



TULIR -
CENTRE FOR PREVENTION
AND HEALING OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In today's world and our reliance on search engines and social media, you would hardly find information about the founders of Tulir – Centre for Prevention and Healing of Child Sexual Abuse, in Chennai. Strange for an NGO whose work though, is well covered for a little over a decade of their existence.

Meet Vidya Reddy and Nancy Thomas, two of the founders (there were four initially) and social workers, who work at the non-profit and non-governmental organization, whose mandate of working against Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) includes public education programs, developing information resources, creation and strengthening of support networks especially for legal assistance and psychosocial healing of abused children and their families. Technical assistance and training related to professional response sector involvement are also significant activities besides fostering coalitions and networks to influence policy and legislative initiatives.

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Despite a stellar reputation for its work, Tulir is one of those few NGOs that's least interested in self-promotion. "What good would that do? If it's not going to make a difference in helping the cause of creating awareness on CSA, we're not interested," says Nancy. "Vidya and I don't matter in the larger picture. We don't want focus shifting from the crime to us."

Within the broad span of their programs and projects, addressing the implications of the intersection of digital technology

with sexual violence against children, improving the experience of child witnesses' entanglement with the criminal justice system, assisting child and youth serving organizations evolve child protection policies, the social marketing of child sexual abuse prevention, sexual abuse prevention education for children with disabilities, working with youth whose behavior is sexually harmful, assisting other civil society organizations with their sexual abuse intervention programs and reframing media coverage of sexual violence against children, are of special interest.

That undivided focus, dictated by constantly changing realities has been the way Tulir has functioned since its inception in 2004. Founded by three young professional social workers from different educational backgrounds, and a "dinosaur with a chequered work experience" as Vidya likes to call herself in comparison to the others' age and experience, Tulir's primary objective was, and continues to be, creating awareness on prevention of sexual abuse of children, and another very important aspect – healing the effects of the impact. A key aspect to any of their work is not to shock or create any

sense of paranoia. But, to educate and empower with ways and means of addressing it and include everyone in the process. The reason why "the great Indian network of family and friends" has been their mainstay in assisting their work right from, say, creating the logo, to volunteering at public events to "just about helping us keep our sanity, sometimes" says Nancy.

As Vidya loves to put it, there was no 'Big Bang' moment for starting Tulir. "Just that four of us realised that there



You are the boss of your body

Your private body parts are not to be looked at or touched by anyone else – except to keep you clean and healthy.

There is also no need for you to touch or look at someone else's private body parts.

Private body parts are the parts of your body covered by underwear or a swim suit.

Smart ways to be SAFE

It is never okay for someone to take photos of your private body parts or for you to do the same

Your lips are private too and they are on your face to smile, eat, talk, whistle ...

If you don't like how your body is being treated, You have the right to say No, Stop, Don't. Even to an older person.

You may also feel confused sometime. Like when you and your best friends have a fight. You're angry because your friends fought with you, but you still like them because they're your friends.

Our body is amazing – It talks to us especially when it feels

Sometimes telling about someone may make you feel nervous, scared, confused... BUT TELL. And keep telling till you get help to be safe again

Anytime someone touches you in a way that makes you feel scared, nervous, unsafe or confused, you need to get away and tell an older person in your circle of safety. It's not your fault. Even if you can't get away or tell immediately, you did nothing wrong.

Write the names or draw the faces of people who you would tell, to be safe.

And remember - Secrets about touching are never OK - you must tell. It's never too late to tell.

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Tulir

given the short shrift and in the end it was the kids who were bearing the brunt”.

When the NGO began, response to sexual violence was usually reactionary either from the community or stakeholders. It was more punitive, which rarely helped survivors and also excluded prevention initiatives. It was little understood that everyone plays a part and that it takes a community to protect a child– not just the family and neighbourhood, but educators, police, academia, judiciary, healthcare and media professionals, etc., all share equal responsibility in addressing sexual violence against children within a framework of policy, programmes and legislation. It helped, though it did not seem helpful at that time, that there was no template to follow, allowing the quartet to think out of the box and be innovative and naively intrepid in the way they created the programs.

Has Tulir achieved its goal? “It’s definitely an on-going process but yes, we’d like to believe we have made progress,” says Nancy. “Not that the larger society is not in denial or apathetic even now, but compared to a decade ago, people are more willing to at least acknowledge sexual abuse of children, and that is the first step of putting in the safeguards” points out Vidya.

They are propelled by a strong sense of duty and responsibility and the sadness of witnessing the less than optimally led lives of many adults who have been sexually abused as children. Well aware of their biggest limitations of being a small organization, they have turned it to their advantage, working in an almost “guerrilla style” process – picking an aspect, creating maximum impact to catalyse change with strategic unconventional ways and with little budget to spend.

Very ambitious about advancing the understanding of addressing sexual violence, they have no grand plans for Tulir but are more interested in bringing about

a seamless integrated response system to cases of sexual violence, which gives folks enough confidence to report a case. “I’m also pragmatic enough to accept that sexual violence can never be eradicated but it is preventable and reducible and “Moving upstream is the only way” says Vidya who is zealous about the prevention aspect and believes transforming communities by involving individuals from being passive bystanders to actively intervening within their own spheres, is the only way forward.

To achieve all of this, and more, Tulir is needed to exist as an entity. “In 2004, I was pursuing Masters in Social Work,” recalls Nancy. “And was doing block placement as a part of my curriculum at a child welfare organization where Vidya was volunteering. Almost as if fated, the two other co-founders, Alankaar and Vipin T. who have since moved onto social enterprise and academia respectively, were attending a conference which Vidya and Nancy were also attending, and they realised they had a common objective. Interaction with Indian born American social worker Lois Engelbrecht, whom they consider a mentor also gave them the much needed initial technical understanding, as there is nothing even now by way of formal training or study on sexual violence, available in India. Likewise they are extremely grateful to the guidance of their trustees Mrs Andal Damodaran and Geeta Ramaseshan for keeping them grounded while going along with their often “off the wall ideas”. Everything that Tulir has done since, right from the way its name was chosen to the way in which Vidya and Nancy function as a team, are carefully thought-out processes and conscious decisions. Tulir - Tamil for young, tender leaves as well as leaves sprouting after a period of adversity resonate with the two cornerstones of Tulir’s work

“We wanted both prevention and healing mentioned to articulate the words child sexual abuse. Though it may sound tokenistic, we believe it is yet another way to erode into the silence of the most public secret.

was hardly any understanding and limited resources to address sexual violence against

children. More importantly, the unique dynamics of sexual violence was, and is still,