

**Process Documentation  
of Strengthening Open Shelter component of ICPS in Assam with  
special focus on creating protective environment for children living  
and working in railway stations/trains within Assam**

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## Background

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According to the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000 and amendment thereof in 2006, Section 3 defines children in need of care and protection (henceforth CNCP), a street child which means a child who (a) because of abuse, neglect, poverty, civil or military disturbance or any other reason, has left his or her home, family or community and lives, begs or works on the streets; or (b) because of inadequate care, begs or works on the streets but returns home at night.

Understanding these children and engaging with them so that they can make choices in life which is helpful for them in the long run the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (henceforth ICPS) has developed a system that will effectively and efficiently protect children. One such system being the

Open Shelter designed to provide a space for children.

### **Context of 'Open Shelters' as mandated under ICPS:**

**ICPS mandates Care, support and rehabilitation services within which it aims to initiate and support 'Open shelters' for children in need in urban and semi-urban areas.**

The large numbers of homeless children, pavement dwellers, street and working children and child beggars, left on their own and in need of care and support, is an urban phenomena of great concern. 29% of India's population resides in urban areas, half of which live in conditions of extreme deprivation compounded by lack of shelter and access to basic services like sanitation, safe drinking water, education, health care, recreational facilities, etc. The urban population is also expanding rapidly because of intense rural-urban migration, swelling cities and towns, further compromising the ability of civic authorities to meet people's basic needs. A large proportion of the migrant population ends up residing in inhuman conditions in slums, squatter colonies, railway platforms, pavements, bus stops, tourist spots, etc. As a result, urban poverty and hunger are increasing. In this situation, children suffer the most. A vast majority of them, with or without parental support, end up at traffic intersections, railway stations, streets, sabzimandi (vegetable market), etc. They can be seen begging for alms, wiping automobile windscreens, rag picking, vending wares and may also be involved in petty thefts, drug peddling

or controlled by a begging or stealing mafia. Many of these children also peddle sex for survival and paedophilia is common. These children are very often victims of adult abuse of all kinds: physical, sexual, emotional as well as economic exploitation.

Inhuman and violent life conditions turn many of these children into law offenders, criminals, drug abusers and exploiters themselves. If continued to be neglected, not only are human lives and capital wasted, but such children also become a huge drain on society. Mainstreaming these children is a big challenge, compounded by the fact that they have no parental care and support. It becomes the responsibility of the State to meet their special needs. The State must create a flexible mechanism, which will meet the unique needs of these children, harness their talent and potential, thus giving them the opportunity to become productive citizens.

In order to provide for the growing needs of these children, the ICPS would facilitate setting up open shelters particularly in urban areas. Such centres shall provide a space for children where they can play, use their time productively and engage themselves in creative activities through music, dance, drama, yoga & meditation, computers, indoor and outdoor games, etc. These activities would encourage meaningful peer group participation and interaction. This will ensure their overall growth and development, and keep them away from socially deviant behaviours in addition to fulfilling their basic requirements for food, nutrition and health. These shelters shall also have provisions for health care, quality and flexi-time education and vocational training, including provisions where children can safely keep their belongings and earnings. Counselling guidance and life skill education shall also be provided for channeling these children's energy into productive endeavours. The objective of such a service is to provide an opportunity for the increasing number of vulnerable children in urban areas to be protected from abuse and neglect on the street and provide them access to alternatives. In the long term, these children would be weaned away from street life and enabled to lead a dignified and productive life.

Financial assistance shall be provided through the State Government/UT Administration to voluntary organizations for establishing such Open Shelters as per the detailed guidelines given at Annexure-II. In case a State/UT is unable to find suitable voluntary organizations to run these Open Shelters, the State Governments/ UT Administrations shall run these centres from the funds available.

## Purpose

The State Child Protection Society (SCPS), Assam commissioned New Alipore Praajak Development Society to conduct a barrier analysis of the coverage and affectivity of the work of existing Open Shelters so that the findings can help the State Child Protection Society of Assam to have an understanding about how they 'converge' and 'diverge' from what is mandated for 'Open Shelters' under ICPS, what innovative and creative approaches could be used by the concerned organizations (beyond what is prescribed in ICPS) in running the Open Shelters and also to develop job descriptions of the positions in the OS scheme. The analysis was undertaken to understand the gaps found in the functioning of the Open Shelters operating in Guwahati and Nagaon run by three NGO's.

## Process

Details of the key deliverables expected of the technical support to SCPS, Assam to strengthen the open shelter component of ICPS in Assam:

### **Barrier analysis of the coverage and effectivity of the work of existing Open Shelters:**

**Timeline:** 2 days field visit to each for 3 existing Open Shelters, 1 day for discussion with SCPS, RPF and Unicef

As per the requirement Mr. Deep Purakayastha and Mrs Jhumur Chatterje from Praajak Development Society initially went for an eight day visit to observe the Open Shelter programme run by

- **Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) based in Guwahati**
- **Sadou Asom Gramya Puthibhonral Santha (SAGPS) based in Guwahati and**
- **Gram Bikash Parishad (GBP) based in Nagaon**

2 days field visit to each of the 3 existing Open Shelters were conducted. During the visit effort was made to understand what was presently being done with regard to each of the facets of the component, how did they 'converge' and 'diverge' from what was mandated for 'Open Shelters' under ICPS, how 'Open Shelter' has worked for children in need of care and protection, key challenges faced by the organizations to address the rights of children in need of care and protection in these shelters and lastly key action points for addressing SCPS and the concerned NGO running the Open Shelter. Visits to both the Open shelters and the Contact Points were made.

The top authorities of **Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) based in Guwahati, Sadou Asom Gramya Puthibhonral Santha (SAGPS) based in Guwahati and Gram Bikash Parishad (GBP) based in Nagaon were contacted and communicated with. Discussions were also held with the Chief Executive Officer of the organizations.**

Group discussions were conducted with both the staff members and the children who availed the services of the OS programme. However while interacting with children; presence of the adults could not be avoided under any circumstances.

Meetings were conducted and discussions were held with representatives of UNICEF, Railway Protective Force (RPF) officials and key authorities of SCPS. A meeting was also held with Mr. S.Z.Samuel, the State Chairman of Assam State Commission for protection of Child Rights (ACSC) to comment on the draft which was circulated by the Railway Board and also to discuss how the SCPS could be linked with the RPF Assam.

### **Hosting a Multi stakeholder consultation meet**

#### **Timeline: 1 day**

The second visit was conducted for 1 day where **a** Multi stakeholder Consultation was held to discuss about the draft which was circulated by the Railway Board. The consultation meet was chaired by the State Chairman of **-ASCS**, Mr. S.Z.Samuel. A power point presentation on the amendments of the circulated draft was made, the draft was reworked and forwarded to the

Railway Board in the consultation itself, the statement of purpose was also presented to the house.

The guest list comprised of representatives from

- ❖ **Assam State Commission for protection of Child Rights**
- ❖ **the Social Welfare Department (Government of Assam),**
- ❖ **senior officials of the Railway Protection Force (Northeast Frontier Railways)**
- ❖ **the Government Railway Police (Assam)**
- ❖ **officials of the UNICEF and**
- ❖ **Guwahati Childline.**

**A two days workshop was conducted with the staff members on job descriptions of open shelters and other related legal issues as well training to the GRP officials about how they can support the OS programme**

**Timeline:** 3 days

In the two days workshop with the staff members of the OS, effort was made to brief them and also make them understand about:

- Child protection
- JJ Act
- POCSO (Protection of Children Against Sexual Offence Act)

A detailed discussion was also held to help them understand what form of a job description is. A participatory exercise was conducted with them to help them understand what they should be doing if they spotted an unaccompanied child on the platform. Each participant was encouraged to mention two activities each one would do for the child, which they thought was crucial for the care and protection of the child.

The staff members of the organization were confused about their roles coupled with lack of clarity on child protection issues

Moreover in the absence of a child protection policy in the organization it was difficult for the staff members to carry out their responsibilities.

Clarity on the issue accompanied by knowledge about what should have been the roles of the staff members would have helped to clarify the roles of the care givers and the outreach workers. It would have helped to understand that the coordinator and the counsellor cannot be the same person executing two separate set of responsibilities.

Moreover the presence of a child Protection Policy could have helped to gain an in depth understanding of the issue and this would have lead to the value addition to the existing government scheme.

This discussion lead them to understand what should their roles and responsibilities be in the OS programme. Job descriptions of existing organizations based both in India and in abroad were consulted before articulating the roles of the staff members which was followed by an entire presentation on the job responsibilities.

On the third day of the third visit training was held with the GRP officials. The objective was to garner their support and spell out their roles in the OS programme. A film on Muktangan was shown to them along with games and participatory techniques were used to help them understand and decipher what their role can be in the open shelter programme.

### **Conducting training for the RPF \_ based in three zones namely Rangiya, Tinsukia and Lumding, based in Assam**

**Timeline:** 5 days

Training was conducted with the RPF officials to orient them about the existing Open Shelter programme and what can be their role in the OS programme. It was not possible to conduct the training in Rangiya because the DSC could not provide time as the dates, which were finalised by the RPF themselves clashed with a recruitment drive by the RPF. The DSC had left Rangiya to come to Guwahati for the recruitment. That is why it was postponed.

## Learning's from the Process Documentation

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The major learning's gathered from the process documentation are as follows:

- ❖ The time factor should be kept in mind while planning any training for the uniformed forces. The training should be very focused and a half day should be slotted for the purpose, this should be henceforth followed. The workshop objectives should also be kept specific. The workshop should not be loaded with a range of sessions, the adverse consequences can then be that -the RPF and the GRP officials -exhibit disinterest as too much irrelevant information is being disseminated to them. The objectives should be SMART. We have to prioritise what we want from GRP/RPF rather than loading them with information which will not be of much daily use.
- ❖ The frontline workers of an NGO can understand the training well when it is process oriented and self reflective. The trainings should also be residential to help them make



best utilization of the knowledge being imparted to them. One has to remember in this regard that any process oriented workshops require both time and space and it can only be facilitated by residential workshops. This ensures proper understanding of the entire programme on the part of the frontline workers.