



South Kolkata Hamari Muskan



FINAL REPORT 2019-2020

Nurture, Breakthrough & Dignity:
Initiatives for children, youths and women of
two of Kolkata's red light areas



A note from the founder director

By the time this report reaches you all, the world will be still in the throes of COVID-19 or if we are really lucky then recovering from the Pandemic. When we started 2020, there was optimism and hope—there were to be written and oral exams to fret over, soccer matches and karate competitions to be excited over, photograph and art exhibitions to hold, and be with friends everyday.

All is not lost! We have not been working with children for such a long time to have learnt nothing from them. They have taught us resilience in the face of adversity. The strongest people we know are the tiniest ones and we are using lessons learnt from them to survive the lockdown.

Today, we bring you tales of our small heroes. Their actions and activities along with that of their biggest supporters: the tremendous team of teachers, caregivers, outreach workers, accountants and admin workers, who have worked in tandem in 2019-2020 to bring change to communities pushed to the sidelines.

Do be with us,
Warm regards,
Srabani Sarkar Neogi

An SKHM former student, youth member & now intern, is a teaching assistant at our centre.



Riya and her sister Priya were both children of woman in prostitution. From her childhood, Riya grew up in an "at-risk environment": in a room visited by her mother's clients; or by alcoholic customers coming to her mother's country liquor store which was a side business. Riya, an effervescent child and an ardent admirer of fine arts, first came to SKHM Safe Centre when she was 12 years old (2010). She was a school drop-out. At that time Riya stayed at home with her biological father, mother, her client and younger sister. Because of the home environment on most days she would stay awake throughout the night, going off to sleep only after the adults had gone off to sleep. As a result, she would frequently miss school.

When Priya started to come to the SKHM Safe Centre, Riya would come to drop her off and stay on. Gradually, an SKHM teachers began her re-education. After some months, taking her and her family's consent, she was re-admitted to a government school.

Within few months, she started to excel in her studies. Riya showed an inclination towards languages, had neat handwriting and showed willingness to attend school regularly. At this time she decided to move out of her home and be with her grandmother: because of her mother's increasing dependence upon alcohol. By that time Riya's mother was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis. Though she loved her grandmother, she proved to be quite a handful for her. Riya's progress was untimely halted when her mother started to fall sicker. Soon, she was not attending school regularly to stay back and care for her mother. In early 2016, Riya's mother passed away after a brief spell of illness. She was 40 years old at that time. She left behind two daughters and a son (who is completely illiterate). After her demise, Riya was diagnosed with depression. She stopped going to school and increasingly distanced herself from SKHM. She had to be coaxed to attend one or two of the special classes (art, music, wall magazine writing, story-making sessions) things she enjoyed.

Riya's grandmother started to manage the liquor store that Riya's mother ran as a "side business". In order to compensate for the absence of a maternal figure in her granddaughters' lives she started to give inappropriate sums of "pocket money" to a child who was still in Class IX.

Around that time, SKHM intervened and met with Riya, her grandmother and her sister to talk about the future. In that meeting Riya admitted to a feeling of ennui. But she made a choice to be more at the centre and also be a part-time SKHM youth member. Her caveat: that she was to be allowed to discontinue school for the next few months. Though she showed marked change in the next few months; in the weeks that followed, Riya slowly spiralled into a dark state of mind (manifested through low self-care, withdrawal from centre and friends, etc.). She re-started her individual counselling sessions—after she and her peer group sat down and discussed and decided that it was a step that she wished to take. In the next few weeks Riya's moods oscillated. She would play truant and then seek SKHM's help to "become a regular". She showed an interest to pursue "skill development" projects in Indian Technological Institutes (ITIs). She agreed to attend the National Open Schools (NIOS). In the next year she passed all Madhyamik subjects except mathematics while continuing as a youth member. But this was new Riya no longer running away from her problems.

After she failed to clear the mathematics exams, she took a few weeks off to take care of her newborn niece. Though being a caregiver gave her pleasure, she also began to understand that her extended family was taking advantage of her services. She held no grudges but began to concentrate on completing her mathematics exam.

After being counselled she is now a regular SKHM youth group member who plans and assists community projects to improve the neighbourhood, an assistant teacher at SKHM's Shobhabazaar centre (for which she earns a small stipend) and continues to study mathematics and English language at SKHM Centre. In her sister's words, this is a new Didi (elder sister) more involved and attentive in life. When Priya fractured her leg recently, Riya became the new caregiver who not only made sure that her sister studied but continued her studies with Priya's peers and slew SKHM teachers who took turns to visit the girls in the evening for lessons.



Above: Riya Mandal teaching tiny tots at Shobhabazaar Centre II. (Below) Riya attends the Changemakers' Plan Sessions where in January and February 2020 youths mapped the road ahead for them, along with projects slated to start within the red light area community.

Nurture News

Children & Centre

TEACHERS' TRAINING AND STAFF WORKSHOPS

We are glad to welcome new members in our staff. Swagat Luha, Smriti Sardar and Swapna Powai joined the SKHM team of teachers to accommodate growing number of students with specific needs, especially those who do not speak in Bengali.

Orientation of the staff was conducted at the main admin building where members were apprised of the SKHM Child Protection Policy and teaching and learning methodology.

Also, old teachers received two rounds of training with organisations that train teachers through specialist workshops. The teachers who attended these events were Ananya Ghosh, Anwesha Sil, Srabani Guha Majumdar, Aparajita Mukherjee and Victor Chakraborty.

Jolly Laha, Senior Counsellor at Samikshani and at SKHM, continued her personal growth sessions with all staff at centres.

SKHM Yearly Highlights...

- Aug - New Teachers hired
 - Sept - Teachers' training
 - Oct - Diwali Street Art
 - Nov - Tale of two studies
 - Dec - It's Christmas!
 - Jan - Fourth food kiosk, a film shoot and more teachers' training
- At SKHM we believe that constant training of teachers is the way forward especially considering the stressful conditions that both our teachers and students work in. That along with the personal growth sessions in which methods to mitigate the stress, ways to accommodate students' requests and needs ethically, are discussed.
 - Along with sessions, teachers meet weekly for lesson plans, and monthly for the syllabi and TLM decisions.
 - Quarterly meetings are held with central admin staff so that everyone in the group are aware of steps that are being taken by teachers to improve class attendance and cut down on the drop out rates.

Breakthrough News

BOWBAZAAR CENTRE I & II // SOVABAZAAR CENTRE I & II

Changemakers....

AN YOUTH GROUP WITH A DIFFERENCE

By Indian law, an youth is an individual above 18 years. At SKHM, we go by United Nation's definition for youths. Young people in our area of operation grow up faster and are more responsible at an younger age. So, why not treat them as the young, matured individuals that they are? SKHM youth group members may be as young as 15 years and go up to 25 years.

In the past nine years, SKHM has been conducting personal growth sessions, de-addiction sessions, career and grooming workshops with the youths at the red light area. With this we have been training them in various skill development institutes.

With every passing year, facilitators and counsellors have found marked changes in the youths. The biggest change was when in 2019, youths asked us for a favour, to give them a chance to give back to the community they come from.

Thus, CHANGEMAKERS began.

2019-2020 bi-annual highlights...

- Aug - New Teachers hired
- Sept - Teachers' training
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- CHANGEMAKERS are a group of 30 young people who work together for small, community based projects.
- They meet weekly.
- They plan sessions.
- They document their sessions, prepare reports themselves and conduct surveys to "map" field needs with help of SKHM social workers.
- The group will work on sanitation, education of street kids and availability of potable water within the community for the next months.
- After assessment of their work, a new team will be prepared who will work on the next round of projects.



Above: Changemakers' meeting in process.

(Below) De-addiction session with K. Viswanath. (Left): Kabita Ghosh, SKHM's oldest and eldest student poses with her college ID Card. Kabita is in Vidyasagar College. She is SKHM first teachers' assistant and intern followed by Riya Mandal. She is also a member of Changemakers' Youth Club. Apart from Kabita and Riya, Bipasha Mukherjee, Rupa Bittar and Sumitra Das have also transitioned from SKHM students' program (Nurture) to its youth program (Breakthrough). In case of Sumitra, she continues her studies and remedial classes while also availing youth session services.



DIGNITY News

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Snippets from 2019's Diwali Street Rangoli and Alpana Fair in (above) Bowbazaar (below) and Sonagachhi red light areas.

(Below) Christmas celebrations at the home of one of SKHM funders. Most middle and senior students who had completed their annual tests attended.



Exploratory Research

A Dipstick Survey on the
Impact of Domestic Violence on Children



Two state level children's reports that SKHM participated in. (Above) SKHM was one of the four NGOs invited by the West Bengal Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) to conduct the survey of the state of children in West Bengal. (Below) The report below was mapped, surveyed and written by 20 students of SKHM's Bowbazaar Centre, along with their peers from 15 other NGOs, spread across West Bengal. This study was organised and conducted by "Campaign against Child Labour (CACL)", West Bengal



STATE LEVEL CHILDREN'S REPORT STATUS OF UNCRC IMPLEMENTATION IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA

ORGANISED BY: CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHILD LABOUR





It's alright if you don't recognise these faces, the first time we saw them, neither did we. These were the girl students of SKHM Sonagachhi and Bowbazaar centres with full face of make up, dressed as individuals and symbols of power.

The make over was for a film shoot that was conducted by one of the funders to show the change in the girls' lives without reavealing their identities. The students had a blast and so did we, thanks to their energy.



The third kiosk started by women of Muskan's Mukhorochhok. The social entrepreneurship wing of DIGNITY group.

Dignity

Jewellery crafted by women trained in SKHM's "Costume Jewellery Making Course". These women are a part of the social entrepreneurship branch of DIGNITY group. DIGNITY is SKHM's program for adult women and men in the red light community.





Thank you dear Funders!

Without your generosity, we would not have been able to witness the successes of SKHM staff and students. We are truly grateful for the care, support and concern.