

Expressive Arts and Theatre Workshop

Facilitated by The Yuva Ekta Foundation, New Delhi



The Yuva Ekta Foundation was invited by the Centre for Advanced Research and People's Engagement (CARPE) and the Civic Response Team (CRT), Aurangabad to facilitate an Expressive Arts and Theatre workshop at an Observation Home for Boys in Aurangabad. The workshop resulted in a performance titled 'Jaadu ki Nagri' (A Magical World) that was performed at the Govindbhai Shroff Lalit Kala Academy on September 26, 2019

This qualitative report contains pictures and texts meant for private viewing only. All pictures have been clicked by *The Yuva Ekta Foundation* with utmost care and protection. For any public display of these images, faces must be blurred. Names of participants have also been changed to maintain confidentiality.



The Yuva Ekta Foundation is a not for profit Trust working at the intersection of Youth and Governance. With a core Vision of Social Justice and Equity, we use the Arts as tool for **encouraging self-expression and empowerment** among young adults.

As we stepped inside the Government Remand Home, Aurangabad, we were greeted by 21 smiling faces with “high fives” and hugs. “*Apka naam kya hai*” (What is your name)? “*Kya ap bhi hamko acting sikhaoge*” (Will you also teach us how to act)?

These 21 boys had been a part of an intensive theatre exercise a year ago. Their efforts had resulted in a public performance of Munshi Premchand’s timeless play *Idgah*. After experiencing the thrill of theatre and applause, they were excited to meet us. Our first day was therefore only about breaking the ice, getting to know the group for the first time and mapping our journey ahead.

“Natak kab banega” (When will the play get made)?

At the outset, our intent is to use theatre and arts to work towards self-empowerment and healing. The final performance is a result of the journey the participants go through. Our activities are flexible and we carry a loose plan of action with us. Mostly, our plans change based on group responses and demands. So when we were asked that “*natak kab banega?*” our response used to be met with a reflective silence.



Participants in a game of ‘Simon Says’, where the task is to follow the facilitator’s instructions without making a mistake. It’s a body warm up exercise and a test in attentiveness

We also played ‘Deer-Wall-Gun’. Warm up games are a perfect way to break the ice and create a fun, nurturing and safe space for the participants



As the first day went by playing with names and activities that asked everyone to explore the space, we had very little idea of what the second day would bring. We started delving a little into basic art activities where the boys were asked to explore their dreams, aspirations and perceived hindrances in their path. This was to get a little insight into the boys and help them get clarity of thought.

As days progressed, the questions about the play got stronger but now our responses to the young and vibrant minds seemed more comprehensible. We told them that the script would be an outcome of the exercises we do and the stories they tell us. Their confused silence was gradually withering.



Writing exercise on the first day was a way of giving everyone an artistic tool for expression as they talk about their dreams, capabilities and limitations

“Maine kisi ki aankhon mein aise pehli baar dekha”

(This is the first time I’ve looked into someone’s eyes like this)

From the second day onwards, we realized that this group was more ready to go on stage than other groups we’d worked with before. They had been trained excellently last year and were raring with confidence. Our effort however was intended at something much deeper.

Looking at the group dynamics of an Observation Home, we sensed the presence of deep rooted hierarchies based on age. The senior students were more commanding of their space and respect around the younger ones. Since the age group of participants was diverse (aged 9-17 years), this hierarchy used to trickle down progressively. There was also significant difficulty in maintaining or holding attention, especially in difficult tasks. This difficulty was magnified among the younger ones as some of the work we were asking or would be asking our participants to do would be tough and engaging, often leaving them exposed with vulnerabilities. For the sanctity of the process we had to reduce our group size and accommodate only those who we thought were age-appropriate for the exercises.



Participants in a mirror exercise, maintaining eye contact and moving along with their partner

One of our major breakthroughs came as part of the mirror exercise. As participants were looking into their partner's eyes and imitating their movements, one could sense the concentration that went into fulfilling this endeavor. We sat down later with the group and discussed what each of them felt and the exhaustion was palpable. "*Pehli baar kisi par bharosa kiya hai itna*" (first time I've trusted someone this much); "*thoda mushkil tha kisi ki aankhon mein aise dekhna*" (it was difficult to look into someone's eyes for so

long). Sahil was gutted that he was able to follow his partner's movements only while looking at his eyes. This was one of the foremost moments where we saw the group coming together. Differences of age or height didn't matter in this exercise.

Childhood and Mother as sites of memory

The moment where we found our attachment to the group was in a writing exercise the same day. It was here that we stretched our time in the workshop on the invitation of the boys. This was the evening we made *the book*. A book that covered some crucial memories from the length and breadth of our participant's lives. We felt the readiness and connect with the group to discuss this and felt that they were equally ready to sharing these moments with us. They were asked to write about their first day at the Home, their sentiments and the time spent here, their life before this, remembering one striking childhood memory dear to them.

The throwback was instant. Everyone had a vivid recollection of their first day at the Observation Home. Suraj mentioned jokingly about how he had to go bald because of lice in his hair. Paresh spoke about how he cried, missing his mother. Akshay dreamed of a day where he ran away and lived with his sisters, who have always been his support system. As we helped a lot of them write what they felt internally, their faces expressed genuine emotion of loss, hope and regret. We knew instantly that these were the feelings we wanted to capture through the play.

The opening up of participants and public sharing of experiences helped build positive and reassuring relationships between everyone. We had to constantly reiterate that the workshop is a safe-space where all opinions are respected, even cherished



Giving voice to the expression

We insist on our workshops being safe and trustworthy spaces. For the activities and participants to thrive, this is a necessary condition.

While working on the script and story was important, so was getting across to them at the level of actor-facilitator. Intense emotional labour was interspersed with physical and voice work. Putting a voice behind expression and giving confidence to our group to share their own stories was the task we passionately worked towards. The resultant performance however was only one of our goals. We wanted to leave our participants with tools of empowerment and healing that they could use in their everyday life.

Voice projection is a work in outwardly expression. We started focusing on that mid-way through the workshop process and it continued right till just before the performance. Mostly, it was about being able to get a control of your breath and adapting your body's reflexes. As we noticed towards the end of this process, many who were hesitant to speak earlier were beginning to find a voice. Hierarchies of age initially meant that older boys were dominating discussions and speaking for everyone else. We tried breaking this hierarchy by splitting them into equal groups and positively reinforcing unified group participation. Coupled this with our regular focus on voice and body, we observed two significant outcomes.



An example of participants from all ages being divided into groups to work on scenes from their lives. The short plays created were inspired by elements from all members of the group

Firstly, the younger ones were coming out more openly, playing protagonist roles in smaller scenes and secondly, the older ones were now giving more space to the younger boys, assisting their participation and encouraging them to talk.



Short plays were displayed in front of all the participants since the topic of portrayal was common to all. Everyone was an equal partner in the feedback process, helping in co-participating and co-creating the final performance

What was also reflected through these group-tasks and performances was the lives of the boys inside the Home. From playing cricket to playing with stones, each and every aspect of the day was uncovered. These were the little moments that helped us script the performance.

Taking a bow

As we entered the Govindbhai Shroff Lalit Kala Academy with the 16 boys who were set to take stage, we had left everything to our process. The play '*Jaadu ki Nagri*' (A Magical World) was scripted by the boys, for the boys and was based on their lives and struggles and the innocent need for unconditional love. They spoke highly of their present circumstances in the Home and how they lived with each other. They were thankful because they were fed, schooled and given access to resources that were a distant reality in their life before this. But what happens when a new boy comes to this peaceful life? Does he feel accepted instantly?

The story revolved around the lives of Manas and Shakti, two strikingly different personalities. Manas, the sweet, young boy whose father leaves him in Aurangabad's Observation Home because of difficult circumstances back in the village. Shakti, a child who hides his loneliness and need for friendship with anger and aggression. There is conflict when the two energies meet. They are both in need of love and affection. We go deeper into finding this expression of love in everyday life and how the Home becomes a 'safe-space' where love can be harnessed and spread. The boys invite everyone in the audience to their world, willing to open out their hearts and share this love with everyone.



The golden magical cloth was the element of surprise in the play. It had a crucial role, that which reminded everyone on stage about the power of unconditional love



A scene from the play where we show lives of the boys inside the Home. A senior inmate is comforting the new admission as he misses his family

The performance was met with great admiration and cheer. The boys introduced themselves and shared their experiences with the audience. Admitting honestly that initially the process was boring, Vikram and Saket spoke about the tremendous learning curve they had been through.

From initially being a collection of 21 boys, they took their final bow as a unit, a collective of 16 participants who had seen their efforts rewarded. As the audience responded to key moments in the play, it gave the actors an affirmation of their truth, that their story was worth being told and that people found a sweetness in the honesty of their expression.



This is where we play a game of SPOT THE DIFFERENCE for our readers. Identify the different elements of our team. Can you spot differences in the swagger?

We would like to sincerely thank the team members of CARPE and CRT for giving us this tremendous opportunity to work with the boys. We hope to continue with this association and find more avenues for collaborations in the near future.

Lokmat Times

Performances by special children leave audience spellbound



**LOKMAT NEWS NETWORK
AURANGABAD, SEPT 26**

The much-awaited play performances by the children of Babasai Balgruh of HIV-affected boys and girls and Government Observation Home took place today at Govindbhai Shroff Kala Academy. Citizens from all over the city thronged the venue to encourage the kids. The programme was organized by a city-based social organization Civic Response Team (CRT) in association with CanPack India Pvt. Ltd under their annual initiative 'Hunar'.

The two thought-provoking plays - Bhala More Rama and Jadu Ki Nagri - presented by the children of Babasai and Observation Home respectively won hearts of the audiences and also made them emotional at times. Charumati Khandare, an NSD alumni and Rijul Kataria and Bhanu Mehta of Yuva Ekta Foundation trained the children. The scripts were written by the children themselves.

"Initially we thought we cannot do this. But Rijul Sir and Bhanu Madar made us believe in ourselves and we could do it. Now, we know that we can overcome our fears and achieve something great in life," said one of the children from Government Observation home.

"Every child is full of potential. We just need to help them harness and develop it and they can do wonders," said Gauri Mirashi, CEO, CRT.

Aurangabad First
Page No. 8 Sep 27, 2019
Powered by: erelego.com

बालमनाचे हुनर रसिकांना भावले

म. टा. प्रतिनिधी, औरंगाबाद

आपल्या मनातील खदखद, विचार समाजासमोर आत्मविश्वासाने आणण्याचे प्रभावी माध्यम कोणते असेल तर ते नाटक आहे. व्यासपीठावर उपस्थित जे नाट्य पाहतात ती प्रयत्नांची परीक्षाच असते. नाटकाच्या माध्यमातून मुलांना व्यासपीठ मिळते. त्यांच्यातील नेतृत्व प्रकट झाले. अभिव्यक्त होण्याचा हा आत्मविश्वास या मुलांना भविष्यातही मदत करेल असा विश्वास युवा एकाता फाउंडेशनच्या (दिल्ली) भानु मेहता यांनी व्यक्त केला. बाबासाई बालगृह (एडसग्रस्त मुला-

मुलांचा आश्रम) आणि शासकीय निरीक्षण गृहातील मुला-मुलींनी नाट्य सादर करून उपस्थितांना चकित केले. या मुलांच्या अभिनयकौशल्याने प्रभावित झालेल्या मान्यवरांनीही मुलांचे कौतुक केले. गुरुवारी गोविंदबाई श्रौफ कला अकादमीत पार पडलेल्या नाट्य प्रयोगाला रसिकांनी भरभरून दाद दिली. सिखिक रिस्मास टोमने (सीआरटी) कॅनपॅक इंडियाच्या सहकार्याने 'हुनर' या उपक्रमालगत या नाट्य प्रयोगाचे आयोजन केले होते. या वेळी जिल्हा परिषदेच्या मुख्य कार्यकारी अधिकारी पवनजीत कौर, बजाब सुपचे सी.पी. त्रिपाठी, सिखिक रिस्मास

एडसग्रस्त, निरीक्षणगृहातील मुलांची अफलातून कामगिरी

टीमच्या मुख्य कार्यकारी अधिकारी गौरी मिराशी, कॅनपॅक इंडिया मुख्य कार्यकारी अधिकारी हर्ष वर्धन जाजू, निरीक्षणगृहाचे अधीक्षक चंद्रपान बंगले आणि बाबासाईंचे संचालक नितीन चाकडे आणि बाबासाई आणि शासकीय निरीक्षणगृहातील मुलांनी अनुक्रमे 'भला मोरे रामा' आणि 'जादू की नगरी' ही दोन नाटके सादर केली. या मुलांना नॅशनल स्कूल ऑफ ड्रामाच्या माजी विद्यार्थिनी चारुमती खंदारे आणि युवा एकाता फाउंडेशनच्या रिजुल कटारिया आणि भानु मेहता यांच्या मार्गदर्शन मिळाले. गेल्या १५ दिवसांपासून ही मूले नाटकांचा सराव करत होती. विशेष म्हणजे नाटकांची कथादेखील या मुलांनीच लिहिली होती. सीआरटी आणि कॅनपॅकने गेल्या वर्षी शासकीय बालगृहातील ४० मुलांसोबत हुनर उपक्रम घेतला होता. प्रेमचंद यांच्या इदयस्मरणी कवेवर आधारित 'इदगाह' नाटक मुलांनी सादर केले होते.