



Apne Aap Women's Collective

Newsletter

Sep. - Dec. 2008

Issue 4

Editorial

The horrific terror attacks on Mumbai have left our city tangled in a cobweb of emotions. At AAWC, we have held discussion forums to help our beneficiaries cope with the trauma caused by the terror attacks. The children will be given an opportunity to continue processing what has happened in their group, as well as individual counseling sessions.

Amidst tragedy, there is always hope and that is what the beneficiaries at AAWC consistently show us. Our girls continue to excel at training programs. The girls at the Four Seasons and the Kindergarten Teacher Training program have received great reviews. In addition, one of our Sparrows got married this quarter.

AAWC has successfully tied up with the Breach Candy Hospital for the treatment of all the children in the Sparrows program and the Balwadi (Kindergarten) program. After her medical visit to our centre in November, Dr. Khyati Mehta of the Breach Candy Hospital says that over her visits in the last year she finds that the health of the girls has improved significantly.

Other significant activities include the completion of the renovation the AAWC office, and near completion of the Activity Room. Several generous donors have contributed to the much needed repairs of the AAWC premises. We thank the Lions Club, Gateway for their generous donation towards the brand new computers for our girls.



Eid and Iftar Party

We have had several celebrations this quarter too with the Eid and Iftar party for our girls, a wonderful teachers day celebration put up by our

Sparrows, Diwali celebration where our girls and women played Dandiya and Mr. Sudershan Loyolka's (AAWC Trustee) birthday party. The girls also went for their annual picnic to the Great Escape Water Park and had a fantastic time.

The articles in this issue highlight some of our most important activities. Happy reading and thank you for your continued support.

Ashika Pohoomul

Building Awareness through AAWC Volunteers

Several of our volunteers have worked tirelessly to build awareness about the marginalization of women and children of Kamathipura on an international platform and the work AAWC is doing.

This summer we had a student volunteer, Esha from the Singapore American School. Upon her return to Singapore, she published an article about AAWC in her school newspaper. Excerpts from Esha's article highlighting her experiences are published below.

"This summer, I spent a few weeks volunteering at the Apne Aap Women's Collective, an NGO that rehabilitates commercial sex workers in the red light area of Mumbai and works with their young daughters ("sparrows") to break the cycle of prostitution. On my first day, the girls got over their initial shyness and chatted freely with me, excitedly discussing the script they were preparing on domestic violence that would be broadcast on national radio.

During tutoring sessions I worked a lot with Sarita, 14, on her English homework. Although fluent in Marathi and Hindi, the students struggle with English. Sarita had to learn simple verbs and their tenses, but she was too afraid to ask her teacher what words like "catch" meant. We went over the list, and about an hour later she understood everything. Another day, we analyzed a poem. I had trouble explaining complex terms in Hindi, so describing a metaphor for climbing a rope turned into charades, with other tutors and students trying to guess my meaning.

In their free time, many girls talked to me about their plans to go to college and study science or business. Kanika had an internship with a photographer and planned to work while at University. One girl who wanted to be a brothel owner now plans on becoming a counselor like her mentors at AAWC."

We also had a volunteer named Antionette, from the United States. She has been associated with AAWC for several years. She has raised awareness and funds for AAWC by creating a Ganesha calendar. Some of the images in the calendar were images of Lord Ganesha, painted by our Sparrows. The proceeds from the sale of the calendar will be given to AAWC.

Women's Update

Womans Update

- We are sorry to inform you that 4 of our women beneficiaries expired during this quarter due to HIV/AIDS.
- As Dussera and Diwali were approaching, the prices of provisions in open market were rising. AAWC the approached Ration department to grant an extra quantity of ration, along with some other provisions like Palmolene Cooking Oil, Rawa, and Maida. A women's signature campaign was organized to show the Ration department the importance of the women's request. In response to it, the Ration department fulfilled their cooking oil demand.
- Proctor and Gamble organized a session on female health and hygiene for our women and our sparrows. 9 women and 21 Sparrows attended the workshop. Topics covered included menstruation and menopause. The session was conducted in Marathi. It was informative and simple to understand.

Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee talks to AAWC



However, the women remained courageous and didn't give up. After seeing the success of the self regulatory board the members kept increasing. Very proudly Lata shared that DMSC is now serving 10,000 women in different red light areas of Kolkata and other parts of India.

DMSC is providing several services for sex workers, their children, and for rescued women and minors. These services include adult literacy classes, education centers, a cooperative bank, medical care, skills training, and recruitment, controlling the exploitative practices, and helping with the rehabilitation of rescued girls in state-approved shelter homes.

Their self-regulatory board with the help of the Departments of Police, Health, Labour, Social Welfare, and the Government of West Bengal is preventing trafficking of minor girls and unwilling women into the sex trade. They are also empowering women to avail of their rights as Indian citizens. Lata discussed the consequences of latest amendments suggested to the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act.

Today, DMSC is run entirely by its beneficiaries who have chosen to remain in the sex trade. They are now in a position to pressurize the government to undertake various welfare activities for the betterment of this marginalized group.

Our beneficiaries were shocked to see the power of knowledge. The 'uneducated' members of DMSC were empowered through exercising their right to information. It was truly an encouraging session for all of us. DMSC's commitment to human rights and the solidarity of its members has inspired our beneficiaries to use collective action to combat injustice and exploitation in the Falkland road red light district.

On the 18th of October, three confident ladies, Asha, Lata and Rekha, all sex workers who are members of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) in Kolkata, shared their experiences with AAWC's beneficiaries.

DMSC was set up in 1992 to help sex workers create their own self regulatory board to challenge systemic issues such as material deprivation, social exclusion, exploitation and the infringement of basic human rights.

Rekha spoke of the challenges they faced when the organization first started. Outsiders and women of the community who were against the women uniting, started harassing the members. They used to beat, threaten, spit, and throw litter on the members. Local 'gunda' and police harassment also increased.

Manju Vyas

Sparrows

Update

Here are the highlights of this quarter for our Sparrows:

- 2 of our girls have been successfully referred to shelter homes.
- A Sparrow got married this quarter. She was placed in a shelter home named, Oasis. She married the brother of a colleague at work. Her husband works in a multinational call center.



Kishori Mela

- 2 girls underwent successful appendicitis surgery.
- Feedback on the 2 apprentices at the Four Season's Hotel has been excellent. The hotel manager praised them by saying that, these girls are extremely hardworking and dedicated. Up till now they have shown immense growth and potential. He hopes that Hotel Four seasons itself grabs them when they graduate after 2 years.
- One of our Sparrow is enrolled in a Mukhtangan program to become a kindergarten teacher. Her performance in the program has been outstanding. Upon her graduation, she will be offered a job as full time Balwadi teacher at AAWC.
- 4 of our girls have received sponsorships that will take care of their health, education and essential needs including nutrition, clothing and transport.
- 5 of our girls have been selected Shiamak Davar's Victory Arts Foundation to join the advanced dance peer group. They will be trained to join Shiamak's troop and become instructors at the Victory Arts Foundation.
- Our girls attended the Kishori Mela organized by SNTD and Vacha on the 6th of November. The Mela was part of a National Symposium on girls and girlhood. There were games, activities and educational stalls. Some of the stalls included drawing, painting, paper jewelry making, and cap making. In addition, there were lectures on the construction of girlhood, violence against girls, and how the legal system supports girls.
- Our Sparrows recently took part in dance performance and AAWC took part in the Walk for Multiple Sclerosis patients. The walk was organized by the Multiple Sclerosis Society of India and the dance performances were organized by Victory Arts Foundation.
- A Sparrow alumna is now a professional Mehendi (Henna) artist. She volunteered to put Mehendi for all our girls.
- With the help of some volunteers, we have revamped our tailoring class and made it into a fashion designing class.



Water World Picnic

Children's Day Celebration at AAWC

AAWC thought of making this children's day very special. We wanted to have a celebration where the girls felt special at every minute. We wanted them to feel, "Yes we are indeed the most precious gift from God."

The celebrations were full of surprises. Each activity had something valuable to take back. Usually, our sparrows help us to plan and execute all our activities. But this time, the celebrations were a complete surprise for the girls. We showed them a movie called Roshni. Then we arranged a fun - n - fair in the AAWC premises, where we had stalls like flower making, pot painting, jewellery making, know your luck, best out of waste, a poetry writing competition, a refreshment stall, a dance section and an open mike system to express themselves. The staff also gave a special message to each of them.

Here are some reactions from our Sparrows:

Nishi says - "This children's day I felt like a free bird in the sky. I could fly anywhere I wanted. I have never enjoyed myself so much. I have never gotten so much freedom to do what I like. Whatever we learnt today is so valuable that if we master it we can even earn our livelihood by it. Thank you Didis, I love you all."

Harshada Says - "In the poetry writing stall, the topic I got was 'Bird', like a bird learns to fly in the sky with her efforts similarly I desire to achieve success with my own hard work and perseverance."

Paru says - "As I entered the room I felt I have come to a new world, a world of wonders. All our didis were looking like fairies. All the different activities boosted my confidence level and now I feel I can do so much. How I wished that the evening never ended. Thank you and God bless you my dear didis."

Surekha Says - "This surprise clearly revealed that all our didis had put in a lot of effort and hard work from the depth of their hearts. We all thank you for this wonderful gesture which has left an indelible mark in our hearts."

Shweta says - "This was the first fun - n fair where I enjoyed myself whole heartedly. Thank you to all didis for giving us this mind blowing surprise."

Ashwini says - "I absolutely enjoyed my self and felt very special. No one in my life had done something so amazing for me. After watching the film 'Roshni', I felt that if we know someone who is on the wrong path it is our duty to guide them on the right path. No one in this world is born bad. In the poetry writing process I found my inner self in the words on the paper. All the didis had put in loads of efforts to make this evening special and memorable for all of us. On behalf of all the sparrows I give my heartfelt gratitude to all the didis of Apne Aap. We love you all very much."

Their words clearly indicate that we were successful in making each one feel special and precious

Raheen Jummani



Apne aap
Womans
Collective

The Self Book Project

Tens of Ideas

Hidden Desires

Desire to fly, to rise high.

So much to say, so much to articulate, so much to accomplish.

Let me speak, Let me verbalize, Let me Express.

I feel like cherishing all my Talents,

Let me Express.....

Each one of us is born with immense talent, loads of potential and creativity, and we always want to express. Each day we do a lot of things, and some days are a roller coaster ride. The way to evaluate what we did, what we can do, what we said, how we did all our work, how our relationships are, and how are we progressing is to express it. The best way to express is through creative work. Be it anything - painting, drawing, journaling or writing to name a few.

So, I thought of having a **SELF Book (diary)** for each girl. We do a weekly activity, take different topics and in 'Our Own Best way' express what we personally feel about it in the book. Some of the topics we have covered so far are- Myself, My Best talent, A letter to My mother, My dreams, My school, Gurupornima,

Changes I desire in me, and changes I desire in my house.

As you move from one page to the other you will see each topic is expressed in a different style through pictures, painting, drawing, writing, and poetry. Not just a book full of crayon colors but full with the colors of countless emotions.

This book intends to enhance creativity and communication. It's a package which will also help the girls with clarity of thought, focusing, getting in touch with their feelings, knowing their likes and dislikes, and becoming aware of their own assets and capabilities.

This whole process is a work in progress which helps our girls move towards a goal that is captured in this quote- "I am indeed blessed. There are wonderful opportunities to be myself, to express myself as who I really am. I am the beauty and joy of the Universe expressing and receiving. I surround myself with Divine honesty and justice. I know that Divine right action is taking place. I am one with power that created me. I am wonderful. I rejoice in the truth of my being. I say, so be it, and know that all is well in my wonderful world right here and right now."

Raheen Jummani

Staff Training and Development

New born baby care by 'SNEHA'

'Sneha' - an organization at Santacruz organized a half day workshop for the benefit of the outreach workers of various organizations. Our staff members, Mrs. Sangita Satyam and Mrs. Mangala Murale attended it. DR. D A Fernandez, Dr. S. Narvekar, and Dr. D A Pendse talked about the myths and misconceptions of childcare, the importance of vaccinations, and the do's and don'ts for a new born child. This has helped the staff impart more meaningful information to our beneficiaries.

Anti Human Trafficking Workshop by Women and Child Welfare Department of Mumbai

The Women and Child Welfare Department organized a one day workshop on anti-human trafficking. Different facilitators from CWC (Child Welfare Committee) spoke about the different methods of

human trafficking, important laws applicable to different aspects of trafficking, and the role of CWC and NGOs in effective implementation of these laws. It helped our staff learn about the most up to date laws related to our target group and will be very helpful during their outreach in the community.

Training in Social Marketing of Condoms

Social marketing was a concept that was developed by applying marketing strategies to a product that is socially beneficial to society. Ms. Raheen (psychologist), Ms. Mangala (outreach worker), and Mrs. Sangita (outreach worker) attended this all day workshop held by HLFPPPT. The workshop addressed issues such as capacity building, awareness on different types of condoms available, communication and strategies to create and sustain behavior change while working with women in prostitution.