

Outlive's
Youth
Action
for
Suicide
Prevention
Fellowship



Developed by:

Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy,
Indian Law Society, Pune

Project Partner:

Thumbi Labs

Supported by:

10to19 Dasra Adolescents Collaborative
& Comic Relief, UK



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Law Society 2025

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Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, Indian Law Society (2025, June). *Outlive's Youth Action for Suicide Prevention Fellowship—Report: Cohort 2 (2024–25)*.

Acknowledgements

We developed Outlive's Youth Action for Suicide Prevention (YASP) Fellowship with a deep commitment to centering young people in policy processes for youth suicide prevention. We owe the success of the second cohort of the program to our project team and our brilliant YASP Fellows who have led the way with heart, and a commitment to youth suicide prevention. To our partners and supporters, your belief in the vision and steady encouragement made this possible. Our sincere gratitude to the communities who shared their stories, championed for the cause, and encouraged our Fellows onwards in their journeys.

**YASP Fellowship,
2024–25 CMHLP
Team**

Soumitra Pathare
Arjun Kapoor
Chetana Iyer
Kavita Mandhare
Aneeqa Khalid
Chehak Gidwani
Ankita Lalwani
Gayatri Lokhande
Mehak Malhotra
Yogesh Sonavane
Shilpa Kulkarni
Priyanka Shinde
Suraj Motipawale

**YASP Fellowship
Partner,
Thumbi Labs**

Srinidhi Santosh
Sumit Sute
Sandesh Sapkota
Yashwin Iddya

Guest Faculty

Swati Tiwari
Madina bi Makbool
Suraj Bansal
Amit Gawali
Dr. Sumi Jain
Sushmita Sumant

**YASP Fellows,
Cohort 2**

Aijaz Ahmad Wani
Aishwarya Sahu
Aranck Veer Kunzang
Biroj Kumar Singh
Manan
Manisha Verma
Rahul Kumawat
Siya Deep
Yashu Lama

Design & Illustrations

Sufwan Hasan

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9

YASP Fellows

600+

stakeholders
engaged

5

States

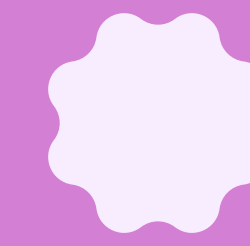
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policy solutions
proposed

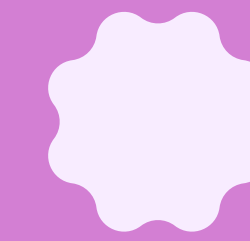
10+

policymakers
engaged

Youth leadership



Policy



Suicide Prevention

Introduction

India's Youth Suicide Crisis

India has one of the highest suicides in the world. In 2016, India (with 18% of the world's population) accounted for one-third of global suicide deaths.

Suicide is the single leading cause of death among young people aged 15–29 years in India.¹ There are 4–20 attempted suicides for every suicide death.²

It is important to note that these numbers are under-estimated by 30–100% due to various reasons such as stigma and fear of criminal prosecution.

In India's context, various factors contribute to youth suicides such as family conflicts, academic pressure, breakdown of intimate relationships, unemployment, violence, identity-based discrimination and other socio-economic factors.³

¹ India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative Suicide Collaborators (2018). Gender differentials and state variations in suicide deaths in India: the Global Burden of Disease Study 1990–2016. *The Lancet. Public health*, 3(10), e478–e489. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(18\)30138-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(18)30138-5)

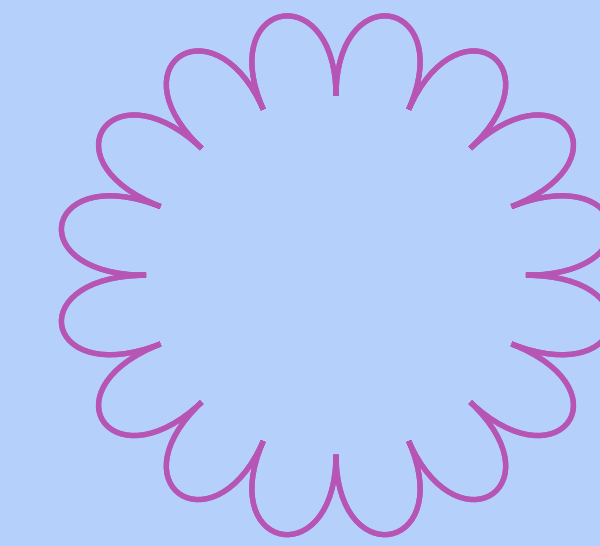
² World Health Organization, Suicide. [Internet]. Last accessed on 23 Jan 2025. Available from: <https://www.who.int/india/health-topics/suicide>

³ Vijaykumar, L et al., Suicide in developing countries (3): prevention efforts, *Crisis*. 2005;26(3):120–124

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends multi-sectoral policy interventions to address systemic factors impacting suicides. In other words, countries should develop and implement suicide prevention strategies across multiple areas of governance, including health, education, law enforcement, employment, social welfare and so on.

At the same time, it's crucial to ensure that people with lived experience—including young people—are actively involved in designing & implementing suicide prevention policies. Their participation helps make suicide prevention efforts more relevant, acceptable, and effective to those directly impacted.

Young people have unique perspectives on how policy decisions at the local, national, or global level can impact their lives in their specific contexts. However, historically, policy processes in countries like India have been driven through top-down approaches that only engage technical 'experts' while excluding ordinary citizens from actively participating in such processes.



Youth-led policy
engagement is an
opportunity for young
people to have their
voices represented in
policy processes

Young people also lack access to the opportunities, knowledge and skills needed to meaningfully engage with policymakers to drive policy interventions on various issues impacting youth suicides in their communities.

One pathway to address these gaps is to develop capacity building programs to support youth to conceptualize youth suicides as an inter-sectoral policy issue, strengthen capacities to lead systemic change, and engage with policymakers to facilitate policy interventions. Youth-led policy engagement is an opportunity for young people to have their voices represented and acted on within policy processes and to raise awareness of suicide prevention amongst their peers and community members.

Outlive's

Youth Action for
Suicide Prevention

YASP Fellowship





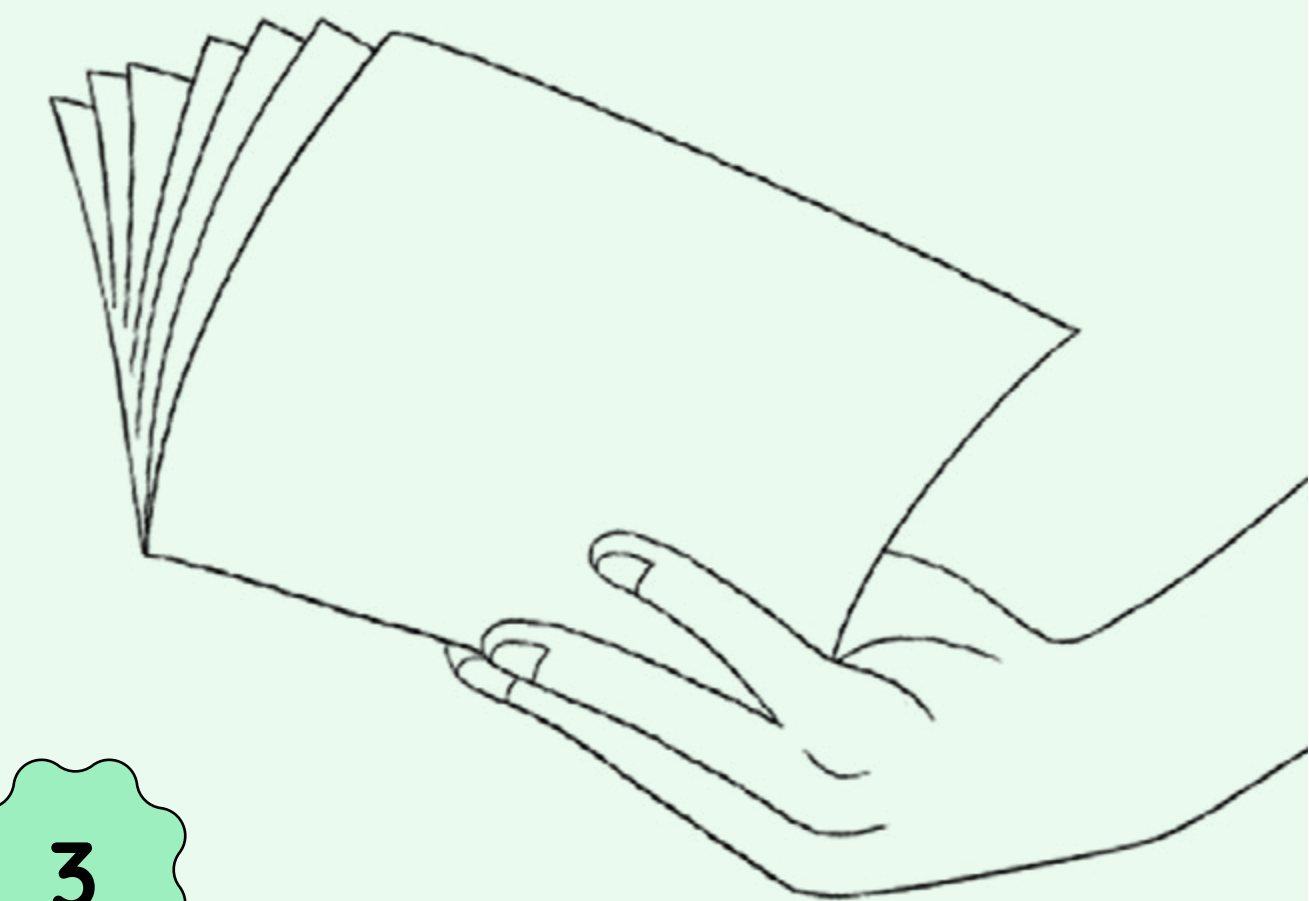
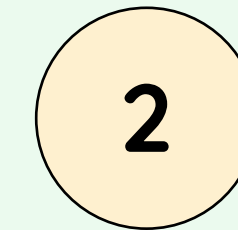
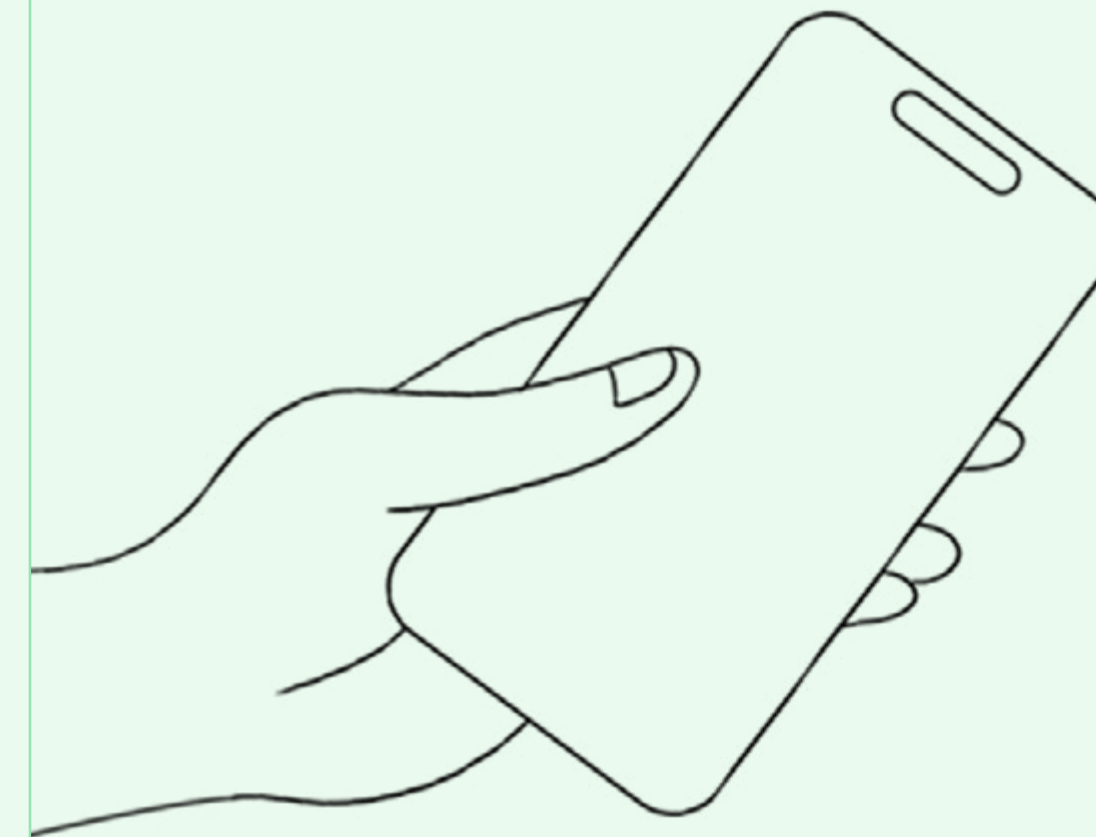
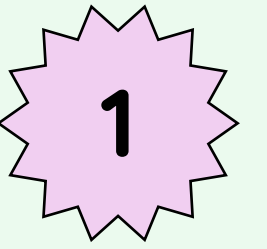
A little bit about Outlive

Outlive is a youth suicide prevention program which engages young people between the ages of 18–24 with experiences related to suicide or self-harm, distress or mental health problems. Currently, there are few suicide prevention programs in India which specifically address the needs of a diverse youth population.

Outlive's objective is to engage young people in youth suicide prevention by increasing awareness, facilitating access to youth-centric suicide prevention support and facilitating systemic changes to prevent youth suicides.

Outlive is led by the Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, Indian Law Society (CMHLP, ILS) in collaboration with its partners Sangath and Quicksand Design Studio. Outlive is supported by Comic Relief and the 10to19 Dasra Adolescents Collaborative.

Outlive has three interventions:





Outlive has been recognised as a good practice example of participatory approaches to service design (involving young people) by the



World Health Organization and UNICEF



The YASP Fellowship

A youth action program co-designed with young people

Outlive's Youth Action for Suicide Prevention (YASP) Fellowship program aims to mentor and train youth leaders aged 18–24 years, to engage with policymakers to identify and implement policy interventions that address the systemic factors of youth suicides.

The program was co-designed with 48 youth with lived experiences of suicide, distress and marginalization through co-design workshops and consultations held in English, Hindi and Marathi. Additionally, over 15 experts in the fields of peer support, suicide prevention and policy engagement were consulted for developing the program. The consultations and co-design workshops focused on young people's insights and preferences for developing a youth action program for suicide prevention.

Young people highlighted their knowledge gaps in understanding laws and policies related to suicide prevention and how policy interventions can prevent suicides. They also emphasized the lack of opportunities to build skills to engage in policy processes for mental health and suicide prevention.

Many also identified their preferences for capacity building and mentoring support to help translate their ideas for youth suicide prevention into actionable plans.

These insights informed the development of the YASP Fellowship as a capacity building and mentoring program to empower youth leaders with the **following objectives**:

- 1 Understanding youth suicide prevention as a policy and systemic issue
- 2 Developing skills to engage with policymakers
- 3 Mentoring support to identify & push for policy interventions as a bridge between the community & policymakers

Structure & Process

The YASP Fellowship comprises the following phases that the YASP Fellows complete across 9 to 12 months.

A. Foundational Training

The foundational training comprises online sessions and two blocks of week-long immersive training workshops using experiential tools such as serious games developed by Fields of View, an organisation which has extensive experience developing immersive tools to train youth and other groups in making policy accessible and actionable.

Fellows gain an understanding of youth suicide prevention as a policy and systemic issue within India's law and policy framework consisting of the National Mental Health Policy (2014), Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 and National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022).

Additionally, fellows understand policy processes and interventions addressing systemic factors of youth suicides and develop tools and strategies to engage with policy-makers and community stakeholders.

B. Community Needs Assessment

During the foundational training, the fellows conduct a rapid needs assessment with different stakeholders including youth in their respective communities. The objective of the needs assessment is to identify a systemic issue or social determinant impacting youth suicides in their community, scope relevant policies and programs, identify existing policy gaps and obtain insights for potential policy solutions.

C. Design & Implement Action Plans

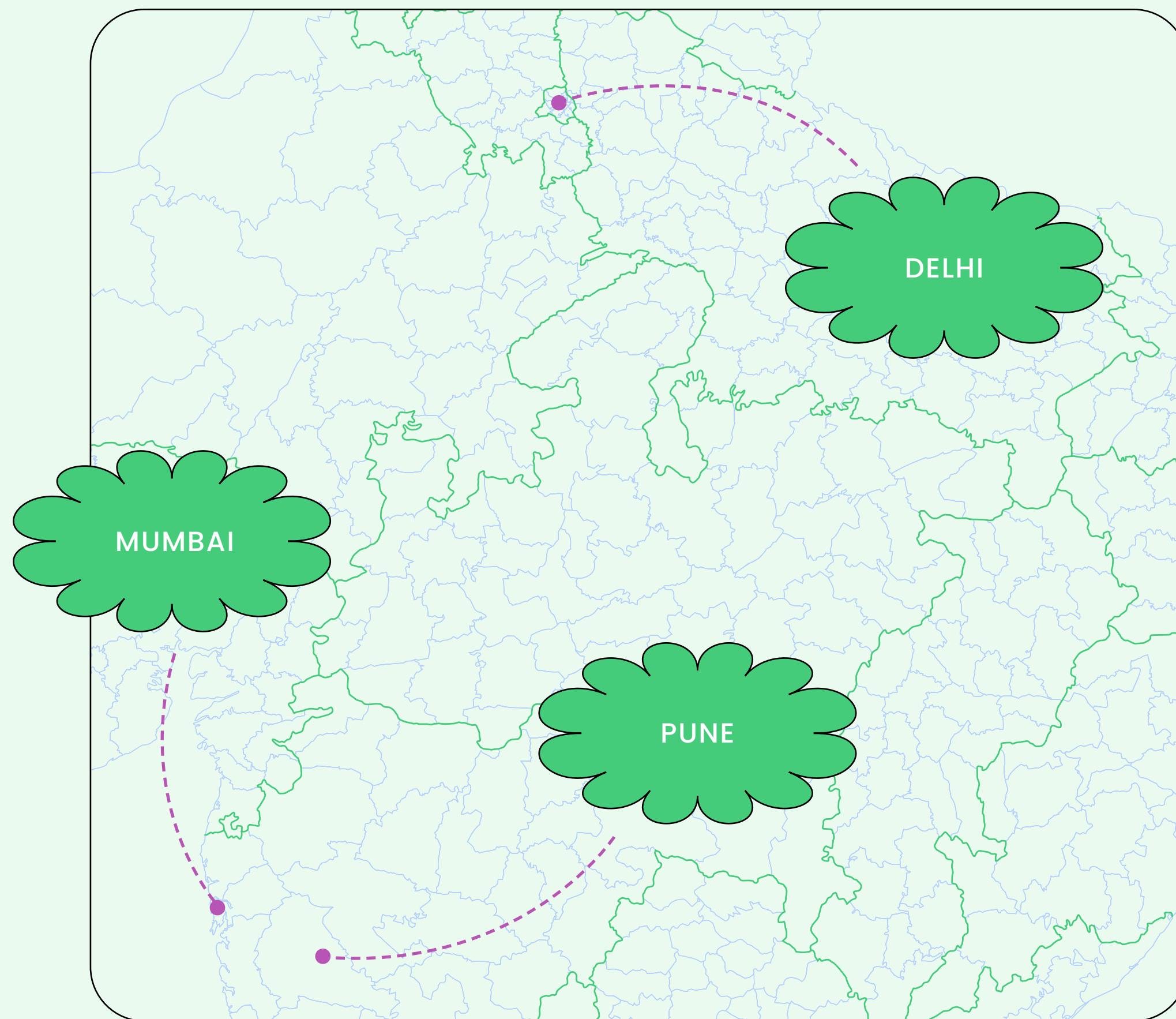
Based on data collected during the needs assessments and secondary research, fellows design and implement a strategic action plan to address the systemic issue identified by them during the needs assessment. The plan comprises a) community engagement activity to identify the policy solution based on the needs of young people and b) engagement with a policymaker to champion for the policy intervention.

D. Individual Mentoring and Support

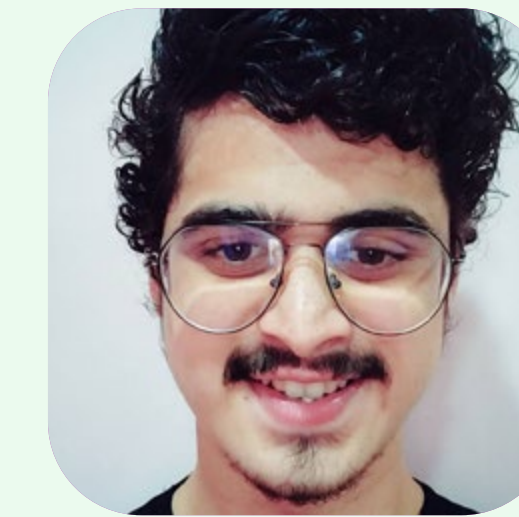
The fellows receive individual mentorship from the program team and sector-specific experts. Additionally, they are provided with a fellowship stipend to support their community and policy engagement activities.

First Cohort (2023–2024)

The first cohort of Outlive's YASP Fellowship brought together 11 young people belonging to diverse communities in Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune. Starting May 2023, these fellows engaged with the Fellowship program and worked on policy actions for issues impacting youth suicides ranging from identity-based discrimination & bullying, gender-based violence, to lack of access to support impacting youth including neurodivergent students, trans youth, youth from tribal communities, and young informal workers.



Swati
22 years



Manas
22 years



Munazah
24 years



Neha
24 years



Alfaaz
22 years



Abhinav
21 years



Lara
22 years



Suraj
20 years



Madina
21 years



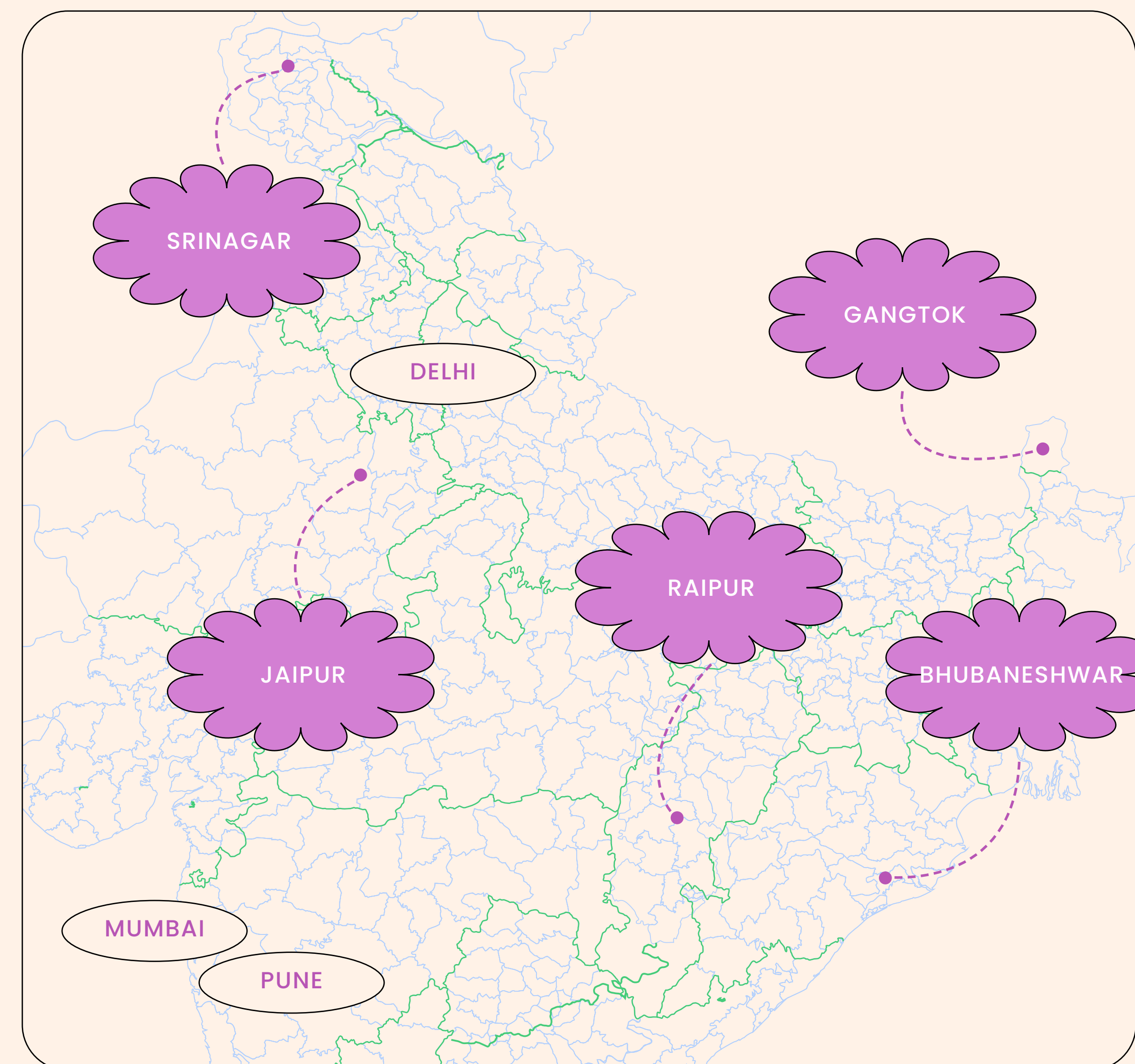
Komal
24 years



Bhavya
21 years

YASP Scale-Up to Tier-2 Cities

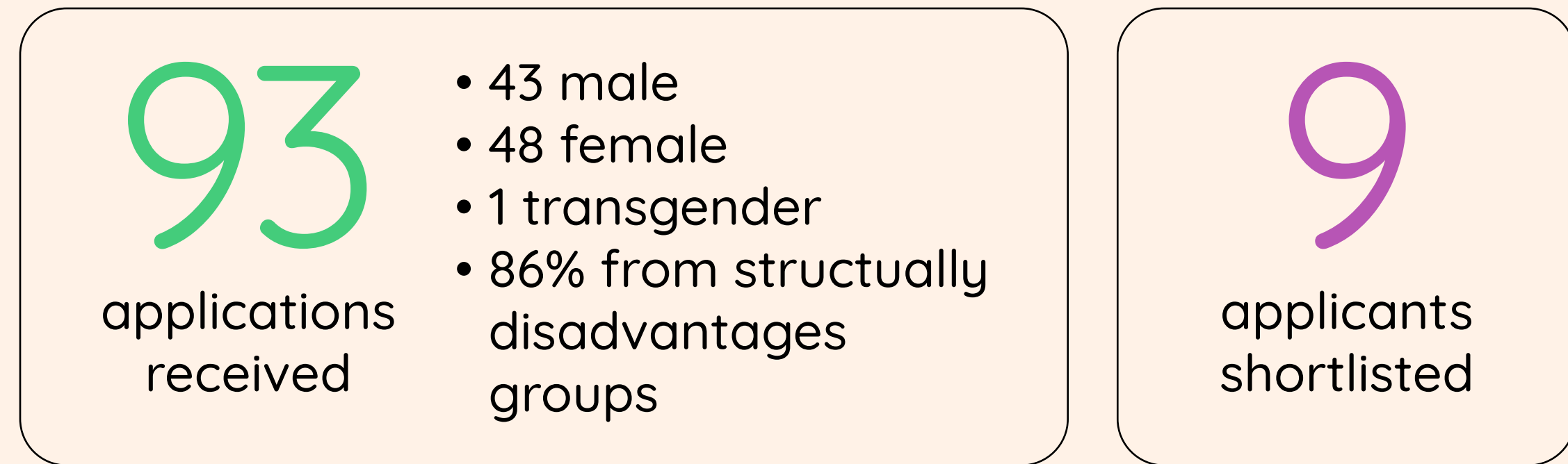
Partnership
with 10to19 Dasra
Adolescents
Collaborative



In April 2023, Outlive’s YASP Fellowship was selected as a top solution under the theme ‘Models and practices for building youth-centric governance and planning’ under the Call for Solutions program, jointly led by the 10to19 Dasra Adolescents Collaborative and YuWaah (Generation Unlimited India) at UNICEF.

This led to the scale-up to tier-2 cities to address the large gap in resources and focus on youth suicide prevention in such cities. Accordingly, the program was scaled to Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, Raipur, Srinagar, & Gangtok across five states.

Second Cohort (2024–25)



The recruitment of the second cohort of YASP 2 Fellows began with targeted outreach to community-based organizations (CBOs) working with underserved youth; LGBTQIA+ & Dalit Bahujan Adivasi Collectives; youth with disability; and educational institutions. The team connected with nearly 70 CBOs across the five cities to invite participation from their youth networks.

Through these organic networks and social media advertisements, 93 complete applications were received. Out of these, 43 applicants were male, 48 applicants were female, 1 applicant was transgender, and 1 applicant chose not to respond to the question. 86% of applicants belonged to structurally excluded communities, including economically disadvantaged groups. Finally, nine applicants across the five cities were shortlisted and selected as the second cohort of the YASP Fellowship.

The foundational training adopted a hybrid approach comprising online sessions and in-person immersive workshops.



The online sessions were conducted by the YASP faculty every week from February to April, 2024. The sessions were designed to:

- Provide a conceptual understanding of mental health, marginalization and youth suicide prevention
- Provide an introduction to laws and policies and identifying the roles of different stakeholders in policy processes



The first in-person immersive workshop was conducted during May 2024 in Pune. The workshop adopted a participatory and game-based approach to equip fellows with a detailed understanding of policy processes in India and locating youth suicide prevention within existing public policies and programs addressing the social factors of suicide. The following is a breakdown of the themes covered in the first workshop:

Day 1 Rights-Based Approach and Policy Cycle

Day 1 focused on an introduction to a rights-based approach in the context of suicide prevention. The fellows shared their experiences with mental health issues and suicide in the context of various systemic and social issues.

This exercise was instrumental in helping the fellows understand the State's role in addressing suicide prevention through policy interventions. The fellows were introduced to the policy cycle describing policy processes from policy formation, implementation to monitoring and evaluation.



Day 2 Local Self-Governance Bodies and 74th Amendment Act

Day 2 focused on understanding the powers and duties of local self-governance bodies in urban areas such as municipal bodies and panchayats as recognized by the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of the Constitution of India.

The workshop was conducted using a comic book on the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts to help fellows learn about citizen engagement on youth suicide prevention through urban local bodies.



Day 3

Public Programs & Policies for Youth Suicide Prevention

On Day 3, the fellows participated in an activity where they were presented with a case scenario based on a public policy/program in the context of youth suicides. The activity aimed to help the fellows understand how youth leaders can engage with policymakers in the context of the policy cycle and processes. They identified the gaps, challenges, and stakeholders relevant for addressing the youth suicide issue through the policy/program.

Additionally, they identified their role as youth leaders in their community and determined the types of interventions they could employ at different stages of the policy cycle, specifically in the context of suicide prevention.

The day ended with a storytelling game, **Ondu Kathe Keli**, where fellows shared personal stories of challenges and strengths related to mental health in the context of education, healthcare, and public spaces. This exercise highlighted systemic issues in their communities and reinforced the understanding that suicide is a policy and systemic issue. The stories also highlighted the proactive leadership efforts of the fellows and their communities.



Day 4

Community Needs Assessment and Visioning Exercise

Day 4 centered on a visioning exercise, where fellows shared their experiences of overcoming challenges and the qualities that helped them persevere. The exercise aimed to foster self-reflection, helping the fellows align their personal values and motivations with those of the Fellowship.

Through creative expressions like drawings and write-ups, they highlighted their resilience in overcoming personal and systemic challenges. Fellows were also briefed about how to conduct the community needs assessment process.

Community Needs Assessment

Following the initial workshop, fellows identified their specific focus areas and target communities for engagement.

The fellows started by identifying the youth suicide prevention issue they wanted to work on, and the community of youth and other relevant stakeholders who are impacted by this issue. Then they engaged with these stakeholder groups through discussions, interviews or surveys to understand challenges, needs and solutions proposed by the community. Between May to July 2024, they conducted a needs assessment within their chosen communities to gather insights for further analysis.





Second Immersive Workshop

The second in-person immersive workshop was conducted during July, 2024 in Pune. The workshop focused on the fellows presenting their community needs assessments and developing individual action plans to engage with their community & policymakers.

Day 1 Community Needs Assessments Insights

The fellows presented their findings from the community needs assessment and received feedback from peers and the facilitators. The presentations highlighted key issues such as caste-based discrimination, mental health stigma, and a lack of awareness about anti-discrimination policies and mental health rights in their communities. The feedback emphasized linking community issues to actionable policy solutions that were data-driven, concise, and reflected on the use of stakeholder engagement.

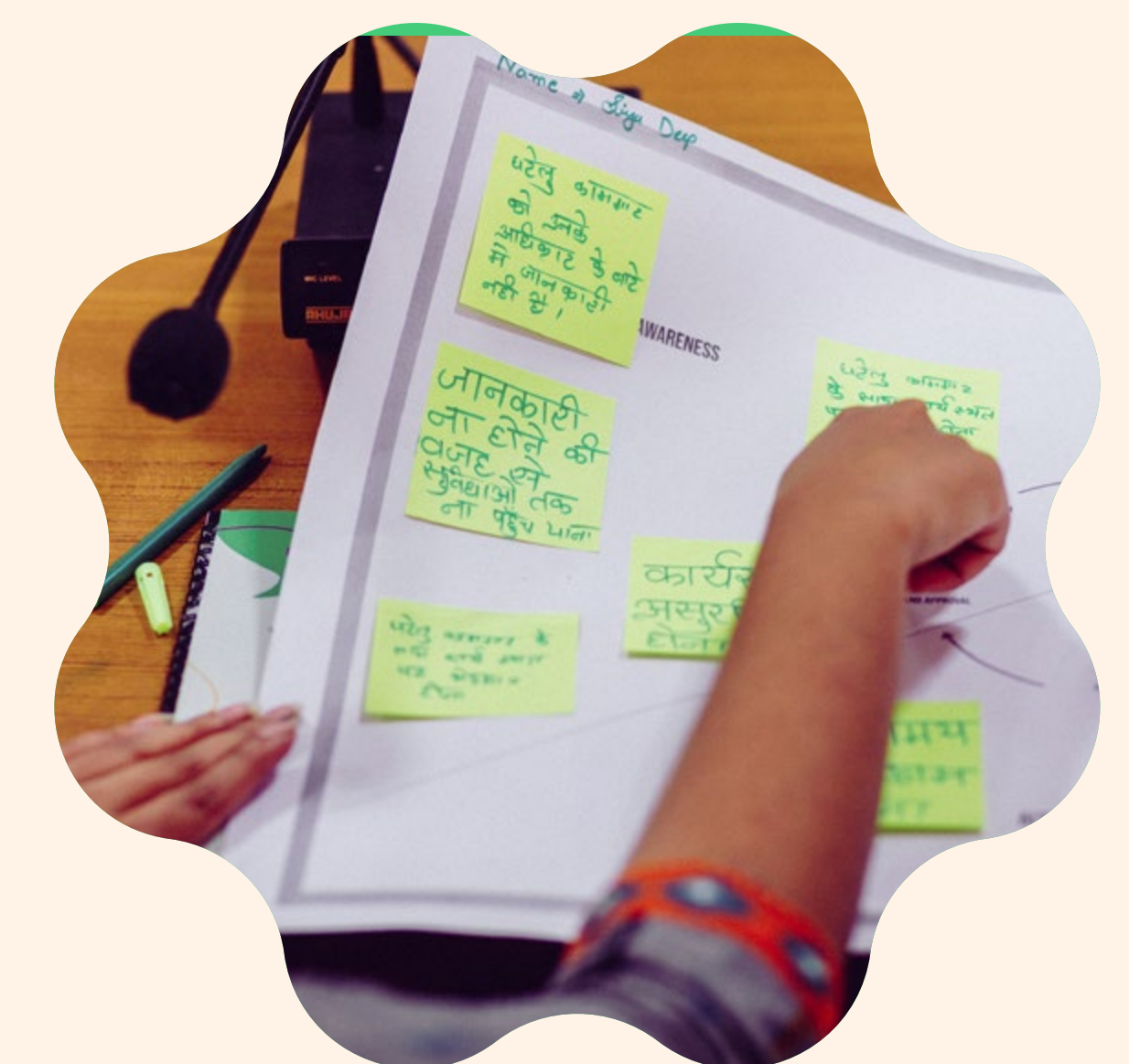
The fellows also interacted with Amit Gawali, a youth representative from the organization Youth for Voluntary Action (YUVA) which works on youth development and engaging young people in local governance. He shared examples of their initiatives on engaging youth for social change, highlighting how collaboration with local authorities, strategic planning, and youth-led efforts are key to addressing systemic challenges related to youth governance.



Day 2 Problem Prioritization & Policymaker Insights

On Day 2, the fellows interacted with Suraj Bansal—YASP Fellow, Cohort 1—who shared his experiences of engaging with policymakers to establish a community centre for mental health support in his urban community.

Based on the needs assessment findings, the fellows engaged in an exercise to categorize their identified challenges within the policy cycle framework, identify the most pressing issue linked to youth suicides, and frame a concise problem statement to develop their action plan to influence policy. The fellows also interacted with a policymaker—**Dr. Sumi Jain**, State Program Coordinator for Non-Communicable Diseases & Mental Health, Department of Health & Family Welfare, Government of Chhattisgarh, who provided first-hand insights on strategies for effective community and policymaker engagement.



Day 3

Developing An Action Plan & Strategy

On Day 3, the fellows explored various tools for reaching out to their community and policymakers. Subsequently, they developed their individual action plan, focusing on practical policy interventions and engagement strategies based on the problem statement identified.

The fellows presented their action plans in a “World Café” format that provided an opportunity for targeted feedback from peers and facilitators.

Day 4

Visioning Exercise

On Day 4, the workshop commenced with a drum circle activity, which facilitated an emotional connection among fellows. This activity, described as both energizing and grounding, enabled participants to express and release their emotions, leading to a sense of inner peace and nostalgia.

Subsequently, facilitators guided the fellows through a visioning exercise, where they created vision statements to articulate their goals as youth leaders.



Community & Policymaker Engagement

The next phase of the YASP Fellowship included the community and policymaker engagements. As part of community and policymaker engagement, fellows were mandated to engage with 50 community members to identify a policy intervention/recommendation which would be presented in the form of a social action tool such as a petition, report or signature campaign to a policymaker in their community. The following is a summary of each fellow's policymaker engagement.

<p>NAME Aijaz Ahmad Wani</p> <p>CITY, STATE Srinagar, Kashmir</p>	<p>STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED 55</p> <p>POLICY CONCERN Supporting the Implementation of Grievance Redressal Mechanisms for Transgender Persons</p>
<p>Presented a report to the Director of Social Welfare in Jammu and Kashmir urging for improved mental health support and grievance redressal mechanism to address issues faced by the transgender community as per the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, 2022.</p>	

<p>NAME Aishwarya Sahu</p> <p>CITY, STATE Raipur, Chhattisgarh</p>	<p>STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED 50</p> <p>POLICY CONCERN Establishing Counseling Centers to Prevent Suicides Related to Domestic Violence</p>
<p>Submitted a petition to a community-based policymaker for establishing a counseling room in the local health center to address suicides linked to domestic violence among women under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.</p>	

<p>NAME Aranck Veer Kunzang</p> <p>CITY, STATE Sikkim</p>	<p>STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED 30</p> <p>POLICY CONCERN Addressing Mental Health Challenges Among Young Adults in Sikkim</p>
<p>Presented a concept note to the Secretary of School Education and the Additional Secretary of Higher Education in Sikkim on integrating mental health first aid and gatekeeper training in teacher training courses for college faculty.</p>	

<p>NAME Biroj Kumar Singh</p> <p>CITY, STATE Bhubaneswar, Odisha</p>	<p>STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED 100</p> <p>POLICY CONCERN Envisioning Discrimination-Free Academic Spaces for Dalit & Adivasi Youth</p>
<p>Called for establishment of SC/ST Cells in higher educational institutions to provide psychological and academic support to Dalit and Adivasi youth, based on the University Grants Commission guidelines for welfare of SC/ST students. Presented findings and a petition with signatures from the community to policymakers in the Odisha Higher Education Department.</p>	

<p>NAME Manan*</p> <p>CITY, STATE Raipur, Chhattisgarh</p> <p><small>*NAME CHANGED TO MAINTAIN ANONYMITY</small></p>	<p>STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED 48</p> <p>POLICY CONCERN Advancing Culturally Inclusive Support Services for Young Men in Educational Institutions</p>
<p>Submitted an application to the Director of Higher Education, Chhattisgarh for stronger enforcement of mental health services on campus, in accordance with the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines for physical and mental well-being of students.</p>	

<p>NAME Manisha Verma</p> <p>CITY, STATE Jaipur, Rajasthan</p>	<p>STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED 70</p> <p>POLICY CONCERN Working towards Inclusive College Campuses for SC/ST Students</p>
<p>Engaged with local policymakers and representatives from the Department of College Education, Rajasthan to enhance the functioning of SC/ST Cells with targeted training, resources, and evaluation for student support.</p>	

<p>NAME Siya Deep</p> <p>CITY, STATE Raipur, Chhattisgarh</p>	<p>STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED 60</p> <p>POLICY CONCERN Championing for Worker Facilitation Centers for Domestic Workers</p>
<p>Presented a petition to the local policymaker for stricter implementation of the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008 thereby improving welfare support for domestic workers.</p>	

<p>NAME Yashu Lama</p> <p>CITY, STATE Sikkim, Gangtok</p>	<p>STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED 20</p> <p>POLICY CONCERN Integrating Life Skills Education in Undergraduate and Postgraduate Academic Curriculum</p>
<p>Engaged with the Secretaries of School and Higher Education and representatives from Sikkim INSPIRES program to propose life skills education as an intervention for undergraduate and postgraduate students.</p>	

<p>NAME Rahul Kumawat</p> <p>CITY, STATE Jaipur, Rajasthan</p>	<p>STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED 50</p> <p>POLICY CONCERN Envisioning Youth-Friendly Counseling Services at Antiretroviral Therapy (A.R.T.) Centers</p>
<p>Engaged with the Rajasthan State AIDS Control Society (RSACS) for integrating mental health and psychosocial support services within HIV programs, and training counsellors on suicide prevention and youth-centered mental health interventions for young people living with HIV in Rajasthan.</p>	

Feedback from the fellows

I had a great experience at the workshop and liked everyone. I felt comfortable with everyone and found the topics very interesting. I understood the National Mental Health Program (NMHP) and District Mental Health Program (DMHP) well. Among all the topics covered, I enjoyed learning about the policy cycle the most.

The workshop was very good and interactive for me. Material is very easy to understand and the way facilitators explained us was awesome.

The case scenarios from the ground level were very relatable. I loved learning through activities and games the most.

The workshop, it's very good. I learned a lot here. The materials were very good, and I'm going back with the learning that I'm capable of doing something for the youth in my community.

The workshop was excellent. What initially seems difficult becomes manageable when explained well. It felt similar to what we study in school or college, but unlike school, where I might get scolded, this workshop was different. The methods of understanding were easy and effective.

YASP Fellow- ship's Impact

Diverse Cohort

The YASP Fellowship program engaged with a diverse and representative cohort of youth leaders across five tier-2 cities. The cohort of 9 fellows who completed the Fellowship belong to diverse communities including gender & sexual minorities; low-income groups; Dalit, Bahujan & Adivasi communities; and youth with lived experience of mental health problems & suicide.

The program has also increased its impact to tier-2 cities such as Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, Raipur, Srinagar and Gangtok, where there is a huge gap in resources and support mechanisms for youth who are in distress and contemplating suicide.

Further, through the fellows, the program has reached over 600 youth and policy-level stakeholders in different communities across the five cities through community engagement activities to increase awareness, address stigma and identify systemic solutions for addressing the social factors of suicide.

Improvement in Fellows' Competencies

One of the key objectives of the YASP Fellowship is to improve knowledge of youth leaders to understand youth suicides as a policy issue and develop skills to drive policy action for youth suicide prevention. According to pre- and post- assessments, the fellows demonstrated a 21% improvement in skills with respect to youth suicide prevention, engaging with communities and policy-makers for social change.

Further, they also demonstrated a 33% improvement in self-reported knowledge and 10% improvement in self-efficacy for influencing policy solutions for youth suicide prevention.

Specifically, the fellows demonstrated improvement in the following areas:

Understanding of the policy cycle and processes to develop social action strategies

Awareness of relevant laws and policies to identify systemic gaps and propose policy interventions to prevent youth suicides in their communities, effectively engaging with policymakers

Identifying systemic gaps and potential policy solutions by involving stakeholders in community needs assessments

Adopting a rights-based approach to mental health and suicide prevention

Community & Policymaker Engagement

One of the key components of the Fellowship is community and policymaker engagement. During the Fellowship, the fellows have cumulatively reached out to over 600 stakeholders through needs assessments, community and policymaker engagement.

This included youth with lived experience of marginalization, distress and suicide, and over 10 policymakers including local community representatives and policymakers across different departments such as higher education, social welfare, labour, health, planning & development and school education.

Fellows have effectively engaged youth in their contexts for addressing the social determinants of youth suicides, identifying systemic gaps and policy solutions. This sparked rich conversations around youth mental health, lived experiences of distress, and problems faced by youth with respect to mental health and suicide prevention support.

Personal & Professional Growth

The fellows reflected on their journey during the Fellowship and shared the following insights about their personal and professional growth.

“I learned that tackling big issues is not about rushing. It is about taking small, focused actions.”

Developing Youth Leadership Skills

The fellows shared that the program has increased their confidence to speak to policymakers independently. Regular mentoring from the YASP faculty supported them in presenting evidence to strengthen their arguments and claims.

Fellows have improved their presentation skills, confidence in public speaking, and ability to engage with authorities or community members, including conveying their messages professionally.

They reflected on the importance of pacing their efforts to mobilize community and policy stakeholders. As one fellow notes, “I learned that tackling big issues is not about rushing. It is about taking small, focused actions.”

Understanding Suicide Prevention as a Policy Issue

The fellows reported that the Fellowship increased their understanding of laws and policies such as the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, which recognizes the rights of all citizens with respect to their mental healthcare and treatment. They now understand how systemic support, or the lack of support, directly impacts people’s mental health, especially those in vulnerable situations. The Fellowship gave them the confidence to stand up for these rights, recognizing that effective mental health policies can bridge gaps in access to care.

Transforming Community Attitudes on Suicide Prevention

The fellows shared that during the community engagement, stakeholders shared their personal stories and support needs while expressing their desire for better mental health resources. Community members resonated with the work being done by the fellows.

The fellows were able to create a space where community members participated in discussions regarding their mental health struggles and identified the needs of the community for support mechanisms. A fellow from Sikkim observed that sharing data and insights on suicide rates in Sikkim helped people understand the severity of the issue. Another fellow shared how hesitant they felt initially while going into the field as community members were reluctant to discuss mental health openly.

However, by sharing their experiences, they ensured rapport and trust with the community, encouraging more people to share their stories and concerns. Another fellow described how initially; individuals hesitated to discuss sensitive topics such as domestic violence but gradually became more comfortable.

The community members also realized the role of government in addressing mental health and suicide prevention.

Identifying Individual & Community’s Role in calling for Policy Solutions

A fellow shared that prior to the YASP Fellowship, they thought of change as a vague concept that only the government could control. This Fellowship inspired them to see themselves as an active part of the change process, especially in calling for solutions based on real-life experiences. They now believe that change should involve collaboration, where the community’s voices are part of the solution instead of just being passive recipients of policies.

Developing Skills as Gatekeepers for Youth Suicide Prevention

During the foundational training, the fellows learned to recognize warning signs of mental distress and suicide. They were equipped with practical skills to provide support and connect individuals with appropriate mental health resources. The fellows shared that these skills would help them support others in their community and position themselves as a community resource for preventing youth suicides.

Outlive's YASP Fellowship stands as a powerful testament to what's possible when young people are meaningfully included in policy processes for youth suicide prevention. It reflects the transformative change that can unfold when young people work alongside their peers, communities, and policymakers.

YASP Fellows are catalysing transformation in their communities by facilitating systemic change for suicide prevention through knowledge, skills and perspective developed during the Fellowship.

Their efforts have laid the groundwork for ongoing dialogue through collaboration, learning, and action for youth suicide prevention.



From lived experiences

YASP Fellows' Journeys

to systemic change

Aijaz Ahmad Wani

24 years

Supporting the Implementation of Grievance Redressal Mechanisms for Transgender Persons



Aijaz Ahmad Wani is from Srinagar, Kashmir, and has spent the last several years speaking up for the rights of the transgender

community in the region. With a master's degree in gender studies, Aijaz has been actively working to address systemic barriers and call for inclusive spaces for the transgender community. Their work is driven by personal experiences of resilience amid adversity. As a non-binary person without familial and financial support, they faced difficulties in pursuing higher education, and experienced societal discrimination, family separation, and suicidal thoughts. Aijaz's lived experiences have shaped their commitment towards amplifying the voices of the transgender community in Kashmir.

Aijaz identified the urgent need for mental health resources and support systems for the transgender community in Kashmir. They found that discrimination and social exclusion in education, employment, and health services, in addition to the lack of awareness among the community about their rights and protections, leaves several transgender individuals vulnerable and unsupported.

Moreover, Aijaz highlighted that despite the passage of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, the community remains excluded from mental health services and suicide prevention programs. Aijaz aimed to address these gaps through the YASP Fellowship program.

During the Fellowship, Aijaz conducted community engagement sessions with 30 transgender individuals and 25 stakeholders including youth leaders and social workers to gain first-hand information on the challenges faced by the community. These discussions highlighted several issues such as social isolation, stigma, and a lack of specific and inclusive mental health resources and grievance redressal mechanisms. Transgender individuals shared their feelings of alienation from government systems that failed to recognize and adequately address mental health needs and prevalence of suicidal behaviors in the community. These discussions culminated in a comprehensive report which was signed by participants and was presented to policymakers.

Aijaz actively worked with policymakers such as the Director of Social Welfare Department and the Chief Medical Officer in Kashmir to present these issues and propose recommendations for establishing a grievance redressal system and appointing a nodal officer to oversee its implementation, aligned with the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. These efforts were commended by policymakers with a commitment to create accessible support structures for the transgender community.

Through the YASP Fellowship, Aijaz not only amplified the voices of their community but also honed communication, presentation, and interpersonal skills while engaging with stakeholders in policy processes. Looking ahead, Aijaz envisions a community where transgender individuals can live with dignity and equal opportunity.





Aranck Veer Kunzang

20 years

Addressing Mental Health Challenges Among Young Adults in Sikkim

Aranck, a college student from Gangtok, Sikkim, is deeply committed to the cause of youth mental health. Aranck's work is shaped by his experiences as a college student, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, and an older brother.

Aranck joined Outlive's YASP Fellowship program with motivation driven by his personal experiences and a commitment to address mental health challenges among youth in Sikkim. Aranck's journey into the Fellowship was also driven by the desire to create meaningful connections with people, and create change that "ripples across society," impacting lives of people beyond his immediate reach.

During the Fellowship, Aranck aimed to address the stigma surrounding mental health and a lack of effective mental health services for migrant college students in Sikkim. To gather first-hand perspectives, Aranck conducted focus group discussions with 30 students from Sikkim University to gain insights on access to services. The discussions highlighted a need for better trained mental health providers in college settings, and confidential support services.

Based on his engagement with the community, Aranck identified gatekeeper training for teachers as a solution to equip them with skills to support students and improve access to mental health care. He presented a concept note to the Secretary of School Education and the Additional Secretary of Higher Education on integrating mental health first aid and gatekeeper training in teacher training courses. Aranck's policy proposals were positively received, with commitments to incorporate them into future mental health initiatives under the Sikkim INSPIRES project. Aranck was also invited by the Sikkim INSPIRES program to participate in multi-stakeholder consultations on youth mental health and suicide prevention to represent the voices of young people in Sikkim and recommend suggestions for improving access to mental healthcare and suicide prevention support for youth in the state.

Although Aranck faced challenges in engaging with stakeholders, such as securing the time and responses of authority figures, he honed several skills in this process. Aranck highlighted how these experiences helped him further develop his communication, time management, and strategic planning skills. Moreover, he also stated the importance of creating concise and actionable proposals while addressing policymakers.

Aranck's work has led to increased awareness of mental health challenges among youth in Sikkim, highlighting the need for systemic change. Looking forward, Aranck envisions a mental health ecosystem in Sikkim where stigma no longer prevents students from seeking help, and services are accessible & effective.



Yashu Lama

23 years

Integrating Life-Skills Education in Undergraduate & Postgraduate Academic Curriculum

Yashu Lama is from Gangtok, Sikkim and is a passionate champion for youth suicide prevention and mental health. With roots in Tamang, Nepali Gorkha and LGBTQ+ communities, Yashu's identity and experiences have influenced and shaped their journey in furthering the cause of suicide prevention and mental health. The loss of a family member to suicide acted as a catalyst and motivated them to join Outlive's YASP Fellowship program and work in youth suicide prevention and mental health. Yashu's journey of healing, self-discovery, and breaking free from societal expectations has further shaped their commitment to addressing mental health challenges among young people.

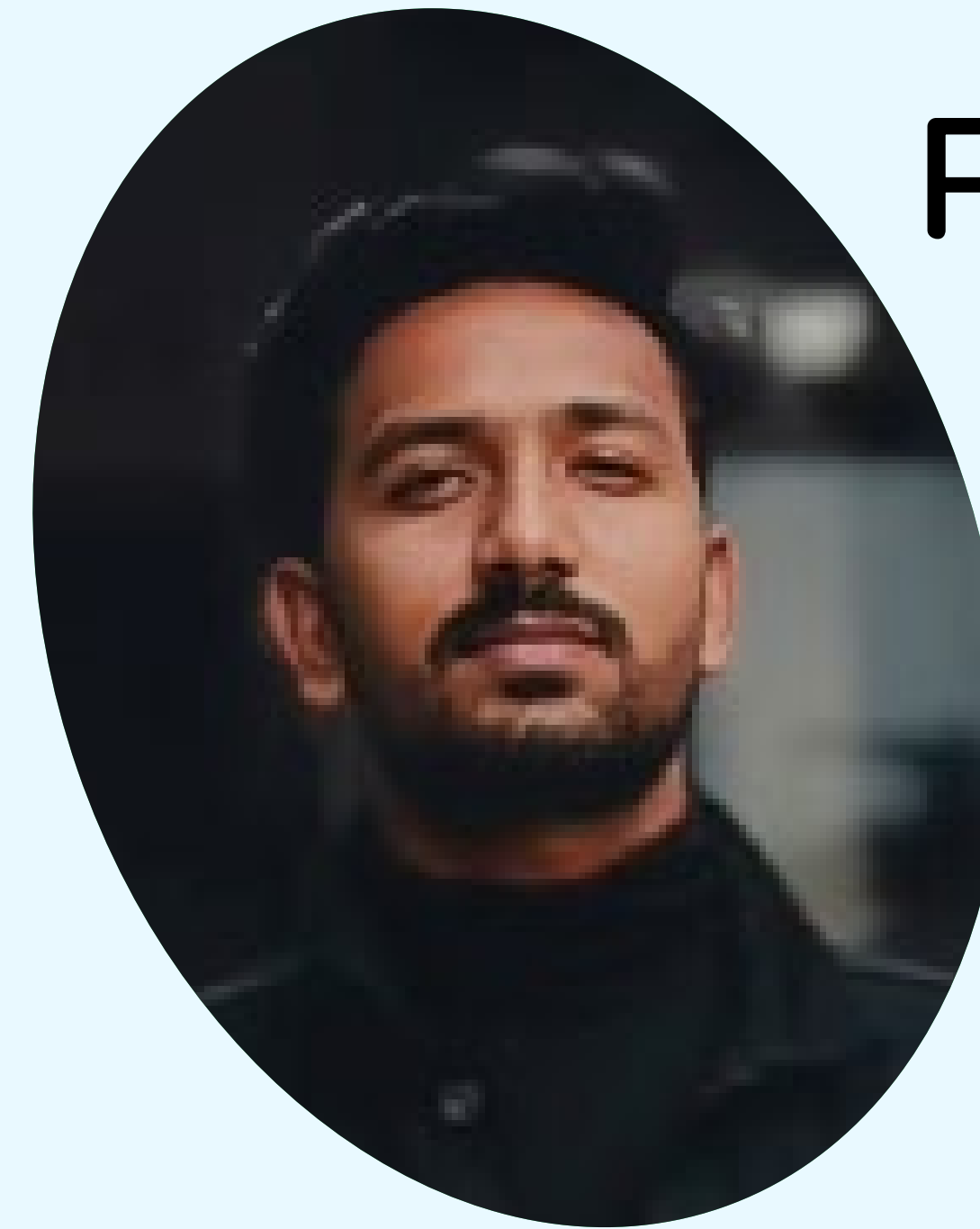
Through the YASP Fellowship, Yashu aimed to include life-skills education among undergraduate and postgraduate students in Gangtok. Yashu conducted informal discussions, surveys, and classroom visits to have candid conversations about mental health. Their community engagement uncovered gaps in mental health awareness, with students reporting limited knowledge of mental health, and identifying stigma and a lack of awareness as factors contributing to mental health struggles and suicidal feelings.

These findings highlighted an urgent need for life-skills education programs tailored to the cultural context of Sikkim. Yashu engaged with policymakers including the Secretaries of School Education and Higher Education and representatives from the Sikkim INSPIRES program to propose life-skills education as an intervention for preventing youth suicides. They recommended integrating life-skills education in undergraduate and postgraduate curriculums to address interconnected issues such as academic pressure, substance abuse, and social stigma.

The discussions led to policymakers drafting a collaborative initiative between Sikkim INSPIRES and the Department of Higher Education. Yashu was also invited by the Sikkim INSPIRES program to participate in multi-stakeholder consultations on youth mental health and suicide prevention to represent the voices of young people in Sikkim and recommend suggestions for improving access to mental healthcare and suicide prevention support for youth in the state.

He was also part of a 11-member state delegation from Sikkim that visited the Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, to discuss potential youth mental health interventions under the Sikkim INSPIRES program, as a representative of youth voices in the state.

Throughout the Fellowship, Yashu developed skills such as active listening and communication with stakeholders. Looking ahead, Yashu envisions a future where mental health education is accessible and stigma-free.



Rahul Kumawat

22 years

Envisioning Youth-Friendly Counseling Services at Antiretroviral Therapy (A.R.T.) Centers

Rahul Kumawat from Jaipur, Rajasthan is dedicated to supporting & amplifying the voices of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and LGBTQIA+ youth. He is the co-founder of Positive YUVA Network, which is a community-based organisation working to support persons living with HIV and LGBTQIA+ community in India. His dedication stems from witnessing the challenges these communities face, as well as his own struggles with suicidal thoughts.

Rahul's decision to join the YASP Fellowship was driven by a desire to expand his skill set in suicide prevention and mental health leadership. Through the Fellowship, Rahul aimed to learn ways to prevent suicide, understand mental health, and strategies to support young people's mental well-being. During the Fellowship, Rahul centered his efforts on youth living with HIV, engaging 50+ young individuals at Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) centers through "Chai Pe Charcha" sessions. These discussions highlighted the prevalence of suicidal thoughts and shortage of youth-friendly counseling services. Based on these findings, Rahul suggested training counselors and emphasized the pressing need for mental health resources dedicated to HIV-affected youth.

After his community engagement, Rahul initiated discussions with the Rajasthan State AIDS Control Society (RSACS) to advocate for mental health support within existing HIV programs. Rahul presented key issues from the “Chai Pe Charcha” sessions such as stigma, trauma, suicidal ideation, and a lack of youth friendly psychosocial services. He proposed a model to leverage existing HIV care frameworks and strengthening it by integrating mental health support and trained peer counsellors into programs such as Vihaan and ART Centers. The RSACS team acknowledged the vulnerabilities of HIV-positive youth, and the importance of addressing mental health in HIV programs. The team demonstrated openness to collaborating with the Positive YUVA Network to work on these issues and prioritise youth-centric services.

Looking ahead, Rahul hopes that his efforts create a foundation for systemic change and that the needs of young people living with HIV are addressed in state policies.



Biroj Kumar Singh

23 years

Envisioning Discrimination-Free Academic Spaces for Dalit & Adivasi Youth

Biroj Kumar Singh from Bhubaneswar, Odisha is focused on raising awareness about suicidal ideation experienced by Dalit and Adivasi youth in Bhubaneswar's colleges. Biroj described how his own personal experiences of caste-based discrimination left him feeling isolated during his college education. A turning point for Biroj came when his close friend died by suicide. This tragedy exposed the acute need for suicide prevention support in underserved communities.

During the Fellowship, Biroj engaged over 100 students and faculty members through group discussions who highlighted widespread caste-based bullying and a general lack of mental health support resources. Drawing on University Grants Commission guidelines, he initiated a signature campaign promoting the establishment SC/ST Cells in higher educational institutions, which could provide psychological and academic support to students experiencing distress. As part of this drive, he engaged with policy-makers from the Odisha Higher Education Department, presenting data from his community research and student signatures. He highlighted the urgent need for SC/ST cells, faculty training, and mental health support. The Department committed to reviewing

existing policies and consider establishing SC/ST cells and faculty sensitization programs.

Throughout the Fellowship, Biroj highlighted how he gained valuable insights on how discrimination can influence mental health and the need for collective efforts to shape policy changes. In addition, he honed his communication and interpersonal skills for engaging with policymakers. Looking ahead, Biroj envisions a higher education landscape in Odisha where discrimination does not undermine student well-being.

He plans to further develop his leadership abilities, continue building support networks, and reinforce the case for structural changes that protect marginalised youth.





Manisha Verma

21 years

Working towards
Inclusive College
Campuses for SC/ST
Students

Manisha Verma, from Jaipur, Rajasthan focused on addressing discrimination faced by college students who migrate from rural areas. Manisha describes how she grew up in a community that discouraged girls from pursuing higher education. However, she has always been driven to learn and explore.

Her motivation to focus on youth suicide prevention arose from witnessing the mounting pressure on young people in her community. Manisha highlighted how family expectations, unemployment, and academic stress contribute to an environment where students feel isolated and overwhelmed. Through the YASP Fellowship, Manisha aimed to improve her communication and leadership abilities in order to promote her call for more inclusive college campuses.

During the Fellowship, Manisha learned that students from SC/ST backgrounds often reported bullying and discrimination in college settings. To further understand the needs of the community, Manisha interviewed college students and circulated Google Forms through WhatsApp, asking students to share what they wanted from the government, and was energized by the widespread support she received.

In addition, Manisha held a signature campaign and collected 70 signatures to urge action against discrimination faced by marginalised students and the need for better training of SC/ST Cell members. Manisha's interactions with various stakeholders such as student leaders, faculty, and NGOs highlighted the importance of well-functioning anti-discrimination cells to reduce mental health stressors on young people. Manisha further engaged the Commissioner of the Department of College Education in Jaipur, Rajasthan. She highlighted how caste-based discrimination not only impacts academic outcomes but also increases mental health risks such as depression and suicidal thoughts.

Through this process, Manisha refined her skills of policy-maker engagement, public speaking, and documentation skills. Looking forward, she envisions a future where every student feels safe from harassment & free to pursue education without the burdens of social stigma.



Aishwarya Sahu

21 years

Establishing Counseling Centers to Prevent Suicides Related to Domestic Violence

Aishwarya Sahu from Raipur, Chhattisgarh, addressed the link between domestic violence, suicide, and mental health among young women. In her community, Aishwarya observed that many women lacked awareness of their rights and felt isolated while in abusive relationships. Through the YASP Fellowship, Aishwarya hoped to safeguard women vulnerable to both physical harm and mental distress.

During the Fellowship, Aishwarya engaged with over 50 stakeholders and organized group discussions with women's collectives, health committees, and domestic workers, encouraging them to recognize early signs of violence and seek help. Her engagements revealed that women aged 18–30 in her community can be victims of domestic violence and lack adequate information about their rights. Aishwarya described how this can lead many to consider suicide, as they have no support system or access to government services. Based on her discussions, Aishwarya created petitions and signature campaigns to present to local authorities.

Moreover, Aishwarya identified the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 as a key policy tool while engaging and presenting her data to policymakers. Aishwarya met with a community-based policymaker to discuss the link between domestic violence and suicide prevention and called for a counseling room in the local health center. The policymaker expressed interest in addressing these concerns through counseling services to prevent suicides related to domestic violence. Through her community and policymaker engagements, Aishwarya learnt that consistent follow-up and genuine community participation are critical for building trust and momentum. Looking ahead, she envisions more widespread awareness of domestic violence as both a legal and suicide prevention issue.





Siya Deep

19 years

Championing Worker Facilitation Centers for Domestic Workers

Siya Deep from Raipur, Chhattisgarh, focused on improving working conditions for domestic workers with limited awareness of their legal rights. Siya's motivation to focus on youth mental health and

suicide prevention arose from witnessing domestic workers in her neighborhood endure violence, overwork, and neglect. She observed that the violence and lack of awareness around legal rights contributed to feelings of distress and suicidal thoughts. Through the YASP Fellowship, Siya aimed to increase awareness of legal protections, increase community outreach, and initiate policy changes for better working conditions of domestic workers.

During the Fellowship, Siya organized a signature campaign with 60 domestic workers, demanding the strict implementation of the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008 in Chhattisgarh. She found that many domestic workers do not get their grievances heard, which highlighted the need for support systems. Siya presented her petition to a local policymaker and emphasized the need for Worker Facilitation Centers that offer health, legal, and mental health support. Siya described how her experience highlighted the importance of thorough preparation and clear communication while approaching policymakers.

Through the YASP Fellowship, Siya described further developing her organisational, communication, and negotiation skills. She found that presenting well researched and data driven solutions were important to encourage government action. Looking ahead, Siya aims to expand her outreach across Raipur and connect more individuals with mental health resources and legal protections. She envisions a community where domestic workers are treated fairly and have adequate health and mental health support during distressing times.

Manan

24 years

Advancing Culturally Inclusive Support Services for Young Men in Educational Institutions

Manan, from Raipur, Chhattisgarh, addressed the issue of caste-based discrimination and lack of mental health services for young men in colleges. In their community, Manan observed how individuals wrestled with distress and suicidal thoughts and felt a lack of accessible mental health services. Moreover, Manan highlighted how social inequalities such as caste discrimination exacerbated mental health struggles. Therefore, they aimed to approach strategies to improve youth mental health outcomes with a systemic lens.

During the YASP Fellowship, Manan focused on culturally inclusive support that included trans men and other groups that may be often overlooked in conventional mental health frameworks. Over the course of the Fellowship, Manan interacted with 48 students in informal campus settings, discussing topics such as academic pressure, substance abuse, and identity-based challenges. Based on these conversations, they found that many young people lacked awareness about the UGC guidelines that mandate college well-being centers—an absence that left them vulnerable to escalating mental health issues.

After engaging with their community, Manan approached the state's Higher Education Department with a petition calling for stronger enforcement of mental health services on campus.

Manan described how the policymaker engagement experience helped them understand the importance of perseverance and communication in policy work. Through the Fellowship, Manan further developed their interpersonal and organisational skills and realized the importance of consistent and empathetic communication. Looking ahead, Manan envisions a network of campus counseling programs across Raipur with adequate mental health providers.

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about Outlive

www.outlive.in



Write to us
contact@outlive.in

