



KUMUDINI

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF KUMUDINI

“We envision a society in which every girl child lives a protected life with her rights to survival, development and participation ensured.”

FOREWORD

Pooja Mahato

Chairperson, Kumudini

Undoubtedly, the Year 2021 was not easy as the country faced the second wave of COVID-19, even calling for Lockdown by the government from May, to contain the infection rate, followed by smart Lockdown from September onwards. The Government of Nepal prioritized the vaccination campaign and availed it to citizens above eighteen years of age. The impact of pandemic was observed in all spheres of life, including livelihood options of many with the close-down of businesses and restriction to mobility.

Even in the difficult times of COVID-19 pandemic, Kumudini tried to work as per its mission in providing services and protection to the girl children subjected to abuse/exploitation, acknowledging both challenges and opportunities. The Emergency Receiving Facility (ERF) remained operational, with support from UN Trust Fund, and some activities were conducted utilizing virtual platforms. As per the media reports, incidences of domestic violence and abuse within the families were dramatically high. But, contrary to the news, not many cases were reported/ filed at the police stations. Thus, the cases referred to Kumudini from the police stations was not as high as expected.

Unlike in 2020, some government hospitals provided free PCR testing and even

the cost of PCR testing at private laboratories had lessened, so it was not that difficult. Since all educational institutions were closed-down, the children at the ERF could not be enrolled in the new school year starting from the month of April. Some children continued on-line classes. In general, the in-house staff members worked directly with the children while the other staff members worked from home. But, the outreach worker and the psychosocial counselor, maintaining safety protocol, visited the ERF as well as the families to provide needed support. Despite the prevailing constraints, three projects namely, 'Ashraya – An abode to girl children in need', 'Swabhimani' and 'Bidushi' were implemented.

In 2021, Kumudini extended its work to the community as its earlier focus was more on the ERF. Vulnerable families were provided emergency relief materials and in some cases linked up with the local government offices to access relief packages. A majority of the girl children at the ERF or identified as at risk come from the migrant families. From our experience, the children, particularly coming from the dysfunctional families (single parents, parents married multiple times, alcoholism, gender-based violence, among others) are more vulnerable to abuse/exploitation as the safety mechanism in the family is almost non-existent. It was also observed that in some cases family structures were disrupted when either one or both of the parents had gone for foreign employment with children left in care of close relatives or living with a single parent, both not always providing secure environment.

It is worthwhile to mention that since

the establishment of the ERF in 2016, Kumudini has provided legal support to **forty-six** girl children staying either at the ERF and or in the community with their families. So far the final court verdict of **twenty-six** girl children have come out in their favour. Due to various reasons, four girl children lost in the legal battle and some cases are still on-going. With the number of successful cases, Kumudini takes pride in its achievement, particularly when justice is accessed by the children and their families despite the unfavourable situation that they have to deal with. With success reflected in their eyes, both parents and children seem more confident, motivated and eager to move forward in life.

The established coordination/ collaboration with police, government bodies and like-minded organizations did not deter as online platforms were utilized in absence of conducive situation to attend the meetings in person. During this time, it was imperative to keep abreast of the changing scenarios and as well as to know whom to reach out in times of need. The 'Issue 4' of the Newsletter provides an overview of our program and activities implemented in 2021.

We remain thankful to all individuals/ organizations for your generous and meaningful support. We are immensely thankful to the World Childhood Foundation (WCF), Sweden based- organization working to protect children from violence and sexual abuse, for supporting us from our early days to full five years. Without the foundation you helped us establish, we would never be where we are today. Our special thanks to Ms. Asa Olsson, Mr. Joel Borgstorm and other representatives at WCF for all your support and guidance, both constructive and professional. In this year, more benevolent individuals extended support to us and created space for meaningful collaboration and we remain grateful to them. Our staff members continued to excel in discharging their responsibilities even in difficult times. It indeed is an asset to have such passionate and professional staff members. We also appreciate the support

from the Executive Board extended when/ as needed. We reaffirm our commitment to address the issue of abuse/exploitation exerted to girl children to help them heal and bloom so they can live a dignified life, like everyone else.



Ashraya:

An Abode to Girl Children in Need

In 2021, under the purview of Ashraya project, the core activities consisted of capacity building of frontline care-givers, dealing with abused/exploited children; peer group supervision meetings of care-givers; coordination with relevant stakeholders; regular meetings with mothers on psychosocial issues; and, distribution of child friendly materials to the police stations.

An additional component of Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) to deal with abused/ exploited children, proposed in the fourth year of the project, came into implementation in 2021. Monitoring and Evaluation System was developed and has been applied. Furthermore, acknowledging the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on children and their families, Kumudini received additional funding from WCF to its response and intervention.

Achievements

Capacity building training

The training on 'Basic Psychosocial Support and Self-Care' was provided to **twenty-two** care-givers of shelters from **eighteen** districts, supported by the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens. Similarly, **seventeen** teachers from government schools, **three** NGO workers from **four** municipalities, **fourteen** participants from Women and Children Section and Judicial Committee of **seven** municipalities and **twenty** Junior Police officers from **eighteen** police stations attended a similar training at different times. The participants were trained on basic communication skills for psychosocial support and were also equipped with some techniques on self-care.

Peer Supervision Meeting

An informal network of psychosocial counselors from different organizations, including Kumudini, remained functional also in 2021. Based on the positive feedbacks received from the participants in 2020, continuity was given to 'Peer Group' meetings and **three** such meetings were conducted via virtual platform, wherein, around **twelve** participants attended in each of the meetings. Considering the then difficult time, the meetings focused more on their self-care and less on case sharing.

"Developed a sense of connection, support and safety. At the back of my head, now I have a feeling that if I ever need help there is a group to support me."

- A Psychosocial Counselor, Peer Supervision meeting

Working with families

Over the years, Kumudini has observed that a majority of the mothers suffer from mild to severe psychosocial problems, some with traumatic past and some undergoing difficult times in life. Hence, their healing becomes imperative to enable them to take care of their children who, too, have suffered unpleasant happenings in life or are at risk of such untoward happenings. **Three** meetings with small group of mothers (**six-seven** participants) were conducted by a senior psychologist, with focus on 'who I am' along with psychosocial counselling. The meetings provided space to the mothers to share their problems openly leading them to bond and seek support from each other. Foremost, realizing that they were not alone, helped them to come together and share.

Development of 'Standard Operating Procedures' to establish uniformity in rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of sexually abused/exploited girl children

Kumudini approached the National Child Rights Council (NCRC) to draft a Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) on reintegration of children and the latter took the ownership of the document. The SoPs has been forwarded to the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens for endorsement which is likely to take time considering the change of government after the submission of the document to the Ministry. Utilizing its experiences garnered over the years, Kumudini has also drafted a SoP on rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of abused/exploited children.

Distribution of child friendly materials to the police stations

In coordination with the Metropolitan Police Range Kathmandu, four police stations in Kathmandu were identified to support with necessary materials for child friendly space. Kumudini assisted to set-up a child friendly space in one of the identified police stations, whereas the remaining three police stations were supported with materials to add onto their already existing child friendly rooms. In December 2021, Kumudini was felicitated, along with other organizations, by the Metropolitan Police Range Kathmandu for its efforts and contribution in the prevention and control of Gender-based Violence cases. The recognition has motivated Kumudini in its mission to prevent and protect girl children from abuse/exploitation by working in close coordination with the police and like-minded organizations.

Additional COVID-19 related funding

Kumudini, with support from the WCF, provided emergency relief materials to the needy families of the children, reached as well as under its care and protection, along with psychosocial counseling services via telephone. A total of **thirty-eight** families were supported during those trying times.

Furthermore, safety materials were provided to the frontline workers at the police stations in Kathmandu, where the need for such items was felt. Likewise, **fifteen** government schools, too, received safety materials such as masks, sanitizer and soaps. A total of seventy-five students from the same **fourteen** schools and additional **one** school were extended necessary support. Exercise books, with messages on how to stay safe from abuse/exploitation, were printed and distributed.

System strengthening

A comprehensive assessment of Kumudini's work was conducted by an expert assigned by WCF, which entailed in-depth interviews with staff members, board members, beneficiaries, beneficiaries' families, partner NGO representatives and stakeholders. The findings of the assessment were shared with the staff members of Kumudini. The assessment was a realization for Kumudini in which areas it was successful in achieving as per the set objectives, mission and goal and what further work/efforts were required for improvement. The findings of the assessment revealed that Kumudini has made positive impact in the lives of the girls and their families and has been to establish itself as a trusted partner. However, work is required to have more policies and system in place, data management (particularly qualitative data), and reach out to wider community. Another expert, with support from WCF, conducted training on fundraising for the staff members of Kumudini. The training equipped the staff members on how to strategize and approach donors for funding and the ways for fundraising.

The M & E tools and framework was developed for the organization and the staff members were oriented for its implementation.



Care and Protection (Swabhiman Project)

Realizing the lack of facilities providing specialized care to the girl children vulnerable or subjected to sexual abuse/exploitation, with the support of UN Trust Fund, Kumudini continued the operation of the ERF with a capacity of **fifteen** girl children at one time. The objective of the project is to provide quality of care and protection to girl children, who are trafficked and victims of abuse/exploitation or at risk, to help them in the healing process and prepare them for successful reintegration

Achievements

In 2021, a total of **twenty** residents (**nineteen** girls and **one** woman) subjected to trafficking, sexual abuse/exploitation or at risk, received residential care at the ERF. Their age ranged from **six** to **twenty-one** years. However, the girls from **thirteen** to **seventeen** years constituted the major proportion of the residents. Most of them were from outside Kathmandu Valley, basically from **fifteen** districts of Nepal. In terms of ethnicity, around **fifty** percent of the girls were Janajatis, followed by the socially privileged ethnic groups and a few from Dalit community. Kumudini reached out to **fifteen** girls and **three** woman in the community. Hence, a total of **thirty-eight** girls and women received support from Kumudini during this period.

Holistic services of Kumudini:

- Psychosocial Counseling (individual and group)
- Legal support
- Education (formal and non- formal)
- Family counseling
- Recreation (handicraft making, dance, games etc.)

A multitude of services, provided to the girl children in the ERF, are as follows:

- a. **Medical support:** A total of **seventeen** girls received medical support. The major health problems were related to psychological distress and six girls were on psychotropic medication. Hence, the girls with psychosocial problems

"I have noticed a lot of changes in me after coming to Kumudini. I have learned to be respectful and polite. I have become much calmer and I do not even fight with my sister that often now. I now share my emotions and feelings with others and that really makes me relieved. I am also using social media less and stopped making friends haphazardly. I have come to love cooking and I do make some delicious items. The services that I like at Kumudini are being able to go to school, attend extra tuition classes, accessing books from the library at the ERF, outings and fun activities with other residents, being able to visit my family from time to time. I have felt a lot of positive changes in my life and thus, I would like to thank Kumudini and will always remember Kumudini wherever I go."

Rita (name changed), 15 years old resident at the ERF

were treated at the nearby government hospitals. **Two** girls were admitted in the hospital for fifteen days due to suicidal ideation and severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) respectively. Other general problems were related to eyes and ears, reproductive health and some minor ailments. Similarly, upon request by the police, the girls were supported for forensic investigation.

Despite all safety measures, one residential staff and eight girls at the ERF

tested positive for COVID-19 in September. In coordination with Tokha municipality, all of them were referred to the government isolation center and brought back to the ERF after their test results were negative.

b. Educational support: The girls are keen to pursue their studies irrespective of their well-being, including mental health caused by the untoward incidences experienced prior coming to the ERF. A total of **twelve** girls were attending school from the ERF while with the support of UN Trust Fund, **nine** girls were enrolled at a regular school and others were supported by their own families and through Kumudini's other project (Bidhusi). The girls adjusted to online classes run by the schools and the regular school even though they joined late.

c. Legal support: Due to COVID -19 pandemic, the legal proceedings were not as swift as at other times. The court also remained closed during the Lockdown imposed by the government. The legal proceedings of **twelve** girls are on-going. Out of those **twelve** cases, respective families had lodged the First Information Report (FIR) while Kumudini assisted for **eleven** cases either by providing legal counseling or by recording statement

"I feel legal proceeding is very important to fight against injustice. I received courage to fight back and was motivated to speak up with the support received at Kumudini. I am now fearless and have self-confidence to do any work. I feel that I am not alone as I have helping hands. From my experience, If any incident happens to me or someone else, rather than hiding, I suggest that we should stake support from police, family and organizations. I feel I am strong to that."

Arati (name changed), 17 years old, who received legal support in 2017

"After coming to Kumudini, I learnt some skills like drawing and paper craft. I used to cry excessively. I was a bit arrogant and complained all the time. I was suspicious of everything. I am slowly managing those emotions. I feel that I have become emotionally strong. Due to untoward experience, I had irregular periods which has been treated now and I feel relieved about it. Now I can even say 'no' to something I do not like and have learnt to share my feelings. I receive lots of love here and now I have learnt to love myself and others."

Nisha (name changed), 17 years old girl at the ERF

d. Working with families: A total of fifteen families were intensively followed-up for home assessment, and were provided psychosocial counseling and legal counseling as well as other necessary support. Out of the **fifteen** families, under the necessary support, two families received support to pay for food and educational bills. More than the monetary and material support, Kumudini emerged as a place where they could share their emotions, problems and seek support with a belief that Kumudini will never let them down. But, Kumudini is minutely assesses the case before extending any kind of support as a precautionary measure to reduce dependency and to enhance their potential and resilience for survival.

A total of **seven** girls were reunified with their mothers with continuous follow-up and social welfare support. Undoubtedly, the first option for reintegration is the family, but if the family environment is not safe and protective for the children then they referred to other organizations for long-term support. In 2021, **five** girls were referred to other organizations.



Bidhusi: Empowerment through Education

With the financial support from 'Books for Change', an organization based in Switzerland, Kumudini implemented a project titled 'Bidhusi' to operate a library at the ERF, provide scholarships to the girl children in need and conduct sessions on 'Common Threads', a psychological tool for group healing of survivors. The project aimed to help children, particularly girl children, access books for their overall development to enhance and improve their knowledge and reading habits.

A total of **twenty –nine** girls (nineteen staying at the ERF and ten with their families) and **six** young adult received support through the project from January - December 2021. Out of the **twenty-nine** girls, **twelve** girls were supported to continue formal education. As some families lacked access to internet and did not possess smart phones, six girls could not attend classes properly.

The library was shifted to the ERF from the office so the girls had access to the books anytime they wished to read. Mostly, children issued Nepali short stories, books on general knowledge and Nepali fiction. The recreational activities entailed paper craft, story reading, painting and indoor games (ludo, carom board, badminton, balls etc.).

The second phase of 'Common Threads' project was conducted with the same group of **six** participants from January 2021 and all sessions were completed by September. The sessions were integrated with somatic experiencing (SE) therapy to work with the body. As per the feedback received from the participants, it is be an effective tool to deal with trauma and focus on present moment.

Other activities:

Even though the physical presence was restricted, Kumudini organized and attended various meetings to strengthen its coordination with like-minded organizations

and related stakeholders. Kumudini also participated in a few online research/survey related to protection issues and COVID 19. Kumudini participated in a research titled 'Pivoting to online: the benefits, challenges, and possibilities for international programme evaluations in the era of COVID -19.' The article was drafted by the Researchers in co-partnership between WCF, Kumudini and Asha Nepal.



Reading class in library



Safety materials distribution to Police



Safety materials distribution to the government school

CASE STORY 1

Pinky (name changed), a six years old, originally from one of the adjoining districts of Kathmandu, lived in a rented room in Kathmandu with her father, a daily wage labourer, and brother, as her mother left them for another man one and half years ago. While father left for his daily work, the children remained in the room often looked after by the other renters of the building. One day, a neighbor, thirty-five years old, who worked with Pinky's father, under the guise of protector, mercilessly raped her. When the Women Group of the locality came to know about the heinous crime, they rescued her and with the help of the police arrested the alleged perpetrator. Pinky was referred to Kumudini in February 2021. After receiving medical aid at the hospital she gradually recovered and also started to show interest in her studies. She was then enrolled for formal education where she started with the basics. The home assessment revealed that her father had a difficult childhood and had lived in a shelter for street children and had no ties with his immediate family members. Even though he has a good relationship with his children, he is not financially and psychologically sound to take care of them. For survival, he has go to work every day leaving children unattended with high likelihood of re-victimization. Hence, after healing for some time at Kumudini, Pinky has been referred to Asha Nepal for long-term support where she is receiving shelter and education. She is in touch with her family and visits them during festival times. She is happy and doing well.



CASE STORY 2

Rimi (name changed), aged twelve, comes from mid-western Nepal. After her father's demise around five years ago, her family migrated to Kathmandu, where as a sole bread winner, her mother worked as a daily wage labourer. Very soon after coming to Kathmandu her family was dispersed as her younger brother was sent to be looked after at a church, whereas Rimi and her younger sister were placed at a shelter run by an

NGO. In the meantime, her mother remarried. Due to financial constraint, after two years, the NGO sent Rimi and her sister back to the family and were enrolled in a government school. One day Rimi shared with her mother that her step-father was sexually abusing her while she was away working as a dishwasher at a nearby eatery. But, her mother did not believe any bit of what Rimi said. Since both the parents were alcoholic, they fought a lot. During one of their drunken brawls they were arrested by the police upon complaint lodged by a neighbor. Along with the same neighbor, Rimi went to the police station and shared about the sexual abuse that she frequently endured and stated that she was not safe at home. The police then referred her to Kumudini in August 2021. From the assessment conducted at the ERF she did not have major health issues, both physical and mental, but she would have nightmares sometimes. Even though she got along with the new friends at the ERF, she refrained from sharing her emotions and feelings easily. Only recently she shared with the psychosocial counselor that she had been raped earlier by another neighbor when she was just eight years old, but since her mother never had time for her children legal case was not filed. Now she is in grade four at a nearby school and is an average student. Perhaps as she never had a family environment at home, it is still difficult for her to abide to the rules and set routine at the ERF, and thus, she has to be guided and reminded regularly. The home assessment report shows that the family lives in the slum area near the bus park, which is not safe for unattended children. Her mother has to work from early morning to feed the family. It is not safe for Rimi to stay with her step-father, in absence of her mother, as he is likely to abuse her at every possible opportunity. Considering her family environment, Kumudini is now looking for an organization which provides long-term support in a protective environment with opportunity to pursue education. Even though family is the first option for reintegration, it may not always be safe to send the child back. However, Rimi is in contact with her mother and the bonding is more stronger than before.



Gratitude and Thanks

An update is incomplete without the mention of individuals, whose generous contribution has motivated Kumudini to pursue its mission even more empathetically and professionally. The contributions made so far are deposited in Kumudini's core fund, set aside for emergency situations, which are imminent when donor funded projects come to an end. A special thanks goes to **Ms. Nisha Sharma** for making Arya's (name changed), a thirteen years old sexual abuse survivor, dream to pursue education possible from 2019 till date. We are grateful to **Mr. Didier Wenger, Ms. Bhawana Maskey, Ms. Wendy Cheng, Dr. Wong, Mr. Bowny Bown, Mr. Yurendra Basnett, Ms. Bimbika Sijapati, Mr. Joseph Aguetant, Ms. Akriti Singh, Mr. Dev Sagar Shrestha, Ms. Sinora Shrestha, Mr. Ajit Shrestha, and Mr. Saroj Lama** (Khukuri House) for your kind support extended over the years. We would truly appreciate your similar support, if possible, also in the future. We will continue to send you updates in the coming days so you can learn about our work, including both achievements and challenges. We are more than happy to respond to any queries or suggestions you may have. Please feel free to share about Kumudini with your friends and acquaintances to expand our circle of well-wishers.



Psychosocial support training to the Police Personnel



Child friendly materials distribution



Weekly meeting with the girls

Photo Gallery



Child friendly room set up



Doing their homework



IG support to the mother



Outing of the girls



Staff visiting home



Extra activity



Playing carrom board inside ERF



Psychosocial training to teachers

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