

## Social-Emotional Learning and Parent Engagement<sup>1</sup>

A UNICEF study reported that 1.6 billion children and youth were impacted due to school closures across 188 countries globally.<sup>2</sup> Children continued to be one of the most vulnerable groups during COVID related lockdowns as they did not have a voice in most spaces including their families.

Children continued to witness violence in the family, amongst parents and caregivers. Restriction in movement, loss of livelihood and income, isolation, the physical distancing measures led to heightened levels of stress and anxiety in parents, caregivers and children, and cut families and individuals off from their usual sources of support.<sup>3</sup>

Socio-Emotional Learning, already a critical component of learning for adolescents, became even more important in the light of aggravated stress that the adolescents were enduring due to COVID-19. Social-emotional skills are at the core of a healthy adult life- mentally, socially, spiritually and truly equip us to bounce back from any limiting experiences or deficit from our contexts.

Learning starts at home, and so does Socio-Emotional Learning<sup>4</sup>. [According to the CASEL](#)<sup>5</sup>, “The insights and perspectives of families and caregivers are critical to informing, supporting, and sustaining SEL efforts. Research suggests that evidence-based SEL programmes are more effective when they are extended into the home. Avenues for family partnership may include creating ongoing two-way communication, helping caregivers understand child development, helping teachers understand family backgrounds and cultures, providing opportunities for families to volunteer in schools, extending learning activities and discussion into homes, and coordinating family services with community partners.”

### I. Objective of parental engagement under Project Sampoorna

As part of [Project Sampoorna](#), the objective of engaging with the parents was to enable **parent mindset change** so that they can support their children’s emotional wellbeing at home. The interventions with parents to strengthen SEL activities and facilitate support at homes were implemented across 60 schools in 5 districts of Jharkhand, namely - Giridih, Chattra, Palamu, East Singhbhum and Dumka. Due to the lockdown, the engagement was largely virtual.

The tribal communities in Jharkhand<sup>6</sup> constitute 26% of the total population<sup>7</sup> of the State. With a difficult geographical terrain and connectivity issues abound, as of now only 1,427 panchayats in the state have access to broadband, while 4,459 panchayats do not have broadband or internet

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<sup>2</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/>

<sup>3</sup> Global status report on preventing violence against children. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020.

<sup>4</sup> [What is SEL?](#): Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions

<sup>5</sup> The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is helping make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education from preschool through high school.

<sup>6</sup> Jharkhand is a state in India where Project Sampoorna aims to demonstrate evidence-based SEL programme with the objective of embedding SEL into policy and practice of the education system.

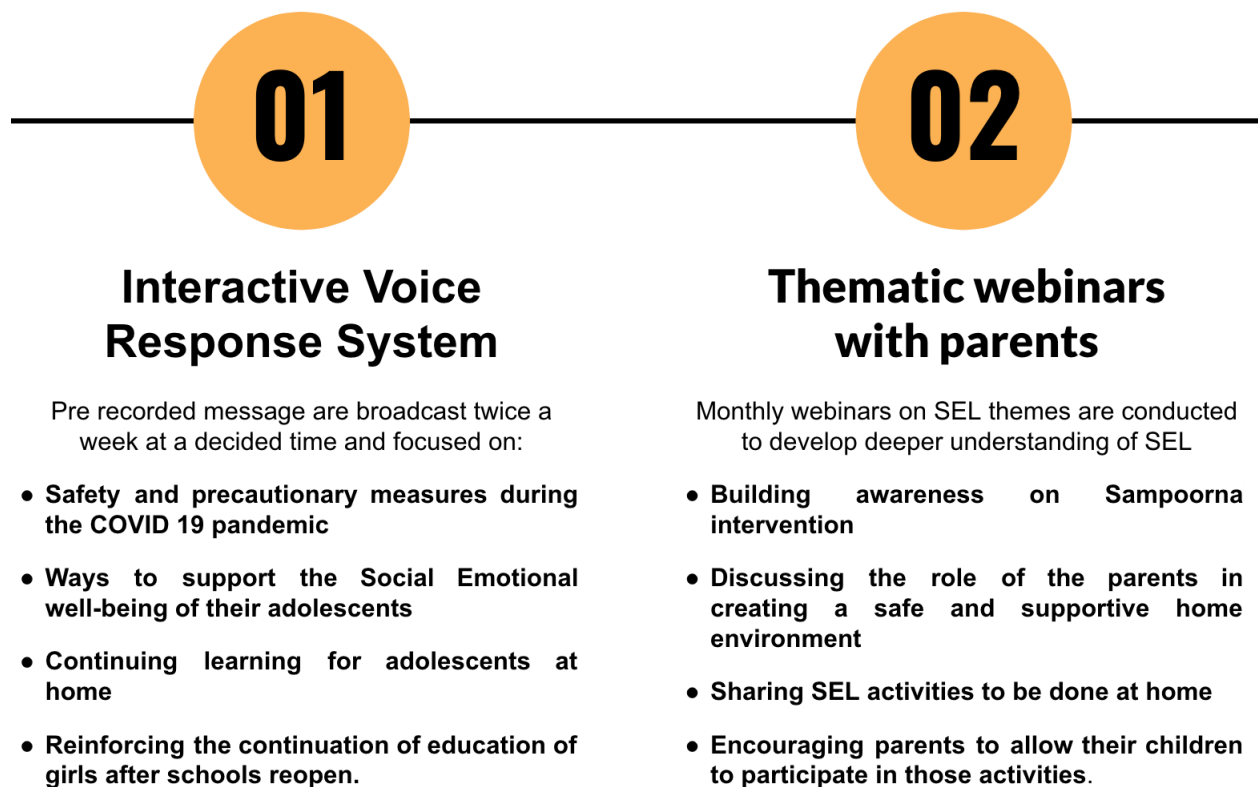
<sup>7</sup> Census data 2011

facilities<sup>8</sup>. Jharkhand faces a myriad of issues, one of which is hunger and food security. An adolescent girl shared, “if all family members wanted to eat a full stomach then the food would not be enough”. Through the course of discussions conducted during phase 1 COVID lockdown in India, many families said that the schools should open so that children could get at least one meal a day.

Adverse conditions in Jharkhand affected adolescents’ and their caregivers’ wellbeing, creating a gap which could be filled by social emotional learning.

## II. Strategies for engaging parents

As part of Project Sampoorna, two core strategies were implemented. The goal of these initiatives was to help parents experience SEL, observe the behaviour of their children, adopt some practices at home and enable growth for their children:



*Figure: Core strategies implemented under Project Sampoorna*

## III. Major Findings

In the current times and to sustain life-long learning and support for children, SEL needs to make its way into the homes and parents need to become a central stakeholder. Interventions with parents help them empathise with children, and parents are able to nudge them towards academics and learning processes. IVRS and webinars have been a key tool to reach the parents during the pandemic, and they will remain a means to build, connect and initiate dialogues in the future.

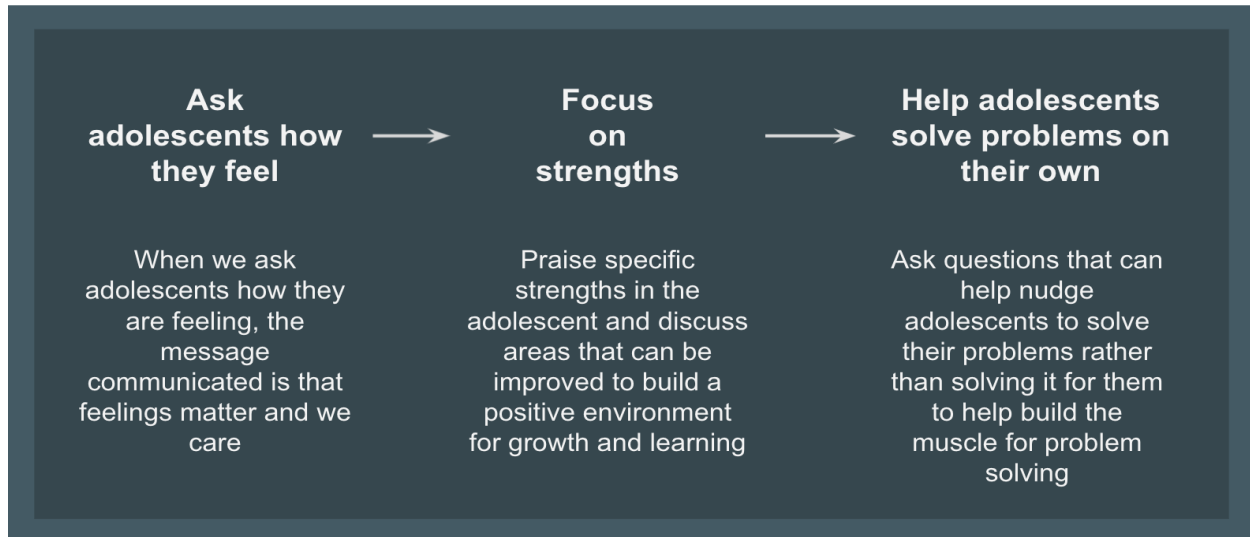
<sup>8</sup> [News report](#)

**1. IVRS:** We observed that the call pick up behaviour is influenced by factors such as agriculture season and parents' movement for livelihood opportunities, factors beyond our control. However, the call timings were reworked based on parents' availability. Following these changes, the call pick up rates increased over time. To sustain listenership, it is important to avoid any gaps in the broadcast of the message, they should be broadcast as decided and communicated to parents. Also for sustaining the interest of parents, different content formats could be used e.g. story, roleplays, narration, jingle, seeking response and others. Until now, phone numbers of 10,000 parents have been collected and more than 60% of parents have been reached out through both IVRS and webinars under the programme. Among the parents who heard the IVRS message, over the course of May - August 2021, 43% reported some understanding of SEL while 24% reported an improved understanding and 23% reported no understanding of SEL. Qualitative feedback showed an increased understanding and empathy towards children's needs and areas of support by parents

**2. Webinars:** The team was initially sceptical about the response that could be expected from parents especially because most of the parents are engaged in farm activities or other livelihood activities during the day. However, an attempt was made and the first webinar saw the participation of 545 parents. The information about the webinars was shared through the school leaders and teachers along with support from the District administration. These webinars continuously saw the participation of school functionaries and district functionaries as well. In subsequent webinars, parents' participation increased to 3200, as the team also understood a suitable time slot to engage with parents upon receiving feedback.

The programme reached out to 6077 parents through the IVRS and 3200 parents through Webinars. These are parents from government schools and from interior tribal areas. The assumption that parents from marginalised communities are not interested in the education or wellbeing of their children is thus challenged. While both these engagement strategies helped to build awareness and enable dialogue, more intense interventions such as parent meetings, immersion exercises are needed over a sustained period to bring about a much deeper shift in mindsets. Also to support the adolescent girl and make parents allies in SEL, the support of the larger system including district, block and school level functionaries is required. Each of these actors need to understand the importance of these interventions as they exercise an influence on the other.

More than 60% of parents have developed some understanding of SEL through the various interventions that were made under Sampoorna to engage the parents. Parents can make small changes that can have a larger impact on the growth and development of their adolescents. Some simple approaches that can be applied on a daily basis at home are:



**Figure: Examples of approaches parents can use at home**

Giving families the [resources](#) to foster social and emotional experiences at home, as well as the tools to reflect on those experiences together, is an important part of engaging families in SEL. The benefit of families reinforcing critical social and emotional skills and language at home extends beyond the school walls.

#### References

1. Global status report on preventing violence against children. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.