



PRERANA'S
Anti-trafficking Center

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP
OF TRUST WITH THE CHILD



Aparna's (name changed) case was referred to Pratishta in June 2019. A case worker from Pratishta, with support from another case worker from Prerana's Post Rescue operations team, has been working closely with the child since she was referred to Pratishta. Children who have experienced a traumatic event, often find it difficult to share information about themselves, and about their lives, as the process of developing a relationship of trust takes time. They often appear to be guarded, and distant from people, even if the people intend to help them.

Developing a relationship of trust with the child is a challenging process, with its highs and lows. To add to this, for children placed in child care institutions (CCI), being away from their family and loved ones, along with adjusting to the new environment, can add to their trauma. The children might not disclose all the details about their lives including their families, their past traumas at once. Thus, it is crucial that the case worker is sensitive, and patient, to the child's emotional needs at such times.

Aparna (name changed) is a 15-year-old child, who is a victim of commercial sexual exploitation. On 9th June 2019, she was admitted to Pratishta, a child care institution, by the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) as a child in need of care and protection (Under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015).

Aparna, in her first interaction with the social worker, had shared that she had been staying with her family in Raigad for the past six years, but added that they were not her biological family. She did not share much about her biological family, saying that she was unable to recollect much about them.

As part of the interventions in Aparna's case, the CWC had ordered a Social Investigation under the Juvenile Justice Act 2015. During the Social Investigation, Aparna's caretaker family, the Patils, shared that they were not aware of the current whereabouts of Aparna's biological family. As shared by Aparna, she lived in a construction site with her biological family, situated close to the Patils. She liked visiting the Patil family as they lived close by, and gradually she started living with them. According to the Patils, Aparna's biological family never opposed the child choosing to stay with them. Aparna, seems to consider the Patils as her family, and the Patil couple as her parents. It was also observed that the Patil family was very fond of Aparna, and would come to visit her at the CCI, with the permission of the CWC. Over the course of the next few months, the case workers, along with the CWC, also explored the possibility of restoring the child to the Patils by declaring them as fit persons under follow-up. However, the same could not materialise.

When Aparna was admitted to the CCI, she found it difficult to adjust to the facility. She missed her family (The Patils) and wanted to go back to them. Prerana case workers had observed signs that indicated trauma in the child - she had sleep disturbances, somatic complaints, irritable moods, and was fearful of being left alone. She was despondent and anxious for her safety. Aparna also exhibited aggression, and emotional outbursts directed at

the staff and other girls. There were also instances where she harmed herself. It was observed that there was a likelihood of the child taking impulsive decisions that could cause harm to her, and others around her. The child was referred to Prerana's in house counsellor, and started receiving the much-needed mental health support.

At the CCI, she was encouraged to participate in various in-house activities like study classes, dancing, singing, drawing, yoga, playing games, etc. In due time, she also became a member of various in-house 'Children's Committees' in the CCI such as Nutrition Committee, Health Committee, and Cultural Committee and showed commitment, hard work and diligence in her roles.

Gradually during Aparna's stay at the CCI, her rehabilitation was discussed with her to develop a care plan for her. Aparna had never been to school and found it difficult to read and write, but she was keen on joining a school. A few months into her stay at the CCI, her case was discussed in one of the case management meetings. It was discussed that there was a need to understand her basic intellectual functioning and hence, it was suggested that an IQ test of the child should be conducted. It was also felt that the report of the IQ test will help the case worker in making a well-informed decision, regarding her education. Subsequently, Aparna was accompanied for the IQ assessment, and it was found that she was a child with special needs, and had a mild intellectual disability.

Aparna was keen on joining a school, so the case worker initiated the process of enrolling her into a school for children with special needs. She was enrolled in a privately run special school, attended by three other children from the CCI. Aparna was happy attending the school, meeting other children, and teachers. Aparna would take initiative in doing her homework, assignments, and would share her new school experience with the other residents as well as the Patils when they would come to meet her during the parent's meetings.

In February 2020, almost 8 months after being in the CCI, and a few weeks before the COVID-19 induced lockdown, Aparna disclosed in one of the individual meetings, with the caseworker that she wished to share some details about her biological family. Aparna disclosed the names of her immediate family members, including that of her mother, father, sisters, brother, uncles, and aunts, along with the address of her native place. She shared that she belonged to the state of Chhattisgarh. However while sharing this information with the case workers, she requested them to not contact her biological parents. The case workers appreciated that Aparna shared this with them and respected her choice.

On the 18th March, Aparna harmed herself, and had to be hospitalised. On her discharge from the hospital, she got into a verbal altercation with a few girls in the CCI, and insisted that she be restored. The case worker helped her stabilise, and used grounding techniques to help create space from the distressing feelings. It was when she felt better in April 2020 that, once again, brought up her biological family and asked the case worker to try and locate them, saying that she would like to be restored to her biological family.

The case worker shared all these details with the CWC. However, by this time the government had declared the lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID19. As a next step, a plan was prepared to try and locate her family. The case worker acknowledged the child's decision, and informed her that they will try their best to trace her parents. The case worker further discussed the challenges and restrictions in the intervention that might come up due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

Aparna's family belonged to the Durg district of Chhattisgarh. On 10th June, the case worker shared Aparna's case study with the Childline of that district. The Childline Coordinator, with the help of his team was able to trace Aparna's family on 11th June 2020, based on the address shared by the child. Aparna's family shared that they had believed Aparna to be dead, as there had been no news about her all these years, and hence, had not filed a missing complaint. Aparna on the other hand, was extremely happy about having found her family.

This information was shared with the CWC, and with their knowledge, a phone call was facilitated, between the child and the family, where the child spoke to her family after five years. The limitations due to the lockdown in restoring Aparna were discussed, with both the child and the family, and the steps involved in the restoration procedure, and the role of the CWC, was also explained to them.

Since then, Aparna has been talking to her family through a weekly video call. The case workers would continue to facilitate the same, until the process of transfer is completed. The CWC has not had their sitting since the lockdown but the pre-release form along with all documents have been shared with them.

This case is an example of how it takes time to build a relationship of trust with a child. It becomes important to not pressure the child, accept and respect the child's opinions, and preparedness, while giving them the space and freedom to approach the case workers, when they are ready. There were times where Aparna changed her decision of contacting her biological family, and asked the case worker to not follow up on them. However, when Aparna was sure, the case worker began her work and Aparna was regularly updated on all the developments in tracing her family. Prerana believes that regular counselling sessions, individual sessions, and listening to the child all along, are essential in building a relationship of trust. It is also important to recognise and understand that while efforts are being made by the child and the CCI, there are some decisions which are in the hands of other duty bearers who also need to be equally sensitive to the child's rights, emotions and needs. Together, they can serve the best interest of the child.

P.S. We are sure that most of you must be doing such data gathering and analyzing exercises at your end too. If you are, please do share the same with us. We shall be more than happy to share it on our website

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20



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