

## How PSD's Community Cricket Program empowered Omm to advocate for child rights and gender equality



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Young people from slum communities often find themselves on the margins of society, many deprived of basic human rights such as access to education, and seldom given the opportunity to develop and realize their full potential ([Agarwal et al., 2021](#)). A child's right to play, one of the most fundamental rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), is often found lacking in such settings partly due to the lack of infrastructure and facilities, as well as prevalent social dynamics. This is further exacerbated for girls due to deep-rooted gender role expectations and notions about their physical capabilities as being less than those of boys, leading to a gender divide in play ([Raskind et al., 2020](#)).

To empower young people in overcoming these barriers, [Pro Sport Development](#) (PSD) and [The Upamanyu Mallik Initiatives](#) (TUMI) have been implementing the [Community Cricket Program](#) (CCP) in underserved communities in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Designed for young people aged 12 to 18 years, the program provides sporting opportunities while using cricket as a platform to engage participants in discussions on child rights and develop their leadership skills. A key feature of CCP is its mixed-gender approach, which aims to empower young people to challenge gender-based stereotypes and promote equality.



Omm Sai Das

Omm Sai Das, a student of class 8 of Beena Bharati Vidya Mandir in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, has been an active participant in the CCP since December 2023. He initially joined PSD through its flagship Community Sports Program (CSP) before transitioning to the CCP. Through this program, Omm has not only improved his cricket knowledge and skills but has also been empowered through education on child rights.

### **Provision of sporting opportunities**

Hailing from a slum community in Bhubaneswar, Omm always felt limited in his means to access adequate sporting facilities which severely restricted his engagement in sports. However, this changed when he first joined the CSP, which provided him with ample exposure to sports, allowing for more consistent and meaningful engagement.

In addition to enhancing his skills, the program also contributed to a noticeable improvement in his physical health and fitness. He shared:

“Earlier, I used to just sit around but now I get to play 1-2 times every week including both cricket practice and matches. Such frequent engagement in exercise has also led to an increase in my health and fitness which has helped me stay ahead in physical activities.”

While CSP laid the foundation for his involvement in sports, joining CCP was a pivotal moment that propelled his interest and honed his competencies in cricket. He mentioned:

“I did not even know the rules of cricket before. CCP has taught me and my peers how to play cricket properly according to the rules. I also learned how to grip the bat and the ball, how to flick the wrist while bowling and batting, and how to catch while fielding.”

Omm noted a personal improvement in many cricket-specific skills such as bowling and batting, which bolstered his self-esteem and confidence, enabling him to overcome his initial self-doubt with support from the PSD facilitators. He shared:

“Earlier, while batting, I was often scared when facing the bowlers and I was unable to even grip the bat properly. Then ma’am [PSD’s facilitator] encouraged us to overcome our fears and face the challenge head on. This motivated me to push myself and now I enjoy batting and do so without fearing the bowlers. Now, I am also working on improving my bowling.”

### **Developing key life skills**

Through his participation in the program, Omm developed essential skills, particularly in communication, teamwork, and leadership. The structured activities and facilitated matches helped him collaborate effectively and build strong relationships with his peers. He also recognized the importance of clear communication in enhancing team coordination and improving overall performance on the field.

While leadership styles can vary depending on the values and beliefs of each person, Omm understood that, as a leader, he greatly prioritizes unity and teamwork. Mutual respect was also a key learning for him. He mentioned:

“During practice, we are always respectful towards each other and support each other. We give the same time that we ourselves would require for the same thing- thus we treat the other person the same way we treat ourselves. This has improved our leadership.”

Competitive matches organized by PSD facilitators played a crucial role in skill enhancement and resilience, leading to an increase in confidence and self-esteem. Competing against other schools in structured games helped foster a positive attitude toward challenges. Reflecting on this experience, Omm shared:

“Even if we lose, we can try harder again and win next time.”

### Breaking down gender barriers

PSD’s mixed-gender approach also provided a space for Omm to interact meaningfully with peers



Omm playing cricket with his female peers

of different genders, which served to break down the gender divide. Marking a departure from earlier gender-based expectations, this form of collaborative play redefined his notions of the capabilities of girls, allowing him to realize that not only can girls play well but do so on an equal footing with boys. Omm expressed:

“We used to think that only boys can play sports such as cricket. Even though we knew about women in sports at the district, state, and national levels, we still felt that they did not play as well as men. PSD taught us that whatever the sport

may be, both boys and girls can play it and play it equally well.”

Omm highlighted a stark change in the boys’ attitude towards their female peers. He mentioned how boys would refuse to play with girls, fearing that playing in mixed-gender teams would cause them to lose as they deemed the cricket skills of girls to be inferior. Through CCP sessions, they realized how misguided their thinking was:

“We began to realize that our way of looking at it was wrong. Girls cannot be solely responsible for a loss as boys often lose too. The final outcome only depends on the collective effort of the entire team, not one individual.”

Consequently, their attitude changed as they adopted a more inclusive and supportive approach:

“Earlier, we used to scold the girls because they were not able to play well and could not bat or bowl properly. But now, we have seen a big improvement in their skills which has led us to realize that they can do all the things we can. We should support them and offer guidance whenever they ask for help.”

### **Empowerment through education on child rights**

The CCP has also played a crucial role in enhancing his awareness of child rights. Through his participation, Omm gained valuable knowledge about what child rights entail, including access to nutrition, education, and sports and play - all of which contribute to a child's physical and mental well-being. Before joining the program, he was unaware of these rights, but now he recognizes their importance in ensuring holistic development and growth.

The program also enhanced his understanding of gender in relation to child rights. Omm reflected on how he came to see that these rights should apply equally to both boys and girls. He shared:

“Regardless of whether they are a girl or a boy, each child has these rights. This also taught us that whatever boys can do, girls are also capable of the same.”

Omm now actively educates his peers and classmates about child rights, ensuring greater awareness and social change. He is particularly motivated to prevent child labor and understands the importance of reporting such cases to the appropriate authorities. As he expressed:

“In the future, if we see any child leaving their education to work, we will protest against that and contact the child rights helpline.”

### **Way forward**

Omm believes that the knowledge he has gained from the program will shape his future actions and inspire broader societal change. One of his key commitments is to stand against child labor and actively advocate for children's rights. He is determined to educate others about their rights, empowering them to protect both themselves and those around them. Additionally, he is passionate about challenging gender stereotypes, as he mentions:

“We will educate society and explain to people that girls and boys are not different, girls are just as capable as boys.”

He plans to create awareness in the society about the importance of extending equal opportunities to all young people. This includes ensuring that girls are given the freedom to explore the world while also being equipped with self-defense skills to empower and protect themselves.

Omm's journey highlights the transformative impact of using sport as a medium for child rights education, not just on an individual level but also within the broader community. His story highlights the importance of equipping young people with knowledge and advocacy skills, enabling them to champion equality and justice. By fostering awareness and driving change at a grassroots level, individuals like Omm play a crucial role in shaping a society that respects and upholds the rights of every child, regardless of their gender.

*The [Community Cricket Program](#) (CCP) is a structured, mixed-gendered intervention delivered by [Pro Sport Development](#) (PSD) and [The Upamanyu Mallik Initiatives](#) (TUMI) that engages young people between the ages of 12 to 18 years from underserved communities across Bhubaneswar. By leveraging the power of cricket to improve young people's health and wellbeing, the CCP aims to equip them with crucial soft skills and sporting values, as well as increasing their awareness on issues of child rights.*