

PROJECT NAME:

NIGHT SHELTER

Proposed By: **Nishtha**

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SISTERHOOD

PROPOSAL

(April 2022 – March 2023)

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The red light area in the Puratan Bazar area of Baruipur, West Bengal has more than 150 commercial sex workers living permanently and about 150 floating sex workers who visit every evening. They live in small, dirty, window-less rooms and are manhandled by the 'Mashis' and the pimps frequently. The women lack basic human rights as they can easily be sold off by the 'Mashis' to any well-paying client and taken away.

Sex workers are raided, "rescued" and confined in shelter homes usually under abysmal conditions. The police most of the time break their belongings, abuse them in public and mercilessly harass them. For these reasons, the clients too, out of fear avoid going to them. In other words, these commercial sex workers hardly get any protection that actually is one of the basic rights of any citizen of this land. Due to such reasons those who practice it often do so clandestinely and sex workers are not willing to come forward, acknowledge their identity and access services provided by government. Their lives and work are in a grey zone that is considered illicit, spills over into practical issues such as a lack of identification documents such as voters' ID cards, Aadhaar numbers, caste certificates or ration cards which remain inaccessible to the majority of sex workers. Many are single mothers and unable to produce proof of residence for long periods of time or show ancestral documents required for obtaining caste certificates. Sex workers move frequently to avoid identification by family or for better earning opportunities. This makes it doubly difficult to provide relief work through government channels that ask for ration cards and other identity and address proof. Although negotiating with the local administration, we tried to make those vital documents available for most of the Commercial Sex Workers, more are still waiting in the list. Even their close relatives deny giving them any help.

The COVID-19 pandemic stranded many sex workers in cities, towns and districts, especially those working in 'Baruipur Puratan Bazaar Red Light Area'. They were refused rations and any relief since most of them did not have ration cards. Once their savings ran out, women were asked to vacate their rented rooms amidst the nationwide lockdowns. Women reported attempting to resort to desperate measures to return to their home but these sex-workers live in a world within a world and once a woman gets into this profession it is never easy for her to go back to her normal life.

PROBLEMS DURING LOCKDOWN

The lockdown has escalated the risk of poverty and ill health for the sex workers, as there are no clients in the market. Moreover the clients with whom they deal with everyday are also those who absolutely collapsed as soon as the lockdown was imposed due to the surging Covid-19 pandemic. These clients include, rickshaw walas, van pullers, hawkers, and other people belonging to meager income group category. The commercial sex workers we are talking about hardly generate income around 30 to 40 rupees per client. Whatever they earn in a whole day, gets divided into three parts – the house of the 'Mashis' in which they dwell in, hooligans those who pretend to give them protection and lastly they keep what is remaining. Therefore we can easily understand how difficult times they must be going through during this difficult time.

As the COVID-19 pandemic was making its inexorable sweep across the globe—accompanied by stringent lockdowns and restrictions—it soon became clear that the sex workers' community would be badly hit. Initially confined to the elite in India—international travelers and their contacts—the novel coronavirus has now affected all strata of society. Because its spread depends upon people's physical contact with each other, physical distancing and restriction on mobility, or "lockdown," as advised by the World Health

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Organization was seen as the primary mode of prevention. This translated into a total ban on human movement and restrictions on physical contact between people. This is devastating for those sections of society whose livelihood itself depends upon human contact. The looming uncertainty about when this will end has left them in a lurch. Besides the medical profession, other professions dependent on physical contact, such as masseurs, hair stylists, sports persons, etc., are all facing the brunt of the lockdown. Sex workers, a large population that earns its livelihood through work pivoted around human touch and intimacy, has been gravely affected.

PROBLEMS FACED BY THE CHILDREN OF THESE SEX-WORKERS

The abuse, violence, hardships and inhuman treatment sex workers forced into the trade face, cause irreparable damage to their psyche. They are so broken and scarred that it takes years of counselling to come to terms with the trauma. They are stripped of their dignity, identity and endure a lifelong punishment for no fault of theirs. They are the untouchables and invisibles of our society.

Sex workers and their children, born into brothels, endure horrible living conditions, and lack nutritious food and basic medical needs. Each night the children are pushed onto the streets when their mothers work. They are extremely vulnerable and susceptible to abuse and violence themselves.

Most children of sex workers are denied an education because those controlling the trade believe this will hinder the sex trade in future. These children also have a stigma attached to them that makes breaking away from the profession very difficult. They have little identity besides being 'a sex worker's child' and their entire life is spent battling against it with neither hope nor a future. Most often they have no option but to "join this line of work" and live the same way.

Children born and brought up in red light districts are more often subjected to abuse within their "homes" and are ostracized in social spaces. The environment of the red-light district is not conducive to the well-being of a child. This was due to a plethora of reasons which ranged from the lack of space for children to issues of substance abuse. Due to the lack of space, it was recorded that they often slept in cramped terraces or makeshift spaces which are covered with plastic sheets. The problem of drug and substance abuse is rampant too, with about a huge percentage of the boys having admitted to consuming addictive substances such as *gutka*, cigarettes and alcohol.

Due to the nature of the trade, girl children are particularly vulnerable. The focus group discussions revealed that mothers felt helpless when a client touched, molested or teased their daughters verbally. The issue of sexual abuse is so commonplace, that 100% of the children when asked stated that they had at least heard of cases of sexual abuse that have occurred with their friends, siblings or maybe other children living in their neighbourhood.

Due to their early exposure to sex, children often use their own sexuality to gain attention from others, which increases their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Some sex workers also feel pressured to enter their daughters into prostitution. Often, the only remaining viable option that parents seek to protect their daughters is to get them married at an early age, which is certainly not in the best interest of the child. Children of commercial sex workers are the victims of social discrimination, like their mothers, and suffer from inferiority complex, social alienation and lead a poor quality of life. Children of commercial sex workers are often deprived of education as educational institutions require the biological father's name for enrolment. Female children are groomed for the same profession while male children often perform casual work. Oftentimes, these children are overlooked and little effort is made to integrate them into the mainstream of society through education and meeting basic needs.

The children of the sex workers live with their mothers and grow up amidst the crime, poverty and squalor of the brothels. The children are all malnourished and many of the children are frequently physically and sexually abused by the clients. Most do not go to school nor have any understanding about health and hygiene. The children do not have any opportunity to escape their environment and even when presented with one, are unable to cope as they lack the basic skills to adapt. The children are exposed to crime, alcohol and drugs at a very early age and the significant majority of the male children grow up to lead a life of crime. The stigma of growing up in a brothel prevents the female children from being

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accepted in society and almost 100% of them either join their mothers or are raped and forced into prostitution.

THE BEGINNING

The problems these commercial sex workers and their children have been going through are many; and this was where we couldn't resist ourselves; and with the support from ASHA for Education, Atlanta Chapter, we started a night shelter in September 2006 for the children of these sex workers at Baruiapur red light area to provide safety and foster care. The night shelter, in addition to being a safe haven for the children, provides emotional and nutritional support, clothing and recreation in the form of games and story-recitals to 32 children in age group of 2.5 to 14 years. Some of the children have been accepted to local schools through Nishtha's help and the night shelter also provides non-formal teaching support to these children with their homework.

The night shelter remains open seven days of the week and the staff alternates their duties on a rotation basis. The mothers are free to visit the children anytime. A former sex worker acts as an outreach staff to ensure no child misses their attendance to the shelter owing to playing, watching TV in the neighborhood etc. as any child left unprotected immediately becomes a prey to the neighborhood pimps and clients visiting the brothels.

ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH ACTIVITIES

Nishtha has not only engaged the children of these Commercial sex workers in formal education by getting them admitted in some prominent government schools but here in the safe shelter our caregivers and teachers have played a very important role in monitoring the children and providing them guidance for study during evening hours. They have developed a schedule in discussion with the children for the whole day and insisted all the children follow it. Seeing them now even the teachers of government schools confess that these children don't seem to have come from such a background. These children have now given up evil practices, shunned using filthy languages and are putting efforts to study very hard to secure good results. They have not just improved their behavior but also their way of wearing clothes, and making themselves presentable just like any other normal child. Coaching on social skills helped the children of Commercial Sex Workers to maintain proper social behavior in schools and become well-adjusted with peers while cultural activities, as well as games and sports, had given them a sense of social acceptance since the children from the larger society participated with them.

Educational guidance provided by the teachers and caregivers helped the children to deal with their doubts related to academic issues. In fact, cooperation and support from community volunteers and public representatives was instrumental in the socialization process and helped the children to overcome any inferiority feelings and regain their self-confidence. Coaching on social skills helped the children of Commercial Sex Workers to maintain proper social behavior in schools and become well-adjusted with peers while cultural activities, as well as games and sports, had given them a sense of social acceptance since the children from the larger society participated with them.

The local stakeholders too are supporting us a lot in transforming the situation. When the government had imposed total restrictions over opening the schools, we conducted our class with the 32 students in one of the local parks, abiding the health guidelines. The stakeholders were the ones who supported us to continue with the class for these children since they thought providing classes to these children was very necessary since they might get spoiled again. They personally permitted us to continue these classes and said that if ever the police tried to stop taking the class, they would urge them not to do so. However after their assurance we have started our shelter home once again and again these children are enjoying the same benefits which they used to get pre lockdown.

A few Significant Achievements –

Two girls who were part of our Night Shelter have completed their graduation and are presently working in one of the Government Organizations. One among the two has relocated her mother in a company provided quarter whereas the other girl was unfortunately since her mother had committed suicide before she could see the success of her daughter. The best thing is both these girls are living a dignified life. Nishtha regards this as the most significant and remarkable achievement ever.

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Apart from this we now have children who are studying in 8th, 9th, 10th, etc. hopefully these children will also complete their secondary examinations successfully and make themselves a way for a successful career.

Every year we admit children aged 12 or 13 to government homes or residential schools since they won't get protection living in the red light areas.

We have seen an enormous strength in the mothers of these children. These mothers have rescued 8 minor girls who were forced into sex works by some men involved in sex trade and trafficking. Doing so in such a profession requires a brave heart but these mothers have shown their fearlessness and have taken an oath they will die but won't allow any girl to get into this profession forcefully. The courage that these mothers have shown is immeasurable and beyond the word of praise. How often we have seen any one going against their own law getting murdered but these mothers did not fear about their own lives and rescued those innocent lives. They contacted Nishtha and we immediately took the help of the Police and local administration to send them to the government home safely.

All these were remarkable achievements and it has come only because of the support that we have been getting from the Asha for Education. We look upon them as the architect behind everything; the way they are supporting these most vulnerable and deprived children with their unconditional love is absolutely unparalleled.

THE PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Providing the children of the Commercial Sex Workers, a safe shelter, nutritious food and most importantly formal education.

WHOM WE ARE SUPPORTING

06 – Children of Crèche (aged 4 months to 2 years)

32 – Children (aged 5 years to 12 years)

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NISHTHA

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S L. No.	Particular	Budget
A	Personnel Cost	
A.1	Part Salary of Accountant (Rs.3500 X 12 Months)	42000.00
A.2	Internal Auditor Fees / Travel Allowance Rs.5750 x 12 Months	69000.00
	Sub Total	111000.00
B	Programme Cost	
B.1	Night Shelter	
B.1.1	Honorarium of Social Worker (Rs.6000 X 2 head X 12 Months)	144000.00
B.1.2	Honorarium of Cook (Rs.4300 X 12 Months)	51600.00
B.1.3	Part Hono. of Supervisor (Rs.4000 X 12 Months)	48000.00
B.1.4	Clothing for Children (Rs. 300 X 32 heads)	9600.00
B.1.5	Dinner for 32 children (Rs 10 X 30 heads(average attendance) X 340 days)	102000.00
B.1.6	TA for Staff (Rs. 600 X 12 Months)	7200.00
B.1.7	Toiletry for children (Rs 30 x 32 heads x 12 months)	11520.00
B.1.8	Honorarium of 01 Care Giver Rs.4000 x 1 head x 12 Months	48000.00
B.2	Creche for 6 children	
B.2.1	Food for 6 Children Rs.30 x 6 heads x 340 days	61200.00
B.2.2	Clothing for 06 Children Rs.500 x 06 heads	3000.00
	Sub Total	486120.00
C	Administration & Monitoring	
C.1	Electricity, electrification, electrical fittings, other maintenance etc	4000.00
C.2	Printing , postage & stationeries	2000.00
C.3	TA for monitoring	1200.00
C.4	Miscellaneous Exp.	1000.00
C.5	Audit Fees	2400.00
	Sub Total	10600.00
	Grand Total	607720.00