



Corner meeting by CW in YV

## TALKING ALOUD ALLOWED

**DR. KAAREN MATHIAS**  
**SENIOR ADVISOR - BURANS**

Greetings - and we are now thankful for the monsoon and the rain falling thick and fast... even though we also have to negotiate landslides and wet roads as we go about Burans work.

In this Burans Bulletin we celebrate the opportunities for community leadership that we can facilitate through Burans. We interview Pooja Baluni who started work as a community member working with us as a peer facilitator of our youth resilience program, Nae Disha. Pooja was a natural group facilitator and was invited to join the team as community health worker. Her skills in training shone through, and she started working as a trainer and has now been promoted to be a project assistant and team leader. Go Pooja!

We also focus on our work promoting access to epilepsy care in our Yamuna valley project. More than 80% of people with epilepsy in rural India lack access to medicines and primary epilepsy care. We profile our work to reduce the disability, stigma and challenges of living with epilepsy in this remote and rural corner of Uttarakhand.

Thank you again for your ongoing interest and support to Burans. We're excited to continue promoting mental health building on resources in communities.

## ACCESS TO CARE FOR EPILEPSY IN YV

### Gunjan Prasad-Clinical Psychologist

Over the last 3 years, the community workers of Burans have identified over 90 people living with epilepsy in Naugaon and Purola blocks, Uttarkashi. Epilepsy is one of the most prevalent neurological disorders and affects over 50 million people worldwide.

Among the people with epilepsy identified by Burans, 45% had not accessed care due to various reasons such as; unavailability of medicines and medical facilities, poor socio-economic conditions, lack of transportation services and in some cases, lack of family support.

Additionally, many people try traditional approaches rather than biomedical treatment. For example, Suresh (name changed) who had symptoms of epilepsy) went to five different religious leaders for treatment. After numerous failed attempts at alternative treatments, he finally visited a doctor and using anti-epilepsy medicines, his seizures have stopped. When asked he said- "I never skip my medicines and things have been going on fine. I can work now and take my medicines with me wherever I go."

The biggest barrier for people seeking treatment in Naugaon and Purola has been the unavailability of doctors and shortage of medicines in the area, leading to challenges taking medicines needed regularly. The barriers are twofold: Firstly, many doctors are not confident to diagnose and manage epilepsy, instead referring people to tertiary care facilities and expensive investigations which may not be required. Secondly, although epilepsy medicines are listed as essential medicines by Government community health centres, they are often not available.

Community workers, people with epilepsy have found alternative ways of getting medicines, especially from Dehradun (a 5 hours bus journey from Naugaon). However, this is costly in time and money and people with epilepsy in rural areas need a more sustainable approach.

The Burans team has been addressing these problems in three ways. We are seeking to engage a neurologist to train the rural Government health doctors in primary care of epilepsy after monsoon, in 2022, so Government doctors can manage patients themselves, and refer appropriately. Secondly, we have engaged with medical officers and other government officials to address the medicines supply issue. We have also had support in advocacy for access to medicines by the Disabled Persons Organisation in Naugaon. Thirdly, Burans community workers have been hard at work to continue raising awareness on medication adherence and side effects and to promote biomedical care of epilepsy with community members and traditional healers.

It is a slow process but we keep pushing for innovative and sustainable solutions that work in this context

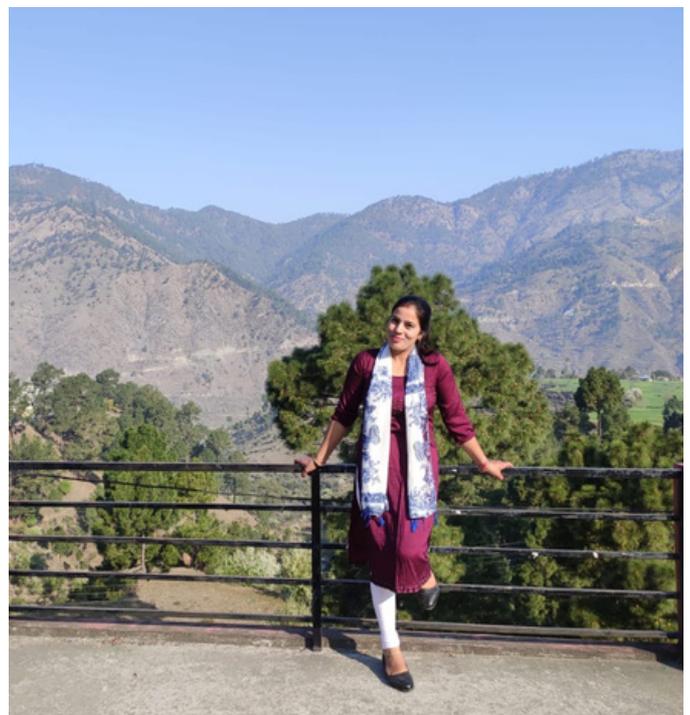
# 90

PPSDs have been  
identified with Epilepsy  
in YV.

## MY JOURNEY: FROM A VOLUNTEER TO PROJECT ASSISTANT

### Gunjan Prasad- Clinical Psychologist

Pooja Baluni started working with Burans as a volunteer in 2014, with limited awareness of mental health. Through training sessions and coaching by Community workers, she gained an increased understanding about the vision of Burans and the need for mental health support in her community. Pooja visited the community with CWs and observed the work they did. She conducted door-to-door awareness and helped in gathering people for different events. She enjoyed interacting with people in the community and raising awareness on mental health. Eventually, Pooja was requested to conduct an observational visit for the Nae Disha program in Naugaon, Yamuna Valley. This was a great learning trip as she learned new things about running this program in a school setup, and also gave valuable feedback to the new team running this program in these schools. Pooja was appointed as a community worker with Burans in 2019 in Dehradun, where she continued learning and facilitating in the community. While working as a community worker she also had a dream of becoming a trainer one day and this dream is being fulfilled as she now takes up more coaching roles for programs such as Swasthya Labh Saadan and Parwarish (Parenting) program.



During this journey, she has evolved and learned many things. She also faced many challenges along the way.

*She said 'Burans gave me many opportunities and helped me come this far. Because of Burans and the support of my team, I pursued my Masters in Social Work and am on a journey to fulfill my dream of becoming a trainer.'*

Pooja is now a full time employee with Burans in the post of Project Assistant and is passionate to continue working in mental health in the communities.

## **Comings and Goings**

- Farewell to Neetu Gurung. Best wishes for your future endeavours!
- Welcome Suhani, Kavita and Samita ! Our new community workers for Yamuna Valley.

## **SUPPORT BURANS**

We can only work in disadvantaged communities because of donations from generous people who want to make a difference.

We welcome donations both big and small to support our work. If you are keen to fund a specific program – let's talk. Be in touch!

Contact us at [info@burans.org](mailto:info@burans.org)