

Reena and Deepa's Journey Towards Stability



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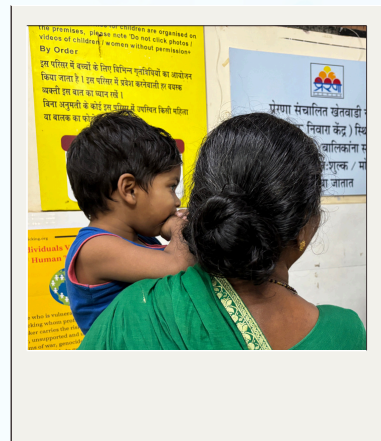
Background

In 2023, during a community outreach visit in Kamathipura, our team met Reena and her young daughter, Deepa. Reena was struggling with a painful reality—Deepa, just three years old, had started asking difficult questions about her mother’s life in the sex trade.

Reena wanted to shield her child from the world she was living in, but she was running out of ways to do so.

When we introduced her to Prerana’s Night Care Center (NCC), a safe space for children in high-risk environments, she saw a glimmer of hope. Within two days, she enrolled Deepa.

“She has started asking too many questions about my customers. Yesterday, she even wanted to come with me and a customer into the room. She cried so much, and I had to beat her. I felt terrible, but I had no choice. I don’t want her seeing me like this. She will be safe in the NCC,” shares Reena.



Prerana’s Night Care Centres were initiated as a response to the needs of mothers in the sex trade to keep their children safe during the night. The NCC provides services such as – protected shelter, wholesome nutrition, education support, safe play options, safe sanitation options, and opportunities for skill development, awareness sessions, and an overall platform for holistic personality development and growth.

A Life Shaped by Hardship

Reena's journey had never been easy. Born in Howrah, West Bengal, she grew up helping her mother on their small farm. **At just 12 years old, she moved to Mumbai to work as a housekeeper** for her maternal aunt in Malad, hoping to support her family. There, she fell in love with a coworker and got married in 2013, at 13 years old.

At first, things seemed hopeful. She became pregnant within five months, and her husband took her to his village for the delivery. **In 2014, she gave birth to a baby girl.** But soon, their marriage began to crumble. Arguments escalated, and eventually, her husband abandoned her and their newborn daughter, cutting all ties.

Struggling to provide for herself and her child, Reena desperately searched for work. **In 2015, a man from her village offered her a job in Mumbai—with one condition—she had to leave her daughter behind.** With no other option, she entrusted her child to her mother and moved to the city. That's when she was trapped. The man who had promised her work turned out to be a trafficker. He took her to Bhiwandi, where **she was confined to a lodge and sold for ₹1 lakh.**

She was not allowed to leave or meet anyone. Customers were sent to her, and while she was given a small sum of money to send home, she had no freedom.

"In Bhiwandi, I was kept in a *Pinjara* (a cage), not allowed to meet anyone or go out unescorted. Customers were sent to me in the lodge. **The pimp gave me money every week, which I sent to my mother.** I was allowed to call my mother to check on her and my daughter, but these calls were monitored.

The pimp and another woman provided my food, bought me clothes and toiletries, and covered my health expenses. At the time, I did not know how much they charged each customer. **"Sometimes, a customer would give me money, which I was allowed to keep,"** shares Reena.

By 2019, at just 19 years old, she was forced to work in a dance bar. It was there that she met **a customer who promised to rescue her** and give her a stable life. Clinging to that hope, she eloped with him. But instead of a fresh start, he took her to Kamathipura's red-light district.

In Kamathipura's RLA, Reena still remained in the sex trade. All that had changed was she could keep all the money after **paying rent to the brothel owner and a commission to the pimp** who brought her customers. In 2020, Deepa was born, and despite the circumstances, Reena wanted to give her a better future. But she remained trapped in the trade, trying to survive while also sending money back home to her first daughter and mother.

Our Intervention

When we met Reena and Deepa, we knew immediate action was needed. Our first priority was Deepa's well-being. However, **adjusting to the NCC was not easy for her.** She cried often, refused to interact, and ate only biscuits and chips, rejecting the nutritious meals provided.



Our caseworkers worked closely with Reena, discussing Deepa's nutrition and overall well-being. **Slowly, through engaging activities and educational videos, Deepa started adapting.** She watched, listened, and, little by little, began to embrace the healthier habits encouraged at the center. She moved on from biscuits and chips to fruits, idli, poha, egg, and rice.

Recognizing the importance of early education, we encouraged Reena to enroll Deepa in a Balwadi program run by Mumbai Smiles. With our assistance, Deepa was admitted, and soon, she began to flourish. **She became more social, greeted people with a warm "Namaste,"** and even expressed how safe she felt at Prerana. "This feels like home," she once told a staff member.



Legal Identity and Financial Security

During Deepa's admission process, we discovered **she had no identification documents.** Reena had an Aadhaar and PAN card, but Deepa had nothing official. Determined to secure her legal identity, our caseworkers accompanied Reena to multiple municipal wards, overcoming bureaucratic hurdles until they **successfully obtained her birth certificate and Aadhaar card.**

Reena also wanted to ensure financial security for Deepa. She had attended an orientation on the **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY) scheme** but hadn't been able to start an account. We found a donor to cover the initial deposit, and Reena committed to making small but regular contributions to keep the account active.

Steps Toward Stability

Beyond financial stability, we focused on empowering Reena as a mother and individual. **She actively participated in our mother's meetings, where she learned about child healthcare, parenting, and financial management.** She even joined art therapy sessions and group outings with Deepa.

To help her access essential resources, we assisted her in applying for a food card, which is currently being processed. Although she has yet to take full advantage of our Economic Rehabilitation Program, we continue to guide and support her, **encouraging her to build a stable and independent future.**

Application of Social Work Principles



Individualization

The caseworker acknowledged Reena and Deepa's unique experiences and needs. The social worker did not apply a generalized approach, instead, she assessed their specific challenges, fears, and aspirations.

Acceptance

Reena's past experiences, including her life in the dance bar, sex trade, and challenges in motherhood were met with non-judgmental support. This acceptance helped build trust and encouraged her active participation in interventions.



Self-Determination

Reena was provided with information and options rather than being thrust with decisions. For instance, she was given information about importance of pre-school for Deepa, she was guided towards economic rehabilitation programs but was given the space to make the decisions at her own pace.

A Transformative Journey

- **Deepa's Growth:** She has adjusted well to the NCC, eats nutritious meals, and enjoys learning.
- **Early Education Secured:** Deepa was enrolled in a Balwadi, ensuring structured learning and social development.
- **Legal Identity Established:** She now has her birth certificate and Aadhaar card, securing her access to future opportunities.
- **Financial Security Initiated:** A Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana account has been opened for her, with contributions in place.
- **Reena's Progress:** She has developed a stronger understanding of parenting, financial planning, and available support systems.



A Call For Continued Support



Reena's journey is far from over, but with continued guidance, both she and Deepa are **on a path toward a more secure and hopeful future**. Their story is a testament to how early intervention, legal documentation, financial inclusion, and community support can transform lives.

At Prerana, we believe in long-term, sustainable change. With the right resources and unwavering commitment, we can help more women like Reena **break free from cycles of exploitation and provide their children with brighter futures**.

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