

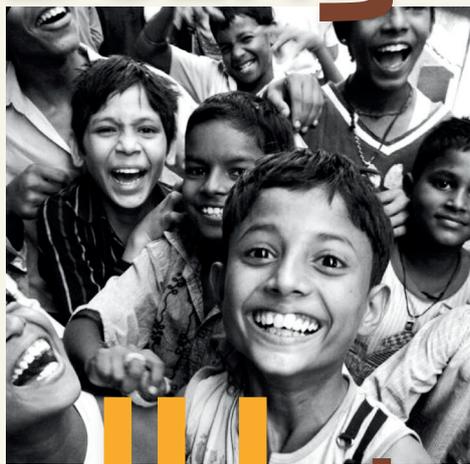


Schizophrenia Research  
Foundation (I)



Department of  
Youth Mental Health

# Being



Y<sup>th.</sup>

*A Peek into*  
**YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH**

COVER PAGE CREDITS

Anand Padmanabhan



## CLINIC TIMINGS

**MORNINGS 9:30 - 1PM**

MONDAY

THURSDAY

SATURDAY

**EVENINGS 1:30 - 5PM**

WEDNESDAY

FRIDAY

## SOCIALS

**SCAN ME**



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# DEAR READERS,



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
&  
DESIGN

I'm honoured to introduce this special edition of our youth mental health magazine, centred around the theme of children's experience. As my first time serving as Editor-in-Chief, it's been both a humbling and inspiring journey to help bring these voices and stories to light.

In this issue, we explore how children see, feel, and navigate the world around them—from the quiet moments of resilience to the challenges that often go unheard. Each piece reflects the importance of listening to young minds with empathy, curiosity, and care.

This edition would not have been possible without the incredible dedication, insight, and heart of the editorial team. Their passion for youth mental health and commitment to amplifying young voices have shaped every page of this publication.

Thank you for joining us in this conversation. I hope these stories stay with you long after you turn the last page.

*Sowmya Dhanasekaran*

Warmly,  
Sowmya Dhanasekaran

## MANAGING EDITOR

Arpita



## DESIGN

Samyukta



# Team

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Krishnaveni



Sara



Sriranga



Vijayalakshmi



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# FROM THE CHAIR



“I see that there is a lot of *energy* and *enthusiasm* in the Department of YMH and I am sure many of these challenges of youth mental health will be met in the coming years by them”

In 1984, the Founders of SCARF had initially envisioned it as an NGO to deal with primarily severe mental disorders which are the psychotic disorders such as Schizophrenia and Bipolar disorders. Psychosocial Rehabilitation, Research and Awareness creation were then the main activities. As our OP services gained steam, we started catering to persons with all mental health issues such as depression, anxiety etc. SCARF's activities also expanded to teaching, training, lobbying leading to the formation of a training academy STAR.

Ten years ago, in response to a need expressed by the public, SCARF started DEMCARES for persons suffering from dementia offering a spectrum of services ranging from OP to day care, home based care, community care and inpatient services.

The most recent addition is the Youth Mental Health services started in 2021. COVID and its aftermath provided a fillip to these activities and now we have a full blown department with psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists, counsellors, volunteers etc.

We are working with educational institutions, child care agencies, and the community at large. We are also working with Tamil Nadu Govt on Model schools.

All this has met with a hugely commendable response and we have also been able to initiate many research projects on YMH.

What is important to understand is that every NGO needs to be very sensitive to the needs of the community they are serving and appropriately expand the services.

While we can be happy with the progress of YMH work, I would like to share my views on what we probably need to focus on in the coming years, apart from delivering usual care.

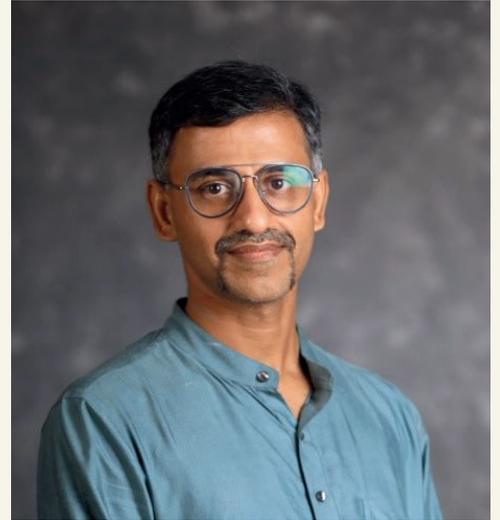
- Building public-private partnerships : It is essential to work with the state to reach the schools for the lower socio economic groups such as the schools run by the Greater Chennai Corporation.
- Motivating the youth to seek care: Our research has clearly shown that while the prevalence of anxiety and depression in students of schools and colleges is as high as 30% , very few of them actually seek help for their emotional/psychological issues. We need to identify innovative strategies to improve help seeking practices by the youth.
- Convincing teachers and the school management about the importance of mental health. This has to be on on going process in the institutions.
- Youth friendly apps or other means to hold their attention and concentration. The YES App is a beginning in this.
- Work with media personnel to get them to write more on this subject, from the perspective of different stakeholders. This should include film and TV stars and sports persons championing youth mental health.
- Establish a consortium of centres in India doing similar work .

BEST WISHES,

Dr.Thara.R.

CO-FOUNDER AND VICE CHAIR  
SCARF

# OUR VISION



“Talent is universally distributed,  
Opportunities are not”

Welcome to this edition of our Departmental magazine “Being Youth”. This magazine (as compared to our previous newsletter) aims to be more engaging and provide information for everyone, including young people, parents, teachers, administrators, and researchers. Each magazine will have a cover article that will attempt to bring together clinical practice and research. This edition, we turn our spotlight to the fascinating and essential theme of experiencing emotions especially as youth do over their developmental trajectory.

This issue's cover feature delves deep into the emotional lives of children and adolescents, offering insights from clinical practice, emerging research, and the voices of youth themselves. We explore the ways emotions manifest, the challenges and triumphs young people face, and evidence based approaches to nurturing emotional health in families, schools, and communities.

In addition, you'll find updates on our department's clinical services, where our multidisciplinary teams are innovating care pathways and refining best practices. The research section highlights ongoing studies and recent publications driving the field forward—especially in emotional development, prevention, and intervention strategies. Our outreach programs, meanwhile, continue to build bridges with schools, NGOs, and families, ensuring our commitment to accessibility and equity remains strong.

As you read through the magazine, I encourage you to reflect on the powerful role emotions play in our own and also consider the way things might be different from a young person's perspective. Let's remain steadfast in our aim: to foster an environment where every child and adolescent feels seen, heard, and supported.

Thank you for your continued dedication and passion for youth mental health.

## Dr. Shiva Prakash

HEAD (CLINICAL SERVICES AND TRAINING),  
DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AT SCARF

# An Ode to CHILDREN

*Anika Saloni*

As we began shaping the theme for the magazine's current edition, we wanted to capture the essence of children – the giggles, the mischief, the tears, the tantrums, the stubborn silences, and the sudden “I love you”s that undo us in a second. They remind us that we were once them, and one day they will be us.

For a long time, I used to see children as extensions of their families. Like a piece of a puzzle, not the puzzle itself. So, when a child walked into a mental health centre, I would turn to the parent and ask: “What do you want changed in your child?” instead of looking at the child and asking: “What do you need?”



It sounds obvious now, but back then, I didn't know. I didn't know that even a six-year-old carries a world inside them – a heavy chest, a restless mind, sleepless nights. Imagine being that small, trying to explain why the world feels too loud – and the only vocabulary they have is: “My tummy hurts.”

Jean Piaget once called children “little scientists.” And truly, they are – experimenting, exploring, forever curious. Their inner world is made up of small observations: the smell of their mother's sari, the sound of a cartoon theme song, the comfort of a favourite corner of the bed. Their world is stitched together with innocence, creativity, and wonder.

But somewhere along the way, adulthood arrives, waving a big eraser, telling us that innocence is weakness. We call it “adapting.” And yet – maybe innocence is the very thing worth protecting. Maybe, in a world this fractured, their wonder is the last untouched place.

There is so much wisdom in their kutti minds. So much love in their kutti hearts.

When I was first trained, I learned behaviour therapy and parent management training – methods that saw children’s behaviour as “problems to be fixed.” But children ended up teaching me the opposite. They showed me that their “disruptive” behaviours often carry truths: a need, a fear, a longing. Once I started listening, really listening, the therapy room changed. Suddenly, it wasn’t about fixing, it was about witnessing. The room became alive with joy, silliness, sorrow, and trust.

At times it even felt like magic – because when a child feels safe, anything can happen.

Outside of therapy, I found myself drawn to movies with children at their centre. Cinema has always known what we often forget: children are not passive bystanders.

They are wide-eyed witnesses – to cruelty and to beauty. The innocence and wisdom of children have been beautifully portrayed in many films.

Through their stories, we learn valuable lessons about mental health and social realities – from discrimination and racism to adoption, divorce, LGBTQ experiences, and much more. From Hollywood movies like Jojo Rabbit, Room and The Florida Project to Tamil gems like Anjali, Kannathil Muthamittal, Super Deluxe’s Rasakutty, Vaazhai, Rhythm, Kaaka Muttai and Deiva Thirumagal – these films remind us:

Children don’t always understand everything, but they feel everything. And that is more than enough.



Perhaps that's the greatest lesson children teach us : To love doesn't require complete understanding – only presence.

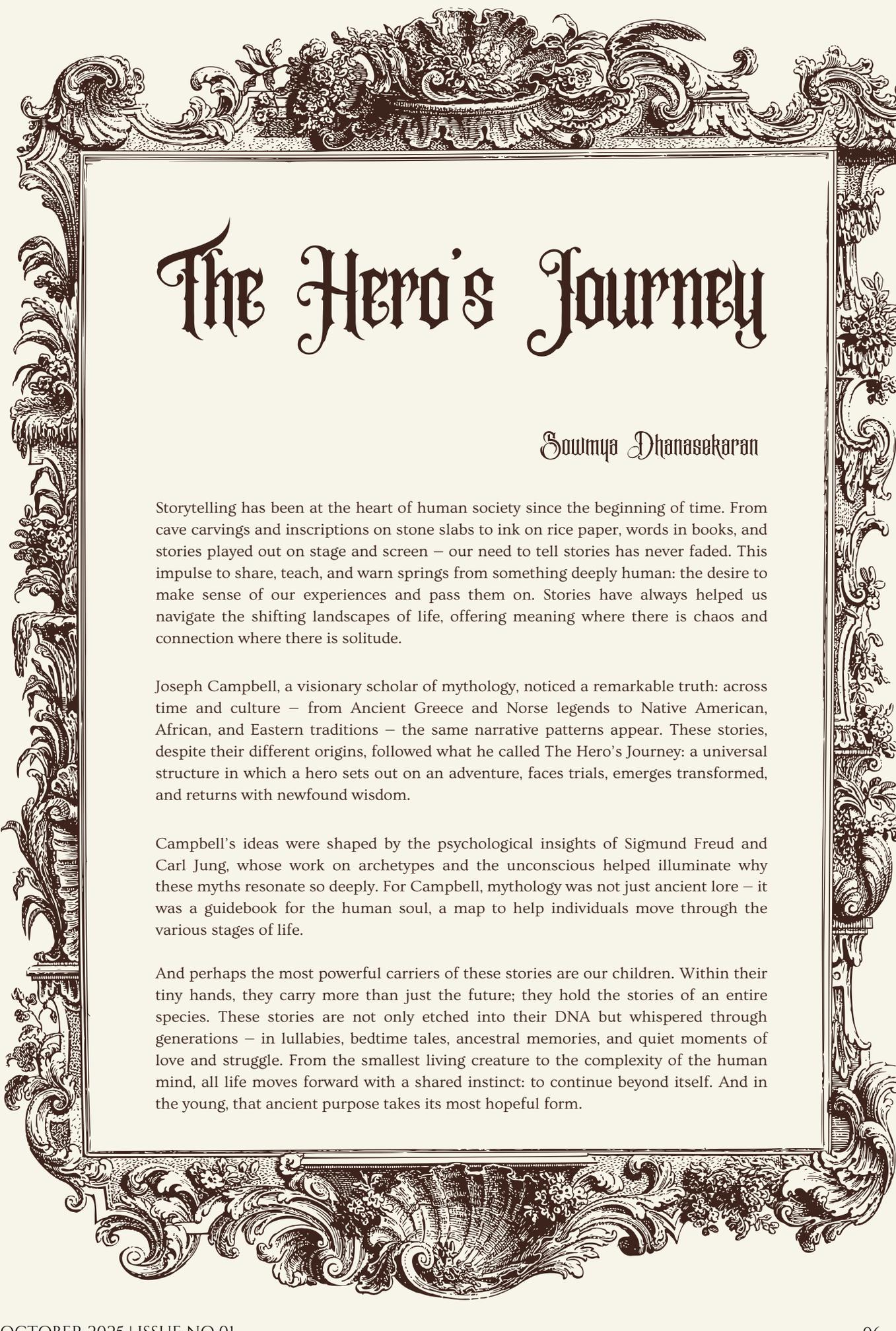
At YMH, we see children as young as six for therapy. Some come in with tantrums, some with bullying wounds, some with depression, some with worries too big for their tiny frames. And some come carrying the unthinkable – abuse from the very hands that were supposed to protect them.

And yet –  
over and over again, we see it:  
Resilience in its rawest form.  
Sometimes, all it takes is one safe person.  
One adult who listens.  
One friend who believes.  
One therapist who cares.  
Children take it from there.  
Somehow, they find joy – even in darkness.  
They laugh, they play, they forgive.  
They live – fiercely, messily, beautifully.

So what I would like to say to the little ones is this:  
We are honoured to walk beside you.  
We learn from you every single day.

*And for all that you are — we see you, we  
hear you, and we thank you — for being our  
best teachers, our little scientists, our silent  
comedians, and our fiercest survivors.*





# The Hero's Journey

Sowmya Dhanasekaran

Storytelling has been at the heart of human society since the beginning of time. From cave carvings and inscriptions on stone slabs to ink on rice paper, words in books, and stories played out on stage and screen – our need to tell stories has never faded. This impulse to share, teach, and warn springs from something deeply human: the desire to make sense of our experiences and pass them on. Stories have always helped us navigate the shifting landscapes of life, offering meaning where there is chaos and connection where there is solitude.

Joseph Campbell, a visionary scholar of mythology, noticed a remarkable truth: across time and culture – from Ancient Greece and Norse legends to Native American, African, and Eastern traditions – the same narrative patterns appear. These stories, despite their different origins, followed what he called The Hero's Journey: a universal structure in which a hero sets out on an adventure, faces trials, emerges transformed, and returns with newfound wisdom.

Campbell's ideas were shaped by the psychological insights of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, whose work on archetypes and the unconscious helped illuminate why these myths resonate so deeply. For Campbell, mythology was not just ancient lore – it was a guidebook for the human soul, a map to help individuals move through the various stages of life.

And perhaps the most powerful carriers of these stories are our children. Within their tiny hands, they carry more than just the future; they hold the stories of an entire species. These stories are not only etched into their DNA but whispered through generations – in lullabies, bedtime tales, ancestral memories, and quiet moments of love and struggle. From the smallest living creature to the complexity of the human mind, all life moves forward with a shared instinct: to continue beyond itself. And in the young, that ancient purpose takes its most hopeful form.

Across species, the young symbolize continuity – but in humans, they also symbolize possibility. They do not arrive in the world empty; rather, they come open – full of potential, curiosity, and vulnerability. In caring for them, we’re not simply preserving life – we are shaping meaning, culture, and memory. We’re telling a story that may continue long after we’re gone.

What sets humans apart is not only our intellect but our inner world – our ability to reflect, feel, and shape meaning from our experiences. This complexity begins to unfold early in life. A child’s growth is not just physical but profoundly psychological and emotional. As they slowly move from innocence to awareness, they begin crafting their identity – often long before they have words to name it. Their minds, in constant evolution, are learning to interpret a world that is equal parts wonder and confusion. We may look at children and see simplicity, but their internal landscape is vast and ever-changing – shaped by everything they absorb, hear, and feel.

Their world is unlike ours. At birth, they enter as fragile beings – their senses just beginning to wake, their bodies wholly dependent on another for survival. Their first connections are formed not through words but through presence: the warmth of a mother’s skin, the comfort of a heartbeat, the soothing rhythm of a voice. In these early interactions, children begin forming their foundational blueprint for safety, trust, and love. This first bond – often with a parent – becomes the prototype for all future relationships.

But not every beginning is soft. In homes marked by trauma, war, instability, or neglect, this foundation can crack. A mother burdened by mental distress or environmental hardship may struggle to provide consistent emotional care. And research has shown that such early disruptions in attachment can significantly affect a child’s cognitive, emotional, and physical development.

As the child grows, their awareness expands rapidly – faster than their brain’s ability to fully process or regulate the world around them. The frontal lobe, responsible for executive functioning, emotional control, social understanding, and decision-making, does not reach full maturity until the mid-twenties.



During this period of rapid development, children are incredibly impressionable – still learning how to separate their own feelings from those of others, still building the toolkit they’ll need to navigate the challenges of life. That’s is when the role of the adult becomes critical.

Children learn primarily through observation. They watch how adults speak, how they listen, how they argue, how they love. Every small gesture – a kind word, a patient pause, a warm hug – becomes a silent lesson. Adults are the mirrors in which children learn to see themselves. When that mirror reflects compassion and stability, children learn to trust not only others but also themselves. When it reflects anger, indifference, or chaos, they may internalize fear, confusion, or self-doubt.

Yet learning does not happen in isolation. Beyond the home, schools, peers, and communities become extensions of a child’s world. A school can be a sanctuary – or a source of deep emotional pain. Positive, consistent environments help reinforce healthy behaviors, while inconsistency or toxicity can disrupt the fragile process of identity formation.



And what happens when they are exposed to pain without the language to express it?

Mental health struggles in children – anxiety, depression, OCD, trauma – often begin earlier than we care to admit. A child may not know how to say, “I feel hopeless,” or “I am afraid,” but their behavior speaks volumes: withdrawal, aggression, silence, confusion. In many cases, it’s the adults around them who must read the signs and respond with care. Sadly, some children are met with dismissal instead of support. When their suffering is minimized or ignored, they may begin to believe that their pain is invalid – or worse, that they are the problem.

This kind of emotional neglect, especially when compounded by bullying, academic pressure, or abuse, can become deeply damaging. During the vulnerable process of identity-building, rejection and criticism can carve deep scars. A child who repeatedly feels unloved or unseen may carry guilt and shame into adulthood – sometimes to tragic ends.

And yet, in all of this, there is resilience.

Children are incredibly adaptable. With the right support – even one stable relationship, one safe space – they can recover from extraordinary hardship. They can learn to rewrite their inner narrative, to believe again in safety, in love, in the possibility of healing. Research continues to show that a child’s ability to overcome adversity is deeply connected to the presence of at least one caring, consistent adult.

Every child is a hero in the making, stepping into an unknown world filled with wonder, trials, and transformation. As mythologist Joseph Campbell reminds us, every hero needs a guide – and so do children.

This is where we all come in.

Parents, teachers, neighbors, mentors – each of us has the power to shape a child’s journey. Not through grand gestures, but in quiet, consistent acts: listening, showing up, offering comfort, and helping them name what they feel. These small moments become the tools they use to face their inner dragons – fear, self-doubt, and loneliness – with courage.

“It takes a village to raise a child,” but more truly, it takes a village of compassionate guides. When we choose empathy over criticism, connection over indifference, we become the mentors who walk beside them – not shielding them from life, but helping them grow through it.

Within each child lives the seed of a future myth – a story waiting to unfold. Our role is not to write it for them, but to help them believe they can.

Let us be the ones who stand beside them and say: “You are not alone. You are ready. Go forward.”

*“Behind every young child who believes in themselves is a parent, a teacher, or a mentor who believed first.”*

– Matthew Jacobson

# CELEBRATING GROWTH

WHAT'S NEW?

“MANY MANY CONGRATULATIONS TO DR VIJAY AND KALAVEENA. THEIR HARD WORK OVER THE YEARS HAS BEEN PHENOMENAL AND THE PROMOTION IS WELL DESERVED! MY BEST WISHES TO BOTH OF THEM.”



**DR. R. PADMAVATI**  
DIRECTOR,  
SCARF



**DR. VIJAYA RAGHAVAN**  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (RESEARCH),  
DEPARTMENT OF YMH

“THE FUTURE OF MENTAL HEALTH LIES IN LISTENING DEEPLY, WORKING TOGETHER, AND LETTING LIVED EXPERIENCE LEAD US TOWARD REAL SOLUTIONS.”

## MY JOURNEY SO FAR

I began by looking at research through a narrow lens of finding something new and interesting. Over time, I was mentored by many people who have deeply contributed to the science of mental health. Listening to and learning from people with lived experience shifted my view towards addressing the problems they face from a systems perspective and ensuring that research serves them meaningfully. I have also learned that collaboration across sectors is not a privilege but an essential part of creating solutions. Finally, I understood that training and nurturing young leaders is one of the most powerful ways to strengthen mental health research.

## MY VISION

To take up big challenges in mental health services and research, work collaboratively, co-design solutions, and ensure that people with lived experience lead the way.



## MS. KALAVEENA V.S. COORDINATOR, DEPARTMENT OF YMH

“TO GROW IS TO EVOLVE — AND I AM  
GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO  
GROW WITH YMH.”

Taking up the role of Coordinator in the Youth Mental Health Department is more than just a new designation—it’s a deeply personal milestone. This role feels like a culmination of a decade-long journey filled with challenges, transformation, and purpose.

### MY JOURNEY SO FAR

After completing my masters in counseling psychology, I began my career in 2014 as a Case Manager, stepping into the mental health field with curiosity and commitment. I faced several personal and professional hurdles, and honestly, for the first two years, I was working without feeling growth or confidence. But everything changed when I started creating my own opportunities to learn, to grow, and to see my work through a wider lens. That shift brought me into diverse roles: I’ve worked as an OP/IP rehabilitation therapist, research staff, arts and theatre-based intervention therapist, and eventually stepped into the role I always aspired to—Psychologist!. Every step of this journey added a new layer to my growth, and more importantly, helped me discover my true purpose in life. When I joined the Youth Mental Health (YMH) team, I had my doubts. I believed I couldn’t connect with children or young people. But my experiences proved otherwise—working with youth not only changed my perspective, it ignited a deep passion. Today, YMH has become the space where I feel most aligned, inspired, and alive in my work.

### NEW RESPONSIBILITIES & ROLES

As Coordinator, I now carry forward this passion with a broader perspective and deeper responsibility. In addition to continuing my involvement in clinical services, training, and outreach programmes, I now oversee these functions—ensuring they are aligned with our department’s goals and values. My role includes mentoring the team, designing impactful and need-based training, strengthening institutional collaborations, and representing the department in various academic and professional platforms.

### MY VISION

My vision is to grow the Youth Mental Health Department into a dynamic, inclusive, and youth-led space—where young people feel heard, empowered, and supported. My aim is to move beyond just spreading awareness, and to build meaningful, culturally responsive mental health support systems that are relevant and sustainable. I hope to deepen our impact in the community through consistent, collaborative efforts, while continuing to create safe spaces where youth can grow, express, and thrive. Equally important to me is the growth of the team—ensuring that each member has the opportunity to shine, take initiative, and transform in their own professional journey. I aspire to strike a healthy balance between systemic expectations and team well-being, fostering a space where both people and processes evolve together.

# WELCOME TO THE TEAM

As a Research Assistant on Project STOPS, I support research, facilitation, and implementation of school-based suicide prevention initiatives. My academic background includes a Diploma in Ashtanga Yoga, a B.Sc. in Psychology, and an M.Sc. in Psychology with a focus on School Psychology.



**AJITH KUMAR B**  
RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Professionally, I've worked through the Bhumi Fellowship to foster student-driven classrooms, strengthen parent-school partnerships, and support teacher development. I've also interned at SCARF and NIEPMD, gaining hands-on experience in mental health interventions and community engagement.

I'm passionate about blending psychology with holistic practices to make mental health support more accessible and meaningful for all communities.

## Recent Research

### ARAVIND GURU A, RESEARCH ASSISTANT

- 1 DEVELOPING AND PILOT TESTING A COLLABORATIVE, LOCALLY CONTEXTUALIZED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM FOR PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS IN CHENNAI, TAMIL NADU  
[ASIAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY](#)
- 2 EXAMINING THE EMPLOYMENT RELATED FACTORS AMONG PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS: FINDINGS FROM A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY IN CHENNAI, SOUTH INDIA  
[ASIAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY](#)
- 3 EMPLOYMENT AND PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS IN INDIA: A SCOPING REVIEW  
[JOURNAL OF PSYCHOSOCIAL REHABILITATION AND MENTAL HEALTH](#)

### PAUL SOLOMON S, RESEARCH ASSISTANT

- 1 BARRIERS TO SEEKING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AMONG YOUNG PERSONS WITH MENTAL DISORDERS IN SOUTH INDIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY  
[EAST ASIAN ARCH PSYCHIATRY](#)

# WORKSHOPS & TRAININGS

## NIRAIVAGAM



The Youth Mental Health Department of SCARF conducted an introductory training on the trauma-informed framework for Niraiivagam, an organization founded by the Salesians of Don Bosco that offers psychosocial and spiritual support to individuals with mental health concerns. They are a team of 30 community workers, including Psychologists, Social workers, Occupational Therapists, and Special Educators.

The one-day workshop aimed to build capacity and enhance awareness among mental health professionals to view psychological issues through a trauma-informed lens. The session included a blend of didactic sessions, interactive activities, and case discussions.



# EQUITAS

As part of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, Equitas Small Finance Bank participated in a one-day mental health awareness training conducted by the Youth Mental Health Department.

The session aimed to equip Equitas employees with the skills to identify early signs of mental health issues and understand appropriate referral pathways. The program successfully raised awareness about the signs and symptoms of mental illness in children, adolescents, and young adults.



This year, we trained 39 peer support volunteers from KREA, enhancing their ability to provide compassionate mental health support. Through a competitive selection process, we interviewed 30 candidates and identified 15 exceptional individuals to join our peer support network.

## KREA UNIVERSITY, SRI CITY

Our clinical team dedicated over 20 hours to delivering high-quality training, ensuring volunteers were well-prepared. Additionally, we expanded our outreach by conducting mental health literacy workshops and substance use awareness sessions for KREA staff, fostering a more informed and resilient community.



RKM School, T. Nagar, approached our department seeking support for ninth-grade students who were exhibiting active self-harm behaviors. In response, we designed and implemented a targeted mental health program focused on equipping students with the skills to cope more effectively.



A total of 160 students from the 9th grade participated in this structured intervention. The program addressed three key areas:

1. Supporting students in identifying and expressing emotions,
2. Promoting help-seeking behaviors during times of distress, particularly about suicidal thoughts and self-harm, and
3. Developing practical coping strategies for managing self-harm urges.

Following the positive impact of this initiative, the school has formally requested our assistance in recruiting a full-time school counselor, along with continued supervision and training support from our department. This reflects both the effectiveness of the program and the school's commitment to building sustainable mental health support systems.



We had the opportunity to facilitate a lively two-hour, activity-based session for 85 teaching and non-teaching staff at Sindhi College of Arts and Science, Numbal. The workshop focused on Managing Stress. The session, conducted in collaboration with the college, was highly interactive and participatory, encouraging the participants to reflect on their own experiences with stress. Together, we explored various types of stressors, problem-solving approaches, time management techniques, healthy coping mechanisms, and the importance of maintaining a work-life balance for overall well-being. One of the key takeaways that emerged was that stressors are often seen as “big problems,” when in reality, with the right mindset and practical strategies, they can be managed more effectively. The session not only equipped stakeholders with actionable tools to manage stress but also created a space for self-reflection, collective learning, and resilience-building, empowering them to strike a balance between their professional and personal lives.





# Prakruti Foundation

In collaboration with Prakruti Foundation, we had the opportunity to reach nearly 1,500 school children through a meaningful mental health initiative as a part of their project. Through this opportunity, we were able to focus on positive mental health, help-seeking pathways, and healthy coping strategies, while also addressing other pressing concerns identified within schools and colleges. These interactions created a safe and open space for children to express themselves and access guidance. Teachers, too, showed great interest, sharing classroom experiences and seeking clarity on supporting their students' well-being. Even within the short window of 30-60 minutes with a mental health professional, children reported finding the sessions supportive and impactful—reinforcing the need for accessible and school-based mental health resources.



# RAJAPALAYAM RAJU'S COLLEGE.



On World Suicide Prevention Day, Aravind Guru delivered a session on exploring suicide myths and misconceptions to the students of Rajapalayam Raju's College.

The session was conducted online for the first time. The unique format included a student-friendly college professor acting as a co-facilitator, whose presence was instrumental in navigating group dynamics and ensuring the interactive and participatory nature of the discussion was maintained.

The session covered key topics such as:

- Understanding suicide and its warning signs.
- Debunking the most common myths and misconceptions.
- Actionable steps for students experiencing suicidal thoughts or knowing someone who is.

Despite initial concerns about participation, the students were highly engaging and vocal. This successful adaptation highlights the department's flexibility and proactive thinking in overcoming practical challenges to support student mental health and well-being. We sincerely thank the college management for their unwavering proactive support throughout the process.

# STELLA MARIS COLLEGE

A fruitful interaction was held with 31 second-year MSW students at Stella Maris College, who eagerly participated in a discussion about mental health and wellbeing of youth. We addressed 2 major challenges that youth face currently - substance use and behavioral addictions and navigating relationships.



This interactive discussion covered topics related to identification and differentiating substance use from disorders, identifying aspects of healthy and toxic relationships and worked on building up Motivational Interviewing skills to enhance the ability of the students to gather more information. With a healthy splattering of laughter, action, moving around and discussing movie scenes, this session was as valuable for the trainer as it was for the trainees.

# TEACHER'S CORNER

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

# TIPS & ADVICE

## MENTAL WELL-BEING ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN SIMPLE, ENGAGING, COUNSELOR-TESTED IDEAS:

### “PICK ONE THOUGHT AND LEAVE ONE THOUGHT”

IN A STICKY NOTE - IN MY CABIN THERE IS A CHART WHERE I'VE ADDED A CHART WITH GENERAL QUOTES THEY PICK AND LEAVE THEIR THOUGHTS WHATEVER THEY THINK - THIS HELPED STUDENTS TO REGULATE THEIR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS, HELPED THEM RECOGNISE AND ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR STRENGTH AND TO WORK MORE ON BUILDING IT!



### FEELINGS THERMOMETER - WALL CHART

– LET CHILDREN POINT TO HOW THEY FEEL (HOT = ANGRY, COOL = CALM).  
– TEACHES SELF-AWARENESS AND EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY.



### WORRY BOX

– STUDENTS WRITE OR DRAW WORRIES, PUT THEM IN A SEALED BOX.  
– REVIEWED TOGETHER ONCE A WEEK OR ALONE IF NEEDED.  
– GIVES EMOTIONAL RELEASE AND NORMALIZES SHARING.



### “SAFE CORNER” IN CLASS

– A COZY SPACE WITH SOFT CUSHIONS, CALMING VISUALS, AND EMOTION CARDS.  
– HELPS STUDENTS SELF-REGULATE WHEN OVERSTIMULATED.



### “DRAW YOUR DAY”

– I'LL LET KIDS DRAW WHAT MADE THEM HAPPY/SAD TODAY.  
– ESPECIALLY HELPFUL FOR NON-VERBAL OR RESISTANT CHILDREN.



## UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR: THE ABC MODEL

I BELIEVE THAT UNDERSTANDING THE "WHY" BEHIND BEHAVIOR IS CRUCIAL. THAT'S WHY I OFTEN EDUCATE THE STAFF USING THE ABC MODEL: ANTECEDENT-BEHAVIOR-CONSEQUENCE. THIS SIMPLE FRAMEWORK ENCOURAGES US TO PAUSE AND REFLECT BEFORE REACTING:

- A** **ANTECEDENT: WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE THE BEHAVIOR?**  
(E.G., A CHILD WAS TOLD "NO," A DEADLINE WAS MISSED, A ROOM FELT TOO NOISY).
- B** **BEHAVIOR: WHAT WAS THE SPECIFIC ACTION OR REACTION?**  
(E.G., A CHILD YELLED, AN ADULT WITHDREW, SOMEONE SLAMMED A DOOR).
- C** **CONSEQUENCE: WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE BEHAVIOR?**  
(E.G., THE CHILD GOT ATTENTION, THE ADULT AVOIDED A CONVERSATION, THE DOOR BROKE).

BY UNDERSTANDING THE ABCS, WE CAN IDENTIFY TRIGGERS AND PATTERNS, HELPING US TO RESPOND MORE EFFECTIVELY AND THOUGHTFULLY, RATHER THAN JUST REACTING TO THE BEHAVIOR ITSELF. THIS SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE IS POWERFUL FOR BOTH PERSONAL GROWTH AND GUIDING OTHERS.



## "3 CS RULE FOR TEACHERS": BEYOND PUNISHMENT

FOR TEACHERS NAVIGATING CLASSROOMS, MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS, ESPECIALLY IN CHILDREN WITH ANXIETY, OPPOSITIONAL BEHAVIOR, OR INSECURE ATTACHMENT, CAN BE PARTICULARLY DEMANDING. I CONSTANTLY REMIND TEACHERS OF THE "3 CS RULE," WHICH IS OFTEN MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY PUNISHMENT:

- C** **CALM TONE:** WHEN GIVING INSTRUCTIONS OR ADDRESSING MISBEHAVIOR, MAINTAIN A CALM TONE OF VOICE. A RAISED VOICE CAN ESCALATE ANXIETY AND DEFENSIVENESS.
- C** **CLEAR INSTRUCTION:** PROVIDE CLEAR, CONCISE INSTRUCTIONS. AMBIGUITY OFTEN LEADS TO FRUSTRATION AND NON-COMPLIANCE, ESPECIALLY FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE ALREADY STRUGGLING.
- C** **CONSISTENT PRESENCE:** MAINTAIN A CONSISTENT PRESENCE. THIS MEANS NOT JUST BEING PHYSICALLY THERE, BUT CONSISTENTLY ENFORCING BOUNDARIES, OFFERING SUPPORT, AND SHOWING UP EMOTIONALLY FOR THE CHILD. CONSISTENCY BUILDS TRUST AND A SENSE OF SECURITY.

THESE "3 CS" FOSTER A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT WHERE CHILDREN FEEL SAFE, UNDERSTOOD, AND MORE CAPABLE OF MANAGING THEIR EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIORS. THEY ARE FUNDAMENTAL TOOLS IN BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND PROMOTING MENTAL WELL-BEING IN THE CLASSROOM.

# SAFE SPACE

MS.VIJAYALAKSHMI



The Youth Mental Health (YMH) Department at SCARF created the Safe Space with one vision in mind: to provide young people, between the ages of 16 and 25, a place where they could simply be themselves. This space was designed for all youth whether or not they were directly connected to SCARF because we believe mental wellbeing should never be limited by boundaries or affiliations.

As mental health professionals, our work with schools and colleges often brought us face to face with the hidden struggles of young people. We heard stories of pain, isolation, and silent cries for help, many of which went unnoticed by families and caregivers. These experiences made us realize the urgent need for a space where youth could feel safe, supported, and truly heard.





The Safe Space was born out of this need. It is not just a physical room, but an environment built on trust, respect, and reliability. To protect the value of this space, we follow a few simple rules ensuring it remains a nurturing, non-judgmental place for all who enter.

Here, young people are encouraged to talk, reconnect, express themselves, and revitalize their minds. The goal is not only to provide emotional support but also to foster a sense of belonging.

Every Saturday, the space is open for youth-led programs & activities designed by and for young people to enhance their wellbeing. Alongside these programs, mental health professionals are available to guide and address individual concerns, making the space both empowering and therapeutic.

The Safe Space at SCARF stands as a response to the unseen struggles of young minds, and as a promise that no young person should feel alone in their journey toward wellbeing. Between April and June 2025, the revival of rYMs Safe Space blossomed into a vibrant journey of connection, creativity, and healing for young minds. From cheering together at an IPL match screening and moving freely in expressive dance sessions to prepping for the Pride Parade, participants discovered the joy of community and self-expression. They found grounding in nature by making over 1,900 seed balls, explored emotional depth through films like *Inside Out 2*, and shared their voices in music, art, and heartfelt conversations.

Saturdays became a canvas for youth-led exploration whether through playful treasure hunts, reflective book discussions, co-creating policies for the future, or celebrating Pride with T-shirt painting and banner making. Each activity, be it laughter-filled stand-up comedy, the quiet focus of mandala art, or the powerful dialogue on identity and acceptance, carried the essence of safety, belonging, and emotional release.

What made these moments truly special was the energy and courage of the young people themselves supported by facilitators who created space for them to lead, share, and grow. This phase not only revived the Safe Space but transformed it into a living, breathing testament of what youth-centered mental health support can be: a place where identities are celebrated, connections are nurtured, and young people walk their journeys with strength, creativity, and hope.

# DR. SHIVA'S ASK ME ANYTHING

## ***Can mania be misdiagnosed as psychosis?***

Mania a mood disorder characterized by elated (happy) or irritable mood that would be excessive than the situation would warrant. This condition is often accompanied by other associated features of changes in energy level, sleep, self care, appetite, behaviors, and thoughts. Psychosis is a symptom cluster characterized by changes in the thinking patterns, and content, sensory experiences and behaviors that are unexplainable by observers. Sometimes persons who have manic symptoms may also have psychotic symptoms and persons with psychosis many appear to have behaviors that might appear like they are experiencing mania. It is possible to misdiagnose one for the other. Serial examination, and follow up and a detailed history are needed to make a confident diagnosis of one or the other.

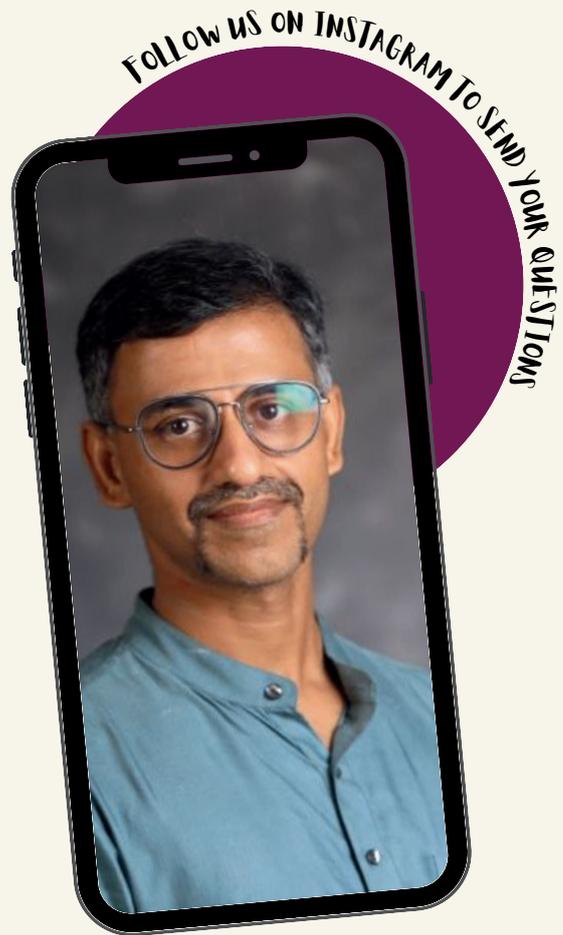
It is helpful to seek treatment from a trained mental health professional rather than just crosschecking symptoms against a list of symptoms from online sources.

## ***How do you define normal? (I am just curious how you see it if you think there's a normal)***

"Normal" is an extremely difficult concept to comprehend and mental health professionals spend a long time trying to understand it. In order to consider a person's actions or responses to be normal or abnormal, mental health professionals have to look at it from the context of the individuals life experiences, biological predisposition, Developmental status, prevailing social and physical environment, patterns of thinking and the interpersonal engagement at the moment. So, its not possible to sit in judgement without understanding the individual in detail.

## ***What is Youth Mental Health? And what is the difference between teen and Youth Mental Health?***

Youth mental health is just a method to acknowledge that this period of transitioning from childhood to adulthood is changing. There used to be a time where young people were expected to become independent or start providing for their families very early in life. Now, it recognized that brain and social development continues well beyond the teenage and thus, a separate field of youth mental health is necessary to provide specialized care.



## ***A lot of times harm to mental health is systemic and in such situations how is it fair to ask youth to change or adapt to the situation? How can we work in such situations? Given systematic changes are hard to achieve.***

Mental health is impacted by our environment, physical and social. This is why people face greater challenges when faced with things beyond their control, such as the social situation they are in or the climate. This does not mean that adaptation is not possible.

As said by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971): "Grant me the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference"



## EVERYTHING FELT LIKE A PUZZLE

DR. SHREEPRIYA,  
MRC. PSYCH, TRAINEE

"When I first started my Youth Mental Health placement, I expected structure – assessment, diagnosis, treatment. But honestly? Nothing prepared me for the emotional messiness of it all.

A child's distress might show up as stomach aches and school refusal. An adolescent's as angry outbursts or painful silences. A young adult's as an existential spiral wrapped in sarcasm and memes. I'd come home some days feeling like my brain had run a marathon and my heart had been wrung out. Nothing was ever straightforward and that's exactly what made it feel so real, so human. Every young person felt like their own universe. What looked like defiance was often fear. What seemed like laziness was sometimes trauma.

I second-guessed myself constantly.

But then I saw how the team held space, how they asked the right questions, how a small shift in tone could unlock something meaningful.

Slowly, I realised that being a trainee wasn't about having the answers. It was about paying attention, and having the patience to sit with the unknown. I started to trust the process and the people in it a little more each day.

It often felt like solving puzzles where the picture only made sense when you viewed it from all sides. And even then, it kept shifting. But even in all the uncertainty, there were tiny sparks of joy like the moment a quiet teen finally softens his frown, or a child who hadn't made eye contact for weeks suddenly reached out to share their drawing. As I move on to Dementia Care, I carry this experience like a compass. Youth Mental Health was messy, beautiful, and filled with moments of meaning. It reminded me why I chose this path – and why I'll keep choosing it."

# STORIES



## FINDING HER VOICE: A QUIET ACT OF COURAGE

PAUL SOLOMON,  
SOCIAL WORKER

Sometimes, the most powerful breakthroughs happen in unexpected ways. I recall a Forum Theater session where a young girl sat quietly, observing. The play's scenes, particularly one portraying criticism, resonated deeply with her.

She later revealed she constantly felt "not sufficient," hearing it from school, friends, and even at home. The weight of feeling like a "punishment" was immense. As the play ended, despite her initial hesitation, her friends encouraged her.

She bravely asked to go back and replace a scene – an unusual request we granted due to her sincerity. Though scared, she pushed herself forward.

Then, with quiet determination, she spoke a few simple words:

"I will study well from now on. Don't scold me again and again."

At that moment, she stood up for herself.

Afterward, tears welled up as she explained, "When I saw that scene, I felt like I was seeing myself. I was happy others tackled it, but I wanted to do it myself. I had never spoken up like that before, and I was scared. But I spoke for myself."

It was a profoundly special moment.

She later shared, "It was a first step for me. I will try it at home."

# BEYOND CRISIS: BUILDING SAFER SPACES FOR CHILDREN

Child sexual abuse remains one of the most urgent and sensitive challenges in the field of child protection and mental health. Effective responses require both immediate crisis interventions and sustained long-term support to help survivors heal and reclaim their lives.

I recently had the privilege of facilitating an online workshop on “Interventions in Child Sexual Abuse: Immediate and Crisis Intervention and Long-Term Mental Health Interventions.” The workshop was organized on the theme: “Essential Interventions and Skills for Working with Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse for Functionaries of District Child Protection Units (DCPUs)” by the Savitribai Phule National Institute of Women and Child Development, Regional Centre, Guwahati.

The program brought together child protection functionaries from diverse regions, creating a platform to discuss practical strategies, trauma-informed approaches, and the skills necessary to respond with sensitivity and care.

During the sessions, we explored:

1. Crisis Interventions: How to ensure immediate safety, stabilize survivors in moments of distress, and respond with empathy and clarity.
2. Long-Term Interventions: Building pathways for sustained mental health care through counseling, therapy, and supportive networks that promote resilience and recovery.

What stood out throughout the workshop was the commitment of the participants. Their questions, reflections, and shared experiences highlighted the urgent need for equipping frontline workers with essential tools to handle such sensitive cases. The discussions reinforced that while the challenges are immense, the collective determination to create safer spaces for children is equally powerful.

On a personal note, this experience was both humbling and inspiring. It reminded me that every conversation, every skill shared, and every effort to strengthen professional capacity contributes meaningfully to safeguarding children and supporting survivors in their journey of healing.

I am immensely grateful to the Department of Youth Mental Health and the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (I) for their continuous support in my growth. A heartfelt thank you to Ms. Pranami Tamuly, course director, National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) for entrusting me with this valuable opportunity.

Together, through collaboration and capacity building, we can move closer to a world where children are safe, heard, and nurtured.

VAISHNAVI R,  
RESEARCH ASSISTANT- LIFESKILLS  
DEPT OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH (YMH)  
SCHIZOPHRENIA RESEARCH FOUNDATION (I)

# TESTIMONIALS

## Onwards and Upwards

### 16 YEAR OLD,

YMH CLINIC

“My therapy journey has been going well. I am now able to manage my emotions with ease. I now feel more confident than before. In the beginning it was tough to cope up with my emotions but all thanks to the counselling. I feel fresh when i come to scarf hospital.”

### 21 YEAR OLD

YMH CLINIC

Therapy helped me very much in recovering and making me a better person. It helped me in analyzing the situation and then taking an action ...

Special mentioning to my therapist who was my psychologist. Her exceptional guidance throughout the journey made things more easier and comfortable . She is very approachable and listens to everything with a lot of patience.



### 22 YEAR OLD,

YMH CLINIC

The YMH programme at SCARF has been a safe space for me to share my thoughts, feelings and issues. It has helped me acknowledge and understand my problems. With their help, I have been able to come up with practical solutions for my problems, which has made me feel a lot more confident about myself. I would definitely recommend their services to other young people seeking support.

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*“Don’t go through life, Grow through life” - Eric Butterworth*



ANIKA SALOMI

**22 YEAR OLD,**  
YMH CLINIC

The Youth Mental Health Services at SCARF have been quietly transformative. They truly deserve appreciation for the thoughtful work they're doing (and maybe a lifetime supply of coffee too).

Honestly, in the middle of packed schedules, long to-do lists, and the occasional feelings of “?!!”, the flexibility they offer, both online and offline, has made it so much easier to access support when it's much needed.

My only regret is not having discovered them earlier. It would have spared me many moments of overthinking and staring into the void.

A heartfelt thank you to the team for reaching out to the places and people that need it most. The impact of your work is real and deeply valuable.

Thanks again.

**19 YEAR OLD,**  
YMH CLINIC

"I still remember my first day in SCARF. I was in a place where I had no will to live, no hope for tomorrow. But through the process, I found light in the darkest corners of myself. Today, as I look back after completing my sessions, I no longer think of how to end my life, I think of how to make it more beautiful. Therapy didn't just help me survive; it helped me rediscover the joy of living."

**19 YEAR OLD,**  
YMH CLINIC

I am someone who has taken services from SCARF Chennai and have truly benefitted from their support. Under the care of the psychiatrist and with the guidance of my therapist, I was able to work through my challenges and make real progress in my mental health journey. Their guidance made me feel understood and never judged. Thanks to them, I am now in a much better place mentally and emotionally, and I have learned the importance of seeking help without hesitation. Their patience, encouragement, and understanding gave me the strength to move forward with more confidence.

I believe SCARF is playing a crucial role in spreading awareness, reducing stigma, and offering real support to people who need it.

I am deeply grateful to SCARF for creating such a caring and positive space for young people like me.

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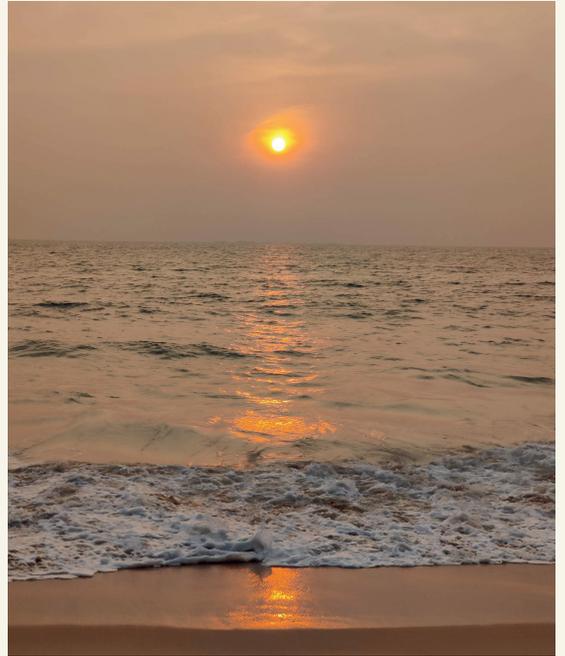
*“Every Voice carries gentle strength.”*

## 21 YEAR OLD, YMH CLINIC

Hello everyone. Good day to all. I definitely have to provide feedback on the YMH team of SCARF. I was going through the worst and most horrible phase of my life. I lost a very, very close person in my life. During that time, I was not able to do anything. I did not want to live my life. It felt cruel to live, but I did not want my parents to suffer the same pain again. So I did not want to live, but I was unable to die or hurt myself. I did not know what to do; I was stuck. At that time, I wanted someone to guide me and stop me from taking the worst decisions. So I opened up and reached out to my mother's counsellor.

She introduced me to the YMH team. I spoke to the psychiatrist. I am not someone who can freely express my feelings. I personally struggle a lot to express myself. But as a professional, the psychiatrist gave me the space, and I opened up to him. After some sessions, I was able to express myself, and the medicines helped me come out of that worst stage.

Then after some sessions, they started therapy for me. In the beginning, I was struggling to express and communicate what I think and what I feel. I felt like my therapist might not be able to handle me. But now, I can say that she is one of the best therapists ever. For me, the therapy session is the only place where I can express myself freely.



Now I see her and communicate with her like a mature friend who can help you recover from the worst situation. Currently, I am not fully recovered or have fully come out of the trauma, but compared to my past worst phase, I have recovered a little bit and am doing better.

Thank you, YMH team of SCARF, especially my psychiatrist and my therapist, for guiding me and trying your best to help me recover from the pain. If someone feels like me or is in a difficult situation like me, I will surely suggest you reach out to the Youth Department of SCARF. They will surely help. You will get through it and get better.

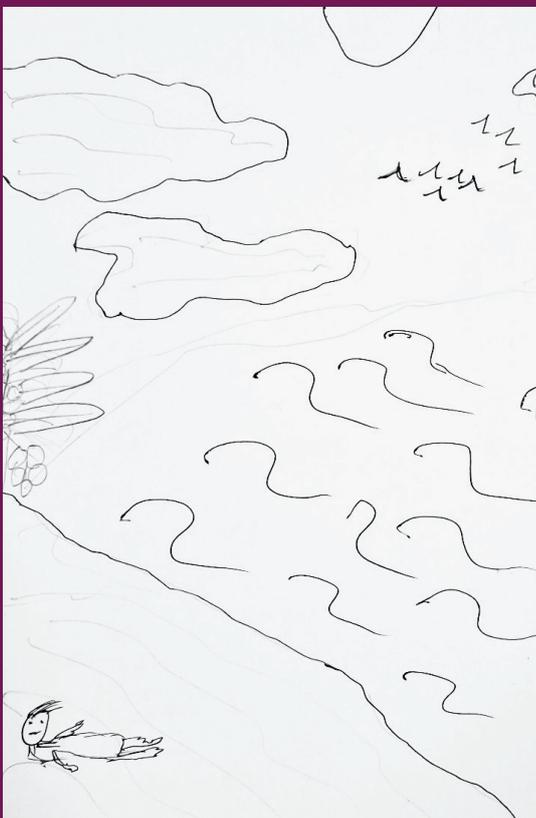
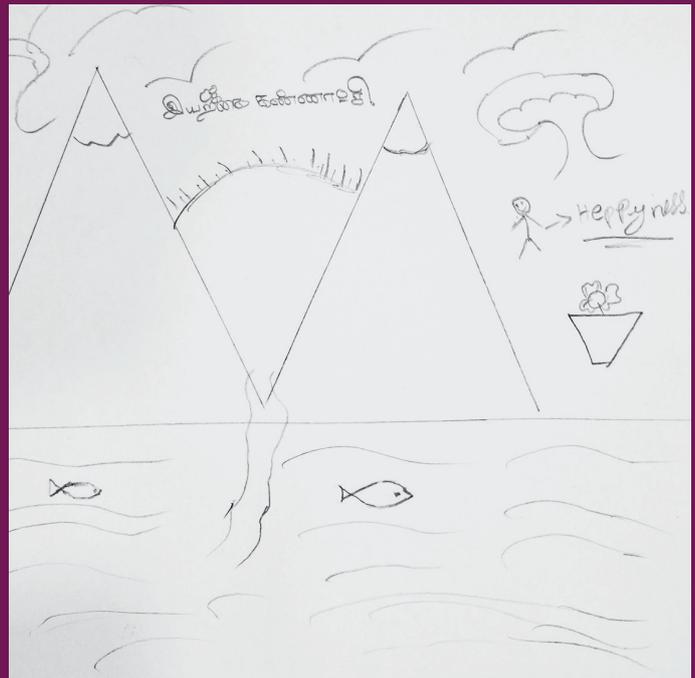
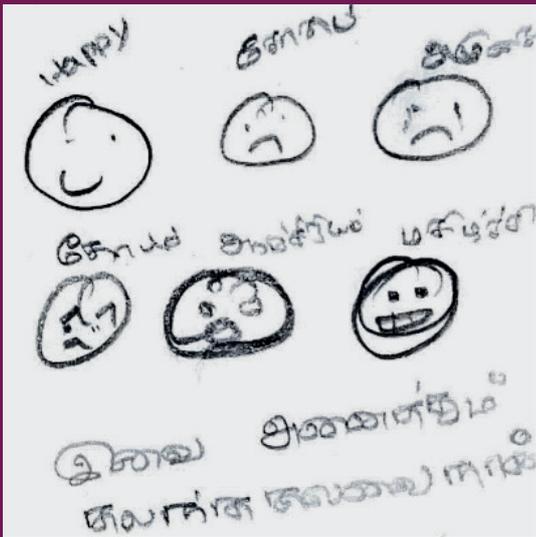
Don't ever hesitate to reach out if you want to find the way. Once again, thank you very much, YMH team of SCARF.

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*“Be not afraid of growing slowly; be afraid only of standing still.”*

# Art work

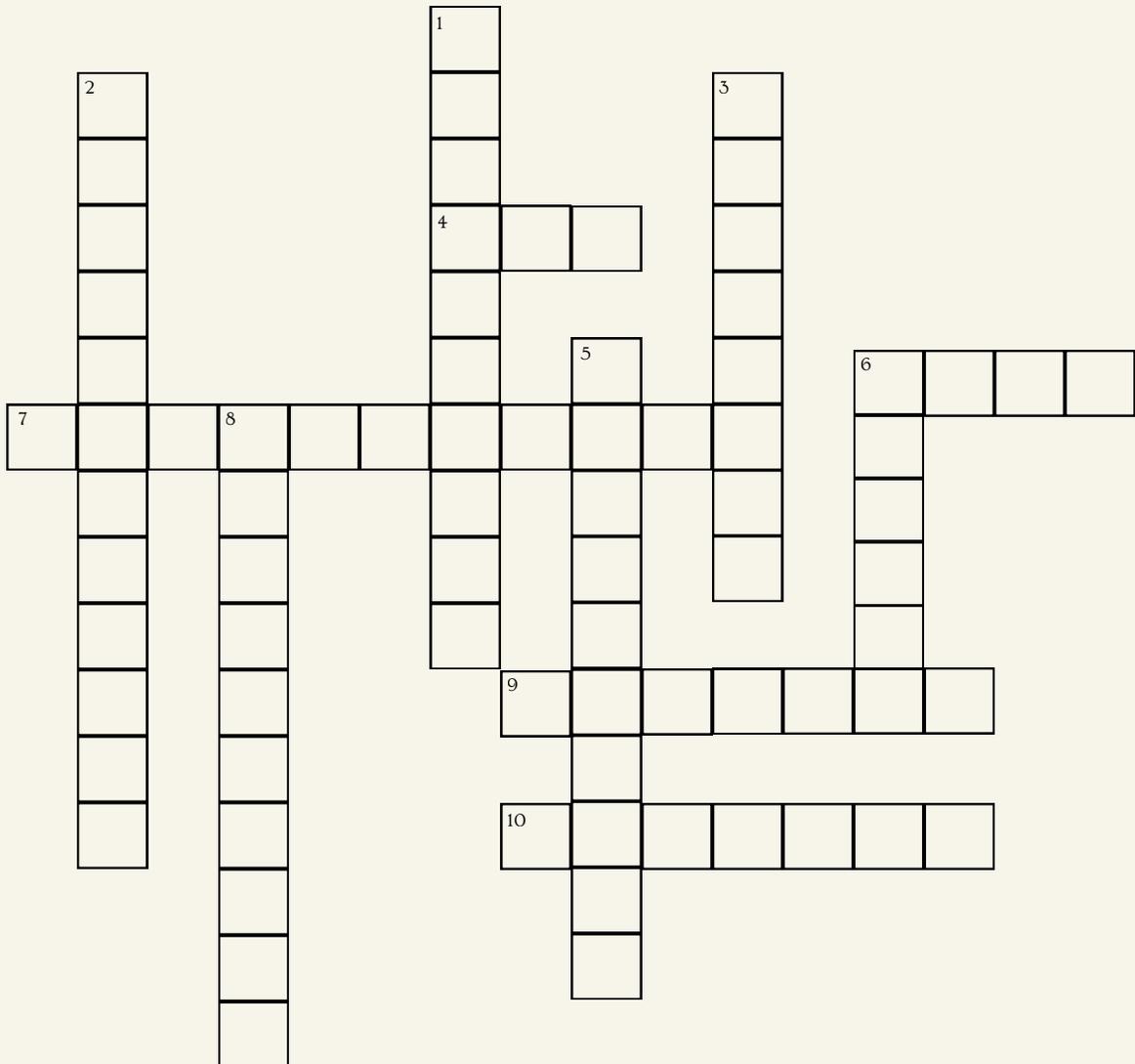
Children we work with in our research projects and interventions were asked to depict their understanding of Mental Health through Art.



# PUZZLE CORNER

ANSWER KEY WILL BE POSTED ON OUR INSTAGRAM PAGE!

(WHICH YOU SHOULD REALLY FOLLOW BECAUSE WE'RE FUN)



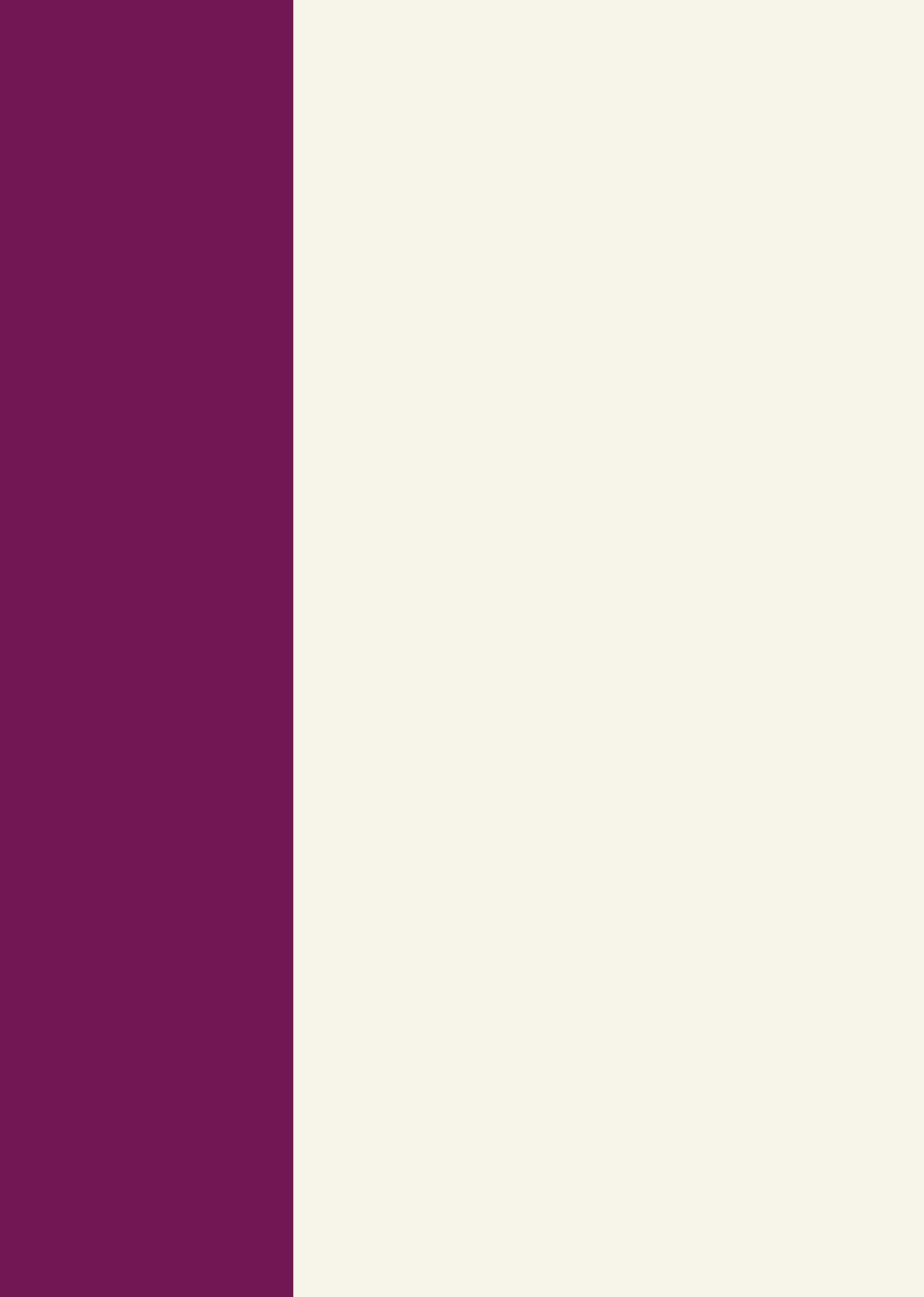
## DOWN

- 1 - THE SCIENCE OF MIND AND BEHAVIOUR
- 2 - A PROFESSIONAL WHO CAN PRESCRIBE PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATION
- 3 - A HORMONE RELATED TO STRESS RESPONSE
- 5 - THE ABILITY TO RECOVER FROM DIFFICULTIES OR STRESS
- 6 - EXCESSIVE, IRRATIONAL FEAR OF SOMETHING SPECIFIC
- 8 - FEELING DISCONNECTED FROM REALITY

## ACROSS

- 4 - A THERAPY THAT FOCUSES ON NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIOUR
- 6 - A TRAUMATIC EVENT MAY LEAD TO THIS DISORDER
- 7 - A COPING STRATEGY INVOLVING SLOW, DEEP BREATHING AND AWARENESS OF THE BODY
- 9 - A MOOD DISORDER MARKED BY EXTREME HIGHS AND LOWS
- 10 - A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION INVOLVING PERSISTENT WORRYING







Being **Y**th.  
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