



# Impact Report

(2024-2025)



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## FOUNDER'S NOTE

It has been a year of joyful adventures for Cities for Children, in which we really grew by leaps and bounds. We entered the global stage, as we were featured in the **HundrEd Global Collection** of most impactful and scalable innovations of 2025, launched in Helsinki, Finland. While this recognition was a milestone, our focus remains on creating meaningful experiences that protect childhood for every child we are able to reach.

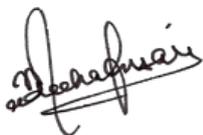
In Pakistan, we **doubled the number of girls' government schools** we worked with and formalised the way that we articulate impact on **socioemotional learning (SEL)**. We also created a solid footprint for our work on **"Maar Nahi Pyaar"** – ending corporal punishment and violence in learning spaces. We continue to build the "case for love" in classrooms with important stakeholders, from frontline teachers and head teachers to parliamentarians and policymakers.

Through our sister entity in the UK, we began to fill a gap that we saw for **newly arrived refugee children** who were not yet enrolled in schools. Our trauma-informed playful learning sessions have now stretched for over a year, building crucial language skills while also gently supporting their mental health. We find children waiting for us every week.

My personal favourite has been the expansion of our work in the early childhood sphere, through the creation of **"Dhanak" (Rainbow)**. This was a special space we created in a community with large numbers of out-of-school children, in partnership with Junior Jinnah Trust. We worked to fill it with colour and learning, and to ensure that the beautiful "graduation" ceremony at the year end led to real future paths to learning.

We are grateful to the trust placed in us by our supporters – in particular the Malala Fund, which helped our team grow in Pakistan, and individuals who gave their Zakat for our work with out-of-school children, refugee children, and to a new partnership providing **hope and healing for children in Gaza**. Doors were held open by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, the National Commission on the Rights of the Child and the Federal Directorate of Education, and well as our partner schools. A great big thank you to the team that showed up every day, and has helped build this organisation brick by brick.

Sincerely,





# O V E R V I E W

At Cities for Children, we believe that all children deserve the Right to a Childhood, the right to read, play, and feel safe. This ethos guides everything we do, from our grassroots programmes in Pakistan to our growing work in the UK.

Since our founding, we have worked to reach the most marginalised children, providing access to learning, emotional wellbeing, and safe spaces to grow and thrive.



# OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS

SEEKHO SIKHAO SAATHI

**1661**  
CHILDREN  
CONNECTING  
& LEARNING

**44**  
TEACHERS  
GUIDING THE  
WAY

MAAR NAHI PYAAR

**546+**  
TEACHERS  
CREATED SAFER  
CLASSROOMS

HANSTI BASTI

**279**  
YOUNG  
LEARNERS  
DISCOVERED  
JOY

MANZIL

**66**  
GIRLS  
UNLOCKED  
DIGITAL SKILLS

DHANAK DHERI

**50**  
CHILDREN  
SUPPORTED IN  
AN EARLY  
CHILDHOOD  
SPACE

# Pakistan Programmes





# SEEKHO SIKHAO SAATHI

Seekho Sikhao Saathi (Partners in learning), which began as a response to school closures during the **COVID-19** pandemic, is our signature programme based on a **child-to-child model**. Through this, we train **older children** (Baray Saathi, aged 10-12 years) to deliver playful foundational learning sessions to groups of **younger children** (Chotay Saathi at the early years level). Given a supportive space, the older children emerge as champions of learning while experiencing transformative growth.

The programme is implemented by Cities for Children in rural **MoFEPT** schools, with the support of the **Malala Fund**. Following a successful pilot in 2023, the second iteration of the Seekho Sikhao Saathi programme was completed in **20 FDE schools** across Bhara Kahu, Tarnol, Sihala, and the Nilore sector from 2024-25.



## PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The programme aimed to have an impact at two main levels to address the dual challenges of children’s retention and performance:

1. **Building foundational and early learning skills** at an important stage of brain development, so children enter primary school ready to learn
2. **Building socioemotional learning (SEL)** and life skills for girls to thrive in secondary school

SCHOOLS  
20  
FDE  
Institutes

BARI SAATHI  
166  
Grade 6  
Level

CHOTI SAATHI  
1200  
Early  
Grades

### Direct Reach

School	Year	Student Reached	Sessions Delivered
FDE 10 Schools	2023-24	480	12
FDE 20 Schools	2024-25	985	12

# KEY OUTCOMES

The impact on Chotay Saathi was measured through the comparison of baseline and endline survey across the domains of

Literacy

Numeracy

Socioemotional

Motor Skills

## IMPACT ON CHOTAY SAATHI

By the end of the programme, the endline survey results showed that the Seekho Sikhao Saathi programme created a positive impact on students' foundational learning and socioemotional development. **Across all domains: Early Literacy, Early Numeracy, Science and Motor Skills, students made significant progress, moving from Level 1, "Doesn't Know" to Level 3, "Knows it Well".**



Fine Motor Skills  
88% reached  
Level 3



Numeracy  
75% successfully  
named & sorted  
basic shapes



Oracy  
27% → 70% of  
children could talk  
about a story

## IMPACT ON BARAY SAATHI

During the focus group discussions and coaching sessions with Baray Saathi, they shared responses reflecting an increase in Kindness and empathy towards their peers and Chotay Saathi.

After becoming part of the programme, **76%** of Baray Saathi reported an overall sense of personal growth and positive change while **68.8%** of Baray Saathi shared examples of improved confidence and communication skills. **62.4%** Baray Saathi mentioned that they developed a sense of responsibility and ownership in their helping others, bringing ideas to the sessions and being independent at their homes and schools.

"Bari Saathi Mehwish from IMSG Jhangi Syedan mentioned that I want to be a teacher, for that confidence is required and this experience taught me the importance of teaching"

**67%** Baray Saathi reported that they are motivated to learn and more responsible towards their studies.



**91.2%**

Baray Saathi  
reflected that they  
are more kind  
towards others



"I really liked listening to everyone; the way the CS listened silently and attentively made the experience truly memorable."

- Bari Saathi Arifa

# HIGHLIGHTS

## Sri-Lankan Delegation

We hosted an international delegation of 51 researchers and education officials from Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and AKU-IED for a field visit to witness our Seekho Sikhao Saathi child-to-child programming model in action in government schools.





# DHANAK DHERI

Dhanak Dheri ("Rainbow Dheri") is an **Early Childhood Education (ECE) space** in Dheri Hassanabad, Rawalpindi, established by Cities for Children (CfC) in collaboration with **Junior Jinnah Trust (JJT)**. Designed as a model ECE intervention, the programme provides children from underserved communities with **foundational literacy, numeracy, and socioemotional skills** to ensure smoother transitions into primary school.

With Pakistan facing one of the highest rates of out-of-school children globally, Dhanak Dheri sought to address gaps in early learning through a **six-month, play-based programme that emphasised exploration, discovery, and child-led learning.**



## PROGRAMME DESIGN

To ensure age-appropriate development, learners were divided into two cohorts:

YOUNG COHORT  
19  
Ages  
3-4.5

OLDER COHORT  
31  
Ages  
4.5-6



# METHODOLOGY

## Community-Embedded Support

Two teachers were selected directly from the local community, guaranteeing an intrinsic understanding of the children's backgrounds.

## Playful Learning

We prioritised training that equipped educators with engaging, respectful, and enjoyable learning methodologies, aligning with contemporary ECE research.

## Safe Environment

Teachers received Maar Nahi Pyaar training, equipping them with strategies to cultivate a nurturing learning environment, free from corporal punishment.

## Peer-Led Mentorship

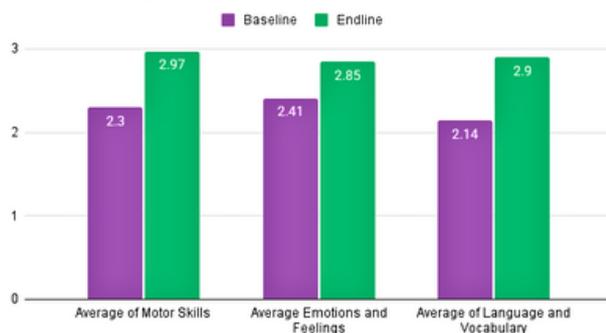
We incorporated mentorship by engaging Baray Saathi alumni (Big Partners) from the previous Seekho Sikhao Saathi initiative to lead fun STEM sessions.

## TRANSITION TO FORMAL SCHOOLING

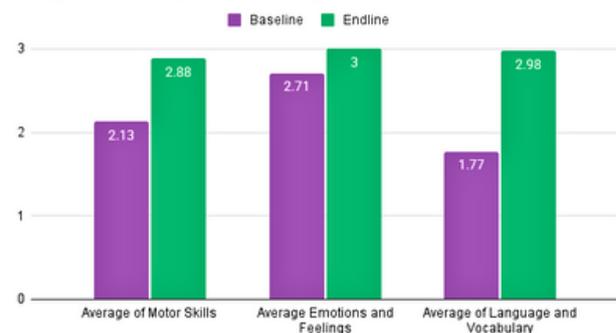
Out of the 31 school-ready children, 14 have enrolled at JJT's primary school, 4 children joined local government schools, and 1 child is using JJT's Smartphone Education System. Decisions for the remaining students are pending with local schools.

# OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Older Children (4.5 - 6)



Younger Children (AGES 3 - 4.5)



The assessment results clearly demonstrate the power of the playful learning methodology. For our Younger Children (Ages 3–4.5), Language and Vocabulary skills grew by an impressive **57.6%**. Similarly, the Older Children (Ages 4.5–6), who were preparing for primary school, showed a significant **57.6%** increase in English Alphabet Recognition and a strong **26.1%** improvement in Language & Vocabulary, validating the programme's effectiveness in boosting readiness for formal education. Beyond academic gains, the programme achieved crucial success in socio-emotional development and motivation.

For both groups, **the ability to express Emotions and Feelings** improved significantly (up 32.7% for the younger cohort), highlighting the positive impact of the safe, nurturing learning environment.

## 2ND ECD SPACE LAUNCHED

Our second Early Childhood Development space began operations in partnership with ITA.

# HIGHLIGHTS

Graduation Ceremony at  
**Dhanak Dheri**





# HANSTI BASTI

Hansti Basti – the “Happy Hoods” programme – is CfC’s flagship play-based learning initiative, designed as a **6 week creative learning programme** for children from underserved communities. The programme was implemented in partnership with **Fareezah’s Kotha Kalan Campus** and **Basic Education Community Schools (BECS)**, catering to children who often have limited access to formal education.

By engaging **61 university-student volunteers** from **Fatima Jinnah Women University, Foundation University, and Rawalpindi Women University** as facilitators, Hansti Basti nurtures children’s socio-emotional well-being while fostering empathy, confidence, and a deeper sense of community engagement within the volunteers themselves.



## PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

Hansti Basti is a child-centred initiative with the following core objectives:

1. Create joyful, inclusive, and emotionally supportive learning environments
2. Strengthen children’s motivation to learn and build social-emotional skills
3. Promote resilience through play-based learning and creative expression
4. Enhance confidence, empathy, and problem-solving abilities in children

STUDENTS  
192  
Grades I-V

VOLUNTEERS  
61  
From 3 Universities

### Direct Reach

School	No. of Volunteers	No. of Students
Fareezah	35	90
BECS	26	102

# ACTIVITIES AND ENGAGEMENT

Children explored identity, emotions, and community through interactive and playful activities such as:

- Making stress balls to learn emotional regulation.
- Creating picture stories for self-expression.
- Designing cultural stalls to celebrate Pakistan's diversity.
- Drawing superheroes, linking personal values and family to resilience.

## IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

Both Fareezah and BECS cater to children with limited access to formal education. The programme significantly improved attendance and student engagement.



### Improved Attendance

"Many students used to take leave and not come to school, but after the programme started, no one does, especially on Tuesdays." – Teacher, BECS

### Increased Enrollment

BECS enrollment increased by 42% (40 new students) after the programme.

### Integration into Curriculum

Teachers at Fareezah adopted select Hansti Basti activities (e.g., stress balls) into regular lessons.



# KEY OUTCOMES

“

One child shared: “I learnt that when you feel angry, it’s best to squeeze a stress ball, take deep breaths, and then continue the conversation.”



97%

Volunteers expressed willingness to participate again, citing personal growth and joy of community.

“

Another child said, “I learned that you can do anything you put your mind to. I learned to never give up.”



94%

Volunteers observed improvements in children’s confidence, self-expression, and emotional management.

“

Children began practicing learned activities (stress balls, paper bags, and how to be resilient) at home and school.



84%

Volunteers noted growth in problem-solving and cognitive skills.



# MANZIL KASHI

“Manzil Kashi” (v.) — “Sketching the path to your goal.”

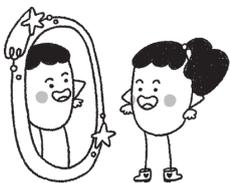
**Manzil**<sup>1</sup> is our digital platform for **SEL**, and hosts courses that support skill development for alumni Bari Saathi who were part of our previous Seekho Sikhao Saathi cycle.

The Manzil digital platform was developed as an extension of this support for **socioemotional learning**, designed as a pathway for continued learning and self-reflection. Meaning “**destination**” or “**goal**,” Manzil aims to support Bari Saathis beyond the school and into their personal journeys of growth.



## PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

“Manzil Kashi’ is a self-paced 7-week course to foster independent learning for Bari Saathis to achieve their life goals through interactive videos, worksheets, activities, quizzes and goal-tracking tools by developing the four important life skills”:



**Confidence**



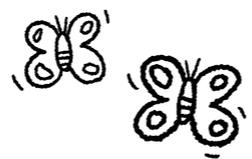
**Creativity**



**Communication**



**Goal-Setting**



“

“To improve my self-confidence, I realised that believing in myself and practising kindness were essential steps toward achieving my long-term vision of supporting vulnerable children.”

-Bari Saathi Mehwish

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis and full assessment data, please refer to the complete report, Manzil Kashi: Our Journey through Social Emotional Learning (2024-2025).

# KEY OUTCOMES



86%

Completion rate of our Manzil courses was achieved, with 9 out of 10 schools successfully completing them.



96%

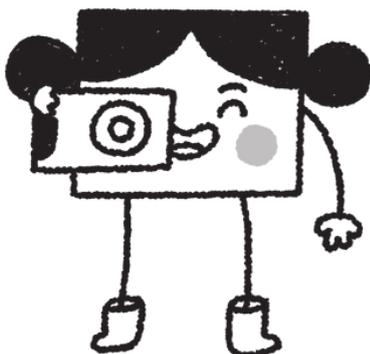
of Baray Saathi practiced public speaking in different contexts after completing the Communication module, while 3.6% didn't practice the skill.

More than half of the Baray Saathi used the digital tools for the first time, particularly generating the email IDs and online learning system.



57%

of Baray Saathi recognized kindness and empathy as their key qualities





# MAAR NAHI PYAR

The “Maar Nahi Pyaar” initiative works to end corporal punishment and promote positive discipline in schools in Islamabad. We started this campaign in **2023**, with the endorsement of the **National Commission on the Rights of the Child (NCRC)** and since then we have trained over **546** teachers, both from formal schools (under the Federal Directorate of Education and private systems) and non-formal schools.

In a comprehensive intervention in Pehli Kiran schools, we also supported teachers through refresher training, helped them create tailored classroom management plans, and conducted classroom visits to ensure proper implementation and provide necessary support.



## KEY OUTCOMES

- Formal school teachers reported more confidence in managing large classrooms without violence.
- Non-formal facilitators highlighted that strategies helped with multi-grade teaching and children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Engagement with **NCRC** (National Commission on rights of child), **NCHD** (National Commission of Human Development), **BECS** (Basic Education Community Centers) strengthened policy-level advocacy and aligned MNP with safeguarding frameworks.
- Entry into **Early Childhood spaces** (Karachi) indicated adaptability for early years.

**TEACHERS**  
**546**  
 From formal & non formal institutes

Year	Trainings Conducted	Sessions Delivered
2023	01	10
2024	15	333
2025	07	203

# PROGRAMME SUMMARY

In the Islamabad Capital Territory, legislation was approved in 2021 to officially put a ban on Corporal punishment from all institutions. **Despite legislation there, Corporal punishment was widely used in schools in Pakistan.** During our discussions with the teachers, we found out that **one of the main reasons behind this gap was the lack of awareness about alternative techniques and support for teachers.** To bridge this gap, we launched our **Maar Nahi Pyaar project in 2023** to raise awareness about the harmful impact of corporal punishment and to also equip teachers with alternative classroom management tools so that they could shift their practices from punitive discipline toward positive disciplinary strategies.

This was a **training programme** covering the content around creating safe classrooms for children and implementing safeguarding systems at the School level. In some of the schools, we conducted training at the request of the school administration. Other than the training session, we also implemented a whole school intervention in **Pehli Kiran Schools**, where we conducted refresher training with the teachers, supported teachers to create their own tailored classroom management plans and conducted classroom visits with the help of the school principal to ensure the proper implementation of these strategies and provide adequate support to the teachers.



# ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS



1. Our founder, Madeeha Ansari, featured on **Zara Hat Kay**, bringing national attention to the urgent need to end corporal punishment.
2. She also joined a **podcast with Aga Khan University's Institute for Educational Development** on 30th April, sharing perspectives on building nurturing, non-violent classrooms.



3. Maintained **consistent engagement with NCRC**, exploring joint advocacy and co-branded awareness posts.
4. A **Maar Nahi Pyaar livestream** was hosted with Programme Officer Syeda Ansa, further amplifying the campaign's reach.

5. Consolidated Maar Nahi Pyaar project learnings and on-ground experience into a research paper, which was accepted for presentation at the **UKFIET International Education Conference at Oxford University** in the 2nd week of September. We also delivered a presentation on "Ending Corporal Punishment in Schools in Pakistan" at a Keeping Children Safe (KCS) members-only webinar, engaging participants from Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.



# UK Programmes





# UK PLAYFUL LEARNING

Our work in the UK **began in July 2024** in partnership with West Sussex Council. The initiative started with a focus on one hotel, providing vital support to **111 refugee families** whose children spoke over **10 different languages**.

The initial phase was a **six-week pilot program**. Due to the critical need and positive reception, this was swiftly extended to an additional **12 weeks in November 2024** (the period covered by the detailed impact report) and further extended for another 12 weeks in April 2025.

Between July 2024 and April 2025, the number of children attending our Playful Learning sessions had doubled, reaching over **250 children**.



## KEY OUTCOMES

We aimed to create impact in three main areas:

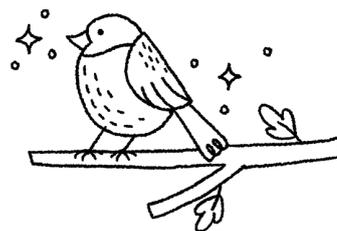
### 1. DIRECT LEARNING

The sessions focused on English language learning, often themed around basic subjects each week.

Children actively practised **English vocabulary**, including shapes, colours, and numbers, and learned to order both numbers and months. A session on birthdays, a concept new to many of the children, led to an **"interesting cultural exchange"** as the group learned about each other's traditions. In final feedback, children acknowledged that they had "learned new skills".

### 2. POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The playful approach provided a vital "break from the monotony of the hotel environment" and created a secure, joyful space for expression. **Emotional Regulation Sessions** aimed to help children identify regulation strategies and manage big emotions like anger.



In just one year, we doubled the number of families we support



We reached over **200** children through our play-based sessions

## Case Study

Ahmed stated that he was **"angry all of the time"** and struggled with controlling this anger, became a fantastic role model for the younger children. **He started reading books to the group, often in two languages, and made sure that a child with a physical disability wasn't excluded when playing games.** Ahmed's father noted the profound change in his son: *"Dera mazaydari!" (Very fun!) "Ahmed really looks happy and is very eager to go to school now. We are particularly grateful that he had an opportunity to really freely develop a little bit [more]."*

The Farsi word for happy, *khushal*, was one of the first words the team learned. The activity children collectively voted as their favourite was making Christmas Trees.

We noticed an overall positive impact on well-being. In a final reflective activity, children expressed that they felt "very happy" after attending the activities.

“

"I liked bubbles and Christmas trees, they made me happy"

### 3. SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

SEL goals focused on confidence, communication, and relationship building. Activities like the Spaghetti and Marshmallow construction encouraged sharing and cooperation. The final creation, a woven tapestry titled **Humbastgi** (meaning 'togetherness, connectedness'), featured a decorated strip from each child, promoting collaboration and collective pride. **The final feedback session confirmed that children were happier after attending the sessions and were "excited to attend future sessions", showing a clear increase in confidence and engagement.**

For children who have experienced displacement, play is not a luxury; it is a vital tool for healing. The Playful Learning approach is deliberately trauma-informed, ensuring the children feel secure and supported. The sessions were designed to restore a sense of choice and autonomy elements often lost during displacement by allowing children to lead activities and express themselves freely. This approach successfully provides: **"A crucial outlet for children to work through their big emotions in a safe, constructive, and supervised way."**



# HIGHLIGHTS

## Iftar at High Commission

The Pakistan High Commission in London hosted a special showcase and Iftar for Cities for Children, providing a platform to articulate our impact on refugee and out-of-school children and announcing a new Ramadan fundraising partnership with Seenaryo to support children affected by conflict in Gaza. about the iftar go here





# LOOKING AHEAD

Our commitment to restoring the Right to a Childhood, the right to read, play, and feel safe, remains at the heart of our mission. As we look toward the future, we are not just scaling programmes; we are deepening the roots of belonging and confidence in every community we touch.

We will continue to expand the reach of our playful learning models to ensure that every child, regardless of their circumstances, finds a safe space to grow, a voice to express their dreams, and the foundational skills they need to thrive. We are excited to build on this momentum, fueled by the joy and resilience of the children we serve, ensuring that no child is left waiting for their chance at a bright future.



