

West Godavari Helpdesk Report

Introduction

West Godavari is one of the largest Help desks among the 6 Help desks established across AP and Telangana State. The West Godavari team has 2004 members in its CBO, who benefitted from GFATM (Global Fund To Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria). They have 7 OB members (Office Bearers) for 7 Mandalas. At the ground level, they have a number of hotspots, around 142 hotspots. For each 100 members of the community in a hotspot, there are 10 communicators in place who are constantly in touch with OB members, and are the mediators between ground level members and Office Bearers. Most recently, 550 members were surveyed to gauge the healthcare, social welfare and human rights status among sex worker community members in West Godavari.

Impact of the Helpdesk (beyond numbers)

The Help desk has had a very personal impact on many of its community members. This impact is beyond numerical benefits or surveys or empty guidelines issued. It is reflected in terms of how united the community feels and how much they believe in the cause of which they are a part. This emotional impact and unity were possible only by holding gatherings and meetings, and making people feel as welcome and important as they would in case there was a horizontal power structure. For strategic reasons, there isn't a horizontal structure in place. However, power is evenly distributed among all community members who make sure that they are part of the celebrations on World AIDS Day, Women's Day, National Girl Child day, Sex Workers' Day, etc.

Honourable guests are called on these days and celebrations who recognise sex workers and the work that they do, and recognise the legitimacy of their work. This elevates the confidence that community members have and strengthens their faith in the cause.

These celebrations are not only ways of gathering community members but also a way of carving a media image and making a mark in the social work sector of the area. Many media persons who, even during the time of HIV prevention and AIDS worker meetings, had failed to recognise the value of sex workers and their role in curbing the spread of AIDS, or even their identity, were able to discover them through this Help desk. ON World AIDS Day, an event was organized by the Help desk to which many media persons showed up and were very impressed. They were so smitten by the work of the Help desk that they assured Office Bearers and CBO Leaders that they could call the media persons for any other future events for coverage without any hesitation and help would be provided.



Distribution of ration and food among two HIV positive community members with no source of income or means of supporting themselves.

Due to the Help desk, networking for the sex worker community has grown so much that the contribution of sex workers in local areas has become more noteworthy, visible and prominent. An invitation-based association with another NGO called the Jyothibai Ambedkar Phule Organization, proved that sex workers were increasingly being recognised. The office bearers and community members were called on stage and awarded with recognition and respect for all their sincere work towards women's welfare. This was a very emotional moment for many in the Help desk as it was the first time they were being treated with respect on par with any other woman on a public platform, and being given recognition for their work, which was ignored at the time of HIV prevention and the fight against AIDS.

పేద కుటుంబానికి సహాయం

జంగారెడ్డిగూడెం: పట్టణంలోని పేద కుటుంబానికి మీ ఆండ్ మై వరల్డ్ (ఎన్ఎస్ఎస్డబ్ల్యూ) హెల్ప్ డెస్క్, వైఆర్జీ కేర్ ఆధ్వర్యంలో సోమవారం గ్యాస్ కనెక్షన్ అందించారు. స్థానిక ఏరియా ఆసుపత్రి సూపరింటెండెంట్ డాక్టర్ వజ్రకిరణ్ గ్యాస్ బండ సమకూర్చగా, హెల్ప్ డెస్క్ కో-ఆర్డినేటర్, ధరణి మహిళా వెల్ఫేర్ సొసైటీ ప్రెసిడెంట్ కె.రాణి స్థానం అందించినట్లు హెల్ప్ డెస్క్ సభ్యులు తెలిపారు. గ్యాస్ కనెక్షన్ను డాక్టర్ వజ్రకిరణ్ చేతులు మీదుగా అందజేశామన్నారు. పెసిలేటర్ ఎం.రాజేశ్వరి, ఐసీటీసీ కౌన్సిలర్ శ్రీనివాస్ తదితరులు పాల్గొన్నారు.



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<https://epaper.sakshi.com/>

A newspaper article published on some of the work conducted by the Helpdesk.

The Help desk, therefore, not only provides an emotional pillar and recognition to community members, but has also been at the forefront of any crisis management that needs to be done and is always alert for rescue. Apart from managing and attending crises, the main work that the Help desks take up is ensuring proper Identification Documentation for sex workers in order to ensure that they are eligible for the Government Schemes and benefits for low income groups.

Many community members received their first ever Aadhar cards, PAN Cards and/or Ration Cards due to the help of the Help desk. They were also helped in submitting their applications to various schemes of the Government, including a Housing scheme for which seven community members had even gotten selected.

Hidden Sex Workers & Their Contribution

In the areas that we especially work in, there are a lot of sex workers who are hidden and do not reveal the nature of the work they do or their identities. This is because they are also labourers and have entered in sex work only because they aren't able to make enough money by labour work.

The hidden nature of the sex workers is especially difficult to work with because they do not wish to attend large meetings and wish to be addressed only in

small gatherings. They are not extroverted and do not wish to freely associate with the CBO or its meetings and work.



Distribution of Ration and donation money through the Help desk among 25 HIV positive patients, with the help of the Irrigation department.

However, just because they are not able to associate with the CBO does not mean the Help desk cannot help them or do not need their support. Hence, CBO leaders and Office bearers begin to build friendships and close personal relationships with these people, as much as they can, in order to build an effective communication network available to them for help and assistance in social welfare and healthcare, and available to us to gather momentum.



Ration that was distributed in multiple villages.

Hidden sex workers are being provided access to the opportunity to claim human rights and Government schemes that are applicable to them, including basic Identity documentation such as Aadhar, Ration and PAN Cards in order to be eligible for certain benefits and be able to open Bank accounts. Their contribution to the

networking and communication, and hence, outreach of the Help desk has been immense. It is difficult to identify hidden sex workers, but those in the community can secretly reach out to the hidden sex workers and help them whilst also gathering support for the Help desk.

Therefore, the contribution of hidden sex workers, although does not surface, is what keeps the running and reach of the Help desk authentic, smooth and beneficial.

Skill Development by the Helpdesk

This district has been extremely active in its skill development programs and opportunities. Ever since the pandemic began, the brutal decline in sex work opportunities and overhead expenses took a huge toll on the livelihoods and mental health of sex workers. The community, although very proud and unapologetic of the work they have to do to sustain themselves and their families, were looking to expand their money making techniques and sources of income. The fear of crises similar to the pandemic putting them out of work became all the more real and fear-inducing.



Organization of a skill development workshop in tailoring and stitching by the Helpdesk.

Therefore, the leaders of the Help desk organized skill development workshops and mass-teaching programs in order to provide more job opportunities to sex workers and increase their confidence levels. For example, 30 community members were gathered, their timings synchronized and a tailoring workshop was organized. Certain donors were consulted and asked for help in securing orders for the products stitched or made by the sex workers who learnt the skills of stitching and

tailoring. Some deals have also been secured with partner customers in neighbouring districts (community wedding contracts, etc.) who will bring in clothing & tailoring orders for sex workers, who have been attempting at perfecting their skills in tailoring.

Challenges Faced by the Help desk

One of the biggest challenges that the Help desk faces is unnecessary and very obstructive interference by the police and Government officials who have a very narrow thinking and uncompromising attitude. An example of this is an incident that occurred when the Help desk workers were trying to secure a Housing Scheme for some of its members.



Donation of a cooking gas station to a very poor family in the community by the Help desk leaders and guests.

In Appanaveedu, West Godavari, a scheme for housing was announced. Ten members of the CBO sent in their applications and 7 had been sanctioned. However, when these applications reached the higher sanctioning officer, the Village Revenue Officer, he, despite knowing fully well from the list of information submitted to him that the members were sex workers, held a meeting with them publicly and posed multiple questions about their occupation and work. He wanted the women to self-confess their profession, making them uncomfortable. After the CBO leader was called and she made clear the work of the sex workers, he threatened to call the police station and have the women penalised. All the seven members panicked immensely. Not only was their privacy violated but also their anonymity and safety were compromised. The members would be ostracised from society and their families would disown them.

Today, these members have split up and they live in different areas. Since the stigma would intensify and the public humiliation destroyed their dignity, the seven sex workers left their village. They were all shaken up. This incident took place despite the efforts and fight of the CBO.

Rani, the CBO leader, confronted the VRO and reminded him that his job was only to verify certain credentials of the beneficiaries such as whether they are residents of that village, and whether or not they belong to that particular low income group. His job definitely did not entail verifying whether a woman is a sexworker or not. Incidents like these send shock waves to other hidden sexworkers and undermine all the efforts of the CBO. They pose the biggest threat to the trust that we struggle to develop between certain hidden sex workers and the CBO. Not only do they hinder our relations but also pose a threat to the security of our members. If their applications were sanctioned, all that would have happened would be the beginning of housing benefits for seven underprivileged women.

This dangerous interference on the part of uncompromising Government officials extends to not letting Help desk members conduct surveys or help low income groups. It has significantly reduced since the Help desk is establishing connections with higher Government officials, however, it is still a threat to people and a risk that many community members are not willing to take. Thus, this remains the biggest challenge at the moment.