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Swasthya Darshan

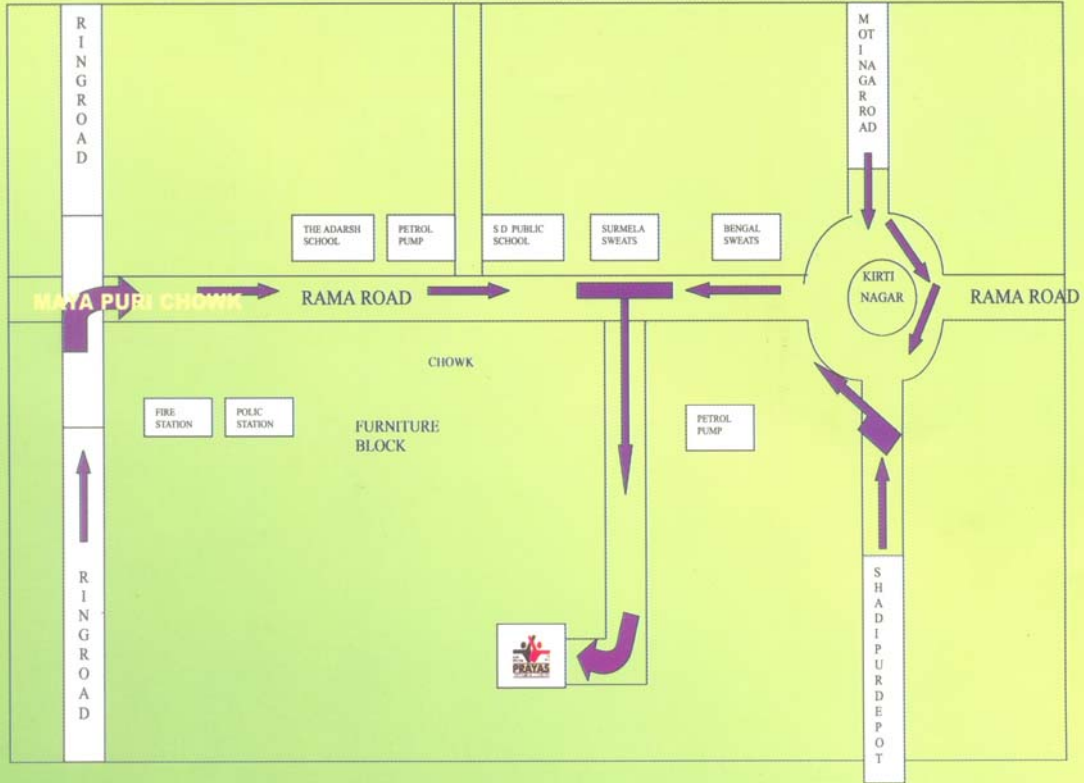


Prayas Health Services



(A quarterly newsletter of Prayas Health Service, a health unit of Prayas)
Prayas is an NGO working for the Welfare and Development of Street Children

LOCATION MAP



Prayas Health Service

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Foreword

In medieval times, the children were regarded as *preformed, miniature adults*. By sixteenth century, childhood became a distinct phase of the life cycle. The '*puritan belief*' in original sin fostered a harsh, authoritarian approach to child rearing. During the *seventeenth century Enlightenment*, the views like 'Noble savages' and 'inherently good' child promoted humane treatment towards children. Since then, the childhood is viewed as a distinct phase of life when a person is innocent, agile and vulnerable and therefore, demands special care, support and nurturance.

Children find love, shelter, nourishment and sense of identity and belongingness through their families. Those within protected families, develop in a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment. Unfortunately, many children find themselves in vulnerable conditions where they lack adequate protection and support conducive to their childhood needs. Some have no family at all or are separated from it due to a mishap. Several others belong to disintegrated families or families traumatized by a disaster, natural or man made. The poverty stricken families of various rural and urban slums, wherein parents leave home for work early in the morning and return back late in the evening or night pose an equal amount of threat to the safety of their children. Such children experience a sense of neglect and are often placed in abusive and exploitative situations when left alone at home. Not only this, some children who take up petty jobs as domestic helpers, rag pickers, street vendors or even beggars to make money for their survival, are also placed in equally vulnerable situations and suffer harassment on regular basis. A few others suffer atrocities by parents and guardians themselves. Forced by such dire circumstances many of these neglected and harassed children turn delinquents. Thus, the children, be neglected or delinquents, are literally the same segment of the society. Such under privileged and disadvantaged children exploited for work or sex make silent cries for help.

The children who need substantial protection beyond what their families can offer are categorized as "Children in especially difficult circumstances". They are a common sight in cities living under sub-human conditions without identities. However, these children who number anywhere between 80 to 100 million in India, exist beyond the concern of society, governance and even policy makers.

Prayas is an organization that emerged in response to these silent and yet deafening cries of thousands of neglected street and working children in the country. As the name suggests, Prayas is an organization endlessly making efforts to support, cuddle, protect and nurture thousands of such street and neglected children on the roads of Delhi, Gujarat and Bihar. While working with these children for their education, nutrition, shelter and development, Prayas felt that the *health care* and *nutrition* should be the first call in the care and protection of children. As a result, '*health care*' was built as an integral part in the intervention programme of Prayas.

The street and slum children have special health problems because of the conditions in which they live and grow. They are vulnerable to a number of infections, most of which go unattended causing unusually high mortality rate and more serious health problems. Our philosophy is to respond to the felt needs of these children. With this vision, the **Prayas Health Service** started in 1995 with a health

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