



SHUKHAR FOUNDATION
OUR JOURNEY

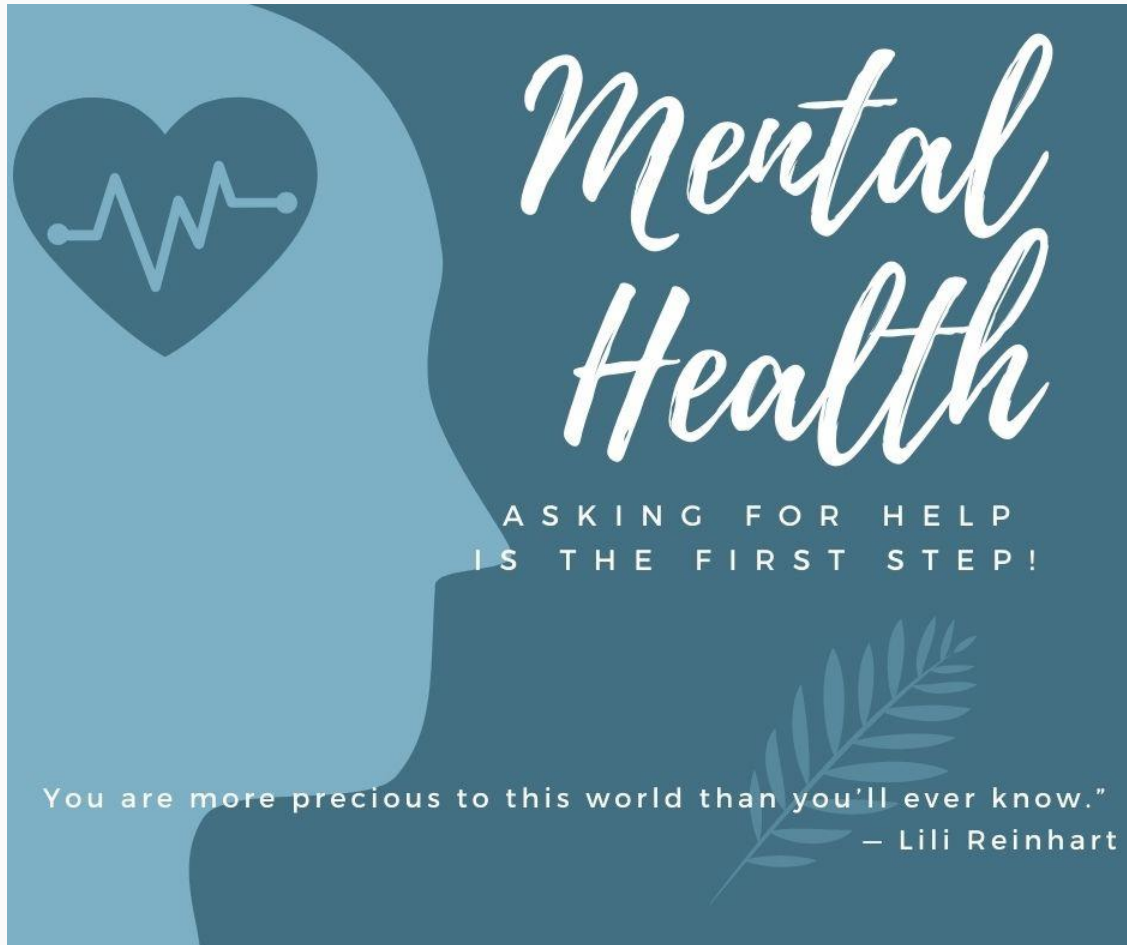
Cases with Mental Health Issues

The Covid-19 Pandemic revealed many issues that were always around, but never acknowledged and therefore, never aired openly or addressed satisfactorily. One of these issues is the presence of mental health within our midst. Stigma and discrimination has always prevented those afflicted with mental disorders to postpone or totally neglect to seek professional intervention. This in turn, traps them in a cycle of illness with dire consequences. Covid-19 exacerbated the loneliness and other negative effects of mental illness.

One in three Canadians will experience mental illness during their lifetime. Many Canadians are affected by it either directly or indirectly through family, friends or co-workers. The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 7.5% of Indians suffer from some mental disorder and that by the end of the year, because of COVID related and other pressures of life, that number will roughly be around 20%.

Our work in Gujarat has brought us face to face with individuals and families who are in desperate need of help to deal with mental illness. Many families have come forward to seek help in spite of the fact that society still looks down at those battling such heart wrenching conditions.

In many of our previous Newsletters we have mentioned these cases, but this Newsletter will dwell totally and in-depth with the individuals and their families. A person's mental illness does not impact just him, but also his/her family and the people amongst whom they live.



Rahim

Rahim's is a sad story with a confluence of multiple personal tragedies. He is mentally challenged and so is his younger brother, though at present times Rahim's disability is very severe and affects not only him and his family but also their interactions with society. Rahim's family is ultra-poor and he lived with his legally blind mother and mentally challenged brother. Rahim's maternal uncles live in the same village and provide some guidance and assistance.

During our annual tour of Gujarat in 2019, our Team Member in Porbandar insisted that we visit Rahim to evaluate his condition, as she was told he needed urgent attention. We were travelling from Malia Hatina to Porbandar and decided to visit him as it was not too much out of our planned route.

We had been informed that Rahim's family and their neighbors, were very concerned and disturbed as Rahim had lately run through the village without any clothes on and had become violent if any one confronted him. Rahim is a young man in his early thirties, very well built and very strong so it was very difficult to subdue him. When we visited him, we found him in a small, totally dark room. He was sitting in

a corner, totally naked and with bushy, unkempt hair and a demeanor of a vicious animal ready to pounce!

We quickly realized that he needed to be institutionalized and therefore made an unplanned visit to Astha facilities that caters to mentally challenged patients. We convinced the director to arrange to have Rahim brought to their facility. A few days later, an ambulance and a few medical personnel traveled with Rahim, who had to be sedated for their safety.

Rahim has responded very favorably to his treatment and has integrated quite well into the institution's population. We arranged for his mother to visit him and the video we received showed a very happy reunion between mother and son. Rahim, of course, wanted to return home with his mother, but that does not seem possible for the near future as his behavior is totally controlled with drugs and the home environment is not conducive to proper delivery of his medications; any lapse in his treatment regime would definitely result in a setback of the good progress he has made so far.

Mental illness cases are emotionally stressful for our team members and also require us to plan for long term expensive financial support.

We are most grateful and feel immensely blessed to have a very generous donor family come forward and commit to the long term financial support of Rahim's treatment.

We pray for this family and all our other donors, well-wishers and supporters for making it possible to help our underprivileged brothers and sisters in Gujarat.



Rahim (BEFORE) Locked in room.



Rahim (AFTER)

Riyaz

Riyaz is 42 years old and was diagnosed with a mental health disorder at age 30. Until then, he was gainfully employed.

He lived with his brother, sister-in-law, his niece and a nephew. The family really cares for him and wanted

him to stay with them, but were finding it difficult to afford his very expensive medications, especially since Riyaz could not work and therefore, could not contribute to the family's finances.

Late last year, the family sought out a Gujarat Team Member and requested some form of financial support, while they took care of him at home. We started funding his medications and kept monitoring his progress. We soon realized that his mental condition was deteriorating and that his treatment needed to be escalated.

During the period that we were trying to find the right institution to move him to, he experienced one of his worst days and killed a neighbor's dog. This riled up the neighbors and they demanded that he be committed to a mental institution.

We have now moved him to a facility which looks after him, involves him in various activities and where he is regularly being visited by doctors and specialists.

The Gujarat Team is presently funding his medical expenses from our contingency account until a generous donor steps forward to offer financial support.

It is our earnest hope and prayer that Riyaz responds favorably to his treatments and starts living a normal and a better quality of life.



Riyaz.



Riyaz.

Sarfraz

Our first encounter with Sarfraz's family was in the slums of Porbandar where the family lived. We decided to enroll his two sisters in our Student Sponsorship Program. One sister stayed in our hostel in Malia Hatina and the other travelled every day to Ranavav from Porbandar, to attend an English medium school.

Sarfraz was 5 years old when we met him. It was difficult to find a school that was ready to educate Sarfraz as he was mentally challenged. This forced one daughter to stay home and look after him so that the mother could go out to look for work. The father had addiction issues.

The local Jamati institution identified this family as one that could move out of the slums and into a housing project that was being established by them. The Council approached the Gujarat Team to help the family with the down payment and fortunately we were able to find a generous donor to meet this request.

During our subsequent trip to Gujarat, we visited the family. To our dismay we found out that Sarfraz, due to his mental condition, was getting progressively more violent and destructive and had ruined the apartment by scratching the walls. This forced his mother to stay at home and look after him, instead of going out with the father to sell vegetables from a "rekdi", or push cart. The father had mended his ways due our severe pressure and reprimands from the Gujarat Team Members.

When the father fell sick, the family lost the only bread winner in the family. The Gujarat Team came to the decision that we had to find an institution that would look after Sarfraz, thus allowing the mother to go out to work and freeing the sister to go back to school, uninterrupted.

Astha is a reputable institution in Porbandar with well trained professionals and an ideal environment for patients like Sarfraz. Within a year he improved immensely, which in turn, boosted the family's morale and future prospects.

Once again, we met the family in 2019 and were most humbled and happy to see the amazing transformation that the whole family had undergone. Sarfraz had adjusted very well at Ashta and was a much happier child. The mother was happy as she was able to work and both her daughters were thriving in their studies. One of the daughters is training to be a physiotherapist in Ahamedabad. In 2020 we received a very heartwarming letter from Sarfraz's sister and below is an excerpt from that letter.

"Thank you for sending my brother to special school. There is a huge improvement in him. This has allowed my mother to go out and look for work. You also support my sister and me by buying clothes for us and providing us travelling expenses and with our education. Once again thank you. You all are in our prayers".

It is humbling to note that with generous donation from a sponsor and sincere efforts by our Team Members, we have made a difference in Sarfraz and his family's quality of life.

Sarfraz was our first case involving mental health issues. We were very encouraged with his progress and are presently dealing with a few more such cases

For the donor family this noble gesture on their part is a source of happiness and satisfaction and for us all it illustrates the immense power of caring and giving.

Our sincere prayers that all those who brought sunshine in the lives of this and many other families, be blessed with just rewards in this life and the hereafter. Ameen.



Sarfraz with his Mother.



Sarfraz (BEFORE)



Sarfraz (AFTER)

Salim

In November 2021, the Chairperson of the Social Welfare Board in Mahuva, Gujarat, contacted our Team Member in Bhavnagar with an urgent plea to help Salim. Salim comes from one of the Red Zone Villages, so named because these villages have only a handful of Ismaili families living beside a majority of non-Ismailis. There are often incidences of communal strife and skirmishes.

Salim is 35 years old and suffers from mental health illness. His mother has been looking after Salim by herself for the last 10 years. Before that, Salim's sister was a big help, but she left home once she got married. As his mother got older it became more and more difficult for her to care for Salim, both physically and financially. Sometimes she would not give him his medication, either because she forgot or she ran out of it. This affected Salim's behavior and demeanor in a profound way. Without his medication, he would become abusive, uncontrollable and violent towards his mother and others.

During one such occasion in November, Salim's mother faced a very difficult situation: his behavior was very violent and totally out of control. When his mother tried to calm him down, he severely beat her up. It took the intervention of many neighbors to subdue him and bring him under control. The force the neighbors used, resulted in severe and long-lasting physical injuries to Salim. He has gone through intensive treatments and many surgeries and is still in a lot of pain. Some ill-intentioned neighbors also used this occasion to make Salim and his mother's life very difficult. They insisted that Salim be removed from the neighborhood immediately and be institutionalized. This prompted the Social Welfare Board member to seek our help.

We contacted Astha Institution to take care of Salim as we have been happy with the treatment Rahim has been receiving there. They assessed Salim's condition and agreed to admit him. It is estimated that Salim will be staying here for the foreseeable future to get his life as close to normal as possible.

Salim's mother is staying with her daughter, with the knowledge that Salim is under professional care and well looked after, though she misses him dearly.

Our heartfelt gratitude and thanks to a very generous family that came forward to fund Salim's medical expenses. May the family be rewarded in plenty for this very noble gesture. Ameen.



Salim.



Salim's Mother (with scars from Salim).

Beside the cases that we have talked about in this Newsletter, we deal with quite a few mentally challenged individuals who, for various reasons, want to be looked after at home. When dealing with young people, especially, their parents are reluctant to send them away to an institution.

One such case involves a young boy, Rajah, whose parents requested help because he is mentally challenged and becoming more aggressive and destructive as he ages. They are getting older themselves and looking after Rajah was proving too stressful for them, yet they wanted to look after him at home. The Gujrat Journey Team undertook major renovations to their home, including installing safety bars in the kitchen and the bathroom. The family is managing quite well now and are happy with Rajah's progress.

We have talked extensively about Seema in our previous newsletters. We helped her by enrolling her in the Aga Khan Hostel and Girnar School in Malia Hatina. She is 13 years old and studies at a grade two level. She has flourished remarkably well and seems much happier than when we first met her. She is an avid singer and a great dancer and loved by all around her.



13 Year old Seema at Girnar School.



Rajah being looked after at home.