**Background**

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in India is rampant, affecting four children every hour (BBC, 2017). A survey conducted by National Commission for Protection of Child Rights revealed that 53% (2017) of children reported having been through a form of sexual abuse. CSA commonly occurs in places like schools, where children spend most of their time during the day. To enable peace in societies, protection of children becomes important.

**The Project**

Project Safe Word aimed at spreading awareness about Child Sexual Abuse and teaching children “safe words” that they could remember and protect themselves, their peers, and those younger to them. To do so, several methods were (and in fact, are) being used. The location chosen for the project is Hyderabad, Telangana.

While the Government of Telangana has come with some resources to educate children, the content is limited. Considering that not only due to the lack of knowledge but also due to the increased vulnerability among children in government schools (as they mostly belong to lower socio-economic backgrounds), the target group for the execution of this project was children aged 10-16 years studying in grades 6 to 10 in government schools.

First, collaborations were established with the School Education Board of the Government of Telangana, without which, this project could have not been possible. The officials provided us with relevant and existing teaching material that was in place so that we could go through it and make value addition with our project. Next, training material on Child Personal Safety was prepared in the forms of PowerPoint presentations and posters and was verified by the officials of the Board. This was prepared in two languages: English and Telugu. To prepare this material, the team consulted various primary and secondary resources to maintain the quality and authenticity while dealing with a sensitive subject matter.

The team first conducted an online workshop for approximately 400 teachers using the material to spread awareness as well as train them on how to best talk to students about abuse and personal safety. Due to COVID-19, schools in the State remained shut for most of the summer, which was a challenge for the team to overcome. However, although there was limited time, once the schools reopened, the team visited different Mandal-level schools in the city and conducted workshops for approximately 1000 children in the span of 10 days. The training material (posters) were distributed in all the schools visited.

The flagship activity of the Project was to create books for students to read. The books contain a story with illustrations drafted by the team, exercises to test the children’s level of understanding, and more information about CSA and Child Personal Safety took over the last few pages of the book. The part on information is predominantly meant for adults perusing the book to understand why talking about CSA and personal safety is important and how it could be navigated. This book was also prepared through rigorous primary and secondary research conducted by the team.

**Next steps:**

Until the end of 2021, the team has a few more online workshops planned that would be conducted via Zoom for children in government schools. Additionally, the team is also building an e-learning module to increase access to information about CSA and to spread awareness to mitigate the problem. We are also looking to collaborate with other state and national NGOs that work in the field of children’s safety or education.
The aim of the project remains to enable peace in the society, wherein children maintain personal safety and are not subject to any kind of sexual abuse. As children understand sexual abuse, they would not only be protecting themselves but also not be potential perpetrators. This would help the country’s rate of sexual abuse decline and enable a great sense of values of sensitization and respect. With this, the country would move a step closer to ending this form of violence and promote peace.

With the help of the generous funding received as part of the Davis Projects for Peace and the support extended by the School Education Board of the Government of Telangana, 1000 children and counting, are now aware of how to ensure personal safety. Teachers and parents are being more equipped to address this issue in classrooms and spread awareness. With this, communities within Hyderabad, Telangana are moving towards promoting greater peace, starting with child safety.

*Pictures of the team conducting workshops in schools*

*Pictures of the team conducting online training workshop for teachers*

*Examples of the training material (booklet, poster, and slides from a presentation)*