

A MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE

Stories of married adolescent girls as
agents of change in the movement
against child marriage



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ABOUT THE MOVEMENT

The Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment (IMAGE) is a project which **empowers early married girls** (EMGs) to lead secure lives where they can harness their potential to the maximum. Apart from supporting the girls in getting out of their exploitative situations, **IMAGE also organises them into a movement against child marriage**, where they are facilitated to fight for their rights, raise their demands, advocate for change and prevent child marriages.

As part of this movement, EMGs are identified and grouped together where they are sensitised on their rights and trained in tools of advocacy. Work is also done to initiate positive behaviour changes towards these girls by their families and communities. Girls from the movement displaying confidence and passion for change are selected as **leaders and trained to spearhead this movement of young change agents**.

The movement also organises an **interface between the girls and the Government** and other authorities for active participation from the stakeholders to address the issues of child marriage and concerns of married adolescent girls. Apart from this, evidence and documentation of the problems are gathered and shared with the Government and other stakeholders.

BLOOMING TO BECOME A LEADER

Mangala is a fourteen-year-old from a village in Karnataka who was married at the age of 9 when she was studying in 3rd standard. Being the third eldest daughter out of seven, she was married off at a very young age like her elder sisters. The main reason being the family's abject poverty whose source of livelihood from rain fed agriculture and seasonal labour could barely ensure their survival.

After her marriage, her father decided to drop her out of school and planned to send her for daily wage work. During this, she and her elder sisters were identified by IMAGE (Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment - Karnataka) Team, Bagalkot in the year 2018.

The IMAGE staff frequently made visits to their home and convinced her parents to continue her education.

Now all the three early married girls in the family are continuing their education and are supported with study material and tuition fee. They have also enrolled in vocational training. After sensitisation from the staff, the parents

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decided not to send their daughters to their husbands' homes till they turn 18.

Now, Mangala is an active participant in all the project meetings and workshops on Child Rights, awareness programmes on Child Marriage and Gender-Based Violence.

Her display of confidence, leadership qualities and determination to fight against child marriage resulted in her becoming a Movement leader.

She is now taking the responsibility to spread awareness against child marriage, child rights, child labour and the importance of education in her community. She is also stopping child marriages from taking place in her village.

She adds, "I want to become a scientist and as a Movement Leader, I want to contribute my best towards building a society which is free from child marriage and child labour. I also aim to reduce the dropout rate of girls in my village."



NAYANA LEADS THE WAY

Nayana is a 17-year-old from a small village in North Karnataka. She got married at the age of 14 when she was studying in class nine. In the initial days of her married life, she faced a lot of challenges but that didn't stop her from pursuing her studies. She even secured 80% in the SSLC exam.

When the IMAGE team first approached her, she was hesitant and didn't open up but she gradually realised that they were there for her empowerment and she registered for the activities offered by IMAGE.

Through the awareness, she was able to know about Child Rights, Child Protection Laws and the ill effects of Child Marriage. As part of IMAGE activities, Nayana went to Bangalore to attend workshops on the ill effects of child marriage.

"In that workshop, they provided some topics related to child development, child marriage, etc. and asked us to present in the forum. I went and gave a presentation for which I received a lot of compliments. There, I got to know that like

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me there are many more early married girls undergoing struggle and hardship", said Nayana.

Due to her effective communication skills and confidence, she was given the responsibility of being a Movement leader of IMAGE, representing 15000 young early married girls.

She says, "Now, I have a responsibility to build a child marriage free society. Together, we can end child marriage. I believe in the power of unity to fight against this issue. I will build a strong movement against child marriages with the support of girls like me. I am now confident of this."



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SHRUTHI TAKES ACTION

Shruthi is a fifteen-year-old early married girl who lives in a small village in the Bagalkot district of Karnataka. She was married off to her maternal uncle when she was just a nine months old baby. This kind of marriage is common among her community and is often referred to as "thottilu maduve" (cradle marriage).

In the year 2018, she was identified by the IMAGE team in Bagalkot district. She was registered as an Early Married Girl. She attended the awareness programmes about the ill effects of child marriage.

In 2019, she joined the Spoorthi Children's Club and became one of the active participants in the children club. She has developed her knowledge about child marriage, Child Helpline 1098 and has also learnt about the health and hygienic practices for adolescent girls. As soon as she reached puberty, her in laws pressured her family members to send her to the in laws house. She took the support of one the children club members and informed the IMAGE team



and ChildLine 1098.

The IMAGE team members and the Child Welfare Committee counselled her parents to not send her to the in-laws' house before she turns 18. The parents understood and agreed to even continue her school education.

Sruthi's story is a testimony to the change that can be brought by early married girls in their own lives.

She says, "The Children club was an eye-opener for me and helped me act wisely by contacting and sharing with the IMAGE team and ChildHelpline. Our Children Club members and neighbours are also very happy and praise me for my courageous work and remarkable changes in my life. I pledge to fight against the injustice early married girls face."



CELEBRATING EMPOWERMENT

Sindhu is a twenty-year-old girl who lives in a small village in Bidar district of North Karnataka. Her parents are agricultural labourers. After completing her 10th standard, she was married off due to poverty. She agreed to the marriage because of her parents' economic challenges.

She went to her husband's house with high hopes but within two months she became a victim of domestic violence from her husband and her in-laws. She was harassed everyday because Sindhu's parents couldn't meet their dowry needs. Her husband used to get drunk and assault her physically. She came back to her parents' house but was pressured and blackmailed by the in-laws and husband.

In 2018, when the IMAGE programme was initiated in Bidar District, she was identified in the survey and was registered as an early married girl.

The team members made frequent visits and ensured her participation in all awareness and training programmes. Gradually, she opened up with the staff members. The team

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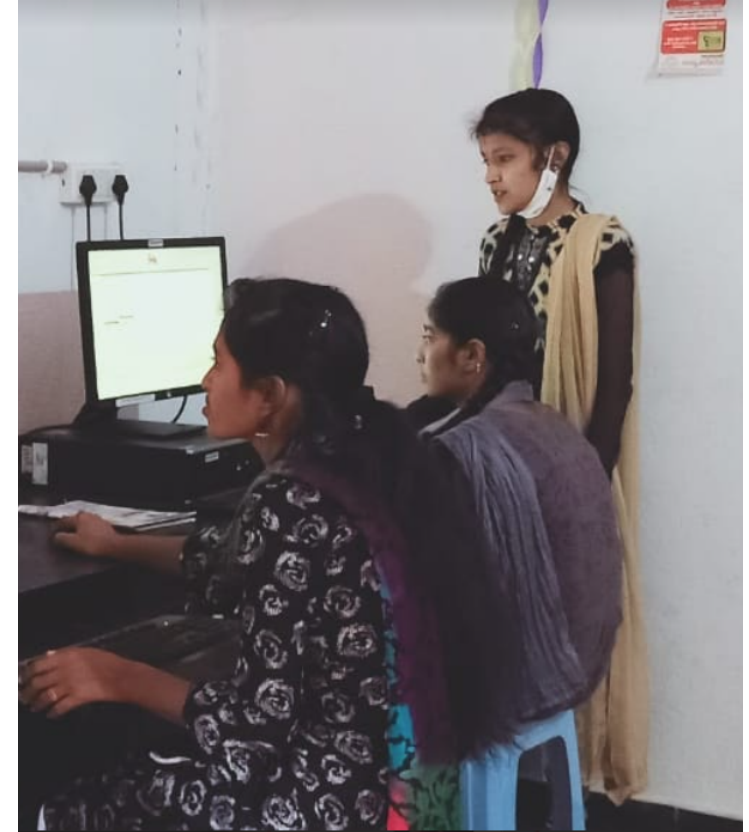


provided her with moral support and helped boost her confidence. In 2019, she undertook a computer vocational training course under IMAGE and her life took a turn when a computer course centre was inaugurated under the IMAGE project.

She got an opportunity to become the course teacher for the students who were coming to the centre for learning. She continues to handle three batches with 5-6 students in each batch.

Sindhu today sets an example to married adolescent girls by being an agent of change in her community in equipping girls in computer skills.

Sindhu says, "I was depressed after the bitter experience in my married life. The IMAGE team and their programmes have encouraged me to take the next step in life. They gave me new confidence and courage. Because of them, I am happy that I get to teach computers to students."



STOPPING A CHILD MARRIAGE

A lot of communities faced real challenges to sustain themselves during the Covid-19 lockdown. The school and colleges were also shut down due to it. This caused even more trouble in the lives of rural poor children as their means of getting education literally stopped.

Sneha*, a sixteen-year-old girl from Bagalkot district, who was studying in Morarji Desai school at Moodbidri returned to her home town due to COVID-19 and was staying with her parents.

During this time, her parents decided to marry her off on 29th November, 2020 at a temple by 4 am as the bridegroom's brother's marriage was also arranged on the same date.

Both parents had thought about doing the two marriages at the same time as it would reduce their social obligation and marriage expenses.

On 28th November 2020, Childhelpline 1098 received a call from the IMAGE movement team regarding these child

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marriage arrangements. After confirming with the caller, the team reached the place immediately. The Child Welfare Department, Village Extension Officer, Police officials, REACH/TdH-NL staff and the field facilitator reached the place and enquired with her parents.

Her parents were not ready to cooperate and were lying about their daughter not being present there as they hid her in a room. The team was able to gauge the situation and rescue her.

They warned her parents about their attempt of a child marriage and the penalty amount of Rs. 1 lakh and prison term for 1-2 years. They also provided them with the knowledge of the POCSO Act. Her parents were made to sign on the document which stated they would not marry off their daughter until she is 18 and has completed her education. The rescue team also reached out to the boy's (Basappa) family and educated them about child marriage and its consequences. The team took a disclosure letter from Basappa's parents.

The marriage was about to happen at 4 am and the IMAGE movement succeeded in stop the child marriage by 2.30 am. The timely action measures prevented Sneha from becoming a victim of child marriage. Like Sneha, many other child marriages are being stopped with the help of married adolescent girls who are part of IMAGE movement.



PARTNERS

LEAD PARTNER



CONSORTIUM PARTNERS





TOWARDS A MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE

EARLY MARRIED GIRLS FIGHT AGAINST
CHILD MARRIAGE

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stops child exploitation