

Friends of Freeset

August 2010 Newsletter

There's a theme that often comes up in conversation among the women at Freeset. It shows up in meetings, talks with visitors, in casual conversations: their concern for the women who still stand in line.

The Freeset women still live in the red light district. They have sisters, other family members, and friends who are forced to sell their bodies. They rub shoulders with girls in the trade every day. And their hearts go out to them in a beautiful, compassionate way.

You would think that their natural, human tendency would be to try to forget their pasts, dissociate their emotions from their memories. But they don't forget, and their hearts are torn by those who don't have freedom---because they've been there.

For those of us who can't truly relate, who are fortunate enough to never have been 'inside the skin' of a girl who's been trafficked, information about the neighborhood surrounding Freeset will stir hearts and horrify. A walk around Sonagacchi at night can bring feelings of overwhelming sadness, frustration, and anger at injustice. The experience often leaves people in tears.

But true compassion according to the definition above? That comes from the women themselves. And while they appreciate their own freedom, their worlds will never be quite right until others have it as well.

They are the ones who constantly challenge us that the number of women at Freeset needs to be in the thousands!

"Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too."
(Frederick Buechner)

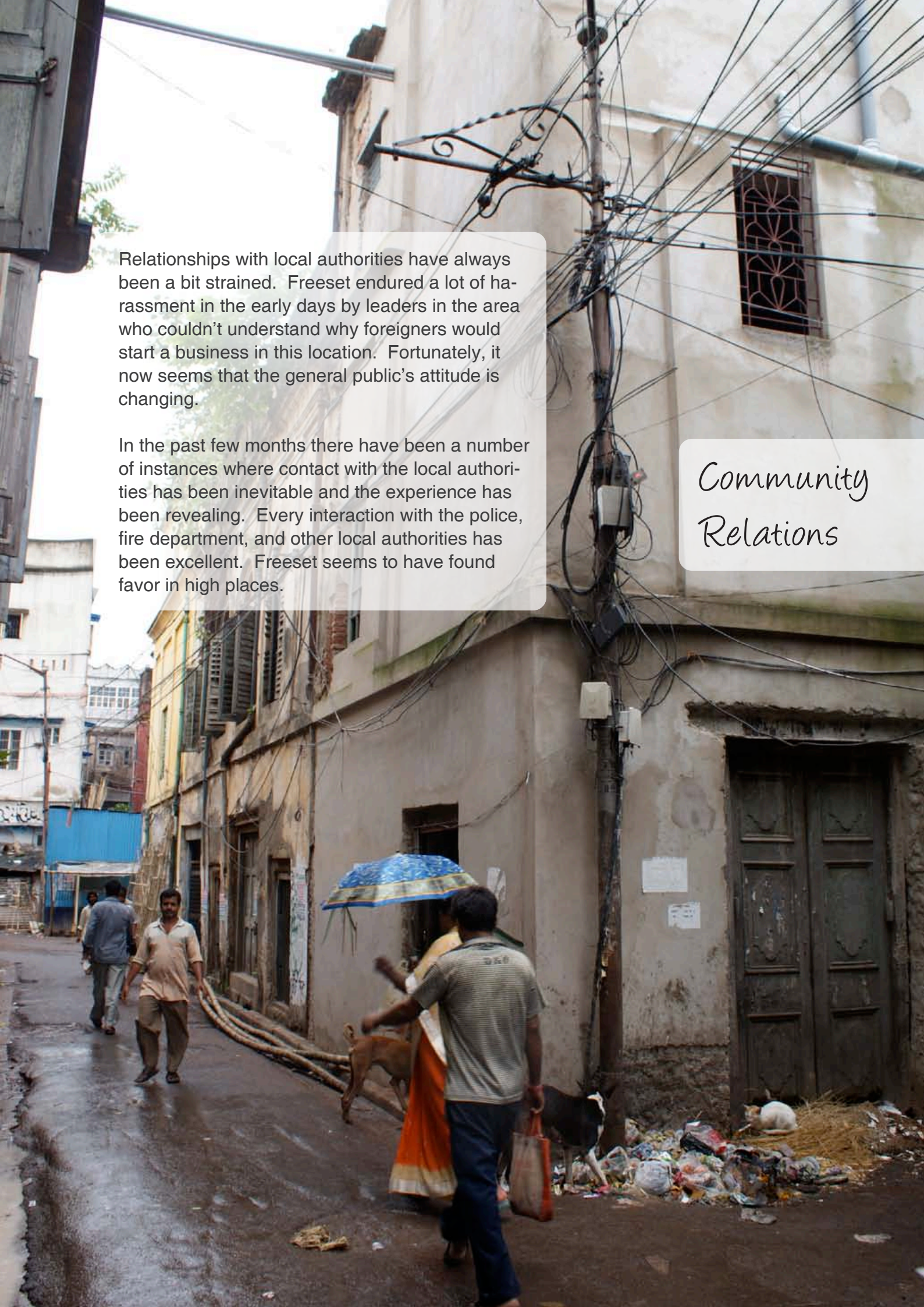


Fire at Freeset

Shortly after dark on May 27th phone calls flew. There was a fire at Freeset! Staff, both Indian and foreign, raced to the scene and the fire was quickly put out. Losses were a few hundred T-shirts with some minor equipment damage in the screen printing unit.

The general mood the next morning was one of intense gratitude. Even though the fire occurred it could quite easily have been so much worse, and thankfully no one was injured. Kerry commented, "although we had a fire and that's not good at all, I was proud to be part of a team that pulled together so well. I was also encouraged as I walked through the community crowd of hundreds gathered around our building. Quite a few of them told me not to worry, everything was okay - including the police. I sensed the community was with us rather than wanting to blame us for the fire. It was a nice change." The fire has given Freeset an opportunity to evaluate the fire prevention systems currently in place.

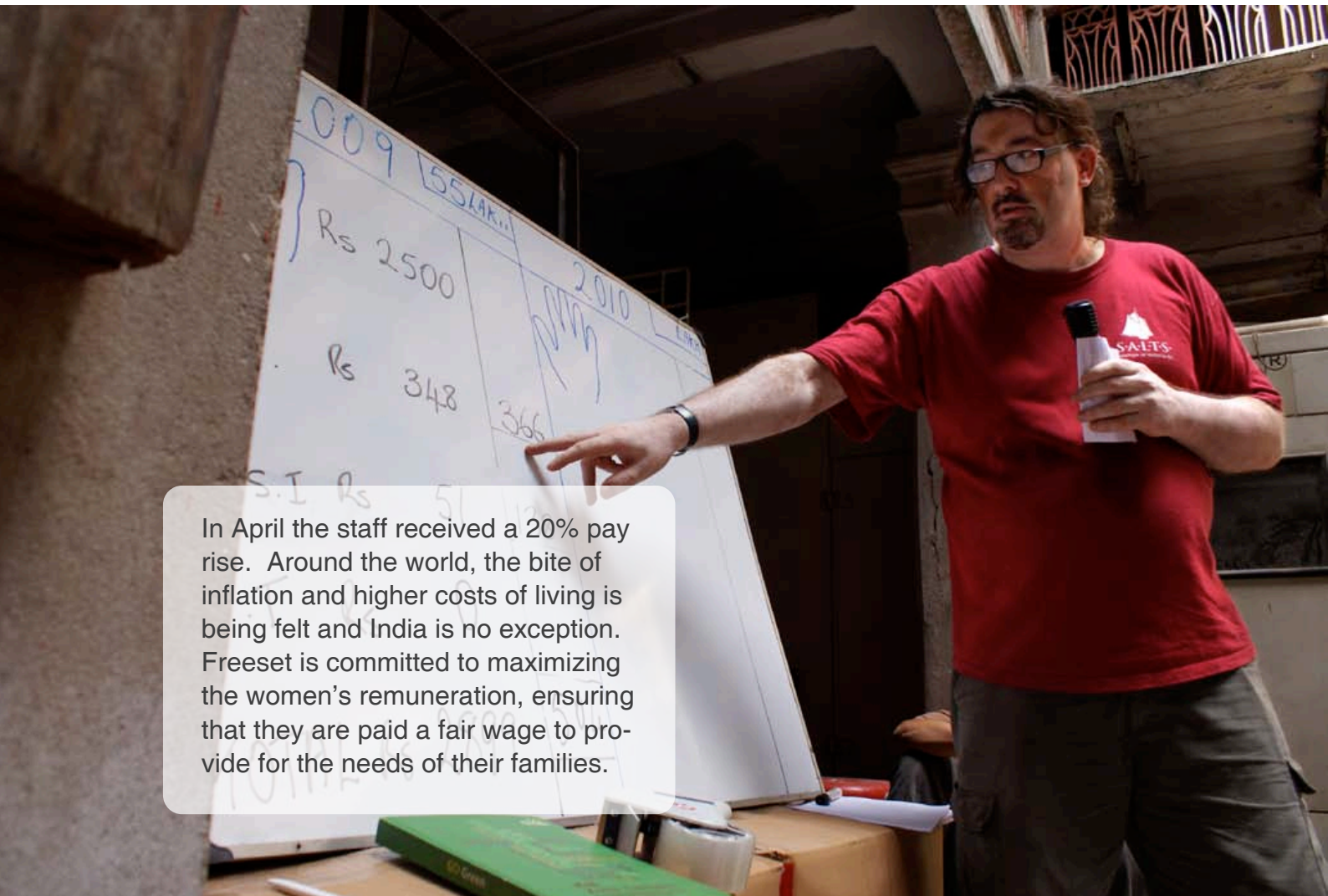




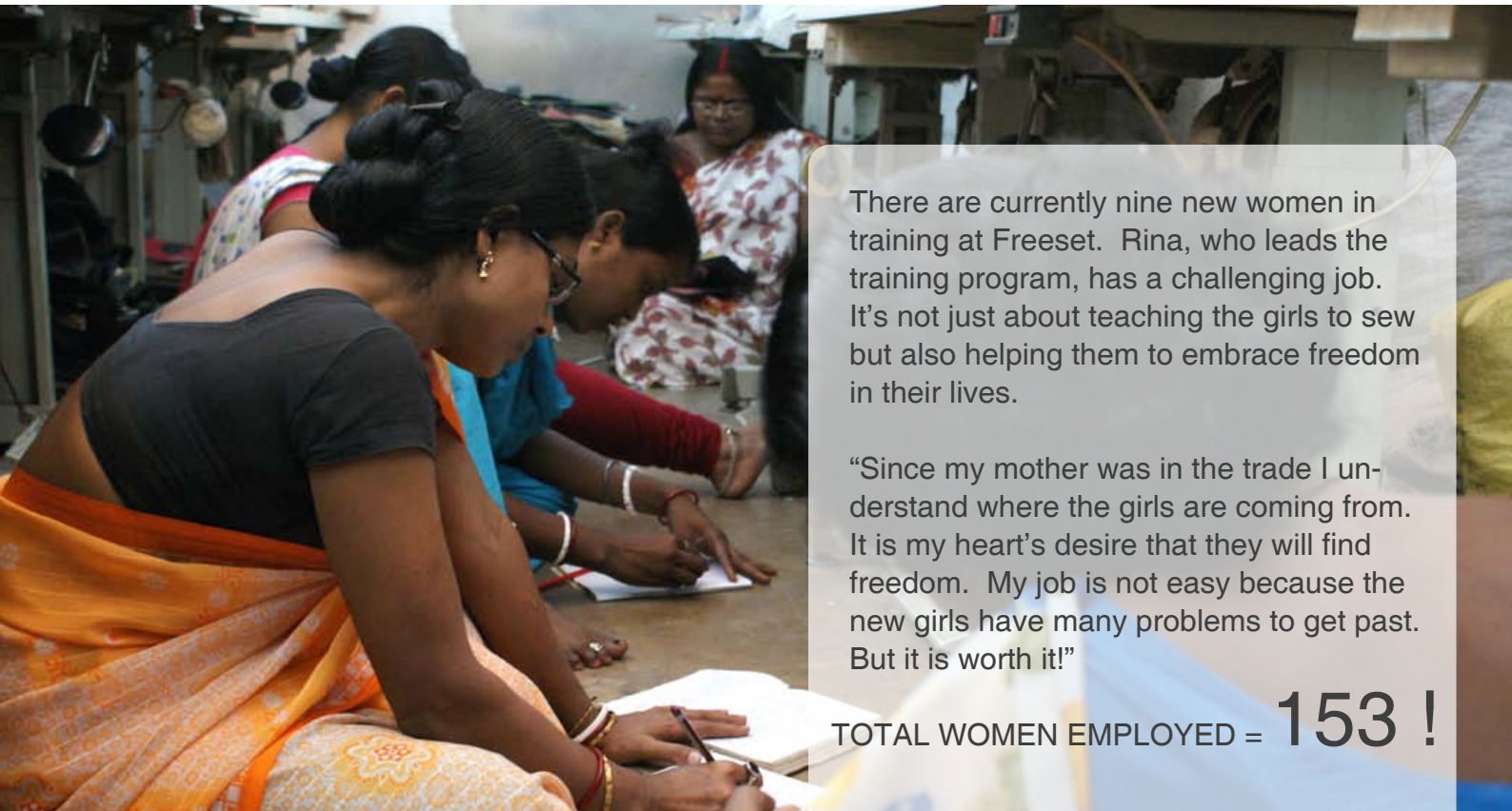
Relationships with local authorities have always been a bit strained. Freetset endured a lot of harassment in the early days by leaders in the area who couldn't understand why foreigners would start a business in this location. Fortunately, it now seems that the general public's attitude is changing.

In the past few months there have been a number of instances where contact with the local authorities has been inevitable and the experience has been revealing. Every interaction with the police, fire department, and other local authorities has been excellent. Freetset seems to have found favor in high places.

Community Relations



In April the staff received a 20% pay rise. Around the world, the bite of inflation and higher costs of living is being felt and India is no exception. Freeset is committed to maximizing the women's remuneration, ensuring that they are paid a fair wage to provide for the needs of their families.



There are currently nine new women in training at Freeset. Rina, who leads the training program, has a challenging job. It's not just about teaching the girls to sew but also helping them to embrace freedom in their lives.

"Since my mother was in the trade I understand where the girls are coming from. It is my heart's desire that they will find freedom. My job is not easy because the new girls have many problems to get past. But it is worth it!"

TOTAL WOMEN EMPLOYED = **153 !**

Staff representation

Last year Freeset enlisted the help of ASK, an organization that specializes in capacity building for staff. ASK is helping us put systems in place to further the empowerment of women in leadership roles in the business. At the the end of May, ASK facilitated an election at Freeset in which seven women were elected to form a Producers Forum Committee. They will be responsible for meeting monthly with three members of management.

Good communication with the women and ensuring that they have a strong voice in the day-to-day running and future of the business are priorities at Freeset.



Parul has worked at Freeset for nine years and is one of the newly elected Committee members. Recently orders have been a bit slow and the women have had a few paid days off from work. Parul said,

“ We want Freeset to grow. If we don't have more orders how can we get thousands more women free? Just as I found freedom myself and my life and my family's life has changed for the better, I want the girls still standing in line to have that also. ”



A Great Addition...

Freeset welcomes Piyush Pradhan to its staff. From her early childhood Piyush has had the desire to work with the poor and underprivileged. Since prostitution is not openly discussed in Indian society, she didn't learn until she was a teenager that there were women forced to sell their bodies for profit. Her heart went out to them.

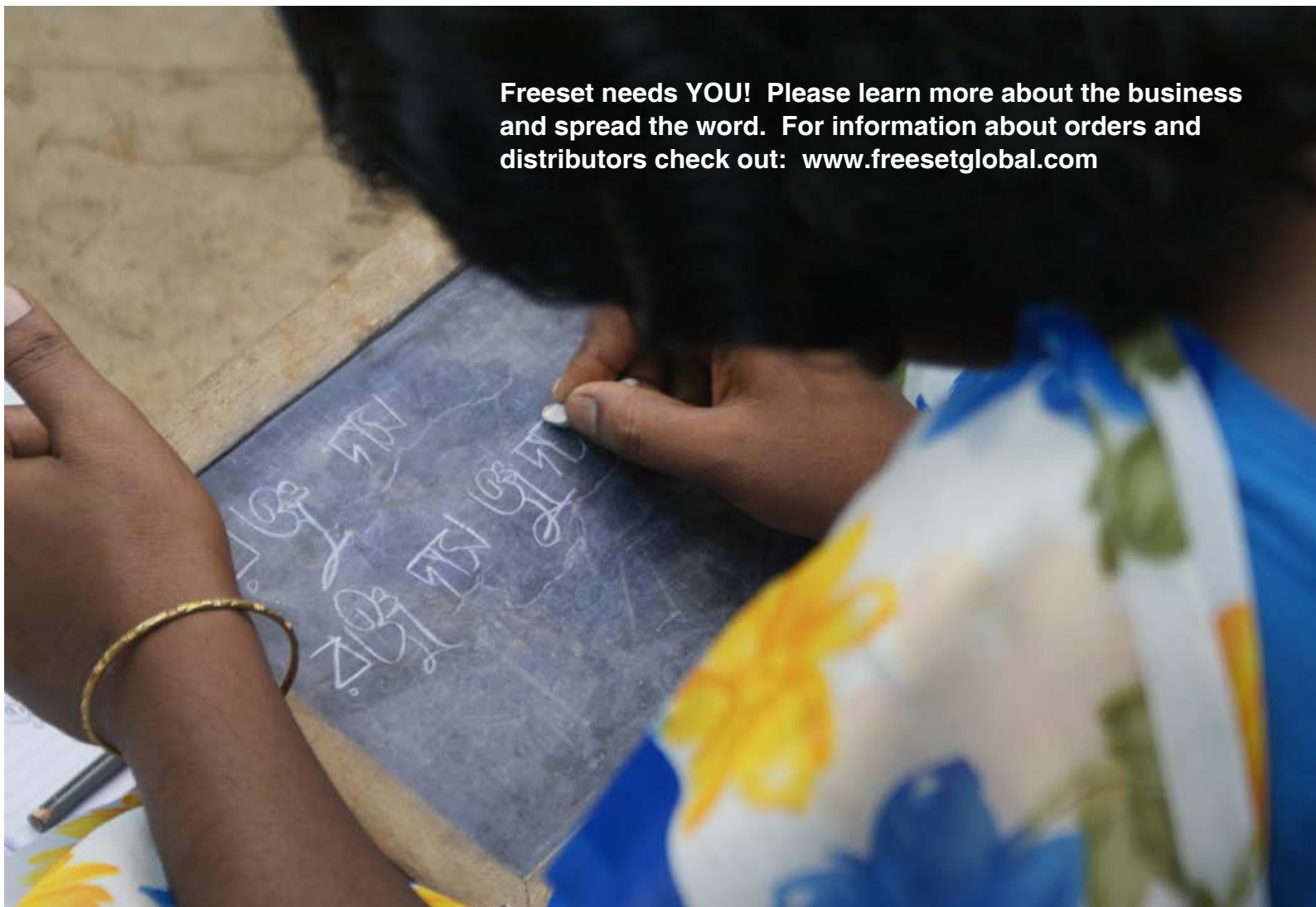
Piyush grew up in the Indian state of Orissa. While finishing her studies, Piyush heard about Freeset from a friend. The idea of working with women who had been in the sex trade is one that excited her, but was difficult for her family and friends. She says, "It causes me to be looked down upon to want to be the women's friend. It's just not done."

Piyush spends her time in the local community looking for potential staff and helping women through obstacles that might prevent them from working at Freeset. She also offers help to the women currently on staff with challenges in their lives outside of work.

Piyush says, "I am enjoying my work at Freeset. It's good to see that the women have different lives now and I am glad to be helping them. But I am very sorry about the women I meet who are still standing in line. They make me cry."

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Freeset needs YOU! Please learn more about the business and spread the word. For information about orders and distributors check out: www.freesetglobal.com



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A comment or suggestion?

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