

KOSHISH...

AN INITIATIVE ON HOMELESSNESS AND DESTITUTION

INTRODUCTORY
ISSUE



MENTAL HEALTH WEEK
6 - 12 AUGUST 2012

VIEW COMPLETE ARTICLE INSIDE

FOREWORD



Dear Friends and well wishers of Koshish,

It is our pleasure to present to you the first edition of Koshish e-magazine. It is a matter of deep satisfaction and happiness to see this quarterly magazine finally getting released. It marks a small but very significant step forward for all of us at Koshish. For a program that is committed towards sharing of experiences and supporting learning of the youth, this e-magazine would surely be an important tool. We wish to make this magazine not only informative but also interactive. We hope that through this e-magazine, we will be able to connect with all 'Friends of Koshish' while also building new relations and live the ideas and spirits of Koshish! We hope to bring to you, not only what happens at Koshish but also in the areas of Urban Poverty and destitution overall, be it people's struggles, some innovative experiment carried out in some part of the country or any scheme or policy from the government's end in this regard. We'll attempt to make this platform as enriching as possible, bringing together the experiences and experiments from all over. We would like to hear your views and opinions on what is shared with you. That will help us make this channel stronger and valuable.

I take this as an opportunity also to reflect on what has gone in over the last few years. We have grown from a small team of one person in one city to 18 people spread across 3 states, apart from active partnerships in about 20 states of the country. Koshish began as an opposition to the criminalization of destitute people that was happening in the form of the Beggary Prevention Legislation. It was a response to the unfair but systemic structure that the State followed to deal with the issue of homeless and destitution. We pledged for a society where the poor was not getting punished just for being poor, where poverty itself was not treated as an offence. Once the dream was dreamt, it had to be realised. Koshish was the name of that realization. Dreams had to be merged with the reality.

It's been a journey of exploration and realization of human relations and potential. We have seen the extremes. It's amazing to see the grit and determination with which persons in the state of destitution fight through their struggles of survival on a daily basis. They go through severe forms of abuse and deprivation and very often face hostile environments. As such, it's no less than a wonder that these people still have the strength to fight against all the odds and continue. As we work with people living in the institutions, we see a completely different side of human existence. Here, relations are formed that are based on pure love, nothing else. We witness the most vulnerable sides of the people, suffering from family break-down, illness or social abandonment. But it's here only that we have seen their never ending will to fight and tremendous power to build and value the relations. It is this strength of people that has held us together and kept us going on and on.

Personally, Koshish's work has resulted in major changes in my own self. I value life much more than I ever had. I value what I have in life much more because I have seen what the deprivation could do to you. My respect for human relations and each individual's worth has grown manifolds. Each individual is worth living a life of dignity and acceptance. It's been a long distance travelled on a personal front as well where needs have grown to a bare minimum today and the commitment to have an honest life has grown into a necessity.

We hope we'll keep getting your support and encouragement like in the past. This could be a long battle for justice but we feel strengthened and supported with all of you being part of this journey. We appreciate and value each one of you and look forward to continue our engagement with you. This e-magazine will help us do that more regularly and effectively. Please feel free to write to us with any feedback, suggestions, comments etc. Your inputs will help us improve.

Warm Regards,
Mohd Tarique
Project Co-ordinator

Koshish's journey to venture into a largely unexplored and unpredictable area of work with the urban Homeless has witnessed its share of ups and downs. Nevertheless, we have been moving ahead taking care of the big and small concerns, with the combined efforts of the entire team. The team has learned from each one's strength, holding each other in times of crises. While it has been a long journey till today, we present you a gist of what Koshish stands for, our vision and aims for a better society that stands for justice for all...



Over the years, the TISS has amassed an extensive experience base on issues related to poverty, beggary and destitution, the criminal justice system and social development. To build on its engagement with socially excluded populations, the TISS started a Field Action Project, Koshish in 2006 where it committed itself towards the protection of the rights of one of the most vulnerable populations, i.e. Destitute and shelter-less people criminalized under Beggary Prevention Legislations of the State.

At the core of the project, lies the issue of homelessness. With various processes of 'ill-planned' planned development, lack of family support, acute illness or absolute poverty, poor people are forced into Destitution. The issues that such people face once out there in the unfamiliar and very often 'hostile environment' were largely the starting point for the conceptualization of this work.

There have been very serious linkages



between destitution and beggary; both helpless people getting into beggary as well as state punishing the working poor on charges of beggary, merely on the basis of their appearances. There is a popular notion among people that those who are into begging are making lot of money and they do it as choice and therefore, deserve to be punished. In reality, these notions have very little relevance. Unfortunately, people choose to go by what is convenient for them to believe, without bothering to know the reality.

The Beggary Prevention Law was brought in place to check the issue of beggary. It aimed at preventing beggary through training and rehabilitation of those who were involved in begging. However, the way beggary and beggar is defined in the act changes the whole document into very vulnerable and anti-poor law. Over the years, it has been largely arrests and punishment that got implemented, while the training and rehabilitation program became either irrelevant or absent.

Since August 2006, Koshish has been working in Mumbai and gained enough experience and understanding that is being used constructively to engage with broader advocacy and model-building work. With this aim, we extended our work to Delhi where we collaborated with Department of Social Welfare, Delhi Government.



Dr. Vijay Raghavan, Project Director, Koshish-

"The journey of Koshish during the past six years has been one of struggles and breakthroughs. Our aim is to get the anti-poor beggary law repealed and introduce policies and programmes which reach out to the homeless and the destitute population in cities and towns. Towards this end, some significant steps have been taken, in partnership with the State and civil society organisations. The Koshish team is committed towards the promoting the basic rights and citizenship entitlements of the homeless and the destitute, who continue to face stigma and discrimination in society. We feel greatly encouraged that we are not alone in this struggle; we walk with many others both within and outside government who share our vision of a society where the most marginalised can live a life of dignity."



Our Vision

Koshish aims at addressing the interrelated issues of beggary, destitution and homelessness through a combination of measures, pitched at the varying levels of providing support for basic and immediate needs, facilitating linkages to gainful and secure employment and advocacy for integration into the larger society. It also aims for the development of meaningful policy for securing rightful entitlements.

Our key objectives include-

- To reach out to the destitute and homeless population and to understand their psychological, social, economic, cultural contexts.
- To engage with daily issues of survival, protection and growth thus addressing the immediate causes that may possibly lead to beggary.
- To work with the population in custody under Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 and assist in their reintegration with the family and society.
- To mobilize the destitute and homeless population to participate in the process of rehabilitation.
- To engage in advocacy for inclusive policy and programs securing rightful entitlements as citizens.
- To network with state agencies and non-governmental bodies for intervention, advocacy and resource mobilization.



The focus largely remains on rehabilitation of people through means of repatriating them back into families, searching for jobs they can work in best and engaging people in vocational training like tailoring, candle making, hand-craft, jewellery making, plumbing and house wiring etc.

Koshish also works with the population that lives on streets and are prone to high levels of subjugation based on their lack of identity. The work with people living on streets has focussed on identity, rationing, health, sanitation and sensitization about the BPBA. Koshish has created a very visible space for itself within the government set up for positive negotiation based on mutual trust and sound understanding of the issues involved. Koshish has formed a National Alliance on Homelessness with organisations in about 15 states. Through the network it has been questioning and addressing the issue of relevance of beggary law.

Koshish, which started as a small initiative in 2006 has developed into one of the most significant initiatives of the TISS in recent times. It has not only impacted the lives of hundreds of people caught in the web of poverty and destitution but has also made significant inroads towards discussions on amendments of the law and policy administration.

THE DIRECTOR'S WORD...



In an interview with Koshish, Professor S Parasuraman, Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, shares his vision for the Field Action Project. Read on...

What made you support and believe in the project proposal, made by a student for a long-term field action project for TISS?

This has always been the practice. When a student develops a project that addresses difficult issues, we find resources to support them. It has been a history of TISS, most field action projects are started by students. If students are interested to work, they must be convinced about it. I did not have any idea where the money will come from, but I know, if you do good, money will come. We started as a very small team with Tarique. As we started growing, Tarique started mobilizing resources and TISS also had some money for support. That is how we took it up as a Field Action Project. Even today, we accept such proposals from students. All the ideas do not grow into full-fledged projects. Koshish was one successful experiment.

How is Koshish, as an idea, different for you?

Beggary is not an independent phenomenon. It is a part of a larger process of the political economy. If people are not given proper livelihood options, they graduate from the rural to urban areas. It is not their fault. Koshish works on the fundamental ways on how poverty and deprivation are created. It is a part of the TISS philosophy to deal with such issues. We need to deal with

the immediate causes to cure the symptoms. We have to deal with the processes, which are a part of a much broader equation of how poverty can be dealt with. Koshish is not a clinical programme. It is a transformative programme. Through Koshish, we work to address the law and the system and find alternatives within and outside the system.

How do you see Koshish's standing today since when it began in 2006?

Koshish has grown. There is a tangible way to do work. There is a pathway where we try to scale up. We started with Mumbai, circumstances made us move to Delhi and Koshish has grown there too. We are careful in our expansion and we expand at our own pace. We have our own model for growth. Once, when we met the Social Welfare Secretary of Delhi, we were asked to submit a proposal for funding to the Government. I said we do not need funding. We have Tarique. You can give us the space to work. Once we take funds from the government, they will want work done their way. So we do not take government money for the project. We offer fellowships to our students to work in the project and secure the core team. Other resources are generated from the TISS maintenance grants, HDFC funds some of our programmes. We are not worried

"I did not know where the money will come from, but I know, if you do good work, money will come. Koshish was one such successful experiment"

about the money as long as we are doing good work.

How has Koshish focussed on the issues of urban poverty and homelessness, thereby making a difference to the urban population?

We are dealing with the broader issues of poverty and destitution. Within that we are trying to find people's homes and send

them back. There are models of home tracing, processes for avoiding custodialization, models for imparting vocational skills and a model for rehabilitation. We ensure people do not end up on the streets again, for instance through the shelter programmes of the state. At a broader level, we focus on policy making issues. We are only focussing on certain cities but the model can be duplicated all over the country. This is the value of the project. We are not the State. We are an academic institution with limited resources. We demonstrate our bit to make the government do their task.

What do you think is Koshish's contribution towards developing the concept of homelessness?

Homelessness has been an important issue to TISS. We have always worked on it. It is not a new idea. Koshish is working to find a lasting solution to the issue. It is very important to get rid of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959. It is important that the homeless populations gets counted and given certain entitlements like ration cards, pan cards, etc. We do our work in the rights framework. We need to make the State responsible for honouring these rights. Koshish demonstrates that we need linkages to bring about development, growth and change. Where there is conviction, courage comes automatically.

What is your vision for Koshish and where do you see Koshish five years from now?

I do not believe a project should go on for a long time. If we work on the Beggary Act for 20 years, it will be like the Millenium Development Goals. We need tangible outcomes for poverty and destitution, so that people are not seen on the streets. We need to keep five years as our horizon, not more. We will see Koshish in a different light after five years. For instance, our Childline project was supported only for five years. Today it is an independent national programme. Koshish will help people get out of their situation as a National programme in the coming years. It will all depend on how people work on the project and the issue.

Celebrating Health...
Mental Health Week
6 -12 August 2012



As a remembrance, for the victims of the fire accident of 6th August, 2001 at Erwadi, Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu, Koshish organizes the Mental Health Week in the first week of August every year. The week commemorates the ghastly event of 2001 where mentally ill patients were tied

to their beds when a devastating fire broke out killing 28 and seriously injuring the others. No one responded to their screams, assuming it to be the regular hue and cry and a 'routine behaviour'. The case of Erwadi is not an exception. Such cases of depriving the mentally ill of their basic human rights and keeping them in utterly inhuman conditions has been in the limelight as a global issue since the beginning of the millenium. The shocking incident had brought into limelight the issues long hidden within the field of Mental Health. Overtly, this may appear like just another callous neglect of policy makers in our over-populated accident prone society, but the reason is more deep and multi-factorial with an equal share of biases and stigma associated with the masses, faulty state policies, lack of knowledge of mental illness, false beliefs about its treatment and the financial implications on the family as well as the patient.

The lapse in seeking professional medical help, over-expectation from traditional practices, cursing and alienating the person for their behaviour, demeaning the existence of the person are other implications leading to the severity in the condition of people suffering from mental disorders. The severity of mental illness has risen to such as level, that today, Mental Illness ranks 4th in the global burden of diseases, seemingly displaying the alarming nature of its existence.

This year, Koshish organized the Mental Health Week from 6th to 14th August, 2012 at the Beggars Home, Chembur. The Mental Health Week was



proposed to be able to get all the inmates, care takers, probation officers and the superintendent together and celebrate the space needed by everyone to feel free and accepted. It acknowledges every souls need to seek a space to speak, listen and interact about issues they face in their everyday life. The week is not observed to evoke sympathy, but to remember and rededicate ourselves to the cause of the mentally ill and their plight.

Koshish team member, Shekhar, remarked, "We celebrate Mental health week with the idea that mentally disturbed need not be treated like animals and locked up in the barracks, but deserve to be treated well like other people. The week is mainly a period to sensitize the staff about the mentally ill, which also helps us reduce custodial



violence. It is also celebrated in memory of those who have suffered from mental illnesses. During this week, most women participate in various activities for merriment which help them open up."

This year, the Mental Health Week was inaugurated by the Superintendent of the beggars home, with songs sung by the inmates, followed by dances, indoor and outdoor games collectively organized for the inmates and the care-takers, tree plantation, candle-making, greeting cards, mehendi, craft and painting. Those emerging victorious in the various activities were given gifts by the Koshish team at the closing event of the Mental Health Week.

The Mental Health Week was successful in promoting the efforts of the people to understand and generate awareness about mental health through spread of information and educating people about coping mechanisms to deal with such groups. The week helped all of us come together and realize that each one of us is special in our own ways and need to be loved to grow together and improve our well being.

Home Is Where The Heart Is!

The 'Calling Home' program, one of the first interventions initiated by Koshish in 2006, continues to be an effective means of rehabilitation... Thousands of families continue to find their long lost members through this program.

Read on...



The idea of 'Calling Home' was initiated in the year 2006 when the Koshish commenced its interventions in the beggars home. The prime objective of the program has been to initiate the process of family tracing and subsequent release of the client by helping the individual contact his or her family, employer or friend in the instance of arrest. This is a legal right of the inmate and was started for their benefit and addressal of their problems. In addition, the program helps not only in verifying the details provided by the client but also this makes the client trust us, thereby controlling their aggression to a great extent. This further helps in controlling the violent behaviour which may otherwise result in disciplinary action against them by the authorities.

There were other ideas which evolved when the process moved further which involved help in detecting wrongful arrests the individuals are caught on false grounds. As the program developed, it facilitated many individuals with psychological comfort and nurtured a sense of security when they were made to speak to their families. In cases

of individuals with mental illness, when the individuals do not have contact details of their families, but remember addresses, we make home visits.



This helps us ascertain the medical history of the individual and reasons behind them leaving

their homes, thereby beginning the process of release of clients from the custody.

Calling home is the key process in tracing out the family which further enables identifying the socio-economic condition of the family, owing to which the individual can also be given legal aid. With the help of this program thousands of individuals have been repatriated with their families till date. There have been instances where the families have shown reluctance to accept the clients who have been in custody. The home visits give us the opportunity to explain it to them that these people have not done anything wrong, but it is the presence of such laws, which punishes them merely on the basis of suspicion. In cases where the clients do not have any support system, alternative rehabilitation plans for the individuals have been made. These include referral to shelter homes, finding employment and medical treatment.

The Calling Home program continues to run successfully even today, reuniting people with their long-lost families to start life afresh!

Team Speaks

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Calling Home was started to help the client speak to their family, relative or friend via the phone, which was not allowed earlier.

This is the legal right of the inmate and has been started for their benefit to address their problems. This makes the client trust

us and help us make a difference to their lives ''

- Pallavi Thakare,

Koshish, Mumbai

ACADEMIC AIMS

Dr. Vijay Raghavan, Project Director, Koshish, speaking about Koshish's focus on academics and contribution towards Social Work Education...

Koshish has served as a crucial learning platform for social work students to understand the issue of homelessness and destitution. Every year social work students, both in Mumbai and in Delhi, are placed at Koshish for their field placement and training. Our idea for their training goes beyond their period of placement with us; we focus on the time post their field work, when they will be required to engage on-field.

Koshish has also evolved as an intervention model for the students to learn about working within the systems. It is difficult to work with the government systems especially those within the criminal justice system and it requires special skills to be effective in these spaces. Strategies and

methods that Koshish has developed while dealing with the constraints of being located inside the custodial institutions are effective tools to learn the process of positive engagement.

With the aim of building broader awareness around the issue of destitution and homelessness, we encourage students from different streams of education to volunteer with us. Every year we get a number of students for internship, coming from various universities and academic backgrounds who get trained in the methods and approaches of dealing with the persons in destitution and criminalized while still following the law.

Apart from inclusion of the beggary laws and issues relating to the criminalisation of poverty

in the course curriculum at TISS, Koshish travels to various colleges and universities and orients students about the law and its impact on the lives of poor people as a part of our advocacy and sensitization efforts. While briefing them about our interventions through different programme components, we help them analyze how the governance systems address issues of urban poverty and destitution.

Youth have a critical role to play in ensuring the rights and justice for all marginalized and vulnerable groups. They need mentoring and guidance support to be able to realize their potential and Koshish is committed to extend that support.

'WHEN WORDS BECOME INADEQUATE... PICTURES SAY IT ALL'



'Vocational training in electric work in progress at the Male Beggars' Home in Lampur, Delhi. Hundreds of men have benefitted from similar vocational training modules by Koshish during their detention period and successfully gained employment on release'



LIFE HAPPENS... AT THE BEGGARS HOME!

The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 (BPBA, 1959) was brought in place to check the issue of beggary. The main idea was to prevent begging through rehabilitation of those involved in begging. Unfortunately, the way 'beggary and beggar' are defined in the law, makes it a very anti-poor document, which punishes the poor just because they are found on the streets. Therefore, what remains today is not a law aiming towards the rehabilitation of the poor but a means of arrest for the police to take punitive action against the poor for being poor. Owing to the nature of the BPBA, 1959, which criminalizes poverty a large number of working youth have been legally wronged. One such case is Umesh (name changed).

When the police arrested Umesh under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 in March 2011 and brought him to the Beggars Home at Chembur in a state of despair and hopelessness, little did he know, where life would lead him in the course of the next one year. Who would have imagined a commerce graduate from the University of Mumbai, working with a reputed organization in Mumbai as an auditor to be found on the streets, ignorant of his surroundings with an aggressive personality and a faded memory.

The only son in the family, Umesh used to be a bright student in his school days. He studied in his village high school at Kinjewade in Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra. Umesh lost his father at an early age and being the only boy in the house, had to bear the responsibility of his family. He lost three out of his six sisters when he was 13. He lived with his mother and three sisters in his village up until the

completion of his high school. He came to Mumbai to pursue his undergraduate studies. Umesh graduated in commerce from Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar College, Mumbai in 2002 and started working as an auditor with Mittal Associates in Mumbai before which he had a brief stint with KEM hospital as a data entry operator.

Inside the beggars home, a repulsive and glum Umesh was difficult to work with since he gave no response when spoken to. The Koshish team and the probation officer at the Beggars Home found him to be rather reserved and reluctant to share his life. He had lost all hope of getting back the life he once lived as an exuberant working youth. It was difficult to understand him and what led him to the state of mind he was in. After continuous probe and psychiatric treatment and medication, there were visible signs of improvement in Umesh's health and behaviour over the next three months, which was a ray of hope towards channelizing his rehabilitation process. Gradually, Umesh started visiting the Koshish team and talking to them voluntarily about his interests and past life. He showed interest in working and pursuing a career as a Chartered Accountant. He was given a diary to write whatever comes to his mind on a daily basis. This is how his family and background was traced amidst immense speculation and hard-work to convince Umesh to get back on track. It was then figured that Umesh blamed himself for the traumatic life experiences of his life, especially the death of his mother, who died of a fire accident at his village home, when he sent her back from Mumbai. He later stayed with his

sister but broke away from her due to domestic issues. Shattered by the past occurrences finding himself stranded alone in the world, Umesh was out on the streets and had lost control of his mind.

Umesh showed signs of recovery as he spoke of pursuing his career once again and getting out of the beggars home. Then again, it dawned upon him that he had lost all his certificates and degrees to a theft at Kurla station while on his way to find a job. It was a challenge to get back all his duplicate certificates and create life afresh for him, with new bank accounts and identity cards. One by one, things started falling into place with his University documents being delivered to him, a savings bank account being opened at the Andhra Bank with the help of the Superintendent of the Beggars Home, Mr. Gautam Arwel and finally his Pan Card delivered at the door-step. His physical and mental health was also restored in the course of time and Umesh was all set to step out of the confines after one whole year.

Today, Umesh, dressed in his crisp white shirt smartly tucked in, confidently leaves for his work as an Accounts Assistant in Chembur from his new home in Thane, leaving behind his past with a hope to get back all that he has lost and march ahead to achieve his ambitions and dreams which remain unaccomplished. The Beggars Home and the Koshish team, all by his side throughout, feel proud and humbled by the makeover and success achieved by Umesh and the combined efforts of the people who have made this day a reality.



An Appeal

Every support, small or big, is significant. Every rupee contributed, every minute spent as a volunteer, every feedback/ suggestion made as a well wisher has its impact in the rehabilitation of a person. You are welcome to help us in a manner that suits you best.

- 1) By donating towards general expenses
- 2) By volunteering for specific programmes
- 3) By sponsoring medical expenses of clients
- 4) By supporting repatriation visits
- 5) By donating, clothes, medicines, etc.
- 6) By being a part of our internship programmes

Cheques/ Demand Drafts could be given in the name of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai with a covering letter mentioning the contribution towards Koshish.

WE VALUE YOUR SUGGESTIONS AND ALWAYS LOOK FORWARD TO WAYS OF IMPROVING THE PROGRAMME.

For any suggestions, feedback, information, please feel free to contact us:

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