

# Ek Baatcheet

Stories of parents, children, and  
learning during lockdown





# Foreword

---

As learning shifted online last year due to the pandemic, Saajha understood that several parents were unable to support their children in learning as they did not have access to smartphones. Thus we initiated a project with **150 households** where smartphones are provided to the homes which are in need. Further, parents are also supported on using these devices to ensure learning continues at home and they can create an enriching environment at home. Most of Saajha's call centre executives are trained mothers who can empathise with parents, address their concerns and provide adequate information and access to resources locally available. This booklet attempts to document experiences of parents and children with home learning during the second wave of Covid-19 in India, as told to our call centre executives. Following is a note by Neelam ji, one of our call centre executives about her team's experience of connecting with parents during this time:

*"My name is Neelam and I am here to share my team's and my calling experience.*

*The experience of calling 150 households was marvellous because we were calling those families who did not own a single smartphone and who were not able to support their children in their schoolwork. There were also some parents who did have a smartphone but were not able to support their children.*

When we began calling, we had to be careful to get the information we needed through the course of the conversation without informing the parents that they would be given a smartphone by Saajha. This was challenging for us to some extent, but we were able to do it within the stipulated time. The parents we spoke to were facing many challenges. Due to the Covid-19 lockdown, people did not have access to employment and ration. In addition to that, fear due to Covid-19 was at a high. It was difficult for them to leave their homes which were rented and cramped. This was especially tough for the children. These children and their parents were both anxious because they could not study for want of a smartphone. Their school teachers would advise them to buy a smartphone, but these parents could not afford to even buy ration to feed themselves regularly since the lockdown had affected their employment and sources of income adversely. These are some of the things that parents shared with us during the calls. These were our first calls to this set of parents but the conversations were easy and natural in a way that would make one believe that we have always known each other. It was good to talk to them and also to be able to complete our target of selecting 150 households to support. Our next task was to call these 150 parents and inform them that they would be receiving a smartphone and academic support from Saajha. The parents were overjoyed to hear that they would be receiving this support. They were quite emotional too, and thanked us profusely for caring for their children.

They had a few questions about the program:

- Will we be charged for this service later?
- Are you representatives of the school?

- *Has the government asked you to support us?*
- *People who tell us about such free of cost programs end up asking for money later. Will this happen here as well?*

*We answered these and other questions in a conversational manner.*

*In this manner, it was a different experience for us to have these conversations with parents. We were able to feel their happiness when they spoke to us. Parents always want their children to progress with education, and so they were ready to recharge their phones with an internet data pack every month, even if that meant that they had to ration their other expenses. It was evident upon talking to the parents that they cared about their children's studies a lot. We have formed a close bond with the parents of these 150 households."*



# A father supports learning during lockdown



Dharmendar ji\* lives in the Badarpur area of Delhi and works as a taxi driver. He has two sons, Amar and Sunny who study in 5th and 2nd grades respectively.

Dharmendar ji was happy to share his current situation and the challenges he was facing with our facilitator. He reported that due to the second wave of the pandemic, there was a dip in his work leading to financial hurdles. He added that since his neighbourhood was seriously affected by Covid-19, he and his family did not venture outside and all of them were cramped inside their small home. He said that his children were unhappy with this situation and wished to be able to go outside.

There is one smartphone in the family which belongs to Dharmendra ji, which is where his children access their schoolwork. Since he is a taxi driver, his children study on the phone whenever he is at home. Due to the lockdown, they are not able to go to tuition classes. He said that they are somehow able to manage their school work, although the pace at which it happens has slowed down. He and his spouse help their children with schoolwork. Dharmendar ji shared that they try their best, but hope for the pandemic to ease soon. It was evident that he was glad to hear from someone who wanted to know about his and his family's well-being and his sons' studies. He also reported that he was in regular touch with his sons' teachers.

Saajha's facilitator reassured Dharmendar ji with a few words of hope and caution and shared our incoming number and WhatsApp bot number with him for which he was thankful.



# A mother ensures learning despite adversity



Shabana Khatun\* lives in a slum in the Noor Nagar, Okhla area. She has three children who study in 5th, 4th, and 1st grades respectively.

Shabana Khatun was glad to receive Saajha's call. She and her family are going through an especially difficult time. In April this year, just as the second wave of the pandemic was climbing to its peak, there was a devastating fire in the Noor Nagar area which burnt down nearly 1000 shanties in Noor Nagar. Shabana Khatun's was one of them. She and her family were able to escape but all their belongings were lost in the fire, including their ration cards, documents, and their children's bags and books. She reports that since then, they have been having a hard time accessing ration and have been surviving on the kindness of NGOs who distribute food to the affected families in the area.

She said that they were able to save the one smartphone in the family, which belongs to her. This is the phone where her children receive their schoolwork. Her children's tuition teacher helps them with their schoolwork, and they take turns to use the phone while at work. Shabana ji said that it is highly inconvenient, but they have to manage. She supports her children at home.

She was eager for help from Saajha for studies and well as ration, and our representative assured her that she would receive the same.



# A father seeks accountability



Azaruddin\* ji lives in Okhla. He has three children, two of whom are in 7th and 2nd grades and the third is a toddler. A month and a half ago, his wife bought a smartphone on which their children and their niece receive their schoolwork.

Azaruddin ji is a teacher in a private law college and he helps his children with studies as much as he can. They do not attend tuition classes.

He reports that he is disappointed with the school. He did not receive the entire set of school books for his children for two years in a row. When he went to the school for the books, he was not able to meet the teacher or the principal. When his mother went to the school to collect worksheets, they were not available and neither did she meet anyone who could guide her and she returned empty-handed. There has been no contact with the new teacher. He has also not received the whole ration from the school.

Saajha's representative advised Azaruddin ji to co-ordinate with the SMC of his children's school which gave him hope.



# A mother supports continued learning



Manisha\* ji lives in the Badapur area and has four children, three of whom are in 8th, 7th, and 2nd grades and the the youngest who is 4 years old is disabled.

Manisha ji's husband is a labourer. Their family survives on ration received on their ration card. Manisha ji cannot leave the house to work since she has to look after her disabled child. She told Saajha's representative that her daughter has not received her textbooks for the 7th grade and her son's textbooks for 7th grade were recalled by the school as he progressed to the 8th. There is one smartphone in the family which stays with Manisha ji, where the children receive their schoolwork. She says that she supports her children in their studies. She sits with them after her housework and ensures that they spend time with their books. Her elder son and daughter both study using the 8th grade textbooks. Manisha ji and her husband go to the school to attend meetings and collect textbooks and ration. They are also in regular contact with the schoolteacher. Manisha ji reports that they are facing a challenge being able to afford milk for their disabled daughter and that is the only item of food she survives on. They cannot afford tuition classes either.

Our representative told Manisha ji about Saajha's helpline and bot and informed her that we would support her with her children's studies in these challenging times.







Saajha