

Burans: The Winter Edition

New Horizons, Stronger Connections: Stories of Growth and Impact
Dec. '24

Thinking Aloud Allowed!

The winterline (the unique line of cloud and sky) is forming in the Dehradun valley and Burans team members riding a motorcycle need gloves and scarfs now. We are excited to share our winter newsletter. It has been a busy few months in Burans. We have seen some exciting outcomes for young men in the Suddhowala state jail – we tell the story of one young man below. We have also learned lots through opportunities to visit and learn from others.

We share our learnings while visiting Prayas in Rajasthan, joining a mental health festival in Bengaluru(Mannotasava) and several inspiring groups in Tamil Nadu. – read more about it below. We are also excited that from 1st January 2025 we enter into a new partnership to implement our prison mental health programme with the Rohini Nilekani Foundation. There is lots to be thankful for and we appreciate support, engagement and wisdom shared with us by community members and by many of you who read the newsletter. Thank you.

Kaaren Mathias
(Senior Advisor, Burans)

Snapshot Of Our Success In Prison From January – June 2024

By Atul Singh, Team Leader, Dehradun

Our organisation has been recognized for its impactful work in mental health support within the prison system. The Prison Department identified a critical need for counselling and mental health services for inmates and partnered with us to address this. Since the memorandum of understanding on August 6th 2023, supported and funded by Ember, we've been conducting regular weekly visits for mental health awareness training using the Nae Roshni module, and one-on-one Active Listening and Problem Solving (ALPS) sessions in both male and female barracks.

Our work has been highlighted in various platforms:

- **Prison Staff and Administration:** The Inspector General (IG) and prison staff have actively promoted our efforts, providing space, coordinating groups, and organising events.
- **Prison Inmates:** As key beneficiaries, the inmates participate in group sessions and one-on-one ALPS sessions, and their positive feedback has been instrumental in showcasing our program's success.

At Suddhowala jail, the Burans staff was invited for key events like Independence day and Republic day. On the occasions of Burans coordinating programmes like World Mental Health day, Sports day and Women's Day, the prison authorities encouraged and appreciated the work.



The Deputy Inspector General rewarded the project with a memento for sports day and Jail Diwas.



We have completed 81 one-to-one Active Listening and Problem Solving sessions(ALPS). Many of those who had ALPS sessions reported that they felt relieved after sharing their problems and hurts and had clarity of thoughts on how to go about it after ventilating with the staff. 18 members of our previous group have gotten bail and moved out, 48 ongoing group members in the Nae Roshni sessions. The group members have learnt skills for resilience, communication and building relationships. Some of the group members formed a small safe group where they can share things and help each other, for e.g out of addiction to smoking. The group members also made a safe space for the new inmates and kept them from bullying.



83 members in the female barrack and more than 350 members improved their awareness and mental health self-care skills through our Mental Health awareness programmes. Some of the participants are now able to identify symptoms and refer them for help either to the clinic or with Burans staff.

The group members have also shown that they are now able to support those who were going through mental health concerns and were able to express concern and empathy with each other. Inmates of the 'Baccha' (young adults of 18-21 years) barracks provide mental health support to new inmates who recently came and are kept in the quarantine barracks.

Testimonial from the peer leader in the male group:

After Burans started sessions young men told us there has been no bullying of a new inmate in the youngster's barrack (18-21 years) which had been a frequent practice earlier. Instead, they told us that they stand up for persons who are being bullied and are concerned about them.

Earlier they also said there was a strong sense of in and out - e.g. they formed closed groups and looked down on people who are an outsider. They tried to show power by trying to put down or scare others who were already fearful but now they compete to help or reach out to a person. They are proud to say "I was the first to help this person when he came first and he shared his troubles with me." They were glad that they could be of help to somebody in need.



A further change is a sense of growing empathy and care within a barrack. Rohit told us that whenever any of them had their family or friends visit them for 'Mulakaat' (where family/friends have an opportunity to meet an inmate twice in a week for an hour) and another person did not have anybody to visit them, they shared their food and things with the other person who did not have it. They cheer up those whose family members haven't come. Earlier their conversations with each other were just putting down each other and calling them names and bad words but now their talks and discussions are serious and matured and they use less bad words.

A young 19 year old man made a 'thank you' card for the Burans team before he left.

10 Year of Burans services to Community Mental Health

By Puangrai Liu Rongmei, Research and Documentation Officer

On September 14th, Burans celebrated its 10th anniversary of providing community-based mental health services, marking a significant milestone in its journey. Founded in 2014 as a partnership between Emmanuel Hospital Association and the Uttarakhand CHGN cluster, Burans is administered by Herbertpur Christian Hospital.



The celebration was attended by representatives from government and private organizations, who also served as guest speakers. Dr. Mathew Samuel introduced Herbertpur Christian Hospital (HCH), highlighting its strong community health department and role in implementing Nari Niketan since 2016. Mr. Martin Sam discussed the Anugrah Project, which provides disability support through prosthetics, orthotics, therapy, and learning centers. The audience also learned about other key mental health projects, including Shifa, Community Homes, and Burans.

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It was an auspicious occasion where we had Dr. Kaaren Mathias share the journey and origin of Burans. We had the opportunity to screen a short animated video on Burans' work produced with support of Ember which was well-received by the audience.

Burans project is operated across two blocks, Naugoan and Purola in Uttarkashi district and 18 slum areas in Dehradun.

Mr. Jeet Bahadur and Mr. Atul Singh brought the overview of Burans' work and prison initiatives that have fostered hope and positivity. Not only the leaders, but the panel was organized of individuals with lived experiences of psychosocial disorders along with caregivers, members from Disabled People's Organization, parenting groups and Nae disha who shared their personal testimonies on their involvement with Burans.

The celebration was filled with encouragement and joy when the children from Burans' parenting program performed a vibrant dance. Burans received appreciation from Mrs Madhu from OPEN, Mr. Ronjoy from SNEHA and Mr. Manoj Jatav Paarshad of Indresh Nagar who acknowledged Dr. Kaaren's leadership and Burans' contribution to the community.



The event does not conclude here, we had Dr. Negi and Dr. Surender among us, both psychiatrists who addressed the audience with the importance of community mental health efforts in supporting the holistic development and recovery of individuals with psychosocial disabilities. And bringing the program to a closure with this, we requested our participants with lived experience and their caregiver for a cake cutting ceremony as well as a signature campaign with a pledge to be open to learning, understanding and supporting positive changes for mental health.

The 10 year celebration of Burans highlights a decade of progress, and fosters a renewed commitment to continue its impactful work.



Snapshots

1. Sports Week



Prize distribution ceremony of Sports day on January 6, 2024 with Deputy Inspector General, Jailor, Director of Community Health in Herbertpur and other dignitaries. Almost 200 inmates participated from male and female barracks.

2. Women's Day Celebration:



On International Women's Day, we hosted a vibrant celebration that included dance competitions, a ramp walk, Garhwali dance performances, and a skit involving female inmates.

3. Group Member's Farewell:

Rahul (pseudonym) is a slender 20 year old boy, who was withdrawn and silent during the initial sessions went with clarity and focus of what He wanted to do further in his life-support his parents with agriculture. Rahul's farewell marked a poignant moment as he bid farewell to the Hosla group after benefiting from our program since its inception.



Rahul's transformation, from withdrawn to actively engaged, showcased the program's success in fostering personal growth and resilience among participants. His reflections on friendship, learning from mistakes, and personal development resonated deeply with his peers.

4. Burans visits IndiaVision Foundation:

Burans Team visited IndiaVision Foundation, a 30 year old NGO in Delhi, founded by Ms Kiran Bedi working for prisoners. The team engaged in discussions with the IVF staff about their approach, relationship-building, and challenges. The IVF team shared their journey, highlighting how focusing on a single group helped achieve long-term success. Cultural activities and learning engagements were key to building strong relationships with inmates. A visit to Dasna Jail in Ghaziabad, housing over 5000 inmates, showcased IVF's initiatives, such as radio stations, computer labs, literacy groups, tailoring centers, and music and dance clubs. These activities helped inmates stay mentally active and productive.

This inspired our team members to incorporate cultural activities to our sessions – the Nae Roshni module starts/concludes with songs or dance which has kept the group members active, interested and engaged in the group.

Our efforts now are to raise mental health awareness among prison staff. This remains an important area where we aim to engage and provide essential mental health knowledge to improve overall support for inmates. Despite the challenge, our success in prisons with the inmates have been fruitful.



Team Visits Prayas NGO in Rajasthan for Cross-Learning

By Jeet Bahadur, Team Leader, Yamuna Valley

A two-day cross-learning visit to Prayas NGO in Pratapgarh, Rajasthan, provided our team with valuable insights into community empowerment and sustainable development in tribal regions. Prayas, known for its rights-based advocacy, forest conservation efforts, and healthcare initiatives, has significantly improved the lives of marginalized communities.

On the first day, the team attended an orientation session led by Prayas staff, Jawahar and Vijaypal, who highlighted the challenges of working in isolated tribal areas. The second day focused on tribal villages, where women described their growth from limited roles to active participants in solving local issues through monthly meetings and Jansunwai forums. These forums enable communities to voice concerns directly to government officials. However, challenges like inconsistent government representation persist.



The visit emphasized the power of rights-based advocacy and participatory mechanisms like Jansunwai in addressing socio-economic challenges. The team aims to integrate similar strategies to empower communities and drive sustainable development in their work.

Exposure visit to Chennai for Prison Project

By Samson Rana, Project Service Provider



The Burans team visited Chennai from November 5th-7th, 2024, to learn from established projects addressing psychosocial and rehabilitation challenges, particularly within the criminal justice system. The visit included interactions with PRISM Trust, the Banyan NGO, and key prison and juvenile justice authorities.

PRISM Trust, a 10-year-old initiative, focuses on rehabilitating first-time petty offenders and reducing recidivism, and the team met the staff at their Georgetown Office near the Marina Beach.

The founder, Adv. Ravikumar Paul, shared PRISM's origin story, when he read an article that 40% of the prisoners were innocent which is unconstitutional and sad. The team visited a Drop-in Centre in Saidapet, observing athletic and value-based activities fostering healthy routines and relationships among participants which emphasized health, spirituality, and consistency, training as peer leaders to build discipline and leadership skills.

The superintendent shared over 15 years of experience working with children in conflict with the law (CCL). Key initiatives included yoga, music, tailoring, a library, and a baking unit, ensuring engagement and value-building. Counselling services, though mandatory, faced resistance from some families but were impactful for beneficiaries who embraced the opportunity.

PRISM's strong relationships with inmates were evident. The intake process involved detailed profiling, entry counselling, legal aid, and addiction intervention. Skill assessment and job placement services prepared inmates for life post-release. Exit counselling before bail equipped inmates for societal reintegration, supported by police and PRISM follow-ups.

The Chennai visit was an enriching experience, highlighting transformative approaches in prisoner rehabilitation, juvenile justice, and community reintegration. Insights highlighted the importance of holistic, data-driven, and collaborative methods. Burans looks forward to integrating these learnings into its initiatives for improved mental health and social justice outcomes in Uttarakhand.





Exploring the Frontiers of Mental Health at Mannotsava 2024 in Bengaluru

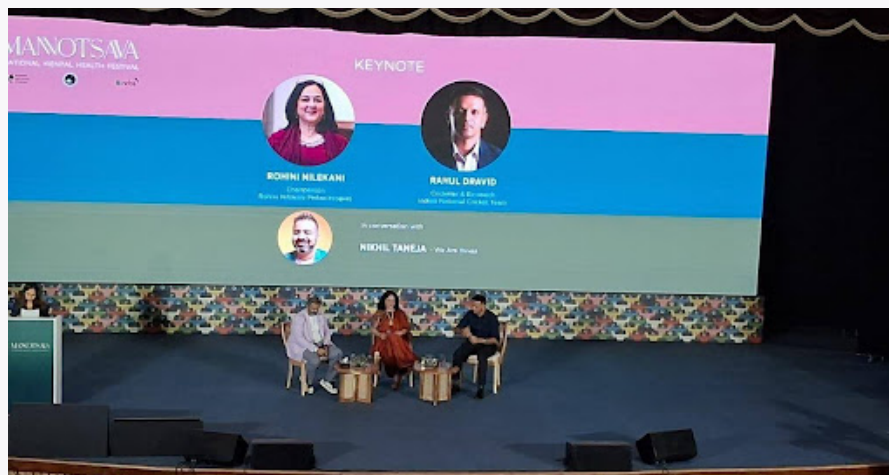
By Sharon Stanly, Research and Documentation Officer

On October 26th and 27th, 2024, Burans team members attended Mannotsava, an exceptional mental health festival hosted by NIMHANS, NCBS, and Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies (RNP).

This event was a collaborative initiative that brought together healthcare professionals, researchers, artists, community advocates, and people with lived experiences (PWLE) to explore the diverse dimensions of mental health and its societal impact.

The festival created a dynamic atmosphere with over 105 speakers and activities that included hands-on workshops, panel discussions, interactive sessions, and thematic stalls. It tackled a variety of topics such as technology, philanthropy, gender, childhood, and innovations in mental health, embodying the true essence of a 'festival.'

A Platform for Dialogue and Inspiration



One of the event's highlights was the keynote addresses by Mrs. Rohini Nilekani and cricketing legend Mr. Rahul Dravid. Mrs. Nilekani shared her fulfillment in leveraging her resources to uplift individuals in distress, while Mr. Dravid reflected on the importance of fostering team mental well-being through listening, encouragement, and acceptance of vulnerabilities. These speeches set the tone for the festival, emphasizing the shared responsibility of nurturing mental health.

Sessions of Insight and Impact



The festival offered a variety of sessions across three auditoriums, with stalls and workshops enhancing the learning experience. On day one, a session titled "Suicide: Role of Lived Experience in Changing the Narrative" featured Dr. Nandini Murali, who shared her personal loss to suicide, and Dr. Anish V Cherian, who highlighted the lack of post-suicide attempt care in hospitals. Both emphasized the need for community mental health professionals and bereavement support.

Day two included a session on "Campus Cares: Mental Health and Higher Education," focusing on suicide prevention and mental health education on campuses. Another session, "Digital Mental Health: Hit or Miss?" discussed mental health apps, with a focus on the SHARP app, which monitors relapse risks in individuals with serious mental illnesses. The session highlighted the need for accessible and user-centered app designs to enhance mental health care.

Mannotsava thoughtfully included on-site support teams for attendees who might feel triggered during sessions. This gesture extended beyond creating a safe space, fostering an environment where science and society intersected to promote mental well-being.

This festival exemplified the power of collaboration and dialogue in addressing mental health challenges, encouraging us to keep striving for an equitable and inclusive approach to mental well-being.

Hamari Anubhav Hamare Aawaaz

Burans HCH, in partnership with IMHA, is thrilled to announce an upcoming 4-day training program in Dehradun from 16th December to 19th December 2024. This training aims to foster meaningful collaboration with individuals who have lived experiences of mental health conditions, offering an inclusive platform for shared learning and dialogue. Mental health practitioners from across the country will join this venture to exchange knowledge, experiences, and strategies for creating impactful and empathetic mental health services. We are excited about this enriching opportunity to build stronger partnerships and enhance community-based mental health practices. Stay tuned for updates and highlights from this unique event!