



Apne Aap Women's Collective

October 2017 - December 2017



DEAR ASSOCIATES

Greetings from Apne Aap Women's Collective!

I present you with the last newsletter of 2017, designed specifically to update you of our developments and challenges in the past 3 months.

AAWC is delighted to inform you that we have been selected by DHL for its 'Living Responsibility' CSR campaign- for the third time in a row! We also collaborated with Small Change for their 'Festive Fundraiser', a Christmas fundraising event through which we have received health and utility kits for all our young beneficiaries. The global Joy of Giving week was also celebrated at AAWC with volunteers leading painting sessions for our Umang and Udaan beneficiaries this quarter.

As for activities, We have initiated newer sessions of vocational training on small-scale industries (like candle and soap making) and beauty training for our Umeed beneficiaries.

We have also held many celebrations like the annual picnics to EsselWorld and Prati-Shirdi-Balaji, and the yearly Clown Without Borders theatrical event- in which our Udaan beneficiaries led comical plays for almost 60 women from the red light district of Kamathipura and Falkland Road.

I would like to extend my immense gratitude and warmth to all of you for being our constant support system. It is especially because of your faith in our work and ideals that we have been able to achieve our goals for this quarter.

Warm Regards

Manju Vyas,

Chief Executive Officer.

Apne Aap Women's Collective



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Umeed

Stories

Walking through a dimly-lit and dilapidated building, our outreach team walks up a narrow flight of stairs to finally reach the pinjaras (cages) cramped on the third floor of a brothel. Heaving, they squat so as to be able to communicate with the women sitting around on the cracked floor.

The outreach team starts handing out each of the women a packet of soy milk, protein biscuits and some bananas, along with a sheet of activity paper. 'Here, we are going to learn some basic English today', says one of outreach members to the women around.

Curious and excited, the women almost immediately start scanning through the activity sheets provided to them. Parvati*, a women trafficked into prostitution at the age 14 asks, 'Didi, will we also learn how to hold a proper conversation in English? I want to greet my children in English when they come back from school! I want them to feel proud of their mother.'

Parvati* is just one of the many women living in the red light district of Mumbai, hoping that someday she would have the skills and stability to leave this trade for a life of dignity outside of the community. At AAWC, we work on facilitating this process into a reality for such women. As the primary contact between AAWC and the women of the red light district, our outreach team provides women of Mumbai's red light district with regular adult literacy classes, nutritional supplements, health camps, counseling and other emotional support, awareness meetings on topics of hygiene, effective parenting, sexual health etc., financial literacy and other general aid as and when required. Due to the rigorous outreach we conduct, our team has been able to enroll 23 new women under the Umeed program. This is demonstrative of the constant efforts put in by AAWC, clubbed with growing awareness amongst the women to strive for a better life through the resources provided by us.

Program Update

Education

We at AAWC recognize the importance of formal education, and the consequences of being unable to access it. Due to their socio-economic backgrounds and being trafficked into the flesh-trade at an early age, most of our Umeed beneficiaries have never had any exposure to formal or informal educational systems.

AAWC realizes that providing formal education to women involved in prostitution is not an easy process, and hence we have designed a program that works along with the routine of our beneficiaries. Our outreach team conducts regular adult and financial literacy drives and provides our beneficiaries with notes and assessment sheets on the field daily.

Our field team has been successful in reaching, educating and monitoring almost 70 beneficiaries in a month for the adult literacy activities.

Almost 15 of our Umeed beneficiaries have been able to open their own bank accounts, thus demonstrating the positive impact of our financial literacy drives.

This quarter we recently elaborated parameters to gauge their level of understanding through interactive worksheets and tests.



Health

AAWC understands the importance of access to quality health care, and has always been proactive about our beneficiaries accessing only the best and certified healthcare professionals. From providing our Umeed beneficiaries with monthly health-checkups to medical referrals to govt hospitals for aiding the HIV+ beneficiaries/ STDs with specialized care, we realize the needs of our beneficiaries and support them accordingly.

Apart from medical assistance, we also provide our Umeed women with nutritional aid like multivitamin/protein supplements, health packs of soy milk, bananas, moringa seeds, multigrain breads, etc. We also supply our beneficiaries with access to subsidized/free groceries, so as to enable their potential to cook healthy meals for themselves.



This quarter, around 35 of our beneficiaries attended the quarterly health camp held in November, with upto 75 women receiving nutritional aid.

We have helped almost 27 of our women to apply and receive health-cards.

14 of our beneficiaries were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in this quarter through the regular health checkups held by AAWC.

Empowerment

Considering that women get trapped in prostitution at a young age, and are thus unskilled and uneducated for most parts of their lives we find it imperative to provide them with vocational training sessions. We believe that equipping our women with such simple yet financially-beneficial skills will further aid them in leading a life of dignity and sustainability, eventually getting out of the traps of prostitution.

We also empower our beneficiaries to advocate and lobby for their own rights. In November, AAWC had collaborated with 48 other NGOs of Mumbai to petition for the usage of viral load testing for HIV+ individuals. Almost 20 of our women had participated in the same, and had an enriching experience learning to fight for themselves.

This quarter, around 38 of our beneficiaries (including new enrollments) undertook these vocational training courses.

Approximately 40 of the women were provided with such additional support to attain government documents .

We have helped almost 27 of our women to apply and receive health-cards.

Along with empowering them with these skill sets, we also aid them in maneuvering everyday challenges of being members of the red light district-like helping them receiving birth certificates, health, ration and Aadhar cards, other governmental schemes and benefits, opening bank accounts, analyzing official documents, etc.



Counseling

AAWC understands that women in the red light districts go through both mental and physical traumas, and hence deem it imperative to support them through our mental-health assistance. We conduct regular counseling and therapy sessions with all of our women, along with providing specialized discussions on topics such as sexual and menstrual health, substance abuse, personal relationships, effective parenting, healthcare for chronic illnesses, etc. which may have adverse effect on the mental well-being of our beneficiaries.

We have been able to reach around 35-40 women and help them through many dire situations.

These activities include using performative arts, flyers, group discussions, sessions on yoga and other interactive platforms to spread awareness about emotional well-being

We held macro-level field based activities to promote mental well-being of our beneficiaries.

Home Visits

Home visits are an important and fundamental element of our Umeed program. Considering the trade our beneficiaries are employed in, our home visits require utmost sensitivity and planning. Home visits also ensure that we are constantly in touch with our beneficiaries, and available to aid them even in situations where they can't visit us at our centers.

These visits also act as a great space to bond with the women about their children- who are usually enrolled under our Udaan/Umang programs. To bridge this gap in their relationships, we make sure to discuss the importance of motherhood and positive parenting with our Umeed women. Without our outreach team's home visits, we would be unable to create such an intimate and positive rapport with all our beneficiaries.

Some of the home visits this quarter were undertaken to discuss with our beneficiaries about sending their children to school, following up on one's ART (for HIV+ women) procedures and medication, checking in about a possible Tuberculosis diagnosis, and a welcome visit for a mother of a newly enrolled Balwadi (kindergarten) beneficiary.

Recreational visits

Recreational visits are activities that often lead to the bonding between AAWC and our beneficiaries. Apart from creating rapport, such visits help us create trust and incentivize positive behavior from otherwise authoritative figures like- brothel owners and pimps.

This quarter, we undertook innumerable recreational activities like the annual picnic, beach visits, interactive activities like art and crafts, witnessing drama, etc. One of the grandest activity was the annual day-long picnic mentioned above. Almost 50 of our Umeed beneficiaries visited a local religious/cultural monument- Prati Shirdi-Balaji.

Celebrations

At AAWC celebrations take place throughout the year. In this quarter, one of our most cherished celebration was of Diwali. Diwali is a pan India celebration of the win of Good over Evil, and is often known as the 'festival of lights' for its high usage of lanterns as a decorative equipment. Our Umeed beneficiaries volunteered to draw and decorate the floors with beautiful Rangolis with the colours provided to them. The beneficiaries played games, danced and sang songs with the staff members. The meeting concluded with special festive refreshments



UDAAN

Stories

'First time in my life I saw sparkle in the eyes of my daughter, as she performed a drama for me and other didis (referring to other mothers/women in prostitution) on healthy eating and hygienic being.

It was so funny but I also realized how important it is to eat the right kind of food from the right kind of place. Even if she demands pani puri (famous Indian street junk food) from next time, I will make sure that it is home-made.'
-mother of an Udaan Beneficiary

PROGRAM UPDATES

EDUCATION

Along with formal education through schools, we also provide additional tuitions to our beneficiaries- especially to those who have been diagnosed with various forms of learning disabilities like slow learning, hyperactivity, attention deficiency, etc.

A large group of International volunteers from Australia conducted interactive English speaking lessons.

We also held computer classes which were aimed at enhancing their understanding of Microsoft Word, Excel and Paint tools.

This quarter, we had 4 new school admissions and zero dropouts.

One of the most interesting activity of our spoken English classes, was the 'Read (to) Yourself' activity wherein the beneficiaries were encouraged and requested to perform opposite mirrors so as to inculcate a sense of self-esteem within them and to develop their sense of body/non-verbal language.

Health

Along with regular health camps, this quarter we addressed the issue of iron deficiency and irregular menstrual cycle in a few of our beneficiaries, who have then been recommended appropriate medication by the doctor.

This quarter, about 23 to 25 of the Udaan girls (and other community adolescents) had the benefit of attending our health camp.

Many of our Udaan beneficiaries contracted high fever and common cold due to weather change. With timely intervention, we could tackle these issues meticulously.

We organized specialized awareness programs on topics like 'puberty and the ensuing bodily changes', 'gender and sexual education', 'seasonal healthcare', etc.)

Counseling

Growing up in an absence of a sense of belonging, clubbed with the allure of the red-light district (no schooling, free junk food and entertainment like films, television and make up) – our adolescent beneficiaries are particularly at risk to develop nervous and personality disorders. Hence, we hold balanced therapy sessions for our Udaan beneficiaries.

'She is a very intelligent child. But sometimes, it is this wit and smartness that causes her hyperactivity. Though it has been easy to identify the triggering causes, it is a difficulty sometimes to be able to get her attention and work on that with her consent.' Said one of the main therapists visiting our center

This quarter, 2 of our beneficiaries were referred to a counselor upon being observed with slow learning and very poor understanding of academic concepts

One of the interesting mentoring events this quarter was a session with an all-women tribal handicrafts organization, which led to our girls developing professional desires in creative fields.

We also undertook a visit to a 'Career Guidance Fair' recently, to help Udaan beneficiaries preparing for their board (10th and 12th) choose a desired career path.

Empowerment

We also work on empowerment in terms of vocational activities, identity-based documentation aid, life skills sessions and development of leadership skills through various extra-curricular. Though such lessons we aim to equip our beneficiaries with a sense of independence and high self-esteem thus, prevent inter-generational prostitution.

This quarter we helped creating a few Aadhar cards, birth certificates and Bank accounts as part of our documentation aid

We have also held sessions on financial literacy through interactive discussions and games.

We also held vocational training activities, and one macro life skills session. The life skills session was aimed at developing confidence and self-esteem in our beneficiaries.



Celebrations

This quarter, we celebrated events like Children's day, Diwali, Christmas etc. The Udaan girls maneuvered each of these events, which involve planning, anchoring, handling food, etc.

Our Udaan girls also held some activities as part of the same, like 'crafting lanterns', 'poetry on children', 'crafting Christmas trees' etc. A lot of the products from these activities were then used as decorations for the same, thus leading to a well-rounded and planned cycle of productivity.



Extra-curricular activities

This quarter, we held many extra-curricular like theater classes, computer classes, English speaking sessions, and music classes.

We have collaborated with Clowns Without Borders who hold weekly theatre session with our beneficiaries to teach acting skills, plus they also hold their own events wherein clowns from Sweden and India hold comical shows.

Such shows often lead to respite from the everyday stress of adolescent lives. Theatre and music sessions work upon the self-esteem of our beneficiaries while being highly interactive; it also acts as a space for our adolescent girls to release their anxieties, repressions and excess energies.



Recreational Visits

Recreational visits are activities that often lead to the bonding between AAWC and our beneficiaries. Especially by incentivising behavior with interactive educational visits to museums, theaters, beaches and amusement parks- we work through positive conditioning to create discipline and a sense of humbleness in our beneficiaries.

This quarter, our Udaan girls also attended 'Mime' shows- a unique theatrical experience for them. Mime shows were an exciting form of expressing. It also taught them about the uses of body language, combined with knowledge on various perspectives on art.

Often due to continuous exposure to violence since infancy, our beneficiaries develop issues of anger and defensive un-emotive behavior, and we observed that exposure to mime shows has led to them to emote in gentler and calmer manners.

'When I went on the annual picnic this year, and I was told it's because I was well behaved and attentive a child- it felt good! This picnic has been so much fun, and I wouldn't have liked to miss it due to any of my mischievous behavior at the center! '



Exclaimed Shreya*, when discussing excitedly about her visit to an amusement park based in Mumbai.

Around 80 of our Udaan beneficiaries had visited this park for a day-long picnic, where they immensely enjoyed rides like horror house, water ride, rollercoasters etc

UMANG

Stories

'Do you go to school?' Asked a passerby while our Umang children were returning from the garden. Upon scrutinizing the stranger well, one of the witty beneficiaries responded immediately, '...yes ofcourse!'

'We also learn poems and 1...2...3... numbers at our school!'. Though a very minute conversation, it made the overlooking Balwadi (Kindergarten) teacher rather happy to see the Umang children present their education with such pride.

'Rushing into the room immediately after their visit to the garden, our Umang beneficiaries were brimming with excitement and hunger alike as soon as they had stepped inside the center.

Amidst such chaos, the Umang Program Manager witnessed a small incident of humanity. While a large chunk of the Umang beneficiaries had already queued for lunch, one of them had managed to cut the line and reach the serving space before others. Upon sudden and surprising realization of the same, she immediately put her plate back down, stepped out of the lane and let other behind her eat their lunch. When probed about her behavior she said, 'if they had been standing here for longer, how can I eat my food before them?!'

Taken aback by the genuine concern and honesty in the words of this Umang beneficiary, the Program Manager then made an example of this beneficiary for positive behavior amongst her peers.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Education

This quarter, our Umang beneficiaries continued to learn alphabets, numbers, colors, shapes, basic English and Hindi poetry and other fundamental literature of a kindergarten. Some of the quick-grasping children have also been introduced to easy mathematics and English reading. Most of our beneficiaries did well in the assessments, with no learning disabilities identified amongst the children.



About 35 of our Umang beneficiaries were involved in monthly academic assessments in the last three months



This quarter, Ms. Dutta arranged for a Santa Claus costume and encouraged one of our Balwadi teachers to play the lead role in a story Ms. Dutta was to narrate.

This quarter, we introduced warm-up exercises and group activities at the start and end of each session making them fun and interesting.

Health

The health program for our Umang toddlers include monthly health checkups, routine medical referrals, nutritional aid provided through a well-designed diet chart, multivitamin and protein supplements, following up with hospitals and doctors, etc.

Along with this, we provide awareness programs for their mothers (ex: neonatal care, medical treatments for contagious diseases, seasonal healthcare, etc.).



This quarter, around 20 total Umang members benefited from our monthly medical check-ups.

This quarter saw periodic supply of sourdough breads, healthy salads and sandwiches, which complement the beneficiaries' daily meals with varied tastes.



Nutritional aid in the form of healthy and warm meals, protein and multivitamin supplement and soy milk was also continued to be provided on a regular basis.

Counseling

Acknowledging the fact that most of our beneficiaries are born into single-parents, violent or broken family structures. We recognize the need for therapy to prevent further development of their emotional instability and any mental health crisis. These include one-to-one mentoring/Individual sessions, dog therapy, art therapy and referrals to external experts for aid with severe mental health issues.

While the dog and art therapy sessions are held weekly, the individual sessions and referrals to external experts are held as per requirements. To make it further interesting, in one of the sessions we also introduced Udaan beneficiaries (who were once a part of dog therapy sessions during their Umang membership- 2yrs to 5yrs) to share their dog therapy experiences with the current Umang beneficiaries. This led to a great bonding sessions, and also helped the newer Umang beneficiaries feel comfortable with the nature of the therapy.

Umang Mother's meeting

A large proportion of our beneficiaries do not receive adequate affection from their mothers. It is imperative that AAWC intervenes to create a harmonious and loving relationship between the child and its mother.

This quarter, we focused on medical superstitions as the theme for our regular mothers' meetings. Targeting superstitions about a Childs heath- like 'buri nazar' (a common Indian form of superstition of what in West is known as dark magic), using quakes and their unscientific methods to heal illnesses, considering contagious diseases as a bad omen etc.,

Udaan Umang sessions

In the recent quarters, we have also initiated a new method to tackle feelings of belongingness, compassion and family in our beneficiaries. Having noticed that the Umang beneficiaries are closer to the adolescent girls (Udaan beneficiaries) , we realized that designing a few sessions between them may lead to positive changes in both sets of beneficiaries. As assumed, these sessions have led to higher bonding amongst the children, with the Umang toddlers.

Celebration

We celebrated Daan Utsav (Joy of Giving week) with our Umang beneficiaries. This event saw about 7-8 volunteers lead a crafts session with the Umang beneficiaries out in a local garden.

This quarter, we also celebrated events like Children's day, Diwali, Christmas etc.

During these celebration, we also held activities like 'crafting lanterns', 'poetry on children', 'crafting Christmas trees' etc.



Recreational Activities

Activities such as indoor and outdoor games, arts and crafts, story-telling sessions, watching quizzes on television, etc. were held this quarter for our Umang beneficiaries. All of our beneficiaries have enjoyed the activities, and often look forward to more of these due to the fun and informal nature of such events. From playing football in an outdoor garden, to crafting their own Christmas trees- the activities this quarter were designed to provide a holistic and wholesome fine tuning to our children.

