

Thinking Aloud Allowed!

We are happy to share our most recent Burans' updates now we are in the monsoon season. These annual rains are so critical for cooling the land and providing us all with food. In our Yamuna valley work we have been giving focus to codesign of our programmes with community members—this makes them more relevant, acceptable and appreciated. Jeet and Krishna outline some of the ways we are doing this and some of the priorities identified by communities.

We are also very thankful for input from interns from diverse educational institutions who give us new ideas and often support training for lay counsellors and frontline workers. We share the reflections of one of our recent intern from St. Joseph's University, Bangalore. We are looking forward to more active collaboration with the Uttarakhand District Mental Health Programme in coming months—more on this next time! Thanks for your interest and support!

Kaaren
Senior Advisor, Burans

Learning to Co-design: Workshop for Burans Team

BY PUANGRAI LIU RONGMEI



The staff at Burans had an intensive workshop on co-design approach and its application, led by Prerana (trainer at Burans). The training led the groundwork, defining the concept and its flexible nature. We explored our own journey in mental health and the concept of 'participation.' The training also highlighted the distinction between 'experienced' and 'lived experience'. We, as a team, reflected on how to integrate co-design into daily work, including planning community awareness activities, addressing workplace challenges, and understanding the community needs. Reinforcing the importance of empathy and creating 'safe spaces' to defy vulnerability and factors like stigma and social isolation associated with mental health.

A segment of the training focused on intersectional identities, how understanding it can promote equality, identify program shortcomings, uncover root causes and inform more effective strategies.

In a particularly insightful and fun activity, we even role-played co-design within the context of a marriage, demonstrating how these principles apply to many aspects of life and relationships. The workshop acknowledged the difficulties in achieving equal partnership and power, proposing active participation in decision-making as a key solution. We strongly commit to recognize co-design and integrate the approach to our existing programs fostering more equitable and effective mental health initiatives.

Co-Design and Co-Production: Putting "Nothing About Us Without Us" into Practice

BY JEET BAHADUR



At the heart of our approach is the powerful principle: "Nothing About Us Without Us." We believe that communities must be at the center of decisions that affect them. To bring this vision to life, we formed a group of individuals with lived experience, called Experts by Experience (EBE). This group plays an advisory role, guiding our work to ensure it is grounded in real needs and voices from the community.

To strengthen this inclusive approach, our team has undergone training in co-design and co-production. Co-design is not just about consultation; it's about working with communities, not for them. Through this method, we are engaging directly with each of our boundary partners—the key organizations and groups we work with—to co-develop our exit strategy over the next three years.

We have created a guideline to help facilitate the co-design process with each boundary partner. These sessions are designed to create space for shared thinking, where all stakeholders can bring in their ideas, needs, and concerns. The goal is to ensure that the exit plan is not only inclusive but also sustainable—reflecting the aspirations and ownership of all involved.

After each co-design and co-production session, we develop a detailed implementation plan. This includes activities, training, and ongoing support based on what was co-created. To ensure accountability and effective delivery, a specific team member is assigned to lead the implementation of each activity with the designated group. This structure enables focused support and close monitoring, increasing the chances of long-term success.

Through this process, we are not only planning our exit but building leadership, strengthening ownership, and ensuring that the communities we work with continue to thrive—on their own terms.

Co-Design Activity in the Community

BY KRISHNA RAWAT

We are doing the co-design activity with different boundary partners in our community through which we know what our community needs and how we can fulfil those needs with our skills so that in the coming time the community can take further initiatives for its needs and problems.

On May 20th to 23rd 2025, when we discussed the co-design approach with different boundary partners, it was good that various community members wanted the problems to be solved, such as alcohol addiction which is on the rise, domestic violence, providing facilities in the village for the development of village and to promote mental health as well as to form committees to work on these areas.

What we have found is that with community input into the programme content and processes, we are able to connect better with content that is more relevant and acceptable. E.g. We use Garhwali language and idioms like *paagal* (crazy) or *tension* (depression) to express ideas around mental health in conversations which is particularly appreciated by older people who are less likely to be fluent in Hindi. During the discussion, we witness inspiring examples of community-led action. In Barkot, a group of women bravely raided homes selling homemade liquor, reported them to the police and pushed for a ban. Whereas, in another village, women with few men marched to protest an alcohol shop near a school. We aim to build such resilience and self-reliance on this spirit.

Overcoming Challenges:

The biggest challenge to address in the community is domestic violence, while community members are aware of it, they often deny its presence in their homes. People of the community are not able to give time because of their farming and it may take more time to fully engage them in the co-design process. They don't understand the meaning of co-design, a term which itself is new to many. Due to lack of time, discussions with them are not being held openly and well. Some who do participate lack confidence in expressing their ideas openly, partly due to limited literacy, hindering them from fully contributing their perspectives.

We are committed to continue implementing this approach by working hand-in-hand with them, we believe we can create sustainable solutions that truly benefit the community.



Himalayan Horizons – My Transformative internship in Yamuna Valley

BY SAKSHI KUMAR, MSW STUDENT AT ST. JOSEPH'S UNIVERSITY, BANGALORE



Unveiling Community Well-Being

My week in Uttarkashi (Naugoan and Purola), an immersive journey with Burans was far beyond what I'd learned about community health. Witnessing the resilience of ASHA workers and GVS groups, I discovered their important role in navigating challenges from limited healthcare access to dealing with substance abuse. Initially it was difficult to understand the local ways, but I quickly realised the power of active listening and Burans' inclusive approach.

Navigating Community Currents: Insights from My Burans Internship

My internship with Burans provided profound learning. I got to know the pressing community concerns, from healthcare access to the far-reaching impacts of substance abuse and gender inequality. I understood the vital role of ASHA workers and GVS groups in leading health initiatives and the urgent need for mental health support.

Understanding the complexity of village dynamics and the roles of local groups was a bit of a challenge, as my knowledge was primarily theoretical. However, door to door and active listening quickly helped me overcome that. Sometimes, encountering disinterest was demotivating, making me question the meetings' purpose. But by observing how Burans' staff handled, I saw the power of consistent and empathetic dialogue.

Inspiring Observations:

Firstly, I was inspired by the hard work and independence of the women, caring for their children, managing their homes, and working on the farms was surprising and really showcased their incredible potential.

Secondly, referring to the GVS group in Yamuna Valley, the community leaders were active, and the idea of choosing leaders from within the community itself was thoughtful—they understood their community and its problems best, helping them find better solutions.

Overall, time with Burans left a deep appreciation for the community and their social and health issues and I believe the sustainability will be renewed through resilience of the community they are working with.