

Prayaas

Endeavours of Mitra Foundation



Mar 2014

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः

SARVE BHAVANTU SUKHINAH

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The Beginning of a Journey

by Premkumar Vadapalli

Welcome to the first issue of Prayaas, capturing and sharing the efforts, attempts and endeavors of the Mitra Foundation.

All of us are guilty of taking things for granted. Be it our health, our education, our lifestyle, our recreation, our family and friends and many other things. There are others around us, in our neighborhood, in our city, in our country for whom many of the above are something they don't get to even think of in their normal day, something they wish for but consider out of their reach.

Then an unexpected tragic event happens, jolting us out of our hypnosis. For a while, we start valuing every small thing. We start stepping back looking at our life and those of people around us. We resolve to live life differently, want to make a difference, but more often than not, do not convert this inner drive into any concrete action, and soon fall back into the slumber, the "nothing can happen to us" attitude.

One such event happened about a year back in our apartment, our extended family. One of our friend, neighbor and a family member, Shakti, just about 34 years, fell very sick when visiting his home town Bhubaneswar. He was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia. Before we realized the seriousness of the issue, the situation got critical and he succumbed to it within 48hrs of detection. This shocked all of us out of our normal routine. It has been one year since,

and when we think of it, we still wish it was only a bad dream.

After the first few months, few of us affected by this tragic event got together and were looking to see what we can do in his memory, and to act on some of the initial reactions we had felt. After some deliberation we had decided that we would like to do something related to cancer and families affected by it. We also wanted to use this trigger to see how we aim for a broader and bigger goal: Setup a framework to enable multiple such initiatives, in such a way that others who might have gone through similar experiences and would be motivated to take up a similar cause could also benefit.

Thus was born the Mitra Foundation. Setup as a Trust with 3 of us as the Trustees, Mitra Foundation was registered on 21st Nov 2013. In line with the structure of the Trust, we have started the first targeted activity, to work with families of Cancer victims in need of support, and get them over the hardship and to move forward in life. This is the Jeevan Shakti Fund, providing the 'strength to live' for the target families. Since its inception, we have connected with other institutions working with Cancer patients, identified and started working with 3 families, of persons who passed away due to cancer and are in need of specific support to get back on their own legs. You will read more about this in the article, 'Our First

Efforts', in this newsletter by Manish, Kiran, Anindya and Sridhar,.

One of the thoughts behind setting up the Mitra Foundation, in addition to doing charitable activities is to enable others to take their intent, triggered by various reasons, of giving something back to the society, and to convert it into action. We are currently learning through the experience of working in this area. Our initial experiences are captured well in the article by Trupti.

We see this as a beginning of a long journey, and expect to build on these learnings. Through Mitra Foundation, we will persevere to be more effective ourselves in giving back to the society as well as to help others take up similar initiatives with us or independently. We look forward to your continued support and hope you find your own calling to give back to the society.

IN THIS ISSUE

Getting Started with Jeevan Shakti Fund

The learnings as we went through our first few attempts at identifying and then working with families needing support. What we initially started with and what we had to adapt as we moved ahead. Page 2

Our First Efforts

So far we have been working with 3 different families. Here we will summarize the situation and work we are doing with each of the families. Page 3

Foundation Day

On May 6th we had sponsored the lunch and conducted an activity at Karunashraya on the first anniversary of our dear friend. Read about it in the end. Page 4

Getting Started with Jeevan Shakti Fund

by Trupti Godbole

*There are times in our lives when we look back to see,
what could have been different to make it a worthwhile journey.
It can inspire us and give us motivation to serve,
those who are in distress all around us we observe.
Distressed because of of some unfortunate event in life,
which has made their living a continuous strife.
All together we can make a difference,
and attempt to support and be of some assistance.*

"Jeevan Shakti Fund" was launched, which looks to rehabilitate the families of terminally ill patients - especially if the patient is a breadwinner of the family. To begin with, it was decided to focus on families of terminally ill cancer patients.

To get the information about such families, the trust members thought it best to get in touch with Karunashraya Hospice, Marathahalli, Bangalore. A meeting with the Public Relation Officer of Karunashraya, Smt Hema Shyam proved to be a good start. She put us in touch with the counsellors Smt Poornima and Smt Bindu, who are in constant touch with not just the patients in Karunashraya, but also the families of the in-patients.

Meeting the counsellors and the in-patients in Karunashraya was a very emotional experience for us and it only reinforced the need to help such families where the breadwinner is a terminally ill patient. The counsellors provided names of three families where they saw scope for Mitra Foundation to support the children of the patients.

What began as an attempt to sponsor the education of the children of these families, actually turned out to be an opportunity for the Trust members to also personally connect with the families and to understand their situation and needs better. For example, in case of the first opportunity, it was realized that just paying the fees for the son's school and tuitions would not suffice. What was additionally needed in this case, was some amount of counselling to help the family understand how the son could go ahead with his studies and also eventually think about vocational training so that he can begin earning soon. Some amount of counselling and financial help was also needed to help the mother resume the business of her late husband.

In case of another opportunity too, the Trust members are still in touch with the family and are counselling the wife of the deceased, to begin some kind of work so that she is able to earn a living since at present there is absolutely no source of income for the mother and daughter.

Another thing that came up during the visits and meetings with the beneficiaries was that only counselling the families to do what we felt was the right course of action for them, was not sufficient. We realized over the period of time that the beneficiary families are also greatly influenced by the surrounding folks and relatives. For example in case of the first beneficiary family, the Trust members had counselled the son to get admission for vocational training along with his academic studies so that by the time his SSLC exams are over, he would also be half way through with his vocational training and then on finishing it would be able to get

a placement and begin earning. However, the family was advised by the relatives to let him only do SSLC and they finally decided that he would only focus on the SSLC exam. The Trust had also counselled the daughter to enroll for vocational training in computer course since she seemed to be keen on doing the same too. However, in spite of having begun the admission procedure, she did not get enrolled and went back to her husband's family due to some family emergency.

In case of the second beneficiary family, the Trust members have been trying to counsel the wife of the deceased to begin some work so that she can generate some income. The trust members also suggested that she takes up a tailoring course, which the Trust would sponsor, and then join as an assistant in some tailor shop. However, she is keen on taking up only cooking job and is hesitant to go for any other type of work. Here too, the members of the Trust felt that the neighborhood community is influencing her decisions to a large extent and hence though the members felt that the tailoring course would help her, she is not yet convinced about it.

After meeting with the beneficiary families for a few times, the trust members also realised that just paying the school and tuition fees for the children or providing financial help to set up a micro business was not sufficient. The members also felt a need for giving the families additional help to sustain their lives, for example, giving them groceries for a few months till their financial condition improves.

So far the journey of Mitra Foundation, since its inception, has been a fulfilling one since it provided lot of learning opportunities in form of these three cases that the foundation has helped so far. We have realized that the opportunities are abundant and we just have to look around and see how we can serve the distressed. We have also realized that monetary help alone does not help when we serve the beneficiary families. There is a larger need for moral and emotional support, and also for creating opportunities for long term sustenance which is more crucial. The real issue is that of empowerment of the beneficiaries and not just looking at satisfying their short term needs.

Now a need is felt to find more sources to find potential beneficiaries. This is being taken up by the committee and the trust is confident that it can make a positive difference to the lives of the families of terminally ill patients.



Volunteers in discussion with the Counsellors from Karunashraya.

Our first Efforts

by Manish Choudhary, Kiran Godbole, Anindya Saha and Sridhar Chakravarthy

Opportunity One:

This was our first opportunity to initiate work of Mitra Foundation .

We visited Karunashraya and the councillor put us in touch with a family whose sole earning member had succumbed to cancer about two months back. He had returned from Dubai after he was diagnosed with this illness. He was running a small business of selling artificial jewellery before starting to work in Dubai. He is survived by wife and two children – a son who is studying in 10th standard and a daughter who is married but separated and has a child.

We visited the family at their residence to understand their situation and how we can be of help. Due to sudden loss of their family's sole breadwinner, they were quite stressed and confused about future. During our interaction, we could assess that the son was keen to pursue his studies. Mother was willing to work and possibly restart the business of selling artificial jewellery. Son and daughter also showed interest in vocational training. Daughter was also open to doing a job in order to earn for her living.

We had few more interactions with them and it was decided to support the son towards continuation of his education (school and tuition fees, books, etc) We also decided to provide initial capital for buying the material required for door to door selling of artificial jewellery. We also tried to arrange for vocational training, but both the children could not join due to their constraints.

We also realized after a few meetings that the family needed immediate sustenance support in the form of groceries and small expenses. We decided to provide the same.

At present, the son has restarted his school and is preparing for his exams. Mother has started her micro business. We are in the process of identifying a suitable earning opportunity for the daughter.

Opportunity Two:

Our second experience is with a family where the wife was fighting in the terminal stage of the cancer. After our team got informed about her plight from

Karunashraya, she soon succumbed to death in a matter of few days. The husband of the deceased wife and the two kids in the family suddenly had to cope with this dear loss. Since both the husband and wife were working earlier they had taken a sizeable loan to spend towards her treatment. After the wife's death the repayment of the loan loomed as a huge financial crisis for the



A child whose education we support. In the background is the child's father discussing with Mitra Foundation Volunteer, Anindya Saha

family. The husband who had temporarily stopped working started working overtime. However he was still finding it difficult to make ends meet. Mitra Foundation stepped in during this time and provided help to the family by paying the school fees of the children for the current academic year. This enabled them to continue with the schooling of the children which is so important for them to build a strong future. At present the husband is concentrating on his work to earn a steady income and repay the loans which are due. Mitra Foundation is exploring ways to help the husband in repayment of the loan as well as continued education for his children.

Opportunity Three:

Mitra Foundation is also currently supporting another Family. The breadwinner of this family had succumbed to cancer, and is survived by his wife and daughter (Studying in 9th standard in a School in Shivaji nagar). He was the only earning member of the family.

Mitra foundation decided to support this family with (a)Supplying household provisions such as dal/oil/atta etc to run the



Trustee, Dr. Hanifa, working with the beneficiary to fill the form

household for a few months (b) Continue education of the daughter. We are currently counselling her mother to look out for Employment opportunity and are exploring avenues for her to enhance her skills . In this context we got in touch with tailoring training institutes, garment industry. This process is currently continuing and we will continuously engage with the mother to work out a sustainable plan. We are also committed to supporting the daughter as she enters 10th standard next year. Beyond that we will also be exploring with her opportunities for vocational training that she can leverage to enable her for any part time work in parallel to continuing studies.

KARUNASHRAYA

The Bangalore Hospice Trust (BHT) – Karunashraya, is a registered charitable trust by the Indian Cancer Society (Karnataka Chapter) and Rotary Bangalore, Indiranagar to provide free-of-charge professional palliative care for advanced stage cancer patients who are beyond cure.

WEBSITE:
<http://www.karunashraya.org/>

Foundation Day

by Volunteers, Mitra Foundation

On 6th of March, it was 1 year since we had lost our close friend Shakti. Being the reason behind the motivation for the start of the Mitra Foundation, we did want to commemorate this day in an appropriate way.

We had planned to sponsor the food for the staff and the inmates at Karunashraya on that day. In discussion with the management at Karunashraya, we had arranged for the volunteers of Mitra Foundation to spend some time organizing activities for the residents of Karunashraya ahead of the lunch.

On that day we had reached the center at 11am. First off we had donated some of the clothes and other items we had collected. These items are reworked where necessary and then put for sale at a discounted rate in the store at Karunashraya for the benefit of many of the families visiting the center.

We then spent some time interacting with the Counsellors, Mrs. Bindu and Mrs. Poornima. They have been our key connection to the beneficiary families that we had been working with since our inception. We had used this opportunity to give them an update on our activities and status for each of the families. These were the families that had lost a dear one, a bread winner, and in whose time of difficulty the counsellors were there for them. When we had approached Karunashraya with our objective for the Jeevan Shakti Fund, our goals were in good complement with that of Karunashraya, and the needy families as known to the counsellors were communicated to us to follow up with.

After the interactions with the counsellors, we had begun the activity with the staff and inpatients. We had a game of tambola for

them.

About 25 odd participants were there, and we had some gifts for the first and second full-house, and some chocolates for the rest of the prizes. We had multiple winners from the staff and the patients. Every one enjoyed the activity, and it was a very relaxing change of routine for them. We did get requests to try and see if we can be there more regularly and have such activities. Some of the volunteers Trupti and Sarita are considering to visit monthly to interact with the counsellors as well as look to have



Volunteers at Karunashraya during the lunch supported on the 6th of March

regular events for the inmates.

By the time we had finished the activity, it was past noon, and time for the lunch to be served. It arrived on the trolley, with meals as prepared for each of the inmates, based on their request, but within the constraints of their medical state.

Post the lunch we had spent some more time with the counsellors, to understand their experience from multiple years of service at Karunashraya. We inquired about other opportunities that we should be aware of and pursue to see if there is some contribution Mitra Foundation can make in supporting them to get back on their legs, and regain faith in their ability to move on.

SHAKTI SHANKAR RATH

A dotting Father, loving Husband, caring Son, understanding Son-in-Law, loyal Friend and committed Colleague in every true sense...

You will be remembered always...



Nov 19th 1978 to 5th Mar 2013

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