

Meeting with Orphans and Semi-Orphans: Tarangambadi Taluk

Date: 16.07.06

Venue: St. Teresa Girl's Higher Secondary School, Tarangambadi

Organised by: SNEHA and NCRC

Participants: 53 children from Tarangambadi Taluk + SNEHA, NCRC, SIFFS representatives

The context

The Tsunami of December 2004 made around 600 children orphans or semi-orphans. Most of the orphans and semi-orphans are with their relatives in their own community and a few are at orphanages/children's home. It is almost two years since they have been with their relatives and amidst the growing concerns of 'how they would be treated at their homes', NCRC and SNEHA organized a meeting with orphans and semi-orphans of Tarangambadi Taluk. 53 children in the age group 7-14 attended the meeting.

Purpose of the meeting

To give the children an occasion to come together, ventilate their feelings and have fun

To know their living in their own community – how they are being treated at home by their relatives

The proceedings

The meet began with a welcome song. Ms. Jenita of SNEHA welcomed the group. An ice-breaking session ensued which included a game through which the members got introduced to the rest of the team. The participants were asked to take a chit from a handful of chits that contained names of birds or animals. Children who got the same name would make a sound representing that bird/animal and went out to discuss about themselves. The children were instructed to consider themselves as their partner and introduce the other person. The children introduced the partner by telling her/his name, location, likes and dislikes. Ms. Dhanalakshmi of SNEHA facilitated the process.

Another game followed this. The entire group was divided into two- two groups stood in circles – one circle behind the other. The facilitator instructed that when she says *alayadikithu* (Waves coming) the first group should wave their hands in unison and when she says *kaattadikithu* (wind is blowing) the other group should wave their hands. When the same slogan is repeated twice one group should swap each others position. In the process if some could not find a place, that person would be out of the game.

Next session aimed at knowing how the children are being treated at home. The entire group was divided into small groups and a sheet with faces showing different emotions were given and asked to give colours to the pictures and rank them, write the names of who they related each pictures to. Later each child was asked to describe why s/he liked/disliked the person. A few of the children were seen bursting out in tears when they described about their parents who had died in tsunami.

In the next round the children were given a format asking for details like family members lost, whose guardianship they are living now, occupation of the guardian, change in place, feeling about the new atmosphere, school where they studied before tsunami and studying after, death compensation, where is it deposited, ambitions etc.

After this exercise they were shown a unicef film on gender discrimination. A small girl Meena is not sent to school while her brother goes to school. She helps her mother in household chores. She has got a parrot friend who visits the classes and teaches Meena some basic arithmetic. Once she happened to see a thief and her learning helped her to identify the thief and catch him red-handed. The family and villagers got impressed by Meena's bravery and knowledge and they have decided to send her also to school.

Following the film, Mr. Jerald, sector head-NCRC, asked the children what they learned from this. Many talked about the friendship of Meena and parrot and how it helped Meena. Jerald took a cue from this and told the children not to worry, there would always be good friends around who are ready to help.

Just before wrapping up the session, candle light prayer in remembrance of the children who had died in Kumbakonam fire accident on July 16, 2006, was organized. The children were asked to stand in circle and candles were distributed which they lit and placed before them. Everyone closed their eyes and Mr. Jerald prayed on behalf of the entire group.

Then, the children were asked to tell the group how they felt at the end of the day. Some of the responses are as follows:

- ◆ Was able to interact with others very well
- ◆ I could express my feelings and pains
- ◆ Was a refreshing expressing

Ms. Annie George, CEO, NCRC distributed gifts to all the children

Once the session was over, the facilitators which include NCRC staff, SNEHA staff and SIFFS staff got together and evaluated the days session which suggested organizing these types of events at regular intervals and decided on to develop an action plan for this.