

AAGAAZ THEATRE TRUST

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025



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OVERVIEW OF 2024-25

2024-2025 has been very exciting for the whole Aagaaz team, as we grew in number, grew our roots deeper into the work we so earnestly believe in and spread our dreamy wings to take flight into things that felt scary and yet important to do. We have developed the Khwāb Ghar regular programing to include many more members from the community, we have begun to make the repertory more independent and we have expanded a little more - in terms of our team, our programs, our partnerships as well our space.

This kind of slow yet thoughtful growth has only been possible thanks to the unconditional support we have had from the larger arts and social development sector as well as wonderful and generous institutions and individuals who have fueled our belief and dreams with their support.

In this report we will attempt to summarise our work at Khwāb Ghar with residents of the Hazrat Nizamuddin basti- who are children, adolescents, young adults and women. We also look at the work of the repertory as theatre makers and performers, while simultaneously leading the work with the community as well as their work on their own capacity building. We also take a brief look at engagement with our larger community of artists, partner organizations, allies and networks.

VISION

We envisage a world of equality and well-being. A world where everyone feels a sense of belonging and can shape their lives with an understanding of their rights and responsibilities as members of a shared society.

MISSION

Our work is led by youth from the community to build resilience through arts and play, based out of our Community Arts Centre and Library (Khwāb Ghar) in Basti Hazrat Nizamuddin.

TANA BANA - OVERVIEW

The team's dream for our work has been to co-create a safe space with and for our community in Nizamuddin basti. Tana Bana is the intersection of community and arts and it has evolved in ways that we hadn't imagined. We've had the opportunity over the past year to remind ourselves of the wonderful ways in which the arts uncover layers and layers of our selves and redefine our perceptions about things outside us, while helping us stay curious about the things that are beyond us.

Khwāb Ghar has seen a steady footfall of over a 100 children 4 days a week, and with the work extending to mothers and cultural programming that is open to families, more than 500 people have been a part of our work in various beautiful ways. Some pivotal moments and news from the past year :

Our Library Program is now led by Jasmine and Zainab, who with their learnings over the past two years are now leading the administrative aspects as well as the creative ideation behind library programming. Every Tuesday we have the space full of children rushing past each other in the corridors to the other rooms to experience the different parts of the Open Library. July onwards, Shaam Ki Library became a regular part of their lives - every evening, the space is open for an hour for children and young people to come engage with books, stories and games.

Arts and play sessions with children have continued quite regularly three days a week, the groups now divided on the basis of age have grown in numbers and engagement has been across different mediums like theatre games and exercises, toys, art and craft, films, music and movement. Each session begins with 30 mins of free unstructured play, and then 40-60 mins of structured or guided play. The facilitators meticulously plan, reflect upon and document each session and work on their facilitation based on mutual feedback and the needs of the children.

Through home visits and chai-pe-gupshup, there is regular interface with the families as well. The facilitator duo / trios work on planning weekly and have monthly check-ins to reflect and work through challenges that come up.

TANA BANA

Readiness Group



Age Group : 2 to 14 years
Group Size : 18 to 25
Sessions through the year : 120

The readiness group is for new children who come to Khwab Ghar, to help them understand the rhythm of the space, to make them get used to the space and it's rituals and agreements, and then to transfer them to a regular group apt for the their age and needs. In this group, they try to make new friends within the group and to feel a sense of belonging. The facilitators use theatre exercises, book readings, toys and board games, dance, music and songs to enable the group to learn together.

-Naghma



TANA BANA

Early Years



Age Group : 4 to 7 years

Group Size : 18

Sessions through the year : 119

Our primary objective throughout the year was to deepen the connection between our everyday work with children and a long-term vision for their growth and development. We focused on building a range of skills and capacities in children by integrating arts and play within a developmentally appropriate framework. Over the past year, we witnessed our older children taking up more space in sessions and gradually forming meaningful relationships with newer members.

We observed greater interconnectedness, creativity, and sensitivity among the children. This year, we balanced foundational, holistic learning with a more nuanced focus on psycho-social themes, responding to the children's evolving needs and interests.

-Jasmine, Saddam and Ritika



TANA BANA

Children



Age Group : 8 to 12 years

Group Size : 23

Sessions through the year : 115

In this group, that is fondly known as “goofies” we use theatre, story-making, and singing as key tools for engagement. The children especially enjoy theatre, so we prioritize those in our sessions and often work in smaller groups on various themes. They also frequently discuss the importance of being respectful to one another and enjoy playing together.

Last year, our objectives focused on building socio-emotional skills, developing the ability to listen to each other, and nurturing relationships within the group. We explored these goals through tools such as play-making, story creation, and shared experiences like watching movies together.

-Ismail



TANA BANA

Adolescent Boys



Age Group : 12 - 17 years

Group Size : 12 to 15

Sessions through the year : 112

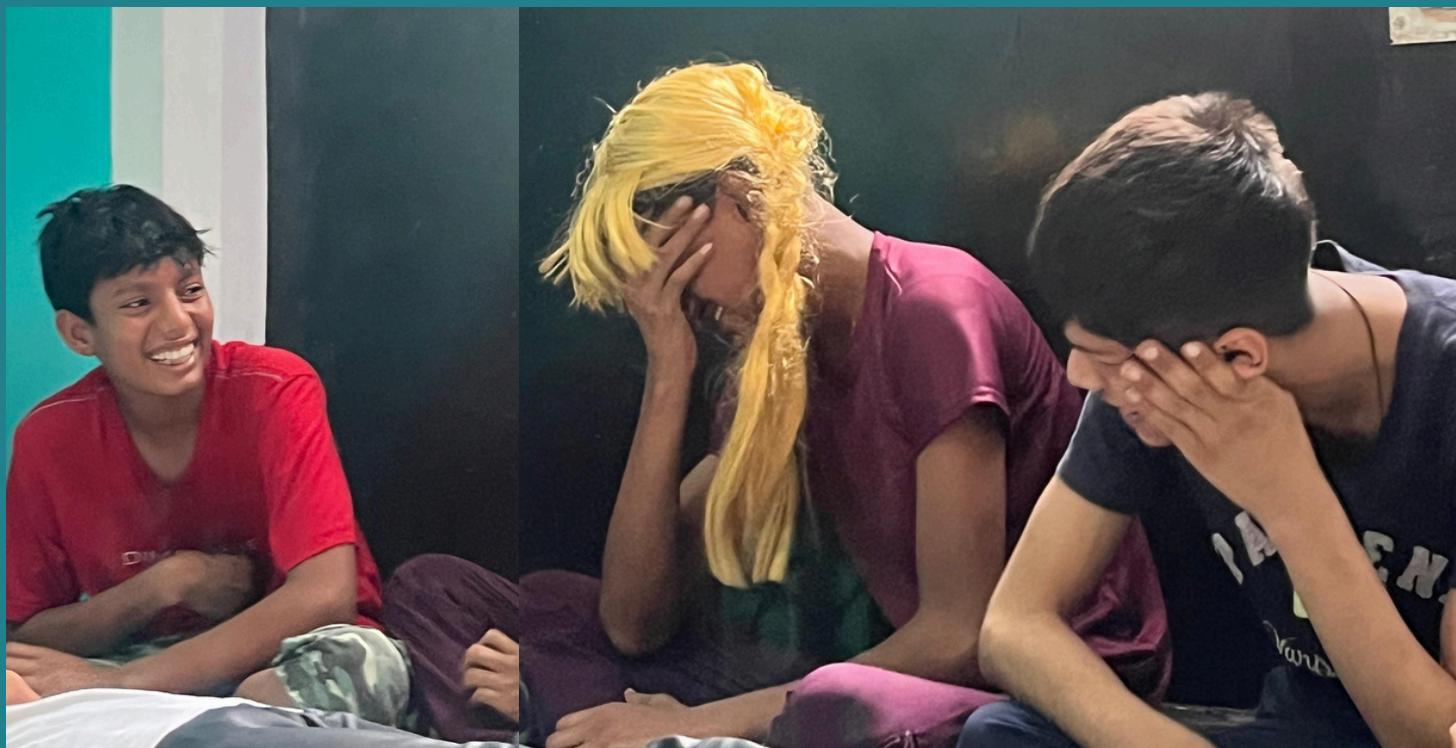
This year, we worked on theatre using our bodies and explored emotions through *rasas*. We tried to understand our inner feelings and created a dance performance which we shared with others.

We discussed how our bodies behave on stage and in daily life. We also talked about things happening in Nizamuddin and how they affect us. Along with this, we explored what ownership means and how we can take more responsibility in this space and our lives.

TANA BANA

Adolescent Boys

One of the boys from the group, Rihan, has started taking strong initiative. He motivates others to attend sessions, shares creative ideas, and helps create space for everyone in the group. He sometimes helps by co-facilitating and exercises as well.



TANA BANA

Adolescent Girls



Age Group : 12 to 15 years

Group Size : 8 to 10

Sessions through the year : 61

In our adolescent girls group, we use body movement to explore feelings, emotions, desires, and consent. There's a dedicated time called "check-in" when they willingly share their thoughts and experiences. Sometimes, one-on-one sessions are needed for deeper conversations. This year, we've also discussed how to build stronger relationships within the group so that we can stay connected and present together in the sessions.

TANA BANA

Fursat aur Akshar



Age Group : 33 to 45 years

Group Size : 6

Sessions through the year : 76

The Fursat aur Akshar program is designed for women from the community, including mothers of the children who attend our sessions. It offers them a space to relax, take a break, and express themselves amid their busy routines at home.

We meet three times a week. One day is dedicated to reading books in the library. Another day, called Fursat, is for watching films, engaging in conversations, or visiting exhibitions. The third day focuses on learning—reading, writing, and using digital tools.

This program gives women time for themselves. It brings back joyful memories from their childhood and encourages them to reflect on their own dreams and needs. While they continue to care for their families, they also gain new skills that build their confidence and sense of independence—both at home and in the world outside.



Visits and Collaborations

Over the past year, we planned several visits outside the basti for the women - these include attending “Do You Know This Song”, a performance by Mallika Taneja that explored themes of love, longing, and grief—deeply resonating with many of the women.

We also visited the Travancore Palace for their month-long exhibition “Empowerment”. A collaboration with Rafooghar introduced us to the art of stitching, which we are now integrating into our sessions as a medium for expression and storytelling.

Another meaningful collaboration has been with Women Walk at Midnight, a collective that organizes night walks for women. Together, we hosted a night walk in Nizamuddin Basti, where women from the community reflected on their relationship with the night and their neighbourhood. For many, it was the first time they had ever walked through their locality at night.

TANA BANA - CAPACITY BUILDING

Through the year, we had 64 hours of capacity building as part of our regular program training and mentoring in addition to 20 full day trainings of trainers as part of Project Rihla and a 4 day clowning workshop for the whole Aagaaz team. As part of our program capacity building, the team was taken through learning processes based on using art and music as a tool, developing a trauma lens and sensitivity, gender and sexuality, library education and theory, early childhood care and education, clowning and theatre as a tool, constitutional rights and social justice, films and journalism as ways of storytelling, art based journaling and how to design games and exercises thematically.

LIBRARY

The Tuesday ‘Open Library’ became ritualised this year as a weekly high-production event, revolving around Aagaaz’s library practices. The theme of each Open Library is shaped by the season, the needs of our audience at the time, relevant events or happenings in the neighbourhood, and things that seem exciting to create. It is set up each week by 9 facilitators working together. The year saw the Aagaaz team push their library-based learnings in new directions, and experimenting with different forms. From making shadow puppets, to holding poetry sessions, to treasure-hunting for eggs in the library, to creating a haunted house experience, to welcoming different storybook characters-in-role (Santa Claus) and historical figures (Jawaharlal Nehru) into the space, to our highlight: an elaborate Khwāb Ghar election process in tandem with the Delhi Elections, in which all library members participated in the process of campaigning, voting and playing the roles of elected representatives of the space.

All of these activities were linked to books from our collection, and opened up spaces for discussions on a range of different themes. We covered over 70 books and explored themes such as going home to the village, the importance of children in society, teachers as people, friendship, belongingness, oppression, emotions and emotional regulation, fears and anxieties in childhood, health emergencies in the Basti, Halloween, Christmas and Eid celebrations.

This years' Open Library drew an average of 45 children each week, and had over 20 visitors from outside coming to see the work in action.

Mahila Library

As an extension of the Fursat aur Akshar program, this year a group of 5-8 women from the community began to have library based sessions on Tuesday evenings. Often drawing from the Open Library design, these intimate sessions saw books being read aloud by their facilitator Saira, and involved time with puzzles, games, arts and crafts, characters-in-role and in-depth free-floating discussions.

Shaam ki Library

This year we realised that children from the community had an urgent need to be in the space, and to experience free-play and access our collection of toys, games and books. In July 2024 we initiated the evening 'Shaam ki Library' which runs on all weekdays apart from Tuesday. Initially run by the Aagaaz team of artist-facilitators, it is now in the process of transitioning into a volunteer-run and led program. As of this year we have three dedicated volunteers Abid, Ashraf and Hiral, who come in twice each week, as well as the non-repertory members of the Aagaaz team.

The Shaam ki library provides an hour of unstructured access- broadly divided into time for books and time for play. In the beginning we would see a footfall of 6-7 children, and attendance has now expanded to up to 30 children every evening. While some are regular readers who come specifically to spend time with the books, most are there to be able to play.



TANA BANA - CHAI PE GUPSHUP

This year, we explored several themes with the women in our group:

Exploring the self through dance and movement

Building listening skills

Reconnecting with the child within

Building a relationship with the library

Exploring different art forms like painting

Opening up spaces for meaningful conversations

Exploring theatre through image-based work

Understanding how they care for themselves

Questioning and discovering what leisure means to them

We also celebrated Ramzan by hosting a special Iftar party with them and the community.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In terms of cultural programming for the community, we had a couple of opportunities where we invited our extended families to Khwāb Ghar:

1. On 20th April, the Incredible Child exhibition was curated by Samina Mishra, who worked with children from Afghan refugee families on creating zines of their experiences and stories. Some of the children who created these zines came to Khwāb Ghar and shared these with members of the basti
2. We celebrated Aagaaz's Birthday as the Khwāb Ghar Festival on 26th June, with showcases by the children who are a part of our regular sessions. The children shared pieces they developed - dances, songs and plays - to an audience which comprised of our children's parents and our extended Aagaaz ki Dunia - facilitators, volunteers, supporters, mentors and members of the community.

3. In collaboration with Storybeings and Point of View, we organized a grassroots digital storytelling festival on 18th of August. The festival showcased short films created by young people on themes of gender, dreams, connections and mental health.
4. From 9th to 15th December, Khwāb Ghar was a partner venue for the WIP AltFest Delhi. We hosted film screenings, workshops and a musical performance of Sozkhwani, which was well attended by members of the community and the children.
5. We hosted a few evenings of Iftar and welcomed all our children and their families and friends and supporters to celebrate together. We had over 300 people join us on these evenings as many people broke their fasts and ate and enjoyed the sunset together.

KHEL MEL - FACILITATORS' COLLECTIVE

In 2024, we decided to rename ourselves and redefine what the collective is. In some ways, we met less regularly than we would have liked to, but in many beautiful ways, Khel Mel members integrated deeply into our regular work, volunteering, supporting and leading different kinds of sessions. Manjari led the process for applying for and executing the Mirrors Fellowship project with Aslam, Naghma and Zainab, where they explored masculinity through movement and conversations with our group of adolescent boys. This process culminated in a short film, or rather episodes that ask very important questions about masculinity and gender.

During the performance season for the repertory from October to December, things got quite busy for the actors as well as the facilitators, but whenever we needed helping hands to keep our regular work going, Denis, Jasmine, Akanksha, Manjari, Mehneer stepped in to support our

regular sessions, while Deepan and Pranav regularly volunteered to support during events and Open Library. It was wonderful ending the year together with many of our facilitators during the Iftar celebrations in March, and we are excited to have them back in the space soon.

2024

17th April - Meeting to plan for coming year
8th and 18th May - Movement based sessions
5th June - "Love You?" sharing at Lilanoor
26th June Aagaaz birthday at Khwāb Ghar
18th August Khwāb Ghar film festival at Baraat Ghar
25th September - "Chowkidar" sharing at Lilanoor
Mirrors Fellowship - September to December with Manjari

2025

29th January - Screening of the Mirrors Fellowship films created by Manjari, Aslam, Naghma, Zainab and Shahid
27th February - Zainab's play reading
28th March - Iftar party



DRAMA JAMS

The Sunday Drama Jams are a weekly free-peer sharing space for anyone who likes to play drama games or works with people using drama. The attempt is to innovate new possibilities of play and to create a space that runs organically without a meta-facilitator, curated in-the-moment by only the people in the room. This year, we held only two Drama Jams—on May 5th and May 19th, 2024—as the team has been occupied with several other projects. While the sessions are currently on pause, we hope to restart them soon.



THEMATIC ENGAGEMENT

CREA Workshop (12th and 13th August 2024)

During Crea's SELF Academy, Jasmine and Aabshaar brought tools from Image Theatre/ Forum Theatre, Movement and Art for the group of 32 women. The SELF Academy workshop focused on creating a space for the women to experience Theatre as a tool of expression and engage with their own feelings as well as the community they are part of. Themes that we delved into were Self in Relation to Community, Building effective Communication and Trust, Safety and Consent. Towards the end of the two day workshop, we concluded with a performance sharing of what the women had learnt during the course of the workshop. The 5 groups prepared a play of 5 - 7 minutes on different stories that had played out in their lives.

REPERTORY PERFORMING ARTS

This quarter, our repertory team performed six shows across Delhi and Bangalore, presenting two major plays: *Rihla*—a story about the longing for home, identity, and a new country—and *Bhaagi Hui Ladkiyan* (BHL)—which brings the real-life struggles of four young women to the stage. We performed BHL at the KNMA Theatre Festival (19 Oct, Sundar Nursery) and Shed 9 (24 Nov), experiencing intimate settings and emotional audience responses. *Rihla* was showcased at four venues: Courtyard Koota, Bangalore International Centre, Sabha (Bangalore), and Studio Safdar (Delhi). A special highlight was performing at the W.I.P ALT Festival, where the team's support, warmth, and seamless coordination made it a truly enriching experience.

Through these performances and travels, we continued using theatre to spark dialogue around social issues, build connections, and find joy in storytelling.



CREATIVE PRACTICE

With the rep team, we watched the play Desdemona Roopakam, based on the film Omkara, which explored how caste and power are still manipulated for political gain, alongside the themes of masculinity and violence against women prevalent in society. We read Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, which emphasizes the importance of marginalized communities telling their own stories and using theatre and image theatre to challenge power structures and inspire collective change —particularly for Dalits, Adivasis, women, and the LGBTQ community. We studied Vijay Tendulkar's story Gidhha, which portrayed the hunger for power, the objectification of women, and the stark divide between poverty and wealth.

In Oedipus Rex, we explored how the protagonist's arrogance and denial of truth lead to personal tragedy, highlighting themes of fate, blindness—both literal and metaphorical—and the destructive cost of uncovering truth. We also created improvised performances on themes like police systems and poverty, and learned technical aspects of theatre such as light rigging and different types of stage lighting.



FURSAT KA WAQT

Recognising leisure and rest as an important part of wellbeing and social health, we organized a Team Retreat - a day away from the hustle and bustle of our everyday lives in a farm-house a few kilometres outside the city. The team was found playing in the garden and in the pool for most of the day, when not eating delicious food catered by the Dastoor Kitchen, or napping individually or collectively in the grass and on benches and couches. This was a highly welcome break after a few very intense months of work, as different programs are being run simultaneously by the team. We feel that fursat ka waqt like this is very important since it normalises and prioritises the well being of individuals in a team.



PSYCHO- SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SAFETY

Every month, facilitators from Hank Nunn Institute hold a group session on psycho-social health , in which our repertory members participate. So far, we've worked on themes such as:

What is love? What do boundaries mean to us and how do they look or feel for us? What does a group mean to us—how do we see and understand the idea of a group.

All our team members are in regular 1 on 1 sessions with therapists, some from HNI and some independent practitioners. 2 of our team members also have support from highly experienced psychiatrists who practice at Sitaram Bhartia hospital.

To hold space for each other, the team calls for Listening Circles on a need basis. Dialogue Circles are another such space where the team comes together to address conflict and explore and discuss issues important to and for the team. The team also does regular check-ins, one on one with various members of the team as well as with the whole group, where space is made to share whatever is going on in our lives.

We are consciously adapting our policies to make them more relevant to our team members needs, be it the working hours and leave policy, or the safety guidelines and policies. We also have a comprehensive set of guidelines on protection against harassment of all kinds and a wonderful and considerate ICC that understands of the context of the team and responds sensitively to anything that comes up.

FUNDRAISING

This year was tough with regards to fundraising — many of our usual donors weren't able to contribute, our donor list was smaller but we still managed to find unexpectedly new donors. Even if some of our usual supporters couldn't contribute, they helped to share our message widely. We diversified our fundraising strategy to adapt to the year's developments in the following ways.

Past Learnings: Used last year's strategy sheet as a guide.

Team Planning: Comms & Funds teams aligned early and planned platforms.

Ambassadors: Trained fundraising ambassadors with ready collaterals and messaging.

Layered Outreach: From close circles to wider contacts like volunteers, vendors, mentors.

Consistent and personal follow ups: Team members regularly followed up with leads

DM & WhatsApp Drive: Lots of personal DMs, Insta/FB messages, and WhatsApp outreach.

Emotional Connect: Personalized, genuine and specific asks worked.

Encouraged small Donations: Many small amounts added up, plus a few big ones helped daily.

Apart from this, we had specific programmatic support from some wonderful institutions such as Mariwala Health Initiative, Azim Premji Foundation and Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies.

WAY FORWARD

As we move into the next quarter, our focus remains on staying deeply connected with our current beneficiaries and partners, making the repertory more independent both as performers as well as facilitators and leaders of this work. The capacity building is also taking a turn towards knowlegdege building and practices in organizational development, fundraising and programme management, while continuing to deepen and expand our trauma responsiveness, addressing and adapting to the needs of each individual group and taking care as a community, of ourselves and of each other.

We have taken up an additional floor to cater to our growing numbers and programs, and we are exciting to design and adapt the space to our different group's needs to include a room for the women, a library for adults, a multimedia room, a small black box/ screening / performance room and a resource library for the groups we work with. We look forward to hosting our neighbors and our partners from across the country with this additional space for performances, screenings and many interesting engagements. We are also looking forward to seeing our work with young people galvanizing them towards positive action. Finally , we are also hoping to weave in more pockets of radical rest into the always bustling Khwāb Ghar and its programs, to ensure sustainability and wellbeing.

OUR PARTNERS

Allies

Mukkamaar
Bargad
The Community Library Project
Sama
Cequin
Chintan
Torch
Shakti Shalini
Zaika e Nizamuddin
Nazariya
ArtReach
Rafooghar
Kutumb Foundation
ADN
Atma
The Hope Project

Yellow Streets
Youth Alliance
CEQUIN
Free Library Network
Hank Nunn Institute
MAP
APF
Krea Foundation

NGOs

IYRC
Kishalaya
DMRC School
Manzil
Learning by Locals
CKS Foundation

OUR PARTNERS

Supporters

Lilanoor
The Oddbird Foundation
Black Box Okhla

Mentors, Guides and Advisors

Shipra
Suneja
Sunandita Mehrotra
Vrinda Misra
Rajesh Nirmal
Nagesh Jadhav
Anurupa Roy
Shambhavi
Sanjana Kapoor
Mohit Satyanand

Kabir
Sonia Khanna
Kanika Satyanand

Institutional Funders

Azim Premji Foundation
Mariwala Health Initiative
Rohini Nilekani Foundation
CSR OML

Trustees

Vardhna Puri
Archit Krishna
Ayush Bansal
Avani Batra
Anirban Ghosh

ANNEXURE

Blog Articles:

[https://aagaaz-
theatre.medium.com/](https://aagaaz-theatre.medium.com/)

ANNEXURE

Financial Report

AAGAAZ THEATRE TRUST



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