Kusum’s road to recovery

Kusum is 13 years old and hails from Darbhanga (a state in Bihar). Her father runs a small food shop, which suffered losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. His earnings have dwindled to Rs. 7000 ($82) in a month.

Originally, Kusum had five siblings. She had a brother and five sisters; but unfortunately her two older (twin) sisters passed away. Now she has two sisters and one brother. Her elder sister has studied up to the Intermediate level. Nonetheless she is still jobless and stays at home. Her other sisters are studying in 8th, 6th and 4th classes. Her mother is a housewife. The rent of their house is ₹3000 per month. Three months rent is overdue – they have no income, so they cannot pay.

Kusum is studying in a remedial class at Sarai Kale Khan drop-in centre of BUDS. Seeing Kusum's financial condition, BUDS gave her dry rations this year. Unfortunately Kusum has been ill for the last seven months. Her teachers and counsellor found out that she suffered from chronic stomach pain and she was referred for check-up to the BUDS mobile health van. Despite taking the medicines, Kusum’s pain increased and one night she woke up crying because it was unbearable. Her parents took her to a nearby hospital where the doctor did an ultrasound.

The ultrasound showed a possible tubercular lump in her stomach. Her mother was distraught and she came to consult Shobha, the BUDS counsellor. She was very worried about her daughter. “Now that my daughter has tuberculosis (TB), she'll be on leave for a month. She will be fine, won't she? Before that I had two twin girls whom I have already lost, I cannot think what will happen to Kusum”. She started weeping. The counsellor soothed her, saying that the 6-months course of TB. medication is being done at the DOTS (Direct Observed Treatment Short Course) centre. She would be fine; however, special attention would have to be given to Kusum's meals, for example adding fruits and ensuring she ate a balanced diet. After six days Kusum's mother came to the Centre in

tears, and reported that Kusum had stopped eating. She had to be fed forcefully and kept saying she was going to die in a few days. The whole family was in tears at the thought of losing yet another daughter and very worried at Kusum's condition.

Shobha's testimony

Shobha, the counsellor at the Centre told them to send Kusum to the Centre for half an hour for a few days. When Kusum came, Shobha asked her how she was. Kusum said sadly, "Madam, I am not at all well." Because I have T. B. and every day, I have to take tablets on an empty stomach, because I am unable to eat anything, I vomit all the food I eat. I feel that now I will never be able to recover". She begged Shobha not to tell anyone about her illness.

Shobha reassured her that TB was quite a common disease in India and in Kusum's case it had probably been caused by lack of proper food and a weakened constitution. "If you try to eat regularly and take your medicines you should be alright after a few months". In order to create an atmosphere of positivity and encourage her, the Centre staff took her weight. Kusum told them that she had gained 2 kilograms (up from 25 kg to 27 kg). The staff at the Centre were really happy at Kusum's progress and she herself said that she was recovering! The counseling staff at the Centre were planning a cultural programme and Kusum promised that she would dance at the function. Kusum's mother is very happy that her daughter is being treated and is confident of getting better but is also worried about the expenses of getting milk and fruits for her daughter. She has sought BUDS assistance in meeting Kusum's nutritional needs.

Kusum now attends remedial classes and her health is improving. The BUDS counsellor and staff have really helped her on the road to recovery.