

# CHILDREN AS PEER LEADERS TAKING FORWARD ADVOCACY

Children engaging and supporting their peers,  
including reaching the most vulnerable

Asia and the Pacific: India

Prior to the pandemic, with the support of StreetInves, CINI worked with 30 street-connected children and young people, capacitated them as peer leaders responsible for informing their street-connected peers, advocating for their rights, and conducting participatory research on their vulnerabilities. Those peer leaders, after the outbreak of pandemic, studied the issues faced by their peers during lockdown and identified that the lack of authentic information to be a major reason behind street connected children facing lack of accessibility to on-the-ground-services. The peer leaders, known as Street Champions, were inspired with a sense of responsibility to keep their communities safe and well-informed. They asked, “As leaders, aren't we responsible to provide our communities with correct information? At least we can try to keep others prepared for an emergency!”

They have visited communities and trained other children on sanitization.

Also reached out to children to support them if they're being victims of VAC.

The street champions conducted a quick survey during the onset of pandemic through online platforms as well as one-to-one interactions with 150 of their peers, which has thrown light upon the mental health conditions of the street connected children as well as instances of abuse faced due to the onset of lockdown.

## CHILD-LED Advocacy

Apart from informing, the peer leaders have been advocating with local Government as well as State level governments through various platforms. During the lockdown, various service delivery systems such as public toilets were temporarily closed, and the food scarcity was heightened to maximum. Facilitated by CINI, they took the matter to the local authorities in order to ensure better accessibility to services for street connected children. Apart from local level advocacy, the peer leaders, along with various other children living on the pavements and temporary settlements of Kolkata, came together as members of City-level Children's Group and raised the issues directly to the service providers through whom health, education, protection and nutrition services are rolled out.

CINI believes in networking and facilitated the process building City Level Children's group together with 12 other CSOs working with street-connected children in the city. A webinar that took place on 28th of August witnessed the participation of more than 20 children and young people from the streets of Kolkata, various CSOs and Government representatives from Education, Protection, Health and Nutrition departments participated in the webinar. CINI and other CSOs created access to online platforms for participation in the webinar, children directly raised their concerns regarding the health services, continuity of education, child marriage and child labour issues along with family members struggles to feed all the members due to loss of livelihoods. They also raised issues regarding access to shelter facilities, sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities which is further affecting their health conditions. The respective stakeholders took notes of the issues, and responded positively by committing to ensure that children living on the streets to have better access to the services; and also shared various Government helpline numbers directly with the children to connect in case of emergencies.

## Child in Need Institute