

SCHOOL CENTERED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

A Proposal by United Way Mumbai

United Way Mumbai is a part of the 130+ year old United Way movement spanning 41 countries across the world. Our mission is to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities to advance the common good.

We work closely with a network of 400+ NGOs and a large number of corporates for their CSR programmes, workplace giving campaigns and other events. This includes designing of CSR policy and strategies, due diligence of NGO partners, programme implementation, employee volunteering, impact assessments and financial and programmatic reporting.

Over the past 17 years, we have partnered with over 300 companies and over 1,00,000 individual donors investing close to INR 390 crore for community development projects. Our expertise lies in identifying, designing & implementing high impact projects in the areas of Education, Health, Income, Environment, Public Safety & Social Inclusion in both urban as well as rural communities across the country.

The Project

The School Centered Community Development (SCCD) programme envisions all children in our communities have access to quality education and grow up to realise their full potential. With this objective, United Way Mumbai proposes an integrated project for education enhancement in a municipal school / zilla parishad school.

The selection of school would be subject to approvals and recommendations of the Education Department which will be obtained on confirmation of the project. The school would have a minimum of 500 children from Balwadi to Standard 10.

The project would have the following key interventions:

- I. Infrastructure upgradation
- II. Early learning
- III. Remedial education
- IV. Reading programme
- V. STEM
- VI. Career Counselling
- VII. Parent engagement

I. Infrastructure Upgradation

Inadequate school infrastructure is a significant deterrent to retention and learning in school. With limited space and resources, schools tend to crowd a large number of students into small classrooms. Classrooms often lack adequate lighting and ventilation. A large number of schools run without functional toilets, including separate toilets for girls and drinking water facilities. This

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leads to illness and absenteeism which affects learning. There is also a need for appropriate recreation facilities.

As part of this component, we propose two kinds of infrastructure upgradation. Specific requirements in each of these would be finalized once the school is determined.

- a. Upgrades for safety and hygiene which may include refurbishment of school wall/gate, improvements in ventilation and lighting, refurbishment of sanitation facilities or provision of safe drinking water
- b. Upgrades for play and recreation which may include cleaning and de-weeding of school ground, plantation of trees, installation of play equipment, etc.

II. Early Learning

This component would focus on ensuring school readiness of children between 3-5 years of age. School readiness includes:

- Physical well being
- Social and emotional health
- Independent learning habits
- Language development
- Cognitive processes like attention, memory, problem solving, creative thinking etc.
- General knowledge regarding the environment surrounding the child
- Pre-academic skills for learning of literacy and numeracy

This will be done through equipping the Balwadi with necessary educational material, training and building capacity of the teacher and encouraging learning through celebration of festivals and field trips.

The Balwadis are often bare and lack educational material that is stimulating and relevant for the children. The charts and flash cards which are received through government trainings are also not well maintained or displayed. The children, as a result, do not have an opportunity to engage with the material and develop motor skills, cognitive skills and language skills.

Through this project, a set of good quality educational material will be supplied to the Balwadi. This material will aim to address multiple areas of the child's development – Physical Development (material to develop gross and fine motor skills such as beading, sorting, clay, balls, balancing blocks, water play, etc), Language Development (charts, flash cards, reading cards, books, alphabet cut outs, songs and rhymes, etc), Socio-Emotional Development (imaginative play material such as dolls, household material, animal figures, puppets etc which encourage peer engagement and socialization), Cognitive Development (basic puzzles, manipulatives, counting, matching, art material, etc) and so on.

The material would be displayed / stored in a manner that makes it accessible to the children. This would encourage children to develop independence in work, learn to make decisions and choices, learn sharing and care of material. An inventory of all material will be maintained and updated on a monthly basis at the Balwadi.

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The Balwadi teacher would be trained through a series of quarterly trainings on pedagogy, establishing classroom routines, appropriate use of educational material, cooperative play, developmental milestones, assessment and planning. In addition, experiential learning opportunities would be created for children through celebration of festivals and exposure visits or field trips.

III. Remedial Education

ASER reports show annually how children are lagging behind with basic conceptual knowledge. The Right to Education Act requires children to be promoted to the next class at the end of an academic year irrespective of their levels of learning. Children who are promoted without adequate grade level skills struggle to cope in school. They are at greater risk of drop out and their time in school is not productively spent.

In order to improve learning outcomes and equip children with a stronger educational foundation, we propose initiation of remedial learning classes for children from Stds. 1 to 4. The programme would begin by assessing learning competencies of children. Children who are more than one grade below grade level would be recommended for the remedial learning class. This class would be run during school hours itself. An additional teacher resource would be provided to the school to manage these. The teacher would be required to work with children in small groups and run them through a structured remedial curriculum. Additional worksheets and content would be prepared for the same. The assessment would be repeated in five months at the end of the first term and children who have reached grade level would be integrated back into the classroom.

IV. Reading Programme

Education is not just about learning new information. A key aspect of education is the expansion of brain function. While learning academic course content in science, geography, social studies and mathematics is of great importance, cognitive development of children is of far greater value. Numerous studies have shown that reading is a great tool to promote cognitive development and learning. Research also suggests that learning to read actually improves the way the brain functions.

Children who struggle to read tend to fall behind academically. They find it hard to grasp complex written concepts and are unable to keep up with classwork requirements. The ability to read and comprehend material allows them to self-learn and explore new topics. In addition, reading contributes greatly to a child's imagination. Being exposed to different cultures and ideas, a well-read child tends to have a broader world view. Natural readers also tend to be more confident and better communicators.

We propose a reading programme that encourages children to foster a love for books and reading for pleasure. Through this programme, we will set up a mini library in each class from Std. 1 to 10. Each library comprises of 130 books which are curated keeping in mind the reading abilities and language preferences of the children. The books are carefully selected to be culturally relevant to

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the children while also being well written and beautifully illustrated. In addition, each child will be gifted a set of 5 books each. For many children, these will be the first set of books they own. The children will be encouraged to read and exchange the books with their friends.

Reading journals will be distributed and children will be shown how to record their wish list of books and reviews of books they have read. We will also conduct a series of book reading sessions by children's book authors and other professionals. Through animated readings, they will make the books come alive and intrigue the children to want to read more. Teachers of each class will also be trained in assisted reading techniques.

V. STEM

Science has always been a complex subject for school children. The teaching of these subjects is unfortunately text book centered. Teachers and children approach the subject as a body of facts and a set of answers, absolute and immutable, which explain the universe. Often these explanations come in the form of one word or phrase taught by the teacher and learnt by heart by the student. Science education, in many schools, develops competence but does not encourage inventiveness and creativity.

The first and most basic problem in Science education that has persisted and resisted solution since Independence is our inability to provide schools with labs and equipment to be used while teaching science.

As part of our STEM interventions, we propose to set up a Mini Science Centre in the school. This MSC will be equipped with a range of 65 table top working models with 30 back-drops mapped to 120 concepts of Mathematics and Science for Class 5 through 10. Teachers will be trained in the use of this material. This will allow them to introduce abstract concepts to the children through concrete examples and materials.

For children in Stds. 1 to 5, STEM will be supported through a digital learning platform. This platform is equipped with audio visual lessons on concepts included in their curriculum along with worksheets and exercises. The digital learning platform promises to bring STEM learning alive and make it engaging for students. The modules can be used to introduce different concepts as well as for revision and assimilation.

All teachers in the school connected with STEM will be trained in pedagogy and project based learning methods. We also propose to organize an exposure visit for each class to a place of STEM interest (such as the planetarium, science centre, etc). A STEM newspaper will also be prepared on a monthly basis with contributions from the students themselves. This will include interesting experiments, quizzes, fun facts and other pieces to engage students.

VI. Career Counselling

In today's highly competitive environment, admission into colleges has become a challenge. The cut off percentages are rising and the number of courses available to students has increased

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significantly. Children from marginalized communities often lack the awareness and direction they need to navigate through this complex system and find a career path best suited to them. Right from setting goals for themselves to choosing a college, the process can be daunting for them. Being first generation learners, they often do not have adequate role models showcasing different educational and career paths. At times, they also lack motivation and haven't quite understood where their aspirations lie.

Through this component, we endeavor to support young persons from marginalized communities in setting goals and charting a career path for themselves. Through a structured curriculum, the programme would assist the students in developing a sense of self, a greater understanding of their own abilities and motivations and an awareness of the education and career opportunities available to them. A Career Assessment Battery would be administered consisting of an Intelligence Scale, an Interest Inventory and a Differential Ability Inventory. A detailed report would be prepared for each child and include recommendations based on findings of the assessments and clinical interviews with the child and her teachers/caregivers.

In order to encourage exploration and self-discovery, we are also proposing that a Career Fair be organized by the children. In preparation for the Career Fair, the children would work in groups and research specific careers in detail. They would then be required to create projects / presentations explaining the work profile, required qualifications, career path and projected income for each of the careers. These projects may be displayed by the children for their peers and visitors at an exhibition.

VII. SMC and Community Engagement

The School Management Committee is an official body comprising of parent and teacher representatives with the mandate of overseeing the functioning of the school. Since this is a part of the RTE regulations, schools form these committees diligently. However, the committees are rarely empowered or trained to fulfill their responsibilities. They remain mere placeholders and occasionally are not even aware of having been elected to the SMC. The SMC, as a group of engaged parents, must be leveraged to connect with the larger community.

The project will conduct sensitization workshops with parents on issues affecting children's learning and development. These may include issues faced by girl students, a conducive home environment, low cost nutrition, bullying or abuse, importance of attendance, career opportunities, etc. Parents will be supported in discussing these issues and identifying solutions which can be implemented at the school and community level. In addition, community outreach would be done to initiate a change in attitudes and practices towards children's education. This would be done through home visits and home based interventions, creative methods such as street plays, poster exhibitions and other mediums.

Project Timeline & Budget

The project intervention would be for a period of three years. Based on response received within the first year, the project may continue some interventions in the selected school and identify

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additional schools for interventions in year 2 and year 3. The budget for each year is proposed as INR 35 lakh.

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