



“Discussions during adolescent meetings made me realise how important it was to look beneath the surface, ask questions and align to good causes. Once I had the conviction that I was standing up for what was true, I could influence my fellow mates for changing their thoughts, behaviours and actions.”

Twenty-one-year-old Vinod Panchal hails from Darda Hind village in Tonk district of Rajasthan. While studying in Class 12, Government Adarsh Senior Secondary School, he joined the school Child Rights Club (CRC) and regularly participated in meetings held on every second Saturday of the month. Members of groups like Meena Manch¹ and Gargi Manch² also used to participate in these meetings along with CRC members.

The issues discussed at the CRC were related to child marriage, child labour, child rights and child security. CHILDLINE – a helpline to report violations of child rights such as unlawful child marriages – was a key discussion point. Vinod took a keen interest in CRC activities and was at the forefront of discussions with adolescents so that they were able to identify, recognise and report cases of abuse, exploitation, discrimination and harm.

The biggest change came when he asserted himself in his own life. He had always resented being forced to

sit at the family shop and miss school. Through CRC facilitators he learnt to be firm with his family. Initially, his family reacted negatively but seeing his persistent stand, they stopped burdening him with extra work and he was able to regularly attend school. After a few years when they forced him to marry, he told them he wanted to study further and he would not consider marriage till the age of 25.

His activism extended to his wider community too. When he heard of a neighbour's daughter being forced to marry at 17 years, he spared no time in meeting her family and informing them about the legal implications of underage marriage. He ultimately convinced them to postpone the marriage. Encouraged by these successes, Vinod is now putting his heart and soul into accelerating efforts to stop child marriage in his own and neighbouring villages. Community members are also gradually coming forward to support these efforts and convince members of their circles to refrain from child marriage. Vinod has become a force for change wherever he goes!

¹ A forum for school girls from classes 2 to 8, inspired by the animation series “Meena”, produced by UNICEF to promote the value and rights of the girl child.

² A forum for students from classes 9 to 12, to inform them on child rights and to promote the value of the girl child.