



A faith-based, residential community of adults with and without Intellectual Disabilities.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMUNITY

The Caritas Goa Community model is based on the Communities of the International Federation of L'Arche.

We are an intentional community.

We aim to provide a place of inclusion, welcome and belonging for adults with Intellectual Disabilities. We hope to create a space for them in society at large by integrating them in to a smaller local community and so provide an alternative model to the currently accepted system of institutionalization

Recent studies by a local research organisation (Sangath) have shown that there is an increasing need to integrate the intellectually disabled into society and create a stable, safe environment for those whose families are no longer able to support them. This is especially true for the adults many of whom are in the degrading position of having to attend schools and day-care centers despite being over 30 years old.

What is our purpose?

We do not seek to be a solution to the problems of marginalization and dehumanization but to be a sign that a solution is possible with and by God's love.

We recognise that we cannot take in every person with an intellectual disability. We will, however, make every effort to support all those that we can in all the ways that we can.

What happens here?

We are a residential community of individuals (comprised primarily of members **with** intellectual disabilities (**a.k.a. Core members**) and members without intellectual disabilities (**a.k.a Assistants**). This means that the main reason for our existence is to create for the intellectually disabled a space that can be called 'my home'. This is the concept of an owned, shared space where one is loved and valued whether or not one is productive or able in the eyes of the world.

One of the most important aspects of this community model is that it gives each member with disability (a.k.a. "Core Member") ownership of his/her environment in a greater way than previously possible but also in conjunction and relationship with others of their peer group. Thus, for example, when a new person is to be welcomed into the community, the existing members have a crucial role in deciding whether or not this person is a suitable companion and house-mate.

The Core Members are (as per their individual capabilities) also given the freedom and support needed to make any/all decisions themselves, whether important or trivial.

Workshops

One of the root principles of this project is to enable people to grow through work & responsibility.

Workshop A is a creative manufacturing workshop (art, candles, woodwork, wire jewellery, jams and pickles etc.).

Workshop B is a garden project that will focus on growing fresh fruits, harvesting vegetables and flowers, and getting this retail ready for sale in the local community.

The Core Members will be paid a small stipend for their work (weekly or monthly) out of the profits from sales. This amount will be theirs to spend as they see fit (barring compromises to their health) and will encourage them to feel the confidence and self-worth that comes with doing

something and being paid for it. We encourage learning autonomous decision making for all our members.

Neither of the workshops is likely to be financially self-sufficient and they are not primarily intended to provide significant for the community in any meaningful way. They will exist to give the Core Members skill development and socially meaningful engagement during the week.

A typical day in the life of the community:

07:00 am	Getting up. Some Core Members may need help.
07:30 am	Morning Prayer and a cup of tea/coffee.
08:00 am	Helping Core Members with bathing, dressing and organizing bedrooms.
09:00 hrs	Breakfast.
09:30 - 10:30 hrs	Workshop or day center time
10:30 hrs	Coffee break.
11:00 - 12:45 hrs	Workshop or day center time
13:00 hr	Lunch, followed by washing up.
14:00 - 15:00 hrs	Rest time. Tea break
15:30 - 17:00 pm	Workshop time
17:00 - 19:00 hrs	Rest, recreation or helping in the preparations for supper (Shopping, cooking, etc.,).
19:00 hrs	Evening house gathering & prayer
19:30 pm	Supper followed by washing up.
20:30 pm	Closing the day with a prayer and song and retiring to bed.

Intake

Identifying a disabled person for potential membership can happen in two ways:

- 1) The person him/herself has been introduced to the community or the idea and has expressed interest of their own accord.
- 2) The parents/carers of the disabled person know of the project and feel that it would greatly benefit him/her.

The intake process will begin with the formation of a “Circle of Support” around each of the disabled people that are interested in joining this community. The formation of this group will be explained, facilitated and moderated by the Divya Sadan community.

All proposed Core Members must be over 20 years old. There is no existing upper limit but it may be found that such a community is not feasible for the very elderly or feeble due to their need for more trained medical care.

Once a Circle of Support(CoS) has been established and the Core Member is clearly keen to join (or it is decided that joining is in his/her best interests), the CoS provides the community with the documentation required. The community then assesses (with an Occupational Therapist, if necessary) whether or not the premises are suitable for the Core Member’s specific physical needs.

If physical requirements are met, then the community will then write up a personal budget based on the Core Member’s individual needs and presents it to the CoS. If necessary, the community assists the CoS in applying for any available Govt. grants or other sources of external funding to help support the project. If this is not possible, the community will still make the maximum effort to take the Core Member in with whatever funds exist.

Alongside the budgeting/fundraising process, the Core Member will be invited to visit the community for a meal and to spend a whole day. During this time, the existing residents and the applicant can get to know each other and form an impression of whether or not they are fully willing to try living together. After initial assessment, there is a one to three months enegagement period as a member of the work programme in order to familiarize the core member to Divya Sadan.

Once all the preliminaries are accomplished and any necessary adaptations to the physical space are made, the Core Member is welcomed into the community for a Preliminary Trial to live in the community for weekdays with the weekend at home. At any point during the trial period or at completion, meetings can be held between the community and the CoS to iron out any specific problems that may have arisen or even to review whether community life is the best option for the Core Member.

Once the trial period is over, the Core Member will either be welcomed as a full member of the community or will be supported to explore other options.

Intake - Circles of Support (CoS)

A Circle of Support is usually a group of 7-12 members which may include:

- Immediate family
- Close friends (w/o intellectual disability or with very minor intellectual disability)
- Particular social workers or teachers or workshop trainers

- Anyone else who has a good knowledge of the person concerned and is willing to support them and ensure their well-being (relative, doctor, psychiatrist, priest, etc.,)

Any or all of these should (wherever possible) be chosen by the disabled person in question if he/she is deemed capable of such a decision.

[NB: Membership in such a group should be completely voluntary and all members should have the responsibilities involved clearly explained before joining.]

The key criterion for eligibility to join such a circle is a sound knowledge of the proposed Core Member based on extensive interaction over a sustained period of time.

Other than this, the group should ideally represent an even balance between people who have an emotional attachment to the Core Member and people who are more distant and can be more objective while still focusing on the best interests of the Core Member in question.

It is imperative that the CoS is a place of trust and total safety for the Core Member because only then can he/she be empowered to make important decisions. Most people with intellectual disabilities have never been allowed to participate in decision-making regarding their future. As a consequence of this, the possibility to make one's own decision will be both exciting and terrifying for them and this should be borne in mind by the CoS.

The CoS also provides a safe place for the Core Member to bring up any problems or difficulties he/she is facing in their daily living. It is intended as a way to ensure that the Core Member has a voice of their own.

The CoS should also compile, in collaboration with any necessary professionals, a detailed file about the Core Member. This should contain:

- a) A profile of the person's disabilities/conditions
- b) A detailed description of his/her daily activities & routines, including any particular likes & dislikes (food, colour, music, etc.,)
- c) A list of any peculiar habits (regarding either self, others or physical environment)
- d) A detailed medical history and a current list of any regular medication including contact details of the prescribing doctor(s).

Once the Core Member has moved into the community home, meetings can be once a month or as requested to discuss his/her progress in the new environment. The first few months, while all concerned learn about each other, are likely to need more hands-on attention than later.

Once the Core Member is settled, the group can meet every 4 months to ensure that the person is doing well and that all needs are being met in a satisfactory way. Meetings can happen more or less frequently as deemed necessary by the group or the community.

We are people with varying levels of ability, different cultural and religious backgrounds, seeking to be a community of faith and transformation. We wish to grow together by deepening relationships and a giving and receiving of love, respect, care, friendship, forgiveness and celebration.

We seek to uncover, celebrate and make known the unique gifts of every person and to create a place of welcome, acceptance, belonging and equality for adults with and without Intellectual Disabilities. Through our presence we seek to be a sign of hope and possibility.