

Nishtha – Empowering women and girls through education, opportunity and self-reliance

<http://www.nishthasisterhood.org/>, <http://www.ashanet.org/atlanta/>

Site Visit Report to Nishtha - December 22, 2013

Asha for Education supports two projects with Nishtha; the *night shelter for children of sex workers* and the *Jagaran project for educating and empowering girl children and women* in two villages near Baruipur, West Bengal. Asha Atlanta primarily supports the running and operations of the night shelter while Asha Washington DC was supporting the operations of the Jagran project until December 2013. I have provided an *executive summary* of the mission and problem on page 4 of this report. Additional details about Nishtha, the origin of the shelter and my previous site visit report from 2011 can be found at <http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=756>.

The night shelter houses roughly 36 children born to sex workers of the surrounding brothels. I visited the Nishtha night shelter around 2 PM on December 22, 2013 as a part of my overall site visit to Nishtha (Jagran and night shelter). Similar to my previous visit, I also visited the brothels to meet the mothers. Since my previous visit in December 2011, the children have been moved to a new shelter constructed by funding provided by Asha for Education (80%) and AID Washington DC chapter. The new two-storied shelter is much bigger and spacious and better suited to serve the needs of the children as they grow older and in number. There are separate dormitories for boys and girls and a large spacious hall/common room for the children of various ages to study and engage in their activities. The kitchen appeared to be well stocked and the bathrooms and lavatories were sufficient in number and appeared clean. The night shelter is open seven days of the week and a former sex worker acts as an outreach staff to ensure no child misses their attendance as any child left unprotected immediately becomes a prey to the neighborhood pimps and clients visiting the brothels.

Most of the children in the shelter were born to women in the brothels in and around Baruipur. These children range from all ages (2 yrs to teens). The staff of Nishtha have very diligently worked with the local schools and ensured that all children are admitted into formal schools so they are provided a proper education. However, in the case where a child is the product of a migrant mother who moves from brothel to brothel, that child may never have received any type of education. I was informed by Minadi that these children were lagging far behind the curve, making it very difficult for them to be absorbed into formal schools. These children are still housed at the shelter during the night but are sent to be with their mother during the day when other kids go to formal school. In other instances, children who are too young to be accepted into school (2 – 4 yrs) are also sent to be with their mothers during the day. This is a very dangerous situation overall as any child left unsupervised at anytime around the brothels is prey to being kidnapped and sold either by a pimp or sometimes even the mother herself.

Since it was a Sunday, almost all the children were at the shelter and they showed me their skills in dancing and singing that their teachers had taught them. I also met with the two girls who were born to two sex-workers and were raised at the shelter for their entire lives. These two girls became history when in 2011 for the first time, two girls, born to sex-workers were admitted into college. Their college education was supported both by support-a-child funds by Asha and contributions from the mothers. More recently, in 2013, one of the girls again made history when she was accepted into a Nursing program with a job offer at a Government hospital following her graduation from the program. This story is a testament to the perseverance of Nishtha and their mothers who against all odds, pushed to ensure that the girls would not end up in the brothels like their mothers.

Following the visit to the shelter, we went to one of the brothels to meet the mothers. The mothers from the surrounding brothels were also gathered there meet with us. The mothers, all of whom are sex workers told me that they were very grateful for the presence of Nishtha and the night shelter without which they would have no hope for their children. While we were there, a malnourished baby was brought o our attention by one of the women. This baby was abandoned by one of the other sex-workers and was being cared for by the sex-workers. The baby was found about a week earlier and appeared extremely malnourished and was throwing up non-stop, unable to keep down any food or water. Minadi immediately instructed her staff to take the baby to the local

doctor for treatment. I followed up with Minadi for a week after my return and found out that the baby was eventually transferred to the local Govt. hospital and kept there for few days and provided treatment until he recovered. This is another example of how Nishtha's timely intervention and help saved this baby's life.



Children of various ages living at the shelter.



A dance show presented by a girl living in the shelter. The staff and teachers of Nishtha are standing in the back.

Update on Rinki:

In 2011, while I was visiting the shelter, I got to meet with Rinki, who attends formal school as an 8th grader. Her mother is a sex worker who abandoned her as a child. Rinki was raised by other sex workers in the neighboring brothel and has lived at the shelter since its inception. Now that Rinki has grown into an attractive young girl, her mother has decided to come back into her life and from what we learned, has sold her to a wealthy client of hers. At present another sex worker whose daughter is attending college (thanks to Asha SAC) has taken Rinki under her

wing and is protecting her. I visited the brothel where this lady works and was assured by her and other workers that they would do their level best to keep Rinki from being delivered to the client who bought her.

During my visit in December 2013, Minadi informed me that after my visit in 2011, Rinki’s mother took away Rinki to be with her in Kolkata at some point in 2012. This was a very grave situation as there was no way to protect Rinki from being forced to join the sex trade. The staff of Nishtha and the other sex workers stayed in contact with Rinki’s mother and urged her to return Rinki back to Nishtha. The mother eventually relented and Rinki returned to Nishtha. Soon after, in 2013, Rinki fell in love with a local boy and married him. However, since they were both minors, they are staying with the parents of the boy and assisting the family in their business. The staff of Nishtha is keeping a firm eye on the boy and his family to ensure that they do not sell Rinki to other pimps (a common fate that befalls girls who elope from the shelter and get married).

Immediate Concerns

- (1) **Support for day-time supervision for children of shelter:** The night shelter currently has ~10 kids who are very young (~2-4 yrs) or older children who were unable to be reintegrated into formal schools. At present, these children are sent back to the brothels to be with their mothers during the day, a very risky situation. Nishtha needs support to pay for their lunch expenses, cost of cook for lunch and salary of a staff member who can supervise these kids and keep them engaged in the shelter during the day. Estimated budget ~\$2000 per year.
- (2) **Tutoring support for Class V-X for children of the shelter:** There is an immediate need for providing after-school tutoring support for children of sex workers living in the shelter and studying in middle school and high school to help them keep up with the competition. The staff of Nishtha is not equipped to deal with the complex problems of middle and high school math and science. After supporting the shelter for 8 years, we will fail in our duty if we cannot enable these kids to pass out of high school at a pivotal time in their lives when the easy life of sex and crime lures them away from school. Minadi has provided the proposed budget for providing tutoring support for 11 kids as listed below. Any support towards this very urgent cause will go a long way in ensuring that another child’s life is not lost to sex and crime. Estimated budget ~\$2000 per year.

#	Description	Quantity	Rate	Amout
1	Fees for Tutor (2) Morning	11	2000	44000
2	Fees for Tutor (2) Evening	11	2000	44000
3	Educational Materials 11 children	11	1000x11	11000
4	Uniform	11	600	6600
5	Misc	1	2000	2000
	Total			107600
	USD @ 55 rupees to the US dollar			2109.803922

Thank you for your attention.
 Anuradha Bulusu
 Chapter Coordinator
 Asha for Education, Atlanta
 January, 2014

Executive Summary

MISSION: Night Shelter for Children of Sex Workers in Baruipur, West Bengal, India

OBJECTIVE:

- Ensure a protective environment to the highly vulnerable children of sex workers
- Ensure that the children become part of mainstream society

BACKGROUND: Extreme poverty and starvation forces women to take up prostitution. The women lack basic human rights and can easily be sold off to any well paying client and taken away.

Children born to sex workers grow up amidst the poverty, squalor and crime in the brothels. Most do not go to school.

Children are all malnourished and physically and sexually abused frequently by the clients. They are exposed to crime, alcohol and drugs at a very early age.

Significant majority of boys succumb to a life of crime. **Almost 100% of the girls take up prostitution or are kidnapped and forced into prostitution.**

ACTION: NISHTHA with support from ASHA for Education, Atlanta Chapter started a night shelter in September 2006 for the children of the sex workers. Shelter remains open seven days of the week.



32 children of ages 2 to 14 years come to the shelter every night.

The night shelter provides safety and emotional support. Nutritional support, clothing and recreational activities are also provided. Non formal teaching is provided to some of the children who have been accepted to local schools through Nishtha's help.

HOW IT WORKS: The children come in the evening and stay till morning when their mothers are out working at night. The children work on their homework from 5pm to 8pm. Creative classes take place from 8pm to 9pm followed by dinner and prayer before bedtime. In the morning, they attend cleanliness class followed by Morning Prayer before leaving for formal school or to be with their mothers at the brothel during the day.

CHALLENGES:

- Integration of children into mainstream society through non-formal educational support
- Minimize dropout rate from schools and night shelter by providing tuition support after school
- Provide support to supervise the children remaining at the shelter during the day
- Empowerment of mothers to minimize prostitution

Primary contributing factors for drop-out rates:

Girls

- Sold by their mother to brothels
- Kidnapped and forced into prostitution
- Provide child care to siblings

Boys

- Exposure to crime and drugs

ANNUAL BUDGET to operate night shelter US \$6000

PROGRESS

