

Site Visit Report

Agniva Roy

2nd and 21st January 2023

1 Background

Nishtha runs the Night Shelter for children of the women who work in the red light area in Baruipur. This shelter was built in 2014 with Asha Atlanta's support, though Nishtha had been doing their best to take care of these children for many years. This shelter is built with the purpose of providing these children a decent childhood and education, so that they can escape the clutches of the sex trade and lead a more respectable life. There are currently about 30 children in the shelter, who stay there from late afternoon to late night. They get meals and the caregivers there help them with schoolwork, or engage them in activities like reading, singing, dancing and simple games. There is also a creche set up where older women take care of infants – about 3 or 4 infants were there, and a new born. The shelter is a plain 1 floor 2 room house with a roof.

Changes from last visit: The roof has now been covered and is in the process of being turned into another room, so that older students can study better, and so that there is more space for the children and their activities. I was told that there are some concerns that the boundary of the house is not enough to protect from people jumping over the walls – hence they are planning to enclose it and construct a gate.

2 My visit

2nd Jan: The children were working on homework, painting, or reading, when we arrived. There were about 30 children present, their tutors, and some of their mothers. They greeted us enthusiastically. They then sang and performed dance for us. Their teachers showed us photos of a recent performance they had put up in the community. Some of the students had recently received awards for good performance in schools.

21st Jan: This was a more informal visit, as I had requested. The students were working on their studies. I went around and spoke to them, and asked them questions about their studies. I asked some of them to read from their textbooks, which they did fluently. Some others were practising writing the English alphabet. Some of them were learning arithmetic, and were happy when I assigned them simple problems. They were able to work on them without help from their teacher, who was also present. Their teachers are patient and loving, and take pride in their students doing well. Some of the older children are preparing for their board exams. It is a matter of concern to Nishtha to have older children in the center, as they are easy targets of sex-traffickers.

The children are fluent in conversation and confident in their answers. They are also quick, and do not hesitate to ask for clarifications in case a question is not clear to them. Mosquitoes are a major nuisance in the area – they have nets to protect the infants.