

SAJHA

DHAGO

ANNUAL REPORT

HEALING THROUGH ART, STORYTELLING, AND COMMUNITY

ESTABLISHED MARCH 27, 2022

KATHMANDU, NEPAL

ANNUAL REPORT
2081/82 BS
(2024/25 AD)





MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

When we first imagined Sajha Dhago, we dreamed of a space where survivors of violence and trauma could find healing not just in words, but in action—in the quiet rhythm of a needle and thread, in the safety of a circle, in the courage to say, "This is my story."

Over the past year, that dream has taken shape in ways that still move us. In 2081/82, we walked alongside 379 women, queer people, and other survivors across Nepal, helping them reclaim their sense of self, their voice, and their strength.

This report is not just a list of numbers and activities; it is a testament to the resilience of the people we serve and the power of community. We share it with deep gratitude to every donor, partner, and volunteer who has stood with us. Because of you, more survivors have found a safe place to heal.

With heartfelt thanks,

Jamuna Maharjan

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ABOUT SAJHA DHAGO



OUR STORY

Sajha Dhago is a non-profit organization established on March 27, 2022, to support survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), natural disasters, war/conflict, and displacement. We work with women—including marginalized single women, survivors of domestic violence, and sexually exploited teens—and persecuted members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Together, they use sewing, storytelling, and art to express their pain, resilience, and hope.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Trauma from violence can cause immediate effects like shock, fear, guilt, and physical symptoms. If untreated, survivors often struggle with PTSD, depression, anxiety, and challenges with intimacy. With proper support, many survivors show remarkable resilience and can heal deeply.

Sajha Dhago creates a way for survivors of various forms of violence and trauma to regain lasting psychological well-being.

IMPACT SNAPSHOT: 2081/82 AT A GLANCE



6

Healing Circle Cohorts

379

Survivors Reached

651

Training Participants

1,030

Total Beneficiaries

OUR MISSION

To ensure that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) receive support to heal from enduring psychological effects through training, intervention, and research.

OUR VISION

We envision a world free from any form of violence. As long as violence exists, we need to ensure that all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence can access survivor-centered intervention for deep and lasting psychological recovery and transformation.

CORE VALUES

Empowerment: Helping survivors reclaim agency over their lives and futures.

Equality: Working to reduce gender inequality and discrimination.

Social Justice: Supporting the most vulnerable groups in society.

Community Care: Building solidarity and mutual support networks.



OUR OBJECTIVES

Provide active, transformative, and effective psychological intervention for survivors of violence and trauma

Build the capacity of community facilitators for psychological intervention

Conduct systematic research on the effectiveness of trauma treatment

OUR HISTORY

Sajha Dhago was officially established on March 27, 2022, by psychologists, clinicians, and social workers committed to feminist values and mental health support. We strive to empower women, girls, and queer communities in their efforts to reduce gender inequality.

We believe in empowerment, equality, and social justice. Our goal is to work with the most vulnerable groups, helping them heal from trauma, gain confidence, and achieve a better position within their family, community, and society.

OUR CORE INTERVENTIONS

Tension & Trauma Releasing Exercises (TRE): Body-based practices to release stored tension and trauma

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS): Group and individual support for trauma survivors

Training of Trainers (ToT): Experiential training for psychosocial practitioners across Nepal

Alternatives to Violence (AVP): Workshops on non-violent conflict resolution and community building



Activities	Location	Participants	Facilitators
Queer Circle	KTM	11	3
Ward 23	KTM	10	3
Ward 25	KTM	18	3
Asha Nepal	KTM	12	4
Kirtipur	KTM	16	4
Bhaktapur	Bhaktapur	23	4
Ward 23 (Gov)	KTM	23	3
RHEST I	Udaypur	22	2
RHEST II	Dhangadi	21	2
RHEST III	Bhaktapur	19	2
RHEST IV	Bhaktapur	15	2
AVP	Kathmandu	40	4
Nagarik Awaz	East Rukum	65	2
Nagarik Awaz	Rolpa	84	2
TOT	Kathmandu	16	3
Exhibition	KTM	500	7
Child Protection and Safeguarding Workshop	KTM	25	2
Thames Career Fair	KTM	30	2
Queer Mental Health Submit	KTM	50	2
Travelyeller	KTM	30	2
	TOTAL: 6	TOTAL: 1030	TOTAL: 76



379 Total individuals reached through healing circles this year

Number of circle cohorts: Queer Circle, Ward 23 (Phase I & II), Ward 25 (Phase II), ASHA Nepal (Phase I), Kirtipur (Phase II), Bhaktapur (Phase II)

Age and identity range: Adolescent girls, adult women (single and married), queer and trans participants, and women with disabilities.



HEALING CIRCLES: WHERE STORIES BECOME CHANGE

Every healing circle is an investment in long-term safety, mental health, and community resilience. Each group brings together women, queer people, and other survivors who rarely have access to survivor-centered trauma care.

Through 14–20 sessions of guided storytelling, body-based practice, and sewing-based art, participants move from isolation and shame toward confidence, connection, and hope.

WHAT CHANGES IN HEALING CIRCLES

Emotional Recovery:

Participants report better sleep, reduced anger, fewer intrusive memories, and a stronger sense of inner calm by the end of Phase I and II circles.

Voice and Agency:

Many women and queer participants say they learned to say 'no,' set personal boundaries, and speak up in family and community spaces where they were previously silent. Participants report better sleep, reduced anger, fewer intrusive memories, and a stronger sense of inner calm by the end of Phase I and II circles.

Belonging and Solidarity:

Groups often evolve into support networks where participants 'cry together, laugh together, and heal together,' reducing isolation and stigma.

In 2081/82, we ran healing circles in several communities, reaching 379 women, queer people, and other survivors of violence and trauma.

QUEER CIRCLE – PHASE II

JUNE 2024 – OCTOBER 2024 | 11 QUEER AND TRANS PARTICIPANTS

What changed:

- Participants made new friends, felt less alone, and began to trust a group space where their identities were respected and protected.
- They learned to say “no,” manage stress, reconnect with creativity (drawing, fashion, doll-making), and express experiences that had previously been silenced.

“

I felt like a thread somehow tied me up with Sajha Dhago. I got to make new friends, I learned to say No, stress management, and various other things. The doll reminded me of my childhood. I loved drawing and designing dresses... when I mentioned fashion designing to my family, they said it was of no use... which demotivated me. And this doll represents one of my close friends. ”

WARD 23, KATHMANDU – PHASE II

JUNE 2024 – OCTOBER 2024 | 10 WOMEN TRAUMA SURVIVORS

What changed:

- Women learned to set and widen personal boundaries, moving from feeling “suffocated” to feeling safer and more in control of their emotional space.
- The circle maintained a slow, steady healing rhythm; participants stayed engaged and felt both proud and sad when sessions ended.

“

My brother came to visit me the day after Chaitya Purnima... he showed me immense love and care before heading to the Trisuli Mela. Unfortunately... my brother selflessly risked his life to save someone else... Whenever it rains, it feels like he is drenched in the rain somewhere... I hope that one day we will meet again. Your sister, Pratigya, loves you, Brother. ”

WARD 25, KATHMANDU – PHASE II

JUNE 2024 – OCTOBER 2024 | 18 WOMEN (SINGLE AND MARRIED)

What changed:

- Participants reported that they can now speak up, laugh more, and feel “free of tension.”
- Many described improved family relationships and said they eagerly waited for each session because the circle felt like a supportive home.

“

From this program, I can speak up, I can laugh, and I have received much support here. I understood the homely behavior, and my family relations have improved. I am free of tension now. I was eagerly waiting for when Phase II would happen, but it has just been completed now. I grew up in the forest and jungle, and I am also back in the forest and jungle. ”

ASHA NEPAL – PHASE I

AUGUST 2024 – JANUARY 2025 | 12 ADOLESCENT GIRLS, SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

What changed:

- Girls moved from fear and hesitation to openly sharing stories of pain, hope, and identity.
- Through storytelling, art therapy, somatic practices, and sewing-based expression, they built emotional resilience, self-awareness, and mutual support.

“

Throughout my life, I have endured many pains, but one hurt stands out – the pain inflicted by someone I consider my own... It is challenging to piece together broken glass... the scars remain forever... Even if I am not your biological daughter, I am still someone’s daughter. Why do you choose to cause me pain and suffering? ”

KIRTIPUR (WARD 2), KATHMANDU – PHASE II

NOVEMBER 2024 – JANUARY 2025 | 16 WOMEN

What changed:

- Women reported better sleep, improved anger management, more self-confidence, and the ability to speak up for themselves.
- The circle became a safe community where participants could openly share, express emotions, and support one another.

“

There was a time in my life when I felt victim to a mental illness. Gradually, I lost my balance without even realizing it... I lost my dear friends and neighbors... The way people treated me made me feel like a ghost, not a human... I hope that no one else ever will experience the torment I went through. ”

BHAKTAPUR – PHASE II

NOVEMBER 2024 – MARCH 2025 | 23 WOMEN

What changed:

- Participants reported the ability to say “no,” better sleep and eating habits, and increased self-care and attention to their own needs.
- The group formed strong emotional bonds, “crying together, laughing together, and healing together,” and became a deeply cohesive circle.

“

It was enjoyable to sit in this program. I enthusiastically participated, but then my father passed away, and losing him was very difficult for me mentally... Suddenly, the news of my father’s death brought me great pain and made life very hard... It felt as if my life was as dark as a courtyard without sunlight. However, while attending this program, it became easier for me to forget that pain and express my emotions. This program was very helpful to me. ”

WARD 23, KATHMANDU – PHASE I (GOV)

FEBRUARY – APRIL 2025 | 23 WOMEN

What changed:

- Women learned practical tools to understand and manage their emotions, moving from feeling overwhelmed to feeling more in control of their inner world. They shared personal experiences in a safe space and built deep, trusting connections with one another.
- Participant feedback shows clear shifts in emotional well-being: better sleep, improved anger management, higher self-esteem, and a new confidence to voice their thoughts at home and in the community.

“

We could see focus, excitement, and joy on their faces when they were sewing. Some women brought pieces of clothing from home, and some even sewed at home and brought their work to the sessions to attach their story pieces.” This simple act of stitching became a sign of ownership and commitment to their healing journey. ”





**STORY
CLOTHS:
STITCHING
PAIN,
RESILIENCE,
AND HOPE**



I HAVE LIVED IN MANY COLORS

I remember the red, vivid, urgent, constant fight against the body I didn't choose. Red was anger, frustration, and sometimes, survival. Every morning, I faced a reflection that felt like burying my true self with someone else's skin, and every day, I carried the weight of that dissonance.

But there was also yellow. Yellow was the hope I clung to when everything else felt too heavy. It was the promise that someday I'd be more than this, that light was waiting for me at the end of the struggle. Yellow was the first time someone called me by my name, my real name, and it fit perfectly.

Then came green, growth. It did not happen all at once, but gradually, like spring thawing out the cold earth. Green was the transition, each small step toward the man I knew I was. The first binder, the first haircut, the first time I looked in the mirror and saw not just a reflection, but a future. Green was the beginning of something.

Purple always felt like a dream. It was the unknown, the vision of who I could be. It was the possibility of standing tall and free, my body no longer a cage but a canvas. Purple was what I had been longing for. Every time I thought about MASTECTOMY, every day that one day, I'd look down and finally see myself: no barriers, no dysphoria, just me.

And then came the day. The sky was blue, and so was my heart, a Tranquility I hadn't known in years. Blue was peace, the steady, quiet relief that washed over me as I lay on the Surgical table. I was scared, but I was ready. This was my body, and soon, it would feel like home.

Eventually, after the surgery, I hope the first thing I will feel is joy. Yellow, blinding and bright, will flood my senses. For the very first time in my life, my chest will be mine. And in that moment, I'll know all the colors I've lived through have led me to this, finally feeling whole.



MERO PRERANA

I am a person with a disability, but despite that, I have promised myself to keep working as long as my hands and legs are functioning. In my family, there isn't a single person who truly cares for, loves, or supports me and my mother. I have tried to control my emotions and maintain my patience as much as possible, but I don't know what I did wrong to deserve this from them. At home, I've always treated everyone with love and support. However, if my mother and I sit and talk, other family members seem to think I am complaining to her.

When I first joined this program, I was very scared. But after hearing the stories of the other participants, about their happiness and sadness, I also felt encouraged to share my own story with my sisters. I often have conflicts at home. In the past, I had severe anger issues, but they have lessened. I pray to God regularly, listen to bhajans, and even sing them. I have nerve-related health issues and a weak heart, which is why I can't speak loudly.

People often don't do good for themselves and become envious when they see others doing better. They don't accept their mistakes and are quick to point out the flaws of others. I always pray to God that I never have to deal with such people and that I find peace. I try to help everyone as much as I can. I also pray that we always have enough food to eat, shelter to live under, and clothes to wear. This program has benefited me because the facilitator has done so much for me. They have consoled me and given me positive advice, for which I am deeply thankful.

BOUNDARIES THAT I DREW/ DARK SUNLIGHT THAT CAME INTO MY LIFE

I am writing this story about my life on this Common thread. There was a time in my life when I fell victim to a mental illness. Gradually, I lost my balance without even realizing it. Along with losing my balance, I also lost my dear friends and neighbors. I noticed a change in how my friends and neighbors treated me. It felt as if night had fallen in an instant for me. Everything seemed dark. The way people treated me made me feel like a ghost, not a human. Being vulnerable, I used to cry a lot seeing how others treated me. There seemed to be a barrier between me and my loved ones. They were reluctant to come to me, and I didn't feel like going to them either. Even my home became chaotic. I hope that no one else ever will experience the torment I went through during that time. This is a moment or a dream from my life that I can never forget. I never want to relive this time.



MEMORY OF FATHER



It was enjoyable to sit in this program. I enthusiastically participated, but then my father passed away, and losing him was very difficult for me mentally. My father used to help me; he shared in my sorrows and rejoiced in my happiness, which supported me a lot. Suddenly, the news of my father's death brought me great pain and made life very hard. As a result, I felt like living alone, and I didn't want to eat. It felt as if my life was as dark as a courtyard without sunlight. However, while attending this program, it became easier for me to forget that pain and express my emotions. This program was very helpful to me.

OTHER SERVICES THIS YEAR

Beyond our Healing Circles, Sajha Dhago delivered targeted trainings and workshops that strengthened mental health support, non-violent conflict resolution, trauma healing capacity, and safeguarding practices across multiple districts.

These services extend the reach of our model by equipping frontline workers, partner organizations, and community leaders with trauma-informed tools.



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID (MHFA) REFRESHER TRAINING

Sajha Dhago partnered with RHEST, a women-led organization working to prevent girl trafficking, to refresh and deepen mental health skills among its staff and community workers.

- Focus: Recognizing common mental health issues, reflecting on earlier MHFA training, and learning practical stress-management tools.
- Participants: 77 across four clusters (Makwanpur, Udayapur, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Banke, Bardiya, Surkhet, Tanahun, Sindupalchowk, Kavre, Ramechhap).

What changed for participants:

- Stronger understanding of how mental health problems show up in daily life, especially in communities affected by trafficking and gender-based violence.
- Increased confidence to identify distress and offer first-line support, including around alcohol misuse and its impact on mental health.

"I learned about the impact of alcohol on mental health and the importance of mental health awareness regarding alcohol abuse."

A participant from Sindhupalchowk



ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT (AVP) – PAPAS HOUSE

Sajha Dhago facilitated a three-day AVP Basic Workshop at Papas House to build non-violent conflict resolution skills and emotional regulation among children and youth.

- When: 2–4 April 2025
- Participants: 40 (two groups)

What we focused on:

- Practical tools for resolving conflicts without violence.
- Building community, affirmation, cooperation, and trust.
- Helping children and young people manage anger and express themselves clearly and respectfully.

What changed for participants:

- Better conflict-resolution skills and communication, with less tendency to escalate disagreements.
- Increased self-esteem as children realized they could handle difficult situations without aggression.

“This workshop has taught me to be friendly and to work as a team... It has also provided me with information on violence, non-violence, and its various forms”

Participant Reflection

TRAUMA HEALING WORKSHOPS WITH NAGARIK AAWAZ

Sajha Dhago collaborated with Nagarik Aawaz, a peacebuilding organization, to deliver trauma-healing workshops in conflict-affected districts.

- Locations and reach:
 - East Rukum: 3 groups, 65 participants
 - Rolpa: 3 groups, 84 participants
 - Total: 149 participants

What we focused on:

- Body-based and psychosocial activities to help participants reconnect with their bodies and emotions.
- Creating safe spaces for dialogue, reflection, and collective healing among conflict-affected women and youth.

What changed for participants:

- A stronger mind-body connection and awareness of how trauma lives in the body.
- A sense of lightness and relief after the sessions, and a renewed commitment to caring for their holistic well-being.

"I feel light and relieved."

Participant Reflection





TRAINING OF TRAINERS (TOT) ON SAJHA DHAGO'S ART-BASED TRAUMA INTERVENTION

Sajha Dhago hosted a 10-day experiential Training of Trainers to scale its art-based trauma healing model across Nepal.

- When: 16–26 April 2025
- Participants: 16 psychosocial practitioners from inside and outside the Kathmandu Valley, including Far Western Nepal, NGOs, and academic institutions.

What we focused on:

- Deep immersion in the Sajha Dhago trauma-healing process, including story cloths, group facilitation, somatic practices, and safe group dynamics.
- Helping practitioners not just “learn a method” but experience the process themselves, so they can lead with empathy and insight.

What changed for participants:

- Many reported reduced shoulder pain, better sleep, more regulated emotions, and increased self-confidence after going through the process.
- Participants left motivated to take this model forward and implement it with their own communities and students.

One participant's story cloth captured a deeply personal trauma—being cheated on by her doctor husband while pregnant—and how, through the training, she could finally identify this as a core wound and begin to heal

“This flower shows that I am blooming in the suffocation... My story cloth shows a doctor's vest which I could finally sew after talking about what happened to me, and there is a broken heart which represents my marriage.”

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION REFRESHER

To uphold strong ethics and safety, Sajha Dhago conducted a one-day refresher on safeguarding and child protection.

- When: 11 November 2024
- Participants: 25 (Sajha Dhago staff, facilitators, and a counselor)

What we focused on:

- What safeguarding from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) means in practice.
- Core points of Sajha Dhago's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and how to apply them in daily work with survivors.

What changed for participants:

- Renewed awareness of roles and responsibilities in protecting children and vulnerable adults.
- Stronger shared understanding of boundaries, reporting pathways, and survivor-centered responses.





SHOWCASING OUR WORK

Sajha Dhago shares survivors' stories not only within healing circles, but also in public spaces where community members, leaders, and allies can see, listen, and learn. In 2081/82, exhibitions and events became powerful ways for your support to reach beyond the circle and shift how people understand trauma, healing, and resilience.

WOVEN STORIES: THREADS OF RESILIENCE” EXHIBITION

This exhibition turned survivors’ stitched stories into a public, collective statement: trauma exists, but so does courage and healing. Around 130 handmade story cloths created by participants were curated into an immersive experience.

The numbers at a glance

Over 500 people visited the exhibition across 5 days

22 story cloths were shared in storybooks with full narratives

22 story cloths were displayed on the walls with short descriptions

86 story cloths were used as curtains and panels, transforming the gallery into a living tapestry of survival and hope

Three guiding themes:

The Unseen Scars – raw, often hidden pain and the long tail of trauma

Resilience – the slow, nonlinear journey of healing and reclaiming one’s voice

Hope – the safe physical and emotional spaces where survivors can breathe, heal, and rebuild



What visitors said

“Themes and stories are so motivating and seem very helpful for a healing journey. Keep continuing such good work.”

“A powerful exhibition, thought provoking and much needed.”

“It was very interesting and healing. My wife and I learned so many good things. So blessed to be here.”

“So creative! Full of true stories and beautiful stories.”

“Healing by the means of stitching just like wounds are surgically stitched up!”

“A very beautiful exhibition and shows a unique perspective to those who are not from Nepal.”

For funders and partners, this exhibition shows how circle-based healing can catalyze wider social change: shifting stigma, building empathy, and opening conversations about gender-based violence and mental health.

EXHIBITION EVENTS: DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT

To move beyond viewing into dialogue and practice, the exhibition included focused events for different audiences.

Opening Ceremony – 12 February 2025

A guided tour followed by a panel on gender-based violence and its mental health impacts. Speakers included:

- Kamala Parajuli – Chairperson, National Women Commission
- Benu Maya Gurung – Executive Director, AATWIN
- Smriti Khadka – Executive Director, Aasha Nepal

The conversation highlighted why survivor-centered mental health interventions like Sajha Dhago are essential alongside legal and policy responses.

Group Discussion with Participants – 14 February

15 participants from different Sajha Dhago circles shared their healing journeys, takeaways from Phase I and II, and how the intervention has influenced their families and communities. This created direct, respectful contact between survivors' lived experience and the wider public.

Slow Stitching Workshop – 16 February

13 attendees joined an intimate slow stitching session to experience the grounding, breath-linked stitching techniques used in Sajha Dhago's trauma healing process. Participants described feeling more present, calm, and curious about the method.

These events turned the exhibition into an active learning space where policymakers, practitioners, donors, and community members could feel and understand the work, not just read about it.





OTHER EVENTS AND OUTREACH

Throughout the year, Sajha Dhago also showcased story cloths and its trauma-healing model in diverse public spaces, building partnerships and visibility.

Thames Career Fair – Presented Sajha Dhago’s work to students and educators, introducing future professionals to survivor-centered mental health practice.

Queer Mental Health Summit 2024 (Blue Diamond Society, 26 December) – Shared story cloths and connected with queer community members and allies, emphasizing inclusive, queer-affirming trauma care.

One Billion Rising 2024 – Joined the global movement to end violence against women, exhibiting story cloths as acts of resistance and testimony from survivors.

Trave-Yeller VIII by GET Nepal (8 March) – Marked International Women’s Day with a story cloth stall, highlighting women’s stories of survival and empowerment.

LOOKING FORWARD

As we look to the coming year, our goals are clear:

- Expand our healing circles to reach more survivors in underserved communities
- Strengthen our Training of Trainers (ToT) program to prepare more psychosocial practitioners across Nepal
- Deepen our research on the impact of art-based trauma interventions
- Continue building partnerships with organizations working on gender justice, mental health, and peacebuilding

We know that healing is not linear, and change takes time. But every stitch, every shared story, and every small step forward matters.

SAJHA

DHAGO

