

# Implementing What I Learned at ICASSI 2011

By

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ICASSI Scholarship  
2011

## **INTRODUCTION**

After several attempts, the year 2011 saw my first ever encounter with ICASSI. At the onset my choice of courses were clear, they would be courses that would be useful back home, be it in the university, in the community or in my private practice.

I chose half day courses for both weeks, so I could absorb as much variety in the two weeks at ICASSI. The courses were Group Art Therapy, Psychodrama, Trauma and Growth and lastly Addiction. Even during the two weeks, I could foresee how I would be able to use the things I was learning at ICASSI back home. However once I actually got back to India and started executing some of the workshops I had planned, Adlerian Psychology took on a path of its own. The impact the workshops had on the people and feedback from them then set the stage for what I would do next. When I look back now on the months since ICASSI, I can honestly say I did not think I would be able to do so much with what I learned at ICASSI, but I'm absolutely delighted that I did.

The following are some of the activities that I have conducted post my return from ICASSI this August up until December 2011.

## **THE ICASSI WAY**

The first of many activities was a series of classes that lasted over a month on Adlerian Psychology conducted for Masters' level students as well as my colleagues at the Department of Psychology, Nowrosjee Wadia College. Although Adler is part of the syllabus in the 'Personality' course, it is taught as some distant, not easy to fathom psychoanalytic theory that is not accessible to the current generation. Repackaging it the "ICASSI" way made it easier and more relevant for the students and it was quite an eye opener for the other faculty members as well. This series of workshops helped initiate a project in the department where the students encouraged each other to let Social Interest guide their behaviour on as well as off campus. During the course of a month, the students would meet to share how they implemented the concept in their own lives and how they were now teaching family members to do the same.

## **RESEARCH**

Post the series of lectures I conducted in the Department of Psychology, where I work as adjunct faculty, a few of the students became interested to learn more about Adlerian Psychology, so they read up and researched it. Together we realized that pretty much no research on Adlerian concepts in the Indian Context had been carried out. Hence we decided to take up research on Birth Order and Personality as part of the research activities of the department for post graduate students. The project is nearing completion and will be submitted for publication to a peer reviewed journal shortly.

## **IN MY PRACTICE**

I primarily work with youth and a lot of them have been abused. The abuse varies from physical, emotional as well as sexual. My learning for Anthea Miller's Trauma, Recovery and Growth course

has helped me deal with these clients with a fresh perspective and the results have been very encouraging. It has not only helped these young people, but has also given me a new skill set as a therapist.

Abuse seems to be closely linked with addiction in what I have seen thus far, be it narcotic substances, food, or destructive behaviour. Even while at ICASSI it was easy to tie in knowledge acquired from Anthea Miller's class with Jim Holder's course in Addiction. All of what they said linked so beautifully with each other that as a whole it seemed like a comprehensive understanding of abuse and addiction. While there, I was able to discuss this link with Jim and this enhanced understanding of the two has helped me in my practice immensely. Linking the concept of positive intent in Addiction and how the (imagined) need for safety and security may work as positive intent has helped me understand my clients so much better and I believe that makes me a better therapist.

### WORKSHOPS

Drawing from the plenary sessions where the focus was often children and the positive impact Adlerian Psychology has on development and upbringing, a series of workshops were conducted the focus of which were Children. However since it is the significant adults in a child's life that can truly teach the child, the workshops were aimed at reaching out to caregivers or people who have the most effect on children, namely, teachers, coaches, counsellors, special educators and parents. Using the Crucial "C's" as well as Frank Walton's books as the foundation for the workshops, experiential workshops were designed for these adults, with the aim of creating awareness and providing a support system for them incorporating several techniques from the Drama Therapy course. The workshops were very well accepted and promoted discourse on a lot of parenting techniques that are currently prevalent in India but are questionable. I believe the most significant outcome of the workshops were that the groups decided to stay in touch and support each other through the challenges that working with children/teens may bring forth.



Role Play Techniques employed at the workshop



Interactions and discourses at the workshops

### ART and DRAMA THERAPY

My time with Judy Sutherland, Heather Leigh and Anabella Shaked at ICASSI was enriching to say the least. Though music, art and drama are an integral part of Indian Culture, Art/Drama as therapy is looked upon with more scepticism than usual psychotherapies. Hence the idea of conducting a whole day workshop that could introduce the concept of art/dramas as therapy naturally followed on my return from ICASSI. The workshops were open to anyone who was interested, and was publicized through word of mouth and listings in local newspapers. The response was phenomenal! So much so that the chosen location couldn't accommodate the number of people who had signed up. As a result the workshops were held several times over the last few months for students, teachers, counsellors, therapists, parents and art enthusiasts.



One of the Art Therapy Workshops



An activity at a Psychodrama Workshop

### REACH OUT

On receiving such a positive response from the students I believed that the Adlerian way may be more relevant in the Indian context than I realized. From the plenary sessions of Jurg Ruedi, Theo Joosten and Paul Rasmussen, I realized the importance of social interest, encouragement and moreover inculcating these from an early age. Since I have been working with youth and in

2010 had founded and moderated a group called Reach Out to Life, I believed that would be the best place to start reaching out to the community with Adlerian Principles. Although I didn't realize it at the beginning social interest, community feelings and a sense of belonging have been deep rooted in the Reach Out ideology, hence the core group readily lapped up the idea of taking these principles to the children and youth of the community.

The best place to reach the maximum number of children was through schools. I also realized that with the core group of two plus me, we were not going to be able to reach too many people. Hence I put up fliers in various psychology departments across different colleges in the city, with the hope of roping in post graduate students to help me reach as many schools as possible. To my absolute delight, 20 postgraduate students responded to my fliers, I added them to an already existing group of 3 volunteers of the Reach Out foundation who had been conducting workshops for school aged children and trained them on a workshop I developed called "Resilience through Social Interest". After training these 23 volunteers, we approached public schools across the city and began conducting this workshop for students from Grades 8 to 12. Thus far, in the last three months we have conducted the workshop for about 2500 odd students in the city and by the end of this academic year would have conducted this workshop for hopefully close to 10, 000 students in Pune city.



Some of the Reach Out Volunteers

### ROC

The group of Reach Out Volunteers has become a cohesive unit and work well together. We felt the need to meet more often to share ideas, talk about issues that may be relevant to us as students, teachers, a community and as the youth of the nation that has the propensity to initiate change. It got me thinking about the Adler Cafe and how that seemed like the perfect setting to exchange ideas and assimilate some new ones as well. So was born the Reach Out Cafe or popularly called ROC (pronounced 'rock'). On the second Saturday of every month, the group meets, we decide on a theme for the meeting. These meetings are open to anyone that may be interested, whether an active volunteer or not. ROC seems to cut across age, gender,

occupation and education. Depending on the theme, ideas and information are exchanged through discourse or interactive games. The aim of ROC thus far has been to create awareness about youth related issues as well as to inculcate social interest and a feeling of community. ROC is now a monthly activity that is eagerly anticipated.



Some activities at ROC

### FEELING OF COMMUNITY

During a ROC session, the discussion veered toward the importance of belonging and how this feeling of belonging shapes us as people and more importantly as a society and the fact that so many children in India are denied this feeling of belonging as they have been orphaned or abandoned at a very young age. We knew that we needed to do something, so over the next few days we visited several orphanages and children homes around the city and found that these Homes aren't even able to provide decent clothing or food to the children that they house. One such Home called *Santvana* (meaning solace or comfort) in particular caught our attention as it seemed to not have much at all. This Home is run by Christian missions who were more than happy to receive anything we could give. However, being a group with no external funding and since most of the costs of school workshops and ROC are personally borne by me, I was not financially in a position to give much more, so we decided to do what we call a "Paper drive". We went door to door across several neighbourhoods in the city and asked them to give us old newspapers, cans and bottles, these were then sold to waste centres. In all we collected about 700 kilograms of old newspapers and waste. While going door to door we also collected old clothes, toys and books that could have been of use to the children in this Home. All in all we collected enough of money to buy new clothes, books and toys as well as pay for dry cleaning of all the old clothes that were donated. However, we were intent on not just giving them things, we wanted these children (ages 3 to 17 years) to feel like they belonged, so we decided to spread a little Christmas cheer. We organized a Christmas party and spent a day with these children, playing games, singing with them, and sharing Christmas treats with all 40 of them. That for me was "Gemeinschaftsgefühl" in action. The children were simply adorable and now we have decided to visit them more often and also volunteer psychological services to some of the children who live there that may benefit from it as they have been through significant distress at a very young age.



Games with the children at Santvana



Christmas treats for the children



Volunteers along with staff and children of the *Santvana* Home

## **IN CONCLUSION**

In the five months since ICASSI, I have been able to implement what I have learned in the University, in the Community as well as in my private practice as I had set out to do and will continue to do so.

Two weeks at ICASSI gave me a new pair of eyes as a psychologist, therapist, teacher, researcher and more importantly as a person. I learned not only in the classrooms but in all of my interactions outside the classroom as well. ICASSI truly seemed like the "happiest place" on Earth and that is simply because the faculty and veterans of ICASSI live by what they preach. ICASSI has been life changing in every way not only for me but indirectly for the people who have learned about Adlerian Psychology through me and if not for the scholarship neither they nor me would have been privy to the world of ICASSI and its teachings. I'm thankful for the same and I hope I'm able to be at ICASSI more often and share what I learn every single time and hopefully in time be at the forefront of organize an ICASSI in India!