

2024 - 25

PROJECT UNNATI ANNUAL REPORT

Dorf Ketal Chemicals India Ltd.
The Humsafar Trust



Overarching Objective: Fostering Socio-Economic Inclusion and Growth of the LGBTQ+ Community

The LGBTQ+ rights landscape in India has made steady strides in the last decade, particularly with the NALSA vs. UoI Judgment of 2014, decriminalization of same-sex relations in 2018, and finally with the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. Realisation of the rights enshrined within these legal safeguards, however, remains an uphill climb.

Social stigmas and prevalence of discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community continue to hamper societal participation, as well as equitable access to education, healthcare, housing and livelihood. Project Unnati was initiated to bolster the LGBTQ+ community's access to socio-economic mobility. The project focused upon creating opportunities in education and entrepreneurship for LGBTQ+ individuals, while simultaneously creating social environments conducive to growth. The project strived to build pathways for realisation of LGBTQ+ individuals' full potential in society.

Project Unnati aimed to champion the creation of community spaces, while integrating them with greater society, enhancing visibility and awareness regarding LGBTQ+ identities and unique needs. That inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community doesn't remain restricted to metropolitan cities was of key focus, with project activities and beneficiary pool having been targeted in tier 2 and tier 3 cities. The project aimed to reach LGBTQ+ individuals not in silos, but in conjunction with their social contexts. Particularly, the project aimed to reach parents and natal families of LGBTQ+ individuals, in an attempt to nip vulnerabilities stemming from familial exclusion at their bud.

Project Unnati served to exemplify holistic interventions with the LGBTQ+ community, highlighting the need for addressing disproportionate economic vulnerabilities as hand-in-hand with historic social marginalisation and continued exclusion.

Project start and end time:

Start Date: 01st April 2024

End Date: 31st March 2025

Project Objectives:

- To Strengthen LGBTQ+ Awareness and Inclusion in Academic Spaces
- To Create a Cohesive Social Environment for LGBTQ+ Individuals
- To Enhance Societal Awareness Regarding LGBTQ+ Community
- To Enhance the Socio-Economic Status of the LGBTQ+ Community



PROJECT OVERVIEW

The collaboration between Dorf Ketal Chemicals India Ltd. and The Humsafar Trust was initiated in FY 2023-24 to enhance socio-economic inclusion and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in India. Carrying on the momentum from the previous year, Project Unnati furthered socio-economic growth of the LGBTQ+ community, while simultaneously attempting to influence social inclusion.

The project, which kicked off in April 2024, played a significant role in academic inclusion, economic enhancement, familial acceptance and in promoting visibility of the LGBTQ+ community in India.

Project Implementation reached 11,762 beneficiaries directly and reaching 149,204 persons indirectly.

Project Unnati strongly contributed to regional LGBTQ+ movement building, supporting pride marches and festivities in 10 cities, namely- Mumbai, Pune, Vasai-Virar, Vadodara, Gandhinagar, Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Lucknow, Kanpur and Chandigarh.

Decentralisation of LGBTQ+ movements from metropolitan cities enabled creation of safe spaces, as well as of dialogue, critical for socio-economic enhancement of LGBTQ+ individuals across India alike.

Through the support of Dorf Ketal Chemicals India Pvt. Ltd., The Humsafar Trust contributed to the furtherance of LGBTQ+ community visibility via organizing and supporting **15 visibility events across 10 cities, reaching over 3000 individuals**. These events engaged audiences and community members in innovative ways, such as via cricket matches, flashmobs, holi celebrations, fetes and more.

Mainstreaming of LGBTQ+ issues is achieved most effectively through documentation and dissemination of authentic accounts of queer lived realities. Project Unnati aimed to achieve this through documentation of transgender persons' self-narratives surrounding their own lives and accompanying successes, challenges and defining experiences. **5 transgender persons** were supported under Project Unnati to document their life journeys and publish the same as **autobiographies**. These autobiographies are envisioned to strike a chord of kinship and empathy with the audience, calling for much needed recognition of queer resilience.

The project also integrated film media and short-form video content as advocacy tools to further causes of parental acceptance, empathy and non-judgement. This was achieved through production of the viral short-film- **Tutti Fruti Cake**, as well as through 3 social media reels shot with prominent Marathi actors. The cumulative reach of these media products was **1,38,271 views**.

More tangible results were achieved through provision of support to **21 individuals** in pursuing **higher education and 5 in skill training**. Through our upskilling initiative, LGBTQ+ individuals were enabled to enhance their capabilities and employability. Simultaneously, to ensure that LGBTQ+ individuals are able to sustain in academic environments wherein threats of bullying, harassment and discrimination hinder access to education, The Humsafar Trust **sensitised 12 educational institutions** under Project Unnati. These sessions engaged with **over 1200 student, teacher, and staff bodies, sensitizing across Sex, Gender and Sexuality spectrums**.

Finally, through Project Unnati, **10 LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs** were capacitated via seed-funding and business management skill-building under The Humsafar Trust's **Dolphin Tank** initiative. The support enabled the selected entrepreneurs to scale their business ventures, while also contributing to a growing ecosystem of LGBTQ+ entrepreneurship.

OBJECTIVE 1: TO STRENGTHEN LGBTQ+ AWARENESS AND INCLUSION IN ACADEMIC SPACES

Activity 1.1- Sensitisation with Academic Stakeholders

Educational Institutes are formative spaces for all individuals. With lacking advancements in the development of a comprehensive Sexual Education curriculum, differences between sex, gender, sexuality, the presence of identities beyond cisgender and heteronormative binaries, as well as safe sex practices to prevent the spread of HIV and other STIs, are lost upon students and educators alike. In the midst of this, LGBTQ+ individuals often find themselves othered within institutes, and find difficulties in sustaining and completing their education.

Sensitisation workshops help familiarise student, educator and staff bodies with sex, gender, sexuality spectrums and the LGBTQ+ umbrella. These also help institutes in realising the knowledge gap surrounding these concepts, laying foundations of developing a comprehensive sex education curriculum.

Through the support of Dorf Ketel Chemicals India Ltd., **The Humsafar Trust was able to sensitise a population of 1218 students, teachers and institute administrators across cities of Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, New Delhi, Ghaziabad, Jamshedpur, Patna, Bhopal and Guwahati.**

S.No.	Date	Institute	Attendees
1	25-06-2025	Jasudben ML School, Mumbai	196
2	26-06-2025	KMPM Vocational College, Jamshedpur	78
3	27-06-2024	Ramnarain Ruia Autonomous College, Mumbai	50
4	26-10-2024	iTeach BJR Schools, Pune	27
5	28-11-2024	People's College of Dental Sciences & Research Centre	105
6	29-11-2024	Gandhi High School, Khagaul	106
7	13-12-2024	Manyavar Kashiram Degree College, Ghaziabad	84
8	22-01-2025	St. Xavier's College, Mumbai	23
9	11-02-2025	B.K. Shroff College, Mumbai	73

10	14-02-2025	Sri Aurobindo College, New Delhi	16
11	22-02-2025	Handique Girls' College, Guwahati	125
12	24-02-2025	Cotton University, Guwahati	66
13	11-03-2025	Indian Institute of Management, Nagpur	296



Activity 1.2: Education and Upskilling Support

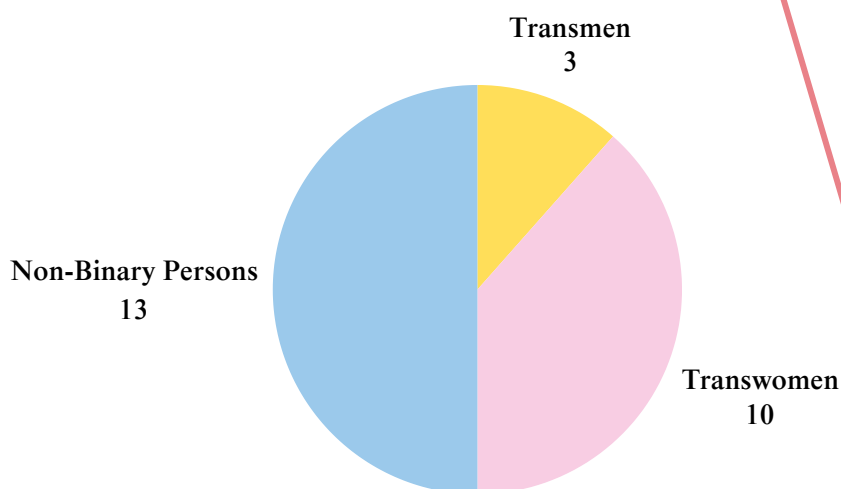
Key to accessing means of dignified living is quality education and 21st-century skills. LGBTQ+ individuals, however, face barriers to accessing both. Lack of familial support, ails of bullying, harassment, and discrimination within educational institutions, all hinder LGBTQ+ individuals' holistic development and subsequent access to opportunities for economic mobility.

The absence of stable financial support in pursuing education and skill-building programs is a key barrier in light of the given context. Recognizing this, The Humsafar Trust, under Project Unnati, sought to support 26 LGBTQ+ individuals.

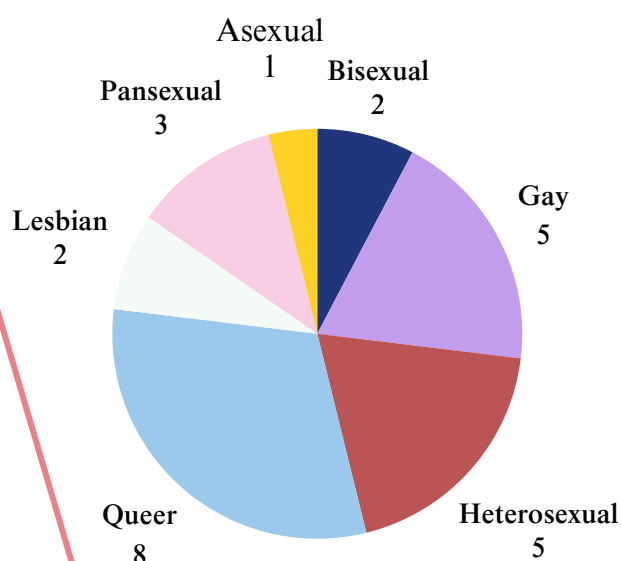
Scholarship applications were called for via The Humsafar Trust's website and social media platforms, as well as through mobilization efforts via The Humsafar Trust's network of community-based organizations.

Between the period of April 2024 to March 2025, **26 LGBTQ+ individuals** in need of scholarships were identified and supported through the project. The demographic details of the beneficiaries are depicted below. As compared to the collaboration between The Humsafar Trust and Dorf Ketel Chemicals India Ltd., in the previous year- FY 2023-24, under Project Unnati in FY 2024-25, The Humsafar Trust was able to reach out to beneficiaries from more diverse SOGI- i.e., students identifying as asexual and lesbian were benefited for the first time from this collaboration; the scholarship support was also extended entirely to the transgender community, as opposed to the previous year when more cisgender students were benefitted; finally, the project implementation team ensured that the support reaches those most in need from the community, particularly considering household income and availability of familial support, with 17 beneficiaries having household income of less than INR 2,00,000 per annum.

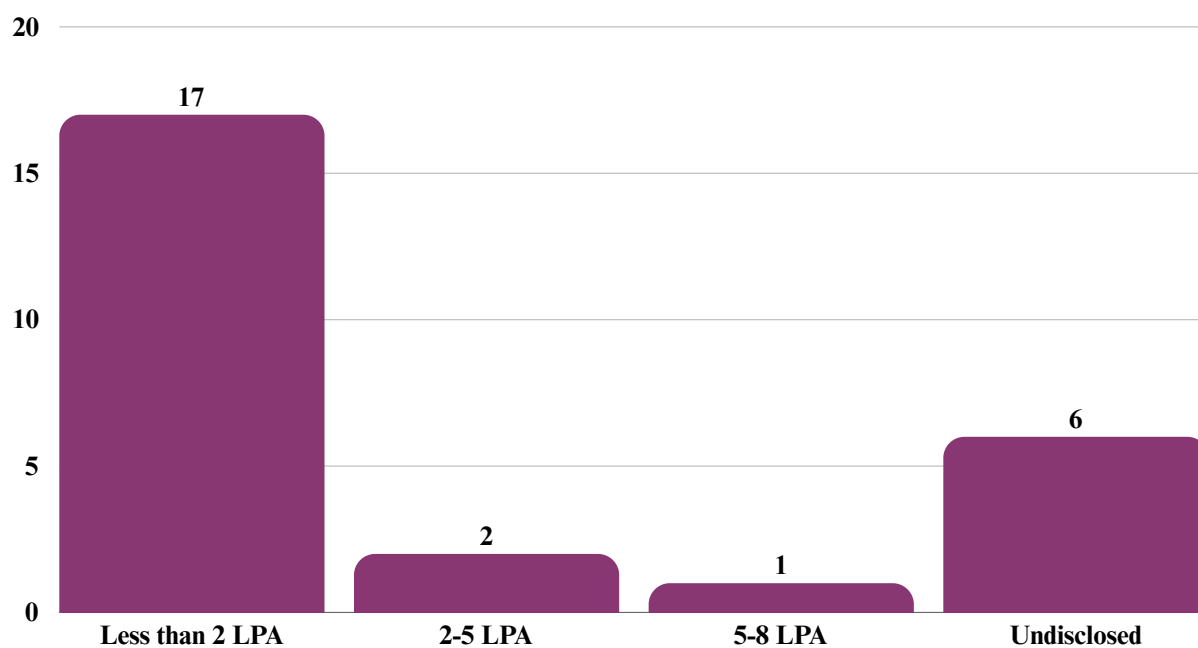
Gender Wise Analysis



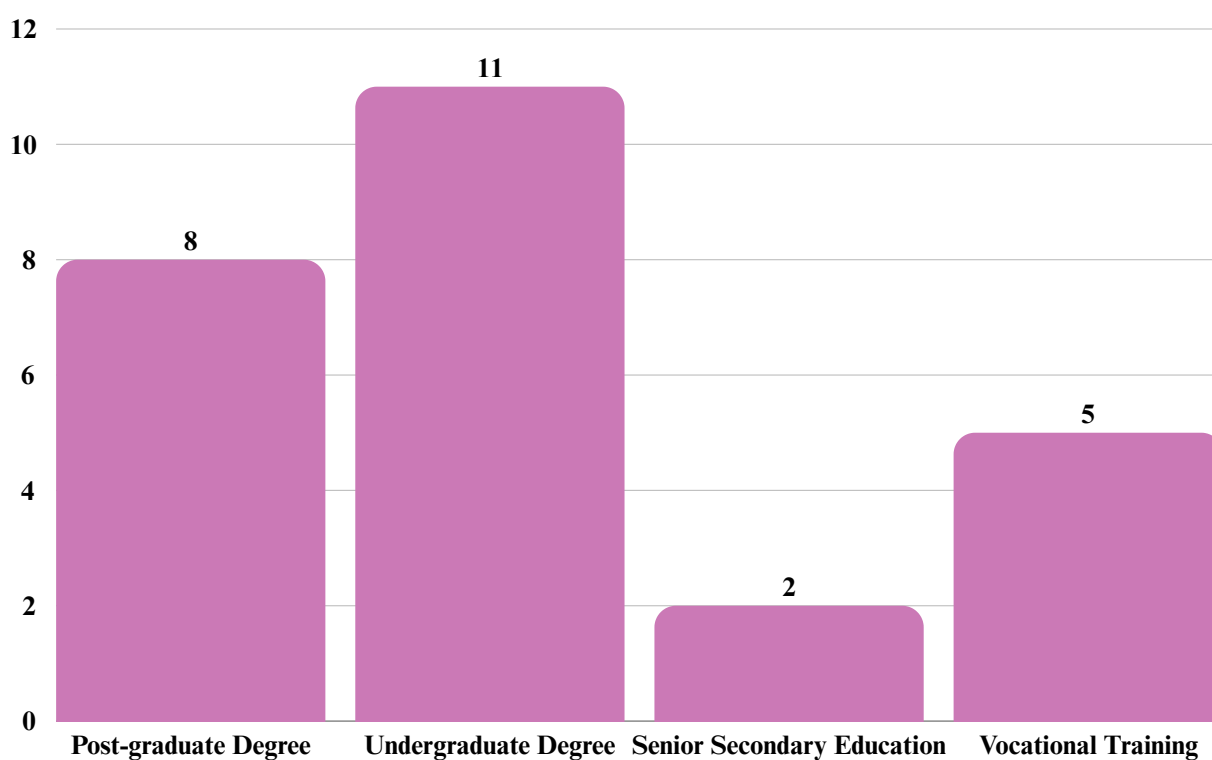
Sexuality Wise Analysis



Annual Household Income



Choice of Course



OBJECTIVE 2: TO CREATE A COHESIVE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS

Activity 2.1- The Acceptance Meet

On 15th August 2024, The Humsafar Trust hosted the much-anticipated Acceptance Meet 2024, an annual celebration of solidarity and shared journeys between the LGBTQ+ community and their allies. Coinciding with India's Independence Day, the event served as a powerful symbol of liberation from stigma, discrimination, and silence.

Themed “Legacy of Love: Intergenerational Stories of Acceptance,” the 2024 edition focused on how meaning and forms of ‘acceptance’ have evolved across generations.

The event drew over 200 attendees from diverse backgrounds, many of whom shared personal stories of transformation—moments of reckoning, resistance, and ultimately, embrace. Parents, siblings, grandparents, colleagues, and friends stepped forward to talk about their emotional journeys.



A key highlight of the day was a thought-provoking panel discussion on the theme “From Tolerance to Embrace: How Acceptance Has Evolved Over Time.” Esteemed panelists included Ranjana Bhaviskar, a proud Sweekar Parent of a young transwoman, and Diva Ambegaonkar, a passionate young ally. Their dialogue offered generational insights into how societal attitudes have shifted, emphasizing the power of empathy, visibility, and active allyship in shaping a more inclusive world.

What sets the Acceptance Meet apart is its unique, youth-led spirit. The event is driven by the energy and dedication of voluntary members of Yaariyan—The Humsafar Trust’s youth initiative. These young changemakers devote themselves year-round to curating themes, planning programming, and building a safe, inclusive platform where even the most unheard voices can resonate. Their leadership ensures that the Acceptance Meet remains relevant and deeply rooted in community needs and aspirations.

As stories unfolded and hearts connected, The Acceptance Meet 2024 once again proved to be more than just an event—it was a movement of love, courage, and collective healing. It reaffirmed The Humsafar Trust’s unwavering commitment to creating bridges between the LGBTQ+ community and their allies, and to ensuring that acceptance is not a one-time act, but an ongoing legacy.

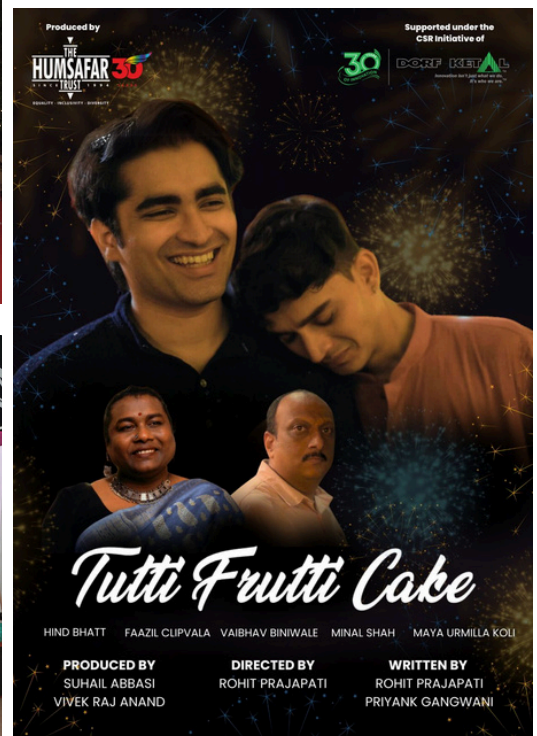


Activity 2.2- Film on Parental Acceptance of LGBTQ+ Individuals

In collaboration with Geet Theatre, a Vadodara-based production house, The Humsafar Trust, under the aegis of Project Unnati, produced Tutti Frutti Cake, an endearing short-film on parental acceptance of a young gay man. The film takes us through the turmoils that queer individuals and their parents often go through in their journeys of acceptance, while also underscoring the vitality of support systems found in families of choice.

Tutti Frutti Cake was released to a grand audience of over 1200 individuals at Mumbai's coveted **Gulabi Mela** on January 26th 2025; the film was widely appreciated by the audience who shared heart-warming reviews and also sought the opportunity to interact with the film's cast and crew.

Meant as an Advocacy tool, the film was subsequently released on Youtube, where it has garnered over **74,000 views, 2400 likes and 207 comments**. Demographic details of film viewers are given below, with most viewers, i.e., 49% being Adolescents and Young People (13-24 years of age), and male viewership at 78%. The film will also be used in Corporate awareness session to maximise impact.



Comments by Viewers



@samir.modesto_ca 2 months ago (edited)

So beautiful! I had tears in my eyes while watching this! Love is Love! Why is it so difficult to understand. Beautifully done! Thank you for this video.



117



Reply



19 replies



@gajanhaas 2 months ago

Excellent storyline. Stuck to the message without any straying. Kudos to the actors and everyone involved. Love is love no matter who loves whom. No boundaries



@neeteshsonawane1257 1 month ago

Wonderful. Excellent! Society need change mindsets. Feel the story from depth of my heart ❤️



5



Reply



@RahulKumarDas1706 2 months ago

"all are scared! If you stay a lil bit longer with us, the baloon of misconceptions will burst off" emotionally too touchy ❤️
Exclusive n Excellent script. ★

While the film has received words of praises from viewers online, it was also most recently critically acclaimed at the 3rd Socio CSR Film Festival and Awards 2025, as **‘The Best Film on Trans Acceptance and Empowerment.’**



OBJECTIVE 3: TO ENHANCE SOCIETAL AWARENESS REGARDING LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Activity 3.1- Enhancing Visibility of the LGBTQ+ Community

1. Vasai-Virar Pride Festival:

Held in a semi-urban locality, the Vasai-Virar Pride Festival was a vibrant celebration that brought together over 300 community members, allies, and local stakeholders. The event marked a crucial moment for queer visibility in the region, offering a rare and much-needed space for LGBTQ+ individuals to gather, celebrate, and be seen. Through performances, speeches, and interactive elements, the festival was instrumental in initiating meaningful dialogue on LGBTQ+ rights, acceptance, and inclusion. It helped build a sense of solidarity while encouraging ongoing, grassroots-level community advocacy and participation.



2. Vadodara LGBTQIA+ Sanman Yatra:

The Vadodara LGBTQIA+ Sanman Yatra saw a turnout of 200 participants and played a pivotal role in breaking the silence around queer identities in smaller cities of Gujarat. With local leadership and cultural elements woven into the march, it emphasized the importance of regional pride events in fostering acceptance and inclusivity.

3. Pune Pride March:

With over 900 attendees, the Pune Pride March stood out as one of the largest and most vibrant gatherings under Unnati 1.0. The march not only celebrated queer identity but also saw the active participation of students, corporate allies, and families, making it a strong model of intergenerational and intersectional support for LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion.



4. Lucknow Transgender Gaurav Yatra:

The Lucknow Transgender Gaurav Yatra brought together 200 transgender individuals and allies in a powerful and moving demonstration of visibility and pride. Centered around the leadership and voices of transgender persons, the yatra helped amplify urgent demands for dignity, legal recognition, and improved access to essential public services in Uttar Pradesh. It served as a significant platform for advocacy, community empowerment, and public awareness in the state.



5. Dibrugarh Pride Walk:

The Dibrugarh Pride Walk, attended by 200 individuals, marked a significant milestone for queer visibility in Assam's upper region. As one of the first such events in the city, it played an important role in initiating public conversations around LGBTQ+ rights and representation. The walk helped mobilize local youth, media, and institutions to take a step forward in supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion and awareness in the region.

6. Gandhinagar Pride Festival:

In Gujarat's capital, the Gandhinagar Pride Festival gathered 400 people for a vibrant day filled with performances, community storytelling, and awareness-building activities. The event helped strengthen LGBTQ+ visibility in the state's political hub and encouraged participation from student groups, civil society organizations, and local allies.



7. Anniversary of Same-sex decriminalisation:

6th September Celebrations at HST Vakola: Commemorating the anniversary of the 2018 reading down of Section 377, the 6th September event at The Humsafar Trust's Vakola center brought together 50 queer individuals and allies. The event provided a reflective yet celebratory space, underscoring progress made and ongoing challenges in the LGBTQ+ movement.

8. Kanpur Pride Festival:

With the participation of 300 people, the Kanpur Pride Festival was a notable milestone in LGBTQ+ visibility in Uttar Pradesh's industrial city. The event featured engaging cultural performances and a vibrant pride parade, which helped foster deeper engagement with local youth, media, and educational institutions. This inclusive gathering created important opportunities for dialogue around acceptance, rights, and community solidarity.



9. Queer Premier League:

The Queer Premier League, a sports-based initiative, saw 45 LGBTQ+ individuals come together to compete in a spirit of camaraderie and empowerment. The event helped challenge stereotypes, promote team-building, and position sports as an inclusive space for queer persons.

10. QGames, Juhu Beach:

The QGames at Juhu Beach brought together over 500 participants for an engaging day of queer-themed games and community bonding. This unique event used play as a tool to increase LGBTQ+ visibility in a popular public space, helping to promote acceptance in a lighthearted, inclusive setting.



11. LGBTQ+ Flashmob:

With 1000 attendees, the LGBTQ+ Flashmob was a high-energy, public performance that took place in a prominent urban location. The activity generated curiosity and dialogue, using the power of dance, music, and art to challenge stigma and affirm LGBTQ+ existence in everyday public spaces, reaching a wide and diverse audience.

12. Gulabi Mela:

The Gulabi Mela, attended by 1300 people, was the largest visibility event under Project Unnati. Designed as an inclusive fair, the mela showcased queer entrepreneurship, art, and culture while offering HIV testing and legal aid stalls, reinforcing the intersection of visibility with access to rights and services. The event also featured live performances and interactive sessions, drawing diverse attendees and fostering deeper conversations around community empowerment and inclusion.



13. Chandigarh Gidda Celebrations:

Blending cultural pride with queer identity, the Chandigarh Gidda Celebrations drew 300 attendees and celebrated LGBTQ+ inclusion through the traditional Punjabi dance form. The event beautifully merged heritage with advocacy, fostering intergenerational conversations on gender and identity.

14. Guwahati Holi Celebration:

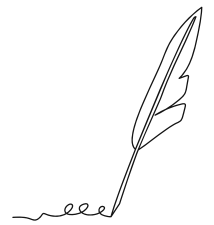
The Guwahati Holi Celebration was a vibrant, intimate gathering of 34 LGBTQ+ individuals celebrating the festival of colors with pride and joy. The event provided a safe, inclusive, and affirming space for queer folks to engage in cultural traditions, build connections, express themselves freely, and celebrate their identities in a supportive, festive environment filled with laughter, music, traditional sweets, and vibrant community spirit.



15. Vadodara Pride:

With 300 participants, the Vadodara Pride marked a significant moment of visibility in a city known for its cultural conservatism. Organized by local LGBTQ+ leaders, the event combined performance, advocacy, and public engagement, strengthening community resilience, representation, and sparking important conversations on inclusivity, acceptance, and equal rights in Gujarat's evolving social landscape.

Activity 3.2- Publication of Transgender Persons' Self Narratives



Trans representation in media has been on the rise in the last few years, however even so, authentic trans stories remain foreshadowed by heavily caricaturised and inaccurate depictions of trans persons and their lived realities.

To counter stereotyping and insensitive imagery, it is crucial to center trans persons self-narratives in media, highlighting experiences as lived and narrated by trans persons themselves. Bearing this in mind, The Humsafar Trust endeavoured to publish 5 autobiographies by trans persons who wished to present their life journeys to the world.

The 5 authors were identified through a wide call seeking expression of interest; post which concept notes shared by willing authors were sifted through and the most compelling 5 chosen by The Humsafar Trust's team. The 5 selected authors were subsequently anchored under editors to help hone and deliver convincing narratives; all 5 books are presently in writing stages, with drafts being periodically reviewed by The Humsafar Trust's team. Let's take a small glimpse at the 5 authors and their stories:

I. Sarvagya Soni is a DEI lead in the FMCG industry and a multi-disciplinary artist who tells powerful stories through words, music, and performance. As a transmasculine individual, Sarvagya's life has been a journey of resilience, defiance, and self-discovery—proof that trans people can live full, joyful lives despite the odds. Through their art and activism, they've become a voice of courage, representing those who've long been pushed to the margins.

The Rebel Within is Sarvagya's story—a powerful narrative of breaking free from societal expectations and choosing authenticity over silence. From enduring years of invisibility to standing tall on stage and sharing their truth, their journey is one of transforming pain into purpose. As the first openly trans person in their hometown, Sarvagya now uses their platform to inspire, advocate, and lead others toward a more inclusive, hopeful future.

II. Rihana Yadav, a 33-year-old social worker from Delhi, has dedicated her life to advancing the rights and well-being of the transgender and LGBT+ communities. Born into a modest middle-class family, Rihana faced discrimination, financial hardship, and personal trauma from an early age. Yet, through perseverance and the support of community work, she turned her struggles into strength—championing access to healthcare, education, and dignity for marginalized voices.

Her story is one of resilience, transformation, and advocacy. From working as a laborer at 16 to founding Sahiina Trust and pushing for the establishment of the Transgender Welfare Board, Rihana's journey reflects her unwavering belief in equality and unity. With every challenge faced, she continues to pave the way for a more inclusive society—where all individuals, regardless of identity, are treated with respect and humanity.

III. Joyita Mondal, born in Kolkata into a traditional Hindu family and assigned male at birth, has journeyed from rejection and isolation to making history as India's first transgender judge. Her early life was marked by bullying, dropping out of school, and navigating identity in a society that refused to understand her. Yet, through immense perseverance and the strength of the transgender community in Islampur, Joyita rebuilt her life—pursuing education, earning a law degree, and breaking barriers in the legal system.

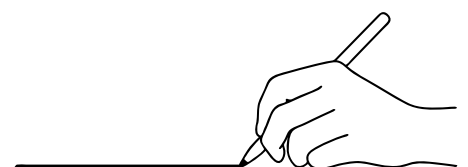
Her story is one of extraordinary resilience and purpose. Joyita's work through the Dinajpur Notun Aalo Society has brought education, healthcare, and vocational training to countless transgender individuals. Committed to justice, empathy, and equality, she is a powerful advocate for marginalized communities. Her journey not only challenges societal norms but also inspires others to embrace their truth and create a more inclusive world.

IV. Kaunish Dey Sarkar is a passionate social worker and transman from a small town in West Bengal, whose life has been shaped by resilience, love, and the fight for LGBTQI+ rights. Growing up in a conservative environment, Kaunish endured stigma, discrimination, and personal battles with identity, yet emerged as a beacon of hope for others. His life with his wife, a transwoman and activist, and their child with Down syndrome, redefines the meaning of family—built not on convention, but on acceptance, strength, and deep love.

Kaunish's journey from being bullied in school to becoming a respected advocate and community leader reflects a profound transformation. His work spans counseling, advocacy, employment initiatives, and the arts—all aimed at creating safe spaces and opportunities for trans people, especially transmen. With dreams of launching shelter homes and entrepreneurial ventures, Kaunish continues to fight for a world where everyone is free to live with dignity. His message is unwavering: never compromise—because only by living authentically can we begin to change the world.

V. Ashu Goyal, a 25-year-old social worker from Indore, Madhya Pradesh, has dedicated his life to advocating for marginalized communities, particularly children and the transgender and queer population. Born into a modest middle-class family, Ashu's early life was marked by identity struggles, social exclusion, and emotional hardship. Inspired by the NSS and Scout Guide movements during his childhood, he began working in health programs for the gay and trans community at just 18, contributing to accessible HIV/AIDS care and awareness.

Despite facing discrimination, abuse, and a lack of family support, Ashu never gave up. He pursued education, engaged in national and international social initiatives, and became a vocal advocate for transgender rights. His grassroots work led to the formation of the District Trans Welfare Board and the appointment of a dedicated officer within the police department for trans issues. Ashu's journey stands as a powerful testament to resilience, showing that when driven by belief and purpose, no obstacle is insurmountable.



Activity 3.3- Creation of LGBTQ+ Advocacy Reels

To mainstream LGBTQ+ identities in Indian households and to foster empathy and care towards the community, The Humsafar Trust collaborated with 3 Marathi television and film industry actors to create 3 LGBTQ+ Advocacy Reels.

These reels, conceptualised, scripted and shot by The Humsafar Trust, carry simple messages of respect, understanding, and non-judgmental attitudes. The actors starring in the reels were reached out to in light of their pre-existing connection with Marathi audiences. All reels have been posted across the actors and The Humsafar Trust's social media handles in Marathi, with English subtitles, to ensure mass reach.

The following information details the reach of the reels, as well as that of collaborating parties.



Lets understand and accept everyone around us.

Niranjan Kulkarni

Followers- 87,800

Reel content: "Let's say No to Assumptions and Yes to Understanding"

Views- 17,900

Likes- 712

Shares- 165

Comments- 39

Followers- 2,18,000
Reel content: "Kind Words make a Kind World"

Views- 53,000

Likes- 849

Shares- 594

Comments- 37



then see how the world, becomes a beautiful place.

Apurva Gore



Alas! Say bye to judgements

Charul Deshpande

Followers- 16,200

Reel content: "Let's Look at People, Not Labels"

Views- 6,304

Likes- 308

Shares- 53

Comments- 3

OBJECTIVE 4: TO ENHANCE THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Dolphin Tank, an initiative of The Humsafar Trust, is designed to foster a supportive ecosystem for LGBTQ+ led enterprises. The programme leverages nominal seed grants, market linkages, skill-building and mentorship support to boost selected LGBTQ+ led enterprises and integrate them with broader marketplaces.

Recognizing marginalizations in the marketplace, The Humsafar Trust partnered with Dorf Ketal Chemicals India Ltd., to identify 5 queer entrepreneurs to be supported under the Dolphin Tank initiative over 2023-25, and an additional 10 queer entrepreneurs to be supported over FY 2024-25.

Selected enterprises were identified bearing in mind, not only the promise of their business performance, but also the socio-economic barriers faced by the trans-entrepreneurs and their ability, or lack thereof, to tap into formal sources of financing- bank loans, MSME incentives, etc.

Each entrepreneur was supported with a grant size averaging INR 1,20,000. Periodic monitoring of enterprises, virtually and through field visits, as well as dissemination of the programme were of key focus.

Aside from seed-grants, the programme encouraged the enterprises on the following goals:

1. Business Registration
2. Tax and Audit Compliances
3. Enhanced Financial Management
4. Credit Readiness
5. Enhanced Business Networks
6. Comprehensive Business Planning
7. Break-Even



Activity 4.1- Continued support - Dolphin Tank Initiative

1. BAMBAI NAZARIYA

Owned by Diego Miranda, Bambai Nazariya was a Mumbai-based café, which has served as a pioneering model in diversity hiring from within the LGBTQ+ community in the service industry. The café, since its opening, had been operated by transgender women- who were employed in the capacity of chefs, waitstaff, cashiers, and hostesses. The enterprise was supported with a seed grant of INR 1,00,000 to procure an industry-standard coffee machine. The cafe, however, was unable to sustain in Mumbai owing to surging rent costs and has since relocated to a small outlet at Pune Airport.





2. IN[]ME

Started by Shauryavir Singh, who is a Cis-Gay man from Amritsar, Punjab. His venture, IN[]ME is an intimate wear brand that currently retails jockstraps in India. Although the product finds great popularity within the queer community, in India the same is hard to source locally at affordable prices. Shauryavir recognized this market gap and aims to fulfill it through IN[]ME. He required resources to expand operations, and register his business, as well as his catalog to include other intimate apparel. He was supported with a seed grant of INR 1,30,000, through which he registered his business as a sole proprietorship, procured an import license and diversified his product range.

3. CONNECTING MITR

Founded by Priyanka Sharma, a trans-woman from Jorhat, Assam, and based out of Delhi, Connecting Mitr is an exceedingly sustainable enterprise that recycles waste flowers from temples and other places of worship, to make potpourri, essential oils, fragrances (ittar), as well as a wide range of infused teas. Priyanka is the sole operator of her business and requires resources to procure a dehydrating machine to increase the pace of her production, when working with natural flower waste. She has been supported with a seed grant of INR 25,000, through which she procured the said equipment and also acquired an FSSAI license for her business.



4. RUNE

By Vaibhav Tanna, Cis-Gay man from Ahmedabad, Gujarat. He is an artist who specializes in embroidery. Rune is his venture under which he offers a wide range of arts-based products and services, including- embroidered bookmarks, canvases, murals, bags, adult coloring books, embroidery workshops, as well as customized artworks. Vaibhav applied for support under Dolphin Tank to expand production, market his venture, and register it. He has been supported with a seed grant of INR 96,400.

Rune's business has picked up greatly over the last year, with him having tapped into corporate gifting, collaborations with social enterprises and so on.





5. Aahare Mon Started by Sumedha Mandal, a Bisexual Cis-Woman from Kolkata, West Bengal, Aahare Mon, an eatery and takeaway space in Kolkata. Sumedha co-runs the joint alongside her partner and family, and aims to bring the taste of a warm home-cooked meal in everything that the restaurant serves to its target population- students and workers who have migrated to the area. Through Dolphin Tank funds- INR 1,50,000- Sumedha was able to bring in some enhancements to Aahare Mon- such as a new gas pipeline connection, & industry standard cookwear.

Owing to unsustainable rent costs in the original outlet, Aahare Mon had to relocate to a smaller outlet in August 2024; post relocation, through Dolphin Tank funds, Sumedha has heavily invested in marketing the restaurant in her new neighbourhood. She hopes to expand to corporate catering going forward.

**The Dolphin Tank implementation team visited Aahare Mon for a monitoring visit on 11th February 2024.*

Activity 4.2 - Dolphin Tank Initiative

1. Amaira Adwani: In 2024–25, Amaira's storytelling-driven coaching business grew by 50%, enrolling over 150 students with more than 70% scoring above 90% in French, Math, and Science (CBSE & ICSE). The business registered under MSME and saw a 30% revenue increase, while creating two part-time jobs as it reinvested earnings to improve quality and support.

As a trans woman entrepreneur, Amaira found the Dolphin Tank support transformative— not only providing resources but also validation and visibility. This backing shifted community perceptions, allowing her to lead with confidence and authenticity.

Looking forward, Amaira plans to launch an online French course and a pilot internship for LGBTQ+ students, aiming to expand queer representation in education and build a larger movement beyond coaching.



2. Aishwarya Reddy: Aishwarya Reddy founded Glamour Unisex Salon to build a livelihood for herself and serve the transgender community. Having faced discrimination in previous workplaces, she understood the difficulty of living openly as a transgender person in society. Thankfully, with the support of a progressive guru and her parents, she completed her education—an advantage many in her community lack.

In 2023–24, she received support from The Humsafar Trust and Dorf Ketal through the Dolphin Tank initiative, which enabled her to renovate her salon and invest in upgrades. These changes helped attract more clients and boost profitability.

Aishwarya onboarded one transgender community member and non-community personnel as part of her inclusive hiring approach, aiming to foster diversity and not operate in a silo. The support has also given her the confidence to pursue new ventures, including her dream of entering politics. She remains deeply grateful to The Humsafar Trust and Dorf Ketal and hopes the teams will visit her salon to experience its welcoming services.



3. Dr. Sneha Rooh: Craftisan, a queer-led venture, gained crucial momentum through Dolphin Tank support this past year. This helped fast-track essential steps—registering as a One Person Company (OPC) and completing its trademark—strengthening its legal identity and brand presence.

With renewed focus, Craftisan expanded into bath salts, neem combs, eco-friendly toothbrushes, and launched “Unlabel,” a Gen Z-focused sub-brand with playful, minimalist designs. The team is now pursuing an Import Export Code (IEC) to enter global markets.

For founder Dr. Sneha Rooh, Dolphin Tank was more than financial support—it brought clarity, confidence, and progress that had been stalled due to systemic barriers. Craftisan stands as an example of how timely support can empower queer entrepreneurs to grow with pride and purpose.

4. Pratik Jadhav:

In FY 2024-25, Aadim Studio saw significant growth, thanks to support from The Humsafar Trust's Dolphin Tank program. We achieved a steady monthly profit of ₹20,000 and officially registered as a small business, boosting credibility. Sales grew through craft markets and boutique collaborations. We also hired a local woman artisan, emphasizing inclusive growth.

As a queer founder from a rural area, this support brought visibility and empowerment, showing queerness as a strength. Moving forward, we aim to expand into children's craft kits and art programs in rural schools, hoping for continued support.



5. Riddhiman Jain:

For Riddhiman Jain, Dolphin Tank was a transformative and empowering learning experience. From the selection process itself, he gained clarity on how to speak about his business and improved skills in budgeting, marketing, and pitching—areas he previously had little knowledge of. With the funds received, he successfully launched a long-awaited new product line that had been on hold due to lack of capital. The program also enabled him to kickstart his social media marketing journey, helping him strategize, build visibility, and identify his target audience more effectively, giving his business a strong, focused direction.

6. Shiv Patil:

In the past year, Shiv Patil, a transman based in Panvel, has steadily developed his business providing Aadhaar and document creation and editing services. The business grew significantly, achieving key milestones like registration with authorities, revenue growth, new job creation, and expanding the customer base. Support from Dolphin Tank has been life-changing for Shiv as an LGBTQ+ person, giving him confidence, community, and validation. Grateful for this support, he believes continued funding will help build on successes and create greater impact.



7. Ashly Nelson:

AshCo, a genderfluid fashion and accessories brand, has grown significantly with support from The Humsafar Trust's Dolphin Tank. Officially registered as an MSME, it achieved ₹4,20,450 in sales across 436 orders in FY 2023–24. The funding enabled production upgrades, expanded product lines, and visibility through Swiggy Minis, flea markets, and media features. Once self-funded, AshCo now balances reinvestment and savings. For its queer founder, this support turned a personal dream into a growing, inclusive brand.



8. Meenal Solanki:

Mann Conversations has greatly benefited from the Dolphin Tank initiative in two key ways. First, the HST team and fellow Dolphin entrepreneurs regularly shared valuable opportunities, enabling us to participate in the IIM Nagpur program and Gulabi Mela. Second, the funding support helped us access these platforms, improving our visibility and network—something we couldn't have managed due to limited resources. As a service-based business, we hope for more tailored support in the future. We're deeply grateful to The Humsafar Trust and team for believing in us and uplifting queer-led ventures.



9. Zeddy:

This year marked a transformative chapter for Nazaqatt. With support from the Dolphin Tank initiative, the queer-led brand scaled up production, launched five new products, and completed its first professional product photoshoot. Its official website is set to go live in June. In just three months, Nazaqatt sold over 500 units of attars and introduced eco-friendly, durable packaging—an important move toward sustainability. For founder Zeddy, the support went beyond funding—it offered visibility, validation, and a renewed belief that queer-led businesses deserve space, success, and recognition in today's marketplace.



10. Birshikha Chhetri:

7journeys, an inclusive travel firm based in Guwahati, Assam, has been crafting offbeat adventures and proudly championing Pink Tourism since 2017. Like many small businesses, the pandemic brought immense setbacks—loss of office space, team members, and operational grounding. However, Dolphin Tank support came at a critical time, enabling the business to rebuild from the ground up.



In the first phase, 7journeys regained its trade license, secured MSME registration, and acquired a Nidhi Certificate in 2024. This formalization process laid a solid foundation for revival. The second round of support focused on team building and strategic marketing—helping the business regain visibility and compete in a saturated market.

In FY 2024–25, 7journeys proudly crossed a ₹20 lakh turnover milestone. For its queer woman founder, the journey has been filled with grit and resilience. Dolphin Tank didn't just offer financial aid—it reignited the dream. It gave 7journeys the wings to soar again, firmly rooted in pride, perseverance, and purpose.

**Grateful to
Dorf Ketal Chemicals India Ltd.
for the invaluable support.**

From The Humsafar Trust

