

AUGUST 2022

## Ashoka Centre for Well-Being (ACWB)

a non-aligned Centre offering counselling and psychological support for students, staff and faculty at Ashoka University.



## OUR NEW PREMISES!

We are so proud to announce that ACWB has a new location with dedicated space for counselling rooms, group sessions, trainings, Well-Being Lab and lots of plant friends!



We are now situated on the 3rd floor of the new library building offering both online and in-person sessions to the Ashoka community.



Here is a little glance of our new abode.



Happy to welcome you anytime you would like to drop by!

*Greetings from ACWB!*

*Well-Being Matters is an initiative that sheds light on all matters related to mental health and well-being at Ashoka.*

*This issue will cover the various well-being and training programs conducted by ACWB in the past year.*

*So, read on about all matters that matter as we begin with giving you a little glimpse of our new Centre.*

# INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING

In the throes of the Covid Pandemic in 2021, the Centre provided support to around **1420** members of the Ashoka community spread across **3450** hourly sessions while adding nearly **500** new members approaching the Centre. The year witnessed shifting trends in the kinds of concerns people approached the Centre with as the pandemic changed form. With the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 people witnessed **high levels of anxiety and uncertainty** as they got used to the lockdowns and online work.

The mental health concerns brought to the Centre predominantly express themselves in the form of anxiety, depressiveness and sometimes suicidal behaviour. People approach the Centre for concerns related to **academic stress, relational issues, familial dysfunction, identity issues, stress about the future, dealing with disappointment, demotivation** among other problems. The Centre also provides round the clock support and intervention with the goal of averting crisis in time.



On the other hand, as 2021 began with the deadly second wave people encountered increasing concerns of **grief and loss** with experiences of **exhaustion and online burnout**. As the year turned to 2022 with the third wave, we saw more issues to the like of **disappointment, lack of motivation and reduced productivity**. As the university resumed classes in- person in March after the prolonged pandemic, ACWB also resumed work on campus. The Centre has remained functional through the vacations with students continuing to seek support from us in a hybrid mode.

Providing a **confidential and compassionate** holding space for their emotions and helping our clients deal with their immediate as well as long term concerns through continued sessions is the core of the one to one counselling work at the Centre. The number of people who regularly approach the Centre for these sessions is a testimony to the commitment and positive attitude the Ashoka Community has towards mental health and well-being.

# CAPACITY BUILDING

## GATEKEEPERS PROGRAM

The Gatekeeper program is designed to offer sensitivity training for various student groups, residential advisors, cohort leaders, and student representatives. It aims to train students in being **first responders** in mental health crisis.



### ACWB conducts First Responder Boot Camp for handling Anxiety, Panic Attacks and Crisis | Gatekeeper Program



*Team ACWB was delighted to host an in-person Gatekeeper training after the pandemic in our new premises in April 2022.*

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY WELL-BEING  
X  
ASHOKA CENTRE FOR WELL-BEING (ACWB)

### Gate Keeper Training

1

Over 60 Ashoka students across batches have been trained\* to be first responders!

3

First responders have been trained to:

- Identify the spectrum of distress
- Improve their listening skills
- Provide swift support in a crisis situation (e.g. if someone has a panic or anxiety attack)

2

We have conducted 3 trainings, and are looking forward to our 4th one in February.

4

Here's what an attendee had to say about the training: "I feel a lot more prepared to be a first responder. The segment about listening skills was particularly helpful!"

\*THE TRAINING DOES NOT EQUIP STUDENTS PROFESSIONALLY OR PROVIDE ANY KIND OF CERTIFICATION.

The training which is regularly conducted by the Centre involves learning to **identify sources of anxiety and acute distress**, **learning active listening skills**, **offering peer support**, and **help connect students with the right resources**.

The student government, Ministry of Well-Being helps in coordinating the program. Through these trainings ACWB has managed to build a well-equipped group of first responders from amongst the campus community.



# WELL-BEING LAB

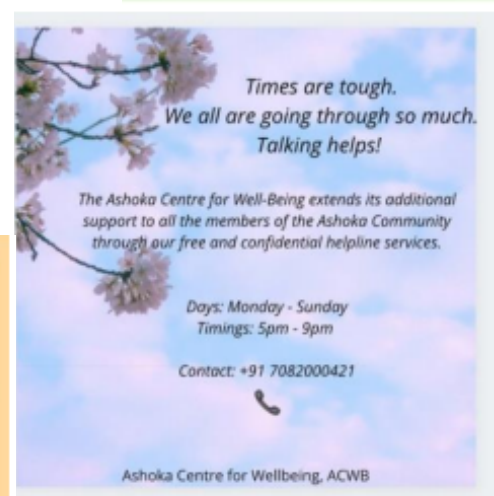
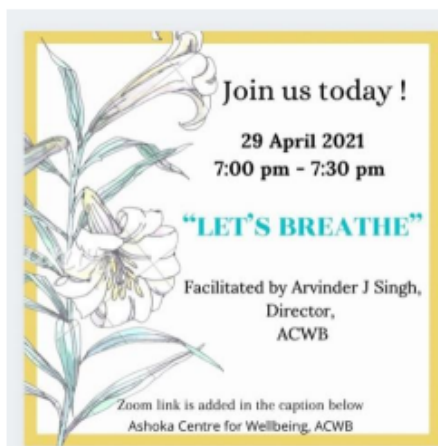
The Centre regularly conducts **research** to observe various trends in mental health within Ashoka which helps plan timely interventions.

ACWB extends its support to the wider community through **awareness programs, peer support programs, social media advocacy, interactive workshops and group sessions within and outside Ashoka.**

The Centre also focuses on **Well-Being at Workplace** through workshops to support the mental health of Ashoka's staff at various levels of the university. All the above is achieved under the unique flagship of our **Well-Being Lab** that was established in 2017.



Some significant problem areas identified







Well-Being workshops with staff at Ashoka.

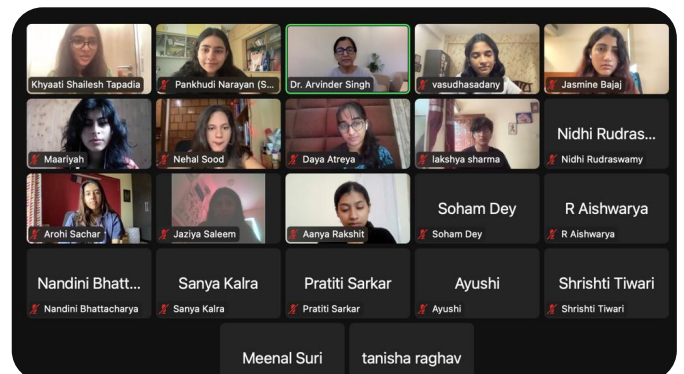
## PEER SUPPORT AND MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

Peer Support and Mental Health Advocate Programs are important for us for capacity building. The Centre has trained roughly **500** students in the last few years who act as peer supporters, peer mentors and mental health advocates.

The role of these trained students is to **open conversations about mental health among their peer group, encourage help seeking behaviour and connect the ones requiring help with appropriate resources.**

**98.99** percent fellows in a feedback survey from the outgoing YIF Batch said that ACWB is an important and valuable resource for students.

Significant number of students who received the Peer Support trainings have emphasized on the usefulness of the program. Many also reported how the training helped them engage with their peers at critical and vulnerable moments and connect them with the appropriate help.



An IC3 training on "Is the pandemic really over? Exploring mental health challenges and transitions for students going back to school"

Orientation and training of the Mental Health Advocates Program

# INTERNSHIPS

Internships are a very sought after and valued engagement with the Centre as they not only offer a peak into potential career in psychology and mental health but are also hard to find in and around Delhi NCR. The Centre offers these opportunities to final year Undergraduate Psychology students within the university.

Through these internships students learn about the Centre, get training in the Gatekeeper's program, engage with learning various modes of counselling used at the Centre and take up projects on advocacy and research.



*The Centre welcomed the fourth batch of internship in-person as a part of the summer internship program.*

*Interning with the ACWB the past month has been a learning experience for me and I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the Centre. Perhaps the session I will cherish the most will be the question and answer session with all the counselors in the centre. I will carry some of those learnings and discussions forward with me. I also really enjoyed coming to campus and working in the Centre's office. The internship and meeting room felt like my own little space dedicated to work. For me it helped create that boundary between work and home which felt quite blurred when I was working from home during the pandemic.*

Anukriti Chawla, ASP 2023, Ashoka University  
ACWB Internship Batch 4



*The Centre organised a Certification meeting for our last three batches of Internship in May 2022.*

The Centre is successfully completed four batches of internships so far and going forward the goal is to offer these internships to students from other disciplines as well as students from other universities.

The interns working with the Centre have provided very interesting perspectives and innovative project ideas. These include advocacy around suicide awareness, queerness and mental health, accessibility to counselling services and help seeking behavior among the students etc. Some of their researches were also able to throw light on particular mental health trends within the Ashoka community with suggestions on how to tackle them. It has been an enriching experience for both the students and the ACWB team.

*“Overall, this internship gave me a number of valuable things: new ideas to consider, information to remember, and avenues to explore. I am hopeful that we can continue research regarding mental health on campus – perhaps ACWB could even develop a small department devoted to this! In any case, I’d recommend this internship to anybody looking to reflect on their own role within the space of mental health and wellbeing at Ashoka.”*

Svasti Dutta, ASP 2021, Ashoka University  
ACWB Internship Batch 1



# CONFERENCE

In continuation of the research collaboration between **Cambridge University** and **Ashoka University**, ACWB organized a virtual conference titled **"The Past, Present and Future of Psych Clinics: Global Perspectives"** on January 22nd and 23rd, 2022.

The conference was organized in response to the prolonged pandemic as it took a huge toll on the mental health of the world's population. In an academic setting this continued uncertainty had left students, educators and parents grappling with a number of concerns including those of mental health. It addressed the increasingly global and Indian issue of mental health, in relation to psychotherapeutic and social science perspectives.

Inaugurated by the honourable Vice Chancellor of Ashoka University, Prof Malabika Sarkar, the conference witnessed a cross-sectional representation of members within the mental health industry including psychiatrists, teachers, counsellors, students, therapists and more. It was very well received with a huge number of participants joining in and an insightful round of discussion.

*"It was a privilege to attend the ACWB's two day virtual conference titled 'The Past, Present and Future of the Psych Clinic: Global Perspectives'. Both speakers in the event brought refreshing and counter-intuitive perspectives on the idea of the therapeutic. Renos K Papadopoulos (Director, Center for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees, University of Essex) brought a novel, counter-concept of trauma, and the ways in which moments of crisis might also bear the seeds of new capacities and forms of resilience. Arvinder Singh (Director, ACWB) emphasized a wellness rather than an illness approach, and the notion of a spectrum, within which the idea of the normal itself comes into question. The events were well-attended and served to open up an important and much needed space for discussion on mental health issues, which is an emerging crisis and a desperately unaddressed and understudied issue within Indian universities."*

Bhri Gupta Singh, Visiting Associate Professor of Psychiatry, Carney Institute, Brown University, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, Ashoka University,

*"Doing psychotherapy or being therapeutic? Complexities of therapeutic care, especially during the pandemic"*



Speaker: Renos K Papadopoulos, Director  
Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees,  
University of Essex

Friday, 21st January 2022  
6:30 pm IST  
1:00 pm GMT  
8:00 am EST

Join through Zoom:  
Meeting ID: 993 5889 8764  
Passcode: 893833  
[https://zoom.us/j/99358898764?](https://zoom.us/j/99358898764?pwd=NHNSdlkYncrVWEsTGx5SEFCV3pFUT09)  
[pwd=NHNSdlkYncrVWEsTGx5SEFCV3pFUT09](https://zoom.us/j/99358898764?pwd=NHNSdlkYncrVWEsTGx5SEFCV3pFUT09)

*"Therapeutic Spaces : Strengthening Mental Health on Campus"*



Speaker: Arvinder J. Singh, Director  
Ashoka Centre for Well-Being,  
Ashoka University

Saturday, 22nd January 2022  
6:30 pm IST  
1:00 pm GMT  
8:00 am EST

Join through Zoom:  
Meeting ID: 963 3329 4321  
Passcode: 557945  
[https://zoom.us/j/96333294321?](https://zoom.us/j/96333294321?pwd=Ty9SaDlnRnZOeFcyMWt1SDVITldlQT09)  
[pwd=Ty9SaDlnRnZOeFcyMWt1SDVITldlQT09](https://zoom.us/j/96333294321?pwd=Ty9SaDlnRnZOeFcyMWt1SDVITldlQT09)

Day 1 of the conference Professor Renos K Papadopoulos, Director of Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees, University of Essex, UK, presented on “**Doing psychotherapy or being therapeutic? Complexities of therapeutic care, especially during the pandemic**”. His talk was a reflection on what is therapeutic and an epistemological framework to locate “*the therapeutic*” within the context of the pandemic. He also shed light upon the range of consequences of being exposed to adversity, the dilemmas in providing help and how to use the opportunity of an adverse situation to change our fundamental perspectives on life.

Day 2 of the conference Arvinder J Singh, Founder Director, Ashoka Centre for Well Being, Ashoka University presented on “**Therapeutic Spaces: Strengthening Mental Health on Campus**”. The talk emphasized the importance of capacity building within an institution or community, more so during adverse situations as the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the enormity of the mental health crisis and the increasing gap between the number of mental health professionals and those seeking help, it becomes imperative to create networks of support within the community. In an academic space, advocates for mental health, peer support programs and training students and staff to be first responders in mental health, can provide wider holding spaces for individuals, preventing stressors from becoming a mental health crisis and promoting the overall well-being of students on campus.

The conference was a huge success and created a platform for students, mental health practitioners and other attendees to learn and interchange ideas about the various struggles faced by people across the globe during the trying times of the pandemic. It also brought forth innovative solutions that can help us deal with the growing mental health challenges facing the world.

*The conference greatly contributed to the journey of demystifying and destigmatising mental health and really provided a space to have a discourse about the collective struggles several of us may be facing as a result of the pandemic. When Dr. Arvinder pointed out the tendency of students and even faculty members to need to be productive during such a time, It completely resonated with me. The session helped me consolidate that I can let that go and take some time out for myself without feeling guilty for not being productive. The mention of therapeutic spaces not needing to be confined within the four walls of a therapeutic setting and the emphasis on creating spaces that are physically and emotionally safe around me was something that really stuck with me. Undergoing the first responder's program myself and also having helped conduct it several times has helped me understand and identify markers of distress not only in those around me but also in myself. Through the conference, I was left feeling a greater sense of control over my actions and a greater sense of calm. I thoroughly enjoyed attending the session and am looking forward to attending future sessions!*

Pankhudi Narayan, Undergraduate Class of 2023, Ashoka University

# ACYWB IN THE NEWS

MCI Executive Director **Marjorie Malpiede** interviews **Arvinder J. Singh** on student mental health ...see more



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India's Campus Mental Health Crisis: How One University is Attempting to Create a New Narrative on Student Mental Health

"By combining the preventative, promotive, and curative aspects of mental health, it aspires to open conversations and build student collaboration."

— DR. ARVINDER SINGH  
Executive Director of Ashoka University's Centre for Wellbeing



Fall 2021 Mary Christie Quarterly



Mental and Behavioral Health

## India's Campus Mental Health Crisis: How One University is Attempting to Create a New Narrative on Student Mental Health

By:  **Marjorie Malpiede** October 20, 2021



Express Healthcare



## THE INVISIBLE INJURY: Mental health and athletic identity



By  **EH News Bureau** on September 4, 2021

*Arvinder J. Singh, Founder and Director, Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing, Ashoka University shares her views on mental health and athletic identity*



# TESTIMONIALS

*"My experience during the sessions that we had was extremely helpful. I can't thank you enough for being there and helping me work on myself. Every session in 2020 was so much insightful. Our sessions helped me explore myself and accept myself the way I am. I don't know how to put this in words but you have literally helped me so much during a really dark phase in my life and the learnings are something that I will carry with myself always."*

- Anonymously Shared

*"The ACWB at Ashoka is known for its one of a kind services from one on one counselling to open conversations on mental health - empowering students. Our collaborations with them were fruitful especially because student-driven initiatives such as the Gatekeeper Training, and Support Group initiatives were given importance. The commencement of these will help lay the foundations for more such initiatives to flourish, strengthening community well-being and student leadership."*

-Minister of Community Well-Being, 2020-2021

# REACH OUT TO US

`well.being@ashoka.edu.in`

Appointment Portal: `http://acwb.ashoka.edu.in`

Instagram: `acwb_ashoka`

ACo4, 3rd floor, across LR310

...because you matter