

Stories of Change



Empowering Adolescents through Life Skills, Leadership and Creative Expression: The Samarth Project



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Introduction

Adolescents growing up in urban poor areas face challenges that impact their overall well-being and future prospects. Facing challenges ranging from poor nutrition and limited access to healthcare, to unsafe environments and restricted opportunities for personal development, these young people lack the knowledge and support needed to make informed health choices.

Recognizing the urgency of addressing these issues, the Samarth project was launched with the aim of empowering adolescents by equipping them with essential life skills. Through focused training and mentorship, the project sought to nurture adolescent champions ,young leaders who could guide and inspire their peers by drawing from their own life experiences.

A cornerstone of the project was its emphasis on experience based learning. Adolescents participating in the initiative reported noticeable improvements in communication, decision-making, and negotiation skills. These champions played a key role in encouraging open dialogue, building confidence, and fostering a supportive environment for growth and empowerment.

Operating in the Vasna ward of Ahmedabad city, the Samarth project reached 1,748 adolescents - 930 girls and 818 boys across 3,000 households. The initiative demonstrated that when adolescents are empowered and given the right tools, they can become catalysts for change, breaking cycles of poverty and building healthier, more resilient communities.

To celebrate and document this journey, CHETNA, with the support of World Comics, introduced a unique medium of expression: the comic strip. During a three day workshop, adolescents were invited to share their stories focusing their challenges, aspirations, achievements and fears. They learned how to visually narrate their experiences, using illustrations to express what makes them happy or angry, when they feel free or restricted.

The final day of the workshop was a vibrant blend of emotion and joy, as participants brought their personal stories to life through comic strips. These narratives address vital topics like nutritional anaemia, pubertal changes, menstrual hygiene, gender discrimination, and HIV awareness.

In addition to the comic strip initiative, CHETNA's team also conducted field visits and conversations with adolescents to collect further personal stories. .

The stories shared here are more than just illustrations, they are voices of resilience, hope, and transformation.



Nutritional Status and Anaemia

The high prevalence of nutritional anaemia among adolescents in India remains a critical public health concern. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), a significant proportion 59.1% of girls and 31.1% boys aged 15–19 years are affected by anaemia. This condition adversely impacts physical growth, cognitive development, academic performance, work capacity, and reproductive health.

Research indicates that preventive iron supplementation, when combined with nutrition education, is an effective approach to address iron deficiency in this age group.

A baseline survey conducted in Samarth Project among 1,608 adolescents (841 girls and 767 boys) revealed that 1,000 individuals were suffering from either moderate or severe anaemia, accompanied by low Body Mass Index (BMI). Anaemia was especially widespread among girls, with 94% affected largely due to inadequate dietary intake, menstrual blood loss, and the frequent substitution of meals with packaged foods. Interestingly, BMI assessments showed that undernutrition was more common among boys (40%) than girls (30%). Additionally, the baseline study shows that only 15% adolescent followed handwashing practices before eating and after defecation

Education sessions on nutritional anemia, with special focus on consumption of Iron Folic Acid tablets and iron rich food brought about positive changes in nutritional status.

From Pale to Powerful





From Ignorance to Impact: Dhruvi Mahor Leads a Health Revolution in Ekta Nagar

A year and a half ago, 14-year-old Dhruvi Mahor from Ekta Nagar, Vasna, was unaware of the importance of health and hygiene. Like many adolescents in her community, her daily routine revolved around packaged snacks, sugary tea, and fried street food, with little awareness of nutrition or personal well-being.

Everything changed when she crossed paths with Team CHETNA. Through a series of workshops and community engagements led by CHETNA which focused on nutrition, menstrual hygiene, adolescent health, and addiction; Dhruvi not only transformed her own lifestyle but emerged as a inspiration of change for over 100 girls in her community.

Dhruvi began by breaking her unhealthy dietary habits. Previously skipping home-cooked meals and indulging in junk food, she suffered from low haemoglobin levels. It was only 9 g/dl when estimated by CHETNA team. With guidance from the CHETNA team, she adopted the "Tiranga Thali," incorporating green leafy vegetables, milk, and fruits. Within the span of six months, her haemoglobin level increased to 10.8 g/dl.

"Earlier, I used to spend around ₹250 daily on packaged food. After learning about the health risks and financial burden, I switched to a healthier lifestyle and saved ₹1,500, which I gifted to my mother," Dhruvi proudly shares. Her best friend, Purvi Mahor, followed her example, quitting junk food and saving ₹300.

Dhruvi's transformation didn't stop at nutrition. She also overcame a serious addiction consuming nearly 10 sachets of tobacco a day. After learning about the harmful chemicals in tobacco during a CHETNA meeting, she decided to quit. Not only did she succeed, but she motivated Purvi to give it up too.

Her awareness around menstruation has also drastically improved. From using just one sanitary pad per day and disposing it inappropriately, she now changes her pad three times a day, wraps it properly in paper, and disposes it in a bin.

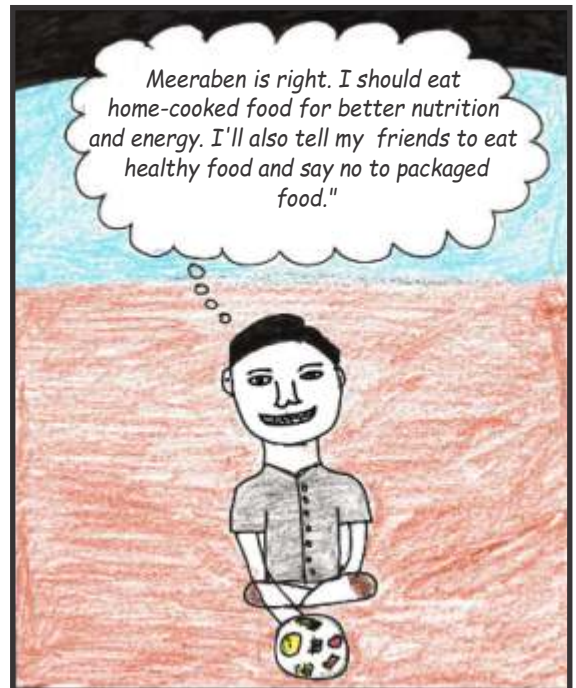
With a better understanding of menstrual health, she now manages mood swings, fatigue, and pain using warm compresses and open communication with her sister, mother, and friends. Importantly, she has been sharing this knowledge with other girls in the community.

Reflecting on her journey, Dhruvi says, “During the project, I also learned about gender equality. I realized that women often fall behind due to unequal opportunities. I want to be the voice of change and push for gender equality in my community.”

From ignorance to advocacy, Dhruvi Mahor's journey is a testament to the power of awareness, determination, and collective effort. She stands tall, not just as a beneficiary but also as a leader of transformation in her community.



A Healthy Choice, A better life





Kuldeep: A Young Champion of Healthy Dietary Habits

Twelve year old Kuldeep, a Class 7 student in a government school in Vasna has become a role model in his community by championing the cause of healthy dietary habits.

His mother, Priyankaben Mahendra Bhai Odn, recalls, "Earlier, Kuldeep habitually consumed 5-6 packets of snacks or namkeens daily. He would demand Rs. 25-30 every day and throw a fit if I denied. However, ever since he learned about the ill effects of packaged food from CHETNA team members, he has completely given up this habit. Now, he chooses only home-cooked meals."

Kuldeep participated in various awareness activities conducted by Team CHETNA in the Savansinagar area. These activities helped him gain knowledge about the link between food and health, inspiring him to make significant changes to his diet. He has adopted the Tiranga Thali approach and now regularly includes peanuts and fruits like bananas, mangoes, and watermelons, alongside home-cooked meals.

His dietary changes, coupled with the regular consumption of iron tablets, have led to a notable increase in his haemoglobin levels from 10.3 g/dl to 11.6 g/dl. Kuldeep shares, "I love drumsticks, and when CHETNA team members informed me about nutritional benefits of its leaves, I included it in my diet. Earlier, I disliked milk and dairy products, but now I include them in my meals to complete the 'white' component of the Tiranga Thali. I also enjoy green vegetables and regularly eat home-cooked non-vegetarian food, which I previously avoided."

A positive side effect of his lifestyle change, is the money he now saves. Since he no longer spends on packaged snacks, he happily uses his savings for stationery items and saves some for the future.

Beyond diet, Kuldeep now washes his hands before and after meals and after using the rest room, a practice he also has taught his family and friends. He has also started wearing footwear while playing, understanding that germs can enter the body through the feet and cause infections and illnesses.

Kuldeep and his family were introduced to these healthy habits through CHETNA's awareness sessions. The sessions were interactive and engaging, featuring games where winners were rewarded with nutritious food items. In one such game, Kuldeep's mother won lemons and was educated about their health benefits, which she found easy to understand and incorporate into her family's diet. Another popular activity was a health-themed version of Snakes and Ladders, which resonated well with both children and adults.

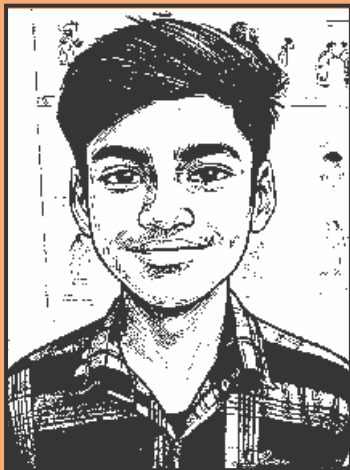
One common yet risky practice in many households is dipping hands directly into water containers to fetch a glass of water, leading to contamination and increased disease risk. Upon CHETNA's suggestion, Kuldeep's family switched to a water dispenser with a tap, ensuring safer drinking water.

Kuldeep's influence has extended beyond his home. He shared his newfound knowledge with his cousin Pritam, who visited him during vacation. Inspired by Kuldeep, Pritam also began consuming milk, vegetables, and non-vegetarian food while making other positive lifestyle changes. Additionally, Kuldeep educated his friends, Veer and Prahlad, about the dangers of tobacco, successfully encouraging them to quit.

His impact even reached his mother. Priyanka admits, "I was addicted to *gutkha* (*chewing tobacco*). After Kuldeep educated me about its harmful effects, I have significantly reduced my consumption because I do not want to suffer from cancer. I have also decided to ensure that my three young daughters receive wholesome, nutritious food so they can lead healthy, disease-free lives."

Kuldeep's story is a testament to the power of knowledge and awareness. His journey from an unhealthy lifestyle to becoming a community health advocate showcases the ripple effect of positive change in one child inspiring an entire family and beyond.





Harsh Can Now Pursue His Love for Drawing Thanks to Healthier Choices!

Many adolescents initially responded with “No time, no interest” when invited to CHETNA's workshops and training programs. However, today, they eagerly participate in every CHETNA event, realizing the immense value of these sessions.

One such adolescent is Harsh Dipakbhai Madhav, an 11th standard student from Yogeshwar Nagar. His father works as a mason, and his mother is a tailor. With a strong aptitude for Mathematics, Harsh was quick to calculate the financial impact of his daily packaged food consumption of Rs. 60 per day. When CHETNA's team explained the health risks of processed foods and encouraged him to switch to home-cooked meals, he decided to give it a try.

"Earlier, my mother would scold me for eating packaged foods and insist on home-cooked meals, but I never listened. However, after CHETNA's sessions on nutrition, I understood the importance of a balanced diet. Learning about the Tiranga Thali was fascinating and I started adding orange, white, and green foods to my plate. This made my mother very happy!"

The impact of this change was visible, on Harsh's hemoglobin levels which increase from 11 g/dl to 13 g/dl. He also motivated his friend Nikhil to adopt a healthier diet.

Harsh has always been passionate about sketching, but he often lacked the resources to pursue it. Now, with the money he saves by avoiding packaged foods, he invests in stationery materials to hone his drawing skills.

Through CHETNA's workshops, Harsh also gained crucial knowledge about adolescence. He now follows proper hygiene practices, using soap and water for personal cleanliness. His newfound awareness has inspired his friends and younger brother to do the same, reducing the risk of allergies and infections in their daily lives.

Moreover, Harsh overcame misconceptions about masturbation and nightfall. Earlier, he believed that masturbation weakens the body and that nightfall is a disease. Now, he understands that these are natural physiological processes and nothing to be ashamed of. He also learned that acne and pimples are common during adolescence due to hormonal changes, easing his previous concerns.

Initially, Harsh and his friends avoided CHETNA's sessions, citing "no time, no interest." But once they attended, they realized how much they were gaining. Today, they actively participate and acknowledge the transformation brought about by these sessions in their lives.

For the CHETNA team, this is a moment of immense pride witnessing young minds embrace knowledge, make informed choices, and build healthier, brighter futures!





Pubertal changes and Menstruation

Adolescence is a critical developmental phase marked by rapid physical, emotional, and psychological changes. It represents a major biological, cognitive, and social transition, which can be overwhelming and difficult for adolescents to manage. This period of transformation often leads to challenges such as eating disorders, accidents, substance abuse, depression, engagement in risky sexual behaviours, and even anti-social activities.

One of the significant challenges faced by adolescents is the lack of accurate and age-appropriate information about the physiological, psychological, and sexual changes they experience. In India, the social environment rarely provides structured opportunities for young people to gain this essential knowledge.

A particularly concerning issue is the limited access to scientific information about menstruation, especially among urban adolescent girls. For many, the first menstrual experience is shocking and traumatic, largely due to a lack of prior knowledge or preparation. Deep-rooted cultural taboos portray menstrual blood as impure, leading to stigmatization and social exclusion during menstruation. This fosters feelings of shame and negatively impacts girls' self-esteem. In many households and communities, menstrual health is not openly discussed, leaving girls to cope with confusion and misinformation.

A baseline survey of the Samarth project revealed that only 45% of girls reported practising menstrual hygiene. Recognizing this gap, the project implemented structured educational sessions for adolescents. These sessions aimed to enhance their understanding of the human body, with a focus on reproductive health and the functioning of reproductive organs. Comprehensive and scientific information about menstruation and menstrual hygiene was provided. These sessions not only improved knowledge but also created a safe space for adolescent girls to share their experiences, voice concerns, and break the silence around menstruation.

Breaking the Silence





Lalita: A Young Changemaker Transforming Her Family's Health

A tragic incident from Ulhasnagar, Maharashtra, sent shockwaves across the country. A 12-year-old girl, unaware of menstruation, stained her clothes when she got her first period. Her 30-year-old brother, misinterpreting this as a sign of physical intimacy, subjected her to relentless torture, ultimately leading to her death. He was later arrested.

This heart-breaking incident is a stark reminder of the deep-rooted ignorance surrounding menstruation in our society. If people lack basic knowledge about menstruation, how can they be expected to understand the physical and mental health challenges associated with it? At such times, organizations like CHETNA play a crucial role in creating awareness and dispelling myths. For years, CHETNA has been working in Vasna urban poor area of Ahmedabad city, to educate adolescents about menstruation, reproductive health, nutrition, addiction hazards, and hygiene.

Lalita's Journey of Change

Lalita Sargara, a 17 year old from Someshwar nagar, has been associated with CHETNA through CHETNA's activities with adolescents. Actively participating in CHETNA's sessions, she has made significant improvements in her own life and has influenced those around her. "Earlier, we had no knowledge about our own bodies. We didn't understand menstruation, reproductive organs, or even the urinary system. But CHETNA's team explained everything in a simple and effective way using aprons printed with anatomical diagrams. We now stand out from our crowd at school, as they are still ignorant and confused about these issues as they have never been taught about the same. "

One of the first ways Lalita applied her learning was by helping her cousin Heena. When Heena got her first period, she panicked, not knowing what was happening to her body. Instead of suffering in silence, she reached out to Lalita, who calmly explained menstruation, menstrual hygiene, and the importance of nutrition.

Heena is now comfortable discussing periods with her family and ensures she follows proper menstrual hygiene, including changing sanitary pads 2-3 times a day.

Lalita's participation as a "Youth Champion" in CHETNA's "Life Skills Training Program" has empowered her to adopt and advocate for healthier lifestyle choices. She now follows a Tiranga Thali diet, which has helped her increase her hemoglobin levels from 7 g/dl to 11.10 g/dl. By including more home-cooked, nutritious meals with green leafy vegetables and reducing packaged food consumption, she feels physically stronger. Beyond her own well-being, she took an active step in helping her brothers quit tobacco.

Learning about its harmful effects from CHETNA, she convinced them to give up the habit and focus on eating healthy and nutritious food instead.

Lalita's story is a powerful example of how knowledge and awareness can transform lives—not just for individuals, but for entire families and communities. With young leaders like her, a healthier and more informed future is within reach!





"Red Is Powerful": How Renu Turned Menstrual Stigma into Strength

It was February 2023. In a packed hall of 150 people at a public school in Vasna, Ahmedabad, a confident 19 year old took the microphone and captivated the audience.

"Menstruation is a normal physiological process. A regular menstrual cycle indicates a healthy body and mind. It's time we break the silence, reject the shame, and embrace the truth. Red Achha Hai! she declared, with a spark in her eyes and conviction in her voice.

Meet Renu Prajapati, a young changemaker and voice for menstrual dignity.

Just over a year and a half ago, Renu was like any other adolescent girls curious, unsure, and struggling with unanswered questions: Why do only girls menstruate? Why can't we touch pickles or water the Tulsi plant during our period? Why do our moods shift during menstruation?

These questions found a safe space and scientific answers thanks to CHETNA's awareness sessions in her community. Through engaging and respectful discussions, the CHETNA team helped Renu and many others understand that menstruation is more than just managing pads, it is an integral aspect of a woman's reproductive health.

Empowered with knowledge, Renu took it upon herself to educate others. "My cousin Vandana used to be scared and confused about her period," she shares. "I explained to her what I learned from CHETNA. Now, she manages it with confidence." Renu also guided her friend Aarti on menstrual hygiene and healthy eating, which she readily adopted.

Before CHETNA's sessions, Renu and her friends hesitated to talk about physical changes or ask questions especially about the pubertal changes in boys. But CHETNA created a judgment-free environment where their doubts were heard and addressed. The girls, once hesitant and unsure, became informed and self-assured.

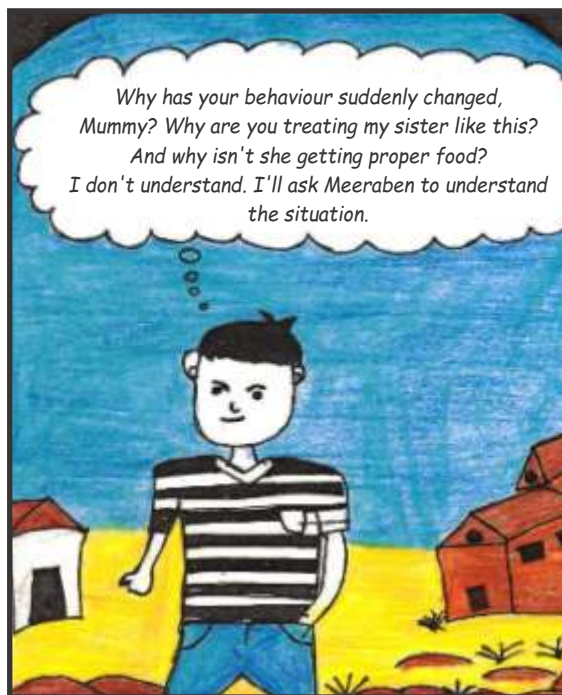
Renu was soon selected as a “Youth Champion” and trained in life skills. This experience sharpened her leadership abilities and boosted her confidence. It also helped her reflect on her lifestyle choices. The girl who once thrived on instant noodles and junk food, now chooses green leafy vegetables, dairy, and home-cooked meals.

Renu's transformation became contagious. She helped her father quit tobacco after learning about its harmful effects. She also educated her mother about menstruation and reproductive health.

Inspired by her daughter, Renu's mother now says, “Now that I understand the importance of reproductive health, I have decided not to marry off my daughter at a young age. I want her to achieve her educational dreams and I will spread this awareness to our relatives too.”



Together to stop Gender discrimination





From Myths to Facts: Himesh's Journey of Awareness and Transformation

Sixteen year old Himesh Jadav from Shakti Nagar, Vasna, once believed, *"Masturbation is a sin. One drop of semen is equal to 100 drops of blood. So, masturbating weakens the body and spoils future sexual life."* These misconceptions, passed on by his friends, filled his mind with fear and confusion during his adolescence. He had many such doubts about his growing body but didn't know where to turn for reliable answers.

This is when CHETNA's team stepped in. Through the 'Samarth' project, they addressed Himesh's questions with accurate, scientific information about masturbation, nightfall, and other physical changes during adolescence. The guidance helped clear his misconceptions and replaced fear with clarity.

A 12th-grade student, Himesh has been regularly attending CHETNA's meetings and training workshops for over a year and a half. These sessions not only provided him knowledge but also built his self-confidence. Once a shy and confused boy who couldn't even talk to his elder brother or father about his doubts, Himesh has now grown into an aware and confident young man.

He didn't keep the knowledge to himself. Himesh actively shared what he learned with his friends and cousins. He reflects, *"Before CHETNA, no organization had ever visited our community. Our schools gave us knowledge, but no one taught us about our bodies, health, nutrition, or adolescence. CHETNA has been like a friend and a support system to us."*

Himesh also made positive changes in his lifestyle. Initially, he avoided milk and dairy products, but after CHETNA's sessions, he started including them in his daily diet. He reduced packaged snacks and namkeens, instead choosing leafy vegetables and home-cooked meals. His parents supported him, even if the new choices meant slightly higher costs.

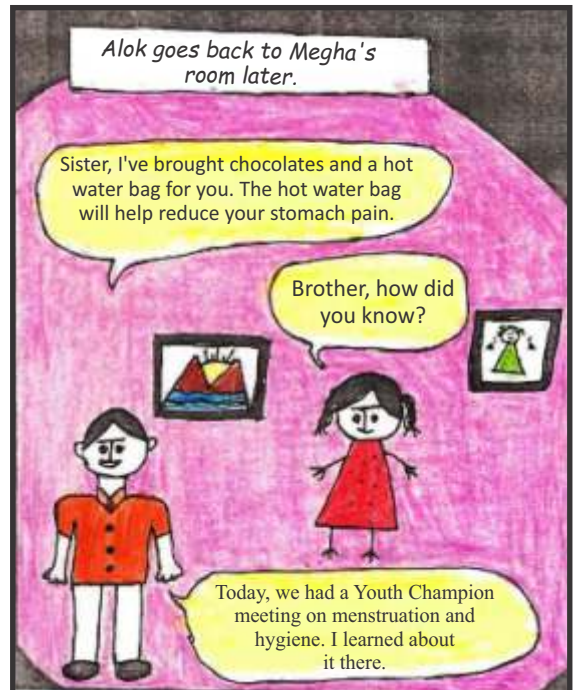
In June 2022, CHETNA organized a BMI and haemoglobin testing camp in his area. At the time, Himesh's haemoglobin was just 10 g/dl. With dietary improvements and increased physical activity, his Hb rose to 13 g/dl. His stamina and overall fitness have improved significantly, and he has become a role model for others in his community.

He also took part in CHETNA's "Small Awareness Activities." Learning about the harmful effects of tobacco, Himesh gave it up completely. He now also follows good oral hygiene practices and brushes his teeth twice daily.

Speaking enthusiastically, he says, *"My favourite program was the Life Skills Training. I met other young people, played games like Kho Kho and Langdi. We lost at first but practised hard and finally won! I also learned leadership, teamwork, and managerial skills. Now I dream of pursuing an Masters in Business Administration. I feel ready to live a healthier life and face life's challenges with confidence!"*



The Strength of Knowing



Hygiene Heals

Mahi meets Priya

Mahi, I've been experiencing itching in the vaginal area during my periods. What should I do?

Oh, I remember hearing in the menstrual hygiene meeting that this could happen if menstrual hygiene is not maintained

There's a menstrual hygiene session tomorrow, and I'll be there. You should attend the meeting too. Can you come?

Okay, I'll come to the meeting.

Periods and Hygiene Class. At the end of the session, the girl reflects on what she's learned.

Oh no, I haven't been following these practices. I really need to take better care of myself and follow this advice:

- Take a bath twice a day
- Change your pad every 4 hours
- Eat nutritious food
- Exercise regularly

Mahi meets Priya after 2 months

How are you, Priya? I hope you're feeling better now.

Yes, I feel so much better now. The itching has stopped. I've been following all the hygiene practices during my periods, and I even share this information with my friends now.



HIV/AIDS

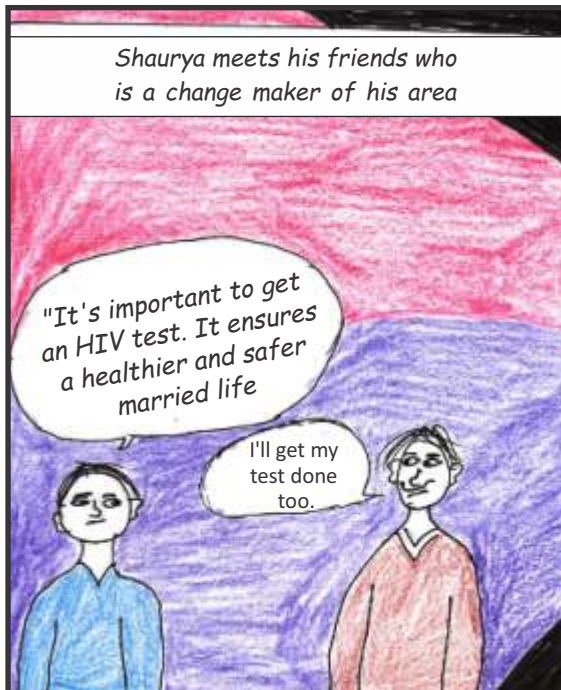
It is an undeniable reality that many adolescents are engaging in sexual activities, which places them at a significant risk of sexual and reproductive health issues, including HIV. However, these young individuals often lack the autonomy and knowledge required to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. As a result, unprotected sexual activity can lead to unwanted pregnancies, unsafe and illegal abortions, increased morbidity and mortality, and a higher risk of contracting reproductive tract infections (RTIs), sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV/AIDS.

Our experience indicates that empowering adolescent girls with accurate information about RTIs, STIs, and HIV combined with life skills such as effective communication and negotiation can have a transformative impact. These tools not only help them protect their health but also build their confidence to make informed and responsible choices about their bodies and lives.

From Fear to Friendship



New Generation, New Thoughts





Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination remains a significant challenge faced by adolescent girls, impacting their overall development and well-being. From an early age, many girls experience unequal treatment in their families, schools, and communities. They are often expected to conform to traditional gender roles, which limit their opportunities for education, mobility, and decision-making. This discrimination becomes more pronounced during adolescence, a time when girls face increasing restrictions on their behaviour and appearance, while their male peers often enjoy greater freedom and support. These inequalities affect girls' confidence, self-esteem, and aspirations. In many cases, they are denied access to critical information about their health and rights, leaving them more vulnerable to issues such as early marriage, violence, and exploitation. Addressing gender discrimination is essential to ensure that adolescent girls can grow into empowered, informed, and independent individuals.

During the baseline survey of Samarth Project, it was observed that a significant percentage of girls (40%) discontinued their education after completing the 8th standard to support their mothers, who work as domestic workers. In contrast, boys typically completed the 10th standard before taking up jobs such as delivery work or employment in malls.

Adolescents' wellbeing is influenced by multiple stakeholders, including parents, teachers, community leaders, health workers and policymakers. Their active engagement is crucial in creating a supportive environment that fosters education, health and gender equality.

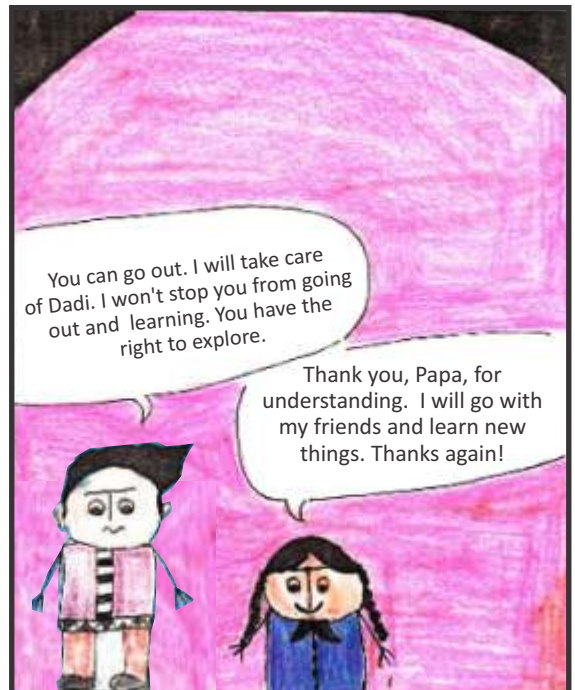
To accelerate change, mass awareness activities were organized to shape community perceptions, break gender stereotypes, and foster a supportive environment for adolescents. Street plays were conducted to raise awareness on key issues such as gender equality, child marriage prevention, the health risks of early pregnancies and the importance of education for all. These interactive performances reached over 7300 community members, sparking dialogue and encouraging social change.

To reinforce positive messaging, wall paintings were created in public spaces, illustrating the same themes. These visual messages serve as constant reminders, helping to shift mindsets over time.

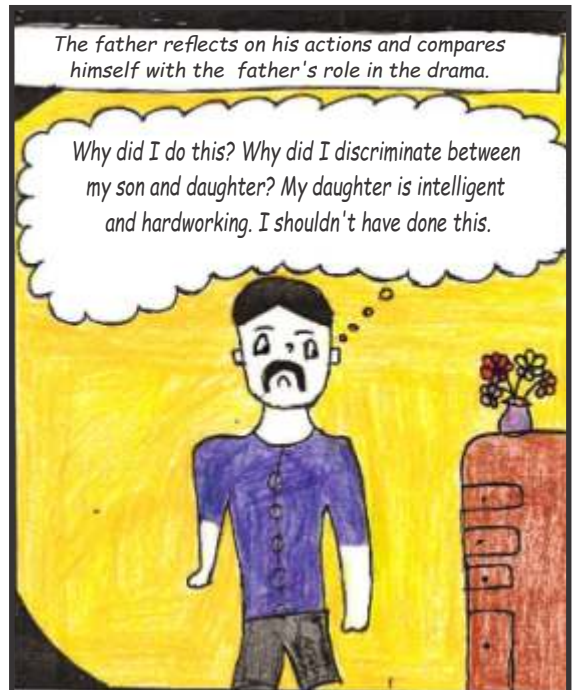
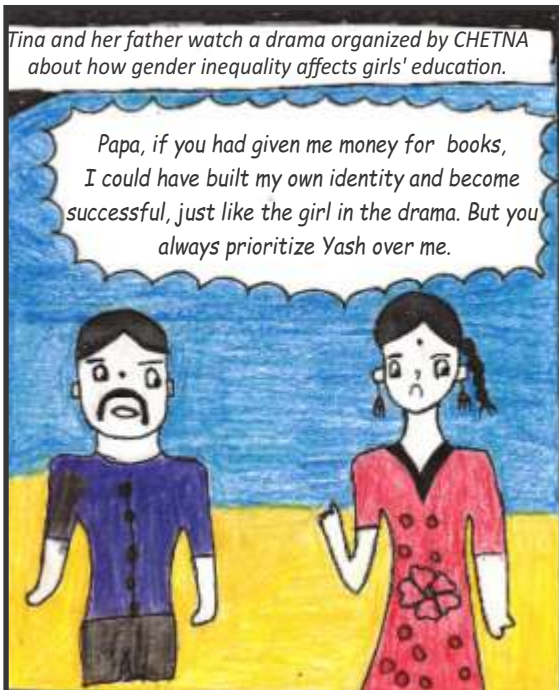
Education: Wings to Meetal's Dream



Breaking barriers, Building Dreams



Too late to Let Tina fly



When Parents Trust, Children Thrive





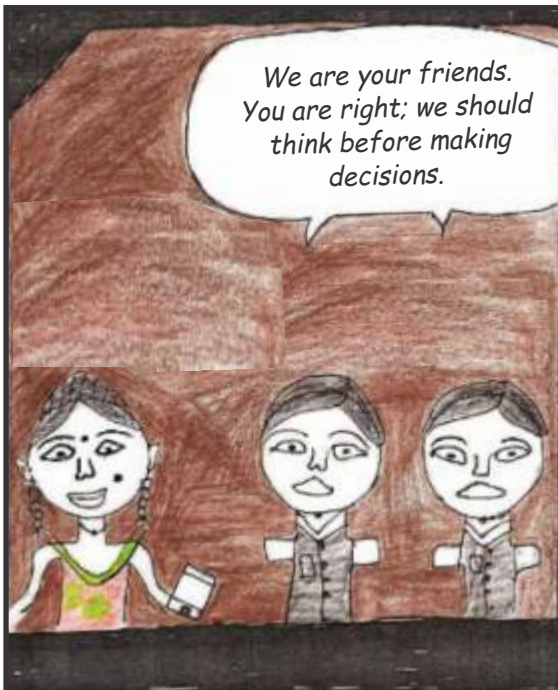
Life Skills

Life skills education is a vital component of adolescent development, equipping young people with the knowledge, values, and abilities needed to navigate the challenges of everyday life. It fosters critical thinking, effective communication, decision-making, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills which helps adolescents to build confidence and resilience. Life skills education empowers adolescents to make informed choices, build healthy relationships, and grow into responsible, self-aware adults.

As part of the initiative to empower adolescents and enhance their leadership potential, 200 adolescents with strong leadership and communication skills were identified and selected as Youth Champions through a structured process.

These youth champions underwent comprehensive life skills training, covering key areas such as self-esteem, communication, decision making, and critical thinking. To further strengthen their skills, a specially designed workbook was introduced providing structured exercise and activities to reinforce learning and real-life application

Bhavana chose class over cake





From Silence to Strength: Urvashi Rathod Leads by Example

“Life Skills Training has boosted my confidence.” “Consuming diverse and nutritious food has been a game changer for me. I rarely fall sick now.”

These are the words of 17-year-old Urvashi Shiva Bhai Rathod, a resident of Krushna Nagar in Vasna and a student of Class 12.

Just over a year ago, Urvashi was a shy and reserved girl who would stay silent even when spoken to. She lacked the confidence to participate in discussions or express her thoughts. But everything changed after she attended CHETNA's Life Skills Training sessions.

“I had never participated in any such training before. The Life Skills Training by CHETNA has transformed me, I can now speak with confidence and express myself clearly,” says Urvashi.

CHETNA organized 6 such training sessions for 200 adolescent "champions" across 8 zones in Vasna. For Urvashi, the change began from the very first session. Interactive games, discussions, and bonding activities helped her connect with peers and break out of her shell. “This was the first time I truly interacted with other children,” she shares.

Earlier, Urvashi often fell ill with frequent episodes of cough, cold, and fever. Her meals consisted mostly of packaged snacks and tea, often skipping home-cooked food. But through a creative Health Snakes and Ladders game and engaging health camps, she learned about nutrition and hygiene. She was introduced to the Tiranga Thali concept and started including green leafy vegetables, milk, and fruits in her meals. She also reduced her tea intake, avoided junk food, and followed proper handwashing practices.

As a result of these changes, her haemoglobin levels improved significantly from 9 g/dl to 11.7 g/dl. She now takes iron tablets regularly and actively asks for them. She has also passed on her learning to her family, parents, grandparents,

younger brother and close friends Shreya, Prachi, and Anuradha, all of whom now follow healthy habits.

One of the most touching aspects of Urvashi's transformation has been her awareness around menstruation. Earlier bound by taboos and confined to a room during her periods, she is now informed and empowered. Thanks to CHETNA's creative demonstration using aprons with organ illustrations, she understood her body better and overcame myths related to menstruation.

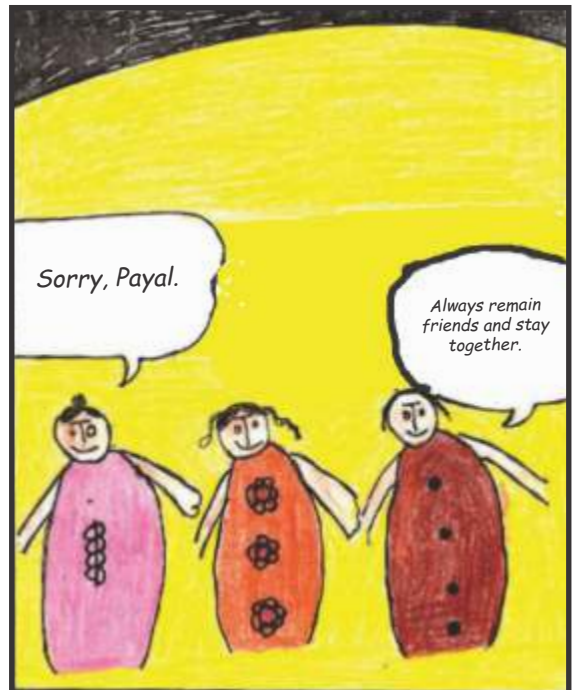
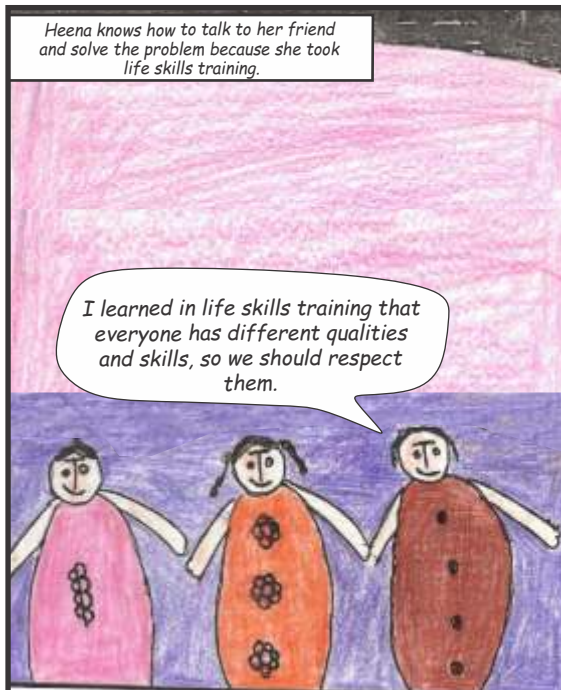
She has shifted from using cloth to sanitary pads and ensures proper disposal. She even carries an extra pad to school to help other girls in need. "CHETNA has brought real, positive change in my home during menstruation. We are no longer bound by outdated restrictions," she says proudly.

Looking ahead, Urvashi aspires to study nursing and contribute to building a healthier society.

Her journey from hesitation to leadership is a powerful example of how knowledge, confidence, and care can create a ripple of change. With young changemakers like her, the future truly looks bright.



True Beauty Knows No Shade





From Confusion to Confidence: Sahil Dantani Champions Change in Sorainagar

Just 1.5 years ago, 18-year-old Sahil Dantani, a 12th standard student from Sorainagar, was struggling with confusion, myths, and a lack of direction. Surrounded by misconceptions about natural bodily processes like masturbation and nightfall, and heavily reliant on junk food like noodles, pani puri, and packaged snacks, Sahil's physical health and self-esteem were both at a low point. His haemoglobin level was just 7 gm/dl.

The turning point came when CHETNA began its work in Sahil's community. Through interactive training sessions and workshops on nutrition, hygiene, adolescent health, and life skills, Sahil found the answers he had long been seeking along with the confidence to make lasting changes.

Today, Sahil is a transformed young man. He no longer hesitates to ask questions or speak openly about issues affecting adolescents. With improved awareness, he now practices proper hygiene, including washing his hands with soap and cleaning his private parts regularly—habits that he has also encouraged in his friends Akash, Vivek, and Mayur.

He has adopted CHETNA's *Tiranga Thali*, including green leafy vegetables, pulses, and fruits in his daily meals. As a result, his haemoglobin level has risen to 11.7 g/dl. His healthier lifestyle has even inspired his mother to cook more nutritious meals at home.

Sahil shares, “My mother still hasn't quit tobacco, even though I've been trying hard to convince her. She spends ₹50 daily on it. But I haven't given up, I'll continue trying until she stops completely. On the brighter side, my uncle has quit tobacco because of my constant encouragement.”

Sahil also participated in a life skills drama organised by CHETNA with the core message being of teamwork and leadership. Since then, Sahil has become more confident. He made new friends through CHETNA's Life Skills program and continues to share the knowledge he has gained with others in his neighborhood.

Importantly, Sahil has also overcome the stigma and embarrassment associated with discussing puberty-related concerns. He now understands that nightfall and masturbation are normal and natural bodily processes, thanks to scientifically accurate information provided by CHETNA's educators.

Sahil has not only transformed his own life but is actively influencing the lives of others encouraging 7–8 adolescents to join CHETNA's programs. His story reflects the true spirit of youth empowerment.





Addiction and Social Media

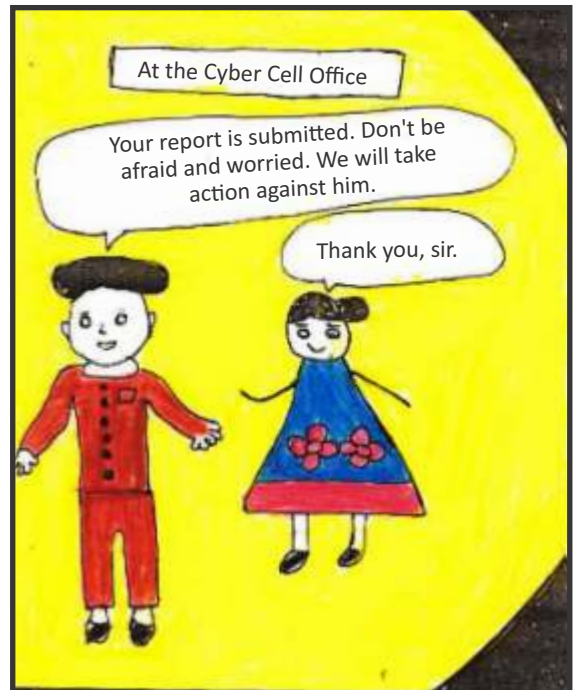
The use of tobacco, alcohol, and other harmful substances has become a growing global concern, especially among children and adolescents. The accessibility and social acceptance of these substances have significantly contributed to their increased usage among young people.

The early initiation into substance use is associated with a range of serious health and social consequences. Alcohol and tobacco consumption in adolescence can interfere with normal brain development, leading to cognitive impairment, poor academic performance, and long-term dependency. Furthermore, substance use among youth has been linked to physical violence, high-risk sexual behaviour, road accidents, depression, self-harm, and even suicide. It also contributes to irregular school attendance, increased dropout rates, and challenges in maintaining consistent employment or vocational training.

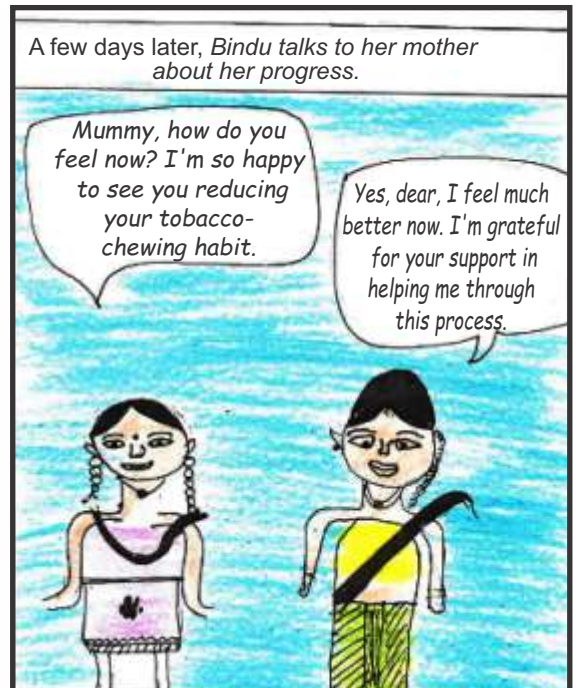
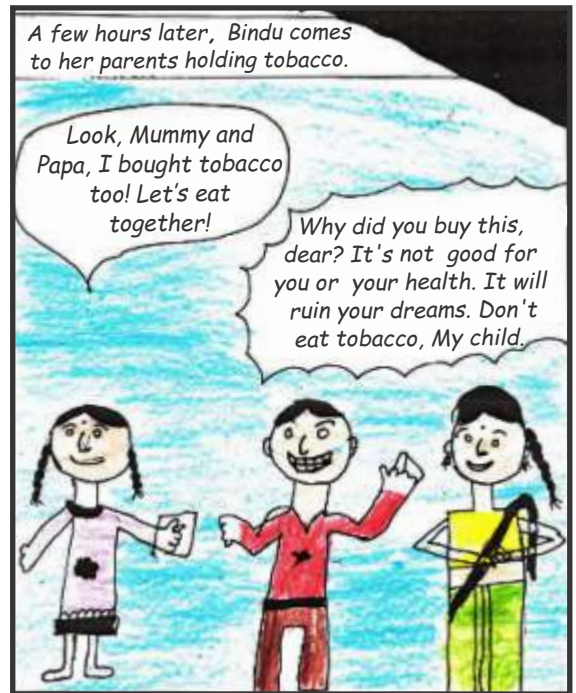
Another growing concern in this digital age is the widespread and often unchecked use of mobile phones among adolescents. A large number of adolescents now have access to smartphones, either their own or borrowed from parents.

Mobile phone overuse is becoming a form of behavioural addiction, with adolescents spending several hours a day glued to their screens. This constant exposure has been linked to sleep disturbances, decreased physical activity, poor concentration, and increased anxiety. It also negatively impacts critical thinking, creativity, and real-world social interactions, thereby affecting overall emotional and Intellectual development.

Dar ke aage jeet hai



Happiness begins with a Tobacco free Life





Payal's Power: A 13-Year-Old Girl Who Led Her Family and Friends Towards a Tobacco -Free Life

"If I can quit, why not my father and friends?" – Payal

Thirteen year old Payal from Yogeshwar Nagar, Vasna, achieved something many adults struggle with. She not only quit tobacco herself, but inspired her father and friends to do the same. A rare and powerful transformation for a girl so young!

Her father, Vikrambhai Rajput, works at V.S. Hospital. Despite witnessing patients suffer in the cancer ward due to tobacco consumption, he continued using it. Both Payal and her younger sister Priya had also taken up the habit. But today, none of them consume tobacco and it's all thanks to Payal's determination.

The turning point came about 1.5 years ago when CHETNA began organizing awareness and education sessions in their community. The team regularly visited homes, talking about health, hygiene, and nutrition. In one such session, they discussed the dangers of tobacco and its link to cancer. Payal attended the session with her mother and sisters, and it changed everything.

That day, both Payal and Priya decided to quit tobacco completely and succeeded. But Payal didn't stop there. She took it upon herself to help her father quit too. It wasn't easy, but with constant persuasion and support, he finally gave it up and never went back.

Encouraged by her success, Payal convinced several of her friends Bhagvati, Kashak, Karina, Ankita, Kesar, Mahinur, and Minhas to stop using tobacco. They all made the shift towards a healthier lifestyle, inspired by Payal's leadership.

Payal also made big changes in her daily diet. Earlier, she would begin her day with unhealthy street and packaged foods like papad with potatoes, wafers, pani puri, kurkure spending ₹20–25 daily. After learning about balanced diets and the *Tiranga Thali* from CHETNA, she switched to home-cooked meals, milk, dairy products, and started including green leafy vegetables especially coriander, which she didn't like initially.

These changes made a significant difference in her health. Her haemoglobin, which was earlier just 8 g/dl rose to 11 g/dl, thanks to improved eating habits and regular iron supplementation.

Though Payal has not yet started menstruating, she feels prepared. CHETNA's sessions on menstrual hygiene helped her elder sister manage menstruation better with regular changing of sanitary pads, good personal hygiene, and understanding the importance of nutrition during this stage.

Payal now practices proper hand washing with soap and water before and after meals and after using the toilet and encourages her family and peers to do the same.

What makes Payal truly remarkable is not just her personal transformation, but her unwavering commitment to inspire change in others, be it her family or her circle of friends. At just 13, she is a role model of resilience, knowledge, and leadership.





A Healthy Choice: Komal's Fight Against Tobacco and Tradition

In Yogeshwar Nagar, Vasna. Ahmedabad city Team CHETNA had organised a health awareness session. During the session, adolescents and women were engaged in a discussion about healthy and unhealthy habits. As the conversation turned to the harmful effects of tobacco consumption, three adolescent sisters Komal, Asha, and Monica abruptly left the meeting.

What went wrong? The youngest of the three, Komal Rameshbhai Dantani, later shared, *"We were addicted to tobacco. I also used snuff. We didn't like hearing about its harmful effects, so we left the meeting."*

But Team CHETNA was determined to bring about a positive change. After the session, they visited the sisters at their home and patiently spoke to them again about the serious health risks associated with tobacco use. Their persistence paid off. Komal and her sisters promised to quit tobacco, and they kept their promise!

"Quitting tobacco was challenging for me. I was consuming 5-6 packets daily. But the CHETNA team counselled us about its harmful effects, including its link to cancer. That made me decide to quit completely," says Komal.

However, the withdrawal was tough. To cope with the urge, she initially replaced tobacco with packaged snacks and junk food. But with continued guidance from CHETNA, she gradually shifted to a healthier diet, incorporating vegetables and fruits.

Now, Komal not only feels physically stronger but also notices significant improvements in her overall well-being. Her hemoglobin level, which was alarmingly low at 7.6 g/dl, is steadily increasing due to a combination of quitting tobacco, consuming a Tiranga Thali, and taking iron supplements. She no longer experiences fatigue, mood swings, or frequent illnesses. Additionally, the money she previously spent on tobacco is now used to buy nutritious food, including pulses and non-vegetarian items.

Komal belongs to the Devipujak community, which imposes strict restrictions on menstruating women, including prohibitions on cooking and touching men. Women are even required to use separate daily essentials, and any violation of these rules results in a hefty fine of ₹12,000 paid to temple authorities.

Despite these rigid traditions, Komal has embraced proper menstrual hygiene. She ensures she bathes twice a day, eats nutritious food, and maintains cleanliness by using soap and water.

Beyond her own transformation, Komal has encouraged her friend Payal and her sisters to adopt a healthier lifestyle. Coming from a family of seven sisters, five of whom are married, Komal understands the struggles of missed opportunities. Her parents, who sell vegetables, were forced to stop her schooling during the COVID-19 crisis due to financial constraints.

But Komal's determination remains unshaken. She loves school and dreams of continuing her education to build a better future.

With young changemakers like Komal, the future of our country is in the right hands!



Less Screen, More Success

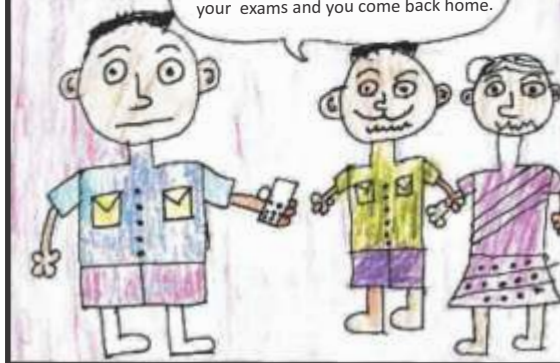
Society Compund

Bhumir spends long hours on his phone, leading to consistently low marks in school exams



Bhumir, why are you always on the phone? You've lost interest in your studies! Hand it over right now!

No phone until your grades improves. No one will use the phone until after your exams and you come back home.



A few days later, Bhumir meets his friends.

Kannu, Jayesh, Rahul, let's go out and play!

Yes, let's go!



After coming home, Bhumir proudly shares his results with his father.

Papa, I scored 80% in my exams, and I've also been selected for the cricket team! Thank you, Papa.

Very good, Bhumir! I'm glad to see you focusing on both studies and sports. Reducing screen time has definitely paid off!





CHETNA

For Women Young people Children

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