



# LISTENING FOR ALTERNATIVE STORIES

Narrative practice with vulnerable children  
and young people in India

Facilitated by:

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Written by Louise Carmichael & David Denborough





*It was as though every time we walked out for a break or after the session, we would look at each other with different perspectives and with more respect and admiration for everything that each one of us had faced and coped with in our lives.*

Farida: Young India Fellow, Ashoka University, Sonapat, India

*I have had a very big change in my life after the workshops Tree of life and Cricket Team of Life. They have helped me see the lives of people from their perspective rather than from the gauging meter made by the society about what is right and what is wrong. These workshops have instilled an undying hunger in me to do more narrative therapy for the children and people in need.*

Mashreeb: Madras Christian College: Masters of Social Work final year.

*Narrative therapy struck a chord with me. It revolves around stories about people's lives and experiences and this is how we, my family/my community, normally relate to each other. It's not something abstract. Narrative Therapy has taught me to listen completely.*

Sneha: Young India Fellow, Ashoka University, Sonapat, India

In collaboration with:

Prayas Juvenile Justice Aid Society, New Delhi

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Indira Peer Educators Collective, Chennai

Odanadi Seva Samasthe Trust, Mysore

Madras Christian College, Chennai

Ashoka University, Sonapat

Udavi Village School, Pondicherry

*This publication describes the use of narrative practices with vulnerable children, young people and workers in a number of different contexts in India. The use of the Cricket Team of Life, the Tree of Life and collective documents, songs and timelines, are each described. These approaches enable practitioners to listen for and elicit young people's skills, knowledge and alternative stories of identity.*

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# PART ONE: Cricket Team of Life

## At Prayas Observation Home for Boys

‘Don’t lose hope ... give yourself into the game no matter what’

Young participant of the Cricket Team of Life

How can we respond to boys in conflict with the Law, aged seven to sixteen, once they have entered the Juvenile Justice system in India? What opportunity, if any, does the short incarceration in the Observation Homes (several days or weeks) provide for psychological, emotional and social rehabilitation? When it is time for these boys to leave the Home, could they think differently about themselves and their future possibilities?

Prayas Observation Home for Boys is a home where boy juvenile offenders, aged ten to sixteen years, are observed at the discretion of the Juvenile Justice Court in Delhi, India. The committed care-workers of Prayas Observation Home already offer skill development in crafts such as needle-work, sewing, painting and kitchen skills. However POHB were enthusiastic when the resident psychologist, Srishti Sardana, and Louise Carmichael, consultant trainer, opened up a conversation about what might be possible in relation to emotional and psychological rehabilitation.

We believe that the short-term incarceration of the boys in Homes may represent an opportunity to begin a process of re-authoring identities for the boys. To make it possible for hidden stories to become visible, a narrative approach called the Cricket Team of Life was specifically adapted for this context.

### *About the Team of Life*

- The Team of Life is a folk cultural narrative methodology developed by David Denborough to enable young people to talk about their lives through sporting metaphors. The Team of Life approach was originally developed using football metaphors with former child soldiers in Uganda (see Denborough, 2008; [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/team-of-life.html](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/team-of-life.html)). With cricket being so embraced by young men in India, it was felt most appropriate to use a cricket metaphor in this context. The full version of the Cricket Team of Life is outlined by on pages 13 – 19 of this publication.



## The first Cricket Team of Life in India

Facilitators were Srishti Sardana, Mashreeb Aryal, and Louise Carmichael.

In September 2013, a psychosocial rehabilitation workshop was held within Prayas Observation Home for Boys. While we had a very small window of time with the boys of just four days, this brief interaction represented a significant opportunity. We adapted the Cricket Team of Life process to work in a culturally appropriate way within a number of constraints:

- Since the most common time period juveniles are held in Prayas Observation Home, as ordered by the Juvenile Magistrates Court, is between two days and two weeks, we decided to attempt a brief five-day group-work intervention to include as many of the boys as possible. Unfortunately, almost half the boys received court orders before the process had finished, which led to an earlier than anticipated end to the process.
- Prayas workers were able to work with us on restricted availability only, as other work demands continued to take priority. This impacted the hours we had to work with the boys, considerably reducing contact time with the group to just one-and-a-half hours a day on average.

Here we will describe the workshops, the methodologies and the reflective process, and include collective documents created out of the boys' own words. These words were spoken in conversations about cricket and how cricket reminds the boys of their own lives and what is important to them. Stories were recorded about what helps the boys 'win' in life and in cricket, what they value in both cricket and in life, and how to keep in alignment with those values. While we were unable to complete all parts of the Cricket Team of Life process, we did share some quite profound experiences.

### Session One: *Let's play Cricket!*



**Figure 1** *First game of cricket with the young people and staff members*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The faces of the Juveniles in Conflict with Law have been erased in abeyance of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 guidelines.

The first day we played a game of cricket with two teams of eleven players each, a scoreboard and an umpire. We were careful that no staff assumed leadership. We took the sum of people, split them into two groups of batsmen and bowlers. No other directions were provided, therefore the teams were allowed to choose players for their batting orders and their captain. When the teams were formed, the toss was carried out with the use of a coin, as is the tradition of the game of cricket. The match lasted for five overs. We then re-grouped off-field into a room designated for the workshop/training.



**Figure 2** Boys and staff members assembled around with the symbol cards

### *From playing cricket to talking cricket and life*

Building on the experience of playing together, we asked each participant to select a symbol card<sup>2</sup> to represent something they appreciated about how others in the group had played cricket in the morning game.

Many of the boys had been using various aliases like 'pickpocket'. We decided to give the boys an opportunity to create a different sort of alias: one which described a strength that another of the team appreciated in his cricket play. When a boy was acknowledged for playing like Sachin<sup>3</sup>, he chose to accept, or not, that name for the workshop duration. This conversation then moved more generally into what the boys liked about cricket and the following questions were asked:

- *What do you like, enjoy or value about cricket?*
- *Do you also value these things in other areas of your life?*

After talking about this for some time and writing the emerging responses on a blackboard, themes such as *the value of team and teamwork* and *trust* came up several times.

<sup>2</sup> These symbol cards have been compiled by Louise Carmichael and include photographs that cover a plethora of social and cultural images. They help participants to begin sharing and interacting with each other without the use of directive questioning.

<sup>3</sup> Sachin is the first name for Sachin Tendulkar who has been acknowledged as one of the finest cricketers of all time.



### *Negotiating trust and confidentiality*

We then decided to move outside and draw a circle in the sand – to represent the circle of confidentiality. The purpose of doing so was twofold. Firstly, most of the boys [8 of the 12] were unable to read and write, so we needed to use a physical ritual to enable them to provide meaningful consent to participate in the workshop and for us as facilitators to take notes of their words. Secondly, we needed a ritual to negotiate confidentiality.

In order to create a culturally appropriate ritual, we used the metaphor of the *lakshman-rekha*<sup>4</sup> to represent a circle of confidentiality [refer Figure 3]. Boys were given the option of stepping into the circle which would indicate their willingness to participate and their commitment to confidentiality. This was also the way we as facilitators showed our commitment to confidentiality.

During the process, one of the boys decided to step out of the circle. He spoke honestly that he would find it difficult to abide by confidentiality. This was a critical turn of events. It brought with it a sense of commitment and reinforced the importance of trust during the days that we were to spend together. The rest of us took steps to move into the circle and with this commitment, we ended the first day.



**Figure 3** *Boys standing inside the Circle of Confidentiality*

<sup>4</sup> Lakshmanrekha is a metaphor derived from the Hindu scripture, meaning a 'line of righteousness'. We made use of this commonly known 'metaphor' in the Indian culture to create a sense of integrity among the boys. We drew the lakshmanrekha in the sand, and asked the boys to step into the circle 'only if they were ready to commit to confidentiality'. Those boys who were not certain of their commitment could choose not to step into the circle and thereby refuse participation in the workshop.



## Day two: the spirit of the game

During the late hours of the morning, we assembled in the room, split into three teams of 5-6 players, and started with a warm up game of *balloon racing*<sup>5</sup>. We then remained in these same three teams to talk further about cricket and in particular, 'the spirit of the game':

- *What are some of the important things about 'the spirit of the game' to you?*
- *Are these same things also important to you in life?*

Everyone then re-joined the large group and those who wanted to shared the conversations that had unfolded. The facilitators took notes of what the boys were saying in order to create the following collective document (Denborough, 2008; Newman, 2008).

## No-one is a bad player by heart, everyone tries their best

We are together because the courts have sent us here. We all like cricket! We talked about the cricket we played yesterday, what we liked about how each other played today, as well as other things we like about cricket.

### Team Work

Many of us like playing cricket because of the team. Some of us recognise that being encouraged and supported by others, by friends, by elders, helps us to perform better. Sometimes friends show us the right direction; teach us what to do and suggest things to us. Everyone in a team listens to a good captain. During the cricket game yesterday, the captain was reminding everyone of their roles in their team by deciding who should be doing what. Good captains can help us by reminding us of our roles.

One of us highlighted how teams and friendships are important in life too, 'One friend helped me a lot, helped me with my parents, convinced them that school and education are important, he also taught me how to drive'. Another one of us told how much he valued respecting and being respected by friends, 'We share a relationship like brothers. I tell him that I believe in him, that he has the potential, and if he works hard he can go far ahead in life.' Another of us acknowledged another player who cared for his team mates the same way he cared for his faithful dog, 'You think a lot about your team mates'.

Some of us look at the other person and, in seeing how he plays, we derive energy and motivation. We play on each other's energy. One of us acknowledges that if someone else is playing really well, 'I look at him, see how he is playing and I also try to play like that'.

### Celebration

Encouraging the team enhances happiness in the team. By playing well I make others in the team also happy ... I like to spread joy and happiness amongst everyone. I want to celebrate with the team every time someone gets a batsman out. We hug each other.

### Being encouraged and supported

All of us agree that being encouraged and supported is critical to our playing well. So too is being praised. One of us recounted the first time he went to the field with his friend to play cricket ... *'But when I tried to bat I couldn't connect with the ball. I missed quite a few balls. I was feeling hopeless ... I thought I couldn't do anything. I didn't even realise that I was holding the bat the wrong way around. Then my friend came to me and told me that I could bat. He told me to have hope and confidence that I could do it. Only then was it possible. He asked me to not lose hope and give myself into the batting no matter what. When the ball came my way, I whacked the ball with all my heart and soul. The ball went so high and far that it was nowhere to be found and I had still held the bat the wrong way. I learned to play cricket from my friend because he motivated, encouraged and supported me.'*

<sup>5</sup> The balloon racing exercise was carried out as a form of warming up, wherein three teams were formed to race against the other in completing relay-rounds with balloons. This was quite physically challenging!



### *There is a happiness in winning*

We talked about winning, about 'being eagerly responsible to win, to score for my team'. One of us has it in him to win the whole game by himself when others can't deliver. To win you need a different kind of thinking. *Unusual thinking. This thinking needs tact and strategy.* There is happiness in winning. It enhances the happiness of the onlookers too.

### *Finding happiness in the happiness of my family*

I find happiness in the happiness of my family and sadness in my family's sadness. The happiness I get when I watch my team win is akin to the happiness I got when I first received my salary. One of us recounts that when I brought my first salary of Rs.5000 back home and handed it over to my mother, she was very proud over my concern, hard work and perseverance for the sake of the family. My first act of offence has really hurt my family, especially my mother. Seeing my family unhappy and sad hurts even more because I realised that their happiness was dependent on me in important ways. They love me so much that they were ready to pay any price to bail me out of here [the Observation Home]. I need to reciprocate in some way.

### *Hard work: An important skill*

We value hard work. Some of us were acknowledged for working hard on the cricket field by the score on the scoreboard. It's the same in life as well. Without hard work, neither will you get any money, nor will you get anything else in life. Hard work is very crucial in cricket and in life. Parents feel happy when their children have learnt to value hard work and money in life and started earning to support them, especially when you are a boy.'

### *Batting well: Timing and intention*

In cricket, we can bring about happiness and victory to the team by batting well. But if the timing is not correct then the ball doesn't go where you intend it to. One of us acknowledges that timing and intention are very important for batting and for life. It's a skill. *'When the aim is right, when the intention is right, when the timing is right, the ball always goes where I want it to go.'*

### *Making regrets useful*

*'I don't like missing a catch because I miss an opportunity to get a crucial batsman out ... I regret having made a mistake in my life ... I don't like that feeling. Regret is useful because I make changes so that I don't make the same mistake again. I would try and correct and do better the next time. I want to have a good future ... but to have a good future I need to get quality education ... without education you can't have a good future. My opportunity has gone but I'd like to help my siblings have an education.'*

### *Defending our teams*

Defending our teams is our primary focus. One of us does this by putting pressure on the opposing team by delivering very fast balls when bowling. *'This is my strength. Being very observant of the other team's weaknesses and capitalising on them and decreasing their run rate.'* Another of us defends his team by remaining trustworthy and reliable for his team members and maintaining consistency in his batting performances.

### *Fielding*

Fielding is critical to get the opposing team out. Catches can get the better/critical players out. One of us said today how he likes the energy and enthusiasm in fielding and running after the ball.

### *Good friends/bad friends: knowing the difference*

All of us agree that friends are important and that there are both good friends and bad friends in life. Some of us got involved with the wrong people, they're not good to have in your cricket team.

### *To play like Dhoni*

Some of the qualities we identified as being important that people have in a cricket game, include 'being calm', 'playing with the heart [or soul]', and 'always being there for your team', like MS Dhoni<sup>6</sup>. Dhoni has the ability and grace to arouse faith and hope and happiness in other teammates. That's what we hope to do some day.

\*\*\*

Before we had a chance to read this document back to the boys, we received feedback from them at the end of day two. They informed us of their suspicions about our intention with the documentation process. They were concerned about how the document may be used by us and who would be able to read it. Some were concerned that what they said might get used against them – especially as part of supplementing evidence against them during court proceedings. When we were given this feedback, it seemed vitally important to clarify these doubts and concerns. It also seemed important to seek the advice of our team coach, David Denborough<sup>7</sup>. Having done so overnight, we returned to the boys on Day Three.

### *Day Three: An apology and reading back their words*

Upon our return the next day, we responded thoroughly to the concerns the boys had raised. We did so in five ways:

- Firstly, we acknowledged the boys' skills in protecting themselves, for using their 'sixth sense' [intuitive/instinctive power] to look out for deceptions. We acknowledged how valuable and important these skills must be. After this acknowledgement, some of the boys mentioned external threats they sometimes face, such as those from law enforcement personnel, and how, in such times of insecurity, they do need to use every capability they have to avoid being scapegoated.
- Secondly, we apologised for not adequately explaining the documentation process. We also used this apology as an opportunity to elaborate. We explained that the reason we were writing down everything that was spoken or shared by them was to help us to learn to listen to what was important to them.
- Thirdly, we acknowledged that since it was their story we documented, they held the utmost right to decide the fate of the document. If they wanted to, they could choose to retain it themselves, or allow us to retain it or burn it – to vanquish its contents. We asked them for their consent for the document to be read back to them before they made any such decision.
- Fourthly, we offered to share or disclose our stories if they would be interested or curious to know more about us. As we had sought their stories from them, we invited them to ask us any questions about ourselves and we would honestly answer these.

<sup>6</sup> MS Dhoni is arguably the most popular current Indian cricketer. Until recently, he was the Indian captain in all three forms of the game. For more information about MS Dhoni, see: <http://www.espnricinfo.com/india/content/player/28081.html>; Retrieved at: 5.57 | 22/09/13)

<sup>7</sup> David Denborough (PhD) works as a community practitioner, teacher and writer/editor for Dulwich Centre, Australia, and has been instrumental in initiating and implementing novel models of narrative practice across a wide range of populations.



After many questions, much laughter and relaxation, the group then dispersed for lunch. They insisted to play a game of cricket soon afterwards, and we consented. However, we were eager to know if they would like to play the game first or to listen to the document of their stories before the game. This was a choice we wanted them to make. They were unanimous in wanting to listen to their stories first.

The responses from the boys after listening to their stories was overwhelming. Some of them exclaimed:

*'Wow! That's amazing ... that's a lot of work!'*

*'All our stories were woven in together ...'*

*'I liked that we were one voice, no-one was singled out ...'*

*'You took all the good stuff and left all the bad stuff out, all the mistakes, which we should never have said, you omitted'*

The boys affirmed their desire to retain the document and expressed that they also wanted us to keep it with us and to share it with others for whom it might be useful.

The relationships in the room had shifted. There was now, clearly, mutual respect. The boys and the facilitators were stirred by the presence of each other.

#### *Day Four: Naming the opposition team*

We started the day with a small cricket match of just three overs. The boys had chalked the field and set the pitch long before our arrival and the game started on time. We then moved back into the room to begin our discussions about the *opposition team*. This team is membered by those aspects/injustices in life which stop some of us from having access to a fair game. Some of these aspects, such as poverty, drugs and extortion, had already been introduced by the boys in the preceding conversations.

It was anticipated that this externalisation of the opposition would help the boys distinguish clearly those things in life which impeded the boys' alignment with their preferred, value-laden life story, often referred to in narrative therapy as their 'alternative story' (White, 2007). It was also anticipated that this separation from the opposition would allow the boys to appreciate the immense resources they have shown in their lives thus far, resources which may be consciously chosen to use in their own cricket team of life against the opposition team.

It was relatively easy to explore the opposition team positions. Each boy wished to attribute social injustices to various positions. There was a great huddle as positions were moved around the field until consensus was reached about the positions of injustices that would stop the boys from winning their game and sometimes crippling their best efforts. Quite quickly they successfully identified a collective opposition team that they are facing.





**Figure 5** *One of the facilitators noting down the positions being allocated by the boy.*





The prominent responses of the boys were recorded as follows:

## The Opposition Team

### **Wicketkeeper:** *Addiction and drug dependence*

This stands closest to the batsman's position on the pitch and constantly interferes with the ability of the batsman to remain focused on the game.

### **Deep Fine Leg:** *Extortion and exploitation by police and politicians*

The police and politicians constantly exploit the poor and spare the wealthy and therefore they are the enemies of the poor – of those who suffer in poverty. Some of the boys mentioned corruption many times citing it as a major problem for them.

### **Third Man:** *Societal stigma and tarnish*

The boys spoke about how they are highly stigmatized, especially by their peer group, after they leave the Observation Home and return to their school within the communities where they live. The constant tarnishing of social prestige suffered by the boys and their families is of immense concern to the boys.

### **Cover:** *Unemployment and lack of (legal) work opportunities*

There is a lack of job opportunities for boys who have been caught in offending and been to court, even among those who have been educated. 'Cover' works closely with the 'Wicketkeeper' because unemployment is closely linked to drug use to relieve anxiety, hunger and to help forget the misery of poverty.

### **Long Off:** *Illiteracy and negligence at the school*

The obstacles already mentioned, coupled with deplorable teaching and educational environments prevalent in the government school system in Delhi, mean that many boys drop out of school and remain illiterate.

### **Silly Mid-Off:** *Illiteracy and negligence at the school*

One boy wanted to also place illiteracy at Silly Mid Off really close to the batsman as it is a constant hindrance.

### **Deep Mid-Wicket:** *Poverty*

There is no money. Our parents are either earning minimally or not working enough, and there is a lack of money to find proper food. Poverty propels people to steal. Petty theft can sometimes contribute money back to the family, say for a sister's marriage, to buy a bottle of Coca-Cola, or something nice to eat.

### **Deep Square Leg:** *Hunger*

Given that many boys have large families, because there is little money to feed the many mouths at home, there is always hunger. Where there is hunger, there is also sometimes anger at the injustice, which in turn can support ...

### **Short Mid-Wicket:** *Revenge and vengeance*

### **Long On:** *Violence and gang wars*

One boy's story explains the significance of violence and gang wars:

*I am the eldest of four siblings. Neither of my parents went to school or can read or write. It has been my dream that all my siblings get an education, but that dream has fallen down. I had given up. I was going to a public school here in Delhi when one day a gang raped my sister on her way home from school. When I was also beaten for approaching the gang, I went to the school for help but the teachers there were weak, they did nothing. If we took any action the gangs would also beat us. They would follow us home after school and we would be beaten. There was no point going to school any longer since the gangs had taken over. So I left, and I also formed a gang of my own to avenge my sister. I am the leader of my gang. (This boy had been linked to eleven homicides).*

After this boy had been through the Team of Life process and had been released from the Observation Home, we held no hope of finding him to follow up. However, one month after his release, by pure chance he found Srishti Sardana. He approached Srishti on a Delhi street and told her that he had dis-banded his gang and had gone back to school. He was very proud and excited about this future. He had reignited his dream of an education and of having his siblings educated.





*The Opposition Team Sheet*

#### *Concluding words*

By the time we had completed this Opposition Team, we had developed good enough relationships with the boys and they came running in to tell us that they were being let out of the Observation Home early! There are no outreach services for these boys and we could not expect to have further contact with them. Unfortunately, this is therefore where the Team of Life process stopped.

The sessions we managed to hold demonstrated that the boys hold expert knowledge about the conditions of their lives - both the conditions that lead to criminality and what new conditions may assist them to turn their lives around. In the future, we hope to use the Team of Life narrative approach to create meaningful, culturally appropriate, Indian-centric psychosocial rehabilitation programs within Observation Homes. We hope the Team of Life can assist in the development of structures of support for these young people. Perhaps it can also assist young people to address past actions they may regret and enable the generation of alternative storylines of identity.

The next section of this document outlines the entire Cricket Team of Life process that we hope to put into practice in the future.

#### **Note**

Ashoka University in Delhi sent several students from their Young India Fellowship (2013-2014) to intern with this Cricket Team of Life project. These students, with the guidance and supervision of Louise Carmichael and Srishti Sardana, wrote a research paper published in The Learning Curve, the annual academic journal of the Department of Psychology at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, This article can be accessed at: <https://lsrpsychology.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/tlc-2.pdf>



*Photography: Enrico Fabian*





# The Cricket Team of Life Methodology

## by David Denborough

The Cricket Team of Life narrative approach consists of five sections:

Preparation:	Talking about cricket
First Innings:	Creating your Team of Life
Second innings:	Batting – taking guard
Third innings:	Bowling – honour and responsibility
Fourth innings:	When we are tested

This approach was developed for work with Indian young people in Observation Homes or juvenile justice settings but may be adapted for many different contexts. The aim of this approach is to enable young people to generate alternative narratives of identity, to address hardships they may have experienced, actions they may regret, and to create a sense of ‘team’ and collective identity to enable preferred futures. Conversations take place through sporting metaphor which is often much easier for young people than to be expected to speak directly about their lives (Denborough, 2008). If young people do not enjoy cricket, alternative sports are used as the basis of the metaphor. The most popular sport used within the Team of Life is football (see: [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/team-of-life.html](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/team-of-life.html)).

### Preparation: Talking about cricket

The following questions can invite young people to speak about their lives through the metaphor of cricket.

*‘We don’t like cricket, we love it’*

What do you like, enjoy or value about cricket? Do you watch? Or play? Or both? Are any of the things you like about cricket also what you value in the rest of your life?

*Teamwork*

Cricket is a team sport. What do you value about being part of a team? In your opinion, what makes a good team player?

*Favourite team, favourite players*

Who is your favourite team? Who is your favourite player? Why are they your favourite? Do you like them for what they do or also how they do it? Do you like their style? Their attitude?



### *Rules of the game*

What are some of the important rules of cricket? Why are they important? Are there any rules that you like the best? What about in life? What are some of the rules that you think are important in life?

### *Spirit of the game*

Cricket has clear rules, but it also has something called 'the spirit of the game'. What are some of the important things about 'the spirit of the game' to you? Are these also important to you more widely in life?

### *Favourite cricket sayings or cricket philosophies*

Do you have any favourite cricket sayings? Or cricket philosophies? Are these sayings true in life too?

### *Leadership*

Who is your favourite leader or captain in cricket? What makes them a good captain? What do you think is important in a leader in cricket or in life generally?

Write and/or draw the answers to these questions in a small book.

## **First Innings: Creating your Team of Life**

### *Creating your Cricket Team of Life*

Draw up a team list as if it is batting order (You can use a formal score sheet for this ... or you can simply write the list in the small book)

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11.

12th man

Coach

Put your favourite player in their usual position in the batting order.

Now, think about your life as if it is a cricket team.

### *Coach*

In your life, who is like your coach? The person who has taught you the most in life? Someone you respect. They can be alive or no longer alive. List them as your coach in your team sheet. You can have more than one. They can even be someone you have never met but you look up to (like a hero, or a religious figure). Your coach could even be a book or an organisation or community.

### *Captain*

In your life, who is your captain? The person who gives you advice? Who encourages you when you are down? Who gives you feedback when you are going off track? Put their name(s) in the batting order wherever you think they should bat.

### *Your openers*

Who are the people in life who are like your opening batsmen? These are the people who face the fastest bowling. They are the people who are brave and who try to get you off to a good start. These are people who come before us. Who are the people in your life who have come before you? Who has faced hardship for your team? They may be alive or no longer alive.

### *Your own position*

Where would you put yourself in the batting line-up in your Cricket Team of Life? Why? Is that your best position? Or is that the position that the team needs you in at the moment?

### *Your batting partners*

Batting in cricket is all about building partnerships. Think about who in life you would consider your 'partner' or friend. These may be 'partners' you still see, or maybe friends from your memory. Place them next to you in the batting line-up.

### *12th man*

Your 12th man is like your reserve, someone you will call upon if you need them. Is there someone like this in your life?

### *Supporters in the stands*

When you are at your home ground, who are the supporters you imagine in the stands. Who are the people (living or non-living) who are hoping you will do well?

### *First aid kit*

When your team faces a difficulty (an injury/a player going down) what do you turn to? What supports your team in hard times? What is in your first aid kit?

### *Home grounds (fields of dreams)*

What are your home grounds? Where are the places you feel most 'at home'? You may have more than one place. They may even be in more than one country. Your home ground might be somewhere you go regularly, or somewhere you only visit in your memories or dreams.

### *Team motto*

What are some of the important values of your team? What is this team standing for? What values are you defending? Can you think of a motto or slogan for this? What is the history of these values? Have they been a part of your team for a long time?

### *Theme song*

Do you have a particular song that means a lot to you, that you could call the 'theme song' of your life at the moment? If so, what would it be? Why is it significant to you?

### *Commentator*

Who is your favourite cricket commentator? Why are they your favourite? What about in your own life?

Who is the person who tells the best stories about your life? Who would you like to have as your commentator for your Cricket Team of Life?

### *Umpires*

In cricket there are always at least two umpires who play an important role. These are the people who make sure the game is played by the rules. They are the people who keep the peace. Who are two 'umpires' in your life? These might not be people in formal positions of authority. They might be people in your family or your community who you know will tell you when you are going off-track. They are people we can rely upon to give us direct feedback, who will tell us when we are doing something that is not okay. Ideally, these are people we can trust. Please name two 'umpires' who can help you to play the game of life by the right spirit.







## Second innings: Batting

### *Your stance / taking guard*

When you begin your innings, your stance as a batsman is very important. This is an important part of knowing where your stumps are, so you can protect them. How do you take your stance in cricket? How do you take guard? (It's good to physically demonstrate this). Making sure you are balanced is critical. Your two legs are like your pillars. You are now starting a long innings to get your life back, so your stance and how you take guard in life is going to be important. Balance is particularly important. What do you think is important to balance in your life? And what are going to be your pillars? What are the two most important things you believe in? These are your pillars. This is what helps you to take a good stance in life.

### *Protection*

What sort of protection do batsmen use? There are rules and regulations about this. What sort of protection is important to you where you are living now? How do you protect yourself? How do you protect what is important to you? How can you ensure that how you protect yourself does not hurt others?

### *Concentration*

Cricket is a game of the mind. Batting requires great concentration. What are some of the things you have heard about how batsman keep concentrating for hours upon hours? How do they not let their minds drift? How do they deal with nerves? Ask around. Do some research. Who do you know that has good concentration skills? Why not ask them how they developed these?

### *Knowing when to defend and when to try to score runs*

Building an innings involves knowing when to defend and when to try to score runs. This is also true in life. Sometimes we need to spend time preparing and defending for our team, and other times we can really go out there and try to play the flashy shots. How can you tell the difference? What are you working on at present? Is this a time for flashy shots? Or is this a time for knuckling down, concentrating, playing every ball on its merits?

### *Batting in partnership*

Batting is all about partnerships. What makes a good batting partnership in cricket? What about in life? What is important in friendships? In relationships? In family relations?





## Third innings: Bowling

### *As a bowler*

When your captain has asked you to bowl, it is an honour. Your captain is asking you to help the team. It is also a responsibility. Your job is to try to take wickets and not give away runs.

### *Setting your field*

When you are bowling, you need to make sure you set your field carefully. What are some of your favourite fielding positions (cricket has many funny fielding position names!).

Silly mid-on; Short leg; Deep fine Leg; The covers; The slips.

Draw a cricket oval and imagine you are about to bowl. Place your 11 fielders in the positions you want them.

Because this is your own field, you might want to add in some extra positions. You might want to make some up. Such as:

- The friendship arc
- The honesty sphere
- The regrets
- The loyalty zone

Refer back to Part Two and place your team mates in the appropriate places on the drawing of your cricket oval.

## Fourth innings: When we are tested

### *The greatest test*

Test matches are played over five days. This is one of the longest sports!! They are called a test because they test or challenge players so severely. They are a test of strength, fitness, endurance, concentration. Do you have a favourite test match that you can remember? What was special about it? What do teams need in order to be able to survive and thrive in test matches?

### *A past test that your team survived*

Can you think of one test or challenge that you and your team has played in the past? One big challenge that your team has already got through? This might have been recently, or a long time ago.

Where was this test/challenge (on what 'ground')? How did your team manage to survive it? What parts did everyone play?

What skills did you use?

### *Current test*

Are there any things in your life that are challenging you and your team now? Are these long challenges, like a test? Make a list of the 'tests' or 'challenges' that your team is currently facing. This might include describing and naming 'the opposition team' that you are up against (see pages 10 – 11).

How are you preparing for these tests / challenges? What parts will each team member play? Can you use any of the skills your team has used in the past?

### *Personal set-backs / injuries / making a comeback*

Do you know any cricket players who have had injuries or personal set-backs? Or maybe they lost form and lost their place in the team for a while. Or maybe they did something that wasn't good for the team.

- Do you know any players who had such a set-back but then made a come-back? What did they have to do to make a come-back or to recover from an injury? How long did it take them? What sort of recovery work did they have to do?
- Have you ever had a personal set-back? Lost form, or lost your way for a while? Are you now trying to make a come-back?

What sort of training or recovery work are you doing?

- Who is helping? When do you plan to return to the playing field (of life)? When you do, how are you going to make sure the problem doesn't arise again? What plans are you putting in place? Who is going to help?

#### *When you've let the team down*

In cricket (and in life) it can feel terrible when you have let the team down. It can be particularly difficult if you have run-out your batting partner, dropped a catch, made a duck, or been very expensive in your bowling. You can feel like you want to disappear.

- When this happens, how do you think cricketers cope? How do they keep going? How do they keep trying to contribute to the team? What training do they do to try to make sure it doesn't happen again?
- In life, it can also feel terrible if we have let the team down. It can be particularly difficult if we have hurt someone else.
- Are there times when you have let others down? Or hurt someone? If so, what are you doing now to make it up to the team? What training are you doing to try to make sure it doesn't happen again?
- If you had to give advice to other young cricketers who have let their team down, what would you say to them? How would you try to help them to get back in their team? What do you think they could do to make it up to their team?

#### *Justice team*

In many places, there are injustices. Things are not fair. Or there is violence to contend with. In these situations, when we are trying to work against injustices, or when we are trying to prevent violence, it can be important to create a Justice Team. This is the team that is going to help us to prevent injustices and to prevent violence.

- Think now of who and what could be included on your Justice Team. Who do you know that makes a stand against injustices? Who believes in fairness?
- Draw a cricket oval and place all the different people, organisations, beliefs and values that you would include on your Justice Team.







## PART TWO: Tree of Life narrative approach

The Tree of Life is an approach to working with children, young people and adults who have experienced hard times which was initially developed by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough (Ncube, 2006; Denborough, 2008) to assist colleagues who work with children affected by HIV/AIDS in southern Africa. This approach is now being adapted and used with children, young people, and adults in a wide range of countries and contexts (see [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/tree-of-life.html](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/tree-of-life.html)).

This approach enables children to speak about their lives in ways that make them stronger. It involves children drawing their own 'tree of life' in which they get to speak of their 'roots' (where they come from), their skills and knowledges, their hopes and dreams, as well as the special people in their lives. The participants then join their trees into a 'forest of life' and, in groups, discuss some of the 'storms' that affect their lives and ways that they respond to these storms, protect themselves and each other. The Tree of Life enables children to speak about their lives in ways that are not retraumatising, but instead strengthens their relationships with their own history, their culture, and significant people in their lives.

### *History of the Tree of Life narrative approach in India*

In late 2012, Srishti Sardana, Louise Carmichael and Caresse Cranwell collaborated to deliver the Tree of Life to staff and children at Odanadi Seva Trust, in Mysore, Karnataka, who work to rescue trafficked and sexually exploited women and children. Srishti Sardana won a national academic award\* for the research paper produced from this project. The feedback received from staff and children confirmed the applicability and adaptability of the Tree of Life narrative approach to Indian communities. Several of the women participants wanted to go on to study the process further so they could run the workshops themselves.

Due to the success of this initial program, Miriam Samuel at Madras Christian College Department of International Social Work in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, made it possible for the Tree of Life approach to be used within the India Community Welfare Organisation (ICWO).

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\* Srishti Sardana's paper, 'Hyper-Ghettoization, Anomie and the State – Exploratory Enquiry of Children Trafficked for Prostitution', was awarded Best Paper Award, XXII Annual Convention of the National Academy of Psychology (NAOP), 2012, India. The theme of this Annual Convention was *Psychology in India: Emerging Trends in Theory, Research and Practice*.



## Tree of Life with the children of sex workers in Vadapalanni, Chennai

Facilitated by Sathesh Kumar, Mashreeb Aryal, Louise Carmichael, and Caresse Cranwell

The India Community Welfare Organisation (ICWO) is auspice to the Indira Female Peer Educators Collective (IFPEC), which represents over 2,000 women sex workers in Tamil Nadu. Initial conversations with a group of the women representing IFPEC identified that their main concern was that their children do not get trafficked into the same sex-work industry that they themselves were in. Many women in IFPEC had been abducted by traffickers as children, or as young women, or forced by family into sex-slavery due to pressures from poverty. The women felt they had had no choice, but wanted to ensure that the same did not happen to their children.

Under the guidance of Mr Hariharan, Secretary of ICWO, many of the women's children had recently been enrolled and were now attending school. How then could we build on the knowledge and resources that the women, children and community already had, to protect the children from sex trafficking? It was agreed to begin the journey with the Tree of Life process.

### *Training: learning from the inside*

Twelve Social Work interns, from several Chennai Universities, were then trained in the Tree of Life approach to become facilitators. The training involved experiential learning. The interns participated in the Tree of Life process themselves before considering the narrative theory that informs the approach. This 'learning from the inside' is crucial in cross-cultural learning, for both trainer and participant.

We also used our time together:

- to adapt the Tree of Life activities for the Tamil culture and children;
- to research which Tamil games, songs and rituals would be appropriate to use as part of the process;
- to practice facilitation. This was particularly important since it was the Social Work interns who would deliver the program in the Tamil language.

The interns then delivered the Tree of Life, in Tamil language, to over 30 children aged ten to sixteen years old. Louise Carmichael provided supervision, coaching and facilitation as needed. The workshops with the children occurred over 6 half days, and spanned nine weeks. The women from IFPEC sourced a Community Hall in an adjoining community. The children were asked to come once, and then it was their own choice if they stayed or returned for the remaining sessions. All the children returned, most for all of the sessions.



Some of the interns and Louise Carmichael during the Tree of Life training at ICWO, Chennai



## Vadapalani Tree of Life

Facilitated by Sathesh Kumar, Mashreeb Aryal, and Louise Carmichael

### *Session One: A song emerges*

After initial 'getting to know each other' activities, we introduced the idea of talking about our lives through what we know about trees. We brainstormed onto paper all the different things we knew about trees; what they look like, (branches, leaves, trunk, fruit, flowers, roots); how they grow; what different kinds of fruit they produce. We asked if the children had a favourite tree. Stories were told of times they had spent playing, climbing and sitting under trees. Children talked and laughed at length. We wrote down, in Tamil language, as much as we could in the children's own words.

We then had a morning tea break and the Tamil Masters of Social Work interns, who were all very confident with singing and dancing, were asked to write a song from the words of the children. The task was given to Sathesh Kumar who gathered all the words we had brainstormed, and in ten minutes he skillfully wrote the first verse and chorus of a song. After reading out the song to the children to check that the words were accurate and to see if they wanted to add anything, Sathesh sang the song to the children. The room became still as the children recognised their own words and lives reflected back to them ... a feeling of anticipation grew. The lyrics were written onto sheets of paper and distributed amongst the children who, by this time, were all very excited (for more about community song-writing see Denborough, 2002).

Sathesh split the group into boys and girls in opposite corners of the room. The children sang the verse one group at a time as if they were calling to each other. This seemed to encourage the children to sing up and developed a friendly kind of competition between the boys and girls. We completed the day by sharing a big watermelon.

### *Session Two: Linking our lives to trees*

We arrived for the second workshop one week later at the same place and time. Some of the children were waiting for us at the front of the hall, and these dozen children went and rounded up all the others. We were asked and agreed to not reveal to local residents the children's mothers' identity or profession. The women's profession is highly stigmatised and, while they had once lived in this community, they were no longer welcome. We recognised that it was also best practice to keep the group consistent and only include children of sex-workers, otherwise the children may not feel safe to speak of their experiences.

We then engaged in an activity we had learned at Odanadi. We planted little seeds into seedling pots, the children watered them, and then set them aside. We talked about how these seeds needed sun and water to begin the growth process and what would happen to the seed. Each child then took one pot home to care for it. The bush seeds sprouted quickly, within a few days.



### *Visualisation and drawing their own particular tree*

We then invited the children into a visualisation and movement process whereby they pretended they were a tree seed sitting in soft fertile soil. They started in a crouched position ready to be planted and watered. The children were then led through the visualisation to grow from seed to fully grown trees, while being encouraged to use all five senses to experience this. The sun on their skin, the wind in their leaves, the smell of damp soil, etc. Accompanied by gentle music, each child was in a quiet spot in the room, a place where they wouldn't be distracted by their friends. Each child had a sheet of artist drawing paper and oil crayons. When the visualisation/movement process ended, the children sat down and, before they spoke, took ten minutes to draw their experience. We kept the music going until the drawings were complete. The visualisation and movement process nurtured a rich inner experience which in turn provided vivid sensory content that the children used as creative material as they drew their own tree. As a result, each child's tree was unique.

The Tree of Life process enables children to convey experiences of life through visual imagery, with or without writing words or talking about their personal experiences. This is important because it means that the children remain in control of what they disclose.

Here is an example where an eight-year-old child at Odanadi spent three days drawing nothing but colour and lines into her individual tree, roots and ground. She kept her drawing protected and hidden from view by constantly covering it with her arms. Facing away from the rest of the group she turned her drawing face down when an adult came near. On the third day, she drew a figure and next to it wrote 'bad man'. While we gave her many opportunities to talk with us we did not push her to do so - her decision not to disclose was respected. She was visibly relieved after drawing the figure and no longer needed to hide her drawing from us. She also added many other words and images.

We ended the session with another round of singing the children's Tree of Life Song!



### *Sessions Three & Four: Creating the Tree of Life*

We gathered on this morning knowing it would be a big day. Today we were going to draw the whole tree from roots through to fruits and we would speak about our lives.

After singing our song, we got straight down to it. Everyone drew another tree, from roots to branches, to leaves, filling a whole page. We turned on music, which supported the children to be 'in their own world' and to not chat too much.

While the children were still drawing their trees, the facilitators began to make links between trees and children's lives:

*'Just like trees, we also have roots. The roots in our lives represent where we come from and what we return to that gives us strength.'*

Talking about our 'roots' is an opportunity to celebrate culture (our language, songs, villages, families, communities) and to acknowledge everything in life that gives us nutrients, that feeds and nourishes us.

Some children, however, knew very little about their early life, or, in the case of Odanadi, had only known institutional care. At Odanadi, many women and children acknowledged each other as family, while our enquiry into their roots included everything that nourishes the children in the present and recent past.

Children were instructed to represent their lives in the roots, either with words or images. A third choice was also given; to use colour, lines and shapes to represent their stories of their lives. This way they didn't need to tell us their story until or if they were ready to tell it.

The following notes assisted facilitators to ask the children about different parts of the Tree of Life. The whole group of thirty children was facilitated by one intern in Tamil, while the rest of us supported him and the children by moving around and working in smaller groups or one-on-one. The interns didn't ask all the questions listed below and they adapted and adjusted them in order to use culturally and age appropriate language:

#### *Tree of Life*

##### **Roots: Where you come from ... what has made you who you are today?**

Draw or name your village, home, temple, family members, friends, pets, special places or festivals, and the people who gave you comfort, made you safe, protected you, supported you, let you be you, made you who you are today.

Some other specific questions can include:

- Was there someone you went to when you were upset – mother, brother, relative, friend, neighbour ... someone who could comfort you? Or who could make you laugh? Care for you? Someone you felt safe with? Someone with whom you did interesting and enjoyable things? Someone who you could be yourself with? This could also be a pet ...
- Or was there a place you went to where you felt safe ... perhaps being alone was safe for you. Was there somewhere you could go to when you were upset, wanted to think, needed to be by yourself?
- Was there someone who protected you when you were bullied by adults or other children? Did you do other things with this person? What was special about your relationship? This person liked to be with you too. What do you think they liked about you? What did they see inside of you?
- Was there someone you liked doing things with? For example, did you like cooking or gardening with a mother or grandmother? Or did you like playing cricket, piano, dancing, gardening?



**Ground: Where you live now and all the things you enjoy doing in day-to-day life**

Where do you go? What do you do? Do you go to school? What is your hobby? Do you play games or sports? Do you do chores or run errands? Do you play with friends? Do you help your ma with the cooking, fetching water, etc.? Write down or draw into the ground these things you do in your daily life.

**Trunk: Skills, strengths and what you care about**

Look into your ground at what you do in daily life, or into your roots, to find the skills you have learned and developed. For example, if you play football then your skills may include being a good team player, good ball handling skills, running fast, or the skill to encourage others. If you like spending time with friends then you may have skills of listening, or helping, or talking to others, or the skill of making friends.

Specific questions can include:

- What do you like doing? What do you do well? Examples might include: running, eating all your dinner, playing in a team, reading, dancing, making others laugh, thinking ... Are you good at caring for others? Maybe you care for younger brothers and sisters? Are you a good listener? Do you help people when they need it?
- What do you think is important in life? Examples might include: to eat all your food and not be wasteful, to be honest, caring, work hard, think of others, look after yourself or others?

**Branches: Hopes, dreams or wishes that you have for your life**

- What are your dreams for yourself, your family, village, community, country?
- What would you like to be doing when you're an adult? Give some examples.
- Where would you like to be? What would you like to be doing? Who would you like to be there with you?
- Who would you like to be? How would you like others to know you? Examples: to be known to be fair, honest, to be known as someone who can lead the people, be hard working, be funny, be kind, be happy, etc.
- Imagine how it would be to live in this future? What would it look like and how would you feel?
- Where did your hopes and dreams come from? [relate this back to the roots, ground or trunk]
- How do you keep your hopes and dreams alive?

**Leaves: People who are important to you [alive or no longer alive]**

- Who is important to you in your life?
- What is special about this person?
- What did they teach you about yourself and life?
- What is/was it like being with this person, how do you feel?
- Are there characters in Hindu/Muslim/Christian stories that are important to you? Are there Gods or Goddesses who give you strength when you think about them? What are their qualities?
- Are there sports people, Bollywood actors, dancers, poets, who inspire you? What are their qualities that you admire?

**Fruit/Flowers: Gifts (resources/values)**

- What did these people give you, e.g., maybe they helped you feel strong, happy, special about yourself ... did they believe in you and your abilities? Give examples from your own life: I was given a love of the ocean; I was given the gift of music, faith in God, a feeling that I was strong and capable; I was given the love of reading, etc.
- Who gave this to you? Why do you think they gave this to you? What did they appreciate about you ... what did they see in you? What made them want to do this?
- Or, what contribution do you make to others, at home, in school, with friends? For example, do you take care of others, keep them safe?

## A forest of life

After children had completed their trees, we then invited the children to stick their drawing up on the wall together ... to make a forest. We wanted to reflect to the children a collective image of their trees. We are inviting children to tell not only individual stories, but collective stories (Denborough, 2008). We took time to appreciate the beauty/difference in shapes and sizes of the trees.

We reflected back to the children what all the trees had in common. Using the same language the children used, we also named different aspects of their trees, e.g., we read aloud different children's dreams and hopes; naming the special people represented by leaves; and so on. During this re-telling, the children's trees came to life. The children were able to recognise themselves there in the forest and to reflect upon the ways in which each tree is unique and yet also have much in common.

The children offered some beautiful reflections during this process. One child noticed that the big trees provide shade for the little trees and that without trees the birds would have nowhere to nest. We talked about the ways we support each other in our lives just like trees belonging in the same forest.

We then asked for a few volunteers to share the story of their trees. As each volunteer spoke, the facilitator asked about the child's hopes and dreams for their future and also the history of these hopes and dreams.

Each child was also asked to select one strength card from those spread out on a sari on the floor that reminded them of a friend in the room. They said aloud the name of their friend and acknowledged the person as having the skill or strength listed on the card they had chosen.

We then decided we wanted to add to each other's trees. We wrote on each other's trees many things we knew about our friends' strengths and skills which our friends may not be able to see in themselves.



## Storms of Life: Externalising problems

This next section of the process enables children to speak about difficulties in life and the ways they endure them. This happens in a collective process, so that children do not have to speak about their individual experiences (see Denborough, 2008). Here are some of the questions we asked:

1. As magnificent and beautiful as our trees are, Can we say they are always free from danger? What are some of the potential dangers our trees may face?

The children liked this question and had no problems in expressing themselves saying things like:

- people cutting the trees down for firewood
  - people and dogs pissing on them
  - storms blowing trees over
  - pigs eating the tree roots ... and so on.
2. We have likened our lives to those beautiful trees in the forest (pointing back to the drawings). Would it be right to say that, like the trees and forests, children also face dangers and troubles? What are some of the problems and dangers that children sometimes face?

Children named many things including:

- *strange men being in the house*
- *Mum and Dad arguing and fighting loudly*
- *hunger when there is no food to eat*
- *strange people snatch some children and take them away*
- *being bullied*
- *being hit or beaten*
- *not going to school*

3. We then discussed the effects these may have on some children

One of the older girls spoke about how her parents were always fighting and that this meant she wasn't doing her homework because they lived in just one room together. This was included on the list of the effects of 'storms' in children's lives.

4. We then talked about whether or not it is the children's fault that such things happen

The children were clear with a resounding 'NO!' ... children are not to blame!

5. Narrative approaches are very interested in drawing out children's survival skills and knowledge. We ask, 'What do children do when these problems and storms come into their lives? Are there ways that they respond? Are there things they can do?' Again, this is a collective conversation so that no child was under pressure to individually disclose.

Many examples were given of ways the children managed storms of life, and the children were fascinated to hear what each other were saying:





- *Talk to someone they trust*
- *Go to their neighbours' place*
- *Run away to protect themselves*
- *Talk to their teacher*
- *Pray*
- *Ask for help*
- *Hide*
- *Talk to their parents*
- *Invite their parents to their graduation*
- *Write their parents a letter*
- *Ask each other, their siblings or their parent(s) to 'help them keep their dreams alive'.*

This was a tender and excited conversation. To close this session we asked the children, 'Are the storms always present? Are our lives sometimes free of storms? What do we do when the storms have passed (Ncube, 2006)? The children broke into groups of five to talk and reflect on these three questions. At the end of these discussions, one person from each group was invited to stand up and give a brief summary of what their group had talked about.

We then asked the children to write a letter to someone in their life, to tell this person what they had learned about themselves, their lives, and about their dreams and aspirations for their future. This could include letting a person know how they could support the child to realise their dreams, what the child feels would be helpful. We also said that they could ask this person to the graduation where they could read out their letter if they wanted to.

Even though we were unable to return to the community for a long time (about six weeks) due to some political unrest, when we did return the children were waiting!

#### *Graduation ceremony*

We held a graduation ceremony for the children where they each received a 'certificate of completion' and a coloured laminated copy of their own Tree of Life.

Some of the children invited others with whom they wanted to share their Tree of Life. Some of them read their letters aloud.

A smaller group of four of the older girls with two of the interns recorded their Tree of Life song in a professional recording studio and CDs were distributed amongst the children! You can hear this song at [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/songs.html](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/songs.html)

#### *Feedback*

One of the older children said that, while they have done many activities with adults before, this was the first time they had been treated as equals: 'What we thought and said was truly valued'.

Another girl said. 'I know now I have good friends here'. While the children had grown up together, she reported that they had never before talked openly about their dreams or their troubles. As a result of doing the Tree of Life together, she said that she knows her friends in a new way. Significantly, she knows she can turn to them in times of trouble.





*These symbol cards have been compiled by Louise Carmichael as an assortment of photographs that cover a myriad of social and cultural images.*





## PART THREE: Supporting workers

*'Telling our story makes us feel free'*

Facilitated by Srishti Sardana and Louise Carmichael

Narrative practices are also used to support staff, who themselves are facing many obstacles, to tell their stories in ways that sustain them in their work.

*Introducing ourselves through what we value*

For instance, staff at Prayas Observation Home for Boys were invited to introduce themselves by choosing an image card which reflected something they valued in their work with children. The following collective document, crafted from their words, records what is important to them:

### **I feel maternal**

*I feel maternal thinking about the children in need of care and protection who do not have a mother. They also need to be cared for and loved.*

### **Being the warrior**

*I feel like a warrior fighting for goodness, and if I didn't do this I would not find peace.*

### **Just like the bird, the human seeks freedom, it is a human right**

*We cannot discriminate between us and them. I have been underprivileged too and have known how tough a life one leads when in deprivation, without respect, and being humiliated. When we have the privileges, we need to ensure the same for those who lack them.*

### **Acting with intent, purpose and spontaneity**

*If you can turn up in the moment and make the most of it, capitalise on it, you get where you want to. Time waits for no-one. If we cannot make good use of time at our hand, we will end up losing something that is critical to our lives. Wake up for now is the time! If you are sleeping then you need to wake up right away.*

### **Child welfare, children's needs**

*I feel the need to provide the children with safety. The Government is busy being power-savvy and they just keep talking/discussing, but then you see the child labour situation and look at the homes of the politicians. Children and their rights are most critical to our nation.*



### *A collective timeline*

We then explored what inspired workers to take the first step in their professional journey. We did this through the creation of a collective timeline (see Denborough, 2008).

The following questions were used to help staff to remember and tell their narratives:

1. When did you first think, 'I am going to work with children in need?' What was happening then?
2. What step did you take? When? (represent this moment on the personal time-line)
3. What would you call this step? What did you decide? (create a theme) e.g. *'I'm going to stop the violence against children!' ... 'all children should be loved (safe, fed, etc.) ...'*
4. What did it take to do this? (Name the skills, special know-how. Who wouldn't be surprised to know this about you?)
5. Was there anyone else who knew about this step? Was there anything or anyone who supported, helped or encouraged you to take that step? You could have been inspired by a person, an organisation, a social movement, a movie, a book, something you read in the paper, etc.

A volunteer was invited to plot these significant moments onto a time-line pasted along the length of a wall. Others in the group also volunteered to tell their stories and likewise plotted significant moments. We then added a second timeline to plot the social and political movements that were happening concurrently with participants' personal life journeys.



Staff also used a large map of India to trace their stories beyond their own lives. Journeys were traced across India from Sri Lanka, from Pakistan, and beyond. These were places where grandparents and others lived and developed values and aspirations, which were brought with them from afar as they resettled around Delhi and which they are carrying on in their work with children.



During the group conversations, participants were asked to notice if something was said that elicited feelings or memories for themselves of their own life situation and story. Whenever this happened, participants were asked to use diaries, which were handed out to them, to journal their thoughts. They could also select an image from the symbol cards that felt congruent with their memories and feelings of their own story. Drawing pads and crayons were also made available. All this material was then gathered together by the facilitators to create the following collective document which is also available in Hindi:



**Just like the bird, the human seeks freedom:  
it's a human right.**

We came together today to talk about our work with children and to tell our stories about how we came to work at Prayas Observation Home for Boys in Delhi; what skills we brought with us; and what motivated us to make this choice.

*The broader context*

*'Everyone I knew was going to the city to get more money ... more income ... better jobs ...'*

In the late 1980s and 1990s, India's government began to systematically liberalise the Indian economy. It did this through privatisation and attracting foreign investment. This had an impact on local village farm lands in the north of India, around Delhi, where land was being bought up by industries and where the labour became mechanised. This had enormous effects on the local workforce as everything had previously been done by hand. The new industries had limited numbers of jobs for a very large workforce.

Many of us started our work here at Prayas Observation Home for Boys together in the 1990s when we travelled to the city from the villages to find work. One of us shared how he learned a very important lesson from this:

*The city taught me much. I was exposed to the violence and unfairness of the world. This made me selfless and unconditional. Each time I was to return to my village, I would buy in the city some things that I would have noticed people needed, but could not procure. Like once, I brought a cane stick for an old woman in my village, because she constantly kept struggling to walk. She was unrelated to me and that gesture meant the world to her. It does not harm to remain unconditional in giving ... it can change someone's life. This is a value, which I now take back to my village, as well as to my work here with the boys. We try to teach them (the boys) about selfless acts, and that when we have privileges we need to ensure the same for those who lack them.*

*We recognise we are from the same past as these children*

Some of us suffered in childhood and we want to help children so that they don't have to experience the same pain from the humiliation of discrimination as we did.

*'We recognise that we cannot discriminate between us and them.'*

One of us reflected, *'I have been underprivileged too and have known how tough a life one leads in deprivation without respect and being humiliated'*.

Some of us were illiterate when we came here. For several of us, our siblings had an education but we didn't. One of us was told repeatedly that he was 'not good enough for anything' and so *'in 1994 I left and came to the city'*.

Another of us was humiliated for being a girl:

*My parents always reminded me of my failures and reinforced that I could never be good enough to take care of them or myself ... whereas it was implied my brothers would. So as a little girl, I would ask myself, 'How can I become my parents' support?' I left to go to the city to look for work.*

*'We are all working for children and our histories push us forward.'*



### *Thinking of our mothers*

As we talked about these histories, some of us were thinking of our mothers:

*When I went to work in the city, leaving behind the village, I often wrote letters home to my mother to keep her informed about my progress. She could not read my letters, she was illiterate, so I would never receive a reply from her. From that moment on, I decided to work for children and to make sure that all those children who could not go to school and who were neglected, were ensured proper care and good food. I feel maternal when I work with these boys. I always wanted to be a good mother and I try to be that for these boys.*

*My mother respected my work here. It was important for me to know that my mother was finally convinced about me and at peace with me, by seeing me this way with the children.*

### *Learning through the hardest times*

A couple of us have worked here for many years and we have learnt a lot through some of the really hard times:

*I remember in 1997, when this was still a home for neglected children, how much we used to struggle to even get them to learn how to use a toilet. They would sleep and excrete in the same room and there was so much filth and stench. I don't remember a single year when I was not hospitalised. Often I used to think of leaving this place, but then I would think 'but who would look after these boys'. So I have stayed! Now I know how important health is and I pass this on to the boys. I play cricket and chess with these boys to keep both body and mind sharp and healthy.*

### *Our work supports us through difficulties*

Several of us, in times of personal crisis, were supported by just being with the children, immersed in the children's lives and the purpose this brought to our lives:

*I used to spend all my time here ... eating, drinking, even sleeping here, amidst the children. I had no other place to go, nowhere to return to. I had been married for just twelve months when my wife died in childbirth. It broke me. I thought I couldn't work any longer ... but the founder of Prayas, Mr. Kanth, told me to spend all my time here with the children and so I did.*

### *We know about stigma*

The children we look after are stigmatised when they leave here. Many of us were also discriminated against as children: some of us by our own parents for being a girl, for being a burden, because some day our parents would have to arrange for our marriage. One of the women remembers that:

*While my brothers were looked upon as resources for my parents' support in old age, I remember that when my father didn't have enough money to feed us, he would beat me and my mother up.*

These days, we use our knowledge of stigma to support the children here.

### *Personal struggles are connected with the struggles of others*

In the 1990s there was a lot of violence in Delhi and in our neighbourhoods. We have learnt so much along the way. These were difficult times in India when we were still growing up. We were probably as old as these boys here are at the home. Violence was in our homes as children, but when we were children we couldn't stop it.

Many of us remember those times in Delhi:

*I was returning from school and we heard that our Prime Minister was assassinated by a Sikh man. And the next moment, we witnessed turbaned men being tied to the trees and burnt alive. We could see how their wives and daughters were attacked and brutally raped.*

*There was a bandobast (curfew) that led to people locking themselves up in their houses for as long as a week, without even having food to eat. This brought us closer as a family, created bonds, and stopped the violence at home. Many of us here were children at this time and some of us had already been experiencing violence in our homes, which as children we could do nothing about. When this bandobast happened, we suddenly forgot about the violence at home.*

Some of us decided at this time to work with children to stop violence.

This was a critical time in Delhi and for us in our childhood. We have learned so much from those times. One of us learned how critical it is for children to have positive support, to have people who care for us and remind us of our goodness and virtues:

*When I was twelve-years-old there was a teacher who was a Sikh. She was very supportive of me and often praised me for my integrity and diligence. Then, during the times of the bandobast, when the schools were shut down, we lost touch with each other. When the school resumed, she returned with brutal injuries on her body. She told us that her husband was killed and she would be leaving Delhi to go to her village. My support system was snatched away from me and I started to feel scared of going to school. I have never forgotten her and the way she struggled for justice. Now I am carrying on this struggle (sangharsh). It is as if my personal struggle is combined with the struggle of others in my community. I never want another child to be bereft of such positive support.*

One of us says: Just like the bird, the human seeks freedom, it is a human right.

*What these documents meant to the staff:*

When the staff members heard their words and stories reflected in this document, they gave the following feedback:

- *We are excited about what we've learned through this process.*
- *This has revived our friendships!*
- *We have all been through hardship, we have come to know each other's story and we need to watch out for each other. Telling our story makes us feel free. It lifts a burden and helps us to appreciate each other.*
- *Just as we have now spoken freely, the boys also need to be able to talk freely.*





## PART FOUR: Narrative approaches to therapy, group work and community work

The Tree of Life, Team of Life, collective documents, songs and timelines, are ways of working that utilise ideas from the field of narrative therapy, an approach to counselling and community work that was initially developed by Australian, Michael White, and New Zealander, David Epston. Narrative therapy centres people as the experts in their own lives and views problems as separate from people. Narrative therapy assumes that people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives. The word 'narrative' refers to the emphasis that is placed upon the stories of people's lives and the differences that can be made through particular tellings and re-tellings of these stories.

Over the last thirty years, narrative therapy has brought a wide range of new ways to respond to people and the problems they are facing. These include:

- externalising the problem (White, 1988/89)
- the use of therapeutic letters, certificates and documents (White & Epston, 1990)
- re-authoring conversations (White & Epston, 1990; Epston, 1992; White, 1995)
- saying hullo again conversations which are a particular response to grief (White, 1988), and
- narrative responses to trauma and traumatic memory (White, 2004; Denborough, 2006)

People from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives are now engaging with narrative ideas – from family therapists, community workers, teachers, psychiatrists, academics, anthropologists, psychologists, community cultural development workers, social workers, film and video documentary makers. As these engagements occur, they lead to further creative developments in narrative thinking and practices.

Over the last decade, partnerships with practitioners working in contexts of profound hardship and social suffering (including within Rwanda, Aboriginal Australia, Palestine, Uganda and Zimbabwe), have led to the generation of narrative methodologies that can be used beyond the counselling room. These have come to be known as forms of 'collective narrative practice' (Denborough, 2008, 2012).

Collective narrative practice methodologies often build upon the everyday, ordinary rituals and joys of community life. People's connections to nature, sports, stories, songs and histories can be the starting point for conversations. For instance, the Tree of Life narrative approach (Ncube, 2006; [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/tree-of-life.html](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/tree-of-life.html)), uses metaphors from the natural world to assist vulnerable children to 'tell their stories in ways that make them stronger' (Wingard & Lester, 2000). The Team of Life narrative approach uses sporting metaphors for similar ends. Significantly, collective narrative practice methodologies do not require people to speak in the first person about their lives, and they emphasise the skills, abilities, hopes and dreams of participants. This ensures that these approaches do not 're-traumatise' people. Instead, these ways of working create contexts for pride, the acknowledgement of 'hard-won' knowledge, and the celebration of 'goals' that young people have already scored in life.



## Further information about narrative therapy

For an overview of narrative therapy approaches, see Morgan (2000), White (2007), Denborough (2014), or the Dulwich Centre website ([www.dulwichcentre.com.au](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au)).

## Further information about collective narrative practice

For more information about the Tree of Life, Team of Life, and other collective narrative practices, see Denborough (2008) and the Dulwich Centre website: [www.dulwichcentre.com.au](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au)

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*This publication describes the use of narrative practices with vulnerable children, young people and workers in a number of different contexts in India. The use of the Cricket Team of Life, the Tree of Life and collective documents, songs and timelines, are each described. These approaches enable practitioners to listen for and elicit young people's skills, knowledge and alternative stories of identity.*



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