

K O S H I S H

Field Action Project on Homelessness and Destitution



Annual Report

(Mumbai Unit)

2015–2016

Tata Institute of Social Sciences

Introduction

The year 2015–2016 was an extremely eventful and exciting period for Koshish with several advancements in each of the programmes of the organization. An important development was the draft of Persons in Destitution (Protection, Care and Intervention) Bill 2015', getting finalized with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. Though it is still a long way before the proposed draft is presented as a Bill and becomes a law ultimately, it is still a satisfying point in the context of efforts that went in.

Koshish took a significant step forward in building its organizational structure. Teams from all three units of operations, i.e. Delhi, Maharashtra and Bihar, met in Patna for the Planning Meet. We wanted Delhi and Maharashtra teams to engage with and understand the 'Community based Intervention Model' (piloted in Bihar with extremely positive results), as we are advocating for it to be adopted by States across the country as 'Non Criminalizing Framework for Rehabilitation'. This meeting was also to work towards forming a common, shared understanding of various programmes of the organization and to undertake an

exercise to see how far we have come from where we started. Meeting saw teams reflecting over the journey of the organization through all these years and deliberated over the value system that makes us who we are as an organization and planned for future.

Some of our programs like Picnic for the clients or 'My Space' or clients going outside to work or for training, have become synonyms for faith in rehabilitative justice, while challenging the core of custodial approach. Celebrations of occasions like festivals or Women's Day or Mental Health Week etc. served as a bridge connecting the clients in custody and their custodians i.e. the institutional staff. For us, such experiments continue to reinforce our belief on Human relations.

This year, we also saw expansion of our Youth Engagement program. Team members reached out to different universities and colleges, orienting the youth on the issues of homelessness and destitution. Over the period of one year, team mentored several fieldwork students, interns and volunteers from various educational institutions and diverse educational backgrounds ranging from Law and Criminology to Disability Studies, from Management to Psychology and from Engineering to Journalism.

While we kept working on the law and policy, apart from developing the community program as an alternative to custody, we also kept on with our programs related to capacity building of the government agencies. Several orientation sessions and workshops were organized for the institutional staff. This was done primarily to promote long-lasting change in attitudes and actions, and also to facilitate access to the many resources available with the government.

As we worked on institutional population, we kept building on the support for the families of these people

so that their reintegration was not a temporary matter but a permanent one. Families faced with poverty or lack of access to services, especially in the cases of mental illnesses, needed locally available support. Last one year saw us strengthening our understanding and network with organizations in different states and we have active partnerships with groups in more than 20 states today.

This work has been both a professional and personal commitment of sort. And this commitment has been there not just from the young team of Koshish but also from various other persons. If we could reach out to large number of people, both inside the institutions as well as outside, it was due to the support we received from groups and individuals. Be it the Police or the *panchayats*, colleges or hospitals, civil society groups or officials from institutions, people responded very positively every time we reached out to them seeking support for a client.

It is not common to have a funding partner who puts absolute faith in the program and not just let you design the program independently but also engage

to understand the issue in its totality. We are fortunate to have HT Parekh Foundation as our funding partner. They have been supporting us for several years now and more importantly, they have been there as partners and not as funders, thereby, making the association lot more meaningful and valuable for us.

As we complete the year and begin with a new one, we acknowledge and thank everyone who has believed what we do and extended support to us. Every single individual who believed in us is of extreme value and a source of strength to us!

Year 2015-16 saw significant progress being made in each of the programs. Brief on each of these programs is presented below:

1. Intervention with Custodial Population:

a. Protection of Legal Rights:

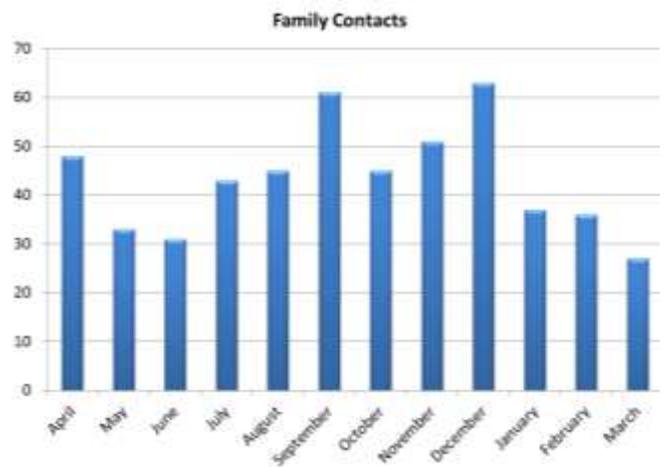
Protection of Legal Rights is one of the most important programs of Koshish. Under this program, phone calls are being made as the primary step towards



protecting the legal rights of the clients who are brought in as accused. Subsequently, home visits to family, friends and acquaintances are conducted, wherever possible. This helps in reintegration of the client with

family. Also, these visits provide us with evidence which further facilitates the release of the client from the court. Since the arrests are random and Act itself is flawed in the manner it describes begging, large number of working homeless people are rounded up. In the absence of any legal representation, these people become highly vulnerable for long term detention. Loss of employment, social stigma, rejection by the family is some of the other severe consequences of these arrests.

Under this program, on the basis of information collected through case



work, home visits and phone calls, Social Investigation Reports (SIRs) are prepared and submitted to the court through the Superintendent of the institution.

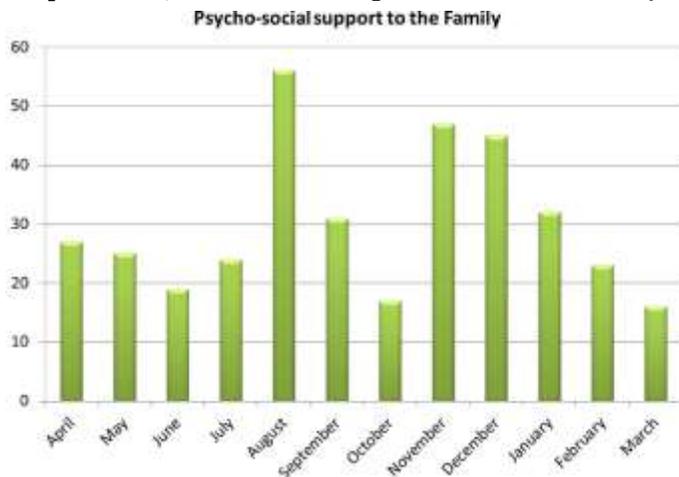
Protection of Livelihood



In addition to this support given to the clients in the court, case workers contact the employers of the working people and educate them about the Beggary Prevention Legislations. Usually there is a degree of resistance or the apprehension that sets in the employers on learning about their employees' arrest. Very often this results in loss of employment for the person. Through our program with employers, we help them understand the vulnerability of their employees and increase the acceptance after the release.

During the year, we worked on the legal Unorganized sectors are picked up by the police, entering the danger of losing the job due to the stigma. By providing

b. Counselling: As part of case work process, counselling becomes very



important in making clients comfortable in sharing the information, which helps us in securing their release. Many

representation of a total of **2050** clients who were arrested and sent on remand or who were serving sentence after detention. It includes making phone calls or home visits to the friends, family or the employer of a client for gathering the information to support the release.

Protection of Legal Rights also works towards protection of livelihood. As stated earlier, arrest of the person makes the employer apprehensive about keeping him back on work. It is routine that people who are working in the

legal aid and counselling to the employer, we were able to secure the livelihood of **1494** clients.

times, after the arrest, clients develop certain inhibitions and fears; counselling session helps in easing out these fears. These are the individual sessions where case worker and the client interact in



an environment of absolute privacy and client, who is otherwise stressed and often in the state of trauma, to feel safe, realizing that there is “someone” who is there to listen their stories.

While working on the release of the clients, we are encountered with situations where family shows rejection or resistance towards the client. Also, there are situation where family’s capacity to handle the person is limited, especially in the cases where client has mental health issues. Therefore, along with the clients, it becomes important to provide the counselling support to their families. This helps us in making them understand the situation of the client and plan for rehabilitation accordingly. This process of psycho-social support for the family continues even after the release of the client.

In this period, a total of **936** clients were provided with the counselling service. An extended support was provided to the families of **362** clients by providing the psycho-education. Wherever necessary, the families were linked to the treatment facility at the local level.

c. My Space: People who are in custody live controlled lives and face lot of restrictions. Through this program,

comfort of the client. This allows the Koshish has been able to create a space within the custodial set-up, where clients are under no restriction or control on free expressions. ‘My Space’ helps clients in overcoming fears and burden of being directed all the time. It is a space where one can be “oneself”. ‘My Space’ was attempted as an experiment about 8 years ago, with the belief that everybody has a right to live without fear or control. We also wanted to assess if ‘fear free environment’ would have any impact on the recovery



process for the client. This has certainly turned out to be one of the most amazing experiences.

From what we have experienced, ‘My Space’ or the ‘freedom to express’ helps in the rehabilitation as a whole. Clients have been able to plan and decide for themselves after an elongated participation here. In this period, more than **200** clients have participated actively in this program. Dancing, Singing, Skits and gardening etc were

all part of the activities that clients chose to do as part of this Space. Different sessions on mindfulness, personal-hygiene etc. were organized. Clients were also involved in activities like drawing, painting, art and craft etc.

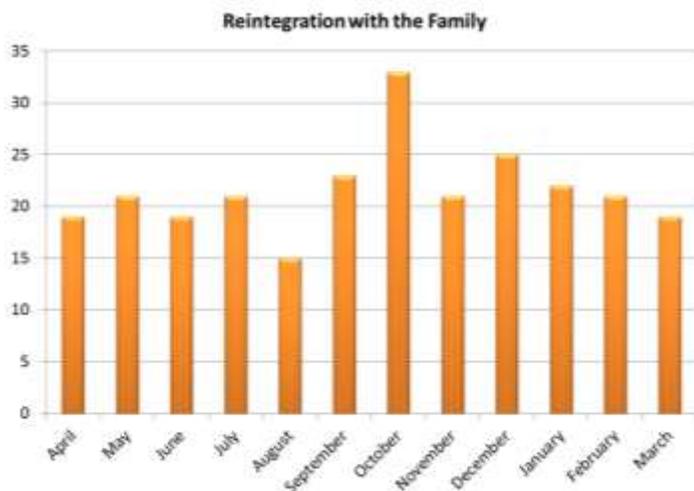
d. Special Legal Intervention:

i. Special Release: In cases where there were issues such as possibility of loss of job, discontinuation of treatment or some other emergency with the client or wherever the evidence was strong enough to seek immediate release, Koshish made use of a provision of “Special Release” for those clients. Special Release is a provision under which an appeal for release of the client is made to the court before the completion of the remand period. We were able to get the total of 49 clients released under this provision. Though there is a resistance from the institutional authorities in using this clause, we were able to get them use this for these clients citing the added vulnerability they faced.

ii. ‘Release on License’: Legislation also provides for premature release i.e. release before the completion of detention period. If the conduct of the

detainee is good and person shows preparedness to refrain from begging, an appeal for early release can be filed with the Chief Certified Inspector’s office. There are conditions attached with this clause. Koshish made use of this provision and ensured release of 3 persons who were sentenced for detention.

e. Repatriation and Reintegration in the Society: In this year, Koshish contacted the families of **520** clients. Along with that, we were also able to contact **242** employers which resulted in securing of their respective jobs. Koshish also has a network of employers called “Employer’s Collective” which comprises of the employers who understand the philosophy that we work with, and act as a major stakeholder in the context of ensuring economic stability for the client. These employers not only support their own those clients who were placed with them, but also other clients who might have the skills or willingness to work in their enterprises. These employers have evolved as a group of employers that is ready to come ahead in support of the people getting processed under the Beggary Prevention Legislations.



A lot many people who are arrested suffer from different kinds of disabilities or illnesses including mental illness. Such people are often lost and have forgotten their way back to home. Koshish tries to trace the family of such clients with the help of partner organizations, local police, network of volunteers and *panchayats*. After contacting the family, the client is then repatriated with the family in most of the cases.

In this period, Koshish traced the family of **259** clients and facilitated their reintegration with the family. The family is connected with a local organization so that in case of emergency, the family can be supported. It helps in avoiding the relapse and making the rehabilitation process more sustainable. Also, **82** clients or their families that couldn't afford the cost of travel to Mumbai and back home were provided with the post release support.

f. Medical Intervention: In many cases, situation is such that any long term intervention can be initiated only after immediate health condition has been addressed. Large number of the persons arrested under the Beggary Prevention Legislation suffers from different kinds of ailments and health issues. It becomes essential to respond to the immediate medical needs of the clients. Most often, health condition itself is the root cause of their ending up in destitution. Any rehabilitation plan has a prerequisite of first responding to these medical conditions. Koshish works towards linking clients from the custodial institution with different government hospitals for the purpose of treatment.

I. General Health: During this year, Koshish connected **34** clients to general hospitals outside the institution and more than **30** clients were connected with the internal medical facilities within the institution.

II. Mental Health: We have developed a regular program with Regional Mental Hospital since large number of persons who are arrested under the Beggary law suffer from range of mental health issues. For psychiatric treatment, **82** clients were connected with Regional Mental Hospital, Thane, on both OPD and admission basis.

We have been also extending our support to the hospital in tracing the families of patients who have recovered substantially but families haven't been contacted. These people are forced to stay in the hospital since the families didn't come or couldn't be found.

To create more awareness and remove the stigma associated with mental



illnesses, we organize focused programs. We observe 'Mental Health Awareness Week' as one such program every year. This year too, this program was organized amidst lot of fun and excitement for the clients and thorough involvement from the institutional staff. There were different games and activities organized for the clients and staff of the institution. This week was used as an avenue to generate awareness regarding mental health and breaking myths around the same. Both the clients and the staff participated in the event with lot of enthusiasm.

g. Livelihood:

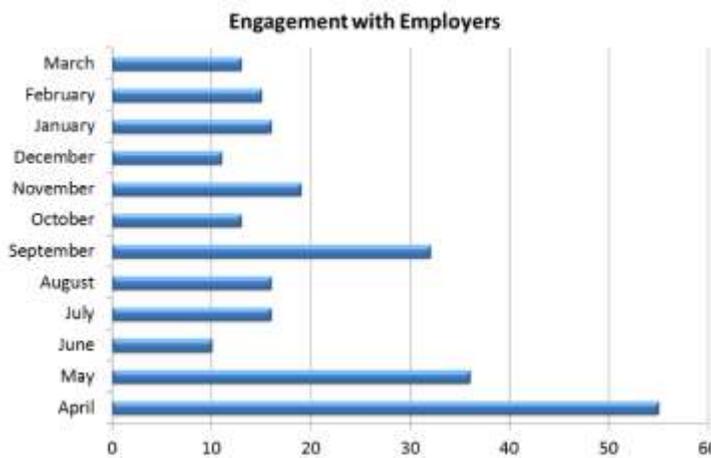
i. **Vocational Training:** Vocational training becomes essential for economic rehabilitation of the clients. For



vocational training, Koshish follows a three tier process which includes "mental preparedness", "personality assessment" and "vocational guidance and support". We believe that any plans for the social and economic empowerment of the person will work only when we address the factors that affect them negatively, forcing them out of their work/livelihood, and pushing into extreme destitution and dependence.

Along with providing the vocational skills to the clients, it is essential to provide them life-skills to make them employable. Koshish conducted sessions on life-skills throughout the year. A total of **102** clients were engaged in this program.

ii. Employers' Collective: We work towards securing jobs for our clients after providing the vocational training. Employer's Collective becomes an



integral part of this cycle as clients often need a work environment which understands special needs like medication, break on regular intervals etc. During this period, Koshish provided vocational training to 4 of its clients while 4 other clients, who already possessed relevant skills, were placed on respective job. However, the most significant use of Employers' Collective happened by ensuring retention of clients into the jobs that they already had before the arrest. Experience of working with the unorganized sector employers prepared us better to negotiate with the employers after securing release of the client.

Using the concept of 'Employers' Collective' that we developed as part of our rehabilitation program for the custodial population, we are creating

the opportunities for livelihood for the non-custodial clients, especially the youth.

h. Institutional Placement: Many clients did not have a place to go after their release. Similarly, in some other cases, there was a need for a shelter after we had placed clients on job or due to extended medication. Institutional placement became helpful in such situations. It acted as a transit between institution and independent living. We used its network of organization for this purpose. In this period, 7 clients were placed in open institutions after their release was secured from the custody.

I. Sports: For us at Koshish, Sports have always been much more than plain sports, beyond physical activity and recreation. Sports have been used as an effective means of checking custodial violence. It also helped in strengthening



the relationship between institutional staff, clients and Koshish team. Throughout this 1 year months, clients

from remand and detention cells as well as staff from the institutions, along with Koshish team, participated in indoor games and outdoor sports like badminton, volleyball, cricket and table tennis etc.

j. Building Institutional Staff Capacity:

In this year two picnics were organized for the institutional staff of both Beggar's Homes as well as Kasturba *Mahila Vastigruha*. Most of the time, the care-taking staff remain overworked



due to shortage of staff and the nature of the work. Their needs and issues faced by them often go unnoticed and they remain stuck in the monotonous



cycle of work. These picnics were an attempt to provide the staff, a day for

themselves. It helped them to overcome the inter-personal issues. These picnics were part of our broader program that we do to build a cadre of aware and sensitive care takers. For this, several



sessions, individual as well as group ones, were organized with the care takers. Also, a workshop was organized on 'Self Development'. We also felicitated the staff and thanked them for supporting the rehabilitation process. With all these efforts being invested, the institutional staff has grown into a stronger and motivated team. This helped in care takers and constable developing understanding and sensitivity towards the client group.

2. Community Based Intervention:

What happens once the law goes? Will the protection from arrest and subsequent punitive action be enough to enable a person move out of the



state of destitution? How will the end of Beggary Prevention legislation mean end for beggary as well? To answer these and many more such questions, we have been working on the other vertical of our advocacy approach. We have already been running a non-punitive, non-custodial, community based intervention in Bihar and now that framework is being introduced to other states and wherever possible, we are pitching for it to be piloted.

We started reaching out to the governments and share the Community program in Bihar. Like Maharashtra intervention, Bihar program is also in collaboration with the State government. Since we experienced very positive results from there, the intervention was introduced to the government here. Idea is to let the state see a possibility of protecting its people without criminalizing them.

We introduced our community intervention in one cluster in Mumbai.

We aim to establish this as feasible and effective alternative to the current custody based framework. Entire program is based on capacity building framework i.e. to create positive reinforcement for people to move out of destitution. The broader design involves community mobilization, preventing negative action, creating enabling environment, providing necessary support especially towards emergency situations like health or legal aid, and skills building and assistance in assessing government schemes and programs.

Two broad aspects of the Community based model are explained briefly below:

a. Children as Important Stakeholder: Children are one of the central features



for the community based intervention. The provisions that criminalize most unorganized forms of livelihood, including the traditional ones like performing Arts, Fortune telling etc, result in wide range of populations



becoming vulnerable under these laws and this certainly enhances the violations and the vulnerabilities of children manifolds. Children may not be kept in beggars home but they are surely the victims of the law. These children face the double impact of the law. One, their parents are always at the risk of getting arrested for practicing the ways of livelihood which have been equated with beggary under the law. Secondly, since it is these traditional skills and way of life, that

these children are also trained in and exposed to, they themselves become the potential victims and face the risk of getting processed under the law. We have initiated mobilization in the areas where homeless concentrate in the city. Idea is to work towards prevention of arrests of adults and assist them in finding better jobs so that they move out of destitution. On the other end, an educational program has been started for the children. These are the children who were completely into begging. Under this program regular classes are being conducted for the children so that they can be prepared for getting admitted in the schools. At present, around 30 children are part of this program.

b. Facilitating access to government schemes: There are several existing schemes that should have been extended to the homeless and destitute population. However, people's inability to fight the resistance from the government systems created for delivery of those services results in added marginalization. Community program has been focussing towards increasing the access to government services and schemes. Koshish team has started the process of getting the ration cards issued for the families which do not have the same.

3. Youth Engagement Program:

Koshish sees tremendous value in students, interns and volunteers as we firmly believe in the capacity of the youth to bring about positive change in society. As part of our Youth Engagement program, during the year, 7 interns and 8 field works students were mentored by Koshish in Mumbai.

We also reached out to youth at universities and colleges through workshops and seminars. Students from various colleges were provided with orientation around the issue of homelessness and destitution along with the exposure visits to the Beggar's Homes. A group of students was taken for exposure visits to the Beggar's Homes working in other districts of Maharashtra as well. We conducted 6 orientation sessions with students from varied background where more than 800 students participated in total.

We also organized special sessions on the theme of homelessness and State's response to young children from the community. Total of 3 such sessions were organized and each session was attended by around 140-150 children from the neighborhood slum where one of our network organizations is working. These sessions were part of the Youth Mela that the partner organization organizes for its community. Over 400

children were reached out through these community sessions.

4. Night-Out Program:

Night-outs are very essential in understanding the realities around the homeless people. In the night, the streets and the political economy of the city changes completely. People who were working whole day come back to sleep at various locations. Koshish carried out night-outs to understand the needs of the people who are spending nights on the streets and responded to emergency situations of the destitute persons found, as per their need. These night outs were regular feature where lot of students also accompanied us.

5. Alliance Building and Networking:

a lot many people, who are arrested, are either abandoned elderly, or who lost their way or the ones who suffer from different kinds of disability/ mental illnesses. Such people are often lost and have forgotten their way back to home. Koshish tries to trace the family of such clients with the help of partner organizations, local police, network of volunteers and *panchayats*. After contacting the family, the client is then repatriated with them.

This year, we were able to facilitate the repatriation of **118 such** clients. Wherever needed and possible, the family was connected with a local organization so that in case of emergency, the family can be supported. It helped in avoiding the relapse and making the rehabilitation process more sustainable. **38** clients or their families, which couldn't afford the cost of travel to Mumbai and back home were provided with the travel help.

6. Team Building Process: It's not easy to do this kind of work, especially given the custodial environment and constraints that come along with



custodial set up. Tales of extreme sufferings and human pain make our work even more challenging and

emotionally draining. It becomes imperative that there are opportunities created for the team to come together and reflect once in a while about the



journey and plan future course of action.

In the month of August, Koshish team went for an outbound training camp to Kondhane village in Karjat, Maharashtra. It was a unique experience for the team to take a break from the routine tasks of the institution and field and to reflect and introspect about work, self and the organization. The camp was full of group activities, challenges and adventure activities. It helped the team members to know each other better and perform as a team.

7. **Law and Policy Advocacy:** There are two critical broad verticals for intervention in the context of our advocacy work; Advocacy for law



reform and national policy on destitution and secondly, building capacities and demonstrating strong community based rehab model that can be followed upon once law is repealed. This year, we made significant progress with both.

We have been actively pursuing the idea of Central Legislation on Destitution with Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India and last year, were instrumental

in getting a Special Committee constituted by the Ministry. Committee prepared the draft for Central Legislation and submitted to the Ministry at the beginning of the year. Last few months were used to push for the draft through various stages of the Legislative process. Since the draft legislation had been sent to State governments inviting their opinion and suggestions, we worked towards providing our inputs to some of these State governments. We were consulted by Bihar, Maharashtra and Delhi governments and we gave our inputs on their responses to the Central government. West Bengal government had constituted a committee to prepare the response on the Central Draft Bill and committee approached us for our views on the State legislation that the state has.

We also continued with regular follow ups with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India.

While we work towards supporting the persons in destitution, we believe equally in the significance of the other end of this equation, i.e. the state. We have stayed within the system to challenge the system. We do not want to be there doing this intervention forever. The dialogue that we had initiated long back, about the relevance

of beggary law (BPBA, 1959) in today's context has been finding significant acceptance now. Several states are debating the issue and there are many who are supporting the idea of the repeal.

While we were happy with the development, we were also conscious of the fact that having a 'Model Legislation' may not really be useful, especially given the state's neglect of the issue. We, therefore, proposed to the government for changing the committee's mandate of preparing the draft for model legislation to the Central Legislation. Within the Special Committee of 4 members, we created a sub group of 2 members along with a government official and had several informal meetings to discuss the possibility of developing Central Legislation instead of Model Legislation. We, as a member on this committee along with another Committee member developed a note that could establish the need and technical possibility of having Central Law on Beggary, a subject that till now is State law as it is considered to be a subject of law and order and that falls under State List of Constitutional Lists. We established that beggary wasn't really an issue of Law and Order but of Social Assurance, a subject that falls under Concurrent list. Government

accepted the note and decision was taken to go for Central Legislation.

Accordingly, draft for Central Legislation was prepared and submitted to the Ministry. There were rounds of discussions and consultations where feedback was provided and further changes were made to the draft. Subsequently, the draft was sent to the State governments', inviting their opinion and suggestions on the same. At this point, draft is with the states and few states are to submit their response while most others have already done that.

8. Research and Knowledge Generation: A field study was initiated to map the status of clients who were repatriated by Koshish. This study allowed us to examine our repatriation program in the context of long term rehabilitation of the clients. The study enabled us to modify our program and strengthen it further, making it more relevant to people's needs. We were also able to identify and respond to specific needs support that client or the family required.

We have also developed a manual on Family tracing and Repatriation process. This manual is already being appreciated for its relevance and utility. This is a detailed module providing step

wise inputs on repatriation process and can be used by any institutional authorities/ ngo's or any other group that might be working with institutional population and where repatriation might be the need. Module has been used for training the institutional staff in states of Delhi, Bihar and Maharashtra.

9. Reaching out to Media: While we have always engaged with media on specific aspects of our work, by and large, we stayed away from the regular coverage by the media. Driven by the institutional nature of our program, we made an organizational decision that we will work without creating any propaganda around what we are doing. Instead, we adopted an approach of bringing the issues to the notice of the concerned authorities and got them addressed.

The situation within the custodial institutions is not very good. Institutional staff themselves is faced with several constraints and there is very little support available for them. Bringing the issues of custody out into the public domain would have brought lot of visibility to the project but that would have come with the risk of issue being met either with knee jerk instant reactions from the state and the administration, especially at the institutional level, or the situations

being met with insufficient responses. That would have also created a feeling of betrayal and a dent in the trust and confidence we share. We didn't want any of that to happen.

We realized there was lot of interest regarding the custodial aspects of our work whereas stories of people's grit or the ones breaking the popular notions were not met with the same enthusiasm. Friends in media explained this as the pressure of their sector. It should be 'news' for them to be able to carry it. However, while we understood the operational design, we still believed media had the responsibility of bringing out the real issues i.e. the fundamental factors leading to state of destitution and what law does. We also knew there was space within popular media to represent core concerns that we wanted to be presented.

With this understanding, we engaged with the media space and explained how the law was playing with the lives of thousands of people.

There are several myths surrounding the people in destitution. These are mostly the notions based on untrue but popular perceptions and assumptions. These myths become barriers when it comes to seeking justice against the misuse of law or attempting to access

the systems meant for people's welfare. By organizing people's campaign, building their capacities and bringing out the 'hidden or unrepresented' side of their life, Koshish, to an extent, has managed to break those myths and with them, barriers have also gone, ensuring change in perceptions and attitudes at various levels.

There is wider degree of acceptance that has been created among the people at large.

Whole idea behind engaging in all such activities is to educate people about the reality, to bring up the situation of destitute citizens to masses so that 'strategically constructed' biases against the poor are challenged and broken. With the change in societal perception, the value and worth that an individual in the state of destitution sees in himself, will change, starting, thereon, the cycle of change.

We were able to develop sound understanding with leading dailies like Indian Express, Times of India, Mumbai Mirror and Mid Day etc. While Indian Express and Mumbai Mirror did exclusive pieces on the nature of the law and how it must be repealed if people's vulnerability and helplessness is to be prevented from getting criminalized, Mid Day, Times of India and DNA carried reports on specific

incidents of violations that required to be brought into public notice. It is heartening that we have developed positive understanding with media groups. And this understanding is based not on what makes for good news item but around the role that media needs to play in changing societal attitude, breaking the myths around destitution and seeking enabling legislation.

Stories of Hope:

a) **Deepak:** Deepak, aged 40, was arrested by the Marine Drive police on October 31, 2015 while he was walking along the shops at Girgaon Chowpaty. He was suffering from mental illness and survived on the streets by asking for alms and food. After the trial, he was detained for a year.

When Koshish team interacted with him in the case-work sessions, he wasn't able to remember much about his past. He could only mention that he was from Supaul district of Bihar and had left home around three or four months ago.

Deepak was referred to the psychiatrist and his treatment was started. He began coming for group sessions regularly and became a very active member. He would motivate other clients for participating in different vocational and life skills sessions that were conducted. Gradually, there was a significant improvement in his mental health. From being an extremely silent person, he began interacting with others.

Deepak started to share information with us gradually, over a period of time and told us about his past experiences and life. He told us that when he left home, there were his parents and four brothers in the family. He used to work

as a labourer in other people's farm as the family didn't have any land.

As shared by him, Deepak belongs to a economically weak family where most of the members were involved in labour based work. After getting lost, he wandered many cities and eventually reached Mumbai. He has faint memories of doing odd jobs like construction work and working at some hotel in some cities that he doesn't remember much about.

After many months of case work intervention, Deepak could recall his village's name and also the details about his family members. Taking leads from the information provided by him, we started tracing the family with the help of local police. The Police responded to the request immediately and the same day we were able to confirm that Deepak was from Chhatapur village of Supaul district of Bihar. It was also found that he had been missing since about 8 years, and not just a few months. When Bihar was hit by floods in 2008, Deepak got washed away with the floods and the family got separated. After the water came down, the family came back to their home, but Deepak didn't.

The family tried to search for him in the relief camps, in the nearby villages and wherever they could, but it was of no use. After many years, the family had lost their hope and they had no idea if Deepak was alive. When the family was contacted after tracing, they could not believe that he was alive and doing well! The team gathered that Deepak's mental health condition had deteriorated due to his encounter with the natural disaster and also with extreme conditions he faced on the street.

Deepak talked to his family over phone and it was an extremely emotional moment for both, Deepak and his family. His brother Ramesh, who was working with some construction company in Delhi wanted to come the very next day to receive him. However, this was not the end of Deepak's struggles. It was realized that the floods had also washed away any official document and/or any proof of identity, which is necessary for the release process.

The Koshish team contacted the police again and told them about the situation. The Police agreed to support the family and provided them with evidence to prove that Deepak was missing from the village. Additionally, we spoke to the Sarpanch and few other panchayat

members and asked them to certify that Deepak was a resident of their village and Ramesh was his brother. Both the police and panchayat supported in this regard and we managed to establish the required identity and relationship as mandated by the law.

Ramesh, though excited to find his brother, was also a bit apprehensive and worried about the travel as he was to come here for the first time. He also needed to go to his village from Delhi to collect documents and then come to Mumbai after that. We ensured that whole process for release from the institution was completed in a day so that Ramesh could go back and resume his work as soon as possible.

On February 04, 2016, Ramesh came to Mumbai and Koshish, through the Superintendent of Beggar's Home made an appeal to the court to review his detention order. It was argued that Deepak was begging due to his forced circumstances and it was result of his getting separated from the family that he reached this situation. Deepak's detention order was revoked by the court and he was free to go with his family.

We arranged his medicines for a month. His brother assured that he will continue his treatment upon his return,

from the nearby district hospital.

Currently, Deepak is living with the family and working with his younger brother as a construction worker. We are maintaining a regular follow-up with him and the family. His medication is continuing from psychiatrist in Supaul and he is doing well. Most again become an earning member of the family.

Deepak's story tells us that sometimes all it requires to rebuild life is some support and timely intervention. His separation from the family had put him in a cycle of homelessness which further resulted in mental illness and destitution. Treatment and reintegration with the family has put him back on life with self-sufficiency and dignity.

b. Kalyanamma: An elderly woman, around 70 years old, Kalyanamma would remain silent mostly and hardly interacted with anyone in her ward. Her communication was also restricted due to the fact that she could speak only Telugu. When she was brought to Beggar's Home about 3 years ago, she had an injury in her leg and struggled to walk. Due to her medical condition, she was placed in the Hospital ward of Beggar's Home and that too added to her limited interactions with people in

the institution. Within few days of her arrival, she was diagnosed with mental health issues as well.

Due to language constraints, Koshish needed to call Telugu speaking volunteer to translate the conversations with her. Since our conversations were dependent on the availability of volunteer, it reduced the frequency of individual sessions with Kalyanamma. However, there was a relation established and she used to come to 'My Space' very frequently, even though she didn't understand the language of conversations there.

She was put on treatment for her mental illness from Regional Mental Hospital, Thane. In the beginning she didn't remember many details. However, with the continuous treatment, her situation improved and she began to recollect her past. Also, while she would feel comfortable visiting 'My Space', she wasn't comfortable in sharing her details. It was almost two and a half years when she started opening up. Probably the improvement in her mental health also resulted in her feeling more assured.

She could recall her native place but didn't express any openness about going back to the family. She came from Narasaraopet city in the Guntur

District of Andhra Pradesh. She didn't want us to contact her family and often tried to change the course of conversation if we spoke anything regarding family. We could clearly sense there was some conflict or rift with the family; there was something that she was yet to share with us or probably what she didn't want to recall itself. We, therefore, decided to wait for her consent and letting us trace her family.

Eventually, one day, Kalyanamma shared that she wanted to go back home. She also shared how she moved out of her family. As shared by her, she had left home around three years back after having an altercation with her son and daughter-in-law. She left home in anger to go to her brother's place in Vijayawada, but couldn't make sense of the stations and got off the train only when it reached Mumbai, which was its last station. Having reached an unfamiliar city, Kalyanamma was sitting outside the railway station, not knowing what she should do when she was picked up by the police and brought to Beggar's Home. Her inability to communicate in Hindi or Marathi meant she couldn't explain herself and make the officers understand about her situation.

She belonged to a middle class family and her husband had died long back.

She was taken care of by her three sons and daughter in law. She also has grand-children, whom she was missing the most. After Kalyanamma shared her desire to return home, we started the family tracing process with the help of local police station from her district.

Within two days, the police was able to locate the family and informed that the family had filed a missing complaint for Kalyanamma. Apparently, family had been searching for her all this while. We spoke to her son who shared how they had been worried about her and did all that was possible to search for her, from the day she left home. They had looked for her in Guntur, Vijayawada and all other places wherever their relatives lived. On learning of her being safe, her family was extremely happy and assured to come to take her at the earliest.

This development was shared with the staff of Beggar's Home and everyone was happy that we were able to locate Kalyanamma's family. There was a sense of joy about her going back to her family and home.

Since she was already sentenced for long term detention, she could be released and repatriated with family only through seeking release under 'Release on License' clause of the

Beggary Legislation. We explained this situation to the family and requested them to be patient and positive. We asked them to send us the required documents of identification and also a copy of the complaint that they lodged with the police so that the case for her release be built and process be initiated. Family sent the documents immediately and within 15 days, we were able to secure her release from the custody and she was sent back with the family. Seeing her going back with the family was a sight of extreme happiness and satisfaction.

We continue to follow-up with Kalyanamma and her sons on regular basis. Currently she is staying with her sons. Her treatment is being continued from a private clinic. The sons consider themselves very lucky to have found their mother and get her back after they had lost all hopes of seeing her again.

c. Anna Bhau: Anna was a small farmer from the Buldana district of Maharashtra. Anna, 45 years old, used to work as agricultural labourer and his wife Sunita worked as a domestic help. Anna was suffering from leprosy from his childhood. It had limited the functionality of his hands, yet he tried his best to work. His two sons also supported the family by doing labour work.

Anna developed mental illness around three years back and his ability to work went down due to heavy medication. He grew physically weaker day by day. Already being in an economically challenging situation, the family got additional pressure due to Anna's health condition. It led to frequent arguments and altercations in the family. One day, after such incident, Anna couldn't take it anymore and left his house without telling anyone. He took a train and directly came to Mumbai around two years back. His self-esteem due to leprosy was already low, and his inability to work further shattered him down.

After coming to Mumbai, his treatment got stopped. He tried to get work in construction and also tried some odd jobs like cleaning the porch of the shops, cleaning etc. This wasn't giving him enough money to survive. In between he was forced to beg as there were days when he wouldn't get any work and had to live off alms. His health continued to deteriorate. Somehow, he managed to save some money and bought a weighing scale where charged people two rupees for telling them their weight. He never liked begging and wanted to do some dignified work. This is the least he could settle on. He continued to work

like this for about an year or so, but police would arrest him often under the Beggary Prevention Legislation as by staying and sleeping on the streets, his clothes remained “dirty”. After his third arrest, he was detained for one year. Anna was very upset about it and he lost all hopes from life. According to him, he tried his best to live with dignity, but all his attempts failed due to his “condition”.

Anna required an elongated series of counselling sessions to pull himself up. Along with that, his treatment was started for leprosy through government hospital. We also tried to convince him that he can consider going back to his family and we will continue to support his treatment for both, his mental illness and leprosy in his village. After some hesitation he agreed to inform his family and go back to his village. We traced his family through police and the response of the family was very positive. They wanted to take him back at the earliest. Anna started crying on the phone and said that he wanted to go home and that we should send him

home as soon as possible.

Anna’s son came along with all the required documents to support his release. The case of Anna was forwarded to the court through the Superintendent for review in the detention order. The court revoked his detention order and set him free. Anna was very happy to be able to go back home and told us that he is very proud about himself that he will be living in “his house” with “his family”.

Koshish provided Anna travel help that he can comfortably go back home without putting an additional financial burden on the family. We continue regular follow-ups regarding Anna’s treatment. Currently his treatment is continued from Akola District Hospital and his health is stable. He is back on work and is supporting his family.

Anna’s story is one of determination and dignity. He never gave up his hope and continued his battle against all odds.

The Road Ahead...

Since the beginning of our work we have worked in partnership with the government. It has been our firm belief that without influencing the government and its functionaries, systemic change could not be made a reality. Ideating and modeling interventions is possible for civil society organizations but making it reach the masses is the responsibility of a welfare state. Also considering the resources involved, only government with the national budget at its disposal shall be in a position to affect positive changes for the masses. For example, Koshish's independent interventions for people in destitution shall not reach their motive if a person/individual client gets arrested under the Beggary Act. Through our partnership in certified institutions established under BPBA or protective institutions run for the rehabilitation of destitute persons, we have come to an understanding that more change is possible as a partner of the government than as its adversary. We have been able to negotiate for fair processes and navigate difficult spaces to a great

extent. We have successfully built a case for decriminalization of destitution as criminalizing it not only unconstitutional but also failed to bring about any change in the issue of Begging, homelessness and destitution. In our collaboration with the government outside custodial institutions we have been in a position to guide the government on the issue and what interventions are possible and can give positive results. This has become possible as our experience and expertise on the issue is now being cashed in by those who wish to replicate our model of work whether in the government or outside.

The road ahead seems to be an exciting one with several challenges and milestones to reach. The Bill and its importance must reach the civil society especially the youth to build a public opinion about it. While the regular programs shall continue in the next year, added efforts are going to be invested in taking the Destitution Bill to various forums to create positive environment around it.