

Peer Educator Stories: Sustainable Partners for Change in Nepal

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Improving the health services available to young women in Nepal has been a priority of the ACQUIRE Project's Reproductive Health for Married Adolescent Couples (RHMAC) Program. Until recently, women coming to a facility for care either had to sit in a chair or lie on a narrow bench or on the floor for exams, all seen as degrading and uncomfortable. Through RHMAC, health officers have received training and have instituted changes to accommodate youth in their facilities. But many times, more than curtains and tables are required in order to improve services.

Four peer educator couples in Gamarhiya Village Development Committee (VDC), Parsa District—Jalandar Thakur and Anita Devi Thakur; Narish Ram and Sunita Devi Ram; Sabindar Prasad Kusuwaha and Shanti Devi Kusuwaha; and Parmananda P. Kanu and Teter Devi Kanu—decided to take matters into their own hands. The four couples learned that they could play important roles in the health of their community by becoming active in the management of the facilities and accessing funds for improvement of services. As they held meetings and went door-to-door talking about reproductive health and family planning, they became well-known in the community.



Jalandar Thakur
Anita Devi Thakur

Narish Ram
Sunita Devi Ram

Sabindar Prasad Kusuwaha
Shanti Devi Kusuwaha

Parmananda P. Kanu
Teter Devi Kanu

As they became more active in their wards, Sunita Devi Ram and Jalandar Thakur were invited to join the health management committee. In the meantime, the health post “in-charge,” Birendra Shah, gave Sabinda Kusuwaha an extra key to the sub health post for emergencies. The in-charge also received training in youth-friendly services through ACQUIRE/RHAMC and obtained curtains and an exam table for the sub health post. However, the peer educators noted that these additions were pointless, since the sub health post was so poorly maintained. The files were in disarray on the floor, and garbage lay behind the new green curtain and filled the room that was intended to be the examining room. There were only two tables and two chairs, and there were no posters or information on the walls.



Village Health Worker and Maternal and Child Health Worker in the new exam room

One day, when Mr. Shah was out of the office for the day, Sabinda gathered the other couples together and entered the sub health post using his key. Together, they cleaned and reorganized the office. They threw out garbage and placed files into the cabinets. Using materials they found stored, along with posters provided through the ACQUIRE Project, they covered the bare walls with colorful and informative wall hangings. The examination room was cleared out, the new exam table was placed in the corner, and the green curtain was rehung to separate the room from the rest of the office. At the end of the day, they left a note on the chair of the in-charge of the health post instructing him not to change anything.

When he returned, Mr. Shah was very angry, saying these were changes he had intended to make anyway. However, over time, he relented and together he and the peer educators are working to access VDC funds for more improvements, specifically for:

- Construction of toilets for the sub health post
- Development of an official citizen charter that lists available health services and their cost, and which is to be publicly placed at health center locations (This indicates that the national government officially hands over authority to local government.)
- Implementation of outreach awareness programs in marginalized remote communities

In a meeting with the VDC leadership, they agreed to all of the above requests. In addition, the VDC will assume the costs of snacks for the monthly meetings and has asked them to turn in a proposal for Rs37,000 through the Women’s Development Office, to continue their work after the ACQUIRE funding ends. When the VDC is officially handed over to the authority of the local government, the citizen charter will also list the names of the peer educators on the front of the sub health post.

The health post in-charge, Mr. Shah, says that due to the efforts of these couples and the other peer educators, there has been a 25% increase in outpatient services and a 50% increase in antenatal services. He says that he now welcomes the involvement of the peer educators and that they deserve support and respect by the government and community. Sabindar Kusuwaha continues to hold the key to the facility, but he and his partner peer educators no longer have to sneak into the facility to make changes. The health providers and community members now work together to make improvements in their community health services.

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