



# Embracing Change: Our Journey at Eklavya Foundation for Mental Health

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As I sit down to reflect on my time at Eklavya Foundation for Mental Health, I'm struck by the profound impact it has had on me, both personally and professionally. What began as a mere service learning opportunity has evolved into a transformative journey of self-discovery, empathy, and empowerment. I was immediately struck by the Eklavya Foundation's philosophy.



The organization, which was established with the goals of raising awareness and eradicating stigma, is a ray of light in a culture where talking about mental health issues is still frowned upon. Alongside my four esteemed batchmates (**Tanisha Kesharwani, Aanshi Singh, Ananya Kharola, Rujul Bhale**) from the 2nd Year of BSc in Mental Health program at Symbiosis Institute of Health Sciences, I embarked on this journey with a sense of purpose and determination. Our work spans a multitude of projects, each aimed at challenging perceptions and fostering understanding around mental health issues. Whether it's "**Bahar Bharat**," where both mental health care giver and client get opportunities to express their emotions in form of poetry,

"**Sangarsh Chitre**," amplifying voices through pictorial storytelling, which is my personal favourite, "**Phoenix**," where in people share their stories of recovery or "**Stich**". But it's not just about the projects; it's about the people—the dedicated individuals who make up the fabric of Eklavya Foundation. Additionally, we organized a program where Dr. Rukadikar Sir was invited for a specially designed training program which consisted of 4 consecutive sessions focusing on coping skills. We were volunteers there, further highlighting our commitment to spreading awareness and supporting mental health initiatives.

**Tanisha's** story resonates deeply with me, as she shares her journey of growth and learning within the organization. From her initial conversations with mentors to the opportunity to interview experts, her experience embodies the nurturing environment that defines our foundation. Tanisha also adds "Eklavya Foundation MH provided an enriching experience for me, starting from a flexible start date to insightful work in mental health. Anil Vartak Sir and Smita Mam were supportive, and interviewing Dr. Manohar Dalphad was a highlight. Grateful for the opportunity and wishing the team success in their noble endeavors."



**Aanshi's** words echo the sentiments of fulfillment and empathy that permeate our work. As she describes her experience as a volunteer, I'm reminded of the profound impact of our collective efforts have on the lives of others. Aanshi shares, "Being part of Eklavya Foundation as a volunteer has truly been transformative. I am amazed by how Eklavya actively contributed to destigmatizing mental illness and supporting caregivers. I got a chance to give small contributions with the responsibilities including making posters, interviewing experts like Dr. Manohar Dhadphale, and translating experiences. Through my volunteer work, I learned the importance of empathy and fostering a supportive environment. It was fulfilling to be part of promoting understanding and acceptance of mental health challenges in our society."

**Ananya's** infectious enthusiasm for our cause and her sincere appreciation for our work at Eklavya Foundation reaffirm our collective dedication to making a positive impact. Ananya shares, "My time at Eklavya Foundation MH has truly been fulfilling. It's my first venture with an NGO, and I'm genuinely touched by the heartfelt mission that guides our work here. What excites me most is the freedom to explore creative ideas, bringing depth and excitement to our initiatives. Working alongside my classmates has been a delight, fostering both camaraderie and effectiveness in our efforts. It's incredibly satisfying to be part of something meaningful, contributing to mental health awareness while making a difference in people's lives."

**Rujul's** mention of the warmth she feels within our community strikes a chord with me. It's this sense of belonging, of being part of something greater than ourselves, that fuels our passion and drives us forward. Rujul says, "I acknowledge the community awareness work at Eklavya Foundation. Being able to contribute through translations into Marathi ensures that our message reaches the local population effectively. It fills me with pride to know that I'm contributing to tangible difference in my community through this vital work."

As students of mental health, our journey at Eklavya Foundation goes beyond the confines of a classroom. It's an immersion into the complexities of real-world advocacy—a journey marked by challenges, but also by moments of profound growth and understanding. The activities of Eklavya Foundation—from support group meetings to awareness campaigns—are a testament to their unwavering dedication to their cause. Being a part we realized, despite being a relatively young institution, the impact reverberating far beyond the confines of community, touching the lives of countless individuals.



At the heart of their mission lies a vision—a vision of an informed, empowered, and inclusive society. They have a vision guiding them in everything they do, from organizing support group meetings to conducting awareness programs in schools and colleges. I want to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Anil Vartak, whose guidance and mentorship has been invaluable to us. His unwavering support has been a source of strength and inspiration, propelling us forward even in the face of adversity. As I look back on my time at Eklavya Foundation, I'm filled with a profound sense of pride and gratitude. Each day brings new challenges and opportunities for growth, reaffirming my belief in the power of collective action to effect positive change. In closing, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the entire team at Eklavya Foundation for Mental Health. A lesson I would carry for the rest of my life would be that mental health is not just about mental wellbeing but also breaking barriers, and ensuring everyone feels recognized and respected.