

100 Stories of Change..
by Goonj..

31st

Story

Giving a new lease of life.. PART II



The first story in this series highlighted how using material contributed by the masses (be it furniture, wardrobes, tables etc.) in our own work and infrastructure building not only gives us a sense of purpose, it keeps our creative juices flowing while frugality and simplicity has become a part of our DNA.

BUT what would it be worth if we didn't go out into the world with what we believe in. This next in the series story shares how this mantra of reuse and recycle has become our call to action with partner groups, the communities we work with and for individuals and families struggling for the basics, especially after disasters..

Earlier this year the people of a small Musahar (one of the poorest, rat eating communities) village in Bihar expressed a desire to build a school for their children under Goonj's Cloth for Work (CFW) initiative. They converted a temporary structure on a vacant land into a Chehak (school-cum-Community) Centre. 43 village families mobilized resources (110 bamboos and shramdan) for construction, pooled money to take care of the teacher's salary and worked for 5 days to construct the center. Goonj immediately provided 43 Solar LED lanterns along with Tarps, Flexes and ropes. We promised to provide continuous support if we noticed a marked behavioral change in the children. When the enrollment went from 55 to 75 children in a matter of months, we provided more than 70 chairs apart from benches, tables and desks to the school.

This last bit may seem like a minor detail but imagine this – a bamboo structure (made without any cement or wood), filled with colorful modern furniture. The simple yet powerful move from the ground to the chair and table proved to be a huge motivation not only for the children but for



their parents as well. “When this little girl Munni Kumari reached school she looked stunned on seeing the complete overhaul of her class. While the rest of her classmates were excitedly hopping on their seats, she stood outside the class trying hard to absorb that something like this could be her’s. I

explained to her that she deserved every bit of it. Only then she took her seat.” Says Bachchan Lala, (center head) recalling one of the most touching moments he had with Goonj's furniture support to his school. These are not wonders we are claiming to have done but it's true that just free midday meals are not enough to lure kids to schools. Maybe the absence of these basic school materials wouldn't have made a difference but their presence is definitely one step ahead in boosting the morale and motivation of these children.



In this have and have not's world, filling these little gaps is what we aim to do.. One such example of filling the gap is been shared here in this story.. The teachers and the kids of a Delhi based school may be hardly aware of this new lease of life that their out fashioned furniture had got but we (Goonj..) as a link between this Chehak center in the remotest part of Bihar and this affluent school in Delhi take highest pride in connecting these dots..

The addition of furniture got the parents excited as well. They not only collected mud and plastered the inner and outer walls of the center but also decorated the entire campus before putting up chairs and desks in the class. Now they want to construct a new bamboo structure next to the center, to accommodate the growing enrollments, using the spare chairs and tables. That's what we call ownership.

Our grassroots partner groups are the most critical element of our work and many of these organizations are run by some really passionate individuals. Over the years we noticed how any of these organizations find it hard to sustain themselves. That's how the concept of introducing 'Office Kit' came up for our rural counterparts.

A typical Goonj Office kit includes a basic support of Furniture (Tables, Chairs, Almirahs), Stationary, Curtains, beddings, Utensils, torches, umbrellas, first-aid kits and toiletries etc. Our motive has been to take care of the basics for these organizations, to free them up from mundane expenses so that they can diligently do what they hope to, for their communities.. Also, for them to cherish their dream of a proper work place of their own.. Prakhar Bharitya, the young founder of a youth mentoring organization called Youth Alliance, comes every year to Goonj's processing center with his new batch. On reaching Goonj's office kit making section he makes it a point to share how the office material support made life easier for his organization. There are many organizations across India who have breathed easy on their own infrastructure needs because the furniture and other material from the cities played a critical role. Sharing here some names from across India - Kajla Jan Kalyan Samiti (East Medinipur, WB), NEST Jalpaiguri –

W.Bengal, Spandan Samaj Sewa Samiti Khandwa – MP, Gram Vikas Odissa and QUSES - Munshiyari (Uttarakhand).



This story would be incomplete without the mention of our work with Mamoon Akhtar's organization, the Samaritan Help Mission (SHM) in Howrah. Mamoon Bhai, as he is fondly called by everyone, started his work in the bylanes of Tikiapada, a neighborhood famous for

all the wrong reasons. His work stands widely acknowledged and awarded today. He started with imparting education to slum children from a 400 sq. ft room, which has over the years turned into a 5 story school building for slum children, in front of that small room. He also runs a health center and a vocational training center. What's all this got to do with Goonj you may wonder.. Over the years Goonj sent truck loads of used windows, doors and tiles apart from mirrors, boards and occupational equipments for the Vocational training center, providing the support in SHM's early years of building up. Organizations like SHM doing exemplary work do find the support from the world sooner or later but in the initial years the freeing up of their resources helps. "Goonj has helped SHM with the infrastructure support. That finance was used for program expenditure. This was a big support for a small organization like SHM." says Mamoon Bhai. Many such organizations like SHM could save a lot of money and the same resources could be used on other serious needs of their organizations as well as for the communities.. Ram Prasad, father of three daughters who studied at Mamoon Bhai's school says "*Goonj connection key baad ek naya mod aaya. Goonj itna bada building key liye resource deta hai aur aaj meri teeno ladki achche school mein padh raha hai.*" (connecting with Goonj brought about a new turn in our lives. Goonj gave resources for such a big building.. That's how my three girls are studying in good schools now.). When we started work with New Life, a drug treatment and research center in Odissa, it was up and running for more than a year. Today four years later it has gained a well deserved prominence and has three branches in Khurda, Balasore and Bhubaneswar..



“Every corner of New Life bears the impact of Goonj. So far, we have received every type of material from Sujni to computers, Ration to toiletries even our complete offices have been set up with the required furniture support from Goonj. As a result, we have achieved great success in socializing so many drug addicts. Approximately 800 (in the age group of 13 to 65) patients are admitted in both our centers for a period of three to six month” Says Prashant, Founder of New Life. In Bengaluru Goonj has been providing necessary support to Sparsha Trust for the last 3 years. More than 158 shelter children are provided with basic requirement such as beds, sofa, dining table, tables, trunks, bed sheets, mats, woolen sweaters, slippers, shoes, clothes, toys, note books, education material and toiletries.. *“By providing the basic necessities to these underprivileged children, we can help them lead a dignified life with comfort”* Says Gopinath R. from Sparsh. The beds are used for sleeping and the table for reading and writing purpose. The sofa set has been used in the office. And they keep their clothes in trunks. The children are very happy to wear shoes while going to the school. They are also using beds, bed sheets for sleeping and are making use of dining table to have food. Don't forget that all these stories are a result of the material you give.. No matter how bored you are with your old chair or sofa set or how keen you are to do away your old cupboard to get a new shiny one.. There's always a blessing waiting for you at Goonj.. Words can't capture the gratefulness and thanks we get from the one's who receive your stuff with all due humility and dignity.. We carry all of this with a sense of satisfaction and pride in what we do..
