

# *Bonds of Belonging*



## **In this Issue:**

CARING FOR A  
HOMELESS PERSON –  
A FATHER FIGURE

THE MOST LOVED  
RESIDENT AT SARBAR

LONGING TO BELONG –  
CREATING THE WORLD  
THAT ACCEPTS

CREATING BONDS AFTER  
EXPERIENCING  
ABANDONMENT  
and other stories...

Persons suffering and surviving psychosocial disabilities face a dire problem - the loss of relationships. The stigma attached with mental health conditions often severs a person's ties with members of the community and their family.

Belonging is a human need. We all want to belong - to someone, someplace, to a group. It makes us feel accepted, gives us an identity, and above all contributes to our mental wellbeing.

In this issue we celebrate belonging - the longing for one, the creation of one, the finding of one. It is truly to be celebrated for belonging and acceptance after abandonment is a victory.

# Contents

<b>NAYA DAUR -</b> <i>CARING FOR A HOMELESS PERSON - A FATHER FIGURE</i>	<b>3</b>
<b>SARBARI -</b> MY BEST FRIEND SUMI	<b>4</b>
<b>UMHP -</b> LONGING TO BELONG - CREATING A WORLD THAT ACCEPTS	<b>5</b>
<b>MARUDYAN -</b> CREATING BONDS AFTER EXPERIENCING ABANDONMENT	<b>6</b>
<b>DAY CARE CENTRE -</b> ACCEPTANCE AND APPRECIATION ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY	<b>7</b>
<b>RESTORATION -</b> SERENDIPITY OF HOMELESSNESS AND A SHELTER	<b>8</b>
<b>CRUST &amp; CORE AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING UNIT -</b> ACHIEVEMENTS	<b>9</b>
<b>NAYAGRAM</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES</b>	<b>11</b>



# NAYADAUR

*Community-based Care and Support Program*

## CARING FOR A HOMELESS PERSON - A FATHER FIGURE



A shopkeeper on the platform of North section Sealdah is no regular person, he has helped a homeless man suffering from a mental health condition to rebuild his life. Subal Da (60 years) has gone beyond his means to help Ramu recover. He has provided Ramu with employment at his shop and works closely with our social worker to understand the intricacies of providing care and support to a person with psychosocial disability. He has become a proxy family to Ramu.

Ramu was found by the Naya Daur sitting in a fixed spot near a road side snacks shops, talking to himself, but not very untidy that generally homeless persons look like. After building rapport with the caregiver and Ramu we were told that Ramu was under the care of Subal Da (60 years) for the last 3 years but went missing for one and half years, after which he returned. Upon his return his psychosocial problems were evident. Subal Da understands the need for medical and counselling services that will help Ramu recover and live a productive life. With regular support - medication and Subal Da's care, Ramu is improving. Now, at first meeting with Ramu, it is difficult to understand that he has any psycho-social problems.

Presently he is working at Subal Da's shop, does regular marketing, above all calculates money and, is responsible and reliable. The relationship between the caregiver and the client is like father and son. Ramu participates in all of Subal Da's family events and stays with them during that time.

Subal Da's compassion is an asset for society, for he is driven to care for someone who has lost those he calls his own, and has taken the role of caring family member. Moreover, Subal provides a daily wage which is now about Rs. 40. Subal informed that Ramu has saved around Rs. 4000 till date and he is going to open a bank account for Ramu so that he can put his savings, thereby moving towards economic independence.

Naya Daur is an outreach programme for homeless persons with psychosocial disability, with organic community rehabilitation at the heart of it. It leverages local support in providing mental health and allied services to the beneficiaries on the streets itself by roping in the support of voluntary caregivers. The programme is in its expansion phase - beginning services in North Kolkata now!



Ramu with Subal Da at their stall at Sealdah Station

# SARBARI

*Shelter for Homeless Women with Psychosocial Disability*

SARBARI was established in April 2010 in collaboration with Kolkata Municipal Corporation for women with psychosocial disability. A place which insulates women with psychosocial disability from the abuse and violence of living on the streets. In this shelter, women with psychosocial disability, discover new skills and start rebuilding their lives. This safe haven enables them to undertake a long journey from "Nowhere" to "Somewhere", from "No one" to "Someone" – perhaps a citizen of the State, but most of all a human being with hope and a future to look forward to!



*Ayushi and Sumi at Sarbari*



*Sumi when she just came to Sarbari*



*A recovered Sumi enjoying in the gardens*

## "MY BEST FRIEND SUMI"

"Sumi, is my best friend", "I like Sumi the most" is a common answer when the residents at Sarbari are asked who is their friend is. She is diplomatic, calm, always ready to help and smiling. When women come to the shelter from the streets, often traumatised, a friendly personality like Sumi gives them assurance and a sense of security.

Sumi was brought to Sarbari by Kolkata Police in November 2017. When she came, it was evident that she had been living on the streets for many days. She was highly malnourished and unkempt, constantly muttering to herself, and was very withdrawn. She didn't talk to anybody for two weeks, didn't participate in any activity and chose to remain isolated. After a couple of months she first shared in the counselling session that she belongs to a small village Dhupguri (North Bengal) where she used to live with her parents and seven brothers. She has no idea why her family treated her badly which forced her to leave home one day around 4/5 five years ago.

How did Sumi become the most loved resident and best friend of many? Dance Movement Therapy and regular counselling sessions helped her open up physically and mentally. She became more social, and started participating in the vocational training unit where she would make jewellery with the other residents, she expressed her interest in cooking for the meals, participated in all kinds of household chores and most importantly started taking care of the elderly residents at Sarbari.

Sumi expressed that she used to do farming with her family back at home and would like to go to live in Kashipur and work with at the fields there in our Assisted Community Living program – Nayagram. She now stays in Kashipur works at the fields, enjoys the greenery, has made new friends there and we hope that this experience of being closer to her cultural experience she will be able to remember more details about her family and we can help her reunite with her family.



# URBAN MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM (UMHP)

*Available, Accessible and Affordable mental health services*

## LONGING TO BELONG - CREATING A WORLD THAT ACCEPTS



Pradip (age 60) came to the mental health clinic at Ward 26 with his mother and made it very clear – He was alright. However, after 3 sessions with the counsellor a tragic story of betrayal, unmet dreams and longing to belong began to unravel. A world where this longing to belong was created.

At the age of 16, after completing his 10th grade examination he was forced by his father to assist him at the family business. He reluctantly joined and eventually also started his own stationery business. His interest however was – mountaineering, rock climbing, cricket coaching and a dream to be an entrepreneur. After two years of starting his own venture, his father forced him to stop his own business due to a financial crisis. It was from this time that Pradip's mental health condition started to deteriorate.

He started isolating himself from his family members, started living in his own world – muttering to himself and leaving his home frequently for 10-12 hours. In the meantime he built a relationship with a non-bengali girl which was strongly opposed by his father. This led to aggressive altercations which eventually reached its peak that led him to being admitted to a private psychiatric hospital. Here he was diagnosed with schizophrenia and stayed at the hospital for four months, to recover.

After exiting the hospital he found it difficult to resume living the way he did before, the trauma of losing his business, being rejected by his partner for having a mental illness, and not receiving acceptance from his friends and family, made him feel isolated. He further withdrew from social interaction and started living in his own world of delusions and listening to the radio.

Pradip experienced betrayal in multiple ways, at the hands of his partner and his family. While he was away recovering from his extreme mental health condition his father burnt all his valuable belongings, including his mountaineering certificates. These blows severely affected his mental health. The only love he receives is from his mother and the delusional world he has created for himself.

Counselling at UMHP's Ward 26 health unit has allowed him to ventilate his emotions and helped him identify his strengths and weaknesses. He has started working regularly, developing an interest as he is now motivated to save money and go trekking again. He is slowly orienting himself to the reality outside, and has also started a part-time business. However, he still seeks the comfort of belonging in an imaginary world with a partner who he will go to the mountains with after he has saved enough.

Urban Mental Health Programme (UMHP) caters to the mental health needs of the slum based population through clinical and community outreach service in collaboration with the KMC. From operating in 2 wards (78 and 82), it has now expanded to 3 more wards of the city (54, 26 and 11). It has actively carried out community awareness on mental health via schools, auto campaigns and other outreach activities.

# MARUDYAN

*Shelter for Homeless Men with Psychosocial Disability*

MARUDYAN is a shelter for homeless men with psychosocial disability, an enabling space for them to return to the mainstream society. Currently, it is catering to the needs of 30 such men. The focus is on imparting transferrable livelihood skills to the men through their engagement in notepad making, paper packets making and paper plate production.

## CREATING BONDS AFTER EXPERIENCING ABANDONMENT

Three men found the bond of friendship with each other – at a place where they reached after having lost all bonds of love, care and belonging – living on the streets with mental illness – abandoned and lost. Creating new relationships, finding comfort, sharing their past history, staying together showing a feeling of unity, and innate need of human to have bonds.



*Dheeraj, Nasir and Sebappa in conversation*

Dheeraj, Nasir and Sebappa are three different clients enrolled in Marudyan who are of residence of different States of India. Nasir and Dheeraj are from Bihar and Madhya Pradesh speaks Hindi and Sebappa from Andhra Pradesh speaks Telegu. All three of them are diagnosed with Schizophrenia, and were spent considerable time living homeless on the streets. Within a month of residing at Marudyan shelter, they became tight friends.

We all know that mental illness is largely stigmatised in our society and almost all clients have experienced inhuman treatment from their families and community members. As they develop various symptoms of mental health problems, that include social isolation, aggression, hostility, thought disorder, delusion, disorientation, elevated mood, lack of coordination, impaired faculties etc which creates an obstacle to social interaction and often drives them to withdraw into themselves, the ‘normal’ members of society choose to maintain a clear distance from them. The bonds of family relationships and friendships that gives one support, hope, joy and contentment cease to exist.

Sebappa, the Telegu person found it extremely difficult to talk with the caregiver, counsellor and others, yet he has found solace and ways of communication with his friends Dheeraj and Nasir. Other members always request the team to find someone who could be able to understand him so that the restoration can be easier. They give a noble statement of replacing “I” by “We”, illness becomes wellness fast.



## DAY CARE CENTRE

*A Rehabilitative Space for Persons with Psychosocial Disability*

### ACCEPTANCE AND APPRECIATION ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY



Moumita engaged in therapeutic activities at the centre

Acceptance and appreciation helps a person break out of the cage they put themselves in, to isolate themselves from the world around. Moumita recovered drastically after joining the Day Care Centre at Keoratala. After meeting persons with similar problems and engaging in craftwork and therapeutic interventions provided at the Centre Moumita showed immediate results of improvement, she gradually started feeling accepted, a place where she belonged, where she wasn't ridiculed. Where she could redefine her self-image and build self-confidence.

Moumita Roy came to Iswar Sankalpa's Ward 82 Health Clinic under the UMHP, in 2014. At that time she was very inattentive, depressed, lacked energy and had poor concentration. She was diagnosed with Intellectual Disability with Behavioural Problems and co-morbid Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. She exhibited intense anger, and had poor interpersonal skills. She was often in a confused state of mind about her existing situation. She also lacked motivation to execute daily activities. After meeting with the doctor and the counsellor she was referred to Keoratala Drop-in-centre for she needed to engage in activities and socialise with other people.

She was initially engaged in paper making, sewing and Functional Literacy Classes but found it hard to participate in any of these activities, but her family was supportive and continued her treatment. After completing her school education she joined the production division of Iswar Sankalpa's vocational training unit where she developed an interest for regular work. She socialises with the trainers and participants at the Training Unit, she is gradually improving her craft skills and her family is very happy with her progress for Moumita is no more the same person who sat isolated and unmotivated.

She earned one thousand rupees this Diwali making diyas at the Vocational Training unit. This triggered her motivation and instilled in her a sense of self worth. She is now involved in sewing machine training which she is interested in and continues her Functional Literacy Classes at the DIC and counselling sessions with UMHP. We are positive that soon Moumita will be capable to live a happy, healthy and productive life.

The Day care centre provide a therapeutic space for persons with psychosocial disability with the aim of advancing holistic healing through an array of bio-psychosocial interventions.

It draws clients from all the other programmes of the organisation, serving as a critical convergence point for accelerating their habilitation and rehabilitation process. There are two such spaces now- in Keoratala and Hastings

# Restoration

*Restoring homeless persons back with their families*

## SERENDIPITY OF HOMELESSNESS AND A SHELTER



*Sabita and her sister Pata at Kashipur where they met after years of separation*

Two sisters were rendered homeless due to psychosocial disability and found each other at our shelter. Pata a resident at Sarbari since 2015 had told us about her “buri di” (old sister) long time back. In 2018, when Sabita came to our shelter and told us about her family we realised she was our Pata’s ‘Buri Di’. They met each other, after years of separation due to homelessness. What are the chances of such occurrences!

In May, 2018 one of our project staff noticed a 50 year old Savita at Bhawanipur bus stand with poor physical and mental health conditions. She was brought to Sarbari (shelter for homeless women with psychosocial disability) and after few days of treatment she identified her own sister Pata.

The team arranged for their meeting at Kashipur where Pata is a resident at the Nayagram program (Assisted Community Living) and they were delighted! They held hands and sat for a long time, Savita left after blessing Pata.

Sabita Bhattacharya was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and as shared by Pata she had been suffering for a long time. Within 5 months of care, medication, counselling and therapy Sabita was stable and expressed her desire to go to her daughter’s home. In the middle of September Sabita was taken to her daughter’s home for a trial of 7 days which went extremely well. Sabita’s daughter was relieved to know that her aunt,



*Sabita, the day she was located by the Team*



*(left) Sabita with her daughter*

Pata was safe and happy under Iswar Sankalpa’s care. This case of homelessness and finding shelter is indeed a case of serendipity, where a scattered family members found each other.



*Sabita, the day she returned home*

When our clients have recovered considerably upon receiving treatment, care and support they are able to give information regarding their past family life. This information helps us, restore them back to their home to live a better life, for it is love and care that heals best.



# Crust & Core and Vocational Training Unit

*Livelihood Programs to Empower Persons with Psychosocial Disability*



*Open Mic event at Crust and Core*



*Sushma receiving applause at Gyan Manch*



*Excited customers shopping at our stall*

Persons with psychosocial disabilities need to be empowered to be self-reliant and seek economic independence in order to travel the journey from the Margins to the Mainstream. The cafe cum training unit - Crust and Core, and the Vocational Unit Unit - Saksham seek to do this. This program also gives participants of the program a space to present themselves in society in a new role.

Both the units are doing extremely well inspite of facing lots of challenges. Two events were organised in collaboration with a youth theatre group - Bhaand Express; one open mic evening - Limbo to talk about the state of 'being stuck in between'. Both, the clients of Iswar Sankalpa and participants at Limbo had something in common - they weretalking about persons who brave a battle against forces that make them feel small and insignificant. The second was at Gyan Manch on 13th September in collaboration with a play HOK NATAK. Sushma , one of the team member of Crust and core spoke about her journey and received a standing ovation from the audience of 150 people which boosted her confidence.

## Achievements of Café and VT unit are as follows:

- Regular sales by 5 fixed customers increase the café sales
- Organized 4 Pre Festival exhibitions at Apeejay, Capgemini, Stone Paper Scissors and Night Market at P.C. Chandra that helped to increase the Diwali sale to Rs. 58565.00.
- Collaboration was made with the VT unit for a diwali hamper was a new idea for promoting the production.
- Gala celebration of Crust & Core held where each woman involved was acknowledged for their hard work in front of the entire staff of Iswar Sankalpa



*(Left) At the Gala celebration of 6 months of Crust and Core (Right) Diwali hamper produced by the clients of Iswar Sankalpa*

# Nayagram

*Assisted Community Living for previously homeless women with psychosocial disability*



Janab Firhad Hakim, current Mayor of Kolkata inaugurating Nayagram

In the last quarter, Iswar Sankalpa, went one step ahead in its latest Programme known as Nayagram- Rural Independent Living for Women with psycho-social disability. Iswar Sankalpa constructed a new one storied building (plan for a two storied one in the near future) in an open space of around 2500 square meter, in Uttar Kashipur, South 24 Parganas. This was inaugurated at a big celebration in the presence of State ministers, local administration leaders, and the community itself.

Presently there are 12 residents at Nayagram; all of whom have been in Sarbari shelter for at least 2 years along with 2 caretakers and one coordinator. Within the complex, the residents are involved in agricultural farming of seasonal vegetables for their own consumption. Beside there is around 4 Kathas land where they are learning farming and are supported by two local people for selling these items in the market to generate income for programme management.

The journey from a guarded and protected living at the shelter to freedom in a community setting in open spaces has high potential for recovery as the residents of Nayagram are women whose roots lie in rural living, this is a way of connecting to the parts of their selves they are most familiar with.

However, there are risks due to which they sometimes may not be able to enjoy freedom in all aspects of living and remain constrained by habit or might feel overwhelmed, over stimulated and consequent mismanagement of freedom. This can further lead to distress and risk of relapse. To prevent this, a detail schedule has been developed in such a way that the inmates can be involved in various engagements that include agriculture, animal husbandry and crafts. Budget is one of the main constrain to extend the programme with utmost care and support.



The resident of Nayagram in front of the building

Nayagram is an assisted community living programme in a bucolic village- Kashipur. It is to help the women who have recovered but for whom chances of returning home is relatively lesser get a home, away from home! A house has been constructed for them and they are being trained in farming & related work.



## Highlights

- ❖ 19 clients from Urban Mental Health Programme have newly engaged in job and 57 clients are retaining their jobs for last 6 months highlighting their progress.
- ❖ 8 clients are receiving disability pension of Rs. 1000/ month, one step ahead towards reintegration in the mainstream.
- ❖ 28 clients are ensured with public distribution system.
- ❖ 2 clients are employed with an earning of nearly 5000/ month.
- ❖ Visibility of Shelter taken into consideration and 2 signboards fixed in the public place for identity.
- ❖ Completed Baseline survey on community attitude on mental illness in new 20 wards under Kolkata Municipal Corporation where new homeless clients have been identified for further action.

## Challenges

- ❖ Three to Four months after restoration clients are not being accepted by the family members and there are cases of missing.
- ❖ Gainfully employed for these clients are really hard and if they got some, sustaining after 6 months is always a big question.
- ❖ Number of new clients in 3 new Wards-11, 54 and 26 are much lower than the target.
- ❖ Motivate sex workers and their family members identified as psycho-social disorder to visit the ward health clinic. They are reluctant to come to avoid stigmatization.
- ❖ Marketing of paper plate in terms of price, product, people and promotion.