



SUCCESS STORIES



Outcome of "Aakar"
Training in the State of Maharashtra

Anugraha Foundation for Employment Opportunities,
Pune | January 2018



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
SUCCESS STORY 1: Quality Education for Everyone	8
SUCCESS STORY 2: Trained Staff... Happy Children... Satisfied Parents!	11
SUCCESS STORY 3: Exciting Activities Draw Community Closer to the Anganwadi	15
SUCCESS STORY 4: Effective Time Management + Creative Thinking Leads to Better Attendance	18
SUCCESS STORY 5: Teaching Learning Materials Make Learning Fun and Impactful	21
SUCCESS STORY 6: Inspired Anganwadi Worker Brightens Up the Classroom.....	24
SUCCESS STORY 7: Sheer Determination helps worker run Anganwadi Centre efficiently	27
SUCCESS STORY 8: A Positive Mindset Leads to Smoother Operations at the Centre.....	30
SUCCESS STORY 9: Students and workers at a tribal center conquer language barriers	33
SUCCESS STORY 10: Child-centric approach helps worker de-stress the atmosphere.....	36
CONCLUSION	39
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	41
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	42

INTRODUCTION

The development of young children—be it emotional, social or physical—and the education they receive in early childhood, shapes their overall personalities. The critical period provides parents and guardians the opportunity to explore the full potential of children and instil in them the required academic as well as non-academic skills. Early childhood reflects outcomes of the child's personality later down the road. It is considered to be one of the most crucial stages, where it is possible to accomplish tremendous amounts of learning in so brief a period.

Successful early education and caregiving in a formal set-up can positively fortify a child's future, irrespective of the family background and financial status. Early education does not only determine a child's success in school but also in his/her entire life, helping encounter real situations in the real world. Thus, it is important to invest in quality education of children at a very young age and ensure their future well-being.

In today's world, people do understand these benefits to a certain extent, but are not fully aware of the negative consequences of neglecting early childhood education (ECE). Furthermore, most high-quality early education programs are not mandated. In many countries across the globe, though children have the right to free education, it is voluntary. Due to this, a good percentage of children below six years of age are deprived of the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Governments, schools, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other institutions introduce various schemes with benefits for children to increase attendance at the early education centres. If parents capitalize on these schemes and maximize support and learning opportunities for their children, they stand a good chance of setting the young minds on a trajectory of success. However, owing to various reasons, parents do not take advantage of the schemes. In many cases, parents fail to understand the long-term benefits of the schemes and early education for their children.

So, is there a way to expand and improve access to ECE? Well-trained teachers with the aptitude to attract children with an innovative teaching approach and through interesting activities help address the challenge to some extent. In India, these frontline workers have been contributing their time and efforts to: change the mindset of parents and children, involve the community in promoting early education, and coalesce with various institutions to enhance the quality of education delivered to young children in the age group of three to six years. Where does India stand at the moment, and what is the country doing to improve the current state of affairs with respect to ECE? Read on!

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN INDIA

India has realized the importance of early childhood education, and this awareness has been brought to life through investments in Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) for children in the age group of three to six years, supported by large-scale government and private initiatives to run these AWCs. While various projects have been initiated to improve the quality of education for children in the age group, many Anganwadi Centres still function the old way. Inadequately trained/untrained Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), lack of a standard syllabus, absence of a fixed timetable, scarcity of age-appropriate learning material—all these factors together question the efficiency of the noble cause.

The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) has partnered with a few NGOs to improve the current state of affairs. In India, the ICDS is one of the largest programmes for ECE. Being in the public sector and with non-formal preschool education as one of its key services, ICDS is also one of the largest integrated programmes for children below six years.

If we focus our attention on the state of Maharashtra, ICDS spans across all 36 districts in the state—364 rural, 85 tribal and 104 urban slum areas. The team comprises of 36 deputy CEOs, 553 sanctioned CDPOs and 3899 supervisors. There are 97,945 Anganwaadi Centres and 13,011 mini AWCs across the state.

As per ICDS, the current population dynamics in Maharashtra in the three to six years age group is as below:

- Total number of children aged between three and six years = 38,69,088
- Out of this total number, children attending pre-school education = 27,91,321
 - Girls = 13,57,133
 - Boys = 14,34,188

“AAKAR” – MAHARASHTRA STATE ECCE CURRICULUM

UNICEF in India is fully committed to working with the Government of India to ensure that each child born in this country gets the best start in life, thrives, and develops to his or her full potential. Considering the need for ECE and the renewed focus on strengthening non-formal pre-school education delivered at the Anganwadi Centres, UNICEF decided to take action. In 2006, in the state of Maharashtra, UNICEF took the lead in creating a standard curriculum for early childhood education (for children in the age group of three to six years) through MSCERT, ICDS and experts in the field of ECE. **Aakar, a state-specific Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) curriculum was thus developed.**

Aakar is a child-centric curriculum focussed on experiential and play-way methods of learning. It covers the holistic development of the child, instilling all necessary skills that involve physical, cognitive and social aspects of a child's growth. Aakar also consists of professional development services manuals and handbooks for teachers with activities for effective delivery of the curriculum.



Post-Aakar implementation scenario: Children listen with rapt attention while a story is narrated the fun way!

Prior to the development of Aakar, AWCs were not fully capable of preparing students for school. Some AWCs merely acted as creches for children of working parents. There was lack of direction, with each AWC executing its own set of standard activities to promote learning. Education was imparted in a haphazard manner with some AWCs adopting incorrect methods of teaching that could potentially harm children. As an example, some pre-schools taught three-year old students how to write numbers. The right way of teaching would need to first begin with teaching children to count numbers, followed by orally recognising the numbers, followed by writing numerals, and finally writing numbers in words.

With Aakar, a more structured approach came in place. It was the first time that a formal curriculum was implemented in the AWCs in Maharashtra. The aim was to equip students with motor skills and

other skills that would prepare them for school. Aakar offered AWCs with the right means to create a liking for education in children using playful methods. However, post-development efforts also seemed significant.

The curriculum had to be taken to every AWC in the state of Maharashtra. While it was important to share the curriculum across AWCs, there was a greater need for adequate amount of training in the right manner for supervisors and AWWs, to ensure success of the initiative. Investments on the development of the Aakar curriculum could be justified only by ensuring every AWC supervisor, AWW and helper across the state had a strong understanding of the Aakar curriculum and its delivery.

There had to be consistency in the way education was imparted across Maharashtra. AWWs had to hone their leadership and mentoring skills so as to empower children in the age group of three to six years with education, using the best possible approach. This could be achieved by training the trainers. A formal, structured education program for the frontline workers—supervisors, AWWs and helpers—on the Aakar curriculum became the need of the hour.

THE TRANSFORMATION – TRAINING THE TRAINERS

It was realized, to achieve programme goals, a great deal of accountability rested on the effectiveness of frontline workers delivering education services. Training the trainers became crucial to strengthen the ability of existing human resource. The private sector was also expanding at unprecedented speed, adding to the urgency of conducting comprehensive training/re-training for teachers. The highly unregulated sector thus embarked on a transformation journey.

Teachers had to be taught innovative ways of constructively strengthening the foundation of formal education for children. It was also vital to harmonize activities of all service providers in accordance with programme mandates, standards and legislations.

UNICEF and ICDS, along with NGO partner Anugraha Foundation for Employment Opportunities, executed a project to strengthen the state capacity to deliver ECE. Together, they aimed at developing a cadre of government master trainers from the cadre of supervisors available with the ICDS.

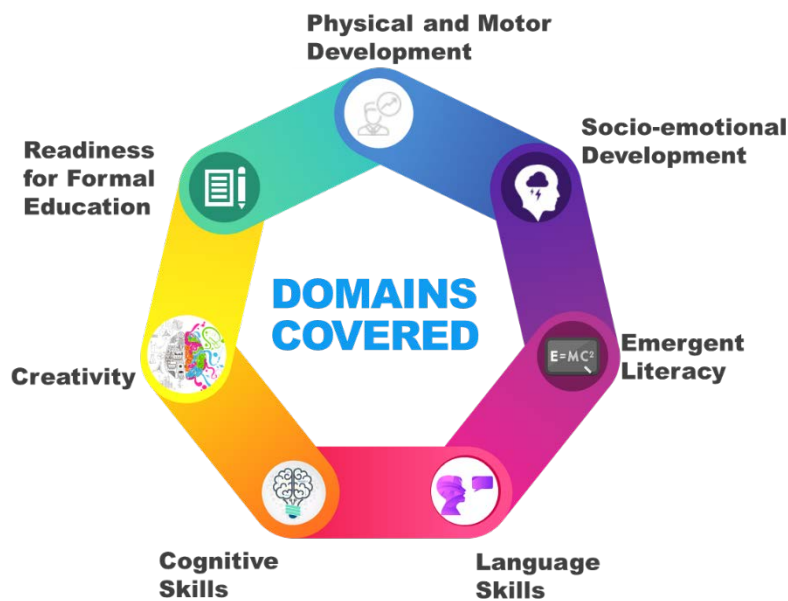
ICDS Maharashtra has been instrumental in taking this down further to the grass root level. The master trainers conducted trainings for AWWs in their respective districts and started this transformational journey of taking “Aakar” to every AWC across the state.



CASCADED TRAINING MODEL



Due to its comprehensive nature, the Aakar curriculum training program was divided into two phases. Phase I of the programme covered easy-to-follow topics, including basic objectives of ECE, different areas of development of a child in the three to six years age group, and the physical, cognitive, creative and language development of children. It was crucial as it involved building awareness across the state on the importance of ECE and its relevance in the holistic development of the child. The training also focused on the role of the supervisor in ensuring age-appropriate activities were undertaken regularly at the Anganwaadi Centre and with the use of relevant teaching and learning material.



Phase I of the project started in May 2016 and was successfully completed by December 31, 2016. During this period, representatives from 19 out of the 36 districts were trained at state level. Subsequent trainings were conducted by the state at the district level. As part of the process, 69 state-level master trainers (SLMT) and 303 district-level master trainers (DLMT) from 19 districts were successfully qualified. In 2017, the remaining 16 districts were targeted, extending Phase I of the Aakar curriculum across the entire state of

Maharashtra.

On successful completion of the training, supervisors, AWWs and helpers, were able to function more efficiently. AWC campuses transformed into livelier places for education with better attendance, happier students, satisfied parents, and stronger collaboration between AWCs and the community.

The training modules developed by Anugraha Foundation for Employment Opportunities based on the state "Aakar" curriculum for ECE helped create a cadre of master trainers across Maharashtra who in turn trained their next level in ECE. This e-book aims to showcase a few success stories that were an outcome of this initiative.



SUCCESS STORY 1: Quality Education for **EVERYONE**

Inclusive education in an urban setup at Anganwadi Centre #121

District	Thane
Taluka	Gandhinagar, Kopri
Supervisor in charge of Anganwadi Centre	Aditi Gaikwad
Anganwadi Centre worker	Surekha Panchal
Total no. of children	16

AGE DEMOGRAPHICS:

Age Group	Boys	Girls	Total
3-4 years	2	3	5
4-5 years	4	1	5
5-6 years	2	4	6
Total	8	8	16

CONTEXT

A visit to Anganwaadi Centre #121 would show children busy writing, and the Anganwaadi worker (AWW) correcting the children in a dominant manner at all times—no matter what the situation was. There were no age-appropriate activities conducted for the children, and neither was the importance of these activities communicated to the worker. The Anganwaadi worker had limited resources and had no specific agenda to adhere to. The role of the helper too was not clearly defined. Though children with special needs enrolled at the AWC, they did not receive the necessary attention. They were given the required nutrition and sent home.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Was the Anganwaadi worker at fault? The AWW was not trained to work with the children with special needs and had no idea how to deal with them. Certain tools were provided, but the AWW did not know how to use them in an effective manner to keep the children engaged in activities. She did not know how to answer questions from parents of normal children and special needs children regarding the absence of toilets at the AWC. There were instances where the Anganwaadi worker paid the rent for the Anganwaadi Centre from her own pocket. The helper visited houses convincing parents to send their children to the Anganwaadi Centre.

STRUCTURED AAKAR TRAINING TRIGGERS A POSITIVE CHANGE!

Aditi Gaikwad, the supervisor in charge of Anganwaadi Centre #121 who underwent a structured training on Aakar, takes up the initiative of transforming the AWC. She trains the AWW on the importance of reading, writing and math-readiness activities for the children. She emphasizes the importance of informal talk and free play for children. The training also covers topics on inclusion of special needs children—how and why these children need to be included in the programme and the kind of activities that should be conducted for them.

LET'S MEET SANDEEP AND REEMA, TWO BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Sandeep, a 3.5-year-old boy, enrolled at the AWC. He could not walk fast or fold his legs due to locomotor challenges. When Sandeep initially joined the AWC, his mother or father carried him to the Centre. He could hardly lift his feet and walk. At the AWC, the Anganwaadi worker conducted various physical activities for Sandeep. Gradually, Sandeep started lifting his feet and walking. Other children at the AWC encouraged him too. While the AWW does not force Sandeep to participate in any activity, he has been encouraged to at least give it a try.

Reema is four years old. She has challenges in communication and is a very shy girl. The AWC near Reema's home was not very conducive to her needs, and hence, her parents enrolled her in the Gandhinagar AWC. Reema's mother really liked the way the AWW included all children in activities and the enthusiasm with which she conducted them. It is only four months since Reema started coming to this AWC and a drastic change in her behaviour has been observed. She has become more open and mingles with everyone at the Centre. A 5.5-year-old boy helps Reema participate in activities and encourages her to complete them.

The AWW has created a very comfortable and secure environment for the children, and the teacher-child bonding has gone a long way in creating a positive atmosphere.

THE BENEFITS

The Aakar training imparted the required knowledge to supervisors, letting them know how and why certain activities needed to be conducted. As a result, supervisors along with AWW were observed to be more enthusiastic while conducting activities for children. They could now confidently answer questions from parents of children enrolled at the AWC. Children with special needs have become an integral part of their programmes. The role of the helper too is well-defined, making her feel included in all activities being conducted at the AWC.

Post-training, the supervisor feels that the AWC is child-friendly in the true sense. Four corners arranged every day—for the play house, creative activities such as colouring and sticking, beads, and manipulative toys—add more colour and life to the AWC.

Children come to the AWC on or before time and don't cry when their parents drop them at the Centre and leave.

The special needs children have a school which welcomes them and includes them in all routine activities of learning.



SUCCESS STORY 2: Trained Staff... Happy Children... Satisfied Parents!

Structured Aakar training improves attendance at Anganwadi Center #69 in Rural Maharashtra

District	Satara
Taluka	Wai
Supervisor in charge of Anganwadi Centre	Veena Kale
Anganwadi Centre worker	Smita Panse/Ranjana Nikam (helper)
Total no. of children	24

AGE DEMOGRAPHICS:

Age Group	Boys	Girls	Total
3-4 years	2	7	9
4-5 years	6	4	10
5-6 years	3	2	5
Total	11	13	24



INTRODUCTION

The AAKAR structured learning training programme has been enabling teachers at Anganwaadi Centres to facilitate the physical, **cognitive** and socio-emotional development of young minds effectively. With a well-defined schedule, outline of activities, and staff responsibility allocation, goals and consequences are predictable. The programme offers the required practical experience and supportive training to develop skills of children in the best possible manner. Students enrolled at Anganwaadi Centres enjoy a transformed experience, and this is evident in the increase in attendance at the centres over time.

This success story explains how the AAKAR curriculum training programme for AWWs has been able to enhance success and strengthen student development more efficiently than an informal or unstructured training.

IS THE GRASS ALWAYS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE?

Meena enrolled her three-year-old daughter, Dhanu, at the Anganwaadi Centre in her village. Meena works at the mill nearby and drops a crying Dhanu at the centre every morning. The mother, who is aware of the Anganwaadi teacher's kind and cheerful nature, is unable to comprehend the reason for Dhanu's incessant crying and whining. On the other hand, Meena cannot help but notice Dhanu's friend, Sharad, who is always happy. "Sharad loves going to school," exclaimed the boy's mother proudly. Sharad goes to a private nursery school in the outskirts of a small town, and of course, his parents did pay a stiff fee to get him enrolled there.

Dhanu's happiness is all that matters to Meena. How does Dhanu spend her day at the Anganwaadi Centre? Will the private nursery school solve the conundrum for little Dhanu and her mother? How feasible would it be to send Dhanu to the same private nursery school? The thoughts put Meena in an insoluble dilemma.

Then, there is a change! One fine evening, Meena notices Dhanu teaching Sharad a song she learnt in school. The next day, Meena drops a smiling Dhanu to the Anganwaadi Centre. The mother and daughter seem quite happy. What triggered this change in Dhanu's behaviour? Let's analyse!

A MONTH AGO...

Dhanu and her classmates went to school each morning and simply sat in the classroom. There was no fixed schedule or time table that teachers adhered to. The staff spent most part of the day teaching children a few songs and taking care of fretful kids like Dhanu. What was the value-add offered by the Anganwaadi Centres in comparison with the private nursery schools?

A common attitude—not without reason, perhaps—is that private-run, English medium schools are far superior to state-run schools. Premises of private schools are generally attractive, and many parents prefer sending their children to these schools, equating private, pretty schools to quality education. How far is this perception true? Was there anything else lacking in the way education was delivered at the Anganwaadi Centres?

Attendance of children in the age group of three to six years was marginally low at the Anganwaadi Centre. In most cases, as soon as the children turned three, parents moved them to an English medium or private school. To survive in such a competitive environment was by itself immensely challenging for the Anganwaadi supervisors. Was there a way to improve student strength and enrolments at the Anganwaadi Centres?

THE CHANGE!

Supervisor Veena Kale takes charge of the situation! She undergoes a training programme on AAKAR conducted by Anugraha Foundation for Employment Opportunities. She learns the importance of planning and scheduling activities at the Anganwaadi Centres.

She receives hands-on training on several tools that would accentuate and encourage cognitive development in pre-primary children. She realizes the difference! Ms. Veena Kale also learns different techniques—singing songs, storytelling, play-way methods that employ physical, communicative and overall developmental tools, pre reading, pre mathematics experiences, etc.—to engage the young minds. She now becomes aware of the best ways to execute activities for little children.

The structured training programme facilitates consistent and high-quality education to children at the Anganwaadi Centres giving the children an equally powerful start as those enrolled in private schools.

A TRAINING PROGRAMME PACKED WITH POWER!

It was awe-inspiring to watch the transformation in children's behaviour at the playground as Ms. Veena Kale organized physical activities that were demonstrated to her during the training. Storytelling techniques learnt at the AAKAR training helped the supervisor keep the children engrossed during the entire session. Eventually, all children started enjoying and participating actively in the activities. New songs with new rhythm made singing fun and brought in vibrancy in an otherwise dull atmosphere filled with fretful children. The supervisor mastered the technique of gently weaving in the AAKAR curriculum in to the fun sessions, enabling children to grasp and recall new concepts easily.

DHANU LEARNS TO BE HAPPY

Curriculum concepts were reemphasized multiple times and in diverse ways—at the playground via storytelling, through dance and drama, etc. Dhanu and her classmates were thoroughly engaged through the day and looked forward to returning to the Anganwaadi Centre the next day. With a robust, well-defined curriculum, the trained staff had a clear direction and comprehensible goals in mind. They were motivated and in turn kept the children motivated, facilitating an exciting journey of exploration and discovery for the children.

Children like Dhanu happily returned to the Anganwaadi Centre every morning knowing instinctively and cognitively that there was something new to learn at the centre. Children in higher grades too participated in the exhilarating activities and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

THE BENEFITS

The structured training programme infused awareness of training goals and strategies, setting a clear path to enable accomplishment of those goals. Heavy emphasis was laid on expected outcomes and strategies with a fixed curriculum to follow, and this helped realize tangible benefits that led to the programme's success. The training programme enhanced the supervisor's ability to deliver a consistent and high-quality learning experience for the children in the age group of three to six years age.

The AAKAR training helped supervisors cultivate a new environment at the Anganwaadi Centres, which eventually accelerated enrolments—from 20 last year to 24 this year in the three-to-six-years age group. While the trend of parents moving their children to private schools as soon as they turn three seems to have stopped, Anganwadi Centres are witnessing a month-on-month increase in enrolments. Anganwaadi workers now proudly proclaim that every three-year old in the village has enrolled at the Anganwaadi Centre. Parents have begun noticing several changes in their wards and realize that their children are very happy to go to the AWC.



Happy teachers and students at Anganwadi Centre #69 in Rural Maharashtra pose for a photograph.



SUCCESS STORY 3: Exciting activities draw community closer to the Anganwadi

Structured Aakar training helps attract the community toward Fanashi Dandi Adiwasi Wadi

District	Raigad
Tehsil	Mangaon
Anganwadi Centre worker	Pooja Dalwi
Anganwadi Centre helper	Pradnya Gole
Total no. of children	21

AGE DEMOGRAPHICS:

Age Group	Boys	Girls	Total
3-4 years	2	2	4
4-5 years	6	2	8
5-6 years	2	7	9
Total	10	11	21



INTRODUCTION

Anganwadi Centres are the focal points for delivery of ICDS services to children. The AWW and helper play a pivotal role in child growth and development. It is their responsibility to impart quality education to the children in the age group of three to six years enrolled at the AWCs. They also act as agents of social change, mobilizing community support for better care of young children. However, lack of community participation and coordination between Anganwadi workers and the community has been a matter of concern. Parents choose to send their children to private-run, English medium schools and consider them to be higher in rank when compared to Anganwadi Centres. A change in mindset of the community is possible by transforming the way education is imparted to the young minds at the AWCs, and this success story proves just that!

A CHAOTIC SITUATION AT ANGANWADI CENTRES

On a typical working day, Anganwadi workers are loaded with a long list of tasks: offering education to children in the age group of three to six years, providing supplementary nutrition to these children, reaching out to various beneficiary groups in the community, preparing for upcoming immunization and health check-up camps, etc. With multiple areas to focus on, the workers were unable to fully concentrate on the development of children enrolled at their respective centres.

At many centres, there was a dearth of teaching aids and toys. Besides, the few activities that were conducted for the children were neither impactful nor exciting. Helpers at the AWCs spent most part of their day looking after toilet-related needs of the children. Distributing food was their second key responsibility.

SHASHI'S MOTHER IS CONCERNED

Shashi and his friends enrolled at the Fanashi Dandi Adiwasi Wadi. However, Shashi was bored going to school. When his mother enquired, Shashi mentioned that he would simply sit in the classroom the whole day, except when the class was singing songs or having lunch. Yes, unfortunately, there was no fixed time table for the worker and the children. While the children came in unhappy, the AWW taught them to sing a few songs—the same monotonous songs day after day. Once in a while, the worker narrated children's stories. However, the delivery wasn't strong enough to keep Shashi and his friends intrigued. The worker was helpless as she had to also spend time maintaining reporting charts and logbooks.

The worker found it taxing to keep the children busy for a period of three hours. Shashi's mother had enrolled him at this Anganwadi Centre only because it was close to Shashi's house, and she did not have the necessary funds to transfer him to a private-run school. But, neither the workers nor the children seemed interested in coming to the Anganwadi Centre.

In such a scenario, how would the community feel motivated enough to send children to the AWC? Members of the community looked upon Anganwadi workers with suspicion and did not participate in any activity promoted by the AWCs.

THE TRANSFORMATION

Seema Thakare decided to address the challenge. Through the structured AAKAR training programme for the workers, she emphasised on the importance of imparting education in a joyful atmosphere. She focused on various activities that were part of the AAKAR syllabus, including task prioritization and storytelling techniques. Seema encouraged the Anganwadi worker to conduct physical activities in an open space and highlighted its importance—how it would leave a positive

impact on the children, parents and the neighbourhood. She also made the helper realize her duties and responsibilities in the growth and development of children.

SPREADING GOOD VIBES...

After the training, the Anganwadi worker felt motivated to conduct various activities for the children. She was able to grab the attention of the young minds. Parents saw a noticeable change in the children's attitude toward attending school. Gradually, the positive vibes and the impact of outdoor activities conducted at the Anganwadi Centre couldn't escape the eyes of the neighbourhood, passers-by and the society at large. The transformation inspired community participation and it helped stabilize student strength at the Anganwadi Centre. Parents voluntarily participated in activities, such as looking after children's hygiene, and keeping the centre's campus neat and clean. Shashi now has more friends enrolled at the centre and he loves going to school.



SUCCESS STORY 4: Effective time management + creative thinking leads to better attendance

Aakar training helps workers at Nanhe Tare Anganwadi (Centre #193) manage student time optimally

District	Satara
Taluka	Karad
Village	Padali
Sevika in charge of Anganwadi	Arundhati Garud
Anganwadi sevika	Chandbi Shaikh
Total no. of children	51

AGE DEMOGRAPHICS:

Age Group	Boys	Girls	Total
0-3 years	0	2	2
3-4 years	5	4	9
4-5 years	9	6	15
5-6 years	16	9	25
Total	30	21	51



INTRODUCTION

Timetables in schools play a significant role in the overall development of children. They teach children the value of time management at a very young age. More importantly, a timetable ensures that due importance is given to the right task at the right time, and no teacher is overloaded with too many activities back-to-back. Parents, teachers and students are all aware of the day's schedule well in advance, and a smartly defined timetable sets up a natural rhythm and routine with predictable outcomes. That was one of the core objectives of developing the Aakar curriculum for children in the age group of three to six years enrolled at the AWCs in Maharashtra. Let's look at the situation before and after implementation of the Aakar curriculum at the Nanhe Tare Anganwadi Centre in Satara District of Maharashtra.

A MONTH BEFORE AAKAR IMPLEMENTATION

The Anganwadi workers spent the day teaching the same songs to the children, narrating the same stories day after day, and distributing food to the children enrolled at the centre. They did not have a set schedule to adhere to and did not realize how critical it was to have a timetable. Of course, the workers had additional reporting responsibilities that did not involve interaction with the children. Workers failed to understand the reason behind the low attendance at the AWC despite spending time convincing parents to send their wards to the centre.

Chitra, a three-year old girl loves playing with her friends in the neighbourhood every evening. However, the same lively Chitra displays just the opposite behaviour while getting ready to go to the AWC the next morning. Chitra's parents find it a daunting task to get their little girl to go to school. The AWC, they say, is the safest place for them to leave their child for the day while they are off to work. But, was that the reason for the existence of that AWC?

It was the responsibility of the AWCs to equip young children in the age group of three to six years with necessary skills and prepare them for school. Non-formal pre-school education delivered at the Anganwadi Centres had to be revamped completely. The Aakar curriculum and structured training for the supervisors, workers and helpers at the AWCs was introduced to transform the learning experience for children.

THE TRAINERS GET TRAINED

The structured training on the Aakar curriculum was conducted for the workers at the Nanhe Tare Anganwadi Centre. The trainer stressed on the importance of having a strong timetable for the students and teachers that included a morning prayer, followed by an open-air game, then a new activity to promote creative thinking in children (a new activity every day), followed by singing. During the training, the AWWs realized the importance of encouraging children to be punctual. They learnt about the selection of age-appropriate songs for the children and how they needed to be taught with the right actions/expressions.

Other topics covered in the training included: understanding children's problems and ways of addressing them, encouraging children to participate/complete activities based on their individual capacities, inculcating hygiene-related habits in children, selecting the right stories, and delivering the stories in an interesting manner, involving children in the narration. The workers realized that every child had a unique personality and individual characteristics, which had to be identified and appreciated.

THE TRANSFORMATION

An appealing campus: After attending the training, the worker and helper realized how a beautiful campus had the power of drawing the community towards the AWC. Fully aware of the beauty of

private-run English medium schools in the vicinity of the AWC, the AWWs took special care of the campus—decorated the classrooms, kept the courtyard neat, put up colourful Rangoli designs at the entrance, and planted the holy basil plant in the compound.

A happier and disciplined Chitra: Workers took care of creating and maintaining a lively environment to keep the children happy. The change triggered a growth in headcount at the AWC. The workers helped Chitra and her friends learn the importance of good habits. As an example, they took off their shoes and placed them neatly outside the classroom before entering. They washed their hands before eating and after using the washroom. Chitra ensured she reached the AWC on time for the morning prayer without whining about going there. She started loving the activities conducted, the doll house, open-air games played, etc. She also learnt to share with her friends.

Supportive AWWs: After attending the Aakar training, the AWWs began conducting activities like jumping and walking in the right manner and with a lot of variation during the physical activity sessions. They paid special attention to the physical comfort of children while conducting activities. The worker spoke to the children in Hindi as well as Marathi so that they were more comfortable communicating with the worker. The AWW also taught children the basics of the English language so that children were prepared for competitive exams that they may need to take up in future. Through story-telling, the AWW was able to teach even complex topics such as traffic rules. She also came up with her own ideas to make the activities more interesting. Workers encouraged the use of beads, stones and seeds in innovative ways to develop motor skills of children and to promote creative thinking. The helper too has her role well-defined.

CONCLUSION

Post training, AWWs understood the role they played in shaping the personalities of children in the three to six years age group. They realized the impact that routine activities could create if implemented the right way. They understood the basics of scheduling and planning activities in order to manage time effectively. AWWs knew how to keep the young minds engrossed for three hours a day, every day. The AWCs became centres of early childhood education—a transformation from being mere snack and food distribution centres. Strict adherence to the timetable has driven an increase in the number of children enrolled at the Anganwadi Centre. Allocating slots to particular activities every day in a balanced manner is now routinely managed. Planning and preparation for the activity is given due importance. The children are also given appropriate time to complete the activity and also to wind up.



SUCCESS STORY 5: Teaching learning materials make learning fun and impactful

Aakar training helps workers at Anganwadi Centre #195 use teaching learning material effectively to enhance student experience

District	Satara
Taluka	Karad
Supervisor in charge of Anganwadi Centre	Arundhati Garud
Anganwadi Centre worker	Shabana Sutar
Total no. of children	95

AGE DEMOGRAPHICS:

Age Group	Boys	Girls	Total
3-4 years	14	11	25
4-5 years	24	16	40
5-6 years	9	21	30
Total	47	48	95



INTRODUCTION

A variety of teaching learning materials (TLM) are employed in activity-based learning. Broadly, the term TLM refers to anything that instructors use to add value to the topic in hand, making it more meaningful, enjoyable and memorable for students. Toys, dominos, flashcards, posters, paper art, etc. can all be considered as TLM. The use of TLM enhances student engagement and interaction, enabling them to learn new concepts the fun way. Context-specific teaching learning materials help children grasp concepts easily, increasing student success.

Children below the age of six years tend to be more attracted towards learning facilities when instructors use teaching learning materials. Colour, innovation and creativity intrigue the children, getting them to fall in love with education. Teachers who use TLM are able to differentiate themselves from the rest. They are able to tailor lessons more effectively to evoke attention from students. When simple everyday articles are converted into learning material, and complex topics are explained aided by these objects, the lessons register more easily in the students' minds. By customizing teaching learning materials based on student ability and preferences, teachers are able to activate every individual child's learning style, making the experience extraordinary.

This success story talks about an Anganwadi worker who participates in an Aakar training and realizes the impact that TLM can bring in. After the training, she is determined to transform the Anganwadi Centre by introducing teaching learning materials in everyday activities.

UNTIL RECENTLY...

This was a classroom where the teacher followed the same routine every weekday—reciting the morning prayer, teaching children to sing the same songs through the year in a monotonous way, reading out the same stories that the children have already listened to, and distributing food. It is perhaps a classic example of not using TLM. Workers at Nanhe Taare Anganwadi Centre #195 were unable to envision anything beyond their duty of ensuring children remained calm until it was time for them to get back home. They were not aware of what needed to be done to hone the skills of the little children. The classrooms were dull and unappealing with no posters, art or craft. Unfortunately, most parents too were illiterate and apathetic about their children's development at the AWC.

THE ANGANWADI WORKER GETS TRAINED

The Anganwadi worker attends the Aakar training. It is only then that she realizes the true worth of a teacher in the development of children. She understands the potential of everyday objects—how they can be transformed into interesting teaching learning materials. The trainer teaches the art of making handmade TLM at the centre by involving the little children. This meant that there was no need to invest in any readymade aids. The training included development of various TLM—dominos, pictorial descriptions, story narration with pictures, clay toys or fruits, attractive towers from waste boxes, bird descriptions through actions and voice modulation, wall painting of trees using finger prints, beautiful greeting cards with glue, etc. The training taught the worker the right way to conduct activities with an objective of encouraging and boosting each child's unique strengths. She learnt how the much-loved dolls could be used in an excellent manner to inculcate hygiene-related habits in children. The worker and helper received excellent guidance.

TRANSFORMATION AT THE AWC

After the training, the AWW decided to take action. She took care in selecting age-appropriate songs and teaching children to sing with the right actions and expressions. There was a noticeable change immediately. Matchboxes and other paper/cardboard boxes that were otherwise disposed after use

were now being used in various creative ways. The worker leveraged exclusive TLM from the Aakar training to aid the development of gross motor skills and fine motor skills of the children as well as their physical and intellectual growth. Boosting pre-math skills of the children became easier. The AWW used everyday objects like talcum powder boxes and bottles to teach topics such as different sizes and quantities. With their imagination going wild, children were able to develop beautiful designs using beads, dominos, etc. The young children enjoyed creating charts, drawing pictures and developing artwork, and it was a joy to see it all displayed on the classroom walls.

THE BENEFITS

Activity-based learning with the use of teaching learning materials has resulted in an enriched experience for the students enrolled at the Nanhe Taare AWC in Satara District. Excited children do talk about this experience to their parents and other children in the neighbourhood. Children from other schools are attracted to the AWC and this has resulted in a gradual increase in headcount at the Anganwadi Centre. Some parents claim that the development of their children is at par, and in some cases, higher than that of children enrolled in nearby English medium schools. The innovative method of teaching has made children more confident and they are able to sing and act without hesitation. The students and workers are happier.

The Aakar training made the worker realize that getting one's hands on valuable teaching learning materials is not as difficult as it may seem. There are innumerable ways for teachers to increase the content of their teaching toolbox by creating their own material. Every teaching learning material developed becomes an asset that enhances the value delivered to the young minds.

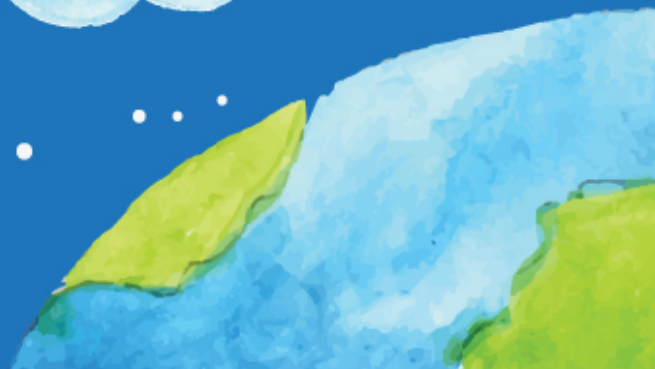


SUCCESS STORY 6: Inspired Anganwadi worker brightens up the classroom

Aakar training enables worker to bring about an overall transformation at Anganwadi Centre #78/19



District	Jalgaon
Project	Bodhwad
Supervisor in charge of Anganwadi Centre	Damyanti Ingale
Anganwadi Centre worker	Vidya Badgujar
Total no. of children	40+



INTRODUCTION

Teachers across the globe make use of every available opportunity to enhance the learning experience for their students. They proactively look for ways to improve student learning. Considering the fact that young children spend a major part of their day learning from teachers, it is not wrong to assume that the atmosphere at a learning facility reflects the quality of teaching to a great extent. A dull and unappealing school campus will have fewer students enrolled, in comparison with beautifully decorated, inviting campuses, and rightly so! A fresh and colourful ambience can brighten up a child's state of mind. How can a teacher possibly utilize every little space available at the learning facility to encourage participation and learning? There are a thousand ways to achieve this. Proper training and guidance can help teachers create wonders.

This success story talks about the importance of a wholesome learning environment to promote student development. It explains how an Anganwadi worker, after attending the structured Aakar training, focuses on enhancing the ambience at the AWC using available resources to make it conducive to learning.

A STORY OF THE PAST...

Three Anganwadi Centres functioned in the same building, and this story is about Anganwadi Centre #78/19—one of the Anganwadis that was operative in the building. The new proposed space for the Anganwadi Centre was not ready yet, and hence, the AWWs managed to conduct classes and activities in the current space. However, the building was poorly constructed and looked unappealing in every sense.

The Anganwadi Centre was meant for children below the age of six years. But, there wasn't anything available to attract the little ones. Attendance was extremely low. What was worse? With the building still under construction, a few local residents used the Anganwadi Centre as a toilet. The Anganwadi worker was gravely hurt by the reality of the situation. She wanted to do something about it, but did not know what could be done and how.



THE TRANSFORMATIONAL TRAINING

The Anganwadi worker, soon after attending the structured Aakar training, was inspired by the newly acquired learning. The training focused on the holistic development of children. It provided ideas on involving the community in improving the AWC for the benefit of their children's development. It covered various ways of attracting children towards the AWC and touched upon different innovative methods that could be deployed to keep children occupied while they were at the AWC.

It was just the right time! The AWW felt empowered to transform the situation at the Anganwadi Centre. As a first step, she cleaned the classroom and the campus. She collaborated with the community and convinced people in the neighbourhood to come forward and help improve the centre for their children. The neighbours worked together and provided doors and windows for the classroom. They got the walls painted. These collective efforts literally turned a toilet building into a learning facility.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Gradually, the efforts started bearing fruit. There was a tremendous amount of change.

IMPROVED ATTENDANCE: About 25 children were enrolled at the AWC before the transformation took place. Today, over 40 children in the three to six years age group come to the AWC happily to learn.

A CHEERFUL ATMOSPHERE: Earlier, children yearned to get back home after lunchtime. Today, the classroom is so bright and cheerful that children are reluctant to leave the AWC even after closing hours.

INTRIGUING TEACHING LEARNING MATERIAL: To make the classroom and activities more interesting, the AWW created simple handmade material/art & craft from disposable items. This inspired the children too to make the classroom livelier, and they started bringing in empty bottles and boxes to create their own art related to the topic being taught at the AWC.

BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE: The little children have seen the effort taken by the AWW and the community in transforming the AWC. They are now more sensitive, patient and disciplined. They listen to every activity quietly and actively participate in it. Yet, they handle things very carefully and leave them in the right position before getting back home.

A STRONGER RELATIONSHIP: The transformed atmosphere has also strengthened the student-teacher bond. The children have feelings of respect and love towards the worker and helper, and vice versa. They have acquired good manners too—taking permission from the worker, etc.

CONCLUSION

The Aakar training and the transformation that took place at the AWC thereafter inspired the worker to work harder. She was differently-abled, but that did not deter her from achieving her goal. The training taught her to rise to the occasion, maximizing potential and circumventing obstacles to create an environment conducive to learning for the children.



SUCCESS STORY 7: Sheer determination helps worker run Anganwadi Centre efficiently

Anganwadi worker beats the odds to feel belonged to the Korpana Gopalpan AWC; Aakar training helps her run it smoothly

District	Chandrapur
Taluka	Gopalpur
Supervisor in charge of Anganwadi Centre	Deepa Hammand
Anganwadi Centre worker	Chandrakala Churmure
Total no. of children	23 (11 boys and 12 girls)



INTRODUCTION

A teacher's dedication to students and faith in the teaching profession goes a long way in enabling a power-packed learning experience for students. There are thousands of teachers across India who are an inspiration not only in school, but also in the community surrounding the campus. They lead the way and serve as beacons of hope and opportunity for children who follow in their footsteps. However, in many remote locations across India, education is not seen as a pathway to success. In such places, teachers go the extra mile to drive home the point that education is essential and it will make the future brighter.

This story talks about an Anganwadi worker who goes the extra mile, literally, to ensure smooth operations at the Anganwadi Centre. From relocating with her entire family and learning a new dialect to engage with the community, to getting trained and transforming the AWC for good, this story teaches a lesson of grit and determination.

INITIAL DAYS AT THE AWC

Chandrakala Zurmire functioned as a worker at the Korpana Gopalpan Anganwadi Centre. She had heard from local residents that the AWC needed a worker, and that's how she secured the job of an AWW at the centre. She belonged to a different village and travelled a long distance to get to work every day.

The AWW's primary duties and responsibilities revolved around distributing food to the children enrolled at the centre, talking to parents and convincing them to send their children to the learning facility, and a few other routine tasks that were mundane and monotonous. The AWW was a dynamic lady with a pleasant personality, but her potential was not explored to the fullest. One fine day, Chandrakala decided to do something to change the situation.

THE AWW GOES THE EXTRA MILE!

The local Gondi dialect was new to the AWW. But, Chandrakala put in additional efforts to learn the language (and is now a master at it). Once she learnt how to strike a conversation with local residents in their language, she began building her network. She collaborated with the community. Soon, the AWW realized that she had already crossed the first few steps towards improving the AWC. She had to now spend longer hours at the centre and in the neighbourhood. Chandrakala rented out a place in the village and moved to the new house with her entire family. The community began noticing the sacrifices that the AWW was making to truly belong to the village. She spent a lot of time educating parents on children's hygiene, their eating habits and nourishment, punctuality in attending school, etc. She made the AWC more accessible to the children.

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL AAKAR TRAINING

Then came the Aakar training! It was the icing on the cake. The structured training gave a new direction to the AWW's efforts. It taught her the objectives behind the early childhood education programme. She realized that her duties went far beyond taking care of the children's nutrition and hygiene-related needs. She took interest in not only gaining knowledge but also in the practical implementation of it. The training focused on various topics, including age-appropriate music, stories, free play, general knowledge and science experiments. Having no prior exposure to any of these topics, everything seemed new to the AWW. But, she grasped all the knowledge that she could from the training and worked toward executing it at the AWC. For queries with respect to children and the AWC, Chandrakala maintained a notebook where she jotted down questions to seek answers later.

WINDS OF CHANGE AT THE AWC


After attending the training, Chandrakala spent hours and hours together to create a variety of teaching aids—also known as teaching learning materials or TLM. She leveraged the training and her creativity to develop the TLM using easily accessible material from the neighbourhood. The innovative and exciting learning material intrigued children at the AWC. The AWW used it as per the newly set timetable. With a fixed schedule in place, the AWC also began operating smoothly.

After attending the training, Chandrakala passed on the learnings to the helper, and the helper started taking up additional responsibilities. Together, they invested a lot of time and effort in decorating the AWC—to make it more appealing to the children and conducive to learning. Chandrakala also started going on regular home visits and conducted parent-teacher meetings to promote the well-being of children.

CONCLUSION

The entire community as well as the Gram Panchayat members were appreciative of the AWW's efforts. As a token of appreciation and gratitude, the Ministry of Women and Child Development, a branch of the Government of India, presented her the award for Best AWW in 2016-17.

Chandrakala experienced first-hand the transformational impact teachers can have on the lives of their students. She wore many hats—of a teacher, a friend to students, an advisor to parents, etc. in order to perform her duties responsibly and efficiently. After participating in the Aakar training, she challenged herself to take up new initiatives as per the new timetable. To the children, she became a partner in learning and gave it her to all to run the Anganwadi Centre efficiently.



SUCCESS STORY 8: Anganwadi worker's positive mindset leads to smoother operations at the centre

Structured Aakar training stimulates a positive change in attitude of teachers and students

District	Nagpur
Project	Big Tajabaug
Supervisor in charge of Anganwadi Centre	Tasneem Shaikh
Anganwadi Centre worker	Malini Chimankar
Total no. of children	50 (There were no children in the 5-6 years age group.)



INTRODUCTION

A person's attitude may be construed as a dimension of personality that becomes apparent in the individual's interactions with others and in different situations. In the world of early childhood education, a teacher is the ambassador and primary messenger of knowledge, and his/her attitude towards the teaching profession matters just as much as the willingness of the child to absorb the learnings. The attitude directly impacts the child's development. How a teacher adapts to any modification in the educational system and the way he/she responds to the changes, reflects in the students' behaviour too.

The Aakar curriculum was introduced in the State of Maharashtra for children in the age group of three to six years enrolled at the Anganwadi Centres. The new curriculum was taken to AWCs across the state for implementation, and AWWs realized that a massive transformation had to take place to make the initiative a success. This story explains how an Anganwadi worker beautifully blends into the new system with a positive mindset, and how the structured Aakar training guides her on the path to success. As a result, a complete change in attitude is observed in the children too.

UNTIL RECENTLY...

The Anganwadi worker who was employed at Nagpur's Big Tajabaug AWC followed the same routine day after day. The AWC was located in a slum and about 50 children below the age of five years were enrolled at the centre. The AWW's typical day involved reciting the morning prayer with the children, teaching them to sing the same songs through the year, reading out a few stories and distributing food. Making sure the children were occupied for three hours every day was another key responsibility that the AWW fulfilled.

After performing the same tasks for quite some time, days started getting predictable. Though there wasn't anything interesting for the AWW or the children, they were comfortable with the current routine. However, the Aakar curriculum and the structured training that followed for the AWW, changed the scenario. The training made the AWW realize that she was meant for the duties she already performed, plus a much greater role that she wasn't aware of until then.

THE AAKAR TRAINING

The Aakar training made it seem like the AWW had opened Pandora's box. It also meant that she would have to change her approach towards teaching. While the training had a world of surprises in store for the AWW, she quickly understood that an alteration in her attitude would make things easier. She received expert guidance, and with the right mindset, the AWW was all set to implement the learnings at the AWC.

A FEW MONTHS LATER

There was a complete transformation at the AWC. There were plenty of toys and teaching learning material (TLM), yet everything was neatly placed subject-wise at their designated location. The AWW had worked towards creating enough context-specific TLM for all 50 children at the AWC. They were never seen snatching objects from each other's hands. The AWW had stimulated a change in attitude in the children too.

The new timetable as per the Aakar training was being followed at the AWC and everyone strictly adhered to it. As soon as the children entered the AWC, they put their bags and footwear in place and began playing. After exactly 20 minutes of free play every day, they would get busy solving exciting puzzles. The day continued as per the schedule.



had resulted in a drastic change in worker. It had made her a more person.

The children always took prior permission from the AWW before beginning a task. They shared a cordial relationship with each other and with the AWW and helper too. Considering the fact that the AWC was located in a Muslim community, the AWW used Hindi as the medium of instruction to make the children more comfortable. However, the helper spoke in Marathi and children grasped both languages quite easily.


The children were well-mannered and greeted visitors with a warm "Namaste". After attending the Aakar training, the AWW realized the importance of having an informal atmosphere at the AWC while dealing with little children. This informal ambience instilled a sense of freedom in the students, and they communicated openly with the AWW and helper. This is not seen too often at other AWCs.

The AWW and children sang songs melodiously. The AWW invested additional time in learning new stories and songs. The Aakar training attitude of the approachable

The Anganwadi worker, fully engrossed in a story-telling session.


CONCLUSION

After the training, the worker and helper had their roles defined. The AWW went the extra mile to make improvements at the AWC. With the right attitude, she was able to transform the environment, making it more susceptible to the holistic development of the children.



SUCCESS STORY 9: Students and workers at a tribal center conquer language barriers

Aakar training helps workers at Anganwadi Centre #169 in Raigad overcome language barriers to offer quality education



District	Raigad
Taluka	Mangaon
Village	Patnus
Supervisor in charge of Anganwadi	Seema Thakare
Anganwadi worker	Rajashri Gaikwad
Total no. of children	26

AGE DEMOGRAPHICS:

Age Group	Boys	Girls	Total
0-3 years	5	5	10
3-4 years	2	2	4
4-5 years	4	4	8
5-6 years	2	2	4
Total	13	13	26



INTRODUCTION

Confucius, a Chinese teacher, editor, politician, and philosopher, once made this profound statement: If language is not correct then what is said is not what is meant, and if what is said is not what is meant then what must be done remains undone! Languages help people express themselves, bridge gaps and rise above barriers in the easiest way. But, when the language of the speaker is unfamiliar or new to the listener, communication can become an insurmountable task.

Many a time, children find it extremely challenging to communicate with teachers and classmates when enrolled in a new school that follows a different language as the medium of instruction. These children gradually adapt to the new surroundings with support from parents, teachers and friends, and learn the new language. However, the degree of difficulty is higher in the case of preschool students. With most children having little or no knowledge of the formal medium of instruction, introducing the new language to the little ones becomes the duty of the instructor. Teachers tasked with this responsibility need to be sufficiently trained to deal with the uphill task.

This case study explains the journey of an Anganwadi worker—how she fought language barriers and accomplished her goal of offering quality education to children in the age group of three to six years who were enrolled at the Anganwadi Centre.

THE CHALLENGE

The worker in charge of Anganwadi Centre #169 in Patnus village was finding it difficult to keep children engaged for three hours a day. The centre was located in a tribal locality and children who were enrolled at the AWC knew to communicate only in the local tribal dialect. This was quite challenging for the Anganwadi worker who did not belong to the tribe, and hence, did not know to converse in the local language. Even if the worker tried teaching children to communicate using the formal medium of instruction, the efforts would go in vain as attendance was highly irregular at the AWC.

Parents often moved to brick kilns or road construction sites where they worked, and the children had to go along for months together—till the work was completed. This resulted in a demotivated worker who only taught a few traditional songs and narrated a few stories to the children to keep them occupied for three hours a day. The helper's key responsibilities included distributing food and taking care of toilet-related needs of the children. The worker and helper could not think of ways to transform the situation.

AAKAR TRAINING DRIVES INNOVATION

The supervisor, Seema Thakare, takes ownership of transforming the AWC into a place of learning, fun and innovation. She conducts the structured Aakar training for the worker, and during the training, focuses on the development and utilization of educational material. She explains how the teaching learning material or TLM can be leveraged to enhance the progress of children. This rings a bell. The worker immediately relates the topic to the situation at the AWC. She imagines ways of creating TLM in interesting ways and using the material to intrigue children, capturing their attention. She gets all her queries clarified during the training, and with expert guidance from the supervisor sets out to implement the learnings at the Anganwadi Centre.

SPEAKING A NEW LANGUAGE

After the training, the Anganwadi worker focused on creating educational material relevant to topics that had been laid out in the Aakar curriculum. The children suddenly appeared to be interested in coming over to the AWC every morning. They showed interest in learning. Gradually, the Anganwadi

worker started simple conversation-based activities using the TLM. This helped the children learn common phrases to be used in everyday conversations.



Children and worker at AWC #169 in Patn us village communicate freely with each other

despite language barriers.

The worker found it easier to capture the attention of the children, teaching them new words every day, and the children started adjusting well in class. Children also showed interest in helping the worker create learning material. The worker enacted stories rather than reading them out, while children watched and listened in rapt attention.

CONCLUSION

The Aakar training not only helped the children learn a new language, it also helped the Anganwadi worker keep the children engaged for three hours every day without any hassle. The training promoted the implementation of various innovative ideas at the AWC. The worker and helper were able to successfully communicate with the children and vice versa. They introduced novel ideas to promote optimal learning when children were present at the AWC, rather than worrying about the low attendance when parents had to migrate to their work sites. While everyone was aware of the existing language barriers at the AWC, the Aakar training program showed the worker powerful ways of tackling them. With the right guidance, they were able to rise above the issues and transform the AWC.

SUCCESS STORY 10: Child-centric approach helps worker de-stress the atmosphere

Aakar training helps worker at Banghar Anganwadi (Centre #27) adopt a child-centric teaching approach effectively

District	Parali
Taluka	Satara
Supervisor in charge of Anganwadi	Sarika Dhane
Anganwadi worker	Asha Gautam Sawant
Anganwadi helper	Archana Pravin Jadhav
Total no. of children	11

AGE DEMOGRAPHICS:

Age Group	Boys	Girls	Total
3-4 years	2	1	3
4-5 years	1	4	5
5-6 years	2	1	3
Total	5	6	11



INTRODUCTION

In a child-centric teaching approach, the child is at the centre of the education model. This approach aims at understanding the mindset of the children and crafting teaching methods accordingly, so as to enable a higher degree of learning. It considers the skills and practices of students in the classroom while developing the teaching plan. It empowers students with lifelong learning and independent problem-solving. With complexity rising in every walk of life, it is crucial to prepare children at a very young age to confront challenges. Pre-schools that adopt the child-centric teaching approach are bound to accelerate the journey of the children on the trajectory of success.

This case study clearly brings out the difference in outcome after the child-centric approach is adopted at an Anganwadi Centre.

THE CHAOTIC BANGHAR ANGANWADI CENTRE

The building rented out to run the Banghar AWC was cramped and non-compliant. The area was declared non-productive. Hence, a Gram Panchayat couldn't be formed. Due to this, financial help to run the AWC was out of reach.

The classroom wasn't inviting either. It was teacher-centred where the Anganwadi worker chose what the students learnt, and how they learnt the lessons. She had complete control on the mode of assessment too. The worker repeatedly asked the little children to write. She was unaware that it was an incorrect practice that could potentially harm children as their muscle co-ordination and fingers hadn't developed fully at that age. Ideally, children should be given pencils only at the age of 4 or 5 years.

The AWW gave drawing samples and asked the children to replicate them. After they drew as per their individual ability, the AWW altered the drawings, and this demotivated the young minds further. While the children were busy writing or drawing, the AWW filed up registers. Education was being imparted in a haphazard manner that left the children unhappy. They cried with fear every time the worker asked them to come over to her desk.

With nobody monitoring the progress of the children or questioning the teaching approach, the AWC became the least favourable place for education. Parents enrolled their children in private-run English medium schools in the vicinity of the AWC. Unfortunately, the Anganwadi worker was not trained enough, and was hence unaware of the right way of imparting education. Furthermore, she did not have the time or interest to comprehend the reason for low attendance at the AWC.

The teaching approach had to change, emphasizing each student's interests, skills, and learning styles. The worker had to function as a facilitator of learning for the children as opposed to being a stern dictator. However, that would require a 360-degree transformation, and achieving such a change would be nearly impossible without the right training for the AWW.

THE AAKAR TRAINING – A RAY OF HOPE SHINES BRIGHT

At this critical juncture, the AWW received an opportunity to participate in the Aakar training. It was an inspiring experience for the AWW and it made her realize what went wrong at the Anganwadi Centre. The training highlighted the importance of a child-centric learning environment at the AWC. The trainer explained how an Anganwadi worker can use playful methods to imbibe in the children a liking for education. The Aakar training covered various aspects of child development, including language development, creative development, open games and pre-mathematics. The worker realized when and how to equip the little children with motor skills and other skills, so that they are ready for school. At the end of the training, she was all set to implement the learnings at the AWC and promote the holistic growth of children enrolled at the centre.

THE TRANSFORMATION BEGINS

Under the supervisor's expert guidance, the Anganwadi worker adopts the new route to teaching: the child-centric approach. She gives children enough freedom to explore their creative potential. She allows them to play in water and soil, letting them discover the beauty of nature.

The AWW creates a timetable as per the Aakar curriculum and everyone abides by it. The worker organizes age-appropriate activities for the children which they enjoy. She also creates her own teaching learning material and utilizes it in various innovative ways. This makes learning fun and impactful. What was earlier a dull Anganwadi Centre, now gets transformed into a bright and lively place.

The worker also begins collaborating with parents of children enrolled at the AWC. The transformation that initiated at the AWC gets extended to the children's homes too. As advised by the worker, parents allow their children to play in water, soil and sand. When the level of freedom given to the little children is slightly relaxed, parents and the AWW realize that the children trust them even more. The little ones share their day-to-day learning experiences with their parents every day.

CONCLUSION

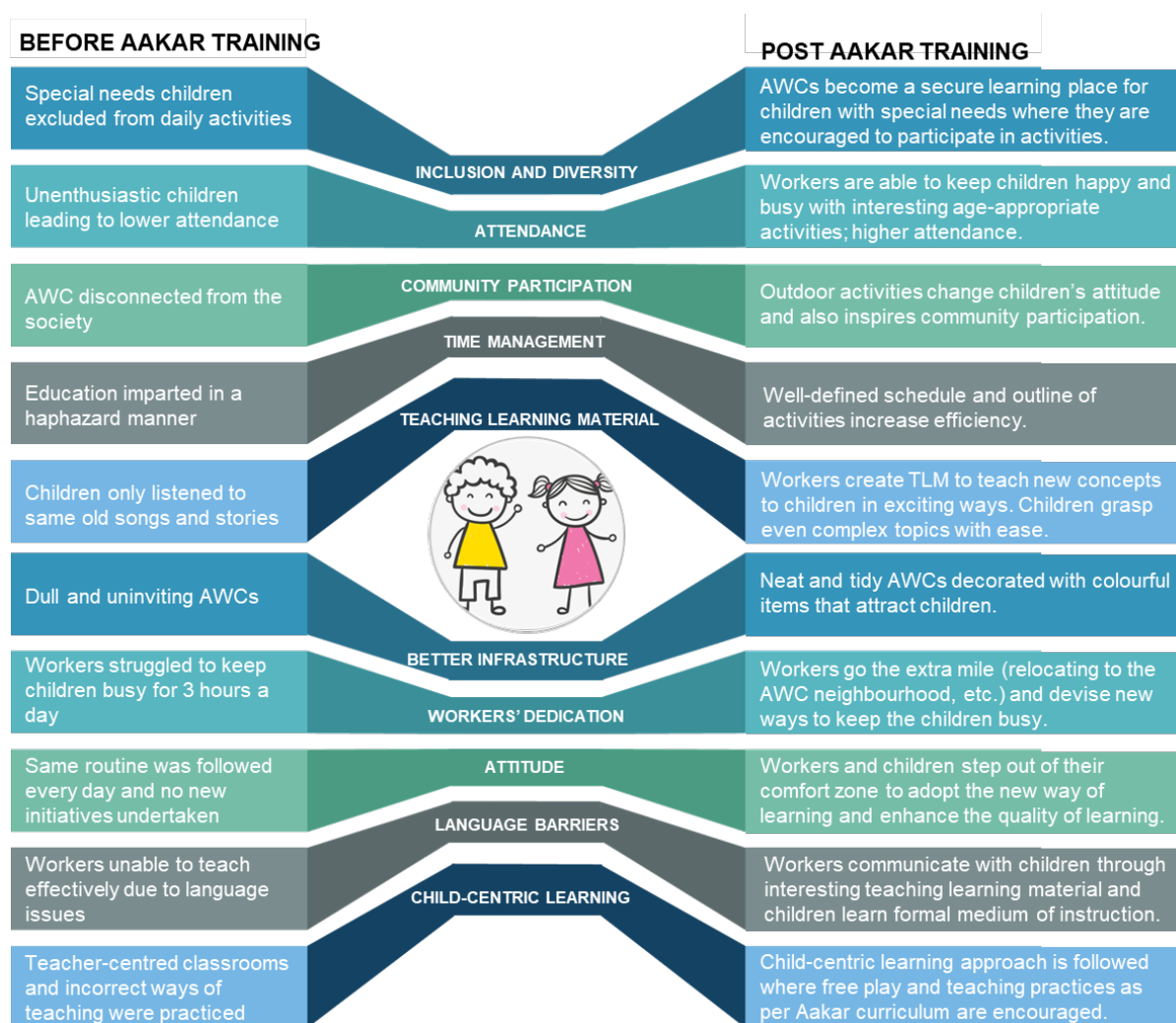
After the Aakar training, there was a noticeable change not only in the teacher's attitude but also in the children's behaviour. Timid, weepy and unhappy children were happy and smiling. The fear when their name was called out by the worker had vanished. The children's as well as the society's perception of the quality of teaching and learning at the AWC rose significantly.

CONCLUSION

The Aakar curriculum was introduced in the State of Maharashtra to address the need for early childhood education, at a time when there was a renewed focus on strengthening non-formal pre-school education delivered across Anganwadi Centres. The child-centric curriculum promoted experiential and play-way methods of learning, enabling the holistic development of children in the age group of three to five years.

The training programme initiative undertaken by UNICEF and ICDS, along with NGO partner Anugraha Foundation for Employment Opportunities, supported this change and strengthened the state capacity to deliver ECE effectively. It helped create a cadre of master trainers across Maharashtra who in turn trained their next level in ECE.

After the structured Aakar training, Anganwadi Centres across the state have derived tangible results. Aakar implementation has witnessed great success. Frontline workers have ever since been focusing on the physical, cognitive and social aspects of children’s growth.



Prior to the implementation of the Aakar curriculum, workers were not competent enough to prepare the young children for school. Education was imparted in a chaotic manner, and incorrect methods of teaching were followed that could inadvertently potentially harm the growth of children. However, with Aakar, a more structured approach came in place.

On successful completion of the Aakar training, the frontline workers became more confident and efficient. The Anganwadi Centres became popular for the quality of education and the way it was imparted. The training facilitated a more fulfilling experience for the staff, parents and children.

The Aakar training programme is progressing at a quick pace to AWCs across Maharashtra. The best practices that are an outcome of the programme will soon be followed in every single AWC, making the centres the most sought-after places for early childhood education. We have covered only one part of Aakar so far. The second part needs to be planned soon and taken to the grassroots level so we can accomplish a holistic ECE curriculum across the state.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We at Anugraha Foundation for Employment Opportunities have developed this e-book. However, it would not have been possible without the kind support and help of many individuals and organizations. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all of them.

We are highly indebted to UNICEF and ICDS for their sponsorship, guidance and constant supervision during the course of the project. The AWC supervisors, workers and helpers across Maharashtra trusted in our approach and implemented the learnings at their respective centres. This pay-it-forward initiative would not have been a success if these trained individuals hadn't transferred the knowledge gained to the next level of frontline workers. Our heartfelt gratitude to all these individuals for their significant contribution towards the success of the project.

We would also like to express our special gratitude to the young children enrolled at the AWCs, their parents and the neighbourhood surrounding the AWCs. Your support and determination to send your wards to the AWCs increased attendance, and that is the very reason why it was possible for us to have these success stories.

We are thankful to all those who assisted us in providing with all necessary information and pictures relevant to the project. The details went a long way in getting us to complete this e-book on time.

We would also like to thank the following people for their invaluable help and support:

Ms Reshma Agarwal	UNICEF Education Specialist Maharashtra State
Ms Sharmila Mukharji	UNICEF ECE Consultant Maharashtra State
Mr D G Mundhe	ICDS Deputy Commissioner, Maharashtra State
Mr Vijay Kshirsagar	ICDS Deputy Commissioner Maharashtra State
Mrs Sandhya Nagarkar	ICDS CDPO Pune
Mrs Ashwini Kamble	ICDS CDPO Thane
Mrs Seema Patil	Director, Anugraha Foundation
Mrs Veena Sant	ECE Strategist, Anugraha Foundation
Mrs Madhuri Deshpande	ECE Mentor, Anugraha Foundation
Mrs Nita Walimbe	ECE Project Coordinator, Anugraha Foundation
Mrs Deepthi Alvares	Documentation Specialist, Alvinto Creatives