A night scene in a village with a large tree and children reading. The scene is set in a village with several houses with blue roofs. A large tree with green leaves and glowing yellow lights is the central focus. The title 'JUGNU' is written in large, glowing yellow letters across the tree. Below the tree, a group of children are sitting on the ground, reading books. The sky is dark blue with a full moon and several stars.

JUGNU

Stories of First-Generation Learners from Bhowapur



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This report is co created by
Arti Verma, Avinav Kumar, Sunpreet Singh, Tayyaba Parveen

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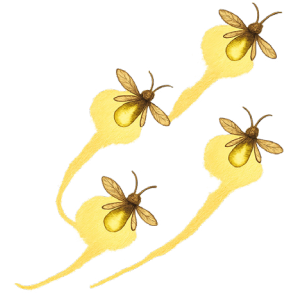
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Reach us at
info@phia.org.in
+91-11-2625 8107

Registered Office
D25/D, First Floor, South Extention II, New Delhi -110049 India



Acknowledgement



As we reflect on the journey of this programme, I want to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who stood with us in making this possible. This coffee table book is the result of many hearts, voices, and hands coming together. Behind every story in these pages is a circle of people who believed, guided, and supported. It reflects the resilience of children, the courage of families, and the commitment of those who believe in the power of education.

To our donors and supporters - Caritas India, Chistian Aid, Change Alliance, Gripple, MTX)—thank you for believing in this vision. Your support has not just funded a programme, but opened up possibilities for children who had been overlooked for far too long. Because of you, many of them are now walking into classrooms, finishing school, and dreaming bigger than their circumstances.

To PHIA's incredible team on the ground—teachers - Vibha, Nisha, Reena, Heera, Rajesh, Manisha, Khushi, Project Coordinator - Hemlata for their dedication and tireless effort in bringing these stories to light. I have seen your efforts firsthand—walking long distances in the heat, sitting with parents to explain why education matters, helping a child spell their first word or apply for their first school admission. These are not just tasks. They are acts of hope, and they are changing lives.

And to the children and families, who trusted us and welcomed us into their lives. Their stories of hope, courage, and determination are the soul of this book. By opening their lives to us, they have given us lessons far beyond the page.

This book is dedicated to them, and to the promise that education opens doors, creates possibilities, and builds futures that shine brighter with every step forward.

- Arti Verma,
Programme Lead,
PHIA Foundation



A City of Journeys

Delhi is a city built on journeys. Families have travelled here from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and across India, carrying little more than determination and the hope of opportunity. According to the 2011 Census, Delhi is home to the second-highest number of inter-state migrants in the country, with NCR expanding edges stretching into Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan to absorb this constant flow of people.

For many, the promise of the city unfolds in the narrow lanes of slums like Bhowapur, where daily wage labourers, waste collectors, and domestic workers build their lives brick by brick. Life here is fragile yet vibrant, with families navigating the hardships of poverty, overcrowding, and insecure housing while holding on to dreams for their children. In these homes, where water, healthcare, and education are scarce, childhood itself is often interrupted. But even in the most difficult conditions, the desire for dignity and opportunity continues to shape each family's story.



Lighting the Path

For children growing up in urban slums, school can feel like a distant promise. Poverty, unstable housing, lack of supervision when parents leave for long hours of work, and limited awareness about the value of education all create barriers that push children out of classrooms and into vulnerability. Many are the first in their families to even hold a schoolbook, and without support, the cycle of exclusion often continues.

PHIA Foundation began its work in Bhowapur with a simple but powerful commitment: to make education a possibility for every child. The first step was to reach out to out-of-school and never-enrolled children, to welcome them into bridge education centres that would give them both the confidence and the foundation to enter formal schools. Over time, these centres became more than classrooms. They grew into safe, supportive spaces where children could imagine new futures, parents could see the value of learning, and entire families could begin to believe that education could break the cycle of hardship.

By placing dignity at the heart of its work, PHIA's effort has been not just to enroll children in schools but to nurture first-generation learners who can step into a different kind of tomorrow—one defined by choice, opportunity, and hope.



Steps Toward Transformation

- Creating safe and welcoming spaces where unattended children can learn, play, and receive structured after-school support while their parents are at work.
- Ensuring that every child has a place in school by enrolling out-of-school children, supporting bridge education, and reducing dropouts through remedial learning.
- Walking alongside parents to build awareness about the power of education, while also linking them to government schemes that strengthen the household.
- Helping families overcome bureaucratic barriers by guiding them through documentation and admission procedures so their children can enter formal schools with ease.
- Supporting children's overall well-being through regular health check-ups, nutrition assistance, and psychosocial support to address malnutrition and mental health concerns.
- Encouraging students to dream beyond Class 12 and providing pathways into higher education, skill development, and vocational training.
- Offering one-to-one guidance and counselling to help children recognize their strengths, clarify their educational goals, and choose the paths best suited for them.
- Advocating for improved access to water, housing, and sanitation, recognizing that stable living conditions are essential for children to learn and grow.

Together, these efforts go beyond academics. They focus on child protection, family involvement, and community well-being, creating not just opportunities to attend school, but the environment for children to thrive and imagine a future filled with dignity and possibility.

What we aim for

At the heart of this initiative lies the belief that every child deserves the chance to learn with confidence and joy. The Jugnu Education Centre was created as a bridge for children who had fallen behind or never had the opportunity to begin formal schooling. Here, they receive not only remedial support but also encouragement through engaging activities that spark curiosity, strengthen learning levels, and nurture self-belief.

Equally important is the work with families and the wider community. By engaging with parents, building awareness about the value of education, and ensuring that schools function effectively, the program creates a circle of support around each child. Education becomes not just an individual pursuit but a shared commitment, woven into the life of the community itself.



Working Together for Change

Change becomes stronger when it is shared. PHIA has built meaningful partnerships with organizations that share its vision of holistic child and community development. Together, these collaborations have created opportunities that extend far beyond the classroom.

Through its work with the Liver Care Foundation, children and families were introduced to the importance of liver health and preventive care. The Pinkishe Foundation helped young girls understand and manage menstrual hygiene with dignity, while the Shakti Foundation equipped families with financial literacy training that offered them greater stability and confidence in managing their futures. Mental health counselling and support for accessing social protection schemes provided vulnerable households with both relief and resilience.

To broaden horizons, PHIA organized educational visits to institutions like the National Small Industries Corporation and local science centres, where children could see learning come alive. Cultural exchange programs with Tigermove opened doors to creativity and self-expression, reminding children that education is also about joy and discovery.

Beyond direct services, PHIA lends its voice to larger conversations on urban poverty and migration. Through advocacy networks such as the Humse Hai Delhi Forum and the Pravasi Sahayta Sochna Network, the organisation works to ensure that migrant families are not left invisible but are recognized and included in the city's development journey.

Together, these partnerships strengthen the fabric of the intervention, making education not just about school, but about life, dignity, and opportunity.



The Difference We See

PHIA's sustained work through the Jugnu Education Centre has begun to change the story of education for children from migrant families. These are children who often grow up facing deep-rooted disadvantages, both social and educational. Through years of patient effort and targeted interventions, the Centre has not only improved access to schooling but has also opened the doors to new futures for first-generation learners who once stood on the margins.

One of the clearest impacts has been on school retention and learning support. More children are staying in school, and with the help of remedial classes at Jugnu, they are able to keep pace with the curriculum. For children who once risked dropping out, this extra layer of guidance has become the difference between disengagement and confidence in their learning journey.

A milestone moment came when twenty first-generation learners—fifteen girls and five boys—successfully completed their higher secondary education. In families where no one had ever crossed this threshold before, their achievement marks a powerful shift. With continued mentoring, these young people are now enrolled in undergraduate colleges, setting a precedent in their households and inspiring younger children in their communities to dream of similar paths.

Equally significant has been the mainstreaming of nearly two hundred out-of-school and never-enrolled children into formal schools. This transition has been pivotal in breaking the cycle of exclusion, allowing children to replace vulnerability with opportunity and to see education as a real possibility in their lives.

The impact extends far beyond academics. Parents are beginning to see education differently, especially for their daughters, and the community as a whole is nurturing safer, more inclusive spaces for learning. What is taking root is a deeper transformation—one where education is no longer viewed as out of reach but as a pathway to dignity, opportunity, and empowerment for entire families.

200+ children who were out-of-school or never-enrolled have been mainstreamed into formal schools.

**93 male &
116 female**

Changing perceptions

around girls' education and inspiring communities to see education as a pathway to empowerment.

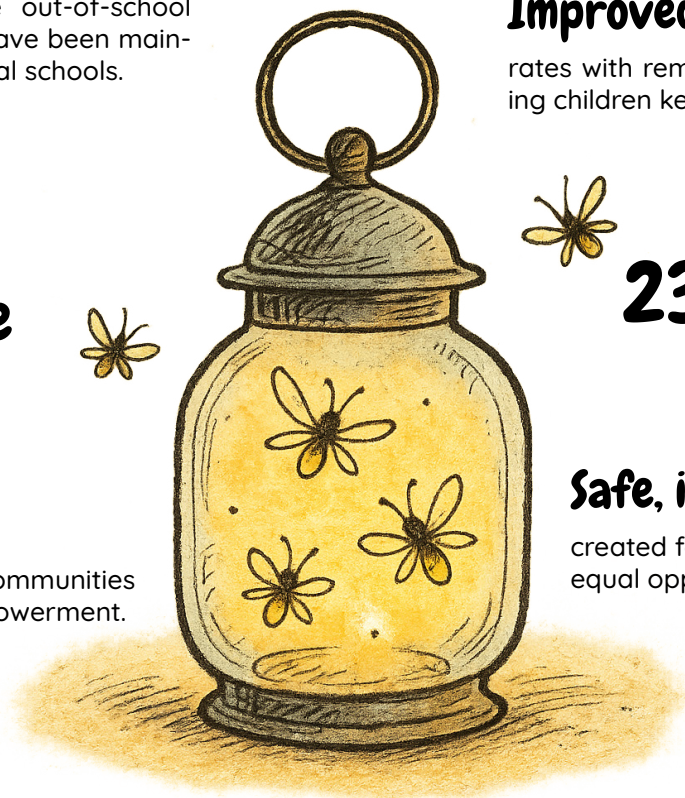
Improved school retention

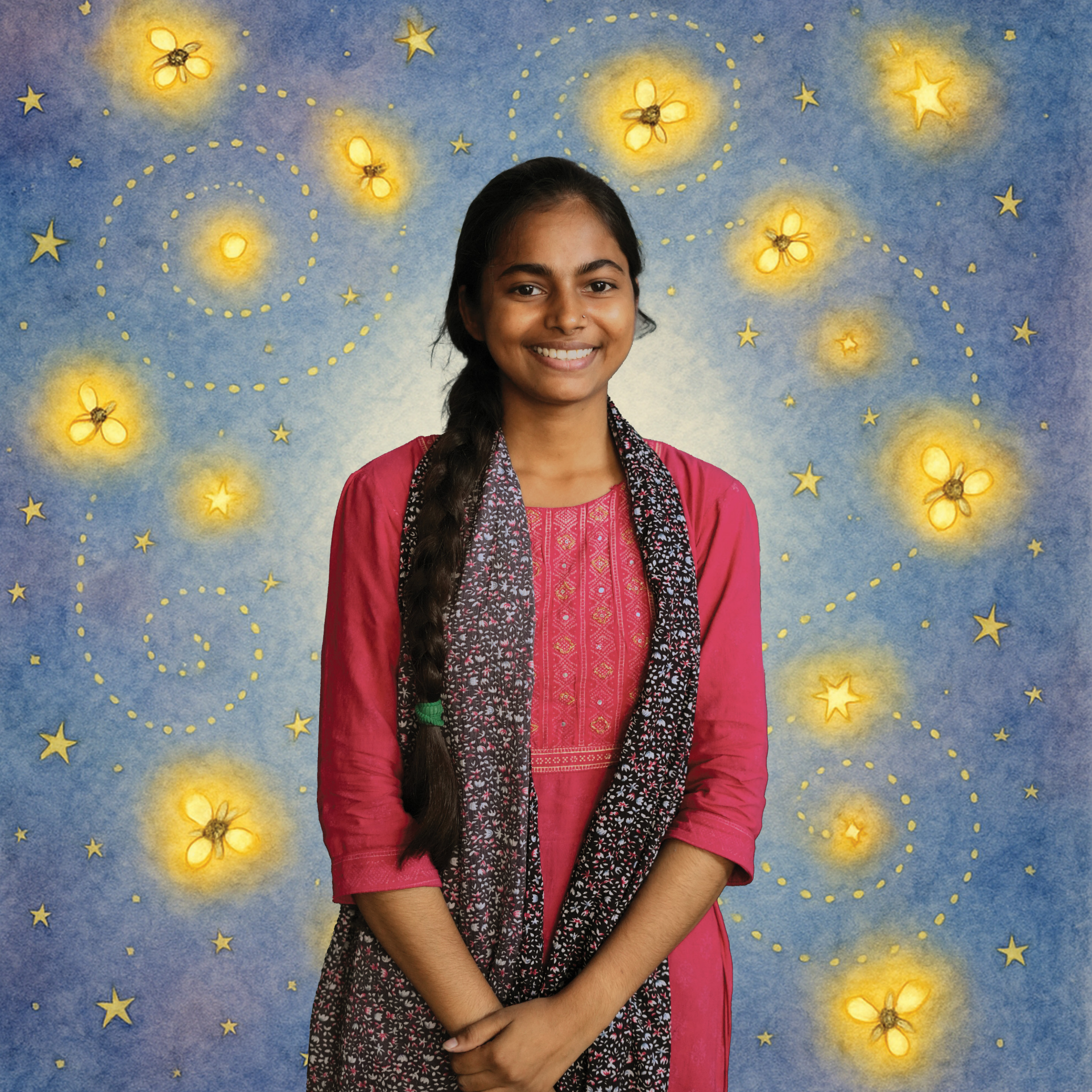
rates with remedial education support helping children keep pace and reduce dropouts.

23 (17 girls, 6 boys) have completed higher secondary and enrolled in college.

Safe, inclusive learning spaces

created for migrant children, enabling dignity and equal opportunities.





Rani



As far back as she can remember, Rani has always loved to learn. Even as a child, she instinctively knew she had to give her full attention to her teachers and her classes. She says with quiet pride that never once in her life did a teacher have to call her to focus. Shy and reserved by nature, she grew up as the youngest of five brothers and two sisters to parents who had migrated from Patna to Bhowapur, on the outskirts of Delhi, hoping for a better livelihood for the family.

She studied alongside her sister until class 5, always following her footsteps, finding comfort and courage in her company. When her sister was married and left home, Rani remembers crying for days, her life suddenly feeling emptier without her sister's presence. The loss left her confidence shaken, and doubts began to creep in, even though she had always believed in her ability to learn and knew education was her strongest suit.

When life takes one thing away, it shows us another path for us to grow. That moment came in 2017, when a friend introduced her to the Jugnu Education Centre in Bhowapur. At first, she was shy and hesitant, unsure whether she would be accepted. But the warmth of the teachers there soon made her feel at home. What began as tuition quickly grew into something deeper, a place where her talent was recognized, her confidence was nurtured, and her belief in education was transformed into her greatest strength. For Rani, Jugnu became not just a centre, but the foundation on which she began to build her power and identity.

With time, she found herself helping her teachers, guiding her classmates and younger children at the centre. Through regular feedback and counseling from the teachers at the Jugnu Education Centre, even her parents grew more confident in her abilities and supported her wholeheartedly in continuing her education. What started as small acts of support slowly turned into a part-time job of teaching, giving her both confidence and responsibility.

The path, however, was not without obstacles. Her brothers, who had studied only up to classes 3 and 5, believed that Rani had already studied enough and began pressuring her parents to arrange her marriage. The pressure grew heavier because, even in her extended family, education had never been taken seriously.

Even as the pressure mounted, Rani chose her own path. With the money she had saved from teaching, she enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts course at a nearby college, close enough that she could balance her studies, support her parents, and continue her part-time teaching job. When she told her mother that the course would take four years instead of three, her mother worried aloud, "Will you not marry for four more years now?" It was not just a mother's concern, but a reflection of the way society often sees marriage as the only guarantee of care and security for girls. Yet, by then, Rani had already begun to show her mother another truth, that education could give her the strength to stand on her own and shape her own future.

Confident in her learning and the value of her hard work, Rani saved every rupee she earned from her part-time teaching job. She proudly handed over her very first salary in cash to her mother, securing the rent and rations for the entire family. Today, while building her education and contributing to the household, she is carving out a new identity for herself, one rooted not in dependence but in self-reliance. This budding independence has made her parents proud and given Rani the courage to stand tall against societal pressures. For her, education is her true source of strength. And this is only the beginning.



Sandhya

Sandhya was only six when her mother made the most courageous choice of her life. Leaving behind the weight of in-laws' disapproval in Nalanda, Bihar, she boarded a train to Delhi with her two young daughters and nothing more than determination. That first night was spent at the railway station, and soon after, she built a small shack in the Bhowapur slums. The decision was simple yet profound, her daughters would study, even if it meant starting life from scratch.

At first, Sandhya had little interest in school. She watched children around her carrying bags and books, and her curiosity was piqued. Drawn by the promise of biscuits and a school bag, she walked into the Jugnu Education Centre. What began as curiosity soon became connection. The teachers at Jugnu encouraged her, even visited her mother, and reassured her that education would not be a burden but a bridge. With their support, the family secured the documents needed for school admission, and both sisters enrolled in regular classes.

Sandhya still remembers the day she first wore a school uniform. In that simple moment, she felt a shift at home—her mother's struggle no longer looked like endless survival, but the beginning of a better future. Every evening, she eagerly recounted her lessons, and with each story, her mother's confidence grew. It was clear that the fight to leave Bihar had been worth it.

Through her school years, Sandhya thrived. Her mother's steadfast belief and Jugnu's guidance gave her the courage to imagine more. After finishing Class 12, she dreamed of becoming a Sub-Inspector, a path that required graduation. When her father, who had rejoined the family in Delhi, never interfered with her studies until she completed 12th, refusing to pay the fees for college the Jugnu Centre stepped in to pay her first-year fees. Sandhya has since taken charge of her own journey. In her second year of college, she has already cleared the entrance exam for civil services, studying on her own through YouTube lessons and mentorship from a Sub-Inspector she connected with online.

When she sat for the exam, only her mother knew. Together, they kept it a quiet secret, returning home with the results as if carrying a shared victory. When Sandhya finally told her father, his wide smile said more than words could.

Today, Sandhya practices for the physical tests with unshakable confidence. She dreams of wearing the uniform, returning to Bihar not as the little girl who once left with nothing, but as an officer ready to serve. For her, the slum is temporary, what remains permanent is the courage her mother passed down, and the strength education has given her to transform that courage into destiny.





Sapna

Sapna Das grew up in the narrow lanes of Bhowapur Slums, where every monsoon turned the paths into stretches of sticky mud, and every day was a lesson in resilience. Her parents had migrated from Bihar, carrying little more than determination and the hope of building a better life. They built a modest shelter in the slum, and though life was not easy, Sapna remembers her father's words echoing with certainty: "No matter what, my children will study."

Her father's own story makes this conviction all the more remarkable. Being the eldest of five brothers, he left school after Class 10, carrying the entire family's responsibility on his young shoulders when his father passed away. With one hand disabled and the other sorting through waste for a living, he has never let hardship stand in the way of his dream. He wanted his daughter to have the freedom of choice that comes with education, something he had always felt was missing in his own life. His stand has quietly inspired others as well. Sapna's uncles, influenced by their brother's determination, are now motivated to ensure their own children's education and to pave the way for a brighter future, while their kids often turn to Sapna with curiosity and pride to hear about her lessons.

Sapna has been part of the Jugnu Education Centre since she was barely six. There, she found not just a classroom but a circle of care, teachers who believed in her abilities, guided her with patience, and reminded her that she had a voice worth listening to. Over twelve years of schooling, Sapna never once failed or stumbled in her studies. Her steady progress was not just marks on paper, it was confidence gathering strength day by day.

There was a time, after Class 9, when whispers of marriage began to circle around her. Relatives from both her paternal and maternal family insisted it was time. But Sapna, carrying both fear and determination, shared her worries with her teachers. They stood by her, speaking to her father and helping him see beyond the pressure, reminding him that his daughter's journey was meant to continue, not be cut short. Since then, he has been her fiercest defender, answering the pressure of relatives with calm conviction: "Only after she finishes graduation."

Today, Sapna has completed Class 12 and is preparing for college. She smiles when she compares her life in Bhowapur to her village in Bihar. The house there is built of mud, and the community barely thinks of education. But here, she says, even in the slum, there is an air of learning, of children dreaming with books in their hands. That environment, along with her father's courage and the unwavering support of Jugnu, has become the soil in which her aspirations grow.

Sapna's journey is far from finished. She dreams of building a life where her achievements can honor her father's sacrifices, where education becomes not just her strength but her legacy. And as she looks ahead, she carries with her a truth that shines brighter than any obstacle: when one person believes in you completely—be it a teacher or a parent—it can change the course of your life forever.



Rakhi

Rakhi was seven when her world began shifting in ways she could barely understand. She lived with her parents and five brothers in a small rented home, her childhood filled with play and laughter. But when her father built a shack in Bhowapur slums and moved the family there, life became more fragile. Just two years later, when Rakhi was nine, her father passed away, leaving behind a silence that has never fully left her.

Her mother, a house help, suddenly became the family's anchor. With quiet resilience, she juggled work, grief, and the task of raising her children. For Rakhi, this became the seed of her own determination: "I want to do something for my mother," she often tells herself.

Those early years were full of pauses. Rakhi and her siblings dropped out of school for nearly two years after their father's death. But life began to shift again when she discovered the Jugnu Education Centre. What drew her in first were the activities, the books, and the warmth of the space. Soon, it became the place where she found her direction. In her words, "That was when I heard my inner voice say—yes, I want to study."

At home, her mother too had begun to notice how the families she worked for prioritized education. She came to realize that learning was not a luxury, but a lifeline. With effort and support from Jugnu, Rakhi and her brothers were enrolled in school again. The transition was not easy. Having studied earlier in a private school, Rakhi felt the difference keenly and carried a sense of incompleteness. But Jugnu gave her more than textbooks, it gave her encouragement, motivation, and small challenges that grew into lasting confidence.

She still recalls one moment clearly. In Class 6, teachers at Jugnu set a target: anyone scoring above 85 percent would be taken on a picnic. Determined, Rakhi studied harder than ever and achieved 88 percent. That single moment of seeing her effort turn into achievement—became a turning point. From then on, she began to take her studies seriously, carrying the joy of each success as fuel for the next.

The Jugnu Centre also opened doors she had never imagined. Exposure visits to museums, outings, even a visit to a cinema hall, each experience sparked dreams of giving her mother a life of joy and dignity. She wanted her mother to smile not just with strength, but with ease.

Today, Rakhi is in her first year of a Political Science honors degree, having completed her Class 12 in 2025. Alongside her studies, she teaches Class 9 and 10 students at a local coaching institute, using the syllabus as both a livelihood and preparation for her own competitive exams. With every class she teaches, she is strengthening her foundation for the government job exams she is determined to clear.

Her path is clear in her mind: first, secure a government job to stabilize her family and move them out of Bhowapur. Then, aim higher towards the civil services. Her ultimate goal is to become an IAS officer, a dream that once seemed distant but now feels within reach.

Rakhi's journey is built on resilience, the quiet strength of her mother, and the encouragement she found at Jugnu. Each step she takes is not only for herself but for the family that carried her through loss. And as she looks ahead, her story shines as a reminder that determination, once ignited, can illuminate even the darkest paths.





Kumkum



Kum Kum's life has been a journey between two worlds, her family's ancestral home in Khagariya in Bihar and the narrow lanes of Bhowapur slums in Delhi. She was born in Delhi but at the age of five was sent to Bihar, only to return three years later with her mother and younger brothers. The constant movement meant repeating classes and adjusting to different systems of schooling. In Bihar, where teachers often left classrooms unattended, her spark for learning found little encouragement. Back in Delhi, however, a different path slowly began to take shape.

At home, life was far from easy. Her father, once a plumber, had given up steady work and turned to alcohol. Quarrels between her parents were common, and more often than not, her father directed his frustration at Kum Kum, blaming her for troubles she never caused. Through it all, her mother remained the pillar of the family, working tirelessly as the sole breadwinner, making decisions on her own, and never once denying her daughter the chance to study.

After Class 10, under pressure from relatives and concerned for her mother's fragile health, Kum Kum was married. But her dreams did not end there. She carried her books with her into her in-laws' house, determined to continue her studies. When she was told to abandon them, she made a bold choice, packing her bags and returning to Delhi, back to her mother and to the Jugnu Education Centre where she had always found encouragement.

With Jugnu's support, she completed Class 12 and in 2024 enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts program with tuition fees covered by PHIA Foundation. She dreams of becoming a teacher, a goal rooted in both her love for learning and her belief in guiding others. For eight months she worked as a part-time teacher at the Jugnu Centre itself, gaining confidence and discovering the joy of being around children. When that contract ended, another opportunity opened and she continued teaching at a different centre. Each classroom she steps into brings her closer to the teacher she aspires to become.

Kum Kum says she has always carried confidence within her, but it was guidance, gentle and steady, that helped her find her path. The Jugnu Centre became that compass, reminding her that even when life pulls you away from your dreams, you can return to them with greater strength.

Today, Kum Kum stands as both a student and a teacher, shaping her own journey while helping others begin theirs. Her dream of becoming a teacher is no longer distant, it is unfolding lesson by lesson in the classrooms she now leads.

Sunny



When Sunny first came to Delhi with his parents, school was not part of his daily life. His father drove a rickshaw, his mother worked in a company, and the children stayed at home while their parents laboured to keep the family afloat. Everything began to change when teachers from the Jugnu Education Centre came to the slum, asking parents to send the children who were not in school to the centre. Sunny remembers how the staff not only welcomed him but also guided his family through the entire admission process, from applying for Aadhaar cards to securing a place in a mainstream school.

At Jugnu, Sunny found a rhythm in learning. He studied with dedication and was able to progress quickly, moving from Class 5 directly to Class 7 without feeling the weight of pressure, because the centre had prepared him so well. He began to see education not as a chore but as an opening of possibilities.

In 2021, life shifted suddenly when his younger brother, who was preparing for his Class 10 board exams, was diagnosed with a brain tumour. While his parents travelled back to Bihar to care for him, Sunny was left alone in Delhi to complete his own exams. Soon after, he went to join his family and saw how serious the situation had become. Wanting to contribute, he travelled to Jaipur and took a job in a dairy for two months to help pay for medicines and household needs. His father took his brother regularly to Kolkata for treatment, but when his brother passed away, Sunny was unable to see him one last time. The pain of arriving at the village two days too late stayed with him deeply.

When the family returned to Delhi, teachers at Jugnu stood by Sunny, encouraging him to continue his education. Through their support and his own reflection, he came to a realisation that education was the one thing he could never afford to leave again. Since then, he has pursued his studies with steadfast focus. He completed his Class 12 in 2023 and is now in the second year of college, preparing for government job exams. Alongside his studies, he has enrolled in a computer course and is also learning mobile phone repair so he can one day start a small shop.

Sunny has also discovered another passion. A friend taught him how to handle a camera, and together they began a YouTube channel, creating videos that soon grew into a hobby of editing and filming. This passion opened unexpected doors as he began to get freelance work covering weddings and parties, adding another layer to his skills and independence.

Looking back, Sunny sees both loss and resilience woven into his journey. His parents now fully support the education of all their children, and he carries forward not only their hopes but also the memory of his brother. Through studies, skills, and creative pursuits, Sunny is shaping a future where education and determination walk hand in hand, and where every lesson learned is turned into strength for what lies ahead.





