



Pioneering mental health support in Nepal



KOSHISH is a DDP partner organization in Nepal: a mental health self-help group set up in 2008 by people with lived experience of mental illness. The pressing and long-term issue of mental health is so often neglected, but has come to the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. In Nepal as elsewhere, mental health has deteriorated, and suicides have increased.

The work KOSHISH does to promote better mental health, to show that mental illnesses can be preventable and treatable, must go on. At the same time, they provide immediate practical help to people who are in crisis or homeless because of their mental health and the stigma they suffer.

In extreme cases, women in particular may be tied up, hidden or cast out of their homes. KOSHISH has rescued over 600 women, many in pitiful states having suffered physical and sexual abuse on the streets, their mental illness untreated and exacerbated. The KOSHISH Women's Transit Care Centre provides talking and occupational therapy, diagnosis and medication and, above all, kindness.

While many are turning inwards towards concerns close to home, and funding for overseas causes becomes ever scarcer, we are campaigning to keep the spirit of international awareness and solidarity alive. It would be wonderful to find people interested in supporting the pioneering work of KOSHISH.

Mental Health in Nepal

'Koshish' means 'let's try', and for more than 10 years we have been doing just that in a country with little in the way of mental health services or trained professionals but a great deal of stigma and ignorance about mental illness.

There is only one mental health hospital for Nepal's population of nearly 29 million, few trained psychiatrists (most have gone abroad) and a woefully inadequate number of psychiatric nurses and hardly any mental health services at district and primary healthcare levels. If found to be mentally ill, people may be dismissed from their jobs.

Most families resort to traditional healers, believing that mental illness may be punishment for past sins, possession by evil spirits, or simply bad behaviour. Sons and husbands might get better treatment, but wives and daughters are labelled hysterical and demonic, to be cast out or hidden away.

The impact of mental illness that goes undiagnosed, untreated and socially stigmatized is one of the biggest causes of disability and suffering, not just for the individual but for the whole family, leading to a host of social, economic and emotional traumas.

Psychosocial Support

In response, KOSHISH has been providing mental health and psychosocial support services since the COVID-19 lockdown began in February 2020, supporting people in need through its psychologists, counsellors, social workers and mental health experts.

To reach more people, it has expanded existing community mental health programmes and extended its free 24-hour helplines. In 6 months, over 1,000 people received mental health and psychosocial support, including 8 women who received specialized, residential care.

KOSHISH has also held interactive online events for students, to promote the understanding of mental health and suicide prevention; broadcast public service announcements on COVID-19's impact on psychosocial wellbeing on FM radio and social media; and responded to natural disasters such as the 2015 earthquakes, with psychosocial First Aid to those left homeless, displaced or bereaved.



Women's Transit Care Centre (WTCC)

10 years ago, with a grant from Jersey Overseas Aid, DDP supported KOSHISH to set up Nepal's first mental health drop-in centre, which has grown into the Women's Transit Care Centre.

Mental illness has left many Nepalese women and girls outcast and destitute because their families cannot cope or have abandoned them. The WTCC has rescued, rehabilitated, and cared for more than 600 women, helping them with diagnosis, medication and counselling, reintegration into their families, if safe, or on to other accommodation and supported independent living.

Women rescued by the KOSHISH team from the streets of Kathmandu or referred to them by local authorities from across the country are assessed and cared for, over 3-6 months on average. The WTCC is currently housed in a large rented property in Lalitpur, near Kathmandu, and can accommodate up to 30 women at a time, supported by social workers, nurses, counsellors, kitchen and security staff.



Budget

The total cost of the WTCC service over 3 years (2020/22) is £294,469, of which £214,599 has already been raised, from sources including Himal Partners (Oslo), the Mennonite Central Committee (USA/Canada), Souter Trust (UK via DDP). Nepal's Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (with responsibility for disability), whose departments make referrals to WTCC, also provides a small annual grant towards running costs.

We are fundraising for the shortfall of **£79,870**: to cover the cost of rescue missions, food, medication, nurses and caregivers, therapeutic activities, psychologist/counsellor fees; travel, follow-up visits and assessments; upgrading record-keeping; and utilities: water, electricity and cooking gas.

Measuring success

Effectiveness will be measured by the WTCC's results: length of stay, wellbeing, ability to socialize, levels of self-care and confidence, successful reintegration or independent living. The nursing staff and social workers keep detailed records for each woman, from rescue or referral, treatment, counselling, occupational therapy and training, until they leave – and follow up afterwards to ensure that the women are safe and well.

Rehabilitation is a long and painstaking process and KOSHISH's social workers make careful assessments for the safety of women returning to their families. Alternatively, they are found other safe havens, and training and livelihoods opportunities to give them a better chance in life.

Ramila

The COVID-19 pandemic has an adverse effect on the mental health of people around the world. In Nepal, the virus has spread rapidly, with an increasing number of cases, accompanied by over 1,200 cases of suicide.



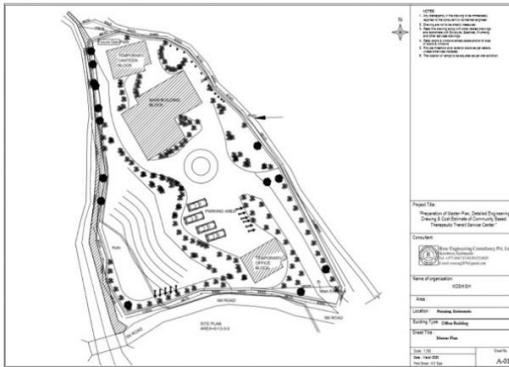
21-year-old Ramila (not her real name) was rescued and brought to the WTCC after trying to take her own life during lockdown. She had experienced mental health problems for

a long time, and attempted suicide before, but before the pandemic her condition was improving thanks to medication and counselling. Ramila was happy with her work in an office, but the COVID crisis changed everything. Lockdown brought loneliness and confinement to her rented room in Kathmandu. Her condition worsened and Ramila again tried to take her life. After 48 hours in hospital, she was brought to the transit home for short-term psychosocial support and care.

Initially Ramila was quiet and detached, but with care and support she began to open up, engage in therapeutic activities, and her condition is improving. She is just one of many people experiencing mental health problems during this crisis, but it remains the most neglected area in the health sector.

Therapeutic Centre

To house all its current community-based programmes and the Women’s Transit Care Centre, and as a base for its national advocacy and suicide prevention work, KOSHISH has raised funds over the past 6 years for the creation of a permanent Therapeutic Centre in a green valley about 20 miles south of Kathmandu. The centre will be a safe haven for women in mental health crisis and a resource for families and the base from which all KOSHISH’s programmes will operate and policy research and advocacy will take place.



In 2013, KOSHISH’s founder Matrika Devkota won the Dr Guislain ‘Breaking the Chains of Stigma’ global award and donated the entire \$50,000 prize money to start the building fund. Phase 1 – land purchase, site clearance, architectural consultations, and government permits, costing a total of £209,722 – was completed in early 2020, thanks to funders including ‘The Weight we Carry’ (Canada); Himel Partners; Friends of KOSHISH, Germany; and the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens.

Phase 2

The second phase of the project involves construction of a three-storey flat-roofed building (modelled on the right, housing the WTCC); linking this will be a separate admin building with offices, therapy and conference spaces; kitchen and dining rooms; laundry rooms; an access road; supplying services; landscaped gardens etc.



Detailed architect plans and costings have been done, and a full budget breakdown is available. Planning permission process is almost complete with the local authorities. Total cost of Phase 2 is estimated at **£460,000**. KOSHISH and DDP continue efforts to raise the funds.

Mental Health Advocacy



Alongside all its practical work, KOSHISH works nationally to press for the inclusion of mental health provision in hospitals, health centres and posts, and for training more mental health professionals. There is only one mental health hospital for nearly 30 million people, and of the few qualified psychiatrists and mental health nurses, many have left to practise abroad.

We aim to support KOSHISH to promote better mental health literacy – especially among young people – and for a more open attitude that normalizes rather than stigmatizes. Nothing about mental health is easy or quick but

KOSHISH have over the years gained a great deal of experience and proved their tenacity, maintaining continuous and informed pressure for changes to legislation and budgeting.



The founder of KOSHISH, Matrika Devkota, suffered mental ill-health for many years without proper diagnosis or treatment. He chose to talk openly about his experiences, to de-stigmatize attitudes towards mental health in Nepal, and became a respected advocate in the national media. For his tireless fight against stigma for the mentally ill, Matrika has received accolades including the 2013 Social Service Award, the Dr Guislain International Award, the Human Rights Award of Nepal's National Human Rights Commission, and was elected an Ashoka Fellow in 2017. In recognition of his contributions to national awareness of psychosocial disability, Matrika was appointed in July 2020 to the National Disability Directive Committee, under the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, to facilitate disability policy work.

The Organization

KOSHISH has a team of 80 people throughout their well-organized structure, with demarcated cost centres – the Women's Transit Care Centre; community-based mental health outreach in 4 provinces; advocacy, legal and disability rights – and overlapping central admin and finances. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure the safeguarding of vulnerable people, beneficiaries and staff, financial probity, and the effective use of resources.

KOSHISH has the capacity to collect and analyse data efficiently. In the first month of the COVID19 lockdown, for instance, the teams reached out to 727 beneficiaries of existing programmes to assess impact and new concerns, discovering that 40% of beneficiaries had run out of psychotropic drugs, 3% reported violence and 27% were in need of basic essentials, so KOSHISH could respond to people's current needs. They also analysed police reports of deaths and were able to ascertain a marked increase in suicides in the first few months of the lockdown. They have responded with online support sessions and a well publicised free telephone number and calls are answered by trained mental health professionals.

About DDP

Disability and Development Partners (DDP) is a British charity, founded in 1992, and based in Norwich. Our objective is to support disabled people's organizations and others to protect disabled people's human rights and equalize opportunities in health, education and livelihoods.

We are currently working with partners in Ethiopia, India and Nepal, on projects helping disabled children, youth, women and men to achieve their potential and live healthier lives. We have also worked with partner organizations in Bangladesh, Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde and Burundi.

In our work we include those whose disabilities are less visible, deaf and hard of hearing and those with mental health and psychosocial issues. Comic Relief, UKAID/DFID, Jersey Overseas Aid and the Medicor Foundation are among some of our most recent project donors.

Please contact us if you would like to know more about KOSHISH and its pioneering work for mental health in Nepal, and about DDP:

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