

AUROVILLE PROJECT COORDINATION GROUP

Project Report Format

1. Name of the project:

Applied Research: Restorative Circles in Auroville

2. Name of the project holder(s):

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3. Amount received in rupees from SDZ:

Rs. 1,73,469

4. Year in which grant received:

2016 (January)

5. Amount(s) received from other donors:

n/a

6. Please describe the activities of the project and the final outcome, or outcome so far if project has not been completed.

6-Month Report: January – June 2016

We are extremely pleased with how this Project is unfolding so far. We had many ideas and strategies for how to bring the Restorative Circles practice to Auroville, and how to raise awareness and collective dialogue around justice and restorative conflict resolution practices.

Our team has grown to include 2 more full-time team members, Kati and Helene (in addition to L'aura, Janet and Shanti).

The grant, which covers L'aura's monthly Auroville Maintenance (for just under 1 year), has allowed L'aura to dedicate her time and energy fully, and to lead this project in all its steps, in a way that she would not be able to do without this funding.

So far, we have offered 10 Restorative Circles Workshops – 7 of them were open to the general public, 2 were for “The Learning Community” school, and 1 was for the Koodam team (including their volunteers and supporters). In total, we have had 75 participants, and 57 of them have been Aurovilians. The feedback has been resoundingly positive – our participants see value in our work, appreciate the new perspective, the learning and new skills. We have a weekly Practice Group, and the attendance is regular and consistent, ranging from 6 to 12 participants each week (again, mostly Aurovilians).

We have also hosted 3 public World Cafes, where we showed movie excerpts from real Restorative Justice events from different parts of the world, as an inspiration to start dialoguing about what we might want to develop in Auroville. The excerpts included the Truth & Reconciliation process in

South Africa, a Restorative Dialogue in Nepal after the 10-year armed conflict, and a culturally-based healing process for Canadian First Nations.

We have facilitated 5 live Restorative Circles, and another 4 are in progress. The results are positive. Our participants have been touched by the process and see it as a valuable tool for Auroville. Even though participants may have been challenged with the topics and relationships at hand (which is inevitable, as conflict is not a comfortable situation to be in), in the end they experienced a shift and a sense of forward movement, saying that there was increased understanding of each other, and increased willingness to work things out in new and unexpected ways.

Our Circles have included, to name a few:

- (i) a falling out between the parents and teachers' team at an Auroville kindergarten;
- (ii) a lack of clarity and misunderstandings regarding leadership roles and inclusion among parents at an alternative parent-run Auroville school;
- (iii) a long-standing falling out between the present Administration of an Auroville outreach school and its previous Administrator, and a related loss of trust and hopelessness among its neighbouring residents;
- (iv) loss of trust and misunderstanding of agreements between a previous Auroville guest house Executive and the new Executives;
- (v) long-standing personality clashes between Aurovilians working with stray dog care, and its impact our community response to stray dog care;
- (vi) long-standing personality clashes and lack of shared agreements about how to deal with encroachment on Auroville land among residents in an Auroville greenbelt community;
- (vii) and neighbourly discord and loss of trust among residents in an Auroville residential community.

We have a team of emerging RC Facilitators (and Co-Facilitators), and we are amazed by how much we are learning and witnessing with this project. Some of us have been studying this process for several years, so finally being able to put it into practice and to truly engage with the community is very rewarding. The strongest feeling has been one of building (or strengthening) our sense of community – that is, getting to know and trust each other, sitting down with fellow Aurovilians whose faces we may know, but with whom we have never really dialogued, and being curious to hear their perspectives.

It has been meaningful to engage with people around the topic of conflict and justice, as we see how vulnerable of a subject it is, something many of us want to avoid, and yet something that we have all experienced, and where we all long to be heard for our perspective, and to find harmony and peace again.

It is extremely refreshing to see a sort of collective intelligence at work, that anybody can initiate a Circle, that anybody can be named, that we never know who will be invited and what perspective he or she will bring. It means that in a Circle we meet as individuals and as equals, whether we are members of Working Groups or not, whether we are Aurovilians or not, whether we are local Tamil workers or not. We have found that this process invites a sense of ownership and responsibility – that is, if we want to see change, we need to get involved in creating the change, instead of waiting for “somebody else” to fix the problem. It has been refreshing to see that we can start to solve our own problems, to trust that we have the resources as a community, and that we do not necessarily

need to depend on Working Groups to find the solutions, or to lose all hope and resort to silence and avoiding as the only way to cope.

Although we officially wrote this project up as a 1-year venture, we actually see it as a much longer project, something that might take 10-15 years to unfold and blossom. So in saying this, we see how much work there is for us to do, and much we still need to learn. We are already very aware of two large gaps we need to walk towards:

- (i) engaging and dialoguing with Tamil Aurovilians, specifically those who joined Auroville from the local villages, so that we can better understand how they relate to conflict and justice;
- (ii) engaging and creating more mutual understanding with Working Groups, so that they can better understand our work, we can better understand the complexities they are dealing with, and so that together we can create systems and processes that are effective and trusted by the community.

On a very practical level, we are also dealing with a financial challenge. Very frugally, we asked only for L'aura's 1-year Maintenance, because in essence that was the most essential funding needed. However, in order to carry out all the activities we would like to carry out, we will need to do more fundraising.

Such activities include our upcoming 1-week Film Fest (scheduled for October) on the topic of Restorative Justice, where we also intend to invite guest speakers and experts in the field of Restorative Justice, Nimisha Desai from Gujarat, and Duke Duchscherer from Canada/USA. In addition, Duke will host a live Restorative Dialogue Healing Process between some of our cultural groups in Auroville, in the hopes of restoring trust and connection, and healing some of the misunderstandings and pain connected to our cultural differences.

In addition, we have other activities in progress:

- (i) developing a community-wide survey regarding our views on justice and what kind of a justice system we would like to co-create in Auroville;
- (ii) developing a sort of Truth & Reconciliation process, that would be based on the principles of Restorative Circles, and that could be used to support reconciliation and reintegration of individuals whose reputation is very much damaged. (For example, if someone wants to join a Working Group but can not because of the amount of negative feedback against him/her, he/she could ask for a such a process in the effort to take responsibility for his/her behaviour and start to redeem him/herself.)
- (iii) developing a sort of Restorative Response to conflict at "The Learning Community" school, among the students.

Attachments:

1. Article from La Revue d'Auroville
2. RC Workshop Participant Feedback Forms
3. Live Circles Participant Feedback Forms
4. Thank You note in News & Notes after a Live Circle

7. Please provide a Financial Statement by filling in the table below. Rows may be added or deleted.

	Amount INR		
Amount of grant received from Stichting De Zaaier	Rs. 1,73,469		
List of expenditures by category			
L'aura's monthly Auroville Maintenance (for just under 1 year)	Rs.16,230 per month (for just under 1 year)		
Total			
Grand Total	Rs. 1,73,469		

NB As additional material, you are welcome to include graphs, charts, maps or photographs:: please save images reduced to lowest resolution jpg files (**no larger than 500 KB each**).

NB Reports generally describe what was done during the project period, what was learned, or what was particularly successful (or unsuccessful if that is the case); **what role a particular grant played** in relation to other funds received and, what is being done to follow-up on the project. **A financial statement explaining how funds were spent is part of every report.**

Please note that all funds from all donors are sent to the Auroville Unity Fund and all withdrawals and expenditures for any project or activity are to follow the Auroville Unity Fund accounting procedures.