

The Opentree Foundation's Play Programmes Update Half Yearly Report FY 2025-26

About this Report:

This report provides an overview of key activities conducted between April and September 2025, shares field observations and impact stories, and reflects on how Play is transforming children's everyday learning experiences.

How play-based learning eases transitions into schools



A moment of joy as Akash & his friends rediscover confidence through play

For many young children, adjusting to new environments can be overwhelming. A new place, unfamiliar faces, structured routines, these can be especially difficult for children growing up in vulnerable communities, where emotional safety is inconsistent and fragile.

This was the case for Akash, Rajesh, Gautam and Geetesh (*names changed*), who study in Class 1 at a Zilla Parishad school in Maharashtra's Latur district.

When they first entered class, they were scared of teachers, cried at drop-off, and did not want to leave their parents or grandparents. For many weeks, they stayed quiet and away from classroom activities.

Their teacher noticed this and took a gentle, playful approach to help them settle. Each day, she began class with a short pep-up session that included singing, clapping games and simple movements to bring energy and smiles to her students' faces. Pep-up activities, especially when rooted in play, serve as powerful tools to support children's emotional, social, and cognitive readiness for learning.

Using the play-based methods she had learnt through The Opentree Foundation's (TOF) workshops, she introduced structured play outside the classroom. These sessions created a safe, fun and friendly atmosphere. Akash, Rajesh, Gautam and Geetesh slowly began joining in, curious and engaged. These playful moments helped them feel more comfortable with school.

After each session, the teacher conducted reflection activities – a regular part of TOF's play sessions – by asking questions like, *"What did you enjoy in today's play session?"* and *"What did we learn from the games we played today?"* These moments helped the children reflect, process their experiences and share their joy.

Gradually, the teacher brought learning into play, using alphabet puzzles and number games. The boys, who once avoided classwork, now began to recognise letters and numbers. Soon, they were confidently reciting the alphabet, counting up to 100, naming fruits and shapes aloud, and showing what they had learned with joy.

Today, these boys come to school every day, full of energy. They not only sit through class but also play, speak up and even lead activities with their classmates. They have found joy in learning through play.

Their journey shows that with patience, play, and thoughtful reflection, children can overcome fear, build confidence, and grow in every way: socially, emotionally, and academically.

- ***Story shared from ZPPS Borphal, Ausa, Latur, Play Centre LA.379***

From Players to Creators: How Play Builds Confidence and Collaboration



Play sparks creativity and collaboration – Nitin and his group redefine the classic game

Every classroom has children who brim with curiosity, eager minds that constantly seek puzzles to solve and new ways to make learning their own. Often, all they need is the right spark. At Greenland English High School, that spark came alive during a play session conducted by The Opentree Foundation (TOF). The classroom buzzed with anticipation as TOF's Outreach Play Worker (OPW) presented a challenge to Class 7 students: *"Create your own new game by changing the rules!"*

For Nitin and his group, this began with hesitation. Their assigned game, *Snake & Ladders 3D*, felt too simple. *"What new game can we make with this? It's just a regular dice and board game!"* they said. But with the OPW's guided encouragement to "think differently", the group soon turned that uncertainty into innovation. When the OPW returned, they were met with a delightful surprise. Nitin and his group were already playing their own version of *Snake & Ladders*, with completely new rules, which they proudly named *Upside-Down Snake & Ladders*.

They had reimagined the classic game by flipping its core mechanics:

- The game could only begin if a player rolled a 3 instead of 1.

- Snakes became ladders, helping players climb.
- Ladders became snakes, bringing players down.
- One group member took on a shared role of rolling the dice for everyone to ensure inclusion.

This inventive version of the game did more than add excitement, it nurtured strategic thinking, collaboration and empathy. Nitin emerged as a thoughtful leader, explaining the new rules with patience, ensuring equal participation, and guiding his peers with clarity and confidence.

Nitin's story proves something powerful: when children are given the freedom and safe space to explore, and the trust to lead their own learning, they naturally demonstrate life skills that extend far beyond the classroom. Play becomes a doorway to curiosity, resilience, and the confidence to navigate challenges, reflecting the National Education Policy 2020's vision of experiential, play-based learning that equips children with the skills they need to thrive in a complex, ever-changing world.

- *Story shared from Greenland English High School, Mumbai, Play Centre MU.852*

Key Updates from April 2025 to September 2025

1. Capacity Building of the Programme Outreach Team:

As part of the 'Playworkers Unnati Workshop Series' and in preparation for the new academic year, a series of in-person workshops was conducted for the Outreach Play Workers (OPWs), serving as both onboarding for new members and refresher training for existing OPWs. The series included a 5-day workshop in June, followed by 2-day sessions each in July and August & September, covering essential skills. The training aimed to equip the team to deliver the programme effectively while adopting playful approaches to engage children and build capacities in facilitation, classroom and behaviour management, observing play, communication, and volunteer engagement.

During April to September 2025, 18 programme outreach team were trained to deliver impactful play sessions



TOF's OPWs attend a workshop designed for them to explore strategies to maximize classroom playtime and build essential skills

2. On-ground Play sessions:

Play is the primary way in which children explore a world that is not in their control. The Opentree Foundation's (TOF) Play centres are safe spaces for children to explore and engage in developmentally-appropriate play sessions. The play sessions are an hour-long session that start with energisers, fun and movement-based activities and are aimed at starting the session on a joyful note. This is followed by children engaging in carefully-curated and strategically chosen games and play-based materials. Our Outreach Play Workers (OPW) and Play Centre Facilitators (PCFs) support children to understand the games, learn through them, work in groups, help them think independently and more. The play session ends with another energiser, in addition to children sharing what they liked the most about the day's play session and what they learned. These play sessions are conducted with children between 3 to 13 years at schools.

Between April to September 2025, our Programme team members and Play Centre Facilitators (teachers) conducted 7950+ Play Sessions across Maharashtra.



Groups of Children engage with carefully curated board games that support in building essential life skills during Play Sessions

3. Setting up Play Centres & Replenishment of Play Materials:

The programme outreach team conducts stock and quality checks at TOF's Play centres and initiates the process of restocking the games and play material at the centres. These games are categorised as per age groups: Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary and as per the six categories of games in the TOF's Play Programme, i.e. SPBANG: Strategy, Puzzle, Blocks, Alphabetics, Numerics and General. The team ensures that children have access to not just age-appropriate and category-wise games, but also that these games are in good condition. This also allows the PCFs and programme outreach team to conduct play sessions smoothly.

During April to September 2025, over 1160+ games were delivered across TOF's play centres during this period, with game materials replenished at 302 centres.



TOF's programme team conducts frequent stock checks to ensure appropriate and quality games are accessible to children.

4. Transformative 'Power of Play' Workshops

On-ground training sessions are conducted with the Play Centre Facilitators (PCFs) to make them aware and knowledgeable on play-based learning and re-orient them on TOF's play programme. These training sessions give them the ability to identify and nurture life skills in children. They are trained on new games and how to effectively use them in classrooms, as part of their daily teaching, in order to build stronger student-teacher bonds and greater confidence in integrating play into a teaching pedagogy.

Our Programme Team conducted **74 'Power of Play' workshops** training **950+ Play Centre Facilitators** of Maharashtra during this period.



Teachers from different Play centres participate in the activities, play games during the training sessions

5. Volunteer Engagement

Volunteers play a crucial role in supporting the TOF team to ensure children continue to learn through play. The volunteers supported us with on-ground Play sessions at TOF's Play centres providing support to our OPWs in classroom management and increasing the student engagement with Play.

Total number of Volunteers engaged during this period: 104



Volunteers join our team on field to support in classroom management and engage with children during play sessions

Additional Activities:

1. International Day of Play Global Roundtable: “Choose Play, Everyday”:

To celebrate International Day of Play, we organised a Global Roundtable on June 11th. The Roundtable featured powerful insights from our panelists Dr. Sarah Aiono (Longworth Education), Tia Mathisen (Playworks), Ingrid Srinath (Resource Alliance) and Shweta Chari (The Opentree Foundation) where they discussed the urgent need to embed play in education systems, public policy, and community spaces, and to reframe play as a Right for every child. This roundtable, moderated by Smarinita Shetty (Indian Development Review) was attended by over 200 participants who were reminded of the importance of building a world where every child’s right to play is protected, practiced and prioritised.



International Day of Play Global Roundtable: Choose Play, Everyday organised to discuss children's fundamental Right to Play

2. Celebrating 21 Years of the ‘Power of Play’:

The Opentree Foundation (TOF) celebrated its 21st Foundation Day this August, marking another year of transforming children’s learning through Play. The milestone event brought together over 100 volunteers who facilitated fun play sessions and distributed games to 1,000 children across our partner schools. From board games

to storytelling sessions, origami workshops, and other playful activities, the day was a joyful celebration of learning through Play. With the support of volunteers, children also received games and toys, ensuring that the spirit of play continues beyond the Foundation Day celebrations.



TOF's 21st Foundation Day: 1,000 children, 100+ volunteers and a day full of play.

Rebuilding Childhoods through Play

Investing in play is one of the most powerful ways to make mental well-being and learning truly accessible for children at-risk. With your support, over **1,50,000 children** can continue to **learn joyfully, grow confidently, and reclaim their right to a happy childhood.**

Thank you for being a part of the Play movement!