



## WISDOM OF A LIFETIME...



"It has been 27 years and they have become my family now," claims Fareed, a 55-year old vaccinator working for the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) in the challenging area of Kati Pahari, Karachi.

Kati Pahari is a hill famous for its small alleyways and congested construction of houses dotting the slope. Some parts of the area cannot be reached with any vehicle and require climbing the hill on foot to reach the communities residing on the top. The residents of Kati Pahari, especially females, do not descend the hill and neither do they welcome individuals from outside their community.

It was 1992 when Fareed joined EPI as a young 28-year old vaccinator to work in Kati Pahari. It was also a security compromised zone back then, marred by regular skirmishes and fatalities. Fareed knew in his heart that to make any progress he had to do what he knew best - learn and adapt.

Fareed is naturally blessed with quick learning skills, 'I joined as a young man who did not know much about professional working environment. When I used to sit amongst doctors and other highly qualified people, I felt like an outsider, even though they were very welcoming," said Fareed.

"I liked the way they all dressed up formally every day and was impressed by their charismatic personalities. I had a feeling that the people of Kati Pahari would be welcoming if they saw me as somebody they could trust - like a doctor! And thus, I started to learn and adapt the mannerisms and styles of the doctors around me," he laughed.

"I was right! It worked!" exclaimed Fareed, "Once I went up the hill and there was a fight going on between the local community people. The moment they looked at me they stopped fighting and made way for me and said - Doctor Saab you can pass through here. I have corrected them on numerous occasions that I am not a doctor, but they say that I am a doctor for them! They do not just respect me but also listen to what I have to say."

Fareed has made his irreplaceable place in the hearts of the people of Kati Pahari. His appearance, punctuality, and his soft nature has earned him the trust of the local community.

Mr. Kaku, an old local councilor who also runs the Kaku clinic, a fixed EPI Center in Kati Pahari, praised Fareed's work and said, "since Fareed has joined, women and children have started coming in hordes for vaccination. It is only because of his personality and his trustworthy nature. He devotes considerable time in explaining the purpose and process of vaccination to parents and makes them feel comfortable. Men trust him so much that they allow only Fareed to administer TT vaccine to their pregnant females." Fareed visits a different center every day of the week as per his schedule, but community people also call him whenever they are in need of vaccinations to cover missed children or missed doses.

Fareed has successfully convinced the refusal families as well to at least get their children vaccinated during campaigns. "I believe there is nothing you cannot resolve with love and a bit of patience. I urge the young vaccinators across country to not just treat vaccination as a job but to build connections with the people. Being mindful of your appearance and attitude during community visits affects the level of trust people have in you."



Fareed now takes young vaccinators with him to Kati Pahari as well. He believes it is important to train the young vaccinators and make their entry into the community easier through the rapport he has built over the years, after all, it is time for him to pass on the torch to the younger generation.