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Annual Report 2020-2021

Himalayan Anti Aids & Anti Narcotic Drugs Society (HANDS)

Annual Report

2020-2021

First and foremost, blessed are we to have survived and still surviving the Covid-19 pandemic that has wreaked havoc across the globe. Kalimpong was one of the first towns in North Bengal to have been hit by Covid-19 detection and first fatality towards the end of March 2020, days before the country went on a full lockdown mode. Since then and up-until now, the year 2020 has been full of up and downs. We have witnessed extreme human sufferings and loss of lives side by side with extraordinary feats of human courage and resilience. 2020 has indeed been tough for everyone and throughout these pressing Covid-19 times, HANDS has religiously worked towards providing its service towards the recovery and treatment of its in-house patients. And this would not have been possible without the hardwork, commitment and dedication of HANDS's staff. Equally important were the trust and belief that patients and their family members had on us throughout the long lockdown, for which we are immensely grateful. But Covid-19 has and still is causing major impediments in conducting many planned activities for the patients and their family members. In order to not jeopardise our patient's health, who are already vulnerable; and to minimize the risk of group infection of Covid-19 since all our patients live in the Rehabilitation Centre at Chebo Busty, Kalimpong; we drastically cut down many activities directly involving our patients that we have undertaken in the past years such as family visits, picnics, family classes and so on. However, the HANDS staff stationed out of the Rehabilitation Centre however have continuously worked outside of the Rehabilitation Centre in raising/creating awareness about the social ills chronic chemical dependency and substance abuse in and around Kalimpong region.

We have briefly outlined some of the activities that HANDS undertook in the year 2020-2021, individually and in collaboration and partnership with other local organizations based in Kalimpong and other regions nearby below. Two most important contribution of HANDS staffs, especially those stationed outside of the Rehabilitation Centre's has been in 1. Going to different places where HANDS was called to create awareness despite the scare and risk of Covid-19; and working towards providing relief materials during Covid-19 lockdowns with other local NGOs

under the umbrella body Kalimpong NGO Network (KaNGON) in poorer, marginalized areas within Kalimpong region.

1. International Day Against Drug Abuse & Illicit Trafficking 26th June 2020

On the occasion of observing International Day Against Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, this year, HANDS in collaboration with Kalimpong Television (KTV) organised two sets of programs. Due to peak covid lockdown during this period, we had to resort to online medium and refrain from our regular mode of observing this day. So on the 26th of June, 2020, we had a webinar on local issues surrounding drug abuse and illicit trafficking in Kalimpong where a few selected key individuals from different walks of life were invited for an online live panel discussion with HANDS coordinator Mr. Nereus Mukhia on KTV. The key guests were Shri. Jugal Ch. Biswas, DSP Head Quarters and Shri. Suraj Lama, OC Traffic, Kalimpong District Police. All of them have been associated with combating drug abuse and illicit trafficking issues in Kalimpong for a while now. The online webinar was well received by locals with over 3000 viewership. Our second set of the program consisted of four-day series of testimonies that our patients, staffs and ex-recovered individuals had prepared. We showcased one testimony as an episode per day from 23rd to 26th June 2020 on KTV. In these testimonies, the individuals told their stories of drug abuse, their different experiences, difficulties, success stories, about the treatment (rehabilitations) they received or gave at HANDS and how they eventually became integrated back into the society.

2. Awareness Program at Kalijhora, Kalimpong 28th June 2020

As a follow up to 26th June's International Day Against Drug Abuse & Illicit Trafficking programme, HANDS conducted a one-day awareness program at Kalijhora along NH10 highway. HANDS collaborated with "Youth and Masses" of Kalijhora for this program where HANDS took some of its ex-patients (recovered) to give first-hand account/testimony to the youth, and made power point presentations to create awareness. The program was attended by some 200 local youth of Kalijhora who actively engaged with the HANDS's recovered patients with their questions and queries. Amongst guests, HANDS had invited the police representative of Sevoke Outpost – OC Pravin Gurung to interact with the youth.

3. Prevention drive in containment of illicit trafficking with Milan Club, 7th Mile on 5th July 2020

HANDS in association with Milan Club members of 7th Mile, Kalimpong conducted an urgent intervention and awareness day program on the 5th of July 2020. The residents of 7th Mile, specially some of the concerned youth had major grievances of instances of drug abuse in their community, due to which, they had requested HANDS to urgently intervene. Seven young boys were given intensive awareness counselling on that day as they were found to be in possession of substances the same day. HANDS intervened and motivated them to seek help. Two of the seven boys then joined HANDS for rehabilitation and are well on their path of recovery.

4. Independence Day Celebration at HANDS Rehabilitation Centre, Kalimpong on 15th August 2020.

Independence Day celebration is one of the most awaited celebrations of the year. This is because in Kalimpong, this day is celebrated by the public, school and college students including administrations with great pride, pomp and show. So patients in the rehabilitation centre looks forward to celebrating this day and we at HANDS try our best to make this day as entertaining and fun as possible for our patients and staff members. Not to let the patients miss what's happening in the world outside the rehab, we started the day as usual with marchpast for which our patients had been practicing for weeks. This was followed by flag hoisting and a day full of indoor games and sports in the form of mini tournaments such as carrom board, chess and tambolas. A special lunch is prepared for our patients and staffs on this day

5. World Aids Day on 1st December, 2020

On World Aids Day, 2020, HANDS approached Kalimpong Police to join force with them in greater dissemination and awareness of drug abuse and drug-abuse related aids issue arising from intravenous drug abuse in the region and its repercussions not just on the users but also their families, friends and society in general. So we went to the Police stations and meet the officers, we also meet other key local citizens and civil society of Kalimpong, local

journalists and requested them to join hands with HANDS to fight against drug related incidences of aids.

6. Christmas celebration with Christian Motorcycles Association on 25th December, 2020

HANDS has always celebrated Christmas with members of Christian Motorcycles Association (CMA) who visit the rehabilitation center on the 25th December morning. The young members of CMA come early at 8 am and share the significance of Christmas with the patients – all of whom belong to diverse backgrounds. HANDS believe in religious diversity; and gives space and encouragement to its staffs and patients for the celebration of all religious and cultural festivals as celebrated in Kalimpong. Unfortunately, many such religious festivities could not be celebrated at the centre due to lock down. Since lockdown has been lifted by December, the CMA members brought with them cakes and other food items with the patients. They conduct pray for and with the patients, sang Christmas Hymns making the environment in the rehabilitation centre very lively. The purpose of such visits is also to motivate the patients into believing that there is a life, fun and happiness without drug use.

7. Awareness along with Glen Family Foundation in Sundung and Pudung on 2nd March 2021.

On 2nd March 2021, HANDS in collaboration with Glen Family Foundation conducted a one day awareness against alcohol abuse and the ills associated with alcohol consumption amongst the youth and even young children. Often in rural villages, we focus more on alcoholism and its dependency in addition to substance abuse. We specially spoke about alcoholism dependency, preventive measures, its cure and its impact on the dependent alcoholic as well as their entire families including children. Around 50 children and youth attended this days workshop.

8. Awareness in Kalimpong Collage during Kalimpong College Beauty Pageant on 1st March 2021.

HANDS has always looked for new faces amongst the locals who can connect with the common masses and spread key awareness information in general. HANDS got an

opportunity to work with students of Kalimpong College who were participating at the Kalimpong College Beauty Pageant 2021. The theme of this years pageant was substance abuse and HANDS helped all the student contestants understand this social ill, document it, what treatment HANDS provide, the efficacy of it, and so on. The documentary that the contestants had made was showcased on the final day of the pageant and also broadcasted on local Kalimpong channels, which had a mass outreach given the high viewership for the pageant and pageant winner.

9. Various Family Classes and Counselling

Keeping in mind Covid pandemic and SOP precautionary measures, our regular family counselling classes which we used to earlier hold in one day was broken down and held in smaller groups on different days to avoid over-crowding. This enabled the HANDS staff to have family classes everyday thought the week. However, we did conduct a few big group classes. HANDS believes that family counselling via such interactive classes is an important step that goes towards the final rehabilitation of the patient when they are discharged. Given this, HANDS have always made family classes and counselling a mandatory part of the patient's rehabilitation process. Smaller groups this time allowed us to interact more interpersonally than in big groups. In such classes, we explained to the family members what the patients are learning in the rehabilitation centers, how the patients must be handled/treated once they return back to their respective homes, how to deal with the patients at home, what the patients have to continue doing at homes and so on. We also cater to the needs of our patients who have been discharged but must continue to attend their follow up sessions at HANDS Day Care centre.

10. Sober Birthdays: Celebrating success in treatment and recovery of patients.

Another key HANDS activity is the celebration of sober birthdays of patients who have recovered well and have remained off any kind of substance use/abuse. We celebrate this as a successful milestone in the patients journey towards full recovery; and invite our past patients for a cake cutting ceremony followed by a good lunch. But there is much more to this. We celebrate these success stories to motivate and show our in-patients that staying clean of substance is possible, being productive and living a normal life is possible, being

full-functioning members of the society is possible, integrating back into the society, community and most importantly their families is possible. We show our patients that they too can overcome their recovery processes and walk toward the path of healing, free from substance use.

11. Walk/free-time exercises

Apart from the regular classes/sessions at the rehabilitation centre such as group discussions, personal counselling, reading and writing that have been designed for patients, HANDS also added a few activities for the patients as a part of their recreations during these pressing Covid times such as patient-group-walks, supervised outings, vegetable gardening, gyming, and exercising for them to channel their energy and minds into their recovery.

12. Covid-19 relief work

HANDS is one of the founding member of Kalimpong NGO Network (KaNGON) - a collective, autonomous organization of **22 registered NGOs of Kalimpong** that has envisioned to pursue its aims and objectives by building positive synergies and strategic partnership with the Government, other Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), other Community based Organisations (CBOs) at the local level to encourage, facilitate and promote more local-participation and community engagement in decision-making processes particularly concerning and combating the social ills within Kalimpong. And as a part of KaNGON, HANDS coordinator Mr. Nereus Mukhia and few other staffs stationed outside of the Rehabilitation Centre volunteered in numerous activities throughout the lockdown and post lockdown to provide services to the local people of Kalimpong.

Kalimpong was one of the first towns in North Bengal to have been hit by first Covid-19 detection and first fatality towards the end of March 2020, days before the country went on a full lockdown mode. In the absence of proper information about the precautions against the virus and the lockdown that was imposed by the government, HANDS in collaboration with other NGOs of Kalimpong raised donation to buy PPEs for the health care workers during the initial days of Covid-19 when PPEs were in shortage. These PPEs were bought from Siliguri and distributed amongst the health care workers, and other essential services workers for their protection. During

peak lock down, HANDS and other NGOs again raised funds from amongst themselves and from the public to distribute basic food aids to poor and marginalized people who had been severely hit by Covid-19 lockdown. Massive amount of food items such as rice, lentils, oil, sugar, salt, spices, potatoes, onions, soyabeans, hand sanitizer and masks were distributed both within the municipal areas of Kalimpong as well as the exterior villages of Kalimpong. HANDS coordinator Mr. Nereus Mukhia travelled throughout Kalimpong town with other NGOs to raise awareness about the importance of social and physical distancing, wearing of masks, and other sanitation habits that people had to emulate into their daily habits.

In addition to these, HANDS has continued its operation at its two centers – the rehabilitation and the day care. The following are the numbers for the year 2020-2021.

THE FIGURES AS PRE THE PERFORMANCE CHART AND REGISTERS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. Rehabilitation Centre

Patients treated in the rehabilitation centre: 136

Chemically dependent: 70

Alcoholics: 51

Poly (Both): 15

Total no of patients succeeded after discharge: 93

Out of which its categorized as (Chemically dependent – 52, Alcoholics-38 , Poly – 3)

The annual success rate of the rehabilitation centre in percentage is – 68.38%

2. Day Care / Drop in Centre

Patients treated in the Day Care Centre: 485(out of which- individuals on a regular basis)

(Regular)Chemically Dependent: 350

(Regular)Alcoholics: 95

(Regular)Poly (Both): 40

3. Family Classes in Day Care Centre

Total No of family classes conducted on a weekly basis : 36

Total No of family members attending classes: 330

Over all HANDS has what its current capacity has enabled it to do. We have had a very peaceful year unlike the last year. Our success rate has been boosted by 68.38 % 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. Let us continue to work with the same dedication and contribute towards our people and community in Kalimpong