

Your impact through

Women's Safety



Our Women's Safety program is dedicated to ending violence, abuse, and exploitation against women and girls in India.

We address two of the most prevalent and intractable forms of abuse – domestic violence and trafficking of young girls for sexual exploitation. The effects of the pandemic continued to worsen the circumstances for vulnerable girls and women between January and June 2021.

Opportunity's Women's Safety work in India is carried out with partner, My Choices Foundation, through two major initiatives: Operation PeaceMaker and Operation Red Alert.

Operation PeaceMaker aims to reduce domestic violence by working with empowered community women (PeaceMakers) who are trained in family and marriage counselling, and all aspects of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005). PeaceMakers refer women to our highly skilled professional counsellors, who handled over 1,200 cases in the last six months and more than 11,500 cases to date.

Operation Red Alert works throughout India to prevent child trafficking of young girls through grassroots education, a national helpline, and mass media campaigns. We are currently active in eight states in India, having continued to deliver the Safe Village Program throughout the pandemic to 512 communities reaching over 32,000 people.

This project is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Thanks to your support...

43,036 women benefited from our safety programs

Operation Red Alert delivered 512 Safe Village Programs to **32,044 beneficiaries**

The Operation Red Alert helpline received **7,151 calls informing 61 active cases**

50 PeaceMakers reached **10,992 beneficiaries**

Operation PeaceMaker handled **1,211 cases of domestic violence**

“

My Choices Foundation gave me a variety of legal options about my situation which proved beneficial. They also provided the best support and guidance when I was at my lowest and helped me boost my confidence. Today, I am much stronger and better equipped to protect myself.” **A beneficiary**

Voice of the program

‘My journey towards self-confidence’

When Arya was abandoned at a young age, she was brought up by well-wishers and other caretakers. Over time her fear of abandonment grew until she didn't know where to turn. Police officers who identified her as vulnerable to trafficking referred her to Operation PeaceMaker's Safe Home.

When she arrived at the house, Arya was withdrawn, she didn't talk or engage in any of the activities. She was afraid, extremely weak and had panic attacks. After psychological and medical assessment, Arya was given medication and counselling. Our counsellor helped Arya by encouraging her to express her feelings through art and music. It took some time before Arya opened up, but eventually, with support, she made a breakthrough and started talking about her fears and trauma.

During one of her counselling sessions, Arya mentioned that she felt safe for the first time. She had been moving from one home to another to have necessities met but now at the safe home, she did not have to worry about her safety.

With the help of our counsellor, Arya was able to locate an extended family member who was willing to take care of her. She lived with them for some time and eventually was able to marry a man of her choice with the help of her extended family.

Today, Arya is safe, strong, confident and empowered with coping mechanisms taught by our counsellors which continue to help her.

She shared that she had felt like a fish out of water with no love, support, family or genuine people to love and be loved by. Now she feels that she would like to get back into the stream of life, knowing her basic rights and having the strength to deal with challenges of mainstream society.

**Name changed*

Below: Women participating in community awareness programs on women's rights and safety in India.

These women have kindly given their permission to be photographed and featured in Opportunity International Australia's materials.



Strategic direction

With India grappling with the second wave of the pandemic in the first half of 2021, Operation PeaceMaker and Operation Red Alert realigned to the needs of the women we serve. Our safety programs worked to provide education, connection to various healthcare resources and psychological counselling to families affected by COVID-19.

COVID-19 has challenged us to reach out in new ways to those in need of help and support. The Operation PeaceMaker program offered telephone, online and in-person counselling. Our experienced domestic violence counsellors proactively analysed their client bases using our custom-built PeaceTracker software to identify and connect with every woman who might be at risk.

Simultaneously, our army of PeaceMakers – local women trained to be first responders to domestic violence – reached out to women in their communities to minimise the negative impacts of lockdown. We also ramped up our counselling services by launching an additional national helpline number for women and girls to seek help or counselling and report domestic violence, expanding our work into four additional states - Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and West Bengal.

As the pandemic spread, restricting field activities, we moved operations online. We conducted webinars to create awareness about gender-based violence, mental health, toxic masculinity and more.

Specific WhatsApp groups were created to continuously engage with our beneficiaries and provide access to information about gender-based violence and necessary services.

With school closures, increased screen time and mounting financial struggles, children were at higher risk of trafficking. Traffickers moved swiftly to take advantage of this increased vulnerability. Opportunity is working to leverage data and technology to better target our interventions and programs. We use social media and technology platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and YouTube with digital learning modules.

The Operation Red Alert program continues its important work through the Safe Village Program in rural Indian communities, aiming to reach 750 villages by the end of the year. The program will provide upskilling training to 500 volunteers – nodal teachers and Gram Mitras (community safety promoters) – as well as training 100 law enforcement officials in Telangana.

The focus for the next six months is a pilot project with local police on counselling domestic violence calls coming through the police emergency helpline, as well as training and sensitising the police to the signs of trafficking and domestic violence.

Sustainable Development Goals

Our Women's Safety programs contribute to multiple SDGs 5: Gender equality, 8: Decent work and economic growth, 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17: Partnerships for the goals; our work is primarily aligned with SDG 5: Gender equality.

The core message delivered through the PeaceMakers and the Safe Village Program is the elimination of violence against women and girls in all forms. Our programs aim to shift historical and culturally driven perceptions about women and girls by challenging social norms through education and training on gender equality, household decision-making, dangers of child marriage and domestic violence. This means being alert to signs of trafficking, empowering girls to become agents of change and through Respect2Protect, a program highlighting the role of men and boys in protecting women and girls.

Additionally, we are working to convene stakeholders from civil society groups, government agencies and NGOs whose work addresses SDG 5 to develop a cohesive response to support legal frameworks to address sex trafficking; child marriage and domestic violence.

“

Services provided by My Choices Foundation were beneficial. It was because of My Choices Foundation and you (counsellor) that I have become stronger and self-confident.” **A beneficiary**

Case Study

‘Poverty makes girls and women vulnerable to trafficking’

There is a direct link between the lack of education and poverty common in rural villages and increased child marriage, trafficking and domestic violence, as a counsellor from the Child Helpline tells:

‘Because rural land and opportunities are scarce, people migrate from rural areas to urban areas to earn a livelihood, often leaving children behind. Children themselves often have long commutes to their schools, which are far from the villages. Families who migrate are both more susceptible to trafficking-type threats and have less support to address those threats.

‘In many villages, having girls is cast as a burden. The dowry system is a big problem in these villages as a bride’s family pays the groom’s family for the cost of taking care of the bride. Traffickers come in all guises: sometimes relatives of the groom’s parents, part of trafficking networks, convince the bride’s parents that they can marry the girl-child into a good family without a dowry. They even give money to the parents.

‘We recently had a case where a girl’s aunt tried to get her trafficked. Because of the relatives’ involvement, the parents didn’t question her leaving.’

‘I am working to help women know their rights’

‘My name is Syeda Salma Sultan, I am 37 years old and I am a Peacemaker for My Choices. At 15 I got married, my husband was 25 – at first, we were happy but after five years my husband took my cousin as a second wife. After that I left him. I had two children and no money. Who will support us? I got a job in a bank.

‘After four years my husband came back and said sorry. I moved back into his home and we had two more children. Again, things got bad; he started beating me. I felt so sad and alone. I could not speak to my sisters or brothers. I did not tell anyone about the abuse.

‘The first time I told anyone about my past was during the PeaceMaker training at My Choices. Other women told their stories too. Some were so brave. It is so important for women to tell their story. My Choices will help with domestic violence and child marriage. I was so young when I got married, I was not ready. I will not let my daughters get married until they have finished their education and they are ready.

‘Every woman is beautiful and powerful. But in India women do not know their rights. My Choices and the PeaceMakers help women know their rights. Today I am happy I do not work in a bank – I am a PeaceMaker.’ - **Syeda Salma Sultan, 37, PeaceMaker**

[Watch Syeda’s video](#)

VIEW LATEST REPORTS FOR ALL PROGRAMS

This report highlights the impact of our programs up to 30 June 2021.
For more information, past reports and client stories, please visit our website:
opportunity.org.au/your-impact

Opportunity International Australia Limited

ABN 83 003 805 043

PO Box A524
Sydney South NSW 1235 Australia

T: 1800 812 164 or +61 2 9270 3300
E: opinfo@opportunity.org.au

opportunity.org.au

We are a valued partner of the Australian Government, receiving flexible funding under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) each year to implement development and poverty alleviation programs overseas. Every donation you make to this project will be combined with funding from the Australian government to reach more people – your donation will allow us to extend our programs.



ACFID
MEMBER



OPPORTUNITY
International
AUSTRALIA

Don't fight poverty. End it.