

On National Cleft Day, NGO Smile Train India Brings Cleft Awareness into NDMC Classrooms

Category: Business

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On the occasion of National Cleft Day, [Smile Train India](#), the country's largest cleft focused NGO, partnered with the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) to raise awareness and advocate for cleft lip and palate issues. They implemented a comprehensive school-based engagement programme across NDMC schools in the national capital.



NDMC Students Bring Book Series “Smiles That Shine” to Life Through Theatre for National Cleft Day

As part of this initiative, Smile Train India rolled out **“The ABCs of Change”** (Awareness, Behaviour, and Confidence) across 10 NDMC schools, using storytelling, interactive learning, and creative engagement to build early awareness, empathy, and inclusion among primary school children. The programme integrates cleft awareness into classrooms, positioning children as active participants and ambassadors of change within their schools, families, and communities.

Central to the initiative is Smile Train India’s picture book series, **“Smiles that Shine,”** the first-of-its-kind children’s series designed to promote empathy, kindness, and understanding around facial differences, including cleft lip and palate. Through imaginative storytelling and relatable characters, the books normalise differences, encourage conversations around self-confidence and identity, and help reduce stigma from an early age.

The school programme concluded with a three-day creative theatre workshop led by Rahul Khanna, a renowned theatre practitioner and storytelling facilitator. Primary school students from NDMC schools developed and performed short plays inspired by the “Smiles that Shine” stories, bringing the narratives to life through expressive enactment and reinforcing messages of empathy, inclusion, and acceptance.

Cleft lip and palate is a treatable birth difference, affecting approximately 1 in every 700 children. However, lack of awareness, social stigma, and misinformation often delay treatment, impacting a child’s health, speech development, confidence, and social integration. By embedding awareness within schools, Smile Train India and NDMC aim to encourage a more inclusive environment for children with facial differences.

Speaking on the initiative, **Kritika Choudhary, Director, New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC)** said, *“Schools are not only places of learning but also where empathy and inclusion are shaped. This partnership with Smile Train India brings together health awareness and creative learning. By engaging children through stories and theatre, we hope these values extend beyond classrooms into homes and communities.”*

Mamta Carroll, Senior Vice President and Regional Director, Asia Smile Train India, added, *“Cleft care goes beyond medical treatment; it is about building confidence, dignity, and a sense of belonging. Through initiatives like Smiles that Shine, The ABCs of Change, and the culminating theatre workshops, we are using storytelling to help children understand and embrace differences, and to grow up with empathy, kindness, and inclusion at their core.”*

By anchoring cleft awareness within classrooms and creative expression, Smile Train India and NDMC reaffirm their shared commitment to early intervention, inclusive education, and community-led advocacy, ensuring every child born with a cleft has the opportunity to grow up healthy, confident, and included.

Over 35,000 babies with cleft conditions are born in India each year, and many of them go untreated because of social stigma, misconceptions and a lack of knowledge about the treatment that is available, by improving community level awareness. Smile Train's school outreach program aims to spread awareness amongst the young minds.

For cleft treatment related query or support, **please call our toll-free helpline number: 1800 103 8301.**

