

Her Future Coalition - Dining For Women Final Grant Report

May, 2020



Overview

Grant Purpose: Red Light Resource Centers, Kolkata

Grant Amount: \$49,200

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Intended Outcomes:

Our goal through this grant was to expand and support our three Red Light Area Resource Centers in Kolkata. We planned to provide job training, employment, counseling, and informal education for women trapped in forced prostitution, as well as education, counseling, safe space, and therapeutic arts for their children.

Specifically, our intention through the expansion of the Resource Centers was to:

- Increase the number of children in education support programs and enhance our education programs with additional materials and instructional staff
- Add additional education programs, including English
- Increase the number of women in vocational training programs
- Continue infrastructure improvements to increase the capacity and number of people served (to 250 women and children)

- Develop and implement program measurement, data collection, and monitoring programs
- Expand program capacity to provide increased services to 250 women and children

Achievements

We are very proud of the achievements of this project, and grateful to Dining for Women for giving us the means to serve some of Kolkata's most vulnerable children and women with life-saving, life-changing programs and consistent, long-term support.

Obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic has created huge challenges for the project, and for all our programs in India and Nepal. In fact the Red Light Resource Centers are currently closed as India's nationwide lockdown. However, this crisis occurred near the end of our grant period, at which point we had already achieved almost all of our stated goals. Thanks to the traction already gained, we have been able to maintain emergency services, such as food distribution and remote education/tutoring over the phone, to our Resource Center families.

Below is a summary of achievements in each of our objectives:

1. Increase the number of children in education support programs and enhance our education programs with additional materials and instructional staff

We have been able to increase the number of children in preschool, remedial education and school support programs from 180 to 270-. We have provided five new laptops and added lending libraries to two of the three centers.

2. Add additional education programs, especially English language instruction

3 additional teachers have been appointed. One part time teacher has been replaced with a full time teacher. We bought study materials and a science experiment kit (lab kit. We brought in a consultant educationist/ resource person to revisit the teaching pedagogy at the centers. All teachers received training to align their capacity in order to customize education support to the children. We added computers and computer training, and created lending libraries at two of the centers, at which we offer weekly library arts and reading classes. . We have added two English teachers, and launched a computer training program at one of the centers

3. Increase the number of women in our vocational training programs

We have added 18 women to the vocational training programs, 8 in goldsmithing and 10 in cooking/catering. 7 women from the community who work as staff members at the centers are also supported through this grant.

4. Continue infrastructure improvement which will increase the capacity and number of people served

We built a second floor on one of the centers, doubling the capacity of that center, and making it possible to run vocational training workshops on the ground floor.

We also built jewelry desks and added cabinets so that the jewelry trainees could have a safe and separate place to work.

We rented, refurbished and furnished a new center in Kidderpore red light area, where we will be opening a fourth Resource Center once the COVID lockdown is over.

5. Develop and implement program measurement, data collection, and monitoring programs

We determined that we did not have sufficient staff capacity to do this ourselves, so we engaged a professional with extensive experience in data collection and impact measurement - Paromita Chowdhury - to create a data collection and impact measurement system for our projects in India. Her work has been somewhat delayed by the lockdown, so we will send the new monitoring and evaluation plan and framework to DFW when it is completed, likely by August.

6. Expand program capacity to provide increased services to 250 women and children

We have been able to grow and improve the Red Light Resource Centers and to provide more and better services to 340 women and children

***Additional, Unexpected Outcome: Providing Emergency Support in the COVID crisis**

We are providing at least 6 weeks of emergency food to all women and children at the Resource Centers, and in our other programs, during the COVID lockdown, so that they do not become even more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation due to hunger and desperation.

Her Future provided, and will continue to provide additional funding to the project from our general budget in 2019, we spent about \$15,000 exclusive of our general staff time/salary percentage. In 2020, due to the COVID 19 crisis, we expect to spend \$50,000 on the Resource Centers and the emergency needs of the mothers and children who use them.

Challenges & Solutions

Obviously the biggest challenge for our organization, and every other NGO in India, has been the COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting 60 day lockdown, followed by the devastation of Cyclone Amphan. Our families in the red light areas were particularly hard hit by these problems, because they live 4 or 5 to a room, and the rooms where they live are small, and poorly ventilated. Unfortunately, there were several COVID deaths around the corner from our Bowbazar Center, so that area was declared a containment zone and residents were barricaded in their homes for several weeks.

In the early days of the pandemic, it was very hard to get food to our girls and moms, because our staff and partners were not able to leave their homes to buy food or deliver food. Over time, we were able to solve this problem with help from local staff (mothers in the project) and the local police. The Centers remain closed, schools remain closed, and thus our teachers, tutors and counselors are working with the kids over the phone. We are hopeful that we can reopen the centers, gradually, with limited capacity, beginning in late June.

The other major negative impact from COVID-19 is its negative effect on the US economy and thus on our donors' ability to give this year. All fundraising events have been cancelled, and we have lost a few large donations because of the changed circumstances of those donors. We just did our first virtual gala and were happy with the results (raised about \$30,000). We intend to do more virtual fundraising this fall and will continue with an aggressive fundraising campaign to make up for lost donation revenue. We have also cut all non-program spending aggressively, to ensure that we live to fight another day. Our girls and their families in the red light areas, slums and shelter homes of India and Nepal are going to need our help more than ever in the coming year.

We have overcome several other challenges with this project (as previously shared in our interim report). Part of this project is a vocational training program in goldsmithing - a field in which HFC has trained many survivors in the past, at various shelters and workshops in Nepal and India. However, this was the first time we have offered this type of training directly *in* a red light area.

The Red Light Resource Centers are relatively small, multi-use facilities. The building in which we offered the jewelry training serves over a hundred women and children each day, and it was just one room and a courtyard when we started. Working with metals and open flames is not safe to do when there are a lot of people - especially children - running around. Needless to say, we did not want to kick the children out of the space so we could teach jewelry. It took many months - during which we focused on the safer skills of beading and wire-bending - but eventually we were able to build a second floor on the building, move the children's programs upstairs, and create a separate space for the jewelry team to safely work on all the skills of goldsmithing.

Another challenge which we have made progress on since our interim report, was a human resource issue. Soma Seal, the trainer and program manager for the jewelry program, also trains, supervises, and handles social work at our other jewelry center in Kolkata. As soon as Soma began training at the Resource Centers, she realized that the women there have higher needs than the women in the other program, and she needed to go there 3-4 times a week, both for teaching and for counseling and moral support.

Some of these women are only just getting out of the sex trade. Almost all have grown up in the red light area and have high levels of trauma. Trafficking and prostitution are normalized for them - they did not previously imagine any other kind of life. Extreme trauma affects short term memory, and makes learning slower.

In January, we promoted another woman from one of our vocational training programs - Sonali - to take over some of Soma's work so she can focus more on the trainees at the Resource Center and give them women there all the attention and care that they need.

Lessons Learned

We also learned that while providing a pathway out of prostitution through other job options is a critical step, some women will not be in a position to take the opportunity. Each person has her own timing, and as awful as their situation may seem to us, there are elements of it that may be working for them. For a variety of reasons, some women may not be ready, or wish for, alternative employment.

When planning vocational training/alternative employment projects for this community, it is wise to expect a higher than usual percentage of recidivism, and an initial lack of interest from a large percentage of the community. Furthermore, employment options that pay less than the women were making in prostitution are unlikely to be successful.

Change Within the Organization as a Result of this Grant

- We have hired a staff member to set up a monitoring and evaluation strategy.
- We are working much more closely with our local partner, South Kolkata Hamari Muskan.
- We promoted one of our jewelry artisans to a management position, so she can relieve the burden of a staff member working in this project.
- We got two incredible volunteers from a DFW chapter in the Bay Area, who have transformed our home party inventory management system!

The Unexpected

Running this project over the past year, we have learned to rely - more than ever - on the partnership and insight of our local partners (in this case, South Kolkata Hamari Muskan). Neither Her Future, nor SKHM, would have been able to keep the girls fed and safe during the pandemic working independently. We shared our problems, our worries and at times even our despair, holding nothing back, during twice weekly Zoom calls. . We got way past the point of 'standing on ceremony', or pretending to have it all figured out. The crisis brought us all closer together, and we are grateful that DFW's support of this project gave us a platform for coming together.

While visiting India in February, we rented and refurbished a space in another red light area - Kidderpore- as a fourth Resource Center. The space was exceedingly humble, some might say squalid, and our team was frankly quite skeptical about whether we would be able to work there effectively.

Then COVID-19 hit, and then Cyclone Amphan swept through Kolkata, with particularly bad damage in the Kidderpore red light area. Seven of the families from our school sponsorship program (who would have been the first beneficiaries of the new center) found themselves flooded. The kids were crying as they watched their few possessions floating away. It was (and remains) monstrously hot, and there was no electricity for over a week (still not restored in that neighborhood). Without fans

or lights,, and with sewage-contaminated water flowing through their homes, these 7 moms and their children took refuge in our new space. Everyone had teased me about this space, and even I had admitted it was pretty basic, and wondered if we had made a mistake in renting it. But for the families sheltering in it now, it is by far the nicest place they have ever lived. The electricity is working, it has fans and even AC. It is brightly lit, and clean and freshly painted. Their appreciation and delight has been, to say the least, a humbling and inspiring unexpected benefit for us all.

Strategy

We did not change our strategy for this project in any significant way.

Impact

The number of beneficiaries directly and indirectly impacted by this project is slightly higher than anticipated: the three centers are serving 275 children and 85 women (250 total was our goal with the grant).

We estimate the number of indirect beneficiaries to be about 250, including many family members of project beneficiaries who received food during the 60+ day lockdown, community members who get food from the food cart run by the women in our cooking and catering training, and the infant children of mothers in the program.

Monitoring and Evaluation

During the grant period, as discussed earlier in this report, we engaged a professional with extensive experience in data collection and impact measurement - Paromita Chowdhury - to create a data collection and impact measurement system for this project, and for all our projects in India. As we do not yet have the new system in place, during the grant period, we tracked (using attendance reports, staff reports, and observation)

- Number of women and children using the center
- Frequency of attendance
- Which services they received
- How often they received counseling, tutoring, training etc.
- Skill level of women at beginning and end of vocational training
- Income of women at beginning and end of vocational training
- Academic progress of children

Moving Forward

This is an ongoing project, and indeed we expect to remain in the community long term. As soon as the Centers are able to reopen, we intend to conduct a series of strategic planning sessions with our entire staff and local partner organization, to lay out a 3 year plan for the Centers, in light of the impact of COVID-19. For now, we know that we expect that the Centers will grow at a modest pace, adding another 10% a year, until we are serving 1000 women and children. We do not expect any growth in 2020 or the first half of 2021, due to funding challenges that we and our partner are both facing, and likely to face for the next year.

We plan to expand the computer training program, adding more equipment and increasing the frequency, length and depth of computer classes. If our funding permits, we will hire a full time staff member to work exclusively on this aspect of the program.

Her Future is also considering renting additional space in or near the Bowbazar red light area, where we can consolidate our existing vocational training projects from all over the city, and add new ones. This will make it easier for girls and women from the Resource Centers to take advantage of any new training programs, and job placement services. The timing of this will be determined by our funding situation.

Expenses and Funding

A detailed list of all expenses is attached.

Receiving this grant, and the positive association of our partnership with DFW, enabled us to obtain another grant for the project from Jen Hansen Jewelry (\$10,000). Our partnership with DFW elevated our year in a myriad of other ways. We have been proud to share this partnership on our website and in our annual report, and several major donors have commented positively on it. We believe it has strengthened our story of global sisterhood, and will continue to have a positive impact in the years to come.

This is the message we would like to convey to the DFW community:

Through the generosity of Dining for Women, we have been able to maintain, and expand our Red Light Resource Centers in Kolkata. Thanks to you, we have been able to provide comprehensive services to 350 women and children over the past year. These services are needed and appreciated more than ever in light of the current crisis.

The Resource Centers which you have supported keep children safe, and enable them to get an education to break the cycle of poverty and exploitation. Best of all, this project helps families to remain intact and together. These centers make it possible for mothers - who are themselves victims of the most severe forms of gender violence - to take care of their children and to build a better future for themselves and their children.

Thank you!

