



FINAL REPORT
PROJECT INNER LIGHT
STRESS MANAGEMENT THROUGH EXPRESSIVE ARTS
KHULA AASMAN IN COLLABORATION WITH PRAYAS- TISS, Mumbai
BYCULLA JAIL Feb to April 2023



Art work by one of the participants
"There are many difficulties in life, but I still want to fly"

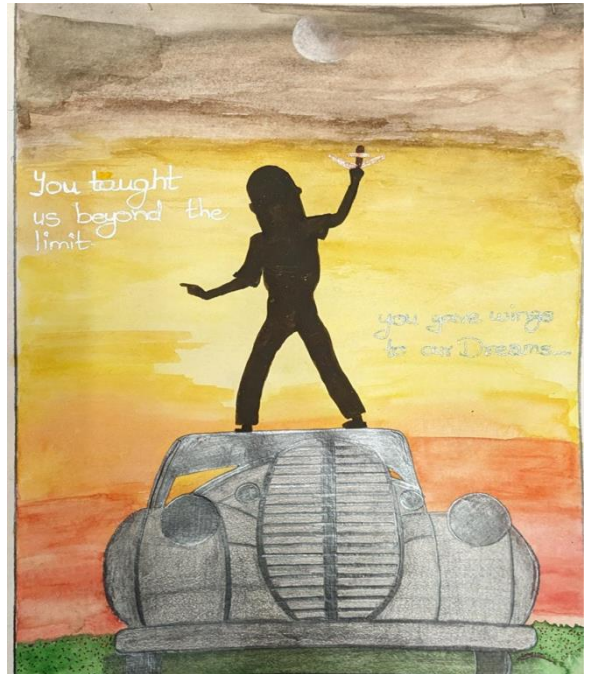
*"I feel more confident", "I feel calm",
"I feel different within",
"This program has helped me discover
myself" "I feel more confident",
"I feel different within",
"humein achhi soch rakhni chahiye",
"This program has helped me
discover myself"*

About Project Inner Light -

Project Inner Light is a therapeutic expressive arts intervention program that was started by Khula Aasman Trust in 2016 for the incarcerated population for emotional catharsis, self- discovery and self-growth - using various modalities such as dance/movement, art, drama, games and music. Since then, the intervention has been carried out in Kalyan, Nasik, Yerawada, Thane and Byculla central prisons and jails.

This year in 2023, the program was conducted at Byculla Jail from the 24th of February to 6th

April- covering a total of 15 sessions of a duration of 2 to 2.5 hours each, for women inmates, in collaboration with Prayas, TISS, Mumbai, providing financial support and coordination with Jail authorities The program ran under the name of Stress Management for an easier understanding amongst prison authorities and the inmates.



We thank Dr. Vijay Raghavan –Professor, TISS at Centre for Criminology and Justice, School of Social Work and Sakshi Desai- Social Worker for the smooth running of this course.

About Expressive Arts Based Therapy (EABT)

It is a form of therapy that encourages a person to work through their issues using expressive arts-based exercises. EABT does not require a person to have any sort of artistic ability. It helps a person channel their thoughts and emotions through various forms of creative expressions.

About the Program

There were several women who wanted to enroll for the program - 55 was the number we received from the staff in charge. We had to restrict the number to take in 35 women. Our sessions are usually quite intense and require one on one attention many times. We therefore restrict our numbers to usually around 25. We had a regular of around 20 women by the end of the intervention.

Profile of the participants –

Women inmates under trial

Number of Participants - 20 to 35

Age - Between 20 to 55 years

Time of imprisonment - Between 6 months to 7 years

Types of crime - Fraud, murder, abetment, drug trafficking, some unknown and some claiming innocence

Educational background - A wide range covering school dropouts, fisher women, college dropouts, graduates and a PhD student.

Location – Most participants were from cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Lughnow, Pune except few from rural area

Space

The sessions were conducted in an empty, unoccupied barrack in the new wing, separate from the main barracks, providing a safe, undisturbed environment to a good extent, which helped the process to go deeper.

Facilitators –

Sarita Ganesh and Tanvi Oswal with documentation by Fatema Qutubuddin

Objectives

A wide range of objectives were worked upon through the medium of all the above activities
Bringing Calmness and Joyfulness Positivity,

- Hopefulness for the future
- Better Communication/ Relationships with other inmates
- Co-operation Reduction in anger and fear levels
- Better Sleep
- Reduction in crying episodes
- Building Resilience
- Making efforts towards self-growth

Typical Session Design -

The sessions followed a structure of the following manner:

Check in, warm up, main theme of the session, sharing, cool down, check out and closing ritual.

Range of Activities -

We covered a large range of exercises since the beginning of the intervention - starting with circular dances, movement with imagery, touching upon surface emotions through art, sharing one's story using gibberish (a self-devised meaningless language), to then taking a deeper dive into releasing anger through drumming and vigorous dance/movement, writing, uncovering deeper un-confronted issues using drama therapy, shedding off labels, taking on a new identity, rediscovering and unveiling our dreams and desired attributes, mindfulness and awareness, understanding the relationship between thoughts and emotions, learning to change thoughts, trying to work upon habits - such as gossiping, and then finally using metaphors to talk about our roots, values, strengths and how we relate and contribute to the world.

We also provided the participants with mandala art sheets for coloring during their free time in the barracks.

Some Key Highlights of the Program

- Simple games and circular dances to build group spirit
- Using drawing and coloring to uncover emotions
- Drumming and vigorous movement to express and release anger
- Drama therapy to confront unresolved issues
- Sculpting (in pairs) to bring out one dreams and hidden/desired qualities
- Using the metaphor of a cup to show what emotions and feelings, thoughts we carry and how they affect our reactions
- Using the metaphor of trees to validate and reaffirm one's roots, strengths and how one relates and contributes to the world around

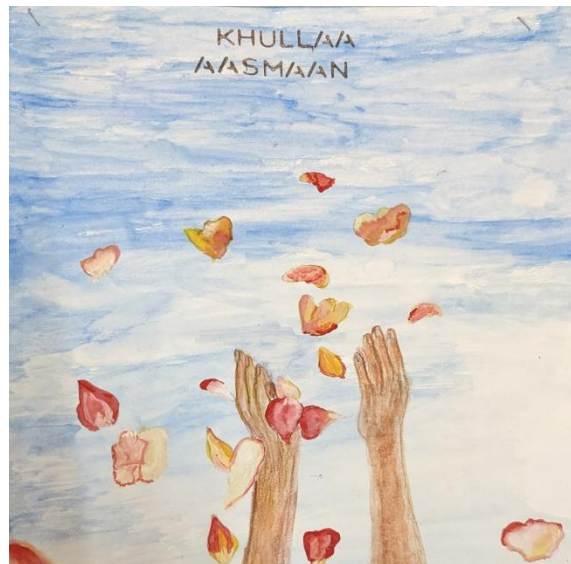
Some Key Observations

There was an overall shift in the energy and happiness levels after most of the sessions. Focus and engagement levels increased gradually in the process. It was difficult for some participants to close their eyes and to focus on the breath in the beginning. While this did not completely change for everyone, there was an improvement after towards the end for most of them. We noticed a positive change in the attitude of participants who were most engaged in the process, throughout the intervention. There was a clear change in the feelings of hope for the future and a sense of determination and willingness to take charge of their current situation.

The body language and facial expressions of the participants, changed by the end of the intervention - even in those who were more silent participants. The restlessness seemed to be lesser and some participants were very attentive. Postures also changed in this period. An increased willingness and an enthusiasm to learn new things was expressed by the entire group. External factors influence the state of mind of the participants. Meditation and self-practices could help maintaining a state of calmness

Feedback from the Participants

We got very encouraging feedback from the participants, at the end of every session and the end of the intervention.



Painting by Participants

We could see a change in the body language, a spring in the step at the end of most sessions. There were topics that were difficult to grasp for some, they still tried their best to understand. They generally expressed a positive feeling about being able to share in a safe space and had developed a good amount of trust with the facilitators. Most of them requested us to continue the program with them and even others.

It also adds great meaning to the program when the constable on duty also asks to be a part of the process and contributes her insights to the group.

*"I get a different perspective to think
and to deal with my problems",*

*"We have never spoken to
each other or shared with
one another here before",*

"I feel more courage and belief",

*"This is the first time I have
ever told anyone of my past",*

"I feel hopeful for the future"

*"I am able to take care of myself
better than before."*

*"I sleep better. I have stopped taking
sleep medication since joining this program."*

*"I feel encouraged to pursue my dream to be
an entrepreneur when I leave the prison."*

*"I will start building towards becoming
a teacher for little children."*

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"I feel different within",

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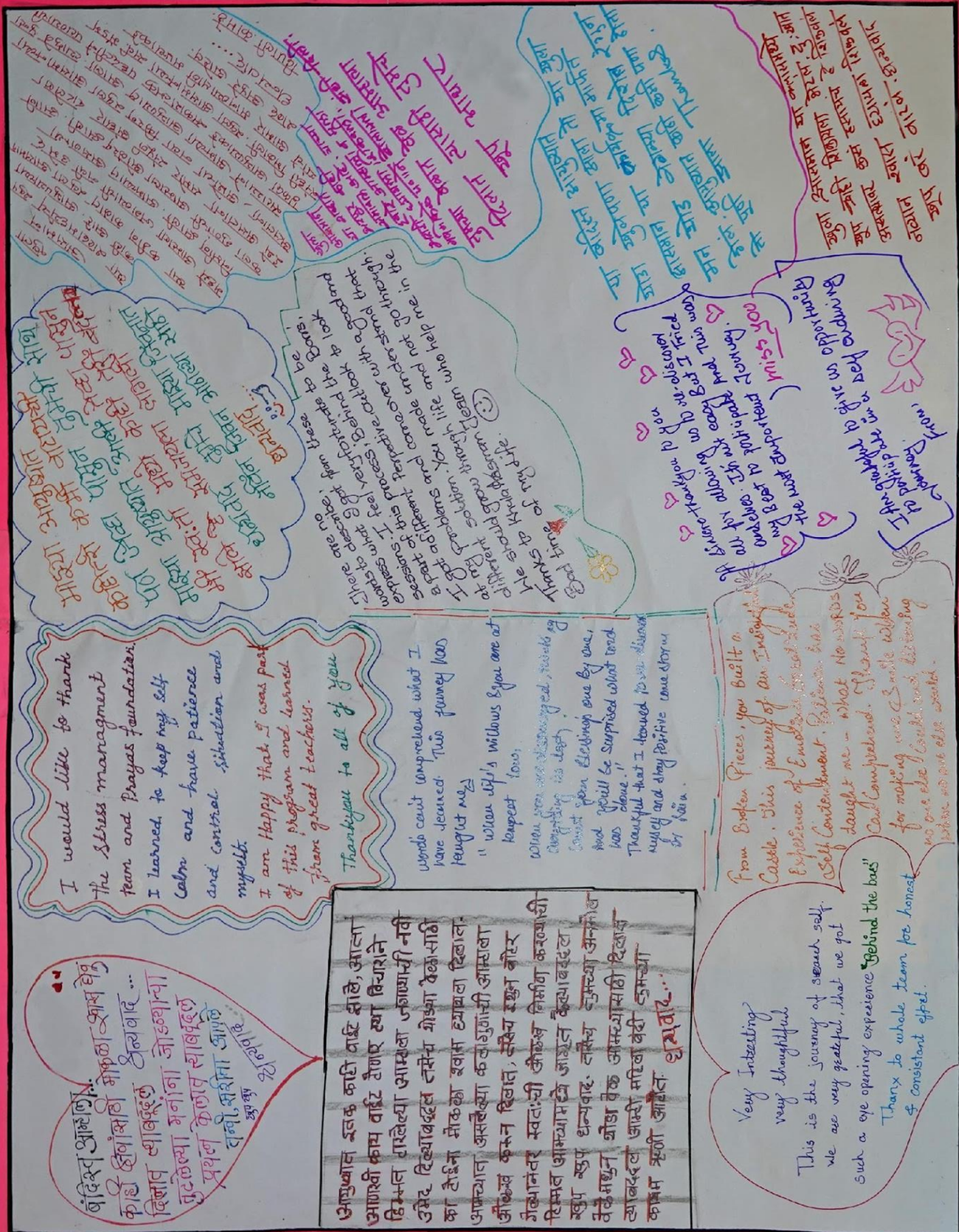
Certificate ceremony.

The Superintendent Mrs. Chintamani was invited at the end of the program to present certificates to the 23 participants who had more than 50 percent attendance.

The group set up and performed a 15 minute play to showcase a summary of the intervention and what they had taken away in the process to the superintendent and other prison staff. It was encouraging and also heartwarming for all of us to see the talent that is present in these settings that could be put to use better, if given a chance and opportunity.



Our certificate to them -6x8 inch



Their Certificate -A feedback card by the participant - 2x3 feet

Concluding thoughts

Avenues for positive engagement are required in jails and prisons in order to make productive use of jail time, to heal and transform and to come out ready to rehabilitate in the society on release. Our programs bring groups to a level of transformation, enthusiasm, energy and hope that when utilized well could lead to more promising outcomes - for inmates, the jails/prisons and even help during rehabilitation period. While prisons have now become a learning ground in many places, there should be a way to engage even the under trial population in more useful ways that allow them to become more responsible citizens within the jail and on exit.

Every inmate we have interacted with has a wish to do well for the sake of their families and to make a good name for themselves. It is important that opportunities are generated in a way that would prevent people from taking drastic measures that lead to punishment through imprisonment again. Perhaps literacy and education programs could be started, a library with a good set of books on various subjects, and a work opportunity could certainly go a long way along in bringing about transformation and reform.

Our intervention helps bring back **the self esteem, confidence and self-worth** that has been lost, it helps in changing thought patterns and bringing positivity. A supporting listening environment would help boost the learning to a much greater extent and encourage inmates to lead a better life even within the same premises.

We earnestly feel that frequent interventions that could cover more inmates in the process could help in bringing about a transformation in the jail environment.



Submitted by Sarita Ganesh and Tanvi Oswal for Khula Aasman Trust