

Vision Unlimited

Ethnographic Insights and Recommendations



How this report is organized

- Background

- The report briefly outlines study activities undertaken in Gurgaon in 2023

- Findings

- We present the main ethnographic insights from our engagement, focusing on the different perspectives shared by parents, children, and teachers

- Synthesis of Findings:

- The report summarizes what Vision Unlimited is based on fieldwork findings, discussions with teachers, and previous conversations with Vision Unlimited CEO, Shibal Bhartiya. These highlighted value propositions built on Vision Unlimited's strengths identified and directly voiced by Vision Unlimited's 'beneficiaries', particularly parents and teachers.
- This report then situates Vision Unlimited in the appropriate conversations about addressing the challenge of street children and children being out of school in India.
- The next section of the report delves into specific supports Vision Unlimited is providing to children, putting them into operational categorizations for more targeted and progressive supports.
- The report then highlights the three key added values of Vision Unlimited, the three-pronged foundation of its model of operation.

- Recommendations and proposed Theory of Change

- Our findings are followed by recommendations for the next steps, divided into main recommendations and secondary recommendations, based on the understood urgency of Vision Unlimited's current operation.
- We conclude with a draft of Vision Unlimited's proposed Theory of Change (TOC) that draws on the findings presented here, as a starting point to be further populated and refined by Vision Unlimited.

Field Activities

Study activities

- The primary insights for this report were derived from the in-country fieldwork to Gurgaon on the 26 – 28 November 2023.
 - Fieldwork activities included a visit to all 4 schools of Vision Unlimited. For each of the visits, the RFI team, consisting of Dr. Joanne Yoong and Dr. Sherria Ayuandini, held discussions and had conversations with the parents of the children attending Vision Unlimited, either in a group setting or on a one-to-one basis. During the visits, the field team also engaged with the children in group and one-on-one conversations and in activities.
 - A full-day workshop with Vision Unlimited teachers was held on the second day of the fieldwork. The workshop was originally planned to be a monitoring workshop which was then adjusted, due to the current and most pressing need, to be a value proposition workshop where the RFI team explored together with the teachers and Vision Unlimited CEO their current understanding of Vision Unlimited scope of work, value, and immediate impact.
 - A demonstration of a teaching day was held on the last day in one of the schools where the field team conducted participant observation both in the younger class (approximately up to 6-years-old) and in the older class.
- In addition, a review of the existing literature addressing the challenge of street children and children being out of school in India was conducted to better help contextualize the findings. A brief summary accompanies this report to provide further details.
- Recommendations were generated from this fieldwork, document perusal, workshop, and direct engagements with Vision Unlimited staff and relevant stakeholders



Ethnographic Insights

Highlights of Findings

Parents' Voices

What Parents Shared with Us

Parents' Background and Aspirations

- Parents are connected to Vision Unlimited either through active outreach done by Vision Unlimited teachers when surveying the neighbourhood or by organic referral , i.e. referral from other parents, by chance encounter when they walked around the neighbourhood, or by their children who came across Vision Unlimited first.
- As a result at each site, the sociodemographic majority strongly reflects the nature of the surrounding neighbourhood, such as a community of a particular caste, a settlement of migrants, or a group of workers at a specific housing estate
- However, some common themes emerge
 - Most parents are in manual labor, doing construction, domestic work, delivery, or driving. Some are casual day laborers for hire.
 - Some parents have a transient lifestyle based on seasonal migration from rural to urban areas to follow work opportunities or due to safety concerns.
- Parents generally hoped for their children to do better in the future than they are now.
 - They aspire for their children to be educated, marry later and have better jobs, which most consider to be something stable, including teachers, doctors, engineers, police officers, and being in the army.

*“Only when they study can they do better than us.
When I was young, my father never sent, me, now I ‘m married, I have to work”
“[For] my kids to study, learn, good things, get a good job.”*

- Most noted that there was no difference between boys and girls for them as they wanted both to equally go to school and receive education.
- Most of the parents who were engaged were mothers by virtue of the sessions taking place during working hours, so particular attention was paid to elicit fathers' perspectives as well



What Do Parents Value?

- Parents valued Vision Unlimited for its educational support to their children and appreciate that it is free to attend.
- Parents recognized Vision Unlimited's value in providing their children tutorship after school. This is especially true for those whose children go to government schools in the morning and need extra support after. Without Vision Unlimited, the only remaining option would be expensive private tutorship. *"but I don't know, because I would have to spend money I don't have,"* remarked one parent who works as a domestic worker.
- Some parents for whom government school is not a high-quality option or for whom government school is not accessible noted that without Vision Unlimited, they would have to send their children to private schools which they cannot afford

"We're poor, how come we'd be able to spend money [for private education]."

"If this school is not here, nothing."

- Parents with a transient lifestyle especially appreciated that it made it hard for their children to receive regular education as well as exposure to Hindi and English beyond their native language. These parents highly valued the presence of Vision Unlimited in their neighbourhood and close to their work which allowed them to work nearby and still monitor their kids.



- Parents remarked that Vision Unlimited teachers teach well beyond the level of quality that they would otherwise have access to

"[We] get to meet good teachers."

- Some parents specifically stated that they came back to the area after some time away, due to work or safety, because they wanted their children to go back to learning under a particular Vision Unlimited teacher they have grown to trust.

Other Supports – Food/Physical/Socioemotional Security

- Apart from educational support, parents also appreciated Vision Unlimited providing meals for their children which their children look forward to.

“They are so excited to come to school usually, they come to school for food, they’re hungry! They don’t eat breakfast so they can come here and eat!”

- For parents, Vision Unlimited provides a safe space for children when they are away.
 - Because of where they live, it often means that children play on the street during the day. Parents also recognized other dangers that their children are facing by being on the street, including drug use and a risk of harassment and physical harm to the girls.
 - Parents noted that being assured that their children have a space to be when they are at work is the main reason why they could then leave for work.

“If I don’t have this place [Vision Unlimited] I can’t go to work,” remarked one parent.

- Having Vision Unlimited as a safe space for children also allows *both* parents to work, giving them more economic opportunities for the household.

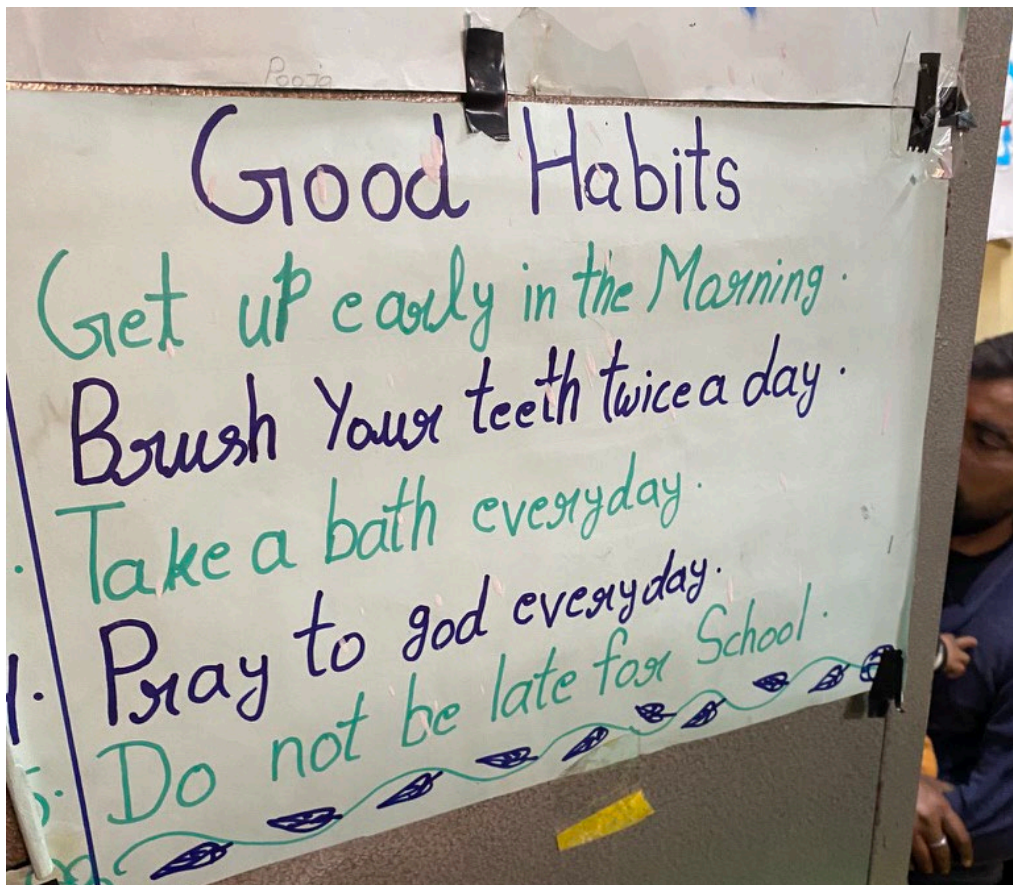
“I also have to go to work, sustaining households,” said a mother who is a domestic worker.

- Parents also noted that Vision Unlimited allows for the youngest in their family to tag along. They saw this as helpful because this meant the older siblings, who otherwise have to care for the younger siblings, could attend classes and study.
- Parents further valued that at Vision Unlimited their children “get love and affection”, as well as the opportunity for “a treat every now and then.”
- Other parents shared that without Vision Unlimited, their children might have to be sent away back to their hometown, separating them from their parents the parents find difficult.



Outcomes For Children

- When asked what changes they noticed the most in their children, parents cited attitudes and behaviours related to
 - Personal hygiene : handwashing, toothbrushing, bathing, wanting to wear cleaner clothes
 - Social skills : using less violent or abusive language, being less rude and more polite to elders, such as greetings them more respectfully.
 - Learning : “studying well”, like studying more, doing their homework at home.
 - Independence and self-regulation: “*motivated and driven*” , waking up by themselves and coming to school on their own.
- Notably, parents also noted that attendance at Vision Unlimited contributed to their children’s well-being, as at Vision Unlimited their children “get to be happy”.



Ongoing challenges faced by parents

- Parents remarked that their life is difficult but emphasised that nowadays, it has become less difficult than before.
 - Their overall living situation is seen to be challenging from time to time. “[L]ots of difficulties, staying in a temporary shelter,” mentioned one parent.
- Parents shared that it continued to be hard to be enrolled in a government school especially if they were new migrants.
- Some mothers shared that it was challenging to receive permission from husbands to let their daughters go to school. It was only after a repeat ask that the husbands relented.
- With respect to Vision Unlimited specifically, parents did not raise many challenges, but noted that some of the older kids (beyond the age of 15) sometimes felt left out as they were not able to attend



Fathers' Perspectives

- While the majority of parents interviewed were mothers, fathers were also present and were engaged in discussion to explore potential differences in their perspectives
- Fathers did remark that they have differing concerns than mothers about their children. They felt that they worried more about money and how to afford education
 - For instance, one individual earning about 9000Rs per month said that tuition of 500-600Rs for government school and even 1000-2000Rs for private school is something they could not afford.



- Fathers especially worried about their daughters

“We worry more about the daughters – we don’t care if the boys are running around!”
“In the evenings, we don’t let the girls go out, we worry about them. It’s important for them to be somewhere safe. Here [in the neighbourhood] the girls are not very safe.”

- Fathers also noted how they worry about their daughters’ marriages due to them having to pay dowries, although they remarked that they were hopeful that things would change with education, sharing hopes and confidence in their daughters.

“We get children educated so that at some point these practices will stop.”
“Girls bring their own fate, make their own destinies, girls can be presidents, astronauts.”

- Fathers had aspirations for their sons as well, particularly to do better jobs than themselves

“It’s pointless if they do the same thing”
“I’ve been laboring, I don’t want my son to be laboring”

- They also saw education to be an important factor in a boy’s marriage because boys needed to first earn money before marrying (which education would help support)

Children's Voices

What they think of Vision Unlimited

Children's Voices

- Children seemed happy and excited to come to Vision Unlimited.
- From a social perspective, they shared that they like coming to Vision Unlimited to be with their friends. When they were not at Vision Unlimited, such as the off day on Tuesday or during the holidays, children said that they would play on their own outside, use their mobile phone, and roam around the streets
- They often specifically mentioned the teachers as their favourite things at Vision Unlimited.
- When asked what they loved most to do at Vision Unlimited, children would first answer “study” bringing up maths specifically
 - Children also mentioned dancing, singing, drawing, playing, and other cultural activities
 - They also said they enjoyed doing arts and crafts, making decorations, and learning public speaking at Vision Unlimited.
 - A number of children also mentioned food/snacks
- Children shared what they wanted to be when they grow up, which include teachers, doctors, and police/army officers

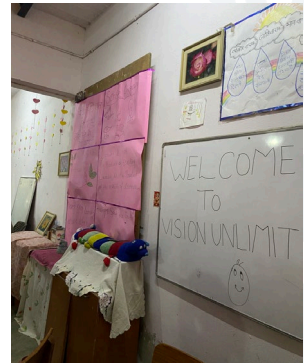


Site Visits and Teaching Demonstration

Some Notable Observations

Site Visit and Teaching Demonstration Observation

- Each site has a class of more than 100 children enrolled with about 40 students attending at any one time supported by 1 or 2 teachers
- Sites were purposefully chosen based on community needs, including the need to facilitate attendance by children excluded from the government schools due to special needs, physical disabilities or residency status
- Regardless of the surrounding areas, classrooms were kept secure, neat and clean, with kitchen and toilet facilities available in one site
- In addition to educational posters/materials emphasizing both academic and social learning, children's own contributions and artworks were on display in most spaces



Site Visit and Teaching Demonstration Observation

- In the demonstration class, pedagogy included both group and individual recitation and individuals coming up to do boardwork.
 - The demonstration subjects covered were English, Mathematics and Hindi, with exercises pitched to the entire class group of mixed ages.
- This was combined with teachers walking around to give children individual attention
 - Teachers would individually give tasks for younger children to do by writing on their slate or exercise books for the older ones.



Site Visit and Teaching Demonstration Observation

- Throughout the class period, children mostly remained seated and paid attention over a sustained period of more than 2 hours.
 - Children sometimes chatted with one another and worked together most of the time focusing on completing their individual tasks.
 - They often eagerly wanted to show it to the teachers when they had finished their tasks. Each child looked encouraged when teachers acknowledged the good work they had done before giving them additional tasks.
 - When a child was done with their work and yet to be visited by the teacher again to give them additional tasks, they sometimes remained idle or looked around but were generally orderly and did not move about the class
- Children were overall keen to participate in class and observed to be able to voice their thoughts and most eagerly volunteered to either answer questions or lead the class.
 - In the younger children's class, children seemed proud when chosen to stand in front of the class, introducing themselves and their families before leading a poem.
 - In the older children's class, children shot their hands up to answer questions and seemed to really want to be chosen to come up to the board.
- Very young children (those younger than 3 years old) seemed to integrate well in class, practicing doing their lines on their slate on their own. The slates provided to the younger children helped retain their attention.
- Some children with different needs also attended the class and seemed to be calm and comfortable among other children, here and there interacting playfully with others.



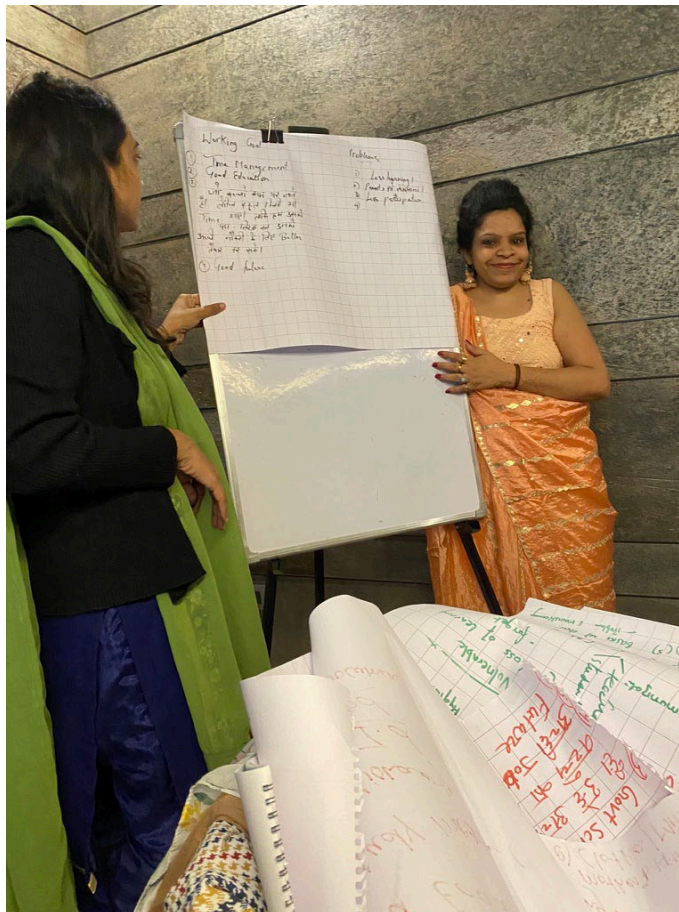
Teachers' View

What is Vision Unlimited?



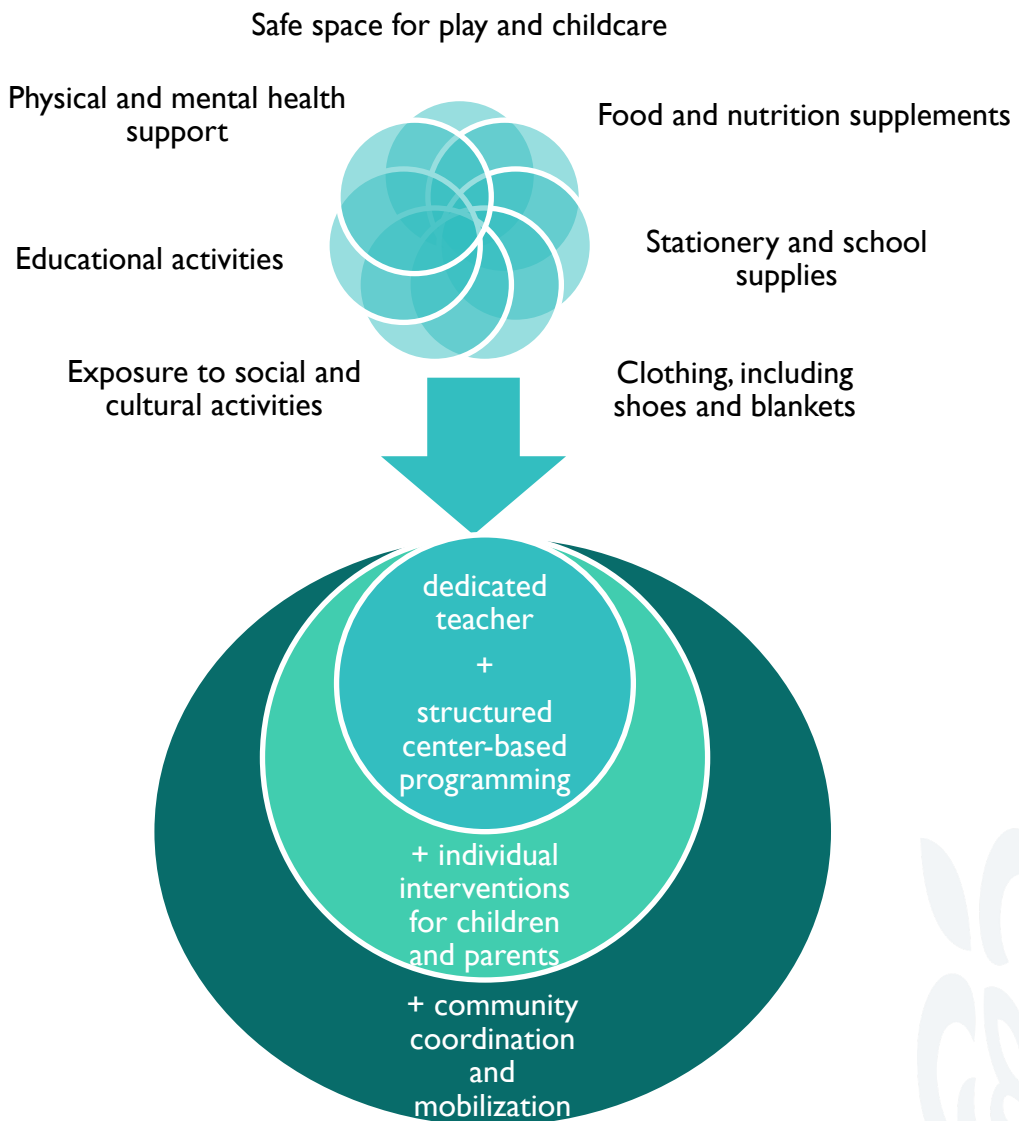
Teachers' Background

- Vision Unlimited currently has 5 teachers. All female, 2 with an NGO background and 3 with previous teaching experience and qualifications.
- Some of the teachers were recommended by previous Vision Unlimited teachers to apply for the position. While others are community members who live in the nearby community and in some cases parents whose children are also part of Vision Unlimited.
- Teachers received training when first joining Vision Unlimited, in pedagogy and also in information technology skills. New teachers have a period where they shadow an already established teacher as part of their on-the-job training.
- In addition to delivering center programming and community support, teachers have recordkeeping and administrative responsibilities and also take it upon themselves to research and innovate new teaching approaches



How do teachers see Vision Unlimited?

- When asked to describe Vision Unlimited, teachers focused on core services as well as how Vision Unlimited bridges the gaps between existing systems of support and the ground realities of marginalized children and their families



- Teachers also highlighted the diversity of groups within the larger target population that benefitted from Vision Unlimited. One teacher described the overarching goal as *"to give equality – this is the most important part of Vision Unlimited - among religions, communities, caste, finance, status"*

What is Vision Unlimited's approach?

- It is important to note that while Vision Unlimited is often referred to casually as a school, when asked to describing it more formally, there was only one occasion when a teacher did so
 - Instead, teachers often referred to Vision Unlimited as a committed and trusted family that valued connection and closeness: teachers cared for and reached out to children and parents, while parents also reached out for help
- Although literacy and numeracy support informed by state curriculum standards is provided, teachers spoke of supporting learning more broadly as a core part of holistic child-centric care, covering academic, socioemotional and life skills/interests

“we develop the strengths of each individual child”

- Rather than narrowly delivering formal education, teachers saw themselves addressing both more basic as well as higher-order needs to help children journey towards future empowerment
 - Teachers most commonly mentioned exposure to new opportunities - from games and competitions with prizes to outings, learning dancing/singing with opportunities to perform, festival preparations and joint celebrations for special occasions/birthdays.
 - Teachers also described going the extra mile to introduce structure to children in an positive, engaging and appropriate manner, such as going house-to-house to prepare and bring children to the classroom
 - For older girls, teachers specifically highlighted that a social environment trusted by families was critical in enabling participation. For older boys, this included working hard to identify and address risks, such as as developing games to avoid the spread of gambling
 - These experiences inspired children, built self-regulation and confidence, and contributed to social connectedness and well-being.

“We try to give the kids happiness”

“We provide safety, sense of security”

“We give food, stationery, notebooks, whatever they need”

What Teachers Received in Return

- Given the central role of the teacher, working at Vision Unlimited requires strong dedication but was described as also personally rewarding
 - Teachers received support from the community and became community leaders with people having trust in them.
 - Teachers also noted how both parents and children became personally attached to them.
 - In addition, teachers were observed to have strong rapport with one another and with Vision Unlimited stakeholders and volunteers
- Working at Vision Unlimited in their own communities and with their own children sometimes enrolled in the center was also an enabling opportunity for some teachers. Some remarked that their husbands do not worry or fret because they are seen to be in the right place.
- Teachers highlighted how they felt that they were continuously learning in Vision Unlimited, especially from the children themselves.

“Every day there is something to learn, we also learn from the kids.”

- They noted how their life and the lives of their own children improved because of Vision Unlimited, in some of the same ways that the lives of the community are improved

“Our own lives have changed for the better in the process. We feel safe and secure.”



Findings Synthesis

What is Vision Unlimited?



Day-Sunday
दिन - रविवार

Our World

Vision Unlimited's Strengths Go Beyond Schooling

Parents, children and teachers highlighted the following as Vision Unlimited's strengths:

- Vision Unlimited is seen as part of the community itself
 - Teachers and kitchen staff sourced from the area.
 - Physically available in the neighbourhood to be easily accessible
 - Ways of operation adjust to the children's life and do not disrupt other needs or tasks of the child such as sibling care or even earning ages
- Parents have strong trust in Vision Unlimited
 - Capable and trustworthy teachers whom the children adore
 - Perceptible changes in children's attitudes and behaviors
 - Community presence is sustained even through local crises
- Parents do see Vision Unlimited as a school or at least as a place where their children are getting an education but value that Vision Unlimited provides more than just education, including being a safe space, providing meals and emotional support to their children.

What is Vision Unlimited?

A stand in for gaps in adult and institutional presence in the life of a child with a disadvantaged or vulnerable background

A community-based institution whose model of operation is aspirational yet embedded in the life and the characteristics of the children it is serving

An organisation providing a safe space for learning and a happy childhood that respects children's rights and does not just wait for adults

How does Vision Unlimited support equity?

Vision Unlimited enables access to learning opportunities for children who are otherwise excluded

Access

Coverage

Vision Unlimited expands the breadth of learning beyond the academic to include key socioemotional and life skills as well as the continuity of learning for whose learning journeys are disrupted

Quality

Vision Unlimited enhances the quality of learning and the learning experience for those whose needs are not met by the formal education system



Situating Vision Unlimited

- With Vision Unlimited's unique value propositions, it is important to situate it in the right conversation of social intervention in India.
 - Vision Unlimited is *more* than just an after-school club as it provides classes and sessions for the attainment of learning proficiencies, particularly in literacy and numeracy
 - On the other hand, Vision Unlimited *does not tick all the boxes* to be framed as school due to a lack of accreditation, certification, and integrated curriculum.
- In its current form, Vision Unlimited's main "beneficiaries" are children with disadvantaged backgrounds, living in the slums and the streets of New Delhi.
- There is strong, evidence-based support for the critical aspect of Vision Unlimited's more holistic model in this setting.
 - This report is accompanied by a literature review to provide references for Vision Unlimited to situate its operation, including findings that non-governmental organisations play a vital role in India to shift the intervention strategies for street children from charity-based to rights-based and the significant need for health supports, both physical and psychological, particularly for girls.
 - The literature review also highlights the importance of non-formal education to complement formal schooling and how qualified teachers are the cornerstones of good support for street children.
 - Other findings that support Vision Unlimited's mode of operation included how out-of-school support provided to children living in slums resulted in better children development outcomes, particularly for boys.
 - There are numerous findings advocating for the integration of education intervention with health intervention, a model that Vision Unlimited also espouses.

Who are Vision Unlimited for?



Who is Vision Unlimited for?

Vulnerable and disadvantaged children, the main beneficiaries

This includes (nonexclusively):

- Those with no other option for schooling
- Those who aim to enrol in government school
- Those in government school with unmet needs
- Those who work
- Those with additional family responsibilities
- Those from transient/migrant families



Vision Unlimited's staff, who are mainly teachers

Parents and caregivers of children, the secondary beneficiaries

Vision Unlimited's Support for Children

For all children, Vision Unlimited aims to support continuous learning and social connectedness in a safe, secure environment

Group	Primary goal	Issue	What does Vision Unlimited Do?
Children with no other education option	To gain basic knowledge needed for future education and work possibilities.	Formal schooling is practically infeasible for financial, social or other reasons	Substitutes for formal school, focusing on acquire basic skills including Hindi language, basic maths, writing and reading, and English vocabularies
Children aiming to enrol in a government school	To be successfully enrolled and mainstreamed.	Lack necessary documentation to enroll in school and /or are behind standards	Supports the procurement of the necessary documentation, aids the children and their family through the formal school enrolment process., provides support for catch-up tutoring
Children currently in government school with unmet needs	To improve school performance, learning comprehension, and educational attainment overall	Parents lack capacity/ educational background to provide needed academic support / adult supervision after school	Provides afterschool learning support through the provision of tutoring and homework help

In addition to the above, Vision Unlimited's core programme of care for all includes

- Provision of one meal during lunchtime and a snack during the afternoon
- Introduction of routine, improving hygiene habits, addressing overall behaviour
- Immunization and medical checks (breathing, eyesight, height, and weight)
- Provision of school supplies (shoes, bags, etc.)
- Extracurricular activities (sports, dances, performances, trips, carnivals, etc.)
- Summer camp and skill acquisition (sewing, etc.)

Vision Unlimited's Support for Children

Vision Unlimited also tailors its approach to the needs of specific groups of children with competing priorities at risk of disengagement from learning

Group	Primary goal	Issue	What does Vision Unlimited Do?
Children who have to work	To not drop out of the learning process To build children and families' commitment to prioritise education whenever time and circumstance allows	Have to work from time to time or for a period to earn wages. Family is forced to choose between work and learning	• Encourages but does not mandate regular attendance • Refreshes and continues their previous learning regardless of disruption • Work with parents to minimize harmful, hazardous, or risky work to lessen the stigmatisation around working.
Children with additional family responsibilities		Hold additional responsibilities eg older siblings who have caregiving responsibility. Family is forced to choose between education and other family needs	• Allow older siblings to bring their younger siblings to be taken care of while they learn • Provide younger siblings with a safe space and opportunity for early literacy and numeracy
Children from transient/migrant families		Disrupted or unstable learning journeys due to family movements eg work, crises, regular migratory lifestyle.	• Enable children who need to go away for a period to always return • Refreshes and continues their previous learning regardless of disruption • Become a stable gateway for reintegration into the wider community after some time away

Recommendations

Moving forward



Main Recommendations for Growth

- Refine the core components of the Vision Unlimited model versus enhanced support
 - At a micro-level, by design, the specific details of Vision Unlimited's services continuously and organically evolve to meet the needs of its community.
 - This can be misread as “doing too much” or “scope creep”
 - There is emerging consensus around its operation as a learning and activity community center that also offers other supporting services (such as medical check-ups)
 - Continuing to gain strategic clarity especially on how additional provision of services and support bolsters the core mission will result in more cohesive and coherent operation as well as a clearer communication focus to relevant stakeholders.
- Specify clear pathways of progress for each of the categories of children
 - Clarifying how various categories of beneficiaries can progress in terms of their educational attainment, skills acquisition, and psychological and physical well-being provides a direction of an overall development of any individual child while being with Vision Unlimited
- Develop a more structured and pedagogically informed curriculum with progressive attainment
 - Currently, the observed learning supported at Vision Unlimited focus strongly on basic literacy and numeracy. Additional more advanced support is provided ad-hoc e.g. phonics programmes for students led by volunteers
 - For regular students, there is a need for these basic sets of knowledge to be built upon and transitioned into more intermediate knowledge to accommodate children's learning progression. The development of this curriculum could benefit from being done by an expert with a pedagogical background.
 - A clear curriculum allows Vision Unlimited to support the previous recommendation above with clear milestones and increasingly higher sophistication
- Develop a clear data and evidence collection plan for a proof of concept
 - Vision Unlimited operation and value proposition as a learning center is unique and could benefit from building more data to contribute to Vision Unlimited's own learning as it scales, and build the external case for funding and scale-up
 - An evidence collection activity could be built by extending its relatively complete existing monitoring and documentation processes. This activity could first document and analyse processes and later on evolve into learning about outcomes
- Expand organisational structure with more formal programme management
 - As Vision Unlimited expands both in depth and in scale of operation, it would benefit from a dedicated senior programme officer to implement the recommendations above
 - As scaling takes place, a dedicated officer could further ensure the fidelity of replication, while reducing operational risk from external stakeholders' perspective and further focus attention on functions such as fundraising and communications

Secondary Recommendations for Growth

The following additional recommendations are provided as important considerations

- A clear structure for teachers' on-boarding, training, and development
 - Teachers are the heart of Vision Unlimited's model, and sustainable retention and training are paramount.
 - Having a clear structure how teachers progress and develop with Vision Unlimited not only ensures the provision of a more robust support to children but also helps with teacher retention and satisfaction with the organisation.
- A clear volunteer recruitment management structure
 - As of now volunteering opportunities at Vision Unlimited are done on an ad-hoc basis with focus activities opportunistically developed e.g. teaching golf to children.
 - A more structured volunteering mechanism could be developed with clear objectives, required profile and minimum commitment from the volunteers, and a thoughtful exit strategy
 - This would help ensure productive and empowered engagement with children while avoiding the possibility of children experiencing abandonment or other adverse effects from unstable or unpredictable exit
- Integrated children's care services mapping
 - Children attending Vision Unlimited often face challenges that are beyond Vision Unlimited's ability or capacity to address.
 - Currently, Vision Unlimited effectively identifies existing support and services for children's specific care, such as mental health, trauma management, or legal advice, to be then used as referral points when necessary via informal communications
 - At scale, developing a more formal mapping as a resource would allow Vision Unlimited to ensure children's urgent needs are systematically addressed by the right experts who can provide timely, adequate, and appropriate help without having to stretch its current capacity or expertise to address the challenge.

Proposed Logic Model

A Draft to Refine

Preliminary Logic Model Draft

