



Red Light Despatch

Volume V Issue 9

September 2012

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My Dream

The following are responses from the young women of Dharpura from the question

“Why are you excited to be involved in the sewing Income Generation Project?”

“I am excited to earn money and happy to stitch new clothes.”

“I am happy to help my family and by earning my own money I can start my own future and also become an expert at sewing.”

“I am excited that I will learn something new and earn money for my family.”

“I am excited to learn new designs and get rid of what’s going on in the community. I want to save my sister and give her a safe future.”

“I am excited to learn cutting and stitching and to earn money to look after my children.”

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Can the police go anywhere at night?

By Kajal, 14

Forbesganj, Bihar: My name is Kajal. I am a student of class eight. I was sleeping with my mother and father at home on 11th. February night when suddenly the police came into my house at midnight with no warning. They woke me up and shouted at my mother and father and dragged me away from home. My mother was crying and I was very scared. I did not know where they were taking me. Then suddenly I found myself with my friends huddled in a van. I asked

for water. I got scolded. We were brought to the police station and were forced to sit on the floor. I just kept my eyes shut thinking somebody would come and save me. The next day the police took me to some hospital and they humiliated me by pulling my legs apart and checking my private parts. I want to forget that night forever. Can the police go anywhere at night or is this the poor people who they can treat like this?

Stepping Stones to Sustainable Livelihood Options

By Garima Gupta

New Delhi: In the last month, I went on my usual monitoring visit to Forbesganj, Bihar where I saw women from Red Light areas learning stitching of bags of international quality from Nomi Network team. I sat in their workshop and realized that all the middle aged women between 30-45 years wanted to learn a new skill to earn a decent living. It clearly revealed their saturation from the vicious cycle of sex trafficking and moreover giving their children a decent lifestyle. Eighteen women from different areas of Forbesganj were coming to attend this training. They were all happy to learn new stitches.

In the next room, I saw adolescent children learning on computers donated by Asset Foundation. All the children were so engrossed in

their computer sets that they didn’t realize that I had been standing behind them for the last 10 minutes, watching them either doing paint and brush or typing something on MS-Word. When I asked one of the girls about why she is learning computer, she said “I want to do some job but unable to get if I don’t know computer”. When asked about the computer education importance from the State Coordinator in Bihar, he told me that in collaboration with Asset Foundation and DESI POWERS Ltd., a Rural BPO would be established in Forbesganj. Infosys is donating 100 computers from Bangalore to run this BPO . A list of beneficiaries who will be working as employees is ready with the staff of Apne Aap.
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Avaaz petition update

By Lindsey Swedick

New York: Since creating our petition to stop police atrocities on Apne Aap staff in July, we have received support of almost 2500 signatories from all over the world. It is evident that we are gaining momentum our campaign, as we've doubled our signature count in the past 3 weeks alone. That means that well-wishers and fellow activists from multiple states and countries are standing with us as we demand a safe environment for Apne Aap staff to work and accountability for police who show loyalty to traffickers over victims and activists. We have already seen our petition working, as The National Human Rights Commission of India has issued a summons to the Director General of Police to appear in person before the Commission in Delhi on 30 of Sept, 2012 to explain how and why Kalam was arrested, why police officers entered the Apne Aap girls hostel and what he is doing to hold his men accountable. Additionally SP Lande has been sent on three months of leave while investigations are being carried out. Just before the DGP appears for his summons, Apne Aap staff members will present him with the petition and the names of all signatories, with the message that the world is watching. We are hopeful that this will apply necessary pressure to ensure SP Lande is held accountable.

Karate kid asks Hillary to protect her rescuer

By Poonam Nat Dhuniya, 15

Simrah, Araria: My name is Poonam. My sister lives in the Red Light Area of Rampur in Forbesgunge. I might have also met the same fate if Kalam sir had not come and spoken to my mother and put me into the Apne Aap run girls' hostel. I came here at the age of twelve. Here, I feel safe and have been able to study peacefully. I have also learnt Karate so that I can protect myself.

But now I feel scared not from any trafficker/ client but from the police. On 1st. June they arrested Kalam Sir who rescued me and in July the police came in uniform with journalists and said they were inspecting our hostel. I was scared and humiliated. I felt earlier I used to feel safe in the hostel but now no longer do I feel safe, because the police are attacking us.

Mrs. Clinton has said when she was in Kolkata that she was impressed by my confidence and I asked Mrs. Clinton to protect me and my uncle Kalam from the police who don't want that I study and get out of the Red Light Area.



(Continued from page 1 "Stepping Stones To Sustainable Livelihood Options) The interesting part about this BPO is that all the communication between customers and employees would be their regional language and Hindi. It's an opportunity for all the boys and girls from WIP/WAR/Vulnerable communities to learn a new skill. The building which would be constructed inside the premises of Apne Aap's office would half be used by BPO and half by Nomi for their training as well as outlet set up.

Besides technical skills, women were involved in crafting Madhubani jewellery on paper mache and mango pits into something eye soothing. Women learned the skills of making low cost jewellery from

easily available resources and natural colors, which are fortunately liked by Americans and now are a part of New York based Fair Trade shop. When I asked one of the beneficiaries about the rates she expects in return of her work done, she said "Jo bhi 50-100 rupaiya mil jay ek saman ka" (whatever we get in 50-100/- rupees for one product). I felt a sense of change in the environment and I must say that if these women and adolescent boys and girls start earning somehow and getting a feeling of ownership, the concept of sex trafficking would be vanished from the area. It was indeed an eye opening visit for me.

Obama commits to Combat Human Trafficking; Will India Follow?

By Ruchira Gupta

When US President Barack Obama made a milestone commitment against sex trafficking in New York on Sept 25, I was sitting in the audience wondering what it would take for the Indian Prime Minister to demonstrate the same commitment towards the most marginalized girls in my country.

In the middle of a busy election campaign and meetings at the United Nations General Assembly, the President took time out to speak on the subject -- perhaps the most forceful speech ever on this topic by a world leader. President Obama referred to the fight against human trafficking as "one of the great human rights causes of our time," and mentioned new steps to deal with a problem he called "barbaric and evil." The President not only noted that human trafficking is a criminal activity that involves the buying and selling of human beings but squarely called it slavery. "When a little girl is sold by her impoverished family (girls my daughters' age), runs away from home, or is lured by the false promises of a better life, and then imprisoned in a brothel and tortured if she resists -- that's slavery. It is barbaric, and it is evil, and it has no place in a civilized world."

The Central Bureau of Investigation in a statement in 2009 said that there are at least three million prostituted women and girls in India of which 1.2 million are children. The National Human Rights Commission says the numbers are going up and the ages coming down. The latest reported case by the police is of a seven-year-old girl from Darjeeling.

Yet the Prime Minister, even in his second term, is silent on the subject. So is our own female Chief Minister, who could not have failed to notice the young girls with painted faces lined up in her own backyard on the Chetla bridge.

A stricter law to punish buyers of prostituted sex and traffickers is still pending in the Indian Parliament nearly seventy years after Independence in spite of repeated submissions by activists and victims of trafficking to parliamentarians and lawmakers. Such a law has been passed in Sweden, Norway, and Iceland and has been found to act as a deterrent to the sex industry. The delay in the law only puts hundreds of more girls in harm's way.

Even the existing law is hardly ever used to tackle the sex-industry. Often the administration turns a blind eye to the size of the brothel districts, the violence on the young girls, and all the pimps and clients buying and selling little girls. But more tragic is the callousness of senior officers and ministers who simply ignore the miscarriage of justice by corrupt police officers. I was witness in February this year to the illegal detention of a 14-year old daughter of an anti-trafficking activist, Fatima, working for my NGO, Apne Aap within hours of exposing an interstate trafficking ring. Though the Superintendent of Police, Araria, Bihar, ShivdeepLande, tried to falsify a first information report to justify his illegal actions, no action has been taken against him.

Neither the Child Welfare Committee, nor the National Committee for the Protection of Child Rights, nor the ministries of women and child in Patna or Delhi and nor the Home Minister who is in charge of police have even asked for an explanation of this illegal act. The same officer has found strength in this silence and gone on to arrest anti-trafficking activist, Mohammad Kalam on blatantly false charges.

These acts only prove that sex trafficking is one of the most invisible, unacknowledged and under-prioritized problems in our country. Perhaps because it affects more women than men, more girls than boys. Perhaps, because we accept that prostitution is inevitable simply because we believe the myth that men have and are entitled to "unbridled" sexual desire and that some poor girls and women should always be sexually available to meet this desire. Or that sexual pleasure is only for men, associated with domination and not an equal physical exchange between women and men.

Of the 20 million victims that President Obama spoke about in his speech, 3 million are in India. I saw friends and fellow-activists' in the room who were proud of their President for taking on an issue that they had struggled for. Our Prime Minister often takes the lead from friends in the US on economic and defence issues. I wonder when he will have the courage to do so on behalf of the most marginalized -- the fourteen-year-old prostituted girl?

Ashton has a Job(s)

By Ruchira Gupta

The Telegraph, Sunday September 2, 2012

Ashton Kutcher, in India to play Steve Jobs in a film being shot on the Apple founder, spent five hours on Friday morning in the bylanes on the outskirts of Delhi, standing by victims of sex trafficking. Ruchira Gupta, founder president of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, who accompanied him, describes the less-seen side of the Hollywood star. Ruchira is a Calcutta girl and a former journalist with The Telegraph.

I had met Ashton for the first time in 2009 with Demi (Moore) when they wanted to set up the DNA Foundation (Demi & Ashton Foundation in Los Angeles) against trafficking. They had reached out to me and I met them in New York, where Apne Aap has a wing, to brainstorm on how to set up the foundation.

We talked about what is trafficking and what would be the best response to it. I told him that trafficking is made up of both supply and demand. Girls who do not have choices make up the supply. The demand is from pimps and brothel owners.

I told Ashton about Apne Aap's Cool Men Don't Buy Sex campaign. He changed that and started the Real Men Don't Buy Girls campaign and tried to bring in Hollywood stars to advocate the cause. He felt the campaign would attract more attention if he used the word 'girls'. The DNA Foundation still exists and Demi and he still run it together. They are concentrating on the digital platform. They have created a digital task force and are trying to do a few things with people on Google, Facebook and Twitter.

The first aim is to spread awareness and education among men so that they do not buy girls. They are also trying to get the message across to people who are surfing porn websites and also buying girls on the Internet. There are sites that pop up for just 10 minutes. People who know about them, access them within the limited time span and buy girls before the site disappears. Ashton is tracking this through his own understanding and his digital task force. They have created software systems to maintain vigil and share their findings with law enforcement agencies in America. In the long run, we will also work together to use that same idea here.

During Ashton's visit this time, we spoke about the demand issue and what could be done to arrest

the high-profile customers who buy girls in the open. He is very keen on going after them and he is willing to collaborate, share this digital technology and see how we can take it forward and involve police.

He had phoned me four weeks before we met to find out if I was going to be in town. He said: "I would like to visit the Apne Aap facilities with you, if possible."

Before boarding the flight to Delhi, he called me and said: "I'm on my way and I'll phone you as soon as I reach Delhi. I will be there for three or four days and one of my main agendas is to visit Apne Aap."

He wanted to stand by the marginalised girls very publicly. He even said that he had decided that the first tweet he would send out from India would be from Apne Aap although he was here on some other work. And that is what he did. [See box]

I got a call from him on Thursday night. He said "Can we go to the facility tomorrow and can we leave at 6am?" I realised that he did not want to be mobbed. Unfortunately I could not get hold of a car so early and eventually picked him up from his hotel at 7.30am. He was there with his father (Larry M. Kutcher), who also accompanied us.

I took him to Najafgarh, where Apne Aap has three centres. I took him to one of them, next to Dharampura, a settlement for a caste community called Veran, which is trapped in inter-generational prostitution because they were marginalised by a British law labeling them a criminal tribe.

Apne Aap has a community outreach centre there, where Ashton went for a walk. He went into the homes of some of the women and girls to chat with them. At the centre, he spent a lot of time with the girls' groups, sharing his own work with them. The girls told him about theirs.

He was dressed very simply, in a light cotton shirt and trousers. Tied around his wrist with dried flowers was one of the things one wears after visiting a temple or a mosque. He was exactly like the boy next door, only an extremely good-looking one! One of the girls groups has formed a Bhangra troupe that performs at weddings and earns some money. The troupe performed a bit of Bhangra for him.

(Continued on page 5)

ashton kutcher@aplusk: "Met some powerful girls today in Delhi at Apne Aap: A grassroots movement to end sex trafficking!"

***<http://www.apneaap.org>
pic.twitter.com/KvD6ZKSS***

(Continued from page 4 "Ashton has a Job(s)") He also danced a little for them when they asked him to. When they told him how they feel a little scared every time they have to perform in public, he said even he feels very nervous whenever he goes on stage but overcoming that fear is what he loves most about life.

Then Ashton sat with all of them in a circle and discussed what the qualities of a good leader are. The girls said "courage", "good manners" and "respect" while he said that for him, it was "the courage to tackle big problems and to realise that the world around us is created by people no smarter than us". Then he asked: "So we can change it, right?" He met girls who were working on a computer and learning how to write their resume. He was curious to know how much of Facebook and Twitter they know and use. He shared with them his email ID and told them that he was willing to chat with them online if they wanted to chat. Ashton said that the Internet had made him a member of a global community and the girls too could be a part of the community and be friends with him.

We had told the girls that he was a Hollywood actor, so when they met him, they asked him which movies he had acted in so that they could Google and check. Some of the girls want to be actresses, so they wanted to know more about acting from him. The girls are learning English and were trying to communicate with him in a mixture of English and Hindi. I was playing translator.

Because he is an actor, they figured that he would be able to sing and asked him to sing them a song. He sang some lines from Don McLean's American Pie. I translated the lyrics for the girls and I could see the empathy and connection between them.

I saw in Ashton a person of depth, intelligence and sensitivity. The things he said to the girls and

the song he chose to sing were very appropriate and very inspiring. He was very low key, not flashy. The other thing I noticed was when he was interacting with someone in authority, he was very polite but very firm and focused about addressing a need. He could communicate very intelligently, which is often not seen.

Ashton met 22 girls and five women apart from 10 community outreach employees. I dropped him back to the hotel by 12.30pm.

On our way back, he told us in the car how people kept emailing him and saying "support this, support that, show up for this and fund us for that" but rather than doing we only end up raising funds.

"Sometimes I feel so tired, that I'd rather write a \$500 cheque than go for these shows," he said. Ashton said he did not get to live too many such real moments and he felt very happy learning about the work that we were doing, interacting with the girls and sharing his passion. "These are some of the bravest girls I've met in my life." Those were his exact words. He said that it was a privilege for him to know them and he was very grateful to me that I helped him to.

He dwelt on how we could mobilise public opinion so that different sections of society, including law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, helped us arrest and convict those who buy girls. He is also willing to publicise the arrest and conviction of traffickers and be a voice of advocacy for us. We are going to work on that and see how we can make that happen.

Ashton is in Udaipur right now, where he will spend a couple of days before flying back to New York. I told Ashton that I really need him to come to Calcutta next time because it has Asia's largest red-light area, Sonagachhi. We are keeping our fingers crossed.

Creative Writing

Responses from a creative writing workshop in Dumarbanna Middle School in Babuan,
hosted by Jill Pillay/Cape Cinnamon and Soumya Pratheek

Lakshmi*, age 12

'I will stop childhood marriage. When I travel from place to place and eat very good food I am very happy'. 'When my parents scold and correct me I am very unhappy'.

Usha*, age 12

'I want to study and learn

tailoring, when my mother speaks I feel very happy I like my parents very much. I don't want to go to the field that makes me very unhappy'.

Ratu*, age 14

'You should know and be aware of your rights and duties, I will go to the villages and clean them and

encourage other children to do the same and keep up this form of cleanliness'. 'I wish to be an activist against childhood marriage and to be able to teach others about why this is not proper'.

*Names have been changed to protect privacy

DID YOU KNOW?

- Human trafficking, the third largest international crime, following illegal drugs and arms trafficking, is believed to be worth billions of dollars each year. Driving the trade is the demand for commercial sexual exploitation. 79% of all global trafficking is for sexual exploitation.
- Approximately 150,000 women and children are trafficked from South Asia every year and most of them from, via and to India. Trafficking in children for commercial sexual exploitation is one of the primary manifestations of commercial sexual exploitation of children in India, which exists on a large scale and in many forms.
- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) estimates that almost half of the children trafficked within India are between the ages of 11 and 14.
- 90% of trafficking in India is internal, and those from India's most disadvantaged social economic strata including the lowest castes are particularly vulnerable to forced or bonded labor and sex trafficking.



The *Red Light Despatch* is a monthly newsletter published exclusively by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. It compiles articles, testimonials, speeches and interviews by women participating in Apne Aap's Self-Empowerment Groups (SEGs) and other initiatives, as well as by staff members, volunteers, and media figures. The central objective of the RLD is to offer a space for the unique voices of our girls and women. The particular writing style has been implemented to best preserve the original tone of the speakers.

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