

IMPACT REPORT 2025



iPro bono INDIA
Enabling a Just Society

Our impact in 2025

2500+

people directly
benefitting from quality
legal representation

450+

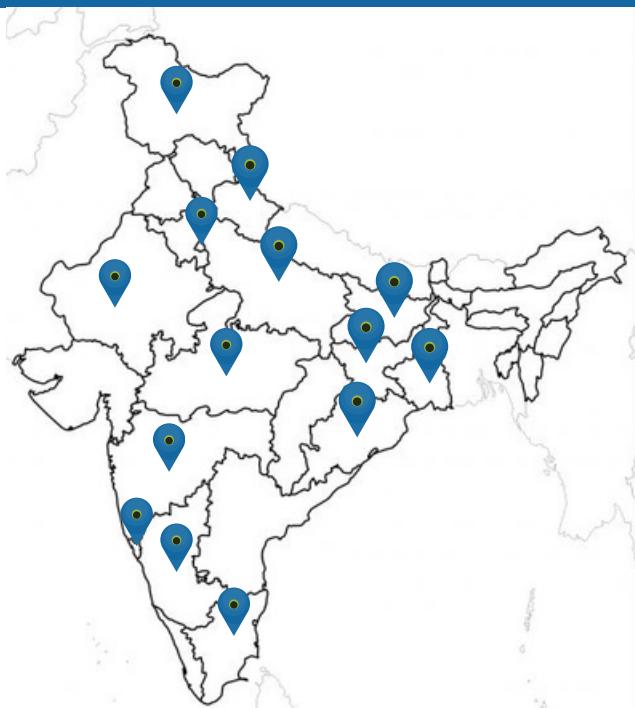
children supported
through psychosocial
interventions

900+

people empowered
through capacity
building initiatives

5300+

gained legal
protections through
strategic litigation



Where we work



Mariam Faruqi,
CEO, iProbono

Justice is built through long, often invisible work that changes systems. These stories show how we drive that work by strengthening institutions, connecting actors, and sustaining collective action. This year, iProbono India reaffirmed that dignity, access, and accountability belong at the heart of the law.”

Our community in India

500+ Community lawyers

61 CSOs

202 Panel advocates

Introduction

Change never takes place overnight. The path to justice is mired in uncertainty, making it easy to lose hope. But incremental changes can yield momentous shifts. For us at iProbono India, the year saw several long-drawn efforts reach a successful end, or make significant progress. This report shares these stories.

For instance, the case of Musab, Tajammul and hundreds of other men who were sexually abused by self-proclaimed faith healer Aijaz Ahmad Sheikh when they were minors. Since 2018, iProbono India supported their difficult legal battle against Sheikh, through direct legal action, support with gathering evidence and the difficulties of negotiating an apathetic and slow legal system. This year, their resilience and determination led to Sheikh being convicted.

But as we know, a positive judgement in court doesn't always translate into impact on people's lives. This was evident in the case of Gopal, Yuvraj, Satyam and Charvi. The orphans, who inherited property from their late parents, found themselves in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) while their relatives took control of their assets. In response to our petition, the Delhi government was directed by the Court to implement guidelines supporting the rights of these children. We are working closely with the Department of Women and Child Development to ensure that they are followed.

Sometimes our work shapes legal precedents that create ripple effects for years.

Binita Modi

Binita Modi
Operations Director
& Chair of the Board,
iProbono India



Two recent cases have done just that. Last year, we represented Anmol, a student with multiple disabilities who was denied entry into medical school. The Supreme Court's ruling in his favour has already helped two more clients with locomotor disabilities gain admission this year. Similarly, the Delhi High Court's judgement in Vijay Kumar Shukla vs Union of India, which incorporated our recommendations for Sentence Review Boards, is now widely cited in petitions challenging arbitrary denials of premature release.

To design meaningful interventions, communities need to be heard. Through consultations and conversations, we uncovered the many forms of discrimination persons with disabilities face when interacting with the police. This year, we trained over 500 police officers across Kashmir, Goa and Odisha to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and build a more informed and empathetic police force.

Children as young as nine are kept in observation homes for months on end in Uttar Pradesh, yet juvenile justice remains neglected. Our program in Lucknow and its surrounding districts aims to change that. We've trained over 40 lawyers and 80 police officers on juvenile justice laws, and represented nine children. With Lucknow University's Department of Social Work we are developing individual care plans for more than 60 boys to support their rehabilitation.

As always, we are grateful to you – our partners, panel lawyers, allies and team members – who make our work possible. We invite you to join our fight for a safe, just and inclusive tomorrow.

Deeksha Gujral

Deeksha Gujral
Program Director,
iProbono India



A Snapshot Of Our Programs

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

We use litigation and evidence-based advocacy as tools to strengthen legal and policy safeguards for vulnerable communities. This year's milestones included unlocking inheritance rights for orphaned children, widening access to essential services by simplifying digital identification processes for people with disabilities, and raising ethical standards for how children and the legal process are portrayed in the media.

» Securing a landmark judgment for orphaned children



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Home > Judiciary > What are the guidelines issued by Delhi HC to safeguard property rights...

Judiciary

What are the guidelines issued by Delhi HC to safeguard property rights of orphaned children

Courts are zealous guardians for the protection of the properties of minors and efforts must be made to ensure that the properties are immediately secured, says HC judge.

KHADIJA KHAN 10 April, 2025 08:08 pm IST

Orphaned children are among the most vulnerable members of society. Even when they inherit assets from their parents, extended family members often take control without the child's consent. By the time these children reach adulthood, they find themselves without the resources to live a stable and financially independent life. iProbono India, in collaboration with panel advocate Tara Narula, brought before the Delhi High Court two cases involving two separate sets of siblings, Gopal and Yuvraj, and Satyam and Charvi, who had lost both their parents, and who, while growing up in CCIs, were at risk of losing the homes their parents had left behind. The court recognised that these were not isolated incidents but symptoms of deeper systemic failure. It directed the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) to develop actionable guidelines that protect orphaned children from such instances of dispossession. The resulting framework, informed by inputs from iProbono India, defines the roles of various stakeholders such as the Child Welfare Committees, the District Legal Services Authority, Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs), and CCIs in safeguarding a child's assets and ensuring that legal proceedings are swift and transparent. Making sure that guidelines are followed is pivotal for accountability, and we engaged the DWCD to orchestrate their implementation by various stakeholders.

» Championing digital inclusion for people with disabilities

Since 2024, iProbono India has been championing the rights of persons with disabilities. In a significant win earlier this year, the Supreme Court ruled that digital accessibility is a constitutional right. This ruling, instigated by iProbono India and Senior Advocate Siddharth Luthra, alongside panel advocate Nitin Saluja, highlighted that the KYC ('Know Your Customer') verification

processes, which include blinking and facial movements, discriminate against acid attack survivors and those with facial disabilities or disfigurements. We advocated for alternative, more inclusive measures instead. Working closely with acid attack survivor and activist Pragya Prasun, we filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on behalf of nine acid attack survivors who were unable to access banking and phone services due to facial disfigurement and eye burns. This PIL prompted the Supreme Court to issue a total of 20 directions calling upon various stakeholders to adopt digital systems that enable people with disabilities to easily access essential services. Directions include the following measures:

- Government and private organisations are to follow official digital accessibility rules, and every department must appoint a specific officer to ensure these rules are met.
- All regulated organisations must regularly check how accessible their services are; people with visual impairments must be included in testing to ensure that systems actually work for them.
- The Reserve Bank of India must provide new ways for organisations to verify identity that don't just rely on blinking; this includes using thumbprints, paper-based options, and other inclusive ways to prove a person is "live" during a photo.
- Digital government services, payment apps, and online platforms must be designed in ways that allow people with disabilities to use them easily.

“This judgement gives me hope, but there's still a long way to go. Implementation is most important.”

Pragya Prasun

» Improving access to public transport for persons with disabilities

iPro bono India continues to represent persons with disabilities before disability commissioners as part of our commitment towards expanding their access to justice. Our efforts included supporting a Mumbai local train commuter with low vision in filing a complaint about its unsafe and inaccessible disability-reserved compartments. This resulted in the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) acknowledging the systemic nature of the problem, and directing the Indian Railways to paint disability coaches in a distinctive colour, install CCTV cameras, and conduct awareness drives. The Railway Board and the Railway Protection Force were also instructed to submit a report demonstrating compliance with these measures. The CCPD's order is an important step towards ensuring safety and dignity for persons with disabilities in using public transport. Due to delays in implementing these recommendations, however, iPro bono India is now exploring the option of filing a writ petition before the Bombay High Court to galvanise action.



» Enhancing the efficacy of JJBs

A well-functioning JJB is essential for children in conflict with the law to access justice and live meaningful lives. With the JJB's inquiries typically spanning a number of years, children are often left in a state of limbo as they await the results of these inquiries, detained at CCIs and separated from their families. A number of RTI (Right to Information) applications filed by iProbono India revealed that in Delhi, 206 cases classified as petty offences are currently pending beyond the statutory six-month limit, with some cases pending for over five years. For serious and heinous offences, as many as 284 cases have been pending for over five years. Statutory review mechanisms have failed to monitor and correct these gaps which undermine a child's right to a speedy trial. To bring judicial attention to these issues, iProbono India, along with Senior Advocate Rajshekhar Rao and panel lawyer Samyak Gangwal filed a PIL before the Delhi High Court. Notice was issued and we were directed to submit recommendations to the Juvenile Justice Committee (JJC) of the Delhi High Court - a high-level body responsible for overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Act. The impacts of this petition are clearly visible: the High-Level Committee responsible for reviewing pendency finally convened after a period of nine years, the Delhi government has directed all magistrates to evaluate the status of case pendency at the JJBs, and the Juvenile Justice Committee has called for the integration of JJB data into the National Judicial Data Grid. Data for three of Delhi's seven JJBs has already been added, as directed. This will ensure that improvements within the system are informed by data and evidence which will, in turn, strengthen its accountability and transparency.

» Ensuring adequate protections under Juvenile Justice laws

India's juvenile justice system prioritises rehabilitation over punishment. For this reason, children accused of crimes are not tried under the adult criminal justice system. Despite this, the Children's Court - where a child is transferred to be tried as an adult after a preliminary assessment by the JJB - allowed the joint trial of Sunil, a 17 year old minor, and his adult co-accused, Raj. We moved the Delhi High Court with support from advocate Ashim Sood and panel lawyer Ashish Kumar. The Court ruled that a child in conflict with the law and adult offender cannot be tried together. This decision is significant as children who are to be tried as adults after a preliminary assessment has taken place are not generally afforded the protections of Juvenile Justice Act. We are working to ensure wider awareness of this judgment amongst the judiciary to ensure that it benefits as many children as possible.

» Strengthening accountability within the criminal justice system

In 2024, we represented Vijay, a life convict, who despite being incarcerated for over 23 years with a track record of good conduct, was denied premature release by the Sentence Review Board (SRB). We challenged the decision before the Delhi High Court, which ordered Vijay's release and issued detailed guidelines and a mandatory checklist for SRBs to assess the eligibility of prisoners for early release. The judgment has since been widely cited to challenge arbitrary SRB decisions, and in 2025, we used it to secure the release of five prisoners whose pleas had been repeatedly rejected. Our targeted advocacy with SRB members, including the Director General of Prisons, Department of Social Welfare, and State Home Department, resulted in the checklist being formally adopted. It is now being used to shape the decisions of SRB members.

» Reaffirming disability reservations as a constitutional guarantee

People with Benchmark Disabilities (PwBD) - in other words people with at least 40% of a specified disability as indicated by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2015 - are routinely excluded from mainstream roles. At the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA),¹³ PwBD candidates were shortlisted and interviewed for four posts reserved for the role of Assistant Professor. None were found to be suitable for the position. Significantly, NIEPA arrived at this conclusion without disclosing their evaluation criteria, cut-off marks, the results of candidates' interview performances, or indeed providing them with any kind of explanation at all. With Senior Advocate Swathi Sukumar, and panel lawyers Rishabh Sharma and Ambica Sood, we represented one such candidate, Dr. Sachin Kumar, before the Delhi High Court. The Court recognised that declaring a PwBD-reserved post as "None Found Suitable" without objective evaluation criteria or meaningful accommodation reflected a failure of the recruitment process rather than the candidates' lack of calibre. The judgement clarified that posts reserved for PwBD should not be taken up by people belonging to other categories (such as the 'Economically Weaker Section'). In doing so, protects the principle that people with disabilities are constitutionally entitled to reservations.

» Ensuring accurate media representation of child-related legal processes

The media holds enormous influence over how people interpret reality. After a popular show on the channel Zee TV misrepresented the legal process by showing a young child's arrest and detainment at an observation home, we filed a complaint before the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) surfacing these inaccuracies. In our complaint, we noted that the law prohibits the arrest of children below the age of seven, CCIs do not house both girls and boys, and children are not tried in the same courts as adults, or with the same aggression. As a result of our appeal, Zee TV was directed by the BCCC to minimise fictionalisation in their depiction of legal procedures and to display clear, appropriate disclaimers where such depictions are used.



A visual from the TV show, Bhagya Lakshmi, where a very young girl is shown to be living in an observation home with boys - a situation that is not allowed by law for a number of reasons.

LEGAL ACTION

iProbono India provides legal representation and advice to vulnerable people and communities, including victims of child sexual abuse, children in conflict with the law, people with disabilities, and those who have been unlawfully evicted from their homes. 2025 was a turning point with many legal battles culminating in justice and relief to communities. Several cases also paved the way for strategic legal precedents that unlocked protections for a wider cross section of the population.

» Ending a culture of 'faith-based' child sexual abuse

After nearly a decade of legal advocacy, a self-proclaimed 'faith healer' in Sopore, Kashmir, Aijaz Ahmad Sheikh, was convicted and sentenced to 14 years in prison by the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Sopore for sexually abusing two children. Survivors estimate that Sheikh had in fact abused hundreds of boys over a period of decades before he was finally convicted and imprisoned. Institutional impunity and superstition veiled as religious belief enabled this abuse to continue unabated.

Though Sheikh was eventually arrested in 2016 after multiple complaints of sexual abuse, he was released on bail within a month. Various factors including the pandemic, lockdowns following the abrogation of Article 370, and other procedural difficulties delayed justice for survivors, many of whom we supported over the years. The court's ruling moves beyond conviction of a single perpetrator to a wider recognition of each survivor's right to pursue redress. Our team is currently providing legal support to survivors who acted as witnesses in this trial so that they too can attain justice and closure.

I am not the only survivor in this case. iProbono India's involvement has been crucial in ensuring that this long standing abuse is brought to light. Their legal expertise, moral support to survivors, financial assistance and continuous follow-ups have been instrumental in our pursuit of justice against our childhood abuser."

Musab Omar, key witness & survivor



» Ensuring fair trial for children in conflict with the law

When 17-year-old Sunil* was accused of robbery and murder, the JJB carried out a 'preliminary assessment' to decide whether he should be tried in an adult court, a process that, as with many cases in the system, was carried out in haste. Sunil was not provided with any documentation explaining how the JJB had reached its decision, or what evidence it had relied on, and was therefore unable to defend himself. His case was then sent to the Children's Court to be tried as an adult. Our team along with panel lawyer Ashish Kumar appealed the decision and, as a result, his case has been transferred back to the JJB where it will undergo a fresh assessment. Sunil's story sets an important precedent for how important it is to follow due process when deciding whether a child should be tried as an adult.

» Delivering justice after a decade of delays

In 2014, 14-year-old Malini* was kidnapped, confined, and sexually assaulted, leaving her physically injured and traumatised. iProbono India with panel advocate Faraz Maqbool represented her through a long and difficult trial that stretched for more than a decade. Earlier this year, the court convicted the main accused for kidnapping, wrongful confinement, assault, and penetrative sexual assault. A second accused, who knew about the crime but had failed to report it, was also found guilty. The court imposed life imprisonment on the principal offender, three months on the second accused, and fines for both. Recognising the gravity of the crime, the long delay in the process as well as the need for rehabilitative support, Malini was awarded Rs. 10.5 lakh in compensation. Today she lives in a residential facility with other survivors and works at a garment factory.

» Challenging discrimination against persons with disabilities in medical admissions

As part of our mission to strengthen accessibility and inclusion in higher education, iProbono India represented three aspiring doctors who were denied the opportunity to study medicine. By challenging ableist assessment practices, we dislodged institutional barriers to medical education for students with disabilities.

Tarigonda Surya Maheedhar, a doctor with an above-elbow amputation on his right arm, was barred from pursuing his postgraduate medical degree under the National Medical Council's guidelines, which required at the time, "both hands intact". Working with panel advocates Sriram Venkatavardan and Anandita Rana, we pushed the Madras High Court to affirm that Surya's eligibility should be based on his 'functional ability' - in other words, his ability to meet the requirements of his degree with the help of assistive aids.

In another case, through panel advocates Sriram Venkatavardan and Karan Verma, we represented Ilakiya G., a young woman with 75% permanent locomotor disability affecting both lower limbs, who was deemed ineligible to participate in MBBS counselling - a process that admits candidates into medical colleges. After the Madras High Court intervened, a fresh evaluation found her eligible. Ilakaya is currently pursuing her education at the Government Omandur Medical College and Hospital in Chennai. Surya and Ilakiya's legal wins build on an earlier judgement instigated by iProbono India, *Anmol v. Union of India* in which the Supreme Court struck down the "both hands intact" rule.

Mehboob Rehan, a medical student from Bihar living with muscular dystrophy, had his admission cancelled by the Disability Assessment Board at Government Medical College Hospital, Bettiah, Bihar, mid-semester. Despite having a valid disability certificate, Rehan was asked by the college to undergo a number of arbitrary re-assessments including a number of

humiliating medical examinations. We approached the Supreme Court with panel lawyer Mayank Sapra to challenge this institutional discrimination. Rehan has now been granted permission to resume his studies.

Nasib Khan, who has muscular dystrophy, was arbitrarily denied verification by the Disability Assessment Board of the Government Medical College Hospital, Bettiah at the time of his admission. The college demanded a non-mandated genetic test report, which led to Khan missing his admission. We represented Khan before the CCPD, arguing that the Disability Assessment Board must adhere to the National Medical Commission guidelines requiring verification based on functional ability. As a result, the CCPD directed the Disability Assessment Board of the college to complete the assessment, and Khan was issued a disability certificate, restoring his right to study medicine under a category reserved for those with disabilities.

» Protecting the rights of incarcerated persons



Prisons in India operate well beyond their capacity, and overcrowding and prolonged pre-trial detention are serious concerns. Many inmates, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, are often unaware of their basic rights and are unable to access effective legal aid. Our legal support ensures bail and temporary releases for prisoners, and although the relief is of an interim nature, it is often the first meaningful step towards justice. We enabled bail and temporary releases in over 25 cases this year, paving the way for family reunification, medical care, and access to livelihood opportunities.

Our client Rajiv, a life convict, contracted HIV while working at the Tihar Jail hospital wing in Delhi. As part of his work, he dealt with medical waste, without using safety equipment like gloves. Over time, Rajiv's health deteriorated severely. Eventually he needed surgeries and specialised medical treatment that the prison was unable to facilitate. Rajiv's applications for premature release were repeatedly rejected by the Sentence Review Board. iProbono India, with panel lawyer Vrinda Bhandari, highlighted the urgency of Rajiv's predicament before the Delhi High Court, which then directed the State and prison to convene a special, time-bound Sentence Review Board. The authorities failed to carry out these directions, and due to Rajiv's worsening health, the Court granted him interim bail. However, since the bail order confined Rajiv to the Delhi NCR region, he was unable to travel to Mumbai, where his family and doctors were based. By pushing the Court to modify its order, we enabled Rajiv to access the care he needed.

» Challenging exclusion in employment

Railway job notifications and online application systems often unjustifiably exclude entire groups of people with disabilities. Among these were our clients, Vikas Kumar and six other people with locomotor disabilities. They were barred from applying to certain jobs with Indian Railways despite being fully capable and holding the appropriate qualifications. With Senior Advocate Swathi Sukumar and panel lawyer Ritika Vohra, we supported them in appealing to multiple institutions and stakeholders including the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), the Delhi High Court, the Supreme Court, and the CCPD to overturn these ableist practices. As a result, four petitioners have successfully submitted job applications to Indian Railways under interim orders issued by the CAT and Supreme Court. Interventions like these are critical to advance institutional accountability and ensure that guarantees under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, move beyond formal recognition to meaningful implementation in practice and open the doors to equal opportunity for those with disabilities.

REHABILITATION AND RESILIENCE

Psychosocial support before, during, and after the legal process can be transformative for child victims of sexual abuse. Whether it is counselling victims and their families about the legal process, accompanying minors to doctors' appointments, facilitating mental health support or liaising with different agencies to admit these children into school, this kind of comprehensive care is vital for healing and rebuilding.

» **Devisha***

Devisha was six years old when she was sexually abused by her friend's brother. Abandoned by her parents when she was an infant, she was left under her grandmother's care. After the crime was reported, Devisha began to receive threats from the accused's family. She was distressed at the idea of giving testimony and when reminded of the assault, she would stammer. Our team worked closely with Devisha for months to build her trust and confidence. We used non-verbal modes of self-expression, such as art and play, that allowed Devisha to narrate her abuse without being retraumatised. Our team also provided her with support on the day of the testimony, empowering her to depose in court without feeling afraid. After Devisha was granted interim compensation by the JJB, our team liaised with various stakeholders to secure a bank account on her behalf so that she could receive the funds. After nearly two years of efforts, Devisha has recovered her confidence and has resumed her studies, attesting to the impact of holistic care.

» **Basheer***

Basheer, a 13-year-old child, is accused of killing the man who sexually assaulted him for over a year. As both a victim of abuse and a child in conflict with the law, Basheer's rehabilitative needs were complex. He was placed in an observation home for close to 40 days before he was granted bail. But when he returned to his family, he received death threats from

acquaintances of his abuser. Our team liaised with various stakeholders to ensure Basheer's safety. We also counselled Basheer and his family to manage ongoing interpersonal tensions. However, these conflicts continued and Basheer eventually ran away, leading to his bail being cancelled and his return to the observation home. Our team then worked closely with the observation home's staff to design a rehabilitation plan. Through a series of art workshops organised by iProbono India, Basheer discovered a space for self-expression and reflection, allowing him to process his experiences and reconnect with himself. He is now on bail and enrolled in school. Basheer continues to receive support from our team, particularly in navigating his complicated relationship with his family.

» **Ayra and Yasmeen***

Ayra and Yasmeen, aged 15 and 10 years respectively, were sexually assaulted multiple times by their neighbour. Both siblings witnessed the other being assaulted. It took over a year for Ayra to gather the strength to reach out to one of iProbono India's panel lawyers. Anxious about how her parents might respond, Ayra asked our team to help support her through this difficult conversation. She was clear that she would only move forward if her parents stood by her. Our team approached the discussion with care, emphasising the importance of taking legal action and helping the family work through difficult emotions. Today Ayra and Yasmeen are taking the case forward with the support of their parents.

My support team helped me throughout the process, from convincing my father to file the complaint to regularly updating me, and patiently hearing every doubt that made me anxious. They made this difficult journey much easier for me with their constant help and kindness."

Arya

» Nazmeen

Nazmeen, aged 17, was sexually and physically assaulted by a group of boys, resulting in life-threatening injuries that left her in a coma for over three months. Nazmeen's family did not feel prepared either financially or emotionally to take legal action. Our team liaised with the JJB, securing for Nazmeen the interim compensation her family needed to support her. To facilitate the transfer of interim compensation funds to victims and their families, biometric verification is normally conducted at the office of the Delhi State Legal Services Authority (DLSA). Since Nazmeen was undergoing surgery and treatment for her injuries, we advocated and arranged for the DLSA to verify her biometric details from her own home. Our team continues to liaise with the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), JJB and the DLSA, as well as Nazmeen's family, to ensure her needs are met. She continues to receive psychiatric care at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) as she awaits her next two surgeries.

» Rachita

Rachita was five years old when she was sexually assaulted by her father's co-worker. Since then we have been supporting Rachita and her family with the legal proceedings. The family relocated to Thane, Maharashtra for their safety. There, they realised that Rachita could not start school in the middle of the academic year. Staying at home was not easy for Rachita, who regularly witnessed violent behaviour between her parents. At her new school, she was physically assaulted by a teacher, pushing her deeper into a cycle of distress and withdrawal. She stopped attending school soon after. We collaborated with our partner organisation, Prerana, to secure her admission into another school and facilitated counselling sessions for her and her family. She was initially placed in a lower class, but within a month she had recovered enough to earn a promotion to the first standard.



Rachita on her way to school.

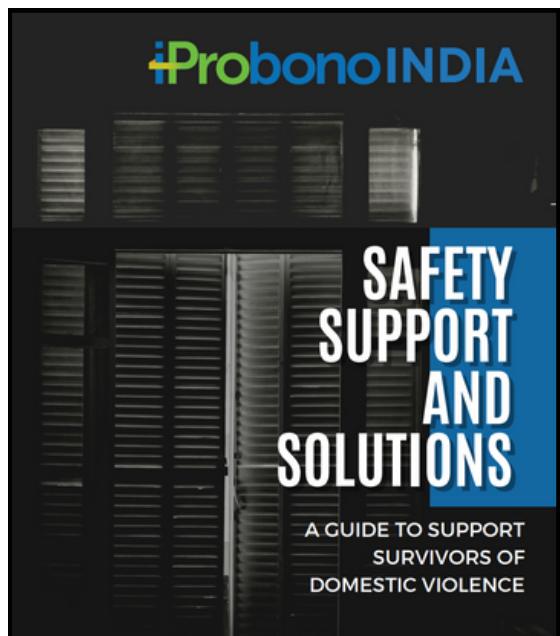
» Rahi

Rahi was 13 when she ran away from home to escape neglect and violence, entering a relationship with a much older man. She was found after her family approached the police and filed a case. After a number of medical tests and ultrasounds, doctors discovered an ectopic pregnancy with no heartbeat - a prognosis that required termination of the pregnancy. Distraught, Rahi was unwilling to undergo the procedure. She was placed in a CCI, and soon after, had a miscarriage. Rahi required medical intervention, but her mother refused to be present for this. Our social worker accompanied her to the hospital, provided her with emotional support, and counselled her, after which she consented to the termination. After Rahi's recovery, she was reunited with her mother, but soon after began to be neglected again. After our team alerted the CWC, Rahi's mother was counselled to help her better understand her daughter's needs. The CWC is now closely monitoring the situation to make sure Rahi feels safe and supported.

BUILDING LEGAL AWARENESS

iProbono India is committed to building the resilience of Indian NGOs by providing vital back end legal support amidst increasing scrutiny. Our team received an overwhelming number of queries from a wide range of NGOs seeking clarity on the ever-evolving requirements of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010. As part of iProbono India's Legal A to Z series, we brought Ranjini Gogoi - a community network lawyer with deep expertise in this area - into dialogue with 75 representatives from Indian NGOs. With greater insight into what is needed for regulatory compliance, participants walked away with a toolkit of resources and strategies that will enable them to successfully register as an NGO, secure uninterrupted funding, and continue their work supporting grassroots communities.

When rights are at risk, preventive action is critical. Legal awareness bridges this gap between vulnerability and justice. We supported our partner organisation, Prerana, by developing the script for a four-part series of short, animated explainers that demystifies the process of filing a POCSO case. The video is from the point of view of a child, making it an ideal resource for child victims and their families, looking to understand their rights in an easy and accessible way. We also worked with various allies, partners, and community members to develop different practical resources that translate legal knowledge into actionable guidance. To encourage community ownership of these resources, we implemented a number of dissemination workshops.



Around 29% of women in India between the ages of 18 and 49 have experienced some form of spousal violence. We worked closely with partners to develop a survivor-centred resource containing critical information on how to identify and prevent abuse, and where to find legal and community support when it occurs.

HUMRAH - A VIDEO SERIES

Humrah offers accessible and readily available, engaging, and easy-to-recall information to child victims of sexual violence and their caregivers, helping them understand and hopefully assert their rights while navigating the legal and child protection process.



EPISODE 1: FIRST STEPS (FIR AND MEDICAL)

In this Episode, Sunita (a child victim of sexual violence) learns about her rights during the recording of her statement at the FIR.



EPISODE 2: STATEMENT BEFORE MAGISTRATE

In this Episode, Sunita learns the importance of giving a statement before a Magistrate. She also learns how her statement is used in the trial.



EPISODE 3: SUPPORT SYSTEM (CWC AND SPs)

In this Episode, Sunita learns about the support system available to her, including the CWC and SPs.



EPISODE 4: COURT PROCESSES (TRIALS)

In this Episode, Sunita learns about the court processes involved in trials.

Video explainers on how to file a POCSO case, developed by Prerana with our support.

BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Building a community of practitioners committed to upholding human rights standards is how we lay the groundwork for accountable institutions. Through collaborations with childcare institutions, universities, the police, the judiciary, and legal services authorities, we pushed stakeholders across the justice system to lead with greater empathy and efficacy.

» Strengthening juvenile justice infrastructures in Uttar Pradesh

The juvenile justice system shows stark variation in standards across states, with some regions demonstrating better implementation of safeguards than others. In Uttar Pradesh, we engaged with stakeholders and undertook in-person visits to CCIs over the course of the year to understand gaps in the state's juvenile justice system. Our research found that key rehabilitative tools mandated by the law, such as Social Investigation Reports and Individual Care Plans (ICPs) that form the basis for individualised needs-based rehabilitation for children, were not being prepared by the relevant stakeholders. Without these documents, decisions on children's care can become generic and disconnected from their unique needs. To bridge this gap, we collaborated with the Department of Social Work, Lucknow University, to place students in an observation home and support their staff with the development of ICPs. Guided and trained by our team, these students created and updated the ICPs for 60 children.

Ensuring that various stakeholders in the juvenile justice system, such as police, legal aid practitioners, and the judiciary, are aware, equipped, and sensitised to the

needs of these children is pivotal for building trust. As the first point of contact, the police are a critical stakeholder in the juvenile justice system. However, we found that prevailing practices are often misaligned with what is required by the law: for instance, we found that FIRs are registered against children regardless of their age, and many below the age of 10 are kept in observation homes. Sensitising the police to these nuances is what drove our partnership with the Lucknow Police and UNICEF's Lucknow division. We conducted a training for over 70 police officers in Lucknow, providing participants a deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities under the Juvenile Justice Act and the POCSO Act.



A training session in Lucknow to strengthen police officials' awareness of the roles and responsibilities of the Special Juvenile Police Unit under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, and the POCSO Act, 2012.

Finally, to unlock access to high quality, affordable legal support for children in conflict with the law, iProbono India has been training lawyers in Uttar Pradesh with the wider goal of establishing a network of legal professionals equipped and ready to take on such cases. We trained over 40 lawyers in Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh, on a range of issues including age determination processes, bail provisions, and preliminary assessment protocols. This training curriculum, which is being rolled out across other districts in Uttar Pradesh, will allow lawyers to reach out to iProbono India for advice and research support in child rights cases requiring nuanced interventions.

Your training was very helpful. We learned about Section 9(2) of the JJ Act and case laws, which allowed us to transfer a child's case, which was pending in the Sessions Court, to the Juvenile Board. The court initially didn't understand, but after two or three debates, they agreed."

Aditya Singh, Advocate

Together these initiatives are helping CCIs move beyond custodial care and evolve into spaces that offer skills, creativity, and emotional growth, in line with rehabilitative goals of the Juvenile Justice Act.



» Strengthening CCIs as spaces for growth and development

CCIs have the potential to make a lasting impact on the children under their care. When set up as spaces for growth and learning, they can help their residents build confidence, develop essential life skills, and heal from past trauma through creative self-expression. But the reality is that most CCIs for children in conflict with the law tend to be overcrowded, with very few programmes available to foster their emotional growth. For this reason, iProbono India partnered with several grassroots organisations to address this critical gap.

In Delhi, we facilitated a first of its kind jute handicrafts and bag-making workshop for a CCI for older boys in Delhi. After we received positive feedback from participants, we expanded this into a six month programme. We also organised a series of art workshops for the residents of another CCI for younger children in conflict with the law, which we delivered with the Art for Change Foundation. Through our partnership with the Yellow Streets Foundation, these young children were taught essential life skills, such as team work, using sports as a way in.



Artwork created during a workshop with Art for Change Foundation.

In response to a request from the District Probation Office and the staff at an observation home for boys in Lucknow, we are currently running science, maths, computer, and English classes for senior students, helping to establish a solid foundation for future college admissions. Previously, more than 150 students had been assigned to just one teacher. Our intervention is creating space for more focused learning. We are also encouraging children to think critically beyond the curriculum - for example, by using storytelling to explore ideas and concepts and ideas around morality.

» Advancing disability-inclusive policing

Despite legal protections guaranteed under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, people with disabilities encounter a number of difficulties when interacting with the criminal justice system. Numerous studies illustrate how inadequate police training and awareness often leads to procedural lapses, neglect, and at times even mistreatment. Through targeted police sensitisation trainings jointly held with various state commissioners, iProbono India sparked institutional shifts to promote a culture of respect and accountability towards those with disabilities. Our trainings provided over 500 police officers across Jammu & Kashmir, Goa and Odisha with nuanced insight into their roles and responsibilities towards people with disabilities and sensitised them to the challenges they face in their daily lives.

We saw the impact of these trainings almost immediately. A month after the training in Odisha, we received a query from a Sub-Inspector in Keonjhar district who sought guidance on which section of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 to include in an FIR for a complaint of assault against a woman with a 25% intellectual disability. Our clarifications enabled him to file a comprehensive FIR that took care of the complainant's needs.

The CCPD appreciates iProbono India's pivotal support in strengthening access to justice for persons with disabilities. Drawing on their legal expertise, iProbono India helped us develop a procedural manual that standardises our grievance redressal process, ensuring greater alignment with the RPD Act, 2016. It represents an important step towards greater transparency and impact."

Praveen Prakash Ambashata. Dy. Chief Commissioner for PwD & Chief Vigilance Officer (PT), CCPD.



Training session for police officers conducted by our team members in Panaji, Goa.



» Building legal empowerment of the Van Gujjar community

The Van Gujjars are a nomadic pastoral community in the Shivalik and Himalayan foothills of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. Despite being stewards of the environment, their legal right to forest resources is often curtailed. iProbono India engaged the Uttarakhand State Legal Services Authority (USLSA), which provides free legal services to vulnerable communities, to strengthen access to justice for the Van Gujjars. By encouraging the USLSA to participate meaningfully in Sela Parv, a traditional festival celebrated by the Van Gujjars to mark their commitment to the forests sustaining them, we laid the foundation for deeper trust and collaboration between the two. Several members of the Van Gujjar community have now been empanelled as Para-Legal Volunteers (PLVs) under the USLSA to promote legal awareness with the community and to act as a trusted resource that advocates for its needs.



Tree planting as part of the Sela Parv festival.

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Running a child care institution in Delhi means living daily with the weight of children's trauma and legal uncertainties. What makes our relationship with iProbono India extraordinary is their genuineness in providing support and making the legal journey less overwhelming. They offer psychosocial and legal support of an excellent standard and build the confidence of institutions to face legal challenges.

- Edlin Jash, Director, Suraksha Homes

Disclaimer

Consent was taken for all the photographs taken by the iProbono India team

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For privacy reasons, some names in this report have been modified and are marked with an asterisk (*).

Photographs without individual captions are representative images and do not depict the identities of specific individuals featured in this report.

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