



# SHAISHAV

## AARANYAK CONCEPT NOTE

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## 1. PREFACE

Since 1994, Shaishav has been working with the children dwelling in the slums of Bhavnagar, Gujarat, India. Children growing up in slums experience a childhood that often defies the ideals of innocent childhood. The horrors faced by these innocent children include-child labour, child marriage, physical and sexual abuse, gender discrimination, substance abuse and much more.

Shaishav means 'childhood'. True to its name, the organisation aims to revive the joys of childhood, and has effectively cut down the number of child labourers in the project areas in Bhavnagar by 78%.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Shaishav has conceptualized a new idea of holistic education from their experiences from Bhavnagar city. It's neither a school, nor an alternative school, nor a vocational training



institute, but an open learning space where children are leaders. Children are trained to understand and learn about life, community living, respecting each other and the environment, where adults just facilitate the process and not hinder it. The kids decide how, when, where and from whom they want to learn. We call

this space "**Aaranyak**" and believe that every change in this world begins with children.

## **AARANYAK: An Open Learning Space:**

We strongly believe that each child is UNIQUE, their passion, learning styles & pace everything is UNIQUE. However, the mainstream education system seldom gives children the opportunities to learn according to their learning styles, especially tribal children who barely have access to education, let alone quality education.

“Aaranyak “will be a sustainable model of education for tribal and other children that gives them the opportunity to unlock their potential and chase their dreams.

### **Aaranyak will be a place where children can:**

- ✦ Learn to nurture nature and optimize use of local resources.
- ✦ Refine the concept of interdependence, learn to empathise, and respect each other's origin and thereby understand diversity and civilizations.
- ✦ Open classes to facilitate self-designed and self-paced learning and peer learning among children.

## **EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

1. An open-learning space for self-led, self-paced and self-design learning by children
2. Children are able to recognize their interest areas and pursue the learning without much adult's intervention.
3. Children reclaiming their rights for empowered living
4. Children and young people have enhanced cognitive, emotional and interpersonal life skills
3. Children process appropriate information regarding adolescence and sexuality.
4. Children identify and seek help when required

## **MAJOR COMPONENTS**

The current Aaranyak program comprises of two major interventions among children in Aashramshalas.



## AAMLI TIMLI

### INTRODUCTION

*Aamli-Timli* aims to create a child friendly - quality learning space in the Aashramshalas

Aashramshalas are residential schools for tribal children in the region. Currently we engage with eleven Aashramshalas and do

activities of life skills, Wenlido, adolescent health and other related engagements.

We believe “*we can’t teach anyone anything, one can only learn. If children are not interested in learning something, no matter how much we try to teach, they will not learn it, they might memorize, but not learn with concept clarity and on the other hand if they actively choose to learn something, they will learn it quickly and keep trying until they learn it. That learning will turn into lifelong learning*”. This is the philosophy behind Vanshala. Hence the focus is on ‘Learning by doing.’

The Vanshala initiative was functional in two villages of Samarpada and Pomelapada for over 2 years. Here children were engaged in after school where activities dealing with reasoning, critical thinking, healthy relationships and numerical are organized. Sessions are planned in accordance with children’s needs

Through the Vanshala initiative, we have observed that children have started to enjoy learning through different projects, especially the younger children who are more enthusiastic about learning new concepts in a play way method.

### INTERVENTION

We are proposing to create a similar learning environment of Vanshala in two Aashramshalas. A primary school (Class 1-8) and an Upper Primary School (Class 9-10). Daily engagements will be planned with these children after their school hours. Interesting and creative activities,



games, puzzles on various themes will be engaged with children. A comprehensive way of learning academic subjects is developed. For instance, learning soil, climate, science through nature walks, exposure visits. Practical based science, mathematics and language learning. The possibilities are diverse and extended in this intervention.

To provide a healthy mental support in these spaces, where children stay away from home, peer groups, self-reflective exercises, interesting journalling are some of the means of executing it.

Through these intense daily engagements, we are certain that quality of the existing curriculum will improve and develop a conducive learning process.

We will set an example for the teachers of these institutions who then will be motivated to strengthen their capacity and indulge in child friendly pedagogy.

A properly documented **Action Research** is an important highlight in this programme. The impact among children for a year will be qualitatively monitored and the results will form the basis for future expansion of this model to other Aashramshalas and residential school campuses.



## INTERVENTIONS IN AASHRAMSHALAS

As mentioned earlier, we provide life skills, adolescent empowerment and protection and personal safety training to children studying in Aashramshalas. We will engage with ten Aashramshalas around

Dediyapada block of Narmada district. Wenlido training is also provided to the girls of all operational Aashramshalas.

## **RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS IN OUR NETWORKS**

Shaishav plays an important role in spearheading and keeping many networks related to Child rights, education in National and State level. We are part of Global Catalyst 2030, National Action and Coordination Group to End Violence Against Children (NACG), Campaign Against Child Labor (CACL), Child Rights Collective - Gujarat and other associated collaborations.

We have identified 15 such residential institutions which are in control of civil societies in these networks. We will train the teachers, facilitators of those residential institutions and ultimately a larger scale of children will be covered under this approach. With the enhanced capacity and skills, these facilitators will productively engage the children and create a quality learning space.

## **RESOURCE CENTRE**

A space that houses all the resources for engaging children critically and constructively will be functional in the Dediapada region. Shaishav is in possession of numerous such activities, books, literatures, training manuals and games. Digital resources will also be available. This is a space for facilitators and teachers who can access these resources, take copies, learn and finally engage the children in their space. Usually, the resources will be provided under a nominal deposit or fee. But largely this will be a pro bono approach.

As already Shaishav possess a rich repository of all forms of resources, only the rent of the space will be an expense in this engagement.

## **RELEVANCE OF AARANYAK**

Aaranyak project has built in answers to various challenges and obstacles that we faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aaranyak focuses on the **concept of Self-design learning of children**. During COVID-19 when the entire education system had come to a standstill, this concept proved to be even more powerful because it makes children independent learners rather than depending on schools, teachers and textbooks.

Life skills training is emphasized upon, which is not taught in formal school curriculum. These life-skills such as coping with emotions, stress management, problem solving, creativity etc. really helps children to be well prepared to handle disasters, difficult situations and overcome them without being too much disturbed by it.



## CONCLUSION



Aaranyak integrates the Gandhian concept of *Kelavani* or *Nai Talim* “**Head, Heart, and Hands**” in its engagements with children. Transformation is most powerful when each element is fully deployed.

**The head:** envision the future and focus on big goals set.

**The heart:** Inspires and empowers

**The hand:** Executes and innovates with agility.

For this reason, the three elements should not be viewed as sequential actions but as three vital sets of activities that should happen simultaneously.

With this new approach towards education, we hope that children cherish their strong roots in their community and preserve local indigenous knowledge and skills. By redefining the educational concept, we aim to improve the quality of life, create opportunities for children to chase their dreams and succeed, thus empowering them socially and curbing migration.