



# Spring Issue: Burans in Bloom

Understanding the Path Forward: Insights from Nae Disha

## Thinking Aloud Allowed

We're excited to share this quarter's issue which has a focus on Nae Disha, which means 'New pathways' our youth resilience and mental health programme that we run with groups of 12-15 young people. We are glad to share the impacts it has had for young people, and also the recently published research study using a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) method. The use of an RCT format is something we were keen to learn about but we actually felt like it limited the way we usually run this intervention. Maybe we'll write about the limitations of RCTs one day. The good thing is that we continue to see the great outcomes for young people and we continue to roll it out!

We are delighted also that we have had a further three years of funding approved by the Mariwala Health Initiative for our Yamuna valley community mental health programme, this time including more on climate and community resilience. We were also excited to start a new partnership with Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies who are providing one year of funding to our prison mental health programme. So much to be thankful for – and thank you to all of you who read our newsletters, for your interest and support in different ways. Please make contact if you are keen to engage more! Thanks, Kaaren



## A Day in the Life of...

By Puangrai Liu

We talked to Shmita, (name changed for privacy) who is a vibrant 13-year-old girl who participated in the Nae Disha Program. Like most of us, she enjoys sneaking in a few extra minutes under the covers on a chilly morning but then often starts her day with meditation. After that, she gets ready for the day—brushing her hair and lending a hand to her mother with breakfast preparations.

While Shmita loves school, today is a holiday, so instead of the usual school, she helps her mother around the house and in the fields. For Shmita, spending time with family and friends is a priority—she's not one to enjoy being alone, and prefers little company.

She dreams of a village where women are strong and empowered, where they have the confidence and opportunities. As for the men in her village, she wishes they had ways out of their struggles with alcohol and gambling addictions. When asked what she is doing to bring such changes, she tells us that she has started making an effort from home, by explaining the harms of these habits to her parents. Moving forward, she plans to try and reduce this issue in her village as well. Perhaps, we can all provide a hand of support for Shmita who wants to see her village as one where people become great friends to one another, truly listening to each other's stories and supporting each other along the way.



## A Beam of Hope for the Young Girls

By Pooja Baluni

In the last few months, we have witnessed a lot of changes for better mental health and resilience among girls participating. We began our Nae Disha programme in the Bindal pul (bridge) area of Dehradun the previous year, 2024. There were 15 girls at the beginning who participated in discussions of boosting self-confidence, setting goals, and navigating indecent behaviours around us.



During the 9th session our staff discovered that a few of the girls were forced to sell illegal substances and were addicted to it themselves because they were financially suffering which led to mental stress and health issues of the young girls. Our community health worker organised a special awareness session about drugs and its abuse, inviting the families and communities to the program. It was exciting to see how the session activities inspired five of the families who pledged to support their children to stay out of any businesses with drugs.

Some parents also committed to sending their children to pursue their education and care about their mental health. The impact of this session showed how communities and families can come together and bring about significant changes. This session also provided hope that with awareness and support, serious issues like drug abuse can be overcome.



## Journey of Transformation Through Nae Disha



By Jeet Bahadur

Nae Disha provides a space different from the usual classroom setting, where participants express themselves openly. This is a story of Sita a studious girl but had never considered finding aspirations and plans for her future. Through Nae Disha she realised how important it was to set a vision and goal after which she communicated it with her parents as well as with peers and teachers. "One of the biggest changes in me was my confidence", she told the staff in Yamuna Valley.

Although Sita used to fear speaking in public, she stood and delivered an Independence Day speech in front of 100 people. It was not only about confidence but more, learning ways to manage stress and anxiety and finally learning to enjoy the process.

She proudly stated that she talks about mental health and awareness with her friends and classmates, "Nae Disha empowered me with confidence, vision, and a voice to create change".



## Facilitators' Reflections on Nae Disha

By Sharon Stanly

Nae Disha has been a transformative journey not only for the children but also for its facilitators. A key factor in its success has been creating a safe, open space where children feel comfortable to express themselves. Ensuring timely sessions and reinforcing ground rules helped maintain engagement and discipline. Many facilitators adapted by selecting convenient schedules for children, making participation easier. Muslim girls particularly enjoyed Nae Disha, as it provided a rare opportunity to step out of their homes, socialize, and learn.

Despite its success, challenges remained—finding suitable locations, dealing with interruptions from family members, and addressing issues like substance use and inappropriate language. However, Nae Disha's interactive approach—games, storytelling, discussions, and role-plays—helped sustain children's enthusiasm. Many participants set personal goals, rejoined school or madrasas, and made conscious decisions to avoid bullying and substance abuse.

For facilitators, Nae Disha was equally impactful. They developed confidence, learned better decision-making, and improved communication within their families. One facilitator shared how teaching these lessons at home strengthened her bond with her children, suggesting that Nae Disha's impact extends beyond the classroom, fostering growth within families and communities.

## Randomised controlled trial (RCT) of Burans' Nae Disha (New Pathways) youth resilience and mental health programme published last month.

By Kaaren Mathias

Young people in India face significant mental health challenges which motivated Burans to develop the 18 week Nae Disha group intervention. Our recent RCT study examines our youth resilience and mental health programme called "Nae Disha 3".



Conducted in urban Dehradun, the study involved 476 participants aged 11–25 from low-income neighbourhoods. Researchers divided them into two groups, with one group participating in the Nae Disha 3 program and the other waiting for their turn to participate (also called a control group).

The results were promising, especially showing the impact of the program on strengthening resilience among young men and women. Girls in the program showed a resilience score increase of 4.12, while boys saw an even higher boost of 5.82. Young women also showed improvements in mental health and self-confidence measures but we didn't see improvements we had hoped for in gender equality attitudes.



Generally young women engaged more actively with the programme and we are still working out how to make the programme accessible for young men.

The study highlights the value of community-based group interventions in boosting youth resilience. Lots of young people who have participated in this programme describe how it benefited them for many years afterwards. The program was both feasible and acceptable, particularly for young women. This study was a lot of work: finding participants and collecting data and running the programme relied on amazing Burans volunteers and staff. Huge appreciation to them all. Thanks especially to Vardhu who led the research with support from Dr Miguel (Umea Universitet), Dr Greg (University of Melbourne) and Dr Smita (St Johns Medical college). Thanks especially to Pooja Bhatt and Samson who led on the data collection. Big team effort! Our first RCT (and possibly last but that's another story!).

If you are interested in more details, see this [link](#) and here is the reference to the formally published study: Srinivasan, V., San Sebastián, M., Rana, S., Bhatt, P., Armstrong, G., Deshpande, S., & Mathias, K. (2025). Effectiveness of a resilience, gender equity and mental health group intervention for young people living in informal urban communities in North India: a cluster randomized controlled trial. *Global Health Action*, 18(1).

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