

EMPOWERING MARGINALIZED OUT OF SCHOOL ADOLESCENT GIRLS & YOUNG WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL SKILLS AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Yawar Qaiyum¹, Bindu Chamoli¹, Anita Singh¹, Sunita Reddy², Shanti Raman³, & Rajeev Seth¹

1. Bal Umang Drishya Sanstha (BUDS), 2. Anthropos India Foundation, 3. South Western Sydney Local Health District, NSW 2170, Australia

Website: www.budsngo.org, Email: rajeevseth@budsngo.org

BACKGROUND

The impact of COVID-19 related lockdowns in India had deepened economic vulnerabilities and amplified discriminatory social systems. The lockdown meant restrictions on mobility, access to education, and lack of privacy for the adolescent girls in the marginalized communities. With little to no access to technology, these girls could not even resort to the companionship of their friends. Facing these hardships impacted their mental health adversely.¹

Bal Umang Drishya Sanstha (BUDS) (www.budsngo.org) is a non-profit organization, which operates in urban slums of India to provide a variety of health and development support services to vulnerable children and youth. During COVID pandemic, BUDS mobile health van (MHV) staff found that girls' education was negatively impacted, and many were at risk of violence and early marriage. Two new drop-in centers (DIC) were opened by BUDS during the pandemic to provide an 18-month long education strategy, vocational skills and leadership development for marginalized girls and young women around the intervention area.



ACTIVITIES

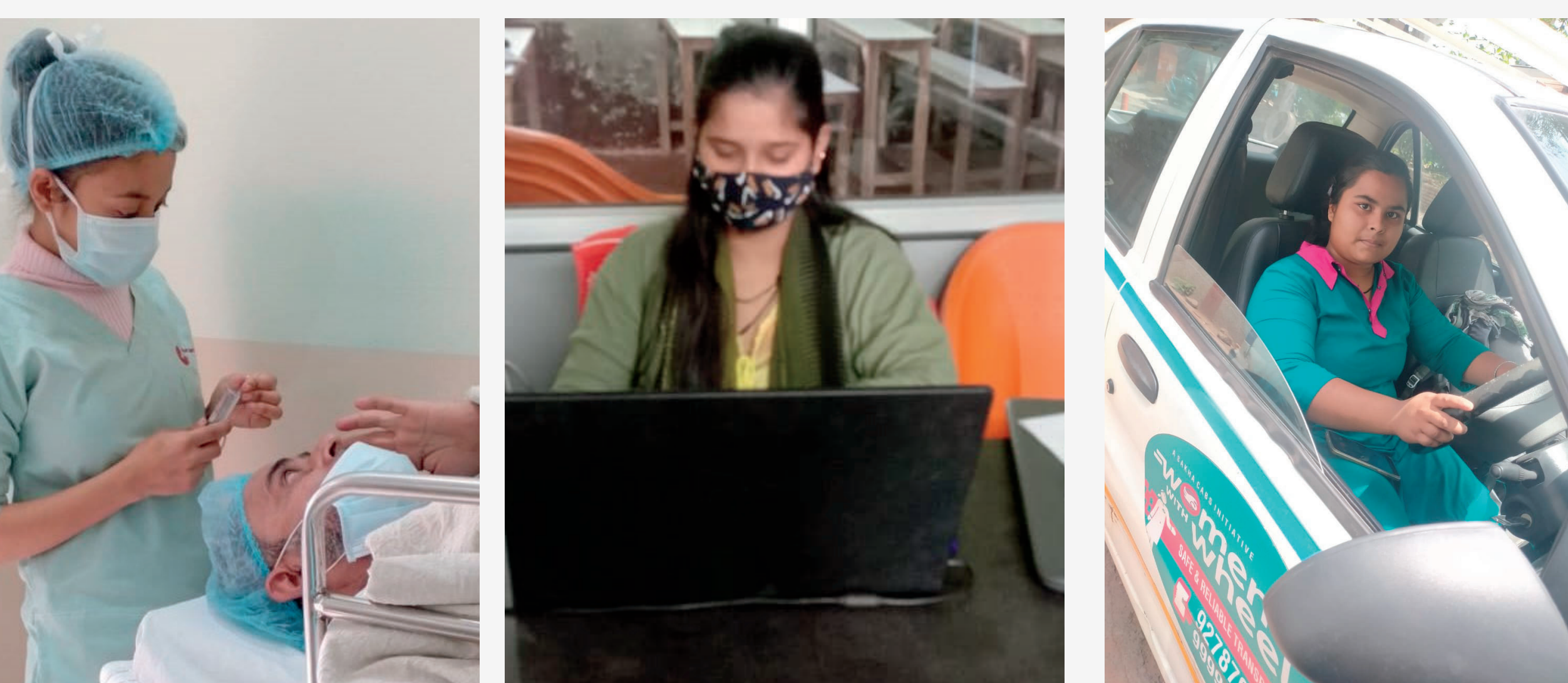
Alternative Functional Literacy program for marginalized adolescent girls and women

BUDS implemented two Parwaaz Adolescent Center for Education (PACE) programs to provide alternative education and skills development for marginalized adolescent girls and young adult women. The curriculum was developed by Nirantar, a Centre for Gender and Education (www.nirantar.net). The materials developed incorporated a women-centric approach and ensured learners view the ways of society through a gender-sensitive lens.



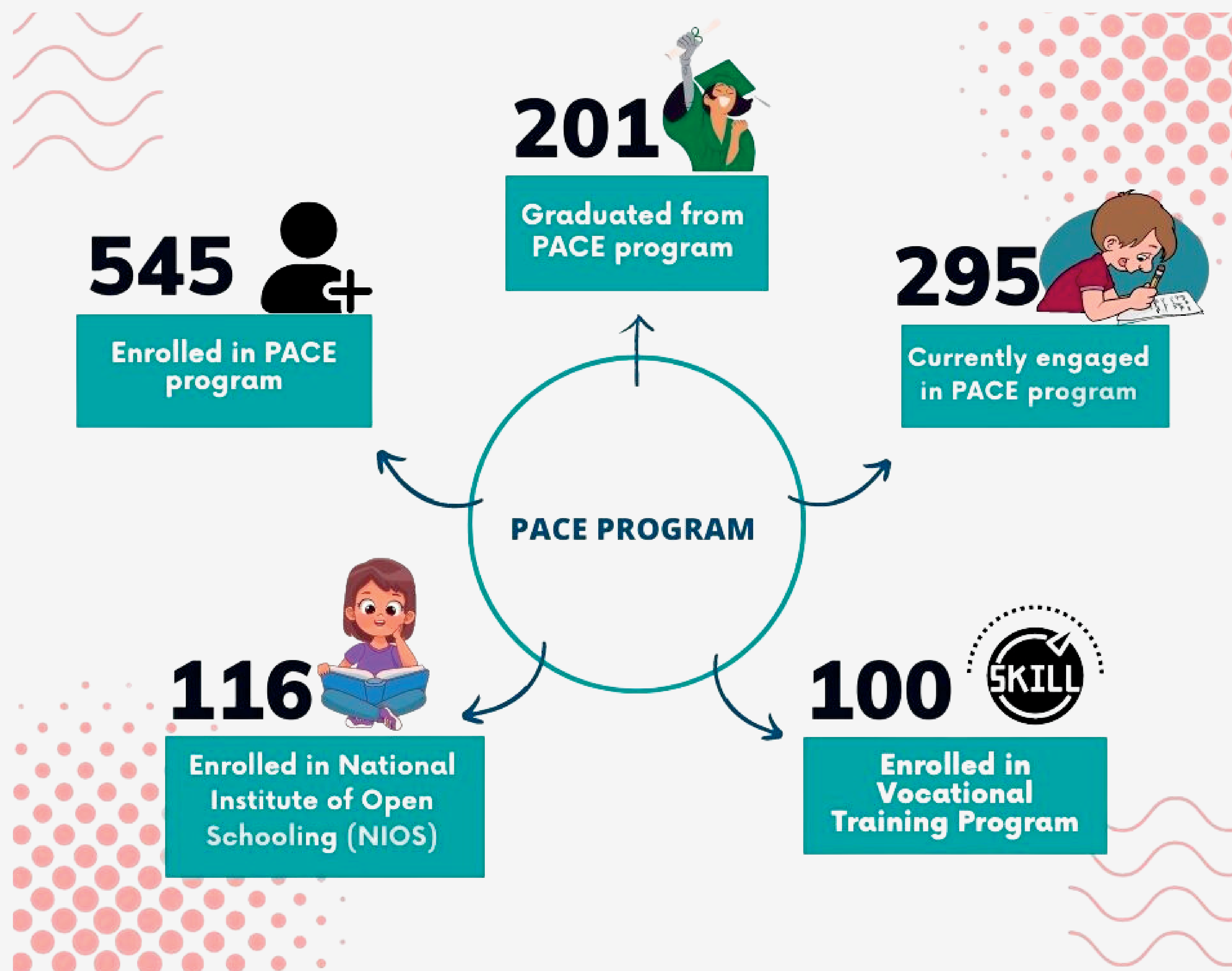
Vocational skills & leadership development program

During the COVID-19 lockdown, PACE centers were kept functional through access to learning through the digital medium. Alumni learners as peer leaders in the community, helped strengthen the young women's leadership, negotiation, and documentation skills, while connecting them to livelihood opportunities.



STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

Out of a total of 545 enrolled since 2018, 201 young women have graduated from the PACE program. During the COVID pandemic years (2020-2021), 100 individuals received skill development training with support from BUDS, out of which 24 individuals trained in the healthcare sector, 32 individuals in industrial sector, and 44 youth in the computer literacy program. During the relief work of the COVID-19 lockdown, we witnessed the current and alumni learners of PACE realizing their potential as change agents. Along with the teachers, they became an important support group for the relief work in the communities. Young women identified PACE centers a safe space for the learners to share their problems, family issues, open up about their relationships and just be themselves. Challenges of delivering the program were identifying committed learners; mobilizing girls through their families; and children from migrant families being at greater risk of dropping out.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. The effects of COVID-19 lockdown on the loss of livelihood and increased economic vulnerabilities in low-income settings.
2. Understanding lack of access to education, gender-based violence, increase mental health stress, in the lives of adolescent girls and young women.
3. Raising awareness about rights of marginalized children
4. The importance of understanding the gaps in child welfare and the specific needs of out of school adolescent girls and young women



References 1: Sharanya Napier, Shanti Raman, Ananya Rattani, Yawar Qaiyum, Vijayluxmi Bose, Rajeev Seth, BMJ Paediatrics Open 2021;5:e001171.

www.budsngo.org



CONTACT US: +91-11-41661237



INFO@BUDSNGO.ORG



E-10, GREEN PARK MAIN, NEW DELHI 110016, INDIA

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