





# LIFE AND TIMES OF ANANDSHALA

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### INTRODUCTION

The School Dropout Prevention Pilot (SDPP) program is a five-year multi-country program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, aimed at mitigating student dropout from primary and secondary school. Its objective is to provide evidence-based programming guidance to USAID missions and countries in Asia and the Middle East (AME) on student dropout prevention by piloting and testing the effectiveness of dropout prevention interventions in four target countries: Cambodia, India, Tajikistan and Timor Leste.

In India, this program (Anandshala) is being designed and implemented by QUEST Alliance. Anadshala is implemented in the Samastipur district of Bihar, in partnership with the Bihar Education Project Council and targets Grade five students in thirteen blocks of the district.

While its primary aim is to address student dropouts, it also focuses on reducing chronic absenteeism. It ensures holistic school and home based interventions designed specifically to engage and place responsibilities on parents, teachers and children equally. To increase enrollment and attendance in schools, efforts are made to create child-friendly experiences in schools and build channels of positive communication and collaboration among parents and schools.



## ARCHANA KUMARI Teacher SCHOOL UMS MORSAND

## **66** Ients

Students love her and are desciplined in her class. said the head master

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#### LIFE AND TIMES OF ANANDSHALA

## **Dreams Come True**

Archana Kumari is a teacher with many dreams and is constantly driven to explore new avenues. She is not only a class teacher at the Morsand school but out of her own interest, she works as the Enrichment Programme teacher for the School Dropout Prevention Programme. Even though her husband was supportive of her career choice, he was not too keen on her pursuing her dream of being a singer. Before the SDPP programme, with responsibilities at home and serving different roles she did not think she would be able to fulfill all her dreams.

She first got acquainted with the SDPP programme after she joined a government school. After seeing her interest in teaching, she was recommended by the Head Master as a potential EP teacher. Even though she had attended other teacher training workshops before, the training that was conducted as a part of the SDPP programme immensely affected her. She began to understand how teaching skills can be developed and applied to classrooms. She began to understand the relevance of focusing on every student in class, breaking sentences, and repeatedly explaining things with examples. Her classes had full attendance and the students were also well disciplined.

The SDPP programme also encouraged her to apply her singing skills to teaching her students creatively. She used these skills during energizing sessions. Using music, she helped students memorize the poem easily. She played word games to increase the vocabulary of the students, which increased cooperation and coordination among students, helped in removing hesitation in students and holding their interest in studies.

She has realized that Anandshala is a platform that has helped her hone in on her skills and build a rapport with her peer. Through this programme she has managed to positively influence the lives of many people. She has also managed to improve her communication skills and English language. She is grateful for the training she has received through the Anandshala programme and all the skills she has developed through it.

She says that because of the SDPP programme, she has gained tremendous respect not just within her family and with her in laws but also the entire community. Parents of children in schools are from her community and have witnessed Archana's dedication and participation during the Open House. She says that she is grateful to the programme since she is regarded as one of the most responsible teachers within the community. The students have also noticed a change in the way Archana teaches. They say that earlier she used to teach in a way that wasn't of interest to them. But now, she uses a lot of actions while reciting poems that make it easier for the students to memorise. She also tells a lot of stories for every lesson to make learning more engaging for the students.

Author: Kumkum Kumari

## AARTI KUMARI Community Champion SCHOOL RJMS, HASANPUR SURAT

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do not feel like I've come to an unknown place. It feels like home! Aarti said

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## Not So Shy Anymore

One of the pillars of the USAID led School Dropout Prevention Pilot program is community engagement. The program aims to bring together parents, teachers and the entire community to work towards a better schooling system and hence prevent children from dropping out of school. In order to achieve this objective, the program works with more than 200 community volunteers who support this school-community interaction. Aarthi Kumari was one such community champion. She was born on 10 June 1994. She lives with her family and is the youngest of all siblings and is currently pursuing her Bachelors Degree.



Before being inducted into the SDPP program, Aarthi used to be extremely shy and barely interacted with people. She wasn't very vocal about her opinions with anyone but her family. Her lack of exposure and understanding of the world at large could be explained by the fact that she was never allowed to travel out of her village.

Aarthi was trained in the Arts and Crafts component of the Enrichment Programme that aims at making school a fun place to be at, and in the process reduce dropout rates. She was thrilled to attend the training.

Not only was this a new experience for her but it also made her realize that she had many skills and qualities that she had never had the opportunity to explore. It was a revelation for her to watch all her colleagues participate without any fear. This gave her the courage to get over her own fear and present her ideas confidently and easily.

She currently closely works with forty students and ensures their participation in all the extracurricular activities. As a part of the programme, she also conducts regular home visits to increase parental awareness about strategies they can use to improve family environment and family support. She monitors the Family Journal and also helps in organizing Open House for the parents. To increase their participation and involvement in their children's education, Aarthi also helps in developing voice messages that are sent to the parents regularly. These messages focus on the relevance of education.

The SDPP programme has helped her develop her communication, training and facilitation skills. She believes in creating a friendly environment for all students to make learning fun and effective. She does not scold children but instead makes them understand patiently and with love. She is loved by all, has tremendously grown in her her personal life and is a lot more open to initiating conversation and engaging with the community outside her home. Sandhya Kumari, one of the teachers said, "She manages to encourage many more people to participate since she understands the challenges they face". Her mother appreciates her effort and says "A girl should be like her, who can talk to anyone. Her style of convincing the customers in the shop has changed. Now our neighbors also come and appreciate her effort and her behavior"

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All this was only done in private schools, now such good things will be taught in governement school as well. It is unbelievable.

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Girls and boys being encouraged to work together in enrichment activities, breaking gender barriers.

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I come to drop my grand daughter to school everyday. Throughout the journey she tells me stories of Anandshala activities in school. I really enjoy listening to her and I am happy that is learning something new everyday. - Student's grandfather

Student SCHOOL

СННОТИ

## 66

Earlier chhotu would ask us to leave school and play with him outside, but now he asks us to stay in school himself. One of his classmates said.

**?**?

## Chhotu Turns Over A New Leaf

Chhotu is a student at UMS Tirapurvi in Samastipur, Bihar. His father runs a small bike repairing shop right next to his school where Chhotu used to spend most of his time. Though both his parents are illiterate, they were very keen to get good education for their son. But Chhotu hardly attended school.

When the SDPP program initiated by USAID started in his school, his attendance, behavior, class performance and work obligation were evaluated and his low attendance, behavior in class and the time he spent at his father's shop, put him in the focus child category. It was clear that he was at risk of dropping out.

The team including the teacher and community champion started monitoring his case closely to identify the reasons and solutions for Chhotu's absenteeism. His father, informed the team that he along his family have been making consistent efforts to get him to attend school, but chhotu is completely disinterested and sees no value in attending classes. His father said,

"I have visited the school in past and spoken to his teachers about it. But nothing that we did helped to get him to school."

Chhotu would sit in his father's shop and look at his classmates playing everyday. Noticing chhotu's interest for about week, an SDPP team member asked him to come join the group and then it was left for him to decide. Chhotu took a few more days to convince himself to come join the group, and there was no looking back.

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Initially chhotu would come in just to attend the sports sessions but as he continued, he built a good relationship with his classmates and teachers. As a part of the Anandshala program, he was encouraged to participate in other enrichment activities that include arts, crafts and body movement. The team realized that Chhotu has a flair for arts and crafts. He enjoyed drawing and painting and soon he was experimenting with different mediums.

The teachers and the community champion started giving him more class level responsibilities. He was made in charge of bringing out all the sports equipment and distributing art material. This not only gave him a sense of responsibility and ownership, but also helped in building stronger bonds with his peers. Now he would help them and encourage them to participate more.

His confidence in himself further improved when he got a platform to showcase his talent at the Anand Utsav(open house) conducted for people from his community. He was further given an opportunity to talk about his work and experience to an external group who had come to engage with the program.

In a few months, these improvements were noticed by everyone both at school and home. His Head master while talking to the SDPP team said,

" This boy takes great interest in his work now. Earlier I would always see him fighting with his classmates, now he is making an effort and cooperating with them"

His mother while sharing her experience said, "Earlier he ran away even if we dropped him to school. Now he cleans his uniform himself and goes to school neatly."

Chhotu himself wants to continue attending the school now. Not only does he participate actively in the enrichment program, he has also started sitting for the remedial classes.

#### Author: Amitesh



Class 5th students using natural colours made with locally available material as a part of the enrichment program.

## **KHUSHBOO**

#### Student

### SCHOOL RUMS BAIKUNTHPUR BRAHANDA

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I never got an opportunity to connect with my daughter's school and her education in this way earlier. - sanjeet mahto, father

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# The Missing Link

Among other children from baikunth pur, Khushboo was in a much better place. Being the eldest among her siblings she had to take on a lot of household responsibilities and help her mother, yet whenever she managed to come to school she finished her work and studied her lessons.

But even then, she was dull and quite in class. She did not take much initiative and would miss school regularly. The days she would come to school, she would either come in late or leave early. So where was the missing link?

Lack of encouragement from her parents and an unsuitable learning environment at home.

Her mother said, "I would rather have my daughters do all the household work so that by the time they get married, they learn how to manage their own household." - sanju devi, mother

Her father on the other hand was too busy in his shop and customers to pay attention to his daughter's education.

When the School Dropout Prevention Program (SDPP) started in her school, which is funded by US agency for International Development, Creative Associates International, one of the key areas identified was parent engagement. SDPP staff along with the teachers and community champions implemented number of interventions in order to make the parents aware and get them to participate in their children's education. Khushboo's teachers started monitoring her attendance and behavior pattern closely. On her being absent, they would make phone calls to her parents, and in case of no response would go to her house to talk to them directly. Over time they built a relationship with her parents. In addition to this voice messages were sent to their mobile phones regularly informing them about events at school and engaging them in locally recorded discussions and anecdotes to discuss the importance of schooling in local languages.

One such event that marked the turning point in her father's attitude towards the school was anand utsav, school's open house. Her father on attending two consecutive open houses said,

At the open house he expressed his joy looking at what Khushboo and her friends had created in the enrichment program, He not only asked many questions, but also gave suggestions to make the anand utsav better. He suggested that the event should become a monthly practice and that he now realizes the value in knowing what the children are learning at school.

Khushboo seems much happier in school now, and her workload at home has been reduced. She with her family fills the family journal regularly to track her attendance and the reasons for her to miss the school whenever she does. Her mother too, is now trying to understand the journal better and filling it her self.

Recently, an SDPP staff member spoke to her father, who said now his younger daughter is enrolled in the same program. He has been invited to the next parent orientation for the new session to share his daughter's story and motivate other parents to engage with their child's education.

Author: Sourabh Chandak

Parents and their children trying to understand aspirations better through art activity at the open house.

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Early Warning System is very critical for the education of a child. We should make it more user friendly so that large number of school can implement the same.

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MAYA KUMAR Student SCHOOL JMS CHAURTOL

## 66

We were considering to send Maya to Delhi to his sister for work. But now we are convinced that he should not leave the session midway and continue studying here. his parents said.

## **Breaking Inhibitions**

Maya Kumar a 10 years old boy from Khanpur block in Samastipur Bihar, was the youngest among his four siblings. His father, an agricultural laborer could hardly support his family because of his ill health and his mother worked as a farmer besides running her house and taking care of the children. Given such conditions at home, Maya hardly attended school. But was that the only reason for Maya to not attend school?

As a part of the program Student Dropout Prevention Program (Anandshala) supported by USAID, the Early warning tool was used to assess Maya's case. It uses a holistic approach and took into account all possible factors - scores on attendance, behavior, hindi performance and work obligations. The scores made it clear that Maya was at high risk of dropping out entirely.

Following which the SDPP team started working with the headmaster, teachers and community youth to identify the reasons and find solutions to retain this boy in school. The team realized that what was lacking was a more conducive learning environment both at school and home and that both these have to be tackled with simultaneously.

In class, Maya was one of the quietest boys. He hardly interacted with his peers and was hesitant in engaging with the activities in class. When the staff members tried to establish a personal rapport with him, he said that he was scared of asking doubts in class and felt neglected. The teachers were suggested to handle this case more sensitively.

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They started encouraging him to ask questions, sit in front and learn from other students in class. He was encouraged to participate in enrichment activities conducted under Anandshala that use arts, crafts and body movement to make the learning process more engaging. The sports activities gave him the opportunity to open up and build stronger bonds with his peers. Soon he started enjoying school and found different ways to express and participate.

While this was being done in school, the headmaster and teachers along with the community youth made consistent efforts to communicate with Maya's parents and convinced them of the importance of keeping their son in school. They would make regular home visits and phone calls to talk with his family. The voice messages sent as a part of the program addressed the reasons for absenteeism and the importance of education which helped build awareness. They encouraged and assisted his family to maintain the family journal so that they could track Maya's attendance at home. Their conversations ranged from talking about the issues of the family, to importance of schooling for overall development, to a point where they could share positive results in Maya's progress.

Soon after, Maya who was once the quietest of the lot, now started making earnest efforts to participate in activities. He had built stronger bonds with his classmates and teachers, and started doing much better in academics. In six months his attendance went from 10% to 90% according to his class teacher.

His family is happy that he is attending school and making friends. They have started seeing the value in letting him continue with his education.

Author: Shahid

### NAINA

### SCHOOL ROSERA SAMASTIPUR

## 66

I want my daughter to finish her bachlors degree and become a teacher. - vindu devi, mother

## We Are Together

Naina, a 10 year old girl from Rajwara , had nothing to look forward to in her school. She would often complain that there are no activities in school apart from studying.

Though unlike many of her classmates, her parents were educated and wanted a good education for their daughter, still there were a lot of household responsibilities that would keep Naina busy and distracted. Her mother says,

"I want my daughter to finish her bachlors degree and become a teacher. But my husband works out of town, so I have to take care of the entire house. So I cannot pay attention to her education." - vindu devi, mother

Such circumstances at home, distance from school and her lack of interest resulted in poor attendance and lack of initiative from her side.

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Under the School Dropout Prevention Program (SDPP) funded by US agency for International Development, Creative Associates International, Naina was identified as one of the students at risk with her attendance being less than 60%. She would often leave school early and her language scores were quite poor with her reading skills being less than basic. Teachers from her school said that she hardly participated in class and very hesitant to play with the boys. Being a vulnerable student, Naina was enrolled in the SDPP enrichment program and her teachers and the community champions along with the SDPP staff made sure that they addressed her over all development, both in her language lessons and her social skills. Her teachers would use simple exercises in class to make her learning easier. On the other hand, they encouraged her to participate in more group activities to build her confidence. Naina says,

"Earlier I used to be shy to play with the boys and be in large groups. I used feel they would tease me. But when I saw my other friends playing with the boys and I also saw Jayprakash bhaiya and Annu didi (community champions) working together, I realized that I should play with everyone. Now, all of us are friends and no one teases me. - Naina

Back at home, she would go and tell her mother what she did in class. SDPP staff and teachers were also in constant touch with her mother, to ensure equal participation from her family. Naina's mother says;

"I am very happy to know that now the school is sharing the responsibility of making sure that Naina attends school. If there are times, when she doesn't go, they call me up to inquire about her. They even came home specifically to inform me about my daughter's progress and invite me for the open house at school." -vindu devi, mother

Over the course of time, Naina's outlook towards her school and herself has changed. She has been promoted to class 6th this year. She comes to school on time and stays till the end of the day. Now, her fluency in hindi has improved and her confidence to participate in class and to play with the boys is much more.

#### Author: Kailash Mewada



Installation on voice messages that are sent to the community regularly to inform them about Anandshala activites in school and spreading the awareness around importance of education.

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From the time we started participating in the Anandshala trainings, our confidence level has also increased along with the students. Earlier we hesitated in presenting our thoughts in public, and now we fight over who would get to talk. - Class teacher, Class 5th

PALLAVI Student SCHOOL TIRA PURVI

## 66

happy that Pallavi now eagerly waits for her school to reopen. - he father said.

## Learning Can Be A Lot Of Fun

This is a story about Pallavi who is a student of class five in Tirapurvi village of Kalyanpur block. She has three sisters and a brother. Her father Vinay Sah has completed his primary education and works as a driver. Her mother has completed her middle school and is a home maker. She is loved by all and her parents understand the relevance of education and encouraged Pallavi to go to school. Inspite of this, she was not very keen on attending classes or when she would, she left school early. She made excuses when she was asked about this and her mother was extremely worried about her lack of interest in going to school.



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The Early Warning System of USAID's School Dropout Prevention Programme, supports the teacher in identifying, tracking and addressing the needs of the children at-risk of dropping out from school. When the process was run in her school, Pallavi was identified as a Focus Child. The community champions visited her frequently to understand the issue and take necessary action but she ran away every time she noticed the CC approach her home and refused to talk to him. After repeated visits to Pallavi's home, one day she said that she didn't want to go to school because she wasn't really interested in being there and that the teachers would continuously ask her about her absence and then scold her. What she needed was a more engaging environment at school and more supportive teachers. The CC assured her that the teachers would not scold her again and finally managed to persuade her to come to school the next day.

The following day at school was a very different experience for Pallavi. She noticed that as a part of the Enrichment Programme, after lunch, children drew and painted things in class. She also noticed that children played in school till the last class. The Community Champions in the meantime requested the teachers not to ask her about her absence in school and to all of their surprise, Pallavi reached school early the next day. Her teachers and CC noticed a huge difference in Pallavi's participation thereafter. She was extremely active during the arts and crafts session. She also stayed back in school to participate in all the sports activities. With the language sessions that were provided as a part of the enrichment programme, she also improved her Hindi language. According to her course performance assessment, before the intervention, her score was less than 59% (as per FCI score) and a quarterly assessment showed an average of 80% in language during case management.

Pallavi's active and quick response in school made her favorite among the teachers. The EP teacher said "When she started attending sessions she participated very enthusiastically and also helped her classmates. She now talks in Hindi as well as she used to talk in Maithili.

She wants other children to attend school too. She often motivates her friends who are also identified as focus students to go to school. The girl dreams of getting a good government job and becoming a railway probationary officer someday.

Author: Amitesh Srivastav



Parents playing the "Anandshala gupshup game" along with the community champion to understand the reasons for students dropping out of school.

### PHOOLO

Student

### SCHOOL UMS GURMA

44 Phoolo has always been interested in reading and writing, says mother, Urmila devi.

**?**?

The Dream Of Being A Student

There was not a very good chance that shy, 16-year-old Phoolo was going to stay in school. So much was stacked against her: A history of irregular attendance, the burden of caring for her younger siblings and then the need to work as a part-time maid instead of advancing her education.

"As a kid she would borrow books from other people and try and read. It's because of lack of funds in our family that we couldn't get her to school consistently."

Much older than her Gurmha Middle School classmates, it also wasn't easy for Phoolo to make friends, and she never felt engaged at school. Having to return home often to take care of her brothers and sisters did not leave much time for friendship, or extra activities that would have made learning more fun.

Instead of encouraging Pholoo's scholastic success, her parents were trying to get her married.

An early warning tool developed by Creative Associates International's Student Dropout Prevention Program (SDPP) took all of these obstacles into account when staff evaluated Phoolo. Based on her scores on attendance, behavior, course performance and work obligations, it became clear that Phoolo was at high risk of dropping out entirely. SDPP is supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). SDPP's staff worked with Phoolo's teachers, parents and school administrators to give her extra attention. Her teacher started tracking her attendance regularly, made sure she participated in class and even scheduled regular home visits to meet with her parents as part of the tracking and case management system.

Pholoo was also enrolled in SDPP enrichment sessions, which included activities to encourage creative expression. As she got more involved in the enrichment sessions, she started building stronger relationships with her classmates and teachers.

Initially subdued and hesitant, something shifted in her the day another girl gave a presentation about Pholoo. The topic was friendship.

During the next six months, Pholoo went from missing one in three school days to having an attendance rate of about 90 percent.

Her teacher's consistent efforts to communicate with Pholoo's parents convinced them of the importance of keeping their daughter in school, and they became increasingly involved in her education.

Instead of attending her wedding, Pholoo's mother had tears in her eyes as she proudly arrived at her first Anand Utsav: the school's open house. Soon afterward, she decided Pholoo should stop working and focus on academics.

"Since I have started coming to school regularly, no one teases me anymore," says Pholoo. "I have made a lot of friends. At home my parents give me less work to do and encourage me to attend school and study instead."

Today, Pholoo even brings her younger sister to class sometimes. She hopes her sister can one day realize the same dream: just being a student.

Author: Nitish Kumar

LIFE AND TIMES OF ANANDSHALA

# Fruitful Opportunity

When Priyanka was called for an interview for the School Dropout Prevention Pilot Programme, she was nervous, because she hadn't worked in any other organization before. She also comes from a society where working of women is looked down upon. Priyanka studies Zoology and is the Community Champion of Dharmpur Dakhili.

She found the regular meetings with all the selected Community Champions useful since they were all like-minded and she could identify with some of the challenges they faced. Work plans and monthly activities were also discussed in detail which helped her plan out her targets and work effectively. As a Community Champion, Priyanka used to do home visits as a part of the Focus Child Identification process to update the parents about the activities and progress of their children. She also handed over the tracking posters to parents so that they could track the children's' attendance from home.

She said, "My continuous interaction with parents helped me build a rapport with them. During these interactions with them, I learnt how to convince them that PTA meetings and Open House are good platforms to address any issue they may have. They found it logical and came for the open house where they saw different varieties of material being created by their children; they saw their children doing role-plays and found it interesting and useful.

I learnt many new things in the program and I can now understand myself better. I now understand the behavior of children, teachers and parents and the exchange of knowledge has broadened my thinking."

She feels that the SDPP training has helped her overcome her hesitation. It gave her an opportunity to rethink her career and prove herself in her community. She believes that it is the right of a girl to be educated and she is determined to work towards encouraging parents to send their girl children to school. She says, "SDPP program has helped me strengthen my self-confidence and so my parents and school teachers believe in me. I learnt how to be more articulate and communicate with different people." She wants to reach out to as many children and parents and spread awareness on the importance of education among them.

She says that SDPP is a rare platform to find and so, she is going to continue to work hard and prove herself. Even after this intervention, she says she wants to continue working with children and ensure that every child is provided with enough opportunities to excel in their education. Priyanka is married now, has a family but she continues to come to school every day and dreams of becoming a good professor one day.

Author: Ranjay Kumar Sinha



66 I have seen her take many sessions and I've noticed that all students listen to her attentively and they also respond to all her questions. Said the class teacher **?**?

PRIYANKA

KUMARI

Champion

**SCHOOL** 

UMS DHARMPUR

### RAMITA KUMARI

Student

### SCHOOL UMS PARANPUR

I would go mad if I did not come to school. I want to study, says Ramita.

**?**?

# The Girl Who Dares To Dream

Ramita lives with her family in Dalsinghsarai, Samastipur, Bihar. Her father is usually out of town and her mother works on the fields. She has had to spend long stretches of time not seeing both her parents. Ramita is the one who takes care of her younger siblings and helps her mother in housework. The young Ramita dares to dream big and wants to study and make her dreams come true.

But the non-conducive environment at home and no encouragement from family resulted in her missing school regularly and course performance was much below grade level.

When the USAID led School Dropout Prevention Pilot program started in her school, the Early Warning System was used to assess each student's attendance, course performance, behavior and work obligation to identify the students who are at risk. Ramita's attendance was mere 46% and her

performance score was 2 according to the Focus Child Identification system. The results clearly showed that Ramita is at high risk of dropping out.

Efforts were made by the teachers and SDPP staff to identify the reasons and design a strategy to not only keep Ramita in school, but also help create a more conducive and sustainable learning environment both at home and school. The community champions started visiting her parents regularly and having conversation with them, to make them understand the value in keeping their daughter

in school. They informed them about her performance and discussed the issues related to her with her mother.

At school, Ramita was enrolled in the enrichment program where she was engaged in multiple activities using arts, sports, body movement and language. These activities not only helped her develop an interest in the school, but also helped her with her confidence level, motivation to learn and taking initiative to try on new things. After working with clay in the art classes, she said, I would use this technique to make toys for everyone in my village on Diwali (an Indian festival). The teachers and community champions noticed many such positive changes in Ramita's attitude towards learning. Now she grabs any opportunity that comes her way to lead activities in class, and makes extra effort to do better at her language lessons. Unlike earlier, she talks to everyone in class and responds well to teachers.

According to the recent assessments in her school, her attendance has gone up from 46% to 89%. Even her course performance has improved considerably and she is now able to make sentences and read in class. At home, her mother constantly tries to reduce her workload and encourages her to attend school everyday.

She attended the open house in school and was taken aback by the effort her daughter had put into making the artworks. She had tears in her eyes and said, I have never gone to school, but now my daughter will study. Even if I sleep empty stomach, Ill try and send her to school everyday. She comes home and shares everything she did in school.. she sings hariyaali idhar udhar.. hariyaali, idhar udhar (an energizer from the enrichment sessions)

Ramita wants to continue to study now and has started on the path of making her dreams come true. She says, "I want to study and grow up to become a teacher. Why I want to become a teacher? Because I think the job of a teacher is very valuable. They help people become educated and that in turn helps development of a nation."

Author: Prabhat Kumar

### RUPA

Community Champion

SCHOOL UMS NAVTOL

It was the biggest day of my life because I got an employment on my own merit and became an earning member of my family, She says.

## New Beginnings

Rupa got married when she was 14. Now she has two children and lives with her in - laws in Warisnagar, Samastipur, Bihar. At her father's house, she is the eldest among all her siblings and therefore has always been the one taking care of them when her parents have been away working. Therefore, from the very beginning Rupa has been engaged in household work and not had much exposure.

Sometime last year she heard someone talking about U.S. Agency of International Development (USAID) along with Creative Associates International is starting a program called SDPP in 13 blocks of Samastipur to reduce the dropout of children for which they would need two community based youngsters to implement the program in their local schools. The idea of earning a living on her merit and working with children excited her and she decided to give it a shot. She attended the public meeting as well as gave the interview and finally became a community champion for the Anandshala program.

Although her journey wasn't easy. Initially she had issues in coordinating with teachers, managing data, analyzing situations. She was shy and hesitant to talk to people about the program, and would not travel alone to other villages to visit parents. She always needed a male member to accompany her.

But she worked rigorously with the SDPP team and attended various training programs organized by them. She says she had a lot of learn.

"The first time I went for the training I was both excited and nervous. But I really enjoyed myself. I got an opportunity to practice creative arts and crafts and learn new activities which not only help me in my work but I can practice them with my own children at home as well."

Infact she says that her perception of students has changed a lot. She had the opinion that children in school are ignorant who need to be taught a certain way. But she came to realize that children have their own knowledge and they have their own ways to acquire new learning and make their own decisions.

Being in the program for a year and making so many home visits and phone calls to parents, she is now confident of what she says and understands situations very well. Unlike earlier times, now she would travel from one village to another without having to wait for a male member to accompany her.

Rupa is continuing to work as a community champion for this academic year as well. She is not only doing well in her work, but also at her home. Now she is involved in most decisions being taken in her family. They respect her opinion and proud of her work and effort. Her in-laws said, "we are happy with whatever Rupa is doing and we want her to continue working on this".

Parents of students from her village come to her to talk about their issues and she is one of the most vocal participants in the community champion meetings. She aspires to become a teacher or an entrepreneur in the field of education.

She says, "I want to use the experience and knowledge I have gained from this program."

Author: Rakesh Kumar Chaudhary

Parents at the open house exhibition of the art and craft materials made in the enrichment activities by their children.

E AND TIMES OF ANANDSHALA

## MS SALEHA PARVEEN

eacher

SCHOOL VISHNUPUR BANDE

> 44 Madam I want my child to be like you, is what one of the parents told her.

> > **?**?

# Change Must Start With Me

Ms Saleha Parveen, born and brought up in Dalsingh Sarai Block of Samastipur is a teacher in Vishsupur Bande School, where SDPP activities was implemented since 2012. Being the eldest in the family, she helps her mother with all the household work before coming to school.

The USAID led School Dropout Prevention Pilot program started in her school in 2012. It was a huge opportunity for her since she could engage in different sets of activities and learn consistently. She actively worked with Community Champions. She used to keep herself updated with all the reading materials for the School Dropout Programme. During enrichment activities, she was seen to actively engage with the children. The activities reminded her of her own childhood and because she valued all these activities with her peer group, it gave her immense motivation to involve each and every student in them. The Enrichment Activities helped her enhance her relationship with the children and teach them academic requirements each.

requirements easily. She feels that activity based learning has inspired her more and allows her to make her class child friendly. The Art and Craft session plan was another source of learning and inspiration for her. It taught her to focus on exploring self and the students, building their creative skills, improving teacher-student relationship and their leadership skills and creative activities through experiential and reflective experiences. Attending all the SDPP trainings specially designed for teachers, provided her the space for introspection and enhanced her potential to work in the group. As a part of the program, she was also introduced to various interventions to engage with the parents, like the Phone calls and Home Visits made to make them aware of the importance of education and encourage them to send their children to school. She is very popular among the parents. She takes a lead in organizing the Open house in school that is held as a part of the response plan of the Anandshala programme, to increase the parent-teacher interaction and inform parents about their child's progress. All the parents really appreciate her efforts and keep complimenting her time to time. Her journey so far has increased her determination to prevent children from dropping out of school. She not only teaches at school but does distance learning from a University. Her entire family supports her and they recognise the potential in her.

Saleha says " SDPP has delicately created a supporting system for me to accomplish teaching well, learning well and also making relationship well with parents. Lastly, my confidence says that consistent support at school level and positive engagement of teachers creates effective learning culture both inside and outside the classroom."

#### **Author: Satyam Anand**



### SAVITA

Student

### SCHOOL UMS BHOJPUR

We sent
Savita to
school,
only
because
our
neighbour's
children
were
going.

**?**?

## One Step At A Time

Savita is one of the regular and attentive students from UM School Bhojpur in Sarairanjan, Samastipur district in Bihar. But that's not how she was, at the start of the program

Youngest amongst her seven siblings, Savita was responsible for feeding the cattle and cooking for everyone. With her father working outside the village, mother working early morning, all other sisters married, Savita didn't have another option but to miss school and help her mother to finish household work.

But that wasn't the only reason that was keeping her from attending school. She was 14 and much older than all her classmates which bothered her the most. She hardly mingled with anyone at school. She would sit in a corner and reluctantly do her lessons. All this resulted in her low grades, poor attendance and very low motivation to come to school every day.

When the Anandshala program began in her school, many initiatives were taken for all students even if they weren't in the focus child category.

Once, when an SDPP member along with the community champion went to her house to distribute the attendance tracking tool, they saw Savita washing utensils while her mother was preparing dinner. That made the situation clear to the team and they decided to discuss this with her mother. Savita's mother did not see any value in her daughter's education initially. She said, After much convincing she agreed to send Savita to school regularly only with the condition that Savita would also have to help her with some household work. At school, Savita's attendance, behaviour and class performance were now closely monitored and special attention was given to her. The teacher would ask her questions in class, made her sit in front and tried to create situations where Savita took on more responsibility and interacted with her classmates. It was noticed that she did not participate in enrichment activities much. But after she was given the responsibility to distribute and collect materials after every session, she gained confidence to participate more in class and eventually started doing enrichment tasks.

Similarly, the community champions while conducting the sports sessions gave her time to get comfortable with the activities. Even though she wouldn't participate in every activity, they encouraged her to give feedback to other students and engage with the activity by keeping the score and collecting equipment.

Soon Savita became more active in school. She readily participated in all sports activities. She got over her inhibitions about being the oldest in class and started doing better at her lessons as well.

While Savita was being monitored and mentored at school, the CC and teacher made regular visits to make sure that her parents are engaged in their child's education and are aware of her progress.

When the open house was organized at the school, both Savita and her mother attended the program. This was the first time they attended an open house ever. That day Savita was awarded a gift for showing the courage to participate in class and making an effort to attend school regularly. This gesture of appreciation from her school not only encouraged Savita, but filled her mother with great pride. She became an example for the school and her community.

Now Savita is in class sixth and attends school regularly.

Author: Baiju Shankar Giri

### SUJIT KUMAR

Student

SCHOOL UMS BHOJPUR

۲۹۹ Farlier he used to fight with his friends but now his behaviour has improved and he cooperates with the rest of his peer, Said the headmaster.

99

A Positive Shift

Sujit Kumar is a boy of Class 5 and has four siblings. His parents are illiterate but Sujit is fortunate to belong to a family where his father understands the need for education and wants his children to go to school regularly. Sujit however is not very keen on attending classes. Whenever his parents sent him to school, he either played in the field or returned home, giving excuses that his teacher didn't teach well in his school. Inspite of his parents and teachers continuously trying to generate an interest in him, he refused to stay back in school for any of the classes. He was often found with his friends or even if he attended classes, he would run out once he got his attendance covered.

During the Focus Child Identification process of the Early Warning System, Sujit was identified as a student who required full treatment. As part of the treatment the Community Champions regularly visited Sujit's home and interacted with him and his parents. They told them that he doesn't need to go to the field to play anymore and that there were Enrichment Programme activities that happened in the school itself. He began to attend school to come for the EP activities. To his surprise, he found them interesting and noticed that all the sports activities that he played outside were also included in the EP activities.

There was a remarkable difference in Sujit's behaviour. He initially started coming to school only to attend the EP sessions but he slowly started staying back in school for other classes as well. In October, his attendance was very poor 50%. In January and February, his attendance shot up to 95-

100% attendance. He was not just a self-motivated student who took initiatives but also started helping other students when he was given the responsibility of being the leader in his group.

As a part of the programme, when Sujit's mother came for one of the open houses, she noticed all the work that he had done and the arts and crafts items that Sujith had created. She was overwhelmed and she thanked the CCs for giving her son the attention that he required. She said "If you would not have given attention to my child's studies then he would have dropped out from school long ago"

Sujith was seen continuously working on his skills and personal behaviour, which made him a favourite among his teachers. He improved his Hindi language skills and also shared stories from school with his parents. His parents are delighted with the SDPP intervention and feel that if this program started earlier, Sujits' elder brother also could have benefitted from it.

Author: Md. Rizwan Anwar



## SUNITA KUMARI

Community Champion

# SCHOOL

66 The students consider her a friend. They listen to her. In fact they listen to her more that they listen to us, said one of the teachers. **?**?

# Paving Way For Her Own Dreams

Sunita, a 20 year old girl from Chartual Samastipur is someone who is self motivated, likes to work with children and wants to take her education forward. She was an appropriate candidate to become a community champion for USAID supported School Dropout Prevention Pilot program in Bihar.

She has studied till class 12th and lives with her parents in Samastipur. Though she has another sibling, she is the only one who wanted to support her father financially and reduce the burden on his shoulders. When she got selected for the program, she was delighted and grabbed the opportunity with both hands. However, it wasn't an easy journey.

As a part of her job she not only had to work with young kids and support the teachers in schools but also interact with the community. She had to spend time with parents, understand their issues, help them identify the reasons why their child is missing school and encourage them to send their children to school. Initially she hesitated to approach parents and talk to them in a language that they would relate to. But she underwent a series of trainings conducted by the SDPP team and learned the skill over time. She made home visits to phone calls to all families from her community and connected with each one of them personally. At school, she would try and device new ways to manage the children and keep them engaged. Applying some of her learning from the trainings, she would often divide the class in groups and try to give the students responsibility for their classmates. This not only helped build a sense of ownership in the students, but also made her one of the favorite facilitators at school. The teachers from her school often appreciate her for her efforts and techniques of relating with the students.

Sunita being a keep learner has also learned a lot from the teachers and the SDPP staff she works with. Now she helps your children of her community in their studies. The people from her village who did not know her well enough, now ask for her suggestions. One of the parents told us that,

"we want our daughter to be like Sunita. She inspires people with her abilities. It doesn't feel like she is an outsider."

Her engagement with the program has not only helped her professionally but also personally. At home her parents are very happy with what she is doing and don't stop talking about the changes they notice in her. They say,

"She has become so confident. She knows how the world works. Earlier she would do whatever we tell her. But now she has her own opinions. Now we ask for her opinions while making decisions."

Unlike earlier, now she doesn't need her father to accompany her in all meetings. She travels on her own and does all her work independently. Seeing her dedication and motivation, her parents agreed to let her study further and make a career for herself. She is now doing her graduation from a college in Samastipur. She believes with her hard work, she would be able to get a good job and support a parents fully. She aspires to join an organization that works with people for their development.

Author: Shahid

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