

Turning grief into action

Case Study

March 2014

LAHORE, Pakistan – The death of a child, the worst nightmare for any parent, came true for Ms. Nighat Rukhsana when she lost her two teenage sons in a road accident. The older one, 18, was going to drop his younger brother at school when a car hit their bike, leaving both of them severely injured. They succumbed to their injuries on the way to the hospital. But, Ms. Nighat thinks otherwise. To her, it was due to a delayed emergency response.

Grief-stricken Ms. Nighat was unable to accept the harsh reality until she was approached by her late son's teacher who had joined the emergency rescue service commonly known as Rescue 1122 in Lahore – a city of over 10 million population in Punjab province, Pakistan. She learned about the stories of so many other unfortunate parents who lost their children to different types of accidents. This changed her perspective towards life and she too joined Rescue 1122 as a volunteer. Since then, she has been putting together her efforts for saving lives and preparing women in the area to volunteer or work as emergency responders. She has become a symbol of courage and hope for her community.

"It was impossible for me to become a trained first aid responder, if it weren't for her," tells Ms. Saba Saeed, 19, a college student while looking admiringly at a smiling Ms. Nighat.

"She convinced my parents about the value of Community Action for Disaster Response (CADRE) course for women," Ms. Saba said triumphantly and added: "I'm really thankful to her for convincing the parents of young women of this community."

Ms. Nighat Ruksana received CADRE training along with seventeen men and seven women volunteers at the Emergency Services Academy (Rescue 1122) in 2012 under the Program for Enhancement of Emergency Response (PEER).



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CADRE has trained both men and women volunteers in Pakistan to serve as community first responders.



Asian Disaster Preparedness Center

SM Tower, 24th Floor 979/69 Paholyothin Road, Samsen Nai Phayathai, Bangkok 10400 Thailand

Tel: +66 2 298 0682-92 Fax: +66 2 298 0012

E-mail: adpc@adpc.net Website: www.adpc.net



Ms. Nighat Rukhsana stands beside a Rescue 1122 instructor. She is both a role model and a leader in her community.

The program was implemented by Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) with support from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and American Red Cross (ARC).

Inspiring emergency management

Ms. Nighat's house is a couple of miles from river Ravi and just a mile from Pakistan's busiest highway, the Grand Trunk (GT) Road. The area called Shahdara (Passage of Emperors) is predominantly residential with a commercial semi-urban setup. Houses, schools, shops and markets are located on either side of the GT Road: one of Asia's oldest and longest major roads.

Although, women in Punjab province enjoy relatively more freedom than in other parts of the country, it is hard for young women to participate in activities taking place outside their educational institutes. Ms. Nighat, however, made it possible for some. Eight young women and seventeen men from Shahdara community participated in the CADRE

training course at Rescue 1122, where they learned basic techniques of emergency management.

"Emergency is never small-scale for the victim and his family. Its always unprecedented for them," says Ms. Nighat thoughtfully and adds that day-to-day emergency management prepares volunteers for the worst.

Upon finishing training with flying colors, Ms. Nighat was not sure about the sustainability and outreach of this initiative. She spoke with the officials of Rescue 1122 about the idea of establishing a kind of space for wider awareness. Eventually, Ms. Nighat volunteered her house for meetings.

"We don't really wish for an emergency situation to occur to practice our skills. But I was worried that if the group of basic CADRE graduates fell apart, they would forget what they had learned," recalled Ms. Nighat.

Upon witnessing the level of interest and

enthusiasm of Shahdara community volunteers, which was essentially a result of Ms. Nighat's campaign, the management of Rescue 1122 gladly promised to provide technical support to the group and those who were signing up for training at Rescue 1122 based on the CADRE model.

"We have been working with this community for the last two years. I must say it is the most vibrant and united community I have ever engaged with for emergency management trainings. Ms. Nighat is a role model both for current and future CADRE graduates of this community. She has made it possible to run the program without much external help. This is quite unique," says Mr. Roqiyah Bano, Head of Community Safety Wing at the Punjab Emergency Services.

Community action in practice

Ms. Nighat holds regular meetings of the group and helps volunteers sign up for the courses offered by Rescue 1122 using content from CADRE manuals.



The survival rate in any kind of emergency can be enhanced by preparing the communities for emergency response.

“This group is a family to me. Sometimes we just go outside the city for sightseeing. But the real purpose of such expeditions is to keep the spirit of togetherness alive,” says Ms. Nighat.

On such expeditions, Ms. Nighat always carries with her the first aid bag provided under PEER, which contains everything ranging from basic first aid kit and ropes to reflective vests.

She proudly shares a recent incident where she and her colleagues exhibited response management skills: “Only a month ago, we went to a saltwater lake, three hours from Lahore. It is a popular destination for school trips but requires caution to let children move around due to its hilly terrain that is very deceptive in terms of its height,” Ms. Nighat narrated and continued: “On that day, there was a school trip. I heard a faint scream. We all became alert, but didn’t see anything. Then I saw a little girl standing on a small hill and screaming hysterically, pointing to a girl rolling down the slope. We rushed to the location and found

the girl unconscious. As it happens in such situations, people rush to the site, but CADRE graduates kept them at a distance from the victim. I checked on her. She was semi-conscious and completely traumatized. She screamed as I tried to free her arm from beneath her own weight. I realized that something is terribly wrong with her arm. Meanwhile, her teachers had arrived. They just wanted to grab the girl and rush to the doctor. It took the CADRE graduates quite an effort to tell them that the girl needs some first aid to be able to reach the hospital. The girl’s arm was fractured. A CADRE graduate brought some small wooden strips from a fruit crate a family had brought for picnic. He broke the strips further to fit the required size. I used them as temporary splinter and tightened them with an elastic bandage from CADRE bag.”

Ms. Nighat has helped many people by using her CADRE skills, but what she loves the most is to bring in more and more people to get first aid and emergency management training.

She thinks that survival rate in any kind of emergency can be enhanced by preparing the communities for emergency response.

“We need to involve shopkeepers, bus drivers, donkey-cart drivers and those who spend most of their time out of their houses,” she argues. “These people are more effective as they are on a move most of the time, or spend time where the likelihood of any emergency is high,” she justifies.

Officials and volunteers of Rescue 1122 Shahdara Zone adore Ms. Nighat for her work and determination.

“Can you even imagine that this woman with such a warm and lively smile, sharing the tales of rescuing people, has indeed lost her two young sons in a single road accident,” a CADRE instructor of Rescue 1122 asked ADPC with moist eyes.



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Tel: +66 2 298 0682-92 Fax: +66 2 298 0012 E-mail: adpc@adpc.net



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