

PRAYAS

Social Work in Criminal Justice

Prayas- a field action project of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences Mumbai, strives to promote the rights and rehabilitation of the at-risk populations, particularly in contact with the criminal justice system, namely prisoners, children of prisoners, children in conflict with law & in need of care and protection, women rescued from commercial sexual exploitation and their children, among others.

Rooted in the ethos of social work intervention & socio-legal practice, Prayas directs conscious efforts in empowering these individuals to become citizens leading dignified lives.

Prayas endeavors to bring about transformational changes in the lives of people through service delivery, networking & collaboration with government departments, NGOs & citizen groups, with the basic premise of reducing the chances of people ending up in crime, sexual exploitation, destitution or mental illness, by serving as a pillar of support during their journey towards reintegration and battling the social stigma that envelops their lives.



Newsletter issue

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New Beginnings

Capacity-building of stakeholders

In joint collaboration with the Maharashtra Prison Department, a series of training programmes were organised for prison officials in order to foster a constructive dialogue towards upscaling the legal rights & rehabilitation of prisoners in Maharashtra. The months of October, December and January witnessed the training of over 80 officials on topics ranging from access to legal aid, strengthening library facilities inside prison, role of prison staff & coordination with NGOs to promote rehabilitation, post release, among others.



Education Beyond Bars



The "Literacy School for Prisoners" programme was launched at Aurangabad Central Prison under the TISS-Government of Maharashtra MoU "Prisoners' Welfare and Rehabilitation Project" with the goal of enhancing inmates' capacity for critical thought and effective communication. It would enable literate incarcerated individuals to conduct classes for their non-literate counterparts. They also expressed support to appear for online examinations from inside the prisons. A total of 86 inmates have begun attending these classes regularly.

Strengthening Academic Partnerships



With the aim of imparting and learning strategic ways of applying legal knowledge, a conscious attempt was made to initiate dialogues with nearby law colleges for conducting training sessions for Para-legal Volunteers (PLV) While a MoU was signed with Dayanand Law College, Latur; a PLV training session was conducted at Jitender Chauhan Law College, Mumbai.

Tapping Market Exposure for Quality Products made by Prayas Clients



In association with the Khadi & Village Industries Commission, paper-bag making training was provided to Prayas' female clients (inside prison, shelter homes like Kasturba Mahila Vastigruha & those released) with the objective of skill development & income generation. With nearly 20,000 bags, Prayas partnered up with Jhappi Stores (a shop in Thane that sells quality NGO products) & collected approximately 80 kg of unused old newspapers with the support of a local school.

14 Women at Shanti Sadan Mahila Vastigruha actively participated in the paper-bag making activity that not only boosted their morale but also instilled a sense of possible financial independence.

Impact on Grassroot / Policy Level

Facilitation of a circular pertaining to issuing birth certificates for children born in prison

As an outcome of raising the issue of the name of the prison being mentioned in the birth certificate of children born inside prison, in the meeting of the State Inter-Departmental Committee on Prisoners, a circular dated 16/09/2022 was issued by the Maharashtra Prisons Department stating to mention the name of the city or village of the mother instead of the name of the prison.



In the *Sonadhar Vs. State of Chhattisgarh* PIL, the Bench comprising Hon'ble Justice A.S. Oka and Hon'ble Justice S.K. Kaul of the Supreme Court mentioned about our work and suggested to NALSA to take the assistance of TISS in coming up with suggestions to ensure the release of undertrial prisoners who have been granted bail. In February 2023, suggestions made to NALSA pertaining to release of such prisoners on bail were incorporated in the orders passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Sonadhar vs. State of Chhattisgarh* (SLP No. 4/2021).

Dr. Vijay Raghavan was invited to participate in a budget webinar as one of the 16 speakers, organised by the Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI on a scheme announced by the Finance Minister during the budget session in 2023, for supporting poor prisoners to get released on cash bail or payment of penalty access to legal aid. We suggested the appointment of social workers on a contract basis in prisons across the country to facilitate the process of identifying poor prisoners who need support for payment of cash bail or penalty to get released. This led to the formation of a three-member working committee constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI, to work out details of the scheme in which Dr. Vijay Raghavan was nominated as one of the members. The committee has come out with draft guidelines to implement the scheme which has been circulated to home departments across the country.



Activities at a Glance



TISS-GoM MoU 'Prisoners' Welfare and Rehabilitation Project' organized a certificate distribution programme in the Borstal School, Nashik, for the 8 inmates who completed their 60 days training of two-wheeler repairing through the Pawar Technical Institute, Nashik.



An awareness session was conducted for 35 male and female inmates of Bharuch District Prison, in view of the rising gender-based violence in society. The session covered the features & benefits of SAKHI One Stop Centre for the support of the women facing violence.



Given the significance of gender equality and a positive self-esteem, Prayas JJB Unit organised sessions as well as meetings with the male youth whereby they were encouraged to reflect, identify one's strengths and weaknesses and a pave a way for their future by engaging in vocational training courses.



Prayas and District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Thane, organized a three-days Para-Legal Volunteer (PLV) training programme for inmates of Thane Central Prison, as per the National Legal Services Authority's (NALSA) proposed scheme where PLVs serve as mediators between the legal aid institutions and the prison populace.





Prayas, in collaboration with Lion's Club, Chembur, held an eye and dental camp in Navjeevan Mahila Vastigruha whereby 40 women got their eyes checked, and 36 women got a dental check-up. In the latter, 5 were given prescriptions and 14 were found to require alternative treatment. 21 women (including 8 staff) were provided with spectacles by the Lion's Club.



With the help of Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan and District Legal Services Authority, Mumbai, Prayas donated books to strengthen libraries for inmates in Mumbai Central Prison & Byculla District Prison, respectively.



Prayas started a Home Care Assistant training course in collaboration with iTransform for women inmates at Byculla District Prison, with the support of HDFC Bank CSR, Lions Club of JJ Crescent and Lions Club of Byculla

Women trainees were taken for a recreational cum educational trip to the Flamingo Sanctuary in Thane Creek as part of the pre-placement orientation in the Prayas NGO Placement Programme.



Navjeevan Mahila Vastigruha hosted 25 judges, officers from Department of Women and Children Development and 4 NGOs (including Prayas) across regions of Maharashtra and Goa for their refresher training programme. 4 NGOs were also present including Prayas. The products made by clients of Prayas were exhibited as well as purchased.



Prayas and Fair Trial Fellowship of Project 39A, National Law University Delhi, jointly organised a report release programme of the report titled Legal Aid to Undertrials in Maharashtra: Learnings from the Field in Mumbai. The report was released by Hon'ble Justice Shri P.S. Narsimha, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Hon'ble Justice Shri R. D. Dhanuka, Judge, Bombay High Court and Executive Chairperson of Maharashtra State Legal Services Authority (MSLSA).

Dignitaries included retired High Court judges like Justice Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Justice S.C. Dharmadhikari and Justice Abhay Thipsay; Mr. Todkar, Dy. Secretary of MSLSA, members from the judiciary, Chairpersons and Secretaries of DLSAs of Mumbai, Thane and Raigad, prison officers from Maharashtra, DLSA lawyers, members from the Bar, civil society organisations and academia (faculty and students). 200 jute folders & 50 jute bags were prepared by the female clients of Prayas for facilitating the dignitaries.

With the growing concern of considering suicide as a public health priority, Prayas partnered with Samaritans Mumbai to offer a 2-day workshop for its clients on the need for emotional support, improving skills for managing emotional distress, addressing suicidal thoughts and the range of free interventions they provide.



After the successful completion of the 3-month Para-professional Socio-Legal training for Prayas clients last year, a certificate distribution programme was arranged in TISS Mumbai campus. Fifty clients (male & female) were given certificates of participation. Besides gaining knowledge, clients shared their experiences of how the knowledge and information gained through this training has helped them to develop self-confidence and empowered them to address issues faced in their rehabilitation journey.

They also expressed happiness that they have used this knowledge to help others who live in their communities. For example, a client shared that he assisted a person in availing the disability certificate of a child in the vicinity and ensure his admission in the local school

Income Generation and Production Unit

A total of 18 female released prisoners (8 old and new 10 clients) were provided hands-on training to learn making jute folders, tiffin bags, canvas bags, cotton tote bags, pouches and covers for sunglasses, among others. The training was provided for 2-3 hours a day, at the convenience and feasibility of the clients. Post training, as and when Prayas gets orders, they are provided home-based work on piece-rate basis. This provides supplementary income to the women.

Over 50 female inmates inside Thane Central Prison were trained to make paper bags and cloth based products & managed to collect a total of Rs. 40,000 collectively. The women are able to earn an average of Rs. 300-500 per month through this activity which helps them to buy daily use items from the prison canteen.

Post release, it has been observed that sewing trainings provided by Prayas have enabled clients to earn ranging from Rs.500/- to Rs.9000/- per month based on their skill and requirement of the order. The money is directly transferred in their bank accounts.



Instilling work skills for a stable tomorrow

Completed Orders: 490 jute folders from College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Goregaon; 60 folders from the Commissioner Office, Women and Child Development, Maharashtra; 50 files & jute bags each from the Family Court (Bandra), 30 folders from B.M.N. College of Home Sciences, Matunga and 60 jute bags for the Fair Trial Fellowship Project, National Law University, New Delhi, among others.

Current Orders: Prayas is presently channelizing efforts to complete the order of 700 canvas bags: 500 with Warli Art painted on them and 200 designed with Kalamkari Art. Besides this, an order of a 100 jute bags has also been received. Clients have been approached to consider such learning opportunities for their growth and livelihood, also with the intention to complete the said order in time.



Citizenship Rights Documentation

Prayas works towards helping clients to obtain ID and residence proof documents like Ration card, Voter ID card, Aadhar card, PAN card, etc., and open their bank accounts. A total of 33 clients were reached out to in this domain. 15 clients were assisted in the process of acquiring an Aadhar Card, Election Card, Ration Card and Domicile Certificate.

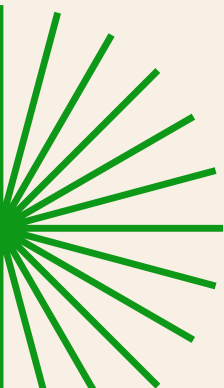


Bharuch team organised an awareness session on the significance of citizenship documents, their usage, procedures involved and potential benefits of Government schemes such as Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana (SGNY),

With the aim of building a legal relationship between the individual and the State, social workers keep the clients at the forefront in the process of application-filing thereby making them self-sufficient. On the other hand, Prayas also seeks advocacy-level discussions that can transform challenges into opportunities for the population, in question.

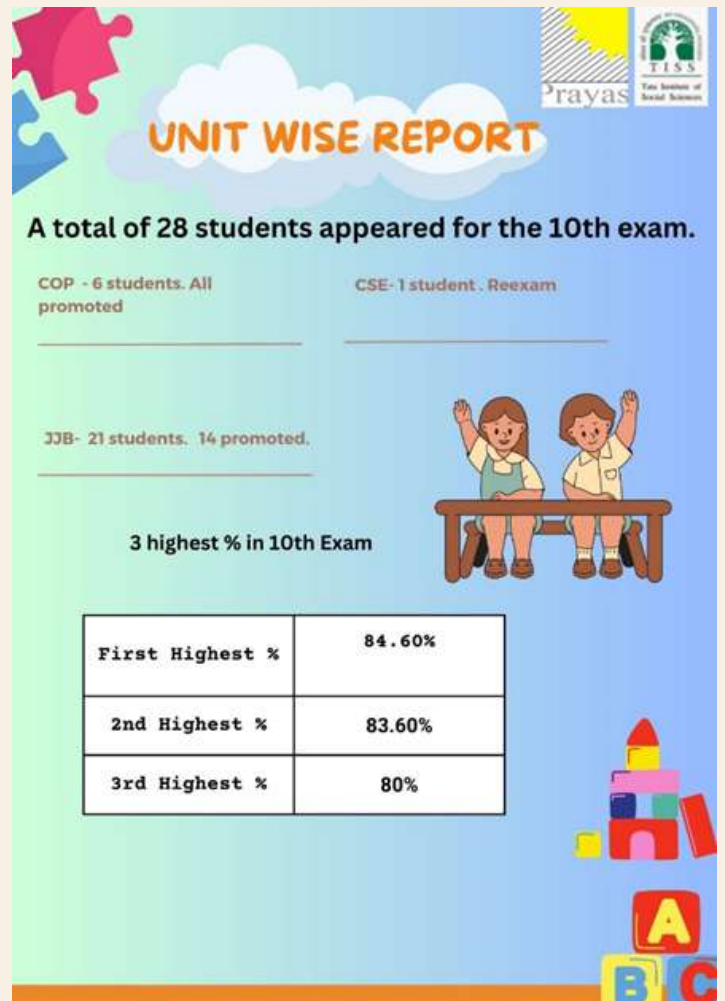
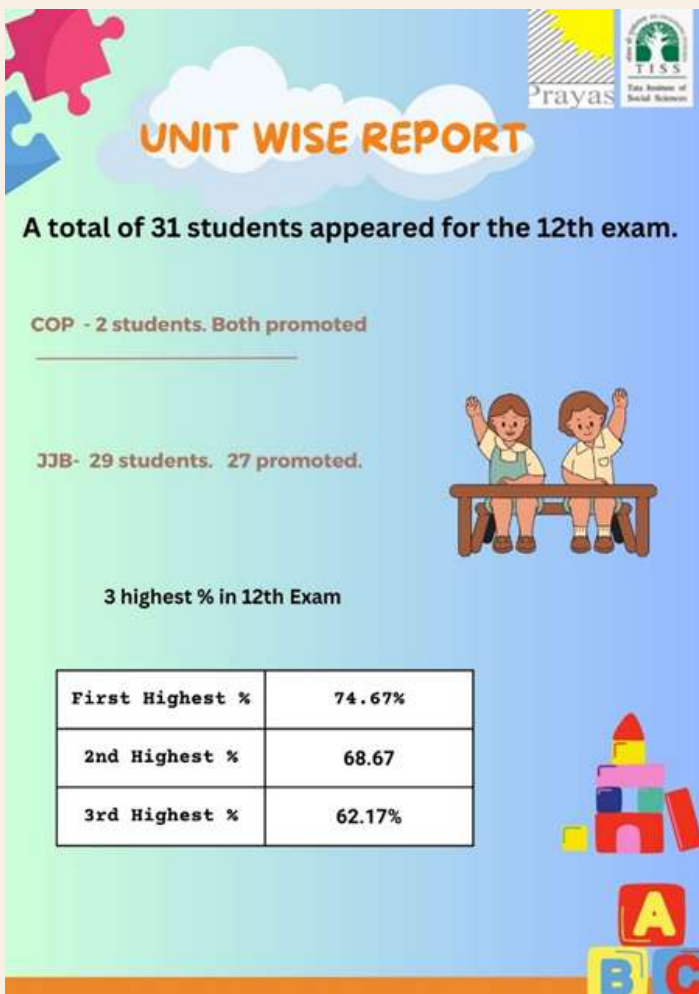
For instance, women released from protective homes and/or commercial sex exploitation, find documentation a rather daunting task given their vulnerabilities. Prayas has initiated a dialogue with the authorities to help them obtain their ID and residence proof documents as well as access to government scheme with a minimum documents, for smoother transition in their civic life.

Prayas organized a camp for issuing E-Shram Cards for over 80 clients. By issuing for more than half of the participants, this card will serve as an identity as well as provide them access to diverse government schemes.



Securing Childhood through Educational Support

Prayas believes children, irrespective of their vulnerability, be it of prisoners, women in distress, commercially sexually exploited and/or in conflict with law, should not be deprived of their basic right to education as it not only helps in their holistic development but also enhances their life skills



Bharuch Unit in a nutshell

Sr. No.	Indicators	No. of beneficiaries
1.	Education Support	62 children
2.	Stationary Kits	14 children of prisoners & 5 prison inmates
3.	Nutrition Kits	27 children of prisoners & released inmates
4.	Books & reading material	2 children of prisoners
5.	Payment of school fees	2 children of a female released prisoner
6.	Stationary & nutritional support to CCL	2 CCL & 5 siblings of CCL

Promoting Inclusion and Rehabilitation through Self-Help Groups

Self-help groups (SHGs) serve as a solid framework to empower women and enable them to accept, adjust and build upon their lost self-esteem through a conducive community-based environment.

Given the impact of previous 3 SHGs (Himmat, Ekta, Pragati),* Prayas has formed 3 new groups namely Saheli (in Virar), Sitara (in Bhiwandi) and Shakti (in Kalyan) with 9, 11 and 13 new members, respectively.

Adopting a person-centred approach, members are now seen processing internal loan requests systematically. Right from receiving applications from the members to ensuring repayment of instalments, in adherence to the rules set by the group, the SHGs have come a long way. Social workers continue to broaden their exposure by associating with like-minded organisations such as Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM) for training and guidance.



Meeting conducted by Prayas with SHG Ekta in a resource centre of MAVIM. Capacity-building, entrepreneurial development and aligning with market trends were some topics covered.

Given the determined will of the clients, Prayas has provided sewing machines and raw materials to SHG members who have expressed their interest towards securing their livelihood with a source of income by providing them work and/or orders on a piece rate basis



Furthermore, members are being closely mentored by Prayas staff on ways to maintain transparency in accounting, documenting minutes of their meeting, conflict resolution, motivate oneself and fellow members to regularly attend meetings and build on their interpersonal skills, among others.



*SHG Udaan has been discontinued & members have been reassigned to nearby SHGs

Stories from the Field



Multi-stakeholder level coordination

Ajit (name changed) lived in a slum and was supported by his ailing parents (60 and 70 years old) who strived to make ends meet through their daily wage earnings. With no education and being unmarried, he often spent time with his friends in the vicinity for company and began developing various addictions. Within no time, he was involved in petty crimes such as thefts and breaking into shops to fulfil the needs of his family as well as fend for his addiction. While intoxicated, an unfortunate incident of murder landed him as an undertrial in Mumbai Central Prison. Post his conviction by the Sessions Court, he was transferred to Nashik Road Central Prison. Given the poverty-stricken condition of the family, during the bail and trial proceedings, he did not have access to a lawyer.

Given the completion of 10 years of sentencing along with his good behaviour inside prison, his legal aid advocate facilitated the filing for his bail application in the Hon'ble High Court of Bombay and was granted a surety bail of Rs. 50,000. However, due to the inability to pay the said amount, his stay inside prison continued for another three months. He then filed another application requesting the authority to modify his application. On the orders of the Hon'ble Bombay High Court, the Superintendent of Nashik Road Central Prison directed the social worker of Prayas to conduct a home visit and present a report for the purpose of verifying his application for release on Personal Bond (PR Bond). Prayas provided in-depth counselling and legal guidance to both the convict and his family members.

It was on the basis of the social enquiry report by the social worker that Ajit was released on PR Bond and instructed by the Court to present surety within 3 months and only upon complying with the said order would he receive the Rs. 15,000 (that he earned inside prison) from the prison officials. The social worker made Ajit comprehend the conditions and guided him to adhere to the same to avoid re-arrest who moved on to present surety, collect his earnings from the prison and was released for good.

This case depicts the role of a social worker in the criminal justice system and the importance of the interventions they offer with respect to navigating through judicial proceedings, providing emotional support to the people affected and bridging a gap between all stakeholders involved.

Rekindling the lost bond between an incarcerated mother and her children

Asha (name changed), aged 24 years, is presently inside the Byculla District Prison for the past 11 months. A native of South Africa, she was arrested along with her group of friends, under the NDPS Act (drug trafficking).

For two months, she did not approach Prayas social workers or raise concerns about her children. When she witnessed the mulakat sessions arranged by the social worker for fellow female inmates, she expressed the need to meet with her children (aged 2 and 3 years, a boy and a girl respectively). The details of the institution that they were admitted were unknown to the mother. After rigorous effort and constant follow-up with various authorities (including police, institutional staff and probation office), the social worker managed to arrange a mulakat, after 4 months.

However, given the duration of separation, her children failed to recognize her and could not comprehend the language of communication. Understanding the sensitivity of the situation, the social worker arranged for a second mulakat session and found some progress with regard to the relationship between the daughter and the mother.

On counselling Asha, a custody application was submitted in the court to request for the transfer of the children from the institution to the prison, from the point of view of keeping the children and mother in close interaction with each other. The order was granted in her favor and the social worker ensured the smooth transfer of the children to the prison.

Partners and Donors



We are grateful to our partners and funders such as the Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives, Tata Motors Ltd., Maharashtra Foundation, Bombay Community Public Trust, Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, Motivation for Excellence Trust, Shree Balaji Foundation, Lal Family Foundation, Tree of Life Foundation, Western Union CSR, DASRA UK, HDFC Bank CSR, SBI Foundation, Nargis Dutt Foundation, and individuals like Adv. Navroz Seervai, Ms. Tara Sabavala, Mr. Thyagarajan, Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Younus, Ms. Geetha Chandrashekhar, Ms. Azka Desousa, Ms. Jasmin Kikani and Ms. Jayashree Grover, among others for serving as a beacon of light through their generous support and conviction to support our work.

Organisations such as Magic Bus, PJC Foundation, Lions Club Dongri, Daisy View Skills, Rotary Club Sion, Arpan, Dharm Bharti Foundation, Bright Future, Mesh Foundation, Skill Learning & Training Pvt. Ltd., Aangan Trust, Arphen and Kohinoor Technical Institute and individuals like Ms. Jalpa Vyas and Mr. Rupesh D'Costa, among others for backing Prayas with their support and guidance for the children in the Dongri Observation Home.

We are grateful to organizations like Al-Momin Foundation, Sahara Foundation, Samata Foundation, Global Care Foundation and individual donors like Mr. Atul Goradiya who play a critical role in paying for cash bail for those who are financially incapable and are incarcerated due to this insufficiency.

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