

ABOUT

Cities for Children (CfC) is a non-profit organization with a mission to protect the “right to a childhood” - the right to read and play in safety. We work to support both learning and well-being for children, especially those affected by poverty and vulnerability. This means creating safe and nurturing spaces, as well as joyful learning experiences that encourage school retention and support holistic development.

INTRODUCTION

Hansti Basti – the "Happy Hoods" programme is a 4-6 week creative learning programme designed by Cities for Children (CfC). It supports children's emotional well-being and social learning by engaging university-student volunteers as facilitators.

Why Hansti Basti?

Hansti Basti is a child-centered initiative that aims to create joyful, inclusive, and emotionally supportive learning environments. Its core goals are to strengthen children’s **motivation to learn**, **social-emotional skills**, build their **confidence** and **empathy**, and promote **resilience** through creative expression and play-based learning.

Through **play**, **art**, **games** and **discussions** the children and the volunteers engage with each other meaningfully and form happy connections with each other creating a playful and encouraging environment.



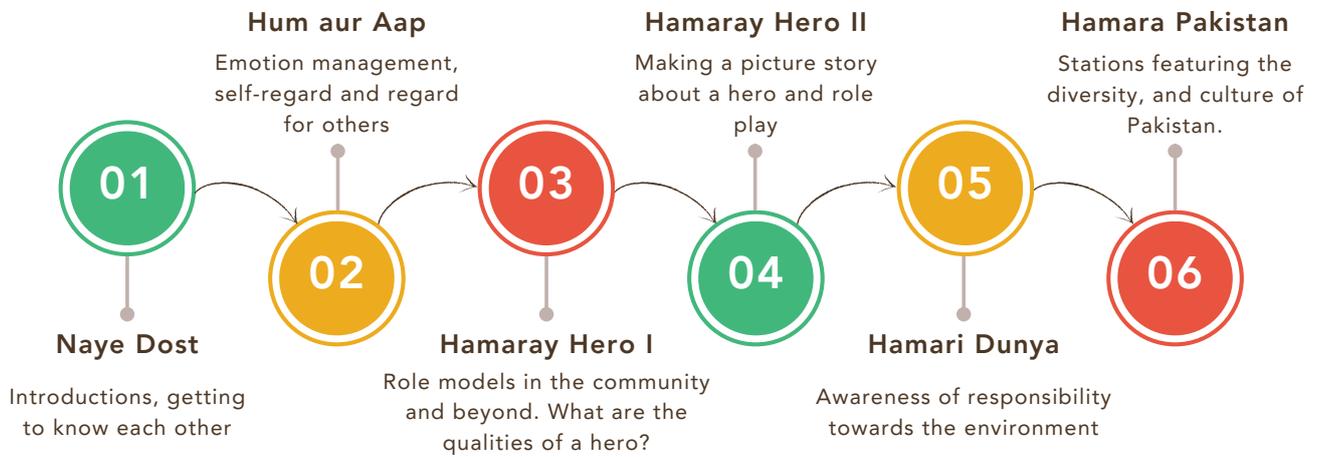
Fig 1. Volunteers and students engaged in a painting activity.

OUR PARTNERS

For our 6th iteration of Hansti Basti, we engaged with students of **Basic Education Community Schools (BECS)**. The Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training implements the BECS program through the Directorate General of BECS. These schools follow a non-formal primary education model, where a single teacher is responsible for teaching all grades (I to V) using multi-grade teaching methods. Through our partnership with BECS we provided educational resources and improved the learning environment by installing fans, helping create a more comfortable and conducive space for students. For this programme, we were joined by MPhil Psychology students from **Rawalpindi Women University (RWU)**. Their academic background and understanding of child development added meaningful value to the children’s learning experience.



PROGRAMME OUTLINE



PROGRAMME IMPACT

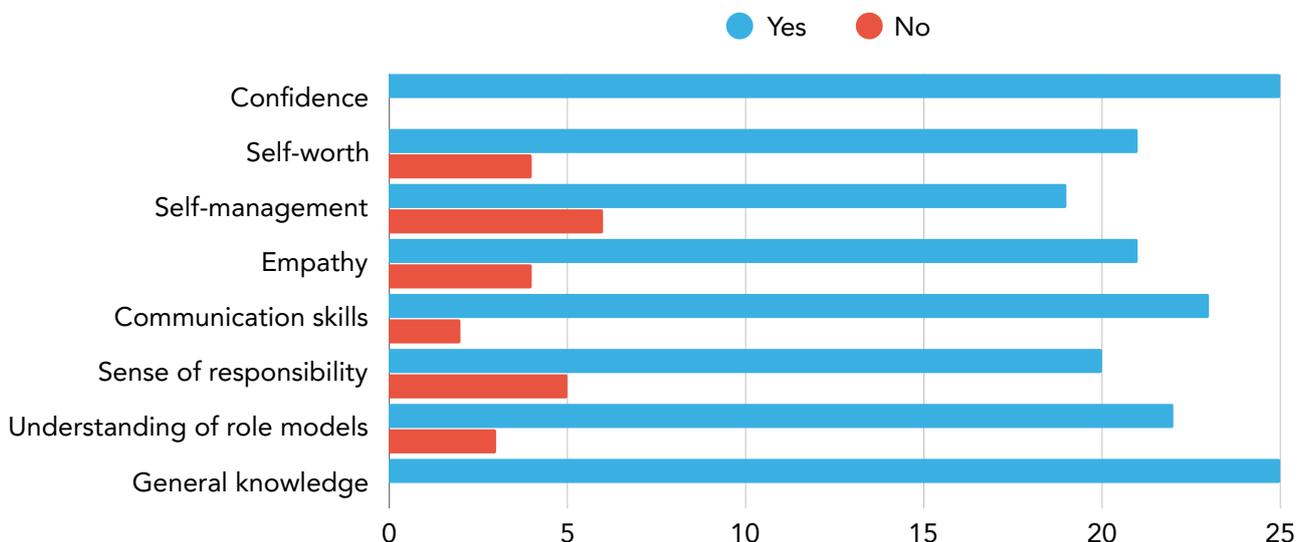
To gauge programme impact, we looked at the qualitative and quantitative data collected through:

- a. End-of-programme feedback surveys with volunteers
- b. Focus group discussions with students, volunteers and teachers

"I couldn't speak to strangers but after interacting with the CFC team and the volunteers I can talk to anyone now"
- Student

Survey Results

The data collected from the volunteers show that most of them noticed a positive change in confidence, sense of self worth, self management, empathy, communication skills, sense of responsibility, understanding of role models and general knowledge about the environment in the children.



Following were the observations shared by the volunteers:

- **Self-Awareness:** At first, many of the students felt shy to speak their minds, but by the end of the program, they became more comfortable and started expressing themselves more.
- **Self-Management:** The students became more independent and organized as the programme progressed.
- **Self-Confidence:** Their curiosity and willingness to learn improved, and they became more friendly with one another, actively participating in activities.

I learnt how to engage children and how to interact with them (children).” - Volunteer

Focus Group Discussions

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to assess the programme's impact on students' self-awareness, self-management, confidence, communication, and connection, while also gathering volunteers' and teachers' insights on its effectiveness and areas for improvement. Below is a word cloud of the changes observed:



According to the feedback from the teachers, they observed behavioral and social improvements among children. Those who had been shy before the programme began to participate more confidently in classroom activities. Teachers also observed improved attendance, especially on Tuesdays. The teachers also reported an increase in the admissions in BECS due to the programme. The teachers also noticed an increase in the motivation level of the children. The data from the focus group discussions with the children showed that they were much happier to come to school after the Hansti Basti programme. 90% of the students said that their confidence has increased.



Fig 2. The students encouraging each other during the play

“One of the best moments was when all the children worked together to make a flag. Everyone was so excited while colouring it, they were smiling and laughing. It was a simple activity, but it brought so much joy and teamwork.” - Volunteer

The programme led to a remarkable rise in student numbers, growing from 60 to 100.



Fig 3. Volunteers having a discussion about emotions with the students

They shared that they had become more **aware of their emotions and were better at managing them**. They also mentioned that they now made use of the stress balls made from balloons and sand whenever they felt angry, which helped them calm down. All the students reported an increase in **learning behaviour**. Many students expressed that they learnt helping others, making new friends, drawing, and making paper bags from old newspapers.

Volunteer Reflections

All **26** volunteers (**100%**) expressed motivation to take part in future community service projects. This unanimous response highlights the program's strong impact in inspiring continued community engagement and social responsibility among participants. Regarding their own learning, they also shared:

"From this project, I learned the importance of play-based learning in child development and how it fosters creativity and engagement. I observed how children learn best through hands-on experiences and interactive activities." - Volunteer

"At first, the children were not engaged at all, but then when they gradually started engaging with us through the activities, they started sharing their feelings with us. It was a great moment for me that the children were gradually connecting with us through the activities and were telling us their experiences and feelings." - Volunteer



Fig 4. Student showcasing the stressball named "bablu", made using sand and balloons



Fig 5. Students holding a handmade bag from recycled newspaper



Fig 6. Volunteer engaged with students in explaining Pakistani culture

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

1

To ensure sustained student engagement and reduce dropout rates, it is essential to invest in teacher training. Teachers should be equipped with the necessary resources and skills to guide students effectively and to support parents in making informed decisions about their children's education.

2

While teachers already have access to the Hansti Basti programme, it is equally important to provide parents with the opportunity to observe these sessions. Seeing their children actively participating, creating, and enjoying the process of learning can help parents appreciate their potential and the value of education.

3

Introducing a peer learning initiative, such as the Seekho Sikhao programme, may contribute to fostering collaboration, building student confidence, and supporting the development of leadership skills



Fig 7. A student showcasing her paper bag



Fig 8. Volunteer helping the students color the paper bag

CONCLUSION

As one volunteer beautifully expressed, *"I learned how to truly enjoy with the children through playful activities."* This simple yet powerful reflection captures the heart of the programme, creating joyful, meaningful experiences that build resilience not just in children, but in the volunteers who support them. The Hansti Basti programme brought about meaningful changes for children, teachers, and volunteers, helping them connect, learn, and grow together. Cities for Children looks forward to continuing this work and reaching more children living in urban poverty through playful, engaging learning experiences that support their well-being and development.



Fig 9. Students and volunteers making a compliment web