



Khula Aasman

Crafting Art for Social Change

ANNUAL 2014

REPORT 2015





# Khula Aasman

Crafting Art for Social Change



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	KA's Vision & Mission	4
2	KA's Theory of Change	4
3	From the Founder's Desk	6
4	Our Achievements	8
5	Outcomes	10
6	Our Supporters	7
7	Governance	14
8	Staff Development	14
9	Financials	14

## VISION & MISSION

### Vision

Khula Aasman envisions a world where everyone lives with dignity and peace with oneself and the outside world by exploring full potential through creative expression for self and social change.

### Mission

To facilitate art based self expression, expand creative freedom and space for needy individuals, groups and communities and enable them to be catalyst of positive change.





## FROM THE FOUNDER'S DESK

A Zen master was once asked how to replace the darkness with light. He replied "light the lamp and the darkness will vanish".

At KA, we know replacing sadness with happiness, dullness with laughter and idleness with hands-on activity will lighten the heart and brighten up the human space.

Khula Aasman started with the vision of connecting art for improving mental and social health. The language of arts (dance movement, stories, theatre, music, clay, painting, etc.), has enormous hidden power for connecting with others as well as communicating with self.

In 2014-15, our small motivated team worked with full gusto to put this vision into action, whether it was women's rescue homes, prisons, children's shelter homes, college students or a senior citizens groups.

The sessions at prison were an eye opener. On the first day a lady approached, without having any clear idea about our whereabouts. She started telling us her story. Probably reading our body language, she narrated it in short. Empathising with her, we convinced her to join the session. She joined, a bit unsure, just perhaps to make us happy.

I met her again the following week during the planned session. This time she joined in without any hesitation. She came over and started to tell us her story. This time I saw a certain 'lightness' in her. "You look better today" I said and she replied, "I don't know if I am right or wrong. I have done MA in English Literature and I work. I was very scared of myself. I was not able to face my own image. After your session, I feel lighter... I can meet myself."

I felt lighter too and wondered what had changed. Not the circumstances outside; the same four walls, lukewarm food, 'watery dal' and the unmoving vacant gaze and unspoken sorrow of people around. Yet, her ability to face the situation seemed to have improved. What had happened during these two sessions were lots of games, dancing and painting and all in a space which had no labelling, no judgements.

In the coming year, we will have more sessions within prisons. We plan to explore ways for making the art and crafts work effectively for prisoners. We hope the availability of positive environment and creative pursuits will slowly but surely navigate them away from ill-feelings, to a more neutral plane, if not completely "positive". The techniques

of art based therapy will give them an opportunity to look beyond themselves. They will learn to locate their actions in the larger frame of things. It might help them to forgive themselves and others.

We will also take ahead lessons from the regular KA sessions at the Rescue Homes for trafficked women and girls. 'Sukoon' programme is an offshoot of this work. Last year we had five women who were in the rehabilitation process at the Home, mastering paper-art at KA office. This programme is still in its nascent stage. We hope to bring in more women to train in the various art and crafts and to take back skills of caring for self and others.

We are developing a range of products to support the women coming in 'Sukoon'. An exhibition of their hand-made products is being planned. The purpose is to give visibility to them and air their voices. A mobile exhibition is being planned so that it can go from college to college and other public spaces.

The literacy class and library located in one of the women's Rescue Homes, has been very well received by the women. We now aim to encourage and help women to complete the learning process by enrolling for secondary board exam through the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

Furthermore, we are planning a clay based campaign with college students to protect our precious water bodies. Every year the sea, river and ponds in Mumbai, have to take in tonnes of plaster of paris as a majority of Ganesha idols are made from this material. To make several young people mould eco-friendly clay Ganeshas, is a duty we must take up more seriously this coming year.

Having realised the possibility of non-competitive games through Play for Peace, we decided to initiate the Train the Trainers programme. We are proud to say that Khula Aasman is now officially a part of the Global Club and a training centre under its aegis.

2014-15 was a year full of exploration and action.

In 2015-16, we plan to work with more intensity and thoroughness.

Santa Ganesh



## KHULA AASMAN'S THEORY OF CHANGE

Increasing evidence from neurology and evolutionary psychology suggests that art plays an important role in our ability to think, to solve problems and recall. Images whether in the form of art making, imagination or dreams, help maintain and stimulate our minds and bodies. The expanding field of neuroscience research has revolutionized clinical psychology and one of the key areas being explored is art based therapy.

Research in depression, a major mental health problem world over, shows an increasing trend in all age groups, mainly due to increasing urbanisation, work and financial pressures, unhealthy, insufficient interpersonal relationships, lack of control, and various forms of insecurities. Studies have proposed that a prevention model for depression focusing on improving social network and educational programmes designed to educate the public, can act as a protective shield against depression. Art has been used since the beginning of human history as a medium for communicating thoughts and ideas and extending social bonding. Art became an instrument for self-expression and symbolism. Since the 1940s, therapeutic use of art has evolved into a distinct discipline.

According to the American Art Therapy Association, art therapy is the use of art creation as a form of psychotherapy for people experiencing trauma or illness, seeking personal development, or struggling to deal with the day-to-day act of living. Through the act of creating art and thinking about the process and medium, people are able to develop skills that increase cognitive ability, awareness of self and others, and help them cope with the distressing symptoms and limitations imposed by disability or disease.

A qualitative study used the Photovoice tool with individuals working in the sex industry in Portland, USA, to understand their needs and aspirations through their artistic self-representation. Research conducted with aboriginal people has shown that cultural activities, traditional art and creative activity in general, could successfully address many of the wounds arising from shared history, residential school legacy as well as personal issues and problems.

In India, a number of organizations working on mental health issues have been promoting the value of art therapy. At the 38th national annual conference of the Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists in 2012, experts shared how the integration of art-based therapies with treatment methodologies as offered by clinical psychologists, can

work well with people in need.

In 2013-14, Khula Aasman (KA) conducted an Action Research programme at a Government Rescue Home for women rescued from prostitution, for evolving an art and body based programme suitable to them. The tools used included dance, games, story-telling, meditation, painting and clay work. The Module showed positive results in terms of de-stressing the women who had severe anxiety, sadness and a feeling of hopelessness. The women shared their traumatic and joyful memories, unwound their knots and enjoyed the fun activities. Specifically speaking, the outcomes were:

- The sessions helped the women to de-stress. The women who attended the sessions were taking lesser time to start the process of rehabilitation as they became more vocal and clear about what they would like to do in future. (Feedback received from the Rescue Home Counsellors)
- Some activities like group painting in a circle taught them patience.
- 'OM' chanting helped them to reflect calmly.
- Women enjoyed the games, dance and other activities along with the sharing of stories and life events. During the sessions and discussions, the women made their own inferences, while the facilitator helped them to review some of their negative feelings towards self and others.
- In general, the sessions helped women to develop a positive frame of mind, which in turn aided them to deal with the emotional ups and downs more effectively and have fewer conflicts with others. Their confidence level seemed to be higher as they were more open to new ideas, ready to discuss frankly without guilt and self-pity.

KA therefore believes that similar modules could be developed to facilitate the participants' acceptance and adaptation to changing situations as well as enable them to learn skills for coping with pressures, stress, and depression.





## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Khula Aasman was formally registered as a non-profit, non-government organisation in July 2013. We are one of the few organisations working specifically in the area of art and body based programme for enhancing mental health of people and bringing about social change. Art and body movement programmes were applied with different groups of people in 2014-15. These sessions helped participants to get in touch with self, to express, gain insight, let go and find new paths, leading to positive change. KA plans to enhance its programme by integrating other Expressive Art forms like theatre and music in a more systematic manner. This will help us to augment our tools for de-stressing, identify alternate ways of community building, create support structures within communities and generate awareness on mental health issues. KA has shared its perspective with academicians, practitioners, researchers and artists, who have endorsed and encouraged our approach of merging art with social change.

Programmes Conducted, Organisation & Venue	Total no of sessions	No of people reached
Art & Body Based Sessions at Navjeevan, Mumbai	66	1056
Art & Body Based Sessions at Sukh Shanti, Deonar, Mumbai	16	176
Art & Body Based Sessions at Deonar Special Home for Girls	12	156
Art & Body Based Sessions at Shanti Sadan Mahila Vastigruha, Ulhasnagar, Thane (MSRLM)	12	132
Literacy class & Books Library, Navjeevan, Mumbai	122	1968
Collaborative Wall painting at Chembur Children's Home, Mumbai & Navjeevan, Mumbai	2	Average of 10 persons
In House Play for Peace workshops, Khula Aasman Office, Mumbai	2	30
Collaborative Play for Peace workshop (With MAVA and David Sassoon Industrial School, Mumbai)	2	30
Orientation workshops for social work students and faculty, Khula Aasman, Mumbai	6	Average of 26 persons per session
Eco-friendly Ganesha idol making sessions (Central and Eastern suburbs, Mumbai)	7	215

### More about Our Work

With funding support in 2014, KA was able to work with

different agencies in Mumbai and Thane, extending its programme wholeheartedly to agencies working with women and children who are at risk and residing in government or NGO centres. In 2014, KA was able to provide regular and need based programmes to women from four institutions, Navjeevan Sudhar Kendra, Sukhshanti at Mankhurd, Deonar Special Home for Girls, and Shanti Sadan Mahila Vastigruha, Thane. The latter was a pilot programme for rehabilitating women who were victims of trafficking under the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Project, (MSRLM), Government of Maharashtra. KA initiated a literacy enhancing programme in the Navjeevan Rescue Home for Women as it was a 'felt need' of the group. We realised that more than 80% of the women at the home are illiterate or have left schooling at an early age. The impact of this fractured and incomplete schooling is the severe reduction of their options for livelihood. Most of them had expressed during sessions that if they were educated they probably would have never entered this occupation. We availed the opportunity at hand by starting a Book Library and a Literacy Class. This provides them the space for learning, re-learning and updating the reading and writing skills. Most women desire to learn Hindi and English and therefore attend these classes with full interest. The KA mentor gives attention to their individual requirements and encourages them to read story books. KA is aiming to get women enrolled for the Secondary School Certificate exam through NIOS.

Mid 2014, the KA team conducted Orientation Programme for students and faculty of social work colleges, on the scope of using art and body based programme in the field of social development. The sessions were much appreciated as they found it had the potential for opening up new communication channels with different age groups, building better rapport with communities especially the marginalised sections, de-stressing themselves and others and thinking creatively.

Last year, Khula Aasman became a part of the Global Club of Play for Peace International and is one of the recognised trainers of Play for Peace modules. Four full-fledged sessions on Play for Peace were conducted during the year. KA conducted two in-house and two collaborative programmes. One in collaboration with MAVA (Men Against Violence and Abuse) and the second with David Sassoon Industrial School.

Through an initiative, 'Sukoon', KA opened up its space





for women who were in the rehabilitation process. This programme was undertaken in collaboration with a TISS field project, Prayas. Our experience at one of the rescue homes had revealed that it is difficult for women to find alternate livelihood. They need some time and space to get into the structure of work while enhancing their skill sets. At Khula Aasman, we not only extended psycho-social and vocational support but also provided a stipend of Rs 3000 - 4000 per month (depending on their role and requirement). Out of the five women who became part of 'Sukoon', two have moved on and two are presently working with us. One of them is preparing for her SSC exam through NIOS.

With the aim of combining art with a 'save the environment' message, Khula Aasman had conducted workshops with women, children, youth and senior citizens, encouraging them to make their own clay Ganesha idol. Our aim was to lace the clay activity of making Ganesha Idols with an environmental message of saving our water bodies. This endeavour was successful as we could reach out to more than 200 people living in different communities in Mumbai. Our success opened up the whole scope for a larger campaign in Mumbai in 2015-16.

Another distinctive strategy we used was wall painting. We encouraged young people from two agencies to decorate the living environment within the limited resources at hand. The participants shared and made visuals of what they recalled from childhood. The activity not only added to their confidence level but also rejuvenated them manifold. The wall paintings transformed the two places remarkably. We plan to continue wall painting sessions with different

agencies.

Dance movements taken from Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) programme (Samved, Kolkata) have been adapted in all the KA modules. In 2014-15, KA anchored six students undergoing the Dance Movement Therapy training programme at TISS. We hope to continue anchoring of DMT students next year as well.

Last but not the least important was the building of new networks with teachers, administrators, artists, government officials and social workers. We networked with:

- Principal, J.J. School of Art, Mumbai
- Principal, College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai
- Principal, SNTD College, Churchgate, Mumbai
- Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Project, (MSRLM), Government of Maharashtra
- Samved, Kolkata
- Prayas Project, Tata Institute of Social Sciences
- Voltas Ltd and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC)

With some agencies, we initiated projects in 2014-15, while with others we plan to commence in the coming year.

Khula Aasman maintained a balance between being a resource and training centre and a field organisation by training social work and development practitioners in the use of art and body based activities and staying in touch

with urban, rural and tribal communities.

## OUTCOMES

### I. Work with Women at Risk

In 2014, KA provided art and body based programme to women and girls at risk. The women were from four institutions, Navjeevan Sudhar Kendra, Sukhshanti, Deonar Special Home for Girls and Shanti Sadan Mahila Vastigruha, Thane.

Organ-isation/Agency	Time period	Particulars of activity	Total number of sessions	Total No. of Participants	Average number of participants
Navjeevan Sudhar Kendra	June 2014- March 2015	Art and Body Based sessions	66	1056	16
Sukhshanti, Manikurd	July & August 2014	Art and Body Based sessions	11	176	16
Deonar Special Home for Girls	July- December 2014	Art and Body Based sessions	12	156	26
Shanti Sadan Mahila Vastigruha, Ulhasnagar, Thane	Jan.- March 2015	Art and Body Based sessions	12	132	11

Navjeevan is a rescue home for women in prostitution, at Manikurd. Sukhshanti is a short stay shelter home for women in distress and need. Deonar Special Home for Girls is a rescue home for minor girls rescued from difficult situations like trafficking. Shanti Sadan Gruha, Ulhasnagar, Thane is a Home for rescued women who are victims of trafficking.

In all the four institutions we found women and young girls suffering from stress, lack of control over their lives and feelings of shame and guilt and hopelessness about their future. We used art, crafts, meditation and body movements for the women and girls through regular sessions.

#### Feedback (Navjeevan):

Most women said that they felt "lighter", "better". Their faces looked happier.

The ABT sessions helped them to listen to stories of other women and gain strength from each other, facilitated the release of pent up sorrow and other emotions.

Helping them to come out of their feelings of shame, guilt and depression was one of the goals of the sessions and this was realised as the women were ready to realign themselves to the outside world with a fresh mind and more confidence.

#### Vignette-1:Sani

*Sani said that when she was 5-6 years old, her parents brought her to Mumbai. She has memories of her parents fighting constantly. When she grew up, her mother decided to go to Dubai for work and her father remarried. Her mother used to send money from Dubai for the upkeep of the children. When she discovered that her husband had remarried and the money was not being spent on her own children, she stopped sending the money.*

*So the responsibility of Sani and her brother was passed over to her uncle. Days passed by and Sani was married off by her uncle when she was very young. Sani's husband left her after one child. Sani had no education, no skills other than being a house maid. The income was not sufficient to take care of herself and the child. So she decided to get into the trade and was caught after being in the trade for more than 3 years. Sani started narrating her story in a very matter of fact manner, but ended with tears releasing her pent up emotions.*

*Sani's attendance at ABT sessions was quite regular. She also encouraged other women to come for the session. She would tell them come at least for some time, "you will forget everything and laugh". She herself would dance, laugh, played games and draw pictures and felt happy with her own creation. She said she would teach all this to her children. Once or twice during the sessions, she complained of headache. The facilitator would let her be a silent observer rather than an active participant. After some time she would join the dance session and at the end of the session she would be happy that her headache was gone.*

*The day she was to be released from the Home, she came up to the facilitator to take her phone number. Her body language, her dress, her big broad smile expressed her happiness and confidence.*

#### Vignette-2:Pam

*Pam was a trail woman with eyes that looked swollen from crying. She started attending the ABT sessions but with little*

enthusiasm. Many a times, the facilitator felt as if she is still gauging and trying to understand what this whole thing was about. One of the session activities was on

*'lifeline'*. All the participants were told that they need to draw a line and mark the happy / positive events above the line and the negative events below the line.

All the participants marked the various events in their lives, marriage, child birth, husband leaving, getting into the current occupation etc. Pam gave us a blank paper saying that she had nothing good to write. The session ended and all departed except Pam. She wanted to talk to the facilitator. Like a waterfall, her story and tears came rushing down. She said she has two children as she was married at an early age. The husband hardly earned and whatever he earned he spent on alcohol. Pam worked as a maid. Money was not sufficient. So she got into this occupation with full knowledge of its nature. Then she was caught by the police and brought here.

She said that now her life is simply dark but she does not want to go back to her family. The children are being taken care of by some relative in Calcutta. She reports her marriage with a man who could not provide her basic necessities, "not even worth two rupees". She feels he has no role in her life now.

After coming to the institution, she got to hear stories of love, care and longing that was part of some of other women's past lives. This saddened her further as she felt that her life had no love, no skills, no education, no future.

After that talk with the facilitator, Pam's attitude changed. She started attending the literacy classes (run by Khula Aasman) more regularly. She made progress very quickly and did not bother about comments from other women, "what is the use of learning now?" Pam was determined. In a short span of time, she picked up enough to read children's story books.

She had realised that education could give her an additional tool to face the world outside. Her face looked more hopeful, calm and determined to get what she needed. Her participation in ABT sessions improved. In the last ABT session, she even wrote a poem expressing her feelings.

## Feedback (Shanti Sadan

### Vastigruha): a) Meditation Activity

All the participants enjoyed the meditation activity which included the healing touch of the facilitator on the forehead at the end. Some of the participants' comments are given below:

*"It was like doing meditation and I like meditating to release the stress."*

*"We do it to relax our body and mind...If we keep thinking about our sorrows that will affect our mind and body negatively."*

*"...today when I was doing relaxation, I felt that earth is calling me and wants to talk to me. I could feel deeply. I wanted to know, but suddenly there was disturbance and I could not complete dialogue with earth."*

### b) Clay Activity

Women went back down the memory lane and located spaces where they felt most secure and peaceful. They drew pictures and made clay items of those images that they reminisced happily or missed a lot.

*"I am missing my home so I made the things I used in the kitchen."*

*"I made the things I miss here...lots of kitchenware, gods like Shiva, Ganesha, and Haji Malang Dargah, cake..."*

### c) Drawing/Painting Activity

*"I feel happy when I draw. I have been looking for opportunity and right time to draw but because I have a baby (12 days old) and because of that I couldn't get time. Today I managed."*

*"I don't know how to draw. I started learning and doing the painting and drawing in your sessions only. I feel happy when I do that. My daughter also loves playing with colors."*

### d) Overall Observations

The sessions helped in forgetting the day to day issues and also recreate hope and confidence in women. Women loved the simple fun activities that gave them learnings in self-exploration, communication, concentration, co-operation, positive thinking and patience.

The participants seemed to like the sessions as they said that they felt calm, peaceful. Some said that their "body stiffness", "pains and aches" had vanished after the sessions.

The facilitators could also observe that the intergroup clashes among women were much less frequent as they got involved in KA activities and the discussions.

### Vignette 3: Salma

*Salma a beautiful young woman, whose husband had left her after two years of marriage, had gone back to her parents home and taken up the trade, due to poverty and lack of earning opportunities.*





*She used to come for the KA sessions on a regular basis. However, she was not present for the last few sessions as she was under emotional pressure. Her court appeal was rejected by the High Court.*

*She had given the names of her parents, but they had refused to acknowledge her. She said she had paid for their survival and the education of her brother. She was shocked that her family members did not want her back. Her only plea was to help her to get out of the Rescue Home and that she would look after her own life. She was feeling sad and angry at her fate.*

## II. Orientation to Social Workers

Social workers have been creative in their pursuit of working with marginalised groups. However, art and body based tools for social change remains largely unexplored in India.

KA organised seven workshops for social work and social science students and faculty in the month of June and July, 2014. These experiential workshops were of three hours each, and were designed to showcase the possibilities of using art and body based activities and non-competitive games followed by a discussion. The discussion revolved around the importance of using body and hands for creative expression, de-stressing, community development work and inclusive approach. Our Orientation sessions were well received by faculty and students.

## General Feedback from Students and Faculty:

- Students enjoyed all the activities. It was an enriching, refreshing experience for them. They realised the importance of doing things with their hands and being





the producer of a product, rather than being mere passive consumers.

- They could also see a clear link between their academic social work course and the ideas of change presented by Khula Aasman.

## OUR SUPPORTERS

- Ms. Krishna Joshi, a student of Economics from U.K. came to Khula Aasman and volunteered for few days.
- Ms. Preeti, has been helping us to enhance the quality of literacy classes by giving her time and sharing books.
- Ms. Nandita Sheshadri, student of SIES College, Second Year BA, volunteered to help in KA office.
- Ms. Cristine, student of SIES College, Second Year BA volunteered with office work.

## GOVERNANCE

Khula Aasman received 12 A certificate from the Income Tax department and has applied for the 80 G certificate.

### Trustees

- Ms. Roopashri Sinha, Researcher & Knowledge Manager
- Ms. Shaku Kothari, Artist & Entrepreneur
- Mr. Akhil Oswal, Designer & Artist
- Ms. Sarita Ganesh, Artist & Social Worker

### Advisory Committee

We invited experts from the field of social work, education and art to be on our advisory board. KA's Advisory Committee members are:

1. Dr. Vimla Nadkarni, President, International Association of Schools of Social Work
2. Dr. Rekha Mammen, Professor, TISS, Mumbai
3. Dr. Uma Shankar, Vice-Principal, SIES, Sion, Mumbai
4. Mr. Sanjeev Khandekar, Artist, Pune
5. Dr. Mohan Deshpande, Artist and Health Educationist, Pune
6. Ms. Gauri Deshmukh, Therapist and Educationist, Pune

### Executive Team

- Founder, Ms. Sarita Ganesh
- Programme Coordinator, Ms. Archana Magar

- Programme Assistant, Ms. Snehal Gaikwad
- Consultant, Ms. Neha Bhat

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT

### Staff Training

- Ms. Sarita Ganesh successfully completed a nine month Arts Based Therapy Certificate Course, conducted by World Centre For Creative Learning (WCCL) Foundation, Pune.
- Ms. Snehal Gaikwad has been attending DMT sessions and has been undergoing informal English classes with Ms. Preeti Sharma to upgrade her own teaching skills.
- Ms. Sarita Ganesh and Ms. Archana Magar attended two days training in 'Gaming for Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice', at Pune.
- Ms. Sarita Ganesh attended a five-day International Leadership Summit at Aurovelly, Rishikesh, Uttar Pradesh
- Ms. Archana Magar attended the 3-day National Conference on Experiential Education Conference at Bangalore.
- Mr. Trevor Pereira attended the workshop, "Creativity ki Chidiya" at Udaipur, Rajasthan.

## FINANCIALS

### Donations in kind:

- Ms. Rishika Shama. donated clothes for the women in Navjeevan.
- We received the books for literacy class from Ms. Shantabai Pungaliya.
- We received Rs 10,000 from Mr Sheetal Baldota.

### Total Funding in 2014-15

MSPH Project Funding: Rs. Twenty One lacs

Doations - Sheetal Baldota: Rs. 10,000

Total Funding in 2014-15- Twenty One  
Lacs Ten Thousand Only







Registered under Mumbai Charitable Trust Act, Reg No. G-29723/Mumbai

C/O Sukhshanti, Opposite BARC  
Main Gate, Mankhurd, Mumbai-88

Ph: 022-25584687

Email: [khula\\_aasman@outlook.com](mailto:khula_aasman@outlook.com)

[www.khulaaasman.com](http://www.khulaaasman.com)