

# AALO

## NIGHT SHELTER FOR CHILDREN OF SEX WORKERS

**Period of Reporting:** August 2010 - March'11

### **Background**

The red light area in the Puratan Bazar area of Baruipur have more than 100 sex workers living permanently and about 150 floating sex workers visit every evening. They live in the very small and dirty rooms, some times without any window. The roads are very dirty and the Kancha (unmetalled) drains emit very bad smell. One can see waste materials are dumped here and there. Since morning, country liquors are sold and many people start consuming this liquor from morning. The environment of the area is always very tense, unhealthy and dangerous, as there is no law and order present in the area. The brothels are owned by some maasi or antisocial elements and the sex workers work under their control. The sex workers do not have any protection here and they are manhandled by the maasi and the hooligans frequently. Some rich person or hooligan or any antisocial element can easily take away any girl by paying money. The children of the sex workers are getting attached with the social environment of the area. Neither they go to school nor do they have any idea about health and hygiene. Their mothers have little chance to take care of their respective children. The children are all malnourished as their mother fail to give them proper and nutritious food. The income of the mothers is quite low and they are to part with some portion of their income with the maasi and the babus. The children some times are sexually abused. They develop many antisocial habits and learn abusive languages. When they grow up many of them also become anti socials, alcoholic and drug addicts. They do not have any alternative better way to live. So even when some of them get some better chance, they fail to adopt in new situation as at times they feel this hampers their independence and machoism and ultimately return to their own area and lead the same antisocial life. The condition of the girl children is more pathetic. Many of them in their early teens are forced to accept the same profession as their mothers has as young girls have greater demand, paid higher and mother has become old to attract the clients.

NISHTHA with due support from ASHA for Education, started a night shelter for children of sex workers at Baruipur red light area providing safety and foster care with nutritional support, clothing and story telling, games, non-formal teaching, recreation and health facilities to 32 children in age group of 2 1/2 to 14 years.

Two main objectives of this programme were to ensure a protective environment to these highly vulnerable children and to ensure that they become the part of mainstream society.

### **Objectives 1:**

To ensure a protective environment for the children born to sex workers.

### **Activities Undertaken**

- During the reporting period, the night shelter extended a protective environment to 38 children. The list of the children are:

<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Name of the child</b>
1	Chandana Adhikari
2	Bandana Adhikari
3	Kakoli Debnath
4	Biki Debnath
5	Bikram Debnath
6	Milon Das
7	Swapan Das
8	Sujit Mondal
9	Ritik Mondal
10	Barsha Das
11	Akash Das
12	Rohit Mondal
13	Rahul Mondal
14	Koyel Mondal
15	Palash Choudhuri
16	Putul Choudhuri
17	Rajes Choudhuri
18	Tumpa Chokroborti
19	Pampa Chokorboti
20	Shibom Bhokto
21	Komol Modok
22	Tumpa Haldar

23	Riju Das
24	Ram Naskar
25	Kartik Saha
26	Brihospoti Debnath
27	Kakoli Debnath
28	Joya Sardar
29	Mampi Biswas
30	Saiful Gagi
31	Salima Gagi
32	Bisnu Mondol
33	Gopal Sardar
34	Sahida Khatun
35	Dip Sardar
36	Avijit Mondal
37	Sarosoti Naskar
38	Priya Mondal

These children come in the evening and stays till morning as their mothers remain busy with their profession from evening to late night or early in the morning. The mother also don't want their children to stay at home that time and also they become highly vulnerable of abuse & voilence from clients or any other antisocial elements.

The children carry out their studies through due guidance from 5pm to 8pm. The creative classes take place from 8pm to 9pm. They take their dinner and they go to bed after prayer. In the morning they join cleanliness class and then attend Morning Prayer before leaving for their home.

The night shelter remain open all nights of a week and the staffs carried their duties on a rotation wise. One old sex worker act as an outreach workers to ensure no children miss night shelter owing to playing, watching TV (in neighbourhood) etc.

We are trying our level best to counter any unforeseen incident but at times after undergoing the hard realities of life, even the mothers become negligent or selfish towards their children. Shahida Khatoon a girl of 12 years went missing now a days, as per others in the are she was last seen with her mother only, but her mother says that Shahilda is lost. We tried to talk to her in detail but she is now behaving abnormally. After seeing this incident we became very concerned. We have send Saraswati Naskar &

Jaya Sardar to a juvenile home as they are not safe even in the hands of their mothers. Avijit Mandal was hyper-active, although most of the children coming to night shelter were hyper active but Avijit was exceptionally hyper. He used to break things, disturb others, beat other children and constantly use abusive language which was also affecting other children. Even our staffs was unable to handle him. Considering all these factors including best interest of rest of the children we have to remove Avijit from night shelter.

Previously, there were many incident like Shahida but we have been able to stop that to quite less (one) and are trying not to take risk for any elder girls and we have taken the startegy to send elder girls to any juvenile home.

## **Objectives 2:**

To ensure that these children become the part of so called mainstreamed society.

## **Activities Undertaken**

- One of the major problem we have seen amongst these children is their poor habit of hygiene maintenance which adds to the factor that people doesn't want to accept them. So, we have stressed on improving the hygiene level of the children and even started to follow a check of their hygiene level. We had introduced some of the hard rules to improve their hygiene level like in the morning they will be provided tiffin only after they brush their teeth, take bath and comb their hairs. Initially we have to face huge resistance from the child and even the mothers of the children. They at times even challeged the authorities but with gradual persuasion and following the rule strictly, now we see that it is gradually coming into habit. Interestingly, those children who were habituated of using ash for brushing their teeth, now promptly ask for tooth paste and say how can they brush their teeth without toothpaste. The children used to have to much of lice in their head. They were often seen itching their head. We then decided to use Medicar (a shampoo to remove lice) on weekly basis. With continuous use of this, the problem of lice hasd reduced considerably.

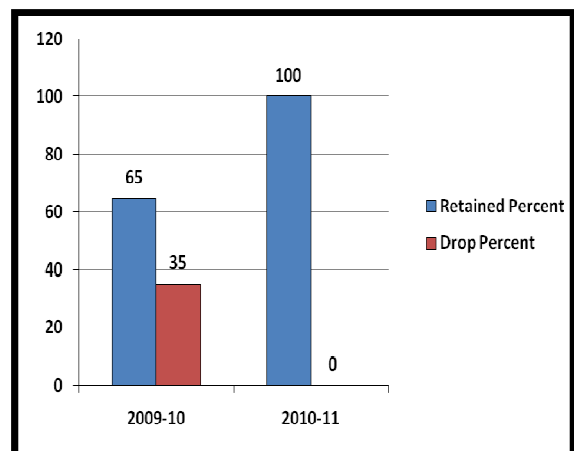
- The children especially boys have very high level of machoism and use of abusive language was quite prominent. So, in order to make them soft & sensitive we carry out various creative activities. A new song instructor comes to the centre regularly. He is quite creative and mixes with children quite nicely. The children have also mixed with him very nicely. The children are now learning different Rabindra Sangeet songs which is highly unlikely for these children as normally they love songs but that of the latest dance numbers or some low grade dual meaning songs which they often hear. We feel that this is resulting in making them less aggressive and is having a very positive impact on them.
- It is need not to prove that education is required for all children to build their perspective and to make their future bright. We also try to ensure that these children also become that part of mainstream education system. So, after building their basic capacity, they are admitted to formal school (although after much negotiation with teachers & parents of other children). Earlier, we used to face huge challenge in ensuring that the children remain in school after admision but owing to their behaviour & non - accpetance from teachers, other children & parents, they use to drop out of school. But, nowadays, the retention rate has increased quite a lot. The class wise details of the school going children are:

<b>Class</b>	<b>No. of children</b>
I	01
II	05
III	04
IV	04
V	03
VI	03
VII	01
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>

- We have to conduct regular meetings with teachers and the mother of these children to ensure that the teacher become a little more considerate towards these children while the mother become supportive towards the education of their child.
- There are few elder girls who go to school. We were observing that they are being teased on the way to & back from school. We then talked on individual basis (one on one) with the local influential people to reduce eve teasing. When the children goes out of their para (area), they are being teased or catcalling is done citing their legitimacy. This always used to demotivate the children to go to school and created a distance & anger amongst these children for the so called mainstreamed society. After facing this problem on a continuous basis, we tried to involve key local people. We even approached a person who was once a “Dada” (renowned goon) of the area and has now left all these but still people give value to what he says.

## Achievement

Normally, the mothers go to different places for the trade citing that they are going to their mother's or relative's house. During that time they either take their children or keep it younger children under the supervision of elder child. The pressure of sibling care limits the regularity or attention of the child. They either don't come to day care or just come to have food. Whenever they come during this period, they lack their concentration. The attendance of school also decline considerably which hampers their overall educational development and even lead to dropping out. The elder girls those who have not lost their virginity are very high in demand. We often hear that they are married to distant places. Actually, in the name of marriage they are sold to some babus. This is done with some typical rituals and puja, as if actually marriage.



But during this phase, unlike previous years no children dropped out of school.

We feel this as a major achievement for us as even after so many odds against the education of these children we have been able to ensure that the children admitted to school continued their education without dropping out of school.