



ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

APRIL 2010 TO MARCH 2011

*I will hold your hands if...
You take life as a challenge to be lived,
Not a burden to be suffered.
I will give you a smile and a hug if...
You love despite anything
I will be your friend if...
You make every weakness of yours,
A strength of your being...*

Aanchal Kapur

Thus, keeping alive the promise to be together and continue to hold hands, Olakh moved on the path of its vision of creating a gender-just, equal and humane society...

This phase brought in new additions to the group of trainees, student volunteers from new educational institutes and new collaborations/expansions at the local and international arena and so on. The period also saw the exchange of various ideologies (Support Forum), the re-visiting of Olakh's last 3 years (External Evaluation) throwing light on what needs to be done in the future. Over-all the phase truly became one of the turning points for Olakh to embark upon its vision, once again.

The regular activities in the Resource centre like reading centers (mobile library), the monthly reader's forum, the documentation of 'her' story, the activities Counseling centre like intervention and mediation along with Aneri (women survivors group) continued. Also, the programs of placement students, national and international trainings, networking, etc. continued. By the end of the phase, some activities were also phased out as new directions needed to be set after completion of 15 years of Olakh's journey in coming October 2011 of which, we are very happy and the extensive external evaluation in the month of February 2011.

Here, follows a brief of the program and activities for the period of April 2010 to March 2011':

Student Placements

Continuing with the program different social work and as interns/trainees, there phase (3 from Anand from M.S. University, University, 10 from KURVE Wustrow, Germany).



of taking students from other development institutes were **24 students** in this Institute of Social Work, 8 Vadodara, 2 from Palanpur Bhavnagar University and 1

They were involved with counseling centres, mobile libraries, data entry of stories from magazines, meetings and events, participation in international campaign to stop violence against women and girls, etc.

activities of the resource and supporting activities like case analysis, compiling photography during special

Purvi Limbachia, a student of distance learning course in social work shared, ***“I have learned how to work with the agency staff, supervisor and my field partner. I have tried to understand more about my own personality and working style and understand others at the same time. I can build a good relationship in the time that follows. The agency is quite significant agency in the community field work. The agency staff is so sensible to the unfair social issues. They can help me to increase the social awareness. This kind of training is very useful to the social work students”.*** (2nd March 2011)

From the past experiences that we have had with the students or trainees placed with Olakh, they lack the back ground and basic knowledge and understanding of the various social issues and related areas. All of them, at one point of time express that they really would like to gain better conceptual clarity of different life-based, social issue as the learning that is given in their universities and colleges is barely sufficient or in depth. Also, many of their professors are their seniors from the previous years, whose knowledge is almost the same as theirs. And this, in the longer runs affects the work in social and development organizations as then we are unable to find or recruit skilled and knowledgeable individuals. Commercialization is also one of the reasons that hinder actual growth of people. And after their placements with Olakh, they gain much clarity and so want to acquire deeper theoretical and practical skills.

Considering all these aspects, at Olakh we plan to initiate a course regular bases for students/individuals who are really passionate about developing self and want to bring about change in the society, as an equivalent to the courses offered in educational institutes.

Board Meetings

Meetings of the Olakh board were held on **28th August 2010 and 5th February 2011 at Olakh office in Vadodara.** The major areas of discussion were the external evaluation of Olakh by Ms. Uma Ramaswami, Ms. Rukmini (programmatic) and Mr. Amrish Kumar (financial) appointed EED, Germany, its preparation, the process and feedback by the evaluators that were discussed at a great length. The issue of a series of late release of installments for consecutive phases and under utilization of funds which have created a vicious circle impacting directly on all programs/activities and the mental/emotional state of the team, was given a deep thought. It was unanimously decided that this needs to be immediately addressed and broken to curb further losses. And so, no major appointments/recruitments would be done for highly skilled, experienced and knowledgeable individuals due to uncertainty of funds.

As Olakh would complete its 15 years journey, the time now is right and crucial, to completely concentrate on re-thinking, re-visiting and create a charter for the coming 10 years. This requires a minimum of 1 year period which would be devoted only for future planning and foreseeing without much of day to day activities. For this interim period, Olakh could ask EED for financial support with the same sanctioned budget.

Visitors & Guests

During this phase, many individuals from educational institutes, social and development organizations, professionals, etc. paid a visit to Olakh. A total of **162 visitors and guests** came. Also, an orientation on Olakh's programs and activities was given to 15 students from Faculty of Family and Human Studies, Vadodara along with a few international students was given on 7th September 2010 and one on 2nd December 2010.

“Thank you for your work for the uplifting of us – women”, shared a delighted Sandra from KURVE Wustrow, Germany

To share with, a group of international students (10) who came in December 2010 approached Olakh as the last resort. They had been promised by an exchange institute for a good placement

with different organizations in the city but they all were just left to themselves. A friend of Olakh met them and immediately brought them to Olakh. These students requested that as their entire stay in India had gone in vain, they wanted exposure even if for a week to the Indian society. They then participated in the International campaign to stop violence against women and girls and also took active interest in a small photo-recording of alternative work roles in the society with a trainee of Olakh.

As commonly shared by all of them, ***“We deeply thank Olakh for sharing its work and letting us be a part of it, even for a while. We were taken care of like children without parents in an unknown country”.***

Mailing List & Telephone Directory

A mailing list and a telephone directory of different social, development, academic institutes, organizations and individuals (local, state, national and international) has been made at Olakh for ready reference. These are used by Olakh both for internal purpose as well as referral for people/organizations seeking information.

HR Manual: Handbook on People Care Practices

This handbook was finalized, both in Gujarati and English languages and is now being used at Olakh.

Credibility Alliance

In this phase, the accreditation with Credibility Alliance, Ahmedabad was renewed. Olakh acquired a Certificate of Accreditation on Desirable Norms for a period of 5 years (June 2009 to June 2014).

Networking & Collaboration

1. Ms. Nimisha attended a **dialogue and discussion on literature** at Gujarat Sahitya Parishad Academy, Surat on **7th December 2010**.
2. **Support Forum:** This is an informal group of like-minded individuals who come together to share, discuss the issues that affect all commonly and support each other in an emotional manner. The first meeting of this group comprising of highly committed, professional and experienced individuals who, since the early 80s have dedicated their lives for the service of the most marginalized, vulnerable groups of our society, was held in 2006 with the motto that they would live together for 2 days. Their collective brings together nearly 15 organizations with 50 individuals, both young and old from the state of Gujarat at one place.



And this year, it was decided to hold the support forum at Olakh, Vadodara. Olakh was the host along with people based in Vadodara as active members in the organizing. It was held on **29th & 30th January 2011**. **42 individuals from all over Gujarat participated**. The 2 days program focused on introspection and rejuvenation of self, relieving stress and enjoying a retreat in the company of like-minded people.



This has indeed become an experience of a lifetime...

3. **Collaboration with Pradan, a national organization:** Pradan, a national organization focusing on livelihood of women in collaboration with UNIFEM to conduct gender trainings for its various groups. This in order to generate an understanding and awareness within the groups. For this, Jagori, New Delhi has been made the main consulting organization. In this phase, first a **planning meeting** of all trainers/consultants associated with Pradan was held in New Delhi from **20th to 22nd January 2011**. And secondly, a **visit to the various field areas of Pradan at Kesla (one of the blocks in MP)**, to meet the groups for whom the trainings are organized was undertaken from **12th to 16th February 2011**. The field visits focused on need assessment of these groups and Ms. Nimisha from Olakh is a part of the team responsible for this block.



Creating 'Her' stories

At the beginning of this phase, **6 meetings** with few eminent, senior and experienced women writers from Gujarat to brainstorm and discuss on the issue of taking the process of documenting 'her' stories further. The aim was also to form an editorial group amongst them. The women include Ms. Harvilas (Ahmedabad), Ms. Himanshi Shelat, Ms. Bakula Ghaswala and Ms. Asha Virendra (Valsad), and Ms. C.S. Laxmi (Mumbai). **These meetings were held on 4th, 5th, 14th and 29th April and 4th May 2010.**

Health Camp



After a rigorous need assessment carried out in the urban slum communities where Olakh works, it is known that many young girls and women suffer from different illnesses and diseases and the health care facilities and opportunities available to them, are very poor and they too are economically weak to avail other facilities. **Thus, a health camp was organized by Olakh on 27th October 2010 for these women.** The camp included eye check-up, general checkup with examination by physicians and third was focus was on prevalence of anemia, diabetes and thyroid by lab testing. **A total of 243 women came to the camp.**

The camp was not limited to only the diagnosis or screening level, but it was also decided to have a follow up with those who are unable to avail health services (which most do from the group selected) after their illnesses or diseases are detected.

The camp was organized with the objectives of creating awareness about health in general to the people, conducting initial screenings for further investigation and also empowers women by informing them about their health status as well as building links with health-care facilities and providers, in this process.



The organizing of the camp was a great team work carried out not just by Olakh team but the team of medical experts, local, state and international levels, volunteers and well-wishers. The camp was



organized at Olakh office premise itself where one could see a continuous round of different things happening at the same time. At one side, there were few people being oriented about good health and nutrition through a poster display, at one side there was a queue for entry followed by eye-check up, general health checking, blood test and then collecting basic tablets of iron, calcium, etc. and then leaving the premise with a home-based nutritious food pack.

The post camp activities include the bifurcation of all forms as per disease or illness detected especially diabetes, thyroid, anemia, etc. The reports were shared with the women individually and they were informed about the care they needed and those who required special and immediate assistant, were sent for further treatment or diagnosis. Few women and young girls were detected having alarmingly low hemoglobin levels and they were specifically asked to seek medical assistant.

This was an over-all great experience for all, the women who came, the team of Olakh, the volunteers and all the medical personnel who participated with complete responsibility, care and enthusiasm.

The most essential part of the campaign was that the entire medical support given by the doctors, lab technicians, assistants, was absolutely voluntarily. Such a commitment towards fellow beings is a rare sight to see in our today's materialistic world. Also, the camp was free (only Rs. 5 per person) of cost where if the same benefits were to be attained outside, it would cost highly to the poor and marginalized communities.

And, as a part of the follow up process, collaboration with different departments and clinics was done like Vaduwala Eye Hospital (the eye check-up was done by them only) who agreed that they would provide the immediate and follow-up services to those who were detected with eye problems. The department of Preventive Health, S.S.G Hospital along with the medical college agreed on doing necessary follow-up. Here, also a medical help desk of a city based trust, Deepak Charitable Trust agreed to offer all support. These services would also be free of cost.

International Fortnightly Campaign to Stop Violence against Women & Girls – 25th November to 10th December

This year the focus of the campaign was creating gender awareness in different groups of people through street theatre, films, games and poster exhibitions. The day began with visiting the decided area or place, gathering people, writing and reciting of slogans, conducting games and poster displays followed by film shows or street plays.



These activities were carried out in **5 schools, 3 hostels, 6 grassroots organizations**. On the human rights day a rally was taken in a mini-truck on the streets of the city where, the street plays were performed at different public places. The campaign included placement of volunteers from other organizations along with Olakh team members. **Around 1,000 people were reached through this campaign.**



out in **5 schools, 3 hostels, 6 grassroots level** human rights day a rally was taken in a mini-truck on the streets of the city where, the street plays were performed at different public places. The campaign included placement of volunteers from other organizations along with Olakh team members. **reached through this**

Shared a young boy during a session on gender in Kishanwadi slum, ***“I had absolutely no knowledge about my body! Didn’t know what all changes take place, as no one had ever shared or made me understand all this”.***

Bhavna from Arya Kanya School said, ***“Right from our (girls) birth, we are discriminated. Gender equality needs to be understood not only by women but also by men”.***



Gender awareness by switching the ‘gendered roles’...



International Women’s Day – 8th March

This women’s day, together with the authorities of the central prison of Vadodara, a celebration was organized in the prison with and for the women and men inmates. Here, **35 women actively participated in the short plays on their lives as prisoners, recited poems and danced in the presence of all.** They even received kits for few basic amenities from the Rotary Club of Vadodara. **There were around 2,500 people enjoying the program of women’s day.**



To share with, a passionate theatre person from the city Ms. Bina was contacted for the same. She runs a small theatre group and has featured in different local television soaps. She met the women before the program, had a dialogue with them and then created a script for a drama based on their life stories. After which, a daily practice of dance (with support of Olakh women) and drama was done for 15 days. The planning, organizing and execution of the entire program was collectively done with the participation of women inmates. Almost all of them were participating and experiencing such a program for the very first time in their lives. Though they were on stage with a mike for the first time, when they came up to share their lives as prisoners, their inner most desires and the environment in the prison, they forgot all fears and spoke bravely. Their heartfelt poems brought a tear in many eyes.



This was the first program ever where both the women and men inmates in the prison, sat out in the open, together...



Trainings/Workshops (organized by Olakh/ were resource person)

As we all know, training is an important tool as well as a significant strategy to support and strengthen the process of mindset changing. It takes the participants through a process of self actualization, understanding concepts, issues, remove prejudices and brings close to the experiences of life by dialogue and discussion. Olakh, since its inception has been a training centre giving basic and conceptual trainings on gender, violence against women and girls, feminism, patriarchy, etc. Different organizations, grassroots, national as well as international, invite Olakh to conduct these trainings for their groups, personnel or activists.

In this phase, **1 local, 3 state level, 3 national and 3 international trainings were organized, where Olakh was invited as a trainer or a speaker.** The details of the same are:

- State level training on **‘Gender, Democracy & Citizenship for Youth’** on **30th April 2010** organized by Akshara (Mumbai) and MASUM (Pune). It was attended by **45 young women and men** from Maharashtra state.
- State level training on **‘Gender’** from **20th to 21st May 2010** organized by Talash (Kolkata). It was attended by **17 community based women activists of the organization.**
- National level training on **‘Gender, Democracy & Citizenship for Youth’** from **7th to 12th July 2010** organized by Jagori Grameen (Himachal Pradesh). This was attended by **35 young women and men.**
- State level training on **‘Gender’** from **27th to 28th July 2010** organized by Valod Vedchi Sewa Pradesh Samiti (Valod). It was attended by **70 women workers** of the organization.
- Talk on **‘Sexual Abuse’** on **12th August 2010** organized by Billabong School (Vadodara). It was attended by **70 students and 25 teachers** of the school.
- Training on **Gender Mainstreaming** organized by GTZ (German Development Cooperation), Kabul (Afghanistan) from **9th to 15th October 2010.** This training was conducted for **21**

participants (20 women and 1 man) from 18 organizations associated with Afghan Women Network.

“Wish you be fine and your optimistic speeches. I freedom of humans in careful for everything, people. I wish that one day without discrimination everybody can live without say his/her emotions and censor. One day that we speech, freedom of living praying and working for would like to be in touch you”. Nilofer, participant shared via E-mail to Ms. Nimisha (27th October 2010, 7:14 p.m.)



doing well. Thank you for will try to work for Afghanistan and be especially of religious I see a peaceful and world, a world that fray and dread. Everybody feelings truly not with have real freedom of and really democracy. I am achieving my hops. I with you and learn from

Further, in order to prepare a plan for further training of the Afghan women activists in collaboration with GTZ, a **follow-up meeting** was held in Jaipur (India) from **28th to 30th December 2010**.

- A **Perspective and Capacity Building** training of Afghan women activists was organized in Bamyan province of Afghanistan by Gawhar Shad Institute of Higher Education in collaboration with UNDP Afghanistan from **20th to 30th November 2010**. Ms. Nimisha was invited as a technical resource person to facilitate this training of **40 women activists** from various parts of Afghanistan. The workshop aimed to build and strengthen the conceptual clarity on gender and peace process among women in Afghanistan and also build friendship and networking.



Understanding ‘equality’ while remaining in the borders of religion...

- Olakh organized a 3 days National orientation workshop on **‘Wenlido’ and Non-violent Communication**. This was facilitated by Ms. Ayesha Sinha from Kolkata from **25th to 27th January 2011**. This platform was to create an opportunity to strengthen powers and extend space for each other by sharing experiences, skills and strengths. Also, there is a need to together plan for future implementation to extend and expand selves in terms of knowledge and skills. **12 individuals from various organizations participated.**
- National level **Gender training** was organized from **16th to 19th February 2011** by Jagori Grameen at Sidhbadi, Himachal Pradesh. Here, Ms. Nimisha was one of the trainers for a group of **40 young people from all across the country.**

- Ms. Nimisha also attended **the voice Honoring Representing Freedom**. Festival honoring women’s Guatemala, Central America **7th March 2011**. She was panelist for the forum of collective power as women violence and intimate of integral justice for



the **Festival of “I am Memory AND the Body** This was the 2nd suffering during war in from **23rd February to** invited there as a health and recovery of to eradicate sexual exchange of alternatives survivors. The festival

focused on the sense of valuing one's experience and search for paths of dignity and justice for women in different parts of the world affected by war, to recover memory from experiences stemming from one's body and constructing one's liberty.

Capacity Building of Survivors and Change Agents

Trainings and workshops at regular basis are conducted for the capacity building of women survivors of violence and the change agents for imparting various skills, knowledge and understanding for self growth and learning. These are planned keeping in mind the need of the hour and the type of group.

- One training was focused on the **'importance and strengths of a women's collective'** held at Ori village from **9th to 13th June 2010**. This was attended by **24 women survivors of violence along with 3 team members**. The trainers were from a Gandhian institute of Mangrol, Ms. Bharti and Ms. Jyotsna.



Understanding the importance of women's collective is very essential...



- The second training was held at Olakh, focusing on **'legal literacy'** from **4th to 7th July 2010** where **25 women survivors of violence and 3 team members participated**. The resource person was Ms. Jaya Menon, an advocate from Mumbai.

- A 6 days **Creative Workshop** from **4th to 10th October 2010** was conducted for the Aneri members and Samaj Shilpies to teach them and give an exposure to new skills and turn waste material to best decorative articles. There were **12 participants**



who learned basic articles like decorating earthen lamps, candles, paper lamps, boxes for sweets, etc. from young resource persons, Ms. Radhi and Ms. Tanvi, students from university. Another objective was to support these women in turning their creative skills towards livelihood.



- Another was a **gender and body literacy training** from **16th to 18th November 2010**. **21 individuals** comprising of student placements, team members, Aneri women and Samaj Shipies participated.

Gender awareness and understanding make the foundation for every training...



Training/Workshops (for Olakh team)

To keep the team updated and informed to the changing situations in the development fields different team members attended local (1), national (3) and international (2) programs to seek an exposure, share and upgraded their perspectives on different issues.

- A 3 days workshop was organized for the Olakh team from **30th September to 2nd October 2010** at Olakh and the resource person was Ms. Parul Sheth. The focus largely lay on moving a step further from being a worker to a skilled and knowledgeable worker. The entire team (14) participated.

- **Two team members** attended the national level **symposium on the 'Role of Women in Peace Building on 18th and 19th December 2010** organized by IPSCR & WRAG (Mumbai) & NAWO (Orissa). The motive of the symposium was to share, understand different situations of conflict present in India and the world around, share strategies of conflict resolution & peace building (focus on women as peace makers) & laws, resolutions on the same. And, to create a wholistic manual/module on peace building.

- **Ms. Nimisha Desai** has been selected to be an Imagine fellow by the Empowerment Institute, New York and she attended a workshop from **6th to 9th January 2011**. This TOT was organized by Empowerment Institute, by Gail Straub and David working in this area since part of this Institute, they program where, they trainers from different world. After taking this first participants need to take phase) from 7th – 15th June Olakh has been selected to after finishing this course, conduct this course in India



New York (USA) hosted Greshon. They have been the last 30 years. As a have started the Imagine sponsor two experienced countries from across the phase of training, an advance course (2nd 2011'. Ms. Nimisha from be an Imagine fellow and they are required to (collaboration with Olakh).

- **2 team members** attended a **Base-line Data Collection and MIS training** that focused on base line data collection and introduction and importance of MIS. It included base line data plan sampling and case studies, with report writing. The whole training was theoretical and during the training they also learnt importance of MIS. This was organized from **28th February to 4th March 2011** where there were 30 participants from northern states of India.

*It's a world of Laughter
A world of Tears*

*It's a world of Hopes
And a world of Fears*

*It's so much that we Share
That its time we are Aware*

*It's a small world after all
It's a small world after all*

*There is just one Moon
And a golden Sun*

*And it's time for Friendship
To Everyone*

*Though the Mountains Divide
And the Greens are wide*

It's a Small World After All...

Anonymous

Feminist Resource Centre with Library

Reader's Forums



Taking ahead the process of collective sharing and reading with book lovers and those interested or drawn towards reading, a reader's forum was organized every 2nd Saturday of a month at Olakh's resource centre. In this phase, a total of **10 forums** took place with 20 regular members in every forum. In this phase, the members were largely students (adolescent girls and boys) from schools, home-makers, college students, etc.



Young minds nurturing young thoughts...

At the beginning of the phase, few forums mainly focused on the methodology, importance and need of reading for all age groups. Also, the necessity of reading in today's fast and changing society was elaborated upon. To bring to light and understand this better, experts and learned but friendly people like Dr. Vibhuti Patel (activist, writer, director of SNTD women's university and also Olakh's board member), Mr. Suresh

Pariikh (well-known social activist and editor of Vichar Valano magazine) and Dr. Ghanshyam Acharya (professor in Bhavnagar University) were invited to share and emphasize on the same.

Prashant, a participant shared, **“One should read books as they are the best friends to give guidance”**. (10th April 2010)

Also, in other forums collective reading of short stories, inspirational stories from magazines and philosophical books, etc. was undertaken followed by sharing and discussion in the group. Through the medium of reader’s forum, one of the young women Smita, started her most favorite hobby of painting again, as she felt that one should always take out time for what one loves the most to do.

Rasik Madhak, Olakh team member, **“Reader’s forum creates a platform to form and strengthen relations, we gain relatives in the form of books and a family in the form of value based thoughts”**. (14th August 2010)

Reading Centers (Mobile Library)

In continuation of the earlier phase, the mobile library functioned in **23 different spots** of the city that comprises of **9 urban slums, 9 schools, 2 hostels and 1 women’s college**. **Around 7,750 people were reached through these centers, running on different days of a week**.

In the slums, the library runs once every week and in the schools, once every month. An average of 20-25 individuals – young children, adolescent girls and boys and women – form the groups of these libraries in the slums. In schools, students from 8th and 9th standards had 65 to 70 students.

At every spot, the processes begin with door to door visits, rapport building with the people, introduction of Olakh and mobile library followed by story telling, book reading, film screening, games, etc. The details of the activities of the mobile library are as follows:

- 1. In the urban slums:** The initial sessions focused on Gender. Olakh representatives would



empowerment and women’s rights.

read aloud or individuals would read the book ‘What is a Girl? What is a Boy?’ that followed by discussions with different groups. Next, films on gender discrimination/equality were shown, followed by discussions and then in the next sessions, story telling, books reading were carried out. Also, the groups were encouraged to read empowering and motivational stories from magazines, story books, etc. to initiate self reading. To take a note here, most of the women who could read, referred to books and magazine articles that talked about women’s

- 2. At schools, hostels and college:** In the schools, the sessions were carried out using two mediums namely book reading and film screenings. Reading of the book ‘What is a Girl? What is a Boy?’ was done in all schools repeatedly and screenings on films on gender discrimination/equality, importance of education, etc. were shown.



Mediums like games, singing of songs were common with all the groups as they not only helped in rapport building but also created interest amongst the groups for participation in the further activities.

Users & Dissemination

250 users came making use of **resources** that includes films/documentaries, posters, comprised of students (school social workers, artists and



around 355 different books, etc. The users mainly and college), researchers, home makers.

Collection of New Resources

In this phase, a lot many new resources, especially books were added up to the rich collection of the resource centre but also few documentaries/films, music and posters were also added. The books mainly comprised of fictional literature, poetries, auto-biographies and compilation of short stories along with references on law, violence against women, health, some spiritual reading and motivational thoughts. It was planned to update the centre with latest in the literature world, especially in the regional language with special focus on women and feminist writers. For this, books were obtained from different cities like Ahmedabad, New Delhi and Mumbai. **A total of 1,100 resources were added.**

Classification & Re-classification

In this phase, resources in 11 major categories out of the 22 were completed where around 700 books were re-classified and around 1,100 new were classified.

Publications & Packages

- **Poster Archive:** As shared earlier, this is a collaborative initiative with Women's Studies Centre, Wisconsin University, New York. A professor once visited Olakh in 2005 and had seen the collection of posters and after many years, through common friends, the idea was generated and put in action. In this phase, 300 out of 500 posters at Olakh were selected whose entire data entry with editing and translation in 3 languages, photo-shoot was conducted. Also, the 1st draft of design has been completed. The collaboration will bring out 3 publications in the next phase, a Digital Poster Archive for the Wisconsin University, a hard Book in 3 languages and a Book for Academic purpose emphasizing role of posters in the women's movement.
- **Songs Book:** Songs in Gujarati and Hindi languages largely from women's movement, inspirational, songs from Hindi films about dreams and aspiration were compiled in this phase. These songs are widely used during programs like training and workshops, celebrations, campaigns and other mass programs. The Gujarati songs are rare and are not easily found so the compilation would be very supportive in having a good source and store for them.
- **Book on Best Wishes:** Since inception, Olakh has practiced the idea of sharing, promoting and nurturing good thoughts with everyone, where even the various occasions or celebrations like birthdays, marriages, etc. are also considered to be an opportunity for dialogue and sharing. This becomes an alternative gift instead of the stereotype gifts that we usually give or receive. Such a collection of wishes has been done in Gujarati and Hindi languages that would be published early in the next phase.
- **What is Masculinity?** Continuing the objective of dissemination of the feminist ideology and education in the regional language, the book 'What is Masculinity?' by Ms. Kamla Bhasin has been translated from English and would be published in the next phase.

Though the activities of the resource centre did take place, they were not completely significant as far as the outreach and dissemination is concerned. With the addition of new resources, the centre has become richer but it's a sad state to see that the use is just minimal. Though the resources are used extensively during trainings, workshops, etc. but the direct outreach to the most marginalized remains. Also, with changing times, the use of the feminist literature by young professionals and students has also reduced. Thus, in the coming phases it is planned to accept this as a challenge and evolve new and innovative strategies to take the literature to large numbers. This would be done with initiating mobile libraries in different areas and with different groups, bringing out various feminist publications in the forms of diaries, calendars, posters like the earlier times in Olakh and third one is conducting extensive trainings and workshops, to spread and disseminated the feminist ideology.

Words of Love

*Oh, do not hurt my beloved,
 Do not march across her
 With your wars an weed-whackers,
 Your tanks, your bulldozers, your bug-spray,
 Do not send weapons, across her beautiful sky
 Where only the constellations should travel,
 Listen to her promise, observe her mysteries,
 Give her your words of LOVE. It is enough...*

Alex Greenwood, 2003

Feminist Counseling & Intervention Center with Healing & Support

Today, with the fast moving world, a lot many changes and developments keep coming up in our lives. One needs to really put up hard work to move along with the changing times but in this ever increasing speed of our society, the condition and plight of women and girls remain the not much changed. With every day approaching, the forms of violence change and the grip of patriarchy falls upon us, the women in a newer way!

Though now women in the process of performing multiple roles since years are getting a better exposure to the outer world. They meet and interact with new people and are becoming aware and alert of their rights, roles and responsibilities. They are uniting as a collective to raise their voice against all forms of violence and discrimination and Olakh is one such space, platform for them.

Olakh's counseling and intervention centre address various issues of women and girls, their needs, conflicts or abuse they experience and the desires and aspirations of their lives. Following are the activities of this program:

- **Face to Face Mediation**

This is one of the most essential and crucial of all the activities of the centre where women survivors of violence share their heart out to the counselors, they are listened to non-judgmentally maintaining complete confidentiality of their issues.



In this phase, a **total of 128 individuals** approached Olakh of which **105 were new counselees** and **23 were follow-up**. The gender ratio was **82 women and 23 men** of the new counselees. Of these **17 were Dalits, 21 Muslims and 67 Hindus**. (Annexure 1)

The issues that were

brought comprised largely of domestic violence varying from physical, emotional, sexual abuse, forced sex with influence of pornography, financial violence on women by husbands, in-laws, either partner having an extra-marital affair, sexual harassment by colleagues, etc. Of these, torturing due to financial dependency (of women) and suspicion on working women (wives) leading to quarrels, were also prominent. The issues



that men had brought forward were mainly based on the problem of their wives frequently visiting their parental homes or the men being suspicious of women having extra marital affair.



As a mediator, Olakh has intervened and taken necessary steps understanding the situation and the people in question. In this phase, 9 women were supported to get back their Stree Dhan (all belongings of women including gifts given at the time of marriage and after), 3 were referred to advocates for legal advice, 1 to the Protection Officer under the Domestic Violence Act, 1 was sent to the Mother Teresa home and 1 to Seva Tirth rehabilitation centre as the women was mentally ill and had no place to go.

• **Women’s Helpline (Toll free)**

This telephone helpline supports the vulnerable women survivors to confidentially share their worries, the discrimination and violence they face and ventilate their inner most feelings. During this phase a **total of 295 calls** were attended on the helpline. The details are:

New Calls: 74

Follow-up Calls: 116

Calls to seek information: 42

Blank Calls: 63

The calls that were made to seek information were largely to know about the Domestic Violence Act, HIV and AIDS. The follow-up calls consisted of asking further guidance to visit a police station or court, etc. In this phase, an attempt was also made to advertise the services of the women’s helpline in the city. For this, firstly the national newspapers like the Times of India, Indian Express and Divya Bhaskar were contacted. Of these, one newspaper started printing the helpline number in its Sunday edition (The Times of India – Property Times).



Further, to spread large scale awareness about the women’s helpline, posters of the same were designed and put in 10 areas of the city with the support of Aneri women and student volunteers. But at the end of the phase, much to our surprise we came to know that the local government has taken the toll free number with their services. This was done with other toll free help lines. It was then planned to collectively address the issue and

question the responsibility of the government systems.



Activities in Central Prison of Vadodara

In the last phase when few change agents along with Olakh team members attended a program organized for the women inmates of Sabarmati Prison in Ahmedabad, it struck them that the women in Vadodara prison would be in similar state and they too need some recreation and space for ventilation. To share with, the program in Ahmedabad was conducted by Ms. Aditi Desai, a well known theatre activist from Gujarat. The thought that occurred turned out in a discussion amongst the women and then it was decided upon to initiate work with women inmates of Vadodara Central Prison.

The process began with having meetings and dialogues with the officials of the prison, seeking permission for work (from Ahmedabad), sharing about Olakh, the objectives of working with women and also understanding the norms of the prison. At first, a permission to work for 3 months was given which later was extended.

The activities in the prison began with rapport building, getting involved with the inmate's day to day work, knowing about their issues, their needs and dreams. There are 250 women inmates in



Vadodara's Central prison where Olakh aims to support by initiating counseling, mobile library, creative work of drawing, singing songs, drama, film screenings and so on. Also, it is aimed to address the legal issues and along with celebrating different festivals as the women missed all this and felt completely cut-off from the outside world.

One such celebration was of the dance festival of Gujarat state, the Garba that was organized for a day where almost 100 women participated with full excitement and enthusiasm. The focus of the activities was also to keep them creatively occupied, creating hopes that a life filled with colors and happiness is waiting ahead for them and that they too deserve this.



During this phase, a good rapport was built with 35 women and the systems, working of the prison are well known. Further, activities of reading magazines for inspiration, good thoughts and motivation like Pitara (Hindi), Vinela Phool (Gujarati), etc. were read regularly by 12 women. Next, the kite festival, Utrayan was also celebrated and kites and thread was distributed to them.

The activities of writing their life stories, drawing, etc. were also undertaken. At the end of this period, it was planned to celebrate the International Women's Day with these women (as shared earlier in the report) where they were involved in the



planning, organizing and implementing of the program that included drama, dance poetry recitation, etc. The women worked hard for this event and the results turned out to be beautiful and very touching.



And apart from these activities, support in making correspondence on their behalf with their families was done where, as a result family members of 4 women inmates came to meet them for the very first time in 10 years (convicted for murder), one was released on bail after her relative came for her and 20 others were put in touch with their families.

Further, as it was known and observed that the facilities of food were not good, especially for the women, the efforts to provide them with good, hygienic and nutritious food have been started. And international trust called 'Akshay Patra' has been contacted who have been providing food in 8 states to more than 8,400 schools. To begin their services in prison, permission has to be obtained from state capital, Gandhinagar and the process has already begun.

Shared Neha (name changed) after Olakh's intervention in her life, "My husband was very abusive and thrashed me every time he was drunk. One day he brought a man to our house saying he was some priest. The visits of the priest became a regular affair and somehow I started sharing my problems with him as he too had a soft corner for me, as he also saw the way my husband treated me. Then our mutual affection turned into love and this, my husband came to know. But by that time I just could not do without my love and had no patience in further bearing my husbands wrath. Then, one day while working in the field, we both planned and killed my husband and also immediately were put behind bars. I have been here (in prison) since 9 years but he was released after a year and since then I have no news of him! I now understand how women are always used and manipulated. But today, I feel proud that both my sons are studying well, the elder one is also earning and sends me money regularly as he feels sad about his mother working in the prison as a cleaner. This became possible only after you intervened, supported him to take his 10th class examinations without a paying a single penny. I will always be so grateful to you as this is truly a bond to be cherished for a lifetime as it is based on love, concern and support and not any selfish motives".

There are many other issues that need to be looked at and deliberations on them are in process. The issues of services and opportunities for the women and men, the issue of gender, over-all hygiene of inmates and the premises, advocacy for those who have been suffering innocently are amongst them. It is thought upon as to what could be Olakh's role in these and how different strategies could be planned for the betterment of the inmates, the small children living with them and their families outside.

Self Help Group – Aneri

Aneri, the self help group of women survivors and change agents continued with its regular activities of capacity, skill and knowledge building along with sharing and enjoying with each other. They meet twice a month but since January 2011 they decided to meet only once a month, looking at the social responsibilities that were not making their meetings very convenient.

Activities of Aneri

- **15th April 2010:** A meeting to have dialogue and discussion to understand the values, principles, skills, roles, responsibilities that make true change agents or social workers were deliberated upon with 30 women.

- **1st May 2010:** This is the same day when the present Aneri group started with its functioning in 2009 and thus, it was celebrated with much joy and enthusiasm by the women along with their families and Olakh team. Prominent and senior women from the city came, like Dr.



Bhagwati Oza, women Ms. Maya, Ms. Leela women led cooperative bank, Bank. They shared about inspired the women to take seek newer heights. This by small girls and a drama by 250 women participated in



municipal corporater, Chandodkar from a Mahila Cooperative their lives, struggle and charge of their lives and was followed by dance the Aneri group. Around this event.

- **14th May 2010:** Few of the participated in a bi-cycle rally early in the month and on with review was done with 31 participants shared their experience of the rally.

Aneri women on environment this day a follow-up women, where the

- **1st June 2010:** The aim of this meeting was first to have a basic discussion on gender through posters at Olakh with 34 women and secondly, as a residential training was planned for the next month, the details of the same were discussed.

- **15th June 2010:** This meeting took place immediately after the women came from the residential training at Ori village (shared earlier). This was a review of the same training. On this day only few women could come and so sharing was incomplete and it was decided to take it on a later day.



- **1st July 2010:** The importance, meaning and understanding of being a women's group (Aneri) were discussed with 20 women. Also, the rules and regulations that should be kept in mind were shared.

- **15th July 2010:** As shared that the review of the residential training of June 2010 was incomplete, this day the discussion focused on the same. The women shared about their over-all experience and also tried to motivate the other women who could not come for the training. 24 women joined in this discussion.

- **2nd August 2010:** In this meeting 24 women met and decided that as it was a festive season going on in the city, they would approach different groups of women at temples and share about Olakh and Aneri group to increase awareness amongst women about the two, Olakh and Aneri group.

- **16th August 2010:** As a day before (15th August) was India's Independence Day, the issue of women's independence, freedom was discussed with a group of 29 women. The day was celebrated but serious thought was given on the situation and bondages that still prevail on women.



- **1st September 2010:** This day with a group of 20 women, the future 6 months planning of Aneri group, what the women want to know, learn and acquire was done. The women shared and discussed that it is important to have basic understanding and knowledge of laws related to women and thus they would like to have more trainings, discussions on this area. Also, the need to learn or acquire skills that could generate livelihood was shared along with creative skills of drama, singing songs, etc.



- **15th September 2010:** This day a review of what the women have acquired in terms of understanding and knowledge of being a group connected to Olakh was discussed. It was

elaborated on the different livelihood skills like cell phone repairing, running a motor garage were discussed and how now the women should become more active and participative. 24 women were present on this day.



- **14th October 2010:** This day the festival of dance, Navratri was celebrated where even young adolescent girls had participated. A total of 75 women were there amongst whom were also old Aneri women.



- **15th November 2010:** As Diwali festival was approaching, the women got together and made cards that they gave to each other. 11 women participated.
- **1st December 2010:** On this day a film was screened for 10 women on the issue of generating awareness on the issue of HIV/AIDS. The film is called 'Ek Chupi Si Zindagi' meaning a life that is hidden. After the film one of the women shared that how her neighbor who suffers from AIDS is always stigmatized and neglected in the society but now after the film, she has decided to change her attitude first and then also make others understand.



- **15th December 2010:** On this day, a group of 14 women got together to play a game to share and analyze their innermost dreams, collectively. The women were asked to pick up different chits that contained pictures of different object, trees, birds, etc. and then had to relate their lives with their selection. This, the women enjoyed a lot.



- **1st January 2011:** This was a review and reflection meeting on the journey of Aneri group since its initiation from May 2009. It was discussed that since the last few months, quite a few members had been irregular and passive in their involvement. Also, there were a few conflict within the group due to which it was getting divided. It was then decided through common consent that the group would meet only once a month instead of 2 days, the women who were creating a rift between the group were made aware of their acts and it was decided that the group should concentrate only on capacity, knowledge and skill building. Here, 18 women participated.

- **1st February 2011:** This meeting was done in continuation of the one in January 2011 to further set rules, guidelines, code of conduct along with roles and responsibilities to function as an Aneri member and to continue the over-all functioning of the group where, 11 women participated.
- **1st March 2011:** As the International Women's Day was approaching, the Aneri women were oriented about the plan to have a celebration at the central prison. They were told about their roles and responsibilities for the event. 12 women met and discussed on the same line.

Field Visits

Since the last phases, the purpose of making field visits and having interactions in different urban slums of the city is mainly that more number of people, especially the marginalized women and girls come to know of Olakh and the work that it does. Once people know about the organization and are able to relate with the work and the aim, they (women) could get together and form their own small groups/collectives and address or take up issues/problems related to them and their area/community, collectively. It is focused to empower women to become self dependent and participate in the public as well as personal spaces of their homes and people in their locality. Also, this would enable the women to seek accurate support in times of crises.

In this phase, field visits in 5 different urban slums of Vadodara were done at regular intervals. The areas of intervention/visit were Sanjay Nagar, Kishanwadi, Navayard and Shankar Nagar.

The initial visits made in a particular area are for rapport building and orientation and then activities of mediation, mobile libraries are initiated with the consent of the people. Around 12 to 15 visits were made in each area with an average of 30 people were contacted in a single visit.

Sanjay Nagar: Sanjay Nagar is an area with 80% of its population working. People have come from various parts of India and reside there. Here, alcohol consumption rates are high and domestic violence is high too. Through need assessment and also dialogue with the government health workers of the area, it was known that condition of women's reproductive health was bad and so small and simple sessions on body literacy, along with general health and hygiene could be taken up.

Kishanwadi: Kishanwadi is a huge area with varied people living. Olakh team contacted around 250 women of which 40 who have joined us and it was planned to conduct regular activities with this group. Also, through need assessment it is known that in comparison to other slums, Kishanwadi is a dirty slum with lot of hygiene problems, most men are alcoholic and domestic violence occurs.

Navayard: Navayard is a huge area with many small slums integrated. Here, Olakh is working in only 2 areas i.e. Navi Ramwadi consisting of 450 households and Aman Nagar consisting of 400 households. The major issues of the area are alcohol consumption, suicide attempts by women, and it is known that women should be empowered through different sessions. Here, the local leader has been supportive and this is good aspect to work in a community.

Shankar Nagar: This is a new community where after the initial visits it was known that work could not be taken up further as almost all the women were domestic aids and had to work for more than 12 hours a days, leaving no time for any other work, so the area was dropped.

And, by the end of the phase, the work that was already on a slow pace was completely phased out as the need to re-think, re-strategize the mode of intervention, especially in open communities was felt. It was shared by the few women from the communities and the team that worked with them that with the ever increasing needs and demands of people, the fast moving, commercial society, the issue of sharing or imparting knowledge without materialistic benefits is not readily accepted. Also, more and more stereotyped skills development is asked for, for easy and quick generation of income.

Compilation of Data

The compilation of data of counseling centre is an ongoing process and in this phase, the qualitative and quantitative data was compiled till the end of the phase. Also, analysis of qualitative data from March 2003 to March 2010 was undertaken where the data was put up in 45 categories consisting of information like types of violence, reasons of violence, intervention undertaken, time period, etc along with basic information of the counselees.

Further an attempt to compile the success stories of those women survivors, whose issues were addressed by the so called untrained women of the women's collective initiative for justice, was done. This compilation was either done by the survivors themselves or by other neo-literate women and it is planned to have a publication of these stories. In this phase, 25 such stories were compiled.

To conclude, the work of the counseling centre needs continuous reflection, collaboration, advertising and collective processed to mediate and intervene effectively with the ideology at the base. When we look at Olakh, a growth journey of the counseling team can be seen where the 2 counselors started off their association with women issues at the grassroots level, moving to be change agents and now they take up issues of women, doing mediation and intervention as per the need. They have had new and varied experiences in this process where at times they were filled with joys and at times, some effect of constantly hearing and being amongst problems did make them feel low. They have much practical knowledge and experience and further theoretical

understanding and skills is to be gained. In the coming phases, they plan to decentralize the services and have their own counseling unit as apart from intensive counseling, immediate intervention and mediation are also of utmost importance.

Reveal

**Peeling away layers of ignorance
Face the truth within
Of good and bad human is a thick composition
Tilting to which side, stop wondering!**

**You came in as you are naked
Open to the elements and humans
Neither are you but choose to be one**

**Go Beyond!
Sailing the boat of wisdom
Rediscover the real you
Reliving in peace prosperity and knowledge
Reveal and revel in
The truth within...**

Anonymous