Being_ RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT BASIC Foundation

QUTWE

Queer-affirmative Unicorns

Transforming Wellbeing Ecosystem

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Restless Development

We are a nonprofit locally led, globally connected network that supports the collective power of young leaders to create a better world. More than ever the world needs young people's power and leadership to solve its greatest challenges. Every year we train, mentor, nurture and connect thousands of young people to use their youth power and lead change.

Restless Development India

Restless Development in India works with community-based youth leaders to lead solutions to development needs that they, their peers, and their communities face.

1,296,662
young volunteers and changemakers directly engaged with through integrated programmes

327,078
community members reached through outreach events and sessions

RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

About the QUTWE Programme

Queer-affirmative Unicorns Transforming Wellbeing Ecosystem

Restless Development, with the support of Grand Challenges Canada (GCC) under the Being initiative, aims to address the significant mental health and well-being challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth in the Dakshinpuri informal resettlement slum of Delhi. Many young people in this community experience family rejection, social ostracisation, and limited access to supportive public services, leading to increased rates of depression, anxiety, and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation. Deep-rooted stigma and lack of familial support have further exacerbated these challenges.

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To mitigate these issues, Restless Development has established the Youth Resource Centre (YRC) as a safe, community-embedded space to foster stronger parent-youth relationships and promote LGBTQIA+ affirmativeness. The intervention employs a three-pronged model to improve connectedness between youth and parents, while addressing mental health literacy, reducing stigma, and improving access to supportive services.

QUTWE's Expected Reach and Impact

500

LGBTQIA+ youth (ages 16–24) and 200 parents/caregivers directly reached

1,000

additional young people to be part of a peer network extension for community-based support

20

mental health professionals trained in LGBTQIA+ inclusivity

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QUTWE within Restless Development's Theory of Change

QUTWE is a youth-led programme under Restless Development India that applies Restless Development's Theory of Change to queer-affirmative mental health and wellbeing in Dakshinpuri. It demonstrates how Youth Power, when nurtured, connected, and celebrated, leads to individual, community, and system-level change for LGBTQIA+ young people.

Why does QUTWE exist?

Young people with diverse genders and sexualities in Dakshinpuri face persistent barriers to mental health support. These include stigma within families, limited mental health literacy, lack of safe spaces, and poor access to LGBTQIA+-affirming services. QUTWE responds to this context using Restless Development's youth-led approach.

How does QUTWE Activate Youth Power?

Nurturing young people to lead

Youth Unicorns (YUs) and selected Parent Role Models (PRMs) are trained on mental health, SOGIESC, LGBTQIA+ issues, and Psychosocial First Aid, building confidence, skills, and leadership.

Connecting youth to support systems

QUTWE strengthens links between young people, families, peers, and mental health service providers to improve access to safe, affirming mental health support and improve parent-youth connectedness.

Celebrating youth leadership

Youth Unicorns lead well-being circles, interactive workshops, intergenerational dialogues, and community conversations, making youth leadership visible and credible.

What does QUTWE Deliver?

- Youth Unicorns and parent role models trained on mental health, SOGIESC, LGBTQIA+ issues, and PFA.
- Peer-led well-being circles and interactive workshops for young people.
- Intergenerational dialogues and collaborative community action projects.
- Awareness and advocacy initiatives with mental health service providers.

What is QUTWE's impact in the long run?

Sustained improvement in parent-youth connectedness, mental health literacy, and access to LGBTQIA+-affirming services for young people in Dakshinpuri.

Success looks like....

- Increased knowledge, positive attitudes, and help-seeking behaviours among youth and parents.
- Improved parent-youth connectedness and communication on mental health and identity.
- Increased use of mental health services by LGBTQIA+ youth and reduced experiences of stigma.

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PYCS: Parent–Youth Connectedness Scale developed by Restless Development

LGBT*QIA+ youth in India face significant mental health challenges, and supportive family relationships are known to be strong protective factors. However, to the best of our knowledge, no culturally grounded and psychometrically validated tool existed to measure parent–youth connectedness specifically for queer youth in the Indian context. To address this gap, we developed and pilot-tested a contextualised scale with LGBT*QIA+ youth (18–24 years) in Dakshinpuri, New Delhi.

The scale was created through a mixed-methods process including literature review, focus group discussions with youth (across gender groups) and parents, expert validation, and pilot administration. The final scale has 35 items across three domains (Emotional Attachment and Support, Autonomy, Control, Acceptance, Support for Perceived LGBTQIA Identity) and shows strong reliability. The tool can support queer-affirmative mental health programmes to strengthen family relationships and community-based care.

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Meet some of our Youth Unicorns

Queer and youth lived experiences are at the heart of how we design, implement, and strengthen mental-health ecosystems.

RAJ, 23
transman

"Fear of violence and fear of getting locked in their house if they share anything... We want to talk, especially to our mothers, but always fear what will happen if we come out."

COMING OUT, CONTROL, AND MENTAL DISTRESS

Queer youth in Dakshinpuri regularly experience severe anxiety around disclosure at home. Coming out is rarely about pride; it is a weighed risk, often silenced by the threat of punishment or expulsion. Mental health suffers in this environment, as expression of queer identity is directly linked to fear and suppression.

TRAYAKSH, 19
transman

"We are outcasts by society from early childhood because of how we walk, talk, or dress.. . Family tries to 'fix' us, but acceptance depends on looking or behaving a certain way."

RESPECTABILITY, SURVEILLANCE, AND INTERNAL CONFLICT

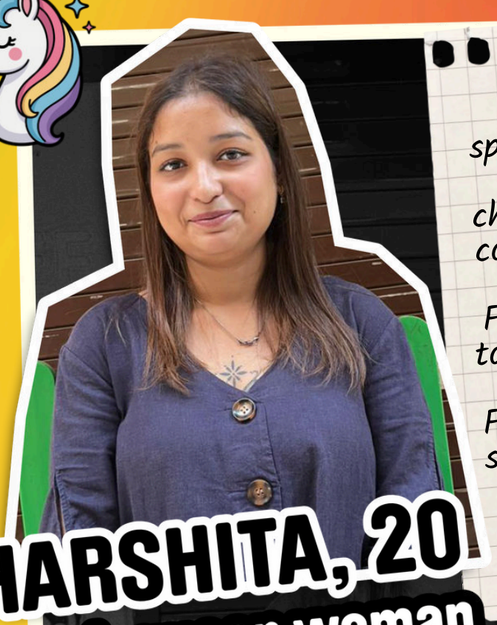
A diverse group of young people from Dakshinpuri shared that Gender non-conforming young people are policed for their behaviour and appearance from an early age, facing attempts at "correction." The pressure to maintain family reputation increases distress, undermining self-esteem as youth strive to live in a way that feels true to them.

SONIA, 23
cisqueer woman

"Not sharing isn't just fear - sometimes silence is the only way to hold on to our boundaries and autonomy. We wait until we're ready."

SILENCE, STIGMA, AND STRATEGIC WITHHOLDING

Many queer youth choose silence not only due to fear, but also as a form of agency, waiting for greater acceptance or financial independence before risking honesty about identities, relationships, or mental health needs.



HARSHITA, 20
cisqueer woman

"Mothers have been spending more time with their children since childhood, which builds a connection. Support from mothers is important. Fathers have the agency to decide whether we can stay at home or not. Fathers are more distant, strict, violent men - that we see, and this idea continues, so we prefer mothers."

EMOTIONAL BLACKMAIL, DISCIPLINE, AND PARENTAL POWER

Emotional connections are complicated. Youth prefer seeking support from their mothers due to greater emotional proximity, but still face manipulation and blackmail. Fathers frequently represent authority, often enforcing discipline or withdrawal if a young person is found to be queer.

LAXMI, 21
cis woman

"Parents beat, take us to doctors, put us on random medications, do house arrest and just try to change us to fit us in the box they want..."

DENIAL, MEDICALISATION, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SUPPORT

Attempts at "cure" through violence or forced medicalisation are common. For Dakshinpuri's queer youth, navigating mental health often means resisting both overt abuse and subtle invalidation of their own identity in their own homes, with little

meaningful support.