



A just and equitable society where mental health needs and well being of all women, men and children are addressed.

Volume 4, Issue 1 / August, 2014 Newsletter

Note from the Chhahari Team

This issue of the Chhahari newsletter focuses on the expansion of Chhahari's activities over the past six months. Building on our learning and the challenges from the Street Project, Chhahari has been gradually developing new approaches and activities to provide better support to our clients. These include primarily the Welcome Centre (see Welcome Centre section) and various other activities that have evolved as a consequence of our interactions with clients, carers and volunteers. Our long term involvement with Reverend Jim Robertson, recently retired, is also a focus in this issue as his contribution has been invaluable. Our volunteers, who spend months working tirelessly and are instrumental in bringing new ideas, are also highlighted along with advocacy for the rights of the mentally distressed, which has always been our key goal. In support of this, Chhahari is a part of the Mental Health Network, which is active in raising issues on mental health in Nepal.

Chhahari Activities

Involvement of new Constitution Assembly members in promoting Mental Health issues in national policy programmes

In December 2013, Chhahari organised an interaction programme with Mr Madan Bahadur Amatya, Mr Udaya Shamsheer Rana and Mr Chandra Maharjan, the three newly elected Constitution Assembly (CA) members from Lalitpur district. We briefed them on mental health issues and Chhahari's activities and our first documentary on the activities of the 'Street Project' was launched. This can be accessed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqq5J6aOp_Q.

During the discussions, Chhahari stressed the need for the Government to focus more on mental health issues, which have long been ignored in terms of policy decisions and budget allocations. The need for expansion of services through Government channels and partnerships with local communities and organisations, such as Chhahari were also discussed.

Chhahari was pleased to note that the CA members took a keen interest in the issues raised. They committed to promoting greater awareness of mental health needs and to advocating on behalf of the mentally ill. This was very positive for Chhahari and we hope to build upon this relationship with more concrete actions in the future.

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Hem Sharma's invaluable support to Chhahari

Hem Sharma, based in Kansas (United States) is a retired Clinical Psychotherapist. He has been a long term volunteer, supporter and invaluable friend to Chhahari since 2011. Each year he volunteers his time and expertise for 2-3 months, which is much appreciated and valued by our clients, their carers and Chhahari staff.



His guidance and support from January to March of this year was instrumental in expanding the services and activities of the Welcome Centre, particularly in terms of providing individual and group counselling to our clients and organising outdoor activities, such as a day trip to the zoo and team building hike to Lakhure Bhanjyang. These activities have been helpful in building clients' strengths, supporting their areas of interest and encouraging them to engage with society. We hope to continue these promising initiatives in future.

Equally important is the renewed energy and wisdom that Hem has imparted to the whole Chhahari family. This has been a wonderful relationship and Chhahari is humbled and thrilled to have him as a life member.

Fundraising events in Nepal and abroad

Chhahari is mainly funded through private donations. We are dependent on and greatly appreciative of the generosity of donors in Nepal and abroad. Over the past six months our major fundraising events have included:



- **The Kathmandu Marathon:** Held on the 21st of September 2013, this continues to be an important fundraising event in Chhahari's calendar. Nine individuals represented us, including Chhahari staff, board members and friends, all running to increase public awareness about mental illness. They succeeded in raising over NRs.219,750. We thank the Chairperson Mr. Vijay Kumar Shrestha of Sukamohar Debit and Credit Co- operative Ltd. for sponsoring our T-shirts for the Marathon.

This year the marathon is on 20th September. We wish to thank Mr Raju Dhakal, the owner of Naikap Village Resort for sponsoring our T-shirts this time. We are aiming to raise even more than we did in 2013.

- **Fundraising dinner in Scotland:** With the support of Everest Inn owner Mr Pashupati Bhandari, Chhahari friend and well-wisher, a fundraising dinner was held on 21st May 2014 at the Everest Inn in Perth, Scotland, raising NPRs.80,000. This

successful event has introduced Chhahari to the community in Perth, expanding our network of supporters in Scotland, for which we are beyond thankful.

- **Kathmandu Chorale:** On 10th May 2014, the biannual Kathmandu Chorale concert was held at the British School, Lalitpur. As usual, donations were collected for nominated charities, which at this concert were Chhahari and the Jana Jyoti Deaf School. Chhahari received NRs.33,700 from the evening. It was overwhelming to see so many people gathered together for the love of music. A warm thank you to the Kathmandu Chorale team, who worked hard to create such a beautiful night for a worthy cause. At the same time we would like to also thank Jonathan Cannon and Iain Gordon, members of the Kathmandu Chorale and British School teachers; for organizing a concert of music for Flute and Piano at the British School which raised NPRs 9050.

- **Global Giving:** Chhahari is now on the Global Giving website. We hope this will enable us to reach a wider network of support and to receive donations from all over the world, and thus to further expand our activi-



ties. This can be accessed at www.globalgiving.co.uk.

- **Collection of clothing:** Chhahari Team would like to thank the entire JCI (Junior Chamber International) Patan unit for donating clothes for our clients and their family members.

- **Carers Group workshop session:** We would like to say a warm thank you to Jenny Saunders, Bimala Shrestha and the entire Elijah Counselling and Training Centre (ECTC) team for a great carer's workshop session. These sessions are of huge psychosocial importance and we wish to continue them in the future.

The Street Project: Its initiation and growth

Since 2011, Chhahari has worked with mentally distressed men and women on the streets through our Street Project. The origins of this undertaking lie chiefly in the realisation that we know very little about the conditions, needs and perceptions of people living on the streets. The goal was therefore to gain a better understanding of these issues and to subsequently develop programmes and activities that target their needs.

As we enter the fourth year of the Street Project and reflect on our accomplishments and challenges, Chhahari would like to acknowledge the contribution of Reverend Jim Robertson and the Barn Church, Scotland. As a student, Jim first met Nepalese students at Edinburgh University. This eventually led to his visiting Nepal in early 2000, when he conducted research on the mentally ill in



various jails in Kathmandu and Kavre because there was nowhere else for them to go. Later, in 2008, he studied the situation of the mentally distressed living on the streets. He visited the only mental hospital in the country in Lagankhel, where he met Dr Surendra Serchan, a psychiatrist and the Hospital Director. Visits to the Centre for Mental Health & Counselling-Nepal (CMC) in Kathmandu and Asha Deep Rehabilitation Centre in Sundarijal also enabled him to gain deeper insights into the way things are handled at mental hospitals and the treatment of mentally distressed patients. In 2011, at a meeting with Nepal Ishai Mandal (NIM) Church in Lalitpur and Chhahari, early ideas for a one-year pilot of the Street Project were discussed, including planning and implementation processes.

Once established, the Street Project adopted an innovative action learning approach, based on reflective learning. Emphasis has been placed on building trusting relationships, enabling staff to connect with people living and coping with difficult circumstances and to respond to the unique condition of each person. This investment of time and effort was considered essential in order to reach men and women who have experienced profound and multiple exclusions.

“On one occasion when a glass of tea was ordered for him and the teashop owner realised who was about to drink it, the glass was snatched back and the tea poured into a plastic cup, as if Bhai was untouchable. A further vulnerability arises when at times he is plied with alcohol and then sexually abused.” – Bhai’s story

“Suddenly he disappeared from his usual haunts. Investigation among local residents indicated that he had been taken away by “some people”, and it turned out he had been “rescued” by a Christian group. Follow up with this previously unknown group, who offered no mental health services, revealed he had been subject to two months of confinement and prayer. Now Ravi has returned to the street, at his own determination, where he remains.” – Ravi’s story

“Mangala, 40 years old, claims to have one ropani of land in her husband’s name, but without citizenship she is unable to make the formal claim. She reports that her daughter in law ‘kicked her out’. Her personal hygiene is poor and her dress is dirty. She is regularly sexually abused by youths, who promise food or money in return for sex” – Mangala’s story

The Welcome Centre

The Welcome Centre at Chhahari opened in October 2013, as a direct reflection of the needs of the men and women with whom Chhahari was in contact through the Street Project. Open on Wednesdays, it is a place where the mentally distressed and their carers can engage in indoor activities and take part in counselling sessions and creative classes.



The centre is equipped with colouring pens, pencils, paints, paintbrushes, chart paper and other materials for the clients to draw/paint pictures, make greeting cards, photo frames, etc. The drawings are proudly displayed all over the walls at the Centre, individually signed by the clients. Clients are also encouraged to write poems and songs, and to sing and play musical instruments. Food

is provided and we have discussions about mental health issues with clients and their family members, chiefly centred around the clients’ progress, problems faced and assessment of the creative sessions.

Over 15 clients come regularly to the centre and we have found the sessions provide a positive platform for both clients and staff. Our observations show that clients’ social skills have improved gradually as they are encouraged to engage with people, not only within the centre, but also through guided outdoor activities and excursions. One indicator of the success of the centre is that clients look forward to the sessions, many arriving much earlier than the opening hours.

Equally significant has been the tremendous response from our staff and volunteers. After observing and taking part in these sessions, many of our volunteers (in Nepal and abroad) have gone on to donate their time and funds for other related activities, such as covering monthly medication bills for clients in financial need, or sponsoring the education and living allowances of carers. These generous donations have enabled Chhahari to expand the support provided to clients and have been invaluable to the clients reached.

Volunteers and their experience working at Chhahari

Pia Noel

I was a volunteer at Chhahari for approximately 3 months. As a recent college graduate in psychology and social anthropology, I decided to do some volunteer work in Nepal in order to learn a bit more about the country and its people from the inside. From the first meeting I had at Chhahari I knew I had found the right place for me and I was hooked.



People at Chhahari have created a safe space not only for their clients but also everyone surrounding them: staff, volunteers, parents, professionals, and friends of friends, landlord and everyone! I found a perfect balance between a very strong work ethic and a sense of community. Hard work, consistency, perseverance, compassion, understanding, openness, generosity and... fun are all there. Despite their limited financial and human resources I was impressed by how much they make do with whatever is available. If someone is in need and wants help, they will find an efficient way of providing this. It was also refreshing to see an organisation working with each person as a unique individual, using a person-centred approach to provide care and identify the strengths and potential of every client, helping them to develop those strengths in order to help themselves, their families and communities.

During my time at Chhahari I was mainly involved in helping with a research project investigating the socio-economic factors impacting on the mental wellbeing of the Pode community in Kumbeshwar and Imukhel in Lalitpur. The Pode communities are those belonging to the Newar lowest occupational caste, the so-called ‘untouchables’. Traditionally they were street sweepers and because of their caste they were denied education and employment opportunities. The amount of professional, and perhaps more importantly, personal skills that I was able to learn and cultivate in doing this research project are invaluable. It was very special to be able to talk to, interview, and spend time with the clients and their families, as well as with professionals in mental health issues in Nepal.

I feel extremely grateful that I found Chhahari and I was welcomed as a volunteer with them. Even though I am now physically apart, my admiration for and commitment to the people and their work will undoubtedly continue for a long time.”

Rakchhya Maharjan

My volunteering experience at Chhahari has been an eye opener. My background is not in mental health but as a co-researcher in a project focusing on a particular area in Lalitpur, I was able to strengthen my interpersonal communication skills via informal and focus group interviews. I have also made friends for life with the staff at Chhahari, the clients and their family members. The friendly and open setting at Chhahari allowed for easy flow of communication.



Aki Kipinä

I am a student of psychiatric nursing from Finland. I spent two months in Kathmandu in autumn 2013 for work experience and was introduced to Chhahari. I spent two weeks with them and was able to observe and take part in their work on the streets and in creative sessions at their centre. I saw the value of their work for those suffering from mental illness, who have no support from the government or their families. Sometimes the only help that could be given was a bag of clothes or some food to survive to the next day. In other cases a mentally distressed person was able to be reunited with his/her family, usually after a long and difficult search by Chhahari. Weekly creative sessions enabled mentally distressed people and their family members to do something fun together and to see that they were not alone in their situation.

At present Chhahari is only able to work in Lalitpur, but they wish to spread their work all over Kathmandu, which would enable them to help many more people and make their work more visible, to increase public consciousness of mental health. I see Chhahari's work as being very valuable and I will never forget those many happy faces I saw in the streets and in the creative sessions.



St. Xavier's students – BSW(Bachelors in Social Work)

Some of the students from St. Xavier's College, Department of Social work were assigned as trainees at Chhahari for one academic year, in order to learn and gain experience while working in a mental health setting. They were placed as an implementation team for the Right to Information (RTI) - Mental Health Advocacy Project, under Chhahari's supervision and guidance. This project explored the potential of the RTI Act, 2007 in mental health advocacy with practical applications to raise questions in the Ministry of Health and Population and the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare. The RTI questions mainly focused upon the allocation of funds for mental health in Government and NGOs. It also highlighted the procedures and criteria applied for NGOs to access funds for MH related activities.

One of the trainees said "I learned how to accept the difficulties, to face challenges and to overcome obstacles. I learned to overcome fear while working in a mental health setting and see beyond the stereotypes of mental health settings." – Suzana Kansakar (Xavier's student and trainee at Chhahari)



Bimal's Story: Living and coping with Paranoid Schizophrenia

Bimal is 32 years old, attractive and kind-hearted. But he suffers from a most wearying and highly stigmatised mental illness. He was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia in December 2013, with the support of Chhahari. One of the cruellest aspects of the disease is that sufferers so easily alienate those closest to them. It effectively robs them of the love and support that are vital in dealing with the devastation wrought by mental illness. In Bimal's case, he blamed his parents for not caring.

The disease has completely changed his life for the worse. His gentle soul has been swallowed up by the twin demons of drugs and schizophrenia. His parents did not know how to deal with their son's condition. For brief periods, he lived on the streets, and there were many nights when his family had no idea where he was. When they did locate him, they initially tried to get him cured through spiritual healers, witch doctors and rehabilitation centres. They were worried and did not know what to do. None of them knew the cause or how to deal with the problem, until they sought help from Chhahari.



Chhahari first sought to diagnose his condition and then focused on the importance of family and community support. More heart-breaking than the actual illness is the way people react to it. He needs a community that does not turn away from those who suffer with mental illness. At Chhahari, he has slowly begun to attend our support meetings and is a regular participant in our Welcome Centre. Today, Chhahari is witnessing a great improvement in Bimal's behaviour. With the support of his mother, and the services provided by Chhahari we see encouraging signs that he is engaging more with people and we hope that his illness is successfully managed and treated, with continuing strong support and the right medication and treatment.

Dinesh Raj Sharma – Member of Chhahari

Dinesh Raj Sharma, the founding president of NAHUDA (Nepal Natural and Human Resource Development Association) and the Well Women Clinic, has contributed towards women's health and social services for over 50 years. He is also an associated member of the Youth Club Society and Rich Fellowship. As a part of his social services, he has visited many villages in Nepal to spread awareness about cervical cancer, breast cancer screening and prevention and sexually transmitted diseases.

The Chhahari team would like to congratulate him on receiving the Sitaram Prasthan Award for 2014. We have deep admiration for the concern and patience he has shown towards women's health and society. He has been a great example for the rest of us, as someone who has dedicated himself to the wellbeing of women.



Food for thought: Some Facts about Mental Health in Nepal

- Married people have a higher rate of psychiatric illness (47.0%) than those who are unmarried (24.3%)
- *Nepal Journal of Medical Sciences, Jan-Jun 2013*
- It was found that psychiatric illness is more common among persons who are misusing alcohol (65.9%)
- *Nepal Journal of Medical Sciences, Jan-Jun 2013*
- The bed capacity of 1 bed per population of 500,000 implies the limitations of inpatient services that can be provided
- *PHP Vol 2 Issue 1 Jan 2011, Amit Dhungel*



If you would like to support Chhahari please contact us at:
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