



ANNUAL REPORT

2023/2024



Dear friends,

each of you has a bond with Skychildren.

A unique and special bond, which for some comes through a friendship, for others through a need for fulfillment, and for some through pure love. Each, however, has undeniably **participated in the growth of this creature**. Brick, grain or vault arch, every material and emotional contribution you have donated has transformed a dream reserved for twelve little girls into the broad and profound growth of an entire community.

This sense of sharing accompanied us in the important step we took this year: we **became an ETS Foundation** (updating our structure to the new third sector regulations), welcoming Laura Parigi to the administrative table and formally recognizing as “participants in the Foundation” the wonderful souls who unreservedly devote themselves to each of our initiatives.

We have grown, remaining ourselves, true to our identity and mission. We continue, together with you, **to save nearly six thousand children from the street each year**, donating every penny donated to this effort.

With us, our children have also grown up. Puja goes to college and is one of the top students in her class. Ishika finished high school with honors and will attend college next year. Preeti has been selected out of hundreds to enter a prestigious university course in tourism management. Beautiful lotus flowers, blooming from the mud of Calcutta. Yes, because in this enchanting and terrible city a few weeks ago **the police again “cleared” the sidewalks** of Central, the area where so many of the children who attend our schools live. They chase them away like rats, to freshen up the streets before the arrival of some prominent personage.

But we, Skychildren Foundation, put our “foundation” there. **Solid as the bond that connects us to each of you**, fruitful with love and future for thousands of other lotus flowers.

The founding members



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OUR NUMBERS



5,925 VULNERABLE CHILDREN SENT TO SCHOOL, protected, cared for, nurtured



19 EMERGENCY SCHOOLS/SHELTERS for street children
2 emergency buildings/shelters renovated, retrofitted, furnished
2 school buildings constructed and furnished



5,074 children/youth NO LONGER "INVISIBLE" (obtained birth certificate or digital identity)



1,611 LINKS TO WELFARE (obtained scholarships, ration cards, grants)
1,147 beneficiary children
356 parents/guardians beneficiaries



6 ITINERANT MEDICAL CLINICS in slums and rural villages with doctors and nurses
8,416 PATIENTS CURED (including 2,715 children)



7 MEDICAL EQUIPMENT for operating rooms
2,432 PATIENTS CURED with this equipment



5 SPECIALIST LABORATORIES for medical analysis
19,240 MEDICAL TESTS performed
4,692 PATIENTS CURED (1,700 children)



1 SOLAR PANEL WELL
drinking water for 2,000 families



131,920 people reached

OUR VISION

A WORLD IN WHICH EVERY CHILD IS GUARANTEED THE RIGHT TO A LIFE OF DIGNITY, TO EDUCATION, TO PROTECTION, TO GROWTH, TO STUDY.

OUR MISSION

SKYCHILDREN WORKS TO IMPROVE THE DESPERATE LIVING CONDITIONS OF STREET CHILDREN IN CALCUTTA, TO BRING EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE, PROTECTION AND HOPE, TO ACHIEVE IMMEDIATE, CONCRETE AND LASTING CHANGES IN THEIR LIVES.

100% OF DONATIONS TO CHILDREN

THE ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS OF THE ORGANIZATION ARE COVERED BY THE MEMBERS THEMSELVES.



OUR AREAS OF INTERVENTION



1. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



2. EDUCATION



3. PROTEZIONE BAMBINI AD ALTO RISCHIO



4. HEALTH CARE



5. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



It was a sense of urgency in rescuing twelve abused girls that led us, thirteen years ago, to found Skychildren. We met them in amakeshift room, picked up off the street, abandoned by families who could not afford a dowry, intercepted by the police at yet another crossing between traffickers, scouted in red-light districts. In our eyes they were, and are, proof of what it means to be born a woman in India: a curse from which one can hardly free oneself. They are often **sold by their parents** while still very young as “domestic workers,” finding themselves **slaves, victims of constant sexual and psychological abuse**. In other cases, they are daughters of girls forced into arranged **marriages around the age of 10** who are often abandoned by their husbands after having numerous children. Other times they are the ones who run away from a daily hell of abuse and violence perpetrated in the family itself, by that “uncle” who is supposed to look after them while their parents are away “home” looking for work.

Thanks to our support, these girls **find shelter, loving care, psychological assistance** with the trauma they have suffered, and the support they need to start or resume school. We are close to them throughout the course of their lives, even when they come of age, strengthening their self-esteem at every important moment of growth, encouraging them to continue their studies, to acquire professional skills to later become economically independent. Only in this way will they, future women, be able to ensure for themselves and subsequent generations a just society, free from violence and discrimination.



Shelter home for abused girls



Here, little girls rescued from situations of neglect, can finally get to know an environment of love and care: they are assured, in addition to the **satisfaction of their basic needs** (quality food, shelter and protection, clothing, etc.), regular school attendance along with educational support from **private tutors** to prevent school dropout, free **legal advocacy**, individual and group **psychological support, recreational and therapeutic activities** for their physical and mental well-being and growth (e.g., music, dance, taekwondo, drawing, painting, yoga and meditation). Within the home, the little ones can attend **courses in embroidery, cutting, sewing, handicrafts, English and computer** skills taught by qualified staff dedicated to their professional training.

When, as adults, the girls by law must leave the shelter, they are still **followed** by our workers **for a period of at least two years**, so that the conditions of the family context are constantly monitored and, if necessary, action can be taken so that the girls' well-being is always guaranteed.

- To date, the shelter houses **53 vulnerable girls aged 6 to 18**.



Residential schools for girls over the age of 18



Since, after the age of 18, by law, one cannot remain a guest of the shelter homes, we support girls who wish to continue their studies by **covering the tuition of the studentate** and **enrollment** in subsequent **training courses** until the end of their education, which often coincides with graduation. Girls who do not wish to continue their studies are accompanied into the world of work through training courses that are as close as possible to their aptitudes and preferences (all attend computer and English courses while in the home) and are helped **to find a job** and a decent home in which to live if they do not return to their family of origin.

- There were **7 girls** supported in boarding school/study this year.



Study support for girls reunited with their families

The family always remains the best place to grow up, and as soon as conditions exist and the socioeconomic situation has improved, girls are reunited with their family of origin.

Once back home, the girls are followed up so that they can continue with their studies and receive **educational support at home**.

- To date there are **22 girls supported** on this path..

SUCCESS STORY

Rupa is a 20-year-old girl, serene and very determined. To meet her today, one cannot imagine the hell she went through.

She entered our shelter when she was just 10 years old and until that day, every day, for a very long time, maybe forever, **she was raped by her grandfather and cousin**. A nightmare with no way out, because in the suffocating darkness of their shack, as they destroyed her childhood, they forced her into silence with the threat of selling her to a brothel. An enlightened teacher was able to read her heart and saved her. Since then, we have protected her, and supported her in her greatest passion, study. A couple of months ago, she finished Class XII with such high grades that she was selected for a prestigious **university course in Travel and Tourism Management**.

In addition to earning an important degree, she will have access to several internships in famous companies in the industry and secure a future infinitely far from that shack.

EDUCATION



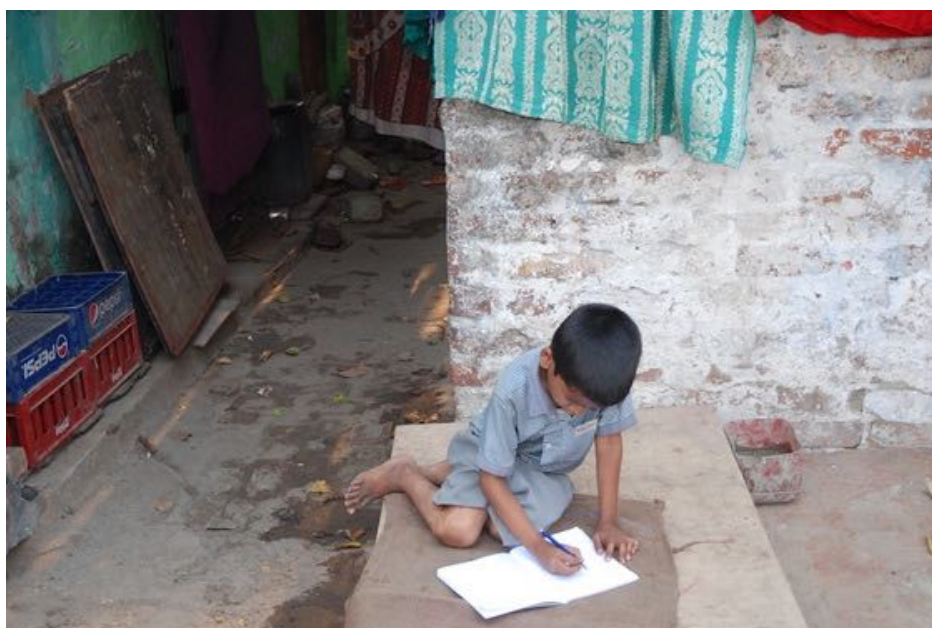
Calcutta is the city with **the highest number of “street children” in the world**. 250,000 children live in desperate conditions, on sidewalks without shelter, in squatter slums, along railroad tracks or among the mountains of garbage in a large open-air dump. They are constantly exposed to **different forms of violence: physical, economic and sexual abuse**. Their daily lives consist of child labor, early marriage, human trafficking, child prostitution, but also starvation, with **no access to education and medical care**. The only way out of this continuum of ignorance and violence has proven to be schooling, because only with a quality education can these children access the training and skills they need to find decent work and unhinge the stranglehold of the misery of their families of origin.

They are children of **illiterate parents** living below the poverty line, unable to protect them from their own misery, unable to understand the importance of education. Child labor is often an essential aid to the survival of the family: pushing children while still young to work is therefore the norm. In this daily routine, independent attendance at public school becomes impossible or, at the very least, of no help. In fact, the street child completely lacks the material resources to access it (documents and money for enrollment, to buy school uniform and books, etc.), but especially the support of someone who believes in the importance of this commitment, help them with homework, motivate them to take exams, and support them in filling pre-existing gaps.

In Indian public schools, **the teacher-student ratio is usually 1 to 70 or 80 children**, so unless they can rely on outside help, they are unlikely to be able to learn even the basics and be motivated to continue their education. School dropout is very high, child labor the only real alternative. Private schooling is obviously out of their reach.

Skychildren offers these children the chance to build a future for themselves away from poverty through school centers built right in the slums or among the sidewalks where they live. These are “**bridge schools**,” which prepare children ages 6 to 16 who can neither read nor write for entry into public schools. In parallel, once this preparatory work is completed, children have been approached and enrolled in school, in our centers we offer, through qualified teachers, constant and daily help to do homework, prepare for exams and deal with everyday difficulties, also to keep motivation high and combat school dropout.

In addition to education and school supplies, we give them all the necessary resources for them to **gain awareness of their rights**, self-confidence, and trust in teachers, psychologist, and educators, which is necessary for them to confide in abuse and violence and to be helped to metabolize and overcome the trauma they have suffered. All of our staff are specifically trained to handle these kinds of situations and liaise **with other psychologists, social workers, police, hospitals, shelters, as needed**. In addition to daily classes and homework assistance, children **receive one nutritious hot meal a day** (often the only one of the entire day), safe shelter, regular health check-ups, individual and group counseling.



★ Kindergarten in the dump

Bringing children closer to education from a very early age, **the kindergarten in the large Baghar Dump** is the only way out of a real hell for 60 children between the ages of 2 and 5. They and their families **live in the mountains of garbage, where wild pigs raze, amid toxic fumes and infected materials.**

Skychildren's kindergarten provides them with a safe place and educational preparation to later enter elementary school.



- **30** boys and **30** girls between the ages of 2 and 5 attend the kindergarten
- **46** children enrolled in elementary school at the end of the kindergarten cycle **373** community people supported
- **60** children undergoing constant medical checkups

★ Bridge schools

A shelter where they can **receive education, books, school supplies, a meal and psychological assistance**; a sheltered oasis where they can learn the basics in order to be accompanied to government school placement or where they can receive support in doing their homework. This is what the Naboasha Education Centers and the “Class in Four Wheels” that Skychildren runs in the slums of Calcutta are for, enabling hundreds of boys and girls to get away from violence, abuse, and illicit activities and find their way, through access to education, to their own redemption.

The project has proven to be highly **successful in rehabilitating school-age children and bringing them into the government school system**: only through education can these children **change their future**, develop more qualifying skills to aspire to more dignified occupations than those of their parents, thus achieving, in the long run, an overall improvement in the living conditions of the entire community.

- **703** pupils aged 6-18 attend our centers **108** new children enrolled this year



★ “Rising Star” School

The lush vegetation of the countryside contrasts with the conditions of extreme poverty and misery in the rural community of West Bengal, about 60 km from Calcutta, where Skychildren supports a school dedicated to boys and girls, the children of mostly illiterate laborers and farmers, who grew up in disadvantaged conditions in one of the poorest areas of India.

With our school, we want to provide quality education for the children, engage them in **recreational activities** that help them develop their cognitive and interpersonal skills and foster their growth and self-esteem.

Raising **awareness among parents and the entire community** is an essential component of the project. It is of paramount importance to make parents understand, through specific meetings with teachers, the importance of education and how to support their children to continue their studies instead of pushing them into child labor and child marriages.

- **123** pupils attend our school
Rising Star



★ Holistic Disciplines

Painting without following a model or a goal to achieve, free from conditioning and judgment, following one's own rhythm, just for one's own pleasure, becomes an **opportunity for gratification, an opportunity for growth, and a source of self-esteem** for our street children. Following the principles of **Arno Stern's Closlieu**, our volunteer **Luisa Adami** has activated a space for free and creative painting in some of the school centers and shelters supported by Skychildren.

In our centers, boys and girls can also practice **yoga, karate, sports, engage in dance and theatrical, music and poetry workshops**: access to these activities gives street children the opportunity to express skills hitherto unknown to the child himself, who gains confidence and deep satisfaction from them, laying the foundation for building confidence in the classroom, making children more self-sufficient and contributing to the development of the whole person.





Supporting studies beyond the age of 16

Turning the hopes and dreams of some young men and women students in the slums of Calcutta into reality: this is the purpose of the Young Students project, behind which are faces and stories of girls and boys who are building, thanks to our support, their future.

With our local workers, we saw the need to support some male and female students in the last 12 to 18 months of high school, because receiving, precisely during these school months, adequate external support is essential to acquire a certain GPA and to prepare to **brilliantly pass the final high school exam**, a prerequisite for gaining access to the desired university paths. For these boys and girls, Skychildren's support will continue during their college years, after which the students will have the opportunity to quickly enter the world of work, acquiring **financial independence** and thus being able to be supportive of their families of origin and the entire community.

For boys and girls who after Class X do not wish to continue their studies or after Class XII will not enter university, Skychildren offers the opportunity to access vocational training and vocational courses dedicated to tailoring, computer science and beautician courses, depending on inclinations.

- **10** are the male and female students we support with this project



SUCCESS STORY

Adi, a 12-year-old boy, lives with his father, mother, and three siblings. Adi's father is a bricklayer and works in their home village in Bihar, a state in India. Adi's father took him to work as his helper. **Adi dropped out of school when he was attending Class II** in his village, and his father, since becoming his helper, has not enrolled him in school. Adi started earning money at a very young age, which, over time, caused him to lose all interest in his studies.

In 2019, his aunt took him with her to Calcutta. Teachers at our bridge school in Central **spotted Adi and enrolled him in the center**. Adi showed a strong interest in **starting school again**, his aunt and uncle encouraged him to continue his studies, and welcomed the idea of sending him to our center. After some time, Adi's father came to Calcutta with the intention of bringing him back to his home village. However, Adi's aunt and uncle objected to the idea of him returning to work; the center's tutor spoke with his father about the importance for Adi to receive proper education and training, also explaining **the benefits that education can bring to Adi's future life**. After several counseling meetings, the father agreed to leave him in Calcutta with his aunt's family, send him to the center, and re-enroll him in school.

During his stay at our bridge school in Central, the teachers found some **behavioral problems** and recommended some **counseling sessions** for Adi. Adi, newly arrived, was very shy, could not bond with other children and was not willing to participate in any activities. Through **motivational counseling, play therapy, and relaxation techniques**, Adi improved a lot in his interpersonal relationships and his interest in studying increased. He attended non-formal support classes at the center for about a month and later enrolled in government school.

Today Adi **attends class VI**. He is jovial and studies diligently. He interacts more with teachers and friends. He participates in all educational and extracurricular activities at the center and school. Academically, he is very motivated to continue his studies and has shown significant improvement.

PROTECTING HIGH-RISK CHILDREN



Of the 13 million children worldwide who are trafficked each year, the majority appear to be from India itself. These are statistical estimates, because typically these children do not have birth certificates and therefore “do not exist” in the eyes of society. What is certain, however, is that everyday thousands of lonely children who have fled abuse, violence, and poverty or who have been abducted or are simply lost are at risk of becoming involved in this human trafficking. Little ones who run away from their families, from even very distant villages to other countries, out of fear or misery, or who are forcibly removed from them and **are lured to Calcutta from the big train stations and bad neighborhoods**. They come there in search of salvation, with a desire for adventure, for a better life, but end up living among the rails and platforms stunned by the cheapest and therefore most devastating drugs, to be **kidnapped, raped, forced into prostitution, child labor, outright slavery**.

Our goal is to stop them in time and **give them rescue and protection**, but also to track them down when they are already in the brothels or invisible in the stations. Thus, we have activated a specialized and dedicated team of workers who man the city's most high-risk locations (2 million people a day transit Sealdah station alone) to locate the little ones before it is too late. We have, over the years, refurbished houses to serve as emergency shelters where we protect these children in the first instance, and we have long been dedicated to the ambitious project of reunification, to bring them back, whenever possible, to the affection of their families.

Rescue Team



A 24/7 emergency response team constantly monitors some of the most sensitive areas of the city and responds promptly and effectively to any emergency affecting the most vulnerable children living on the roadway and along the railroad tracks.

We have been working on this project since 2017, and over the years we have created a close **network of collaborations** to involve the relevant agencies, raising their awareness of the urgency of the problem and the need for a common and structured intervention. In fact, the rescue operations of our team take place in coordination with the railway police, anti-trafficking units, judicial authorities and other institutional entities.

To prevent and resolve emergency situations such as abuse, child exploitation, abduction, and violence, **our team works in three stages:**

- **by continuously scouring the most at-risk areas** such as crowded transit terminals, remittances, markets, train stations in search of lonely and vulnerable children;
- **by promptly intervening in emergencies**, providing basic relief in the presence of a psychologist as well to help the child feel more protected and to manage the trauma in the immediate aftermath; in the post-rescue phase, our workers take the child to the hospital for immediate treatment and to the police for completion of necessary legal procedures.
- The Rescue Team **follows the child after the rescue** in all the bureaucratic needs, supports him during medical checks, accompanies him to the temporary emergency shelter. Once the rescue phase is over, if he is not reunited with his family, the child is placed in a long-term protection and reception system.



Emergency shelters



Since 2018, Skychildren has been responsible for the renovation of some structures in the city so that **they could host children in a state of emergency to welcome them, protect them**, facilitate the immediate management of trauma, provide psychosocial and medical support even in the event of multiple levels of trauma. By law, boys and girls must reside in separate protected homes, so we have restored two different buildings, with child-friendly furnishings and colors, which each house dormitories for **50 girls/boys**, a space for first aid and individual psychological support, indoor and outdoor leisure areas, kitchen and meal area. The renovation of our first emergency home was identified by the Government as a **"national reference pilot project"**.

The children saved by our Rescue Team are taken to these shelters: as soon as they enter, they are assisted in their immediate needs with the aim of immediately building a relationship of trust that allows our operators to understand their needs and the cause led away from home. Thanks to the contribution of our psychologists, **a personalized path of physical and emotional recovery is designed in view of family reunification**. The aim is to strengthen the child's skills through education and training on transversal skills useful for daily life.

- With our 2 emergency homes **we save 797 children in a year**, but the ultimate objective is always to reunite them with their families in the shortest possible time, after having verified their suitability and provided the right support so that the family can truly be the best place for baby to grow up.

Reunification

Nearly 80,000 children, according to the Indian Government itself - data from March 2022 - are "guests" (actually prisoners) in several thousand **"government children's institutions", more similar to real prisons than orphanages**. The United Nations Assembly, in 2019, recognized that orphanages harm children and it was highlighted that over 80% of children residing in these long-term facilities have living close relatives. Supporting de-institutionalization and **investing in the family reunification process** is therefore a fundamental step for the salvation of these children and Skychildren has created an effective reunification model, also recognized in the guidelines for juvenile justice in India. Having noted the positive results, from 2021 **the Government has formally tasked us with also caring for children who are in "government homes"** (public orphanages-prisons) and in shelters supported by other NGOs.



Reunification is a delicate and complex operation, which develops in different phases:

- **trace the biological family**, a process that can be long and difficult when the child is too young to collaborate in the search and perhaps comes, as often happens, from other states;
- **strengthen the family** and allow it access to public economic support programs: parents are almost always illiterate, live below the poverty level and need help in submitting the subsidy request; accompany children and family in rebuilding a bond that has sometimes been broken for years (often in the cases of children coming from government homes);
- **raise awareness among children, parents and the community** about children's rights, the importance of education and the dangers of child labor, early marriage and trafficking, so that the problems that led to the child's removal are resolved;

- create a "**safety net**" in the area, bringing local individuals and institutions to collaborate in the interest of the child;
- **invest in long-term follow-up** (from 6 months to 2 years, depending on the case), in order to prevent the child from falling back into situations of re-victimisation, through in-person visits, remote meetings, telephone calls, indirect checks via the network of relationships built in the local community.

These are very demanding and expensive operations, which require **motivated, trained and qualified personnel**, such as psychologists, social workers, teachers, lawyers and **careful individual planning**.

If the necessary conditions for family reintegration are not present or the family cannot be traced, the minor is placed in one of the long-term reception homes such as the "shelter for abused girls" supported by Skychildren; in some cases the possibility of foster care or adoption opens up for the child.

- In one year we reunited **488 children** with their families

★ Children from the red light districts



Girls born in these areas of the city are often **introduced to prostitution** around the age of 10: for this reason, for years we have been taking care of the children of prostitutes and their safe survival within these neighborhoods.

To date, 235 children/young people aged 3 to 18 and 15 young adults aged 18 and over attend our Centre. The objective is to give them training support to help them enter or re-enter their school career and to ensure that they do not abandon it, to enable them to reach at least 10 years of school attendance. Inside the center the children have access, in addition **to psychological assistance and help in carrying out homework, to workshops for leadership development**, which over the years has led to the creation of a group acting as guardians 24 hours a day, day 7 days a week, a point of reference for children who find themselves facing difficult situations.

Among the activities carried out during the year, meetings with neighborhood mothers continue to involve them in initiatives against child abuse, including sexual abuse, early marriages, intergenerational initiation into prostitution and trafficking of prostitutes under 18 years of age .

- **235 children/young people** attend the Centre



Invisible railway children



The first project we dedicated ourselves to years ago to protect vulnerable children living on the tracks was recognized as so successful that it was taken over directly by the Government of India. Over the years, we have therefore activated a similar program in another area, considered one of the most critical railway hubs in West Bengal, creating **2 reception centers** and an **emergency kiosk open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week** to which children they can contact if necessary.

- This year we identified **305 children** in need along the tracks, of which **289 came into contact with our centres**.
- Among these, **76 children** were accompanied on their path to education and finally enrolled in public school.
- **89 children** at high risk of dropping out of school were included in the "bridging education" program in order to support them to reach a learning level corresponding to their age.
- **90 boys and girls** and teenagers regularly attend **football lessons**, which are always structured so that they are an opportunity to learn not only about discipline, but also about children's rights, individual responsibility and social protection.
- **60 children and adolescents** attend the **karate course**, which is strategic for self-defense, discipline and the ability to determine. This year we are particularly proud because one of our girls became a black belt.

SUCCESS STORY

Rina (not her real name) is a 15 year old girl.

He lived in a slum with his brothers and father. Her mother left the family when Rina was very young, her father is unemployed. Rina's story is rather unfortunate: **she never had the opportunity to attend school**, forced to work tirelessly every day to survive.

Rina, together with her sister, **sold joss sticks in Sealdah station**, while her other brother took care of the house by doing all the household chores. Selling joss sticks wasn't enough, so **Rina started begging**.

One day Rina met a 17-year-old boy named Rakib, who worked as a tailor in a clothing store, and fell in love with him. Rina falls into Rakib's trap without knowing his true intentions and **allows herself to be convinced to marry him**, quickly, without informing her family. Soon Rakib shows his true colors. He comes home every night in a drunken state, physically abuses and sexually harasses Rina, scratches her and hits her all over her body.

Rina runs away, starts selling incense and begging in the station again.

One day Rina **was noticed by the station police and entrusted to our emergency shelter**, where the doctors realized that the girl was three months pregnant. Rina was in shock, traumatised, suffering from panic attacks, insomnia due to the abuse she had endured and a **sudden pregnancy at such a young age**. In hospital, after several sessions with the psychologist, she underwent a medical termination of the pregnancy.

Afterwards, he continued sessions with the psychologist to reduce the trauma and practiced relaxation techniques, deep breathing exercises, yoga and meditation to treat insomnia and panic attacks. The little girl has shown obvious changes: she is now able to sleep at night without having nightmares, her panic attacks and traumas have reduced. In our refuge Rina **is learning to read and write** and also takes dance, music, art and self-defense courses. Our operators are working to track down the father and **return the girl to her family**.

HEALTH CARE



The children we save from violence, that we send to school, that we protect from traffickers, belong to communities that **do not have access to any type of healthcare, not even basic**. They are often born on the sidewalks or in slums, but not in hospitals and are therefore not registered in the registry office: they do not have a birth certificate, so **for the government they do not exist**, even when they need treatment. Our intervention cannot therefore ignore a response to their health needs: we are committed to this front by **organizing fixed moments of assessment and assistance "at home"** in their communities through itinerant clinics, supporting the Hope Hospital for street people through the supply of diagnostic and operating instruments and with the construction and development of the entire laboratory department.

We assist disabled children in the countryside, who before our care had never left their shacks, we provide psychological support and therapy courses to traumatized children gathered in our emergency shelters, residential homes and street schools. But the broadest commitment with the greatest impact on society is the educational one: in each of our projects, qualified patient operators monitor the pavements, the shantytowns, the rural villages where we provide assistance and our schools to inform children and families about the **basic rules of hygiene**, on the necessary vaccination coverage, on the correct use of medicines distributed by our healthcare workers. Attention to non-infectious food and water is also crucial in the desperate living conditions of these people: for this reason we built a well for drinking water in the countryside near Calcutta.

★ Traveling clinics



Health checks are held once a week **in one of the most degraded illegal slums** in the city and once a month **in some rural villages** of West Bengal. We work in areas inhabited by migrants and illiterate farmers who live **far from hospitals**, in situations of extreme poverty and mainly without birth certificates, therefore **excluded from government health services**.

The project takes the form of setting up a **temporary clinic and a dispensary** that allows the inhabitants of the area to access **free basic medical care**, such as visits, vaccination prophylaxis, drug therapies and nutritious meals for newborns. Our staff is made up of 4 doctors, 4 nurses, 2 social workers and 3 volunteers.

Activities carried out for each patient:

- Medical examination, identification of serious cases, definition of treatment, prescription of medicines, medications (doctors and nurses)
- Distribution of medicines (nurse)
- Management of medical records (volunteers and social worker)
- Counseling (social worker)
- Transport to hospital by ambulance (severe cases)
- Follow-up/control (volunteers and nurse)

A **personal hygiene kit** consisting of soap, toothpaste and toothbrush is also distributed. Women of childbearing age are given sanitary towels and birth control pills.

Patients who require **"second level" medical care** are taken by ambulance to government hospitals or to the Hope charitable hospital, supported by us, to carry out diagnostic tests or be hospitalized: we have established a network of collaboration with these structures , which allows us to guarantee free treatment, even at second level.

The project includes an important component of **"counselling" by qualified social workers**: knowledge of the most widespread diseases, the importance of prevention, personal hygiene, check-ups, early diagnoses, the importance of to have a birth certificate. In these moments of meeting we also inform people about the existence of government programs, the importance of accessing them and how to do it with our support (they are mainly illiterate, they also need assistance to fill out the forms).

Also of great importance is the **follow-up activity**, i.e. the checks that the operators carry out subsequently, family by family, to verify that the medicines delivered are not resold, forgotten or taken incorrectly.

- In the reference period we set up **93 traveling clinics**, treated **6,500 people** who did not have access to medical care, of which **2,195 were children**.
- In the countryside - 48 traveling clinics - treated 4,438 patients, of which 3,212 adults and 1,226 children.
- In the illegal slum - 45 clinics - treated 2,062 patients including 1,093 adults and 969 children.





Instruments for the hospital and analysis laboratory



Our support to the hospital for street people has been constant **for 13 years** and takes the form of **donating diagnostic or surgical instruments** necessary to provide specialized medical care.

The HOPE hospital guarantees **quality and completely free healthcare, therapeutic and diagnostic treatment** to disadvantaged people living on the streets and in slums below the poverty line. They are "invisible" people, without the possibility of accessing any government support, unable to receive appropriate medical care. The hospital, opened in 2008, is a beacon of reference and salvation managed by first-rate doctors: today it employs a staff of 80 people, 40 doctors, has 32 inpatient beds and 10 intensive care beds, 2 rooms operating rooms, 1 clinic which also offers eye care and dental care, 1 diagnostic and surgery center with endoscopy rooms and a dialysis unit and an analysis laboratory. All types of operations can be performed except cardiovascular surgery. Part of the hospital is also a street-facing pharmacy. The hospital also provides day hospital services. Over the years, we have donated: electrosurgical units; dental unit; forceps; orthopedic reamer; BIPAP; mechanical lung ventilator; audiometer; Skin Graft Mesher (to make the skin sample suitable for grafting on the patient who has suffered severe burns and is subject to severe infections) medical equipment for performing endoscopies (gastrosopies, colonoscopies and ultrasonography).

In 2022 we opened a **laboratory for medical analyses** inside the hospital and donated diagnostic tools and new generation machinery to equip **5 specialized departments**:

- Biochemistry (blood tests and evaluate levels of lipids, urea, blood sugar, etc.)
Pathology (tests urine, feces and other body fluids)
- Microbiology (identification of bacteria, viruses, parasites and fungi and diagnosis of infections)
- Histopathology (analysis of tissues and cells under the microscope)
- Immunochemistry (evaluation of antibodies in biological fluids including serum, urine, and cerebrospinal fluid, to test the immune system)

The samples were previously sent to third party laboratories, now they are processed internally. The specialized laboratory significantly increases the medical and health care services offered by the hospital to **carry out diagnoses in a shorter time**, develop an optimal treatment plan and better manage patient care. The specialist laboratory also used by other medical centers and external hospitals is therefore a precious **source of income** which is added to that of **low-middle class solvent patients** who can access treatments at discounted rates based on their availability.

Thanks to the laboratory we donated, the hospital is now able to independently cover almost all costs and thus allow free access to treatment to more and more needy and vulnerable people.

The hospital also guarantees a **territorial coverage service**: an ambulance travels the streets and slums of Calcutta at night with a doctor, nurse and medicines on board, to identify and provide aid to people living on the margins of society and bring them promptly to hospital when necessary.

- In the reference period, thanks to the equipment donated by Skychildren, **6,632 patients were treated**, including **2,226 children** and **4,406 adults**.
- Analysis laboratory: **3,362 patients treated**, of which **1,064 children**.
- **16,295 laboratory tests** were carried out.

★ Disabled children



Before the arrival of our **physiotherapist, speech therapist, wheelchairs and walkers**, children with severe disabilities living in rural villages outside Calcutta survived in a reality that simply ignored them, were left to fend for themselves or in the care of inexperienced young mothers, unable to help them. In fact, these children are normally unable to leave their huts and, frequently, this means that they remain completely alone, without any comfort or social comparison while their mothers work in the fields. They are thus destined, by this **isolation and the impossibility of attending school**, to see their physical and above all intellectual and relational difficulties worsen. If they survive, once adults they have no hope of autonomy and almost always end up living by begging. In 2021 we noticed them when we went to visit the "homes" of the children who attend our school and we immediately felt the strong urgency to intervene.

Twice a week a qualified speech therapist helps them improve speech-related disorders and learning difficulties. The physiotherapist follows the 5 children most in need of care 5 times a week and the other children in slightly less critical conditions 3 times a week; the physiotherapist carries out the treatments and teaches mothers how to assist their children and perform the most suitable gymnastics to treat their motor dysfunctions. The sessions are 45 minutes.

Children who require a diagnosis or special treatment are accompanied by our operators to the NILD (National Institute of Locomotor Disabilities), where they undergo an examination and in-depth tests following which specific medicines and therapies are prescribed. **These treatments and therapies are very important** because, in addition to offering concrete physical and cognitive progress, an improvement in autonomy and pain, they represent **great support for families**.

From this year we have opened **a special class for 5 disabled children** within our school in the countryside. A beautiful classroom with child-friendly drawings on the walls and special blue wooden desks tailored to their physical needs. A qualified teacher assists them and, through games, teaches them basic notions, the alphabet and numbers. The mothers and a care giver also take care of giving the children a nutritious snack during break times.

The children and their mothers are taken to school and back home by **school bus**.

- We take care of **12 children** who lack motor autonomy due to serious physical and/or cognitive disabilities.



SUCCESS STORY

Babu is 15 years old today, his father is a day laborer, his mother does odd jobs because she has to take care of her disabled son. The parents are illiterate and live in the countryside north of Calcutta. Babu had to leave school because his physical condition worsened as he grew older and he was unable to walk or talk.

He is a weak child, with severe scoliosis and problems of significant rigidity in the lower and upper limbs.

When we first met him he couldn't stand up, he wasn't able to do anything with his hands, including putting food into his mouth. Even sitting or lying on the ground was difficult for Babu.

The **physiotherapist** consistently treated her stiff limbs **twice a week** and taught her mother some exercises that she needs to do every day. We donated a ball to help him with his gymnastics, a **special aid for pedaling and one to move his arms and shoulders** and thus improve flexibility and increase muscles.

Following the initial improvements, we also **provided a walker and prosthetics to help him stand**. Once a month he is given super protein food to support muscle improvement. The speech therapist takes care of Babu twice a week and his speech problem has improved slightly. Today Babu **can lie down and sit on the floor** without the aid of pillows, his body is no longer so shrunken, he is able to turn around on his own, sit on the chair and eat on his own. Since last year we have inaugurated a class for "our specialchildren" in our school in the countryside. Babu is taken to school by minibus, **his sky blue wooden desk awaits him in his classroom**, a special desk, adapted to him. At school he is learning the basics, how to pronounce a few words and how to count.



Psychological assistance and family counseling

Each of our projects includes an important component of **counseling for children and of involving and strengthening their family** and the community in which they live.

On a monthly basis we organize meetings with parents at school and in parallel our staff carries out **"home visits"** to make adults, in particular fathers, understand the role they have in their children's lives. The involvement action continues in the community, where our operators go around together with the children, members of the support group/volunteers and some parents and hold meetings and awareness-raising seminars. The older children, with the help of the teachers, prepare useful signs at school to explain the various topics to the younger ones and to people who have more difficulties.

In all our classes, **motivation and refresher courses are held every 3 months** with the **10-member community support group** on the importance of receiving education and how to plan their work with the community together. These volunteers play an essential role in helping spread awareness within communities.

During counseling and awareness meetings, topics such as:

- prevention: its importance are discussed sanitary conditions: how to improve them
- health: how to receive basic medical care and free medicines menstrual cycle of girls: related problems
- family planning: use of the pill, how to obtain it, how to use it
- nutrition: importance of receiving at least one nutritious meal a day and which is guaranteed in class, often the only one of the day
- Child labor: the severity and its impact
- child marriage: consequences and how teachers can stop it with the help of the law difference between "safe and unsafe touch": to prevent sexual abuse and harassment education at least up to class X: how to access it and its impact. These children will be the first educated generation in their family
- training courses: how to access them and impact
- gender discrimination: we are all equal
- reduce expenses for addictions: alcohol, gambling
- importance of having savings: even if small (they suffered from hunger, they survived during the Covid lock down thanks to the food rations distributed) and saving for their children's education

- birth certificate (or digital identity)
- social rights: theirs and their children's
- Government welfare programs: existence and how to apply. Predominantly illiterate parents must be helped to produce documentation
- opening a bank account: preparatory to any application for social support



Solar panel well

It is estimated that in India less than 50% of the population has access to safely managed drinking water and that two-thirds of the districts are severely affected by an extreme water crisis (Unicef report). In West Bengal, arsenic contamination of drinking water sources is a widespread problem, causing cardiovascular disease, skin lesions and other health problems. In 2022 we built a well for drinking water in a rural village inhabited by around **2,000 families of which 1,700 live below the poverty level**. The existing public pumps near the village do not work and in any case are not able to reach the depth necessary to supply drinking water. The water table dropped and was contaminated by arsenic. In order to pump water without contamination, the well was dug down to 1200 feet (about 356 m). The water was tested in **government-certified laboratories and the “certificate of purity” was issued**.

The well is **powered by solar panels** because solar energy is ideal where the electricity grid does not reach or is often interrupted by monsoons (not least the impact on the environment is zero).

Once a month our operators check that the well is working regularly, organize the necessary maintenance and promote **awareness meetings** during which they explain the importance of drinking safe, drinkable water and how they can obtain it by reaching our well.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



So that all the initiatives we implement to save, educate, care for and raise our children to be **sustainable** and therefore **successful in the long term**, it is essential that they also trigger a real and profound change in the entire community. Parents, families and teachers who revolve around our little ones must change their approach to childhood, so that the education of their children becomes the priority of mothers and fathers, so that the safety of these children is at the centre of the neighbourhood's interest and so that their healthy growth becomes the mission of the peer group.

Every year, approximately 16 million Indian children are **not even recognised in their identity**: their birth, which occurs on a sidewalk or in a shanty town, to illiterate parents, is not registered. This lack marks their entire life, as it implies exclusion from any system of assistance and public services. The child, not being registered at the registry office, has no right to school, medical care or even an official report to the police in the event of violence or disappearance. In each of our projects we work to **inform and educate families and parents** about the importance of these bureaucratic steps for the future of their children.

★ Identity certificates



An important part of our work is to spread awareness among the most vulnerable local communities of the importance of **obtaining an identity document**. Through periodic workshops, parents understand how crucial it is for their children's future to send them to school, to guarantee them an official identity, to rely on the government support network and thus access subsidies and social assistance programs, which are essential to improve their socio-economic condition.

On a monthly basis, our staff visits families at their "home" and supports them in the process of **obtaining digital identity and government support**: the operators identify and accompany the most vulnerable people to the designated offices to carry out biometric recognition, cover the costs, prepare all the required documentation, fill out the online forms and submit the request for contributions in order to access government programs.

- **40 birth certificates** obtained 227 Adhar cards obtained



Access to government subsidy programs

In addition to supporting them in acquiring identity certificates, we help families in difficulty to gain **access to government subsidy programs**, such as:

Opening a **bank account**: essential to apply for government subsidies

Ration card: **to be able to collect, free or at a discounted rate, basic food rations from** the nearest government store

Secondary and tertiary **medical coverage** for each family

Financial assistance for women belonging to lower classes and particular ethnic groups, provides a cash transfer of 500, 1000 or more rupees per month depending on the category they belong to, support for old age and for the grandchildren entrusted to them

Scholarships for adolescent girls: an annual scholarship of 500 rupees to continue their education and one of 25,000 rupees upon their 18th birthday

Support to enable the growth and **empowerment of adolescent girls**, to improve their nutrition, health and to promote birth control

Financial support for children belonging to the underprivileged classes and attending classes V to VIII; it consists of a scholarship of 500 rupees per year to continue their education

A **credit card** that students from class X and above can apply for; it is a support to continue their studies in India or abroad granted to the most deserving students

- **604** accesses to programs for children
- **399** accesses to programs for parents





Disclosure of children's rights, child and parent monitoring groups



A fundamental part of our projects involves the creation of **groups of young people** and **groups of adults** who are able to create a "bridge" between the most vulnerable people within their community and our operators.

The groups of adults are made up of parents and other members of the community. The **message transmitted "from peer to peer" is very effective**: their action has proven in some cases to be fundamental in making illiterate parents understand the importance of education for their children, to spread awareness, to promptly identify projects of early marriage, sale of minors, domestic violence and intervene before it is too late.

Groups of children are identified in each class and have the task of identifying within the community minors who have never attended school or have dropped out, **situations of danger or violence**. Their help is also fundamental in motivating their classmates to attend lessons regularly and not to abandon their studies. Thanks to their leadership skills, they are extremely attentive and efficient in intercepting the risk of early marriage, trafficking and abuse among their peers.

CASO DI SUCCESSO

In one of the slums where we operate, there is a very poor immigrant family: a father, a mother and two children aged 8 and 15.

The father works as a day laborer and the mother is a domestic worker.

The 8-year-old boy has **never attended school** and the eldest had to **drop out and start working** in a tea stall to help the family.

Members of one of our **child watch groups** identified the eldest boy who worked in the tea stall. They befriended him and learned about the family's conditions. They spoke to the parents and explained how **our bridge schools work**.

The parents initially agreed to enroll their youngest child, but since the eldest earned money, they were reluctant to enroll him in the center. The watch group discussed the problem with the owner of the tea stall and convinced the parents and the stall owner that **education was a priority for the boy**, who then started attending our class.



Main moments of meeting and fundraising organized in 2023 -2024 with our supporters

- Christmas aperitif at the “Salotto di Milano” in Milan
- Lunch to present the projects in India for the guests of the Rotary Club Monza
- Guided tours of the main exhibitions of the Milanese season accompanied by Professor Alberto Marchesini (El Greco, Morandi, Van Gogh, De Nittis, Goya, Moroni, Picasso, Renoir and Rodin).
- Concert entitled “Piano, Amore e Fantasia” with Maestro Michele Perego at the Sporting Club of Monza
- Charity dinner organized by the “Amiche della Franciacorta” at the Saint Georges Premier in Monza
- Golf competition “Baldinini Golf Cup” guests of Brianza Golf & Country Club
- Private parties by our supporters for baptisms, communions, confirmations, birthdays, graduations and weddings accompanied by personalized Skychildren postcards
- Fundraising via Facebook and the [skychildren.org](https://www.skychildren.org) website
- Stoles, belts, bags and clothing, strictly made in India by the Calcutta Rescue Association at Antognelli Abbigliamento in Monza and Chris Cerf in Milan
- Lamps and necklaces made by Luisa Adami, at the Volta 26 store in Monza

Other ways to donate... and it doesn't cost you anything:

On your tax return, in the box dedicated to **5x1000**, write our tax code: **94621150153**. Thanks to your contribution, we will be able to increase our initiatives to fight against poverty, violence, ignorance and injustice.

You can support Skychildren in a very special way: the **Testamentary Bequest**. This form of support, while continuing to guarantee the rights of those close to you, allows you to help the most defenseless and vulnerable children in the world. Your gesture of love and solidarity will allow you to continue to live in the memory, life and future of these children. In this way, you will be able to be reborn in school books, in drinking water and in the medical care that we will guarantee with our work.

"Immortality is what you leave on this earth" Dalai Lama

With the patronage and collaboration of the National Council of Notaries.

How to donate:

- online by visiting our website: **www.skychildren.org**
- bank transfer IBAN **IT 89 K 0344 0204 0200 0000 437100**
- via **paypal**
- you can help us by **letting friends and acquaintances know** about our non-profit organization

You can be the protagonist

If you too have the pleasure of **organizing a solidarity event** for the benefit of Indian children (with your friends at your home, in a venue, with a crowdfunding campaign, for your birthday, for Christmas greetings, for a baptism, etc.), contact us to have all the information material on our work to share with your guests. Celebrating an important moment by doing good is always a great gratification for all the people involved! Organizing an event is not a simple thing and on the occasion of births, baptisms, communions, confirmations, graduations, weddings it is often difficult to choose the favors. These objects speak of you over time and remind relatives and friends of your important event. To give meaning and value to this memory, we can design customized solidarity postcards for you, which will be accompanied by a simple offer.

You can **create a fundraiser** for your birthday or for a special event through your Facebook page and share it with all your friends.

Contacts

If you would like to receive more information about our work or how to help us, you can visit our website www.skychildren.org, call us at +39 335 6652279 or write us an email at info@skychildren.org

Follow us on social media:



THANK YOU

We thank the Events Committee and the irreplaceable Volunteers for the commitment, energy and passion with which they organized all the fundraising events. We sincerely thank all the friends of Skychildren who have continued to support us this year.

It is really important for us to maintain transparency towards you and provide you with the reporting of how each contribution is transformed into concrete action: on our website you can see the Skychildren balance sheets reviewed by an independent auditor. We guarantee that 100% of what you donate goes directly to the street children of Calcutta.

We are fighting to ensure that all children can attend school regularly and learn to know and have their fundamental rights respected. Our goal is to save children and lead them by the hand to the end of their studies and economic independence. Your help, combined with the strength of many people, is the most powerful weapon we have to fight injustice. It is only thanks to your support, and that of sensitive people like you, that all this is possible and will continue to be possible.

We are very satisfied with the work done in the last year, even if there are so many difficulties to face on a daily basis. The political and social situation is constantly changing and we must periodically re-parameterize our objectives. Working in this country in contact with a reality so raw and profoundly different from ours is not easy, but these challenges stimulate us to an even more heartfelt commitment and fuel even more the deep desire to change the reality of these children. It gives us great joy to fight together to give them a better present and future!

Your support will bring about important changes in the lives of these children and in their community.

Thank you for always supporting us and always being by our side, we hope to continue to be the means to make you experience the joy and satisfaction that only concrete help towards those most in need can give. Taking care of someone is the best way to make them feel that they really matter to us.

The founding members

