



# Sakhi Programme Report

2013-2014

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## Introduction

The Sakhi Peer Leadership Programme was a pilot programme, conducted with the Andhra Pradesh Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (APSWREIS). Designed specifically with the needs of students at APSWREIS in mind, the aim of this program was to have the students who attended Her VOICE camp go back to their classrooms as peer leaders or “Sakhis” and disseminate the information they learned in a structured way to peers. Additionally, these girls were trained to be “support systems” or “mini-counselors” who would be able to be first responders in case a girl reported any personal issues at school or at home. The Sakhis would not be responsible for solving their peers’ problems, but they would be equipped to ensure that the girls receive appropriate and timely help and information.

Because the Sakhi program is a big responsibility for a fairly young girl, girls were chosen for this program with special care. From each participating school, 6 girls attended camp. These girls were selected on the basis of their academic performance and demonstrated leadership in school. Additionally, they had to submit a written application explaining why they would like to attend camp.

In 2013, six Sakhis were chosen from over 200 schools, and each of them reached out to many more girls. We are estimating that each Sakhi was able to reach at least 10 other girls. This means that by our fairly conservative estimate, the 1,150 Sakhis who were trained last year were able to reach an estimated 11,500 girls in their schools.

Unfortunately, the monitoring and evaluation structures that were put in place for this programme were not resource intensive enough to get a full and accurate picture of how the programme is running across schools. However, the results show that this programme is worth exploring further. For this iteration of the Sakhi programme, monitoring and evaluation processes included:

- Observations of Sakhis in 4 schools
- Focus group discussions with the Sakhis in these schools, the girls they teach, their mentor teacher and the principal of each school
- A 6-month follow up “reunion” was held in the month of November with Sakhis in districts Zones 5 and 6. This reunion allowed VOICE to reconnect with the Sakhis and gather some feedback about the program. During this time, several focus group discussions were held. Additionally, an impact assessment test was conducted to measure retention of subject knowledge, empowerment and understanding of teaching practices and peer counselling. The last two were not included in the original impact assessment.
- Follow up phone calls with teachers from 20 schools.

This report provides an analysis of the Sakhi Peer-Leadership program, including status of implementation, competency of Sakhis, benefits to participants and Sakhis,

results from a written test taken by Sakhis, anecdotes provided by the school authorities, etc. This report also considers ways to strengthen the program based on participant feedback, VOICE staff observations and interviews with school staff.

## Analysis of Qualitative Data

Information gleaned from interviews with various stakeholders revealed significant information regarding the programme itself, how adults and peers perceive Sakhis, their strengths, workload and support system. Information from these interviews is presented thematically in this section.

### Programme Implementation

One of the biggest concerns during programme design was whether Sakhis would be able to carry out the teaching aspect of the programme. When Sakhis and those around them were asked about how the programme was implemented, the following information was given:

- In most schools, the Sakhis conduct sessions largely during holidays (including weekends), free hours and library hours.
- Because the programme has been conducted in a fairly unstructured way, there was great variation in the number of chapters that Sakhis were able to complete in different schools. However, all Sakhis had completed at least five out of the ten chapters by November.
- Most Sakhis reported that they they scheduled the Sakhi sessions themselves. Sakhis who were more successful in completing a greater number of chapters received help with scheduling from either their mentor teacher or their principal.
- The Sakhis prepared for their sessions either the night before or for an hour or less just before they taught. Most Sakhis reported that they went through the chapter first, made notes and went to their teachers to clarify doubts.
- Sakhis stated that they disliked it when there was insufficient space to conduct the session and when outsiders/participants disturbed the session.

### Perception of Sakhis in the Schools

Another concern that came up often during programme design was how would Sakhis be perceived in their schools – would too much store be set by their word or too little? Would they receive enough respect but still be questioned by their peers when appropriate? Students' responses showed that Sakhis have found a natural and healthy place within the school system.

Students who participated in the focus groups state that they regard Sakhis as leaders to whom they look up, as good friends who will hear them out when they'd like to share something and as sources of crucial information. They like the way Sakhis conduct sessions because they teach well and are friendly.

Students also state that they approach the Sakhis when they have trouble understanding regular classes (e.g. in mathematics, meanings of words in English), have conflicts with friends or parents (Sakhis have spoken to parents about keeping girls in school) and are unwell (either during menstruation or otherwise). Interestingly, students also report receiving help from Sakhis in improving public speaking abilities and getting rid of their stage fear.

The most frequently cited reason for visiting Sakhis reported was difficulty in regular classes. However, many of the girls said that they first reach out to their House Mothers when they need help (a House Mother is the class teacher who is in-charge of responding to the emotional, medical and academic needs of every student in her class). This is because the House Mother is easier to find and has been their established point of contact since they started school. Thus, the entire burden of their peers' emotional health does not fall on the Sakhis.

Teachers stated that the Sakhis are hardworking, dedicated, and patient and therefore make good teachers. Their perception of the Sakhi sessions is that the other students are receptive of the information provided by Sakhis, but are also shy. One teacher mentioned that the participants were initially shy (especially about the chapters concerning puberty and menstruation) but warmed up to the classes later.

The Sakhis liked that they are able to help others by teaching, solving their problems and improving their own confidence levels. Sakhis reported that students approached them when they received a scolding, usually from someone in their family, did not understand regular classes, had health issues or difficulty interacting with their peers. A large part of the counselling, the Sakhis report, is for issues the girls have with friends and family-when there are fights between family members, inability to communicate with parents etc. The health issues were usually related to menstruation-discomfort due to stomach cramps, irregular periods etc.

## Curriculum

Although the curriculum is a simplified version of the material that is presented in the Her VOICE programme, there was always a concern about whether Sakhis would be able to access the material and deliver it to their peers appropriately. Sakhis stated that the chapters are easy, but some reported that sensitive chapters like puberty, menstruation and early risks (marriage and pregnancy) were difficult to handle. Counterintuitively, it seemed that the more sensitive topics were difficult for students to discuss with and learn from a peer. The teachers reported that the Sakhis were embarrassed to teach these topics to their peers. However, the Sakhis reported that other students were embarrassed which made it difficult for them to keep their classrooms productive. Observations of Sakhis teaching chapters on puberty and menstruation as assistant counselors during winter camp suggest that the latter was more the case. Sakhis themselves seemed able to deal with these subjects in an open and matter-of-fact way but peers felt shy to discuss these topics.

## Support Systems

Interviews conducted with teachers revealed that teachers help the Sakhis when they have doubts about the chapters. Teachers are also available to offer moral support. The mentor teachers said that they observed Sakhi sessions when they were in progress and keep track of when the sessions are taking place. They also attested to the fact that Sakhis helped students when they were unwell and when they needed help with resolving a conflict.

Principals interviewed at Warangal and Krishna district schools stated that they were keeping in touch with the Sakhis and were responsible for organizing the schedule for the sessions. They have expressed how the Sakhis are the most active players in school activities and serve as a source of inspiration to the rest of the school.

Support systems within the school were an enormous question when the programme was being designed. It was unclear whether school authorities would be able to support the Sakhis in addition to their existing workloads. However, it seems that there are committed individuals within the system who are willing to help the girls with this work. In schools where Sakhis receive support from their school principal and their mentor teacher, the programme is much more successful.

## Sakhi Workload

Reports from teachers and Sakhis with regard to the Sakhis' workloads were diametrically opposite. Teachers reported that the Sakhis found it slightly stressful to manage preparation and conduct sessions when exams are in progress but are otherwise able to multitask well. Additionally, they stated that the girls in 10<sup>th</sup> standard have trouble conducting sessions regularly due to rigorous preparation for upcoming board exams.

However, both at their schools and during the reunion, Sakhis reported that they were able to manage both schoolwork and these sessions without any trouble. But, once other responsibilities get added to their plates, Sakhis can find it difficult to schedule sessions. For example, one Sakhi mentioned that as she is also a Super Student, she has had to participate in many other activities, which has made it difficult to conduct Sakhi sessions.

## Expectations of Sakhis

To ensure that VOICE and the school authorities have the same expectations of good classroom transactions, we spoke with participants and school management to get their perspectives. It was found that across the board, all stakeholders agreed that to be successful in the classroom, Sakhis must:

- Use classroom management techniques effectively
- Explain the concepts at hand with clarity: simplifying the language and providing examples

- Have a good grasp of the English language and be able to clarify doubts of the students in regular schoolwork.

Feedback from the other students in the schools shows that they think the qualities a good Sakhi should possess are:

- A helpful nature: A Sakhi should always be willing to help out those who reach out to her
- Patience: While explaining concepts whether in class or while helping a student with a subject.
- Confidence: A Sakhi must be confident of the content and lack stage fear.
- A friendly nature: A Sakhi should be able to interact and discuss with her peers without getting angry or impatient.
- Response oriented: A Sakhi should be responsive to the needs of her peers

## Suggestions for Programme Improvement

Individual interviews conducted with school management have brought out some suggestions for improvement. It is interesting to understand what the school authorities view as essential to this programme. They suggest that girls must be trained in moral values and manners. According to the management, more content must be included about protecting themselves if they are sexually assaulted and what steps must be followed after such an attack-e.g. share with parents, meet a gynaecologist etc. Teachers also want Sakhis to be trained to speak to their peers about unhealthy romantic relationships, and refocus their attention towards school. However, while discussing these sensitive issues, teachers state that Sakhis must also be further trained on what kind of stories are appropriate and inappropriate to share in a classroom setting. Finally, school authorities want Sakhis to have more practice with improving their grammar, pronunciation and spelling.

The Sakhis had more concrete suggestions for programme implementation. Many of them said that they want a more definite schedule for their sessions and more interaction time with other Sakhis. They would like their teachers to be more involved in these sessions. They want more practice-teaching sessions, and would like to attend more camps and spend more time with VOICE counsellors. They would like to have more help with preparing for the sessions-to clarify doubts in the chapters etc. A spacious classroom or playground must also be allotted to the Sakhis for conducting sessions with ease.

## Sakhis' Competence as Teachers

Apart from qualitative information gathered from interviews, VOICE staff also observed Sakhi sessions. Observations by VOICE staff of 20 Sakhis in 6 schools (Narsingi, Mahendra Hills, Medak, Krishna and Warangal) revealed that:

- The Sakhis rarely made mistakes in content delivery.

- In several instances, they did not conduct the activities as they were in the book.
- They are able to use all the classroom management techniques taught to them at camp
- When the Sakhis do not spend enough time on discussion, the students were not able to completely understand the chapter.
- Ability to work with another Sakhi effectively is key to a successful classroom. For example, at the first session of the Warangal district school, the Sakhis were not able to distribute the content among themselves effectively which led to difficulty in teaching and classroom management. However, in the second session, the Sakhis balanced each other and were able to manage the class well.
- At another Medak district school, it was observed that the session was high on energy and classroom management techniques were used effectively. The participants could however be engaged to a greater extent without depending on reading the material directly.
- At the Khammam district school, the session had a lot of positive energy but there is scope for much improvement: preparation and explanation would need to be better.

## Sakhis as Co-counsellors

During winter camp, VOICE utilized five Sakhis, who previously attended the summer camp, to assist counselors and teachers who were running camp for KGBV students. VOICE staff found Sakhis to be more effective teachers than some of the contract teachers in APSWREIS. Sakhis related better to campers and were more apt to be silly and play the games, thus breaking the ice with campers. Using strong Sakhis in addition to or as a replacement for teachers during camp was a value addition to the programme. Teachers often do not want to be at camp and can have a negative attitude. Sakhis are always positive and eager to share their knowledge. They can also help cut down the cost of camps because their salaries will be a fraction of a teacher's. Having experienced the VOICE philosophy and teaching methodology in the classroom, Sakhis are more likely to connect with campers in a positive way than teachers. Eventually, we would like to only use Sakhis from these schools to run camps.

## Anecdotal Evidence

Not all of the impact that we have seen has been in the form of interviews or test results. Sometimes, we hear stories of what girls have been able to do that truly inspire us, and make us aware of the positive impact and the potential this programme has to improve the lives of the students we work with. Some of these stories are listed below.



## Sakhis as Sources of Emotional Support

Most of our feedback has come from Dr. Praveen Kumar, the secretary of the APSWREIS. He has visited many schools and says that the Sakhis have a huge following among their peers. All the girls who did not attend camp have learned energizers from the Sakhis and the Sakhi sessions have been fairly well received.

However, apart from the fun aspects of camp being well received, he recently shared with us a more poignant way that the Sakhis have changed their school. He told us that recently, due to a Sakhi's ability to support her schoolmate, a student has recently come forward to report an instance of abuse. Her testimony has led to appropriate action being taken against the perpetrator, which has made the school a safer place for other students.

One of the reasons why Dr. Praveen originally requested us to create the Sakhi programme was because of the high rate of girls attempting suicide within the schools. Since the Sakhi programme has been implemented, there have been no incidents of girls threatening or attempting suicide within the school. This is probably as a result of a confluence of factors, but the availability of Sakhis in the school is certainly one of them.

## Sakhis as Stars

From all accounts – including the Sakhis themselves, their principals and teachers, we know that girls who have been through the Sakhi programme are more likely to represent the school in inter-school competitions. Sakhis are also more likely to speak in public without any stage fear. During the Sakhi reunion, one teacher said that even though these girls performed well in school before camp, after camp they are more likely to be comfortable in unfamiliar situations and are much more confident young women.

Exceptional young women in these schools are also selected to be “Super Students.” These students are selected based on their academic performance as well as their public speaking skills, confidence and ability to represent their schools externally. They also act as assistant teachers for a particular subject within their schools and teach their peers lessons on MANA TV. Out of twenty-one students selected to be Super Students across 201 schools in the 2013-2014 academic year, twelve are Sakhis.

## Sakhis as Entrepreneurs

As VOICE staff continues to visit schools, we hear a lot of stories from Sakhis about the steps they are taking to make the programme a success in their school. One enterprising duo told us that to make the Sakhi programme more like camp, they needed more stationary than was available to them at the school (eg markers, chart paper etc). Rather than go without, Sakhis collected Rs. 2 (roughly 3 cents) from each student who attended a particular session. Students receive approximately Rs. 70 (~1 USD) to purchase toiletries and sanitary napkins each month. The Rs. 2 was

contributed from this amount. These small contributions from each student enabled the Sakhis to purchase the supplies they required to create a fun environment and also ensured buy-in from the participating students.

## Sakhis as Curriculum Developers

One young woman who attended the Sakhi programme in the summer and then became an assistant counsellor for the 2013 winter camp, recently shared that she has written a book on all that she has learned at camp. She stated that when she met girls from KGBV schools, she was moved by how much they needed to learn and how much she knew from attending camp. She has written a book in Telugu in a way that makes VOICE content accessible to these students. She is currently waiting to finish her examinations, edit the book and send it on to Dr. Praveen Kumar for feedback. She hopes to make a difference to other girls' lives by distributing this book through the APSWREIS school system.

## Retention of Knowledge

About 450 Sakhis from Zones 5 and 6 attended the Sakhi reunion that took place in November 2013. At this reunion, Sakhis were tested on

- Subject Knowledge: This section was exactly the same as the test that was administered in the summer
- Empowerment: This section was a sub-section of the test that was administered in the summer.
- Sakhi Test: This test included a test of knowledge of teaching methodology as well as knowledge of "counselling" or how to be a good friend. This test also had a section where Sakhis could rate their level of agreement with various Sakhi qualities. This test had not previously been administered. However, the information was very closely linked to the information that girls had been taught during the Sakhi programme.

An important aspect that was noticed at the reunion was that some of the students who attended the reunion had not attended camp. However, they had been "trained" by the teachers at their schools who had attended camp as co-counsellors. They were then also designated as "Sakhis." While these girls have definitely been acting as Sakhis in their schools, they did not go through camp nor the Sakhi training. Unfortunately, their scores are also included in these reports. This does make interpretation of the data difficult. Nevertheless, the results were as follows:

## Sakhi Test Results

For the Sakhi Test, each section contained between 6-10 questions to comprise a total of 23. Rather than reporting them separately, there are reported together to give a consolidated idea of how Sakhis performed on this test.

Out 353 available observations, the maximum a girl scored was 20. The mean of the sample was 12.46 and the median was 13.

#### Aggregated Scores of the Sakhi Test

Observations	Mean	Median	Max
353	12.4617564	13	20

#### Number of students scoring above

Observations	80%	70%	60%	50%
353	4 (1%)	27 (8%)	148 (42%)	236 (67%)

Furthermore, it was noticed that only 33% of girls scored below the median. There was a small sample of extremely low-scoring students who did bring down the scores for the entire population.

## Subject Knowledge Test Results

For the Subject Knowledge test, we compared the scores of the girls who attended reunion to the scores of the girls who attended camp from APSWREIS.

#### Mean scores on subject knowledge test

Group	No. of Observations	Mean
APSWREIS campers	353	24.51
Sakhis	963	20.02

We know that Sakhis scored lower at the reunion than the full group of APSWREIS campers scored after camp.

#### Difference between the two populations

	Observations	Effect	Base	% Change	P Value
MEAN DIFFERENCE	353	-4.39	24.51	-18%	0.00

Sakhis scores 18% less at the six month reunion than at the end of camp. However, results must be interpreted with caution as there were a group of “Sakhis” who took the test who had never attended camp. Additionally, the samples were not matched and the students who attended the reunion were from only a few zones compared to the students who attended camp. Thus, while attrition of knowledge is a real possibility, it is not the only explanation for the lower scores.

## Sakhi Empowerment Test

This test contained a subset of the indicators tested in the full impact assessment test. Therefore, there is no comparison that is available at this time between data from camp versus data from the reunion.

Out of a possible score of 78, the maximum scored was 41 on the empowerment test. Additionally, the mean is lower than the median, suggesting that there is a group of about 40% of the students tested who performed particularly poorly on the empowerment test.

Mean scores on the empowerment test

Observations	Mean	Median	Max
353	21.0084986	23	41

Comparison of student scores against mean and median

All Observations	Percentage Below Mean	Percentage Above Mean	Percentage Above Median
353	38%	62%	54%

## Limitations of the Written Test

There are many limitations that hinder our wide acceptance of the results from this test. The first, and most important is the sample itself. We were able to reach students from only two zones, when the summer camp was held with students from 6 zones. Thus, there may be hidden factors within the data which make this population qualitatively different from the population that was tested in the summer. Additionally, students who had never attended camp are also part of the reunion data set. Since students and schools were specifically chosen to be a part of the Sakhi programme based on ability and interest, this could have really affected the available results.

Second, the test design was such that only one part is fully comparable to the summer. Since we are unable to make a full comparison to the summer, we are unable to determine whether the results from the reunion are worse or better than the summer results.

Therefore, while the written test does provide good information, the results must be interpreted with caution.

## Benefits of the Programme

All stakeholders agree that there are many benefits of the Sakhi Peer Leadership Programme both for the participants and the Sakhis themselves. Teachers and principals have said how the Sakhis were the most active students in schools to begin with, but are now able to take on more responsibility, multitask with ease, are more confident, are able to speak in public without stage fear and have improved their language skills. These highly motivated and capable young women are now able to

discuss their future plans with clarity. They are willing and able to negotiate with their parents to pursue higher education and careers. They know their rights and how and when to fight for them. They can also identify their own feelings and can act on them. Finally, they can advocate for themselves and their peers in times of need, and can effectively support their peers.

Sakhis report that interacting with college students has given them access to female role models who show them what is possible beyond what they see within their schools. The counselors have inspired Sakhis to pursue higher education and careers. Interacting with adult women, who interact with the world in a way that is different to the women within their schools and home communities, has expanded their world view.

The other students report that after the Sakhi programme, they are now more aware of their bodies, know how to choose their friends. They also know whom to go to when they are faced with a conflict and when experiencing difficulty with schoolwork. Often, there is very little time for fun at these schools. This programme allows students to be children and play while learning. The participants said they particularly enjoyed the sessions because of the energizers and fun activities apart from the wealth of new information and the opportunity to work with diverse groups of girls.

## Conclusion

As a pilot, the Sakhi programme was entirely successful in showing us how bringing a girl to VOICE camp and then teaching her to be peer leaders can take an academic achiever and turn her into a leader at her school. It has also shown us how much other girls benefit from having a peer who is available as a credible source of information and support.

To ensure the success of this programme in the future, some changes will need to be made to the structure, monitoring and implementation. To this end, the 2014 iteration of the Sakhi programme, has a defined schedule and reporting structure. Senior Sakhis, or Sakhis who have been through the programme twice, will be designated as mentors and supports to other Sakhis and will also be the liaison between VOICE and the school. This will help us monitor and evaluate the Sakhi programme on an ongoing basis. Impact will be assessed using the same tool pre-camp, post-camp and 6 months after the programme for Sakhis, and at the beginning and end of the academic year for a sample of other girls. Additionally, both Sakhis and the girls that they teach will be tracked on multiple variables including educational achievement, career trajectory, age of marriage and age of childbirth. Students taught by Sakhis will always take the same test, and be tracked on the same indicators as Sakhis. This will help us measure the impact of a programme that is run by Sakhis versus one that is run by VOICE.

This past year has proven that the Sakhi programme can be beneficial to both Sakhis as well as their peers. However, apart from anecdotal reports, we do not have enough data on exactly how the programme benefitted each stakeholder. The following year is an opportunity to measure the programme at scale, and begin to track the impact longitudinally. From the evidence we already have, it is clear that the programme will help thousands of girls find and raise their voice, and make the world around them start to change.