

cities for
children

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



SEEKHO SIKHAO SAATHI

**INSPIRING OUT-OF-SCHOOL
CHILDREN TO LEARN**



ABOUT US

Cities for Children works to support the learning and well-being of children living in urban poverty. Our main goal is to protect the “right to childhood” – right to read, to play, and to safety. We see, count and care about vulnerable children that few others currently serve, including those from refugee and migrant communities who settle on the margins of cities. Many of these children are ‘on’ or ‘of’ the streets and are forced to choose between going to work or school. Our programme helps associate learning with joy and motivates children to stay in education.

OUR PARTNER

Founded in 2014, Junior Jinnah Trust is a non-profit providing quality education to underserved populations, including orphans, child laborers, street children, and the underprivileged in Pakistan.

With 20 campuses in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, JJT has graduated over 1000 students, currently supporting 1750. In 2023, 1054 new students enrolled. JJT also aids communities with ration packs, cooked food, medical camps, water filtration, emergency response, uniform kits, employment opportunities, and other welfare initiatives. At Junior Jinnah campus students have provision to: free tuition with quality learning Materials, free text books and notebooks, no charges for local and Board exams, bags, stationery and uniform kits (for specific cases).



BACKGROUND

Pakistan has 26.2 million out-of-school children and has been facing challenges in ensuring school admissions, retention, and quality learning. The level of school dropout is particularly alarming - according to UNICEF, “nearly 10.7 million boys and 8.6 million girls are enrolled at the primary level, this drops to 3.6 million boys and 2.8 million girls at the lower secondary level.”

The parents in this community are passionate and hardworking; they dream of sending their children to school, but financial constraints hold them back. With private school fees around PKR 2000-3000, education is unaffordable for most families. As a result, many children drop out after grade 5 or never attend school at all.

To address this, we at Cities for Children adapted our Seekho Sikhao Saathi programme with the goal to motivate children at risk of being out of school to learn.

We began our project in partnership with Junior Jinnah Trust in two kinds of locations:

- Dheri Hassanabad - an underprivileged community in District Rawalpindi. Most adults in the community served by the JJT school work as laborers, trash-pickers, or cart handlers, earning 300-400 rupees a day. Each family typically has 5 to 6 children, making it challenging to make ends meet.
- 3 Basic Education Community Schools (BECS) in Burma Town, under the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training (MOFEPT). These schools offer non-formal, multigrade education in community-based spaces, with a single teacher responsible for classes I to V. The community provides the school premises free of cost, while the Government of Pakistan supplies the teacher’s honorarium, Teaching Learning Material (TLM), and textbooks.

At the start of the program, a total of 107 Chotay Saathi enrolled, however, we began to notice a decline in participation midway. Upon investigation, we found that many of these Chotay Saathi wanted to go to school “every day,” and had organically begun to transition to local community schools!

SEEKHO SIKHAO SAATHI

Seekho Sikhao Saathi (Partners in Learning) is one of our signature programmes, based on a Child to Child model in which we train older children (Baray Saathi/Big Partners), to become education champions delivering playful early learning sessions to groups of younger children (Chotay Saathi/Little Partners).

Seekho Sikhao Saathi (SSS) originated as a response to the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. It initially took place in open-air settings within informal settlements, aiming to maintain children's connection to education. To date, it has reached over 4,500 children, both younger and older, in various contexts.

With support from the Malala Fund Girl Programme, Cities for Children expanded the Seekho Sikhao Saathi initiative. We partnered with the Junior Jinnah Trust (JJT) ' to conduct 12 playful-learning sessions at the Dheri Hassanabad Campus and BECS I, II, and III campuses in Burma Town.

For the target group, we incorporated sessions on literacy, numeracy, motor skills, socio emotional learning and science, with hands-on activities and play-based learning.



The program had two primary objectives to tackle the dual challenges of retention and performance for out-of-school children:

- Encouraging out-of-school children to join community schools, where they could participate in playful learning activities and cultivate an interest in attending school.
- Fostering foundational and early learning skills crucial for brain development,, ensuring children are prepared to learn upon entering primary school.



**1 SCHOOL,
3 BECS**



**35 BARAY
SAATHI**



**107 CHOTAY
SAATHI**

WORKING WITH OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

1 BARAY SAATHI AS ROLE MODELS

The special dimension of this programme was that the older children (Baray Saathi) themselves were at risk of being out-of-school, having had their schooling interrupted. They were enrolled in the JICA Alternative Learning Programme (ALP), and had completed up to a certain level (Package C). For these children to come forward as education champions was hugely significant, and seeing their own peers as role models served as an inspiration. Several new elements were introduced to this end.

2 SCHOOL MEALS

The provision of healthy meals at school helped incentivise attendance, at least in the beginning. This also ensured that all children received meals regardless of their families' financial circumstances, thereby addressing food insecurity within the community.

In Dheri, some Saathis had to leave early because the families faced tough financial situations. When the parents couldn't find work, they moved back to their villages because they couldn't afford to live in the city anymore. Some families moved because they couldn't pay rent. These frequent moves interrupted the children's participation in the program. This highlights the need for more support to keep these children connected with learning.

4 STAFF SUPPORT

All teachers and other school staff involved in the programme were provided small monetary incentive for their support to the programme. Due to this compensation, at Dheri, the school "Aayah" who lives in the same community proved extremely useful in recruiting over 100 out of school children. With the provision of a small amount for cell phone bills, she was able to call parents individually, which played a major role in staying connected with families. Other than this, weekly calls and periodic visits by our programme team were scheduled with teachers to get their feedback and navigate any challenges.

3 COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Before commencing the program, a community survey was conducted in collaboration with the JJT survey team. One of the factors that motivated parents was the absence of any financial burden; there were no admission fees for these sessions, and all stationery and session resources were provided.

An initial meeting was held with parents to explain the objectives of these sessions and ensure their support for this initiative. Interim discussions with parents were also conducted during the sessions to delve deeper into the challenges and obstacles faced by the community, and to explore avenues for additional support.





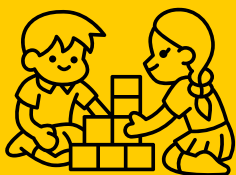
IMPACT EVALUATION

Impact evaluation was conducted through surveys, focus group discussions with students, parents, and teachers, and monitoring visits by the team. More than half of all sessions across all schools were observed by the team and the observations were used for course correction throughout the programme. When measuring impact, we looked at specific skill areas for both Baray and Chotay Saathis.

IMPACT AREAS

* Chotay Saathi impact was measured through comparison of baseline and endline surveys, conducted at the beginning and conclusion of the programme, respectively. We measured impact on Chotay Saathis across the domains of :

- Literacy (particularly oracy or storytelling)
- Numeracy
- Socioemotional skills
- Motor skills



* For our Baray Saathi in particular, we measured impact through weekly reflections, endline surveys and focus group discussions. We looked at impact across various domains of socio-emotional learning, most significant being:

- Confidence and sense of self-worth
- Relationship skills
- Motivation to learn
- Sense of agency
- Positive self-perception



MOTIVATION TO LEARN

“The kids used to be very silent in the start, but as the programme progressed they became very confident in communicating. In the beginning in regular BECs classes we only had 5 students, but during these programs the parents learned how happy the kids are, they started sending their kids and the admission rose to 20+ kids in regular BECS and we had to sadly say we couldn’t take new admissions because of space issues. Otherwise, we would have had 50 kids in the class. The Chotay Saathi even came on days when sessions were not happening because they wanted to learn more.”

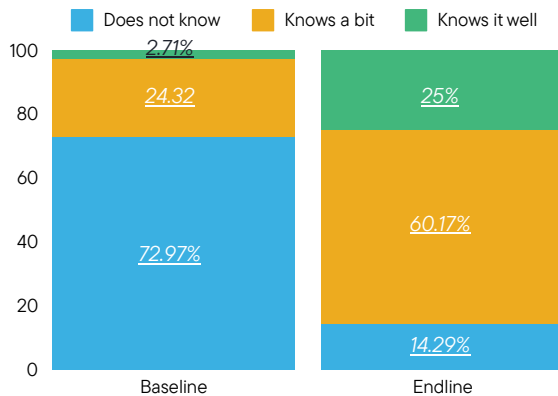
- BECS Teacher

CHOTAY SAATHI IMPACT



LITERACY SKILLS

Comparison of “Reads a 4-Step Picture Story”



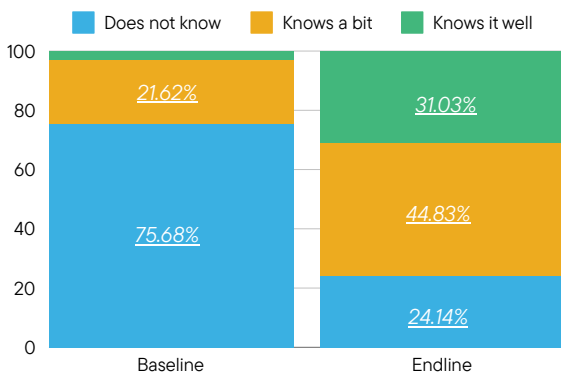
Average scores rose across all subdomains of literacy skills in BECS. There was a marked increase in “reads a picture story” which measured students’ ability to be able to simply narrate what is happening in a 4 step picture story as well as “talks about a story” in which we focused on the ability to add small details to a story to bring it to life.

- * The percentage of students who could read a picture story “well” (level 3) rose from 2% to 25%.
- * The percentage of students who could express ideas through drawing at level 3 rose from 8% to 57.4%.

Literary Skills - BECS

Are These Baselines or Endline Response?	Average Reads a 4- Step Picture Story	Average Talk About A Story	Average Expresses Ideas Through Drawing
Baselines	1.30	1.14	1.49
Endline	2.11	2.32	2.50

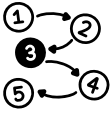
Comparison of “Reads a 4-Step Picture Story”



- * Similarly in Dheri, the percentage of students who could “read a picture story well” rose from 3 percent to 31 percent.
- * The Chotay Saathi at level 1 fell to one third by the endline.

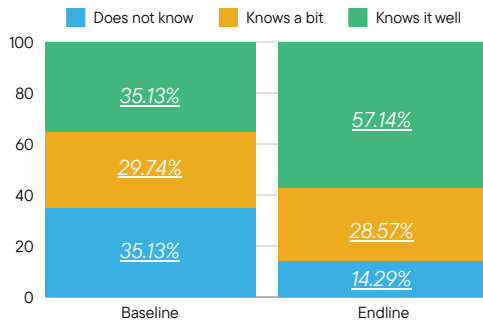
Literary Skills - DHERI

Are These Baseline or Endline Response?	Average Reads a 4- Step Picture Story	Average Talk About A Story	Average Expresses Ideas Through Drawing
Baselines	1.27	1.16	1.59
Endline	2.07	2.07	2.45



NUMERACY SKILLS

Comparison of "Counts from 1 to 10"



For numeracy skills, we measured scores for ability to name basic shapes (circle, square, triangle), sorting objects by shape and sorting by size. These skills serve as foundation for strong geometry skills and during the sessions, these skills were imparted through specific sessions on shape recognition as well as one on identifying patterns around us.

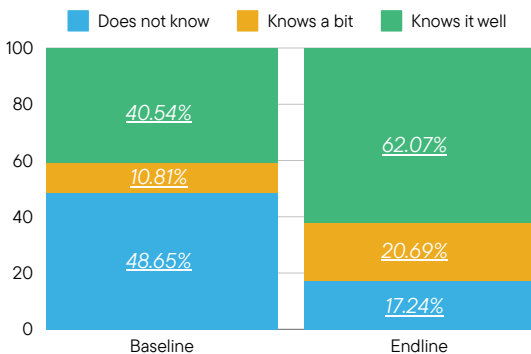
* The data reveals that in BECS, before the session, 35.1 percent of the students were unable to count from 1-10, which fell to 14.3 percent in the end.

* After the session, the percentage of students who mastered counting skills increased from 35 percent to 57.1 percent.

Numeracy Skills - BECS

Are These Baseline or Endline Response?	Average Counts from 1-10	Average of Names Given Shapes	Average of Sorts Objects by Shape	Average of Sorts Objects by Size
Baseline	2.00	1.27	1.62	1.86
Endline	2.43	2.43	2.43	2.54

Comparison of "Counts from 1 to 10"



The students at Dheri campus, especially the Chotay Saathis remained inconsistent in attendance, due to various issues within the community. Due to this, there was some difference in the students who appeared in the baseline and endline. The comparison results however still show the overall trajectory of the larger group.

* In Dheri, before the session, 48.65 percent of the students were unable to count from 1-10, which fell to 17 percent.

* After the session, the percentage of students who could count well rose to 62 percent.

“
MAJORITY OF OUR PARTICIPANTS ARE NOT SCHOOL GOING AND MIGHT NOT GO TO SCHOOL EVEN AFTER THIS PROGRAMME. SO IT WAS GOOD FOR THEM TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE WITH LEARNING IN A FUN WAY.
 - TEACHER

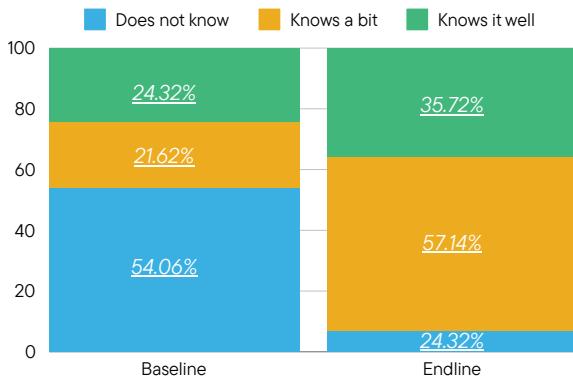
Numeracy Skills - Dheri

Are These Baselines or Endline Response?	Average Counts from 1-10	Average of Names Given Shapes	Average of Sorts Objects by Shape	Average of Sorts Objects by Size
Baseline	1.92	1.19	1.46	2.00
Endline	2.45	2.24	2.31	2.48



SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Comparison of "Shows Confidence"



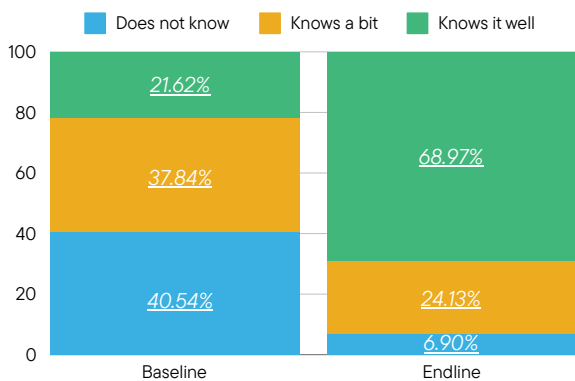
Another skill being targeted during these sessions was the development of socioemotional intelligence among Chotay Saathi. Throughout all the sessions, chotay saathi were tracked to see any improvement in their confidence, relationship building, communication and dharing of the material.

* Data showed that by the end of the programme in Dheri, 35.71 percent Chotay Saathi showed 100 percent improvement in confidence while only 7.14 percent students were still at level one.

Socioemotional Skills - Dheri

Are These Baselines or Endline Response?	Average Listens to and Follow Directions	Average of shows Confidence	Average of Takes and share materials	Average of Understands others' Feelings
Baselines	2.19	1.81	2.03	1.86
Endline	2.66	2.62	2.59	2.59

Comparison of "Shows Confidence"



* In BECS, 68.97 percent of Chotay Saathi developed more confidence after the sessions, while only 6 percent were still at level 1.

* There have also been instances where initially students came to the school crying, but the same students were later reported to be impatiently waiting for session day so that they could engage in playful activities.

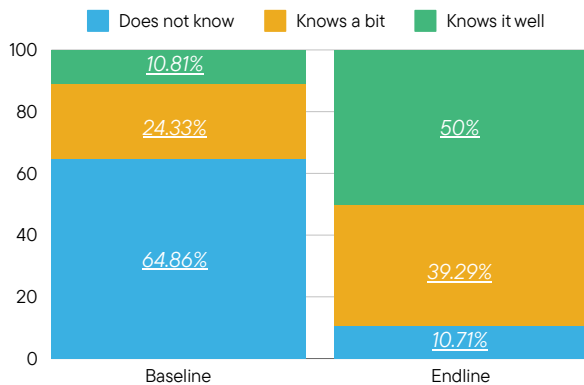
Socioemotional Skills - BECS

Are These Baselines or Endline Response?	Average Listens to and Follow Directions	Average of shows Confidence	Average of Takes and share materials	Average of Understands others' Feelings
Baselines	1.97	1.70	1.95	1.95
Endline	2.54	2.29	2.82	2.43



MOTOR SKILLS

Comparison of “Cuts and Pastes with Confidence”



Students motor skills were also tested by comparing baseline and endline results of their cutting and pasting skill.

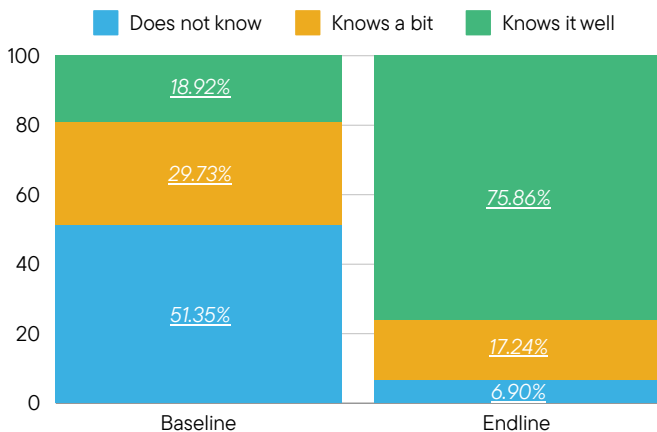
* In Dheri, initially only 10 percent students were able to cut and paste with confidence while by the end of the project, 50 percent students were able to cut and paste with confidence.

* Average scores for cutting and pasting rose by one level

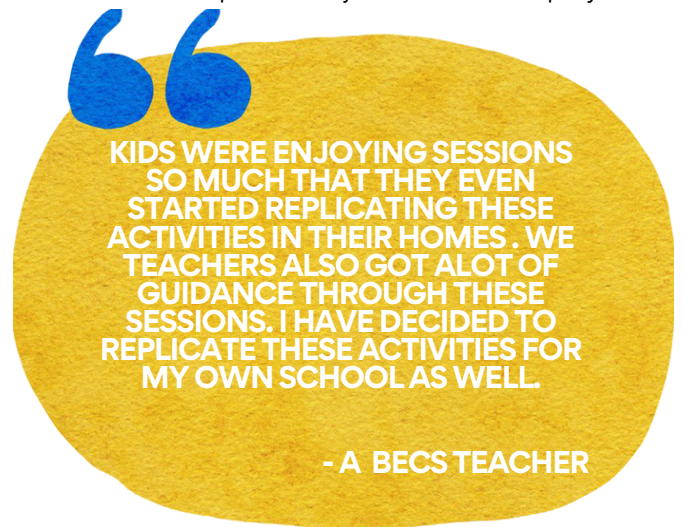
Motor Skills - Dheri

Are These Baselines or Endline Response?	Average of Cuts and Pastes with Confidence	Average of Draws a Straight Line	Average of Threads Beads
Baseline	1.68	2.08	2.19
Endline	2.69	2.52	2.86

Comparison of “Cuts and Pastes with Confidence”



* While in BECS campus, 18.92 percent students were able to cut and paste before the start of programme which rose to 75.6 percent by the end of the project.



Motor Skills - BECS

Are These Baselines or Endline Response?	Average of Cuts and Pastes with Confidence	Average of Draws a Straight Line	Average of Threads Beads
Baselines	1.46	2.08	2.05
Endline	2.39	2.64	2.71

SITARA: A CHOTI SAATHI STORY

Sitara, a bright 4 year old girl, faced significant emotional challenges when she first enrolled in the programme. She would often cry and insisted that her older brother accompany her to every session. Her attachment to him and reluctance to attend alone were evident barriers to her engagement in the programme. Initially, her brother's presence was a crucial source of comfort, and Sitara's separation anxiety made it difficult for her to participate in activities.

The program, with its dedicated Bari Saathis and structured activities, aimed to foster independence and confidence in children like Sitara. In the first few sessions, her Bari Saathi used a gentle and empathetic approach, encouraging Sitara to engage in activities gradually. The supportive and nurturing environment helped to ease her anxiety, and positive reinforcement played a key role in her progress. Remarkably, after just two sessions, a significant change began to emerge.

Within a couple of weeks, Sitara started attending the sessions on her own accord, no longer needing her brother by her side. Her initial reluctance gave way to enthusiasm, and she grew more comfortable and confident. This newfound independence was not limited to the days with scheduled sessions.



On days when there were no sessions, Sitara would cry, not out of distress, but because she wanted to go to school. She even asked her brother to drop her off at school and go back home, showing her readiness to engage in activities on her own with her Bari Saathi.

Sitara's transformation was remarkable. From a dependent and anxious child, she became an eager and independent Choti Saathi. Her journey highlights the profound impact of supportive educational environments and empathetic mentoring. Sitara's story is a testament to how structured support and encouragement can empower young children to overcome challenges and develop a love for learning.



**I USED TO THINK I WAS
ALONE IN THE WORLD,
NOW I KNOW I AM
LOVED BY KIDS**

- A BARI SAATHI

BARAY SAATHI IMPACT

* BODY MAPPING EXERCISE

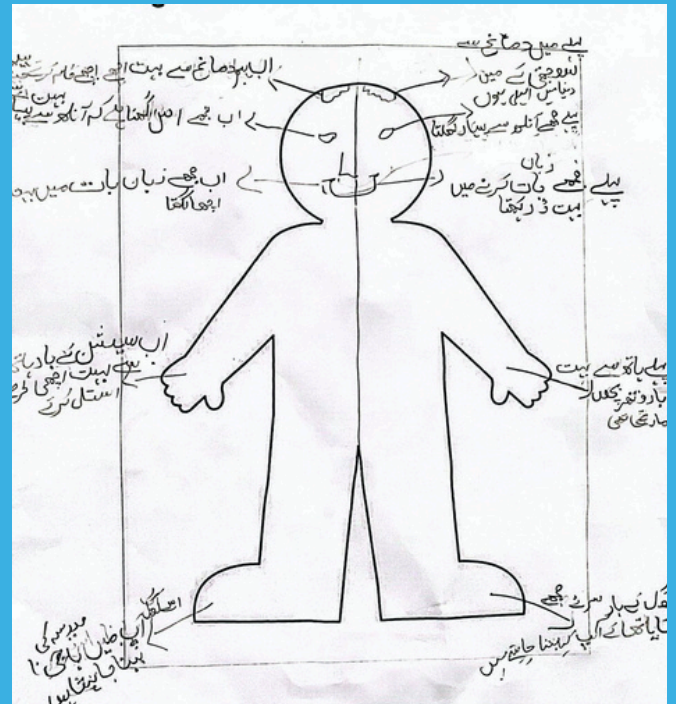
The Baray Saathi were tasked with highlighting their personal progress since joining the sessions on Body Maps, an exercise where students label their thoughts and feelings on “before” and “after” relating these feelings to different parts of their bodies.

	Before Programme	After Programme
Head	I used to think I am alone in this world	Now I know I am loved by kids
Mouth	I was scared of talking	I'm not scared anymore
Hands	I used to hit kids	I don't hit them anymore
Legs	I didn't know what I want to become in my life	Now I know I want to join Madrasah
Eyes	I didn't have love in my eyes	Now I look at kids with love and kindness

70% Increase in Empathy

57% Improved Self-Perception

40% Motivation to learn



Body Map Transcription

Sample: Seema Bibi

The statements from the body mapping exercise were used to identify markers of socioemotional growth, such as improved self-image, motivation to learn and a positive change in communication skills.

Students were able to reflect on their journey throughout the programme and self-report areas of personal growth that they were most proud of.



Seema was a 12 year old Bari Saathi at a BECS campus in our Seekho Sikhao Saathi program. She started as a shy girl, who didn't interact much with the adults. She used to stop herself from enjoying too much because she said, "If you laugh a lot, you cry a lot too."

Over the course of the programme, she became closer to her Chotay Saathi and would talk proudly about how they love her and now she knows there are people who like her. She was able to gain confidence and self-esteem, and think through her goals in life.

BARAY SAATHI IMPACT

* ENDLINE SURVEY AND DISCUSSIONS

92%

Agreed with the statement: "I felt like I became less nervous with time."

100%

Agreed with the statement: "After this programme, I am much more motivated to listen to my teachers and learn."

61%

Agreed with the statement: "After this programme, I have developed an idea of my future goals"

“

BEFORE BECOMING PART OF THIS PROGRAMME, I DIDNT KNOW WHICH PATH MY FEET WERE TAKING ME ON - BUT NOW I KNOW I WANT TO BECOME A DOCTOR. FOR THAT I WOULD HAVE TO STUDY A LOT AND GIVE THE MBBS EXAM

- A BARI SAATHI

“

I WANTED TO BECOME ARMY OFFICER. NOW I KNOW TO BECOME AN ARMY OFFICER I NEED TO GET A GOOD DEGREE

- A BARI SAATHI

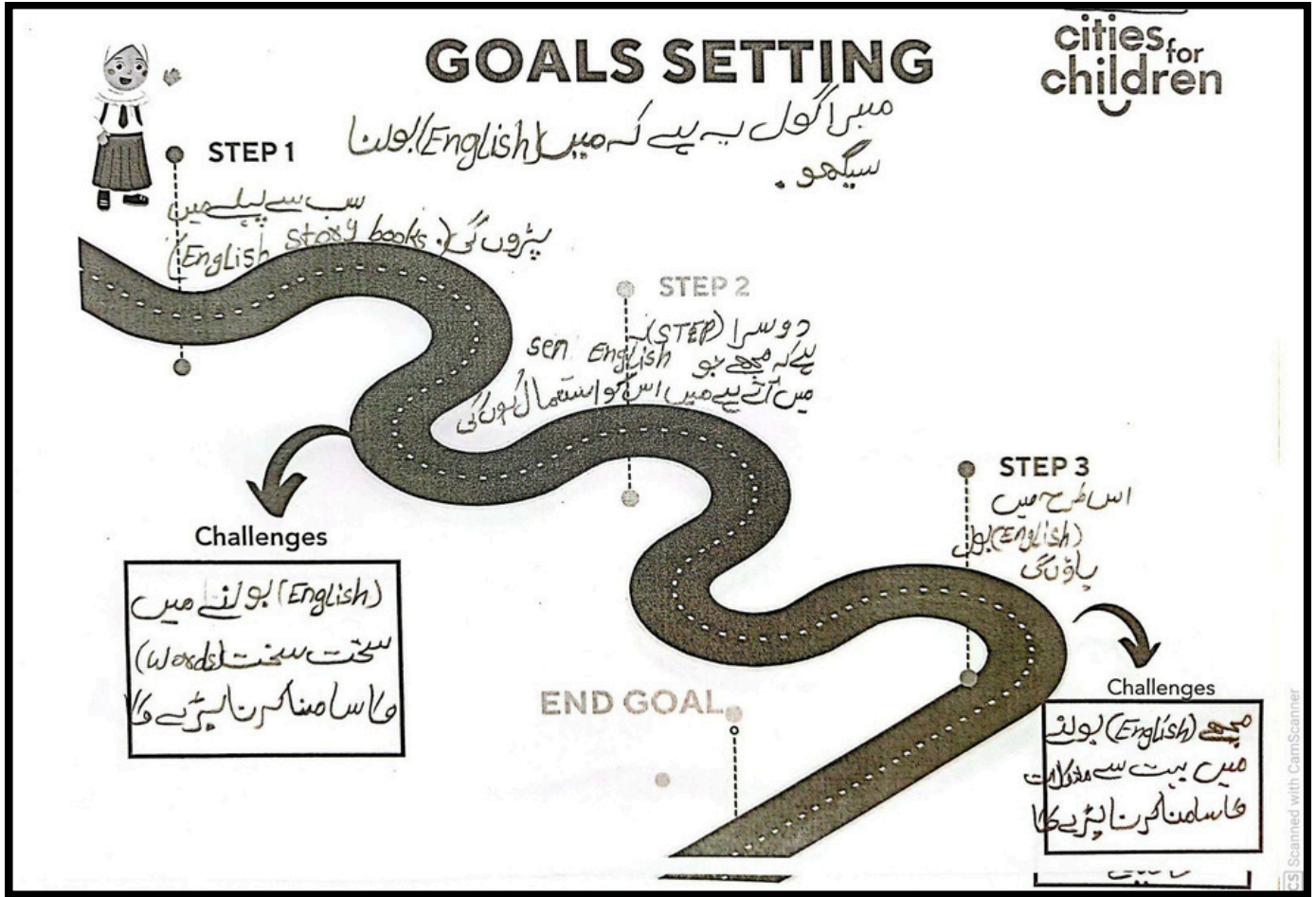
1- آپ کو اس پروگرام میں سب سے اچھی چیز کیا لگی؟
مجھے یہ چیز بہت اچھی لگی کہ بچے پڑھ کر کچھ بن جائے اور جس نے یہ سیشن شروع
کیا میں ان کا شکریہ ادا کرنا چاہتی کہ انہوں نے غریب بچوں کی پڑھائی میں مدد کی ہے۔
2- آپ اس پروگرام میں ایک چیز کیا بدلنا چاہیں گے؟
میں کچھ بھی نہیں بدلنا چاہتی ہوں کیوں کہ اس سیشن میں جو کچھ بھی تھا وہ بہت
اچھا تھا مجھے بھی ضرور آیا اور بچوں کو بھی بہت ضرور آیا۔

A section from a Baray Saathi Endline Form

I'M REALLY HAPPY THAT THIS PROGRAMME IS GIVING KIDS THE CHANCE TO GET AN EDUCATION AND ACHIEVE SOMETHING IN THEIR LIVES. I WANT TO THANK THE ONES WHO STARTED THESE SESSIONS FOR HELPING POOR KIDS STUDY - THANK YOU!

- BARI SAATHI

GOAL SETTING ACTIVITY



The goal-setting activities were crucial in helping students articulate and plan their future aspirations. In BECS 1, for example, a student working in a hotel set a goal to attend school more regularly and save money to eventually open his own hotel. Another student aspired to excel in her 9th and 10th grade exams and was already preparing by studying diligently. These sessions not only helped students set realistic and achievable goals but also encouraged them to think about the steps needed to reach these goals. The activity fostered a sense of purpose and direction among the students, making them more aware of their potential and the importance of education in achieving their dreams.

The goal-setting sessions also included discussions on coping with challenges. For instance, in BECS 2, the students expressed fears about family resistance to their educational aspirations but discussed ways to communicate their desires and seek support. This aspect of the activity was crucial in building resilience and problem-solving skills among the students.

Overall, the sessions at BECS, facilitated by the Baray Saathi, had a significant positive impact on both literacy and numeracy skills, socioemotional development, and motor skills of the students. The goal-setting activities were particularly impactful in providing students with a clear vision for their future and the steps necessary to achieve their goals.

“MY GOAL IS TO DEVELOP COMPUTER GAMES. I WANT TO BE AN EXPERT IN THIS FIELD SOMEDAY. I WANT TO START WORKING ON THAT GOAL BY STARTING TO LEARN COMPUTER SKILLS!”

-A BARI SAATHI AT BECS

WAY FORWARD

ORGANIC ENROLLMENTS

By the end of the sessions, *11 students from BECS and 15 from Dheri* enrolled in local schools. These included free schools in the area as well as the local government school, through which they became part of the formal education system. This shows the potential for creating motivation to enrol in the community.

FURTHER SUPPORT

We will be further supporting our Chotay Saathis, who are 5 years or older, stay engaged with learning by enrolling them in local community schools.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SPACE

To support our youngest programme alumni, we are starting up a free of cost Early Childhood Development space in the Dheri community.

This will serve pre-school age children in the area for the next 8 months, instilling in them a joy for learning and preparing them for enrolment at the Grade 1 level in local government schools.

cities for
children



To learn more about our work, see www.citiesforchildren.co