



**INDUS
ACTION**

Enabling Social Protection



CARE TO PLAY

Stories that inspire action and hope

COMMUNITY VOICES:

SAMEENA

Sameena, a mother of three young daughters, first heard about the Care to Play programme through other mothers in her community and the local MCD school. Juggling household responsibilities and domestic work in multiple homes, she was also navigating a challenging family environment with limited support. With her husband unable to work, the responsibility of earning, caregiving, and household management fell entirely on her. Sameena worked as a domestic worker in nearby homes, often leaving early in the morning and returning late afternoon. With no reliable adult support at home, she made the painful decision to secure her children's safety by locking them inside one room while she was away, separating them from her husband whose unpredictable behavior concerned her.

Despite the emotional and physical demands of her daily life, Sameena held strong aspirations for her children's education and her own growth. When Rakhi, the Care to Play Frontline worker, first met Sameena, it was clear that caregiving burdens and time constraints would make participation in the training programme difficult. Yet, her commitment to her family's well-being remained unwavering. With steady encouragement from Rakhi and flexible training options, Sameena gradually began attending the programme.



She joined the skill-building sessions midway through the programme and completed the five-month course with 62% attendance. By the end of the year, she had also completed the microenterprise training with 85% attendance. The flexibility of the schedule, offering both morning and afternoon sessions, allowed her to continue earning while learning. The child care provision at the training centre made it possible for her to bring her youngest daughter along, creating a safe, supportive environment for both.



One significant outcome of this support was that her middle daughter, who had previously stayed home to help care for her younger sibling, was able to return to school.



FARHEEN

Farheen moved to Delhi as a young bride, full of hope and dreams for the life ahead. In her words, she considered herself fortunate to have a kind and supportive husband, and later, two children who became the centre of her world. Yet beyond the walls of her home, she often felt deeply alone.

Over time, relationships with extended family, both hers and her husband's, grew distant or strained. Friendships she once had faded away. As her responsibilities grew, so did her sense of isolation in the fast-paced, often impersonal rhythm of city life. "I had a home full of love," she said, "but no one to talk to about how I was feeling."

This longing for connection, beyond caregiving and household duties, brought her to the Care to Play programme in Hauz Rani. What she found there surprised her. Week by week, as women came together for training, activities, and shared discussions, Farheen slowly realised she wasn't alone in how she felt. Many others in the community were quietly carrying similar burdens, of loneliness, unspoken struggles, and emotional exhaustion.



Through group sessions and regular interaction, she began forming bonds that grew into genuine friendships. One such friendship, with a fellow participant named Soni, became especially meaningful.

The two supported each other through skill training, childcare challenges, and everyday conversations that made them both feel seen.



At the programme's asset transfer ceremony, Farheen stood before the group, visibly moved. She shared how the experience had helped her rediscover not just new skills and income opportunities, but something more fundamental: her confidence, her voice, and her sense of belonging. "Earlier, I thought this stage of life was just about duty. Now, I know it can also be about growth, friendship, and hope."



On the Frontline : SONIA

The most memorable moment for me was when I used to conduct my sessions at Gandhi Park while working, and many children would come to meet me. They would participate in online WhatsApp activities with me and play some games. Whenever I went to the school to conduct a session, the children would come to meet me, and forming that sweet bond with them was a memorable moment for me, one I will always cherish. They all affectionately used to call me "Appi."

When the children started coming to our Child Care Centre, they really enjoyed engaging in various activities with me. On the few days I was on leave, their only complaint was, "Why didn't Sonia Ma'am come? Now who will play games with us, and who will play with us?" When I returned to the centre, the mothers of the children told me that their children hadn't been coming to the centre because I wasn't there, but now that I had returned, they would surely come. This moment was truly memorable for me.



During the asset transfer event, the respect my candidates showed me during and after the event was a source of pride for me. They said that since receiving my support, they had been given opportunities to achieve something in their lives. Today, whenever I advise them to do something, they find every piece of guidance I give to be correct, which fills me with pride.

I also enjoyed this experience greatly because it was my first time working with young children. Whenever I was with them, I started thinking and speaking like them, and played with them as if I were a child too. This moment is significant for me because I had never spent such time with anyone before. For the first time, I experienced such unique moments with children, which made me realise how precious childhood truly is.

KUSUM

In August 2024, Kusum, a mother of daughters and an active participant in the Care to Play programme, became a key force in helping other caregivers understand and access government savings schemes for girls, particularly the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY).

After initial attempts by Mansi, the programme's Frontline worker, to collect application forms from the bank proved only partially successful, SSY forms were withheld despite requests, Kusum stepped up to help. As someone deeply committed to the wellbeing of girls in her community, she offered to follow up herself.

On 6th August, Kusum travelled to the bank, spending ₹100 out of pocket for the round trip. Although she was eventually reimbursed by the programme for this effort, the trip highlighted the very real logistical and financial barriers caregivers face in accessing even basic information. At the bank, she was told that she could not collect the SSY form because her Aadhaar card listed a different district as her residence, she didn't have a local address proof from Ghaziabad, where the bank was located. She was also informed that a child's birth certificate was mandatory, though the details of what address the certificate should reflect were unclear. The process was neither transparent nor caregiver-friendly.



Refusing to give up, Kusum returned with documents from another caregiver who had a Ghaziabad address, but was once again denied, this time because she wasn't the child's parent. It became clear that accurate and consistent information was hard to come by.

Determined to break the information bottleneck, Kusum devised a different approach. On a later visit, she posed as a parent applying for her own child, not to deceive, but to gain first-hand understanding of the requirements, process, and obstacles. Her goal was to equip the Care to Play team and other mothers in her community with reliable information so they could successfully apply for the scheme themselves.



Kusum's efforts are a powerful example of how caregiving communities don't just need services, they often act as navigators and translators of complex systems for one another. Her persistence helped demystify a process that should be simple, and laid the groundwork for more mothers to begin saving for their daughters' futures.



LAKSHMI

One afternoon in June 2024, Lakshmi had just returned from her farm in Afzalpur, Ghaziabad, when she met Amisha, a member of the Care to Play team. It was 12:30 PM, one of the few windows in her day when she could sit with her daughters before heading back to farming and housework.

Lakshmi has three daughters. Her days are full, her phone is a simple keypad model, and the challenges she faces are shaped by layers of gendered inequality, at home and in society. Her husband owns a smartphone, but is largely uninvolved in parenting. “He doesn’t think much about the girls,” she shared quietly. “They’re mine to care for.”

She often speaks of how different her life might have been had she completed her education. Her sister, married into the same family, managed to finish a Bachelor’s degree, and that difference is something Lakshmi reflects on with longing, not resentment. Still, she hasn’t let her circumstances define her sense of what’s possible.

Even something as basic as opening a bank account was a steep climb. Without support from her husband, she made multiple visits to the local bank, often returning empty-handed. But on the eighth day of Navratri, she met a woman employee who took the time to listen and help. “That day felt like a blessing,” she recalled. “Like I had been seen.”

Lakshmi joined Care to Play with the hope that this support could extend to her daughters, particularly in opening a Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY) account to begin saving for their education. Despite her willingness, she couldn’t move forward: she wasn’t allowed to apply on her own, and her husband refused, saying they would “do it later” when they had money. But for Lakshmi, it wasn’t about immediate savings, it was about building a secure future, step by step.

She had earlier worked with Kusum and Mansi, the programme’s Frontline Workers, to apply under RTE 12.1.C for school admission. But despite completing all the steps, her children’s names didn’t appear in the 2024 or 2025 lottery. This wasn’t just bad luck. A deeper analysis revealed that half the wards where programme participants lived had no RTE-eligible schools nearby, either due to distance or limited seats. The system had failed to account for families like hers.

Lakshmi’s journey is not one of grand outcomes – yet. But it reflects the everyday courage of mothers who persist even when every system around them says their daughters don’t count. She is not just waiting for change; she is inching toward it, one application, one question, one day at a time.



On the Frontline : NAHID

My Journey as a Care to Play Community Champion - Being a Care to Play community champion has been a special experience. My role is unique because I provided both “cash” (unlocking welfare schemes and livelihood support) and “care” (early childhood development, learning, and caregiving support) to our CGs and their families.

My role was different from other frontline workers because here in this role it is not only about providing any kind of services like other frontline workers do

- Helping CGs learn how to play and bond with their children. And what activities our CGs can perform with their children for their holistic growth.
- Guiding them on using welfare schemes like RTE & SSY to get some benefits & improve their lives.
- Supporting CGs to build their motivation ,self confidence and growth mindset to starting small businesses like tailoring.

How I Built Trust and Relationships?

Building trust with CGs and their families was very important. I:

- Listened to their problems with patience and respect.
- Visited most frequently to understand them, their daily routines and their lifestyles.
- Shared simple activities in our PEG sessions that they could use in daily life.
- Creating safe space for all, opened up myself. Make them realising that I am here with you, you can find me accountable.
- Celebrated and appreciated their small successes, like when they sold out their first hand made samples at ShareNet or they have made new and innovative samples for the 2nd workshop.
- Not doing false promises, did all what we said. Made them involved in each processes so that it can go smoothly.

Over time, the CGs and families started believing in me and the program.

Fulfilling Moments:

- Seeing a shy child become more active and playful.
- Watching CGs feel proud after selling their samples.
- Watching CGs feel proud after taking a step ahead and getting exposure of few markets during the program.
- Hearing CGs share how the program helped them improve their lives, their habits, and their mindset etc.

Challenging Moments:

- Some CGs were hesitant to join or trust the program in the beginning. Eventually they are dropped from program.
- Balancing many responsibilities, like taking PEG sessions, follow ups on WA activity engagement, figuring out data for eligible CGs for schemes, giving them documentation support and helping with livelihoods, was little hard.
- Explaining the importance of long-term benefits when CGs wanted quick results.

Making a Difference:

My work made a difference not just by providing support but by changing lives:

- For children : they became happier and learned better through play and care.
- For CGs : they gained confidence and skills to support their families.
- For families: Accessing welfare schemes and starting small businesses will give them financial stability and hope for the future.
- For the community: By promoting awareness of government schemes and their benefits, I contributed to creating a more informed and empowered community. Families started sharing this knowledge with others, amplifying the program's impact.
- For the future: The focus on early childhood development and sustainable livelihoods helped lay a strong foundation for the next generation, ensuring long-term growth and stability for families.



POOJA

Pooja, a resident of Shiv Park 501 AWC, has two sons. Her elder son, who is 9 years old, was 40% disabled, while the younger son faced challenges with speech and limited activity, raising concerns that he might also be disabled. Pooja ji is educated and comes from a good family background. During the POM (Parents Outreach Meeting) sessions, she understood the components of the Care to Play (C2P) program and how it could support her children. She stayed engaged throughout the program, actively participating in all activities and regularly using WhatsApp to carry out activities for her children.

As a result of her consistent involvement, her elder son's interest in activities grew, and the younger son, who had previously spoken very little, began to communicate more. Over time, significant developmental changes were observed, which Pooja proudly shared when her son won a prize in the Ubharta Sitara competition. She mentioned how her son had started talking more, understanding things better, and becoming more active, marking a visible improvement in his development.



In addition to the C2P program, Pooja also showed interest in the Cash segment of the programme. Initially, her son's application for private school admission under RTE 12.1(c) (Right to Education) was rejected, but with persistent effort, Naksh's name was finally accepted in the next round. As a result, Naksh was able to attend school, and he is now better able to understand and engage in activities. While Pooja received support from both the Care and Cash programs for Naksh, she was unable to provide similar support for her other son.

JULIE

Julie, a homemaker from Khora, Ghaziabad, was initially unaware of the various welfare schemes available for her children. Living in a rented home with her husband, a cart puller, and two daughters, Julie faced numerous challenges, including a lack of awareness about schemes, limited resources, and an inability to access information due to her basic phone and limited education. She attended the Care to Play programme at the Indira Garden Anganwadi Centre, where she became involved in various meetings but struggled to keep up with online activities or gather necessary information for her children's welfare. Despite being physically present at meetings, Julie's lack of access to digital resources often left her behind in staying updated on important schemes and opportunities.

Julie's main challenges were the lack of documentation and resources. She was unaware of which documents were required for her children's application processes and had incomplete documents—Sadhana did not have an Aadhaar card, and Ankita lacked a birth certificate. Additionally, Julie did not know where to apply for these documents or which services to approach for help. Compounding these issues was a difficulty in using her keypad phone, which lacked a stable network connection, preventing her from completing essential applications, such as MKSY for her daughters.

Through persistent support and guidance from her front line worker, Julie was able to overcome these challenges. The OTP issue was resolved by swapping SIM cards, allowing the application process to proceed. She was also informed about the necessary documents and guided to the relevant public services. After completing the documentation and application process, Julie gained a better understanding of the resources available to her and learned how to seek assistance when needed. Ultimately, her daughters were enrolled in MKSY, positioning them to benefit from future stages of the programme, which will contribute to their long-term development.



On the Frontline : SUDHA

One day, we organised a camp in Kailash Nagar for filling out EWS forms under RTE. At that camp, a lady came and asked us what form we were filling. We explained that we were filling RTE EWS forms, which provide 25% free seats in private schools for underprivileged children. She told us that she had already filled out the form for her children three times before and that nothing ever came of it—that only the children of those who paid money in advance got a seat, and that it was all a fraud.

We reassured her that this was not the case and encouraged her to fill out the form, saying that her son could get a seat if she tried once more. When she brought the documents, Kiran Didi and I filled out the form together. A few days later, when the EWS results were announced, the lady called me to share the news that her son had secured admission in a good private school through the EWS scheme.

The school was not far from their home in Gandhinagar. She had previously told me that no one in her family had ever gained admission to a private school, and they were from a very poor family. I felt immense happiness after securing admission for her child, and seeing her joy as she shared the news made me very happy as well. I had always wanted to contribute to children's education, and knowing that I could help brought me great satisfaction. At that moment, I felt very proud of myself and of the work I had done.



AAFIYA

Aafiya, a mother of three, lives in Hauz Rani with her family. The past year has been challenging. Her husband underwent a kidney transplant, and the family has relied on support from extended relatives to manage household expenses. Despite these difficulties, Aafiya remains focused on creating better opportunities for her children.

Her youngest daughter, currently in nursery, was eligible to apply for a seat in a private school under RTE 12.1.c. With support from her Care to Play Frontline Worker (FLW), Rakhi, Aafiya successfully applied and secured admission for her daughter in a nearby private school. This moment strengthened the trust between her and the programme, becoming a key milestone in their engagement.

From the outset, Aafiya was an active participant in Care to Play. She regularly attended Parent Engagement Group (PEG) meetings, completed home activities with her children, and developed strong relationships with the FLWs, teachers, and other caregivers in the programme. She also supported community mobilisation by encouraging other caregivers in her neighbourhood to join and participate in the programme.

Aafiya had some prior tailoring experience, which she was able to build on during the pilot through the skill development and livelihoods support component. She attended training sessions, joined the exposure visit to the local market, and remained in regular contact with FLWs to explore income opportunities. After the pilot ended, Aafiya and a few other caregivers approached local factory owners and secured tailoring work in a nearby kurta manufacturing unit.

Today, Aafiya continues to collaborate with others in her group to identify more consistent and better-paid work. Her journey through Care to Play has contributed to stronger local networks among caregivers and supported a growing sense of financial confidence and peer support in the community.



MAMTA

Mamta, a mother of two, lives in Deepak Vihar, Ghaziabad. When she joined Care to Play (locally known as Khelta Bachpan), she was pregnant with her second child and her son Vinayak was already enrolled at the local Anganwadi Centre. She was aware of the RTE 12.1(c) admission provision and was eager to apply for Vinayak.

From the beginning, Mamta stood out as a committed participant, attending group meetings regularly, completing caregiving activities, and actively sharing information about the programme and RTE application process with other caregivers in her community.

Her initial application for RTE admission was rejected due to a technical requirement: the child's birth certificate needed to reflect a Ghaziabad address. Mamta took the initiative to get the certificate corrected, but the second application was also rejected, this time due to a mismatch between the ward listed on the address proof and the school's ward location.

With the support of her Care to Play Frontline Worker, Mansi, Mamta and her husband made repeated visits to the Block Office. These efforts eventually contributed to a local policy shift, allowing families facing similar documentation challenges to reapply. As a result, Vinayak was granted admission in the second cycle.

Mamta's case demonstrates the value of caregiver agency, consistent follow-up, and locally grounded advocacy. It also highlights the importance of Frontline accompaniment to help families engage with complex systems.

Looking ahead, Mamta is already preparing to apply for the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana and Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana for her daughter when she becomes eligible.



In her own words:

“खेलते बचपन से जुड़ कर मुझे अच्छा लगा, इससे मेरी बहुत मदद हुई। मुझे ऐसा प्लेटफॉर्म मिला जो योजना की जानकारी देने के साथ-साथ उस तक पहुँचने में मेरी अंत तक मदद करता रहा।”

("Being part of Khelta Bachpan made me feel supported. I found a platform that not only informed me about schemes, but stayed with me all the way to help me access them.")



On the Frontline : MANSI

There was a time when going to the field, collecting data, and then uploading it became very overwhelming for me, and because of this, I would get irritated with others very quickly. I became short-tempered over small things. During a one-on-one conversation, Sir spoke to me about this.

Apart from this, I learned a lot from the entire job. Everything was new to me—working in an office, being part of a project, working in a team, going to

I would like to share a few more moments with you. For instance, when we went to Nehru Camp just to conduct a survey, there were community leaders to whom I had to explain Care to Play. I felt so nervous that I could only say two lines and then didn't know how to continue. Sir noticed this and handled the situation, but later he scolded me. I felt like crying, but I controlled myself and thought a lot at home about what I lacked and how I could improve. I practiced speaking many times, and the next time we went, everyone noticed a big improvement.



A similar moment happened on the first day of the baseline survey at Hauz Rani. I was with Sudha Didi and our manager, Dinbandhu Sir, and I made many mistakes. At the time, I felt I had done very well, but the feedback document the next day shocked me because it clearly showed my errors.

After seeing that feedback, Sir gave me detailed input, and I felt like I might not be able to do it next time. But at that moment, along with Sir, Midhat also supported me a lot. I practiced extensively, filled many forms at home, and even troubled Midhat for practice, for which I later apologised. By the next baseline, I had performed very well, received excellent feedback, and perhaps when the last caregiver remained, Ashish Sir called me personally.

Everyone needs guidance to move forward, and I want to share one last moment, which might be my favourite. When Kajal Didi left the job and I was assigned the Khora area, the workload increased tremendously—daily travel, parent orientation meetings, and more. Sir explained that to progress, one has to handle work both above and below their level. That became my motivation. Whenever I felt overwhelmed or frustrated, I reminded myself of this, and even now, when challenges arise, I recall it.

For all of this, I want to sincerely thank my entire Care to Play team, my supportive Sir, and my dear friend Midhat.



RESHMA

Reshma, a mother of two young daughters aged 1.5 and 3.5 years, lives in Ghaziabad. Her elder daughter is enrolled at the Hayat Nagar Anganwadi Centre, while her younger child is still at home. A homemaker, Reshma manages the household while her husband works as a construction worker.

Mansi, the Care to Play Frontline worker in her area, first met Reshma during an early outreach meeting. Though the session was scheduled for noon, Reshma arrived early and brought along other caregivers from her Anganwadi Centre. From the outset, she showed strong interest and engagement in the programme, not only attending the sessions but actively participating in discussions and encouraging others to do the same.

While many participants were drawn to the programme for its welfare-related support, Reshma was particularly invested in the caregiving component. She frequently followed up with Mansi to ensure timely initiation of the WhatsApp-based learning activities and consistently completed caregiving tasks shared through the platform. Her child was also recognised during Care to Play's digital campaign that celebrated active caregiving participation.


Reshma was informally recognised by her peers and the programme team as a community mobiliser. She played a key role in sustaining attendance at the Parent Engagement Group meetings and regularly shared caregiving messages and reminders with other parents. She also took initiative to enrol her daughters under the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana and Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana, using her existing SBI bank account in Khora.



Despite her husband's eligibility for the BOCW welfare board card through his work in construction, the family faced a barrier due to lack of proper address documentation – his bank account is registered in a village in Bihar, making access to some entitlements difficult. Still, Reshma continues to be proactive in identifying what's possible and taking steps to secure a better future for her daughters.



On the Frontline : MIDHAT



For me, a special moment is when I go to the field and meet all kinds of parents. When I help them—whether by filling out their forms or completing some incomplete documents—and they thank me and show me respect for my work, I feel very happy and proud. This motivates me to continue working in the same way and helping people.

I have learned many things during training, such as how to communicate with people, how to feel comfortable with parents, and how to make parents feel at ease so they can connect with me through my words and behaviour. This training was provided by my office, my manager, sometimes Tanvi Didi, sometimes Deepak Sir, sometimes Digant Sir from Trickle Up, and sometimes Diksha from the shared team. I am grateful to all of them for recognising and refining my skills, perhaps making me capable in ways I had never considered myself capable.

Before becoming a part of Indus Action and Care 2 Play, I found it a bit difficult to interact and connect with people. This challenge was still there when I first went to the field, but during training, I tried to give 100% participation because I knew that this training was the platform where I would learn a lot and then apply it in the field. I paid close attention to every detail.

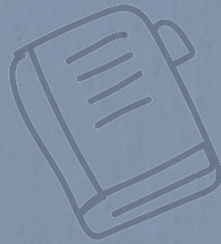
I believe that when we go to the field or work anywhere, the most important aspect is our personality. One can understand a person's character through conversation. Until our manner of speaking and behaviour allows us to draw parents closer through our words, we cannot build a relationship with them. I learned in training how to develop a deep connection with people in the field that would help me carry this programme forward. At times it was very difficult, and at other times it felt easier. Initially, I felt uncomfortable taking the first step, but I gradually began—starting conversations with people, asking about them in a normal way, like their name and what they do. The next time I met them, I addressed them by name and inquired further. Slowly, this process helped me build a good relationship with them.

Eventually, they began sharing both small and significant personal issues with me. When they share these things, it makes me feel very good and trusted. Sometimes it saddens me to think that after a while, our programme will end, and I will no longer be able to meet and interact with the Anganwadi workers and the parents with whom I have built such strong relationships. Still, the work I am doing for them now is something I may not be able to do again, and that thought brings me a little sadness.



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