

Tarasha, TISS

WOMEN WHO FLY TOGETHER, HEAL TOGETHER!

Report of a recreational outing with women living with mental illness

Tarasha is a community-based field action project of the Centre for Health and Mental Health, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, initiated in 2011. *Tarasha* has been working in collaboration with the Directorate of Health Services, Maharashtra, to facilitate recovery and reintegration of women living with mental illness. The primary work has been in partnership with the Regional Mental Hospital (RMH), Thane. *Tarasha* works with women living with mental illness, linking the three cornerstones, shelter, livelihoods and psychosocial issues to achieve reintegration in society. *Tarasha* focuses on economic independence and empowerment in order to facilitate the process of breaking the cycle of unemployment, poverty, marginalization and increasing disability.

Following discharge from the hospital women complete the *Tarasha* recovery and reintegration programme over a period of 8 months to a year. Once they begin working, they voluntarily exit the project and live on their own. Despite exiting *Tarasha*, women keep in touch and stay connected with the team.

This year, *Tarasha* decided to bring recovered women (discharged from the mental hospital) together for a recreational outing to celebrate Women's Day. A two-day outing was organised to Kelva beach, Palghar. A total of 17 women, 4 *Tarasha* team members and 3 field work students were part of the outing. One woman was accompanied by her two-year-old son.

The key objective of the outing was to have fun and enjoy the freedom women had found as part of their recovery from mental illness. *Tarasha* also used this outing as a reflective space for women to look back on their journey from the time of discharge from the hospital till now. Most women are working and earning a living. Some have settled into matrimony. A few women could not join the outing; they were missed by the group.



Women and Team at Palghar station

The team met the women at Dadar station on the 29th of February at 8.30 a.m. While half of the team had already reached Palghar and made arrangements for the food and the stay, the other half ensured safe commuting of the women from Dadar to Palghar. After a quick breakfast at the station, the team, along with women left for Palghar and reached there by 12.30 p.m. Shuttles were arranged to drop women from the station to the rented venue. The place was close to the beach. After freshening up, everyone had lunch followed by a round of introductions and some quick ice-breaking activities. The women got familiar with each other and after briefing everyone with the plan for the evening, women got ready and left for Kelva beach.



Introductions and Ice-breaking activities



Women Enjoying at Kelva Beach

For most women, this was their first time on the beach in their whole life. The experience was novel for them and with utmost excitement for the beach, they entered the water as soon as we

reached there. Women enjoyed the most in the water, with lots of pictures getting clicked, playing at the shore and making the most of their day. The evening at the beach was followed by quick refreshments at the shore and returning back to the house. On their return, women freshened up and chatted with each other, shared their experiences and reported how good they felt because of this outing. One of the women said that she doesn't feel that this day should ever end and all of us should continue chatting overnight without sleeping.

The team of women packed up after breakfast and left the venue by 11 am to reach their residence on time. The outing was supported by The Hans Foundation, New Delhi as part of its overall support to *Tarasha's* project titled *Mainstreaming Mental Health through Creating Inclusive Spaces*.

On the way back



On the way back

The environment that the women had created amongst themselves was something worth cherishing. Not all of them knew each other, but they took no time to befriend and stay together throughout the journey. All of them had some situated goals in their head; not everyone wanted to earn and work necessarily, but those who were working were happy with the work they did. There were a few issues regarding the salary that they get, and *Tarasha* promised to look into it. The one thing that was sure, was that everyone was happy with the state they are in and the new life following long-term institutionalisation.

A 32 year-old woman said on her new-found freedom, *“Aise laga ki puri zindagi hum char diwaron ke ander rahenge, kabhi socha nahi tha khuli hava me saans le payenge”*. (*I had a feeling that I will forever be locked up inside the four walls of the hospital, I had never imagined that I will ever be able to breathe freely again*).

A couple of other women expressed their thoughts as under:

“Zindagi me peheli baar maine aaj samunder dekha hai, abhi tak sirf samunder ke bare me suna tha” (*For the first time in my life, I have seen the sea, till now, I had only heard about the sea*)

“Aise lag raha hai bahut salon ke bad khud ke hisab se apni zindagi ka maja le pa rahi hu.” (*I fell that I am able to enjoy life and living on my own terms after many long years!*)



Hope to live ones' dreams and aspirations

Moreover, there was a promise to the self that they need to progress more in the upcoming years. For example, one of the clients currently goes to a day care centre but she is waiting for some better opportunities of work to come to her. She said she does not enjoy much of the household chores, but if she gets a good job and if that demands her to cook her own food or leave home early, she is willing to put that effort. This made us realize that the new life that each one of them has found as part of the recovery and reintegration process is highly appreciated by them and all are very much willing to make the most of it. Moreover, there is also a sense of solidarity amongst all. With the world that we live in, it is necessary to have some people who understand your past, however dark it may be, but stay with you in the present, and these women are the same for each other. The strength in their wings has helped them overcome their past and the same strength will help them progress in life, despite the challenges that come their way. This women's day is a true celebration for the women of *Tarasha* who have helped to build themselves up with support from the *Tarasha* team, particularly when their own family had abandoned them due to their mental illness.



Women interacting with each other