

September 2023

Impact Assessment of Prayas, Jaipur



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We were most inspired by the teachers and special educators at Prayas who not only made time for interaction but helped us understand the details of the program delivery. Their grit and perseverance form the foundation of the programme. Thanks to Ms Sathya Sengathir and Mr Jaynarayan for helping us appreciate the special roles played by the psychologists and physiotherapists in the rehabilitation of CWSN.

It was most rewarding to see the classes in action and speak to the children who dreamt of becoming doctors and IAS officers. May the force always be with you!

The families of CWSN invited us into their homes and received us with utmost warmth. The images of the families holding their special children shall remain with us as an epitome of love, compassion, and human resilience.

We hope that the report will serve its due purpose in informing the work of Wipro Foundation and Prayas and through that take the mandate of inclusive education of CWSN a bit further.

1. About the report

The report is based on an impact assessment study of Prayas, Jaipur commissioned by Wipro Foundation. In its scope, the study refers to a project carried out on inclusive education of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) by Prayas with the support of Wipro Cares in the period 2019-2022.

The assessment was carried out in September-October 2023 and looked at the different components of the project in detail. The project components included running an integrated school with keen attention to children with special needs; facilitating inclusive education within government schools through active advocacy, systematic handholding, and capacity building; offering home-based care to children facing severe disability and working with families with special needs children to empower them and sensitize the communities around them to build an environment of acceptance and dignity through education. The objectives spelled out by the organization around these five program components form the basis of the assessment.

The report is divided into 8 chapters – Chapter 3 introduces the inclusive education portfolio of Wipro Foundation and the relationship shared with Prayas. Chapter 4 describes the work done by Prayas thus far – outreach and impact, the model, and the areas of work. Chapter

5 mentions the scope of the assessment. Chapter 6 elaborates on the methodology pursued for the impact assessment study. Chapter 7 details out the findings of the study, followed by recommendation in chapter 8.

2. Wipro and Inclusive Education

Facilitating inclusive and high impact education in vulnerable communities in India is an important area of work for Wipro Foundation. It believes that education has transformative power which can bring about long-lasting social change. In its vision to contribute to a democracy where every citizen is empowered and driven by social sensitivity, it sees schools as the building blocks where empowered citizens can be nurtured with strong cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and ethical abilities.

Approach: The Foundation recognizes that the problems facing the school education system are multifaceted and require a varied, systemic response with an emphasis on capacity enhancement of important actors. It sees the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and public institutions as key players offering creative solutions, impacting the discourse on quality education and to some extent the practice on the ground. To support the wide range of work happening on the ground, the education vertical at the Foundation has conceptualized its work in a three-pronged manner – facilitating **access to education**, enabling **systemic reforms**, and offering **founder fellowships** to early stage CSOs to incubate and demonstrate creative solutions. In addition to grant support, Wipro foundation undertakes capacity building across educational, operational and organizational areas; incubates an active community of educational organizations and offers mentoring support from a large group of domain experts and experienced practitioners. At present Wipro Foundation works with 150 plus organizations across India.

Work with children with disabilities (CwD): Working with CwD has been a focus area for Wipro since 2014-15 and has been developed as a separate program. Through the years it has supported a range of CSOs working with children with visual, speech and hearing, locomotor, intellectual and developmental disabilities. The interventions span from integrated rehabilitative therapies to facilitating foundational literacy and numeracy using multiple sensory approaches, building a sensitive environment around CwD empowering families and sensitizing teachers, schools, and the local communities to undertaking systems level work impacting curriculums and enhancing high quality human resource availability through teacher training programs. The Foundation seeks to build a robust community of CSOs working in-depth on the issue of disability and enable cross-fertilization of ideas and best practices within this community.

2.1 Wipro-Prayas relationship

Wipro entered into a relationship with Prayas in 2015 and has been supporting the organization ever since. The support to Prayas falls within the Education for Children with Disability (CwD) vertical of Wipro's inclusive education portfolio and is supported by Wipro Cares, an employee-led initiative of the Foundation.

During the 2019-2022 period, Wipro provided support for the largest integrated school run by Prayas at Raja Park, Jaipur (which has now been merged into the Prayas Special School run at Jhalana Doongri). Along with the school, Wipro supported Prayas in facilitating

inclusive education in select government schools across Jaipur; reach out to severely disabled kids through home-based care and create awareness both among families of CwD and the community on education for CwD. Currently, Prayas is in the third cycle of grant support from Wipro. This report focuses on the 2nd phase of the grant from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

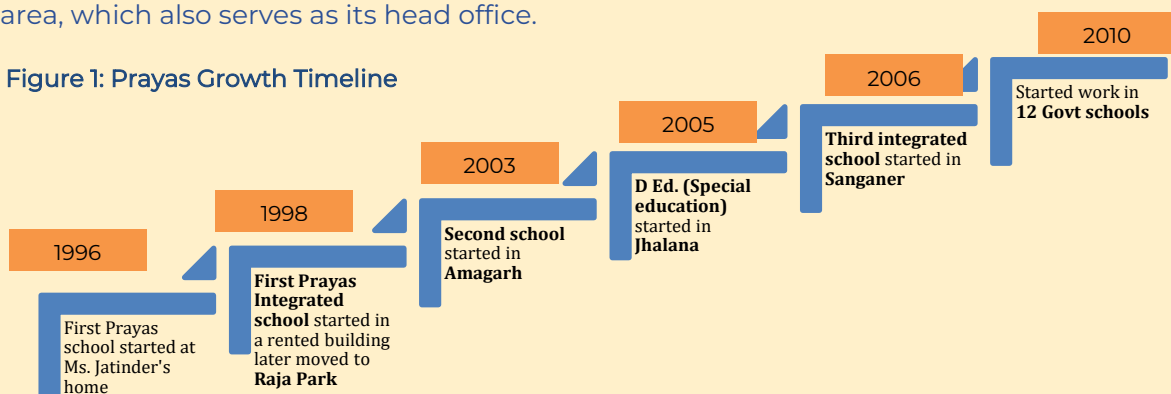
3. About Prayas

Prayas is a Jaipur based organization offering inclusive education and rehabilitation services to Children with Special needs (CWSN). Started in 1996 as a personal initiative of Ms. Jatinder Arora, a journalist with Times of India, the organization has reached out to 700 plus children directly and has served 10,000 persons through its various services across 55 slums of Jaipur.

3.1 Outreach and growth over time

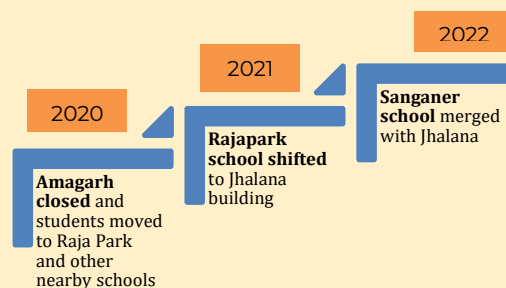
Since its inception in 1996, the organization has seen step-by-step growth in its operational geography and the scope of its work. It grew from one school in Raja Park to 3 schools and one D. Ed. programme in 2006 (refer Figure 1). In 2010, it was also successful in forging a partnership with the government to work in 12 public schools to facilitate integrated education of special children. Given its high impact work and growing credibility, it was successful in securing government land to build a special school in Jhalana Institutional area, which also serves as its head office.

Figure 1: Prayas Growth Timeline



In 2020, due to Covid, Prayas faced setbacks especially due to reduction in grants from several of its international donor organizations. It chose to consolidate its operations and closed down Amagarh and Sanganer. While doing so a few children from those two schools were moved to Jhalana school and the rest were admitted to nearby schools in those areas. At present Prayas runs two schools – an integrated school (in the morning) and a special school (in the afternoon) in Jhalana Institutional area.

Figure 2: Consolidation since 2020



The Raja Park school was being run out of a building owned by the founder's father – on a rental basis. However, over time, the building had become very old, needing extensive repairs. The Founder's family decided to sell the land, and the Raja Park school was also then shifted to the Jhalana Institutional area.

3.2 Program and strategy

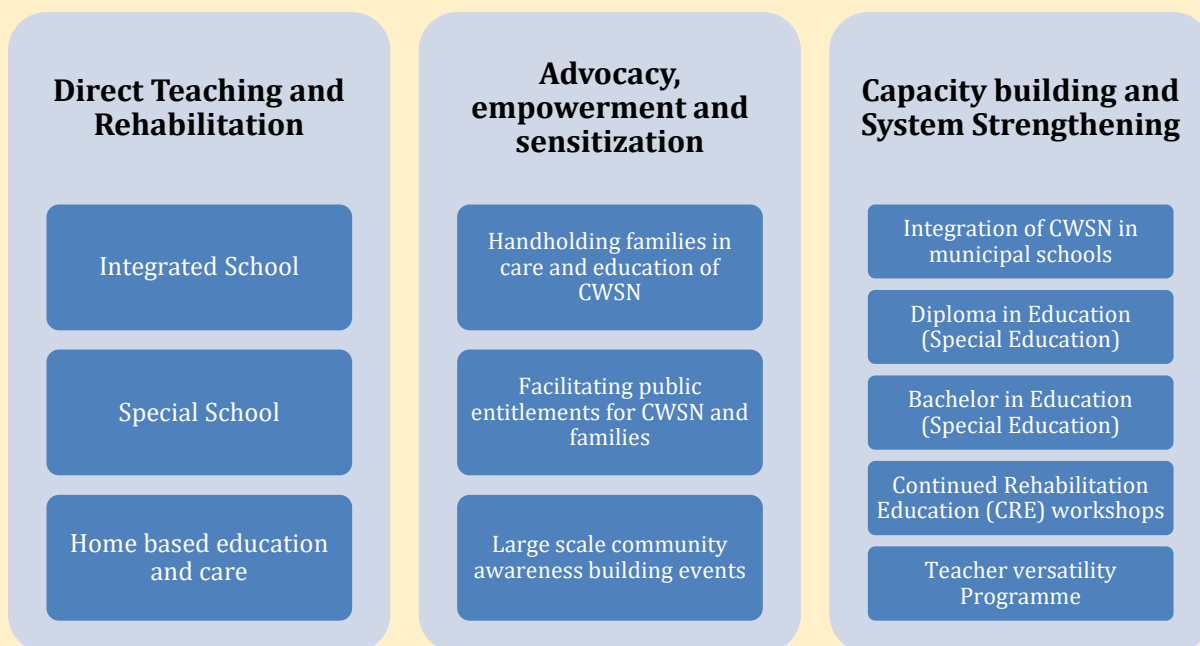
“Our mission is the integration of children, with and without special needs, into mainstream schooling and society by providing quality education to enable their growth and development towards becoming self-sufficient individuals who can live with dignity.”

In its pursuit of a world where there are equal opportunities for all children, including the ones with special needs, Prayas works with a three-pronged strategy (Figure 3). It undertakes direct intervention in terms of **direct teaching and rehabilitation** of CWSN through its schools. It runs both special and integrated schools, along with a home-based therapy for special children who cannot make it to schools.

The direction intervention is followed by environment building efforts starting from the families of the special needs children. Prayas undertakes **local advocacy, empowers families to access their rights and sensitizes local communities** to build an empathetic world around the CWSN.

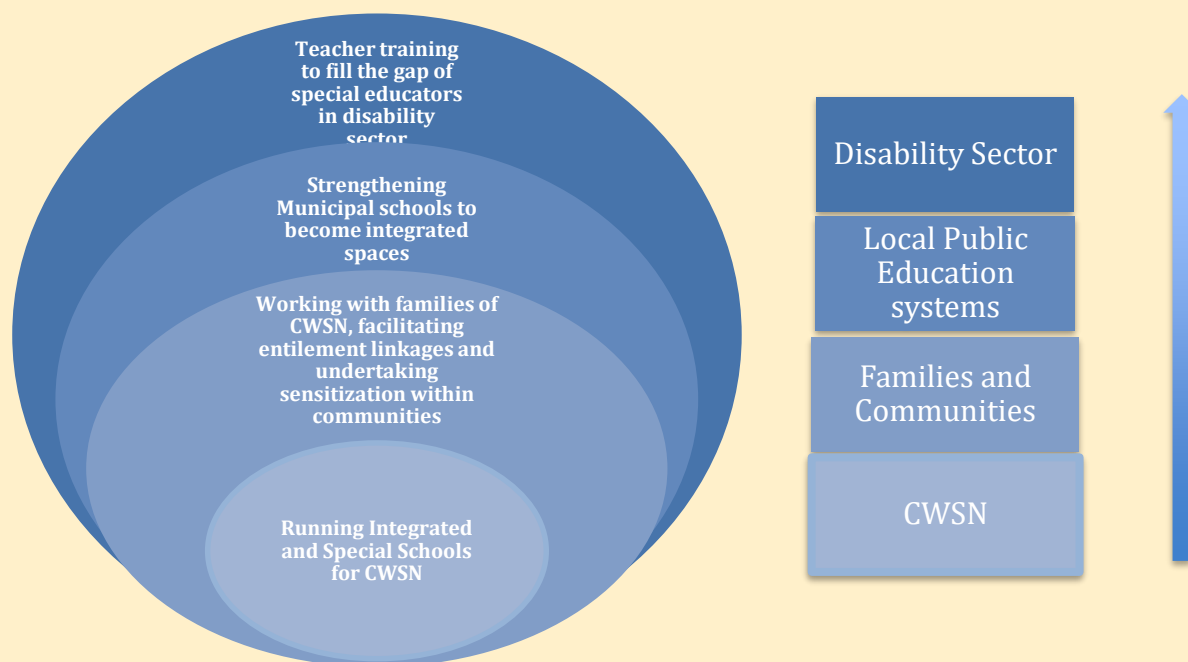
The first step in the environment building exercise for Prayas is working with families. The organization does regular handholding of the families of special needs children in developing hope and takes systematic steps towards building a dignified life for them, including integration with mainstream schools. As part of its work with families Prayas works hard to ensure that they receive the due public entitlements and state welfare benefits meant for them. Helping children get a disability certificate and now the Unique Disability ID (UDID) opens a vista of welfare benefits for them. Finally, it undertakes regular awareness building events to build greater sensitivity towards the issue of disability and acceptance of special needs children in society.

Figure 3: The three pillars of Prayas' Intervention



Prayas recognizes that to be able to serve the needs of special children, their families, and communities it needs to strengthen the response system, including the public schools, and the supply of qualified and well-trained special educators. Thus, **capacity building and system strengthening** becomes the third pillar of its work. As part of this it works closely with government schools in helping push for integration of special needs children into municipal schools, and offer a range of training and educational programs in the form of D. Ed and B. Ed in special education (B. Ed. is upcoming) and the Continued Rehabilitation Education (CRE) workshops for special educators.

Figure 4: Nature and scope of work for Prayas



The interventions by Prayas span the full spectrum of stakeholders, starting from the CWSN to their families, to local public education systems and finally the disability sector, empowering each with dedicated interventions. Figure 4 depicts this hierarchy of interventions and maps it against the different levels at which each is operating, plugging essential gaps.

Given the high impact work being done by Prayas at various levels it was also made the State Nodal Agency Centre of the National Trust and representative of the State Resource Centre on Education or monitoring the syllabus for disabled children.

4. The scope of assessment

The impact assessment has been carried out with reference to the 5 objectives spelled out by Prayas for the period 2019-20 till 2021-22. These objectives were –

1. Provide education for approximately 170 children, including 40 children with Special Needs (CWSN), from nearby slums at Prayas' inclusive Raja Park Model School (Nursery to Class VIII).
2. Facilitate inclusive education in and around approximately 12 government schools for CWSN.
3. Provide home-based special education and physiotherapy to enable children who are unable to perform activities of daily living, enabling them to attend school.
4. Create awareness of disability and its management within families of CWSN.
5. Advocate education of CSWN and promote inclusive education within the community.

The assessment was structured around these five objectives and the findings are also organized around the same lines.

5. Methodology

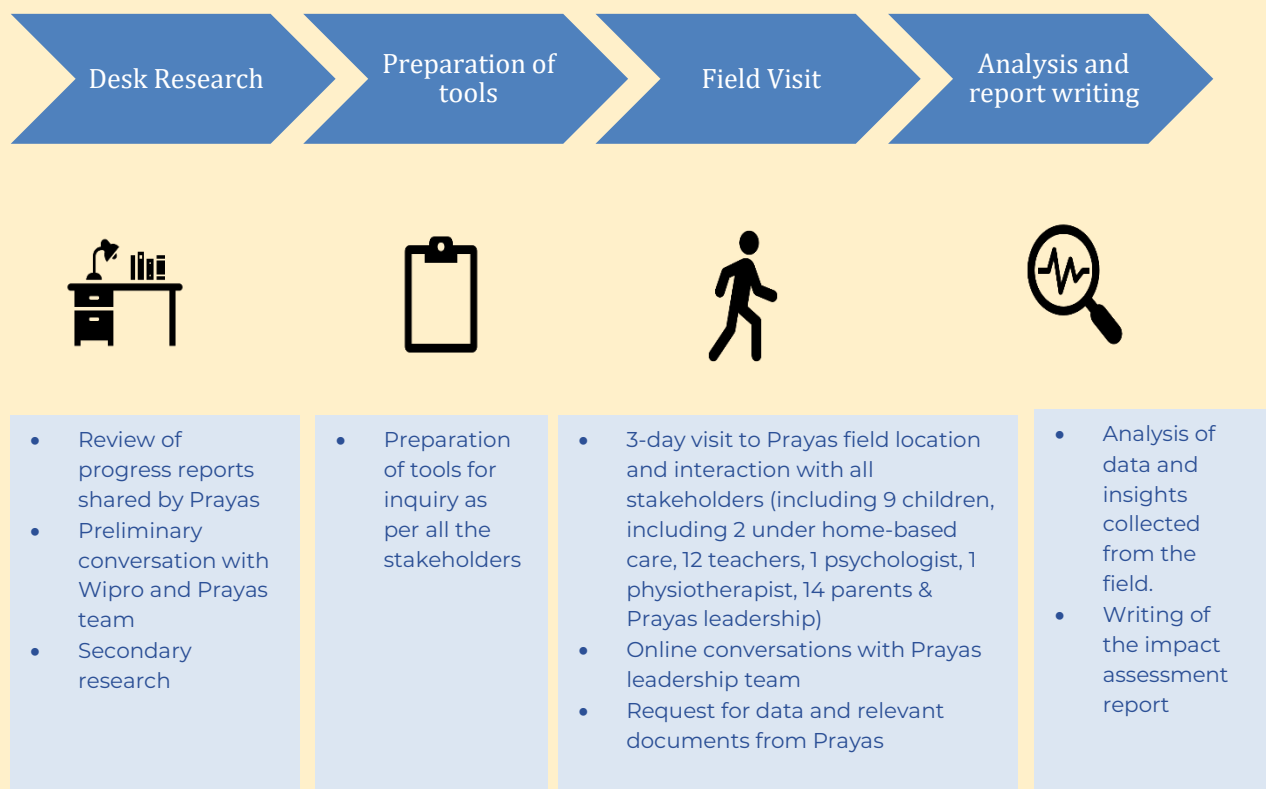
The impact assessment team started with review of the 3 progress reports shared by Wipro foundation team for the years 2019-2022. The reports gave a good insight into the program and the progress made by Prayas through the project years. This review of reports was followed by an online interaction with the Wipro team to learn about the Inclusive education work of the foundation, their focus on disability, about the relationship with Prayas and expectations from the impact assessment. Thereafter we spoke with the Prayas team to learn about the organization, its programs, and the journey thus far. We also reviewed the existing literature on disability and education of CWSN, including international and national policy frameworks, strides made by the government and civil society in offering inclusive education to CWSN and the challenges therein.

This first phase of desk research was followed by preparation of field visit plan and preparation of tools for inquiry from all the stakeholders in Prayas field. A 3-day visit was undertaken by 2 members of Nous to see the work on the ground. On the first day we spent time at the school visiting the classrooms, interacting with children and teachers. This visit was undertaken in the morning, so we were able to observe the functioning of the

integrated school. We also met two members of the Board and made a trip to Jawahar Nagar (Teela 2) to meet a few children with special needs and their families. On the second day we visited 2 of the 12 government schools – Idgah and Rishi Galav nagar school and interacted with the government schoolteachers about their experiences with having CWSNs at their school. We also met with some of the non-CWSN children and their parents, who were a part of the Raja Park integrated school, and subsequently moved to Jhalana when Raja Park closed down. These children have now graduated from the Jhalana school and studying in local municipal schools. In the second half, we were able to see the special school in operation and interacted with the psychologist and the physiotherapist. Thereafter we spent dedicated time with 12 teachers, 3 special educators and 2 community mobilisers – understanding their experiences and challenges. On the third day, we visited the slums again to meet with two children with special needs who are in home-based care and interacted with their families. The visit concluded with a debrief meeting with Chairman of the Prayas Board Mr. Manoj Bhatt.

During the field visit we also asked for relevant program data and documents from the Prayas team which was duly supplied by them. Kalpana ji from the leadership team could not make it for the impact assessment trip (due to being unwell), so a special call was organized with her after the field visit.

In the final leg of the assessment, we analyzed the data and insights received from the field visit and put together our observations with recommendations as a report.



Interaction with Children, Government Schoolteachers & Prayas Team



6. Assessment findings as per the Project Objectives

6.1 Inclusive Education in Prayas Schools

Objective 1: Provide education for approximately 170 children, including 40 children with Special Needs (CWSN), from nearby slums at Prayas' inclusive Raja Park Model School (Nursery to Class VIII).

The Raja Park school underwent a significant transition during the project period of 2019-2022. One big occurrence was that of COVID related lockdown leading to closure of schools. While Prayas adapted quickly to offer online facilities, there was a gap and the virtual medium was neither universally accessible, nor very effective for the students. Furthermore, the building of the Raja Park school which was on a decline became unsafe to continue in. The building was finally vacated in 2021 and the children moved to Jhalana integrated school.

As of September 2023, Prayas has two schools running out of the Jhalana Campus – one integrated and one special school. The integrated school at Raja Park now continues as integrated school, Jhalana and the CWSN are spread across the integrated school and the special schools.

The move to Jhalana required Prayas team to conduct extensive outreach and assure the community about the continuity of the intervention. Transport arrangements were made for all students. **It does say a lot about the communities' and children's bond with the Prayas school, that only 15 students dropped out, of which 14 were CWSN (where travel was much harder).**

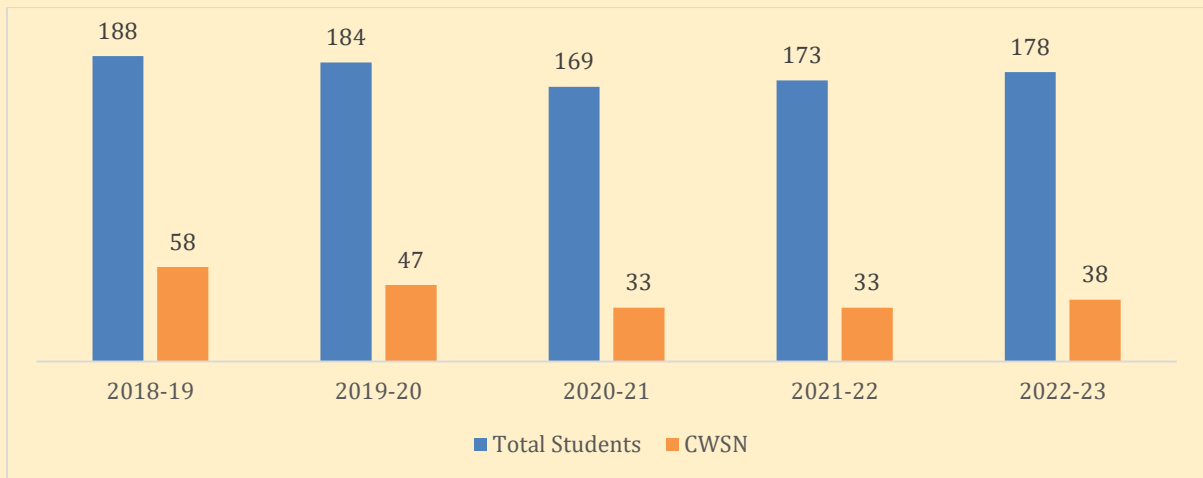
Enrolment and Performance

Figure 5 shows the class-wise enrollment for total and CWSN children at Raja Park during the project period. In 2019-20, the total number of students was 184, higher than the proposed target of 170. The number of CWSN across both CWSN specific classes and other integrated classes was 47, again surpassing the proposed target of 40. In the year following COVID outbreak and the resultant lockdown, 14 children with special needs dropped out, out of which 13 were boys and 1 was a girl (Table 1). **The proportion of CWSN in the integrated school fell from 26% to 20%.** There was a change in number of 'other' children as well with 8 boys dropping out; however, it was almost compensated for by an influx of 7 girls. 4 more children (1 boy and 3 girls) joined the school in 2021-22 (Table 1).

It is notable that through these three years, 7 CWSN sat in the integrated classes, while for the remaining special classes were run at Raja Park.

Through the 3 years of the project period, the average number of students that Prayas was able to maintain was 175 (against a target of 170) with 38 CWSN (against a target of 40).

Figure 5: Total enrolments at Raja School and number of CWSN



Source: Prayas

Adaptation during COVID Lockdown

The COVID lockdown was a period of great churn for Prayas. Very few teachers were familiar with computers and had to be trained in using one. Workshops were organized to train the teachers in online teaching, including how to make videos using their smart phones. A total of 27 teachers were trained in online teaching methods during this period. All the teachers also did the Rajasthan State Certificate course in Information Technology (RSCIT) skill training in computers.

All textbooks till 8th Std. were converted into short videos for the usage of students. The organization made over 650 videos in this period.

Several children did not have smart phones within their families and Prayas leveraged its social capital to arrange for mobile phones. A total of 17 phones were arranged for students and 1 for a teacher.

The team says that the resources developed during COVID continues to be useful even if not daily. Whenever they need to pay attention to a special needs child, they put the relevant subject chapter videos on play for the other children, the ones who are capable to following them without much direct assistance.



Table 1: Class-wise enrolment data for Raja Park, 2019-2022

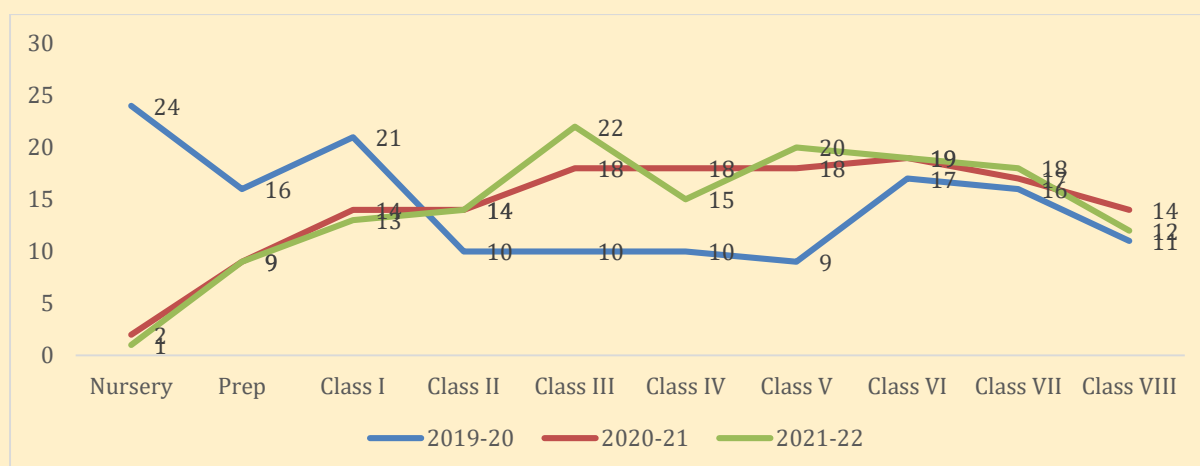
	2019-20				2020-21				2021-22			
	CWSN		Other		CWSN		Other		CWSN		Other	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Nursery			15	9			1	1				1
Prep	1	1	9	5			5	4			5	4
Class I			16	5	1		7	6			7	6
Class II		1	4	5			9	5			8	6
Class III	1	1	4	4			13	5	1	1	15	5
Class IV			6	4	1	2	5	10		1	4	10
Class V			6	3			9	9	1	1	8	10
Class VI			8	9		1	8	10	1		8	10
Class VII	1	1	6	8			9	8		1	9	8
Class VIII			5	6	1	1	5	7			7	5
Classes for CWSN	30	10			17	9			10	16		
Total	33	14	79	58	20	13	71	65	13	20	72	68
Grand Total	184				169				173			

Source: Prayas

The gender ratio of the students is revealing and offers an interesting trend over the project period and beyond. The share of girls in the total students has gone up from 39% in 2019-20 to 47% in 2022-23. Similarly, the share of CWSN girls out of total CWSN students has gone up from 30% in 2019-20 to 39% in 2022-23. We learn from the team that it is part of their conscious strategy to admit more girls as they lack opportunities when compared to boys. The Muslim communities in the project areas show concern over safety of girl children and prefer to keep them at home. In cognizance of this reality Prayas has given preference to girls in school admissions.

A closer look at the class-wise enrolment also reveals a trend that across the 3 years of the project period, the number of children in the higher grades sees a drop. While the trend is erratic in the initial years, there is a drastic drop of 63-75% from Std. VI to VIII. A popular explanation for the same is that after children reach the age of 11-12 in Std. VI, gradually they tend to move out of the classroom towards the labour markets.

Figure 6: Trend in class-wise enrolment at Raja Park, 2019-2022



Source: Prayas

When enquired about the performance of the children taking Std. VIII exams, we found out that on average 10 children appeared for exams every year. In the years 2020 and 2021, as per official directives, all the children were promoted. However, if we look at the data for the previous year 2019 and 2022, children have a passing percentage of 100%. Out of the total, 71% got 1st division in the exams.

Table 2: Performance of Children appearing for Std. VIII Exams

Year	Children Appearing for 8 th Std. exams	Children Clearing 8 th Std. exams	% of children clearing 8th Std Exams	% of children scoring 1st Div
2018-19	8	8	100%	100%
2019-20	11	11	In view of the COVID outbreak, all students got promoted without exams as per instructions by Education department, Govt of Rajasthan.	NA
2020-21	14	14		NA
2021-22	12	12	100%	67%
2022-23	7	7	100%	71%

Source: Prayas

Vocational Education

Helping the CWSN and other children from the community find a meaningful vocation is an important part of Prayas's mandate – something that also reflects in its name “Vocational Institute for the Mentally Handicapped” During the class visits we learnt about the steps taken by Prayas to further this mandate. Teaching children to do tie and dye work, paper-mache, and making handmade soaps and liquids is something that Prayas has been doing for some time. The products made by children are put on display in exhibitions and wherever the sale is sizeable, Fixed Deposits (FDs) are made in the name of students and given to them.

Tearing the paper into smaller pieces (needed for paper-mache) is an activity that is also used as therapy for the hyperactive CWSN in the class. Prayas has also been running a canteen in the Jhalana Institutional area and some of the children have been trained to supply tiffins cooked here to the nearby offices.

More recently, they have set up a bakery training facility and hope to train more children in bakery. Some of the children (5 so far) passing out of Prayas have been placed in hotels such as Red Fox leading self-sustainable lives.



Bilal – it takes courage...

Bilal is a 11-year-old child suffering from cerebral palsy along with moderate Intellectual Disability (ID). He has been studying at Prayas since last 5 years of which the first 3 years were at Raja Park. He is currently in Std. 2. When asked about the COVID period he talks of how he studied online using his father's phone. "*Mam batati thi aur hum karte the*" (teacher would tell us what to do and we would do it). "*Sahi mein padhaai nahin ho paati thi, lekin*" (in reality, however, it wasn't very effective).

He shares that no one teases him here at the school. However, at tuition other children do, saying – "*Gande school mein jaata hai*" (he goes to a bad school). Bilal, however, shrugs it off saying "*Bura ho ya achha, school to school hai!*" (Good or bad, a school is a school). He recounts his experiences of dancing at the school and going to watch special Olympics through the school.

Everyday his father helps him get ready and board the school bus. After returning from school, he changes his clothes and goes for tuition. He adds, "*Ammi kehti hai engineer banna hai*" (My mother says I should become an engineer).

Anjali- we used to fear them, not any more...

Anjali first started her schooling at Prayas Amagarh branch, then moved to Raja Park and is now studying in 8th Std. at the Jhalana Integrated School. Her father works as an electrician while her mother works as a domestic worker. Her elder sister also studied at Prayas and now continues her education with a scholarship from Prayas. She is a bright student who loves her school and her teachers. When asked about her experience of studying alongside special needs children she says "*pehle dar lagta tha, kahin maar na dein*" (we used to fear if they would hit us) but now we play together. As part of the buddy system where a child helps a special needs child in the school, she recounts assisting a girl named Chhavi, who she says is very fond of her. Anjali helps Chhavi out in boarding and getting down from the bus, helps carry her bag when required and so on. She admits that with the special needs children in the class, sometimes learning is slow, but admits quickly "*sabko saath mein le kar chalna hai*" (we need to take everyone along_)

Anjali wants to become an IAS officer and says that when she becomes one, she will have classes for special needs children in every school in Rajasthan!



Mozammil – a smile to win hearts...

Mozammil is a tall, pleasant looking boy of 19 years. Currently, he studies at Prayas integrated school at Jhalana in 2nd Std. He suffers from intellectual disability and hasn't shown much uptake of academic inputs. He plays carrom in the resource room and takes interest in Kabaddi and cricket.

In the time that he has spent at school, efforts have been made to engage him productively and help him develop a skill to help with self-sustenance. He used to make paper-mache birds. Then the team tried to get him to learn computers to which he didn't respond very well. He was taught tie and dye, thereafter which also didn't work. He is now being introduced to bakery with the hope that he may take to it.

Mozammil represents the case of older kids at Prayas with mild intellectual disability who would benefit more with vocational inputs.

Discussion

Prayas has done well in ensuring that the proposed targets are met despite two major setbacks of COVID lockdown and the closing down of Raja Park campus. Few students dropped out during this testing period and the quality was also ensured with 71% students getting a first division in Std. VIII exams.

A small sample of 2 out of 12 students who passed Std. VIII exams last year in 2022 however suggests transition struggles from Prayas to other schools in Jaipur.



The students miss the highly personalized and empathetic environment provided by Prayas teachers and are struggling to adapt to the new environment (arguably more detached) of other schools. One of the students Saltanat Bano, who we met, was a topper at Prayas. And yet, now she spoke movingly of her struggles to settle down in the new school. In her case, it cannot be just an academic challenge (given that she was among the brightest at Prayas), and maybe mostly to do with the change in the overall school environment. There was an impassioned plea from the children who had passed out and their parents to add higher classes in the Prayas-run school. **Is class 8 too early for these children to be mainstreamed – especially since the school caters in large numbers to children (especially girls) from minority communities, who may not otherwise have studied this far? Does it make sense for Prayas to add classes till 12th Std? Or should it invest in a smoother transition of its students to higher grades in other schools, including running extra classes for them** – these are important questions for the team to reflect on.

Furthermore, the efforts for vocational education of children, including the CWSN, needs more concerted attention. The present efforts are sporadic and not in sync with the job market. To be able to facilitate gainful employment, Prayas needs to understand the available job opportunities and work backwards to develop suitable training modules. The current vocational training efforts such as soap making, paper-mache, bakery and such may lead to one-off and small-ticket income generation but are neither sustainable nor sufficient. Some of the children such as Mozammil can also benefit more with a focus with vocational training and that needs to be integrated more centrally in their Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs).

6.2 Facilitating inclusive education in 12 Government Schools

Objective 2: Facilitate inclusive education in and around approximately 12 government schools for CWSN

Since 2010, Prayas has been working in 12 government schools around its intervention area slums to help ensure enrolment of CWSN in the same. Based on the survey performed every year, children with special needs are identified and if they are in the school-going age they are linked to the nearest government schools. The children facing severe disability are provided home based care and education (to be discussed in next chapter).

Table 3 provides the total number of students enrolled in the government schools and the number of CWSN studying alongside. The total CWSN enrolled in these schools are in the range of 75-82 children across the 3 years of the project intervention. Per school the average number comes to 6-7 students. Figure 8 shows the average number of students across the three years as proportion of the total. We see that the share ranges from 8% to 1.3%, the average being 3.6%.¹



Table 3: Number of total students along with CWSN in Government Schools (2019-2022)

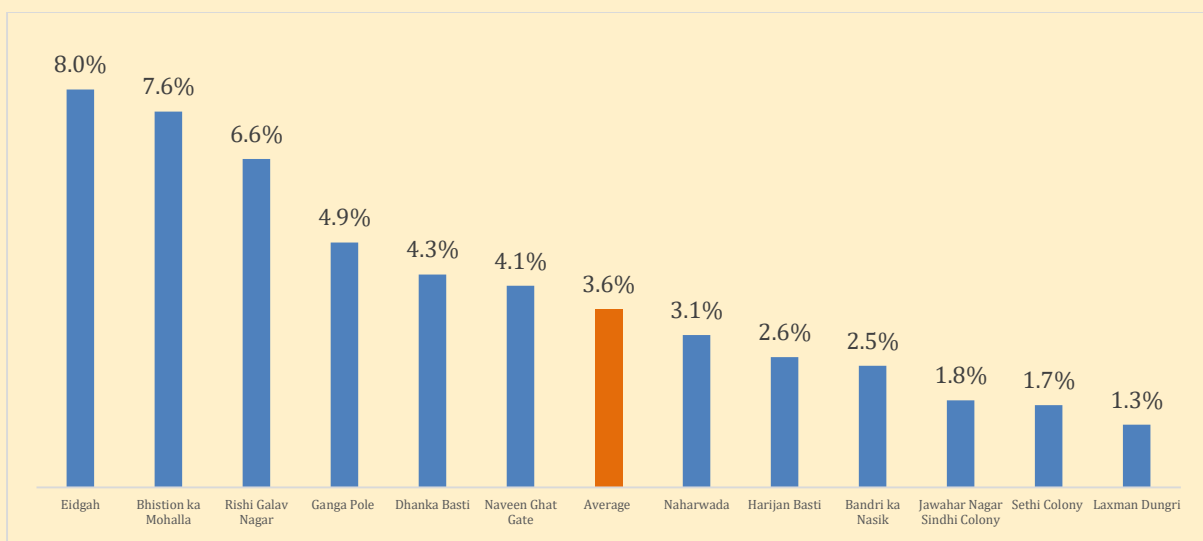
Names of Government Schools	2019-20		2020-21		2021-22	
	Students	CWSN	Students	CWSN	Students	CWSN
1 Bhistion ka Mohalla	140	12	145	10	151	11
2 Eidgah	139	12	148	11	162	13
3 Rishi Galav Nagar	142	9	152	10	158	11
4 Naharwada	150	5	145	4	160	5
5 Bandri ka Nasik	145	4	150	4	155	3
6 Naveen Ghat Gate	290	8	270	12	320	16
7 Sethi Colony	295	6	290	5	328	4
8 Ganga Pole	65	4	75	4	90	3
9 Dhanka Basti	135	6	120	6	145	5
10 Harijan Basti	75	2	72	2	82	2
11 Jawahar Nagar Sindh Colony	190	3	210	4	225	4
12 Laxman Dungri	310	4	325	3	318	5
Total	2076	75	2102	75	2294	82
Grand Total	2151		2177		2376	

Source: Prayas

¹ As per Census 2011, 1.7% of children in India face a disability. Only 61% of CWSN in the age group of 5-19 attend school.

As part of this intervention Prayas plays the role of a serious advocate making a strong case for inclusion of CWSN in the schools with the respective schoolteachers. Thereafter it provides the required handholding in integration of CWSN in the regular classes. A special educator from Prayas visits each of the government schools twice a week, spends an entire day with the CWSN and the teachers. On the days of the visit the special educator from Prayas runs a class separately with the CWSN which the teachers come and observe. The teachers are provided with input on how to engage with CWSN. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are kept and maintained by the special educators for each of the CWSN, documenting annual teaching goals, quarterly targets and progress made against it. The IEPs help guide the interaction of the teachers with the CWSN when the special educator is not visiting.

Figure 6: CWSN as percentage of total students in government schools (Average for 2019-2022)



Source: Prayas

As part of the impact assessment, we visited two government schools – (Idgah and Rishi Galav Nagar) and interacted with 7 teachers and Prayas' special educator. The relationship between the special educator and the schoolteachers appeared most cordial and complementary. The schoolteachers appreciated the role played by Prayas in helping identify the CWSN from the community, helping them in engaging with CWSN, maintaining related documentation, and troubleshooting in case any difficulty arose in the class. The teachers shared that they had picked up useful skills from the special educators and were now able to identify disabilities on their own. They had learnt how to bring those kids to school, how to make them sit in the classrooms and how to make them write. They also shared getting used to the presence of CWSN in the class and appeared comfortable. The initial years, however, were challenging for them as sometimes a CWSN would try to run away, become hyper-active in the class distracting other children. With time they had figured out mechanisms to run the classes in an integrated manner, segregating the class into four sections (depending on their ability to follow instructions and assimilate new concepts), taking help from the older, more mature kids in engaging with the CWSN (including using the washroom and serving food) and keeping the gate of the school



locked during school-time. The segmentation of children helped them spend more time with CWSN. The children in the class had also grown used to having CWSN around and there was no mockery or teasing. The teachers also shared that having CWSN in the class made the children more compassionate – an essential attribute to becoming better citizens and better human beings. *Special bachhon mein bhi heen bhavna nahin aati* (the special kids also do not feel inferior in an integrated classroom). They also remarked how the special children never want to miss school.

All the teachers we interacted with said that they feel quite confident about engaging with CWSN - *Hum Abhyast ho gaye hain!* (We have gotten used to it) being a common refrain. When asked if they could continue without the support of Prayas' special educator, there was a slight hesitation. While they kept saying "*Jab yeh nahin aate hum*

hin to handle karte hain" (when the special educator doesn't come, it's we alone who handle the CWSN), they didn't feel confident about maintaining the documentation (the IEPs). In both the schools the IEPs were maintained by Prayas special educator. When asked why the schoolteachers didn't participate in maintaining the IEPs for CWSN, the special educator from Prayas defended them saying that **"they had excessive workload already and were anyway maintaining documentation for all the remaining children"**.

We were informed that the government conducts 5-day training for all teachers in government schools on inclusive education. Every year one teacher was nominated from every school to attend the training. When asked if these trainings were effective, they said "*moti moti baatein samajh aa jaati hain* (we can follow the broad concepts), such as getting the children who are not following the lessons to sit in front of the class. All these schools also had a provision for special educators; however, the seats were either lying vacant or filled by other teachers. We learnt that there were no special educators appointed in the state for a long time. The ones who were appointed were assigned clerical work and never got to play the role they were meant to play.

The teachers believed that special needs children were getting integrated in the public schools increasingly. “They have now been coming for a long time” ...teachers would say. They also recounted stories of children who finished Std. 5 and had moved to higher grades. Also, “when 2 students come, the 3rd one feels encouraged to come” ...

Discussion

Prayas has been successful in creating an inclusive environment for education in the government schools it is working in. The schoolteachers at these schools have responded well to the intervention and looked confident and comfortable in the presence of CWSN. There is a good reception from the students as well. Some of the teachers have also started making visits to the families with CWSN to ensure their regular participation, suggesting further interest and ownership. Influencing the public education system and government schoolteachers in a positive manner is indeed quite remarkable and goes a long way in furthering their mandate at the systems level.



The organization, however, has been working in the same schools since 2010. The question that it faces now is whether it **should stay on in these 12 government schools, or should it diversify and reach more schools in Jaipur?** What is the preparation required and what could be the plan for phasing out from these 12 government schools so that the existing initiative does not suffer?

We posed this question to the schoolteachers if they were ready to continue the mandate on their own and work independently of Prayas. The response was unequivocal when it came to their readiness to handle CWSN. They all sounded confident of the same, given the years of handholding provided by Prayas. The only place they hesitated was in creating and

maintaining IEPs, which we realized was not just a technical capability issue but more of a capacity issue, given the staff shortage. These schools hardly saw any appointments of special educators and most complained of excessive workload.

The teachers understood that Prayas also needed to move to other schools to reach out to more children. Their only request was if periodic visits could be made to provide the requisite handholding with IEPs. A format of lower intensity support as it phases out of the older schools can be part of Prayas's strategy as it seeks to expand its mandate to other schools across Jaipur.



Filing the large gap of special educators

The government provides for special educators at the government schools to promote inclusive education of special needs children. However, most of these posts lie vacant or are filled by other teachers. There is a provision for 5-day training of regular teachers in managing disability in the classroom which one teacher from the school is mandated to attend every year. Some of the teachers we interacted with had attended this workshop, but it didn't sound sufficient in equipping them to create an inclusive classroom.

In the current format where a special educator from Prayas visits these schools regularly, a good system has developed supporting the needs of the CWSN. However, to make it sustainable the gap of special educators needs to be filled.

Prayas has tried different formats to fill this gap. It organizes 2-3 **Continued Rehabilitation Education (CRE) workshops** every year to further the skill sets of the teachers. However, it has no control over who attends the workshops. Despite its requests to send teachers from the 12 government schools, it receives participants from across the state and there is a lack in continuity. The response to the workshops is also subdued and depends on the interest shown by individual teachers.

In fact, the assessment team had also planned a Focus Group Discussion with the schoolteachers from all the 12 government schools, at the Prayas office. However, not even one teacher turned up, which is probably reflective of the work and home pressures on these teachers.

The organization also started the **teacher versatility programme** and hoped to equip the government schoolteachers in becoming self-reliant in engaging with CWSN. The process envisaged was that the special educators would spend structured time with the schoolteachers helping them appreciate the nitty-gritty of CWSN education, including preparation and maintenance of IEPs. The response to this intervention, however, has been quite lukewarm and as per their own admission only 5-6 schoolteachers out of the targeted 72 have responded to the TVP.



6.3 Home-based therapy and care

Objective 3: Provide home-based special education and physiotherapy to enable children who are unable to perform activities of daily living enabling them to attend school.

This is a rather promising intervention by Prayas which seeks to ensure that no child is left behind. During the annual survey done by Prayas, the stock-taking of out of school children and CWSN, helps ensure that every child's case is attended to. Children with moderate disabilities are encouraged to go to the municipal schools or the Prayas school. The special needs children facing severe disability are also identified and a home-based therapy is offered to them. Every week the special educator visits these children twice and follows a structured curriculum/IEP developed in consultation with the Prayas physiotherapist and psychologist. The activities during the visits include physiotherapy, introduction to basic daily life activities to be able to live a dignified life, and preliminary educational tasks such as holding a pencil. The progress of the child is documented, shared with the psychologist and physiotherapist, who visit the children on a needs basis. The special educator advises the parents/caretakers of the home-based CWSN to learn basic physiotherapy exercises to ensure regularity and progress. All the home-based therapy children faced either cerebral palsy (CP) or CP with varied degrees of intellectual disability (ID). In the last 5 years, the number of CWSN under home-based therapy ranged from 33 to 36 per year.

The progress in some of the home-based CWSN was remarkable as they moved from being entirely bed-ridden to being able to sit in a chair and develop greater control over their motor functions. Notably, in one of the government schools we visited we met a child who had moved from home-based therapy to a regular school. **In the last 5 years a total of 8 kids under home-based therapy have moved to municipal schools** (Table 4). However, as evident from the table, the transition to regular schools is not easy for most children.

Table 4: Number of CWSN under home-based therapy and number moved to municipal schools

	Children under home therapy			CWSN moved to Govt School after therapy
	Boys	Girls	Total	
2018-19	21	15	36	2
2019-20	20	16	36	2
2020-21	17	15	36	0
2021-22	19	14	33	1
2022-23	17	13	30	3

Source: Prayas



Samar – the journey has been a rewarding one...

Samar is the third child in a family of four children. His parents, Md. Ramzani and Tarannu, shared that he didn't cry during childbirth and a lot of efforts had to be made for the same. In their judgment, it was an injury caused by some equipment during childbirth that led to his cerebral palsy. He is now eleven and is a child of a cheerful disposition. The special educator from Prayas has been visiting him twice a week since 2015-16 (except during COVID) and reports a significant change in him, a claim strongly supported by the parents. Once bed-ridden Samar is now able to sit in a chair and has a lot more control over his motor functions. During the interaction he was also carrying a kerchief and with some effort wiping off the saliva falling from his mouth intermittently. He has also been provided with a wheelchair by the Sarv Siksha Abhiyan. Those chairs, however, are meant for adults and not of much use to Samar. His parents share that it would be so much more convenient for him to move if a suitable wheelchair was made available, especially now that he is able to sit for longer time.

Both the parents have been trained in Samar's physiotherapy and the mother especially does it two-three times a day when the special educator from Prayas is not visiting. Sometimes Samar tries standing on his own. His mind is sharp, and he has picked up sign language (to communicate when he needs to use the washroom, etc) and responds to educational flash cards, recognizing different things. He can hold a pen, scribbles, and colours and takes a lot of interest in his younger sister Sara's books. More recently, he has developed a fondness for the mobile phone, loves fiddling with it. Sometimes he can open it and call relatives, all by himself. He is quite observant and can share the whereabouts of members of the family when asked. His family members say "Samar jis din tu bolega, sabki pol kholega" (the day you speak you will spill out everyone's secrets!)



Bilal – leaving no child behind...

Bilal khan is 16 years old and suffers from cerebral palsy with ID. He lives in a joint family with his parents, younger sister Bushra, and his extended paternal family. Prayas' special educator Rakesh has been visiting him for the last 5-6 years. When we visited Bilal, he was facing difficulty in straightening his leg and was restless. Food was served to him in our presence, and his mother helped him sit up holding him in her arms. He is bed ridden but the family claims that since the home-based therapy his understanding of things around is better. Both his parents help him with exercises which they have learnt from Prayas special educator.

Prayas has been working to ensure that Bilal receives disability pension. However, getting an Aadhar, a pre-requisite, has been an uphill task. After much struggle the Aadhar and the disability certificate is made, and the disability pension expected soon.

**Discussion**

The home-based therapy offered by Prayas is a life-affirming intervention run with tremendous faith in bringing dignity to all. The visits and the interactions revealed that this intervention offers the much-needed support to the families of CWSN and has been useful in getting bed ridden children into a more active role, capable of communicating themselves and more in command of their motor functions. While Bilal's case was an extreme one where not much progress could be made, Samar had reportedly shown notable progress. The way both the families received the special educator Rakesh spoke volumes for the relationship and the gratitude the families felt for the support and guidance.

The intervention, however, can use more systematic thinking on what more components could be added to augment the benefits. For instance, a more effective inclusion of speech therapy and technology-based educational solutions can go a long way in channelizing the potential and providing required stimulation to children like Samar. His brain is fully active and can absorb educational content well if delivered using suitable medium. Mobile phone-based educational games can be a good starting point. Furthermore, good speech therapy can help children like Samar communicate much better. When inquired, the special educator expressed a lack in confidence in offering speech therapy. Though some inputs were provided but they were not enough to equip the special educator in delivering speech therapy on the ground. We learnt from the team that it was difficult to find good speech therapists in the city of Jaipur. It would be useful if resources could be mobilized for bringing in expertise from outside the city and train the existing team, also making use of the online medium.

The use of technology or new devices to enhance learning and communication by CWSN, like using mobile games for learning mathematics, history, geography, language, science, etc. The possibilities offered by technology to enhance learning are limitless these days. Specially for children with CP, there is a danger that they can slip into being labeled as intellectually disabled, while they may actually be just needing appropriate stimulus.

Finally, the provision of adult wheelchairs to CP children is highly misplaced. Prayas could make it a subject for advocacy with the education department and ask for wheelchairs suitable for children. Good quality and suitable assistive aids can go a long way in bringing mobility to these home-bound children.



6.4 Awareness building within families

Objective 4: Create awareness of disability and its management within families of CWSN

All the above mentioned interventions by Prayas depend on the acceptance of the same by the families of special needs children. The natural concern of the families to protect these children (both physically and emotionally from having to encounter stares and teasing), coupled with the shame and stigma attached to disability, translated into CWSN been largely kept at home. In case of some of the CP children we met, there are the real practical difficulties of mobility – even if Samar were to get a suitable wheelchair, and even if he is carried down the stairs, the tiny potholed road outside the house is most unsuitable for the wheelchair. Often, therefore, parents are at a loss about how to approach childcare and education in such cases. Prayas works hard with families to help them overcome as many of these challenges as possible, offers hope and handholds families into finding solutions so that these children can live dignified lives.

The path, however, is not an easy one as it needs work on multiple fronts, starting with the resistance from families, even if it stems from their love for the child. During the visits, we heard Prayas community mobilizers say it is more difficult to convince the parents compared to the government schoolteachers. The parents worried about the well-being of the special needs children – “who will take care if they are triggered or get violent, or if they need to use the washroom”; “what would happen if they ran away from the school” and such. As daily wage labourers, dropping and picking special needs children was a cumbersome task. There was also denial of the condition and need for special care, especially in cases facing mild intellectual disability. These concerns were compounded by a debilitating sense of despair and hopelessness. It has taken time and effort to bring the families out of these fears and agree to sending their special needs children to school. The families we interacted would often say – “*Hamne himmat chhod di thi, Sir ne himmat bandhaai!*” (We had lost all hope, Sir (from prayas team) helped us find the courage). They quoted examples where children have learnt a few things and were able to sit at one place. Some also rejoiced in sharing how their child has become very fond of school – “24 ghante haath mein copy kitaab rehta hai, bag lekar soti hai” (the schoolbooks are in her hand 24*7, she also sleeps with her schoolbag).

Government scheme linkages

There was also lack of awareness about government provisions and welfare benefits available to children facing disability. Facilitating linkages to public entitlements for children and families facing disability has turned out to be an effective strategy in building a good relationship with the CWSN families. Prayas has worked concertedly to ensure that all the children it works with have access to disability certificate and now the Unique Disability ID (UDID). These documents become valuable means for the families and the CWSN to access state benefits,



including the disability pension, assistive aids and more. The Escort Allowance of Rs. 8,000

a year (10,000 for girls) for escorting special needs children to the government school is a significant benefit that the families get to avail with Prayas's assistance.

Table 5: Linkages to public entitlements facilitated by Prayas

Children/Families linked with	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
UDID Card	22	11	85	74	65
Disability certificate	18	12	38	41	35
Disability pension	27	34	8	38	21
Aastha card	3	4	3	5	2
Assistive aids	14	21	14	17	42
Escort Allowance	15	11	14	9	12
Palanhar	4	6	1	5	3
Janadhar Cards	28	812	368	317	386
Total Linkages	131	911	531	506	566

Source: Prayas

The home-based therapy (discussed in the previous section) is another important avenue of relationship and awareness building within the families of CWSN. During the bi-weekly visits the special educators train the family members on disability, the unique needs of the CWSN and the physiotherapy exercises, which help with day-to-day management of the special needs children.

Discussion

The work being done to facilitate linkages with public entitlements is a high-power intervention. The benefits are highly tangible and help the families leverage state support and more importantly become visible. The community mobilizers facilitating the process also appeared in command of the nitty-gritty of the schemes, the documentation required and ways to navigate the gargantuan welfare systems. During our field visit, it was rewarding to see a family approach the Prayas community mobilizer for admission of a special needs child in 9th Std in a local school, something they were struggling to secure on their own. This spoke well of the equity the team had built within the community and the change they were trying to bring about.

There is high potential for scale in this initiative and with the expertise developed over time, the Prayas team can think about expanding it to other areas in Jaipur. The escort allowance seemed to play a significant role in the educational decision of the family. In one of the cases, we observed that a child with special needs, Altaf may have benefitted more by coming to Prayas school but was being sent to government school (possibly since the government school offers the Escort Allowance). In its advocacy work with the government, Prayas could possibly try to make a case for escort allowance to be provided for CWSN coming to Prayas' school also. This may help nullify the impact of the allowance and allow for child-centric decisions.

Prayas has also been working to prepare community volunteers, both from families with CWSN and other proactive members of the community to take on roles of mobilization especially for documentation camps. Some of the volunteers, especially in the 12 government school communities, show initiative. However, it is a work in progress as the volunteers are yet to work independently of Prayas to champion the mandate.

6.5 Advocacy within communities

Objective 5: Advocate education of CSWN and promote inclusive education within the community

Fifth among the core objectives is regular advocacy and awareness building within the 55 slum communities of Jaipur that Prayas operates within. Regular events are organized to talk about important social issues, with an emphasis on the needs and requirements for a dignified living for special needs children. These events include rallies, nukkad natak and a variety of camps such as early identification camps, documentation camps, sports day and such. In the last 5 years, 40 such events were organized reaching out to 4231 people. For the project years, the average was 35 events reaching out to 4683 persons.

These activities are critical to creating an enabling and sensitized environment for the CWSN within their communities. They go a long way in making these children visible and an accepted part of the community. These frequent events and interactions also buttress Prayas's relations and visibility within the communities.

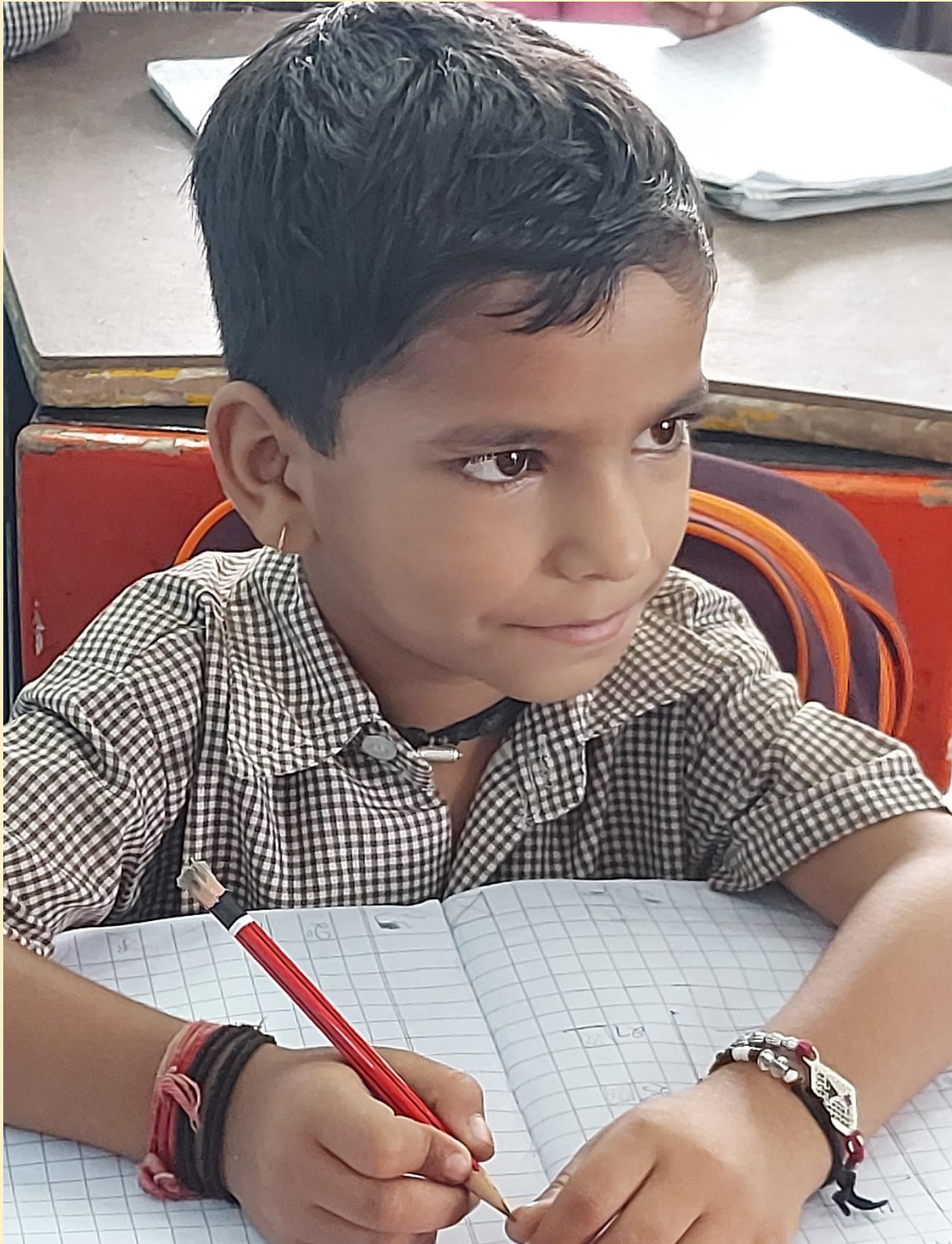
Table 6: Awareness events organized by Prayas

	Type of Advocacy Events					Numbers reached out to	
	Rallies	Nukkad Natak	Milaap	Others	Total		
2018-19	17	3	2	23	45		2877
2019-20	21	4	2	27	54		3904
2020-21	1	0	1	18	20		5318
2021-22	7	1	1	21	30		4826
2022-23	18	5	2	24	49		4229

Source: Prayas



More recently, the team has started organizing special events for the families of all the CWSN namely Milaap, seeking to build a parent-to-parent solidarity network. Prayas recognized that caring for children with special needs was a demanding task and a very lonely one too. Through Milaap, the organization tried to provide a platform where families from across the city could come together to share their life stories, struggles, and develop a sense of community with greater hope for their children.



Prayas teachers and special educators– the worker bees in the fight for inclusive education

Through the visit, the interactions with the Prayas team revealed the central role played by the teachers and special educators in keeping the mandate alive and thriving. The teachers especially showed tremendous dedication, a fact that was frequently recounted and appreciated by the children we spoke to. The organizational leadership also speaks highly of their dedication but rues its inability to pay them well.

We interacted with all 15 of the team members and learnt a few facts about them - Of the 9 teachers (or teachers cum special educators), 67% had done MA B. Ed while the remaining had Bachelor degree with a B.Ed. The special educators had either done a course in disability from outside or had joined Prayas after finishing their D.Ed. 60% came from underprivileged backgrounds (SC, OBC and ST). 40% of the staff (and 67% of the teachers) were women. It was however, surprising to note that not even one of the teachers or special educators is from the minority community, which is the biggest constituency of Prayas.

There is steady investment in their capacity building as Prayas keeps organizing 1-3 training programmes for its staff every year. This involves offering technical inputs in enhancing their effectiveness such as Individualized lesson plan making, behaviour modification techniques for children, use of theatre and arts in special education, online teaching methods or expanding their repertoire of skills through soap making, professional baking and such. More recently, all the teachers have participated in an internal teacher versatility programme (TVP) conceptualized by Prayas which equips them to engage with special needs children with greater effectiveness. The program leverages resources from the D.Ed. programme to train the team in-house.

When asked what their message to other teachers working in the same field would be, they offered the following words of wisdom- "patience and a drive to teach is central!"; "Need to develop a friendly relationship, keep the books away for some time and hold the children near"; "It takes time and hard work (almost double!)"; "the group can't be treated as a homogeneous one, can't look at them all with the same lens"; "it takes love and affection!"; "understanding the children and quick decisions is what is required"; "attachment, a friendly relationship and identifying strengths and interests are useful"; "teach as per needs!"



7. Recommendations

7.1 Enhancing impact

The specific observations related to each of the reviewed interventions has been integrated in respective sections. In here we reiterate some of the recommendations for perusal of Wipro and the Prayas team –

1. **Job readiness of the special children** – Despite the said focus, the component of vocational training of the intervention is weak. It requires more systematic thinking and plans more in sync with the available job opportunities in the market. There are also several non-profits working on the issue of employment of special needs people. Prayas may like to learn from their experiences and integrate those lessons into its own vocational training, job readiness and placement efforts.
2. **Addition of sports** – Sports has been known to have a positive effect on the well-being and education of special needs children. Some efforts have been made by Prayas to facilitate participation of its students to sports events meant for special needs children. These, however, need to be made more integrated into the school curriculum, a necessary step also envisaged by Prayas teachers and its management.
3. **Effective integration of speech therapy** – The home-based children need a more effective integration of speech therapy in their treatment routine. It can add substantial value to their growth and improvement. The current level of training and resource provision is not sufficient and requires more attention.
4. **Escort allowance for children coming to Prayas** – The incentive being provided to CWSN for enrolment to government school though important could be playing an important role in influencing the educational decisions of the families. Prayas may consider advocating with the government to provide the same escort allowance for CWSN coming to its own schools.
5. **Phasing out of active handholding of current government schools** – The organization has spent more than 10 years in 12 government schools it has been working in to promote inclusive education. It is time it developed a plan to phase out, hand over the baton to the existing schoolteachers (who appear quite confident) and reach out to other government schools to facilitate a similar journey of inclusion. This could be a gradual phase out, beginning with reducing the number of visits in current schools on the one hand and adding new schools on the other hand. Of course, the effect of the phase out (even if gradual) will need to be carefully monitored, since it will be unfortunate if the current schools begin to slide back.
6. **Greater use of technology** – Prayas could effectively leverage more technology in assisting its special needs children to communicate and learn better. A lot of progress has been made in this field and the organization needs to apply itself to adopt and leverage some of these technologies. This is really the need of the hour – especially

given the advances made in the technology space – and leveraging the same for the benefit of our CWSN.

7. **The work on entitlements** – Everywhere we went, the one intervention from Prayas that every family we met remembers is the support they received from the organization in obtaining the disability certificate and pension for their special needs child. Despite the government's push on this, at the last mile there still persist a host of challenges which prevent families from accessing these. Given that the field team of Prayas now has a good command over negotiating these spaces and given the high returns from this at the family level, Prayas and Wipro may want to consider putting a higher emphasis on this.

7.2 Building the organization

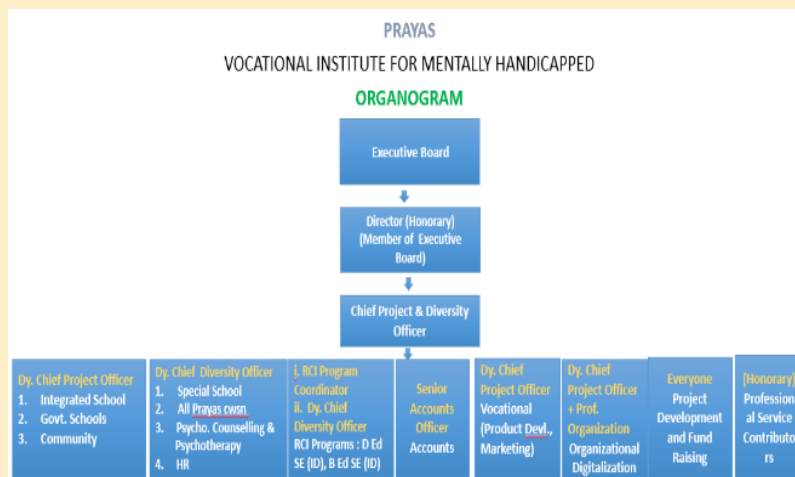
Prayas is a 27-year-old organization built and run on pure passion and perseverance of its hard-working employees, starting with its founder Jatinder Arora. The memories of the founder and the stories that are told and retold, almost like a folklore, are the binding glue and have shaped the organization culture. The organization has shown grit and sustained commitment through the tumultuous years of COVID. Some of the recent setbacks in funding which happened due to COVID have made the organization consolidate its operations and work towards system level interventions in creating human resource cadre of special educators. It has applied for running a B.Ed. programme along with the D Ed. in Special Education and hopes to receive the permissions soon.

There are, however, visible gaps which limit the potential of the organization. One of the biggest challenge is at the leadership level. After the passing away of the founder, the organization seems to have no full time executive head. While independent board members have stepped in and are pitching in wherever they can, it is not immediately clear as to where the integration is happening. In the coming period, as it takes a leap towards greater effectiveness and sustainability, it would help if the leadership question is addressed clearly.

Prayas has indeed come an impressively long way, and can boast of a highly committed team (working on meagre salaries), but to keep building on this strong foundation, it may help if the organization could address the following –

1. **Organizational leadership** Since the demise of the founder Jatinder Arora and thereafter Mr. Maula (the secretary), the position of the leader of the organization has been lying vacant. The revised organogram suggests that one of the executive board members, Shri DD Goel shall serve as the honorary director and along with the chief project and diversity officer Ms. Kalpana Mehta shall together oversee the affairs of the organization. However, it is not clear who is ultimately integrating and tying together all the threads of the organization. The deputy chief project officer, Ms. Pinkum Sharma is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the organization and corresponds with Ms. Kalpana Mehta (based in Delhi-NCR) on important matters. For several decisions, the project officers reach out to the Board, giving it a semblance of a Board-run organization.

In our conversations with representatives of the Board, it was clear that they were also aware of this issue, and we only hope the matter will be addressed in the near future. This will also help prevent the organization from slipping into a project mode of functioning (which is evident even from the current designations in the



organogram – chief project officer, deputy chief project officer – at the highest levels in the organization). The transition from a charismatic founder-CEO to the next CEO is never easy, but we are sure that given the committed board and staff at Prayas, they will cross this bridge successfully.

2. Exposure to other organizations working on disability and special needs

As the organization envisages its future, it would be most useful to interface with some other organizations working in the same space. There is a high potential for cross-learning and exchange. Prayas, for instance, can learn from the experiences of organizations working around job readiness and employment of special needs youth. There are organizations who can offer rich insights into market driven vocational training of special needs youth and help make Prayas a more robust portfolio of work in this area. Wipro Foundation, given its large repertoire of partners across India can facilitate this exchange well. On the other hand Prayas can contribute much from its really rich experience of promoting integrated/inclusive learning in government schools, as also how to work closely with parents and communities in making CWSN more visible and more able to live dignified lives.

3. Active local advocacy and influencing the discourse on disability at different levels

Furthermore, given the long years of experience and expertise developed by Prayas it can play a more proactive role in influencing policy related to disability in Rajasthan. The organization seems to have good relationships within the education department and has been able to build credibility and make a name for itself in the city. It's work with the government schools specially makes it a strong candidate for spearheading advocacy for special needs children in the state. It has a lot to say on the effectiveness and process gaps in the measures taken by the government and while it must already be raising these issues, maybe the same can be done more systematically and in collaboration with others in the same space.

Through its CRE workshops it has developed a good relationship with resource persons outside the state and it can possibly leverage the same in at least building a wider ecosystem level conversation.

4. Building a functional information system (MIS) within the organization

Finally, to be able to become a learning and reflective organization it needs to manage its program data and flow of information in the organization better. In the process of its work, it generates a lot of data. However, it is mostly scattered and not used in sharpening of programmatic offerings. A well thought yet simple MIS can really aid managerial and decision-making and pave the way for the leadership to hone program priorities. More importantly, it will also ensure that institutional memory is built and retained and is accessible to all within the organization.

5. A suitable delegation of powers and decision making

It appeared to us from our conversations that there is a need for a well-defined decision-making matrix and a schedule for delegation of powers. Especially now that Kalpana ji is based in the Delhi-National Capital Region, a lot of small decisions travel up to the board level.

Annexures

Annexure 1: Success Stories shared by Prayas Team

Vishwas – now able to carry on daily living activities on his own...

Vishwas is 16 years old and studies in the Jhalana Integrated school run by Prayas. His father is a driver and mother a housewife. He has an elder sister too. The family has moderate standard of living and Vishwas enjoys a loving, joyful environment at home.

He was identified during a survey and encouraged to enroll in a Prayas school in 2018. When he came to school, he couldn't hold a pencil. He would just sit in one corner and not listen to anyone. He would also refuse to play with other children. When spoken to his parents reported similar demeanor at home. A plan was made to facilitate his learning. He was made to play certain games in a group with other children, he was taught how to hold a pencil and trace words. All these were done for him using play method, involving a group and usage of teacher learning material. Daily activities of living were demonstrated first for him to learn. All these efforts have led to notable changes in Vishwas. He is now able to comfortably hold a pencil and trace alphabets and numbers. As per his IEP, he can now put pearls in a thread, apply hair oil and comb his hair on his own. He seeks permission before going to the toilet and plays and eats with other children.

Mahesh – when the teachers also learnt along with the student...

Mahesh was identified with mental disorder of a mild degree during the annual survey of Prayas. His parents were having difficulty in getting him admitted in any schools because of his condition. They made attempts at Gangapol municipal school, but the principal turned them away saying that a private school will be better. Mahesh's father ran an e-rickshaw and didn't have the wherewithal to afford the fees of a private school. When they shared their struggles with the Prayas team, the community mobilizer reached out to the principal at Gangapol once again. They faced resistance but finally used their persuasion skills to get Mahesh admitted.

Mahesh was not mentally sharp and struggle a lot in school. He would not follow his lessons and when spoken to strictly by teachers he would break down. The special educator intervened and counselled the teachers first, educating them on the issue of disability, the learning problems faced by such children and ways to engage with them. An individual education plan (IEP) was prepared in consultation with the schoolteachers. To start, the special educator visited Mahesh every day for 15 days interacting with Mahesh, facilitating games in front of schoolteachers, and instructing the parents as well on how to approach his education. Slowly, both the schoolteachers and Mahesh started feeling comfortable with each other. He was able to finish his education till 5th Std. He then moved to Bandri ka Nasik government school in 6th Std. and was finally promoted from Std. 8 to 9. He is an average student, but his parents are quite happy with the progress he has shown through the years.

Shoaib – a journey towards self-sufficiency

Shoaib was identified as a special needs child during the annual survey of Lal Masjid area in 2012-13. Since birth he couldn't hear or speak. The family was sure about how to go about

his education, especially as the local schools including the government schools hesitated in offering admission. Prayas helped in getting Shoaib admitted in the Idgah government school, where it was working. To make sure that he can study well, a hearing aid was also provided to him. All the necessary documents were made so that Shoaib was also able to receive the Escort Allowance from the government. Shoaib studied well and passed Std. 5 from the school. Thereafter Prayas team helped with his admissions in Van Vihar senior secondary school. They updated the schoolteachers at the new school on Shoaib's condition, guided them and would also check on his progress regularly. In 2022, Shoaib passed 12th Std. Given his interest in computers he was enrolled in a computers course so that he can become self-reliant and earn a livelihood.

Aaliya – moving from home-based therapy to a regular school

Aaliya was only one year old when the Prayas team had identified her during the annual surveys in Nathji ki Bagichi. She was not able to walk and faced difficulty in having mother's milk. She was quite weak and had no control over her bodily movements. She hailed from a low-income family where both the parents did daily labour and were illiterate. After identification, the physiotherapist, special educator, and psychologist from the Prayas team did a thorough assessment and made a plan (IEP) for her rehabilitation and education. With the help of home-based therapy, Aaliya was helped in gaining control over her motor functions and preparing for a dignified life. For a whole month, she was visited by the special educator daily and given physiotherapy. Her daily schedule with basic life activities was prepared and parents encouraged to keep her clean and tidy. The family was helped to generate all required documentation and access welfare benefits.

After 5-6 years of regular physiotherapy Aaliya is now able to walk slowly. She can understand things and attempts to speak and communicate. In 2019-20, she was admitted in a nearby school in Std. 1. She tries to follow the instructions and lessons in the class along with her classmates and slowly gets her classwork done. She takes interest in her studies and looks forward to going to school.

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