

Recovering the lost smiles!

“It’s amazing to see how young people are using the rebuilding process as an opportunity to improve their lives and strengthen their community...The way these children are bouncing back from even the toughest tragedy is a testament to their resiliency.”

- Roger Federer, Good Will Ambassador, UNICEF

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“I am not worried anymore; Rosy has brought change in me. I will face all the difficulties and I will never ever give up. No one ever believed in my ability but today my parents are proud of me. It was a different experience holding the puppet in my hand and making a performance. I am glad that was able to perform in my own village, everyone appreciated me... My life has changed forever”.

- Sahayarani (17), Velankanni, Tamil Nadu

Recovering the Lost Smiles!

Workshop on Puppetry – PHASE-II

Chapter 1

Reviving lost hopes - Introduction

The tsunami that struck the coastal villages of Tamil Nadu on 26th December 2004 had shattered the hopes of many. The children were the most vulnerable as they faced the impact of the disaster. Traumatized by the force of the giant tsunami wave the children had lost their family, home, every little thing that they had cherished and their hope for a better tomorrow.

Myrtle Social Welfare Network comprising of a team of trained and qualified professionals on Puppetry launched its unique psycho social intervention for the children in the tsunami affected villages of Tamil Nadu supported by UNICEF. Initially the Myrtle Muppets spread awareness on health related issues in 120 villages of the 4 coastal districts of Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Kanchipuram and Kanyakumari

“Young children were the worst affected as they are the most vulnerable in the community. In the post disaster situation the children suffer from lack of understanding and difficulty in communicating their fears. The children were plagued by stress, depression, guilt and worries and hence they required information concerning the tsunami so that they could plan for preparedness in any disastrous situation. This calls for the need of an effective medium to vent their suppressed feelings as well as to help them overcome the unforgettable fears...the puppets helped them in the ventilation process”

- G.V. Venkatesan

Myrtle Social Welfare Network

Looking Back...

The Myrtle team was performing in the villages and was sensitizing the people on health and hygiene related issues. There was good response from the community. The traumatized children were able to recover from fear and were able to lead normal life. For two year old Kabilan who had lost his mother when the Tsunami struck his village, life had a surprise in store for him when Rosy the Muppet came to his village. Ever since the tsunami little Kabilan used to crave for his mother's love and cry out for her every night. The family in order to curtail his crying used to give him the feeding bottle, at times with milk and most of the times without it. Rosy had performed a miracle in the life of Little Kabilan. The Myrtle team in the proceedings of their programme understood the child's problem and intervened with the help of their puppets.



In order to ensure sustainability in the awareness process the second phase of the activities commenced. The Myrtle team organized Muppet Training for the tsunami affected children. This endeavor aimed at creating a cadre of young children in the villages who will be trained to perform puppetry. A three days workshop was held for the children and they performed in their villages after the training. 9 such workshops were held in the districts of Cuddalore, Nagapattinam and Kanyakumari. It was indeed an enriching experience for the children.

Chapter 2

Transforming lives - The work shop on Puppetry

“Our focus has been to improve equity to services and to truly build back better for the children of Tamil Nadu...Many of the programmes we set up in the tsunami-hit communities, such as education programmes and child protection interventions, will now serve as a model for the rest of the state to follow.”

- Thomas George, UNICEF’s State Representative for Tamil Nadu & Kerala.

The workshop on muppetry was indeed a unique intervention; it was a programme exclusively of the children, for the children and by the children.

The three days workshop had a wide range of activities. The children were selected by Nehru Yuva Kendra NGO working in the respective village and though the children were from the same village they hardly knew each other. To combat the



challenge of the differences between the children, the session commenced with an ice breaker session.

A performance of puppet show by the Myrtle team was the trend setter of the workshop. The curiosity of the children was kindled and the children were all set for the learning experience. There were whole array of group activities designed for the children that proved to be effective team building exercise for the children. The children were able to adjust with the other children and learnt to work in a team.

Inputs were provided on Child Rights, Child Sexual Abuse and Health and hygiene. These sessions were participatory and the children were able to provide value addition for the session by narrating their personal experience. The origin and growth of the art of muppetry was also enumerated to them so that they would understand the nuances of puppetry as a performing art with value.

The art of creating characters for the puppet shows were provided for the children. The elements of humour and realistic representation and voice modulation techniques were provided for the children. The children were all set for the script writing process and they were able to identify the theme for the script based on the need of their villages. They sat with their team and were able to develop a script. This script was then recorded with the technical expertise of the Myrtle team. It is indeed an achievement that a collated version of the sound track of the scripts written by the children was documented for future usage. The children were simultaneously given inputs on making of glove puppets.

The children were given options of selecting their choice of role in the performance. A team of children are identified for the clowning performances and they were also trained separately. The other children were given the role of navigator, and the other Muppet characters. The children were able to explore their skills and opted for the best roles.

Special Features of the Workshop:

- 3 days non residential workshop for the children in the community

- Equal participation of girl children ensured. In order to shatter the existing gender



defined role – Myrtle not just involves girl children in the training process but also ensures equal participation of girl children in the clowning training and act.

- The workshop are organized on weekends so as that the children will not miss school
- 14-16 children are trained in each of the training programme
- Of the 16 children, 2 children will be trained exclusively as navigators both for the puppet and for hosting the performance, 4 children are trained for clowning and the rest will be involved in the skit and puppet performance



- The children will be split into 2 groups; each of the groups will be trained in script writing and performance. For every training 2 skits portraying social

issues will be produced

- The children identify the social issues that they want to sensitize the community. They have a brainstorming process on the social issues
- Some of the social issues made into skits by the children are:
 1. Importance of education for girl children
 2. Elimination of child labour
 3. Health and Hygiene
 4. Protection for children against exploitation

5. Education for differently -abled children
6. Combating infanticide
7. Mental infanticide and superstition

- The children were given a lot of training to fine tune performance before the final performance in the community. Each training will be followed by a performance in the community
- There will be a follow up of the training where by the resource team will go back to the community and conduct an informal evaluation of the following performances of the children
- The children were given inputs on personal hygiene, soaps were provided for them to wash their hands before and after food, the children followed these meticulously
- The workshop instilled in the children the spirit of working together in a team
- The children were able to assume responsibilities.
- There were committees of children formed for discipline, game and timekeeping. This instilled in the children various habits that would help them for the future
- The children were able to shed their inhibitions and were able to help others in their team Priya a 12 year old from Nanamedu village from Cuddalore District was able to host a whole cultural performance in her village that was appreciated by the whole community as the child was known to be shy and timid and refused to interact with other children in school and at home
- The children vouched to be catalyst of change in their respective communities and agreed to be ambassadors of peace in their villages

Chapter 3

Children as catalyst of change in their community

There were 9 workshops completed and 3 more workshops were planned and executed with the support of UNICEF. 3 villages were selected in Cuddalore, Nagapattinam and Kanyakumari. These batches of workshop also proved to be exemplary and the follow up performance became internationally renowned.



Ready to face the world! –



The children in Thalangudda, Cuddalore District were eager to attend the workshop. They have seen children from the near by village who came and performed muppet shows in their village some months back. Since then the children were eager to attend the workshop on muppetry. The workshop did transform the lives

of young children in the village.

Jagan who is a 13 year old is shy and timid boy was a constant source of worry for his parents as he refused to mingle with the other children and was scared to talk to people. After the end of the workshop to the awe of his parents and neighbours, Jagan was able to host the show and he was the

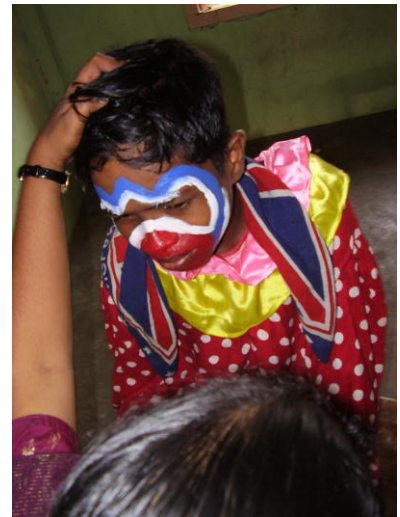


navigator for the puppet performance both in his community and in the show performed in front of the Collector, political representatives and Roger Federer, Good Will Ambassador, UNICEF

For Rajasri, a 13 year old from Thalanguda her life underwent a transformation after attending the workshop. She boldly remarks, “I was always ignored both at home and in school but today I am not ignored, the workshop changed my life forever. I performed the lead role of Rosy the Muppet. I am glad and everyone liked the way I performed now I am not a silly girl anymore... I have a lot of talents and the workshop has helped me unearth my hidden talents”.

Tears No More! – Velankanni

The rainy season was a menace for the children living in Velankanni, Nagapattinam District. Even after two years of the tsunami the children were living in temporary shelters in miserable living condition. When the Myrtle team reached Velankanni the children were eager to see the team and were glad to venture out of their homes to a dry place because their homes were flooded.



The children enjoyed the three days of workshop and came up with skits of exemplary standard. Sahayarani who is now 17 years is a school drop out. She had not ventured to the portals of the school after her 9th grade. But this girl was motivated to go to school and she replies with a smile, “I did not know the real meaning of education till I attended this workshop, I am glad that I was selected to be a part of this workshop. My parents understood that I have talents and have agreed to send me to school. I too love to go to school seeing my performance my parents have changed their minds and are determined to give me a good education and I am motivated to go to school”.



These children were given special inputs on health and hygiene as they were living in inadequate standard of living. The children were able to learn about personal hygiene measures and they vouched to spread the news to the other children in their village and also

follow it in their day to day life. Their performance in their village was also on the same topic. This performance of the children witnessed extensive media coverage.

Muppets Shatter Myths! – Keelamanakudi

Keelamanakudi is one of the worst affected villages of Kanyakumari District. About 335 people and 196 children died in the tsunami in this village. Houses are constructed for the people in this village yet the people do not use the toilets as they fear the filling up of the septic tanks. The children in the school are also not permitted to use the toilets and this has resulted in a lot of discomfort for the children. This issue was identified by the children and the play script challenged the myths and helped in shattering the myths in the community that prevented them from using the toilets.

For fifteen years old Rajeswari the training was very useful and it was able to boost the child's morale. She remarks, "I was little plumpy and everyone teased me in my school and at home, I did not have any friends. It was only in the workshop that the other children were mingling with me. Every time I was teased the organizers of the programme used to intervene on behalf of me and also explained to the other children to refrain from teasing. The other children formed a committee to advise the children who teases me, they vouched to protect me. I have a lot of good friends now".

Thus the workshop was able to make a drastic change in the life of many children in the tsunami affected areas.

Chapter 4

The Way Forward



The workshops did create a lasting impact in the lives of the children and that of their parents. For many children the workshop was an enriching one. For many children they were able to acquire sense of responsibility. These transformations were in fact noticed by the children and in the parents in the post workshop scenario. There is also a need for follow-up workshops as some of the children could be formed in to a permanent cadre of children who will be an asset to the community. In Tsunami permanent shelters awareness is required for sanitation and child protection as the children are the most vulnerable in the disaster situation.

The Process...

These trained children are an asset to the community because they have gained a lot of social values that will help them lead an equitable life; these children have learnt to cope up with the difficulties that they face in their life. These trainings are not a three day affair but it is a process. The children equipped with the skills are provided not just training on puppetry but also they learn to cope up with their day to day trifles. The training sessions provide them a platform to voice out their concerns and seek help.

Sustainability

The trainings coordinated with NYK, ICCW, TNSF, VHAK in their target intervention area. In their respective district office set of Muppet dolls and a 3 tier puppet stage had given for further programmes, so the NGO's are conducting programmes with the help of trained children cadre and community volunteer cadre. They have learnt to identify and address the various social issues like discrimination of girl children, stigmatization, and cleanliness in their respective villages.



Tsunami disaster – countries in crisis

Building back better

Sanitation and hygiene improve in post-tsunami rural Indian communities

TSUNAMI: TWO YEAR UPDATE



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Community volunteer Jeeva goes door-to-door in her village of Thaezanguada, India, to teach children about good hygiene and help families get used to their new indoor toilets.

By Rob McBride

THAEZANGUADA, India, December 2006 – Stepping carefully between puddles left by the latest monsoon, Jeeva moves from one house to the next on an important mission: ensuring that her neighbours know how to use their new toilets.

The young woman's village is a thriving fishing community on the coast of Tamil Nadu State in southern India. It has undergone radical changes since the tsunami. One of the largest transformations has been the introduction of brand new homes, complete with indoor toilets.

Before the tsunami, very few of Thaezanguada's residents had used an indoor toilet. Until recently in this part of India, only around 10 per cent of rural homes had them, making this area one of the most underdeveloped in the country when it came to good hygiene practices.

This situation has been gradually changing, with the response to the tsunami disaster providing an opportunity to advance social development in this area.

'10 commandments' of good hygiene

"I go to all the houses and see that they know about sanitation and cleaning their toilets properly," says Jeeva. "And I make sure that the children know about hygiene."

At each stop, she calls the children together and runs through the so-called '10 commandments' of good personal hygiene. Most of the children seem to know them by heart. On a nearby rooftop, one of Jeeva's colleagues leads a session of mothers and children through the same list.

In this UNICEF-supported project, one volunteer serves 50 households; providing a valuable resource for educating and motivating the community.

Divea is one of the children who can tell you the 10 rules without taking a breath. "Before the tsunami, we didn't have toilets in our houses," she says. "But now we can use them and know about good personal hygiene."



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Jeeva teaches children about the '10 commandments' of good personal hygiene.

Children show the way

With her mother and Jeeva in attendance, Divea shows visitors the toilet – and the bottle of disinfectant used to clean it daily – in the home she and her family moved into just several months ago.

"The women and the children are very quick to learn about hygiene and toilets," says Jeeva. With a coy smile, she adds: "The men take longer to get the message."

In this traditional fishing village, convincing men to use the new indoor facilities (rather than the shoreline, or the land surrounding their homes) presents an uphill struggle. But now, even that is changing – with children often showing the way.

Puppet show gets messages across

Embracing the principle that when children talk, their parents listen, a local NGO partner gets ready for a special puppet show in the centre of the village as darkness falls. Performed by children, the show will inform the audience about the importance of good hygiene, and at the same time spread other messages such as the need to respect child rights.

"It's a very lively way to get the message across," says UNICEF staff member Nisha Rachel Ninan. "It doesn't make an impact just on other children, but on the entire community."

With that, the loudspeakers crackle into life and music signals the start of the show as the audience settles in to watch and listen. This is a community very much transformed since the crisis of two years ago. In some respects it is still recovering, but in others it is now functioning better than it did before the tsunami.