



Walking Hand in Hand: The Relationship between Case Worker and Client

March 2023

Brief Historical Context

In 2010, Prerana's Outreach Team and Prerana's Social Case Workers met Kavita along with her mother Poonam, her aunt, and her grandmother, who were living on a footpath adjacent to the Roshan Talkies and Nekzaat Hotel located in Falkland Road, Mumbai. Kavita was 18 months old then and was admitted to Prerana's Night Care Centre (NCC) on 20th July 2010 by her mother, who is a second-generation victim of sex trafficking and suffers from hearing impairment.

Kavita was also enrolled in the Balwadi (pre-school) run by Prerana when she turned 3 years old. She was a quiet child who did not participate a lot in the activities conducted in the Balwadi. She had difficulty in making friends and interacting with others. She used to cry while being dropped at the Balwadi and spent all her time there by herself.

The Balwadi teacher and Prerana's Social Case Worker supported her and encouraged her to participate in classroom activities, ensuring her that they would move at her pace. The teachers tried to understand her better and also encouraged other children from the class to consciously include Kavita, and support her in their play and other activities. This slowly helped her engage in the classroom slightly more than usual.



Learning to Bridge the Silence

In the year 2014, when Kavita turned 6 years old, she was enrolled in the 1st standard at the Khetwadi GMMC School. She took keen interest in her academics but remained a quiet child. The Social Case Workers of Prerana observed that Kavita had very limited spoken conversations.

This was perhaps due to the limited conversations she had with her mother whose hearing was impaired. Though she displayed limited conversation with those around her, it did not mean she had poor communication skills. With the support and reassurance of her teachers, NCC care givers, and other children from the NCC, she eventually made friends and began having conversations with them.

Kavita also displayed excellent academic performance across subjects such as

A Social Case Worker goes at the pace of the client.

Mathematics, languages, reading skills, etc. It was observed that she gave well thought-out responses and comprehensive answers during the activities in the study classes. Some of these activities were newspaper reading sessions, and Life Skills Education sessions. She participated actively across thematic sessions such as gender sensitivity, personal safety, etc. Over a period of time, the social worker also noticed a remarkable change in her behaviour and her participation in school. This feedback was given to her social worker by her school teachers.

A lot of human behaviour is learned behaviour. Certain functions are learnt over time; individuals are not born with them. As a corollary, certain behaviours and functions can be unlearnt too. A Social Case Worker operates with this understanding.

Keeping the Baggage Down

All the children at Prerana's NCC are provided with a personal locker. Despite providing Kavita a locker to keep her belongings, she would carry an exceptionally heavy bag with her every time she went to school. For safety reasons, children's bags are checked once every week by the NCC staff when they come to the study class. It was noticed at that time that she carried all her personal belongings along with her school books in her school bag. When the social worker discussed this with her, she did not say anything and did not seem to feel that this was "unusual behaviour". This was discussed with the counsellor, who in turn said that it could be because Kavita felt safe having those belongings with her, and that maybe she was experiencing trust deficit due to her past experiences. The counsellor suggested we have a conversation with her on how her personal belongings will be safe if she leaves them in the locker, and how her back would

eventually hurt if she carried a heavy bag daily. Conversations around safety and trust helped Kavita feel at ease over a period of time and the Social Case Workers found that she slowly started using her locker to keep her belongings.



Trauma can manifest in the form of a host of dysfunctional behaviour. A Social Case Worker does not look at such behaviour with a myopic binary lens of discipline and indiscipline. In fact, these are viewed as trauma indicators that help the social worker assess and address the client's difficulties effectively.

Unpacking Past Trauma

During her childhood, the social workers also observed that Kavita was unable to maintain personal hygiene and would often show up without a bath, her hair uncombed, and wearing unclean clothes or her school uniform.

Her social worker at the NCC helped her in understanding the importance of maintaining personal hygiene and how to go about doing so. She supported Kavita to keep her personal locker clean, and together, they created a timetable for brushing her teeth, cleaning and combing her hair, taking a daily bath, ensuring that her clothes were washed and dried, trimming her nails etc. This greatly helped her in learning the importance of personal hygiene, time management, and independent living skills. Over time, she was able to practice these skills and stopped exhibiting poor hygiene.

The Social Worker has to follow the principle of individualization as against the practice of attributing to the victims the qualities of evaluative categories.

The social case worker was frequently told by the school that Kavita slept in class and was "lazy" in her responses and work. The case worker tried to understand Kavita's reasons for feeling sleepy in class by carefully checking her sleeping habits and identifying any concerns. Kavita was unable to fall asleep when she visited her home which was on the footpath and would stay awake all night because she was scared that people would hurt her. This disrupted her sleep cycle throughout the week, and made her sleep during class hours.

The social worker also discussed with the teacher about the need to communicate with children sensitively and not label them as "lazy". Over a period of time, Kavita was able to have a healthy sleeping routine through close support from the NCC staff and her social worker.

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Kavita had five other siblings who she had to look after during her free time. She did not like this and would often misplace her frustrations on them when she was having problems at school or with her friends. The NCC staff made her understand how to manage her emotions and also encouraged her mother to admit the other children to the NCC. She did this, and it relieved Kavita from caregiving and parenting responsibilities.

Behaviour modification efforts in Social Case Work are based on counselling, consent, education, and participation, and never based on force.



Kavita was told that she could become a member of the Children's Committee at the NCC if she was interested. The Social Case Worker felt this would improve her participation and interpersonal skills. When she expressed interest, she was also supported in choosing which committee she would like to join. She chose to be a member of the Child Protection Committee and expressed that she wanted to address issues of verbal abuse, physical violence, and child maltreatment in her community along with the other members of the Committee.

Social Case Work operates under a constellation of lofty values and principles which are democratic, egalitarian, and universal in nature. Children's right to participate in the decision-making processes affecting their life is one often underrated right among these rights.

Working Together, Learning Together

The lockdown induced by COVID-19 forced schools to switch over to the 'online' mode of education. Prerana helped Kavita to adapt to this mode and made learning resources like laptop, data packages etc. available to her. Prerana's study class teachers followed up with her on her studies during online learning to solidify the lessons.

In 2020, in a road accident Kavita lost her grandmother right before her eyes. This deeply disturbed her and as a result, her academic performance dropped. With the help, support and guidance of the Social Case Worker, the counsellor, her mother and her peers, Kavita was able to cope with her grief.

In 2022, she passed her 7th standard at the GMMC school and was admitted to a nearby private school in the 8th standard. Her social case worker was concerned

about her adjustment in the new school with new surroundings, especially because it had been observed in the past that she did not make friends easily. Her peers from her previous school were also not enrolled in this new school.

Her social worker gave her an orientation on the school, the new school schedule, and had a session with Kavita to ascertain whether she had any questions or concerns about transitioning to the new school. The social worker also met with the school teachers in person, and emphasised on the need to not share sensitive information about the child's behaviour. She also briefed the teacher about Kavita's recent transformation from a quiet, introverted child to a participative one. Kavita settled in well at her new school and made new friends within a week, much to the surprise of the social worker. She attended the study classes on a regular basis.

Ensuring Holistic Growth

Some of the activities that Kavita participated in since she was six years of age included Life Skills Education and Health sessions, puppet show, science club activities, newspaper reading, Ekta Gat activities, non-residential summer camp, Balak Utsav (where she performed on stage), dancing feet, stress management & career sessions. All of these sessions were conducted as part of the Education Support Program.

gifts towards the end of the month. This practice was evolved to ensure that students follow all the democratically determined rules and that discipline is maintained. The same exercise is expanded to ensure parents' participation as well. For this, children are encouraged to call their mothers and convey messages to them for attending meetings. The importance of communication with their mothers and engaging them in the activities that the children participate in is also pursued. This helps them form and maintain strong bonds with their mothers.

A Social Case Worker works on the web of natural social relations of the client. The activities, designed specially for the development of a child, form this matrix.

In the behaviour modification system followed in the study class, Kavita was always a recipient of many stars. There are six rules that are pre-decided by the group of children along with the staff. The children are expected to adhere to them; those who are compliant get star points from the teachers and other social workers. They get rewards in the form of

The family, and other primary relations form an important resource of a client along with the resources made available by the State and the society. The Social Case Worker mobilises all such resources of the client for making the benefits sustainable.

Today, the social workers find that Kavita's participation has improved from being a timid, stymied, scared child to a confident, assertive adolescent. With the help of her innate skills and motivations coupled with the guidance provided by Prerana, Kavita is now a confident adolescent who knows how to assert her own space, engage in forming interpersonal relationships, and participate actively in all the opportunities that are presented to her.



A Social Case Worker helps her client acquire behavioural attributes that result in the client adjusting to their problem situation and social environment in a sustained manner. The Social Case Worker also interacts with the social environment of her client with a clear focus on facilitating a better functional equation between the client and her environment.

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Published in March 2023

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