

# Strength India

2015-2016



## Empowering Young Women.

How do we turn buzzwords into action?

How can we work sustainably?

How will we integrate local and international perspectives?

These are the questions that we at Strength India grapple with daily. As an organization born of an uncommon international partnership, we ensure that **our programs engage young women at three levels:**

1

### ORGANIZATIONAL

We work through local organizations, strengthening existing best-practice programs

2

### FAMILY/COMMUNITY

We actively talk to families and engage with the communities in which we work

3

### PERSONAL

We form unique, long-term relationships between the women with whom we work



### Meet Kiran

Our passionate co-founder and project manager



### Learn about Active Spaces

Our programs work with girls through local groups



### Community Outreach and Future Plans

(+ our budget) are in the final pages

# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

## Kiran Pal

Raised in a mud house, 25 people under one roof, Kiran knows the hardships faced by Indian women first-hand. The 8 female cousins still living in her village home inspire Kiran to fight for women each day.

Now, she leads by example.

Kiran left her city, Varanasi, for the first time when she took a 2-month trip around India to learn the basics of organizational networking in the subcontinent with co-founder Tara Celli. As she attended meetings with eight different organizations, Kiran took on personal challenges like learning to swim. Her leadership capacity shows few limitations; she has never refused an opportunity to learn. Her wisdom has contributed greatly to Strength India's decision to pursue opportunities in other Indian states in the coming months.



**“I just want that one day, my parents have that proud feeling.”**

In addition to personal tenacity and ideological motivation, Kiran holds a Master's Degree in Commerce and a Bachelor's in Education. Her passion for learning has enabled her to quickly understand the mechanics of humanitarian projects on both managerial and implementation levels. She has easily assumed the role of Project Manager for Strength India's Active Spaces.

## EVERETT PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH AMELIA

Kiran was very excited to spend 6 weeks working with Amelia Curry, a bioengineering student from the **University of California Santa Cruz**, learning more about computer capabilities. **Amelia was sent from the Everett Program, a unique undergraduate organization within the UC system**, which enables talented undergrads to travel internationally, work with nonprofit organizations, and share sustainable technology skills with local NGO's and social enterprises. Amelia also donated a computer for Kiran, which will enable her to continue taking on more roles within Strength India as we grow and develop organizationally.





### This Year's Highlights

**WE IMPLEMENTED THREE PROGRAMS WITH TWO SCHOOLS**



**SCOOTER DRIVING**  
EXPANDING ACCESS TO THE WORLD



**SELF-DEFENSE**  
ENHANCING GIRLS' CONFIDENCE



**OUT-LOUD READING**  
ENGAGING YOUNG IMAGINATIONS

# ACTIVE SPACES



## Connecting Women & Perspectives

**This year, we worked with 46 girls from poverty backgrounds for 12 months**

Engaging young women is difficult in North India. Systematic social barriers consistently keep girls in the house, out of school, and performing beneath their potential. This is why it's so important for local women like Kiran to lead the engagement process with our girls. Strength India's leaders connect with younger girls on mutual ground; breaking down invisible walls that exist between disadvantaged girls and their independence.



**Extracurricular Engagement**

## Thinking outside the box

Girls experience a decrease in self-esteem as they enter their teenage years, but if they are encouraged to form strong bonds with strong female role models, they have a higher chance of success in school and beyond. We try to engage girls during their critical development years, and provide opportunities for them to get to know themselves and each other outside the watchful eyes of tradition and society.

Strength India participates in 60 hours of observation before we commit to an Active Spaces Partner location. Through this process we get a sense of how our Partners operate, the services these organizations provide (or would like to provide) on a day-to-day basis, the environment amongst the girls, and the level of cooperation from the staff. During these initial few weeks we are flies on the wall; talking with the girls, getting to know their daily activities, and seeing how involved authority figures tend to be.

Based on our observations, we then plan and implement programs specifically designed for the unique environment of each partnership. This year, we partnered with two organizations: Jeevan Hostel and School for Life, and Little Stars School + Shanti Niketan Hostel.

At Jeevan, we implemented a 12-week self-defense program. In the class, girls learned that defending yourself is first and foremost a state of mind: they learned how to take up space and how to be vocal if something feels wrong. However, beyond instincts and personal awareness, we introduced some basic safety techniques: punches, blocks, and how to break away from common grabs. We also designed a two-month scooter driving safety course. Driving is a necessary life skill systematically denied to women in North India. Our girls now enjoy greater opportunities to engage in the world around them.

At Shanti Niketan, we implemented an out-loud reading program. Reading about female Indian boxer Mary Kom engaged girls in stimulating material outside of school, and encouraged them to read for pleasure. It also provided an opportunity for younger girls to engage in accessible social discourse through exposure to alternate viewpoints to the ones commonly projected onto women.

Strength India also spends unstructured time in our Active Spaces to perform conflict-resolution or general social work functions. Circumstances are diverse, and range from resolving arguments about chores, discussing higher education, or tending to sick girls.

### *Celebrating Smiles: a Strength India Value*



Our photography is limited because we don't want our girls to feel exploited. We also rarely showcase anything other than smiling faces. These kids have faced enough hardship without having it broadcasted. Instead, we celebrate resilience!





---

# COMMUNITY

---

**Global engagement, locally**



Although Strength India primarily designs programs through established organizations, our founders feel passionately about cultivating a community of awareness. For this reason, we often participate in online campaigns with our friends and neighbors, bringing the concept of digital connectivity to the communities in which we live.

Furthermore, we prioritize communication and understanding not only with our girls and Partners, but within our neighborhoods. We actively challenge oppressive mindsets about caste, religion, and gender as we experience them day-to-day. We back up our talk with action: if the people in our lives are struggling, we help them fill the gaps with special projects no matter who they are, what work they do, or which gods they pray to.



This year we participated in  
three online campaigns:

#MyLifeAt15  
#SuperPowerForGood  
#WhatIReallyReallyWant

“Sometimes my husband  
beats me. I never crossed the  
threshold of a school. I have  
two kids. No one respects a  
maid, but what can I do?”

“You people are good.  
You understand my life.”



Strength India sometimes provides direct support to our community. For example, we connected our long-time colleague Urmilla, a hard-working widow raising children in a hostile environment, with a respectable job and a fridge so she can feed her family.

Support us to expand one-  
of-a-kind programs for  
women. With **\$50,000**  
Strength India can operate  
4 Active Spaces and pay a  
staff of 6 women like Kiran.

---

# EXPENSES

---

Salaries: \$3,000

Staff Costs: \$2,000

Active Spaces: \$4,000

Special Projects: \$2,000

Travel Costs: \$2,000

**TOTAL: \$13,000**

**2015-2016**





# THE FUTURE

## Prioritizing Menstrual Health

**88% of Indian women don't consistently use hygienic menstrual products.**

Pads are expensive for average women. However, most women we surveyed purchase pads for purposes of going to functions or parties outside the home. Furthermore, 100% we surveyed admitted that they would not have to sacrifice basic needs to buy pads, they simply do not justify the purchase on a regular basis.

**Average women aren't aware of health complications from not using pads.**

Most use old cloth, sand, leaves... whatever they can find discretely. Items are not typically washed quickly, and are not left in the sun to sterilize. However, women are interested in taking better care of their bodies, and most are eager to see an affordable, high-quality product on the market.

**23% of Indian girls begin missing school because of their first period.**

**This statistic is 100% preventable.**



## We are starting a company

As we, Kiran and Tara, have worked with over 400 women during the past three years, we have noticed a common thread, no matter their circumstances: profound lack of access to menstrual hygiene products. If women can't access materials to resolve their own biological needs, what hope is there to break down more radical social barriers? We are familiar with this problem on both personal and professional levels, and we believe women's access to quality hygiene products is a human right.

Together we have surveyed a wide swath of women in Varanasi (one of the least educated and most oppressive regions in India) about their experiences purchasing and using menstrual hygiene products. Inquiries have been conducted with pad manufacturers, testing has been completed, and a product has been selected. Shipping routes have been arranged. We have identified strategic regions and partnerships to gain traction. These advantages put our company in a unique position to revolutionize a \$3 billion industry, simply by fulfilling basic needs.

**We are seeking serious investors to back this social enterprise. Contact Tara ([tara@strengthindia.org](mailto:tara@strengthindia.org)) for more information.**

