



cities for
children

Annual Report
June 2022 - June 2023

Note from Founder

The year 2022-23 was marked with milestones for Cities for Children, and we felt blessed to have been able to expand our footprint in multiple geographies - and simultaneously worked to deepen our impact in terms of quality.

Our sister entity in Pakistan grew by leaps and bounds, as we [piloted new experiential science content](#) as part of our Partners in Learning offering. We were able to [respond to the devastating floods of 2023](#), and set up Temporary Learning Centres in order to provide safe spaces for displaced and affected children to continue to learn - and to play. A big thanks to the donors who responded to our flood appeal, and to Heart Valve Bank for making this possible. We were also grateful for the dedication of incredible partners like Charity Doings Foundation (CDF) in rural Umerkot, and to SPARC who helped us support a peri-urban community in Hyderabad. Finally, we returned to our roots and delivered our signature Hansti Basti (Happy Hoods) community volunteering project in one of our long-term partner schools at the Pehli Kiran School System, to provide a burst of energy and motivation for children to attend and stay in school.

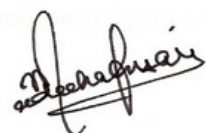
In London, we started with a creative session in a ["Syria Summer Camp"](#) for refugee children in Brent - and were able to pilot our very first Partners in Learning programme with the support of our corporate partner, Alpha FMC. Through this, we are offering one on one support to 13 ["Big Partners" from refugee and asylum-seeking communities](#), to be able to step forward and deliver playful learning activities to 4 and 5 year old children at their local primary school.

Across these diverse settings, our core focus has been to provide support to the most vulnerable children and provide them with opportunities to thrive, to find happiness and build resilience. This was the thought behind our second ["Maar Nahi Pyaar \(Care Don't Scare\)"](#) animation launched in April, which we will continue to work on to [support teachers and caregivers and create violence-free spaces of learning](#).

Through our work this year, we have met incredibly inspiring children and young people children who, in the face of unimaginable challenges, have found within themselves and those around them the joys and wonders of childhood. We continue to learn from them, to adapt according to what they need, and to continue to care about each one.

Thank you for sharing our journey.

Sincerely,

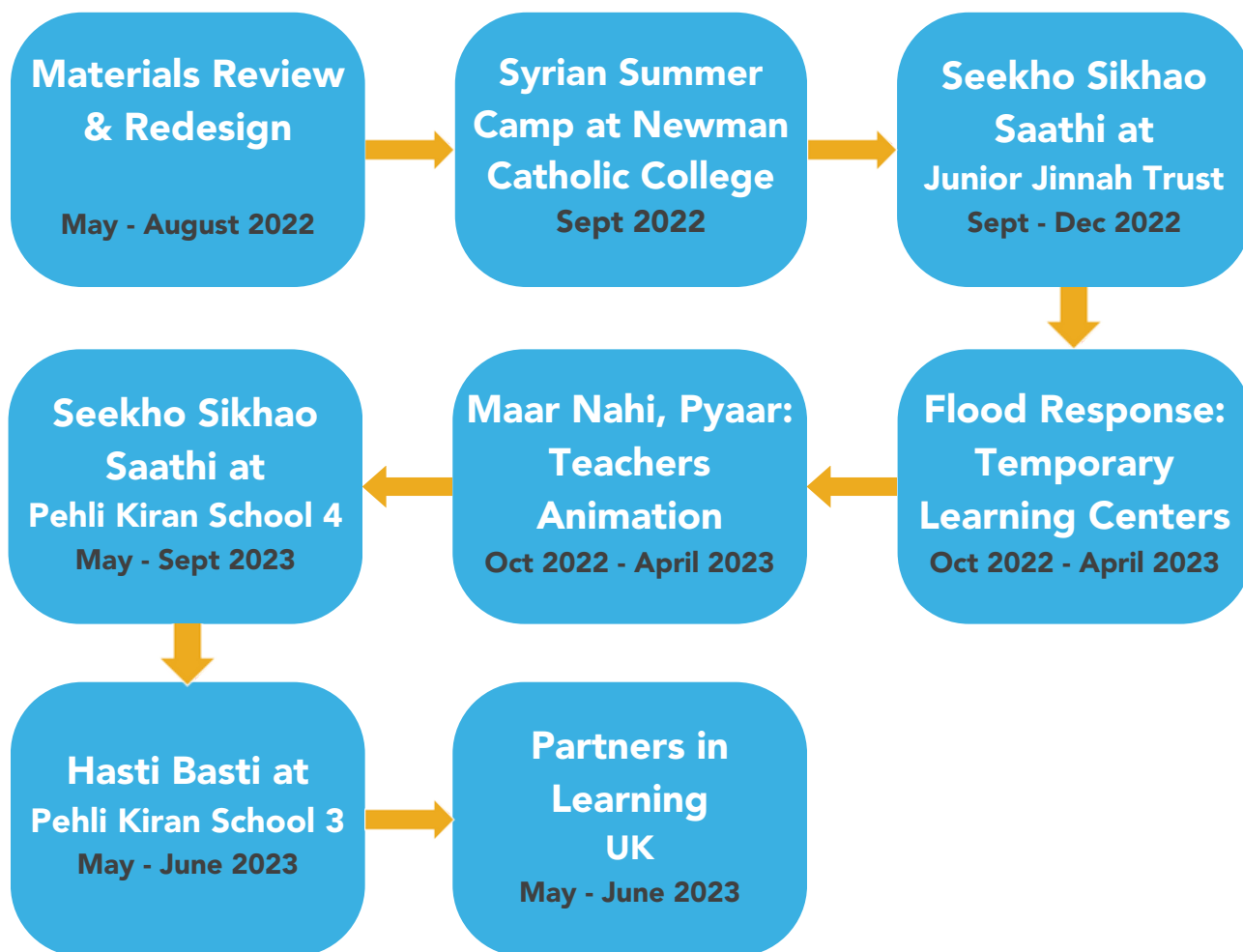


Madeeha Ansari

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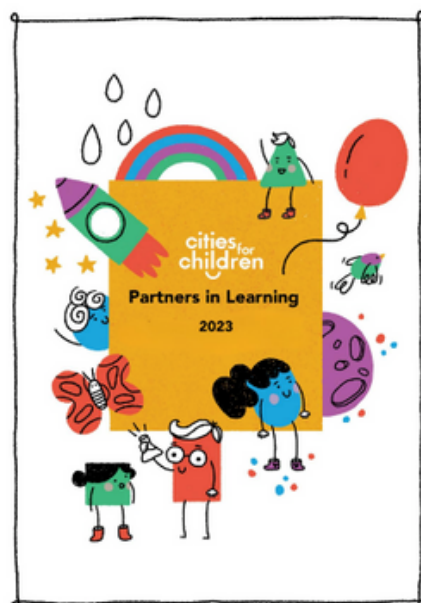
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Summary of Our Year



Materials Review and Redesign

As the Seekho Sikhao Saathi programmes were piloted during or in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19, the content and materials were renewed and adapted to the post-COVID context. Moreover, our manual design was updated with customised illustrations by Sana Kirmani and layout by ECI, to reflect a child-friendly reading experience. This review and redesign activity was supported by the Montessori Group, UK.



In addition to content adapted from the Child to Child Getting Ready for School programme, and our own original content infused with Montessori principles, we engaged Science Fuse as partners to create experiential science sessions for the Partners in Learning curriculum. This aimed to provide young learners with a deeper understanding of the world around them. This content was successfully launched in September 2022.

Seekho Sikhao Saathi (Partners in Learning)

An innovative, signature programme built on an evidence-based Child to Child school readiness model, Montessori principles and our playful learning ethos, which we have been adapting for a range of cultural contexts. Through this, Big Partners (grades 5-7) are trained to become champions of education in their communities and deliver playful learning sessions for Little Partners (at the preschool level).

Since its launch in 2020, Cities for Children has implemented the Seekho Sikhao Saathi programme with a range of partners. Each iteration has provided unique and nuanced lessons that helped to solidify the program's foundational design. For instance, we have learnt the impact of direct coaching on honing Baray Saathi's leadership skills as well as their confidence and ability to express themselves.

As of June 2023, the program has been offered 6 times reaching over over 3379 children including Pakistan, particularly in marginalised urban communities.

In the year June 2022 - June 2023, we implemented a complete programme once in Islamabad and currently have two ongoing iterations, one in the UK and one in Pakistan. Each of these three schools differ not only in the backgrounds of the Little and Big Partners but also in their focus and outcomes.



There are two main levels of impact:

- Crucial foundational and school readiness skills for Little Partners
- Key socioemotional learning (SEL) outcomes for Big Partners





Junior Jinnah Trust: Sept - Dec 2022

The fifth iteration of Cities for Children's signature Seekho Sikhao Saathi (Partners in Learning) programme was conducted at Junior Jinnah Trust school located in Burma Town, Islamabad. This 13 week programme featured sessions focusing on socioemotional learning, building literacy and numeracy skills, and inculcating a curiosity of science in Chotay Saathi and Baray Saathi that aimed to nurture their relationship with the world around them. This was the second iteration of the programme at this school and provided valuable and crucial learnings and insights to Cities for Children.

In this iteration, as we were piloting our science content, a majority of the programme content included interactive and engaging science sessions. The piloted science content, which received an incredible response from students and teachers alike, was curated by a technical consultant, Science Fuse



11

Big Partners

49

Little Partners

Chotay Saathi Highlights

For our 49 Little Partners, we looked at recall of key concepts:

- 65% remembered the key details of how sound travels
- 83% remembered the important things plants need to grow
- 60% remembered all the stages of a butterfly's life cycle

We saw a particular impact on the 9 girls who participated in the programme, who emerged as confident young leaders.

Baray Saathi Highlights

In this programme, a deliberate coaching element was added to support our 11 Baray Saathi in growing their socioemotional skills. Some key indicators of success were:

- 100% felt that they could make a change in their household, school or larger community
- 100% reported an increased motivation to learn in class
- 100% reported an increase in confidence
- 77% felt they could "manage children better"

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Pehli Kiran Schools: May - Sept 2023

In May 2023, Cities for Children launched its sixth iteration of the Partners in Learning programme, with the Pehli Kiran School System (PKSS) No. 4. PKSS is run by the Jamshed Akhtar Qureshi Education Trust (JAQET), a local non-profit organization working to provide street-connected children with quality education free-of-cost. They establish flexible and mobile operations in urban slum communities that are excluded and marginalized.

Cities for Children has previously conducted two large-scale Partners in Learning programmes with PKSS during COVID-19 which yielded incredible impact. This third iteration is being implemented with a more focused approach of supporting Big Partners who have dropped out of school to re-enroll.

In this iteration, we have onboarded the Big Partners as "Teaching Assistants" and through this, we are providing a small stipend to them as a means of incentivizing their return to school. We have also engaged a counsellor to support our Bari Saathis to cope with serious everyday challenges in their lives, and to motivate them towards their goal to returning to school.

The programme has undergone 12 sessions thus far, with 8 remaining to be conducted when schools resume after summer break. The Big Partners have seen a drastic increase in confidence and communication skills, as observed by CfC staff as well as teachers. They are progressively learning to not just teach their groups but to lead them with responsibility. They are building precious relationships with their Little Partners, who treat them as "big sisters."



"I used some extra time in the session tell the Chotay Saathi a story - they not only loved it but thanked me for it too"
- Bari Saathi reflection



6
Big Partners

46
Little Partners



UK Pilot with Refugees: Apr-July 2023

In April 2023, we launched our UK Partners in Learning pilot programme in partnership with Newman Catholic College and Harlesden Primary School, in London. We adapted our signature programme to support refugee children in delivering creative sessions for children from a local primary school. The aim was to help ease the transition for newly arrived or settled refugee and migrant children in the UK, giving them the skills and encouragement to thrive. In addressing the marginalisation experienced by refugee communities, we sought to actively challenge limiting stereotypes. The programme provided an opportunity for Big Partners to become active stakeholders in their education and future, developing their confidence, communication and relationship skills.

Throughout the course of the 7 sessions; the first four were designed as training and support sessions for the Big Partners, with a focus on addressing and supporting their psychosocial well-being. During the following 3 sessions the Big Partners were responsible for delivering sessions that introduced early concepts of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in a playful and approachable manner. The Big Partners had the opportunity to build crucial socioemotional and leadership skills, enabling them to excel in life and gain confidence in their abilities.



One Big Partner expressed: "I loved when I helped and played with the kids because it was really satisfying to see them happy!"



"It was fun teaching and get to know the kids and it gave me a feeling of purpose seeing the smiles on their faces" Big Partner comment



Flood Response: Oct 2022 - April 2023

In 2022, Pakistan experienced one of the most destructive floods in its history, displacing nearly 8 million people across the country. Recognising the urgent need for safe and playful learning spaces for the affected children, Cities for Children partnered with local organisations such as The Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) in Hyderabad, and Charity Doings Foundation (CDF) in Umerkot to set up two Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) for children displaced by the floods.

Both populations consisted largely of families from minority Hindu communities who experienced multiple forms of vulnerability. Amidst this crisis and the complete vacuum of services for children in these two districts, our TLCs provided the affected children with respite from the stress and trauma of displacement, as well as the opportunity to play, connect with their peers, make friends, and stay connected to education, in a safe environment.

Umerkot TLC

The Umerkot TLC was set up with Charity Doings Foundation (CDF) as the implementing partner. It served nearly 200 children from a settlement of internally displaced children and families from neighboring districts. The Centre gave these children an educational space to access play-based learning opportunities crucial for early childhood development. As a result of the centre's activities, our team witnessed the improvements in early literacy and language, numeracy, fine and gross motor skills and socioemotional learning.



Impact Assessment: Baseline to Endline

Early Literacy and Language

64%
increase

Gross and Fine Motor Skills

19%
increase

Numeracy

65%
increase

Socioemotional Learning

65%
increase

One parent revealed: "I used to be worried about my son, but now he goes to school himself and studies. I know that he is going to make my name shine." Similarly, one child shared: "I want to be a doctor and that's why I listen carefully to the teachers. I want to treat people for free. If I don't study then how would I know what injections to give?"

As these quotes demonstrate, the Umerkot TLC was an invaluable solution to the flood crisis in Sindh, that promoted lifelong learning and curiosity for children who would have otherwise had little access due to the flood crisis.

Hyderabad TLC

The Hyderabad TLC was set up with the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) as the implementing partner. It served as a drop-in space for over 100 children from an urban settlement who were affected by the floods and disruption to education, as schools were hosting displaced families. Here, communities faced the long-term challenges of urban poverty, made worse by the floods.

The Hyderabad TLC aimed to bridge the education gap for these children to prevent them from missing out on early years learning opportunities. It provided a safe space that added both structure and routine to children's lives, and connected them with the possibility of changing their lives.

CHILDREN REPORTED

- Feeling EMPOWERED in that space
- Feeling SAFE from violence
- Feeling like they can PLAY there like they can't elsewhere
- Meeting their FRIENDS and talk there (otherwise an issue for girls)
- Having a chance to LEARN MANNERS, not to fight or curse and how to meet people.
- Having a ROUTINE, getting up in the morning, knowing they have to go. Parents said they got up themselves and went themselves because they wanted to.
- Enjoying CREATIVITY and colouring

We shared and adapted some of our flagship Partners in Learning curriculum for the teaching staff, which helped to engage children in playful early learning and associate positive experiences with learning. This curriculum was relatable, engaging and tailored to meet the unique skills and experiences of the children affected; support their learning, and equip them with resilience and the skills to succeed in their academics and life.

"During the past few months, I have seen parents' opinion on education drastically shift. Previously, they did not value schooling and thought that their children would do the same jobs as them. However, after their children's engagement with the center, parents come to us ask us how to get their children enrolled in government schools."

Excerpt from a focus group discussion with the TLC teachers



Twice a week, there were snacks - some provided by corporate donor Hilal Foods, and healthy fruit from CfC. Saturdays were Play Days - essential for children's happiness and mental health!

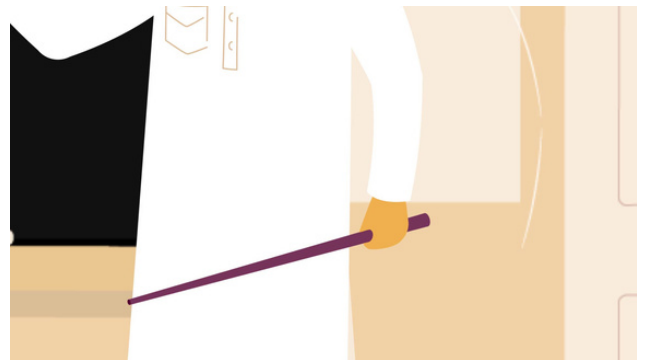
Maar Nahi, Pyar (Care, Don't Scare)

As part of CfC's "right to safety" strand of work, our advocacy campaign, Maar Nahi, Pyar, (Care, Don't Scare) is centered around the belief that home and school should represent protective orbs for children in the hands of trusted adults. Our first resource was created as a response to COVID-19, in which we offered an alternative approach to corporal punishment to parents through our thoroughly developed and widespread animation. Through this, we showed that there is value for every member of the family in considering positive approaches to discipline.



Teachers Resource - 2023

In spite of legislation to ban corporal punishment in spaces of learning within Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) in February 2021, it is still widespread across schools in Pakistan. Particularly after COVID-19, teachers have pushed back claiming that attempts to curb corporal punishment has a negative impact on children's behavior and academic achievement. Rather than the learning losses of COVID-19, lower results are being seen as an outcome of reduced ability to enforce discipline - through violence.



Legislation was an important first step in eradicating violence in the classroom. The second step is to share, through public campaigns and specialised trainings, the evidence that those practices don't work; that they actually harm children and affect who they become in the world; and that there are other, better ways of teaching both academic and life lessons.



In April 2023, we launched the second part of our Maar Nahi, Pyar campaign that aims at providing teachers with positive disciplining methods to manage classrooms effectively, and with love.

The animation has been widely disseminated over social media by leading education experts in Pakistan with over 30,000 views on Youtube / Instagram.

Way Forward

We are currently actively seeking partnerships to move towards the next phase of this campaign: training and equipping teachers with the means to manage their classrooms without violence. We have completed our research on developing this resource and are actively exploring opportunities for collaboration to disseminate the content and deliver workshops for teachers in the upcoming year.

Hansti Basti (Happy Hoods)

Hansti Basti – the “Happy ‘Hoods” project - is a creative learning project aimed at harnessing the energy and potential of volunteers to achieve impact for children in urban poverty. It provides opportunities for children and cohorts of university volunteers to engage meaningfully with each other over a sustained period of time, partaking in playful learning activities. The sessions have been designed to consider the way kids relate to each other; to their immediate environment and communities; and to the wider world.

Hasti Basti at Pehli Kiran School 3: May - June 2023

The Hasti Basti programme kicked off in its fourth iteration at PK-3 in May for a total of six weekly sessions. The PK-3 school has had a historical pattern of low attendance and motivation among students, and after the first iteration "lit a spark" in the school, according to teachers, it was requested for a second time around. Our project volunteers from Bahria University demonstrated great commitment, conducting the sessions in an outdoor setting during a heatwave.

Sessions include a combination of art, discussion, games and theatre to provide children with a positive experience of the learning space. The programme ended with an exposure visit to the Lok Virsa Heritage Museum in Islamabad.

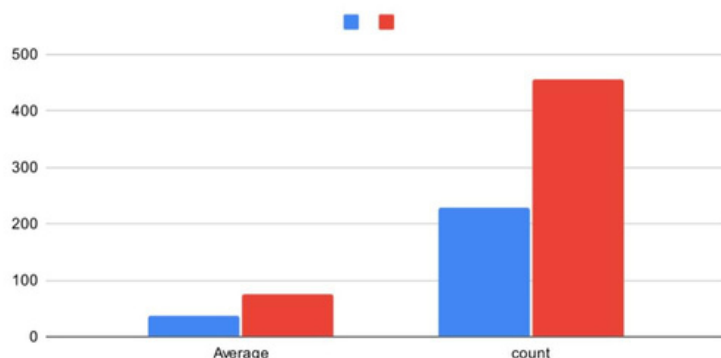


Project Impact: Student Testimonials

"I used to be shy about speaking first, now I'm not because there were students from other classes and I learnt to talk to them. Talking to the volunteers also gave me confidence and now I can talk to anyone and I am not shy anymore."

"Through the sessions I learnt how important it is not to spread rubbish and pollution because in some way we are being part of global warming and the way it is getting hotter. So I learnt that it's not just that rubbish looks bad when you throw it but it also has other effects."

Students' attendance before and during the programme Implementation



90

Grade 2&3
Students

25

University
Volunteers

"I used to feel life is only pain and sadness. In my home, everyone fights, but in these sessions I felt happy. I feel we can create happiness like we created in these sessions."

Project Outcomes

1

Support students to tap into their empathy and encourage them to operate with love and care for those around them.

2

Build critical relationship skills in students to help them form meaningful relationships with their peers.

3

Develop confidence in students and empower them to exercise their agency and practice active citizenship.