



**ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PEIROD OF  
APRIL 2011 TO MARCH 2012**

***So many gods, so many creeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind,  
While just the art of being kind,  
Is all this sad world needs.***

***Ella Wheeler Wilcox***

Empowering, challenging, questioning, exploring and many more of these expressions could best describe of what comprises of Olakh's 19 years journey (initiated after 3 years of exhaustive voluntary spirit, in 1996 – the foundation stone was laid in Vadodara, Gujarat). Next year 2013 Olakh will mark its 20 years of growth from inception to childhood to the young age which have been very rich, learning, intense and path breaking in their own ways.

Also, during these years Olakh has crossed many a milestones and has contributed significantly in the area of women's empowerment and conflict transformation at personal and political levels. The focus was always remained on consciousness raising and challenging patriarchy through campaigns, awareness raising programs, perspective and capacity building amongst diverse groups. Olakh also intervened in natural and manmade calamities disasters (2001 earthquake, 2002 communal conflict, 2005 and 2006 floods with relief and rehabilitation of survivors in Gujarat)

Today, Olakh has been able to create a strong network at local, national and international levels with like-minded organizations, feminist groups, development groups as well as individuals.

At Olakh, we are much satisfied and contented, learned a lot, received a lot of care and love from fellow beings, friends and family (and this continues). And we proudly say that we have been able to build our work culture that responds to various situations and contexts without compromising the feminist principles and values. We have moved on with simplicity, being cost effective and efficient with commitment and dedication.

Says Sharda, a domestic aid about her experience of Olakh, ***"The moment I come to Olakh, I get inspired"*** (7<sup>th</sup> January 2012).

However, this is not all; we have also faced many challenges, at personal, professional and organizational levels. In today's world with changing situation and value system, a world of increasing fundamentalism, commercialization, consumerism globalization and NGOisation, value-based functioning with simplicity and cost effectiveness is considered to be 'underutilization, incompetency and unprofessionalism, etc'.

Also, another very crucial and important factor is limited resources and 'project based financial partnership'. An implementing organization especially like Olakh as a matter of principle does not take multiple projects or jump from one issue to other but continue working on softer issues to change mind sets – questioning power structures within and outside family, supporting survivors in moment of helplessness, even under very trying circumstances. As a result it becomes difficult to practically manage for period of say 5 to 6 months, until the next project gets sanctioned.

Even at present, Olakh's activities are carried forward with a skeleton staff of only four members (care takers and counselors working as paid staff since October 2011) and others are giving their time on voluntary basis as the entire sanctioned project grant got over in September 2011. Though this is also where Olakh's strength

and credibility lies but sustainability and survival have now become a crucial matter, considering professionals who ask high remuneration and long-term association.

This is also due to the fact that as in India and globally, the cost of living has shot up phenomenally and also the big NGOs, donor agencies and corporate houses offer very high salaries with attractive perks and comforts. Thus competing or facing such lucrative offers is very difficult for organizations like Olakh that have a strong value based.

Though the ever increasing growth of this so called developed culture does put us in a dilemma whether to continue the struggle being a small with the same passion, dedication and commitment or somewhere to become so called 'big' with corporate oriented culture where we higher professionals that demand very high remunerations. The dilemma is that Olakh has always supported and has been instrumental in creating spaces and opportunities for diverse women – survivors of violence, women from vulnerable community or women who came out home for the first time and so on - to learn, to grow and become skilled in areas that are close to their hearts and those that are generally considered unconventional. This journey of nurturing and growth does take a lot of energy and also at times doubles the responsibilities of the other few, to teach with patience and love. Here, we would like to share the journey of one of the members;

**A Girl Married at a very young age of 14 years to a man twice her age, faced early motherhood as well, whose husband was abusive, beat her and was a drunkard. Not wanting to take any more of this, she fled from her house with her daughter and caught a train not knowing where it was heading. She was lured in to prostitution by a family who gave her shelter. But somehow she fled from there too.**

**She came to Vadodara, she took to the road to spend her life and this is when a local artist saw her with her little daughter and brought them to Olakh. When she first came to Olakh, she was in a state of shock, tired and reluctant to talk to anyone. She was unable to even understand what everyone spoke around her. For two days, the mother and daughter only slept and were woken only to have food. Then, slowly she started interacting with the team, believing that no one meant any harm to her. And thus, began her journey to empowerment. Initially she lived in the office building, supported everyone with minor office tasks, helped in the kitchen and cleaning of the office and its premises. She has not completed even third standard so she could not read or write and the local language was not understood well as she was from neighboring state. But with continuous support, encouragement and opportunities that were provided at Olakh, she grew and grew. Her daughter was put in a boarding school for free, for her brighter future. This made her even more independent to learn and committed to work.**

**In the span of almost 5 years now, she has learned to write well, gained basic skills of computer, bicycle, office administration, and attempted an entry level course at a national university. She has been in-charge for the over-all office cleaning and maintenance along with day to day and special hospitality of the team members, guests and visitors. She is now a happy and free woman. Her daughter too is a bright young girl and visits her mother during holidays. To share with, she has also been part of the program and activities of the organization. Recently, she was able to make the data entry of 500 posters in Hindi and Gujarati languages for a poster archive which is commendable.**

**She is one of the example of many who has been given space to learn and grow within Olakh But now the question arises, how well has they understood the principles and values that have been instrumental in their journey? Does they relate to the ideology that has been the underline base of the opportunities, support and strength that they have gained? They are part of the larger society and to be influenced by the outer forces is not difficult at all but what is hard is to stick to values or even the realization that these forces do affect you but you do fight against them in one or the other way.**

**Organizations like Olakh go out of the way in terms of providing support and opportunities to women like her, straining human energy, patience but with complete love and compassion but the vicious circle of the society where mostly self-growth, less humbleness, under realization of inputs by others, come in form or the other. This is a challenge that not only Olakh faces but the entire women's movement and it is not easy to cope with it.**

At Olakh, now is the right time to reflect on the component of adequate salary with cautious of not moving towards commercialization or the process of NGOisation, or becoming funder driven. This situation has not only forced us but also in a way given us the opportunity to re-live the great volunteer spirit that Olakh saw in its initial years and which it has experienced and lived time and again during many program and activities. We are very sure that this process will only empower and enlighten us further and bring out results that are always desired.

The struggle deepens and becomes large when we look at the increasing forms of violence like commodification of women's body, conflicts, corruption where as we know and see the rich getting richer and the poor, poorer. We as masses tend to put the complete blame on our governments, but forget that we as citizen too have contributed to becoming materialistic, self-centered, arrogant and insensitive.

Alas, this is the situation of our society and we cannot bring a change in all of them, at the same time. For this, we need to start with our own selves. We need to take and make such initiatives that people get inspired or encouraged on seeing us and would like to join us. We should never think that such a work or initiative is worthless and should make efforts where more and more people can join us.

**Thus, at this juncture we need to have an interim space to envision, reflect and review on Olakh's past journey as well as its future direction – where we really want to move, thus pondering back is very essential before diving in to the future as it would mean a reality check on the strengths-weaknesses, effective methods. This analytical reflection will also provide us vision and guidelines for future direction and enhance to strategize for the next 20 years charter of Olakh.**

#### **ACTIVITIES DURING APRIL 2011 TO MARCH 2012 IN A NUTSHELL:**

As shared earlier, the projected funding phase with respective donor agencies completed in March 2011' and thus from April 2011' onwards most of the work focused and centered on concluding all the activities except support for women and men survivors who are victim of different types of violence and discrimination through the counseling center. During this year we lived and re-lived over and over again while compiling statistics, organizing reports, photographs, data and fact-sheets, feedbacks and stories of success and struggles with immense emotions of hard-work, struggle, love and courage. **It is indeed commendable in today's time that since October 2011 Olakh has sustained without a grant.**

***"In Gujarat Olakh is one such group that has contributed widely towards women's empowerment and I had heard a lot about it. But on visiting the organization today, I have gained a much deeper insight and understand that Olakh runs with a very clear vision and this realization has made me happy",*** said professor Bharat Mehta on his first visit to Olakh (4<sup>th</sup> November 2011').

To share with, the purpose to recapture the essence of our journey and be able to visualize it in a print form – this is what would be one of the main focuses of the next one year of Olakh where an in-depth, intense reflection of the 20 years of travelling on the path of justice, peace and equality will be undertaken in the form of a visual (photographs) and written journey. This will give us an opportunity to take a pause, look back to gain insights of what all was there, how it was done, the positives, negative, strengths that if hidden now could be brought out and weaknesses to be left behind or turned in to good. As Olakh has reached in to young age, a thorough design considering the ever changing society, its needs, and demands needs to be drawn. This would be done with challenging patriarchy and feminism continuing to be at the core, flowing as a philosophy, an ideology that thinks acts and reacts in the righteous ways.



*The gleam that has deepened with years of struggle and experience...*

And during such times, it becomes all the more necessary to seek guidance and support from experienced and knowledgeable people, such as Olakh's board, the senior fellow beings. **A meeting of the Olakh Board was so held on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2012 at Olakh.** The entire focus of the meeting laid on winding up or putting a halt to all the present activities, no new appointments in the team and a decision to not undertake or plan any new initiative, unless an in-depth plan of action was drafted for the next 10 years. Now, a proposal for the interim period to draft and visualize the 20 years journey (In Print and Photographs), strategic planning for next 10 years where different stake holders, experts and various learned individuals would be involved who could guide and support in drawing out the most relevant plan of documentation of 'Her' Stories and initiation of Youth awareness with capacity building and fellowship Program in urban and rural areas should be presented to respective funding partners – Global fund for women, World day for prayer and EED

- **8<sup>th</sup> September 2011:** Ms. Nimisha and Ms. Shobha attended the meeting for the Changing Trust Act in Gujarat and major changing in FCRA organized by Sewa Rural Trust, Jhagadia.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> December 2011:** A meeting with the Charity Commissioner and Olakh's Chartered Accountant, Mr. Hafez Dalal was held in Ahmedabad to know statutory requirement status of Olakh and whether there were any essentials looking at the changing scenario.

### **FEMINIST RESOURCE CENTRE WITH LIBRARY**

As shared in the last phase, after the resources were updated and new ones added in the centre, the process of classification and re-classification continued and was completed in this phase. Also, as a new and different beginning is planned for the coming phases, the resource was completely organized with the physical stock-take, arrangements, data entry along with qualitative and quantitative data updating to keep it ready for use and reference not only for the reflection process but also when new and different strategies of outreach and mainstreaming of the ideology through this medium are planned.

During this phase, **Total No of Visitors were 443** (4 Month record is not available) they are students, professors, activists from NGO and professionals.

Said Professor Usha Upadhyay on her visit, ***"The organized and rich resources, the clean environment, the ever-ready and supportive staff with a warm interaction with all visitors, are indeed Olakh's identity that I have experienced today. I wish them good luck"*** (4<sup>th</sup> February 2012').

**One of the major roles of the resource center different students, professionals and young activists were facilitated like;**

- Ms. Neha, an Architect student was guided for her dissertation on Women's Shelter with the concept of Space and power.
- The team of Sew Rural organization from Jhagadia was guided with the process of setting up and organizing of a user and people friendly library and a welcoming space of an office.
- The team members of Shri Ramkrishna Mission Home Service Varanasi were facilitated and guided for setting up a resource centre and an organized operational and functional system with warm and friendly welcoming space of office.
- Around 12 students from the Faculty of Home Science, 2 Navy officers and 35 students from B. Ed College were oriented about Olakh and its activities.
- And lastly, a team of Olakh gave a presentation about Olakh at the Faculty of Home Science to a group of 40 students.

**The publications consist of**

- **3<sup>rd</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011:** Ms. Nimisha visited the Wisconsin University in USA in regards to the upcoming Poster Archive of Olakh. Further, as shared in the previous phase, the collaborative initiative of bringing out a Poster Archive together with Women's Studies Centre, Wisconsin University, took a step ahead. **it has been finalized to bring out 3 books of the archives of the 500 posters** on various issues like Gender, Feminism, Violence, Conflict, Health, Girls and Women's rights etc. in English, Hindi and Gujarati was finalized.

One would be a **digital archive of these posters**, second a **hard bound book one of the posters** sharing the issues and concepts contained in them and the third one an **academic book that signifies the role of posters in the fields of empowerment, women's movement and social development.**



Back in India, its photography and data entry of the content and on issue based categorization of the posters is complete. Further, Ms. Christine a professor from Women's Studies Department at **Wisconsin** Visited Olakh from **19<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to discuss Poster Archive Book with entire team.** It has been decided first to bring out a photo book and each poster will be translated in three languages. Here, we would like to share that Ms. Jyoti who has joint 5 years before Olakh as part of rehabilitation program for survivors of violence, had no knowledge of reading and writing, she was not familiar with the computer and has not acquired any primary formal education. But in Olakh she has been provided an opportunity to learn various skills – Office work, Computer and driving and so on. As a result she was able to do all data entries of 500 posters in Gujarati and Hindi with great success - This was indeed a great learning and empowering process for her and also for others to know that with a will and dedication to do, one can achieve desired heights. And

also, that these opportunities are rare and found mostly with women's group like Olakh – it requires lot of patience as well as love in heart.

- The **Songs books** (in Hindi around 100 songs and Gujarati around 60 songs). These songs are a combination of issues like human struggle for survival, women's movement, inspirational and spiritual).
- The translation of '**What is Masculinity?**' (Gujarati) has been finalized and it will be published early in the next phase.
- **Library software** has been developed by a friend and well-wisher Mr. Kamlesh Yagnik and it will soon be put in use.
- And lastly, we are happy to share that a case study depicting the life story of Ms. Homai Vyrawala, the first woman Indian photographer has already been published in a Delhi based Hindi magazine, 'Hamari Sabla'.

At present, Olakh's resource centre faces a challenge. It is one of the first feminist resource centers (and the only in the state of Gujarat) with its unique collection on diverse issues with fiction and non-fiction. It has been utilized by diverse groups but since last two years the use and reference of resources has declined hugely. There is a need to think widely and create an approach that reaches to masses, introduce current technological needs or may be shift the focus to rural areas as being physically located in a city where the usage of internet is on a daily high, where references to more issue and value based literature is slowly fading, is now important. From around 100 individuals to not a single person coming for reference today, is a matter of great concern. The resources look like antiques on a display. We hope that after the updating of the centre (done till date) its use for future programs will be meaningful. Also, it is being thought over to re-initiate the mobile libraries once again but in the rural areas where the need is not much fulfilled by adequate resources and knowledge.

### TRAINING, WORKSHOPS AND MEETINGS

**Funds or no funds, Grant or no grant** but needs that are to be addressed cannot be left. And so Olakh continued to be a part of different training and workshop program together with other likeminded groups in the process of continuing the process of spreading the feminist ideology. Providing not only trainings to other upcoming activists but also collaborating for self-growth, having discussions, meetings and in-depth brain storming leading to effective outcomes for resource building were also undertaken.

- **31<sup>st</sup> March to 12<sup>th</sup> April 2011:** As mentioned in earlier report the need assessment study on behalf of GIZ Germany done by Ms. Nimisha in October 2010 in Kabul Afghanistan. Based on the results derived this 10 days training program was designed for 40 Afghan women activists from civil society organizations on skills of networking, advocacy and solidarity. Ms. Nimisha conducted the training and is also one of the members of the core team at Himachal Pradesh in India.

- **5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> June 2011:** Ms. Nimisha attended the phase 2 of the Empowerment Institution in U.S.A. at the



Delamater Conference Center in Rhinebeck, New York. It is a Global Initiative for the Empowerment of Women – Imagine – designed to empower women in challenging life circumstances, to envision and



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create new possibilities for their life, called the “Empowerment Workshop.” This training program is developed by David Gershon and Gail Straub, founders and co-directors of the Empowerment Institute’s School for Transformational Social Change. The ‘Imagine’ initiative will initially be rolled out in five sites internationally where there are partner organizations that have a long standing involvement: Afghanistan, Sudan (Darfur), Nigeria, India, and South Africa. Olakh is one of the organizations from India.

- **18<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2011:** We were one of the trainers of training on Gender, Democracy and Citizenship held at Jagori Rural Siddhbadi Himachal Pradesh that had 42 participants.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> December 2011:** A meeting with the Charity Commissioner and Olakh’s Chartered Accountant, Mr. Hafez Dalal was held in Ahmedabad to know statutory requirement status of Olakh and whether there were any essentials looking at the changing scenario.



- **5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011:** we were one of the resource people for a foundation course on gender for 70 post graduate youth from different universities and diverse backgrounds along with other 3 trainers at PRADAN organization, Kesla M.P.



- **23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> January 2012:** Olakh was a trainer of the training on Gender Sensitization held at Government Girls College Chandigarh for under graduate and post graduate students. There were a total of 147 participants.



- **7<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> February 2012:** Training on Gender Sensitization for 25 staff members of Ramkrishna Mission Home of Service Varanasi, who work on health promotion in 40 villages of Uttar Pradesh.





***“I was very much impressed by this training workshop on gender. The enlightening, insightful and liberating content apart from the facility with which it was conducted in a participative method was not only educative but empowering. No wonder the evaluative incidence which came as the crowning glory for me was totally unsought. Our team which participated in this gender workshop was undergoing rights based approach training after a couple of months when the trainers who were an expert on this issue and unaware about this training interacted with our team and they told me that our team had received excellent training in gender whoever was the trainer!” In short, the training was excellent”***  
 and shared one of the coordinators of Ramkrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi



- **13<sup>th</sup> February 2012:** Ms. Nimisha went for a meeting at Lord Buddha Foundation Sarnath organized by Mr. Dilip one of the participants from a training held in Himachal. He is a lecturer and has initiated coaching classes for children from villages with few volunteers. Nimisha was invited to their centre and had a dialogue with the young volunteers there. She also visited a nearby village called Chari where she met a few widows of those farmers who had committed suicide due to the burden of heavy debt.



- **15<sup>th</sup> February 2012:** Meeting with Ms. Sangita at Kiran Institute that runs schools and vocational guidance center for physically challenged people. The purpose of visit was to gain an insight about their work as well as how the component of gender could be addressed in such institutes.



- **20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012:** The second meeting with Akshara and Jagori Rural organizations to finalize the content of material kit on Youth Mela was held in Olakh. It would be in the form of a 'Mela' (fair) where more than 1000 youth would participate. There would be various stalls on issues like gender, division of work, sexual harassment, friendship and love, health, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, etc. There would be many interactive games, posters, practical activities, films, etc. Olakh has taken the lead in conceptualizing and production of these materials and it would be widely distributed amongst other organizations.

The over-all and general feedback or learning that most of the participants and organizers share about their experience from a workshop or training are always encouraging and insightful, like;

***“This workshop was really liberating in the sense we got new eyes to see society and many problems from a wholly different angle and a confidence that we can think about different issues in an independent and fresh way rather than live with dogmas and fear”.***

***“Gender has been created by human beings in different societies only so human beings can change it as and when required by practice. And men and women have equal potentiality but due to male dominated society man gets more opportunities than a woman”.***

***“We also learnt that equal decision making power for both men and women bring about greater development which is sustainable and inclusive”.***

### **FEMINIST COUNSELING & INTERVENTION CENTER WITH HEALING & SUPPORT**

Work during the first six earlier was very quiet and low busy counseling and program of 8<sup>th</sup> March in the carry on with the activities was communities, the centers/work women could not go further as with their work/responsibilities Looking at the high rate of can run only when two people children, than what to feed and question. Today, just by sitting people also, is very difficult more difficult with the ever



society where the rich are getting richer and the poor, poorer. And this only has forced Gandhians like Mr. Anna Hazare to go on fast unto death. But still the government did not pay any heed to this as common people have no voice, when we get to eat more than needed than why to think about others? Why worry for others? All such feelings have set deep in our hearts. Today people are ready to kill others just for money.

months of this phase, as shared for the otherwise active and intervention centre. After the central prison, permission to again sought. In the that was initiated with the the women are very tied down at their homes/domestic areas. inflation in today’s time, a family earn. And if there are more what not to also becomes a at home, to survive even two and not affordable. All this is increasing corruption in the

### **Face to Face Mediation**

Since the past five years Olakh’s mediation center is run by bare foot counselors who are not professionally qualified or trained but over a period have gained knowledge and experience of the issues. Also, with the space and equal opportunity provided at Olakh, they have independent responsibilities to intervene, mediate and act on issues. In these years they have addresses around 600 cases. Though, with the changing outer world, transforming society and increasing complexities of issues especially in human values, the team was

faced with concerns a great dilemmas and at times less clarity or confidence of decisions making process (whether appropriate or not), etc. The changing situation what we are talking about includes issues like increase in extra marital issues, sexual engagement, young people wanting to marry in young age, throwing out old parents, increase in acceptance of individuals with diverse sexuality and social pressure on them and so on. On one hand are the matters of freedom, rights and living a life on one's own terms that too is right but on the other hand the dilemma of nurturing values of respect, responsibility and concern for fellow human (even ones family), all bring back the same concern of values and principles of humanity?

Regarding the program, the type of issues that were addressed during this phase were mostly issues of extra-marital affair, domestic violence, property issues, fraud by friends, sexual harassment and so on. Of these, marital/domestic violence has been rated as the highest.



***“I felt very relieved that here I was understood well and a proper guidance was given that put me at ease. Many women in my locality face violence so I will surely bring them to Olakh”,*** shared a much contented Bismillah Makrani from Gorwa, Vadodara (12<sup>th</sup> January 2012’).

***“After coming to Olakh, I was felt mentally relaxed and peaceful. I learned how to live and cope with every situation in life”,*** says Neeta Yadav (2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012’).



Sonika Chauhan said for the support and warmth that she gained, ***“I never felt like a stranger at Olakh even though I come from a different state and do not understand the local language. Everyone is friendly and made me comfortable in every way. I was given immediate support, was accompanied to the police station and to my in-laws. They were with me constantly and left me alone which only boosted my confidence. I wish there are more organizations like Olakh for women to seek justice”,*** from Panipat, Haryana (26<sup>th</sup> December 2011’).

**The total number of issues addressed in this phase is 193 of which 102 are new cases and 60 follow-up cases.** Also, 31 individuals visited to seek information and **guidance.** **In this phase, a decision has been made for 62:** 46 went for a mutual compromise (of these 23 were marital issues and 23 other), 16 took divorce.

Looking at the **gender diversity of new cases,** there were **71 females, 29 males and 1 transgender.** Also, one case came from an automobile company. Regarding the **age of these individuals,** we have observed that **most of them fall in between the 20-40 years age group** (11 are below 20 years of age, 70 between 20-40 years, 10 between 40-50, 5 are above 50, 4 are above 60 and for 2 status is not defined).

Stating their **literacy levels, 89 are literate and 13 illiterate (have no formal school education).** **88 of these individuals are married, 12 are single (divorced, deserted, widow or unmarried).** Out of these total, 58 are dependents (economically) and 44 are independent and looking at their **religious diversity, 10 are Muslims and the remaining are Dalits and Hindus.**

***A woman is behind the bars for the last 10 years, only because someone “just doubted” that she had murdered her husband!***

Such is the sorrow of 34 years old Neeru from Rajkot. She fell in love at a young age and got married early. Never had she thought that a man whom she loved dearly would one day turn in to a beast; beating her, thrashing her, abusing her verbally and always drunk. ***He would ask for forgiveness every time he hit her under the same old pretext of, “I did not remember as I was drunk!”*** But then her children too suffered and this left her in deep pain.

Due to many superstitions followed in different cultures, she too was not left untouched. Some man posing as a sage used to visit their house and was aware of her situation. One day, in a fight during gambling, her husband was murdered. No one knows who did it but the sage told the police that she was the one as she had always complained of his violent nature.

***Looking for no evidence, taking no account of what she had to say, she was sentenced for his murder for 14 years.*** Her children (two sons) were put in a support school. She was always very upset and thought only of her sons. As they were young, had no one to look for she did not see them for all these 10 years. During family visits for the inmates, she would cry for the entire day, as there was no one who would visit her. Then one day she received a letter from her elder son, Dharmesh and she was delighted. She shared this with all her fellow inmates as she was proud that her sons were well, seeking good education and had not forgotten their mother. He had written that she had faced a lot of hardships but no more as her son has grown up. He has started working and will get her out on bail.

Then, she met Olakh team during their regular visits to the prison. When she shared her woes, the team got in to action. They contacted Dharmesh at his school and called him over to the office. He came and shared how he was surviving without his mother, taking care of his younger brother and himself. He shared that he had stopped his education as he had to work to support his brother. Olakh team then discussed with them his future goals and guided him towards continuing his education. ***He agreed and with the support and reference from Olakh he got admission in a nearby school, for free.***

***Today, he is in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and doing well in his work. He sends money regularly to Neeru and also meets her once every 3 months. Whenever, he plans to meet his mother, he also makes it a point to visit Olakh. Neeru, is a happy woman now, filled with hope and dreams for her sons and her peaceful future. She always mentions to the people at the prison, that today only because of Olakh her family it not get divided and she hopes to get free from the prison, soon.***

***A man, who delivers religious preaching to others, is like a sage and people look up to him, thrashes his wife to perform sex, everyday in a manner that he sees in pornography! He is a sex-maniac!***

Sonal, a young girl of 21 years was ***first married at the tender age of 16*** but on knowing her husband was impotent, she divorced. The ***second marriage*** happened all too quickly as even after her father disagreed and wanted to wait for some time to be financially stable, her in-laws insisted that they were only interested in her and so would bear all the expenses of the marriage. ***Thus, she got married to this guy who was a religious preacher in their village.***

She was given a lot of gold and other gifts on her marriage from the in-laws and for the first two months, life was beautiful for Sonal. Then, she faced the reality. ***Her husband started demanding sex all the time and beat her up cruelly when she denied. He would tear her clothes in front of others, would click her nude pictures and warned her that he would take her to court and prove that she was a woman of 'bad character'. He would take her to his native, remote village, watch pornography, take some 'energy' giving pills and then demand sex for the entire day.***

She was tired of this and felt like killing herself. Even both their families were involved in this matter and all that happened that she was asked to stay with him after giving him a simple word of advice or so from the elders. ***But one day she decided to take a firm step.***

***She came to Olakh and shared her situation. She cried and pleaded that she should be saved from this violent creature.*** After much discussion with both the families and keeping Sonal's interests in mind, her husband was asked to go for a divorce peacefully. He was very angry and did not want to leave her but she was firm. They finally went for a divorce and Sonal was advised to file a case for maintenance with the court.

***Today, she lives an independent and peaceful life. She has become a cook and earns for her own living as she does not want to burden her parents. She also, supports them and is happy with her life.***

***Workers of an automobile company are on an indefinite strike, reason – discrimination, harassment of workers by middle level leaders/supervisors, work demands outside human capacities and no voice of workers in the production.***

The ***management of this company approached Olakh*** as they felt that it was not only the workers who were to be addressed but also their ***families which were being directly affected by the on-going strike.***

***Olakh intervened at two levels: with the workers and the management to have fair understanding of the matter.*** It was known from the workers how the middle level leader/supervisors harassed them, discriminated them, were bias and never let their voice reach the management for their concerns. They were very united and demanded a fair play. Until then the strike would continue even though they did face difficulties managing their households. The families also supported them as they felt it was their right.

***Olakh after repeated meetings and discussions suggested that both the workers and the management should come for a final discussion with a non-bias and non-judgmental mindset and have a thorough look in to the concerns.*** Olakh would be a mediator for this. Also, a committee consisting of representatives from both sides could be constituted for all types of crises and grievance management. This would decentralize power and benefit both.

***A suggestion for welfare activities and program*** including the families of the workers was also shared. Thus, considering all the aspects a meeting was held, matters were discussed at length and a common ground was found.

***Olakh played a vital role*** here as the issue concerned around discrimination, abuse of people based on different identities they had and lack of freedom for performance; which ***Olakh strives against for a just and equal society.***



*“I am eunuch and had fallen in love with a man but was not accepted. I sought help from Olakh where I was given equal respect, was listened to and they gave me proper and correct guidance to lead my life in a right direction”,*

shared Mahesh Solanki from Harijan-vas, Vadodara (10<sup>th</sup> October 2011’).



*“On coming to Olakh, my first thought was that this is a women’s organization and so I would get no space to talk or share my issue but I am amazed that I was treated with equal respect, listened to and this cured half my illness. If it was not for Olakh, I would have broken down completely. I feel that I have got a new life now”,* said a very happy Bhavesh Patel from Gorwa, Vadodara (20<sup>th</sup> March 2012’).

Also, as a part of the intervention, **67 field visits** were made for different counselees where either the family members were not ready to come to Olakh for discussion, to know about the other side of the story and have a dialogue with the members and also as a follow-up with those women who issues were resolved or those who had gone back with mutual compromise. Visits were also made to police stations, hospitals and to courts.

• **Women’s Helpline (Toll free)**

As shared in the last phase, the helpline number has been taken over by the state government and the matter still is under discussion. Thus, it was shared with the participating groups (women) of Olakh that they should make use of the alternate number in times of crises and emergency. There were hardly any important calls received on the alternate number and those that came were all wrong numbers like some marketing inquiry, railway inquiry, etc. one of the main reasons being the charges applicable that many women cannot easily afford. **The important and follow-up calls were made by the team from the alternate number which is a total of 171.**

## Activities in Central Prison of Vadodara



On the occasion of India's Independence Day on 15<sup>th</sup> of August, this year an eye camp was organized for the women inmates. **Around 200 women underwent the check-up and of these 175 were detected with weak eye-sights.** The women appreciated the efforts of Olakh towards their better health and living.

In this phase the permission to work in the prison got extended and Olakh team members visited every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. After the successful program of the International



Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March this year, meetings and discussions with the women were held to know what the women wanted to know and learn.

**Around 40 women participated in these meetings and it was shared that many of them would like to acquire the skills of a beautician – learn hair cutting, massage, facial, etc.** They not only learned these skills but also practiced it when they had free time. All of them were so excited when even one of their members could successfully perform any of the newly learnt skills. Also, it would happen that young women would pursue older women to participate on which the older women would feel shy and shared that what would people say about them trying to beautify their bodies at such an old age.

This activity went on from 15<sup>th</sup> June to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011 where 25 women have acquired these skills.

### • Self Help Group – Aneri

In this phase efforts were focused towards re-initiating and re-participation of all the Aneri women/members that have been in all these years. It was planned to revive the program once again. For this an invitation through a personal letter was given to all the women. **Then on 18<sup>th</sup> of June 2011 a meeting with 30 women was held where Dr. Vibhuti Patel was invited as the resource person. She talked about the importance of having a group like Aneri, what and how planning for them should be carried out.** The women showed interest and agreed upon meeting on every 15<sup>th</sup> of a month and were enthusiastic to continue with the activities



**15<sup>th</sup> July 2011:**

On this day, 20 women participated where a memory and concentration game was played. As women do not get much opportunities or space to play freely, they enjoyed this game.

Says Savita, ***“After becoming a part of this group I have the courage to come out from my house, alone. Before I would cry on every small matter but today, with this new support and confidence I support others. Also, after participating in trainings on theatre, laws, and women’s collective, I am a new woman now who can talk freely from her heart”.***

**15<sup>th</sup> August 2011:**

The Aneri women were taken to the central prison where they saw the entire premises, met the women inmates and shared each other’s life-stories with them. They talked just like friends and the Aneri women also were sad to know that some of the women were innocent and still were suffering though there were some who had really committed serious crimes and were least bothered about that. The important aspect that the Aneri women came to know and understood from the women inmates was that the inmates were at some peace with themselves, even when they were behind the bars, away from families and were trying to learn, know and understand all that was shared with them, not leaving any opportunity so that if they were released, they could have better future or even if they lived in the prison for their entire lifetime, they would have some new skills and good knowledge with them.

***“On becoming a part of Aneri, I have much courage and the confidence to speak and stand for the right in every situation on the society. With the different visits and trainings organized, the understanding of different realities of society are now better understood and even accepted”***, said Archana after she met the women inmates in the prison.

**8<sup>th</sup> March 2011:** Aneri group have organized a cycle rally with Holi celebration and guest was a celebrate woman Ms. Dr Bhagvati Oza 78 year old a Gynecologist, environment activist as well as cyclist, swimmer has happily accepted with great energy.





## **FUTURE DIRECTION**

And thus, Olakh moves ahead with the aim to take a reflective pause and reinforce, re-instill new energies, strategies, needs to address with the same or more zeal and enthusiasm with which its foundation was laid 20 years back. Now, as we have shared in our earlier report with you that the external evaluation took place from 1<sup>st</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> February 2011' by EED, Germany. Following are few thoughts for Olakh's future proposal based on the recommendations made by the evaluators and internal discussions, which took place during the staff and board members' meetings last year.

### **Interim period to Envision, Reflect, Review & Document Our Journey**

Firstly, as we have been discussing at different point of time and also as suggested by evaluators, Olakh needs to have a breathing space – a pause - qualitative time period – interim space to envision, reflect, and review on its past journey as well as its future direction. Also, it is good time for Olakh to document its journey as we have initiated and carried out many innovative programs and reached diverse constituencies. The path so far has been satisfying and full of new learning, challenges filled with both beautiful and at times unpleasant moments. It is very essential these be pondered upon before diving in to the future, as it would mean a reality check on the strengths-weaknesses as well as on effective methods. The proposed analytical reflection and documentation of our journey will also provide us vision and guidelines for future direction and enable us to strategize for the next 10 years charter of Olakh.

### **Active Engagement of Youth in Social and Development Process by providing Fellowships for further Education and Learning Skills**

Next, a major shift would be engaging youth – girls and boys in the development process with feminist perspective. It is a great need and urgency felt with a deep craving to know, learn, explore and enlighten one's life existence in the communities of the urban, rural and tribal youth. At this juncture Olakh has decided to initiate and explore its activities with youth in urban and rural areas by introducing fellowship for education with perspective and skill building to the less-privileged sections by information and knowledge dissemination with awareness programs and experiential learning – like 'Youth Mela' is gathering of people - an event which can cater to a large number of youth as many as 500-1000 in a day. We can create a space for young men and women to have fun as well as to learn, share experience and insights and express their views on gender consciousness, equality and rights through games, posters, activities, visuals and discussion.

Here, we would like to share the strategic linkage between fellowships and engaging youth in development process through youth mela and workshops on most germane topics like gender relations, reproductive health, sexuality, eve teasing, friendships and relationship etc. We would like to introduce this program by giving fellowships to all those, potential individuals - young women, girls and boys to actualize their dream in to reality and prepare them as future thinkers and activist to bring change in the society. Thus, we have decided to introduce this project playing the combined role of bridging the gaps between the potential human resources with the possible resources to move ahead along with close facilitation to visualize and implement the program. Through this we will also be able to engage and create an opportunity to build up their perspective and capacity as future change agents/leader to take ahead the journey of rural and urban development.

### **Training Center's Short Term Residential Certificate Course Challenging Patriarchy and Leading to Empowerment**

Yes, Olakh is planning to build training center and in future, as mentioned above and shared during the external evaluation process, Olakh's vision (for future) is to offer trainings to different groups of individuals from social, development and educational institutes.

This would focus on different stake holders like grassroots and middle level social activists, young professionals-social workers, human resource personnel, women's rights activists, development workers, local self government bodies, legal activists, youth organizations, human rights activist, journalists and film makers and students from all disciplines (pursuing professional degrees). At present, Olakh has a pool of around 40 experts from different fields who have agreed to join hands and train these groups, sensitize and build up their knowledge base, to work in the development areas with gender/feminist perspective. Olakh would then become a holistic training institute offering varied trainings/courses on a regular basis.

Hence, Olakh has decided to meet this challenge by designing and organizing short term residential certificate courses that would develop gender sensitivity, critical faculty to analyze issues at stake and advocacy for intervention, strategic thinking and policy planning with theoretical models, various operational/practical skills of articulation, presentation, writing, reading and computer competency with communication, and leadership.

### **Creating "Her" Stories**

Next, as Olakh is a feminist women's group and the roots have grown on the feminist ideology, the process of continuing documenting women's stories – 'Her' Stories' would be one of the core areas of focus in the coming years. This is and would be a significant contribution to recognize women's contribution in developing, empowering and reconstructing of society at large. In this regards, we have collected and compiled a database of around 150 Gujarati women, over 70 years of age – who has made remarkable contributions for the reconstruction or development of our society.

***A woman is the full circle.  
Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform.***

***Diane Mariechild***

Our vision is to take their oral history with audio and video recording and photographs and then first to publish a photo book with a one page story and later to initiate the process of writing their biography/stories ("Her stories instead of His stories") in a collective way by eminent Gujarati women writers. This will be a significant contribution to the women's movement – making these women and their contribution visible by writing 'Her Story' in History. We have completed the life-stories of 30 such marvelous women, but have to stop due to lack of funds and would initiate once we enable support for the same. And as we have shared in our earlier reports, the dream to organize a felicitation program bringing the young and older feminists and other remarkable women together is also under consideration.

### **CONCLUSION**

And one of the major issues we are facing is the financial security. Here, we would like to mention that the kind of work that organizations like Olakh undertakes is difficult, lengthy and full of challenges, at all levels. Thus, becoming fully self-sufficient is not possible. And thus, we need to have corpus for the Organization. In regards to the corpus, generally as per our knowledge only funding partners provide corpus to make organization's future secure. But till now we have not asked any of our present funding partners for a corpus nor has any of the funding partner provided Olakh with any corpus. **We have been working from October 2011 to March 2012 without any financial support. Here, we would like to request all our funders to reflect and make some provision for the same looking at the long term security.**

Here, we would like to draw your attention to the entire 'experience' of being judged 'right or wrong from the framework of funding guidelines' that Olakh faced with one of our funding partners, EED (Germany) without having dialogue or considering our back and forth communication, which was very straining. It was only due unwillingness to listen and lack of the deeper understanding and holistic outlook towards volunteerism, selflessness and strong binding to principles of Olakh by the funding channel, FMSF, a time of severe mental anguish and injustice was experienced.

Last but not least here we would like to state that a Program officer MS. Pamela from EED and representatives from FMSF Mr. Sanjay Batra and Mr. Hariharn have made personal visits and given a report which says.....

### Visit findings

During our visit to OLAKH on 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012, interactions were in a very cooperative and positive environment.

OLAKH was extremely open and transparent to us and we were provided access to every document that we needed.

The Auditors representative was very cooperative as well and provided necessary input and feedback wherever needed.

It was observed that, based on the observations and suggestions made by EED/FMSF, during the financial year 2010-11, OLAKH has spent the unspent notional expenses charged to the project.

It was observed that, the notional cost charged to the project has been fully utilized by OLAKH and there is no balance un-utilized notional reserve lying with the organization.

OLAKH has also submitted a statement with the details of transfers made and expenditure incurred out of the notional charges, counter signed by the Project auditor.

Documented by  
Hari Krishna Pasupuleti fom FMSF

BUT the decision has been made without any dialogue or considering the truth of the matter.....this is an example of misusing power which the representative from funders exercise and implementing partner do not get the space even to put forth their point of view.....

Though, the decision was made without any dialogue or taking the truth in to account. This is a sheer example of misuse of power and authority and a judgmental attitude that the representatives of the funders (here FMSF) exercise and the implementing partners like Olakh, have no space even to put forth their point of view or share the details of the actions taken.

Last but not least, we would like to take this opportunity to wish and dream that 'May we be blessed with more trust, friendship and solidarity! Thanks a lot for being with us all these years in moments of happiness and struggle and this journey would not have been so rich without your being there. Also, we are expecting the same spirit and support to taking our journey of gender equality ahead by holding each other's hands.

### OMPLIANCE TO NORMS FOR CREDIBILITY OF VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION

PARTICULARS	COMPLIANCE
<b>A Registration</b>	
• Name of the Organization	<b>Olakh A Space for Women</b> Feminist Resource, Counseling and Training Center
• Registered Address	F- 7 Sagar Apartment, Bodakdev Road Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India
• Present Office Address of Organization	8 A, Nivruti Colony, Opp. Jilla Talim Bhavan, Arya Kanya Vidyalaya, Karelibaug, Vadodara: 390018,
• Public Trust Act	F/3520, Ahmedabad, Date: 26/5/1993
• Society Registration Act	Guj/3654/ Ahmedabad, Date: 26/5/1993
• FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act)	041990006, Date: 3/01/1985
• Bank Address	Bank of Baroda, Karelibaug Branch Kana Complex, Nr. Muktanand Bus Stop, Karelibaug, Vadodara; 390018, Gujarat, India Phone Number; 91 265 2480273
<b>Exemption Under Income Tax Act</b>	
• Income Tax 12 (A) Registration	11/22-0/93-94 – Date: 6/7/93
• Income Tax 50 % Under 80G (5)	No. BRD I.T.O.- III/tech./104-188-5/2010 (Permanent)
• PAN (Permanent Account Number)	AAAT00259M, Date: 18/2/1983
<b>B Clarity and Commitment about Mission &amp; Approach</b>	
• In Memorandum of Association and various Reports	Well defined
• Translated into programs and activities	Well Ensured
• Efforts towards developing clarity and acceptance among staff member, beneficiaries and local community.	With Special effort on regular basis
<b>C Governance and programmatic operations</b>	
• Governing Board Members / Trustees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total Number of trustees – 8,</li> <li>• All are Women,</li> <li>• Only one trustee is working as full time Co ordinator and paid for her professional work</li> <li>• Board Meetings are once in every four Months 3 times in a year and Minimum 2 times– 18<sup>th</sup> May 2011 and 18<sup>th</sup> February 2012</li> </ul>
• Activity Targets and Systems for Ongoing Monitoring and Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women Survivor of Violence are in center,</li> <li>• Our focus is towards Empowerment</li> <li>• Clarity of Role and Responsibilities</li> <li>• Well Planned with monthly target setting</li> <li>• Well define quantitative and qualitative Indicators</li> <li>• Monthly and Three Monthly Review</li> <li>• Focus on Qualitative and Quantitative aspect</li> </ul>
• Policy for purchase, storing, issuing	Well defined and Implemented
• Maintenance of dead stock register	Up to date and 6 Monthly Physical Verification takes place on regular basis
<b>D Human Resources</b>	
• Salary standards	Fair, Meaningful and Logical

Salary of Present Employees				Year of Service of Present Employees			
Goss salary (Rs.)	Male	Female	Total	Year of service	Male	Female	Total
Less than 3,000				Less than 5		1	1
3,001 to 5,000				Between 5 to 10		3	3
5001 to 10,000		4	4	Between 10 to 15		1	1
10,001 to 20,000		1	1	More than 15		1	1
More than 20,000		1	1	<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>				

Monthly pay - Highest Rs.30,000/- Lowest Rs.6,000/-

**COMPLIANCE TO NORMS FOR CREDIBILITY OF VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION**

PARTICULARS	COMPLIANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal Appointment order and booklet on Guide line on 'Olakh norms and rules &amp; regulations'</li> </ul>	Appointment Letter has been given to all. H.R. Manual with Rules and Regulation are in place and all team members are aware of it .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Eligible benefits like PF, gratuity, Leave etc.</li> </ul>	Given to all regular staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional benefits and support for personal accident, Mediclaim, children education, tours, magazines etc.</li> </ul>	Personal Accident and Mediclaim benefits are available for all Team Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Meetings</li> </ul>	Weekly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Olakh's Staff Meetings</li> </ul>	Monthly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity for capacity building and professional development at all levels</li> </ul>	Equal opportunities to all staff members
<b>E Accountability and transparency</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Annual progress reports</li> <li>◦ Annual Audit reports</li> </ul>	Every Year well documented and accessible Every Year well documented and accessible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Aspects:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Yearly budget exercise and financial review in board meetings</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Yearly Basis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Accounts Systems</li> </ul>	Well define and transparent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Emphasis on receipt for every financial transaction (all types of Income and Expenses)</li> </ul>	Well ensured
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Accounts monitoring meetings</li> </ul>	Monthly basis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Accounts audited by professional experts</li> </ul>	Yearly basis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Name of Auditors</li> </ul>	Mr. Hafiz Dalal H. Rustom and Company, 1 <sup>st</sup> Floor, Mistry Chambers, Nr. Cama Hotel, Khanpur, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India Phone: 079 25600733
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation &amp; Review by external agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every 5 years and Well documented, Last External Evaluation took Place on February 2011</li> <li>• Accreditation Certificate from Credibility Alliance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norms of statutory requirement like... Foreign contribution, income tax, charity commissioner, employment exchange, minimum daily wages etc.</li> </ul>	Well Implementation with adherence. All statutory documents have been submitted to income Tax, Charity Commissioner and Home Ministry regular basis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of various Awards</li> </ul>	Largely in the name of the Institution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air Travel :</li> </ul>	Ms. Nimisha has traveled but expenses are bare by invited organization

*They said – take it easy...  
Said – calm down...  
Said – stop talking'...  
Said – shut up....  
They said- sit down....  
Said – bow your head...  
Said – keep on crying', let the tears roll...*

*What should you do in response?*

*You should stand up now  
Should stand right up  
Hold your back straight  
Hold your head high...  
You should speak  
Speak your mind  
Speak it loudly  
Scream!*

*You should scream so loud that they must run for cover.  
They will say – 'You are shameless!'  
When you hear that, just laugh...*

*They will say – 'You have a loose character!'  
When you hear that, just laugh louder...*

*They will say – 'You are rotten!'  
So just laugh, laugh even louder...*

*Hearing you laugh, they will shout,  
'You are a whore!'*

*When they say that,  
just put your hands on your hips,  
stand firm and say,  
"Yes, yes, I am a whore!"*

*They will be shocked.  
They will stare in disbelief.  
They will wait for you to say more, much more...*

*The men amongst them will turn red and sweat.  
The women amongst them will dream to be a whore like you...*

**Taslima Nasreen**

