

# Opportunity Cafe

*Brewing Inclusivity... One cup at a time*

India's 1st non-profit Cafe run by Orphan Transitioning adults with Intellectual Disability supported by Victims of Human Trafficking and young adults from Red light areas

**AN INITIATIVE OF RESCUE AND RELIEF FOUNDATION**



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# Story of Motivation



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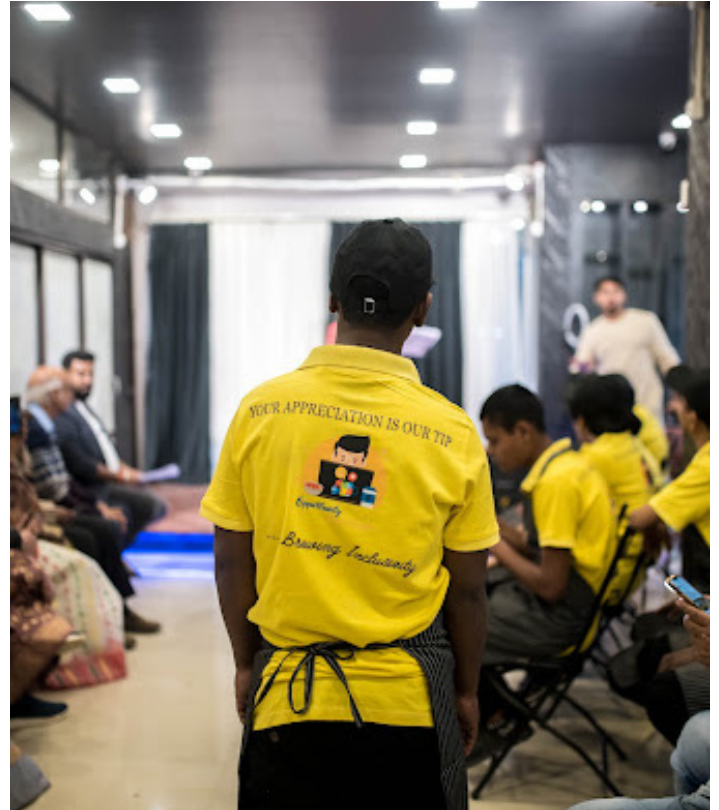
# Background of Opportunity Café

Opportunity Café an initiative by Rescue and Relief Foundation, was born out of a deep desire to create a safe, inclusive space where orphaned young adults with intellectual disabilities could find dignity, purpose, and a sense of belonging. Launched in January 2024, by the founder Advocate Sidhant Ghosh and Sumanta Singha Ray, who are also the founder of Rescue and relief foundation, the café is India's first non-profit café run by these orphan young adults, alongside survivors of human trafficking and vulnerable children from red-light areas. The cafe has a team of 16 members, 9 CWSN and 7 from CNCP homes and Centres

For many of these children, life beyond institutional care was filled with uncertainty. The café became their beacon of hope, offering not just a livelihood, but a place where they could grow, learn, and integrate into society with pride. Through meaningful work, they gained financial independence, self-esteem, and a newfound sense of worth.

Located in Kolkata, the café's welcoming environment, paired with its great food and live performances, has captured the hearts of many. It's more than just a business—it's a movement, showing the world what's possible when society embraces those who are often left behind. Opportunity Café is a symbol of empowerment, and it aims to inspire lasting change across the country, one cup of coffee at a time.

# Problems



## Challenges Faced by CWSN

Children with special needs (CWSN) often live in a world where their abilities are overlooked and their dreams are sidelined. As they grow up in institutional care, they face the heartbreak of limited opportunities and a future clouded with uncertainty. When they reach adulthood, they are often forced to leave the only home they've known, unprepared and unequipped for the outside world.

Many face rejection from a society that sees only their limitations, leaving them isolated and misunderstood. Without proper education, training, or job opportunities, they struggle to find their place, yearning for dignity, independence, and acceptance. The emotional toll of being excluded from a life of purpose and connection is one of the greatest challenges they face—more than any disability they carry.

## The Need for a Sustainable Solution

For many children with special needs (CWSN), turning 18 is not a milestone of freedom, but a moment of profound uncertainty. Legally required to leave institutional care, they often find themselves stepping into a world that isn't ready for them—without the skills, resources, or support to navigate life on their own. Many face unemployment, social isolation, and a lack of guidance, which only deepens their vulnerability.

Without structured support, these young adults risk falling into poverty or dependency, as society does not offer the inclusive pathways they need. This makes a sustainable solution crucial—one that provides them with opportunities for meaningful work, financial independence, and social integration. A solution that not only helps them survive but allows them to thrive, transition into adulthood with confidence, and live a life of dignity and purpose. Opportunity Café was born from this need, offering these children a path to a secure and hopeful future.





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## Recruitment and Training

The recruitment process for children with special needs (CWSN) at Opportunity Café is rooted in understanding their individual strengths and challenges. These young adults are selected from the rehabilitation homes New Age Society for All, Keertika Protection Home and Drop in centre from Khiddirpore and Bowbazar red light areas. The café team, alongside specialists in care and training, carefully evaluates the abilities and interests of each child to match them with roles they can thrive in, whether it's in the kitchen, service, or cleaning.

Once recruited, these children undergo personalized training programs designed to help them adapt to their roles in a supportive and structured manner. The training is gradual and hands-on, focusing on building familiarity with their tasks while ensuring they feel comfortable and confident at every step. Mentors work closely with them, offering patient guidance and encouragement, helping them transition from institutional care into the café's working environment.

***"Once recruited, these children undergo personalized training programs designed to help them adapt to their roles in a supportive and structured manner"***

## Training

At Opportunity Café, the focus on skill development for children with special needs (CWSN), including those with autism, Down syndrome, and mild to moderate intellectual disabilities (MR), is a cornerstone of our mission. Each child's journey into the workplace is unique, and we've designed our training programs to be flexible, compassionate, and adaptive to the specific challenges they face.

## Training Approach for Different Needs

### Autistic Children:

- **Challenges:** Autistic children often face difficulties in communication, sensory processing, and adapting to new environments. They may struggle with changes in routine or exhibit repetitive behaviors, making it hard to adjust to fast-paced tasks in a café setting.





- **Solution:** Our training program for autistic children is structured around their need for routine and predictability. Tasks are broken down into small, manageable steps, and we use visual aids, such as charts and checklists, to help them follow daily routines. Training includes sensory-friendly techniques, such as offering noise-canceling headphones, to help them feel comfortable in the bustling café environment. Over time, with patience and consistency, many have gained confidence in performing tasks like arranging tables, handling customer orders, and maintaining cleanliness.

#### **Children with Down Syndrome:**

- **Challenges:** Children with Down syndrome often face developmental delays, learning disabilities, and physical health challenges that can make task execution slower or more challenging.
- **Solution:** Training for these children is focused on repetition and positive reinforcement. We encourage them to focus on roles that require consistency, such as cleaning, simple kitchen tasks, or greeting customers. By offering continuous guidance and creating a supportive team environment, we help them develop social skills and independence. Their ability to connect warmly with customers has been a highlight, contributing to the café's friendly atmosphere

#### **Children with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities (MR):**

- **Challenges:** Intellectual disabilities can affect memory, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity to learn new skills quickly. Many face challenges in adapting to the dynamic environment of a café, where multitasking is often required.
- **Solution:** For children with intellectual disabilities, we focus on breaking tasks into simple, repetitive actions. They are given roles suited to their abilities, such as food preparation, dishwashing, or restocking supplies. Each task is introduced slowly, allowing them to gain confidence at their own pace. A mentor or supervisor is always nearby to assist, ensuring they feel supported and encouraged to take on more responsibilities as they grow.



# Challenges Faced and Overcoming Them

- 1. Understanding Individual Abilities:** One of the biggest challenges we faced was understanding the unique needs and abilities of each child. Every individual learns differently, so we had to create personalized training plans.
  - **Solution:** We brought in experienced special educators and therapists to assess each child's strengths and areas for development. This allowed us to tailor their training to maximize their potential.
- 2. Building Patience and Routine:** Training CWSN children required immense patience, as progress could be slow and inconsistent. For some, it took time to adapt to even the simplest tasks due to their cognitive or behavioral challenges.
  - **Solution:** We fostered a positive and patient work environment where each small step forward was celebrated. By maintaining consistency in training and offering constant positive reinforcement, we saw gradual but remarkable improvements.
- 3. Behavioral Challenges:** Many children, particularly those with autism or intellectual disabilities, faced behavioral challenges such as difficulty managing emotions or following instructions in a busy environment.
  - **Solution:** We provided regular counseling and behavioral therapy to help them manage stress and emotions. Our mentors and staff were trained to deal with these situations calmly, using de-escalation techniques to create a more manageable environment for the children.
- 4. Building Social Skills:** Social interaction is a crucial part of working in a café, and for many CWSN children, engaging with customers or other staff members was initially a challenge.
  - **Solution:** We worked extensively on developing communication and social skills. Role-playing exercises, team-building activities, and gentle encouragement helped them learn how to interact with both customers and peers in a positive way.

## Success and Growth

Through this focused and compassionate approach to skill development, we have seen incredible growth in the children. Many of them, who once struggled with basic tasks, are now confidently taking on more responsibility in their roles at the café. They are gaining independence, self-confidence, and most importantly, the belief that they are capable of leading fulfilling lives.

**INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITY RUN CAFE WHERE APPRECIATION IS TIP**

### 'Opportunity' they grabbed to trounce odds

**SUBHANKAR CHOWDHURY**

Calcutta: A group of boys and girls with conditions like autism, Down syndrome and several other intellectual disabilities. They did not let their condition get the better of them. They grabbed the 'Opportunity'.

Opportunity is the cafe they run, defying many odds, on Dum Dum Road, about 300m from Dum Dum Metro station.

It is open from 8.30am to 10.30pm.

On Monday afternoon, Artrii and Nupur ushered Metro into the cafe.

Their words sounded broken at first but clear: "Bhetore asun, please (Please come inside)."

In the open kitchen just behind the reception, Sonia was slicing onions on the chopping board. Ramu was serving coffee at another table.

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The group that runs Opportunity cafe on Dum Dum Road

The interiors of the cafe

The group members at work at the cafe. Pictures by Bibhwarup Dutta

the spread on offer: bumble burger, sandwich, veg wrap, chicken wrap, pizzas, stuffed garlic bread and other items.

tient as they are still undergoing training and take time to adapt, unlike us."

"Our team does not un-

Another diner, j Inaki Chakraborty, a digital marketing professional, said: "The quality of the food is

the cafe, Siddhant Ghosh, who runs the NGO, said: "Those with cognitive challenges assist, the victims of child traf-

ficking victims.

The idea of the cafe originated when Ramu and Bikash, two residents of the home with autism, were fired from restaurants where they worked because they were found less proficient compared to their able-bodied colleagues.

A report of the child welfare committee which governs all homes mandates that residents cannot be kept in home beyond 18 years because the accommodation facilities will have to be made available to those who are junior to them, said Siddhant.

"We engaged Bikash and Ramu who completed 18 years in restaurants so they could add jobs and earn a living for themselves. But they were eventually fired," he said.

After their experience, Siddhant said they wanted to come up with a cafe that "these marginalised persons find homely".

"We also wanted to convey the message that if an inclusive approach is extended to them, they can be financially independent," he said.

The cafe has counsellors to help the boys and girls.

Nupur, who has passed higher secondary, comes with her mother from Agarpara.

Does she like it here?

"Kono bhalo lage bandhane, se mile kono kore

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# Impact on CWSN

Employment at Opportunity Café has profoundly transformed the lives of children with special needs (CWSN). By providing them with meaningful work, the café has helped them achieve financial independence, giving them control over their own earnings for the first time in their lives. This has not only improved their economic stability but also empowered them to make decisions about their future.

The café environment has also boosted their self-esteem and confidence. Being valued for their contributions and interacting with customers has helped these young adults break free from societal stereotypes, instilling a sense of pride in their abilities. Additionally, the structured routines and daily social interactions at the café have positively influenced their physical and mental health. With a stable schedule, supportive colleagues, and a sense of purpose, many of the children have shown improved emotional well-being, better focus, and increased resilience. Opportunity Café has truly become a safe space where they can thrive, both personally and professionally.

## Health and Security

At Opportunity Café, the health, security, and financial stability of CWSN employees are of utmost importance, with several systems in place to ensure they thrive both physically and emotionally.

**Healthcare Support:** The café provides medical insurance for all CWSN employees, ensuring their physical well-being is safeguarded. They receive daily training from experienced special educators to improve their skills and efficiency at work, enhancing their abilities while maintaining good health.

**Mental Well-being:** To support their emotional health, the café offers ongoing counseling with experienced professionals. This ensures that any behavioral or emotional challenges are addressed promptly, providing a nurturing environment where the children feel understood and supported.

**Safe Work Environment:** The children live in a secure, safe space on the third floor of the café, designed to feel like a rehabilitation home. This space is supported by other CNCP children, a home mother cum superintendent, and 24-hour security with camera surveillance, creating a safe and comforting environment for all.

**Financial Stability:** Opportunity Café not only provides its CWSN employees with a salary but also contributes to their future through a Provident Fund. Individual bank accounts have been opened for each child, and many have already saved a considerable amount in just a few months. This year, during Durga Puja, they will proudly buy clothes of their choice using their own money. They've also begun contributing to their food expenses within the organization, fostering responsibility and independence.



Beyond financial planning, there is a strong sense of community and bonding among the children. They regularly go on team outings to nearby restaurants, taking turns treating their friends—helping to build a sense of family. The organization is also planning a vacation for them, which they will fund with their own savings, as a reward for their hard work and contribution during the upcoming festive season. This marks the first time they will experience such a personal milestone, further reinforcing their independence and confidence.

# Outcomes and Future Vision

**Positive Outcomes:** Opportunity Café has already made a significant impact on the lives of CWSN employees by providing them with stable employment and a path to financial independence. Many have opened their own bank accounts, saved money, and are actively contributing to their own expenses. Along with financial stability, their self-confidence and societal acceptance have grown as they integrate into mainstream life with pride. The café has helped shift public perception, showing that children with special needs are capable, contributing members of society. Their personal growth—emotionally, socially, and professionally—has demonstrated the power of inclusivity.

**Opportunity Skill Academy:** Building on the café's success, Opportunity Café has launched the Opportunity Skill Academy to formalize its training methods. The academy is currently training 18 more children from New age Soceity for all, All Bengal for Girls, Future Home and Kisholya Home with other CWSN children who have parents, equipping them with skills in the food and services industry. The goal is to provide skilled, trained individuals for corporate roles, further expanding job opportunities for children with special needs.

**Scalability and Expansion:** The café is now focusing on raising funds to open a second outlet in South Kolkata, with the aim of promoting inclusivity across the city. Through social media and newspaper coverage, Opportunity Café has sensitized over 10 million people, showing that special children are not hopeless but are full of potential and deserving of the same career opportunities as anyone else. The future vision is to scale this model, creating more outlets and continuing to raise awareness, helping to ensure that more vulnerable children across Kolkata—and eventually beyond—can have a shot at building their own careers and futures with dignity.





# Call to Action

*"Opportunity Café stands as a beacon of hope and a powerful example of how inclusive, sustainable models can create lasting change"*

It's a call to other organizations, businesses, and social entrepreneurs to take action—adopt similar models, offer opportunities to vulnerable populations, and be part of a movement that brings dignity and empowerment to those who need it most. Together, we can build a more inclusive and compassionate world for everyone

