

A LOVING FAMILY FOR EVERY CHILD

A process document on activation of Ward Child Protection Committee



Background of the project

Miracle Foundation India undertook a programme to create a community-led child protection mechanism aiming at family strengthening, prevention and gatekeeping in collaboration with UNICEF and the Department of Women & Child Development, Government of Maharashtra (DWCD). To implement the project, a consultation was held with the CWC Pune and DWCD, Maharashtra for identifying the intervention areas for the pilot model with the maximum number of child separations.

Based on the consultation and data received from the department, it was found that the Haveli Taluka reported the maximum number of children being separated from their families and admitted to Child Care Institutions (CCIs). The major reasons for separation included parents' illness and children who have lost both parents. Children were also put in CCIs due to reasons like child marriage, children without any traceable family, alcoholism, remarriage of the parents, etc.



Figure seq figure * Arabic 1 Ramnagar map



Further, a need-based situation analysis was conducted by the Deepak Foundation (implementing partner of the project) in the Haveli Taluka. The Ramnagar community was identified to initiate the pilot model. Later, four clusters in the Ramnagar community were selected to implement the project activities: Tuljabhavani Chowk, Bharatmata Mitra Mandal, Annabhau Sathe Chowk, and Mahatma Phule Chowk. The specific objective of the intervention is to pilot a scalable and replicable pilot model of family and community strengthening in selected demonstration sites in Maharashtra.

To initiate the work, a detailed situation analysis was conducted to understand the current scenario in identified areas. A total number of 3 Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs), 5 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 6 Key informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted. A total of 64 vulnerable families at the verge of separation were identified. Major issues identified in families included child labour, migration, single mothers, school dropout children, malnutrition, alcoholism, domestic violence, anemia, lack of awareness regarding financial linkages and livelihoods.

Rationale

A Child Protection Committee (CPC) is a community-based group including duty-bearers, who are primarily responsible for creating and promoting a child friendly and safe community environment wherein all children's well being, safety and rights are protected. The WCPC is an alliance working towards the well-being and child protection issues of children and young people at the Ward level. It is essential to make WCPC active and responsible as facilitators of gatekeeping, along with other stakeholders. The guidance offered by WCPC cannot be a "one size fits all" solution, as any transition requires careful planning, assessment, and adaptation based on its unique circumstances and context including culture. It is the only body that can analyze the strengths and available resources required to stop separation from families.

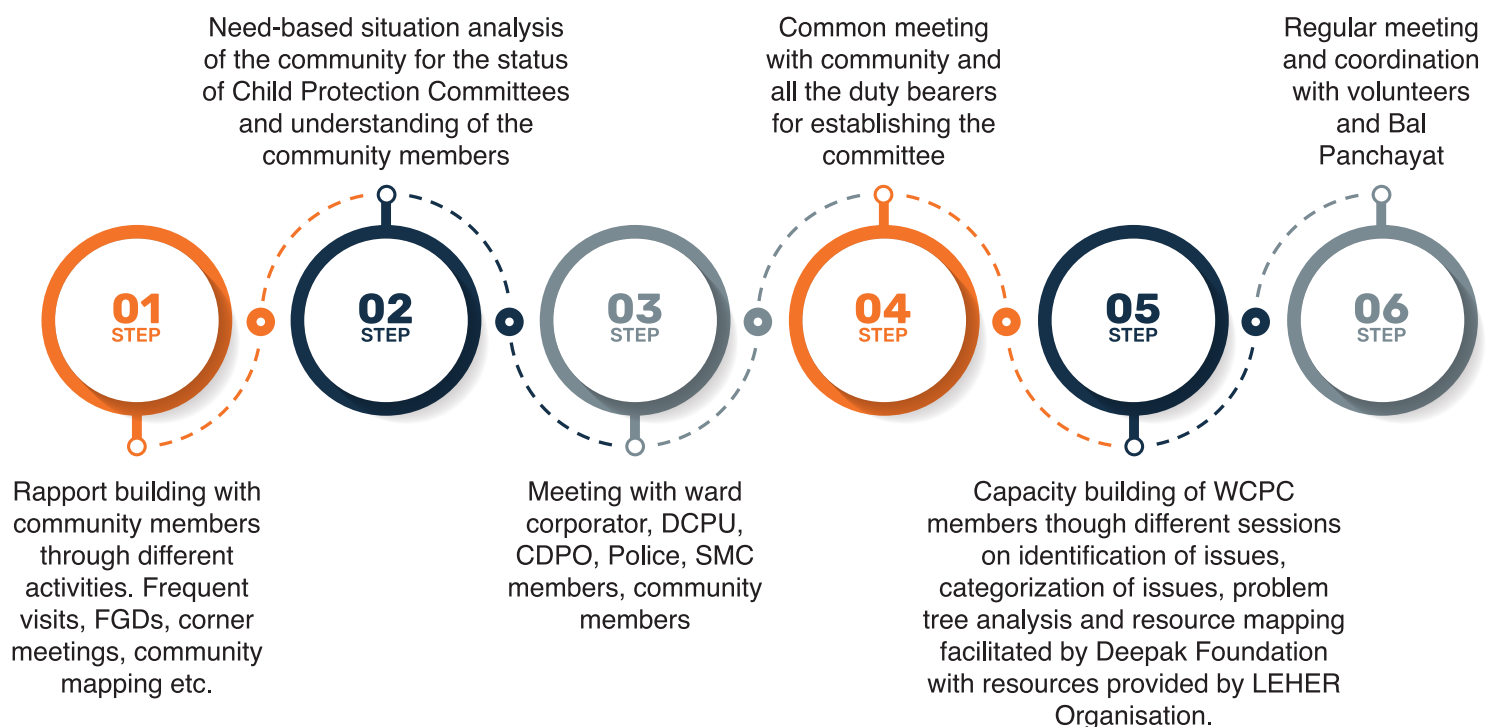
Every child has a right to be protected and stay in a safe environment, and several issues pertaining to child rights and safety arose in the Ramnagar community. The issues included: child marriage, high rate of school dropouts, domestic violence, poor hygiene practices, other child protection issues such as low-lying areas, hanging cables and wires etc. On inquiring upon the existence of child protection committees at the community level, it was found that there are no active committees – an important aspect as laid in the JJ Act 2015. Even community members of the Ramnagar community were not aware about the Ward-level Child Protection Committee (WCPC). This has pushed Miracle Foundation India and Deepak Foundation on need of creating a Ward level Child Protection Committee (WCPC) in the Ramnagar community.



Steps taken for activating/formation of WCPCs

To begin the process, a thorough handholding support was extended to the Deepak Foundation team by the Miracle Foundation India team. The handholding support included: guidance and discussion on WCPC stakeholders, roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders, and the formation process through revisiting the Government Regulation (GR). In addition to this, the Miracle State Team also shared the videos of the Vidhayak Bharti organization, who have been extensively involved in setting up of a number of WCPCs in Maharashtra. Later, Miracle Foundation India organized a detailed and extensive workshop on the WCPC formation ensuring the community-led participation under the technical guidance by LEHER (<https://leher.org/>).

Based on the learnings, rigorous efforts were put in by the Deepak Foundation and the Miracle Foundation India team jointly to form the Committee. Considering the spread of COVID, teams had to do everything with proper precautions in place: from conducting the brainstorming sessions for the need of the committee through interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGDs), street corner meetings etc. Based on the findings and needs of the committee, the teams initiated dialogues with key stakeholders for the formation and also enunciated how the formation of the committee will support both the prevention and monitoring of child protection issues in the community. Due to Covid, it took a little more time in finalizing the members of the WCPC. Over the duration of a month, the Deepak Foundation team met and finalized the other stakeholders for the WCPC committee, including teachers from respective Wards, a representative from the DCPU, a Medical Officer, two child representatives (nominated by the District Collector), the School Management Committee (SMC), the Anganwadi Supervisor (AWW), a representative from CHILDLINE, the Child Welfare officer of the local police station and the Corporator.



Coordination/engagement with DCPU officials

To strengthen the WCPC, an initial discussion was done with the DCPU (DCPO and PO(NIC)), Pune. With support of the DCPUs, 12 members of the WCPC were identified. The names with designations of the committee members were shared with the DCPU in a meeting. The Protection Officer (Non- Institutional Care) was involved in the initial meeting of the WCPC. The DCPO shared the roles and responsibilities of the committee and its members as the torch bearers of the community.

Interventions and capacity building sessions with the WCPC members

- The Deepak Foundation Team conducted an initial session on child rights and child protection with the WCPC, guided by the Miracle Foundation India team.
- Sessions on different laws and rules in the area of child rights and protection have been conducted by DCPO, Pune.
- The Deepak Foundation team facilitated training sessions based on learnings from LEHER's workshops on identification of issues from the community, categorization of issues, resource mapping and problem tree analysis. During these sessions, the formation of committees, community participation and representation, election and selection of WCPC members, roles and responsibility of WCPC members etc were exercised.

Name of the Area	Problems identified
Ramnagar	Domestic violence, child labour, child marriage, economically poor families, high number of children in families, substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, school, drop out children, addiction

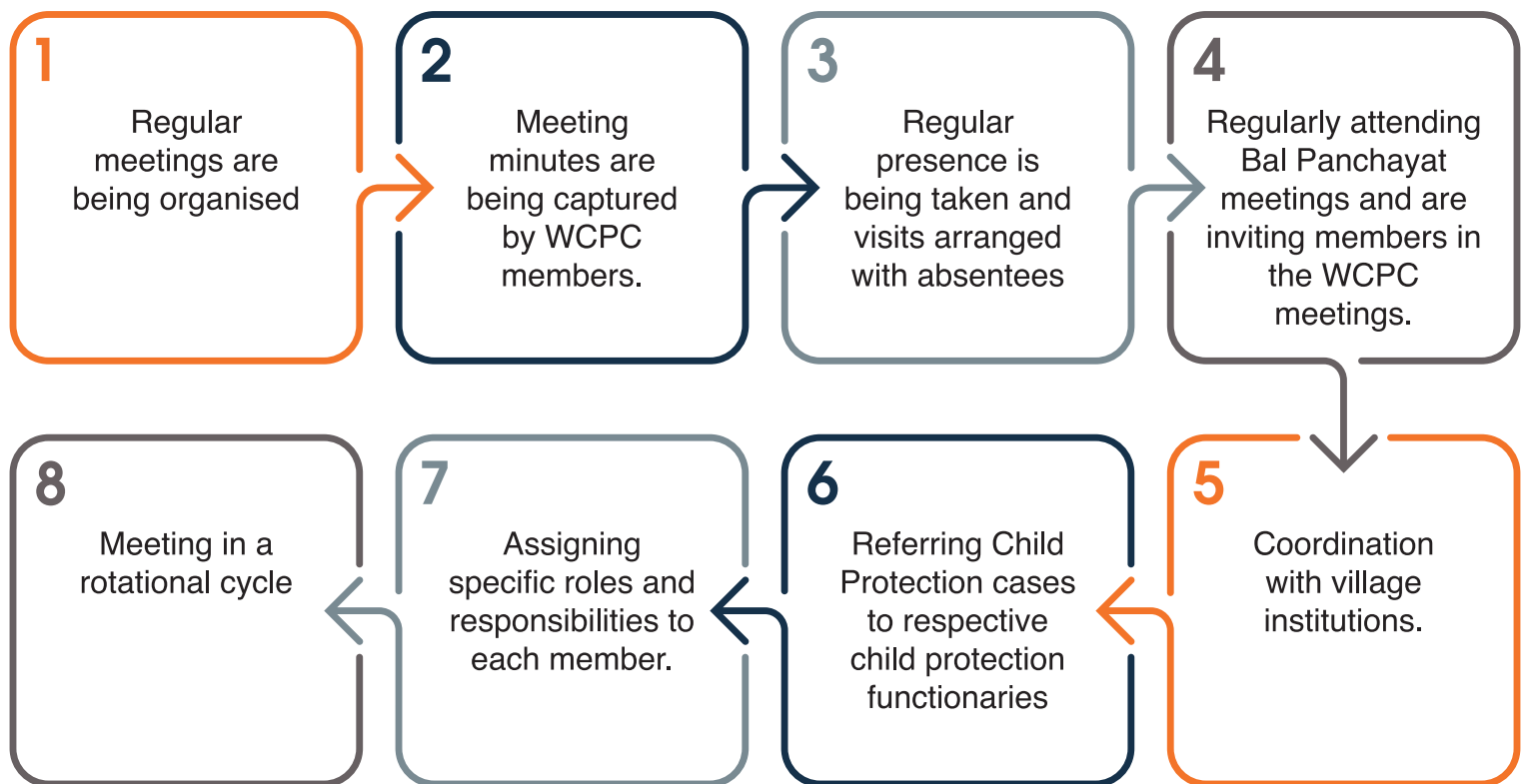
- The monthly meeting of the WCPC was initially facilitated and supported by the Deepak Foundation Team. Gradually, the team supported committee members in finalization of meeting agendas, dates and maintaining meeting minutes with specific action points.
- The WCPC committee meets once a month. In certain emergency responses and special circumstances, the committee meets more than once in a month.



Figure 2. Community mapping chart drawn by WCPC members & community volunteers



Status of VCPC



Periodical self assessment of the WCPC

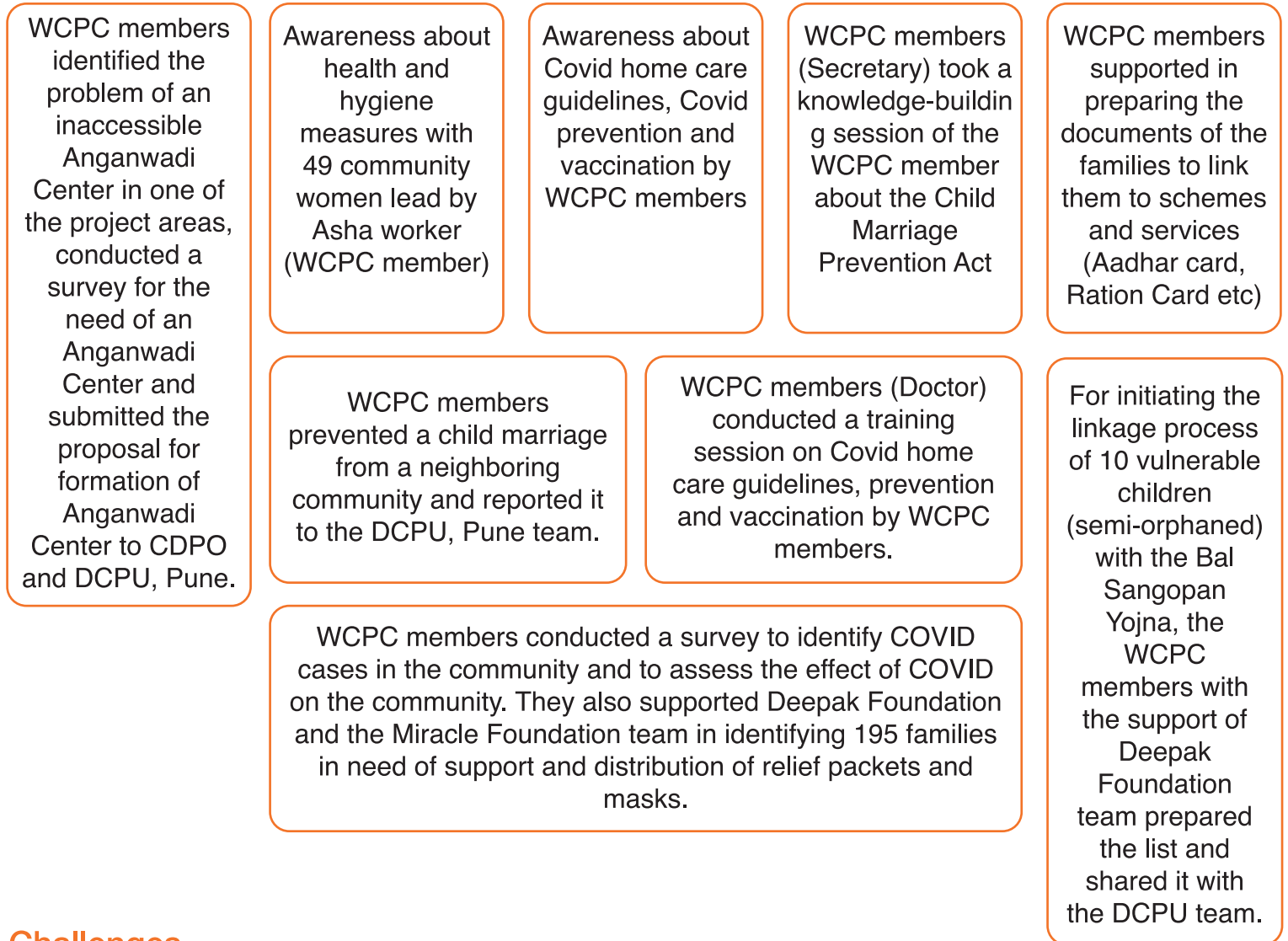
To ensure that the WCPCs are working towards their goal and objective – an approach taught by LEHER – periodic assessments (once in three months) were conducted. The WCPC identified the areas of improvement and made a strategic plan aligned to the objectives for the next three months. In Maharashtra, two periodical assessments are done on points such as ownership, understanding of the purpose and objectives of the WCPC, regular meetings and attendance of members in meeting, awareness about WCPC in the community, capacity building programmes and its impact on WCPC, dialogues within the community about child protection issues and changes in attitude and behaviour towards issues, participation and representation of children and their issues in WCPC, documentation, and evaluation. The WCPC has shown improvement on understanding the goal of the committee, addressing and supporting child protection issues in the community, linkages with government schemes and convergence and community connect along with participation of children in WCPC. The WCPC is still working to regularize the presence of active members in the WCPC meetings and initiatives. Also, as an alternative solution, the WCPC has engaged active community members as WCPC supporters. Child representatives suggested more attention be paid to child protection issues. WCPC members also reached out to the various child protection functionaries to get their support in performing their roles and responsibilities efficiently.

Achievements/Initiatives of the WCPC

Exposure visit of WCPC members

A very important way of learning is learning by doing. With an objective to understand the way in which community programmes are being conducted towards family strengthening through community engagement, a visit was organized to YUVA, Mumbai.

A total of 21 people including 8 WCPC members, 2 child representatives, 4 members from the Deepak Foundation team and one member from the Maharashtra team, Miracle Foundation India, participated in the visit. The visit to YUVA helped the participants understand the process of involving community, local institutes, DCPU and Government department for ensuring child protection and active gatekeeping mechanism in a better and practical way. Also, they learned about how the WCPC is strengthened in urban communities to identify and act on child protection issues in respective intervention areas.



Challenges

- Initially a detailed framework for identification of community issues and categorization has been provided by Leher towards feasible solutions. However, the committee members needed more guidance to carry out child protection work in the community. After the guidance by the team, the WCPC members have identified and prioritized the issues that they would work on.
- When the WCPC started functioning, most of the members were not taking active part. Also there was a lack of awareness about their roles and responsibilities as committee members. Considering the understanding of the committee members, capacity building sessions were conducted to guide and motivate them. The members were also given the opportunity to share their work with larger groups. That helped them to understand their roles and work actively on the child protection issues in the community.
- As the WCPC started working in the community, they were facing issues as they were working in isolation not involving local stakeholders. The community awareness programmes of the WCPC, their roles and responsibilities and child protection issues have helped the WCPC to work closely with local resources. This has built ownership within the WCPC.

- Many WCPC members are Government functionaries, so it was challenging to bring them to WCPC meetings regularly. The committee has started sharing the meeting minutes and key action points to these functionaries which supported the cases of child protection in planning the interventions and convergence.
- Initially the WCPC meetings were facilitated by the Deepak Foundation team. At that juncture, the issues of child protection and participation of children in WCPC was untouched. With constant capacity building, the committee became active, developing an ownership for the responsibilities and addressing child protection issues as a core role.

Learnings/reflections

- Constantly building capacity, trust and ownership of all stakeholders along with implementation organization is a core activity.
- The awareness about the existence of the WCPCs is an ongoing activity in the community, otherwise the issues related to children will not be addressed effectively.
- Power politics and community dynamics are different from community to community, therefore sufficient time needs to be invested to understand each area and develop strategy to work. To address the same, the team has involved the active community members in the WCPC which helps to create the strategies to mitigate local-level issues.
- Networking and convergence through involving different Government departments and representatives like CDPO, Police, ANM etc is helpful to scale up the WCPC committee and boost the confidence of the members.
- Some issues are so ingrained in the community that they refrain from accepting them as an issue (including child marriage, domestic violence, child labour etc). The WCPC members need to bring up such issues and work with the community. Due to the constant awareness and discussion with the community volunteers and different stakeholders, such issues were discussed and different interventions were planned to address the issues.
- The existing community networks developed under the project are yet to start working together – the WCPC, Bal Panchayat and community volunteers – which will result in creating a complete safety net for children. Different events and initiatives like awareness camps, community events, street plays etc. have supported bringing the community on a common platform.
- Community volunteers help in sustainability of the project, but consistency in the volunteers' group is also important where a set of volunteers should be a part of the project throughout the cycle. A strategy for motivating and retaining the volunteers and other stakeholders is a must for sustainable interventions.



Voices/testimonial

'It is very important to change the attitude/perception of the parents about the Anganwadi center. Parents are sending their children to the center just for food> It is very important for parents to know about the purpose of an Anganwadi establishment in the community

- **Anganwadi Supervisor**

We will work to provide a healthy and neglect-free environment for the children of the committee, showing them right path through the ward level child protection committee.

Committee member

There is need for creating awareness about the Anganwadi Centres among the community. We need to build the capacity of the staff there so that along with food, they also focus on education and recreational activities. WCPC members are doing great work in formation of the Anganwadi center for Annabhau Sathe Chowk, it will support so many children of the Chowk.

- **Community member**

'For providing emergency assistance, it is important to consider the family which needs immediate support, even if the family is not among the identified vulnerable families'

- **WCPC member**

This exercise (community mapping) made me realize that in our community there is an uneven distribution of resources and requirements. Needs and resource of the community such as Anganwadi Centres, Ration shops, livelihood options are not available as per the population. However, alcohol, pan and tobacco shops which are not required are in large numbers in the community

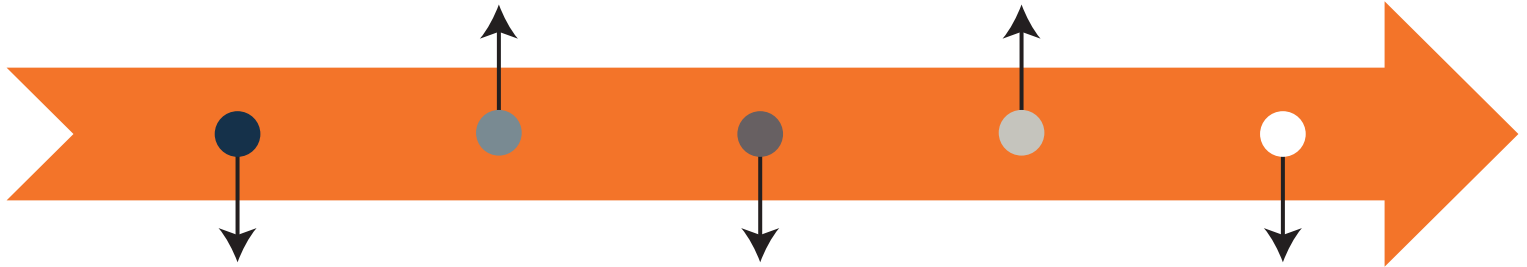
- **Community member**



Wayforward

WCPC members will support children committee on the ground to resolve the children's issues and create space for the children in community

Linkages and networking with child protection functionaries such as government officials, NGOs, local stakeholders etc.



With the support of active community members the WCPC will cover the entire community and support all the vulnerable families in the community

Committee members will continue with awareness initiatives about child protection issues in the community and also provide referral support to the cases of child protection

As and when required, they will approach different experts to build their own capacity as well as reach out to resources required to work actively in the community

