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#12

APRIL 2010

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VIEWS AND VOICES

Sankalp Celebrates 15 Years

On the 16th of January, 2010 Sankalp hosted a get-together for people who have been instrumental to our work for the 15th Anniversary Celebration at our Community Care Centre. Including rehabilitated clients, previous staff, and our growing community of supporters, almost 250 people were in attendance to celebrate our past, present, and future work.

Following an opening prayer and a welcome from our Trustee's Chair, Mr. B.N. Bhagwat, the former Secretary to the Government of India, our Director Eldred Tellis gave a photo presentation of Sankalp's milestones. He began discussing the initial stages, when the "one-man team" was conducting awareness programmes at schools, churches, and colleges. He traced the development of the organization, the opening of drop-in centres, the growth of awareness programmes, and the exchange with international organizations supporting drug users and preventing HIV/AIDS.

Each Sankalp centre had prepared a bit of entertainment, ranging from street plays demonstrating Sankalp's interactions with police, to choreographed dances from Bollywood films such as Slumdog Millionaire. "It's important that we celebrate these events with the Sankalp family. Sankalp gives us a new life, and when we have the opportunity to dance, we dance," says Yatin Nandodkar, one of the Jai Ho dancers. Sankalp entertainment was supplemented with a performance by Shivam, a magician

who travels around Maharashtra spreading positive messages about HIV/AIDS.

Seven teams participated in a three-round drug and general knowledge quiz competition, which tested the expertise of our staff. Some questions included, "Name five of Sankalp's funders," "Who is the writer of India's National Anthem?" and "Describe the philosophy of harm reduction." The Bhiwandi Drop-in Centre finished in first place, followed by the Administrative Office and Mumbai Central as a close second. "I really enjoyed how the evening was imaginatively organized in such a way that all the clients could easily participate in all activities," says Mr. A.V. Krishnan, former Director General of Police for Maharashtra, and trustee of Sankalp.

The cornerstone of the evening was the certificate ceremony for the inaugural batch of Project Hunar, the thirteen clients who have been residentially training to learn data entry work since May 2009. To officially congratulate the completion of their computer and professional skills training, each client was presented a certificate, cosigned by our partner NGO in Bangalore, AMBA CEEIC. "The whole concept of the computer training programme is impressive," said Krishnan, "and the enthusiasm of the clients receiving certificates was heart warming." This marked an important new milestone for Sankalp, as we continue to search for data entry work from large-scale providers.



Certificates for Project Hunar

Growing Up: Ramzan's Story

By Renu Swamy

"I only need love and acceptance, without discrimination for my drugs history," says twenty-four year old Ramzan Sheikh. He went to the municipality school on Dockyard Road in Mumbai for a short time; he didn't learn to read or write, he's forgotten what he learned. He liked to sneak out most of the time to roam around with friends, disregarding his family, his father, mother, elder sister and younger brother. His father could have provided him with an education, but he left the house at the age of seven with no intentions to return. He started smoking beedis, and wanted to be a "master of his own will;" he disdained the control his father tried to exert, and the moral preaching he tried to impart.

He moved to live on the streets outside Victoria Terminus (VT) Station where drugs were sold in abundance. He went without food and bath for days on end; all he wanted was to satisfy his craving for brown sugar. "I did anything and everything to get cash to buy drugs. Petty thefts, picking pockets, conning people, even charging tourists to pose for their photos," constantly running from the police. Ramzan spent time at Arthur Road, Kolhapur, and Byculla prisons on several occasions. He says, "VT was my favourite place as maal (brown sugar) was easy to find. I was beaten up by people, bitten by street dogs, survived wounds without medication. As long as I had my supply of drugs."

When he was eighteen, he met a girl named Asha outside of the station; she had fled her home in Orissa. They grew to like each other, "I protected her and we took care of each other," says Ramzan. She was also struggling with a drug addiction, and soon her parents found her and took her away. When she told her parents about Ramzan, they got furious, "they didn't want their daughter to keep any relationship with me, as I was totally immersed in drugs," says Ramzan. "Now, I'm happy for her; her life would have been worse if she had stayed with me in those dark days."

Many Sankalp peer educators exchanged his used needles for clean needles, tried to educate Ramzan about the available medical treatments and counselling services. But Ramzan wasn't quitting; he continued to fix, "To remove the physical pain, sometimes I took drugs every two hours. It helped me forget, and I felt immense peace and relaxation. This was one thing that brought me happiness."

Then an outreach worker from the Mumbai Central Drop-in Centre (DIC) named Hasmukh Shah, Ramzan's former "using partner," began to change his perspective. Ramzan



Ramzan Receiving His Hunar Certificate

says, "Hasmukh used to be on the streets, submerged in drugs with me, and what he became surprised me." This inspired Ramzan to seek out the services of Sankalp, and he started a course of Buprenorphine, the Opioid Substitution Therapy.

The significant turning point came when he became part of Project Hunar. He received shelter from Sankalp, and visited a partner NGO, AMBA CEEIC in Bangalore to meet intellectually challenged youngsters who were learning computers. Ramzan thought, "If these young kids with such disabilities can learn computers, then why can't I?" This gave him the inspiration to go forward with the programme. Today Ramzan works at Sankalp's Charni Road Centre where he is not only trying his hands on data entry training but also learning English. He says, "I want to make up for all of my lost days of learning." He adds, "Anything I do, the foundation must be strong. I want to get hold of life and do something for my family." He learnt first aid and dressing in Sankalp, and enjoys dressing the clients under treatment. He enjoys attending NA meetings, and thoughtfully says, "In the meetings, we can relate to each other; the journeys of drug people are more or less the same."

In 2004, he tested positive for HIV; he has grown to accept his status, and is an ongoing support person for many clients at Sankalp. "There's an opportunity to marry a girl who's negative, but I can't do that," says Ramzan. The admiration and value he gets from people around him encourages him to do well in life, to pursue a good career, and rebuild relationships with his family. "I'm in contact with my sister, with my mom. She used to be very angry with me, with my addiction. I know I have to improve these relationships, and I'm gathering the courage to tell them about my HIV positive status."

Good Shepherd Recovery Home: A New Ray of Hope

On the 2nd of February 2010, the Good Shepherd Recovery Home was inaugurated at the Lord's Ranch at Tav Village. This was a dream come true for Hilary de Viega, managing trustee for the Lord's Ranch, who had a vision of doing rehabilitation work when he first began pursuing his idea of a place to do the Lord's work.

Although the actual centre is still in the process of being completed, Eldred Tellis of Sankalp Rehabilitation Trust joined up with Hilary by a stroke of divine intervention, to fulfill his own dream of having a rehabilitation centre with a difference. This was not meant to be a 'business' partnership but one where the prime intent is to provide good facilities to those who wish to rid themselves of the habit of alcohol or drugs.

The centre, situated far away from the hustle and bustle of city life, 60 kilometers from Pune, is one of the most picturesque spots that may be found for such activities. Surrounded by mountains and with water running through the valley, the Good Shepherd Recovery Home is a unique place. The tranquil surroundings create a kind of premise to really introspect and discover oneself, which is at the core of rehabilitation. The natural environment and

beauty makes you realize that a Higher Power exists and you actually feel its presence close to you. With this it is not difficult to see that the goal of rehabilitation of drug users and alcoholics will be achieved with the hard work and prayer of all.



Eldred with Hilary



A Picturesque Location

Project Hunar gets their 1st Batch of Work with Special Olympics

By Manju Ekka

The extensive training of ten months for Project Hunar celebrated an important milestone with the 1st data entry job provided by our partner, Special Olympics Bharat Maharashtra. With a deadline of two weeks to complete 300 two-page forms, our thirteen data entry operators finished the assignment within seven days.

Special Olympics held an event called Opening Eyes, a full eye examination in Sewri, and needed to submit these handwritten forms to their offices in the United States electronically. "Who better than these guys to give this job to. I was worried about the complicated eye language and doctor's handwriting, but I was confident they'd work hard to copy effectively," says Sandra Vaz, coordinator of Special Olympics Bharat Maharashtra programmes. "I believe everyone needs a chance. In this case, earning even a little bit gives them satisfaction." Mrs. Vaz is a friend of Sugandha Sukrutaraj, founder/director of AMBA CEEIC, and Sankalp's partner who provided our clients with the foundation and support to begin their training.

The clients who are in this programme were so excited that their dream came true. They felt happy that they were capable of doing something, and doing it well. "Our training has not failed us. This is the first job I've had in fifteen months," says Zakir, one of the Project Hunar members. Each day, the data entry operators spend at least four hours strictly practicing their data entry skills, and continue to receive regular instruction on basic computer skills and English literacy.



Hunar Working on their 1st Job

"It would not be possible to do alone, but we were able to do this with the group," says Hasan, another who took a lot of effort to learn the logistics of the job, and even worked after hours to ensure the job was well checked. "Coordination of the group helped to finish the work fast," says Raju, one of the peer trainers. "The difficulties we faced to do this job was the doctor's hurried handwriting, which we were unable to recognize," says Robin. "But with the help of our staff, we managed."

They are quite sure that they can do any data entry work that comes ahead. Currently, Hunar is testing out a variety of data entry opportunities that will test the operators' knowledge of cursive English, different Microsoft programmes, html code, and the internet. Hunar continues to practice in order to excel themselves and seek out more contacts so that the most appropriate data entry work is found.

With support from the Annika Linden Foundation, the 2nd batch of computer trainees from Sankalp's drop-in centres began their training on the 15th of April, so the 1st batch will bear the responsibility of bringing these clients away from addiction, and into the programme.

A Thousand Thanks

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You joined the Sankalp One Thousand Club and pledged one thousand rupees a year to put more bite into Sankalp's effort to reach out to marginalised street drug users who are desperately in need of help.

It's time to repeat your generous act (we need every rupee and are counting on a thousand from you again in 2010). We look forward to your renewal of your membership and bringing in new members as well.

A thousand thanks in advance.

Three Clients Earned Fellowship with Ashoka's Youth Venture

By David Weinreb

In March 2010, three clients from Sankalp's Project Hunar and Kalyan Drop-in Centre were awarded funded fellowships with Ashoka, Innovators for the Public's branch for youth, Ashoka's Youth Venture (AYV).

Over the course of a one-year fellowship, Ashoka provides the mentoring and resources to young people (ages 15-25) who desire to create real social impact. "In order to pursue an Everyone a Changemaker world, Youth Venture actively reaches out to young people from all kinds of backgrounds and walks of life," says Aditi Punj, the AYV Community Coordinator. In addition, each venturer is provided seed funding of Rs. 5000 so that they may launch their project.

While twenty Sankalp clients attended the first outreach meeting on the 5th of January, and seven clients attended the first workshop, only Zakir Ansari, Amit Rajput, and Abdul Sheikh were awarded the fellowship for their ventures.

Zakir, a computer trainee in Project Hunar, is interested in working with poor children, potentially teaching English, group games, and computers. "Zakir has been dedicated to the programme. He's dedicated to helping people, and takes a lot of inspiration from people, especially Eldred," says Manju Ekka, coordinator of Project Hunar. He has encouraged team members Hasan Shaikh and Yatin Nandodkar to join him, and has held meetings in the Bhiwandi community. "I had wished to study, but my father expired when I was young, and due to finances, I couldn't. I used to feel inadequate, even at the rail stations, because I couldn't read the signs. So many children also are prevented from going to school, and I want to try and help," says Zakir.

Amit, a peer educator at the Kalyan Drop-in Centre (DIC), is engaged in expanding awareness of drugs and HIV/AIDS. "He's so full of energy and is very

enthusiastic. He easily adapts himself to any situation," says Dimple Shetty, 19, a venturer from the Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies. He has worked with staff to determine where efforts in creating awareness would be most useful, and has had conversations with local NGOs regarding his projects, such as the Humsafar Trust. "Amit shows lots of interest in everything, including the computer programme, and is learning how to disengage from arguments," says Balasaheb Sathe, coordinator at Kalyan Drop-in Centre. He has been supported by several team members, including Shaukat Ali and Amar Singh Chauhan.

Abdul, an associate trainer with Project Hunar, has been thinking about his venture for over four years. Abdul has lost a leg, an arm, and two fingers due to drug-related train accidents, and has been working to develop an income generation project (IGP) where handicapped Sankalp clients learn to produce paper bags and lanterns, using handmade paper sourced from a government initiative for rural providers. "With Ashoka, I am developing ideas about how to promote and market my project, and gaining the confidence to really start something," says Abdul.

The participants have attended more than four programmes at the Maharashtra Nature Park, Sion, where they have engaged in a variety of teambuilding and leadership development workshops with approximately thirty other venturers. A venturer from Jai Hind College, Siddhi Desai, says, "It's not weird to have drug users here. There's unity in diversity. You know these people have changed; they've come to help people like them." In the 1st week of March, Zakir, Amit, and Abdul had presented their ventures to a panel of professionals in the field of social work and entrepreneurship, each having passed, and currently pursuing their projects amidst the challenges of balancing other commitments and receiving feedback.



Ashoka Youth Venturers Brainstorming their Projects

Sankalp Beautifies IGM Hospital as part of New Community Assistance Initiative

By Appa Mhaske

On the 23rd of December, 2009 Sankalp's Project Disha in Bhiwandi conducted a community cleanup around the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital. This is part of a redeveloped initiative by all of Sankalp's Drop-in Centres to connect with their surrounding communities, and contribute in a positive way.

Ulrich Kohler, the Director of DO International, a funder of Sankalp, has been a strong supporter of this initiative. "With programmes like these, the community immediately benefits through having a cleaner environment and the community becomes used to interacting with drug users under treatment, therefore potentially working against existing stigmas." DO International, a part of Deutschordenswerke, is involved in drug treatment and harm reduction service provision in India, the Caribbean, and Iran, and has been partnering with Sankalp since around 2002. "Overall, it promotes Sankalp the Service Provider in the community. Sankalp is someone who is directly useful for the community besides the obvious indirect benefit of moving drug using individuals towards a functional lifestyle."

Thirteen clients were organized into three teams, each supervised by a Sankalp staff member, to clean the front and back area of the hospital. IGM hospital maintenance staff provided the tools required, and also directed the areas for work. In the beginning, clients were a bit shy, as they hadn't performed work like this for some time. "After so many months, I took tools in my hands, and it felt great," said Dosul Vara, client from Bhiwandi. Garbage around the grounds was picked up and excess grass was removed, all of which was collected and brought to the nearest municipality dustbin by our clients.

Because of the location and nature of the service, the project was very well received by the local community. The IGM staff, police, hospital visitors, rickshaw drivers, and even a partner health NGO Rashtra Swasthya



Cleaning IGM Hospital

Prabodhini (RSP) was present during the afternoon. Mr. Rehan Khan of Star India News, Bhiwandi took an interview of Sankalp counselor Deepti Patil as well as Sankalp outreach worker Afzal Ansari, and took several pictures of the community cleanup, which was aired on local cable on the night of 24th Dec. 2009.

"This was an opportunity to gain excellent recognition for our work and the potential of our clients. Previously viewed as useless and problematic, the community now sees they are trying their best to give back, and reintegrate into society," says Sayed Rahim, Sankalp's Administrator Officer.

Each month, Sankalp's Drop-in Centres have been planning community assistance programmes, which range from area cleanups to health camps. "In addition to organized community service, sometimes someone from the community needs some basic First Aid care, we'll provide. It helps us build rapport with the community," says Balasaheb Sathe, coordinator at the Kalyan Drop-in Centre. We are looking to establish partnerships with our neighborhoods and local organizations, so that we can continue to improve the community's opinion of drug users, so that rehabilitated clients are accepted in their communities and receive sustainable employment.

World Health Day

On 8th and 11th of April, Sankalp marked World Health Day with two camps. One day was dedicated to mental health in coordination with our psychiatrist Dr. Amit Kulkarni, while the other included eye and teeth checkups for more than 150 people from the community around Mumbai Central in coordination with the Red Cross of Bombay, Saifee Ambulance, and St. John's Ambulance.



SANKALP REHABILITATION TRUST

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