



Give to India
by **Shefali Ganesh**

The Mobile Future

MUMBAI MOBILE CRECHES PROVIDES A SAFE CHILDCARE OPTION FOR WOMEN WHO WORK AT CONSTRUCTION SITES - AN INITIATIVE THAT SERVES A SEGMENT THAT IS USUALLY ON THE FRINGES OF SOCIETY

The illustration that makes up the Mumbai Mobile Creches' (MMC) logo - of a mother reading to her child - is a poignant one. A closer look reveals that the mother is balancing a basket on her head - the kind used by women who work at building construction sites in India to carry sand or bricks.

Construction sites in India employ several thousand migrant labourers. According to a study by the National Commission for Women in 2004, one-third of those employed were women. Normally, these women leave their children in a corner of the work site - which means added anxiety over the safety of the child during the day. However, the pair depicted in the MMC's logo wears a happy smile- a telling statement of the organisation's work in this segment of society.

Forty-two-year-old MMC is an offshoot of the Mobile Creches that was begun in Delhi. Mobile Creches was envisioned by Meera Mahadevan in 1969, moved as she was by the sight of a wailing infant at a construction site in Delhi. In 2006, Mumbai Mobile Creches was formally established to attend to the needs of the children of women working at these sites. MMC, which was formed soon after, developed a revolutionary model of childcare for this segment, which was hitherto neglected in Mumbai and Pune.

MMC's aim is to lay a strong foundation for the children of tomorrow - hence their tagline, 'Futures under construction'. When young mothers go to work at construction sites, they are reassured that their children are taken care of in the vicinity of the workplace. Children up to the age of 14 are taken in - a crèche takes care of the children under three; a balwadi (pre-school) takes in three- to five-year-olds; the older children go to after-school support classes. Fresh meals, vaccinations and health check-ups are administered to prevent malnourishment - a common issue. The MMC's health and nutrition programme ensures that the children's education is not affected because of ill health.

The programme's success can be seen by the increasing number of centres, and the number of children that go on to study in Government-run schools. As Vrishali Pispati, CEO of MMC, says, "We have had 30 centres that reach over 4,600 children in the past year. A significant achievement is that 49% of eligible children were enrolled and attended schools; this is vitally important to our programme." Engaging events, such as the Annual Book Week, has children participating in a series of activities centred on books and stories. By reading to their juniors, the primary-school children gain confidence and inspire those in pre-school. Puppet shows and theatre activities encourage their creative instincts and make learning fun. To ensure that quality care is given to the children at all centres, women from the community are roped in and given complete training on child development and education.

Community outreach is an essential part of MMC's work. Their lokdoots (the word means 'messengers to the public') hold regular street plays, which highlight important social issues. Basic hygiene, prevention of diseases, operation of bank accounts and the harmful effects of alcohol are some of the important themes of these street theatre events. MMC also offers training programmes in childcare to women across Mumbai.

A society with safe, healthy, educated children is the MMC's vision. While their mothers work at laying strong foundations for buildings, Mumbai Mobile Creches helps them by providing their children with a solid foundation for the future. At the busy construction sites, many a mother has regained her smile, and many a child its laughter. 🏠

🏠 **Visit MMC** at www.mumbaimobilecreches.org, email them at contact@mmcmail.org.in, or call them at +91-22-22020869 / +91-22-22020879.

🏠 **Volunteer by spending time** at the centre, organise an outing for the children or donate. (Details on their official website.)

🏠 **The annual Mumbai Marathon** in January is MMC's biggest event - participate in this and show your support. (Details on their official website.)

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