



Providing healthcare and hope to people in the slums of Mumbai

 The Karuna Mobile Clinic, India



Mumbai

Mumbai is a bustling metropolis. Located in western India, it is home to over 21 million people. Streets overflow with activity and a cacophony of noise fills the air. Horns blare, vendors hawk their wares and frenzied conversations break out all around. Cars, bikes and tuk tuks weave in and out of each other, kicking up dust as they hurtle through the streets. It is a place of mayhem and chaos. A whirlwind of activity.

But deep in the Mumbai slums, life is very different. Home to a third of Mumbai's population, sprawling shanty towns stretch out in all directions, a jungle of homes packed tightly together. Blue, plastic sheeting is draped over their tattered, corrugated iron rooves, a last-ditch defense against the driving monsoon rains. Here, there is no bustle. This is where the forgotten live. Those cast out by society. People just like Sonu.



Who will you be helping?

Sonu grew up in a small village just outside Mumbai. She was often sick when young, and so her parents confined her to the house for protection. But this caused her world to shrink. She missed out on school and didn't get to play with friends. It was a lonely existence. During this time, a strange numbness spread through her feet, and patches began to appear on her skin.

Then, one night, disaster struck. A rat chewed off one of her toes as she slept. So bad was the numbness in her foot that she hadn't felt anything. Can you imagine the shock that this little girl felt when she woke up the following morning? She was just 12, and yet she had experienced such trauma.

Knowing something was very wrong, Sonu went to see a doctor. She had to get to the bottom of this. But the doctor's words were worse than she could have imagined. "You have leprosy." Sonu's world collapsed.

"When I found out I had leprosy, I was devastated. I was frightened for my life. Fearful and worried thoughts haunted me. What would happen to me? What would my future be like? If the sickness got worse, where would I get medical help, and who would take care of me? I felt very out of place, as no one else in my family had leprosy. I didn't know how people outside would react, so I avoided socializing with others."

Sonu is now 48, but in the years since her diagnosis, the effects of leprosy have devastated her mobility. The injuries on her feet became infected, and then they ulcerated. Despite regular, ongoing treatment, her ulcers just won't heal. She's lost most of her toes and finds it difficult to walk. Even standing is a challenge for her.

It's meant she's dependent on others to care for her. It's why she moved to the slums of Mumbai, to be part of a community of people affected by leprosy. A place she would be accepted. But like so many others, she can't afford medical treatment.





The Karuna Mobile Clinic

Fortunately, help is at hand. Each week, the Karuna Mobile Clinic parks close to Sonu's home, giving her the treatment she so desperately needs. But the clinic team are far more than doctors to Sonu. They are friends. Friends who love and accept her. "The Karuna team have been a massive blessing. Life has been very tough, but the Karuna Mobile Clinic is a lifeline for me. Besides the medicines, the staff are like friends and care for us."

And it is not just Sonu who has benefitted from their loving care. Each week, the clinic travels throughout the slums, providing free healthcare to people affected by leprosy and other diseases. People who couldn't afford healthcare, or who would be denied it because of stigma.

Activities

Healthcare

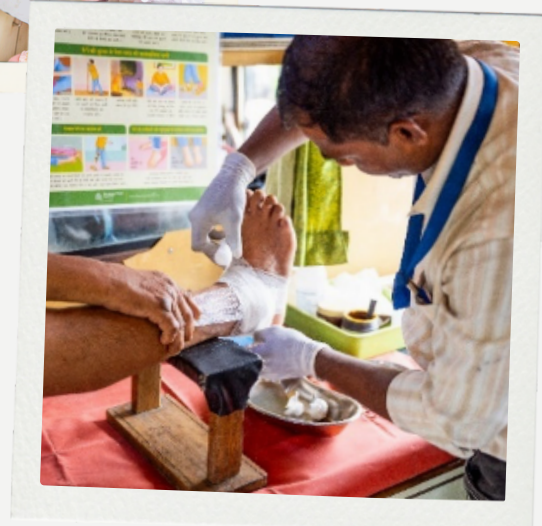
The Karuna Mobile Clinic offers both general medical care and leprosy-specific treatments to people affected by leprosy. These are provided free of charge as it travels throughout the slums. A large focus of these treatments is ulcer care. This is so important, as ulcers are common among people affected by leprosy. So often, nerve damage causes them to lose feeling in their hands and feet. This means that they do not notice cuts to their feet after working or walking on stony ground. However, if these are not treated, they can become infected and ulcerate. If these ulcers are not treated, then amputation is often the only way to prevent infection spreading. Ulcer care is therefore vital if the mobility of people affected by leprosy is to be preserved.

Training in self-care

The clinic trains people in self-care. This teaches people who have lost feeling how to look after their hands and feet. By regularly checking them for cuts, ulcers can be prevented, as wounds can be caught before infection sets in.

Awareness-raising and case-detection

The clinic raises awareness about leprosy. This is such an important part of its work, as when people recognize the signs of leprosy and understand that it can be cured, they are far more likely to come forward for treatment. This helps to protect them from disability and reduces transmission. The team also actively looks for people with the first signs of leprosy as it raises awareness.



Budget

| Description | Cost (\$) |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Project staff salaries | 28,901 |
| Mobile Clinic running costs | 7,876 |
| Case detection work | 4,332 |
| Awareness-raising | 1,291 |
| Training in self-care | 368 |
| Total | 42,768 |

Monitoring and evaluation

The Leprosy Mission has a stringent monitoring and evaluation process in place for the Karuna Mobile Clinic. Reports are produced on a six-monthly basis, and members of The Leprosy Mission Great Britain team visit the project each year. Any challenges faced, and areas for improvement identified, are then discussed and promptly addressed.

For instance, a two-day workshop on gender and inclusion was recently held to discuss how to better meet the needs of different client groups. Reports had shown that fewer women were being reached in case detection work, so the team wanted to discuss how to address this. This led to the suggestion that the team should change the times of case detection work so that more women could attend.


Sustainability

The project is seeking to create a more sustainable model for delivering leprosy care in the Mumbai slums. It realizes that the mobile clinic may not be able to provide care forever, and so it is increasingly training and mentoring government health workers so that they can provide care at permanent clinics. It is also doing this with its case detection work. The provision of self-care kits and training to patients also ensures that they are increasingly able to look after themselves.



Sonu's story is far too common. Right now, many others like her face the devastating consequences of leprosy. Without the mobile clinic, they have no hope. There is nowhere else they can go.

Will you provide healing and restoration to people like Sonu?

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