothe and support her, Mrs. Rubina (MCF SOIR) went to school with Alisha for the next 2 months. Alisha was finally comfortable enough to go to school on her own. There is a marked change in Alisha: she is less frightened and has made friends. Dilferoz and Mrs. Rubina also obtained a disability certificate for Alisha so that she would continue to have the extra support she needed in school.

### **Raja's Story: Coming home.**

When we met Raja he was a 10 years old orphan living in Prithvipur village. He lived with his grandmother and blind grandfather in makeshift dwellings. His grandmother worked as a daily wager to provide food for the family, but could afford barely anything else.

Arti, our community worker, would go often to Prithvipur (Raja's village) and connect with the children. Raja would never come close to her but would watch from a distance when she visited. Arti asked the members of the Bal Sangathan about the child who was watching her. They told her that the boy was known as Raja, or Mohit. He was a 'problem child', going to school only occasionally, drinking alcohol and smoking. He had also fallen in with people who would use him to procure alcohol and cigarettes. He spent his time without purpose or direction. Everyone was frustrated with his behaviour. His school was ready to give up on him and assured Arti he would never come to school.

When Raja joined the bal sangathan, he was met with hostility: The children of the village were not excited about having him in their midst because he fought with them, swore at them, and was usually unwashed.

But Raja was drawn to Arti and her gentle ways. Arti began to build a relationship of purpose and caring with not just Raja, but his grandparents too. Slowly, she gained his trust and discovered the many reasons for his behaviour. She became his friend; bringing him the books he would need for school, some pens to write with and reenlisting him into the school that rejected him. The NSF remedial classes had begun, and Arti created a supportive space in it for Raja, working with the children and the teachers so that he felt welcomed and included. Arti gave Raja tasks to do for the class, and a sense of purpose so that he felt that he also belonged. Raja cleaned the room, distributed refreshments and so on. This helped him feel a part of the Bal Sangathan and slowly he started making friends. Alina from IM in Kathmandu visited and wrote about Raja. All this attention helped Raja feel needed and important.

Raja did learn his ABC and can now read three-letter words. He knows how to count to 100 and understand place values. He can do simple addition and subtraction. But perhaps most importantly, his confidence has grown, he has made friends and feels valued. He has had a hard life and a difficult path ahead, but has come a great way. Arti continues to support Raja. She helped negotiate with the pradhan (village Head) to build a home for Raja and his grandparents. Their home is almost complete.

### **Aastha: Champion of the Environment**

Aastha is the president of the bal sangathan (children's group) in Badhkote. Her grandfather owns a provision store in the village. In June, Aastha attended a training by the Mountain Children's Foundation (MCF) on the environment and the changes we can make in our own lives. There she and others learned how to make paper bags from newspapers.

Aastha took the teachings back to her own bal sangathan. She also realized that her grandfather was selling provisions in plastic bags and this was bad for the environment. The children of the Bal Sangathan went with Aastha to her grandfather's shop and gave him all the paper bags they had made, and requested him to stop using plastic bags.



On weekends, Aastha taught her grandfather to make paper bags, and helped him make them for his shop. Now he only uses paper bags.

In July, Aastha's school had a craft lesson in which they had to make something out of newspaper. Most of the children didn't know what to do, but then Aastha stepped up again to teach her class how to make paper bags out of newspaper. The class made more than 500 bags, which were donated to a shop. The next day the principal congratulated Aastha on her innovative idea and her fight against plastic. Aastha is living the change she wants to see.

### **Khushboo: When a teacher cares**

Khushboo is a young 8-year-old girl who studies in class 4, in the village of Ambadi. Khushboo has two brothers. Her father is a driver and her mother, a housewife. Khushboo is the eldest in the family. Her family has come to Uttarakhand to find work and live in a rented home. Her parents are illiterate and could not help their children in school, neither could they afford school expenses.

When we started working in Ambadi young Khushboo could not recognize the letters in the English alphabet. She could count to 20, but did not know how to write her numbers. The village school of Ambadi had recently received workbooks from the NSF and also tablets with review exercises in Maths and English. Our facilitator Aruna used both these resources, but she also taught the children through games, music, movement and teamwork and mutual respect. With Aruna's special classes, Khushboo can now recognize all her letters and can read three-letter

words. She now knows how to count to a 100 and knows how to write her numbers. She can even do simple addition and subtraction sums. Her class teacher, Ms. Suman Aagarwal, remarked on Khusboo's remarkable change. Her parents expressed their deep gratitude for the support given to their daughter. Khusboo shares all she has learnt with Aruna 'Didi' and teaches her family through music and poetry, just like Aruna.



**THANK YOU FROM THE MOUNTAIN CHILDREN'S  
FOUNDATION**