

“WHY, FATHER?”

Mehnaz Feroz

Ruby’s father doesn’t work. Her mother, sisters and Ruby herself work to earn a living. Since the father is not working, the children have not been able to attend regular school. Then Ruby heard about our drop-in center and came to us. A girl of 13, she had to be admitted to nursery because she had never attended school before. She would work in other peoples’ homes and then come to school in the evening shift.

One day Ruby was absent. And then the next day. And the day after that. I went to her house to find out what the matter was. Ruby’s mother had undergone surgery and was still recuperating from it. Ruby and her sister now had to go work in her place too, so their work didn’t get done by the time the evening shift began.

When I probed a little further I found out that Ruby’s mother owed some money to the woman she worked for. That was why she couldn’t absent herself from work, because she was now working there to pay off her loan. Needless to say, her employer took a little advantage of this fact and was not willing to make any adjustments or give any time off to the mother, unless, of course, Ruby and her sister came to work instead of their mother.

Once the mother got better and started to work again, the children still did not come to our school since their tempo had now broken. I made another trip to their house. I convinced them to bring their little brother to nursery, and to join the school and the sewing classes themselves so they have a useful skill.

I want these children to have at least basic literacy and a useful skill through which they can work at their own terms. I want this generation of deprived people to have the power that comes with knowledge. Real change starts here, with Ruby taking control of her life...

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