

Varsha

When 9-year-old Nisha was found wandering in Koniya, Shakti activator Varsha realised she was vulnerable to being trafficked and ensured that she was sent to a safe shelter home



Varsha is an activator for Aangan's Shakti program for adolescent girls in Varanasi's Koniya community.

Located on the banks of the River Ganga, Koniya is an illegal community of about 30,000 people. Bordered by a garbage dumping ground on one side, the slum has no proper toilets, forcing women and children to use open spaces, raising their risk of being abused or taken away and trafficked.

Nine-year-old Nisha was found wandering unaccompanied in Koniya late one evening. Community members who spotted her tried to find out where she had come from, but the child was too frightened to say anything. Concerned for her safety, they took the girl to Varsha.

Varsha assured Nisha of her safety, and gently earned her trust. Nisha told Varsha that she was from Mughalsarai, about 10 km away from Varanasi in Chandauli district, and that her parents were dead. As she grew more comfortable, however, Nisha admitted that her parents were not dead, and she had run away because they physically abused her at home. She said she did not want to go back to live with them.

Varsha realised that Nisha had nowhere to go, and that this made her extremely vulnerable to being trafficked. On the Aangan facilitators' advice, Varsha called Childline and the police. An official from the NGO came to the community. He wanted to take Nisha to the police station. Since Nisha was not comfortable going with them by herself, Varsha accompanied them as her support person.

A missing child case was registered, after which Nisha was taken to the Childline shelter home. A follow up of her case is being done, where Aangan and Childline are trying to find out more details and background about Nisha, to ensure her safety.

The Situation

According to the Home Ministry, over 100,000 children go missing every year. In fact, 325,000 children went missing between 2011 and June 2014. Many children are kidnapped and trafficked – for labour, into forced marriages, or abused, raped and sold into the sex trade. Unsupervised young girls are especially vulnerable to being trafficked. Most of these children are never heard from again. But if children are alert and able to recognise red flags, they can keep themselves and other children safe.

The Solution

Through Shakti, adolescent girls are connected to a peer network, supported and empowered to recognise risk, and develop strategies to resist pressures of child marriage, dangerous work, and being pulled out of school, to access services, negotiate for themselves, and take steps towards achieving their goals.