



"SEEKHO  
SIKHAO  
SAATHI"

PARTNERS  
IN  
LEARNING



## RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 LEARNING CRISIS

In April 2020, schools in Pakistan were closed indefinitely to contain the spread of the COVID-19. According to UNESCO, global school closures since then have deprived 40 million children of the most critical year of their early childhood education. While the world quickly pivoted towards digital and online solutions, it also meant that children without access to technology fell further behind.

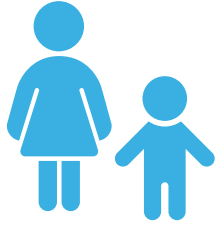
SEEKHO SIKHAO SAATHI or PARTNERS IN LEARNING – was our response to school closures during COVID-19, to support street-connected children without access to digital learning options.

Street-connected children were particularly vulnerable to the social and economic shocks of COVID-19. Many of the education and protection services they accessed closed down indefinitely, and there was increase in negative coping mechanisms like child labour. The longer they stayed out of school, the harder it was for them to return.

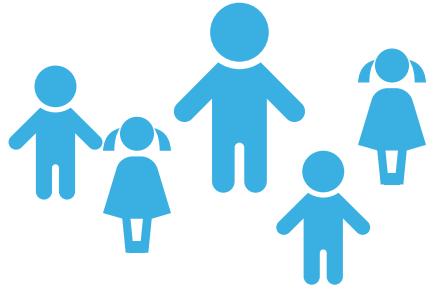


Adapting a Child to Child school readiness model of giving older children the tools to deliver early learning sessions to younger children, we added on a layer of Montessori-inspired, playful learning accompanied by COVID-19 and safeguarding protocols. Beyond the gains in learning, the sessions created a sense of normalcy and routine, which was important to reinforce young children's mental health and resilience

# HOW IT WORKED



ADULTS  
(TEACHERS)  
SUPPORTING  
BIG PARTNERS



BIG PARTNERS REACHING  
GROUPS OF ABOUT FIVE  
LITTLE PARTNERS IN THEIR  
COMMUNITIES

The first iteration (June-August 2020) was in partnership with the Pehli Kiran School System (PKSS) in Islamabad, a network of eight non-formal schools serving children from refugee, migrant and internally displaced communities. This was achieved with minimal resources through crowdfunding, and the help of a seed grant from SAP-ChangemakerXchange.

The second time (February-May 2021) we piloted in a remote rural location with Zindagi Trust, in the mountainous north of Pakistan. In June 2021, we are in the process of reaching a greater number of children in Islamabad, and are excited to have received material and technical support from Montessori Centre International - and to have co-created content with teachers from PKSS.

## REACH

OVER 1,000 LITTLE PARTNERS  
VIA 225 BIG PARTNERS  
(Expanding in June 2021)

"I LEARNT THAT WHEN WORKING  
WITH LITTLE PARTNERS, YOUR  
FACE SHOULD BE A SMILE."

BIG PARTNER,  
PEHLI KIRAN SCHOOL 6

## THE POWER OF PLAY

In designing the play-based sessions we kept the Lego Foundation principles in mind, ensuring that the activities were joyful; meaningful; involved active engagement ; were iterative and involved social interaction.

They included sessions with play-dough to build creativity and motor skills, later followed by a session making toys from mud as a low-cost resource; the board game Ludo for reinforcing counting; and story-telling.

The Big Partners also had the freedom to include their own ideas if they had time at the end of the sessions and thought of art activities, rhymes for vocabulary building as well as local games like hop-scotch - for fun.



# IMPACT - LITTLE PARTNERS

Despite constraints, for the first iteration with PKSS teachers supported us to conduct baseline and endline surveys to gauge progress in the domains of: **literacy and language; numeracy; fine and gross motor skills; and socioemotional learning (SEL)**. These were disaggregated according to class level - play group, nursery or class one. Learning outcomes were similar for both girls and boys.



Across all class groups, there was a noticeable improvement in the four domains; although for SEL there was more anecdotal than quantitative evidence in terms of children beginning to follow instructions, take turns and have the competencies ready to do well at school. In terms of learning gains, the most profound impact recorded was at the playgroup level, where children had little prior experience of school. **The greatest difference was in terms of numeracy skills** as these were constantly reinforced using counters and everyday objects. (A detailed impact report is available separately).

**WHEN SOME CHOTAY SAATHI CAME, THEY DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO HOLD A PENCIL. THEN WE TAUGHT THEM HOW TO HOLD A PENCIL.**

**BIG PARTNER, PEHLI KIRAN SCHOOL 7**

**ON AVERAGE, OVER 75% OF ENROLLED CHILDREN CONTINUED TO ATTEND SESSIONS THROUGHOUT. THIS INCLUDED ABSENCES DUE TO FAMILIES MOVING BETWEEN THEIR VILLAGE AND CITY HOMES, AND RAINS IN THE OPEN-AIR SETTINGS.**

**BY THE END OF 17 SESSIONS THE CHILDREN WHO COULD:**

**COUNT CONFIDENTLY FROM 1-10 IN PLAYGROUP**

**MORE THAN DOUBLED**

**INTERPRET A 3-STEP PICTURE STORY**

**MORE THAN DOUBLED**

**SORT OBJECTS BY SHAPE**

**ROSE 60%**



# IMPACT - BIG PARTNERS

"BEFORE THE SESSION IF ANYONE TALKED TO ME I WOULD LOOK DOWN AND WOULD NOT SHARE THINGS WITH ANYONE. NOW IF SOMEONE TALKS TO ME I CAN LOOK AT THEM AND TALK TO THEM."

In order to internalise their experiences and document their learning, Baray Saathi filled in Weekly Reflection Records that were then shared digitally by the teachers. Some of their self-identified themes in terms of their learning are presented below.

creativity  
**CONFIDENCE**  
LEADERSHIP  
GROUP MANAGEMENT  
problem-solving  
empathy

From the focus group discussions in the end, Big Partners also reported motivation to stay engaged with schools/learning. Teachers shared the unintended impact in terms of improved reading skills, as Big Partners needed to engage deeply with the manuals in order to lead sessions.

AFTER

BEFORE

Now when I look at the children I can see that they learn very well

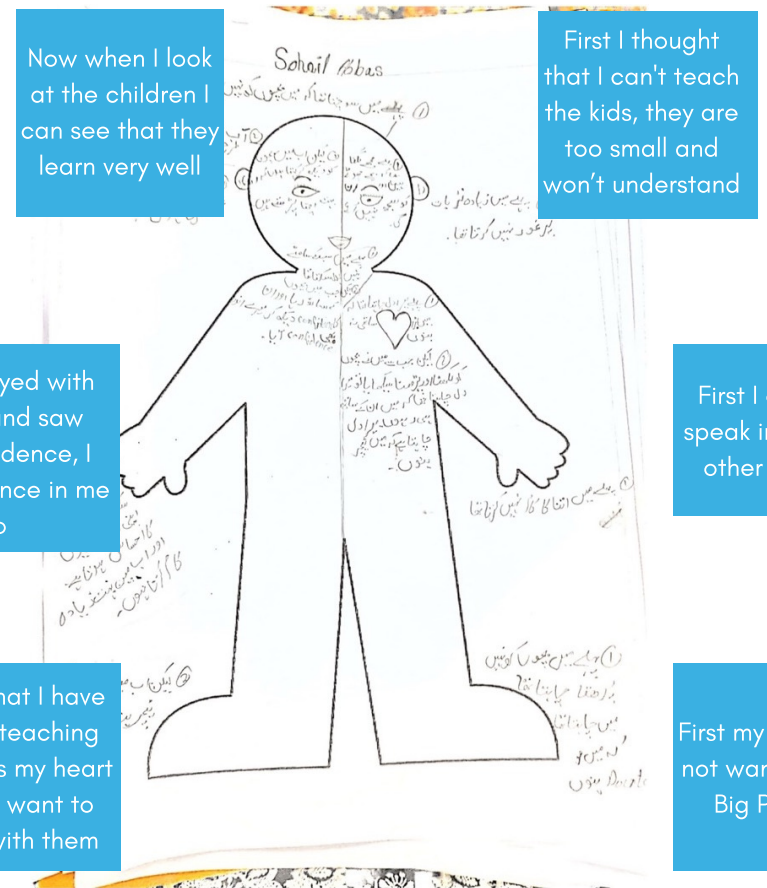
First I thought that I can't teach the kids, they are too small and won't understand

When I stayed with the kids and saw their confidence, I got confidence in me too

First I couldn't speak in front of other people

Now that I have been teaching the kids my heart says I want to stay with them

First my heart did not want to be a Big Partner



Sample body map exercise from FGDs



# IMPACT - SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

## • COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Most communities were immediately receptive to the idea of hosting sessions in and around their homes. They were glad for the opportunity for children to learn rather than their time to be wasted, and staff were mostly able to recruit mothers to supervise the sessions for safeguarding purposes. This came with challenges when adults returned to work, and sometimes sessions had to be moved to school spaces.

## • TAKING LEARNING TO HOMES

One unique element of the programme was that for the first time, it created a new kind of connection between caregivers and children's education. For some non-literate mothers, it was the first time they were able to engage so closely with their children's learning. In the Focus Group Discussion for PK-2, PK-6 and PK-9, staff shared that mothers and older sisters would come and engage in the activities with the children, even learning the poems. The Principal from PK-2 was later approached by proactive mothers saying they wanted to learn how to do these kinds of activities as well.

## • CHANGED PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN'S AGENCY

Parents were able to see how Big Partners were able to make a positive change and take the lead in their communities. There was in many cases new respect for children's agency. Teachers, too, had started out skeptical about the idea of older children leading sessions and had wanted to be far more involved. Eventually, they were surprised by the responsibilities assumed by the Big Partners, and were able to support them with the tools and knowledge needed to lead.



**PARENTS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF BIG  
PARTNERS CHANGED  
AND THEY STARTED  
LOOKING AT THEM  
AS MORE "GROWN UP."**

**"THE KIDS HAD A ROUTINE  
AND A MINDSET TO LEARN.  
WE ALSO HAD A LOT OF NEW  
ADMISSIONS."  
PRINCIPAL, PEHLI KIRAN  
SCHOOL 2**

**THIS WAS MUCH BETTER THAN  
KIDS BEING IDLE. BEFORE, KIDS  
WERE CARELESS ABOUT TIME.  
BEING LATE FOR SCHOOL, BEING  
ABSENT WASN'T A BIG DEAL - BUT  
NOW THEY ARE MORE  
RESPONSIBLE AND AWARE OF  
BEING ON TIME.**

**MOTHER,  
PEHLI KIRAN SCHOOL 7**



# GALLERY



## Reinforcing literacy and numeracy

Simple exercises helped build foundational skills for future learning. Here, a little girl matches shapes and colors.



## COVID-19 protocols

The project promoted awareness of safety precautions for COVID-19. When schools reopened, the first thing Little Partners would do would be to go wash their hands.



## Resilience through happy memories

Creative sessions helped create stronger bonds between Big and Little Partners. The sessions created a sense of normalcy and structure during a difficult time for the children.



## Maintaining a connection with learning

Here, a Little Partner concentrates on his picture while sharing paints and resources with others.

