

YOUNG INFLUENCERS

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Pravah and its Streaming Partners 2008

Set up in 2007 with support from the Youth and Civil Society Initiative of Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Pravah's Streaming initiative seeks to co-create an ecosystem of organisations working on youth leadership and active citizenship for social change. To this end, Pravah partners with organisations across the country, who share the vision and values of Pravah. During the course of this partnership, Pravah engages intensively with its partners, especially in the areas of programmatic and organisational development.

In January 2008, a partnership meeting was held with the Streaming Partners: Pravah Jaipur Initiative, Thoughtshop Foundation (Kolkata), Patang (Orissa) and SAHER (Mumbai). During the meeting, partners highlighted the principles of youth development by sharing stories of young people that illustrate the personal transformation they had undergone during the programme.

Pravah Jaipur Initiative

The Jaipur-Initiative conducted its first youth intervention in Kanoria College in the month of December. It was an all girls college and the general notion of the people outside the college was that the girls here were very docile, not very outgoing, hardworking and very dedicated to their studies. It was very challenging to work with a group who had never attended a workshop before and had no experience of theatre. There were lots of questions around whether our methodologies around theatre, games, dance would work or not. I was also a little skeptical about the fact whether the girls who barely spoke would come up with a play at the end of the workshop.

Malini Verma (name changed), one of the students from Kanoria College who participated in the 10 day workshop that Pravah held during their NSS camp strengthened my belief in the saying "where there is a will there is a way". I saw a significant change in Malini at the end of the workshop compared to the first day I had met her. Behind her radiant smile I sensed a lot of questions, a lot of feelings and stories that this girl with spectacles and a long choti wanted to share.

The first two days I saw her sitting with her only friend Sunaina in a group of 17 people. I was concerned that she might feel out of place in the workshop where some people were quite vocal in expressing their opinions. However, I gave her and myself time for realising that different people have different ways of responding and dealing with situations.

As the workshop progressed she started coming out of her cocoon and tried to initiate conversations with different people in the group. I saw her laughing, yelling and calling out for her new friends. It was wonderful to see her dance and move gracefully with the music and sense her feel intoxicated with her liberated self.

I saw her having fun playing the role of the old man in the play. I still remember the smile on my face that was an outcome of amazement when she just stood up in the middle of the play and shared with the group how she would save water. This satisfied me that somewhere she had identified and understood the issue.

Where initially Malini would say a yes to anything that was being said, now she made efforts to make herself heard and said a no to certain things that she did not agree with within the group. There was an uncanny silence in the group each time she spoke. The silence can be associated with the shock the group went through when Malini spoke, the same Malini who never even whispered before. It was so encouraging to see her give creative ideas and suggestions for the play and just see her be herself.



When I was a SMILE volunteer and had done a street play in a village in Gujarat I remember the smile on my facilitator's face. Now at the end of the workshop in Kanoria when I saw Malini perform I couldn't help smiling. I think now I know why my facilitator had a smile on her face in the village in Gujarat while we were doing our play.

At the end of the workshop what endorsed my view of a significant change in Malini was to see her walk with new friends that she had made during the workshop or just to hear her say how much she loved doing the play and to see her look surprised that she could actually yell or to feel the sense of pride when she shared that she feels her level of self confidence increase to a great degree, her willingness to try out more different things and to see her say a goodbye with the same warm smile which reflected a great sense of satisfaction and to receive a message early in the morning saying "I miss you didi"

When I went back home and reflected on my experiences with Kanoria college I felt something stir within me. I realised that I had started feeling for the work that I was doing and felt a great sense of satisfaction. My journey from being a volunteer to a facilitator was quite difficult but I think someone like Malini has made this transition a little easier and smoother for me.

By Rajani Nair

The Change Within (SAHER, Mumbai)

"My father used to make country liquor, but my mother was determined not to let her children take up this occupation. I grew up in a slum in Jogeshwari with people constantly littering their surroundings and young boys wandering aimlessly with nothing much to do", says Syed Gaus, a volunteer with SAHER for the past four years. He started volunteering at an interschool sports meet initiated by SAHER and organised by local youth groups in Jogeshwari. He says, "I got very interested in this idea of bringing children from different communities together and also building a network of youth groups where they organise something with equal ownership and responsibility for the event. This is what made me decide to continue volunteering with SAHER".

We used to see Gaus come for the SAHER monthly meetings and sit quietly in a corner, listening to everyone. Often we would ask him for his opinion while making a decision, but he would say yes to whatever we discussed and never questioned anybody. When SAHER started a Community Centre in 2005, it was Gaus who came forward and volunteered to ensure the day-to-day running of the place including keeping accounts. We kept wondering how he would go about his work peacefully without any material incentive while his other friends would mock at him for wasting his time.

It was at this time that all of us were in the middle of immense political pressure regarding some awareness campaigns we had started in the community. Family members of our volunteers were being threatened by powerful people and some of our volunteers had even started maintaining a distance from us. We thought the same of Gaus, but he surprised us by supporting us and just by being there when our group was on the verge of falling apart. We realised the internal struggle he went through and that is when we also realised how his engagement with SAHER was having an impact on his thought process.

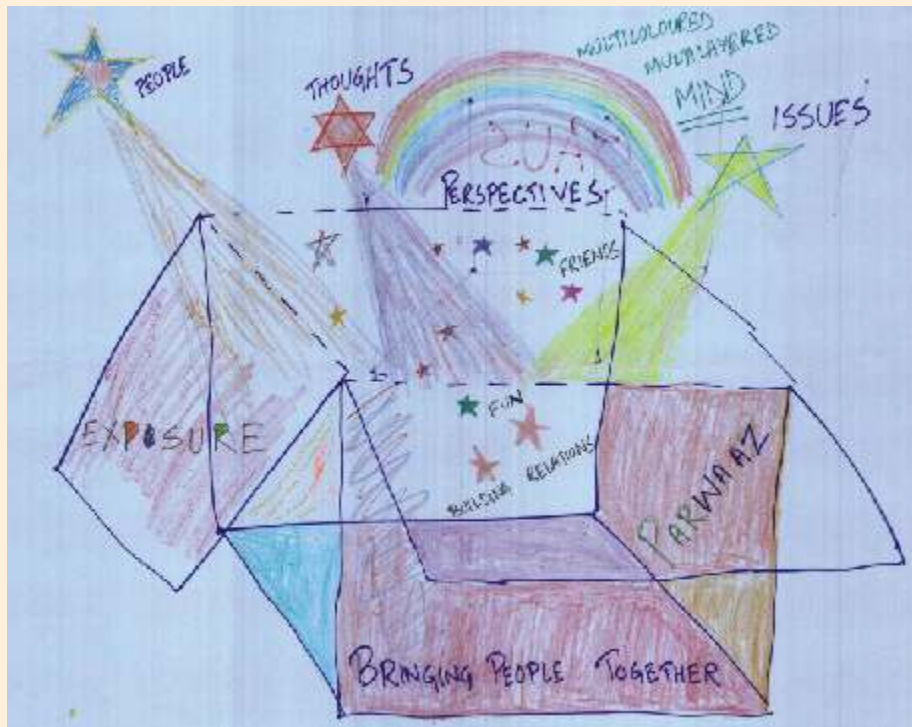
"I knew changes were happening within me, but I never realised them till I went through the Parwaaz process along with the students of Ismail Yusuf College", said Gaus in one of our feedback sessions. SAHER, with encouragement and guidance from Pravah, had started a pilot of a youth development programme called Parwaaz in a local college of Mumbai. As a SAHER volunteer, Gaus would make sure

that he attended all the sessions every Saturday afternoon. A month into Parwaaz and we saw how Gaus would actively participate in the session planning, respond to questions and also voice his opinions on various aspects of the programme.

One day, in one of our sessions, we were discussing the little changes we see in ourselves in the due course of experiential learning. When it was Gaus's turn, he pulled out a small toffee wrapper from his shirt pocket. He said, "I never cared about throwing litter in the waste bins. However, it is in SAHER and especially during Parwaaz that I started feeling concerned about keeping my environment clean. I decided to begin with myself, and now I never throw litter here and there. If there's no waste bin around, I keep it with myself and throw it when I find one. In fact I even encourage my friends, colleagues and children in my family to do the same". That day, Gaus was a huge inspiration for the Parwaaz volunteers and we could see how they had started admiring him.

Last month, the Parwaaz volunteers decided to put up a play on social justice in their college and Gaus ensured that the group met every evening for rehearsals. We knew Gaus was now challenging the ideas and social notions he had grown up with and was going through a process of understanding people and their surroundings. In his own words, "I never considered that an issue could be approached in different ways and there could be various perspectives about a single thing. Now I try to think about the various ways in which different people would analyse and approach a common issue".

Gaus is like an open box now, encouraging lights from different people and places to peep inside and create a mind which accommodates multiple layers of realities. He is more open to learning and enjoys meeting new people and interacting with them. It was overwhelming for us to return from the Pravah streaming meet in Delhi and share how Gaus had conducted an energiser with full confidence while people around him supported him in performing it. The SAHER team is happy and determined to see such transformations in more young people, especially to see Gaus inspire some of them through his experiences.



From 'Me to We' (Pravah)

My first memory of Arjun (name changed), a 19 year old from a premier Delhi University college, is from the first Window to SMILE camp. The camp is one of the first spaces where young people who wish to be a part of SMILE become familiar with the 'Me to We' process. Generally the camp brings together 15-30 young people from diverse backgrounds and colleges and takes them through a journey of getting to know each other, start the process of exploring and understanding their selves, learn teamwork, explore an issue through exposure and challenge their own notions and stereotypes to identify the role they can play in society. In the entire camp, Arjun spoke just one word! The only thing I found out about him in that entire camp was that he had come here because his sister had heard about SMILE and wanted him to come for it.

My next memory of Arjun are the tele-conversations that I had with him about the SMILE group exposure to Halol (Gujarat)- to go see for ourselves and then make up our minds about what happened there in 2002. Surprisingly, the conversation was easy... he simply said 'yes' even before I was half way through explaining why it was important for him to come for it! A week later though, just as I was getting into the self congratulatory mode, Arjun called and shared that he would not be able to make it as he would have to go to Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) in place of his sister who had committed but could not go. Though disappointed, it was a great sign that he had called and shared rather than drop out. This was a sign of commitment. So we figured that he should come for the orientation and the feedback camp and give us a report even though he was going to a different place. He was surprised that we didn't say anything more than that we would miss him.

He came for the Orientation Camp early and readily agreed to help with some coordination calls. He made his love for food and responsibility known through the camp. He loved 'doing stuff' and indicated how he believed so much more in actions rather than 'discussions'. Quiet, observant and largely disagreeing with the ideas being thrown up in the camp (through body language more than anything else), he set off on his own journey.

Three weeks later he came for the feedback camp. He was not happy with his experience at NBA. We talked a bit and that was a huge thing. After all he had hardly spoken till date!

In the evening of the first day of the camp, we went to the Nizamuddin Dargah for qawwali. On our way back, I decided to challenge him on his avoidance of confrontation why did he refuse to challenge anyone when he disagreed with whatever was being said! I called him on his lack of openness to different ideas was it because he was scared of confusion and being hurt or because he was not so sure of his own self and didn't have confidence? He said he did not like relationships, and felt that sometimes speaking was a waste of time because you can never change another person's perspective. I kept asking him why, to push him to think further. I unsettled him then, but just enough so that he wouldn't run away. I discovered that he wanted to be a fighter pilot because he loved planes, and I saw him stay engaged through the camp and the monthly meeting that followed it.

Essential to completing the SMILE journey, the action projects are spaces for young people to take action to address a chosen issue. Arjun joined the action project that the Gujarat-returned group decided on - a session around identity and stereotypes that they would run in colleges because they felt that these were at the root of what happened at Gujarat. It was not easy for Arjun because he had not been for the Gujarat exposure, and being action oriented, the long drawn discussions within the group really became frustrating for him. Observing this, I caught him in the kitchen and checked base. He told me that I needed to facilitate in the meeting because the group members just could not agree and move on! I responded by saying why didn't he try to build agreement? After all, the group had great respect from him, and listened when he shared! And just as suddenly he said 'ok!' I did join the meeting later and found that he did try!

Arjun went for the urban exposure and wrote the following in the feedback- "Significant moment - It was the photo choosing session (self reflection). Though I didn't share I regretted as soon as I said 'No.' I hadn't formulated something to be said but I should have shown the pictures I had chosen. That was the significant moment when I realised that just by being stupid for a second, I alienated myself from the whole group. And looking back I guess I do it everywhere in life. It satisfies the ego somehow maybe or it's just that I am hesitant because of not having enough self confidence. I haven't found the answer, I have chucked the question a lotta time outta my mind. I missed the thing about opening up to people yet again."

I was down with jaundice. When I returned, this was one of the first things that my team gave me to read. Why? Well, it is primarily because while this is a journey of just one volunteer, it impacted each one of us in the team.

He participated in the campaign for Gujarat action day, researched the issue, and understood it more. He started questioning more, loosened up and had fun. He made friends, he hung out.

Arjun came back for the Youth Facilitator training. This training is a means by which the volunteers, who have completed a journey for the year, enter the next process to lead other young people in various ways. He also proactively sought out spaces to engage with issues and shared them with us. He did a survey for Pratham in Rae Bareilly around primary education levels, engaged in every training, and made it to every Pravah event.

The other day Arjun shared that he is seriously considering going in to wildlife conservation as a career. This was a little different from his dream of being a fighter pilot. The experiences of his friends in Satpuda foundation and his own experiences, coupled with the information on an exciting course in the field has made him seriously consider it. He may or may not enter that field, but his openness to it shows that he has come a long way.

Arjun's journey is one which epitomises the journey that we at Pravah term as 'From Me to We'. Every time the Pravah team sits down to figure out what sets SMILE apart, it is the personal connect and the mentoring, the focus on fun and learning and challenging people to push their selves out of the comfort zone. The personal connect helps the team understand the volunteers better and gives them a reason to come back to feel special, needed and wanted... as they are.

We know the process works when we see Ankur check himself in the process of stereotyping someone or when they share with the others - "you know when you join SMILE your life becomes full of conflicts... the problem you start thinking and then you realise you don't agree with everyone... and then you feel you need to share and understand...". It also comes in the form of messages at 6 am when Puneet suddenly figures out what Peace means to him or when Surabhi just lands up at office to hug you and say, "You know my parents have finally agreed to allow me to explore development economics!" or when Sayonika persistently finds ways to go for her individual exposure to Timbaktu Collective for a month inspite of her only sister's wedding being at the same time, and then comes back and say - "You know this is what I want to do...work at the grassroots..." or when a team of them sits down and says, "we can't let this happen... we need to mark the 5 years to Gujarat... let's figure out what we can do"...and after an action project, say... "Shucks! We did that... on our own...! Cool... Wow!"

My last memory of Arjun is from this years Music for Harmony. I walked in and found him on top of a ladder fixing a kite to decorate the place. I remember him confidently getting off, saying "hi!" and then hugging me as I said, "It's so great to see you here... Thank you for being there when SMILE really needs you!" He burst out laughing.

By Neha Buch

Sasmita Sahoo's Story (Patang, Orissa)

Sasmita is an enthusiastic, lively girl from Bolangir District. She was introduced to Patang's Pathmaker programme by Anindita, a Pathmaker volunteer. The day she visited Patang she looked confident yet confused and we were sceptical about her involvement. However we cannot just go by first impressions, and we gave her a warm welcome. So the journey began.

She joined the first residential camp and started proving us wrong. She interacted with everyone, participated in different processes and started taking charge in no time at all. Post the camp she participated in various meetings, workshops, exposure visits and campaigns organised by Patang with college volunteers.

When the Patang team decided to run a campaign on Right to Information, she jumped at the idea. She attended a three-day long RTI workshop and started conducting sessions in her college and department. Sasmita acted in 7 street theatre performances in 3 days time and was part of the play on the closing event. Her energy and enthusiasm in mobilising people to watch the theatre performances on the street, was very inspiring. Her portrayal of 'Yamraj' (God of Death) in the RTI play reflected her theatrical skills and ability to speak in public. Her journey with the RTI campaign took her to meet with the State Information Commissioner and she has received all the information in response to her RTI application about the Bhimbhoi road.

Then came the big day. Patang team wanted to send her to Society for Integrated Development of the Himalayas (SIDH) for a month long exposure visit with another male volunteer but her parents were objecting to it. She however proved the great saying correct "Where there is a will there is a way." She left for SIDH directly from hostel and dared to call her parents just to inform them about the visit.

Presently, she is pursuing B.Ed. at Bolangir (130kms from Sambalpur). One call from Patang is enough to bridge the distance. The moment she is requested to attend a meeting/workshop she comes with her bedding. The only question she asks her friends/ Patang members or distant relatives is "Can I stay with you for a few days?"

Her recent engagement with Patang in designing a programme for old Pathmakers suggests that Sasmita had an exciting journey with us from a confused student, to a passionate volunteer, to a role model. It gives us immense satisfaction to share with you that Sasmita Sahoo is a potential Social entrepreneur with the ability to bring smiles to thousand faces in Bolangir - popularly known as KBK district Western Orissa and one of the most backward districts in terms of all development indices in India.

These stories of personal transformation illustrate some of the principles of youth development.

- Understanding the needs and aspirations of young people
- Greater participation of youth in leadership roles
- Citizenship action: connecting with the social issues and inspiring young people to act for social change
- Exposure to different social realities so that young people can engage with different perspectives
- Fun and creative activities for young people, such as sports, music, theater
- Creating safe, non-intimidating spaces or a platform for young people to express their opinions

Pravah Streaming Partners

Patang

Patang was started in Orissa in 2003. It works with school and college students on building sensitivity to social issues and developing leadership skills for social change.

It runs a youth volunteering programme called "Pathmakers" in partnership with NFI and Pravah in Sambalpur, Orissa. It also works intensively with 7 schools (in Sambalpur, Bargarh and Jharsuguda districts) and runs a citizenship Curriculum called "Making Change Makers" in collaboration with VSO designed and developed by Pravah. Recently, Patang also started a community volunteering programme called "Gunduchimusa" which means squirrel in Oriya.

Thoughtshop Foundation

Thoughtshop Foundation (TF) is a group of design, communication and social work professionals dedicated to creating effective ways of dealing with social issues, with the aim to educate, motivate and empower for social change. Thoughtshop Foundation was registered as a society in 1993.

Their work is focuses around two broad areas. Social Communications which involves research, development, design and training. Some of the issues they have focused on in the past are Adolescent Reproductive Health, HIV/AIDS, Gender & Domestic Violence and Water & Sanitation. The other area is outreach. This involves creating spaces for young people to discover their potential to take initiatives towards positive social change. Some of the issues they have focused on are self discovery/life skills; helping, counselling skills, leadership and teamwork as well as with social issues like HIV/ AIDS, Sexuality and Gender.

Currently Thoughtshop Foundation is training youth facilitators to set up and run youth resource centres in their communities, so that they can address the development needs of their community.

SAHER

SAHER (Society for Awareness Harmony and Equal Rights) is a youth-led Community Based Organisation (CBO) working in Jogeshwari (East), Mumbai and it has been mobilising the local youth from all backgrounds to work towards social peace by addressing developmental issues through collective action and networking.

In 1997, still reeling from the effects of the 1993 Mumbai riots, a group of youth, led by Masood Akhtar came together to address the growing divide between Hindus and Muslims. Coupled with this was the increasing number of young people resorting to drugs and other criminal activities owing to a lack of direction in life. With no resources except for the zeal to act upon the situation at hand, he set out to buy a cricket kit for a group of young boys mostly school drop outs he had gathered around himself. The idea was to channelise the energies of these boys in a positive direction.

SAHER believes that every individual in the society has a right to peaceful coexistence, a prerequisite for the success of any development initiative. Its primary goal is to address the root causes of communal hatred and to ensure that the youth recognise their rights and self-worth in bringing about effective social action. SAHER tries to identify common needs cutting across religious communities and works on them to build civic and political awareness. The idea is to ensure public participation in political processes so that vote bank politics can be exposed for the divisiveness that it brings along with it.

SAHER's Parwaaz programme strengthens citizenship action among youth by enabling young people to realize their potential to bring about meaningful change in society through process of self-exploration, collective learning and exposure to multiple realities.

Pravah Jaipur Initiative

Pravah Jaipur Initiative was set up in 2007. This initiative envisions setting up a Youth Resource Centre that will not only engage young people as active citizens in Jaipur but also build capacities of organisations working with youth in Rajasthan.

The Youth Resource Centre will create a knowledge bank of various programmes, and opportunities for young people, such as fellowships and awards to recognise those who have already undertaken citizenship action and those who would like to explore the arena. The centre will seek to connect young people to the relevant opportunities by helping the latter access them.

The YRC will offer the following:

- a) Creative Media fellowships for youth development: to encourage the use of creative media such as theatre, art, comics, writing, photography, music and sculpting in this field. These will be offered in both urban as well as rural spaces and both in monetary and non-monetary forms.
- b) National and international learning opportunities in the form of workshops, seminars, fellowships, awards, internships, exposures, and volunteering placements.
- c) Capacity building workshops with adolescents and youth and organisations engaging youth in different ways, including schools, colleges and NGOs.
- d) Creating public platforms in partnership with other organisations for youth engagement through Youth Festivals, youth clubs, volunteering placements, skill and issue meetings, and exposure and internship opportunities.

Pravah

Pravah, registered in 1993, is based in New Delhi. It works to build leadership for social change through active citizenship and youth development interventions. Pravah builds with and in youth respect and understanding of citizenship, attitude of ownership for common spaces, skill of leadership for social change and behaviors to develop strong relationships as the foundation. After a decade of intensive work with adolescents and youth, it expanded its portfolio to include teachers training, incubating new initiatives and facilitative work with other organisations working on youth development and together with these partners advocate for youth development and citizenship action.



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