



The place where we
live is called
a red-light area

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The drawings on the cover are self-portraits of the children from the Kalighat and Sonagachchi red-light areas of Kolkata. The book has been made possible with their drawings, stories and essays. Their names have been changed and identities concealed for reasons of confidentiality.

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The place where we
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an apne aap women worldwide project





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To the sons of Rangaroo
laughing is taboo.
A funny tale will make them wail:
‘We’re not amused, boo-hoo!’

They live in constant fear
Of chuckles far and near
And start and bound at every sound
That brings a breath of cheer.

(from Sukumar Ray’s *Abol Tabol*)

Introduction

Children affected by trafficking for prostitution face high levels of violence every day. They undergo the trauma of watching their mothers being abused, raped and beaten. They face sexual abuse themselves. They are often forced to fend for themselves on the streets at night or day while their mothers are being exploited. Some experience death in the form of AIDS while others lose their mothers. Sometimes their friends and extended families are affected by AIDS. They and their families face police abuse, extortion, money lending, and alcoholism. Yet they want to. . . go to school, grow up, live in a nice house, have a job and protect their mothers.

This is their story articulated both in small essays and sensitive drawings. “The place where we live is called a red-light area” is an advocacy project by Apne Aap Women Worldwide, supported by the West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society and developed by the children of Paschim Banga Krira O Janakalyan Parishad and Deepika Social Welfare Trust, from the red-light areas of Kalighat and Sonagachchi in Kolkata. Apne Aap Women Worldwide runs five community centres in red-light areas and slums all over India to prevent the trafficking of women and children.

It is a project developed by children to:

- a) End the demand for trafficked and prostituted children by making men read about the consequences of their demands.
- b) End the stigma and discrimination perpetrated against children by men.
- c) Help adult policy-makers develop interventions for children affected by trafficking for prostitution.

This is a first step. The project evolved even as Apne Aap’s facilitators learned from the children during the workshops. We hope to work with more children and develop more sophisticated tools as we go along. Read on. Listen. Think of the children.

RUCHIRA GUPTA

Chair

Apne Aap Women Worldwide

Message

Today children are exploited in various ways all over the world—for prostitution, pornography, forced labour in hazardous industries, domestic servitude, bonded labour, child soldiers and for petty crime.

Children are increasingly being seen as marketable assets by many adults, sometimes even close relatives. Poverty, unemployment, utter desperation and the demand for trafficked children drive this phenomenon. What is extremely worrying is that due to this violence, children are being increasingly impacted by HIV and AIDS.

It is common knowledge that young people are trafficked into the sex industry due to a myth that sex with children will cure the sexual offender of sexually transmitted infections or that children are largely free from sexual infections, and therefore less of an HIV and AIDS risk for the sexual offender. These children, already traumatized by the process of trafficking, are raped repeatedly and are extremely vulnerable to the threat of HIV and AIDS. ILO-IPEC has estimated that 15% of India's 2.3 million people in the sex industry are children. It adds that to meet the demands of a growing sex industry even children from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Nepal are recruited. In fact, nearly 80% of those in the sex industry were minors when they were first pulled in.

This documentation is an attempt to capture the feelings of the children who have gone through many unmentionable psychological and social ordeals either because they were trafficked or because their mothers were trafficked. Sadly, the shadow of HIV and AIDS is looming large over these children now. Society should work together to protect these children and not turn away from them.



S SURESH KUMAR

Project Director

West Bengal State Aids Prevention and Control Society



Those who made it happen. . .

- Project concept and design *Ruchira Gupta*
- Programme architect and facilitator *Apne Aap Women Worldwide (AAWW)*
- Partners *Children of Paschim Banga Krira O Jana Kalyan Parishad (PBKOJP)*
and *Deepika Social Welfare Trust*
- Book design *Ajoy John*
- Supported by *West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society*

Did you know that . . .

NDIA is a signatory to the UN Convention on the *Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others* (2000), and the supplementary convention on the abolition of slavery, the slave trade and institutions and practices of slavery . . .

And yet, according to the National Human Rights Commission (India) Report, 2004 . . .

- 44.3 % women were drawn into prostitution as children
- 45.5 % of the men who buy women in prostitution are married
- 60% of the cases of trafficking go unreported as stated by police officers
- 50 million girls and women are missing from India's population, the result of systemic sex-based violence
- The Indian government estimates 5.2 million people live with HIV/AIDS in India
- India's explosive AIDS epidemic goes hand in hand with widespread abuses against children who are affected by HIV/AIDS

We know so little. . .

A pne Aap Women Worldwide circulated questionnaires (given below) among a wide cross-section of people in Kolkata, West Bengal, in order to gauge the level of awareness among children as well as adults on topics related to trafficking and HIV/AIDS. A sample size of a 100 adults and 100 children were chosen for the exercise.

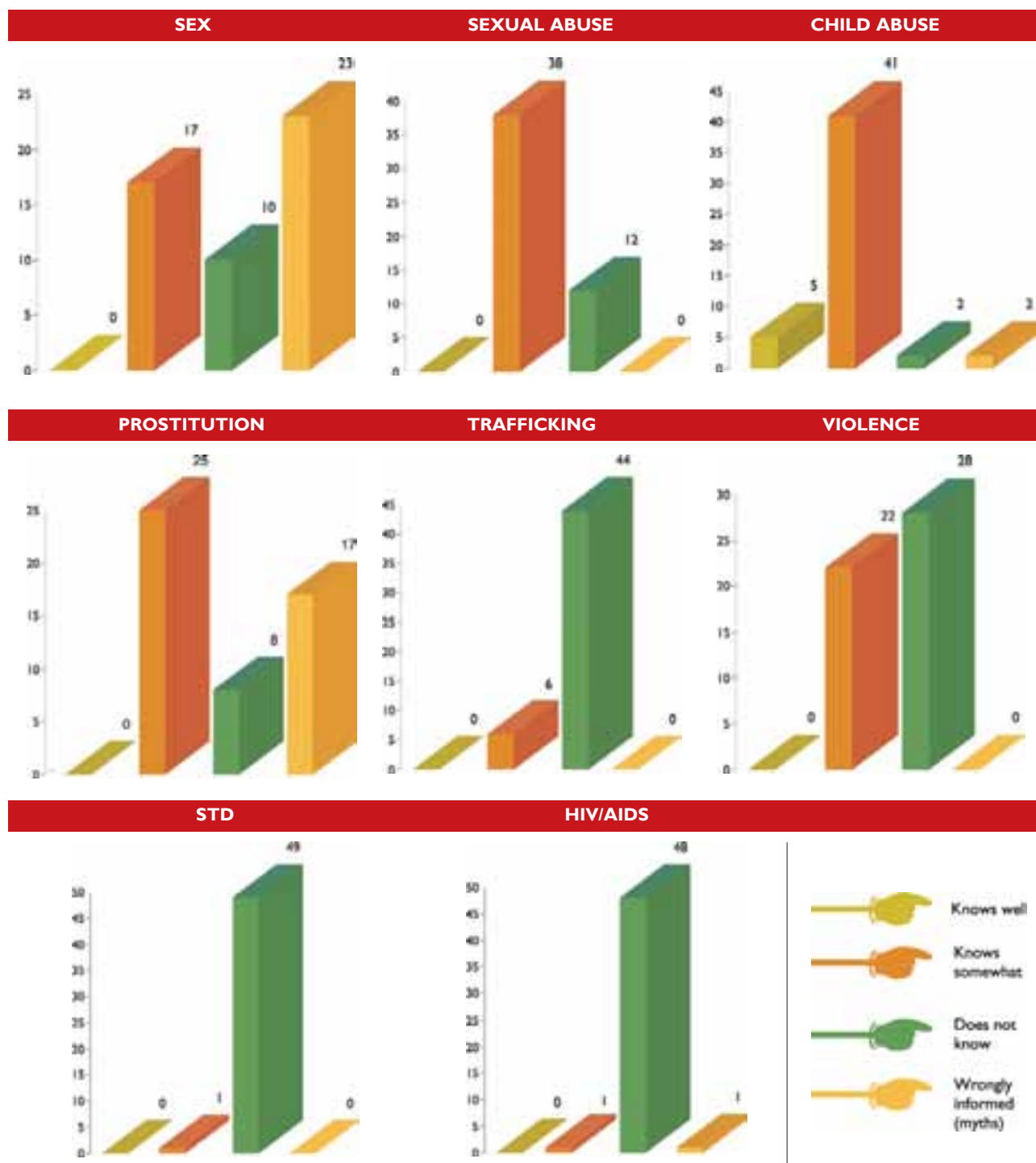
কলকাতা শহরে বাস করা ১০০ জনের উপর প্রশ্নাবলী
কলকাতা শহরে বাস করা ১০০ জনের উপর প্রশ্নাবলী

	Issues	Knows well	Knows somewhat	Does not know	Wrongly informed (myths)
1	SEX	0	17	10	23
2	SEXUAL ABUSE	0	38	12	0
3	CHILD ABUSE	5	41	2	2
4	PROSTITUTION	0	25	8	17
5	TRAFFICKING	0	6	44	0
6.	VIOLENCE	0	22	28	0
7	STD	0	1	49	0
8	HIV/AIDS	0	1	48	1

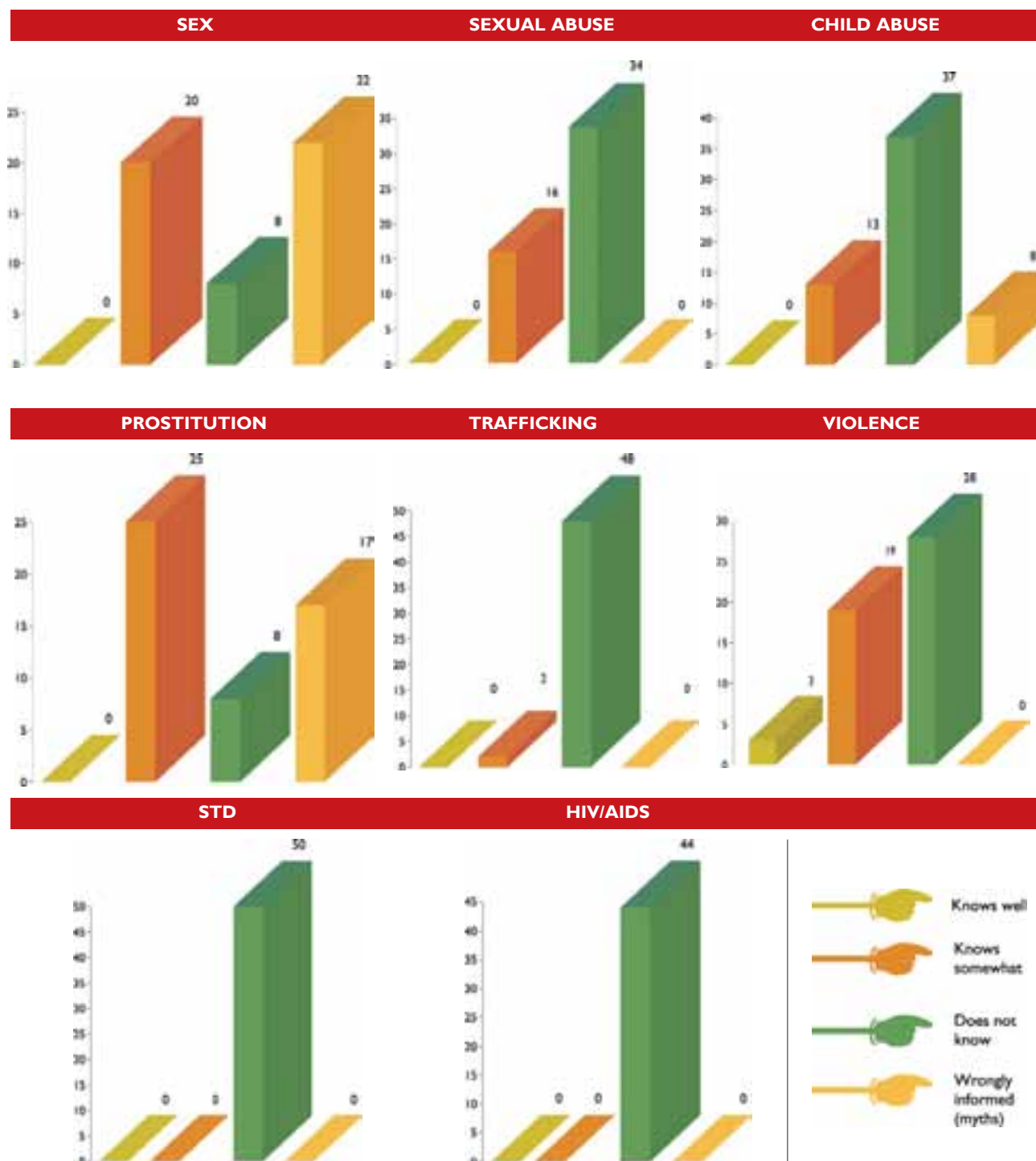
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কলকাতা শহরে বাস করা ১০০ জনের উপর প্রশ্নাবলী

	Issues	Knows well	Knows somewhat	Does not know	Wrongly informed (myths)
1	SEX	0	20	8	22
2	SEXUAL ABUSE	0	16	34	0
3	CHILD ABUSE	0	13	37	8
4	PROSTITUTION	0	25	8	17
5	TRAFFICKING	0	2	48	0
6.	VIOLENCE	3	19	28	0
7	STD	0	0	50	0
8	HIV/AIDS	0	0	44	0

Results of the adult questionnaire (figures in %)



Results of the youth questionnaire (figures in %)



UN PROTOCOL ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS


a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used . . .


—

Article 3, paragraph (a) of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Trafficking is. . .	By means of. . .	For the purpose of exploitation that includes. . .
recruitment	threat	prostitution
transportation	use of force	other forms of sexual exploitation
transfer	coercion	forced labour or services
harbouring	abduction	slavery or practices similar to slavery
receipt	fraud	servitude
	deception	removal of organs
	abuse of power	
	abuse of position of vulnerability	
	giving or receiving payments or benefits	
When any one of the elements from each of the three columns above can be applied together to the situation of an individual, the individual is considered to be 'trafficked'		
Source: Training chart by A2W2 (www.apneaap.org)		

 *And now we will tell
you what the
children know. . .*

This is what we found out

 NCE upon a time there was this bunch of kids growing up in a place that was decidedly not the best place to grow up in. Stumbling on towards adulthood, many of these children learned the hard way that it was their address, their neighbourhood, that set them apart from their peers. People sneered at them when they learned where they lived, friends refused to visit their homes. Every evening, their neighbours, and sometimes even the women in their families, went to stand out on the streets and bring home male customers.

When *Apne Aap Women Worldwide* organized a series of workshops for children living in the red light areas of Kalighat and Sonagachchi, the project drew an overwhelming response. Children bunked school and tuitions to attend, they dragged their parents to introduce them to their newfound *didis*, and displayed an understanding and sensitivity well beyond their years. They talked, they wrote, they drew—they unburdened their little hearts with abandon. And as the sessions wore on, the children expanded on their feelings and thoughts on topics such as violence, abuse, prostitution, stigma, trafficking and HIV/AIDS with a perspicacity that amazed all.

Traditional counseling and therapy proved insufficient to deal with the magnitude of devastation in the lives of children living in red light areas. They face abuse, violence, stigma and discrimination on a daily basis and are hence unable to articulate and externalize their experiences.

Apne Aap Women Worldwide facilitated an interactive advocacy and counselling project with children in red-light areas to write books articulating their feelings, hopes and desires.

A non-intrusive approach worked best. It encouraged the children to reveal information



“We attended the session on trafficking assuming the children would be reluctant to talk about its impact on their lives. We realized how wrong our assumption was as soon as the word was mentioned.”

MAHUA BASAK AND ERIN HUFFER (FACILITATORS)

The three principal sessions of the project

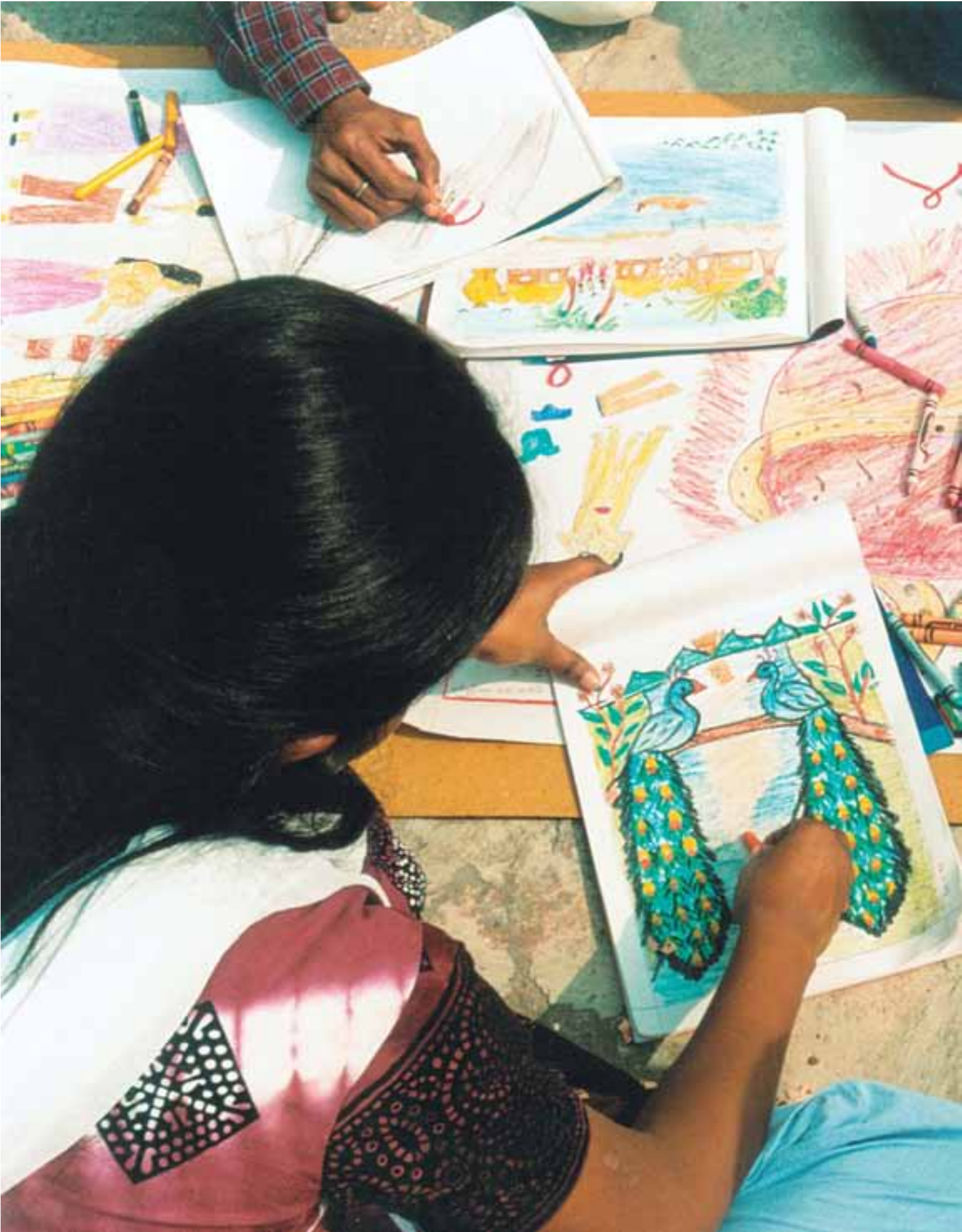
SESSION 1	SESSION 2	SESSION 3
Time frame: 3 weeks, 2-3 hour sessions	Time frame: 2 weeks, 2-3 hour sessions	Time frame: 10 sessions over 2-week period, each 2-3 hours in length
Participants: 39 children between ages 5 and 16.	Participants: 12 children between ages 8 and 16	Participants: 12 children between ages 13 and 15
Structure: Content and structure included drawings on focus topics and interviews.	Structure: Content and structure consisted of individual writings and drawings from each child on stories of his/her choice. Ice-breaking sessions, one-on-one interaction (facilitators with children) and in-depth interviews were used to enhance the quality of each story from each child.	Structure: Content and structure consisted of discussion, writing and drawing on the following topics—HIV/AIDS, Abuse and Violence, Prostitution and Trafficking. Interviews and one-on-one interactions (facilitators with children) were used to enhance material.
Material produced: Drawings and descriptions of ideal living environments and in-depth interviews on prostitution/violence and stigma in the red-light areas	Material produced: Pictures and drawings on ideal living environments and profiles about their lives and some individual stories.	Material produced: Detailed profile of each child and his/her life, knowledge, feelings and thoughts on topics. Detailed drawings on topics, mainly scenes depicting violence, prostitution and HIV/AIDS

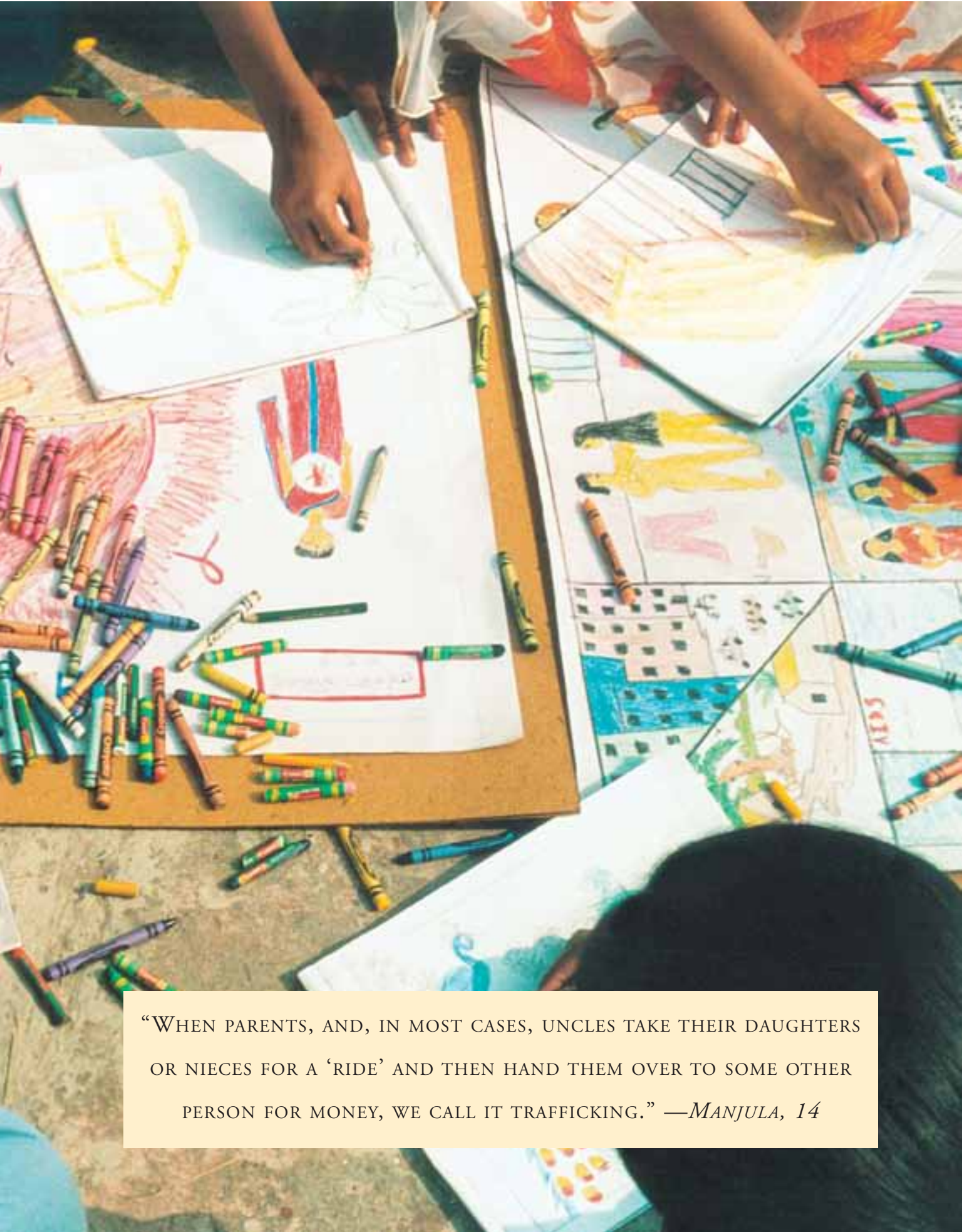
about themselves without feeling threatened. In fact, the project proved to be a liberating and cathartic experience for them. This is because we followed the core ethical principles of:

- Respect for the dignity and imagination of each workshop participant
- Prior informed consent of each participant

The steps

Phase 1	Research
Phase 2	Design of program
Phase 3	Identification of capacity of NGOs and children
Phase 4	Familiarisation and ice breaking with the children
Phase 5	Bookmaking
Phase 6	Analysis and publication





“WHEN PARENTS, AND, IN MOST CASES, UNCLES TAKE THEIR DAUGHTERS OR NIECES FOR A ‘RIDE’ AND THEN HAND THEM OVER TO SOME OTHER PERSON FOR MONEY, WE CALL IT TRAFFICKING.” —*MANJULA, 14*

The monster in our midst

SEX TRAFFICKING

We attended the session on sex trafficking assuming the children would be reluctant to talk about its impact on their lives. We realized how wrong our assumption was as soon the word was mentioned. Although just children, their familiarity and understanding of sex trafficking was so acute that they even had their own definitions.

Their knowledge of trafficking did not flow as freely as the conversations on other subjects. It came out in bits and pieces often surfacing in the middle of another story. This was especially so with the younger children who spoke only about the subject during a group interview. We were talking about their daily activities, likes and dislikes, etc, when suddenly a 9-year-old girl burst into the room with the news that people “dressed like policemen were picking up children from the alley.” All the other children’s eyes widened, they sat forward and couldn’t seem to add enough to this story. We learned that girl children were often kidnapped from the area and sent to “a faraway place like Delhi”.

Were the the children scared? No one, not even the youngest of the group (5 years) gave so much as a nod. We got the impression that this was just a part of their lives that had to be dealt with. A girl, when asked whether she was scared to come to the sessions, said she travelled alone and no, she was not scared.

More than one story was told of the mothers and women of the area fighting back the traffickers and chasing them away with brooms. In the midst of all this came stories of sadness and joy, of dreams and anguish.

Despite the nightmarish monster of trafficking in their world, these children are not pulling the covers over their heads. They are determined to live their lives to the fullest. Their strength and resolve in the face of fear itself was not forced but a natural resilience that has grown stronger with each passing day.

The following stories and drawings on trafficking, violence, HIV/AIDS, death and dreams are a strong testimony to their courage and ingenuity in fighting back.

—*Mahua Basak and Erin Huffer, facilitators*



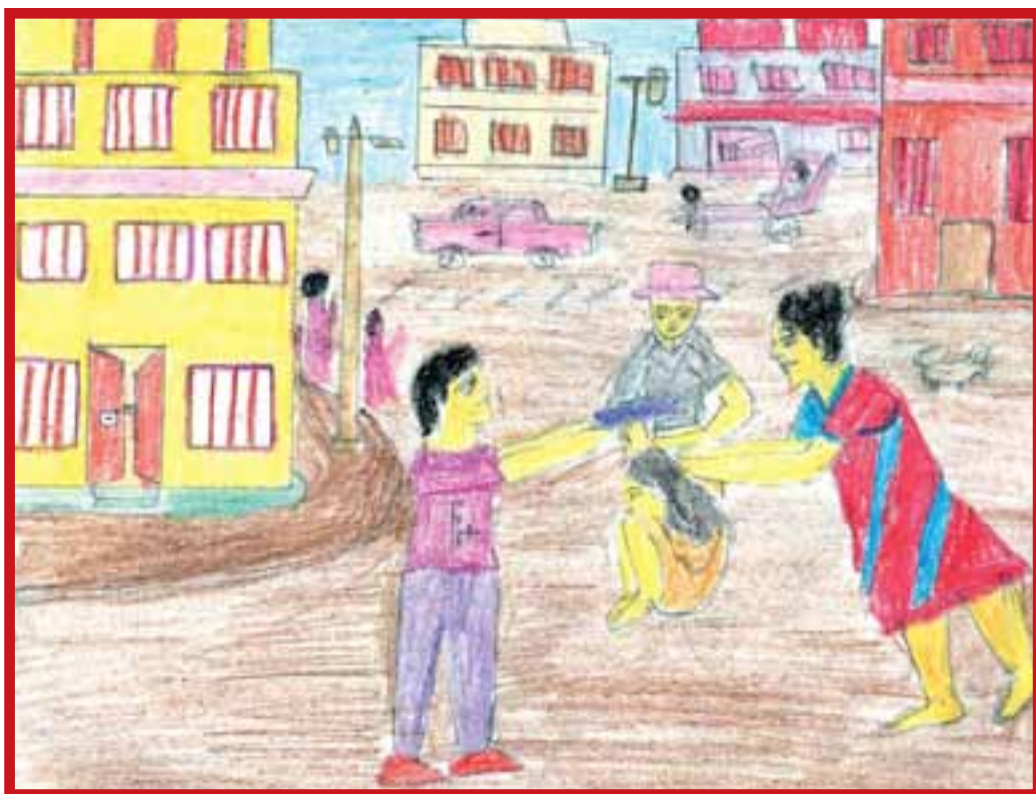
By trafficking I mean taking women and children away from their homes for sale. . . When parents, and in most cases, uncles, take their daughters or nieces for a ‘ride’ and then hand them over to some other person for money, we call it trafficking.

“I’ll tell you about an incident in my life. I used to go to my aunt’s place to study. She often sent me to the local shop to fetch things for her. One day it was 12 noon when I reached my aunt’s place. She sent me to the shop. There was no one on the road. I was on my way back from the shop when suddenly a man emerged from a lane and lifted me up. I started screaming and kicking. That frightened him. He dropped me and fled. I had the scare of my life that day.” —*Manjula, 14*



*“By trafficking I mean taking women and children
away from their homes for sale.”*

— MANJULA, 14



The other day I saw an incident. There was a girl who studied in our school. But she left school after she was pulled into this kind of activity. We never knew that she was involved in trafficking of women and children until that incident happened. She had a friend in our locality. That day she came and called her friend. When the friend came, she offered to take her to her maternal uncle's place. But friend's father overheard them talking. He came forward and challenged her, "Why do you want to take her to your maternal uncle's place?" She got a bit scared and said, "Just like that." But her friend's father had a feeling that this girl was trouble and so he asked, "Where is your maternal uncle's place?" The girl didn't know what to say. She was afraid because she knew that he was a very angry person. He then took the girl to a corner and told her that he would give her a flogging if she did not tell the truth. The girl confessed that it was her maternal uncle who had got her out of school and involved her in trafficking. Her friend's father got so angry that he thought of handing her over to the police. However, because she was just a little girl, he asked her to take him to her uncle. He promised to expose his misdeeds if he did not agree to give up the trade. The girl is now engaged in some good work. She makes hand-crafted items for a living. —*Rimi, 15*



Trafficking, I think, is the act of secretly and forcibly moving little children, young boys and girls, from one country to another. Our locality is a red-light area. Most of the girls who get trafficked into our locality are from Bangladesh. They have no idea about the place they have come to or the path they will be forced to walk. Their husbands bring them to this world of darkness. They do not understand the ways of this place. Their husbands rent a room here, purchase a few essential things for daily use, leave the girls there and go away. Sometimes they share the same room with other girls of the locality. The newcomers ask the experienced, “What do you do for living?” The girls say, “We’re ‘sex workers’. From now on, you’ll also be a ‘sex worker’.” The trafficked girls want to know the meaning of ‘prostitution’. The girls try to make them understand, but it is often beyond their comprehension. Then they start bringing men and do not allow these girls to leave their rooms lest they flee. They threaten the girls until they accept the fact that they are ‘sex workers’. —*Anjali*, 16

WE live in a society where we hear of so many queer incidents. Both boys and girls get trafficked. Little children who do not even know the names of their parents are caught and trafficked. These children are then trained to become pickpockets, touts, thieves and robbers. The girls are sold outside the country. Family members like uncles, aunts, and even parents, sell their children to foreign countries for a small amount of money.

Some years ago, when the word 'trafficking' could be heard quite often, a girl in our locality called Mamoni had a friend called Pamela who was involved in trafficking. Pamela lived with her aunt who trained her in this activity. One day Pamela came and asked Mamoni to go for a walk with her. Mamoni said, "I must tell my father." Mamoni's father, Oshthe, is one of my uncles. Oshthe uncle asked Pamela, "Where do you want to take her?" Pamela could not answer. People in our locality suspected Pamela of being involved in trafficking. My uncle asked for her telephone number. When Pamela gave it, he called up the number and spoke to her parents who said, "Pamela does not live here. She lives with her aunt." Then Oshthe uncle insisted that Pamela take him to her aunt's place. Pamela had to agree. Uncle called a taxi and asked Pamela to hop in. On the way, Pamela suddenly asked the driver to stop and started shouting, "Help! Help! This man has raped me!" A crowd gathered. No one bothered to listen to what my uncle had to say but beat him up black and blue. But any way, Mamoni was saved from getting trafficked. —*Mili, 14*

TRAFFICKING means selling out. Outsiders are not the only ones responsible for trafficking. Often we find cases where people close to the family take part in such activities. There are mothers who do it for money. Uncles and neighbours too play a vital role in trafficking.

Sometimes little children are trafficked and then engaged in theft, robbery and other criminal activities. They are trafficked before they reach the age of maturity. Naturally, when they grow into thieves and robbers they forget everything about their origin. —*Piyali, 13*



“I have not seen a trafficking incident. So I do not know much about it. I have heard about how they do it. Whether it is a woman or a child they sell them for money. They ask the simple girls to go with them for an outing. Some men and women are involved in trafficking. They take these simple girls out from their homes and sell them for large sums of money. . . There are people who even sell off women and children of their family. Sometimes it is a maternal uncle or even a mother. These helpless women and children are then forced to get involved in some kind of bad work. They do not want to do it, but they are forced. And there are people who force their daughters—their own daughters—to get into a physical relationship. Yes, there are such people on this earth.” —*Ruma, 15*



“There are people who even sell off women and children of their family. Sometimes it is a maternal uncle or even a mother.”

—RUMA, 15



A trafficker is a person who hands over boys and girls to other people in exchange of money. They have large factories in Delhi and America. These factories engage five and six-year-old boys and girls. They are so young that I doubt if they can spell their parents' names and addresses. They are sold again, when they are older. Young boys and girls are trafficked this way. —*Abhimanyu*, 15



The place where we live is called a red-light area. Most people hate us if they come to know that we live in this locality. Many people know us to be good girls, but when they see us entering our lane, they think we are bad. All those who live outside this area never allow their children to enter our lane. Their parents say: "If you enter that lane, you'll also become bad like them." And if girls in our school want to come to my home, I tell them not to do so because I know our locality is not good. But I wish, when I grow up, to take my parents and other members of my family to another place. But I know that those who stand below the street lamps do not do it by choice. They have to do it to fill their stomachs. But I have a wish to stop this and get them some good work. For this they must have education. They must be given training in different skills. I wish to teach them, train them and work to make our environment better. —*Pammi, 14*



Of mothers and wounds

PROSTITUTION AND VIOLENCE

With prostitution comes violence of the most horrifying kind. When asked to draw pictures of violence, most of the children came up with graphic images of women being raped and beaten, of men being knifed or clubbed, and of policemen with batons. The pictures spoke volumes about the fact that for most of these kids, violence was not too far away.

The effect on them is immeasurable and inspires many stories and pictures about “sadness”. When talking about prostitution with the children we find that sadness always appears somewhere in the picture. The children are saddened and perhaps more than anything burdened with keeping the big “secret” that every day women must be pressured into prostitution for the survival of their children and themselves.

The accounts prove that the consequences of prostitution escape no one, not even children. All the children in the workshops, especially the girls, had grown up learning not to reveal where they lived for fear it would affect everything, from their parents’ job, their choice of friends, to the school they were allowed to attend.

Despite the stigma and “bad name” prostitution gives to their neighborhood the children are amazingly sympathetic in their views towards the women. None of the children wished to inflict any punishment on the women. If given a choice most of the kids said they would like to help the women find some other kind of work. They know that “those who stand below the street lamps do not do it by choice. They have to do it to fill their stomachs”.

—*Mahua Basak, facilitator*



From the day I opened my eyes in this world, I've seen trouble at home. My father drinks, creates all sorts of problems and beats up everyone in the family. But my mother and granny remain silent. No one dare hit him because my granny loves him very much.

My granny went from temple to temple praying to the gods to cure her son of this evil habit. And then one day, finally, realization dawned on my father. "My mother takes so much pain only to cure me," he thought. From that day he gave up drinking. Now he works hard so that we can get a good education and hold our heads high in society.

—*Manjula*, 14



The people living in our locality have very bad manners. They are quarrelsome and use bad language. They never behave properly with any person. . . By people in our locality, we mean our neighbours. They pick up quarrels over trifles. They quarrel over water. They quarrel in the morning and they quarrel in the evening. If this is what our own neighbours are like, how can we blame outsiders? My parents, brother, sister-in-law and every other member of the family quarrel with our neighbours all the time. If our own people behave like this, why should we blame our neighbours?

Abuses, brawls, quarrels continue from morning till the night. I, along with a few others, am always thinking of ways to put an end to this menace. But I do not know how to do it. If we go and ask them to stop, they will start fighting with us. They will use bad words and create trouble for us. But I do not like fights or quarrels. Not at all. Our next-door neighbours are quarreling all the time. This disturbs the other neighbours. The ruckus prevents children in our neighbourhood home from doing their studies properly. I do not like to live in such an atmosphere. We should never quarrel among ourselves. We should share a good relationship with each other. But if no one wants to listen to us, how can we stop this quarrel mongering? How can we change this situation? —*Aradhana, 14*



‘They come dressed like policemen’

Children: The police are taking all the children. They have taken five of the children.

Facilitator: The police?

Children: Yes. If children go to Boxer Gully, they are picked up by the police. This is happening everyday.

Facilitator: Why?

Children: They are not the police, but they dress up like the police and pick up girl children from the gully. They take the children to Delhi. They hand

over the children to other people.

Facilitator: Are you scared?

Seema: My mother is scared and all the mothers are sending the children to the village next Monday. I am also going to the village.

Facilitator: How old are the girls who are taken away?

Children: Between the ages of four-and-a-half and 15.

Facilitator: Do the police know?

Seema: The people of the area spoke to the O.C. at Bhatawala Police Station. But he said, “We can’t help it if they are using our dress and coming as policemen.”

Facilitator: Are children now afraid to play outside?

Lopa: Earlier I used to go and bring tea from the shop, but now I don’t go. My mother goes.

Facilitator: How did you get here today?

Lopa: I came alone, I am not scared to come here.

Seema: Yesterday, too, the police came and picked up a few girls from Boxer Gully. The women of the area ran after the police with brooms.

Facilitator: When do they come?

Lopa: When the road is lonely. I roam here and there, so I see them quite often.

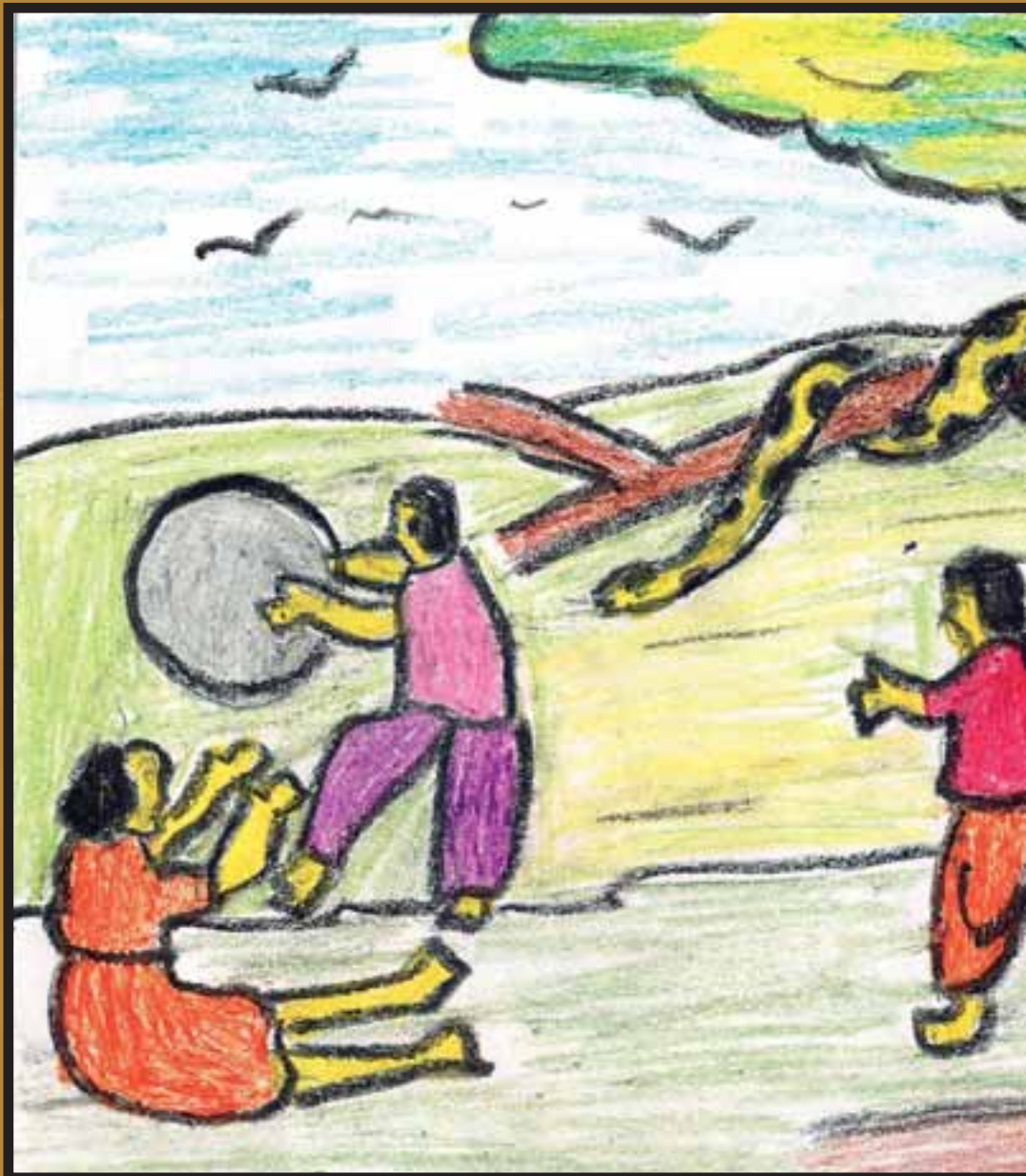
Seema: If someone is new they pick them up.

Can the police protect us?

When I was in Class V, there was a man who would regularly visit our school. When we called auntie, he escaped. When she got back to her work, the man appeared again. We told auntie about it. She informed the police. Following the incident, the police was posted at our school for a few days.

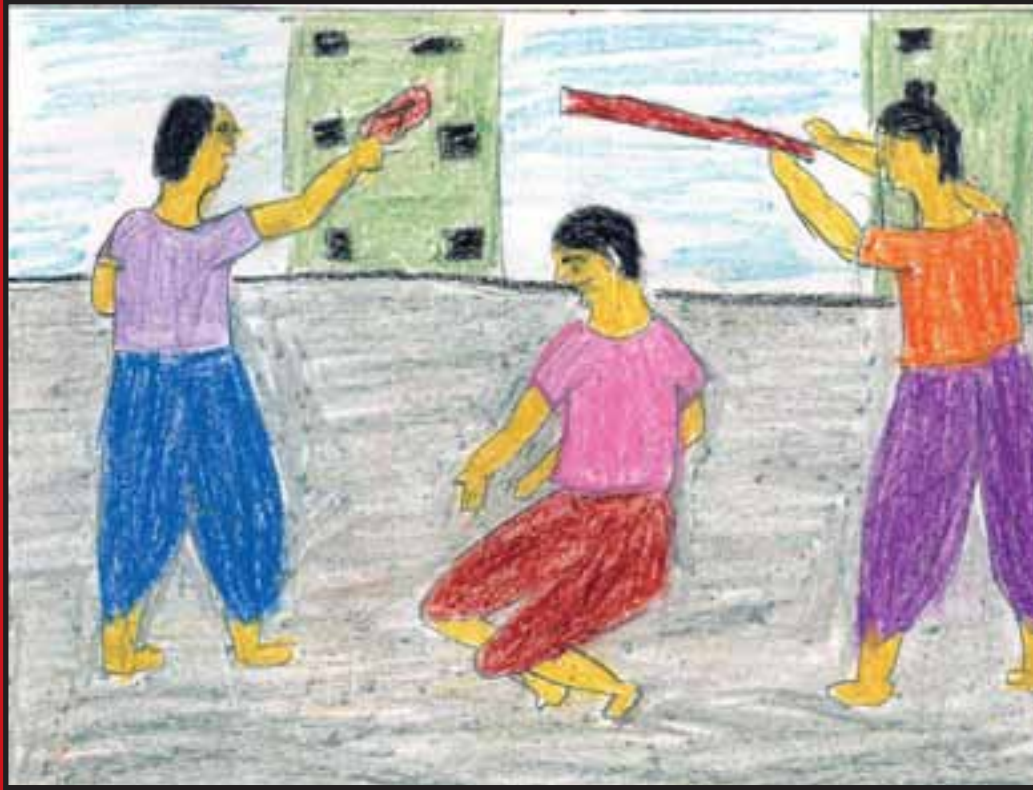
—Piyali, 13







I believe there is no use calling the police. Instead of helping the women they create all sorts of trouble for them. The only thing we can do is to unite all the people and lodge a complaint in the court. We can also appeal to the government. Only then can we close down this red-light area.
—*Aradhana, 14*



*"The red-light area is bad because it causes AIDS.
The disease spreads through the women who do bad
work here. I would like to close it down to stop
AIDS and the bad work."*

—ARADHANA, 14

When the test is positive

HIV AND AIDS

HIV/AIDS is an immediate reality. Though all of them had heard about the disease, most didn't know how it was contracted and its consequences. A few thought it to be an infectious disease. Some felt it could be related to alcohol. When they were asked to describe the virus, most of them said it resembled a snake or an amoeba. All of them were convinced that its colour was red.

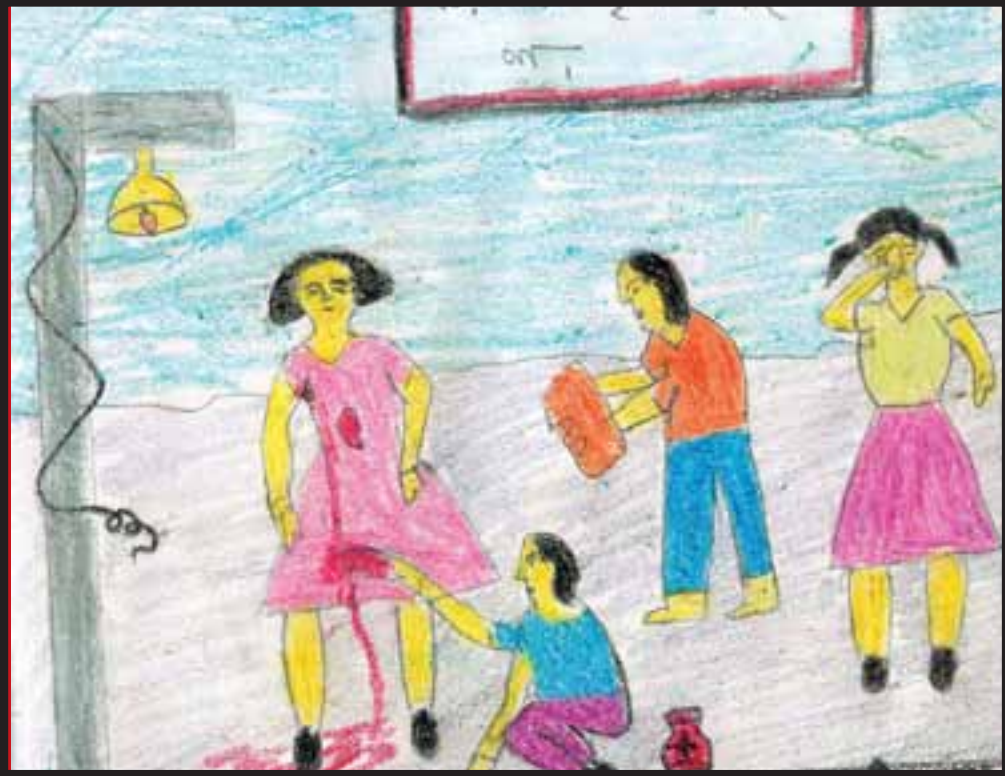
The more enlightened among them had a working knowledge of the disease. "AIDS," said one child, "may be of various types. If I am not careful I may have AIDS. AIDS spreads through blood. No person can live long with AIDS. AIDS may be cured only if it is detected at an early stage. AIDS can spread in various ways. There are many rules about this. It is wise to obey these rules, because AIDS is a very bad disease."

The one common sentiment that echoed among the children was that HIV/AIDS patients must never be left to fend for themselves but must be looked after. "After all they are human beings".

The most tragic cases were the ones whose parents had contracted the disease. They hated their parents for getting infected but their natural love and the pain they felt for them was heart-wrenching. And the fear of being orphaned by AIDS was always uppermost in their minds.

"My father has AIDS," said one of them. "When I heard about it, I was very angry at my father. I suspected that he had been to some woman in the red-light area. Now anyone in my family may get infected by my father. I know it is got through blood. But I really do wish that my father is cured as quickly as possible. I believe that it is possible as it has been detected at a very early stage. And if someone in my family or outside has this disease, I wish that he or she gets cured too".

—Mahua Basak, facilitator



One of the boys in our locality had AIDS. No one knew about it. The boy, too, did not know. We had a blood donation camp in our locality on the occasion of Kali Puja. The boy had gone there to donate blood. The doctors there examined his blood and refused to accept it. Then everyone came to know that he had AIDS. From that day, hardly any person has spoken to him. Most of the people avoid him. But there is one boy who did not stop talking to him. The mother of this boy and all the neighbours asked him not to do so. But the boy said, “Why should I not talk to him? Isn’t he a human being? If all of you behave in this way, how will he get cured? Please take him to the doctor and try to cure him.” —*Piyali, 13 years*

If we know of someone with AIDS, we should not hate that person. We should look after that person till his last day. But if we want to help a person who has AIDS, our parents and family will never allow us to do so.

If we want to say 'no' to AIDS, we should first unite. Then we must organise a group where many women will participate. We should try to make them understand that they should not hate an AIDS victim. They should take that person to the doctor, give medicines and take good care of him. Many people do not know about the disease. The group should take steps to raise awareness, maybe by printing posters or writing in newspapers or organizing a programme on television.

When I grow up, I want to make the people in our locality aware of AIDS. I want to be a doctor and start an organisation. I want to tell everyone that they should be careful about the members of their family, their locality. Instead of hatred, they should try and offer help to every victim of AIDS.

If anyone in my family has AIDS and, especially if it is my mother, I would be the saddest person on earth. Because I know no one can live long with AIDS. And if our neighbours come to know about it they would hate my mother and would not allow anyone to visit our place. I would be very angry with my mother too as I would suspect her of being involved in prostitution. This is because no one in my family has AIDS.

But if I know that my mother has this disease, I would not leave her alone. I would try to help her live as long as possible. I would take her to the doctor, give her the prescribed medicines and keep her in a separate room so that the disease does not spread in the locality. —Manjula, 13 yrs



“The red-light area is bad because it causes AIDS. The disease spreads through the women who do bad work here. I would like to close it down to stop AIDS and the bad work.”

—ARADHANA, 14

If someone in our locality has HIV/AIDS, our parents and neighbours say, “Do not go to that person. You may get AIDS.” But this is not right. If someone has AIDS, he should not be left alone, because that person is also a human being like you and me. So do not hate a victim of AIDS.

My father has AIDS. When I heard about it, I was very angry with him. I suspected that he had been to some woman in the red-light area who had given him the disease. Anyone in my family may get the disease from my father. But I do want to get my father cured. I believe that it is possible, as it has been detected at a very early stage. And if someone in my family or outside has this disease, I wish to get him or her cured too.

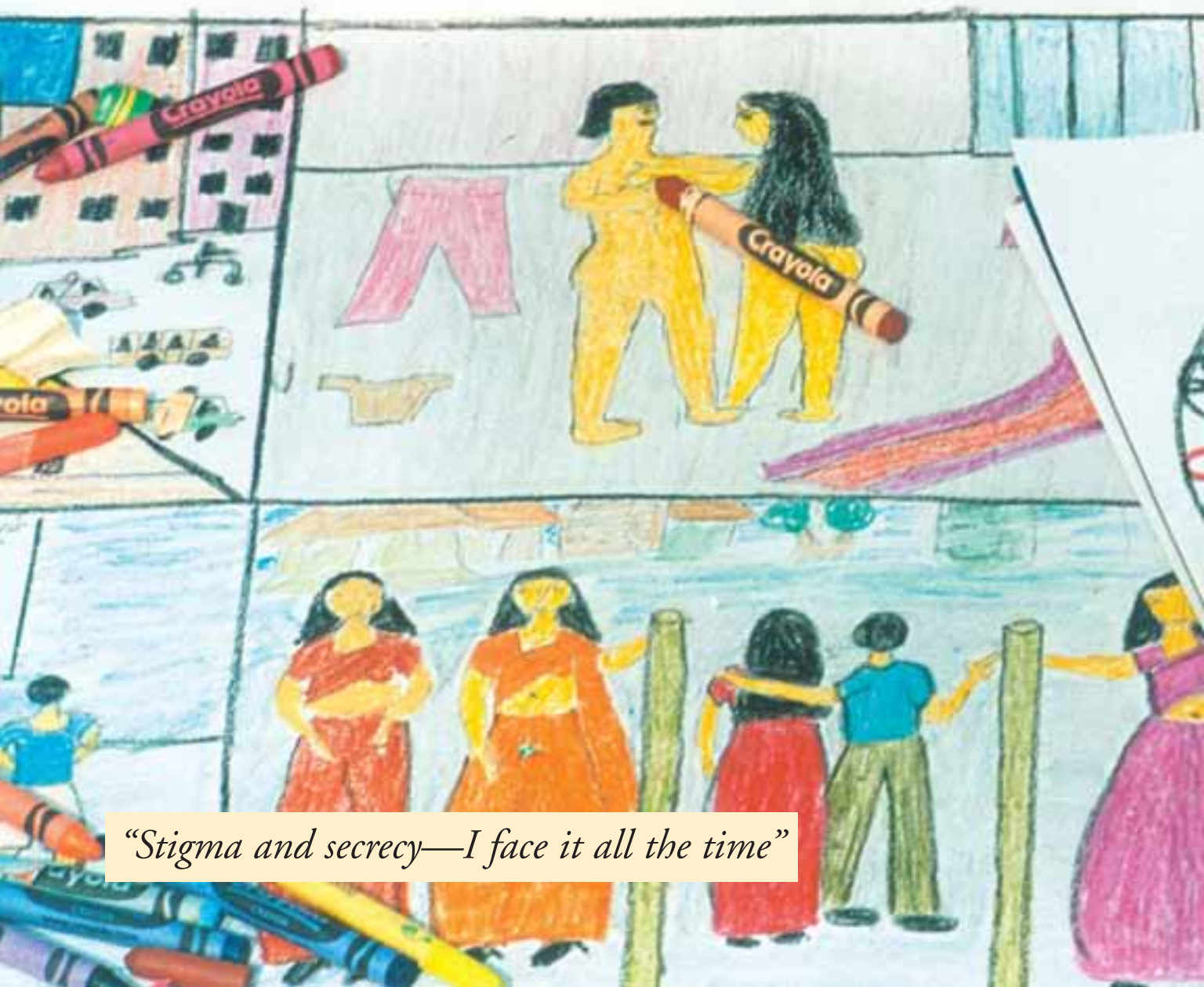
If I wish to work on AIDS, the people in my locality would not accept it. Everyone would have only one word to say—you will not go and mix with those people. They would object strongly to the very idea. — *Aradhana, 14*

I live in an area where people buy prostituted sex. But I cannot say or do anything about it. If I tell them that they should not buy sex or at least use a condom when they do so, they start abusing me. I have told my mother and other women about the danger of AIDS. But they say, “How can we say ‘No’? How will we survive?” My family says I am “talking of things beyond my age”.

After I grow up, if I work for an organization, I want to use my work as a platform to stop men from buying sex. I wish to become a doctor and work for society. The men who buy prostituted sex must be made aware of the consequences of their desire and actions. After I become a doctor, I will open a clinic in this area and spread awareness. — *Mili, 14*



“There are many different types of people in our locality. Most of them are not good people. If someone in our locality has AIDS, no one will tolerate it or keep in touch with him. This is not right. We must not hate a victim of AIDS. If someone among us has AIDS, will you hate that person? We are human beings. So we must all help each other. So don't hate an HIV victim. Then they also will not hate you. You love them and they will love you. If someone has AIDS, make arrangements for that person's treatment.” —*Feroze, 14*



"Stigma and secrecy—I face it all the time"



The place where I live. . .

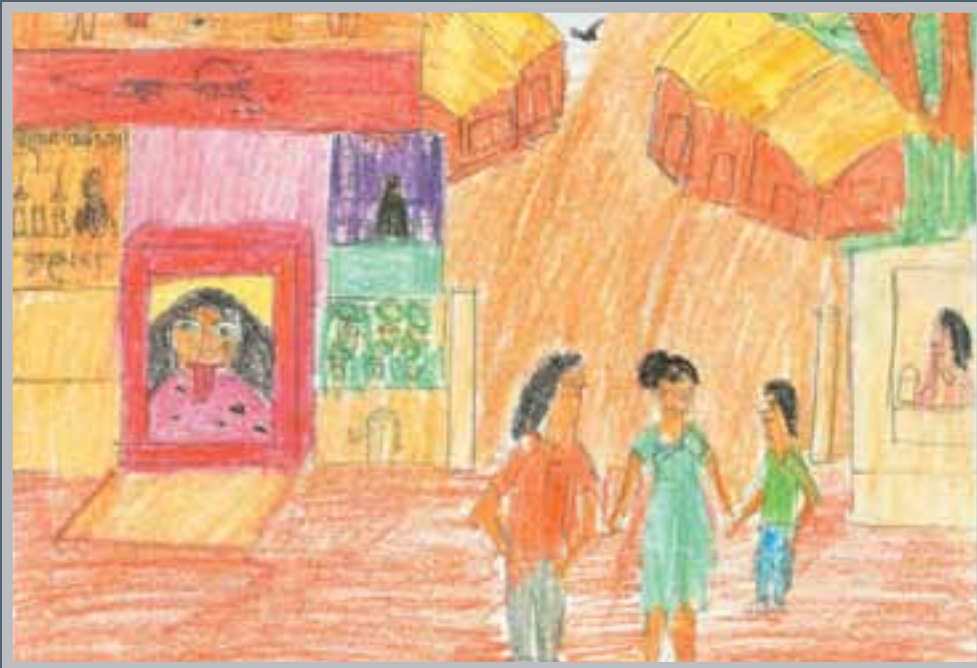
STIGMA AND OSTRACISM

Our locality is called a 'red-light area' by people who do not live here. I am never embarrassed about the place I live in. I do not hesitate to divulge the name of the lane and the area I live in. Those who stand on the streets are also human beings. I do not hate them. I regularly interact with the girls who live in these 'line houses'. But they say, "Do not talk to us." "Why," I ask them. They reply, "You live in a gentleman's house. You go to school. That's why we're asking you not to talk with us." Then I tell them, "Okay, so you do this. But how does it matter? You're also a human being like me. It's true that I go to school. But so what? You're a woman. I'm one too. Only a woman can understand the pain of another woman. This is beyond the realization of any man."

Once, I told them about other ways of earning a living. They seemed eager but said, "Our husbands want us to earn money on a daily basis. If we take up any other job, we can have money only at the end of a month. But that doesn't matter. We'll speak to our husbands anyway. We'll give you the answer tomorrow." When I met them the next day, they said that their husbands had beaten them up on hearing of their plans to quit prostitution.

Such being the condition, what could I do on my own? As a girl, I could well understand the pain these women have to endure.

Despite a number of setbacks, I have had some success as well. I have been able to teach many of them to spell and write their names. One of the women came to me to learn to read and write. I was in Class IV at that time. I told myself that even if I cannot be a proper teacher, I can at least teach them spellings. Only one of them came to me to take lessons. Now she has left this area. After some time she returned to meet me. I told her, "I hope you didn't mind taking advice from a little girl like me." She said, "Not in the least. It is because of you that I'm now working as an attendant in a hospital. At least I could leave this line." Perhaps no one will believe me, but this is a true incident. It is not a story, but a fact. —*Anjali, 16*



I live in a different kind of environment. It is called a 'red-light area'. It has this name because many women in this locality stand on the streets and prostitute. But those who have to do such bad work are not bad themselves. However, if we talk to them, our parents and elders say that we will become as bad as them. But they are not bad at all. I feel bad because I live in this place. Even Tumpa, my close friend, calls this place 'bad'. She never comes to our house. She did not come on my birthday. There is nothing I can do. However, in spite of all these problems, I do not want to leave this place because it is our duty to make the locality better.

Those who do this bad work have to do it for a livelihood. They are not to be blamed because in many cases they have been sold by their husbands or parents or friends. They live here year after year, subjected to different kinds of torture. They have nowhere to go, because no one will accept them as a wives or mothers or sisters. We must come together to form an organisation for these women so that they may learn handicraft, tailoring and embroidery. —*Milli, 14 years*





MY HOME

& OTHER

THINGS

DREAMS AND HOPES



I would like to build a house in my native place. There I will live with my parents—just the three of us. I can see it in my mind's eye. . . There is a pond. A person is taking a bath in the pond. Another is carrying water in a pitcher. There is a coconut tree with huts on either side of it. Two girls on their way home are passing by the huts with loads of firewood on their heads. There are many trees around my house. Birds are flying in the sky. The sun has just risen. —*Saiful, 18*



The place where I will settle down in the future is my native place in the Sundarbans. I wish I could build a house there and live with my parents and grandparents. There will be large trees with fruits. I will plant saplings in the garden in front of the house. Flowers will bloom. There will be a pond a little away from the house. It will be full of lotus leaves and flowers. Ducks will swim in it. Beside the pond there will be coconut trees laden with fruits and date palms. And I will have a few banana trees behind the house. There will also be a paddy field. There will be a wide road in front of my house. I will have a parrot, a dog and a mongoose at home. Birds will nest in the trees. A river will flow at a short distance from the house. Fishermen will catch fish. There will be trees along its banks. —*Sunil, 14*



I wish to live in a house surrounded by trees on all sides. The place would be full of flowers—flowers in brilliant colours whichever way you look. My house would stand at the foot of a hill, by a spring. I would lose myself in the eternal beauty of nature. I wish to live very close to nature. —*Meenakshi, 14*



Story time

Madhumita

By Sunil, 14

In a village far from the city, called Krishnanagar, there lived a girl and her mother. Her father had died when she was just a little child. She lived with her mother. Her family had once been very rich. Her father had been a lawyer. But when he died, her uncles and aunts lodged false cases and took away all their property. They even took their house. The girl and her mother did not have the money to file an appeal in court. So they took shelter in a hut by a forest. The mother took great pains to bring up the child. One day the mother had high fever. There was a garden full of blooming flowers beside their hut. The little girl plucked some flowers and took them to the market to sell. She had made two or three garlands with the flowers. But by the time it was dark, she had not managed to sell a single garland. She became afraid. She did not know the way back home. The people who had come to the market were all on their way back. The girl started crying. Suddenly someone came out of the darkness and took the child's hand. Frightened, the girl asked, "Who are you?" A man's voice asked, "What are you doing here in the dark?" It was a gentleman's voice. The girl could make out that he meant no harm. The girl allowed him to lead her home. On their way, the man asked about her life. She told him everything. The man purchased all the garlands she had made and pushed something into her hands. Madhumita returned home to find that it was a rupee. She used that money to buy medicines for her mother.

The story of the family

By Manjula, 14

There was a girl called Madhumita. She lived in a big family with her parents, brother, sister and grandparents. Madhumita's father was a very strict and short-tempered person. He never allowed her to go out and watch a fight or a quarrel in the village. This made her very angry.

One day Madhumita politely asked her father, "Why do you keep quiet when other people fight?" Her father angrily said, "Why do you have to bother about other people's problems?" She replied, "Our aunties in school have taught us a lesson. All people belong to any one of three grades—high, middle or low. Those who sacrifice their lives for others are high grade, while cheats, liars and thieves are the low grade. Those who prefer to keep away when other people fight and quarrel belong to the middle grade. So father, you belong to the middle grade." Her father was surprised. "Why do you say so?" he asked. Madhumita answered, "It is because when others fight, you prefer to keep a safe distance." Saying this, she went out.

The father thought over these words for two full days. And then he called his daughter and said, "Madhumita, you're right. From now on, I promise you, whenever there is a fight or quarrel in the village, I'll immediately go and try to sort out the differences. Those who are sensible should understand and quit fighting."

From that day, Madhumita's father was a changed man.

An incident in the life of a girl

By Aradhana, 14

There was a little girl. Her parents loved her very much. But they never knew how sad their little girl was. They do not know it as yet. Nor does anyone else know.

When the girl was alone, tears filled her eyes. She silently shed tears, but that did not make her heavy heart lighter in any way. She never let anyone know how unhappy she was. She never meant anyone any harm. She always wished good for everyone she knew.

Her only shelter was God. She told Him about her miseries, her unhappiness. And, believe it or not, she got what she wanted.

But her sadness has not left her. I will pray to God so that He does not hurt the feelings of a good girl like her.

What the children taught us. . .

The single greatest success of this project lay in getting the children living in red-light areas to speak their minds.

- Most children wished that women in prostitution had alternative sources of livelihood
- Most children, unlike adults, would not dream of deserting an AIDS patient
- Most children were severely impacted by male violence and came up with chilling pictures of violence
- Most children were keen on getting a good education
- Most children were extremely sensitive to the stigma attached to the place they lived in
- Most children knew a lot about HIV/AIDS
- Most children were keenly aware of the modus operandi of traffickers

What the children learnt. . .

- Speaking out is empowering
- Speaking out is cathartic
- Speaking out is possible through writing and drawing and not just speaking
- There is an outlet for trauma and depression
- Children can speak to adults



Apne Aap Women Worldwide thanks

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S. Suresh Kumar, West Bengal Society for the Prevention and Control of AIDS

Apne Aap in action

Apne Aap provides health care and education to over 1,000 women and children in red-light areas and slums in Topsia and Khidderpore in Kolkata; Forbesgunj in Bihar; Subhash Camp in New Delhi; and Bhiwandi in Maharashtra. Its aim is to end sex-trafficking and prostitution of women and children



Topsia, Kolkata: a leather-worker's colony.



Watgunge, Khidderpore: a red-light area beside Kolkata's docks.



Laten Bazar, Forbesgunge: a red-light area in a small Bihar village on the Indo-Nepal border.



Subhas Camp, Delhi: a low-caste migrant workers' colony.



Bhiwandi, Mumbai suburb: a red-light area in a migrant power-loom workers colony.

ADVOCACY



- In March 2004, a pioneering conference on Corporate Social Responsibility was held to forge an alliance between the private sector and grass-roots

NGOs to end trafficking of women and children in partnership with the US Consulate and the Confederation of Indian Industries.

- In April 2003, Apne Aap's photography exhibition, 'Positive Lives' on the complex social and emotional impact of the HIV/AIDS



epidemic, was inaugurated by Chief Ministers Mr Budhdadeb Bhattacharjee and Mr Sushil Kumar Shinde of West Bengal and Maharashtra, respectively.

- *The Selling of Innocents*, an Emmy-award winning documentary made by Apne Aap's founder, Ms Ruchira Gupta, portraying the trafficking of women and children from Nepal to the brothels of Mumbai, was translated into Nepali, Hindi and Bengali for use by NGOs for awareness building programmes.



The red-light areas of Kolkata are ghettoised localities, disregarded by modern progress. Crime and corruption exist without fear of law. Violence is a way of life and death and disappearance forgotten easily.

Apne Aap decided to bring together some children from these areas to tell a story, make a drawing and describe their dreams, hopes and aspirations. It was a book-writing project, a narrative therapy project and an advocacy project, all rolled into one. It was also a breaking of the silence surrounding the lives of children in red-light areas. What emerged was a stunning body of work on life and living in red-light areas, of violence and death, of naked human trafficking and soul-destroying prostitution, of disease and HIV/AIDS and almost impossibly and inspirationally, of dreams and aspirations.

The Place Where We Live is Called a Red-light Area is a visual and textual journey into the minds and souls of these children and a peep into their world. An experience that will not be forgotten easily.



Apne Aap Women Worldwide

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