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Apne Aap Women's Collective

Newsletter

Jan'08 - April'08

Issue 2

Editorial

Hello Friends,

This is the second issue of the AAWC Newsletter and we have so much to update you on! There have been lots of celebrations at the centre including Women's day, the wedding of one of our Sparrows, and the last day of school party. Our Sparrows have done us proud by securing top ranks in their final exams, and getting great job offers. Our Balwadi program has expanded and we have also been able to develop our staff training.

In addition to all this, I am extremely happy that we have been able to focus a great deal on awareness building not only within the city, but also on an international platform. In February, AAWC organized an awareness program at Crosswords, Kemps Corner where we sold prayer books and cd's donated to us by Renu Chanrai, the proceeds of which went to our organization. It was a great opportunity to reach out to people who came into the store and talk to them about the work we are doing.

Moreover, in January we organized an educational visit for members of Young Presidents Organization from all over the world, who were here for the India University. We were able to show them around Falkland road and talk to them in depth about human trafficking and prostitution in Mumbai. Many were moved to tears and some of them wrote to us asking how they could help AAWC. I think this visit was particularly successful in creating awareness because actually "seeing" creates a lasting impression.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all our donors for their generous contributions. A special thank you to Ravi Krishnan, Preeti Devi and Shaneen Parikh for their help in fundraising.

Ashika Pohoomul

Women's Day Celebration

At AAWC, we celebrated International Women's Day at the centre by screening the film, Taare Zameen Par, followed by lunch. In addition, there was an awareness program on ration cards and the right to food. Resource person Mr. Praful from Rationing Kruti Samiti was invited.

Women came in large numbers to attend the awareness program because recently the government has stopped making yellow Ration cards meant for people below the poverty line. The Rationing Kruti Samiti explained the procedure of applying for new ration cards and as well as the benefits of the new card. One of the main problems the women have been facing is purchasing kerosene from the open market. Since kerosene is needed on a daily basis for cooking, buying it in the open market is putting a serious financial burden on our beneficiaries. The talk was informative and helpful.

The women enjoyed the movie as well as lunch. All in all, it was an enjoyable women's day celebration.

When asked if she enjoyed the women's day celebration, one of our beneficiaries said, "The food was delicious and we all ate full stomach. It was served with lots of Love that is why we ate double."



Young President's Organization visit to Kamathipura

In January 2008, AAWC organized a tour of Kamathipura for YPO members from all over the world, who were in Mumbai on the YPO International India University.

AAWC took on the challenge of organizing the tour of Falkland road, in an attempt to give our guests an insight into the underbelly of Mumbai- a world of human trafficking, brothels and prostitution. The aim of this tour was to create a greater awareness in the international community about the lives of all those involved in the sex trade, where human life has little value, and dignity is an alien concept.

The event began with our Balwadi children, welcoming the YPOers with a musical performance. Ashika Pohoomul, made a presentation on Kamathipura, where she explained the history of prostitution in India, how women are trafficked, why they continue to remain in this profession, what happens to their children, and the nexus perpetuating the sex trade. Following this, several women, who are beneficiaries of our

organization, shared their life experiences with our guests. We also took them on a walking tour of Falkland road, showing them the squalid and inhuman conditions of the brothels, the women's homes and the area at large. A short documentary film made by AAWC on the lives of the daughters of women in prostitution was also screened. Finally, we explained what is being done and what still needs to be done by non-profits and the government to combat this social problem.

We received an overwhelming response from our guests. An example of the emails and letter we received includes, "The work you are doing for these women and their children is straight from the heart of God. I am so very grateful that I had the chance to see it for myself, disturbing as it was. You will all remain in my prayers for results beyond what we can think or imagine! Please let us know how we can make a contribution."

Responses such as this are encouraging for two reasons. First, they have managed to create a lasting impression on the minds of people, which will help in creating awareness. Second, it has moved people to action- to help in some way.

Visit to Shirdi

One of AAWC's objectives is to give our members an opportunity to enjoy themselves. Since most of the women we work with at AAWC have never seen any place except Mumbai and their village of origin, we decided to organize a field trip for them. On the request of our members, we organized a day trip to Shirdi for forty-nine women on the 23rd of January, 2008.

AAWC is a secular organization. However, all the women were really keen to go to Shirdi. Some wanted to make visit the holy sites, while others wanted to see the place. The women said to our field workers, "Take us to a place for a day where we can forget about our lives, who we are, where we came from and what we do."

They were so excited about the trip that most women did not sleep all night. Even though they had been working till 4:00am, they were all awake and ready by 6:00 am. Some slept on the bus, while others sang and had fun. Once in Shirdi, the women displayed a childlike curiosity and enthusiasm. It was as if they wanted to capture every single thing Shirdi had to offer in a day. It was heart warming sight to see all our members enjoying themselves.

On the way back from the trip one of our members said, "Ek din ka sukoon mil gaya," which means I have received happiness and peace today. We do hope we organize several more trips for our members.

AAWC participates in the Mumbai Marathon

This year was the first time AAWC participated in the Mumbai Marathon. Manju, Raheen and Ashika took part in the Dream Run. We raised over 1.5 lakhs with help from Mrs. Preeti Devi, Mr. Ravi Krishnan, Mrs. Shahneer Parikh and Smt. Sharayu Daftary. It was a great experience.

We had registered all our Sparrows for the run, however, due to limited capacity in the Dream Run, none of our Sparrows were able to participate. However, for next years Marathon, we plan to register much in advance, so that not only our girls, but also the women get to participate!

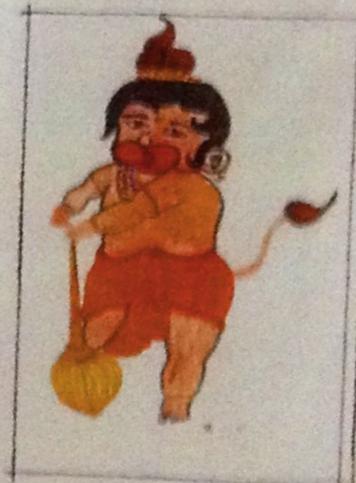
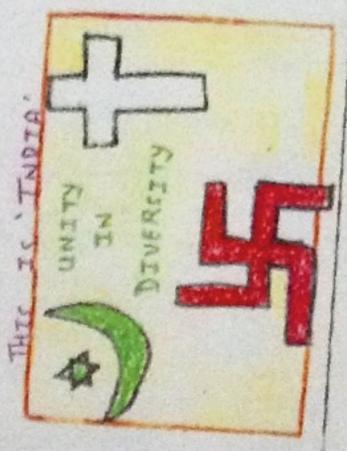


AAWC's Friends

One of AAWC's well wisher's, Antoinette visited the centre in January. She lives in New York and visits our centre frequently. She is a Thai massage therapist by profession.

She conducted a Thai massage session with our women members. It was a relaxing session for all the participants.

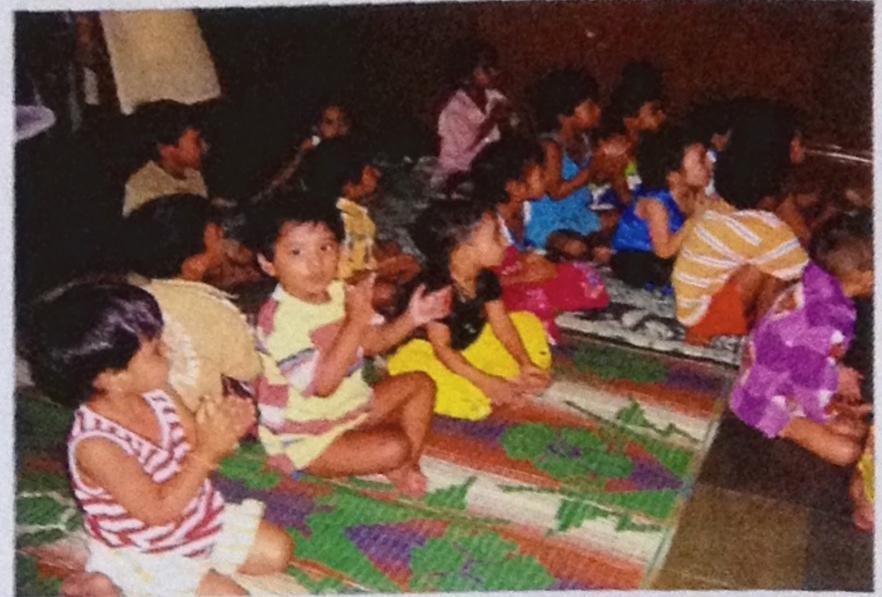
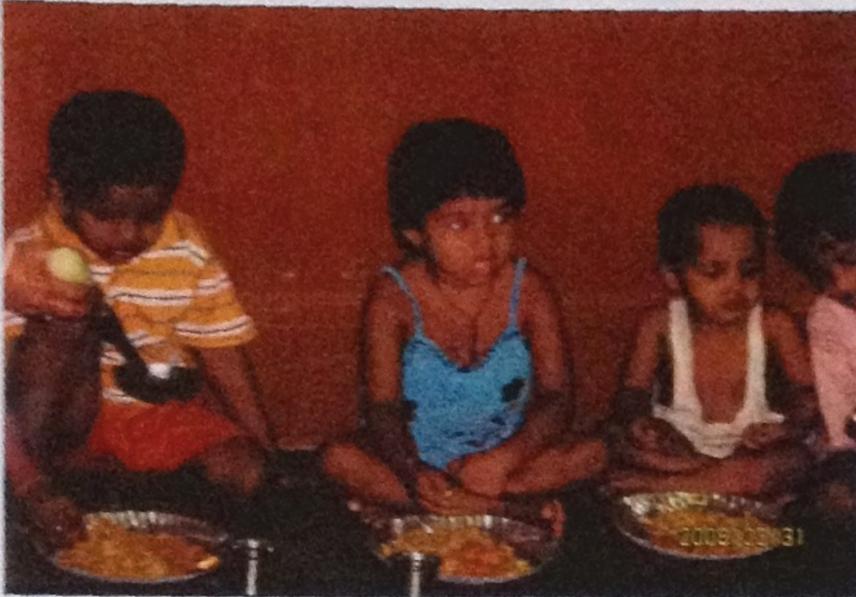
She also conducted a postcard making session with our Sparrows. They were asked to paint Indian mythological figures on the cards. Antoinette took these postcards and sold them in New York to raise awareness and funds for AAWC.



Balwadi Developments

We are delighted to announce that since January 2008, there have been several developments in our Balwadi Program:

- The number of children regularly attending has increased from 18 to 30 children.
- The involvement of mothers in the children has also improved. This is due to periodic parenting meetings that are held with the mothers. Topics covered in these meetings include hygiene and cleanliness, verbal abuse, and physical punishment, how to motivate children, and practicing what is being taught in class.
- Most of our developments are because of our new Balwadi teacher, Mrs. Mangalam Irani. She has taken a keen interest in the children and is very involved in their overall development.
- The last day for the Balwadi was 31st March, 2008, after which summer vacation began. The children celebrated their last day by watching the film, My friend Ganesha and they were treated a delicious lunch.



Staff Training and Development

Our In- house psychologist and Sparrow's Co-ordinator, Raheen Jummani, attended an intensive week long Art Based Therapy Course at the National Insurance Academy in Pune in January.

She learnt how to incorporate drama, dance, music, poetry, story telling, meditation and many more techniques into her practice.

Following her training, Raheen conducted an art based therapy workshop for the AAWC staff. 6 staff members attended this workshop.

Aim: To let participants discover themselves and relax with the help of Art Forms

Process: Several activities were conducted , which included Zen meditation, drawing, dream games, drumming, dancing and relaxation with music.

Feedback from Staff:

"I have started believing the power of positive thinking, and in the power of having strong intent."

"After this session, I feel lighter and free of all the baggage I had stored inside me."

"I have come closer to my own dreams and now truly trust that I will fulfill them."

"Playing the instruments helped release the pent up emotions."

"We want such sessions regularly."