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WHEN HOME ISN'T SAFE: WHAT THE ROLE DOES CHILD WELFARE COMMITTEE DOES PLAY.....

BY MEENKASHI

“ONE CHILD, ONE TEACHER, ONE BOOK, ONE PEN CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.”

There is a particular kind of silence that fills a room when a child has nowhere left to go. I heard that silence for the first time during my internship at CWC Chandigarh, and it has stayed with me ever since. I had joined the internship keeping in mind the legal perspective behind formation of CWC. What I got instead, what happens when a child's own home turns unsafe, and how committee members trying to rebuild something out of that wreckage. Somewhere between the files and the visits, this stopped being just an internship and became the most honest lesson about what it truly means to protect a child.

WHEN HOME STOPS BEING SAFE....

Most people grow up believing home is the only place where we are protected. But for the children who come to CWC, home is often the very place they had to run from. Over a month there, I saw children who had been beaten, starved, unnoticed or simply forgotten by the adults who were supposed to raise them. Chandigarh's own child protection records admit something painful — data shows that a large share of children face some physical abuse in their lifetime, and shockingly, happens within the four walls of their own house, at the hands of someone they trusted. CWC exists precisely for this gap — the space between a child's help and their care.

WHAT CWC ACTUALLY DOES FOR A CHILD.....

What excited me most was how seriously the Committee took every single child produced before it, no matter how small the case looked on paper. Once a child produced under CWC's care, their education is utmost priority — school admissions are arranged, uniforms and books are sorted, their interest in specific filed. Nutritional meals are prepared, not just quantity, because many of these children arrive. Slowly, with proper food and routine, I watched some

of them return to being, simply, children again — laughing at recess, fighting over the last piece of roti. The psychological side is handled with a gentleness__ as child is always a child. Counsellors visit regularly, and staff are trained to notice when a child goes quiet or stops eating, because those are the early signs that something is unresolved inside the. That patience, I learned, is itself a form of healing.

MORE THAN JUST SHELTER.....

I saw boys who arrived scared and silent slowly find their voice on a badminton court. Cultural functions are organised so children can sing, dance, and simply have fun without anyone judging them for the family they come from, they make friends and enjoy it with full enthusiasm. Outings happen on a weekly or monthly basis, and for many of these kids, it is the first time they have ever been taken somewhere just for enjoyment, not for work. Their rooms in the shelter homes are kept clean and inspected regularly, and CWC members personally visit hostels every week to check on hygiene, food quality, and whether any child has a complaint that hasn't reached anyone's ears yet. Improvement meetings are held often, where staff sit and honestly discuss which child is doing better, who needs more attention, and what is still not working. Being one of such members in meeting is great opportunity.

THE OTHER SIDE I WASN'T PREPARED FOR.....

But this article would be dishonest if I only told the good parts. Many parents, after being contacted, showed no concern for their children's whereabouts — some didn't bother to visit even once. There were many families with too many children and barely any income to feed them or to educate them. I met kids who had been sent out to beg because their family saw it as a source of income rather than a crime against the child. A large number of them had never been enrolled in school in their lives. It was especially hard to see how girls, more often than boys, were kept back to cook and manage the house while their brothers were sent out to earn or study. Many children did not even have an Aadhaar card, which meant they technically did not "exist" on paper, making it even harder to get them into government schemes or schools. Alcoholism among fathers came up again and again as a root cause of the neglect and violence at home. Several girls had run away out of rebellion, because the torture and control at home had become unbearable for a child to carry it alone.

THE POLICE WEREN'T HAVING IT EASY EITHER.....

I also spent time observing how the police coordinate with CWC. Officers often had to deal with parents who denied everything, children were scared to speak the truth. Cases would sometimes stall for weeks because addresses were fake, Aadhaar details didn't exist, or families kept shifting locations to avoid being traced. Despite the paperwork and the pressure, I saw officers sit patiently with a frightened child for hours, just to earn enough trust for their bright future.

LEAVING WITH MORE THAN I CAME FOR.....

I joined CWC, Chandigarh internship expecting to learn about child welfare law. I finished it by understanding something far bigger — that behind every file number, there is a child who just wanted someone to notice them. CWC gives these children something they were denied for far too long: a room that's clean, a meal that's warm, a school to belong to, and adults who actually care for them. That, to me, is not just child welfare committee, instead it is a second chance at childhood itself.