

# KOSHISH

An Initiative on Homelessness and Destitution

A Field Action Project of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Volume 1, Issue No. 3

January-March 2013

## Celebrating Life!

Koshish presents a selection of images from across our programmes in Delhi, Mumbai and Patna...



The 'Sapera Basti' is home to hundreds of members of the traditional snake charmers community who have been falling prey to the BPBA since decades.

**I  
N  
S  
I  
D  
E**  
Koshish has begun the process of creating inroads with the community, creating sustainable livelihood options, starting with children. Read on...

Indu Prakash Singh, a human rights defender, poet, author, a feminist, currently with Indo – Global Social Service

Society (IGSSS) as Head, SHELTER Sustaining Housing, Health, Education & Livelihoods speaks to Koshish on his journey of over a decade's work on Urban Poverty and Homelessness.

Here's presenting an excerpt from his interview...

Dear 'Friends of Koshish',

We are back with the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Koshish E-magazine. This is really evolving into a fine platform for us to share our journey and progress with all of you. We received large number of mails, providing us very serious and significant feedback about the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue and we are really thankful to all of you. We hope this response will enable us to further strengthen the quality and range of content published in the magazine.

In the current issue, we bring to you, an interview with Shri Indu Prakash Singh, well known Social Activist, working on issues of Urban Poverty and Gender Equality. His journey in seeking 'Shelter Rights' for the 'Citymakers' as he calls the Homeless citizens, has been one that inspires many and provides hope and strength for the future.

Each of the program at Koshish, like the origin of the project, carries a story behind it. All our programs carry a different philosophy and approach though they might appear as regular routine activities. They are actually more of a strategy than a program. In each edition, we will decode one intervention and bring you closer to us. This time, you get introduced to the 'Picnic', a simple yet unique intervention at Koshish.

In the last edition, we had introduced a column where an ex-student, intern or volunteer would be sharing their experience of being a part of the Koshish family. In this issue, Gitika Sharma, a young, enthusiastic and highly sensitive law student from Delhi University recounts her experience of being with us for her summer internship. It is the energy of the youth like her that fuels and keeps us on a high throughout.

Last quarter has been a happening one at Koshish. It has been quite a productive period, especially at the advocacy front. The Government of Delhi nominated us as member on the 'Advisory Committee' it constituted for institutions established under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959. This will allow us to provide advisory support and guidance for effective and positive functioning of these institutions. The Maharashtra Government constituted a 'Law Reform Committee' to review the existing Beggary Prevention Act and draft the alternative legislation. Koshish has been included as a member of this important body. In Patna, the Social Welfare Department of the Bihar Government has invited us to formally collaborate with them and implement 'Chief Minister's Beggary Rehabilitation Scheme'. We congratulate

the State government for bringing in this progressive scheme where poor and destitute persons are provided assistance and support to move out of destitution and lead a life of dignity. Unlike other states of the country, this is completely a community based program and does not criminalize destitution.

We are also excited to share the launch of Pilot Community Intervention with the 'Snake Charmers' Community in Delhi. Historically, this community has been engaged in a practice that has now been turned 'illegal' under the Beggary Prevention law and as a result, members of the community are frequently arrested. While their livelihood is criminalized, traditional knowledge notwithstanding, there is hardly any alternative made available to them. Under this pilot intervention, we are attempting to respond to the demands of the community while keeping at pace with changing times.

We envision an environment where more and more government officials are oriented towards the 'alternative response mechanism' for the needs of destitute and an increased number of youth are encouraged to engage with the issues of marginalized citizens like elderly, children, destitute etc. Last quarter, we organized two training workshops, around the issues of these marginalized groups, one each in the month of February and March for Government Officials and Social Work Professionals respectively. Both the workshops were supported by National Institute of Social Defence, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India.

A caring and inclusive mentoring is key to nurturing abilities of the youth and helping them become the contributing members. Through internships and opportunities to volunteer, we will continue to provide an environment where the youth is able to think freely and experiment with such thoughts.

We aim to share our experiences and strengths with as wide a group as possible. It is heartening to know that there are people who are willing to support us in any possible manner. We look forward to receive comments/articles/suggestions/feedback from you. Your congratulatory messages and calls provide us the energy and motivation to make this publication better with every edition. Thanks for receiving us with such warmth. Each message from you, every mail you drop us, is precious and valuable to us.

Keep writing and sharing. Happy Reading!

Warm regards,

Tarique

“

”

I Learnt Maximum From The Homeless People. Their Lives Are Like Hundreds Of Books Rolled Into One



Indu Prakash Singh, is currently with Indo–Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) as Head, SHELTER Sustaining Housing, Health, Education & Livelihoods through Empowerment and Rights Intervention, CityMakers Programme, since December 2009. In the category, Save Your City (for the film 'No shelters for Homeless Women in Delhi'), Indu was bestowed with the CNN-IBN “Citizen Journalist Award” in 2010. Indu was also chosen as “Person of the Year, 2003” by the First City magazine. He became part of the Women's movement from 1982 onwards (after one of his friend's sister was burnt to death in Delhi). He is an author of four books on women's issues and the co-author of Delhi: A Tale of Two Cities and four other publications. He has written numerous articles in journals, magazines, newspapers, etc. He also has edited over 50 publications (including training manuals) and been editor of Health for the Millions magazine. He talks to Mohd. Tarique and shares the journey of over a decade of his work around urban poverty, homelessness and shelters. Here are some excerpts from an interview with him.

**MT: How has your journey been so far? What changes have you seen over the decade in the context of Urban Poor. How has the government response changed over these years?**

IPS: We began work in November 1999 and in 2000 Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan was created. It was a huge challenge as there was no literature available for reference. There was no knowledge base either. Both intellectually as well as operationally, there was lack of guidance. We had a young team and I was myself trying to understand the phenomenon. Gradually it began to unfold and we learnt together. We worked as a close knit team with lot of emotions including anger, grief, agony, disagreement but we stuck together.

Today, there are many other groups working on the issue of homelessness and the government is much more responsive but back then, there was absolutely nothing. It has been a journey where one has seen tremendous growth as an individual. Before coming to this I had been a part of the Women's movement,

research, activism, environment, but this work challenged me the most.

During this journey we met people who have remained with us even after moving on and doing different things in life. There is increased support and involvement from civil society groups as well as the State. In fact, State response has changed drastically. Before taking on this work, there were no funds and it was a challenge to manage even the bare minimum that one required.

When we started there were barely 12 night shelters and today there are 170, with most of them being open 24 hours. Back in 2000-01, we tried offering our support to the government but it did not work. Shelters were in bad shape and we filed a PIL in High Court. That is how the first shelters were allotted to Aashray and the state started working with us. Today almost every shelter is run by the civil society groups, with the financial support coming in from the government. It is a huge shift from what it was a decade back.

**MT: This is an area of work that is faced with not only government hostility and societal prejudices, but also extremely disturbing and draining emotionally and physically. What keeps you focussed and motivated especially when there have not been too many significant changes?**

IPS: My education helped a lot, I must say. My masters in Philosophy and Sociology allowed me to approach the issue of homelessness differently. I read Gandhi, Rumi, Gibran, Tagore and Kabir. This evolved me spiritually and gave me courage. As St. Francis would say, 'I wanted to be an instrument of peace'. Humanly this was not possible. Solid spiritual, not religious, base was required that was undying, unending courage which would get emboldened with challenges. I refused to give in as I realized that the problem of several decades cannot be solved in a few days.

We needed more people to carry out this task. We were able to bring in several groups who supported in multiple ways like IHBAS, Katha, Pravah etc. When I started working on homelessness, I had already seen a range of work and did understand how different issues and problems were manifested in society.

I learnt about the role of individuals in changing the society. Theoretical orientation that I received enabled me to respond to the situation. I realized how man is a reactor and not the actor. I studied 'Theory of Exchange' that would teach 'Everything is for Exchange'. As a student I would think 'what a bizarre theory'. I would always wonder how you would exchange human relations. That grounding helped me a lot. I learnt it was important that a strong and resilient team is present. Not judging a person helped in building relations. I learnt to take the person out and put the context in.

Even today I read Meera and Kabir and they continue to inspire and guide me. Since I am working with people who have faced extreme violence, injustice and deprivation, I should be prepared to get shocks on a regular basis. I learnt to listen in this entire process. It was difficult to not hate a person when one saw so much of abuse around but mediation helped me calm down and made me stronger within. It helped me sustain. It taught me an important virtue of forgiving people. Expecting too much from people does not help much. That could actually lead you to hate people. 'Internal knowing' was key element. It guided me to take the right decisions.

Initially, we would attend to every issue we got to know, so that people would get to know about us. We went to understand their issues but brought in those as our agenda and this is how work spread. We began to see it as a 'Human Rights Issue'.

The Godhra incident and Kashmir elections were defining moments in many ways. I began to realize how people are rendered homeless.

Gradually, I began to see our issue in all issues. Tribals, Dalits, Muslims; I started joining all movements. I never allowed myself to be isolated. The idea was simple, 'we continued to work in our spaces and wherever roots met with others, we joined hands.'

We have been strong on rights and networking, not running parallel programs but intersecting. Synergizing the energies was central and that is what continues to define our work even today. This was all about building shared work spaces where others are allowed to enter and walk together.

This has of course been a long but satisfying journey. At times, I would get stuck and not knowing which direction to move. I would walk few steps back and a new road would be seen. However, marching ahead has been lesser than marching backwards. It has always been a struggle to explore alternatives. There have been several bottlenecks but we continued. There were few results to cheer about but team held its ground.

There were also team tyrannies, issues with the funders but the strength of the work helped taking on everything. I would tell the team that they are here to work and that is what they must do. If they were to play games, they were asked to go elsewhere. I learnt maximum from the homeless people. Their lives are like hundreds of books rolled into one. What can teach and inspire you more than that?

**MT: You led 'National Caravan', a program where for the first time issues of urban poor especially homeless were brought center stage. Please share some insights/memories from that experience.**

IPS: National Caravan was something that was much needed and well timed. The Supreme Court was talking of shelters to be created in every state and the Caravan

evolved as a mechanism to check on that, by informing larger players on what was happening in court and what they were required to do. This was also the time when the census was happening. We pledged to ourselves that we will continue our efforts until each Citymaker has a dignified shelter. Through the National Caravan, we were able to connect with past partners as well as form new relations, which was also very reassuring and refreshing.

We plan to take this to other places and as an outcome of associations formed during the caravan, we are now getting into new areas of work. It was a journey where we met several good people who became friends, associates, partners, etc. With these partners, we were also able to reactivate National Forum for Housing Rights. Our work is spread across cities around housing rights and livelihood. Networking and Partnerships can lead to major changes. With the awareness that was created as a result of Caravan, we were able to raise more resources through Civil Society groups than the government. Media too played a very important role. We have some of the best friends in media who took up the issue in the right manner.

We are not alone. We have thousands of people with us.





“Koshish is a gem: original and authentic”

- Indu Prakash Singh

**MT: You have been part of the case going on in High Court. To what extent do you think, the court has been instrumental in getting the shelters created? Do you think court has filled in where the government failed to deliver? Is it 'good sign' for a 'democracy' or an 'unfortunate development'?**

IPS: We are committed to the rights of the Citymakers and the Constitution of India. Despite the fact that we were working with them, to assist them in delivering the services, they saw us as opponents. However, Shahri Adhikar Manch got strengthened because of this opposition. It strengthened us to play our politics and our politics is the 'Constitution of India' that guarantees Equality and a dignified life to all its citizens.

In entire case we did not file a PIL. The Government did not really get the entire nature of the case and started arm-twisting with us. Court took it up that assisting the court and letters we received from the government are contempt to court. This order of the High Court can be used by networks across the country and fight it out.

While the Court has certainly helped in protecting the shelters, judiciary getting into executive function is dangerous. But if executive does not perform, the judiciary has a role to play. In fact this is the beauty of the democracy that when executive fails, judiciary can come in and still protect people's rights and entitlements.

There is no denial that this trend is dangerous and one would not really want to see a repeat. We want to assist the government. It could have been the best model to engage positively, but the government failed it. DUSIB ignored and became adverse. As a network, we worked in unison. The High Court has been vigilant and that resulted in creation of shelters. While we struggled with the government, we received support from all quarters. This case has only strengthened our core belief that if you are following the right track, everything works out well eventually.

**MT: Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) and Civil Society groups have come together to provide shelter and other basic services. How critical you think this collaboration is in the context of governance?**

IS: This will hopefully provide a good partnership model where some administrative work is done by the government with support from civil society groups. It is encouraging to see the two coming together but real partnership has to be based on equality. If government really wants to engage with NGO's meaningfully then this partnership must be that of equal partners. Partners cannot be unequal.

Government brings in its strength of resources, infrastructure and legitimacy while we bring in our experience and understanding. We have lived hundreds of years in these years. The value we bring in our work because of our experience of working with people is lost with the government.

Not that they are bad people but systems do not allow them. If they can work considering civil groups as real partners, that will really be good in terms of improving the services for the poor. Probably we will have a time when both civil society and government will start understanding 100% of each other and make each other stronger.

**MT: What role do you see for groups like Koshish in ensuring rights and justice for the poor? Any message for us?**

IS.: Koshish came in as a very important area. We were very touchy and cautious about beggary. We believed the draconian law must go and did not engage with the government. We believed government might simply use us for their reasons. But the way, in which Koshish intervened, it proved that if you have a strong strategy, it will work. You have strategy, you understand nuances, we are in sync with each other. Koshish has allowed us to work without really worrying for what happens to one of the most vulnerable and wronged group of people. Koshish came in a very beautiful and strong way.

Koshish has been built brick by brick. You upheld the constitutional values and never ever compromised. You were strong to take on the government, you were a strategist and clean. Honesty has been core to Koshish. You shaped it, Tarique, and it is a program that I'm happy about. I'm proud of it. For me, it is my work. It is a gem: original and authentic.

Hats off to Prof. Parasuraman who pursued and backed you completely. You had a dream and he supported. You have trust and faith in the cause and nobody can actually be an enemy to this energy. In fact, people will always be drawn into it if they get into your whirlpool.

Koshish has successfully demonstrated how an academic institution can go beyond classroom teaching and work towards creating a just and fair society. It has also shown how civil society groups can engage with the government systems and bring structural and systemic changes while holding on to the core values of justice and dignity for the poor and marginalized.

I congratulate you on the beautiful work you have been doing and wish you success and strength for the coming times.

# From Walled Barracks to Free Walks...

*Picnics, commonly depicted as outings that groups like families, friends or children enjoy as leisure, has evolved as one of the strongest strategy for Koshish to engage with people in custody. The 'Picnic' is a believable paradox and the first of its kind, initiated in custodial institutions in India.*

**H**ow would you describe a 'picnic'? A casual, routine visit to a predetermined place? A fun-filled outing? Some good time with friends and family? A possible attempt to rejuvenate? Certainly yes. Now, how about having 'picnic' as a 'confidence building' therapy? As a strategy to build upon the rehabilitation needs of people in custody? What if we say a simple activity like picnic can serve as a key strategic intervention for the rehabilitation of these persons? For most, this surely cannot be a possibility. But for Koshish, it's a very precious 'truth'.

'Picnic' as a programme has been on for the past four years now. With time, it has only grown stronger. Memories are still fresh when we first proposed the idea of taking clients out for a picnic. The then Superintendent was completely taken aback and thought we have either lost our capacity to think or we are getting carried away with the support that the institution provided us in the implementation of our rehabilitation program. We knew it clearly that neither was true for us.

We were coming from a very simple but fundamental truth of life: Love and trust wins people. The realization that people remain in



custody for years with not much movement was playing heavily in our minds. Custodial violence, whether a result of extreme frustration that care-taking staff go through or as a resort to maintain 'discipline', was also quite disturbing. Even worse was the fact that our clients were not trusted by the administration. And they were probably right. After all, people were in judicial custody. Incidents of clients attempting to escape were frequent. Every time such an attempt was made, successful or otherwise, it was a question mark on our belief and faith in people. But we knew we just had to try harder, probably needing to trust people little more. And we did that.

We started talking to people during our session, explaining how their running or even attempting that is a mockery of our efforts. Slowly, we realized that we were on the right track. People were very careful of protecting our relation and ensuring that administration did not get the opportunity to point faults in us. Gradually, we had a pool within the custodial staff who were willing to take risk and trust people and see what actually happens. Thanks to the then probation officer and the current Superintendent, Mr. Gautam Arwel, we never had any shortage of support to experiment.





Before a group actually goes out for a 'picnic', there is a lot that is being invested. A group of persons are selected and worked upon. Through preparatory sessions, we discuss the importance of going out and establishing the fact that they are ready to take responsibility for bigger challenges of life. For a group of about 40-45 persons, two-three caretakers and two members from the Koshish team accompany them. The process is made participatory and everyone in the group is given some or the other responsibility. Here, 'adults' are treated like 'adults'. Even the date and place are discussed and decided by the group. Care takers also participate in this planning. The transformation of a custodial group into a team of picnic-goers is amazing.

This program has clearly established a relation of trust at three levels; firstly, between the organization and the administration, secondly, between the organization and the clients in custodial home and lastly between the administration of the institution and persons in custody. Attempts to escape are still a regular feature at the institution but when people are out and can actually run away, they don't even try. This, to us, is the real value and strength of human relations. This is where we see the success of our experiment.

Today, Koshish can confidently speak of the success of the Picnic as a strategy in building trust in the minds of the custodial staff and towards the residents of the institution. Taking care of all apprehensions of the administration about people running away and them being questioned by the court, not once in our experience have the people ever tried to run away from the picnics, even when it is easiest for them.

It is a unique idea within the custodial setup, and operates in contradiction to the conventional practice of 'not trusting people in custody'. The 'Picnic' challenges the punitive approach of institutions. In fact, if understood properly and executed with precision it can be adopted in the process of custodial reforms for mainstreaming the custodial population across any kind of custodial institution.

The 'picnic' has successfully rejected the prejudices around custodial populations. The programme is strongly based on the simple understanding of the power of love, affirming every human life is worth living with dignity and dignity comprises of person being loved and trusted by others.

# Going Down Memory Lane...

## *Gitika Sharma Reminiscences Her Side Of The Story And Shares Her Experience As An Intern With Koshish In Delhi. Read on...*

**W**hen I was selected to intern with Koshish, I was not so confident if I would be able to do justice to the kind work the Team had undertaken, but I can boast that the lack of confidence was only momentary. As soon as I stepped into the office and was greeted cheerfully by everyone there, my nervousness vanished. Another dose of strength was my visit to the residents at Sewa Kutir, Delhi. They seemed troubled and anguished but were all polite and welcoming. In fact one particular resident astonished me. His background and qualifications shook my trust in the so-called family-based culture of Indian society. Interactions with him about his life made me believe that it is quite likely that anyone of us can end up in a situation like that of his, with all the ignorance and indifference bestowed by society.

My experience during the visit to Sewa Sadan in Lampur was not very different either. Talking to the men there, watching their performances, their hospitality and kindness was all very overwhelming. All of them lived with their own predicaments, yet smiled affectionately at us. My material life seemed futile as I saw them cheering each other, as they watched themselves on TV, even in extreme pain. This visit was significant in the sense that during my conversation with few residents I got to know about the strategic reasons and issues related to homelessness. One which affected me the most was addiction among young children, which I later witnessed myself while visiting Old Delhi. It was disheartening!

I was soon deputed to Nirmal Chhaya, Tihar Jail Complex, to work with the

female residents. Since I was alone, I was a bit skeptical. Women there were not so forthcoming. They were clearly apprehensive of sharing their life story with me since they were afraid that I might use it against them. But I am glad that it was just a matter of two days before I could gain their trust and all of them actually queued up to talk to me and share their dilemma in custody, and not just their stories. I can attribute all this to the immense guidance and belief showered on me by Team Koshish.

As I got friendlier with women there, I was appalled to learn their issues. From basic sanitary and infrastructure problems to medical and dietary facilities, they had access to the least possible means. In fact the very ordeal of raids and capturing such men and women seemed arbitrary to me. I gained an understanding of several situations which left me stunned, which only increased when I witnessed the insensitive handling and irrational behavior of Raid Teams. This further infused me with energy to work with greater resolution. I do not think it is appropriate for me to discuss individual cases here in but I think it would be bizarre if I do not mention that I had the opportunity to work with few extreme cases of medical negligence at the Home. I am glad I could convey some issues to the persons in authority who took immediate steps, which were a ray of hope.

For that matter, I also encountered some of the most outlandish reports prepared by the authorities for the residents. I met all type of women there, women from different classes, castes, and religions, who lived quite at peace, sharing each

other's agony and anguish. Their stories were different, yet the same – socially denied, homeless, tortured by own family, or abandoned by loved ones!

Much more tragic was the situation of the children with their mothers. They were deprived of their childhood and innocence. They had no means of education or recreation. These children seemed enthusiastic to study and with help from the Koshish team, I started teaching these kids alphabets and numbers. I gave them coloring books and colors which seemed to usher in a great delight among them. The transformation in these rowdy children was tremendous. While the first day they were snatching books, the next day I witnessed children scolding each other for mishandling colors, notebooks and other stationary.

In just a few days I was everyone's darling! Women would scold me for staying late and not leaving early, or for missing out on coming to the Home for even a day. They looked forward to my visits, and so did I. I didn't realize when my internship ended and it really ached to realize that from then on I would not see those faces everyday and share a laugh with them. Even today I get calls from the families and women who were released. They thank me profusely but I feel it is them who have helped me to grow as a stalwart and tenacious being. They brought me back to reality and made me think of all the meager situations where I cribbed for, as futile. I would not be exaggerating a bit by saying that my internship with Koshish and the moments spent at the Home are among the best moments I will cherish for life...



# Social Work Education and Youth: Strengthening Social Defence

*Based on his experience of engaging with young Interns and Volunteers, Mohd. Tarique discusses and deliberates on the scope for Social Work Education to encourage and motivate youth to work with special groups like the elderly, children, destitute and persons in addiction. He aims to examine and comment on the role of Social Work Education in strengthening Social Defence by preparing youth to work in extremely demanding and difficult spaces.*

It is well established and acknowledged that Persons in Addiction, Children, Elderly and Destitute form a special vulnerable group and require prolonged and dedicated intervention to ensure welfare and protection. The context for these groups is diverse. While the need is severe and real, the response is adulterated with biases, intolerance and misplaced legislation. It warrants specially trained and motivated personnel to work in these complex areas of Social Defence. Unfortunately, there is very little done towards creating a motivated cadre to engage with the complexities involved and respond to the needs of these people.

There is an evident gap between what is required and what is brought in as resources for intervention. Human factor, the most essential ingredient, has not been paid enough attention. While the state is beginning to realize the needs of these groups and has brought in programs, not much is achieved. Structurally, there are programs and schemes but with serious limitations, including prejudices, complexity of the issues itself, mobilization of groups or the actual support available to implement the program. While it is easier to develop programs, it is extremely difficult to sustain those efforts unless a continuous and committed pool of passionate people with a mission is not created.

This is where the role and scope for Social Work Education begins. The elderly and those in begging or persons in addiction need assistance and protection from the state. Already vulnerable due to their social and political context, these groups get further marginalized due to the societal and legal framework that exists in the country, for instance, Legislations like Bombay Prevention of Begging Act 1959, gaps within the Criminal Justice system or popular perceptions on addiction. There are not enough interventions to respond to this vulnerability, with the biggest challenge being the inability to get a trained and unbiased workforce.

These are not regular groups and thus require special treatment to get mainstreamed. Social Work education and training plays a crucial role in getting through the challenges and venture into areas that most would prefer to stay away from. These are the groups largely seen as unproductive and difficult to work with. Experience has been that these groups need an extended period of support, when compared to any other community as the capacity to adjust is lesser, opportunities are fewer and abuse has been far more traumatizing.

Because of the general understanding created about these groups, there isn't enough motivation and incentive for people either. However, given the wide scope that Social Work training provides through Field Work training and exposure to specific groups, it is possible to create the required pool of self driven, sensitive, justice lovers. It is also critical to break the sadness and hopelessness in these groups and design programs that can facilitate social skills and repair emotional strains that persons may have suffered. This helps create a positive space where they could express themselves, leading to stable and effective rehabilitation.

It is crucial to deliberate in depth, on how and what role youth can play if inducted strategically, while building skill sets and capacities for them to be effective. This is where Universities and faculty members, especially those from Social Work, can play a very significant role. There is a clear need felt for the mentoring and hand holding of young professionals who choose to engage with these groups.

In the current socio-political environment, there is a clear shift from providing direct assistance and services to the needy to making those 'support and services' a part of Public Policy and Governance. 'Rights of the Citizens' have become the central idea where accountability is sought from the Government with respect to vulnerable groups. Students play an extremely critical role in strengthening Social Defence and the most structured and streamlined method of doing that is the field work placements.



*“The Beggary Prevention Law has done nothing beyond criminalizing these destitute and helpless populations”*



In the context of these populations, every group poses specific challenges that are difficult to be assessed unless one is tuned to do that. While it is easy to label a person an addict, it is extremely difficult to develop a plan for rehabilitating him/her. In fact, even dealing with them is a major issue, due to their characteristics as well as perceived threats and biases.

At another level, homelessness and destitution is rising at a threatening pace. It has been a result of ill-planned development goals, breaking down of the family system, mental illness, prolonged disability and so on. The Beggary Prevention Law has done nothing beyond criminalizing these destitute and helpless populations. It is observed increasingly that more and more elderly are getting abandoned and being rendered destitute. While on one end, the problem is the trend itself where families abandon them, the other concern is the criminalization that happens when they are processed legally and brought to custodial institutions like Beggars' Homes. The inability of the staff to understand and deal with issues of the destitute or elderly persons deteriorates the situation further.

Beginning mostly as an emotional response to 'a sense of injustice being meted out to certain groups', these interventions by the youth have the potential to grow to be an inspiration for many. Very often, if passion and commitment, is guided properly, it can develop into a beautiful intervention. Students challenge and widen the notion of rehabilitation that the government and society might have.

Possibilities could be endless, depending on how far one is prepared and is willing to travel with the person requiring support. What kind of support one is willing to offer may alter the possibilities majorly. Social Work education effectively creates possibilities of working together, sharing experiences, strengthening students' engagement and creating a platform that could facilitate learning and growth of ideas that students might have and indicate commitment to work on. If 'cadre' is what is required to take on the challenge faced, 'cadre building' can happen best on the training field in Social Work Education itself!

# Life Happens At The Beggars' Home!

A painter by profession, 37-year-old Shahnawaz (name changed) was arrested under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 and brought to the Beggars' Home in 2012. Shahnawaz has been living in Delhi with his wife, sister, brother-in-law and daughters for two decades now.

The Koshish team in Delhi first met Shahnawaz during his remand period, where he requested us to get in touch with his family so he could be released on bail. However, it was difficult for the team to trace his residence since he did not respond well and did not give correct addresses. The team took its time to understand his preferences and interests so as to gain his confidence and get him to talk about his life. In this process, he was sent to a one year detention in the Beggars' Home.

Addicted to various substances for the last ten years, Shahnawaz admitted that he was not on very cordial terms with his family due to this. As we spent more and more time talking to him, he gave away his residential details which enabled us to visit his family. Shahnawaz's family was not too keen on having him back home due to his alcoholism and multiple addictions. His wife, who works as a maid and runs the household, did not want him home either due to his bad habits and the lack of financial support from him. This home visit was an eye-opener for the Koshish team and we realized the need to reform him and indulge him in some kind of vocational training and counseling.

Counseling helped us identify his interests and we successfully indulged him in the Jan Shikshan Sansthan's electrical training programme in the Beggars' Home, organized by Koshish. During the course of training, we regularly counseled Shahnawaz as well as his family so as to increase the levels of acceptance that the family has towards him and vice versa. Counseling also aimed to look at post-release possibilities for Shahnawaz and his family.

During one such session, we found that Shahnawaz had met with an accident, due to which his left hand was not very functional. This raised our dilemma for his employment after release and the options available for his survival.

While we were still looking for jobs for him, Shahnawaz was about to complete his year-long detention and his release date approached. By this time, he had productively completed his electrical training and received his stipend. His counseling sessions continued and he was exuberant that he would finally get to go out of custody. We were happy with our own efforts and were looking forward to hear from one of the employers' from our collective to place Shahnawaz in their company very soon.

On reaching home, to his dismay as much as ours, his wife and daughters were arrested by the police stating that they were immigrants from Bangladesh and lived in Delhi illegally. This shattered Shahnawaz, and was an alert indicator for us since we were worried he would get back to drugs and addiction. We continued to be with him and counsel him through his pain. He informed us about having his wife's documents and produced valid identity cards of his wife and two daughters which facilitated their release process as well.

In the meantime, the confirmation call for Shahnawaz's job was received from the owner of a popular snack manufacturing company in Delhi. He was ready to join immediately and was taken to their office. The employer and his colleagues were informed well in advance about Shahnawaz's background and they were all very impressed and supportive of him.

It has been two months since Shahnawaz was placed at the factory in the packaging department. He has been working diligently and has managed to impress his superiors and colleagues with his fine work and honesty. We visited him twice to ensure he himself is happy with the atmosphere at work. We were glad our efforts to get him placed were not barren after all. He earns a good pay while also staying at the accommodation provided by his employer since his home is a good 35 kilometer ride from work.

We still have a long way to go with Shahnawaz as his wife and children are not with him yet. He misses his family a lot and we would work with him till he reunites with his family because we believe that this story would be incomplete until then...

# Celebrating Life!



*If one has the grit to fight the odds, if one is determined to get what is rightfully due, if one has the courage and does not give up, then there is hope even amidst all the unfairness and injustice... When each day is a struggle, survival is a challenge... An honest attempt is required! Change is possible.*

*Let's have the Hope. Let's strive for the best. Let's 'celebrate life'!*

# Charming the Snake Charmers

*With the launch of our pilot community intervention with the Snake Charmers' Community in Delhi, Koshish is attempting to respond to the demands of the community keeping in mind the continuous threat on their livelihood and traditional knowledge base. Here is a background to our initiative, starting with kids in the community, which we hope will go a long way in the making...*



The Sapera Basti (snake charmers' colony) is home to people from a wide variety of vocations. Historically known as a community of street performers, it consists of men engaged in playing the drums at celebratory occasions. Some are into rag picking, with many of the children joining them either during or after school hours. This colony consists of 25 to 30 families with a total population of 300 people.

In earlier days, some of these people used to be known as snake charmers and were able to earn a small amount of money through that work, but with laws related to wildlife becoming more stringent they were compelled to leave their traditional work. Now, some of these people earn their living by engaging in the traditional performing art of 'Behrupiya' or 'The Impressionist'. Traditionally most of their ancestors were engaged in similar work. But with the traditional art on the verge of extinction most people pursuing it are living in extreme poverty.

The children within the *basti* go to a nearby government school but also engage in other vocations and are addicted to toxic substances. Since the children earn some money of their own through rag picking there is least sanction on the usage of toxic substances.

The anganwadi worker does visit the colony for vaccinating children but the residents do not make use of any other facility available at the Primary Health Centre by choice. Instead they prefer to go to a private clinic run by a doctor within the colony. Alien to the idea of 'Institutional Deliveries' all women have given birth at home. With excessive use of alcohol and drugs, the health status of the community, especially of the children is deplorable. Poor drainage system has further aggravated the problems of poor sanitation.

With an intention of making inroads into the 'basti', the Koshish started working with the children of the community. The team has been able to make some space in the otherwise busy lives of the children, with some non-formal educational activities. It is probably the first time that the children have felt that there is a space and time of their own, meant for their satisfaction. It has given the team some time to understand various dynamics within the community and plan interventions accordingly.

There are few people from the community who have fallen prey to the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959. Koshish team works with them in order to create awareness among them about the law. We are in the process of building a good relationship with them in which they share with us various issues affecting their lives and livelihood.

Children have also started to engage and involve with the team. Their street smartness comes through in most interactions. Within this short period of time the adolescent girls have also demanded that the team takes forward the work of skill building and education with them as well. They have shown willingness to learn some new trade that they can engage in to earn a living for themselves.

We move ahead with the hope that our engagement in the community will go a long way considering the warmth and interest shown by the people and the zeal within the team to work towards preventing criminalizing the poor for their poverty.



*“You were born with wings,  
why prefer to crawl through life?”*

*-Rumi*



# News Update

Last quarter, Koshish organized two workshops in the month of February and March, both supported by the National Institute of Social Defence, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. The first workshop was organised for state government officials working in custodial institutions like children's homes, beggars' homes and shelters for women. The theme for the workshop was 'Rehabilitation of Custodial Populations: Issues and Challenges.' The second workshop was organised for Social Work practitioners, professional social workers and educators. The theme for the workshop was 'Social Work Education and Practice: Strengthening Social Defence.' Both the workshops saw a wide range of experts and trainers participate and share their experiences, thus, making it very productive and successful.

In March 2013, after the initial preparatory phase, we began with our community based Pilot program for the rehabilitation of the Snake Charmers Community. This is the community that engages in begging very actively and members of the community are frequently arrested and brought to the Beggars' Home in Delhi. The pilot program is developed as a non-custodial intervention where the community would be mobilized and encouraged to give up begging. A special unit "Rehabilitation Support Centre" will be set up to extend the welfare schemes to this population in a targeted manner to facilitate their exit from beggary. This would broadly include mental preparedness, motivation, counseling, skills building through vocational training with stipend, placement guidance, education, personality development, life skills, recreation, etc. so that they are mainstreamed into society. It aims to link the communities with existing government schemes for old age pension, disability allowance, widow pension, etc.

Koshish joined and began as an active member of 'Pension Parishad', a collective of People's Movements and Civil Society Organizations, seeking Pension for all elderly persons across the country. Koshish was also inducted into the 'State Working Group' to work closely and build on the progress made so far. We are committed to extend all possible support to the Collective and participate actively.

Government of Delhi nominated Koshish as a member on 'Advisory Committee' constituted for the institutions established under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959. This committee is mandated to provide advisory support and guidance for the effective and positive functioning of the institutions established under the law.

Society for Services for Ultra Poor and Social Welfare (SSUPSW), a body constituted within the Social Welfare Department, Government of Bihar has invited Koshish to partner with them for the implementation of Beggary Rehabilitation Scheme initiated by Chief Minister's office. Both SSUPSW and Koshish are committed to work together and should proceed with the formal collaboration soon.

Government of Maharashtra, after long period of negotiations and engagement, finally constituted a 'Law Reform Committee' to review the existing Beggary Prevention Act and recommend changes required. Koshish has been included as a member of this important committee.

Every support, small or big is significant. Every rupee contributed, every minute spent as a volunteer, every feedback given as a well wisher has its impact in the rehabilitation of a person. You are welcome to support us in a manner that suits you best. None of our achievements would have been possible without your generosity and faith in us.

We value your suggestions and always look forward to ways of improving our programmes. For any suggestion, feedback, information, please feel free to write to us @

[koshish@tiss.edu](mailto:koshish@tiss.edu)



## The Koshish Team

Prof. S Parasuraman

Dr. Vijay Raghavan

Mohd. Tarique

Asif Iqbal, Krupa Desai, Mohd. Nadeem,

Pallavi Thakare, Pradip Kamble, Prem Narayan Jat,

Priyanka Gadre, Qayam Masumi, Sanjana Krishnan,

Shahid Afroz, Shahnaz Syed, Shekhar Thapa,

Sneha Chandna, Subhash Dhaka, Surendra Kumar

Koshish - A TISS Initiative on Homelessness and Destitution,

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Deonar, Mumbai - 400088

Phone: Mumbai- 022-25525250; Delhi- 011-27654388; Patna- 08002836224