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(see pg. 6)

SANKALP
10000
CLUB

#18

April 2013

VIEWS AND VOICES

Manna from Heaven

by Eldred Tellis, Director

Yvonne Baker must be a contented soul. Even after she has left this world for her heavenly abode, she continues to do a great deal of work through 10 NGOs, one of which is Sankalp Rehabilitation Trust.

Yvonne Baker was known to me only through our annual fundraisers, as she became a 1000 club member. Like most of you, she religiously sent in her cheque of Rs1000/- at the start of each year. I sometimes met her at the laundry down the road when we happened to be there with our clothes. She always looked forward to our events and was never short of compliments for the work of Sankalp.

Then one day, almost a couple of years ago, an advocate called up saying he was representing the interests of Yvonne Baker who had passed away and asked for our postal address. The letter that followed floored me.

Yvonne had passed away and left 2% from her estate to Sankalp. I was later to find out that she did the same thing for nine other NGOs that she had supported during her lifetime. It was unheard of for me, the first for Sankalp, and the most pleasant surprise I've ever had. It also said a lot for the person Yvonne Baker was. She was clear, she was sure, she was generous.

For us it was just perfect. We were just facing the fact that one of our donors had a change of policy which was going to affect our project of 8 years and here we found a lifeline at least to carry on for another year! Yes Yvonne, you have allowed us to continue our Community Care Centre for another year. You are certainly blessed and we are happy to have someone up there who will continue to intercede for us so that we can continue our work unhindered.



Project Nivara clients and staff celebrated our dog Cash's first birthday in January!

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Victory: Supreme Court Rejects Novartis' Appeal

by Joanna Percher, AJWS volunteer

Individuals around the world who depend on low cost, life-saving generic medicines produced in India breathed a sigh of relief on April 1, as the Supreme Court of India dismissed Swiss pharmaceutical giant Novartis' appeal for a patent on their cancer-fighting drug Gleevec. In ruling that Novartis' drug was ineligible for a patent, the Supreme Court took a firm stand in protecting section 3(d) of India's patent law, which safeguards against abuses of the patent system by pharmaceutical companies.

Prior to 2005 India did not grant patents for medicines, allowing a booming generic drug industry to arise, producing high-quality, low-cost medicines for India and the rest of the developing world. Each year, these drugs enable millions of individuals around the globe to gain access to life-saving treatments that are otherwise unaffordable. For instance, India produces more than 80% of the HIV medicine used to treat 6.6 million people in developing countries.

In order to comply with the World Trade Organization's TRIPS agreement on intellectual property rights, India amended its patent system in 2005 to include patents on medicines. It did, however, include a public health safeguard, Section 3(d), which stipulates that patents shall only be granted on medicines that are truly innovative. One of the goals was to protect against 'evergreening,' the practice by which drug companies make minor changes to an existing formula with little actual increased efficacy in order to renew their 20-year patents on highly profitable drugs.

Novartis' fight to dismantle Section 3(d) began in 2006 when the company's patent application for a new form of the anti-cancer drug imatinib mesylate, known as Gleevec, was denied on the basis that it was only a slightly altered form of a known substance. Over the next seven years, Novartis would take the case from the Madras High Court to India's Intellectual Property Appellate Board, and finally to the Supreme Court of India, in an attempt to win a patent for Gleevec and prove Section 3(d) unconstitutional.

The ruling on April 1 has sparked much debate in India and throughout the rest of the world about the true price of innovation, and what public health responsibilities pharmaceutical companies have, if any. These companies argue that without strong patent protections they are unable to recoup their money spent on research and development, and therefore are less likely to invest in new, groundbreaking drug research. There are a few holes in this argument. The first is that for drugs like Gleevec, the majority of the research is usually paid for by public and non-profit sources. For this particular drug, Novartis paid 10% of development costs while the rest came from Oregon Health and Science University (10%), the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (30%) and the National Cancer Institute (50%). Estimates put



Sankalp along with other local NGOs protested at Novartis Headquarters on December 21, 2012

Novartis' expenses somewhere between \$38 and \$96 million. This is a tremendous amount of money, but not compared to how much Gleevec brings in annually: \$4.675 billion. When a drug is that profitable, it is no wonder that companies like Novartis try everything to extend their monopolies as long as possible. Novartis would have you believe that a patent system that honors these slight chemical changes with very little improved therapeutic efficacy is one that promotes innovation, just like the U.S.'s patent system, in which 75% of new patents on medicines each year go to drugs that are actually minor changes to existing compounds either to renew patents or create "me too" drugs that are almost identical to drugs already on the market.

Finally, in India, a country where 70% of its 1.26 billion inhabitants live on less than Rs 110 a day, a drug that costs Rs 1,20,000 per month is out of reach. While Novartis has a program that is supposed to provide Gleevec at low or no cost (Gleevec International Patient Assistance Programme, GIPAP), there has been much criticism that this program fails to reach many patients who need it. There have also been accounts that the GIPAP has flat-out rejected eligible patients who were referred to the program. Meanwhile, generic imatinib mesylate costs Rs 8,000 a month, which is much more affordable both for patients and for programs trying to distribute the medicine.

For now, Section 3(d) is alive and kicking, and India will continue producing the medicines that save lives around the world. Further challenges are on the horizon, however, including the pending Indian-European Free Trade Agreement which threatens to place severe restrictions on generic drug manufacturing.

To stay updated on these issues, follow Sankalp on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SankalpRehabilitationTrust and find more information from Médecins Sans Frontières Access Campaign (www.msfaccess.org) and Lawyers Collective (www.lawyerscollective.org).

Recently at Sankalp Rehabilitation Trust...

As always, there has been a lot going on at Sankalp. From moving our Detoxification Centre to a spacious building in Vasai to hosting a peer educator training for the Global Fund, here are some of the things we've been up to:

18th Anniversary



Sankalp staff members cut Sankalp's 18th anniversary cake with Founder/Director Eldred Tellis

Sankalp's 18th Anniversary on January 12th was celebrated with games, cake, and a quiz competition. Since 1995 we have provided services to over 15,000 individuals in Mumbai. Our Founder and Director, Eldred Tellis, had this to say on the occasion:

"Today is Sankalp's 18th Anniversary. We are proud that we have made STEADY progress in reaching more and more drug users who have never had an opportunity before!"

Celebrating Republic Day at the Good Shepherd Recovery Home



Clients and family members celebrate Republic Day on January 26th at our Rehabilitation Centre.

Detoxification Centre Inauguration:



Sankalp volunteers Joanna and Premnath with Founder/Director Eldred Tellis and chairperson Dr. Saroj Jha in front of our new Detox Centre.

On February 3rd we celebrated the inauguration of our new Detox Centre at Vasai. The building is being leased to Sankalp at a reasonable price from Nirashritashramata Trust, whose founder, the late Fr. Peter Bambocha, was committed to helping alcoholics in the area. Our new centre will provide much more room for our clients undergoing detoxification than our previous location in Vithalwadi.

Educational Programme at Ambani International School



Eldred Tellis was invited to speak on February 13th to the eleventh grade at the Ambani International School. The event was organized by Nihaar Shah, a student at the school who volunteered with Sankalp last summer and whose experience left a lasting impression on him. We screened the film *Suee* which follows a character on his journey into brown sugar addiction and shows the help he receives from Sankalp. Eldred answered thoughtful questions from the students.

International Women's Day

On March 8th, International Women's Day, Sankalp held a programme at our Charni Road office with female clients and spouses of clients where we discussed the importance of the day and what women's empowerment means to them.



Senior Counselor and Administrator Sharmila Singh with participants on Women's Day

Global Fund Peer Educator Training



As a Learning Site for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Sankalp holds a 5-day peer educator training regularly to train peer educators and outreach workers from Targeted Intervention Programmes in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa. Our last batch trained twenty-six peer educators and outreach workers and was held in Vasai. Topics discussed include HIV, STIs, harm reduction techniques, and how to properly dispose of dirty needles.

Peer educators in training work on an exercise

Ambulance Donation

Thanks to the generosity of Shri Firodia Trust and Deutscher Orden International, Sankalp is in the process of receiving two new ambulances to help us transport clients in need to the hospital, our Community Care Centre, and testing centres. We will now be able to keep one ambulance at our Detox Centre in Vasai and one at our Shelter at Charni Road. Thank you to our donors!



*Shri Firodia Trusts presents Sankalp with the key to our new ambulance.
From left to right: Mr. and Mrs. Abhay Firodia (Chairman), Mr. S. Padmanabhan (Director, Force Motors), Mr E. Tellis (Director, Sankalp), Mr. Jiten Munot (Sales & Logistics, Force Motors)*

Introducing New Senior Sankalp Staff

The start of 2013 brought the addition of two new staff members to the Sankalp team and we couldn't be more excited to introduce them:



Sharmila Singh joined in early March as our new Senior Counselor and Administrator. Sharmila comes to Sankalp with over 25 years experience in the social sector. Before Sankalp, she worked for the Deepam

Education Society for Health (DESH) as a counselor and trainer on HIV education programmes. Sharmila also worked for many years at Shraddhanand Mahilashram, The Hindu Women's Welfare Society, managing adoptions. Sharmila is excited to work in a new area with a different population, as most of her work in the past has been with children.



Dr. Gofran Chaudhary joined Sankalp at the end of January as our Senior Programme Manager. He has completed his medical graduation, done a PG in emergency medicines, and holds an MBA in health & hospital management. Dr. Chaudhary previously worked at Ziqita Health

Care Limited, an emergency ambulance service for patients from underprivileged backgrounds. He also worked at Seven Hills hospital as Assistant Manager in the Operations Department. Dr. Chaudhary joined Sankalp because he wants to use his medical and administrative skills to deliver high-quality medical services to patients who cannot otherwise afford it.

We are excited to have these two additions to our staff and are looking forward to seeing what new insights and contributions they can bring!

Sustainable Livelihood Programme Expansion

This year has brought some changes for our Project Hunar Sustainable Livelihood Programme. After a mutual agreement suspended our partnership with Tata Teleservices in December, we have been able to join up with local NGOs offering skills training to ensure that our clients continue to train and earn gainful employment, even as our data entry work is put on hold.

In January we joined with the Kotak Education Foundation which provides career training for underprivileged individuals. Three of our Project Hunar participants began the three-month hospitality program in mid-January and are now currently employed in the food service industry—two at Subway and one at the Bombay Gymkhana. Deepak, one of our clients who went through the training says, "training gave me the work ethic and discipline I never had before."

In April another partnership was formed with Yuva Parivartan, a Kherwadi, Mumbai-based NGO which provides training in careers ranging from engine repair to nursing. Three of our clients began classes in April; two are in mobile repair and one is in tailoring and fashion design.

We are excited for these new training opportunities for our

clients which will enable them to be self-sufficient. We are also looking forward to continuing our computer skills training as Sugandha Sukrutaraj of Bangalore-based AMBA CEEIC, our partner NGO that pioneered visual recognition training, becomes licensed to become a sub-contractor for data entry projects.



A client displaying the pants he sewed in his tailoring class

As Long as There is Life, There is Hope

I, Ramesh Ramji Bhandari, was born in Kuwait where my parents, who were from India, ran a family laundry business. My older brother is much older than me, and by the time I was born he already had a garage of his own.

When I was barely 2 ½ years old the first tragic event in my life occurred; my mother was diagnosed with leukemia. My mother, brother and I returned to India so that she could be treated, but unfortunately she succumbed to the illness. In the meanwhile, I was placed in the care of an uncle and his wife who were total strangers to me then. My father returned briefly for the funeral rites but returned to Kuwait immediately after. He tried to take me with him but I was too frightened to go because he was an alcoholic and even though I was a small child some very ugly scenes were etched in my mind. My father therefore left without me, never to return. Till date, both my brother and I do not know whether he is living or dead.

My brother, who was like a father figure to me, had no other option but to leave me and go back. He returned after a couple of years by which time I had reached school-going age. Keeping my care and future in mind, he decided to marry so that I would have a permanent home and someone to look after me. The second tragedy was that my brother got into a scuffle with someone in Kuwait and was put behind bars. Money stopped flowing in, my school fees were not paid and I had to leave school. I was about 8 years old. When my brother returned he was almost a pauper, but took up a job as a driver and tried to reinstate me in school. When I reached the 5th std. an incident that took place that shattered me. During the final exam I had answered all the papers but somehow the teacher marked me absent and declared that I had failed. My brother was called to the school and I tried to explain to my brother that I did answer all the papers but he did not trust me. That day, something inside me snapped because the only person who really cared and loved me did not trust me anymore. I felt abandoned, lonely and very empty inside.

My life changed for the worse. By the time I was 16 I was bitter, rebellious and got mixed up with a group who led me further down the path of destruction. I started smoking gutka with them and resorting to petty robberies to finance my habit. To keep me out of mischief my brother started taking me along with him to work and eventually one of my brother's friends gave me a job in his garage. I worked a while and my first pay packet of Rs.800 was religiously handed over to my brother who very kindly gave me Rs.200 and asked me to buy a decent pair of chappals. I went to a video parlour and lost all the money. I had also seen where my brother had kept the balance money which I took and spent it all on gutka, video parlours and started drinking alcohol. I started stealing articles from the garage and finally lost my job. In the meanwhile, I had graduated in my wayward habits. I started using brown sugar and also visiting red light areas, dance bars and all this required a lot of money. So with my bad habits my thieving escapades also took on a larger dimension. I was caught and jailed. Spent time in jail and was then released on bail by my brother. By the time I was 22 years, I had done it all, seen it all. My brother had reached the end of his tether and broke ties with me.

I got married at the age of 25 on the suggestion of a relative that it would help me. My wife had a son and remained completely in the dark about my addiction. I sold her mangalsutra and a lot of her other jewellery and took a place to continue my nefarious

activities. I landed in the lockup again. My wife, along with her mother, released me but then my marriage was on the rocks and she refused to continue to live with me. I was penniless, had no home and nowhere to go.

I started living under the bridge at Chembur. It was in this state that I was discovered by the outreach workers from Sankalp who held out a ray of hope in my otherwise dark world. This was in 2007. Sankalp staff convinced me to accompany them for a medical check up, where it was discovered that I was HIV positive and had T.B. as well. I was then treated under close supervision and was admitted to Sankalp's Project Nivara, their Community Care Centre. Today I am cured of T.B. and am still undergoing treatment for HIV. During my stay at Nivara I slipped many times. I was not condemned and cast away but was given all the help and understanding to bounce back with renewed strength. Since I was semi-literate, a Drop-In Centre coordinator suggested that I be enrolled to attend the computer course conducted under the Hunar Project. Today I am an instructor.

The treatment, love, care and concern of all the people at Sankalp has helped to restore my confidence and self worth. During my visits to my brother's family I am treated with respect and trust. During my visits to my wife and son I am treated in a civil manner and I am fully aware that this is all my fault and will have to work even harder to restore this relationship. I plucked the courage during the Diwali gone by to tell my wife that I was very sorry for all that I had put her through and begged for forgiveness. All I can do now is pray and hope. The counselors made me aware of my sense of duty towards my son and I give Rs. 1000/- every month. I am indeed grateful to God that he blessed me with a wife who was educated enough to work and look after my son and for sparing both of them from HIV infection. I am also grateful to Sankalp for not giving up on me and treating me with love and respect and thus restoring my faith in humankind. I owe them a great debt of gratitude. Regrets if any, yes. There are times when I feel a kind of loneliness, a void in me and I long for home and family—especially my wife and child. I don't know what tomorrow holds for me but I will cling to the hope that things are going to get better and I will be back with my wife and son.

Ramesh is celebrating four years of being off of drugs this May.

Narrated by Ramesh and written by Maise D'souza, Sankalp volunteer.



Ramesh and a group of graduating Project Hunar participants whom he helped train

SANKALP REHABILITATION TRUST

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