

KOSHISH

An Initiative on Homelessness and Destitution

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In his interview with Sanjana Krishnan, Shri Gautam Arwel, Superintendent of Government Beggars' Home for Women, Mumbai speaks on how he struck the balance between his professional and personal commitments. Pg. 3

Koshish's youngest intern, today an enterprising student of law, Smriti Suri, shares her life changing experiences with women inside and out of custody.

Pg. 11

Presenting The Employers' Collective: Another idea that reverberates Koshish's philosophy and works wonderfully in reinstating people's livelihood and enlarging our support base.

Pg. 6

EDITORIAL



Dear Friends of Koshish,

This is the fourth edition of the Koshish E-magazine and that means we have completed a year of this publication. I'm remembering the time when we started one year ago. So many of you have been engaging with us right from the beginning of this work while many youth have been coming and joining us, inspiring us with your unending energy. The idea behind starting this magazine was to reach out to all of you, connect with you and let you know what was happening at Koshish. It was also meant to create a platform for youth to express and share their views, learn, unlearn and experiment. It provided an opportunity for us to communicate more frequently and meaningfully with all of you.

While we loved your mails, letters and calls appreciating what we were doing, we were equally thrilled by the comments from friends who wanted to see newer aspects added to the magazine. We knew, for sure, this magazine was as much theirs as it was ours. We have improved a lot from the first edition and we are committed to make it better in the editions to come. We have sincerely attempted to work on the feedback received. As you go through the current issue, you will realize that team has worked hard to incorporate suggestions that came from you.

As we enter into the 2nd year with the next issue, we wish to make yet another addition to the features of the magazine. We invite friends/partners to write. Please share the work you are doing, experiences that you know are important for more people to listen, stories that need to be told, anything that you feel will take the objectives of this magazine forward. We will be privileged to carry your writings.

This time, we interviewed someone who is, if not rare, then certainly very limited in numbers. Koshish has been extremely fortunate for having met some of the finest human beings in the government set up. While we take lot of pride on the strength of our team's commitment and untiring efforts, it is true in equal measure that these officials have played an equally significant role. In this edition, you get to meet one such officer, Superintendent of Government Beggar's Home, Mumbai for the Females, Shri Gautam Arwel. An amazing human being, he has been an active partner for Koshish. His association with Koshish goes beyond his formal role of a government official. He is one of the few persons who has held Koshish, protected and nurtured it right from the beginning.

Employer's Collective, a concept we developed with the dual purpose of

protecting livelihoods and facilitating legal support is shared with you in this edition. It looks like a regular collective or group of employers but as you read the article, you will understand how different this is and how significant it is for Koshish.

We also share our 'vocational training' programme that goes beyond regular training framework. Human relations are central to Koshish's being and that gets reflected in all our programmes. Vocational training programme is not a program where the best gets selected, though that would make our results look far better. It is a program that aims to include most marginalized, bridge the gaps of capacities and ensure dignity for all on the basis of the intent and will of the person.

It has been a pleasure reading what our interns and volunteers have to say about us. While they are with us, we all are so much into it that we miss out on certain conversations. It has been a beautiful experience reading these young ladies and men share their thoughts. In this edition, Smriti, a young law student, shares her experience of interning with Koshish. Hers is an interesting case. Due to the complexity of custodial set up and the extremely depressing environment, we did not take students from schools or freshly passed outs. Here was this girl, just out of class 12, who kept on insisting that we allow her to intern till we actually gave in to her enthusiasm. And what an amazing learning we had from her presence!

Friends, while we have been building on work gradually, this is also a period of transition at Koshish. Few new members have come in while few important colleagues have moved out. I take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues who have moved out for further studies or otherwise for the way they have contributed in the growth of the organization. It was quite a learning to work with you all. Koshish wishes the best for you. Hopefully, we will have ways and opportunities to come together and work once again. I welcome new members to Koshish family and hope each one of them will find this place truly meaningful.

Thank you all for making this small initiative such a successful one. We will keep working harder to make it more and more interesting, informative and inclusive. Please do share your thoughts and ideas. We look forward to have some of you writing a piece for the first edition of year two!

Warm regards,

Tarique

“The happiness and peace I see on people’s faces is my motivation”

It is not easy to strike a balance between what a government responsibility would demand from you and what your heart tells; between what is procedural compulsion and what is the call of heart, certain constraints that one might feel when in an officer's position and the freedom of thoughts and actions that your soul drives you towards.

Meet Shri Gautam Arwel, Superintendent of Government Beggar's Home for Women, Mumbai. He has been around for us for every small or big moment. Sanjana Krishnan, in this interview with him, attempts to take him down memory lane and understand the nature of his association with Koshish, compulsions he faced and how he managed to be on both the sides.



S.K: Having seen you over the years, we know you are a person who believes in treating the cause rather than the symptom. What has been your biggest challenge as an administrator in addressing the needs of the persons brought to the institution?

G.A: My main challenge was to find employment for people arrested under the BPBA and brought to the Beggars' Home. Though the Mumbai Home is only the receiving centre and does not really have the provision for rehabilitation, I realized that protecting people's employment was must if we wanted them to have a dignified life. Even when the person was willing and capable of working, nobody was ready to employ people coming from a background like this. Lot of effort went into creating opportunities where they could be placed. Fortunately, we were able to create few possibilities but it still remains one big challenge.

It is important to sensitize people about the issue and empathize with the cause that we are working towards. There should be an alternative livelihood option created so that people do not resort to begging.

S.K: You have been involved with Koshish since its beginning. Your role as a government official demanded a different position from what Koshish would expect you to do. How did you balance your roles?

G.A: I could balance both the roles and actually managed to work out issues between Koshish and Department for Women and Child Development (DWCD). I have been easily able to adjust my role with Koshish as well as my team inside the Beggars' Home. People in the Beggar's Home had faith in me and I had faith in the efforts and intentions of Koshish.

Since I was involved in the very initial stages of Koshish, I commanded the same trust and faith from the Koshish team also. I counted on that trust in doing my job effectively. I was able to take my institutional staff and Koshish team along and saw through all the pressures that came in our journey of eight years. The impact that Koshish created through its presence helped a lot in building this confidence among institutional staff for Koshish. Before Koshish, our work was limited to the regular activities like record keeping, maintenance of home and court work, etc. We used to leave people out of the gate on release. There was no investigation, counseling, repatriation, employment or any other component required for their rehabilitation. I was multi-tasking as the number of probation officers in the Beggar's Home was short and large number of cases would come every day. From interviewing people, going to court, taking care of residents in the home, I managed everything with limited staff. It was very difficult for me as well as for my team. But with Koshish coming in, we ventured into many areas. Slowly, we started detailed inquiry of people arrested, traced their homes, found their employers, started work with homeless, understood needs of people into begging and took steps accordingly inside the home. Gradually Koshish became an integral part of the Beggars' Home. With their non-threatening engagement and honest efforts, they were soon accepted by everyone inside the institution and that made my job easier. I still remember how we used to go for night outs together. All night we used to identify spots where people used to sleep to get an idea of what their primary needs were and how they could be brought out of beggary. Together we gathered support from alliances like Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA), Ration Kirti Samiti (RKS), Sulabh aiming at reducing the number of persons getting into beggary. With joint efforts, we activated government systems and continue to receive support for our people, especially from hospitals.

S.K: Many a times, working migrant homeless workers and abandoned persons get arrested on charges of beggary. They don't deserve to be punished. From your experience, what position would you take on this?

G.A: Most workers in the unorganized sector are migrants and

do not have homes in Mumbai. They work by the day and sleep on the streets at night. They do not have very clean appearance due to the kind of work they do and lack of access to affordable cleaning facilities. This leads to frequent and high arrests. We have been working with the police across all zones in Mumbai to sensitize them about issues of such workers and the losses inflicted on families due to arrests of such persons who are sole earning members in the family. Still there is more that needs to be done, since arrests continue to happen. There are people, especially abandoned women who have been living in the institutions for several years. Most have nowhere to go. Very often families also do not want to take them back since they have been arrested and tagged as criminals. In such situations, we do not have any other option but to seek extension in their detention as we cannot let them out on the streets, especially women, since safety is a major concern. They are safe inside the institution than on the streets.

S.K: You are one of the members of the Committee appointed by Government of Maharashtra to review the current legislation and draft the alternative law. What is your opinion on the current law?

G.A: We need major amendments in the current law. The nature of legislation should be rehabilitative and not punitive. Also, it should provide for a framework that works as a preventive strategy. Detention period should be reduced to six months maximum, not more than that. Vocational training should be there as an essential component. Every Beggars' Home should be linked to an ITI and skill based training should be provided with the objective of securing employment. There should be a provision of release on the completion of vocational and life skills training. All medical facilities should be provided in the BH itself. Counseling should be introduced in all institutions. More importantly, mentally ill patients should not be brought to the BH. They need treatment. According to the recommendations of the Dharmadhikari Committee, they should be referred to the Mental Hospitals for treatment and not be arrested. It is very relevant, since this is not a space where they can be treated and they also cannot be classified as beggars. The Beggary Act should not include mentally ill persons at all.

**“Koshish is the heart of Beggars’ Home”
-Gautam Arwel**



Similarly, old people should be referred to special homes for old age persons, since they have special needs and attention needs to be paid to their health requirements as well. There should be provisions for special treatment of the aged. We should have special homes for the old in the law itself. Same goes for persons with disability. These are all the categories that need special protection and support. Old age, disability or mental illnesses are conditions that increase vulnerability and enhance the probability of destitution. In the new Law, we should be able to take care of these aspects.

The definition of the beggary is outdated and has grown irrelevant and problematic. It definitely needs amendment. People who are into professional begging should only be booked and not the abandoned and destitute. Currently, professional beggars hardly ever get punished since they are easily released on bail or by paying the fine. The IPC should be used to control organized begging and professional beggars. Beggary Law is inadequate to check organized begging and child begging. If we have to control these, IPC is the only option.

The state government is committed for the protection and welfare of its poor. However, this law provides for different response system. There is a need for legislation, but one that aims for the rehabilitation of destitute and homeless and does not criminalise them. Shelter Homes for people with special needs and homeless must be created so that the state can take care of such persons. There should be a separate court in every region for dealing with issues of begging and homelessness.

The probation officer plays a crucial role in investigating the cases and works at every stage of a person's rehabilitation. We should get more time for enquiry and it should not be done summarily. That will allow proper assessment of the factors that led the person to begging.

S.K: This work can drain you out completely. This could be an extremely frustrating posting. You have been here for several years now, both in the capacity of a Probation Officer as well as the Superintendent. What has been your motivation to do the job?

G.A: There are people wandering on the streets, who get arrested and remain in the BH for years. When we trace families of such persons and they come down to take the person back home, the happiness and peace we see on their faces is the motivation. It is unparalleled to any monetary or other gain.

SK: You have played a prominent role in shaping Koshish. What would be your message for Koshish at present?

GA: Koshish is the heart of Beggars' Home. Koshish cannot be contained. Before Koshish started with its intervention, the rehabilitation rate in BH was zero. We just did not have any mechanism to work on long term rehabilitation plans. We were more into preventing escapes or deaths. Koshish brought in the concept of rehabilitation. Koshish engaged with the institution and government officials in a way that created an atmosphere of extreme trust and confidence.

Gradually, Koshish was accepted as an internal part of the institutional mechanism. Koshish introduced various programmes like family tracing, repatriation, vocational training, medical referrals, job placements, etc., which were all welcome initiatives. I want the entire Koshish team to know that the Government is committed to protect the rights of the poor. However, we need support from organizations like yours. Koshish is no more viewed as an external group.

I really wish Koshish grows and spreads across India and achieve many more milestones in the years to come.

A Collective For The Employers'

The employers' collective is one idea that Koshish has been effectively applying to provide legal protection and economic rehabilitation for persons processed under the Beggary Prevention Legislation. Here's presenting a brief summary of the idea that has been working wonders in reinstating people's livelihoods and enlarging our support base.

The arrests made under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 (BPBA), adversely affect the lives of thousands of innocent people. Among the various aspects of human life, one aspect which majorly gets affected due to such abrupt arrests is "livelihood", which remains the nucleus of an individual's survival. Livelihood is the foremost reason, which compels people to leave their families and native places and move to cities. Every day is a struggle, given the irregular and unorganized nature of their jobs, restricted suitability at work given limited skills and problems related to identities. For most of them, getting regular work is a tough task and most find themselves engaged as daily-wage or unorganized labour.

When such persons are arrested under the BPBA, most of them end up losing their jobs, even if released from the custodial institutions after an enquiry establishing them as 'workers' and not 'beggars'. Though released, stigma of having been arrested and fear of coming under the purview of law prevents the employers from keeping a person back on work in most of the cases. Additionally, with the ever expanding manpower available for work in the unorganized sector, the employers are at ease to hire other labourers. Also, there is no motivation for the employer to wait and run his small venture without help for the two weeks that the person spends in remand for enquiry to be completed.

While we conducted a Social Investigation for such cases, we realized how people were losing their jobs irrespective of the court judgement in their favour. While the court accepted our reports, it also asked for an evidence of the persons work. When we would contact the employers, they would confirm knowing the person, but most would not be willing to talk, fearing legal complications. Keeping this in view, a requirement to spread knowledge related to the law and sensitizing the employers about its ill-effects on poor people was deeply felt. Moreover, these people were also identified as potential employers for the people who

lost their jobs elsewhere or were in need of jobs post-release from Beggar's Home.

Therefore, 'Employer's Collective' was constituted with the dual purpose of defending the person in court when charged with beggary and also to seek employment for those in need of jobs. This was a crucial component in strengthening the rehabilitation process.

A group of employers mostly from the unorganized sector; small shops, hotels, contractors, small factories, etc., have been brought together under the collective to provide placement and jobs to people who are released from the institution or need support while being on the street. As a part of this process, Koshish also educates potential employers about how the BPBA, 1959 is used to criminalize the innocent poor and they must not hesitate in supporting a person who worked for them or knew them in the event of arrest.

Koshish strongly believes that employment is crucial for successful transition from homelessness to a life of self reliance. We are constantly working towards expanding this group. The idea is to create as diverse a group as possible so that there is a wide range of alternatives available for the clients to choose from. We took it up as one of the major strategies towards the protection of the rights of the homeless people and so far this group of employers who understand our philosophy, have proved to be a major stakeholder as far as economic stability is concerned.

Employers' Collective has evolved as one of the central interventions and serves as a strong tool not only for protecting livelihoods that it originally aimed at but also facilitates our advocacy work. Growth in the number of employers joining the collective is indicative of more persons acknowledging, understanding and supporting our work. We plan to continue to approach and network with potential employers from various trades for as long as we have innocent livelihoods at stake.

Emancipation Through Education



The education programme in Chitkohra, Patna, Bihar that began with a lot of resistance from the community, is slowly but steadily inculcating an interest in the minds of the children. Parents have come to believe that education can indeed carve out a better future for their children, outside their world of destitution and beggary. This is just the beginning, and the responsibility is even more. They now believe that they can also be educated like other children, that they can also have a better life, that they have the right to a better future. This is just the

Beginning...

On A Vocation

Vocational Trainings for residents at the Beggars' Home has become an effective way to engage, enhance capacities and reintegrate them in a meaningful manner. What started as an experiment is today a full-fledged programme in KOSHISH.

Presenting a humble history of how it all began...



As we continue to progress gradually with our work in the Beggars' Homes we figured that most people living a life of destitution never received a fair chance to educate themselves and develop or acquire the skills that are necessary to be able to earn a livelihood. Most of these men and women were caught in the vicious cycle of poverty. This was one of the main reasons why a person fell into a life of destitution. Vocational training was initiated in this backdrop of our understanding.

Over time, Vocational Training and Placement Guidance have evolved from being a very basic 'need of the hour' element to a stable, comprehensive and sustainable programme in itself.

One of the major changes included the streamlining of the selection process. A month prior to the beginning of the new batch a discussion about the training program is done with the residents. A thorough orientation is organized where they are explained the aspects of what the training entails and what they will be required to do, if and when they become a part of it, the possibilities that training could result in and so on. Post this session with the entire group, a separate assessment is done for each individual who intends to become a part of the training. The factors that are kept in mind while selecting a candidate include age, time of release, family ties, functionality, to state a few.

A conscious effort has been made to make the selection process

more inclusive and accommodative resulting in many residents with physical challenges joining the training. This initiative is only a baby step towards ensuring equality and sensitivity towards the differently abled within the institutions. Initially the differently abled inmates themselves were quite apprehensive about participating in the training as they highlighted how they have been regularly kept away from the mainstream system of employment especially in the informal sector. Most of them had internalized this attitude of society towards them and have consequently been compelled to live the life of a destitute, of which begging is an inevitable part.

Through regular interaction, the residents were encouraged to participate in the training. We attempted to create an environment where they could experience a sense of dignity and anticipate a situation where they could be independent and support themselves.

In Delhi, through constant efforts with the Department of Social Welfare, we have ensured a significant increase in the stipend amount that is paid to the residents who participate in training. From the scale of Rs 8-10-12, the stipend has been revised to Rs 30-40-50 for unskilled, semi skilled and trained clients respectively. This small amount of money has proved to be a very important motivation for a lot of people to participate. It gives them an opportunity to save and move out of the institution with a significant amount of money that helps them rebuild their lives post-release in multiple ways including support for family or even starting up something of own.

With some literate people opting in for the vocational training, we have been able to initiate some theory classes. This involves helping the trainees support their practical training with theory supplements. With the inception of theory, there has also been a change in the final assessment of the trainees. In case only the practical training of the residents has been done, the instructor himself makes the final assessment at the end of the training. The final assessment is done by an external expert who is independent of the training process in general.



Before the residents are released, they are guided about how they can plan their lives ahead and what will be expected from them once they start working. A structured method has been developed and followed to seek employment opportunities for trainees once they complete the training. 'Employer's Collective', our program where we engage with a range of employers, especially from the unorganized and service sector, plays a significant role in

securing job placements for these people.

Summarily, Vocational Training in the beggars' homes has proved to be a tool for the social, economical, and psychological empowerment for the clients.

Another crucial evolution in this program has been the constant up gradation of the course content to bring it as close as possible to the needs of the employment market. There have been changes in the way classes are being conducted. Once a week, the participants share what they have learnt in that week. This works both as a revision and a confidence building exercise.

During classes, trainees are also encouraged to share the issues they face within the institution and solutions are brainstormed collectively in the group. The discussion also includes talks of personal hygiene, aspects of a good personality and starting life afresh. The class is thus being used as a platform for enhancing the life skills and soft skills as well.

A pleasant occurrence has been the volunteering by the trainees of the previous batch to help the current batch of trainees learn the skills of the trade. This has helped motivating the new batch to be more involved. These enhancements have also resulted in reduction in the number of drop outs.



Life Happens At The Beggars' Home...

Here is the story of a case from Delhi, a story of love lost and found, a mother who wants to remain in custody for the happiness of her son, a son who wants his mother with him at all costs, a family that stood united through thick and thin. Read on...

"Life with Dignity... it is not my need or choice. It is my right and I will continue to struggle for it..." When we first met Suman (name changed) in the Female Beggars' Home, Delhi, it seemed to us that despite having faced harsh situations in life, Suman was a strong and courageous woman. To the fullest of her capacities, Suman has always maintained a deep sense of self-respect. Despite having to live on the streets, homeless for months, Suman shared that she has never compromised on living a life of dignity and self-respect.

Suman's story throws light on the dual realities of family structures today. On one hand, a son who would disown his mother for the sake of money and the other who is willing to spend for her well-being despite his dismal financial status.

Suman's elder son cheated her with money and forced her out of his house. He even forced his younger brother and wife out. Suman has not spoken to him ever since and moved on to stay with her younger son since he loved her and took good care of her. Suman was not earning then and her son's income was way too low.

A sensitive and loving mother that she was, Suman felt that her staying in the house would be burdening his family. It was during the same time that Suman had a grandson and consequently the expenses of the family started rising.

Suman decided to move out and started living in a temple. In the temple, she stayed on for shelter and food but never begged for money. It was from there that she was arrested twice and brought to the Beggars' Home. Suman was charged and arrested for what was her love and sensitivity towards her son, or was it for being betrayed by her eldest son, or the dire realities of poverty and her spirit of independence. She was criminalised for being a caring mother!

It was because of her pride, courage and resilience that Suman never tried to get in touch with her sons during her stay in the Beggars' Home. She even averted her son from visiting her or bailing her out. Her

son was frustrated and upset because his mother was in custody and that he was helpless in getting her out.

Suman currently stays with her younger son, his wife and grandson. On one of our visits to her home, she was helping her daughter-in-law prepare lunch. She introduced us to her grandson. She seemed happy and content. We have seen her smiling in Beggars' Home, but this smile was different. It was more heartfelt and meaningful. She prepared tea for us as we indulged in a candid talk; her hospitality and affection were evident as she was bursting with joy.

Suman's son works as a driver. The family lives in a small rented room of roughly 50 sq. ft. Considering the size of the family, the size of the room is shockingly small. Things like privacy, personal space are out of context and unaffordable for this family. When we met her during one of our follow up visits, she admitted that she was wrong and that she should have realized earlier that her place was at home, with her family. She was so pleased to be with her grandson. Her eyes were moist with tears but her smiling face reflected her contentment with life.

Suman is currently working as a caretaker in the Beggar's Home on contract. She is confident today since she works and earns on her own. She no longer sees herself as a burden on her son and is, in essence, satisfied. Having met her at the Beggar's Home, Suman is busy caring for the women in custody – her responsibilities range from minding the kitchen to ensuring medicinal supplies for the residents of the home.

Earlier, Suman did the same work – but then she was a resident herself. The difference now, she says is that she is working out of choice and not out of force. This freedom matters a lot to her. This is all that she has been living for. It is not anymore a compulsion for her, but a 'job' that she loves. Her family is extremely happy to have her back after almost a year of wait and feels proud to be known as Suman's family.

Going Down Memory Lane...

One of the very first and youngest interns at Koshish, Smriti, says, she can boast about her life changing experience at Koshish and the memories she cherishes of the time she spent with us. In her own words, she narrates her side of the journey with KOSHISH...

There comes a point in life when you cannot stop thanking God enough. That point changes your life forever and turns you into a new individual altogether. Getting an opportunity to work with 'Koshish' was one such point for me in life.

'Just' out of school, with a lot of enthusiasm, I applied for internship with KOSHISH as I always had the urge to turn the tables of happiness towards the unprivileged side of the society. Initially when I was orientated about the kind of work KOSHISH was doing, I was unsure if I could do justice to this kind of intervention. I was however, determined to go for it. Koshish usually does not take 'immediately out of school' students as interns but I managed to convincingly argue for myself.

As I started, I was unprepared, a little nervous and scared. All my apprehensions disappeared the moment I met Koshish team and other co-interns. For over a month, they became my team, guided me and stood by me at every point.

After initial orientation with the Central team at the Receiving Centre, I was placed with Women's Centre 'Nirmal Chhaya' inside Tihar Jail Complex. I went there with a huge question in my mind - "Will I be able to do this?" On the first day, I was greeted with polite smiles, which got warmer in just a week. I spent almost my entire day talking to the female residents; listening to them, sharing their pain, playing with the children. We had our light moments as well.

But little did I realise how in almost no time, there was a beautiful bond of love with those women. On listening to their stories, I came to terms with the realities of life. One thing was common between all these people. They had been exploited,

abandoned and ousted by the society and their loved ones.

These are the women who had been abandoned by their own people and had nowhere to go to. There was a feeling of guilt inside me which disturbed me a lot as I had then started feeling and sharing their pain and really wanted them to be on their own.

As days passed, I longed to meet and spend time with them. All the women there treated me like their daughter. They would ask me to have lunch with them, would get upset if I came in late or took a leave, they made me sit right next to them, held my hand and also called me by different pet names. This was all an altogether unexampled experience for me.

Talking to the women, listening to their stories, the quantum of exploitation and rejection they had experienced, everything changed me as an individual. I realised that life is not just about hanging out with friends, going out on weekends or worrying about the slightest of problem in life. I realized how fortunate I was to have the things that I have in life. I realized life could be tough and painful as well.

I started questioning myself about the kind of person I was, about how I break down and lose hope on the smallest problem that comes my way. I realised that if these women who have been through so much can still smile, ask me to cheer up in case I was a little low and live with a hope that life would be better someday and remain strong, then why not me?

After all, my problems were nothing when compared to what theirs. This experience at Koshish taught me how to value relations and appreciate whatever I have.

“I will be a
part of
Koshish,
always!”

- Smriti



There were few moments which I will remember forever that moved me completely. Remembering the sparkle in their eyes when they would see me makes me smile even in the worst of situations. Being able to help them or make them happy, gave me so much of satisfaction, something which is inexplicable. I did share my experience with my family and friends, but the way I felt and the change that came along, is still something which is unfathomable.

The string of love and affection between me and the resident women strengthened with time. The love these people have given me has no boundaries. Even though there were times when I was not able to make any progress in a few cases, they still longed to talk to me and poured their hearts out! I will always remember how everybody panicked when I had tears in my eyes once as I was perturbed over something. Once a woman told me "You are our hope and strength, please do not break down". These words showed the

amount of trust and love they had for me.

In today's world, where everybody is trying to make their place in the society in terms of success and achievements, it is very crucial to stop and look back. Maybe we have come too far, to a space where relations and emotions are dying. All these people need is a little love and respect. Each one, especially the youth can surely give some of their time to these people for which they will be thankful forever.

Nobody wilfully begs. There are traumatic events which make people helpless, break them down and leave them with no choices, in sheer destitution.

Internship at Koshish taught me how life is very uncertain and it might hit really hard on anyone, anytime. My internship was over but my relation with Koshish continues. I will be a part of them, always.

Updates from the Field

The Kerala State Planning Board conducted a one-day workshop on June 21, 2013 to discuss the framework for Assisted Living program for Persons with Disability. Kerala state is in the process of developing a State Policy on Assisted Living. Koshish was invited for this meeting with its position on disability. Kerala state has a Beggary Prevention Law that like many other states in the country criminalizes destitution and provides for the arrest of persons with disability. We did a critique of the state legislation and presented on why it is essential that State government must decriminalize disability if they are serious about developing an effective program on Assisted Living. State Planning Board agreed with our position and included our suggestion of 'Amendment in the Beggary Law' as a prerequisite with the official recommendations of the meeting.

The State Society for Services for the Ultra Poor, Social Welfare Department, (Government of Bihar) recruited the first batch of Community Mobilizers for its program on Beggary Rehabilitation 'Mukhyamantri Bhikshavriti Nivaran Yojna' (MBNY). Koshish was requested to conduct the Induction Training for the same. We took orientation around the field issues and challenges of working with destitute population, essential skills required to be developed, key aspects of the State law, MBNY scheme and central government schemes for the poor. We also facilitated the field exposure visits for the new recruits and agreed to provide guidance to the team.

Koshish Delhi Unit went for a retreat to the State Institute of Rural Development, Jabalpur, Government of Madhya Pradesh between April 30-May 3, 2013. Retreat allowed the time and space for the team to qualitatively reflect on the progress of the Unit so far, review the program and Plan for the next phase of work. The meeting was facilitated by Mohan Ramamoorthy, Senior Journalist and Communication Expert.



Koshish with the SIRD team at Jabalpur

Koshish participated in the 2-day 'State Consultation on Homelessness' organized by Action Aid and Alternative Realities, a Mumbai based organization working on Homelessness. Koshish conducted a session on Beggary Law in the context of criminalization of Homeless citizens. We stressed on how Shelters would still have limited relevance unless State repeals the Beggary Prevention Legislation that essentially criminalizes all sorts of Urban Poverty. Later in the day, as part of the delegation from the Consultation, we also met the Chief Secretary, Maharashtra and briefed him about the status of shelters as well as the Law repeal process and sought his intervention to get the Government's committed response implemented.

Koshish had requested the Social Welfare Minister, Government of Delhi to set up a 'Special task force' to facilitate, support and guide the Pilot rehabilitation program for the Snake Charmers' Community. Government has readily appointed the group with Koshish occupying a central role. This special Committee is meant to identify the possibilities, expedite the processes and avoid unnecessary delays at various levels while taking the government welfare schemes to the people from the community.



'Pension Parishad' organized a State Consultation on issues related to the pension scheme in Delhi. As a member of the Campaign, Koshish was part of the organizing team. We reviewed the Delhi State Pension scheme and presented its critique during the Consultation. We also joined other members of the Parishad on developing the 'Charter of Demands' from the Consultation and had the opportunity to present it formally to the participants.

Koshish conducted two workshops of one day each, for the Caretaking staff at the Regional Mental Hospital, Thane. These workshops were conducted to facilitate better stress management among care takers and other staff members who look after patients with mental illness. The workshops saw significant sharing of experiences from the caretakers. Both the workshops turned out to be extremely effective for the staff and we have decided to make these workshops a regular affair, integrating it as a part of our 'Engagement with Mental Health' Programme.



One of the workshop sessions in progress with care takers performing a skit for the audience.

The Department of Women and Child Development, Maharashtra proposed to set up a State Rehabilitation Committee to lead and guide the rehabilitation program for persons in Beggary across the state and invited Koshish to be a member on the committee. In spite of our different positions on the issue of legislation, we are committed to work with the government and provide our support wherever necessary and possible. We hope such decisions from the government could play a significant role in ensuring non-punitive rehabilitation programs in the long run. Presently, the Committee is under process of setting up and should start functioning soon.



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

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

The Koshish Team

Prof. S Parasuraman

Dr. Vijay Raghavan

Mohd. Tarique

Asif Iqbal, Krupa Desai, Mohd. Nadeem,
Pallavi Thakare, Prem Narayan Jat, Priyanka Gadre,
Qayam Masumi, Sanjana Krishnan, Shahid Afroz,
Shekhar Thapa, Sneha Chandna, Subhash Dhaka,
Surendra Kumar, Tabish Ahsan