

Asia Ashraf
Sunny Trust



Candidate for:
Vice-chairperson
Deputy Secretary

I, Asia Ashraf from Pakistan hold Masters in Applied Psychology (2003) from Punjab University and Diplomas in HR Management and Speech & Language Therapy from the National Institute for Rehabilitative Medicines, Islamabad. I did a one-year fellowship in Substance Abuse, Education, Treatment, Policy and Prevention from Virginia Commonwealth University, USA (2015-2016). I am national trainer Universal Treatment Curriculums (UTC) for the Colombo Plan and internationally certified addiction professional (ICAP) from ICCE, Sri Lanka. Starting as an intern psychologist (2003), I am now Director Rehabilitation and Head of Psychology Department, Sunny Trust Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre, Islamabad, responsible for overall management, program implementation, monitoring and supervision of treatment and rehabilitation of persons with substance use and mental health disorders. I undertake counseling, relapse prevention trainings, capacity-building of addiction professionals including TOTs, and orientation sessions for interns, volunteers and nursing/mental health trainees.

Besides working on treatment and rehab of male population, I am deeply interested in exclusive needs and access to these services for the female, who remain neglected and excluded--drugs being still viewed as a male problem. Social stigma and lack of female-friendly services deny them access to professional services. At Sunny Trust, an all-male facility, I was enforced to improvise treatment/rehab of chronic poly-drug user teenage girls, in desperate need of help but nowhere to go. Our experience in setting up a separate female unit and bringing these girls back to drug-free normal life encouraged us to build an exclusive all-female treatment and rehab facility, Sakoongah (A house of peace and tranquility), for women with substance abuse and mental health disorders. I am working on this project as a life-long mission. We have developed female human resource and acquired the land to build this facility. We are working on its design and scope.

My yearlong stay in the U.S. under Hubert Humphrey Fellowship helped me avail great opportunities including my keynote address at the UN Informal Interactive Stakeholder Consultation preparatory to the UNGASS, held in New York on February 10, 2016. I also attended UNGASS session, held from 19-21, April 2016, which gave me an in-depth understanding of overall drug situation in the world, approaches adapted to address the issues and international drug policy. I increased my knowledge of addiction treatment, rehabilitation, prevention services and international drug policy, besides learning new evidence-based counseling techniques.

As drug abuse fast spreads in this region, treatment services remain highly deficient, and relapse rates are very high. Social stigma, lack of psycho-social support, poor life skills, inadequate follow-up, and limited aftercare by treatment providers further undermines post-treatment recovery and reintegration. To address this gap, I launched a Recovery Club at Sunny Trust in 2017, providing an open, free, safe and friendly space for persons in recovery to discuss their issues with peers and program staff. They practice life skills and grow in their capacity to solve real-life problems. Starting with just 2 persons, RC now has over 30 members. The number of Sunny Trust patients engaged in follow-up and aftercare with effective life skills has almost doubled and keeps growing. I also learned about community coalition model by having internship at CADCA– powerful data-driven community-based approach to address the colossal issue of drug abuse in Pakistan.

I am an energetic, passionate, grass root level female worker with 15 years of experience in diverse areas related to substance abuse (treatment, rehabilitation and prevention). I have worked with diverse groups of youth, women, children and elderly people. I represent Asia region, where addiction is a serious problem, getting worse. Countries in this region share similar problems. My practical experience, yearlong stay at USA, active participation in UNGASS, close and responsible role in drug policy futures has given me a good insight into drug situation, strategies and perspective of the world. It has strengthened my analytical and creative reasoning skills. Being on the VNGOC board, I can better express and share the drug situation, associated problems and can propose realistic and culturally appropriate solutions for the region. I will work for the purpose of VNGOC by being a coordinating body for NGOs; by promoting activities and communication between NGOs and the UN system and facilitating the representation of NGOs.