

COOJ MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION - TOUCHING PEOPLE'S MIND

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ABSTRACT

This case is about how the dying wish of her child propels the founder to start COOJ, a trust that has touched the minds of people in our society in a very different way. The case talks about the process of setting this trust and the work it carries out. The case throws open a question whether, “the current approach towards revenue generation or fund raising is really the right one adopted by COOJ or it requires more organized efforts to sustain and grow its operations and if not what would this right approach be?”

KEYWORDS: Motivation, Social Empowerment, Social Transformation

"We believe that mental health is just as important as physical health maybe even more so."

- Donna Shalala, former Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services

October 25, 2012 like any other typical weekday afternoon as *Dr. Peter Castelino*, a practicing Psychiatrist and Managing Trustee of COOJ was just finishing off the appointment with his last patient for the afternoon and getting ready to leave for lunch, 2 students from GIM knock on his cabin door. At first he seems surprised as his receptionist had not informed him of any more appointments, but when they mentioned, they were here to get some information on COOJ for their college project, the charismatic smile returns back to his face and the tired eyes sparkle with energy as he speaks to them.

INTRODUCTION

COOJ Mental Health Foundation

COOJ is a registered charitable trust, formed with an aim to work for the promotion of mental health and providing for psycho-social rehabilitation services in Goa. It serves its clients through its rehabilitation centers located at Mapuca, Chicalim and Saligao. COOJ works to promote mental well-being and recovery by creating an environment that provides high quality services using therapeutic and evidence based practices, information sharing, education, advocacy and a mission to serve irrespective of class, religion, or cultural differences.

Since COOJ's inception in the year 2000, it has been tirelessly reaching out to people who have been affected with mental illness or disability. Overcoming the hurdles of stigma, myth and discrimination through education and awareness and with the aim of promoting sustainable social and human development, COOJ works towards preserving individual respect and dignity by creating opportunities for growth, regardless of the level of ability.

Dr. Peter Castelino, the Managing Trustee of COOJ, is a psychiatrist with special interest in psychosocial rehabilitation. It is his constant belief that every person regardless of the level of ability can live to their optimum potential if the right opportunities and environments are provided and that is what drives him to work for this cause with an added zeal.

Genesis: The Founder's Motivations and Impact

COOJ or Cause of Our Joy as it was earlier called for the first 10 years of its existence is derived from an epithet of Mother Mary in the litany to the Mother Mary, Mother of Jesus. Mrs. Theresa Trinidad is the Founder Trustee and has been the driving force behind the setting up COOJ. In order to fulfill the dying wish of her only child, Patricia, she invested all her energies and resources into keeping her memory alive. Having worked with the Reserve Bank of India for about 30 years, all her financial skills came as an asset. Being a lay person she entrusted the work of running the trust to Dr.Castelino, and is now not directly involved in its day to day activities, but ensures her continuous support to the cause.

Mission and Vision

To promote mental well-being and recovery by creating an environment that provides high quality services using therapeutic and evidence based practices, information sharing, education, advocacy and a unified effort to all persons irrespective of class, religion, or cultural differences thus creating pathways for mainstreaming.

COOJ envisions a just, humane, healthy and more tolerant society wherein every individual regardless of their level of ability is given the opportunity to achieve his/her full potential thus enhancing individual respect and dignity through better quality of life.

COOJ: Healthy Minds for a Healthy Society

COOJ has revolutionized mental health care in Goa by starting day care centres, wherein the clients spend the day at the centres, indulged in productive activities directed towards improving their self-confidence and integrating them into the mainstream. The stigma associated with mental disorders makes the lives of those affected and their families a constant suffering. The impression created by the asylums and the lone psychiatric hospital in Goa, discourages most people to admit their loved in these centres for fear of them being maltreated. The result is that, most of those suffering from mental disorders fail to get the required psychiatric attention, being cared to mostly by un-trained lay people at home.

There is evidence to demonstrate the clinical effectiveness of acute day hospital care and the supported employment approach to vocational rehabilitation in those with severe mental disorders. When compared to inpatient care, patients in acute day hospitals spent less time in subsequent inpatient care and achieved more rapid improvement in mental state.¹

COOJ also runs vocational units in these day care centres, wherein the clients are engaged in making paper bags, greeting cards, handmade folders, photo frames etc. All the revenue generated from this is returned back to the client. Even though the money generated is very less, this helps build self-confidence in them. Though this initiative does not directly get in revenue for COOJ, the products help in creating awareness about COOJ and its work. These initiatives have helped in creating awareness about positive mental health and illness. Through the rehabilitation programs, its clients have seen more productive days by being exposed to a positive and healthy learning atmosphere. Many have gone ahead into supported or open employment. Affected families have been empowered to deal with the numerous complex issues which are a part of these illnesses. Through programs such as the Continued Education Program, student drop-outs have been assisted into completion of their education.

Initiatives and Programs

COOJ aims to provide psychosocial rehabilitation services and promote positive mental health. The objective of forming COOJ was to bridge the gap between the existing services in mental health and the need for better quality services. It aims to provide sustainable facilities for treatment of psychiatric illnesses through clinics and counselling centres, in

areas where they are not available. It also works to provide rehabilitation facilities for people with chronic mental illness by way of Day Care Centres, Sheltered Workshops, support groups, short and long stay homes, etc.

COOJ also works towards educating people about the importance of Mental Health and to change the attitude of the society and eliminate the stigma associated with mental disorders, so that people suffering from mental disorders are not discouraged from seeking help out of fear of society. With the aim of promoting mental health in Goa, COOJ has been committed to spreading awareness about the various issues relating to it. Their main focus is to encourage a healthy positive living which is without doubt the need of the hour in this fast paced, rapidly modernizing society. The culture is so much ingrained with its own unscientific, superstitious and/or sometimes spiritual theories about mental health and illness that a significant part of the work is directed towards dispelling these myths. COOJ constantly conducts educative programs on mental health hoping that this empowerment with knowledge will aid in prevention and early detection of problems.

Many of the programs have specifically targeted the youth in schools and colleges realizing that they are faced with many stressors. Understanding themselves, coping with stress, identification of psychological problems, peer pressure, alcohol and substance abuse, depression and suicide, internet addiction, etc have been some of the issues dealt with.

Taking note of the rising suicide rates in Goa, COOJ has launched a drive for suicide prevention. As part of the drive it has observed a suicide prevention week during which a number of seminars were organized to create awareness among the youth. It also launched a radio campaign, with Dr.Castelino giving an interview during which he answered queries from callers related suicide prevention, COOJ and its work.

"If you look at the overall statistics of across India, the states with higher literacy rates (like Pondichery, Goa, Kerala) have higher suicide rates. There are no formalized studies, however theories suggest that higher literacy, would eventually lead to higher expectation (job expectations, carrier expectations); family, society expect more and sometimes these expectations are not met." Dr.Peter Castelino in reply to a question on what pushes people to commit suicide. COOJ has recently launched a Suicide awareness campaign in Goa.

The agenda for the general public anti-stigma programs have been mainly focused on bringing about understanding on the scientific aspect of mental health and illness. The focus is not to stop people from practicing their own methods of cure but to integrate them with more scientific methods. In order to achieve this in the whole community COOJ has targeted both rural as well as urban populations by organizing public talks, street plays, street stalls, screening of movies, distribution of literature in English and the vernacular languages of Konkani and Marathi, poster presentations, etc.

Programs Run by COOJ

Keeping in mind its aim, COOJ offers a variety of services both individual and group, to assist people who are undergoing psychological distress to obtain professional guidance irrespective of the nature or intensity of the problem.

Sahodaya - Psychosocial Rehabilitation Program

This non-residential program offers various evidence based therapies for individualized treatment to assist people with mental illnesses or disabilities, to develop and maintain sustainable and meaningful lifestyles. The different, carefully-planned sessions are tailor-made to suit individual needs. This creates opportunities for the development of independent living skills and assistance to manage the illness in a way that would reduce the need for hospital admissions. Being exposed to the program at Sahodaya daily over a period of time results in enhancement of personal growth and self-

understanding, allowing clients to pick up their lives again and get back to work or school thus restoring self-respect and dignity.

COOJ Sheltered Workshop

COOJ Sheltered Workshop is an offshoot of Sahodaya, wherein clients who are sufficiently stabilized and have developed basic skills to be employed, but are not ready to go into open employment, as it may be too overwhelming are given opportunities to earn basic salaries in a protected environment with minimal supervision. Presently the staff of the workshop is involved in making articles like bags, files, CD covers, cards and envelopes among others, out of handmade paper which are actively marketed.

Carers' Hope

A support group for caregivers of persons with mental illness; there are presently two groups functioning, one in Mapuca and the other in Vasco. These support groups meet once a month and have proved extremely beneficial as they provide a non-threatening environment where one can express one's innermost feelings, fears and guilt. They provide a place where doubts about the illness can be clarified and an opportunity to learn from one another. By building friendships, they help to create a support system in case of a crisis. These groups have gone a long way in aiding to break stigmatised isolation which many caregivers go through by encouraging socialisation. Not being passive about many decisions taken by the Government, they have lobbied as a pressure group.

Friends' Club

A support club for persons experiencing some form of a mental illness. The people who undergo a psychological illness usually tend to go through a period of social isolation either due to the symptoms per se or as a result of stigma. Their work performance and abilities may also be affected to the extent of them feeling alienated. People who were once friends have probably moved on with their lives. The purpose of setting up this club has been to create opportunities for building friendships, support and talents. Membership is open to any person who has experienced a psychological illness.

Continued Education Program (CEP)

With the signs and symptoms of mental illness affecting people at any age, very often young people who are at the prime of their education become the targets. They are unable to cope, which influence their academic performances negatively. Many of these students (some of whom may be good intellectually) find their grades declining or even failing classes. It becomes a nightmare for some, especially once brilliant students when they reach a point where they have to discontinue their education, thus shattering their dreams and aspirations.

Through the CEP, which uses a systematized approach to deal with the various issues (cognitive, behavioural, emotional etc.) preventing these students from optimizing their learning potential, COOJ has helped them to get back into the process of continuing their education. Many students have to accept the reality that their ability levels may have changed and hence realize that they have to settle for a course which may be less challenging than the one which they initially desired. The key is to maximize on their current abilities and help them to experience success.

Community Services

As part of its community services, COOJ operates a monthly mental health clinic at Vasco. This became operational after holding several awareness programs and a mental illness detection camp partnered with Lions Club of Vasco. Periodically COOJ has also organized several Mental Illness Detection Camps in various rural areas of North Goa

like Tormas, Chandel, Keri, etc. Understanding the growing need for counselling and psychological testing, COOJ started offering this service to the public from 2007.

Financing: “Give us this day, our daily bread..”

Seed Capital

The seed capital for starting the trust came from the donation made by the founder in the form of a corpus, the interest of which is used to pay for the day to day activities of running the trust. Donations made by well-wishers supplement this and help in bridging the gap. Any surplus is ploughed back into the corpus.

Resource-Generation

COOJ is a charitable organization, with nearly 80% of the funding coming from charity and the remaining 20% from the fees charged from the clients. It has only recently received the first instalment of aid from the Government for the first time since it was started 12 years ago.

“Human resources build up financial resources” remarks Dr.Castelino on how the operations are funded.

Donations come mostly from well-wishers and friends. The revenue Model adopted by COOJ ensures that no client is denied any service for inability to pay. Each client pays as per his capability to pay. Mental health care being a specialized field and requiring specialized skill, COOJ employs mostly trained professionals. This means that, the staff has to be paid a regular salary at the end of the month. The volunteers mostly contribute towards non-core activities like event promotion, fund raising and other support functions.

COOJ organizes an annual Marathon run for the cause of raising money for charity in conjunction with Green Goa. The theme for the marathon in 2011 was “walk for a healthier world with a healthier mind to fight depression”. The promotion for the event was done by the students of MES College through a series of street plays organized to spread awareness for the cause of mental health. The marathon has not only been a good source of the much needed funds but has also served to spread the word about COOJ and its cause.

Events like the Marathon and the suicide prevention week not only serve the function of creating awareness for the cause, but also make people aware of the work COOJ is doing in the field of mental health upliftment in Goa. This publicity is important for COOJ because unless people know about COOJ, they will not donate and without the aid from the donors, COOJ will not be able to do all the work it is doing. Besides events like these, Jumble sales and the appeals that go out during Christmas, COOJ has no formal or planned promotion strategy. Neither does it have a formal or planned fund raising mechanism in place.

“We don’t have any idea for resource generation. It just comes;” remarks Dr.Castelino. “I believe in blessings. I am not worried, even on the 30th (of the month) when I don’t have money; I know somehow that by 31st, the money will come. I just know that. 12 years it has happened, somehow one friend or someone will come and say that he has written a cheque for us.... There is not a single month that I have not paid salaries.”

Dr. Castelino recounts that his personal experience with corporates has not been very good. This he says is mainly due to the fact that they do not have the right contacts and hence cannot approach through the right channel. “Building contacts is very important and sometimes we are so busy with our work that we do not have the time for this”; says Dr.Castelino and then adds, “We don’t have enough funds to employ people (for resource generation). Volunteers come and go, just like the wind...”

Even though they have been applying for government aid for the last many years, it is only for the first time that they have received aid from the government and that too the first instalment has come only in the 3rd week of October. Thus relying on government aid is also not a viable option as first of all it is not a certain source and also if granted the disbursement is not time bound.

Path Way to the Future

Hoping to stop shifting their base periodically and have a sense of permanency, COOJ management has decided to move into a place of its own. Fully aware that this will require finances way beyond their means COOJ is relying completely on the generosity of the community.

To initiate work, they have decided to go in for a loan against their deposits. Presently, they are pretty low on funds, as they have had major expenses in the last year and do not want to eat into the corpus, the interest of which partially sustains COOJ's work. They are also aware that they have to continue paying the rent of the present premise which in itself is a huge drain.

Dr. Castelino admits that even though till now fate has helped them, but for this big project something has to be done to raise the funds. "I have no strategy, but I have to do something once the proposal is ready." Thus the challenge now facing COOJ is how to motivate people to donate to this cause and how can the need for donating be created in them, which would drive them to donate?

REFERENCES

1. Marshall M (2005) How effective are different types of day care services for people with severe mental disorders? Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe (Health Evidence Network report; <http://www.euro.who.int/Document/E87317.pdf>, accessed 26 July 2005).
2. Interview and interaction with the Dr. Peter Castelino, Managing trustee of COOJ Mental Health Foundation and its website.

"The true treasure of a man is not in what he has accomplished or acquired, but rather the fragrance of his life that he leaves upon the hands of others when he is no longer in their presence"

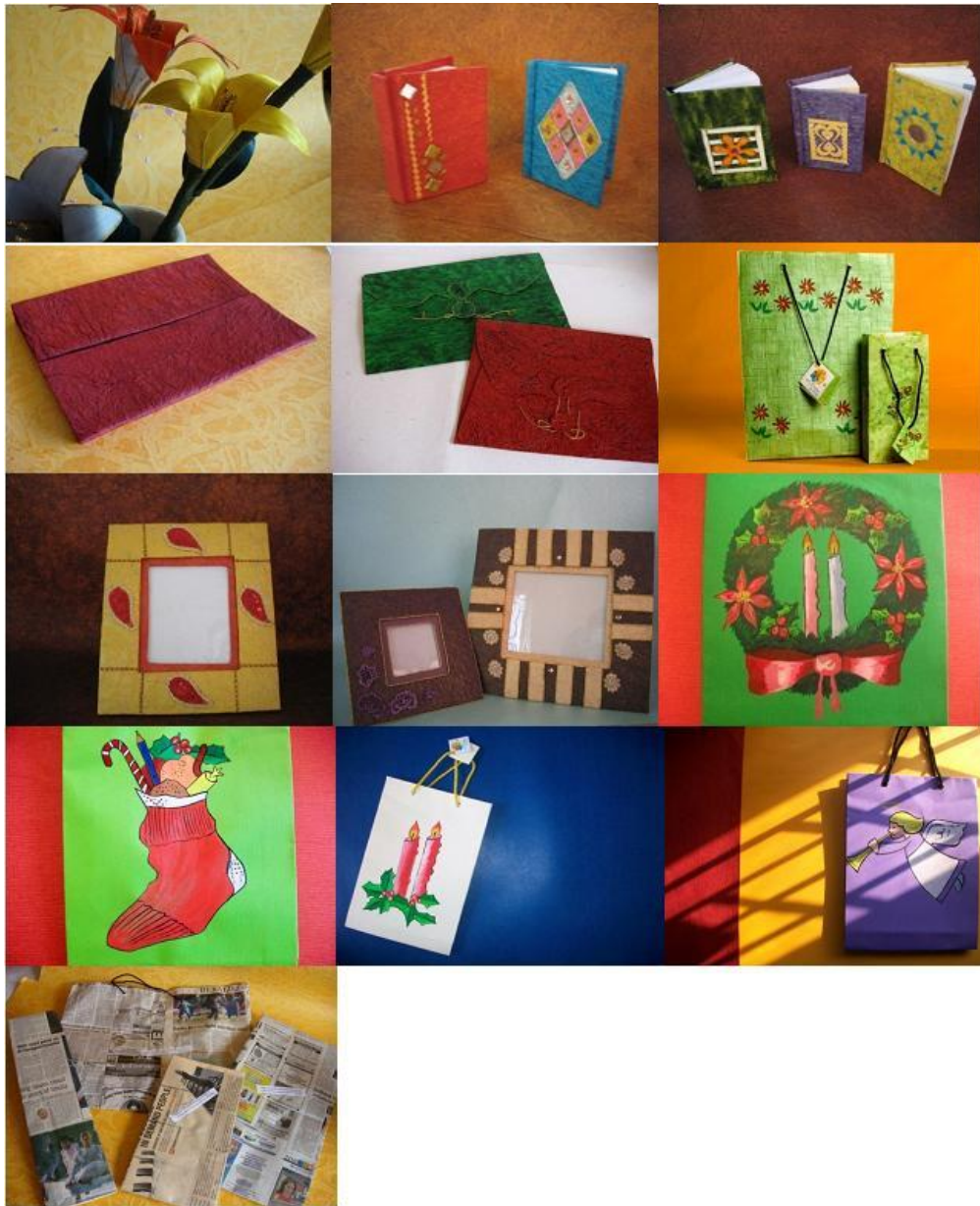
— Julie Hardesty

ANNEXURE

Legal Registrations

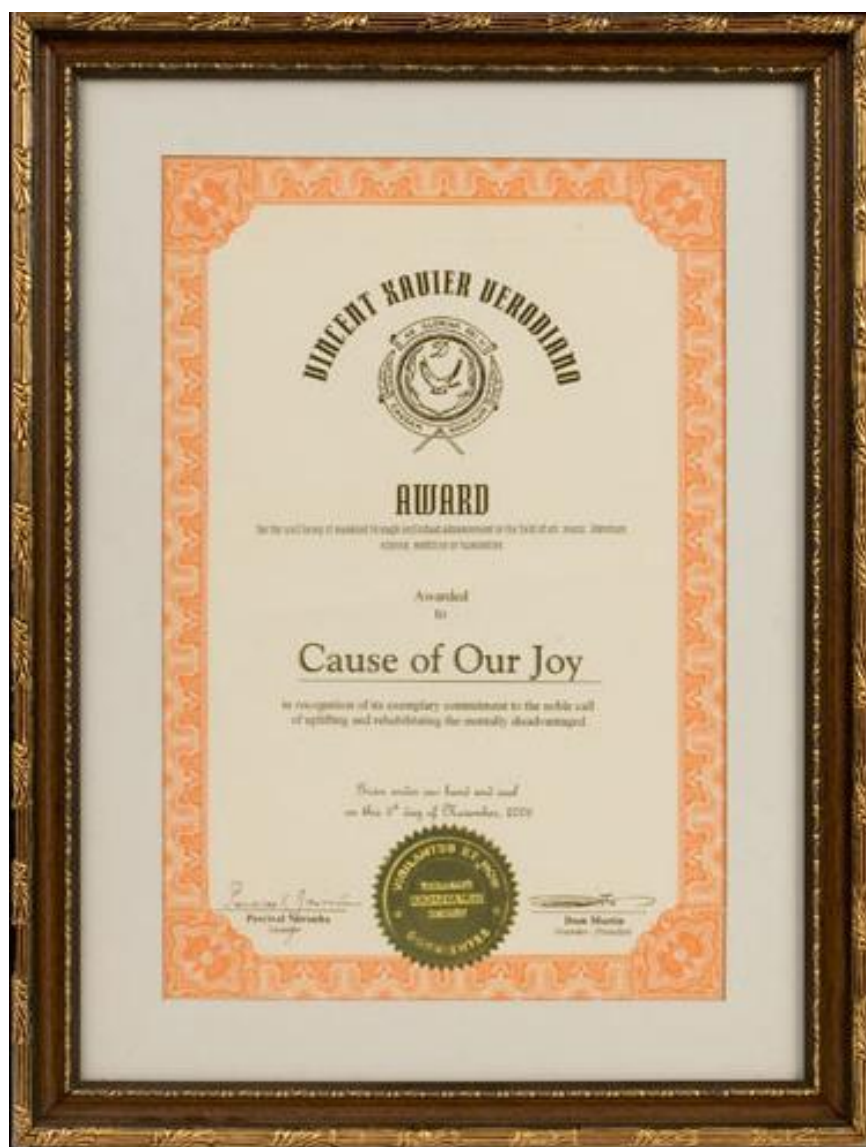
- COOJ Mental Health Foundation Trust registered at Mapuca, Bardez, Goa, India, Sub- Registrar Department -No. 2211/Goa/2002
- As a Charitable Trust under Section 12AA(1)(b)(i) of the Income Tax Department - F.No. C-14/12A/CIT/PNJ/2004-05
- Under provisions of the PWD Act 1995- Act 1 of 1996 at the Directorate of Social Welfare DSW/CERT/15/2005 - renewed as of DSW/REG/CERT/11/2009 valid till 9 February, 2012.
- Income Tax Department for 80G tax rebate, order no F.No. CIT/PNJ/C-21/132/80G/2009-10
- Registered under Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act 2010 Registration No: 271830158 with Punjab National Bank, Mapuca Branch account number 14963 and reference NO.II/21022/87(0005)/2010-FCRA-II

Photo Gallery of Some of the Products Up for Sale



Workshops Conducted by COOJ

- Mental health - an overview
- Mental Illness- who said there is no hope?
- Carers - empowered to care
- Cognitive Rehabilitation
- Barriers to persons with disability due to mental illness, learning and behaviour
- Marriage and mental illness
- Suicide prevention
- Alcohol and substance use disorders
- Internet addiction
- Art of Listening
- Stress Management

Awards and Recognition Received

COOJ Management**Board of Trustees**

Mrs. Theresa Trinidad is the Founder Trustee and has been the driving force behind the setting up COOJ. In order to fulfill the dying wish of her only child, Patricia, she invested all her energies and resources into keeping her memory alive. Having worked with the Reserve Bank of India for about 30 years, all her financial skills came as an asset.



Dr. Peter Castelino, Managing Trustee, is a psychiatrist with special interest in psychosocial rehabilitation. It is his constant belief that every person regardless of the level of ability can live to their optimum potential if the right opportunities and environments are provided.



Francisco Estevao D'Costa, Secretary, has been the pillar of COOJ. A man of few words but of great wisdom steers the COOJ administration. His ability comes from the skills learnt by working not only in his professional capacity at MCSC, Bahrain but also in the social voluntary sector as a key member of the Goa Central Council of the Society of St Vincent de Paul for many years.



Mrs. Lakshmy Unny, Assistant Secretary, is also one of the Directors of the shipping company, Agencia Comercial Maritima in Vasco. Having her elder son suffering from Schizophrenia and hence going through the various

emotional stages of a caregiver, she has dedicated herself wholeheartedly to the mission of bringing hope to the many people and their families who go through the same.



Romuald Fernandes, Treasurer, has vast experience working as the marine superintendent (ship building) for Wallem Ship Management Inc. based in Hong Kong. His all time enthusiasm is a great motivator and his eye for detail keeps our balances in check.