

## How the Community Cricket Program has inspired Deepak to advocate for child rights in his community



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Young people from slum communities are often stigmatized, mistreated and marginalized by society. They are routinely denied their basic human rights in terms of health, nutrition, education, security and protection despite the recognition of their rights in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC). The UNCRC is a comprehensive, internationally binding set of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for young people.

Young people's rights outlined in the UNCRC must be realized for them to develop, thrive and reach their full potential. Furthermore, young people must be made aware of their rights and should be empowered to share their stories and experiences to inspire the change they want to see.

[Pro Sport Development's](#) (PSD) [Community Cricket Program](#) (CCP) engages young people from marginalized slum communities in Bhubaneswar to initiate conversations with these young people on issues of gender and child rights through the sport of cricket. Further, the CCP uses cricket as a medium to build young people's leadership abilities to further empower them as agents of change within their communities.

Deepak Kishan, a class 9 student at Saraswati Sishu Vidya Mandir in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, joined the CCP in November 2022. The program provided him with avenues to build his understanding of child rights and allowed him to develop the life skills required to advocate for his rights and those of others with similar life experiences.



### **Understanding of child rights**

[Global research](#) has shown that a vast majority of young people lack knowledge of or have an incomplete view of their rights. This is also true for young people from marginalized communities in Bhubaneswar, as many of them are oblivious to it, as shared by Deepak:

*“I learned a lot about [child rights]. Earlier, I did not know that we have so many rights. We got to learn about these rights. For example, it is our right to play together.”*

The CCP not only informed the young people of their rights but also gradually enhanced their awareness of the same. Through his participation in the program, Deepak has been able to reflect

on the level of accessibility to these rights among young people from his community. He has also started considering whether young people have been denied their rights as he expresses:

“There are so many children who do not have access to their rights. If we as children have access to our rights, then we will be able to live well, grow properly and develop appropriately”

These reflections helped Deepak realize the significance of rights in the lives of young people. He understood that for young people to live, grow and prosper adequately, it is imperative that they can access their rights.

### **Building life skills and leadership abilities**

In addition to his improved awareness on child rights, Deepak has experienced additional benefits from the program, notably in the refinement of life skills such as communication and teamwork. While playing in a team during program sessions, Deepak would always go out of his way to help and support his teammates, especially when they were losing or under pressure.

Moreover, through Deepak’s participation in team-based activities part of the program, he got a chance to interact more frequently with his peers, resulting in an improvement in his communication skills:

“I learned communication [ through the program]. How to communicate with others, how to talk to and behave with others”



*Deepak (third from left) at the The Upamanyu Mallik Cricket Tournament, organized by TUMI*

Deepak has always believed that he possesses the quality of a good leader. However, prior to joining the CCP, he did not feel as confident in leading a group of people, mainly due to a lack of previous experience. This potential was recognized by PSD's implementing team as they started offering him opportunities to captain and lead his team during cricket matches. Team captainship further honed Deepak's leadership skills and boosted his confidence, as observed by PSD's community coordinator, Pragatee Sethy:

“I have seen lots of changes in Deepak. He always looks to support his team members, and tries to encourage them during matches... he also possesses the ability and confidence to lead a team”

Improved leadership abilities and increased awareness of child rights empowered Deepak to express his thoughts on the importance of child rights education and advocacy among young people:

“If children do not have access to their rights then they will not be able to provide others with those rights. Because if a child does not know that they have rights, how will they ensure that other children in their communities are able to access those rights?”

### **Advocating for child rights at SCCWC 2023**

In September 2023, Team PSD - India Crocodiles was one of the 20 teams from 15 countries that participated in the [Street Child Cricket World Cup](#) (SCCWC), which was being held in Chennai. The SCCWC was an initiative organized by [Street Child United](#) (SCU), to bring together young people from underserved communities around the world, so that they could advocate for their rights and drive change.

Seeing the positive progress made by Deepak in the CCP, he was selected as one of the eight young people to represent Team PSD at SCCWC 2023. Deepak engaged in several meaningful conversations and discussions at the event, where he confidently advocated for the interests of all slum-based young people in Odisha. He also participated in the youth-led congress at the event, a unique platform where young people from all over the world came together, shared their experiences and discussed the specific issues faced by them. Deepak along with other participants at the youth-led congress urged key stakeholders around the world for [concrete implementation of their rights](#).

Through his participation in the event, Deepak also understood the importance of a legal identity for young people. Several young people from marginalized communities around the world lack [any form of legal identification](#). Deepak learned that a lack of legal identity restricts young

people’s access to basic facilities or amenities such as education and healthcare, which further allowed him to reflect on the potential implications it could have on young people in his community:

“There are many children who do not have an identity, children living on streets, under bridges or flyovers. And if one goes to a school, or college or hospital, the first thing they ask for is an identity. However, [many young people] do not have one. I want to make sure that each and every child has an identity”



*Deepak at SCCWC 2023*

This has motivated Deepak to take positive action and advocate for child rights so that young people, irrespective of their age, gender and socio-economic status, are able to access and enjoy their rights.

### **Fostering positive change**

Deepak believes that in order to make child rights universally accessible, it is essential that all young people are educated on their rights. Educating young people about their rights not only has certain individual benefits but also has a positive impact on families, educational institutions and local communities.

Deepak, who now feels empowered by his learnings from the CCP program, wants to use his knowledge and skills to promote child rights in the community and inform other young people and adults about them. Moreover, he wants to work for the betterment of others in his community. He aspires to be a police officer or social worker, as he feels that this way he will directly be able to positively impact the lives of others:

“I want to become a police officer when I grow up. I want to become a high-ranking officer, so that I can bring positive change to our community. Or else, I want to become a social worker like the staff at PSD. I am always very inspired by PSD and the work it does in our community.”

Deepak’s story is a testament to the gradual but transformative impact that child rights education can have on an individual as well as on a community level. It sheds light on the importance of providing young people with access to their rights as it increases their ability to influence their own lives and promotes holistic development and wellbeing. Moreover, advocacy and knowledge sharing at an individual level have the potential to gradually transform communities and societies

into rights-respecting environments. Hence, it becomes the responsibility of young people and adults alike to inform and educate others about child rights.

*The [Community Cricket Program](#) (CCP) is a structured, mixed-gendered intervention led by [Pro Sport Development](#) (PSD) that works with young people between the ages of 13 to 16 years from marginalized slum communities across Bhubaneswar. The CCP leverages the power of cricket to improve young people's health and wellbeing, equipping them with crucial soft skills and sporting values, as well as increasing their awareness on issues of gender and child rights.*