

# K O S H I S H

AN INITIATIVE ON HOMELESSNESS AND DESTITUTION

A FIELD ACTION PROJECT OF THE TATA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, MUMBAI

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USING ART TO REACH OUT TO PEOPLE! VICTOR ALEXANDER, A TISS-EDELGIVE FELLOW  
WITH KOSHISH WRITES ON HOW HE HAS BEEN USING ART AND CRAFT  
AS THERAPY TO FACILITATE PEOPLE'S REHABILITATION NEEDS!



## GOING DOWN MEMORY LANE...

Anushree Kini rewinds and takes us back to her experiences with Koshish as a student...

VANDANA GOPIKUMAR, CO-FOUNDER OF THE BANYAN, CHENNAI, SPEAKS TO KOSHISH ON HER DESIGN FOR A MENTAL HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM THAT ADDRESSES THE COMPLEX MIX OF MENTAL HEALTH AND HOMELESSNESS. READ ON...



# EDITORIAL

## HUMAN LIFE IS THE CHEAPEST THING IN THIS COUNTRY!

*Dear Friends of Koshish,*

*Warm greetings for the New Year! We are happy to present the second issue of our online magazine and thank you all for receiving the first issue with warmth and affection. All of you have played a significant role in the progress of Koshish and your feedback helps us to improve further. Mails and calls we received after the release of the first issue shows the beautiful and caring family of 'friends and supporters' that Koshish is blessed to have developed. 'THANK YOU'.*

*The cold waves of winters are loved by many, for the freshness in the air, with evenings bringing the calming laziness. However, the same calm and freshness turns into pain and fear when one thinks of homeless citizens out there in the open. Winters are the most severe season for the poor homeless citizens. Not that other weathers are any kind but winters probably are the worst and most sudden in the impact on people.*

*This winter we ran a winter campaign in Delhi and Patna units. In Patna the intervention was linked with the state governments program for the homeless where the poor and needy were identified and provided necessary support under State governments' services for Ultra Poor Scheme, in Delhi, intervention was more direct and independent. Regular night outs and shelter visits were organized. Each night spent on the street is a lesson in itself. One wonders how much learnings street life can provide about life!*

*With temperatures going down each passing day, problems kept increasing. Hundreds of people including old, disabled, women and children were being forced to sleep in the open. The situation has far improved from previous years with a good number of shelters coming up. However, all shelters put together cover only a fraction of the population and lot more needs to be done.*

*With nothing to hold on to, not having enough in terms of material and most often relations broken down too, with no alternative support systems, the homeless find themselves in a situation where their 'will and determination*

*to survive is tested the hard way, every single day. Imagine people spending night after night surrounding the little fire that they manage to make by picking up torn clothes, wood, paper and plastic. They hardly have anything to cover up. Not getting sleep is only obvious. It is extremely painful to see small children crying as they would not get sleep due to the cold and dew.*

*During night patrolling, we frequently found people who were freezing and unable to utter a word. A person carries load all day and at night when he folds himself to protect himself from the cold, he looks exactly like a bundle of load that he carries. The poor rickshaw pullers who slog throughout the day, can not even sleep peacefully without the fear of police beating or rickshaw getting stolen.*

*What is the worth of human life when hundreds of people die silently, in the coldness of the night. Many, do not even know if they will see the next morning. It is absolutely essential that people whose rights are violated, themselves stand and speak up for themselves. However, when the biggest issue one faces is of survival and negotiating the uncertainty of life, one could imagine people's capacity to fight back the circumstances that are 'unjust'. It's a long struggle indeed!*

*In this issue, we have added a column where an ex-student, recounts her days with Koshish. Students have been an integral part of Koshish's journey, playing an active role in developing and strengthening various programmes and we want to make them a part of our magazine as well. It will allow us yet another opportunity to learn from 'young minds'. Hopefully, this will soon turn into a regular feature of the magazine.*

*Your views are valuable to us. Please send in your feedback. Confident of your continued affection and support.*

*Warm Regards,*

*Tarique*

# 'ART AND CRAFT FOR A SOCIAL CAUSE'

--VICTOR ALEXANDER

*Victor is a TISS-Edelgive Fellow who runs his fellowship 'Arts and Crafts for a Social Cause'.*

*He is a Social Work graduate from TISS and has a diploma in Arts Based Therapy from WCCL Foundation, Pune. Victor, together with Koshish has been using different art forms with inmates at the Chembur Beggars' Home (BH) supporting them with various rehabilitation needs.*



Decriminalizing the homeless and destitute persons and de-institutionalizing health care and rehabilitation is the destination that all of us are working towards. Given the languishing situation of custodial institutions in our country, the inmates are in need of a routine or schedule that make them work, relax, heal, learn and improve. That is where arts play a fantastic role in the rehabilitation of persons within institutional set-up.

Many of them who end up in the BH have worked as carpenters, tailors, hawkers, house painters, artisans and multi-tasking laborers. There is so much capacity and energy in each one and that needs to be channelized. Through arts and crafts sessions they get a chance to do what they are always good at and their good works contribute to the betterment of one another. A lot of wall paintings have been created by the inmates in the BH where the painters have painted the walls, those who were good at art drew paintings, those who were good at tailoring stitched the fabric that was to be painted, those who were good at carpentry framed the paintings and the rest of them assisted or gave suggestions or appreciations.

At the Chembur BH, for the past one and half years a variety of arts and crafts have been used as a tool to work with the inmates selected for the trainings organized by Koshish. The different art forms are divided into four categories.

1. Creating with our hands: Pottery and clay, craft works, jewelry, drawing, group-painting, flower making, making paper mache products, handmade paper, furniture out of waste materials, etc.
2. Acting with our bodies: Dance Movement activities, games and play activities, theater, drum-circles and body percussion, listening to music, etc.
3. Using our voices: Story telling, singing, praying and sharing.
4. Using every part of ourselves (Body & Mind): Activities that involve speech, body movement and involvement of hands.

*"Art is one true global language. It knows no nation, it favours no race and it acknowledges no class. It speaks to our need to reveal, heal and transform. It transcends our ordinary lives and lets us imagine what is possible"*

*- Richard Kamber*

**"Art Sessions open up possibilities for inmates to go out, produce and sell art or work as trainers"**

**-Victor**



Taking Arts to those people in whose life there is no art and exploit arts to create opportunities that would cater to different needs of individuals, groups and communities is the essence of the fellowship titled as "Arts & Crafts for A Social Cause".

Forceful arrests and detention creates a lot of tension and anger in the inmates. A lot of inmates are found refusing to talk to anyone after arrest and detention as the anger level is high because they themselves believe that begging or staying on road is no way a crime. The Art sessions always start and end with sharing of their feelings and experiences. This helps them express their anger and calm down. The sessions also take their attention away from negative thinking and lead to new positive spirits. Inmates who take an effort never go unappreciated for their work. Any small work done by inmates are well noticed and displayed to all the others with due appreciation.

Engaging in the Art and Craft sessions, they feel free and easily talk about their desires, needs and expectations. They express their future plans for life and speak out about their past painful feelings. This makes it easier for the care-givers to understand the capacity and health needs of the clients and draw out specific rehabilitation plans.

There is a first time for every thing in life. Some times such first time moments become the most lasting memories in our lives. For a lot of inmates art is a first time experience at BH. Many of them hold a paint brush in their hands for the first time. They touch paint and draw something for the first time. Their hands shiver and they hesitate a lot and some of them refuse to do it as well. They start with a basic human face and thus open up and connect.

Though a lot of other institutions like mental hospitals and children's homes have Government

appointed occupational therapists and spaces for vocational training, very few of them are run seriously. At the BH it makes sense if the institution provides the detained people with vocational training and job placement. In such situations, art and craft sessions serve as good vocational trainings where Government initiative is lacking. Inmates develop their ability with the help of such sessions and others who have such hidden talents but are only waiting for an opportunity to develop it further, open up. This opens up possibilities for them to go out to produce and sell art products or work as trainers.

Confidence grows and happiness flows when one is complimented for his efforts. Though inmates do not have the ability to create master pieces, they take efforts to show that they can also try and create with some guidance. The inmates are appreciated for their efforts which boosts their confidence. Many of them have taken responsibility towards the tasks given to them and shown interest to create and contribute to the team.

Such involvements pave the way for building relationship with one another for the inmates. Good relations lead to a happier stay during the detention period. The sessions help them build friendships and and create a sense of brotherhood. It has also brought to the front, leadership skills of many in there. The inmates themselves come forward to help others in situations they can.

Art is a way of taking joy and beauty to one's life. At the BH, along with other rehabilitation work done by Koshish, art is one of the best supplements to add to the intervention. If an inmate accepts art, s/he can accept anything. It is a doorway to reach people deeply. Institutions can be made a better place to live in by adding elements that can help them get into the mainstream. One such great element is ART!

## INTERVIEWING THE CHANGE-MAKER!



"When a 22 year old Vandana set up a shelter for homeless mentally ill women, more than 18 years ago, to provide care and basic treatment, she was struck by the realization that the problem was much deeper since India lacked an effective overall mental health care system. Vandana set about creating community friendly, intensely localized full range of solutions for effective mental healthcare delivery to both urban and rural populations in Tamil Nadu. To ensure its spread across India in the most effective manner, she is widely advocating the replication of these models into the government health-care systems

**In her interview with Koshish, the founder of 'The Banyan', speaks of how she has designed a mental health care delivery system that addresses the complex mix of mental health and homelessness**

***Qs. Work done by 'The Banyan' has been an inspiration for a lot of groups, including Koshish. What has been the source of your never ending energy for such a long period?***

VG: That's very kind. It has not been a straight line though. There have been many disillusioning moments - face offs with the system, every time an invisible, lost and neglected person came our way, having to witness societal apathy and harshness of the worst sort; struggles to keep ourselves afloat, thanks to the magnitude of the problem and ever diminishing resources- both financial and human and having to deal with the complexities of the nature of mental illness, homelessness and poverty - all abstract, stubborn and grey spaces! I could go on... However, for a group of individuals who know no other way than to respond, if there's one thing that doesn't let you down - it's your core from where you draw boundless energy that just appears magically, much to your own surprise. If you empathize to the point that you know it's a stroke of good luck that separates you from the predicament of a less fortunate person, you will learn to respect all human life, regardless of man made boundaries. And when you do that you will find all that you need to embrace - kindness, positivity and hope in the midst of cynicism, chaos and sorrow.

***Qs. While Banyan is widely known for its phenomenal work today, can you share the beginning of it? Where did it all begin and how?***

VG: I think it was a combination of passion, emotion, anger, friendship, upbringing and a stroke of good luck or chance that we set out doing what we did at 22. Vaishnavi and I met a woman, our age outside our

college with matted hair, soot on her body, almost in the nude running from one end of the road to the other, alone in a crowded world. We feared that she would be knocked down and run over by a passing bus. We attempted to rescue her from the streets and find her medical treatment and care so she could chase her dreams and live life on her own terms. We were surprised when we figured that options for homeless people with mental illness were almost absent, almost as if they were doomed to live a life of suffering and die, as the rest of us soaked in our own aspirations. Ever since that point of anger at the world that they thought it okay for this frail woman to be ignored, our eyes sought similar women, some pregnant, some with child even. One fine day, we decided to stop other safe track plans for a secure future and risked trying to touch lives and build a movement that would empower the most vulnerable and marginalised people and attempt to restore their dignity.

***Qs. Mental Health Issues are slowly getting acknowledged but we are still far from what is needed. What are the major challenges you see in developing a caring and effective structure to support people with mental health issues? What have been the positives?***

VG: Mental health is now drawing the sort of attention that it requires, owing to the evidence that points at significant incidence rates, the high disease burden and the impact that it has on many spheres of everyday life. What is also encouraging is that the focus is no longer on the medical model but on the bio-psycho- social approach where the path to recovery is not just promoted through medication but through focus on the person and all his/her needs- social, economic, medical,

psychological etc. The World Disability Report 2010, the UNCRPD and the World Health Assembly's call for convergence between health and social sectors in seeking health pathways for those with a mental illness is indeed the way to go. In India, we are headed in the right direction with attempts to make mental health accessible to all- as a basic right and entitlement through the new Mental Health Care BILL. Access to care remains the single largest barrier in a country like ours where only 123 of the 640 districts have a District Mental Health Programme. 70% of our population is rural or semi-urban and a significant percentage continues to live below the poverty line. A Mental Health Policy Group has also been constituted by the MOHFW, GOI and we will for the first time have a well defined policy that will determine the nature and spectrum of services that will ensure a person with a mental health issue receives the sort of ongoing care and support that s/he may require. However, conversion from policy to implementation is a significant challenge

movements have to usher in an era of parity, justice and reforms, particularly in state run mental health centres that are still sadly ridden with many problems, care is also to be taken that the needs of multiple groups are represented in a balanced manner, since the notion of rights varies from group to group.

A sense of connectedness needs to be established in our world that brings diverse groups of people together and binds them in a culture of kindness. Sadly, we seem to be moving away from this way of life into one where the divide is sharper and the differences evident. Unless this balance is not set right, we may not be able to achieve lasting change and progress. Human and societal attitudes are also to be worked on and this cannot be achieved or improved by good governance alone.

***Qs. Large number of persons with mental illness are processed under Beggary Law for wandering around and detained in custodial institutions. While this is injustice in one way as the person gets punished for her/his illness, it could also be an opportunity to administer much needed medicines, especially in the absence of family/home and the cases where hospitalization would not happen if the illness is not the serious one. Rights vs needs. How can this be addressed?***

VG: This is a very important debate and a tough one. And sadly has not been paid the attention that it deserves. On Rights vs Needs - I think a person should have a chance at life. And to facilitate this process, it is essential that the person be well. To deprive the person a go at life, to be comfortable with the person on the streets being infested with maggots as a result of untreated wounds, to be untouched by the separation of the person from a family, a child, a spouse, a mother who may be searching for him/ her; to constantly fear the horrific abuse including rape that a person could be subjected to while homeless, to have to live with the voices that the PLMI may wish to chase away but cannot, is to me rights ill defined. Rights have to lead to well being, not death, trauma and ill health. If there is an opportunity to heal the person and lead him/ her down a path of wellness, for him/ her then to decide his/ her future course of treatment and life, I personally would bat for that option. However, I'm not in favour of criminalising the person for his/ her illness. According to the Beggary Act, persons with mental illness (referred to as Lunatics) and wandering around are considered beggars and can be arrested and charge sheeted with provision for punishment ranging from one to ten years. So, consider this - a woman is unwell,

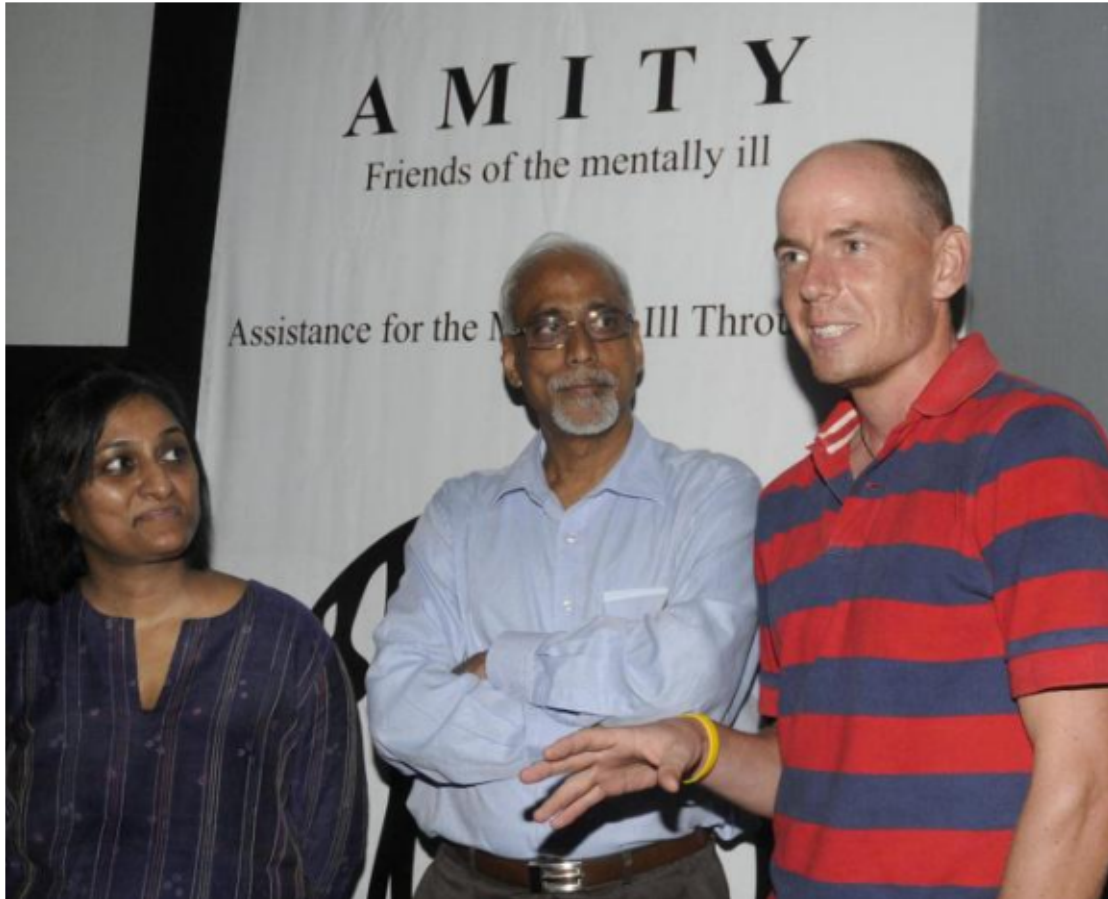


in our country and whether we succeed in delivering programmes the way in which they ought to be is something we will have to wait and watch.

On another note, the user caregiver movement has gained momentum giving the right thrust and an impetus for people living with a mental illness and their caregivers to participate actively in the legislative and policy making process. A lot of focus now is on the rights of an individual and this is a positive outcome of years of lobbying and advocacy. While such

"WHAT I SEE IN THE BANYAN... I SEE IN KOSHISH -  
RESPONSIVENESS, ENERGY AND HONESTY!"

- VANDANA GOPIKUMAR



VANDANA GOPIKUMAR AND TISS DIRECTOR S PARASURAMAN WITH PHOTOGRAPHER CHRISTOPH VON TOGGENBURG

AT THE LAUNCH OF SHORT FILMS ON MENTAL HEALTH IN CHENNAI, TAMIL NADU

cannot access health services because she hails from a poor, tribal belt, faces stigma for a health/ emotional problem, could live in a society that doesn't understand her condition/ problems, could face inequity as a result of her economic status, gender, class etc and then wanders away owing to lack of attention and care to land on the streets of a harsh city or town, is vulnerable and could be abused and at the end of it all- for all the gross violation and deprivation that she has suffered, she is legally punished and treated as a criminal. There is an urgent need to repeal this law and ensure that people with Mental Illness fall under the purview of a Mental Health legislation that aims at providing care-albeit in Beggar's Homes.

***Qs. You have known Koshish since its inception and supported it in a major way. What role do you feel***

***Koshish has played in taking up the issues of destitution, especially given the current socio-political environment?***

VG: What I see in The Banyan, I see in Koshish- responsiveness, energy and honesty. The need to engage, dirty hands and find solutions. The need to challenge oneself and redefine boundaries. Koshish has done remarkably well in paving the path for many - you have cared on the streets, you have been led by the voices and the experiences of the people that you serve, you have affected legislation, you have worked with the Government and impacted change in the most difficult circumstances, you have integrated multiple other needs - not walked the talk, blinkered. I'm in awe of your work and your courage and commitment. Hats off! I cannot suggest anything that you will not think of yourselves.

## LIFE HAPPENS... AT THE BEGGARS' HOME!



Forty-two year old Krishna (name changed) used to be extremely quiet when he was freshly detained in the beggars' home and showed visible symptoms of depression. He aggressively avoided questions related to his work and family. There were times when he rebuked saying he was an independent person and has broken all ties with everyone. He used to withdraw from having any conversations too. Even after more than two months of regular interaction, he did not respond positively. On the contrary, he became very demanding and did not co-operate or even attend vocational training within Koshish's training centre. He often made demands for tobacco and threw random tantrums.

Over time, Krishna slowly began to respond to the Koshish team and shared his personal information. His family was traced and home visits were conducted. Information from both Krishna and his family was made available to continue his rehabilitation processes. From home visits and interaction with his parents, it was understood that he suffered from schizophrenia and was hereditary, as his mother suffered from the same disorder and was being treated for it since the past nine years. Krishna also was taking medicines for the same but had discontinued owing to constant fights at home. He often had fights at home with his younger sibling on issues such as contributing money for running the home. These fights were violent in nature which often resulted in blood-shed and frequent police complaints.

He was therefore skeptical to any sort of contact with his family.

Krishna also had a troubled married life. His wife separated from him and his father-in-law had lodged a law suit against him for alimony for his daughter's well being. He has three young daughters, who are all in school, being raised by his wife in her maternal home. Krishna gave up on his circumstances and left his job in a fit of rage. He was jobless for about a year. He demanded his old parents and younger brother to provide him with money. However, this was not acceptable and feasible for them. It added to existing fights and Krishna left home. He wandered on the streets and slept outside stalls and petty shops in the night. One such time, when he was eating food outside a hotel, he was arrested by the police Beggars' squad.

With Koshish having traced his family and made visits to their home, we had an insight into Krishna's personal environment. The complexities of his case could be understood. The mother in particular was concerned for her son but expressed pessimistic feelings for him. There was lack of acceptance and understanding for the client. The father also was apprehensive to take any responsibility for him. It was found that both client and family were not keen on re-integration at that point.

Krishna was emotionally drained and repulsive towards his family. Additionally, as he opened himself



up, extreme anxiety and hallucinations were visible symptoms. There was irrational belief in superstitions such as black magic as well as grandiose thoughts like 'Sonia Gandhi and most women in the world are charmed by me'. There were aggressive demands for addictive substances too. Therefore, counseling in this case was a significantly important to bring in positive transformations in his mental health, personality, for family re-integration, trainings as well as for employment focus. Family counseling was essential for bringing about family's acceptance slowly and steadily towards him. They had to be counseled to be able to handle such situations better.

Psychiatric medicines were mandatory since Krishna was earlier diagnosed with schizophrenia and suffered from emotional numbness. He had not practised his tailoring skills and was jobless for about one year before coming to Beggars' Home. Art therapy provided the therapeutic environment for stimulating the mind with creative skills. He was also given his stipend as an acknowledgement of his efforts. Krishna had limitations with regard to mental health, which limited his ability to only stitch simple coats whereas the market required tailors with specialisations in

designer coats of latest trend. Finding an employer was a very challenging task. Also, a bank account had to be opened first to save his money.

Finding a suitable job of his preference was difficult and after visiting about nine employers from the employer's collective, he finally selected one place where he has been working for about two months now. According to the employer he has shown improvement in his skills and earns close to 250 rupees per coat each day. His medicines from the Thane Mental Hospital continue as recommended.

Krishna was released at the end of the detention period after one long year. In the barracks, he had shown improvement in his social interactions with others and was found to be helpful to fellow inmates. He has made strong friends who support each other even post his release from the Beggars' Home.

Seeing Krishna transform from being an introvert to an aggressive addict to a helpful friend in the Beggars' Home has been a challenge. It has been a remarkable journey of struggle for Koshish as much as it has been for Krishna himself!

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## TEAM SPEAKS...

" Criminalizing begging is an unjust Act. While conducting the destitution study in Patna, we never came across a person who begged as choice. It is the circumstance, mostly extreme poverty, that has led people to beg. Often, begging remained the only alternative people had. Our ongoing study on destitution explores this very phenomenon: what leads to beggary? Whether it's a preferred way of living or a sheer necessity to survive. The State must work towards bringing the urban poor into the mainstream and create linkages with capacity building welfare provisions that supports them to establish their lives once again. "

- Qayam Masumi, Koshish, Patna

# JOINING HANDS FOR DECRIMINALIZING DESTITUTION AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Mohd Tarique, Program Head, Koshish, narrates the emotional realizations while working with Women suffering from Mental Illness as he stresses on the significance of civil society interventions and government coming together to ensure adequate interventions for the larger population. Drawing from experiences of working with Beggar's Homes, Tarique reflects on why Koshish continues to work with Beggar's Home for persons with Mental Illness in spite of these being custodial institutions...



There are a sizeable number of destitute persons on the streets of our cities for whom life is extremely tough and vulnerable, full of exploitation and abuse. Mental Illness is one of the most prevalent feature of life on the street. There is homelessness, there is mental illness and then there is Beggary Prevention Legislation, which among other things, makes wandering around punishable. If the homeless are vulnerable, more vulnerable are those homeless who suffer from mental illness but the most vulnerable are those homeless who have mental illness and are caught under the anti-beggar laws.

Briefly talking on the law that is there in about 20 states and 2 Union Territories, it's a legislation that does nothing beyond punishing the poor, ill, abandoned and aged. The features of these beggary prevention laws in different states are more or less the same. Broadly, all are criminalizing in nature, where people, irrespective of their physical, economic and psychological condition are arrested and punished for begging. People who need state's assistance, who need to be protected, taken care of and who need treatment are made to serve the sentence under these laws.

Under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 (BPBA,1959), applicable in Maharashtra as well as in Delhi, the term 'beggar' has been defined in a way that even a 'homeless mentally ill' person wandering is considered to be a 'beggar'. Persons arrested under the Beggary Law can be kept in custody for a period ranging from 1 year up to 10 years. Additionally, under special circumstances, where the Superintendent of the Certified Home feels and concludes that the person is incurably helpless and would not be able to come out of begging, this detention could be extended indefinitely after a Special Appeal to the state.

especially with women, very clearly brought out the element of mental illness within the wandering homeless population. When the person is on the street, in spite of all the difficulties, hostilities and exploitation, there is still one faint chance of that person getting spotted by some concerned citizen or civil society organization and referred for treatment but when the same person is arrested under the Beggary Law even that one hope is taken away. At Koshish, we have developed a programme, 'My Space'. It is a specially created space within the Institution where women experience the joy of being themselves, being free. We have a special barrack where women come in every day and engage themselves in activities of their choice. Though we have a structured training and educational program running but largely it depends on the wish of the women. No one tells them what they should be doing. For these few hours when these women are at, 'My Space', they are not governed by the rules of the institution but by their desires and likings. It is here that we have seen the most vulnerable sides of people suffering from mental illnesses. But it is also here that we have seen their never ending will to fight and tremendous power to build and value relations.

There is a general notion that persons with mental illnesses are dangerous, they get wild and uncontrollable; they have no sense of what they do, they are mad and so on... But the fact is that they understand life better, understand relations better and they are the ones who value human values. They love you more than you would love them, who WHEN loved, remain with you, always! We all think of benefits and loss, consequences, fair and unfair, personal space or domination, even with families and friends, we trade with loved ones, but these people understand only love! We really wonder why is it so difficult for us to understand them when they understand us so well. After all, we are all intelligent and 'fit' ones whereas they are

Experiences inside the Beggar's Home,

the ones who are 'Ill' and 'Unfit'?

They might not understand all worldly affairs, but they possess something else. They might not be supported by their families, but they have the potential to be independent. They might not be accepted back in the original homes, but they are capable of starting new ones. They might not be allowed to relive old relationships of blood and society, but they are very much capable of giving birth to new relationships. We are witness to their capacities in doing that. To support them realise their potential, they need a caring intervention that treats them as 'humans' and not just 'clients'. Is government an answer? No. Is Civil Society Organizations (CSO) an answer? No. Not really.

The union of the two as the answer. CSO's and passionate individuals can and have been making significant impact but the problem that we are faced with is huge. Response, too, must be in accordance. Exclusive, Centres of Excellence can be created but when it comes to replication, even the best may not succeed. Live evidence of what I'm saying here is the fact that even today though there are large numbers of organizations working with people with mental illness, most of these Certified Institutions still have no intervention. People lying in these institutions do not receive adequate treatment. We might evolve best practices but it is impossible for any single or few organizations to reach out to every part of the country. One can try and cover few states and few numbers within those regions but most would get left out.

Most well thought out and successful approaches might fail to address the need as the scale and numbers go up. The issue is so severe and complicated that even to think of alternatives, continued and sustained efforts are essential and this sort of continuity is possible only with committed and serious government involvement. It is out of bounds for even the best to match government institutions here. (Government as a system and not custodial institution). Now the issue with the government is, though they have the required resources, what is missing is the compassion and involvement that is as crucial as the resources in the work that we are looking at.



The answer lies in the union of the two. Civil society groups evolving the strategy/ approach and then the government taking over and ensuring that it is adopted and covers the entire population that we are looking at. Experience has been that though government talks of partnership, in actual, relationship is rarely of equality. Unfortunately, this is where the government

tends to go wrong. Government departments function more in the manner of monitors treating organizations being there merely for the implementation.

Second, and more obvious one, is the difference of approach, positions and philosophies. Civil Society organizations are largely driven by their passion and sense of responsibility towards the people and this is where they find it difficult to relate with government institutions as partners.

Now, this is what we have attempted to break. While we continue to oppose what we oppose in the government's position or approach and continue with the demand for change in the legislation, immediate intervention is also carried out and save those who cannot wait for years to see the systems getting changed and improved. We do realize that there are certain cores which should remain non-negotiable but flexibility has to be maintained. However, to ensure that 'non-negotiable' is not compromised upon, the partnership that is established must be based on equality. Compassion and skills of the Civil Society Organizations coupled with the resources and machinery that the government has, can produce wonders. Government must realize that it is not only the resources that matter when it comes to the rehabilitation of the various vulnerable groups. To address the complicated issues of human beings, one needs a very high degree of skills and motivation. The expertise and the skills that social workers bring in must be acknowledged and valued by the government.

Clearly, times are changing and the manner in which people's participation in matters of governance is increasing, it is perhaps the best time for the two to come together and work towards a common goal. Through our experience at Koshish, we can say it



is possible. We have successfully ensured access to treatment as well rehabilitation support for people living in Certified Institutions. We have been supported and encouraged by several sensitive officers in these institutions governed by the state. Be it civil hospitals, beggars home or regional mental hospital, everywhere we have found officers who gave their best and ensured that the best possible treatment was made available. One could argue that why in first place these people are in the custodial institutions and not in the medical treatment set up.

One could also ask why such law exists and whether we challenge it in the court of law. One could even question our own understanding of the issue and may be the intention itself! We too ask these questions to ourselves and for us, it's been very simple answer: we wanted to reach out to those for whom no one else is. We are not experts in mental health but we are linking up various institutions of government and ensuring that unavailability of support groups should

not result in unavailability of treatment for the people. Most of them either do not have homes or would probably not be taken back. Not all are so severely ill that would warrant hospitalization but they still need medication. On the streets we can't really ensure this so while they are here, we try and get them the treatment and finally help them get back towards family or independent living. It is true that the government must find answers to these kind of situations and we must continue to demand till such mechanism is created but what till then?

We want to help government develop that framework where criminalization ends. We are working towards an environment where the resistance is replaced by common understanding and shared compassion for our people. Our strategy and approach is different from the government but we are walking together to ensure the availability of our collective strength. The Fight must be kept on!

## CELEBRATING NEW YEAR AT BEGGARS ' HOME



Welcoming 2013, Koshish organized the New Year Party at Mumbai Beggars' Home in the male and female sections. We were joined by the care takers, custodial staff, probation officers and the superintendents in the celebrations, together with the residents of the home.



Here is a glimpse of the photo story put together by the Koshi sh team in Patna on their experiences on field with the homeless communities. . .



Weekly SHG meeting at High Court Mazar. Most women shared that they do not even know to read any language, both numbers and words. Financial inclusion, in spite of being a progressive initiative by the government continues to achieve limited success due to illiteracy acting as a major countering force.

The invisible crowd - a homeless group outside Patna junction fighting for food packets. There are hundreds of homeless people in and around the station among whom there is a constant sense of bickering for the scarce resource available.

Enough for one means less for the other!



Lost sisterhood - groups of Gulguliya women outside their shacks. There is a lot of mistrust and infighting among the community which makes it all the more difficult for them to unite and fight for their cause!



Top of the World - People living on the roof of shacks under Chitkohra bridge. These shacks are often overcrowded, so most men and elderly sleep on the roof at night. Some new inhabitants, who do not get space also occupy the roof!

# COUNSELLED FOR A CAUSE!

*COUNSELING AS AN INTERVENTION INTENDS TO PROVIDE A CARING, SUPPORTIVE AND NURTURING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE CLIENTS AND GUIDE THEM IN THEIR PURSUIT FOR A BETTER LIFE.*

*COUNSELLING HAS REMAINED ONE OF KOSHISH'S CORE PROGRAMMES IN THE REHABILITATION CYCLE!*

People who move to the city, for reasons ranging from better employment opportunities for a better life to abandonment by the family itself, get processed and are brought to custodial institutions under the Beggary law. We come across these people both during the remand as well as detention periods. Koshish focusses on the rehabilitation needs of every individual who requires support. These people brought to the institutions come from varied backgrounds, from all over the country. In spite of multiple variations, there is one factor common to all these people and that is the abuse and violence that they see while on the street. Invariably everyone finds it extremely difficult to adjust to the environment inside custody.

Unaware of the reasons for arrest and subsequent punishment, people find it very difficult to come to terms with the injustice meted out. Unfortunately, this very often leads to loss of hope which actually slows down the process of rehabilitation, be it reintegration with the family or preparation for independent living. Most clients do not open up due to feelings of anger, mistrust or anxiousness. Koshish, over the years, has evolved a framework that enables persons to move out of destitution. In that cycle of rehabilitation, counseling constitutes an important stage. Through counseling and individual case work, an assessment is made to identify needs that leads to drawing up of rehabilitation plans.

Counseling helps in re-building trust and hope in the clients as it establishes a relation between the

client and counselor that is based on empathy, confidentiality and a non-judgemental approach. It is a process that engages with the clients on a regular basis. Gradually clients begin to communicate and share their background, experiences, hardships faced, reasons for homelessness and so on. This allows the case worker to draw up a rehabilitation plan in consultation with the client.

Observing people's behavior during the seven days of remand helps gather information about their interpersonal skills and abilities, which is helpful for family counselling at the time of re-integration or employer contact for a more sustained rehabilitation. Clients sometimes refuse any help in terms of re-integration. However, they share their journey of life which acts as catharsis for them and gives them an opportunity to reflect on their lives. In case of severe mental illness also, counseling together with case work facilitates in collecting basic information wherever possible. Families and clients are provided psycho-education to understand mental illness better. Most times, senior citizens forget their addresses, counseling helps them recall it through various therapeutic measures. The homeless are counseled for reasons that led them to the state of destitution such as broken relationships, addictions, and other vulnerabilities and also to cope with traumas they are exposed to on the streets.

Counseling with the detention group operates as a complementary support to case-work for repatriation, trainings, referrals and employments. Clients provided support through interventions like



" It was important to open up a therapeutic element to build trust and understanding among people. Counselling forms a crucial step in the rehabilitation process for all clients. It completes case work. It operates on a client centred approach and identifies people's needs to plan further for future actions with their consent."

-Shahnaz Syed, Koshish, Mumbai

psychiatric treatments, medication, vocational training, family integration and jobs are counseled from time to time. Majority of the clients suffer from severe de-motivation and lack of confidence. Counseling focuses on inspiring them for an independent life of dignity, recognising their talents, encourage work in their interest areas and develop an introspective view for overall personality development.

Although a client centred approach to counselling is used, the challenge in Beggars' Home lies in motivating clients to approach counseling voluntarily. Therefore, group counseling sessions are taken to brief them about a service which they do not otherwise have free access to. With time, they start sharing their personal details, express their true emotions and their levels of aggression go down. In certain detention cases, the client and their families are counseled for relationship building so that they have a better understanding of each other and their tendency to fall on to destitution is reduced.

Entering into any form of training is a first time experience for most clients. With regular counseling sessions with the group, several client needs are understood and goals are formed on those lines. Counseling as a programme functions with casework to execute the goals agreed upon by the clients. Counseling helps facilitate case-work in referring clients to suitable employers.

Another major client group of our counseling program are the care taking staff of the institutions. It becomes important to counsel the care-taker and other staff of Beggars' Home who undergo tremendous mental pressure with prolonged exposure to the negative work environment. While individual instances of behavioral violence might be seen, it is largely the impact of long working hours coupled with shortage of staff with absolutely no recognition of their efforts, that turn people aggressive, impatient and intolerant. This not only leads to incidents of custodial violence but harms the care takers as well. There have been instances where care-takers did recognize this pressure and sought support. Care-takers are counseled not only to support them bear the pressure but also to orient and motivate them to be more empathetic towards the clients and enhance their communication skills that would make clients feel cared for and supported.

Change has been observed in people's responses from 'I do not know what to do' or 'I am fine begging' or 'I will do what you say'... to 'I want to work in a hotel', 'I will become a driver' or 'I will go home and live with family'. Counseling as a programme becomes an effective tool for positive development of clients from being hopeless at some-point to confident individuals who wish to come out of destitution and walk towards a better life.

## GOING DOWN MEMORY LANE...

*Anushree Kini, one of the first field work students at Koshish narrates her experience...*

When I look back at my year of field work with Koshish at the Chembur Beggars' Home, what I remember the most are the emotions I felt throughout that year in 2007. I must say, we were told very categorically what we would be in for if we chose the Beggars' Home for our field work. But nothing can prepare you for what you see, feel and experience once you begin working there.

I do not really want to go into what work I did there or what Koshish was doing there at that point, since Koshish and all its achievements are well known. I just want to express what I felt through that process, since that was a real eye opener for me.

What was most shocking, at the outset, was that beggary was criminalized. And not only that, the definition was so vague, it gave the police the power to pick up anybody who they felt even looked like s/he was a beggar, or was selling items at a signal. I remember meeting so many people in the home, who were working, who were either vendors, or daily wage laborers, but were homeless and needlessly picked up by the police. Most often, it was a place where the police could just dump mentally ill men and women. The condition inside the home was a another story and went beyond shocking me. I began to feel like I was stuck in two parallel worlds at the same time.

What struck me most I think about the entire situation there, was absolute apathy toward the entire situation. It was an issue ignored at all levels, by our state, by our institutions, by our people and to some extent even by the social work fraternity. When I told friends or people outside the TISS that I was working at the Beggars' Home, the reaction I got was always almost a puzzled look with a question asking what work

exactly? Isn't it better for the society at large that these "useless, lazy" people are institutionalized instead of being left on the streets harassing "normal citizens"?

Interestingly after a point, I got so used to defending the work I did or people we worked for, that I began to see everyone as an innocent victim. It was only much later into the year, that Tarique told us about a case who had just come in, where a young boy of eight had been found with his arms cut off in order to make him beg. I could not fathom the cruelty of human beings. That's when the sheer complexity of the issue truly hit me. Beggary rackets were real, and so were destitution and homelessness. The issue began to linger in my mind, growing from the atrocious conditions of the Chembur Beggars' Home, to something much larger.

Setting up shelters for the homeless, increasing infrastructure to help officials in the homes and hospitals perform better, availing facilities and resources to deal with mentally ill people in the homes, installing effective rehabilitation programmes, all of this began to merge in my mind as necessary tools and techniques for addressing the issue. The situation cried out and called for reforms at a much larger level, beginning with the repeal of the draconian Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959, to ultimately dealing with national level policies and decisions which cause landlessness, homelessness and destitution.

I know for a fact that the images or the memories of that year are never going to leave me. The one image which has stayed with me the most is that of an old lady, who spoke no language except Telugu and whose Telugu was so garbled that nobody could follow it. She had been living in the home for years. Nobody knew where her family was, nobody knew her exact village in Andhra Pradesh, nobody could tell who she was. She would sit in one corner, all day, quietly, with sad eyes, trying to tell her story but unable to do so...



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

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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\*Koshish has its offices in Mumbai, Delhi and Patna.