



# ASHA KIRAN

Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter

VOLUME 15 - ISSUE 1 APRIL 2009



*Greetings all!*

*2009 is off to a fast start as we are already a quarter of the way through the year!*

*As you will notice reading through the newsletter, we have unofficially dedicated this issue to Asha Seattle's Mumbai/Maharashtra projects. In light of the huge success of Slumdog Millionaire we felt it appropriate to bring to you what we as a chapter are doing to make a difference. Although the film might bring in some masala twists, it is a good reminder of some reality of*

*the situation, and the only way to make a difference is to acknowledge the reality, and continue being the change we want to see. This quarter also brought us many successful local events such as our annual Geetanjali show, booths at the Seattle Asian Arts Museum and much more.*

*Thank you to all patrons for your continued support and encouragement. As always, we welcome your questions, comments, and feedback.*

*Asha Seattle Team*

## **No ground for me to stand on - life on the streets.**

*Malti Raghvan [Asha volunteer, project coordinator for SUPPORT]*

Street life is a culture in and of itself. It is a web of relationships founded on the characteristics of the street - a public space where everything is transient and there is no sense of permanence. The streets are governed by the rules of commerce which are purely about survival; self-centeredness and self-interest rule.

This space is defined by its own language, it has its own definition of what is joyous and beautiful, it has its own set of rules that establish territory and determine a hierarchy of relationships. All of this unleashes chilling power dynamics in the lives of all that have made it their home.

My home; the streets. They become my addiction,

Through our decade long work with the population living on the streets, we have seen drug use to be a fundamental manifestation of street life; a coping mechanism, a place of escape for the soul from the starkness of circumstance that defines life on the streets.

Drug ensnares each "user" into the cycle of street life, constantly closing out all options for change and thereby ensuring that street life remains the only option. Beyond the substance abuse, the use of brute force, a belligerent body language and an aggressive stance become a way of life, an "identity", for each person living on the streets. The brutality of street life is like a script that gets engraved into each and every person who makes it their home.

Children who are addicted to drugs seal their addiction to the streets. Giving up their real names after a few weeks on the streets is their first act of giving up their true selves. Through weeks, months and sometimes years, each one of them has absorbed all the components of this complex script into their being. Each expression, behavior, stance and thought is geared towards what is most important; survival. It is survival that makes each moment on the streets about trying to establish dominance, influence and power over any situation or person.

A new path emerges

Our intervention with drug using children living on the streets raises the question, "What is the journey that a drug using child living on the streets must take on to reach full recovery?"

As we began our work with drug using children we focused on multiple aspects of substance abuse such as what substances they were addicted to and what kind of treatment would make their detoxification process successful? Through trial and error the answers to these questions revealed themselves.

Once the addiction to the substance has been treated successfully, the crucial part of accepting responsibility to building a life is the next step.

It is here that the script engraved from the streets poses the greatest challenge. Working with drug abusing street children we

came to realize that living on the streets creates its own addiction to a life within it; characterized by its language, set of rules and expectations.

In short, street life has its own problems, challenges, solutions and struggles. Survival creates its own dynamics of exploitation, abuse, beggary, petty crimes and addiction to substances.

### **SUPPORT's work with drug using street children**

The need for de-addiction from substance use by street children, the lack of appropriate services to treat substance abusing children, the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and the need to reduce crime underlined the urgent need for intervention. Many of the street children come from difficult backgrounds such as parental abuse, abject poverty at home, sexual abuse. Some merely run away from their homes in far off villages to strike it big in the city. Tragically harsh street life in the big city awaits many children and often they have no where to turn for help. The need for survival on the streets leads the children toward substance abuse and crime.

The rehabilitation program for child drug users began in 1993 with only five children in a small room given by the State Government. Seeing the success of the program, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation offered a place at Vakola, Santacruz (East), Mumbai and the rehabilitation centre was shifted there in 1997. Since then SUPPORT's residential rehabilitation centre has successfully run the program for hundreds of children.

#### *Work and Track record :*

We are one of the very few organizations in India offering a residential rehabilitation program for drug using street children.

As there was no residential rehabilitation center for child drug users in Mumbai, SUPPORT opened a rehabilitation center in the year 1997. After the de-addiction or detoxification program, the children are sent to the residential rehabilitation centre which includes counseling, medical assistance and recreational facilities. The younger children are encouraged to go to school and the elder children are put through vocational training aimed at providing job skills with the ultimate goal of assimilating the children into mainstream society.

There is one residential rehabilitation center for boys and one residential vocational training center for boys at Mumbai. We also have one separate residential rehabilitation center for girls.

Currently there are approx. 60 boys and 30 girls in the age range of 6 to 18 years undergoing detoxification / rehabilitation at the residential centers in Mumbai. The vocational training center trains up to 50 boys in cooking, screen-printing, welding, carpentry, etc.

Approximately 75 children go to school from the residential centers.

### **Our Goals :**

1. De-addiction
  - Awareness / Detoxification through medical treatment.
  - Reduce the stress and anxiety caused by street life / HIV
  - Improve physical and mental condition through proper nutrition, hygiene and awareness programs
2. Education
  - Enrollment of children into regular schools.
  - Vocational training for productive jobs in society
3. Repatriation
  - Unite runaway street children with their families, where possible.
  - Job placement, after successful completion of education / vocational training.

### **Our Facilities**

#### ***Day Care Centers for street children***

There are day care centers near the main railway stations (CST & Dadar) in Mumbai where runaway children gather during the day. During outreach / interaction with children on the streets, the staff tries to motivate the children to change their lifestyles by undergoing a rehabilitation program. Street meetings are very important to reach out to the target group. They are counseled by the staff of SUPPORT, to move in to the residential rehabilitation center, where they can give up the drug habit, get an education or vocational training and change their deprived lifestyle into a more meaningful and respectable life. We reach out to more than 50 children on the streets through the day care centers.

#### ***Residential Rehabilitation center for boys***

The drugs commonly taken by this group are alcohol, brown sugar, gutka / tobacco, glue / solvents, marijuana and heroin. After detoxification (completing drug treatment), they are involved in coaching classes, personality development activities, recreational activities etc. After that they are either sent to school, vocational training, job placement / work as Peer Educators (to work as role model with the same target group) or sent to their homes. Currently, around 60 children are availing this residential facility.

#### ***Residential Rehabilitation center for girls***

The girls have to be kept separate from the boys. The girls run away from their homes for many reasons. One of the main reasons is addiction in the family, step parents, lack of interest in studies and also peer pressure. This center is for street girls who are drug users and usually engaged in sex work to support themselves. Some of the girls are HIV positive. After medical treatment / de-addiction, the younger girls are sent to school and others are encouraged to take up skills like cooking, tailoring, and nursing. Currently, 30 girls are at this center.

#### ***Vocational Training center***

Economic rehabilitation is an important part of the program.

This is necessary for the boys who are not of school going age. Economic self-reliance is the foundation for lasting behavioral change. Unless the boys are taken off the streets and provided an alternate lifestyle, it is not possible for them to be successful. As most of them are runaways at a very young age, they have neither education nor other skills. The skills that they have developed on the street were for survival in that situation. To get them into the

main stream of society, which is our main objective, there is need for vocational training where they can earn their own livelihood.

The vocational training program was initiated with screen-printing, which was very successful. Thereafter, carpentry and welding training programs have been implemented. The response has been quite good with many boys earning a stipend for contract work and / or taking up full time jobs.

## Philosophy of Paying Forward

By *Bharathi Vedula*

Each One Teach One (EOTO) was started in Mumbai in Dec '83 with five students and the purpose of educating children from the economically deprived sections of Sion Municipal School in Mumbai. The organization targets children from 5 municipal schools in Mumbai, 2 schools in Bangalore and 1 in Bhopal. The trust today assists 350 children who are widely praised for their academic scholarship and social responsibility. A total of 5000 students have been benefited from this society in last 25 years (EOTO celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 2008).

EOTO provides one-to-one sponsorship of children unto 12th grade and younger students are tutored by older students. Children are supported until they graduate from High School, University or Vocational Schools. The older students accept the responsibility for a child from a lower grade, in the same school or family. The older student helps the younger one with his studies and ensures his/her welfare. The teachers at EOTO constantly monitor and keep an eye on the older children to make sure they are caring for and tutoring their younger dependents. Also, all the children are given medical examinations and social and family counseling is given for those who need it. A big achievement of EOTO is making the parents aware that in education lies the key to their children's success - they are putting children through school who would otherwise have been fodder for the child labor exploitation machine in India. EOTO also provides the kids a sense of community with other school going children by sending them to inter school competitions, organizing social activities like picnics and sponsoring them for vocational training seminars. The success of EOTO in kindling the desire for education in these children can be seen from the fact that the pass rate of EOTO children has risen from 60% to a stunning 84%. The average pass rate at these schools is 54%. The organization envisages its role as being responsible for overall personality development

of each child in addition to providing daily necessities like uniforms, books, stationary, mid-day snack.



Over the years, the organization has diversified its outreach through appropriate programs. The organization aims to provide overall development of the kids going to the school. The support includes medical help with regular check-ups and subsidized prescriptions, professional counseling for dropouts and their families, vocational training and a computer room with interactive learning tools.

EOTO, Asha-Seattle and Kids with special needs

The society also supports 30 children with disabilities, ranging from mild speech impairment to very highly mental challenges. 10 of these children have individual sponsors, rest of these special kids are funded by contributions from Asha Seattle.

Asha Seattle supports a school for mentally challenged kids on the premises of Sion Municipal School- Mumbai, through our Support A Child (SAC) program. A donation as little as \$ 12.50 can make a difference in a child's life under this program, Donors may choose the child they want to sponsor and may even have one to one correspondence and interaction with the child.

EOTO operates in true mumbaikar spirit and believes in extending arm selflessly to those in need. The Society itself has very low to no overheads. There are no offices to be maintained - each school where EOTO is active provides a room for them. The midday meal provided is cooked by one of the children's parents. The staff consists entirely of volunteers.

### Past

## E V E N T S

### Upcoming

Sikshana & Public Education System: Now and the Future  
A talk by E S Ramamurthy~January 11th, 2009

Asha Booths at Seattle Asian Art Museum-  
First Saturday of Feb, March and April 2009

Geetanjali~April 9, 2009

Namaste Kirkland ~ through April 2009

Wheels of Change ~ July 11th & 12th 2009