

The Right to Education

Fighting the Odds - The Story of Madhuri

MARCH 2020



Prerana commenced its Night Care Center (NCC) in the red-light area of Vashi-Turbhe in the year 2001. The NCC was initiated as a response to an expressed need of the prostituted women in the red-light area of Vashi-Turbhe. The NCC is typically a comprehensive package of positive interventions wherein the children of the prostituted women are taken complete care of. At the minimum, it assures that the children are protected against the dangerous exposure to the nightly transactions of the red-light areas. Further, it also places the children on a sustainable developmental path and keeps them there. The NCC provides services such as – protected shelter, responsible adult supervision, wholesome nutrition, educational support, safe play options, safe sanitation options, and opportunities for skills development and awareness building. It is a platform for holistic personality development and not just protection.

Formal education isn't always a priority for the marginalized children living in the red-light area. Many times, they wouldn't even have access to formal education. Once enrolled in the NCC, if the child is above the age of six years, they would be enrolled in Prerana's Educational Support Program (ESP). The ESP is an intervention that caters to all educational needs of children – be it curricular, co-curricular or extra-curricular. Education is essential for a successful and stable future. Education is the positive right of every child under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

We are here within presenting the story of Madhuri*, a girl who has been availing of Prerana's various protective, care, and support services since 2009 and has faced countless challenges and obstacles in her journey towards gaining an education.

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



When Prerana's social workers met Beena*, she was in the Vashi-Turbhe red-light area along with her three children, Ram*, Madhuri and Ravi*. The Prerana social workers informed Beena about Prerana's Night Care services encouraging her to send her three children to the NCC. Although Beena was hesitant in the beginning, she began sending her children to Prerana for a few hours. The children were eventually enrolled in Prerana's ESP and began attending the evening Study Classes.

Prerana's Study Class aims at reinforcing what the formal educational system aims at giving to the students, namely knowledge, skills and attitudes. The specially trained teachers dedicate hours and provide individual attention to the students grouped according to age and standards/grades.

The social workers continued to speak with Beena and shared the importance of sending her children, especially Madhuri to the Night Care Center (NCC). Eventually, on the 24th of September 2009, Madhuri was enrolled in the NCC at the age of nine.

Soon after joining the NCC she was enrolled in a local Hindi medium school in the area where she began studying in the Second Standard. Madhuri was a bright and regular student, she enjoyed going to school and attending Prerana's study classes. Beena eventually also enrolled Ram and Ravi into the NCC.

As a part of the admission process, the Prerana social workers also speak with the mothers to understand their journey, challenges, and needs that we could jointly address. During their conversation with Beena, she shared that she works as a domestic help in the red-light area, emphasizing the fact that she isn't in the sex trade. During the social worker's outreach visit to the red-light area, the other women shared that she lives in a brothel and is in the sex trade.



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Beena shared that she was married and her husband was the father of all her three children. While multiple women shared that she is in the sex trade, there was no way of confirming the same as none of the social workers have seen her solicit in the area.

When speaking with the mothers, the Prerana social workers ensure that they do not compel the women to disclose details about their lives that they aren't comfortable sharing. In the 30+ years of the organization's work in the red-light areas, some women have denied being in the sex trade. Some of these women would disclose these details after building a rapport with the social worker. At Prerana, maintaining and ensuring the safety and security of the children and the dignity of their mothers is of utmost importance.

Towards the end of 2009, Beena approached the social worker at the NCC and shared that she was facing financial issues as her husband was very sick and she wasn't earning enough to care for the house and send Madhuri to school. The social worker on noting this visited Madhuri's school and discussed the situation with the Principal who agreed to wave off a part of her fees while the remaining was provided by Prerana. Madhuri enjoyed school and was performing well. It was important that Madhuri continued to remain in school and get an education.

Madhuri continued to work hard at school, attended the study class regularly and helped her mother with household chores. In her year-end exams in 2013, Madhuri received an A grade in all her subjects. Around the same time, Beena was ill with asthma due to which Madhuri would do most of the house chores as well.

In 2015, Beena's husband passed away, causing her asthma to aggravate and her health further began deteriorating which caused Madhuri to take over caring for the family full time. During this time, Beena also took up the work of managing the desk at a local public toilet in the area. These sudden changes adversely affected her education, but Madhuri continued to go to school. In 2016, she was regular to school but would either be late or miss the study class. On speaking with her the social worker found out that Beena being ill Madhuri herself was managing the desk at a local public toilet in the Vashi-Turbhe community to collect money from the users. Over and above this Madhuri was also expected to do the household chores, only after which she was allowed to leave for the NCC. On visiting her school, the social workers found out that Madhuri has been facing issues coping with English causing her grades and performance to drop.

In November 2016 Madhuri came crying to the Center and informed the staff that her older brother, Ram had hit her as she was unable to prepare food. He had also asked her to leave the house. Due to this, she requested to stay at the NCC throughout the day, which the social workers agreed to. The following day, Beena came to the Center and spoke to Madhuri with the social worker present, assuring her that she had spoken to her brother regarding his behavior and assured her that the same would not be repeated.

Ram, who was 18-years-old, would constantly drink alcohol and didn't have a job. He was very vocal of his opinion that girls were meant to stay at home and do the household chores. He wasn't happy that Madhuri would visit the NCC either. The Prerana social workers subsequently began working with both Beena and Ram to address the situation. The social workers, however, found it difficult to discuss gender issues/roles with Ram as he was rarely available and would often be intoxicated.

In April 2017, Madhuri was promoted to the 10th standard. She requested if Prerana could assist with enrolling her into tuition classes for math and science as she needed help in those subjects. The social worker met with a local tuition class and enrolled Madhuri, paying her fees as well.

Madhuri would regularly attend her classes and school before which she would go to her home and finish her household chores. Post-school she would attend to the desk at the local public toilet to collect money, she had to continue managing the desk as Beena continued to be unwell. This caused Madhuri to miss the study class at the Center.

When a child is studying and preparing for their 10th standard Board exams, the Prerana team regularly visits the school and tuition class to follow up on the child. The child is referred to the counselor to assist with the stress and also help with time management. And while at the NCC, the staff ensures that the children have a space of their own where they can study without disturbance as well as are regularly eating their meals well. The social worker accompanies the child to the exam Center for their first exam.



During their exams, the staff ensures that each child receives the attention they require during the study class and has the resources needed to study well.

In her first term exams, she failed in all her subjects. This was because her household chores were taking up much of her time and she didn't have time to study. The social worker spoke to her and her mother about this and it was finalized that she would attend extra classes at the Prerana Center. By December 2017, Madhuri stopped staying at the NCC but would continue to visit the Center and attend the study class. During a visit to her school, the social worker found out that Madhuri still wasn't performing well in school and had also stopped attending her tuition classes. On speaking with Madhuri the social workers found out that she didn't want to go for tuitions as her friends were now going to another tuition teacher. The social worker discussed this with Madhuri sharing that she needed to continue with the same tuition if there was no issue with the teaching.

In May 2018, Madhuri's 10th Standard results were announced and she passed with 45%. Through career counseling she was able to choose Arts as the course she would like to pursue, she felt like this was the right course for her. She joined a local college to pursue Arts. Initially, she found it hard to adjust to the college environment due to her challenge with speaking and reading in English. The social workers suggested that she actively work towards improving her English and could attend extra classes at the NCC for the same. In October 2018, Beena went to her village, leaving the house in the care of Madhuri. Due to this Madhuri wasn't visiting the Center for her classes. During a conversation with the social workers, she shared that she only had two sets of clothes to wear to college, and those were also torn. She shared that she couldn't afford to buy anything new and felt out of place as all the other students would come to the college

well dressed. She was then given a few clothes and was very happy to accept them. With Beena having gone to her village, all the responsibilities of managing the house fell on Madhuri. Furthermore, she had to sit outside the public toilet to collect the fees. She also wanted to attend English classes conducted by an NGO working in the area but owing to her hectic schedule, she couldn't. When speaking with the social workers, she shared that she didn't want to study further as it was getting difficult for her because she was weak in English and had her domestic responsibilities.



The social workers counseled her regarding this, sharing the importance of education and various ways she could work around the challenges she is facing. After this Madhuri committed that she would continue with her education and complete her 12th standard by 2020. Madhuri has been receiving an educational sponsorship through Lakshmi Initiative* and is regular to the Center attending the various sessions and activities conducted. She will be completing her 12th standard in 2020 and is currently preparing for the same. She visits the NCC for English classes with one of the teachers as well as spends time working on her English by using a dictionary to learn new words.

The Lakshmi Initiative

National award-winning filmmaker Mr. Nagesh Kukunoor directed the film 'Lakshmi' in 2014, a film depicting the harsh realities of human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation in India. Following the release of the film, the 'Lakshmi' Initiative was launched on 8th March 2015 to commemorate Women's Day. The initiative is an attempt to prevent and protect girls from the threats of trafficking, sexual abuse, and commercial sexual exploitation. It aims to support and empower 'at-risk' girls through prevention, education and livelihood training to provide them with the right to choose a path for themselves and lead a life with dignity. Every year, young women who are availing services through Prerana's various projects receive an educational scholarship through the initiative.

