

# Empowerment of Children by Children

## Program Impact Overview

Bal Panchayat



# Bal Panchayat: Empowerment of Children by Children

Citizens have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, which is one of the hallmarks of democracy. When we extol the merits of parliamentary democracy, we are lauding a system of administration and lawmaking that is representative of the entire population's opinions, interests, and concerns. This includes children as well. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989) provides children with the right to full citizenship. Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”.

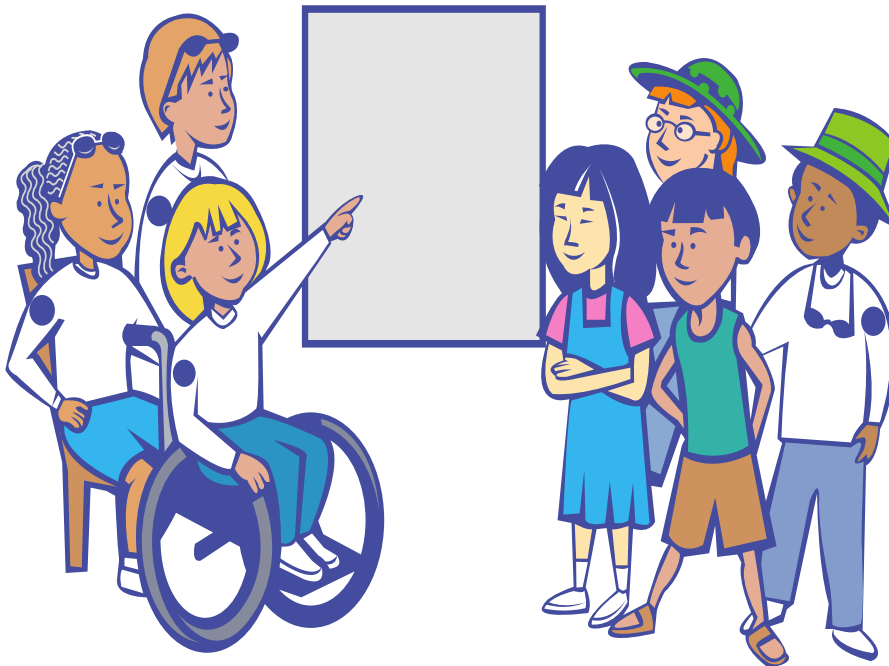
The model partnership project brings together partners including UNICEF India, the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment, Governments of Gujarat, Department of Women and Child Development Maharashtra and Deepak Foundation for the promotion of quality family based and alternative care for children

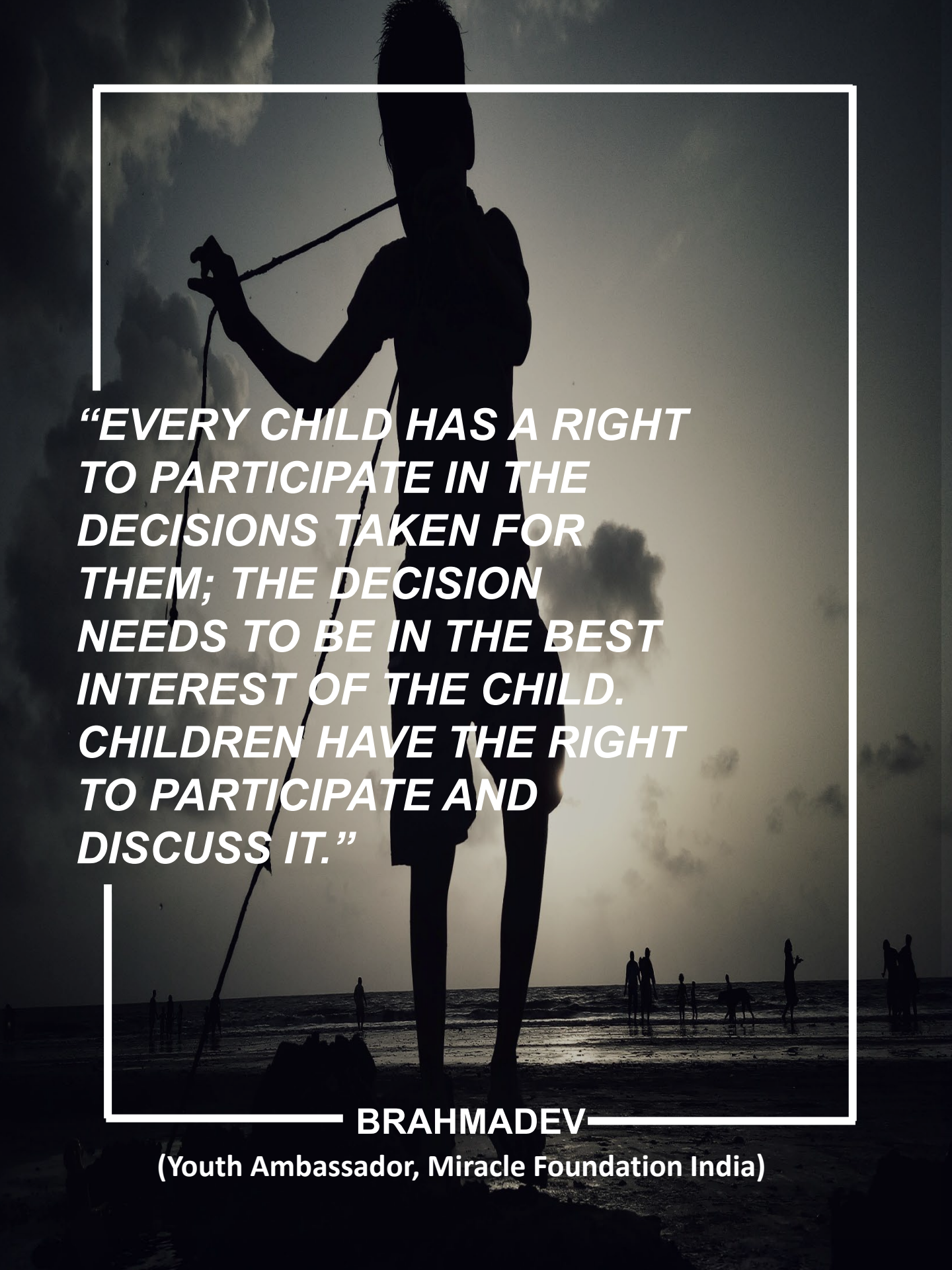
***The Convention transforms children from passive objects to active agents of rights.*** It demands that their views be considered and given due importance.

A vast majority of public decisions affecting children are nevertheless made without considering their views or involving them. Much of the work of government and civil society is carried out without explicit recognition of either children or young people. As children do not have the right to vote in most countries, their voices are often unheard thus becoming a forgotten constituency.

# Bal Panchayat: Empowerment of Children by Children

To promote children's participation in governance for their own development, communities in India have adopted the concept of Bal Panchayat (children's Parliament). The primary objective of the Bal Panchayats is to identify and address child-related issues, establish a gatekeeping mechanism at the community level (along with VCPCs), and assume a vital role in preventing family separation. This paradigm of child or teenage participation is founded on the idea of giving children a suitable democratic forum to interact with adult duty bearers directly in order, to get their attention and prompt action on problems that matter to them. The concept of Bal Panchayat was advocated for by the program in Maharashtra and Gujarat.



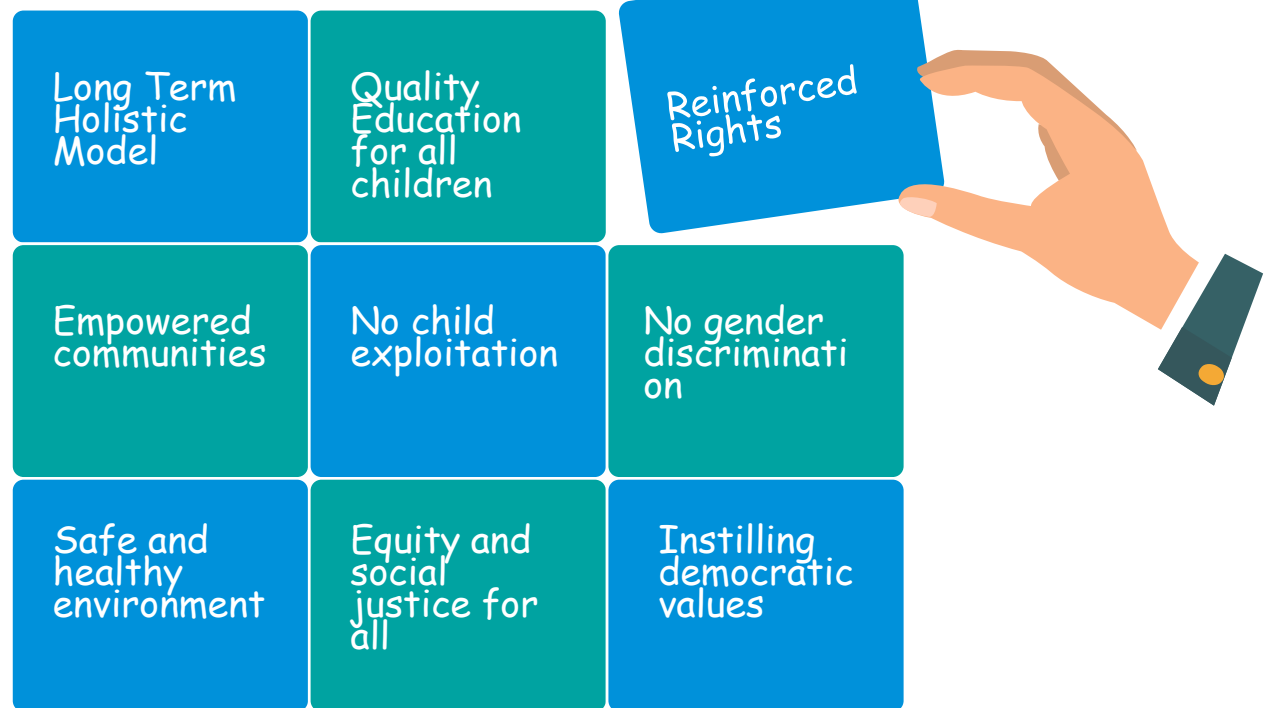
A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a child standing on a beach at sunset. The child is in silhouette, holding a long stick or string. The background shows the ocean and other people in the distance, also in silhouette. The sky is filled with clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow.

***“EVERY CHILD HAS A RIGHT  
TO PARTICIPATE IN THE  
DECISIONS TAKEN FOR  
THEM; THE DECISION  
NEEDS TO BE IN THE BEST  
INTEREST OF THE CHILD.  
CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT  
TO PARTICIPATE AND  
DISCUSS IT.”***

**BRAHMADEV**

**(Youth Ambassador, Miracle Foundation India)**

# Objective of Bal Panchayat



Miracle Foundation India has been working with Bal Panchayats in Maharashtra and Gujarat to empower the children to voice their concerns and stand for what is right for them. The endline study conducted by KPMG has captured the impact of the efforts of Miracle Foundation India towards the formation, strengthening and trainings of the Bal Panchayat and its members.





# KPMG's Approach and Methodology For Impact Evaluation

The endline assessment conducted by KPMG aims to explain what has been done well and what can be improved, moving forward. It will not only assist in determining the significance of the project, including the efficiency of project design and interventions, sustainability of results, and impact of the intervention on the target community, but it will also provide guidance for expanding or replicating the successful initiatives while redesigning or ending the projects/initiatives that were unable to have the intended impact.

The study was conducted through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. These include in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiaries and key stakeholders, as well as secondary research in the multiple thematic areas for a baseline perspective.

## SAMPLING

The community pilot project is being facilitated by Miracle Foundation India with the local implementing partner organization, Deepak Foundation in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

KPMG conducted focused group discussion (FGD) with Bal Panchayat members to collect data. 2 FGDs were conducted in Chota Udepur, Gujarat wherein a total of 29 children participated. On the other hand, 1 FGD was conducted in Ramnagar, Pune, Maharashtra wherein 10 Bal Panchayat members were present.

KPMG asked them questions regarding:

- Major issues identified by Bal Panchayat
- The major impact of the trainings
- Their understanding of their roles and responsibilities
- The changes they have observed in the community



# Inception of Bal Panchayats: A Journey To Empowerment

Miracle assisted the children in identifying their problems through capacity building. Miracle conducted a problem tree analysis through which they identified the issues, root causes, solutions to the issues, and the role that children can play in resolving their issues.

**As a part of their strategy to form a Bal Panchayat in their village, the children decided on a democratic methodology.**

Miracle assisted the children in organizing and contesting for the elections.

Miracle Foundation India (Miracle) visited the targeted area, wherein the children of village were gathered for an interaction. Miracle asked them questions regarding the issues faced by children, if their issues are being addressed, if the children are aware about any forum in place that can help the children address their issues.

**It was identified that there was a lack of awareness about Bal Panchayat.**

Since the inception of Bal Panchayats in the villages, **the children have been able to gather support in stopping child marriage and child labour with the support of VCPC.**

They have conducted monthly meetings with the elders in the community, conducted rallies, raised slogans, etc. to generate more awareness about the various issues faced by children.

**Basis the elections, the children elected 7 ministers.** They were responsible for different tasks like education, health, child marriage, de-addiction, etc. They also elected a Sarpanch and a deputy sarpanch, who organized meetings, identified the issues faced by children and took them forward with the support of VCPC.

**Miracle then proposed the idea of Bal Panchayat.** The children of the community were informed the scope of work of Bal Panchayat, process of Bal Panchayat formulation, designations, and the eligibility criteria for the same.

## Issues Identified By Bal Panchayats



The members of the Bal Panchayat received training from Miracle Foundation India through its implementing agency on the role of the Bal Panchayat and how it can address childcare and protection issues in the community. This included teaching about unique ways to solve a problem, develop patience and thirst for knowledge, cooperativeness, etc. Their trainings also included aspects of understanding their rights and identifying the risks in the community and the children at risk.

**Basis the trainings provided by the project; the Bal Panchayat identified the following issues:**

**1** Child Labour

**2** Child Marriage

**3** High School Dropouts Rate

**4** Missing Children

**5** Addiction Among Children

**6** Inadequate Street Lighting.



# Impact Of Trainings & Hand-Holding

Bal Panchayats (Children's Parliament) is a concept that aims to bring children together to strengthen their voice and leadership, as well as to provide a platform from which they can reach out to adult decision-makers and change-agents in order to draw their attention to issues that affect children directly or indirectly. The concept was advocated for by the program in Ramnagar, Pune and Chota Udepur, Gujarat

The Bal Panchayats have taken collective action to address their concerns and find a solution to them. The children formed committees, drew maps of the community, and highlighted zones that were unsafe after night-time. They addressed their concerns with Community Volunteers and V/WCPC members. They have also written letters to local stakeholders to highlight their problems, such as lack of streetlights and the unsafe distance between the school and the community. During such meetings, they share their initiatives and the work done by them so far.



The Bal Panchayat members have structured themselves into teams, each of which is addressing a specific issue in the community. Some of these issues include:



## Support From Other Agencies & Community Perception

The Bal Panchayat members seek guidance from V/WCPC members on regular intervals. V/WCPC members, Deepak Foundation team and members of Miracle Foundation India helps them on ground in identifying children at risk. If Bal Panchayat identified a child at risk, they seek support from V/WCPCs in addressing the issue. Survey and home visits are conducted along with WCPC members or Community Volunteers. If need be, then they seek support from other functionaries like Police, Childline, Local politicians, etc.

They have organized various street plays during the course of the project to generate awareness about the issues. They regularly seek for trainings from community volunteers and V/WCPC members.

The Bal Panchayat believes that they have identified broader issues/challenges faced by the community and they are working towards solving these issues with the assistance from community volunteers, WCPC, police, local politician, and district magistrate.

Bal Panchayat members a change on the grassroot level. They have identified various problems, sought solutions to address certain issues and solve the issue with assistance from other trained stakeholders of the project.

The Bal Panchayat is a pro-active collective of children working towards ensuring a safe environment for the children in the community with aspirations of eradicating certain pertinent issues like school dropouts, drug addiction and child marriages in the community.



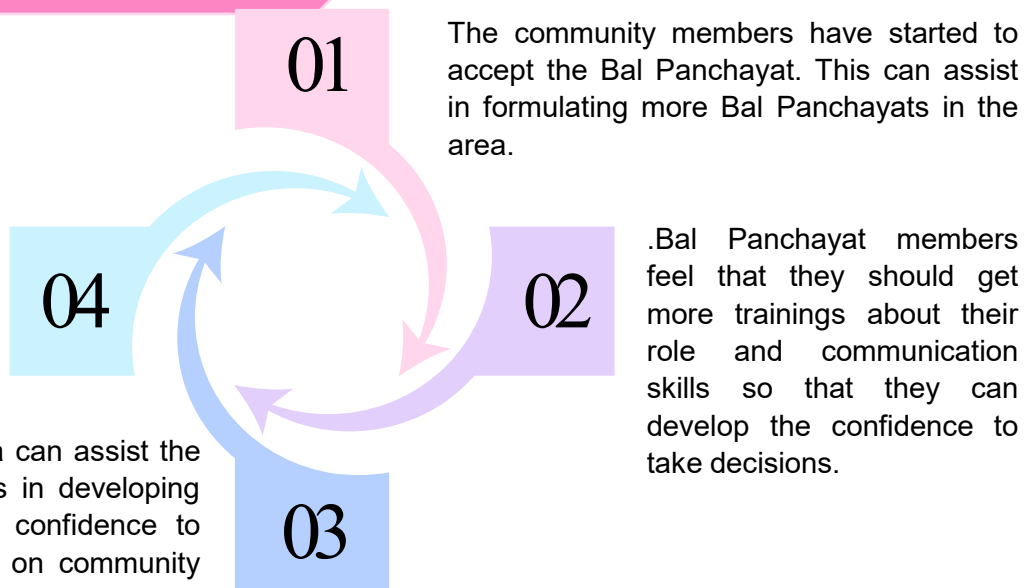
## Challenges Faced By Bal Panchayat

- 01** The Bal Panchayat members feel highly dependent on community volunteers and VCPC members for resolving their issues.
- 02** One of the major challenges faced by Bal Panchayat is the issue of migration. Most of the Bal Panchayat members migrate for higher studies or to a different location with their parents. As a result of migration, the learnings of the Bal Panchayat gained through the trainings provided by Miracle Foundation India migrates with them. The Bal Panchayat members feel that it is difficult to train the new members again and again.
- 03** The children in the community believe that the Bal Panchayat needs to be gender sensitive. There should be some reservation for girls, so that there is adequate representation and issues faced by girls can be highlighted in the Bal Panchayat meetings and subsequently, their issues can be addressed.
- 04** The Bal Panchayat members feel that they lack the confidence required to take firm decisions. They are hesitant to address themselves as 'Sarpanch' or 'minister'. They feel that a great responsibilities come with these titles, and they are too young for such responsibilities. Hence, not many children contest for elections.

## Scaling of Bal Panchayat

Miracle Foundation can assist in conception of a gender sensitive Bal Panchayat.

Miracle Foundation India can assist the Bal Panchayat members in developing the required skills and confidence to reduce the dependency on community volunteers and V/WCPC.



## Key impacts created by trainings

Bal Panchayats mentioned that they have seen an improvement in the following:

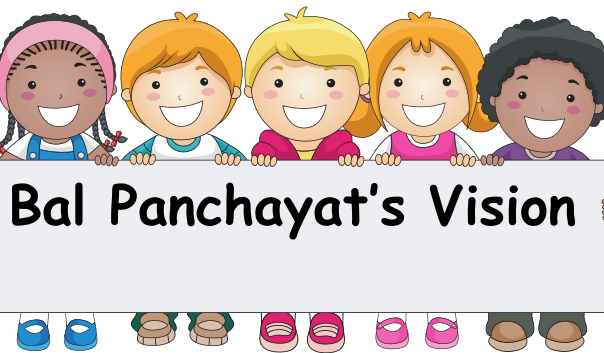
Family relationships

Access to healthcare services

Community/Social relationships

Access to education (supplies, extra-curricular activities, infrastructural facilities, etc)

Children's education



Eradicate school dropouts

Eradicate Drug Addiction

End child marriages in the community



# Thank You!



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