

The Drive To Thrive



General-Secretary Sajid (centre), with fellow VHC members

The rustling of leaves, the laughter of children, and the hum of a tube-well merrily filled the air. Under the shade of a large tree, more than a dozen men and women had dragged *charpais* - makeshift woven beds - into a semi-circle. A man holding a register and a pen stood up to address his peers, “Thank you” he said, “we all have gathered here again today to collect donations for the community work that is dear to all of us. I heartily thank you all for your contributions thus far and hope you will be as generous as you have always been in achieving our objectives,” he warmly said.

Sajid is the General-Secretary of the Village Health Committee in Chak 252 Jarole, near Jhang. The residents of the community, before the interventions under DAFPAK, were unaware of the necessity of ample birth spacing and the health complications emerging from its negligence. Once the community was sensitised, they went over and above their call of duty and as a community, banded together, to collect funding for less privileged families to attain the same services for family planning at the monthly camp.

While talking to the RSPN Communications Officer, Sajid beamed with joy and shared that “our community has been gathering together every month without fail. I am proud of them. This platform has been instrumental for our community, as here we not only discuss our everyday problems freely and openly, but also allow the fortunate members of the Chak to contribute towards helping their less-privileged peers. This proves that no problem is too great when we work together for its resolution”.



He recalled, “In the beginning, when the Punjab Rural Support Programme recommended that we gather together in this manner, only a few people showed up - a mere count of seven men and five women.”

“But now, not only are we successfully collecting donations, but we have also grown in strength and number. The men of our community lend their voice to the issues faced by the women of our community, and we, together, have been working to resolve them. For starters, we have raised awareness about the benefits of birth-spacing and careful family planning. The Social Organisers and Lady Health Visitor from the Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP) have emphasised how important it is for new mothers to wait two years before they conceive again. In fact, not just for the mother, birth-spacing helps prevent health complications in newborns as well,” he claimed.

The VHC has been facilitating the Community Resource Person going door-to-door, spreading information about the use of contraceptives for birth spacing. “We learnt that there were many families that found it difficult to continuously pay the service delivery charges, a recurrent issue that surfaced in our sessions. We then set up a fund for the deserving families, who can contact the VHC during the days the monthly camp is held where we will cover their expenditure so they too can practice birth-spacing. There were many pregnant women in our village, for them we collected contributions to cover travel and medical expenses that enabled them to travel to the hospital for their check-ups and delivery. We have helped four pregnant women in our village this way so far. We are honing this idea further to ensure that our community thrives,” he said while beaming.

