

HelpYourNGO VISIT REPORT

NGO Name: Apne Aap Women's Collective

Date of visit : Wednesday, 17th February 2022

Visit conducted by : Ms Winnie Dholakia and Ms Suvarna Arvind

Location : Kamathipura, Mumbai

About the NGO:

Apne Aap Women's Collective (AAWC) is an anti-trafficking organization that serves women and children in the red-light districts of Falkland Road, Kamathipura and Turbhe. NGO's mission is to provide a caring and supportive platform of holistic services to help women, girls and children in the red- light areas make choices for a dignified and better quality of life. They aim to break the intergenerational cycle of prostitution and since the last 15 years, they have a 100% success rate.

Their Programs and beneficiaries include:

- 1) Umeed (women >18 years old): Overall empowerment of sex-workers through health camps and referrals, nutritional support, adult and financial literacy, skill development, shelter home placement, advocacy, access to Govt. schemes, etc.
- 2) Udaan (for their daughters aged 5-18 years): Empower them to pursue education through admission to schools, mentor-mentee programs, after-school tuitions, nutritious meals, therapy, recreation, counseling and shelter home services/rehabilitation.
- 3) Umang (for their toddlers aged 2-5 years): Develop physical, cognitive, emotional and social skills through kindergarten classes, e-learning, providing nutritious meals, boarding home placement and medical referrals.

Initially a single-room drop-in Center, AAWC eventually developed into a Resource Center to address women's needs and provide them with professional counselling, medical care, micro-savings facilities, education, legal help and empowerment services.

About our Visit:

The HelpYourNGO (HYNGO) team visited AAWC's Resource Center at Kamathipura with our HNI donor Ms. Alka M. and had the privilege to interact with the AAWC CEO (Ms. Manju Vyas), Program Manager (Ms. Rachel), Fundraising and Communications Manager (Ms. Silvia), Field Director (Ms. Poonam), and most importantly the beneficiaries.

Ms. Manju briefed us about her journey of beginning as a volunteer working for the sex workers and then quitting her corporate job and joining AAWC in 1999 to becoming the CEO of AAWC. She faced many life-threatening situations while working for the sex workers in the area; she described one where she was

threatened by the father of a girl in their night shelter. She mentioned that girls and women come from the most marginalized families from the interiors of India and even from Bangladesh.

Then their Field Director Ms. Poonam explained the activities of the Umeed program and daily routine followed under the program. It was notable that even during the first stringent lockdown in March 2020, AAWC was the only organization operational in the area.

Ms. Poonam narrated how she used to leave her house in Nala Sopara as early as 4.45-5 am in the morning and change 3-4 buses to reach the Center at 7 am to be present to distribute breakfast to the beneficiaries. Such is the dedication and commitment of their staff!

Ms. Manju also informed that AAWC has achieved 100% success in breaking the intergenerational cycle of prostitution.

We then interacted with two beneficiaries- one was from Kolkata and the other was from Nala Sopara.

Beneficiary Feedback:

The beneficiaries are extremely pleased with AAWC's initiatives for them. They appreciate that nutritional supplementary food is provided to them every day, they showed us the bananas they had received that day. They have savings in bank accounts and post office accounts thanks to the efforts of AAWC. They also have ration cards and managed to get ration during the lockdown. They are happy that AAWC trained them in tailoring and embroidery and one of the women proudly showed us the dresses she had stitched and sent for her children back home. They expressed the desire to leave prostitution and start pursuing tailoring or some other profession.

The women said that the staff of AAWC has taken care of them like their own children.

The AAWC staff said that they find these women more confident and happy than when they first came to them.

Night Shelter:

We then visited the Night Shelter which is a part of the Udaan program and housed in the same premises.

AAWC has been running the Shelter for the daughters of the sex workers at the Kamathipura Center since 2011 and was earlier housing around 50 beneficiaries. The aim of the shelter is to provide them a safe and secure environment.

However, in compliance with the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) license received in 2020, the existing shelter is permitted to house only 25 girls – thus, AAWC had to let go off many girls that were being housed previously.



Art Activity at the Night Shelter

We interacted with around 20 beneficiaries aged between 3 to 15 years of age. The educational, nutritional, health and recreational needs of these girls are taken care of by AAWC. The mothers are allowed to visit once every month.

Some of the achievements of the girls from the Night Shelter were:

- 12 beneficiaries won Gold, Silver and Bronze medals in Karate competition in 6th State level Karate Championship in 2020
- The girls underwent training for clown shows and then scripted their own play which talks about their life in the red-light district. Commercial clown shows in Mumbai at various theatres were performed by 7 beneficiaries in 2019 and 2020
- Clown drama show performance by 6 beneficiaries in Stockholm in 2018
- Participation of 6 beneficiaries in Brave kid's festival held in Poland in 2018 and 2019
- 2 beneficiaries successful in acquiring chef's job in five- star hotel on merit basis in 2016.

Challenges faced:

- There is a need but no scope for scaling up the number of beneficiaries until AAWC has a bigger space.
- Space crunch at the current shelter limits the quality of services and activities.
- Poor civil conditions of the current shelter home leads to high repairs and maintenance cost.
- Delay in renewal of rent agreement of existing premises due to chances of building going for redevelopment.
- Community interference through regular contact with the young girls is a persistent threat to the beneficiaries and it creates multiple hindrances for the NGO to provide seamless support.
- High real estate prices in South Mumbai clubbed with the stigma attached to provide space to children of sex workers are major challenges.

Hence AAWC is looking to purchase approximately 3000 sq.ft new standalone property in Navi Mumbai to shift the shelter home there. AAWC is reaching out to their ongoing corporate partners for support for this capex project.



Educational and recreational activities for the Udaan Beneficiaries