**The Acceptance Meet 2015**

**Mumbai:** Yaariyan’s Acceptance meet was held on the 15th of August 2015, the 69th Independence Day of India at the Morello Hall of Holy Family Hospital in Bandra, Mumbai. The crowd turnout for the event was close to 300 individuals and volunteers who tirelessly worked to make the event a grand success.

The meet opened with an introduction of the day and all guests stood up in honor of the National Anthem, a video shot with Hijras community members with a theme “Hum bhi Bharatiya hain” This was followed by screening of various short films on issues of coming out and acceptance of the LGBTQ individuals some videos from the Satyamev Jayate Team.

A young filmmaker, Tushar, came up with the idea for the Hijras singing the National Anthem said, “We have seen boys and girls singing Jana Gana Mana, but not transpersons, everyone is an Indian and that’s what’s it’s all about!” Malati Rao, the conceptualizer of “Tell me a story” series emphasized on the need of stories of coming out and acceptance. Lipi Mehta of Satyamev jayate team shared their experiences while doing research on the Alternate Sexualities episode. Film maker Rikhil Bahadur launched the trailer of his film “Time Out” and said that he was looking for positive response for his film. The video interview of a visually impaired mother, whose unconditional acceptance of her gay son touched all hearts. The session ended with a music video by the team of ‘Gangster Gudiya’ who run a YouTube channel with the same name, the video features many number of the gay community in Mumbai, singing along to a cover of Ed Sheeran’s song 'thinking out loud'.

The second half of the event saw individuals sharing experiences of their coming out and acceptance by their families, personal and workplace friends, mothers spoke about their children, cousins for their cousins, friends and colleagues describing how proud and supportive they were about their gay friends. A gay man’s cousin went on to say that, “No matter what church you go to, no matter what you believe in, at the end being a good human is what matters the most!” Padma Iyer, mother of LGBTQ rights activist Harrish Iyer recalled her shock when her son told her about his sexuality which she ultimately accepted saying it doesn’t matter who you choose to be with, a man or a woman, as far as you are with someone. An inspiring story came from a young gay man who addressed his conversation to his mother, who was attending the event seeking her love and acceptance. His heart
wrenching talk brought tears to many eyes. The session went on to address questions posed by the attendees and responded by psychologist Ishita Mandal. When asked about how to deal with tormenting past that many in the LGBTQ community have experienced, Ishita Mandal simply said, “Do not try to erase your negative memories. The more you try to erase, the more you remember and more negativity sets in. Instead, work on the negative aspect of your emotions and accept yourself first, only then you can expect others to accept you!”

The question answer session was followed by a panel discussion on inclusion of LGBTQ in various workplace environments. The panel included Pallav Patankar, Director of Programs, The Humsafar Trust; Radhika Sharma, counselor at the Arpan Trust, Child Sexual Abuse; Dr. Mahinder Watsya, renowned sexologist who runs a sexology column in Mumbai Mirror, a news daily; Yogesh Pawar from DNA Newspaper and Nitin Karani a self-identified gay man working for the corporate end. When asked about the media’s inclusion of LGBTQ concerns, Pallav Patankar said, “even though the English media tends to support the community, the local language press fails to take up the LGBTQ issues as human rights issues.” Recollecting a recent incident by local news daily, Yogesh Pawar said that there have been incidences portrayed by the media which do not even fall in the ethics of journalism. Psychologist and Counselor Radhika Sharma highlighted that there is no connection between child sexual abuse and sexuality of an individual and many LGBTQ have been sexually abused as children “The numbers are high as 53% of children face sexual abuse. It was concluded that a pedophile is a pedophile, a pedophile is not gay or straight and child sexual abuse is non-negotiable offence. Dr. Mahindra Watsa emphasized on the need of the community for self-acceptance. He cited example of Ashok Row Kavi who at a very young age had the courage to come out in acceptance of his sexuality. He expressed that though work was happening around inclusion but it was like a drop in ocean and the community to should actively work with medical fraternity and other corporates. Nitin Karani reflected that there were few corporates who had inclusion policies but the numbers were negligible. He stated that working with corporates or other workplace environments is an ongoing process and needs to be strengthened.

The panel discussion was followed by a booklet launch. The Satyamev Jayate team in collaboration with Humsafar Trust developed a booklet “Acceptance of Alternative Sexualities: Snapshots of LGBT Lives in India”. Ashok Row Kavi, Anuja Parikh, SonalGiani, UrmilJadhav, Sidhant More as community representatives and Chandni Parikh and Lipi Mehta from Aamir Khan Productions launched the booklet as the closing event of the Acceptance Meet.

The aim of Acceptance Meet is to create a friendly environment of acceptance with parents of LGBTQ communities, teachers, friends, employers, colleagues, law enforcement agencies, judiciary and the lawmakers. The event also aims to fill the gaps in knowledge of these stakeholders that they may have about queer issues.

The event was supported by Reliance Foundation, The Humsafar Trust, Yaariyan and Umang in collaboration with LGBTQ community groups and initiatives that Gaysi family, Harmless
Hugs, Mingle, Ministry of Minuscule Minorities, Queer Adda, Q - graphy, Saathi – IIT Bombay and The Q – Knit.

Screening of National Anthem video – Bharatiya, Hum bhi hai.

Filmmakers answer questions about their films

Ishita Mandal talks about the importance of self acceptance

Padma Iyer talks about accepting her homosexual son.
The panel discussion

Launch of the booklet – Accepting Alternative Sexualities