



FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM & PROTECTION:

A STORY OF RESCUE & RESTORATION

May 2019





Prerana has been working in the red-light areas of Mumbai for the last three decades. Within the red-light areas of Kamathipura, Falkland Road and Vashi-Turbhe, we provide the children of victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking with night care services. Over the course of our work in the red-light area, we have come across countless stories of a mother's resilience to give her children the freedom they deserve. Here is one such case of a mother who fought for her son's freedom from the clutches of her brothel keeper, and the impact created when multiple stakeholders work together.

On the 25th of June 2018, Veena* the mother of one of the children enrolled in Prerana's Night Care Center (NCC) visited the Prerana Social Workers. She was frantic as she shared that her brothel keeper of the brothel she was living in, wasn't allowing her to meet her son Rohan*. She had had minimum contact with the child and had only seen him a few times.

THE INITIAL MEETING

The Prerana team met Veena and Rohan during the daily outreach conducted in Kamathipura. As the child hadn't been seen in the community before, they informed Veena about Prerana's Night Care services and encouraged her to enroll Rohan into the NCC. He was enrolled in the NCC on 3rd July 2017. As the Social Workers began to build a relationship with Veena, she began sharing more about herself.

Veena hails from the district of Solapur in Maharashtra. While living there she fell in love with a boy from her neighborhood. In the year 2005, they eloped, after which he brought her to Kamathipura and sold her into a "caged brothel" on 13th Lane. Veena has since been in the sex trade. She attempted to run away with the help of one of her regular customers but failed. Eventually, she paid off her debt and moved out of the "caged brothel" to another brothel on 14th Lane. Veena was under the control of that brothel keeper and was consuming alcohol and drugs.

At the time of Rohan's enrollment into the NCC, he was studying in the 3rd standard. He was enrolled into a school by the brothel keeper and she had put her own name as opposed to Veena's during his school enrollment. Rohan was being cared for by the brothel keeper and living with her after Veena had moved out of that brothel.

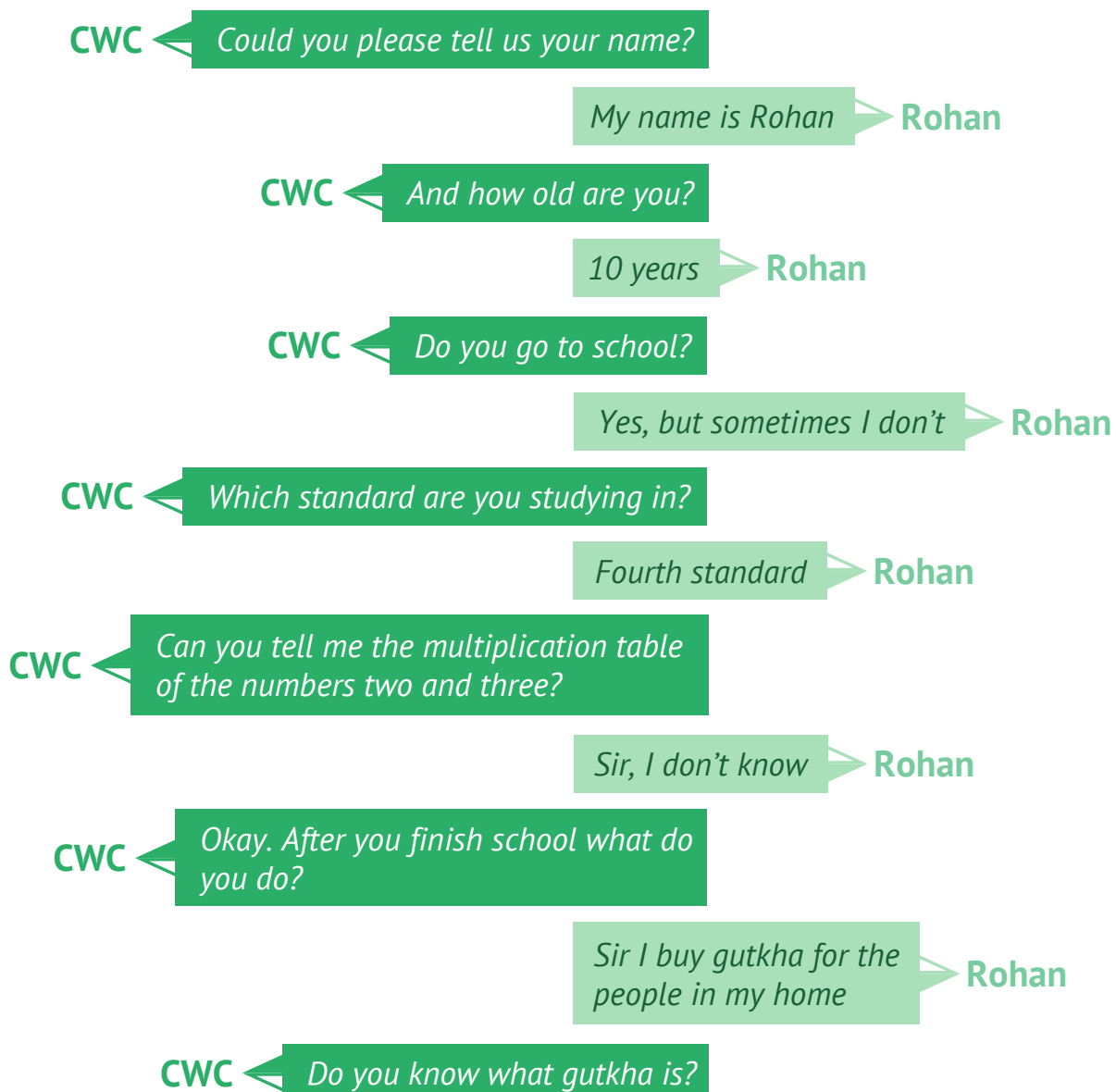
After Rohan's enrollment at the Prerana NCC, he would attend but was irregular. According to Veena, the brothel keeper was responsible for this. He was spending more time with the brothel keeper, who would lure him by giving him pocket money to buy food, and would give him gifts. He was often seen roaming the lanes of Kamathipura running errands for the brothel keeper, and the other women living in the brothels and their customers, but wouldn't interact with the Prerana social workers much. The social workers would regularly visit the brothel he was living in, and would speak to the brothel keeper about sending him to the NCC, she would always agree but would never send the child. The few times Rohan did attend the NCC, he would throw a tantrum as he felt like his mother was taking him away from a woman who actually cared about him. One day while Rohan was at the center crying, the social worker spoke to him, during this conversation he seemed very angry with his mother, was upset that she consumes alcohol. Over the course of Veena's association with Prerana, the social workers had never seen her under the influence of alcohol or drugs. She had been



seen drinking but not to the point of drunkenness. Rohan was referred to the counselor, and Rohan attended a few counseling sessions, Veena also met the counselor a few times. A joint session for both the mother and son was scheduled but in May 2018, Rohan stopped attending the NCC altogether. The social worker continued to make regular visits to the brothel he was living in and attempted to speak to the brothel keeper who would say that Rohan wasn't interested in attending the NCC.

THE RESCUE

In the month of August 2018, the brothel keeper sent Rohan to her village in Karnataka. This further left Veena distraught, and on the 4th of September 2018 she approached the team and said, “Didi, rescue my child from the clutches of the brothel keeper”. The team went on to explain the process of a ‘rescue’ to her. The team explained that it would entail approaching the police, the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and proving that Rohan was, in fact, her child, and Veena agreed to all of it. The Prerana team presented the details of the case to the CWC on 24th September 2018. Due to various reasons, the Police could not ‘rescue’ Rohan but finally after constant persistence from the Prerana social workers on 27th November 2018 during their visit to the police station, the rescue strategy was finalized and Rohan was rescued that evening itself. The next day, Rohan was then presented to the CWC. During his interview the following conversation transpired between Rohan and the CWC members:



Yes, it's tobacco in a packet. → Rohan

CWC ← And can you tell us how much it costs?

Normally one packet is for three rupees, but the shopkeeper gives me four packers for 10 rupees. This way I get to keep three rupees for myself. → Rohan

CWC ← Do you do anything other things for the people in the brothel?

Yes, I get them tea and sometimes also cigarettes. → Rohan

CWC ← Do you get money for buying them things?

Yes. → Rohan

CWC ← So then when do you study?

Rohan quietly looks to the side, not answering that question.

The interview took place in front of the brothel keeper and Mr. Ramesh* a representative of an NGO that worked on health issues in Kamathipura. Ramesh had accompanied the brothel keeper to the CWC and began making a case for her, saying she was a well-meaning woman who had been taking care of Rohan, while his mother was a “drug addict and an alcoholic”. The brothel keeper produced Rohan’s birth certificate and Aadhar card in which her name was listed as his mother. Ramesh also emphasized the fact that the brothel keeper would regularly send Rohan to school and pleaded that the child is handed over to the brothel keeper stating that his organization would closely work on the follow up of the child. The case made by Ramesh wasn’t convincing enough, and the CWC interacted with him as well, discussing with him that Rohan didn’t know basic math, that a child studying in the 4th standard would know. They also asked him why his organization wasn’t working with the mother since their work is primarily in health services. The CWC then asked Veena for her opinion and what she would like to do, she said she would like Rohan to be placed into a Child Care Institution (CCI) so that he gets a good education and does not get influenced by the sex trade. She also wanted him “to have a childhood and not have to run errands”. The CWC noticed wounds on Rohan’s body and with further probe found out that the brothel keeper would hit him with an iron rod.

THE ORDER & THE FOLLOW UP

The CWC decided to place Rohan into a CCI and asked Prerana to follow up on the mother and child's progress as well as develop a care plan for Rohan. After Rohan was moved to the CCI, the Prerana Social Worker began following up with Rohan on a regular basis by visiting him at the CCI. Initially, Rohan wasn't able to adjust to the change in the environment, he was also angry with his mother and Prerana, "for sending him to the CCI".

During Rohan's initial weeks at the CCI, the mother was being harassed by the brothel keeper who wanted her to remove Rohan from the CCI. The brothel keeper would also force Veena to call Rohan and would speak to him. After a few days, Veena finally approached the social worker and shared these details. The social worker suggested they accompany Veena during the next few visits to the CCI. During these visits, the social workers noticed that Rohan was getting more comfortable with Veena. During one such visit, after seeing Veena visit often, Rohan came and hugged her. This was progress in their relationship as they had never shared such a moment before. Veena continued to regularly visit Rohan and he would happily show his mother all that he had done. An IQ test was conducted for Rohan, due to the results which showed that he was below average (a score of 68), he was enrolled into a Special School. On 14th February, the social worker found out that Rohan had Tuberculosis and was immediately put on six months of medication.

A regular follow up on both Veena and Rohan is being done. The Prerana social worker is also working with Veena to help understand her role as a parent and developing a positive relationship with her son. To further facilitate this counselling services are provided to Rohan to help him bond with his mother.



*The names in this document have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals mentioned.