

REPORT FOR THE PERIOD OF

APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2009'

SUBMITTED TO

KIRSTEN GADE

EED, GERMANY

Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst e.V
South and Middle Asia Desk
Ulrich-von-Hassell-Str.
76 53123 Bonn
Phone: 0049 228 8101 2140
Fax: 0049 228 8101 160
Email: kirsten.gade@eed.de

Contact: 8 – A, Nivruti Colony, Opp. Jilla Talim Bhavan, Arya Kanya School Road, Karelibaug,
Vadodara - 390018. Gujarat, India. Phone: 091 – 26 – 2486487/2466037.

Email: olakh.space@gmail.com

Web site: www.olakh.org.in

You Are Called

You are called to be conscious.

You are called to take responsibility.

You are called to be totally respectful.

You are called to listen within.

You are called to forgive all the time, setting yourself free.

You are called to claim your Holiness.

You are called to see the wholeness amidst the parts.

You are called to seek the Highest Good.

You are called to take impeccable self care.

You are called to serve the Highest you know.

You are called to live what you teach.

You are called to love all equally.

You are called to be totally honest.

You are called to be authentic.

You are called to teach with every thought, word and deed.

You are called to appreciate the gift in everything.

You are called.

You are the One.

*Author Unknown (found in manual from
Kripalu 500 hour teacher training Module 2 – Pranayama)*

And thus, with this calling of duty, responsibility and compassion Olakh moves ahead...

At a glance...

After one and a half years since moving in these premises, we are fully set with every corner being utilized most optimally – all necessity requirements of electricity and carpentry work taken care of. The front and back areas are occupied by a variety of plants – the ones planted when the building was bought, making the campus green and fresh all day long. All rooms, placed programmatically, are now bustling with day to day activities...

It was only after the revised grant being sanctioned (by EED, Germany), new people were appointed and they have joined the organization from July 2009 onwards. The sanctioning actually brought in a great relief as till then, the period was filled with a lot of anxiety and loaded responsibilities on the few team members. We all know that uncertainty of receiving funds at planned times, brings in huge amounts of pressures to organizations that depend largely on grants and human resources to carry out their programs and activities.

New appointments

With the addition of new people, new energy has been instilled in the team. After the phasing out and settling in from the last phases, the different programs have taken up a steady and stable move towards the goals and objectives set forth.

After years of experience, Olakh has introduced an ‘**appointment policy**’ for new recruitments. Where, firstly one undergoes a 10 days orientation/induction program (as a volunteer), then a 3 months training period is allotted with specific roles and responsibilities. Finally, appointment is done based on a year’s probation. This gives the organization and individuals an opportunity to familiarize with each other, with the environment, work culture and most importantly values and requirements of efficiency, skills and knowledge.

This is essential, as in today’s fast moving society and with changing needs and demands people tend to change their career and plans thus, experimenting all the time. An expectation of long term associations is rare. Thereby, this policy assists well.

Olakh carried out a 10 days orientation process, three month training period where each was given responsibilities as per their interests, skills and requirements of the time. And then only one year contract will be given. As an outcome, **3 women were appointed.**

Student placements

The process of taking students from different universities/institutes as placements also re-started since July 2009’. Till date **7 students** from **social work institutes** have been placed with their work assignments to support in classification and organizing/arrangements of resource material, film screenings in areas and field visits with the intervention team.

“A common feedback from them is, “The overall environment at Olakh is very friendly and warm. We were never treated as outsiders or individuals who know less. Every opportunity of learning and experiencing whether, on field or in office premises, was given to us.”

“They also shared that they learned communications skills, rapport building and developed confidence, gained knowledge on issues of women and girls, gender, feminism and so on.”

Board meetings

Two meetings of Olakh’s board were held on the **28th June and 30th September 2009** with the major focus on the financial and accounting positions and the need for a proper Planning, Implementing and Monitoring system was shared. It was suggested to appointment an external expert for one year period.

Feedbacks on the personnel policy were also shared and an **important resolution** with regards to the **board members ‘rotation’ was passed.** And the sanctioning of the revised budget with financial positions was shared.

Credibility Alliance

As shared in the last phase, Olakh qualified to seek the accreditation and now acquired the certification from this rating consortium with the two set of criterion – rotation of board members and publishing of yearly progress reports.

Finance and Accounts

As shared earlier, after a line of exhaustive back and forth communications with our partner EED (Germany), matters were settled and so the revised budget was sanctioned. The six monthly audits were also successfully completed

Program and Activities

And also discussion at length taken place on the entire process of documenting **“Women’s Herstory”** – women’s **imagination, vision, courage, vitality, sacrifice, resistance, rebuilding – reconstruction, determination and persistence toward peace and development of society** and **an event to felicitate elderly women of Gujarat** at the occasion of celebrating **8th March, the International Women’s Day is completed its grand journey of 100 years of world women’s movements**. Also, issues of **collaboration and fund raising** were discussed with suggestions of different donors for the program as well as the photo book and book on women biographies decided to publish.

Organizational Planning

With the new phase arriving and programs taking a steady leap ahead, an extensive organizational planning based on the action plan put forth to partner agencies was carried out. From the **15th to 17th September 2009**, the planning meeting was held. On the first day the entire team was involved along with the 7 placements students. The aim was to know each other, as during the past weeks, only a professional relation had developed but the personal relation had touch was missing. The group felt that this was quite an enriching experience, one that not only introduced them with different people but also brought them close to their own selves.



On the other two days a detailed orientation of Olakh’s proposed action plan was done. Taking one program as an example, macro planning was followed by micro planning at individual levels for each member. This was necessary not only for planning but also to know the main and supportive roles and responsibilities of each member.

Visitors



An orientation to a city based theatre group called Samvedan Culture Society was done on the **7th August 2009**. The group consisted of 17 young women and men. A brief sharing about Olakh, its objectives, aim along with different program and activities was done. The concepts of gender, feminism and patriarchy were discussed in detail.

Further, in this phase a total of **126 visitors** were attended at Olakh. These visitors mainly comprised of professionals like activists and social workers from other organizations, students who came for NGO visit as a part of their course curriculum, professionals and well wishers.

Deepti Bhatt, **“Olakh has created a unique identity of its own and through it women are also creating their identities. I am sure they will continue to do the same in future”**. (14th May 2009)

Creating ‘Herstories’

Looking into the hard hitting reality of women’s forced secondary status in our societies, where she is always at the lowest rung of any order, **her contributions, efforts and irreplaceable support for the survival of many lives, goes unseen, unheard and unrecognized**. It is always expected and believed that all that she does or has done is a ‘mandatory’ duty for her that is instilled since birth. And thus, taking account of great revolutions, innovations and inventions, with many wars and disasters behind us, one always comes across ‘His-story’.

There are stories and long told tales of great men, men of valor who gave their all to protect nurture and bring about their communities or countries pride and dignity. Their women though, sat back home, cooked and looked after the family that was home! And thus, it has always been one

of the dedicated efforts of organizations and groups like Olakh to thereby **recognize value and honor the great contributions of such women**. These are women who have through their extra-ordinary works and lives, contributed for the upliftment, development and change of the society at large. Thus, in this context of joining hands and paying a tribute to these exemplary women, **Olakh has initiated an interesting process creating 'her' stories of elderly women from Gujarat state, above the age of 70 years who have struggled and contributed for bringing change and worked for the development of masses.**

It is also an effort to make the younger generation aware of them so that they become an inspiration for the future of a nation. This was one of the objectives of Olakh since it's inception as a part of the resource center programs. The process has been categorized into **3 different steps of identification with an audio and video documentation of these women's oral life stories**, to begin with. A **data bank of around 138 women** is ready and the process of documentation is moving accordingly with all women scattered in different districts and cities of Gujarat. **In this phase, 15 women have already been covered.** They are women of the likes of the first women singers and musicians, Gujarati writers, a graphic designer, an exclusive women's lawyer, the first political photographer and so on. And, it is amazing to know that all of them are at present above 80 years of age! Thus, for the coming phase (October 2009 to May 2010) we plan to complete this 1st step of documentation with an oral history and video document.

The second step will then be to organize a **large level public felicitation of all these women**. Here, we plan to bring together not only these marvelous women but even the women pioneers from the feminist movement, on the same platform. And the final step is to bring all this together and **publish a path breaking book** of these women and all the women involved.

And we are happy to share that **SANGAT (New Delhi)** has agreed to join hands with us and carry forward this dream project as a partner organization. The said second phase of women's felicitation has been planned for 1st – 3rd October 2010.

Trainings/Workshops (organized/resource person)



- **'Deal with the Past'** – This workshop was held from **2nd to 4th April 2009 at Nuremburg, Germany**. Ms. Nimisha was invited to make a presentation amongst a group of around 80 individuals who were researchers, social/peace activists, psychologists, etc. from all over the globe.

organizations – This was organized on the **24th & 25th April 2009 at Olakh, Vadodara**. A total of **18 participants** from 14 organizations of Gujarat participated. The resource persons, having their expertise in the said areas came from different organizations like SEWA Rural, Jaghadia, H. Rustom & Company, Ahmedabad and Hanny Mehta Co – chartered Accountants, Vadodara, along with Ms. Nimisha.



A **follow up meeting** was later organized on the **7th – 8th September 2009 in Vadodara**, where it was decided that a master HR guideline, based on Olakh's Personnel policy should be made for every NGO of Gujarat.



- **Action based Research Dissemination Workshop** – To share and disseminate the findings, perceptions and conclusions of the extensive study undertaken by Olakh after the 2002 communal carnage in Gujarat, a one day workshop was held on **9th of May 2009 at Olakh, Vadodara**.

The process focused on finalizing the report and on get views of experts on the subjects of communalism and communal violence. Experts or people involved in activism against communalism and fundamentalism, and those who have studied the subject were invited to give their comments and suggestions. This included individuals from fields of political science, sociology, law, geography and Olakh team that were a part of the research. The report was presented by Prof. Vibhuti Patel, who played a major role in the compilation of the research study. The workshop was a very useful process in finalizing the report and to seek broader views. It also helped in getting wider picture with views of experts well-versed on the theme.

And lastly it was decided that Ms. Vahida (from Mumbai) a lawyer and activist by profession, well versed and experienced in areas of conflict and human rights at national and international levels, would finalize the report that is likely to be published by March 2010.

• **Gender, Democracy and Citizenship for Youth** – This training was held from **20th to 31st of May 2009 in Himachal Pradesh**. It was organized by Jagori Grameen (Himachal) and Olakh was the main resource person/felicitor. **33 young women and men** from Himachal, Uttaranchal and Gujarat states participated.

Later, a follow up brainstorming session on the 17th and 18th August 2009 was organized in Mumbai (by Jagori Grameen). It was to plan and replicate the same course with other organizations like Akshara (Mumbai), Masum (Pune), Olakh (Gujarat) and Jagori Grameen (Himachal). It was also decided to organize the next trainings in the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat.

• **Apprenticeship training** – This was organized by Pradan (M.P.) from **2nd to 6th of September 2009** where Olakh was invited as a faculty for teaching Gender. This is a continuation to the training session Olakh had done in the previous phase (April 2008 to March 2009). **22 young women and men** from IT field, engineers, etc. participated.

• **Session on Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and Violence against Women** – The Women's Studies Research Centre of the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara offers an 'Interdisciplinary Course in Women's Studies' during August – September 2009. The broad objective of the course is to provide awareness and perspective on and about women's issues and develop gender sensitivity. The participants were about **30 young and vibrant students and individuals** interested in the issue.

Olakh was the resource person for two sessions, facilitated the session on **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005** on **11th September 2009**. The session included key features of the Act and how it has been a landmark achievement for the women's movement for the protection of women from violence. A good amount of discussion was around demystifying the myth that this Act is anti-men and is likely to break more families.

The other session was on **Violence against Women** was held on **25th September 2009**. The main focus was on the broad definition and understanding of violence. The impact of violence on women was also shared and discussed. This was organized by Women's study Center M.S. University, Vadodara..

• **Feminist personal Safety – safety for women and girls** was **September 2009** with **18 young** communities. Along with structural reasons for violence society, it is also quite significant that enhance personal safety dealing with violence in their own



A 2 days session on personal conducted on **25th & 26th women** from different addressing and challenging the against women in a patriarchal to promote empowering initiatives skills of girls and women roles in lives.

The two day long process focused on demystifying some of the myths that women are made to believe and abide by which only increases the possibility of facing violence and the process of victimization. The process helps them to discover and believe in their own strengths and capabilities to protect selves. It gives an inner strength that actually transforms from a state of victim mode to an assertive, confident and empowered being. It speaks of various de-escalation strategies for dealing with violence in their lives through communication – increasing ones boundaries, being assertive, learning to say ‘No’.

The course also includes some simple women friendly physical techniques of defense, release from chocks and holds. The participants participated in the process very actively and enthusiastically. For some of them, as they expressed, it was an unbelievable process of rediscovering the self. Some one said that she feels more safe and confident as she carries so many techniques with her.

• **Workshop on Empowerment: Change Management and Leadership** – The preparatory processes for this national workshop scheduled to be organized from 1st to 3rd October 2009’ at Vadodara was done in this phase. The invited participants are various senior women from all over India who have founded/initiated different women’s groups and programs all across the country at various levels, for different issues centered on women.

The workshop is intended to reduce conflict in the workplace, foster teamwork and improve service delivery, increase self confidence and self esteem; inspire, motivate and promote positive change. The whole process is going to be facilitated by **Ms. Shqipe Malushi**. During the past three years she has been working with GTZ – Gender Mainstreaming Project in Kabul, Afghanistan. Her work focuses on empowerment and leadership activities, team building, vision building and networking, taking in consideration cross cultural diversity, gender issues, addressing personal and professional conflict and conflict resolution.

During the month of **September 2009** all the preparation work like follow up, coordinating and confirming participants, sourcing and finalizing the venue, coordinating with the resource person, preparing training material for the process, etc. were carried out. It is going to be a unique and empowering process which takes one through ones very own but hidden and suppressed world of dreams and possibilities.

Training/Workshops (participated)

• **Legal workshop** – A 3 days legal workshop was organized by an organization called **KMVS (Kutch, Gujarat)** from **28th to 30th June 2009**’. **Two members from Olakh**, one from Aneri and another team member participated. The focus was to share and discuss the important laws and legal procedures related to women, especially violence against women and girls. This exposure would help the women in the processes of the women’s collective initiative for justice as well as other intervention processes.

• **Network meeting against Gang Rapes in Gujarat** – A women’s group called Astitva organized a meeting on the **4th of September 2009**’ at **Valsad city**. This was to address the heinous crime of gang rape – more than 5 such incidences in a span of 6 months – had taken place in different cities of Gujarat like Patan, Rajpipla, Surat, Jamnagar and others. Different social and development groups joined in the meeting with a focus to raise an alarm on issues, measures –legal and social to be taken against the ‘perpetrators’ and ways/means of self defense to know and learn for safety. It was also shared that to fight against these evils, even sensitive men should be called to join hands.

Feminist Resource Centre

After much reflection and through experience of all these years, it was decided that the **objectives with which the resource centre was initiated – dissemination of ideology through literature and promoting reading spread of information – are much relevant** even in this modern era of advanced technology where information is at the tip of fingers. Thus, the activities of mobile library, reader's forum and dissemination of resources (issue based material) would be taken ahead for the phases to come. Also, in the near future film screenings would be re-introduced as a regular activity.

Classification

After organizing and setting up the resource centre, the qualitative task of re-classification/sub-classification of material was started. The focus in these months lay on fictional books that were put in a major category of 'Culture and Literature' and then sub classified into 15 other categories (earlier all the material was under this one category). This also included other material like audio music, films/documentaries, and posters. **Around 4,000 of the total resources** have now been classified into categories like auto-biography, biography, philosophy, short stories, poems, drama, etc.

The entire process has been a rich one with involvement of many including Olakh team, placement students and volunteers. It was planned and discussed why and how the classification was important and points to be kept in mind. Thus, an entire 'user friendly' classification was done manually as well as in the accession records (excels data sheets).



The exercise not only introduced the team with different types of books, their contents, the authors but also familiarized them with material helpful in day to day work and personal lives. Being with books all day long, discussing and sharing its content with each other and motivation and guidance from people familiar with literature, has now resulted into a habit and interest in reading for many of the team. And process of classifying other resources is still on.

Reader's Forum

As we know, each moment, everyday there is something new taking place in the world around us. There are things which are at times ordinary or peculiar or strange that happen with people around the globe. There is change or growth taking place in known and unknown spheres of our lives. And all this is then either in front of our eyes – through the advance technology at our fingertips or it remains hidden and unknown.

Today, it is said and believed use of internet, mobile phones people together and made doorsteps. But this then raises is the scenario, then does it another will be restricted only ways? Or does it also mean perceptions or even dilemmas manner? Is this the only



that growing technology with and globalization has brought information available at our a serious question that if this mean that one's contact with through these mediums or that sharing of information, would be done only in this alternative left with us?

Thus, to sustain the very value of human touch and to share knowledge, information, ideas and perceptions in each others company, Olakh as a part of its resource centre thought of bringing together individuals who have a great interest in reading and also who at some point of time enjoy reading, on a same platform. To share, know, learn with each other the books that they like or

have read and would suggest them for others. And thus, the **Reader's Forum was initiated in the month of August 2009 (scheduled for every 2nd Saturday of a month).**

In this phase 2 forums took place, where **around 25 people were present.** Initially the forum began with each one sharing their love for books, the type of literature they read and would suggest for the group at large. After a list of books was made from the feedbacks received, it was also decided that books written by a few women authors – beginning with Gujarati writers – should be read so that in future, a reader's workshop could also be planned with these renowned women authors. It was also discussed that reading was an important aspect that everyone should try and cultivate in their lives and to increase the membership of the forum and bring along more people together, each one should invite their friends, family and others for the same.

Zola/Mobile Library

As you must be knowing, mobile library is one such activity that Olakh had been planning to re-start after phasing out from the emergency works of the conflict and reconciliation areas. Firstly, the identification of these areas was made, meetings with concerned people was done and then after knowing the types of participating groups, their interests and needs, material (books) were identified.

Thus, in this phase the mobile library the reading center was initiated in **an old age home** named 'Jalaram Vaanprasthashram' in a locality called Nizampura. There are a total of 63 elderly people staying from which **21 are the interested readers.** To begin with, **a set of 50 books for a month** has been handed over to this group and a leader from within them has been identified for the management of the same.

And now for the coming phases, we plan to have a **'Knowledge center on Wheels – multipurpose mobile van'** which, would create a platform for people who have less opportunities and access to resources giving them knowledge, information along with penetrating the seeds of changing/developing mind sets.

Publications

In this phase, the translation of 'Understanding Gender' was published (in Gujarati) and another one on 'Feminism' is on the final stage and will be out in the beginning of the next phase.

Collection and Dissemination of Resources

In this phase, around **220 new resources (mainly books)** were added to the resources of the centre. Along with the classification of the material, shared before, the records systems of the centre were also finalized, cleared and updated as a routine activity. Books that had gone missing since the initiation of the centre, those missing from a set of books or those that were important for the centre were also added to the collection. This process is an on going one.

And along with material collection and organizing, the dissemination activity is also on going where, in this phase a total of **74 users** came, making **use of around 317 material – books, films/documentaries, posters, etc. (Annexure 1).** The users mainly comprised of students from different educational institutes and social workers who had come to collect and refer information on issues like violence, health, law and home makers who have a keen interest in reading books on literature (stories, philosophy, poems, etc.)

***"Great collection of books!"** said Swraj Joshi, a software designer on his first visit to the centre. (1st August 2009)*

Though now with every program getting streamlined, the major focus of the resource centre has been put towards increasing the number of readers, at Olakh's centre along with the outreach activities of mobile library, reader's forum and film screenings. The facilitators feel that there are many who are passionate about reading but the ones really interested in reading the kind of material that Olakh houses, is few. One reason is mind set of readers that being more tuned

towards mainstream material, second is the education system wherein the students are under constant pressure to refer only that which is a part of their curriculum and most importantly how Olakh tries to promote its resources. This though needs constant mind churning and repeated efforts which are also an on going process.

And now looking back in to one of resource center's basic objectives – changing mind sets and information dissemination through literature – has served the purpose all through these years. Though there is a decline in reading and access of these resources, we are still strongly hopeful that with the use of diverse and changing strategies of outreach activities like mobile reading centres, reader's forum, film screenings, etc. that are relevant to today's time, the process of spreading knowledge to different groups of people would go on.

Feminist Counseling and Intervention Center with Healing and Support

Changing forms of Violence

As we all know the entire globe has been gripped by the demonic hands of economic crises. Each day brings with it increased burdens of survivals. For a common human, to even manage two square meals a day is life's biggest challenge, a challenge filled with hardships, slow down and high level hopelessness. In all the ups and downs that everyday life brings in, the women and girls, being placed at the lowest rung of all the oppressed and discriminated, suffer the most. Violence against women is about power and control, it is a crime and a violation of her human rights. That violence is not just a physical action but it manifests at various levels from very subtle to quite obvious forms. It is also psychological, emotional, mental, sexual, economic etc. This is not only in today's so called 'peaceful' times but also during conflicts where women are pushed behind doors and made to serve and feed the family. In short, violence and discrimination never leaves the women's side – begins from the womb and ends in her tomb!

Though on the other hand, with changing times and growth in science and technology taking a big leap, accessibility to services of the internet, mobile phones, etc. has reached the inner most arenas of human lives. As we all know that violence against women and girls is an ever present and ever growing phenomenon. Women and young girls are subjected to violence in many forms – very subtle to quite obvious. And this growth has further supported in increasing violence against women and girls, where only the forms keep on changing. As we have shared, there have been a series gang rapes (only of Gujarat state) where the other important aspect of violence apart from forced sex was the use of technology – mobile phones – to further humiliate the young women with the 'clippings' taken when the heinous crime was taking place. Pornography thus has taken a new form and another aspect of concern is that all these crimes have been done by young men, who are at the prime of their lives.

Further, we also come across an increased trend in breaking of the institutes of family and marriage with people opting to live 'free' lives, trying hands at multiple relations but with no commitments or responsibilities attached with. This also reflects that with the 'need' for comforts and luxuries taking a high, many have lost their curiosity from lives and believe in easy and fast earning, living.

And thus, being surrounded by all these happenings, the services of the counseling centre moved ahead. As known, the aim of the counseling and intervention center is to provide a physical and emotional space for women and other people at large. The major focus of the counseling centre during this phase was put on detailed qualitative and quantitative data analysis of the face to face counseling were done along with re-starting of 'Aneri' group. The day to day activities of the women's collective initiative for justice, women's telephonic helpline and other supportive activities like home visits, record maintenance, etc. were undertaken.

Data Analysis

In this phase, a total of **300 women's issues (cases)** were analyzed into different areas of information divided **over 40 sections**. To share with, these cases include those from the initiation of the counseling centre in 2003 and from the doorstep counseling (women's collective) up to September 2009.

The data that is fed in consists of the women's background, socio-economic status, the problem/s faced, Olakh's intervention, and the present status of the issue with reasons and so on. Now this is an on going activity for the centre to fill up the entire data of every new woman who comes to seek support.

Intervention Group

The women's intervention group functions in the Kalyan Nagar slum area, in an open place next to a municipal corporation's nursery school. At times, when the climate is not suitable to sit in the open, the women move themselves in the school, as apart from mornings it is free the entire day.



They function twice a week – Monday and Friday and during this phase a total of **88 women (issues)** were dealt with where **68 are new, 20 follow ups. The diversity is as 35 Hindu, 20 Dalit, 9 Muslim and 4 Christian women. (Annexure 2)**

The processes include were dialogue with the women concerned, the families (maternal and in laws), other relatives or friends and

government officials (police and lawyers) were undertaken. **4 home visits** were also made in this phase for getting back Stree Dhan. The issues that mainly addressed were again centered around domestic violence – physical harassment by parents and in laws, restricted mobility, no decision making, denial of basic necessities of food, shelter, extramarital affair of partner, denial of property rights, Stree Dhan, etc. Also, issues of fights and conflict with relatives and an issue of a man facing problem due to his wife's psychological condition were looked at.



Telephone Helpline

These services remained closed for the first three months of this phase due to shortage of team in the counseling centre but after new team members joined from July 2009', the services were **re-started**. The services of counseling – telephonic as well as face to face after initial dialogue, emergency support and referral were extended to the callers as per their needs.

The issues addressed in this phase were mental and physical violence, curiosity towards one's sexuality, harassment/torture my husband, health related issues and so on. To share with, the issues surrounding the sexuality came from men callers (though the telephone helpline is for women and girls), but as a responsibility to provide correct and essential information/guidance, these callers were attended to. Their curiosity lied on the changes that they felt within themselves, attraction for the opposite sex where they even visualized having sexual relations with close family members like sisters or mothers. **(Annexure 3)**

Ragini (name changed), 28 years old woman has been living a struggling life since childhood. Her family being very poor, with elder and younger siblings in the family, she could not go to school and to worsen the matters lost her father at a young age. As she grew up, she helped her mother to cook in different households to add in the family income. Her sister was married and her brother grew up to become a chartered accountant.

Later, she too was married to a rich man. But it was only after marriage that she came to know of her husband's extra marital affair with his sister in law. When she opposed, the violence began in the forms of mental and physical torture. The in laws too were not helpful and she was left with no food, support or even needed medications.

Like many other women, she tolerated for a few months and then she approached Olakh. It was a struggle of emotions and legal issues but finally she was successful in getting a divorce along with 'Stree Dhan'. She lives with her mother and earns a living as a cook in different families.

A 46 years old man Devendra (name changed), lives in Dabhoi town near Vadodara. He works with Dabhoi Nagrik Bank (a co-operative). He got married before 22 years and has a daughter and a son.

Just after 2 years of marriage, the behavior of his wife changed drastically. She became very violent, she beat him up, abused him, went about throwing household things, threatened and beat up her children and didn't even cook for them.

Devendra shared that she suffered a psychological problem and had was also taken to a psychiatrist but she never took her medications. Finally, he approached Olakh after which the team paid her a visit but as she is not stable mentally, all efforts to convince her for taking medications were futile. Though as a responsibility towards the woman and her family, the timely guidance and space for ventilation are being extended to them.

‘Aneri’ – Women’s Self Help Group

The activities of this group were re-started from the month of June 2009’. It has been decided to have 2 meetings every month (1st and 15th of a month). The aim behind these meetings is to bring together women from different strata and backgrounds of our society, to share, rejoice, learn and acquire information/knowledge relevant their lives along with entertainment which is a rare opportunity for many women and girls.

Till date, **9 meetings** have taken place, **62 women have associated** with the group of which **31 are regular members (18 Hindu, 5 Muslim and 8 Dalit)** and the number increases with every meeting. The group has indulged into playing games, singing songs, celebration of festivals, story telling, film screening, and discussion on various issues and skills development.



Shared the women, “It is a great feeling to meet and be with women from varied backgrounds. Though being different we are here with the single identity of a ‘woman’. We share, learn, play and games, sings songs relax our entire mind and bodies.

Collaboration with ‘Aap ki Kacheri’ – Your own court

‘Aap ki Kacheri’ is a program initiated by a woman IPS officer, Ms. Kiran Bedi to support and help people, mainly women, to solve and come to a just conclusion for the said issues and problems. They focus mainly on those ‘cases’ which have been pending with the different courts, with no scope for further progress. It is a live program broadcasted on television with the common people joining in as a part of the process – and so the name ‘Aap ki kacheri’. Thus, people approach them or after their research and survey, they take up the issues, as a last resort for a solution or conclusion for the people involved.

As a part of their routine process, the program approached various women’s groups of Gujarat state to suggest issues or ‘cases’, in their knowledge, to be taken up by the court to be put up in front of the public to derive a just, equal and required results. And thereby, in this regards Olakh too was contacted along with others from the state.

As an initial process, they visited the organization, shared their objectives and criterion. Then had a discussion with the people whose issue was put forth. Only one issue was selected from the entire state by the group. This was one of family conflict over property matters and the elder daughter in law, Bilkis Banu had approached Olakh.

To share with, this is a family where two sisters have been married in the same household, thus making them sister in laws. As it commonly happens, one of the two brothers wanted a larger share of the property and so the fight and conflict. After many meetings and discussions with both the brothers and their wives but no solution was sought. The program people, then met them separately, interviewed them (audio-video documentation) and then were called to New Delhi for the final process of hearing to take place. And finally, with their intervention and Olakh's support at local level, the issue was resolved and now the property will be equally divided with Olakh's presence.

Course for grass root level Social Activists and Thinkers

It has been planned that Olakh would start a Multiple Literacy, Capacity and Skill Building course for the Youth of grassroots, to facilitate them in becoming social activists and thinkers. At present, the initial identification of interested youth has begun. Visits to different communities are on going wherein meetings with potential youth are carried out. From this it is known that many young girls, women and boys have interest to join as they had studied up to 10th or 12th class only; further studies being unaffordable or are married and have kids. So, now with the opportunity at doorsteps, they are keen to join.

The larger objective is to initiate an entire course/curriculum wherein through an extensive and exhaustive training for a year, the youth will be prepared and equipped to become social activists and thinkers with special skills of barefoot social workers, counselors, lawyers and librarians. The goal is also to motivate and initiate the process of including youth to the development areas. This is important so that the present, young generation can take forward these processes. Also, from all these years of working and experience, it is known that most of the individuals from the so called upper and middle classes of our society are not willing to take up these issues, as it is felt that they are not affected by them. Thereby, individuals coming from within the most affected communities would be the best leaders to take charge of their own development and empowering processes.

The training thus, will include both theory as well as practical knowledge in areas of gender, communication, documentation, personality development, and computer literacy and so on. Firstly, these individuals would work as volunteers for 3 months wherein they would gain specific perspectives, skills and capacities and later join as trainees for 1 year period. Also, during the training period they will be given a fair stipend to boost their survival – they all come from lower socio economic backgrounds. This will make them capable to place themselves with different social and development organizations.

During this phase, the identification of **5 urban slums** of Vadodara city was done. The team met an average of **25 people** and oriented them about the program. From this, **35 individuals** came for the first round of meeting. After the introduction, only **8 (7 women and 1 man) have been identified** as the enthusiastic ones, who seem to be fit for the said course. Thus, it actually gives a fair idea that to identify and train a minimum of 25 individuals, at least 200 people will have to be scrutinized. Thereby, this is an on going process.

Challenges and Short comings

Looking at the changing scenario of the society due to the glooming world economy, the financial situations of families dependent on day to day livelihood earnings along with every other who hails from different economic strata, is largely affected. Even after meetings and discussions with the women from different communities, it is a known fact that in such a situation, it becomes essential

for every (at least) adult member of a family to earn something to contribute towards the families requirements of basic needs, leave aside comforts or luxuries.

Thus, the question is raised again and again by the women folk as, “What compensation/stipend will we get if we take out time to come to Olakh’s women’s collective or other programs?” Also, they share that by going to one or two households (as domestic aid) in a day, there would be some money flowing in their homes. Thereby, much deep thinking along with alternatives have to be thought upon for women those who are ready to join hands for the larger cause but are heavily tied down by familial responsibilities. And lastly, the need to address the shortcomings of regular documentation, emergency shelter and skills to support more psychological and emotional-mental issues that have always been on a rise, are constant.

Conclusion

Now with the re-started journey to reach the set goals, Olakh with it's streamlined activities, new energy and extended support, is moving ahead on it's vision of creating a gender just, equal, peaceful and humane society.

As shared earlier, after phasing out from the conflict programs (directly from the communities), Olakh again is under going a lot of reflection and review of earlier phases with team and board members and consultants. This in itself has been a journey full of learning. And it is known from this that Olakh is again coming back to its 'original' self.

The basic and foremost objectives of first spreading the Feminist ideology through literature with the activities of like **Knowledge Center on Wheels**, to initiate the process of **documenting 'Herstories'** which recognizes women's contribution in the field of development, empowerment and peace of the larger society. Thirdly, capacity and perspective building course to create for grassroots activists and thinkers for carrying out journey of development process ahead, at micro levels with active participation of youth.

Thus, in the coming phases, the major focus would be on these three outreach activities like **Knowledge Center on Wheels**, process of creating **'Herstories'** and intensive trainings to create **grass root level activist and thinkers**. And along with these, the ongoing programs of counseling and intervention enter for women and girls in crises, student placements and training workshops.

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,

Strength of your being...

Aanchal Kapur

Annexure 1: Dissemination of Resources

Months	No. of Users	Forms of resources	No. of resources
April, 2009'	28	Books	124
		Films/Documentary	3
		Posters	17
May, 2009'	6	Books	21
		Audio Music	3
		Magazine	1
June, 2009'	5	Books	8
		Films/Documentary	1
July, 2009'	5	Books	40
August, 2009'	12	Books	41
		Posters	1
September, 2009'	18	Books	32
		Films/Documentary	5
		Posters	10
Total	74	-	307

Annexure 3: Status of Helpline Calls

Months	New calls	Follow-up calls	Blank calls	Wrong Nos.	Total calls
July 09'	10	18	4	1	33
August 09'	6	15	3	1	25
September 09'	7	7	1	1	16
Total	23	40	8	3	74