



“Sinchan”

Day and Night Shelter for Children of Sex Workers

24 South Parganas, West Bengal

*Directed By **NISHTHA***

Site Report by AID/ASHA volunteer Bhavna Sengupta, November 2012

Basic Introduction of “Sinchan”

“Sinchan” is a shelter for children of sex workers in 24 South Parganas, West Bengal. Sinchan is one of the many projects coordinated by “Nishtha”, a totally community based grass roots level women’s organization started in the 70s that works for the empowerment and development of down trodden women living in the rural areas of West Bengal.

Sinchan started out as a night shelter for the children of sex workers in 24 South Parganas five years ago in 2006. With the support of ASHA and AID, it has been functioning as a day shelter as well for the past 3 years (2010-2013). Sinchan has provided protection, relief and ensured essential rights for the 41 (current) children who are a part of the shelter. The shelter ensures their safety & security, foster care, nutritional support, healthcare, clothing, non-formal/formal teaching, recreation (story-telling, arts and crafts, games, singing, dancing, etc.), and access to a proper education. Nishtha also works to ensure the retention of these children in school, and works on reducing the huge gap between these children and civilized society. Nishtha is attempting to sensitize the community and to mobilize the people at large to accept these children as members of society. They are helping to make these children an integral part of the school system and helping to create a safer more tolerant environment for them in society at large.

Overview of Impacts and Achievements from 2011

- Incidences of child abuse and victimization significantly reduced to almost none, except during festival seasons when influx of clients and strangers were greater.
- More than 80% of the children were practicing personal hygiene habits. Senior children were beginning to help younger children in developing a more consistent routine.
- Retention of the children in formal schools had gone up to 90%. This affected the children positively in numerous ways, but notably they began to behave more similarly to the other children of the surrounding society (i.e., they weren't using offensive language as much and were beginning to behave less violently)
- In total 6 children were admitted to High School during 2011, making 11 total, and all of them attended school regularly, appeared for their Annual Examination, and all of them got through to the next class successfully.
- 2 girls had successfully been protected from the sex trade, and made it all the way through to college. They were enrolled as first year students at Dhruba Halder College at Dakshin Barasat under Calcutta University. One girl decided on a BA in Philosophy, and the other decided on a BA in Bengali.
- All children had been provided with learning and teaching materials including subject books, exercise books, drawing books, and hand writing practicing books.
- In terms of extra curricular activities, a song instructor was employed for the shelter, and the children were provided with books of poems, songs, and arts and crafts materials.
- Once a month meetings were held with the mothers regarding the children's health and education, and 120 'one-on-one' sessions and 64 'small group' sessions were held as well.

Impacts and Achievements of 2012

- In 2011 there were 39 children in the center. 7 children left (reasons given in consequent slide), and 9 new children have been included, bringing the total for 2012 to 41 children.
- One of the objectives last year was to rebuild the shelter as it was very old and decrepit, and could not house the growing number of children (by any stretch). With support from ASHA, the new building is up and running! The building was inaugurated in November 2012, and I got to be a part of the inaugural celebrations (pictures/descriptions in subsequent slides).
- In terms of recreational activities, in 2011 there was only a song instructor and the children also had access to arts & crafts, drawing utensils, and poetry/song books. Now there is also a social worker who comes and teaches them dance and drawing in the morning before school. This has been a wonderful addition, and had a huge impact on the children. I even had the privilege of witnessing the impact as I performed dance with some of the girls of Sinchan at the inauguration of the new building! The social workers and I noted the change in overall attitude and behavior now that they are being exposed to the arts and having opportunities to engage and develop their finer senses. They are less aggressive and hostile, and more polite and gentle in their demeanor. They absolutely love their activities and take a strong interest in them. The song teacher continues to have a big impact. 5 of the children (Biki, Akash, Komol, Swapan, and Jaya) are actually very talented and have taken such an interest in singing that they may even carry this on and appear for exams in singing.

Impacts and Achievements of 2012

- Hygiene practices are more of a habitual part of every child's day now. Whereas before the older children would always have to help the younger children, now the social workers see that they sometimes do it autonomously. The newest members express reluctance and put up resistance, but are slowly persuaded over time to adopt the same practices. It is still a difficult process sometimes, but there has been a definite overall improvement.
- The incidences of child abuse/victimization remains low. The shelter is a much more accepted part of the community now, and the actual members of the community are more invested in keeping the children safe and supporting the shelter. That being said, the whole area is dominated by anti-socials, drug addicts, gangsters, and criminals of a lower socio-economic class, so safety is always an issue. This year, having more of a consistent schedule of activities, classes, meals and tutoring at the shelter has helped retain the children there in the building (when they are not in school).
- The volunteers at Nishtha worked with a nutritionist this year to create a more complete and balanced diet for the children of Sinchan, whilst still staying within budget. For breakfast the children alternate between 3 meals: a boiled egg with one piece of fruit (banana, or guava), bread and a vegetable curry, or chick peas with puffed rice. For dinner they alternate between an egg, kidney bean, or soybean curry, which is served with a vegetable curry and rice. For their snack after they are given cookies or a piece of cake. Thus the children are now getting a sufficient amount of protein in their diet. They try to serve the children fish once a week, but unfortunately it is very expensive.

Educational Impacts and Achievements of 2012

•There are 3 groups of children: the older group goes to primary school or high school, a second younger group (up to age 5) goes to a government run program called ICDS- Integrated Child Development Skills, and a third group of very young children are studying at the center itself from the social workers employed there.

Class	Number of children
At Center	17
ICDS	4
I	2
II	4
III	3
IV	0
V	5
VI	1
VII	3
VIII	2
TOTAL	41

Educational Impacts and Achievements of 2012

- The school going children were provided with all necessary learning materials, such as their school books, exercise books, stationary and supplies, and uniforms.
- 4 special tutors have been engaged to teach the 11 children of the shelter who are in high school: 2 for the Science and Math, and 2 for Arts and Literature. The 11 students get their tutoring in the morning after their breakfast and before attending school, and then get tutored again in the evening after their snack. The students are therefore performing at par with their counterparts in the schools, which is a noteworthy development. In the past, because such arrangements for regular tutoring couldn't be made, the retention rate for these children in the schools was very low because the children struggled to keep up.
- The 2 girls who were enrolled in Dhruba Halder college are doing extremely well. They are in their second year, and their identity is still anonymous in their college.
- As was done in previous years, monthly meetings were conducted with the mothers. In total in 2012, 10 such meetings were completed. Topics of discussion during these meetings were health and hygiene (both for the mothers, and for them to teach and follow up with their children), the children's safety and security, and the children's progress recreationally and educationally and how the mother's could support and encourage the progress. Overall, the impact of these meetings was quite positive. In addition to the once a month meetings, 120 'one-on-one' sessions and 64 'small group' sessions were held as well.

Old Versus New!



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Nighttime Shelter for Children

Organized By: **Nishtha**
Supported by: **ASHA**

