

Himalayan Anti-Aids & Anti-Narcotic Drugs Society (HANDS)

Annual Report

2019-2020

The year 2020 has been exceptionally challenging for all of us with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and Cyclone Amphan that followed soon after; hence working on the Annual Report 2019-2020 is painfully difficult. But even during these trying times, HANDS has continued fighting against another kind of endemic that has plagued Kalimpong district and regions around it – the ever-pervasive chronic chemical dependency and substance abuse. Unlike episodic climate disasters or virus outbreaks which flare up and then drowse away, social ills like substance abuse and chemical dependency are an everyday struggle. Such ills are deeply ingrained and entwined in our communities/society, often making it's identification, intervention and recovery process a daily challenge, for those trying to remedy it like HANDS as well as for the patients and their family members. This is why combating such ills warrants constant support, motivation, genuine interest and acceptance from all, foremost from the immediate family members; and then friends, relatives, neighbors, communities and various other social groups who are a part of our society/community.

We are on our fourteenth year since HANDS's inception in 2006. What started as a four staffed initiative over a decade ago has today fifteen permanent staffs who run the Rehabilitation Centre and the Day Care Centre on a daily basis. We are growing slowly but our organization is still small, and therein lies vast opportunities for HANDS's growth and expansion. We endeavor to work towards that – one step at a time. The whole of 2019 has been a good, easy year for us – quite an uneventful year. We have briefly described all the activities HANDSs was involved in, in this report. However, the first half of 2020 unlike 2019 has quite eventful.

Up until the declaration of country wide lockdown on the 24th of March 2020, we have been able to execute all our planned programs and one day events; including new intake at the Rehabilitation Center and the daily counselling classes at our Day Care Center. However, since the implementation of lockdown, we temporarily discontinued our Day Care Centre services, where we resort to wholesome-

treatment approach and conduct therapeutic family classes and individual counseling to the family members of the patient. The Rehabilitation Centre on the other hand has continued with its operation throughout the lockdown since all the recovering patients and the staffs are housed in together. However, we had to seriously consider a few urgent cases of troubled patients, and after doing a thorough background check-ups, enrolled five new individuals at our Rehabilitation Centre.

No new activities outside of the Rehabilitation Center will be undertaken and Day Care Center for now will remain closed. HANDSs will strictly monitor the ongoing COVID-19 scenario and will consider undertaking scheduled and(or) new activities only after keeping the health safety of the staffs and the patients, including their family members in mind. We wish to make our respective health security and safety our topmost priority.

The following are some of the programs and activities undertaken by HANDS in 2019. Given the mundane routine workout of HANDS residential patients, we take keen interest in making use of key events which give us opportunity to engage more with our patients. This is why celebrating a few selected thematic international and national days including all socio-cultural and religious festivals are much awaited by the patients, who organise and(or) participate in the celebration, and equally have with fun doing so.

Counseling Seminar on “Education and Life Ethics” on 19th April 2019.

One of HANDS key areas of work is to create and spread awareness regarding substance use and its abuse; and chemical dependency. Our target group has always been the youth and youngsters. Given this, on the 19th of April 2019, HANDSs joined a Counseling Seminar on “Education and Life Ethics” for the youth of the congregation organized by the United Churches of North India. HANDS interacted with the youth, and shared firsthand information, anecdotes and other problems locally and globally associated with substance use/abuse. We had a good number of young individuals looking forward to hearing from HANDS, who keenly participated by asking us questions. Two of our staff members Mr. Rajesh Diwali and Mr. Bidhan Pradhan addressed the youth at this seminar.

Meditation “sebir” on the 12th May 2019.

HANDS recognises the importance of a well-balanced, healthy mind. In collaboration with Brahma Kumari Ashram member, HANDS organized a day long

meditation “sebir” (camp) at HANDS Rehabilitation Centre for its indoor patients in Kalimpong. The goal of this one-day meditation camp was to help our patients work on their concentration skills, learn the art of focusing and meditation. Volunteers from Brahma Kumari Ashram came and meet our patients and conducted meditation for them. It was a refreshing event where our patients enjoyed learning this art of concentration. We look forward to many such initiatives from Brahma Kumari Ashram members that would help our patients.

Felicitation by Kalimpong Journalist Association 8th June 2019.

One of the key events that was almost like a morale booster was the recognition that HANDS received for its service towards combating substance use/abuse and chemical dependency in and around Kalimpong. Recognising HANDS decade long tireless efforts, the Journalist Association of Kalimpong District felicitated some of our members at a program organized in Kalimpong Town Hall on the 8th of June 2019. At times, acknowledging the hard work HANDS members in and by our community goes a long way in motivating us further to work harder. This recognition has been well received by HANDS members. In 2019, Mr. Amode Yonzon, the Vice President of HANDS and Mr. Nereus Mukhia, Project Coordinator were felicitated by the Journalist Association of Kalimpong.

Celebration of the 10th Foundation Day of HANDS's Rehabilitation Centre on 10th June 2019.

While HANDS has been working against substance abuse since 2006, the Rehabilitation Centre which followed after three years in 2009 has since its inception been able to intervene and successfully transform hundreds of chemically dependent individuals into responsible members of the society, free from substance use and abuse. We are proud of the fact that HANDS has been able to provide a non-for-profit Rehabilitation Centre - the only one in Kalimpong District, where individuals from all walks of life, different socio-economic backgrounds and severity of substance dependency can seek help. The rate of enrolment and recovery has been very high, which also reflects a dismal state of our community/society where social ills relating to substance abuse still is increasing by the day. On our 10th anniversary, we organised a small celebratory event at the Rehabilitation Centre, where we invited upon a few key public figures. The occasion was graced by our Mrs. Sarita Rai, MLA Kalimpong, district administration officials, board members, staffs and our indoor patients. The

patients had put up a cultural program with folk dance and songs, much enjoyed by all those who attended the celebration.

International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking on 26th June 2019.

Like every year, HANDS grabbed the opportunity on International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking to reach out to the masses, specially the youth and students to create awareness against substance use and abuse, and chemical dependency. This year HANDS had two programs lined up for the day.

HANDS in collaboration with Kalimpong District Police organized a rally starting from Town Hall that would traverse around the town and culminate at Thana Dara. The SP along with other high-ranking Police Officials, Kalimpong Municipality Chairman, students, and the public were a part of the rally. At Thana Dara, the SP addressed the audience or the rally participants on the containment of illicit trafficking of contraband substances. Our Project Coordinator Nereus Mukhia spoke on behalf of HANDS on the issues substance abuse and its dependency.

The same afternoon HANDS also undertook an awareness program on substance abuse to the students of SUMI school. The students were very enthused about the program where they were explained the path from experiment of substances to its dependency. Many questions were raised by the students, which were all addressed by HANDS representatives.

Independence Day Celebration on 15th August 20019.

Independence Day is a much-awaited celebratory day particularly in Kalimpong - which is famous amongst the three hill regions for the colorful, beautiful parades at Mela ground. However, at our Rehabilitation Centre, where we have our residential patients, Independence Day is celebrated in our own humble capacity. This year, like any other year, had the regular parade, followed by a speech on the contribution of the Freedom Fighters of our country. The patients saluted the tricolor, raised it and enthusiastically shouted "Vande Mataram". They sang the national anthem with outmost seriousness and love for our country. A short cultural program was organised by the patients again where they sang patriotic solo and group songs. There were indoor games – tambola - too for their recreational enjoyment.

World Aids Day on 1st December 2019.

HANDS does not let go of any opportunity in reaching out to the masses and World AIDS day has been one of these International events where the staff and volunteers go out to various officials like the Police Department and the public, request for two minutes of their time and pass on the message of HIV/AIDS and its mode of transmission. We give and seek solidarity with other thematic areas. Last year, our member Mr. Yabesh Mukhia took time, meet various police officials and dignitaries, including locals of Kalimpong and created awareness about HIV AIDs.

Health Camp (for awareness) at Suruk on 8th December 2019.

HANDS along with the alumni of St Augustine's School, Kalimpong had organized a health camp and an awareness program for the people of Suruk Busty, which is not only remote and distant but also neglected in terms of infrastructure and development. It was a much-anticipated program and many villagers, particularly the youth had gathered at the designated venue - Suruk Primary School. From HANDS, Mr. Nereus Mukhia and Mr. Palden Bhutia had attended this awareness program. Mr. Mukhia had addressed the locals there, and explained the horrors and ills of substance abuse, specially alcohol related, which remains rampantly in the rural areas.

Christmas Celebrations / New Year Celebrations

HANDS celebrated Christmas with the resident patients. Young members of the Christian Motorcyclist Association volunteered and joined the celebrations.

Blood Donation Camp on 30th January 2020

HANDS along with the Kalimpong District Police had organized a blood donation camp at Town Hall. More than 100 people attended this camp and donated blood. This program was an initiative of Kalimpong Police, where HANDS specific role was to reach out to the general local people and get them to voluntarily donate their blood. Police personals, locals and a good number of HANDS members were key blood-donors.

HANDS Picnic on 16th February 2020

This is another event that HANDS staff and resident patients look forward to. All the resident patients were taken down to riverbank of Rangit for a change of environment so that they would feel refreshed and rejuvenated and can focus on their recovery program. Those who could swim enjoyed the river; while others

danced and sang. It was a fun-filled day. The resident patients were all served special lunch, followed by tea and snacks in a nearby stall.

Anti-substance Campaign on 7th March 2020.

Concerned over the rampant substance abuse incidences amongst the youth, specially school and college going students, Bharatiya Women Gorkha Parishang - a Non-Profit-Organisation, mostly comprising of elderly women - and HANDS organized a one-day Anti-substance Campaign on the 7th of March 2020 at GDNS Hall, Kalimpong. This was HANDS's first collaboration with a woman's organization to combat substance abuse, where various social groups were invited to discuss the growing ills of substance use/abuse. Given this, representatives from different samaj, clubs, and other organizations attended the one-day campaign. It was also attended by the Police Department, Kalimpong, who discussed ways to tackle the growing social ill. Our discussions additionally touched upon issues relating to illicit trafficking of substances solutions. It was a good initiative where women were taking center stage in combating these ills. We look forward to many more such collaborations with Bharatiya Women Gorkha Parishang.

Felicitation by All India Women's Conference on 8th March 2020.

The All India Women's Conference celebrated International Women's Day on 8th of March 2020, with this year's global theme "Each for Equal". Mr. Nereus Mukhia was felicitated for his sustained efforts in fighting substance abuse and all other work relating to this struggle. The event was graced by other women dignitaries like District Magistrate of Kalimpong and MLA Kalimpong. A few other social workers were felicitated too by the dignitaries.

Sober Birthday Celebrations.

All year around, our recovered patients keep coming back to the Rehabilitation Centre to share their success of beating substance abuse and chemical dependency with the residential patients; which in many ways motivates the struggling resident patients to continue with their fight to overcome their respective dependencies. These recovered patients come back to share their joys in being able to make a comeback in life, of becoming responsible and productive member of the family and society at large. They express their gratitude towards HANDS for giving them freedom from active addiction. The Rehabilitation Centre celebrates their success in the form of Sober Birthdays which gives immense hope and strength to the inpatients still under treatment for a better life, a better future.

Weekly Staff Reviews and Monthly Staff Meetings.

To evaluate every patient and assess every counselor's individual progress and success, HANDS Rehabilitation holds weekly reviews by the Centre in Charge Mr. Palden Tamang. HANDS's Project Coordinator, Mr. Nereus Mukhia also gives counselling once a week to the resident patients. Additionally, Mr. Mukhia conducts monthly staff, followed by clinical meetings to understand and assess the treatment of the inhouse patients.

THE FIGURES AS PER THE PERFORMANCE CHART AND REGISTERS ARE AS FOLLOWS:**1. Rehabilitation Centre**

Patients treated in the rehabilitation centre: 119

Chemically dependent: 51

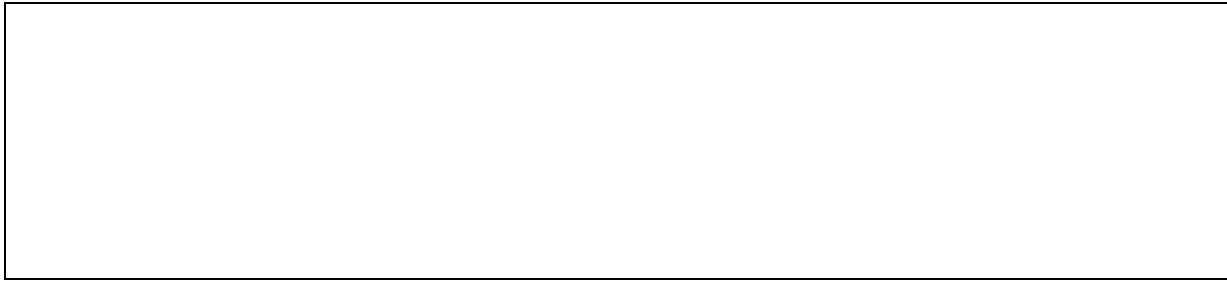
Alcoholics: 56

Poly (Both): 12

Total no of patients succeeded after discharge: 101

Out of which its categorized as (Alcoholics- 48, Chemically dependent – 43, Poly –10)

The annual success rate of the rehabilitation centre in percentage is – 84.87%



2. Day Care / Drop in Centre

Patients treated in the Day Care Centre: 923 (out of which 650 individuals on a regular basis)

(Regular)Chemically Dependent: 523

(Regular)Alcoholics: 240

(Regular)Poly (Both): 160

3. Family Classes in Day Care Centre

Total No of family classes conducted on a weekly basis (every Saturday): 51

Total No of family members attending classes: 1110

Over all HANDS has what its current capacity has enabled it to do. Our success rate has been boosted by 84.87 % which is remarkable for a small organization like ours. We can look back with a lot of satisfaction as we were able to bring back more than three fourth of our patients back to main stream society. They have become contributing members of the nation and brought happiness to their families and to the whole community.

It is with great pride that HANDS can claim to have positively worked towards living up to and fulfilling its larger objectives and visions for a drug free society in our small town of Kalimpong. HANDS has undertaken many activities in the year 2019-2020, often in collaboration and partnership with other local organizations based in Kalimpong and other regions nearby. Let us continue to work with the same dedication and contribute towards our people and community in Kalimpong. Additionally, we must recognize and celebrate the achievements of our organization, our workforce and the individuals we serve. We must learn from our mistakes, measure our efforts, and adjust our plans and strategies accordingly. This is the essence of continuous improvement and one of our fundamental values that we espouse at HAND.

As mentioned earlier, with COVID-19 as a part of our daily lives, until the threats arising from this deadly virus subsides, our Day Care Centre remains closed. Health security and safety of our resident patients, our staff members and all our families are our priority. Let us continue serving our people but this time with more caution.