

VOICES OF CHANGE

YOUNG HEALTH PROGRAMME

AstraZeneca
Young Health Programme
Better health choices, brighter life chances

PLAN
INTERNATIONAL
www.planindia.org





Disclaimer

All photographs, stories, and content featured in this book are the property of Plan India and have been used with the informed consent of the individuals and communities portrayed. The images of children are used strictly for the purpose of sharing impact stories and may not be reproduced, copied, or used in any form without prior written permission from Plan India.

This material is intended solely for information and educational purposes to further aid Plan India's development work, and is produced in accordance with applicable laws.





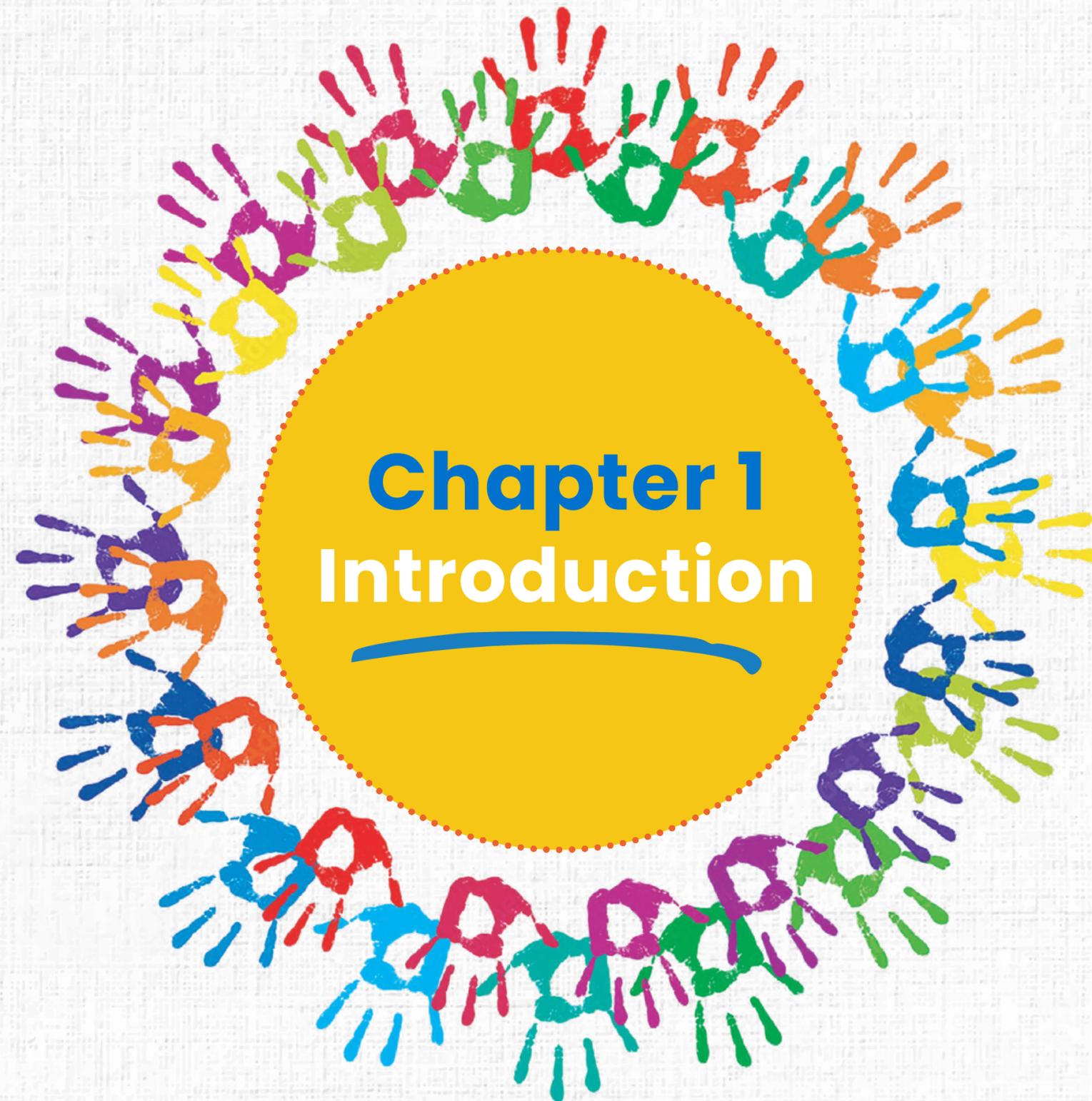
Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	▶	2
.....		
Chapter 2: Voices of change	▶	6
.....		
Closing Reflections	▶	96



→ **746,581 young people** reached since the launch of the Young Health Programme in 2010 in Delhi, Bengaluru, and Chennai with information on non-communicable disease risk factors and adolescent health issues.

In the journey, Plan India built solid partnerships with government, non-profit organizations, NGO's, community based organizations (CBOs) and established strong rapport with key stakeholders.



What we do

The **Young Health Programme** is a global community investment initiative spearheaded by **AstraZeneca**, and implemented in India by **Plan International (India Chapter)**. Its focus is on improving the **health and well-being of young people (ages 10–24)** in underprivileged communities. Since 2010, YHP has addressed the growing threat of **Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs)** and has integrated **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)**, **mental health**, and **gender equality** into its framework.

YHP empowers youth to:

- Build awareness of health issues and make informed decisions;
- Adopt healthy behaviors and lifestyles;
- Lead as **Peer educators**, driving change within their communities; and
- Access youth-friendly health services, particularly around **NCDs and SRHR**.

Where we do it

YHP began in **Delhi (2010)**, and later expanded to **Chennai (2019)** and **Bengaluru (2021)**. In Delhi alone, over **15 Health Information Centres (HICs)** have been established, with **six more underway in Phase IV (2021–2025)**.

Delhi focus areas by phases:

- **Phase I & II (2010–2015)**: Dwarka, Holambi Kalan, Mangolpuri, Badarpur, Madanpur Khadar
- **Phase III (2016–2021)**: Bawana, Sultanpuri, Kirari Suleman Nagar, Jahangirpuri
- **Phase IV (2021–2025)**: Sangam Vihar (F2, C, L blocks), Dakshinpuri (15 B, B blocks), Bawana-JJ Colony

Why we do it

India's youth face an increasingly rising exposure to **NCD risk factors** such as tobacco use, poor diet, physical inactivity, and air pollution. These risks, combined with lack of access to youth-specific health education and services, especially around **SRHR and mental health**, demand urgent attention.

YHP was founded on the belief that **prevention starts early** - that empowering adolescents with the right knowledge, support systems, and safe spaces can lead to a **lifetime of better health outcomes** and more **resilient communities**.

How we do it

YHP's **theory of change** revolves around **youth leadership, community engagement, and advocacy for systems change**:

Strategic pillars:

- **Peer Educator Model**: 5,493 youth trained to educate and influence peers.
- **Health Information Centres**: Safe, inclusive spaces for youth-led learning and dialogue.
- **Behavior Change Communication**: Theatre, rallies, school sessions, and door-to-door outreach.
- **Stakeholder engagement**: Collaboration with parents, teachers, health professionals and community leaders.
- **Policy advocacy**: Engaging with government to strengthen youth-friendly health systems.

The programme also strengthens **Adolescent Friendly Health Services (AFHS)** and orients health professionals to better serve young people.

Our big wins



Youth reached (directly)
746,581



Total community impact
36 lakhs lives



Peer educators trained in Delhi
5493



Parents & teachers engaged in Delhi
261,483



Health professionals sensitized in Delhi
2775

Recognitions:

- **Gold Award – NCD Prevention Campaign**, IHW Summit 2021
- Featured in **The Good Sight, CSRBox, Sattva Consulting's Best Practices Report**

Awareness impact of YHP



Dietary awareness
87.3% increase



Environmental consciousness
75% improved



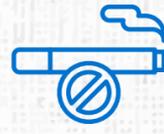
SRHR, STIS, RTIS awareness
41.2% increase



Alcohol awareness
71.3%



Awareness of physical inactivity
67.2%



Tobacco health risk awareness
64% increase

Note: This data presented is from November 2010 to August 2025

Chapter 2 Voices of change

Our documentation journey

The process of documenting this initiative was anchored in the belief that young people are not just beneficiaries but powerful narrators of their own experiences. It was also felt that it would be important to bring forward the voices of the youth who are at the heart of the project - not by speaking for them, but by creating a space for them to speak for themselves.

It was a conscious call to ensure that the documentation process was participatory. Young people were involved not as subjects of stories, but as co-creators and storytellers.

Therefore, to document the stories in a way that felt meaningful and true to their experience, we designed a warm, interactive workshop that served as both an ice-breaker and a storytelling guide. The workshop was as much about confidence-building as it was for creating a safe, creative and reflective space where the youth could explore their own narratives.

The story capture process was fluid and deeply personal. The emphasis was on ownership - the storyteller chose what to say, how to say it, and in what format it should live.

We called this **My Journey**.



The Handprint of My Journey

We began by inviting each child to trace the outline of their hand on a sheet of paper. Each finger represented a part of their personal journey. They were encouraged to decorate their handprint however they liked - with colours, symbols, or drawings that reflected their identity. We then introduced the meaning of each finger:



1. "Who I was" - *The identity*

What was the challenge I faced? As a participant in this programme, what issue was I struggling with? What part of my life needed support, care, or healing?



2. "The spark" - *A ray of hope*

What gave me my first glimmer of hope? Was it a kind word, a session, or a moment that made me believe change was possible?



3. "The shift" - *The turning point*

What did I do differently? Did I join a group, change the way I saw things, or take a step forward? How did it feel?



4. "My bloom" - *Big wins and beautiful changes*

What changed in my life? What were the proud moments, the learnings, or the things that made me feel stronger?



5. "The small things" - *Little habits, lasting impact*

What tiny steps helped me grow? Was it a habit, a role I played, a session I attended or led? Small actions that created a lasting impact.

After completing the handprint and writing their reflections, we sat down for **individual interview with each child** to expand on the points they had shared. These one-on-one conversations helped us go deeper - understanding their emotions, experiences, and turning points in greater detail. It also gave each child space to express freely and be truly heard.

To add a fun and thoughtful twist, we asked them to think of **one thing that “speaks” for them** - an object, symbol, or even a living being that tells a little more about their journey. It sparked laughter, curiosity, and meaningful insight as we explored how this item connected with their growth.

We ended each interview with a creative expression - a **message** the child wanted to share with the world. This could be a poem, a slogan, a song, or simply a heartfelt sentence. It was their way of claiming their story and inspiring others. This process not only brought their stories alive with honesty and emotion, but also helped build trust, confidence, and a deep sense of ownership in the storytelling journey.

Importantly, the documentation became a transformative process for many. It created new roles for them as creators, listeners, and leaders. And it ensured that the narratives emerging were not filtered or framed from the outside, but carried the rawness, depth, and dignity of lived experience - in the voices of those who lived them.

Finally, while this publication highlights the stories of just 12 young changemakers, these remarkable youth are the ‘voice’ of the vast majority of the young people who were an integral part of this project. Their voices echo the collective experiences, hopes, and resilience of all those who participated and helped shape this journey.



Changemaker 1



Alisha, 17

Summary

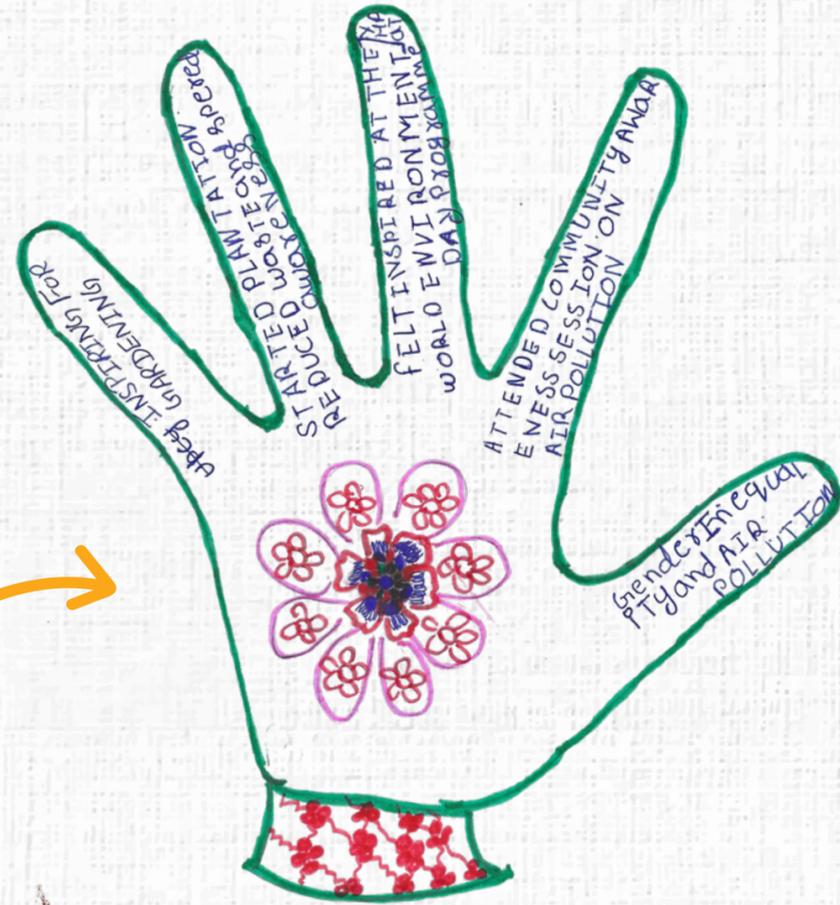
The identity: Air pollution and gender inequality.

The spark: Attended community awareness session on air pollution.

The shift: I felt inspired by the World Environment Day programme at YHP.

My bloom: Started plantation, reduced waste, and spread awareness.

The small things: Gardening.



What speaks for me?



Parrot!

Before, I was like the parrots outside my window, just repeating what others said, never asking questions.

But after joining the YHP, I found my own voice.

Now, I feel free like a parrot - bold and bright, charming with colour, and full of light. Like the plant growing from the earth in my drawing, I'm growing too - strong, hopeful, and reaching for the sky.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

Because of our low income, we didn't have a gas stove and used firewood from the nearby forest for cooking. The smoke would fill our home - it made my eyes burn and my chest hurt. I didn't know it was air pollution back then, but now I do. That part of my life needed care and change.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

A year ago, I joined a community session on air pollution, and later became part of the Young Health Programme. It changed how I saw things. I learned what air pollution really is, how it harms our health - even at home. I never knew that small things like burning waste or cutting trees could hurt the air we breathe. What gave me hope was learning that we can change this - step by step.

3. The shift

The turning point...

When I found out that air pollution is the second biggest cause of diseases after smoking, I was shocked. That moment pushed me into action. Through YHP, I started learning how to be an Environment Ambassador. We planted trees, cleaned parks, made posters, and joined rallies. I even helped inspect parks and plant saplings. It felt powerful to see our school principal and local leaders join us - it made me feel like I could really make a difference.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

One big change was when we started talking to people in our area about keeping the parks clean. Many used to leave food wrappers and plastic behind. With my friends, I began telling them how this harms nature and makes the park dirty. We also watered the plants and picked up litter ourselves. Then, we collected signatures from kids, teens, and elders and gave a letter to our local councilors. And they listened! The park started to get better. Before this, I never knew we could make such a change just by speaking up.

5. The small things

What small activities help me grow...

I garden every day - a small act that plants quiet hope, one seed at a time. Also, before joining YHP, I didn't know that cutting green trees was harmful. We even burned green twigs for cooking or during Holi. But now I know better—green trees give us oxygen and must be protected. Now, I only collect dry wood, and I help others understand this too. Even small changes can grow into something big.



*Aao milker kare ek prayas
Apne janamdin per lagaye podha
apne ghar ke aas pass.*

Let's come together and make an effort. Plant a tree near your home on your birthday.

— **Alisha, Young Changemaker** —

Changemaker 2



Ayush, 16

Summary

- The identity:** Stomach pain and unhealthy diet.
- The spark:** Conversation with classmate on YHP programme.
- The shift:** I eat home cooked meals.
- My bloom:** Now I eat nutritious food, and encourage my community to do the same.
- The small things:** I have more energy for physical activity.

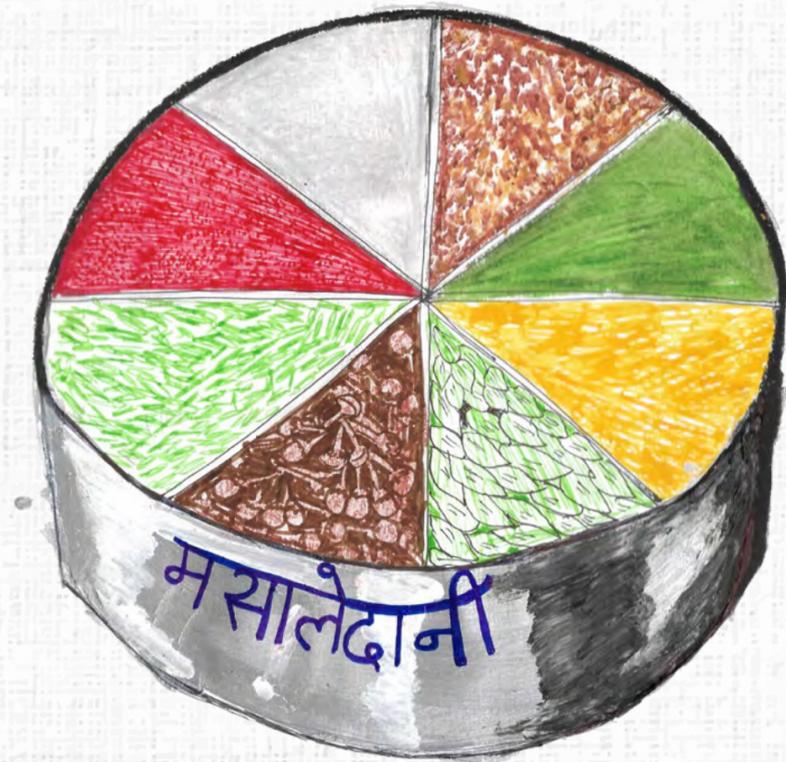


What speaks for me?



Spice box!

I may look simple, but like a spice box, I carry many layers - each thought a flavour, each feeling a scent. The YHP helped me discover the universe within.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

I used to eat whatever tasted good - burgers, chowmein, golgappas - without thinking about health. Junk food had become a daily habit with my friends. I didn't realise how harmful it was until I had severe stomach pain. That was my wake-up call.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

Two years ago, I joined the YHP by Plan India. In the health sessions, I learned about balanced diet and the harmful impact of junk food. For the first time, I understood how I had been mistreating my body - and that I had the power to change.

3. The shift

The turning point...

After attending YHP sessions, I learned that real growth comes from eating a balanced diet with all food groups. I realised junk food had no nutrition and could lead to serious health problems. I cut down on it and chose healthier meals. I also shared this with my friends - and together, we started eating better and feeling more energetic.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

Motivated by the changes we saw in our own health; we began creating awareness in our community. We spoke to people about the dangers of unhealthy diets - not just undernutrition or overnutrition, but also wrong nutrition. We explained how different energy sources like unsaturated fats, saturated fats, and harmful trans fats affect the body. Slowly, people began to listen. They started making small but meaningful changes - choosing healthier foods, asking questions, and becoming more aware. Seeing the whole community shift made us realise: change feels easier when we grow together.



5. The small things

What small activities help me grow...

Physical activity helps me feel more energetic every day. Attending regular YHP sessions didn't just teach me about health, it changed the way I think and gave me the confidence to help others. Through small steps - like improving my own habits, supporting my friends, and spreading awareness - I became part of a larger movement. A movement that's not just changing lives, but shaping a healthier future for all of us.



Eat what's right, both
day and night, For health
and growth, keep meals
light. Skip the junk, avoid
the strain, Or lose your
strength in body and brain.

— **Ayush, Young Changemaker** —



Changemaker 3



Daman, 18

Summary



- The identity:** Alcohol use by my friend.
The spark: Interaction with YHP team in my community.
The shift: Parents' meeting with the YHP team, where we learned many new things.
My bloom: Empowered with the information, many of my friends gave up alcohol.
The small things: Discussing the importance of being healthy with my friends.

What speaks for me?

“Mind!

To me, the mind is like a mirror, it simply reflects what I give it. If I fill it with fear or doubt, that's what I see. But if I give it knowledge, care, and calm - it reflects strength. Through the YHP, I learned that the mind can be trained. I started understanding my emotions, thinking clearly, and making better choices. YHP helped me realise that a healthy, focused mind is my biggest strength, and it can shape my whole life.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

In my area, many young people face serious problems. One of the hardest for me was seeing my close friend fall into alcohol use. I noticed it changing him - he looked tired, lost focus in his studies, and stopped being part of the things that once made him happy. It hurt to watch him slip away like that, and I didn't know how to help. That's the struggle I was facing.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

Through YHP sessions, I learned how alcohol can harm both health and life. I also learned ways to support friends struggling with harmful habits. That gave me hope - and the courage to speak to my friend and try to help him change.

3. The shift

The turning point...

I approached my friend with empathy and shared how alcohol, like tobacco, harms both body and mind - causing dependency, poor focus, and low energy. I encouraged him to try healthy routines like yoga and group activities. Gradually, he began to change, and that gave me the strength to keep supporting others.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

As my friend recovered and grew healthier, I felt inspired to do more. I became a Peer Educator with YHP, guiding youth and families on healthy living. Now, I lead sessions, mobilize the community, and feel proud to be creating real, positive change.

5. The small things

What small activities help me grow...

I now speak proudly with friends and neighbours about healthy living - eating right, avoiding alcohol and tobacco, staying active, and valuing education. Thanks to YHP and Plan India, I've grown as a person and feel proud to be making a real difference in my community.

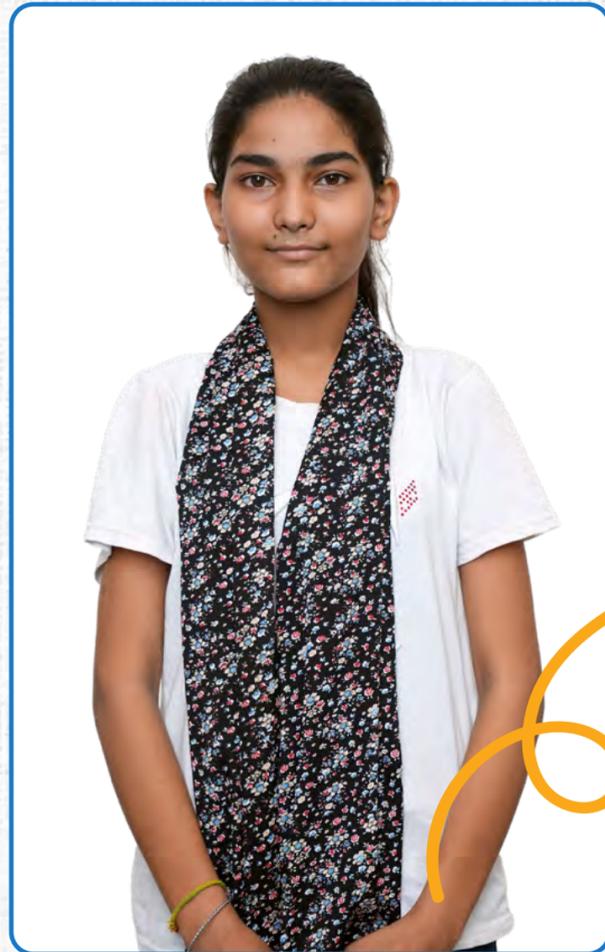




Recovery is real freedom. But
greater freedom is in never
starting - when you choose not
to give in to peer pressure.

— **Daman, Young Changemaker** —

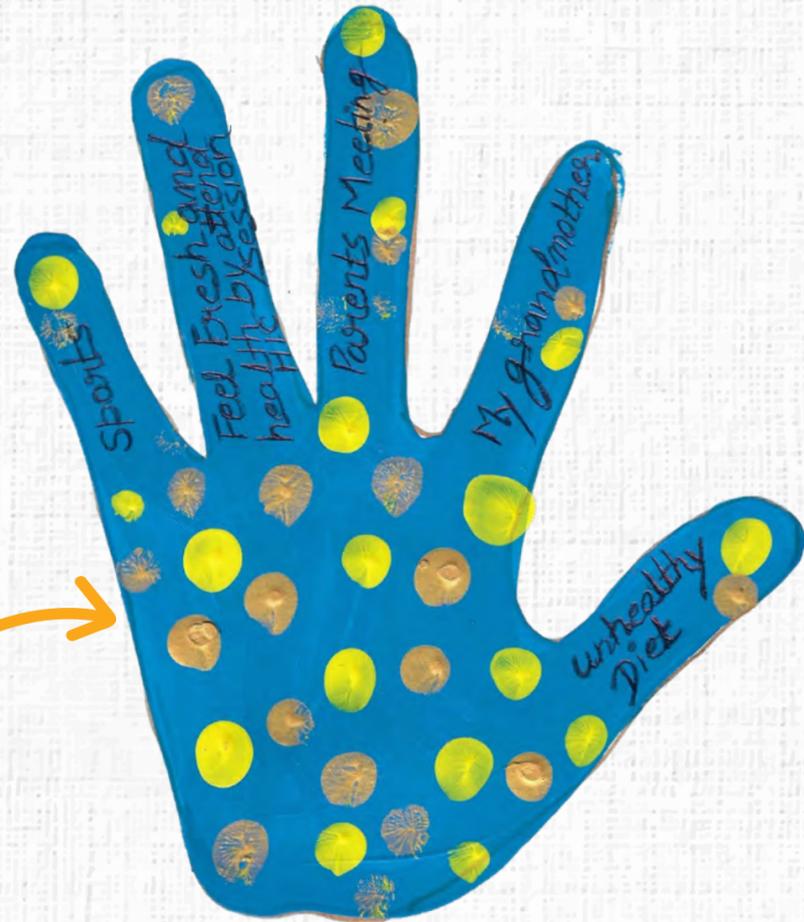
Changemaker 4



Isha, 16

Summary

- The identity:** Unhealthy diet.
- The spark:** My grandmother.
- The shift:** Parent's meeting at YHP.
- My bloom:** Feel fresh and healthy after HIC session.
- The small things:** Sports.



What speaks for me?



A plate of salad!

Through YHP, I learned how something as simple as choosing fresh food can change the way I live and feel. For me, this salad isn't just a meal - it's a reminder that small choices can lead to big changes.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

I used to eat junk food every day - chips, fried snacks, sweets, soft drinks. I felt tired all the time and had constant stomach aches. When the doctor said it was because of my diet, I felt lost. I didn't know how to change.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

I joined YHP three years ago, and I still remember how it began - HIC facilitator came to our area and invited us to a health session at the Health Information Centre. Out of curiosity, I went along with my parents. That one small step changed everything. In the sessions, Peer Educators explained things so clearly - what a balanced diet means, what foods help us grow, and how junk food like sugary drinks, chips, pizzas, and processed snacks can harm our bodies. For the first time, I understood what I was doing wrong - and how I could make it right. That gave me hope.

3. The shift

The turning point...

I even took my mother and younger brother to a YHP session. Slowly, we began changing our lifestyle. I started eating home-cooked meals with fruits and vegetables. My health improved - I felt more active, focused better on my studies, and slowly, I found my confidence again.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

After three years, I'm no longer just a participant, I'm a Peer Educator with YHP. I visit different areas, talk to families, and encourage young people to join health sessions. I especially support girls who feel shy. It makes me proud when they ask questions and trust me for guidance.



5. The small things

What small activities help me grow...

Playing sports keeps me active—but one of the biggest moments of my life was giving a speech on International Day of the Girl Child at a government school. I spoke to teachers and shared how YHP changed my life—and the lives of many girls in my community. That day, I felt bold, proud, and heard. Thanks to YHP, I've become confident, responsible, and a voice for others. I've learned to lead, and now I help others believe in themselves too.



A strong body, and a sharp mind, starts with a balanced diet.

Isha, Young Changemaker



Changemaker 5



Jaya, 17

Summary

- The identity:** My father's tobacco habit.
- The spark:** Community programme on harmful use of tobacco.
- The shift:** Joined YHP and stopped Papa from consuming tobacco.
- My bloom:** My father has given up tobacco and is now healthy, and my mother has stopped crying.
- The small things:** Yoga and exercise.



What speaks for me?



Ear!

The ear is the doorway to wisdom - those who listen truly learn. Through YHP, I listened. To facts, to stories, to guidance. I learned about health, choices, and change. Listening opened my mind, and changed my life. Now, I listen deeply, and I help others hear what matters.



Ear



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

The toughest part was my father's habit of chewing tobacco. It really got me down every time I saw him do it, and I always wished he would quit. Since I was little, I had seen him reach for that tobacco pack multiple times a day - morning, noon, or night. He didn't even see it as a problem. He thought it helped him manage stress and stay alert. Things got worse when he started having mouth sores and a constant cough, but he just ignored it. I tried talking to him, but he would either get angry or walk away. I felt helpless.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

One day, a YHP team member came to our area to hold an awareness session on health and the risks of Non Communicable Diseases. They spoke about alcohol, tobacco, unhealthy diets, inactivity, and air pollution.

At first, I was unsure about joining, but something nudged me to sit and listen. That session changed everything. I learned how harmful tobacco really is - how it can lead to cancer, breathing problems, and deep addiction.

As I heard about the symptoms of nicotine dependence, I could see my father in every word. For the first time, I understood what he was going through. And what gave me hope was this: a tobacco-free life is possible. Change is hard - but it can begin with awareness.

3. The shift

The turning point...

What struck me most was realizing how my dad's addiction was affecting all of us. With support from YHP facilitators, I found the courage to speak to him again - this time with facts, stories, and heart. Slowly, he began to listen. And little by little, he started to cut back.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

Today, my dad has been tobacco-free for over five months. His health is better, our home feels lighter, and my mom has stopped crying. I feel proud knowing I helped bring this change - and hopeful for a healthier future.



5. The small things

What small activities help me grow...

I learnt that to bring change, I must be the change. I stay committed to yoga and healthy habits, and now I share what I've learnt with others in my community. Thanks to the Young Health Programme, I've found my voice and confidence. They didn't just help my father - they empowered me to make a difference.



Tambaku pal bhar ka sukoon deta hai, par zindagi bhar ka dard de jaata hai. Toh kyun shuru karein kuch, jo khatam hi na ho?

Tobacco may give momentary relief, but it leaves behind a lifetime of pain. So why start something that's so hard to stop?

Jaya, Young Changemaker

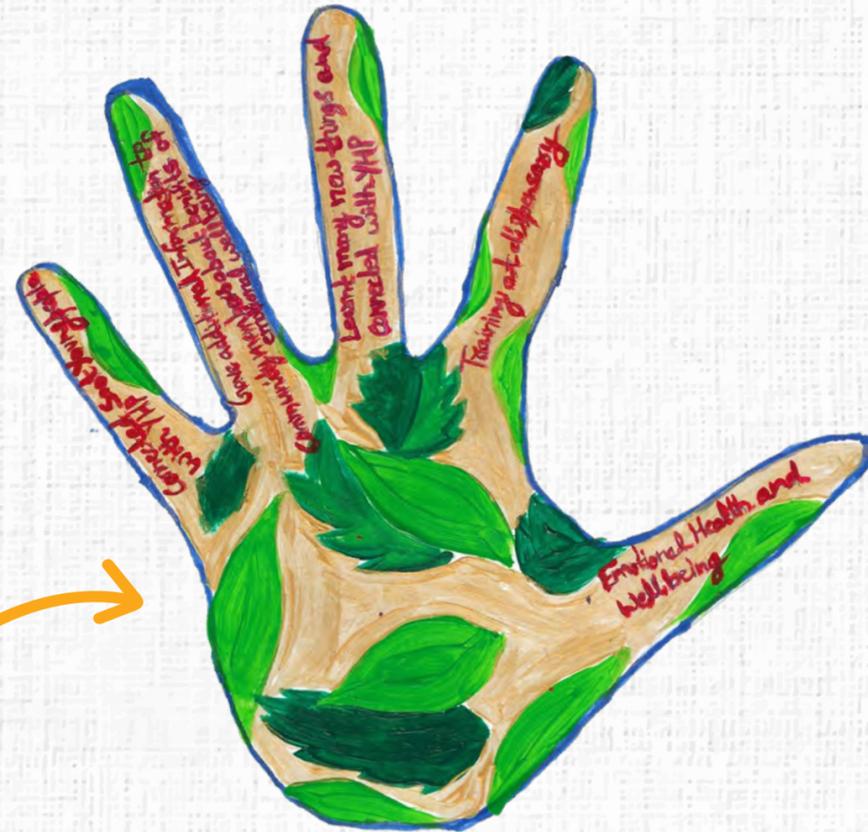


Changemaker 6



Neeraj, ASHA worker

Summary



The identity: Emotional health and well-being.

The spark: Training at dispensary.

The shift: I learned many new things while engaging with the YHP.

My bloom: I started sharing additional information with community members about the benefits of emotional health and well-being.

The small things: Connecting young people to the YHP.

What speaks for me?



Pigeon!

As an ASHA worker, I see myself like a pigeon - quiet, constant, and full of care. Just as a pigeon carries messages, I carry health, hope, and healing to every home I visit. And like the pigeon, my flight may be gentle, but my purpose is deep.



1. The identity *The issue I was struggling with...*

Before joining the Youth Health Programme, my work as an ASHA worker mainly focused on maternal and child health - vaccinations, deliveries, and newborn care. I didn't yet have the tools or understanding to support the broader health needs of adolescents and youth, especially around emotional well-being. That part of the community felt out of reach.

2. The spark *What gave me that first glimpse of hope...*

In 2023, I joined hands with YHP through Plan India. The intensive training and mentoring I received opened my eyes to a new world - one where I could support young people beyond just physical health. It gave me fresh hope and purpose in my role.

3. The shift *The turning point...*

Through YHP, my role as an ASHA worker expanded in ways I had never imagined. I shifted my focus to adolescent health - leading peer groups, speaking openly about mental health, NCDs, sexual and reproductive health, and more. I learned to communicate in ways that are culturally sensitive and youth-friendly. I started collaborating with schools to create open, safe spaces where young people could learn, share, and feel heard. For years, I've been known in the community as the ASHA didi who always shows up - with bandages, with answers, and sometimes just with a kind word. Now, I also bring hope, guidance, and strength to our young people - and that has been the most meaningful shift of all.

4. My bloom *What changed in my life...*

Since joining the YHP, my work has deepened in ways that truly matter. I've successfully referred over 25 high-risk or mentally challenged adolescents for timely care. More than 500 young people and their families have benefited from the outreach and awareness sessions I now support.

The biggest change? Young people - boys and girls alike - feel safe opening up to me. They talk about tobacco use, stress, and everyday health choices. I help their families understand how small habits shape lifelong well-being. I no longer see myself as just a health worker. I'm a messenger of change - and that is my greatest reward.



5. The small things What small activities help me grow...

Field trainings and community workshops gave me the skills I needed. I now connect young people to YHP, support Peer groups, engage schools, and involve families. Step by step, these small actions are bringing lasting change. Today, I don't just see myself as a health provider - I see myself as a youth empowerment and health equity ambassador.



*Zindagi sawar
doon, ek nyi
bahar doo
duniya hi badal
du main,
mei kisi ka sapna
hu, jo aaj ban
chuka hu sach.*

Let me uplift a life,
bring a new spring
Let me change
the world itself
I am someone's
dream, that today
has come true.

Neeraj, ASHA worker



Changemaker 7



Paras, 18

Summary

The identity: Tobacco use.

The spark: Silent rally on harmful use of tobacco.

The shift: YHP showed me a scary video about tobacco use.

My bloom: I quit chewing tobacco.

The small things: Now I'm physically very active, and play cricket.



What speaks for me?



Bat and wings!

They threw bitterness, I swung back. The bat became my strength - turning breakdowns into a comeback. Through the YHP, I found my grip. I learned to channel anger into action, pain into purpose. Like a bat in the hands of a fighter, YHP gave me the tools to rise - stronger, focused, and ready to protect not just myself, but others too.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

Before joining YHP, I was caught in the wrong crowd. My friends used tobacco, and I gave in to peer pressure. What began as 'just trying it' became a habit. Slowly, my health declined, my focus on studies disappeared, and my parents grew worried. I felt stuck in a cycle I couldn't break.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

Things began to shift when a friend invited me to join a World No Tobacco Day rally through the YHP. I went along, not expecting much - but it turned out to be a turning point. We spoke to the community about the dangers of tobacco, handed out posters, and encouraged people to make healthier choices. The energy, unity, and support I felt that day sparked something in me. For the first time in a long while, I felt hopeful - and ready to change.

3. The shift

The turning point...

After the rally, I visited the HIC with my group. A powerful session there, using videos and visuals, helped me truly understand the dangers of tobacco. It can lead to cancer and slowly destroys both the body and the mind. That hit me hard. I decided then and there to quit. I opened up to the facilitator about my struggles, and they offered support and practical steps. I also began distancing myself from the friends who had introduced me to tobacco. That day marked the beginning of my real recovery.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

Over time, I became deeply involved with YHP and spent meaningful hours at the HIC, learning and evolving. As I grew in knowledge and confidence, I began inviting my friends to join the sessions too. Some came, and they're now starting their own journeys of change. Today, I'm proud to be tobacco-free and a Peer Educator. I stand not just for myself, but for every young person who feels stuck. I help others understand the risks, make healthier choices, and believe that transformation is possible.





5. The small things *What small activities help me grow...*

YHP helped me break free from addiction, and become someone who inspires change, not just seeks it. I've made fitness a part of my daily life again, especially through playing cricket. Every match, every healthy choice, is a reminder that I'm not just recovering - I'm rising.



*Hum sabka hai
yehi sapna,
Nasha Mukta ho
desh apna.*

We all share the same
dream,
A nation free from drug
addiction.

*Tobacco se nata
todo,
Swasth jeevan se
nata jodo.*

Break the bond with
tobacco today,
And choose a healthier,
brighter way.

*Nasha kare jo
insaan,
Nahi ho sakta
uska kalyan.*

Those who fall to
addiction's chain,
Will never find true
peace or gain.

————— **Paras, Young Changemaker** —————

Changemaker 8



Prerna, ASHA worker

Summary

- The identity:** Lack of awareness about the SRHR.
- The spark:** The YHP training helped me inspire both the community and young people to lead healthier lives.
- The shift:** Connected to YHP and opened a whole new world.
- My bloom:** Dispensary and my daughter.
- The small things:** Regular home visit.



What speaks for me?



Bindi

My bindi doesn't just reflect tradition, it shines with the courage, care, and strength I carry as an ASHA worker. Through the Young Health Programme, I connect with youth, listen to their challenges, and guide them toward health, hope, and a brighter future - one conversation at a time.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

When I first started working with the Young Health Programme, I realised that many teenagers, especially girls, lacked awareness about vital health topics like menstruation, nutrition, mental health, and reproductive health. Most were too shy or afraid to talk about these issues, and some were silently dealing with serious health problems without knowing whom to turn to or how to get help.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

Over the past two years, I've been deeply involved with YHP, which is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of adolescents in our community. Through YHP, I received intensive training on NCD risk factors, gender equality, emotional well-being, and most importantly, SRHR.

What gave me true hope was the way the YHP team empowered us - not just with knowledge, but with the tools and confidence to connect with young people, understand their challenges, and support them with care and compassion.

3. The shift

The turning point...

As part of my journey with the Young Health Programme, I began leading regular awareness sessions with teenage groups in the community. I created safe, open spaces to talk about topics once considered taboo like menstrual health, mental well-being, and nutrition. These sessions helped build trust and gave young people the confidence to speak up. For those with personal concerns, like anemia, menstrual issues, or emotional distress, I offered one-on-one support and referred them to nearby clinics. This shift from facilitator to trusted guide was a powerful turning point for me.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

Over time, I witnessed a powerful shift - young people grew more confident, started asking questions, and even began sharing what they learned with others. More adolescents started visiting health centres and making healthier choices. As families saw these positive changes, their support and involvement naturally followed.

5. The small things

What small activities help me grow...

Today, I'm proud to be part of a programme that empowers as much as it heals. As an ASHA worker with YHP, I've been given the chance to truly impact young lives - through regular home visits, open conversations, and by being a trusted guide in their health journey.





*Aashaayen
Aashaayen
Kutch Paane Ki Ho
Aas Aas
Kutch Armaan Ho Jo
Khaas Khaas
Aashaayen
Har Koshish Mein Ho
Waar Waar
Kare Dariyao Ko Aar
Paar.*

Hopes, hopes -
a longing
to achieve
something bright,
A few dreams that
feel just right.
Hopes
in every effort, a
fearless fight,
To cross even
oceans with all
your might.

Prerna, ASHA worker

Changemaker 9



Priya, 20

Summary

The identity: Gender inequality.

The spark: My neighbour gave me hope.

The shift: YHP's group meeting.

My bloom: Felt a new sense of freedom, and I started dreaming of a better future.

The small things: Continued my studies while working a job.



What speaks for me?



Pen and wings!

I held the pen when hope was thin. Now, I write my own story. It is not washed away in daily chores. With YHP, I've grown wings - spreading awareness, confidence, and change, one young life at a time.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

I grew up in a conservative neighborhood where girls were expected to marry young, not chase degrees. Even though my family cared for me, we were poor - and tradition said boys came first. My father wanted me to leave school to save money for my brothers' education. My mother urged me to learn sewing instead of dreaming big. I saw firsthand how girls around me were denied the freedom and choices their brothers had. But I wasn't ready to give in. I had always been a top student, and I knew I wanted more - for myself, and for the girls who come after me.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

In 2022, I became part of the YHP and that changed everything. Through YHP, I received training on SRHR, emotional well-being, gender equality, and NCD prevention. For the first time, I had a safe space to question stereotypes and share my struggles. The YHP team offered me counselling and helped me see that my dreams were valid. Though I completed my senior secondary school, I couldn't afford college. That's when YHP referred me to an NGO offering a one-month retail management course. With their support and guidance, I convinced my parents to let me join. It was the beginning of a new chapter.

3. The shift

The turning point...

The retail course became my launchpad. I completed it, got a job at a retail company, and began saving to fund my graduation. Pursuing a Bachelor's degree while working wasn't easy - especially in a community where many believed higher education wasn't meant for girls. But I kept going. Today, I'm not only a student and a working professional - I'm also a peer educator with the Young Health Programme, raising awareness on NCD prevention, girls' education, and gender equality.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

My journey wasn't just a personal victory, it lit a path for others. Inspired by my own struggles, I became an advocate for gender equality, speaking at schools and community events to encourage girls to pursue education and financial independence. I now collaborate with NGOs to help girls access scholarships and mentorship, so they too can rise above societal limits and shape their own futures.



5. The small things *What small activities help me grow...*

Balancing work and studies wasn't easy, but every small step mattered. Today, I'm proud to be a symbol of hope for girls who dare to dream. From facing gender bias to guiding 100+ girls on gender equality and health, my journey shows that change is possible with belief and education. Thanks to the Young Health Programme, I found my voice - and now use it to empower others as a proud Peer Educator.



*Beta-beti ek saath badhein,
Har ghar ki shaan ban kar
ubharen.*

Let sons and daughters grow
together,
Becoming the pride of every
home.

Priya, Young Changemaker



Changemaker 10



Roshan, 15

Summary

- The identity:** Unhealthy diet and time issue.
- The spark:** My friend said, "There is a solution to your problem."
- The shift:** Learnt about balanced diet at YHP.
- My bloom:** Gave up junk food and started eating healthy food.
- The small things:** Drinking green/ karela juice every day.



What speaks for me?



Green juice, hope's fairy!

Green juice in my cup, a fairy by my side -
Nature's sip, my daily stride.
With every gulp, I rise with care,
Thanks to YHP, I now choose what's rare -
Health, awareness, and a future bright,
One green sip, and I choose what's right.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

Before joining the YHP, I ate fast food almost every day - momos, chowmein, anything quick and tasty. I'd even ask my parents for lunch money just to skip homemade meals. Slowly, my health began to slip. I felt tired all the time, struggled to breathe while running, and couldn't focus in the class. My grades dropped, and I didn't even realise it was all connected to my eating habits.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

A friend noticed I wasn't doing well and encouraged me to visit the YHP. With my parent's support, I attended a session at the HIC. That's where everything changed. The facilitator explained how habits like unhealthy eating, physical inactivity, and substance use are linked to NCDs. When I shared my health issues, they gently urged me to reduce fast food, explaining how poor hygiene, harmful additives, and bad cooking practices can affect our bodies. For the first time, I understood how my diet was harming me, and that I could do something about it.

3. The shift

The turning point...

I gave up fast food, and even convinced my brothers to join me. Through regular sessions at the HIC, I learned how to make healthier choices and prevent NCDs. Slowly, I started feeling stronger, more focused, and more in control of my health. Becoming a Peer Educator was a proud moment for me. Now, I actively encourage my friends to cut down on junk food and choose better for their bodies and future.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

Today, I feel stronger - both in body and in confidence. I lead health awareness sessions in schools and my community, sharing what I've learned with others. So far, I've helped over 150 young people join the Young Health Programme, and I continue to inspire many more to make healthier choices and take charge of their future.

5. The small things

What small activities help me grow...

Earlier, I was just a student hooked on fast food. Today, I'm a peer educator guiding my community toward health and well-being. And as a daily ritual, I now start my day with a glass of green karela juice - a small step that reminds me how far I've come.





(Song)

*Zindagi ek safar hai suhana,
Yahan kal kya ho kisne jana.*

Life is a pleasant journey,
One never knows what may
happen tomorrow.

Roshan, Young Changemaker

Changemaker 11



Sita, 16

Summary



- The identity:** Lack of awareness of SRHR.
- The spark:** Conversation with the school teachers to join YHP.
- The shift:** Developing awareness regarding personal rights related to sexual and reproductive health.
- My bloom:** My mom supported me to talk about SRHR at home.
- The small things:** Facilitated lunch session at school for health awareness.

What speaks for me?



Mirror!

They taught us to look at others to learn, but the mirror showed me where to start: with myself. Before YHP, I was full of questions but afraid to ask. At the Health Information Centre, I found the answers, and the courage to speak. Now, when I look into the mirror, I see strength. I see a girl who once stayed silent, now helping others find their voice too. The mirror still speaks - but now, it reflects a changemaker.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

I grew up with questions I couldn't ask. No one spoke about periods, contraception, or what was happening to our bodies. I felt scared and confused during puberty, and ashamed for not knowing more. I wanted help, but feared being judged by parents, teachers, even friends. I stayed silent.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

Everything changed when I joined the YHP at school and visited the Health Information Centre. In my first session, I learned something I hadn't even found on Google - why eating pickles during periods isn't advised. I was fascinated to know that it had to do with polyunsaturated fatty acids and their effect on the uterus. That one fact made me realise: this is a space where I will actually learn. That gave me hope.

3. The shift

The turning point...

For the first time, someone told me it's okay to ask questions - and that SRHR is a right, not a taboo. I learned about menstruation, STIs, contraception, and how sexuality is a part of being human. At the Health Information Centre, I found a safe space to speak freely - no shame, no fear. With support from peer educators and facilitators, I started feeling confident in my body, in my voice, and in my rights.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

Now, I can speak openly about SRHR, with friends and even with trusted adults. We don't hide periods anymore. We say 'Red light' or 'Saheli aa gayi' (my friend has arrived) - and we laugh together. Thanks to YHP, I understand my body, my rights, and my choices. I feel confident asking health professionals for help when needed. I've also helped others understand the risks of unhealthy diets and the benefits of eating right. My mom now supports me in having these conversations at home. And I feel proud to be part of something that's helping young people live healthier, happier lives.





5. The small things What small activities help me grow...

I used to feel scared and alone. Now, I run lunch break sessions at school to talk about SRHR with friends. Sharing what I've learned, especially with girls who felt like I once did, makes me feel strong and full of purpose.

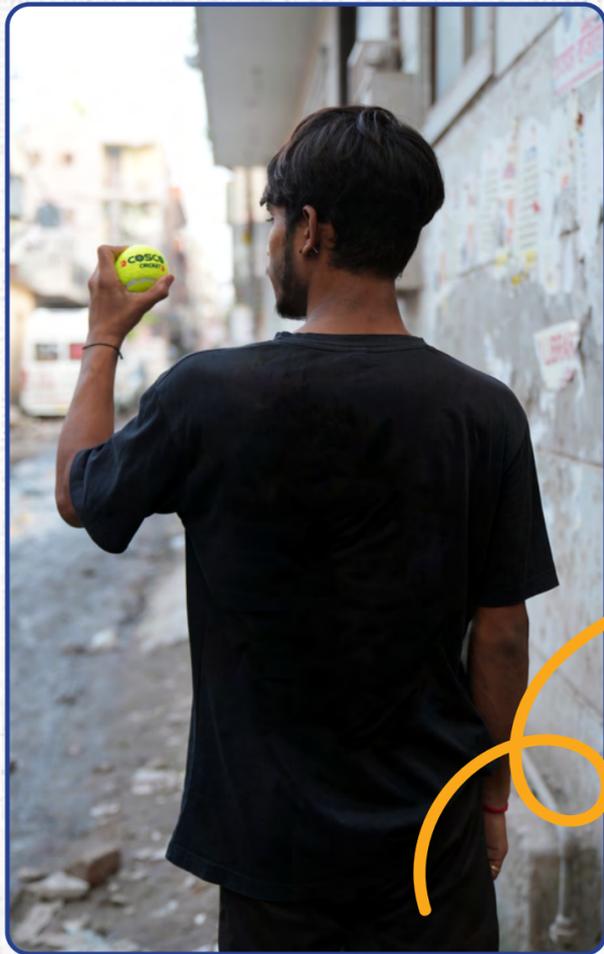


*Sabki rok hai, tok hai, nok hai, jhok hai,
par dil mein phir bhi hope hai... hai na?*

Even when the world stops you, mocks
you, pulls you down, the heart still holds
on to hope... doesn't it?

Sita, Young Changemaker

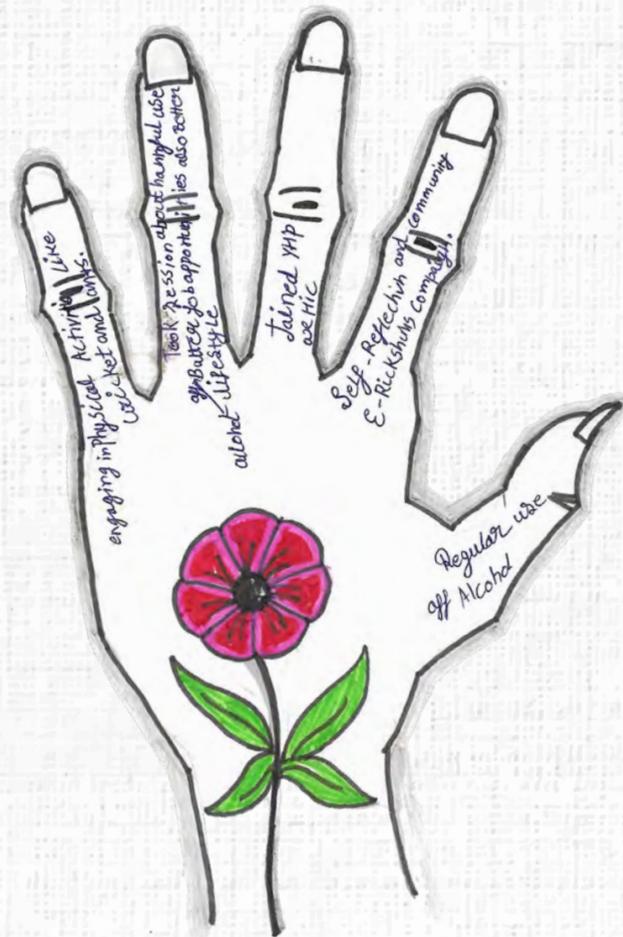
Changemaker 12



Sonu, 19

Summary

- The identity:** Regular use of alcohol.
- The spark:** Self reflection and community awareness through e-rickshaw campaign.
- The shift:** Joined YHP at HIC session.
- My bloom:** Attended a session on the harmful use of alcohol and feel more prepared for better job opportunities and a healthier lifestyle.
- The small things:** Engaging in physical activity such as cricket.



What speaks for me?



Bottle and bat!

I turned the bottle into a bat, swinging it hard to break free from addiction. With the Young Health Programme by my side, I chose courage over escape, and purpose over pain. This is my story. I'm Sonu.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

I was addicted to alcohol for almost two years. What started as casual drinking with friends became a daily habit. I stopped eating at home, asked my parents for money to buy alcohol, and ignored my health. One day, I had severe stomach pain and vomiting. The doctor told me I had a stomach infection caused by excessive alcohol. That was a wake-up call.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

At a local awareness camp by Plan India, I met a facilitator from the Young Health Programme. The session opened my eyes to the long-term damage caused by alcohol and drugs. Hearing real stories of recovery made me feel less alone—and for the first time, I believed that I could change too.

3. The shift

The turning point...

With support from YHP, I joined a peer support group in my neighborhood. Through group and individual sessions, I learned to identify emotional triggers and use healthy tools like journaling, walking, and yoga. I relapsed twice, but the group stood by me. That support made all the difference.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

Slowly, I rebuilt my life. I resumed studying and started working again. Now, I've been sober for over two years. I speak at public sessions to share my journey. If I could turn things around, so can others.

5. The small things

What small activities help me grow...

I stay grounded through small habits - daily walks, journaling, and attending peer sessions. I even returned to playing cricket, something I had stopped when I was drinking. Quitting alcohol didn't just save me, it gave me a second chance.





*YHP kehta baat pate ki, sun lo meri baat...
Nasha zehar hai, insaan ko lachar bana
deta hai.*

YHP speaks the truth, listen to me.
Addiction is poison. It breaks your body
and your spirit.

Sonu, Young Changemaker



Changemaker 13



Vaibhav, 19

Summary

The identity: Physical inactivity.

The spark: I saw the transformation journey of my friends.

The shift: I attended the session on unhealthy diet and participated in 'Millet Mela'.

My bloom: I started feeling energetic and mindful.

The small things: I organised street theatre with local kids.



What speaks for me?



Eagle!

I'm like an eagle - I don't run from the storm, I rise through it. Through YHP, I learnt that physical inactivity doesn't just harm the body - it holds back dreams. I saw how it was affecting youth around me, and I chose to act. Now, like an eagle with sharp vision, I look out for my peers. I lead awareness sessions, support friends in need, and stand tall - fearless, focused, and free. Eagles don't just fly. They lead.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

I used to be physically inactive. Most of my time went into watching TV or scrolling on my phone. I felt tired, sluggish, and often had body aches, but I didn't realise how unhealthy I had become. There were no open spaces around to play, no sports in school, and I had no motivation to move.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

In 2022, YHP came to my school. Their sessions on physical inactivity really struck a chord. For the first time, I felt seen. Through games, role-plays, and stories, I understood how a sedentary lifestyle could harm not just the body, but also the mind. Watching my friends transform gave me the push I needed - I knew I could change too.

3. The shift

The turning point...

I was painfully thin, and it wasn't just a physical state; it was an emotional burden. I felt weak, both in body and spirit. My journey toward a healthier self began when I walked through the doors of the HIC. In those group sessions, I found a community that understood my struggle. I began with morning yoga, slowly building a connection with my body. Kho-Kho (Tag) brought back a forgotten sense of fun and freedom in movement.

Consistency became my superpower, and joy became my motivation. The real 'aha' moment came at the Millet Mela, in a session on diet, where I finally understood that food was fuel for my newfound passion for physical activity. It was a holistic transformation - mind, body, and spirit. And it all started with a single step.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

I became more energetic, confident, and focused. I helped my kho-kho team win three matches! I started asking questions, sharing stories, and building healthy habits. Now, I lead sessions at the HIC and have helped over 100 young people join YHP. I feel proud to be part of something bigger.





5. The small things

What small activities help me grow...

Morning yoga, playing in teams, helping out during sessions, and sharing my own story. I organise street theatre with local kids - it's fun, collaborative, and spreads awareness. These little things added up, and transformed me.



The body achieves what the
mind believes.

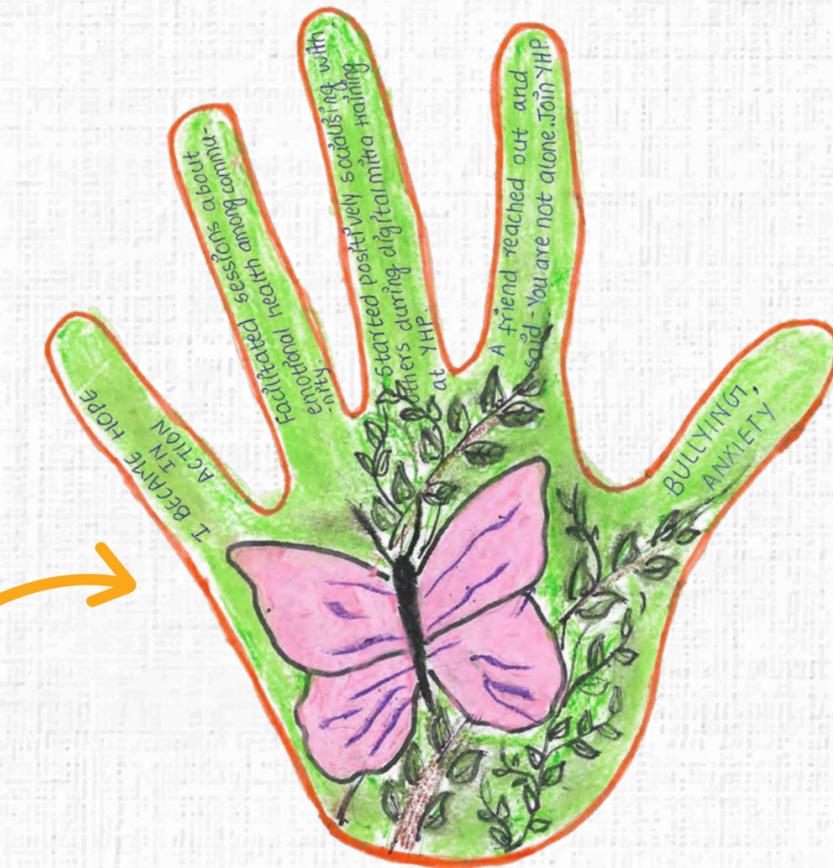
Vaibhav, Young Changemaker

Changemaker 14



Veera, 19

Summary



The identity: Bullying, anxiety.

The spark: A friend reached out and said, "You are not alone. Join YHP."

The shift: Started positively socializing with others during Digital Mitra (Digital Friend) training at YHP.

My bloom: Facilitated sessions on emotional health within the community.

The small things: I became hope in action.

What speaks for me?



Window!

A window feels like a cage, yet also shows the way to freedom. For me, the window was where I'd sit after being bullied - silent, anxious, unsure of myself. It felt like the only place I could breathe.

YHP changed that. Through the sessions, I learnt about emotional well-being, how to express what I feel, and that I wasn't alone. Now, that same window doesn't feel like a cage anymore. It's a reminder that healing is possible - and I help others find that freedom too.



1. The identity

The issue I was struggling with...

I remember it clearly - the moment I stood in front of my class, ready to speak, and suddenly, my voice disappeared. That silence wasn't just stage fright. It was the weight of everything I had been carrying inside.

They mocked me. Questioned my worth. Made fun of how I looked. They turned classmates against me and made me feel like I didn't belong.

"Don't tell anyone," they said.

So I didn't.

I stopped sharing.

Stopped smiling.

And slowly, I began to disappear into the background of my own life.

2. The spark

What gave me that first glimpse of hope...

A friend reached out. She introduced me to a facilitator from HIC and gently shared my story. The facilitator didn't offer advice right away. She listened. Truly listened. And in that moment - I felt seen. That simple act of care became the beginning of change.

3. The shift

The turning point...

The HIC encouraged me to try meditation and helped me understand emotional health and well-being. I joined health sessions, and slowly, began to participate in YHP activities. Through YHP, I found a safe space - a place to speak, to make friends, to feel brave again. I learned about emotions, boundaries, and the skills to take care of myself.

With that support, I found the courage to tell my parents. They listened. My teacher stepped in. The bullies were held accountable, and they apologised.

4. My bloom

What changed in my life...

That apology changed something deep inside me. I finally saw that the fault was never mine. I had been carrying a pain I didn't deserve. And I let it go. I found my voice. I started supporting other children - helping them speak, heal, and believe in themselves again. I even trained as a Digital Mitra, learned mobile video editing, and created films on NCD prevention, reaching 50 young girls with what I had learned.



5. The small things *What small activities help me grow...*

Sometimes, all it takes is one person who truly listens to help you find your voice again. Today, through my story and the sessions I lead, I try to be that person for someone else. Hope isn't just a feeling. It's something we can become.



One listener. One light.

Be that listener. We avoid emotional conversations, but sometimes they're the light someone needs.

Veera, Young Changemaker



Our journey ahead

Over the past 14 years, the Young Health Programme has not only reached over 12 lakh (1.2 million) young people, it has sparked conversations, nurtured leadership, and built pathways to healthier, more empowered communities. This publication brings together the voices and stories of 12 inspiring young changemakers and 2 ASHA workers who have stood at the frontline of this transformation, each one reminding us that real change begins with awareness, courage, and care.

As we look ahead, these stories serve as a call to action. A reminder that data and numbers matter. But what truly endures are the lived experiences, the ripple effects in families and communities, and the sense of purpose that young people carry forward.

There is still much to be done. Non Communicable Diseases continue to affect young people, especially in underprivileged communities, remain vulnerable to the risks. These stories from the field give us hope. They show us that when young people are trusted, supported, and heard, they become powerful agents of change.

Let this publication be more than a celebration. Let it be a commitment to deepen our impact, strengthen youth participation, and integrate health, rights and wellbeing into every space where young people live, learn, and grow.

The journey continues, and we move forward with renewed belief in the power of youth, storytelling, and shared purpose.

Closing Reflections



At AstraZeneca, we believe that young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow, but powerful change agents today. Through the Young Health Programme, we are proud to nurture their potential by combining science, collaboration, and community action to address some of the most pressing health challenges of our time. With our valued partner Plan India, this vision has translated into action, equipping youth with the skills, knowledge, confidence, and platforms to make their voices heard. These young changemakers are taking bold steps to extend the reach of the programme, using their learnings to influence and inspire wider communities. Their courage, creativity, and compassion remind us that Making Health Happen requires collective responsibility and that when youth lead with purpose, they have the power to transform lives and shape a healthier, more equitable future for all.

Dr. Ajay Kumar Sharma

Director- Corporate Affairs
AstraZeneca India

—  —
With our valued partner Plan India, this vision has translated into action, equipping youth with the skills, knowledge, confidence, and platforms to make their voices heard.
—  —





PLAN India

1, Zamrudpur Community Centre,
Kailash Colony, New Delhi -110048

☎ +91-11-46558484 ✉ planindia@planindia.org



f PlanIndiaNGO | 🌐 www.planindia.org | in Plan_India | 📷 PlanIndia | ✂ Plan_India

Be a part of our journey.
Your support can make all the difference.