

ISWAR SANKALPA'S SUMMER ISSUE

NEWSLETTER

April - June '19



Stories

**Lessons from Abdullah
Equity in Philanthropy
From a Wanderer to a Navigator**

Sankalpa ISWAR



Naya Daur : Community-Based Rehabilitation Programme

This flagship community programme is an outreach intervention, wherein the team, along with voluntary community caregivers provides services to the homeless persons with psychosocial disabilities.

130 Lives
Touched since April

131 Caregivers



Urban Mental Health Programme : Holistic Mental Healthcare Services for Persons Psychosocial Needs

A programme in partnership with the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, functioning in 5 ward health units of Kolkata. The aim of this project is to integrate mental health care services into primary health care centres, thereby making mental health care more accessible and addressing the stigma associated with mental health care in our society. 3000+ persons have been registered till April 2019.

234
New registrations
since April

313 persons
reached through
awareness events



Day Care Centre : Rehabilitation Centre for Persons with Psychosocial Disability

We have 2 Day Care Centres (DCCs), one at Keoratala and another at Hastings Police Station. These centres function as day-care units for persons on the streets to get food, shelter, hygiene facilities and access to rehabilitation activities.

36 persons
accessed both
DCCs since April



Sarbari : Shelter for Homeless Women with Psychosocial Disability

A shelter that provides a secure and a therapeutic environment for the recovery and rehabilitation of homeless women with psychosocial disabilities.

95 Lives
Touched since April



Marudyen : Shelter for Homeless Men with Psychosocial Disability

This shelter was started with the growing understanding that men on the streets are also vulnerable to abuse, and are in need of a therapeutic space to be able to recover, and live as inclusive members of the society.

36 Lives
Touched since April



Reintegration : From the Margins to the Mainstream

This programme aims to reintegrate clients back into the mainstream society through these broad areas-

- Vocational and Livelihood skill building
- Reuniting them with their families
- In the absence of a family, resettling them in the community

14 persons
reunited with their
families



Crust and Core : Café cum Training Unit

A livelihood venture of Iswar Sankalpa, serving as a Training Unit cum Cafe to develop skills that will help towards sustainable employment

9 lives
Touched since April



Nayagram : Assisted Community Living

An Assisted community living programme in Kashipur, West Bengal for recovering homeless women with psychosocial disability

12 residents

Lessons from Abdullah

Written by Sarbani Das Roy

A young man went in search of a job outside his home state, Maharashtra. On the way he lost his belongings and reached Kolkata after years of travelling. His mental health had deteriorated to the point of him forgetting his name and where he came from due to the trauma of living on the streets, malnourishment and being away from family. He soon became a part of Iswar Sankalpa's Naya Daur Program – a community outreach program to support homeless persons with psychosocial disabilities. He eventually got a job with a benevolent man – Nihal - who became his primary caregiver on the way to recovery. This story highlights the lessons we learnt at Iswar Sankalpa from Abdullah and his life.



Abdullah under the Hastings Flyover in Kolkata, 2016

I travel back in time to a period when Iswar Sankalpa was just about two months old. The team was on an adventure into the unknown labyrinths of providing community care to homeless persons with severe mental illness.

The day was 19th August, 2007. As the entire city was

being mapped to understand the lives and predicament of such doubly stigmatised persons, the team came to a rubbish dump near Syed Baba's Majhar in Hastings, Kolkata. Something seemed to be moving from within the garbage dump. It could be an animal or human. Saikat, one of our social workers, walked into the dump, determined to find out. And a man was found, sitting there in the posture of offering namaz. **Little did I know that our paths crossed that day for some invaluable lessons of life which unfolded with time.**

People called him "Abdullah" – which means a follower of God or Allah. And we found that a man Md Nihal would give Abdullah some food every Friday when he returned to his shop after Namaz. We then approached Nihal and asked him if he would extend his kindness to also giving Abdullah some prescribed medicine and a bit of compassion too. It was a delight when Nihal agreed and brought Abdullah to a medical camp in Khidderpore organized by Iswar Sankalpa. Late Dr Narayanan diagnosed him with Schizoaffective Disorder and he was advised medication. Under Nihal's care, the gentleman started his journey to recovery.

My first lesson of learning happened when we found Abdullah reading an English Newspaper. The lens through which I have grown up and seen the world around me has given me a sense that 'English' is the passport to Success and all that is coveted by the heart. Hence the probability of finding a man in a garbage dump who knows English shattered several myths singlehandedly. That illness can wreak havoc in any person's life and bring him to the streets irrespective of class, caste or education made me push away all the stereotypes I have held about 'homeless' persons and their identity. Abdullah later disclosed that he was a qualified X-Ray technician associated with a number of hospitals in the Radiology Department.

My second lesson of learning happened after nearly one year when Abdullah remembered that he is from Maharashtra and his name is Suresh Kamble. This was not just a discovery of a name – but it also signified a different religion. To my utter surprise, this revelation did not make any difference to the care relationship between Abdullah and Nihal. The only point of concern was that when Abdullah would pass away from this earth, what would be the parting ritual – a funeral or the burial. We asked Abdullah what he would wish for. The answer left an indelible mark in my mind forever. He said that he has taken a second birth under the love and care of Nihal. Hence Nihal's religion was his religion. The fact that love and not dogmas was the only cornerstone of any religion could not have been more beautifully expressed.

My third lesson of learning happened when after 12 years of being with us, Abdullah's family was finally traced to Sangli, Maharashtra. His children had now grown up and were working in hospitals. His wife had worked overtime – made rotis - to support the children's education over all these years. How eager the children were to see their father, and she her husband once more! Just a few days back they had even thought of applying for the death certificate.

But when Abdullah, now 68 years old, heard this news he was not happy. He kept saying that he did not want to become a burden on his family. He would rather stay with Nihal and work till death relieves him. What kind of sensitivity did this soft spoken gentleman hold in his character which made him value his dignity much more than all the comfort and trappings of a family life? However as the family came to meet him and take him with them, he bent a bit to hold his 30 year old daughter whom he had left when she was just a few months old.

Abdullah went back to Sangli with his Family. But he has left behind a rich legacy for us at Iswar Sankalpa.



Abdullah with all his family members (from left to right - Abdullah's wife, daughter, son, himself, and Nihal) in the shop he worked in for 12 years

Equity in Philanthropy

Homeless persons in shelters come forward to support those rendered homeless by Cyclone Fani

Disability is articulated as a struggle, an unnecessary burden that one must overcome to the soundtrack of a string crescendo. But disabled lives are multi-faceted - brimming with personality, pride, ambition, love, empathy, and wit.
- Sinead Burke

Do you feel that you need to have a lot to give? The residents of Iswar Sankalpa's shelters for men and women proved this otherwise. They gave away 10 cartons of clothes from the donations they received and 60 kgs of ration procured by their meagre earnings, to persons who have been affected by Cyclone Fani. The Cyclone had devastated the coast of Orissa on May 2, 2019.

The residents got together and discussed the effects of the storm that was to hit Kolkata, because of which they had to keep the windows closed, their lunch did not come, the cafe where many of them work was closed and all the staff members had left early. But the storm never came. What happened to it? The question loomed for a while. Soon the residents and two social workers were looking at pictures of the devastation the Cyclone had caused in Orissa. Moved by the plight of persons who have lost their homes and livelihoods, they decided that they would pitch in from whatever little they have, to support them. "I have lived like this," Shampa said, eyes fixed on image of a group of people huddled in a bus station. "When I didn't have clothes, I would wear a torn petticoat and a gamcha, carrying my child around asking for help. People started calling me mad, no one helped me... I will help these people in whatever way I can."

It was decided that since we keep receiving clothes in donation at the shelter, we could give from the lot kept in storage. A call for a final show of hands of those willing to donate the clothes was given – and all 30 pairs of hands in the room rose. "Aboshoi daan debo!" (Of course we will donate!) said Shefali, an elderly woman at Sarbari. At the male shelter the story was the same, In unison they said, "Yes we will help!" "We have a lot of clothes here, we can give a lot." Gautam a resident in Marudyan said.



Shampa giving her contribution to support persons affected by Cyclone Fani

Once the decision to give clothes was made, Jharna Saha - a resident of Sarbari who has been an advocate of the plight of homeless persons with mental health problems across multiple platforms - suggested that we also donate some food. "We feel very good when our supporters give us food, it feels special, like we are cared for. We can also give some food with the clothes. Children rejoice if they get some biscuits during difficult time." Mukta, a young resident joined her, "Yes, if each of us here contributes ₹10 then we will collect ₹300, we can buy small Parle G packets." Shefali quickly added, "I will give ₹100, I will help as much as I can". Over the next few days Jharna was busy drawing up a list of those who contributed and the amount they gave. She

even mobilised the staff members of the organisation to contribute, so that more items could be procured.

The next step was to decide what ration items to give, the discussions were - "Let us give Chawal," said one person. "No, how will they eat it? Where will they get the utensils and cooking fire from?" another reasoned. "We can give Sattu (ground Chickpea), they will be able to mix it with water and eat it. They need nutrition right now." said another reasoning voice. "Yes, we can do that. We can give Cheere (Poha – flattened rice), it stays longer and can be eaten as it is." "I think the children will require sugar for energy." "And with the remaining money we can buy biscuits," said another.



The women procuring ration items to give to victims of Cyclone Fani

There was an in-depth understanding of the struggle for food, when people don't have a stable home. At the shop when the shopkeeper asked if he should pack all the 20kgs of Sattu together, they suggested to pack each kg separately, "It will be easier to distribute," they said.

The next step was to fold all the clothes and pack it in cartons, it was a day's affair and multiple residents joined in this group activity discussing the plight of those affected by the Cyclone, and their personal experiences of storms.



(above) The crew folding clothes to be donated

On 26th May, the clothes and ration items were given to Goonj - an organisation that collects items from urban areas for Disaster Relief and then distributes to the affected people.



(below) "We are ready to go"

The men and women at Iswar Sankalpa gave in spite of having a bare minimum; they gave because they have experienced the struggle. They truly defined giving through empathy, and challenged the role that privilege plays in Giving.

From a Wanderer to a Navigator –

A tale of a homeless woman with psychosocial disability reclaiming the streets, with an empowered role and identity

Crust and Core – training unit cum café of Iswar Sankalpa which aims to empower homeless women with psychosocial disability; enabling them to rebuild their lives by learning a new marketable skill with a hope that it will help them sustain themselves economically, and live independently.

Sushma Malchapure walks down the street, under the shade of her umbrella, carrying her bottle of water and the phone she bought last month with her hard-earned money, working at Café *Crust & Core*. She makes her way to The Melodramatic Company, a home bakery located in South Kolkata's Jodhpur Park, where she works now. She boards bus number 37A, patiently awaiting its arrival at the petrol pump- the landmark from where she navigates her way to her workplace.

In June'19, a special incident took place- Sushma lost her way. She had planned to meet her co-worker from *Sarbari*, and travel together to Jadavpur University for a scheduled interview at the university's Community Radio program. She reached well before time but was dropped off two stops before the one she intended to get off at, and was familiar with.



Sushma at Jadavpur University's Community Radio – Radio JU

In such situations, people often panic. 'Where am I? How do I get to the place where I am supposed to? Am I lost? Should I call somebody? Who do I ask? Who can I trust to

ask?' are some of the questions that a panicked person would churn in their heads when lost. But Sushma an empowered, confident woman, asked a local man, and then confirmed with a policeman and reached the desired destination. You may ask, what's extraordinary about this instinctive act? Let me tell you a story then...

Three years ago, Sushma was living outside Howrah station, robbed off her belongings at a place 2,000kms away from her home in Karnataka. She was homeless and soon developed a severe mental health condition. *"I used to be so scared...during the day it was still better, at night we wouldn't know where to go. It was very scary...no place seemed safe. I was always scared at the thought of someone attacking me,"* recalls Sushma about her time on the streets. Today, she is no longer scared. She has, as you know from the incident, now rightfully reclaimed the streets which were once a place of trauma for her.

When Sushma, our mind champion from *Crust and Core*, was brought to *Sarbari* – Shelter for homeless women with psychosocial disability, she would not trust anybody. She was withdrawn and did not disclose her real name. She remained isolated. It was only gradually that she opened up post in-depth counselling sessions and vocational therapy. Eventually she joined the Staff Canteen run by a Common Interest Group within the shelter, only to later join the new social venture of the organization- the Café, as a baker.

Sushma is an inspiration to many women in the country. She has held herself with dignity and utmost respect. When her alcoholic husband's abuse became unbearable for her, she sent her children to her maternal family and left the village, *"The world is a large place. I decided; I would go anywhere... find a way to live but I wouldn't stay there."* She paid heavily for her bravery- spent months on the streets, lost and fearful.

Today, she has carved out a special place for herself. She is an ace learner, seldom scared to learn new skills. She has learnt to read and write in Hindi, keeps herself informed through newspapers, and counsels other women availing the bakery training at the Café.

This month, two women from *Crust and Core* have successfully "graduated" and are now working elsewhere. They have new roles, they don't identify themselves as dependent persons anymore. They are interacting with persons of society as equals, as contributing members to the society, constantly raising the bar of their 'highest potential.' They are travelling through the city on their own- independently and fearlessly.

Sushma however has an existential question to ask, *"Independent hone mein bahut dar hai. Khud do decision lena*

padta hai." (There is fear in being independent, we have to make our own decisions) – A paradox humans have been deciphering for centuries. We are however, very proud of Sushma - from a lost wanderer on the streets to a confident navigator, Sushma is conquering miles before she sleeps...



Sushma with the founder Shreya of her new workplace The Melodramatic Company

Events and Achievements



Pinkathon 2019, a marathon for women's health saw the participation of 8 women from Sarbari along with over 3000 women from Kolkata. They ran the 3km marathon in 35mins, and were thrilled when they reached the Finish Line.



Iswar Sankalpa conducted an orientation program with managers of Govt. of West Bengal's Vagrants' Homes on dealing with mental health related issues in their residential units on 28th May, 2019



On the 158th birth anniversary of the legendary Rabindranath Tagore, the members of Iswar Sankalpa celebrated his passion for art, music and education. Our clients who are rebuilding their lives through the Functional Literacy Program were facilitated for their excellence and determination. The clients of Iswar Sankalpa, across all programs celebrated this joyous day with Music, dance and art with members of the community.



A three day Mela was organised by the Vocational Training Unit of Iswar Sankalpa. The Hotto Mela held from 10-12th April at Ladies Park, Chetla saw community members participate in a handicraft workshop facilitated by our clients, a street play by a local youth group – Natakkiya, music by Matir Gaan and Siddha Group and a host of cultural programs by the local community members. Products by clients of Iswar Sankalpa and other organisations working with vulnerable populations through vocational training, were exhibited for sale.



50 women and 8 men from Sarbari and Marudyan voted at the 17th Lok Sabha Election. The Election Register Office at Kolkata conducted mock elections with the clients to orient them with the process. Regular sessions were also done by the social workers at Iswar Sankalpa to sensitise the clients about different parties and leaders.

"How does a country become democratic in the true sense? It does so first when its Government is built together by its people, regardless of religion, caste, physical or psychosocial condition! Can we fathom what it means for a person who was once lost, declared by society of 'unsound mind', abandoned by their family, to cast their vote? It means to exercise their freedom of choice and have a control over decisions which reflects interdependence within the society and perhaps gives a clear message "I matter"!"

How You Can Help?

Donation options	Details
Support Medicines for a Client ₹1200	Covers medicines for one client for 3 months
Meals for Male Shelter Clients ₹10,000	Covers breakfast and dinner for one week for 30 residents
Special Occasion Lunch (Non vegetarian) ₹ 24,000	Special lunch freshly cooked and served in our shelters for 120 clients in celebration or in memory of an occasion
Festival Dresses ₹36,000	Covers new dress for 120 clients
Supporting a Client towards Independent Living in the Community ₹13,500	Supports living expenses for 3 months for one client working on an organic farm land owned by IswarSankalpa
Corpus Fund ₹50,000	Supports financial stability of the organization and sustainability of projects

No Strings Attached

Any amount of your choice can be donated through online transfers, cash or cheque, for the cause of supporting homeless persons with psychosocial disability.

You can also contribute through kind donations

Contact:

nayanika@isankalpa.org or +91 88269 01112
for more details

Volunteer & Internship Programmes

IswarSankalpa provides a vast range of internships and volunteering opportunities in different ongoing programmes. We invite you to lend your skills and expertise to our cause.

To find out more, drop a mail at hrdebapriya@isankalpa.org

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All Donations are exempted from tax under 80G

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We sincerely thank everybody who has come forward to put a smile on the faces that go unseen, and for supporting us in all your capacity. Your support gives us the faith to move forward!

