



Bembala Foundation  
Annual Report 2019 - 2020

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## Why and How Did We Start Bembala?

“Urgent help needed. Savitri cannot come to work today because her husband will find her and beat her. She is staying at her sister’s employer’s house but she can’t be there for long. Please can you help? She has two small children.”

Eight years ago, when Whitefield Rising was started, we naively assumed that the problems we saw and perceived were the same problems for all. So, we focused on traffic, garbage, water, tree plantings, and so on. But there were these kinds of appeals too. Every so often a woman and/or child needed our help. As a community, we responded to each of these and did our best to help. But it was apparent that we were not equipped to solve the underlying problem. We could provide temporary shelter, new employment opportunities, and hostel facilities for the children. But, the “victim” often went back to her old situation, and the problems would resume.

It took discussions with people who had worked in this space to understand the depth of the issue and the methods that have evolved over time to best address victims of domestic abuse. The biggest learning for many was thinking about these women as “survivors” and not as victims, given their courage to reach out for help.

The universe conspired to bring the right people together and when the intent is sincere, magic happens. Volunteers came forward doing much more than volunteering. A hospital provided a room to use as a Center, free. A benefactor paid the salary for our single staff member. A friend donated furniture. Mentors and Trainers gave their training for free. Counselors signed up to give their time for free. Thus was born Bembala, exactly one year ago, on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2019. Our sincere thanks to the first volunteers who saw the need, brought the right people together, and made this happen.

“Bembala” means support in Kannada, and that is exactly what we do. We are there to support the victim and to make her a survivor. And that means we allow her the space to come to terms with her situation and empower her with the strength to choose from her available choices. It has been humbling to see 92 people walk into the center in our first year, when not much time has yet been spent on awareness building about the existence of this Center.

Before launching the Bembala Center, we spent months looking for the right partners - lawyers, counsellors, shelter homes, etc. who were experienced, accessible from Whitefield, and when needed, willing to offer their services pro-bono.

Bembala derives its working philosophy from the concept of “befriending”, originally introduced by a vicar, Chad Varah, in 1953. He founded an organization called the ‘Samaritans’ in the UK. Befrienders are typically people from any background, capable of providing emotional support to people in difficult situations, with empathy and a ‘listening ear’. Our befrienders go through extensive training to become the vanguards of Bembala’s work.

## Vision and Mission

**Bembala's Vision** is a community with zero tolerance towards violence; a community that supports survivors of all forms of abuse/distress regardless of socio-economic, cultural or religious background. We aspire to create an easily accessible network of support services across Bangalore.

**Our Mission** is a coordinated and well-informed approach to violence, abuse, and distress faced by women and children, with sufficient interventions that lead to safe communities and families in Bangalore.

## Areas of Intervention

Bembala is a **free** and **confidential, volunteer-run** support center **for women and children** facing violence, abuse or distress. We provide emotional support, and assist in improving their situations. We also provide access to and assistance with a large referral network of partners, thereby enabling protection and empowerment. Our referral partners include the Police, and organizations and individuals who can offer Shelter and Protection, Medical and Legal Aid, Long-term Counselling, Mediation, Financial Empowerment or Occupational Support.

Bembala helps women or children going through any of the following forms of abuse: physical, emotional, financial, sexual, and mental distress as well as cyber-crime related issues. We have also seen a need to support family mediation for some of our cases. During the befriending process, if the situation warrants it, we also offer information to the survivor about the appropriate referral partners available, and how they can help her. The choices of the survivor are given utmost importance and Bembala enables the survivor to think with clarity while weighing in all the options available.

In addition to befriending services, Bembala is involved in running Outreach and Awareness Programs based on long-term impact models. These include awareness talks called 'Bol Sakhi', wherein volunteers go to communities or workplaces, and spend an hour talking to women about domestic violence and abuse and about reaching out for help. Bembala has also conducted health and nutrition camps in collaboration with NGOs. Other modules that we have come up with include talking to school children about abuse and its prevention, running a gender sensitization and listening skills training for police constables, debate competitions, and even a session with an Expressive Arts Counsellor at a community level.





**Figure 1. A Bol Sakhi Session**



**Figure 2. A Bol Sakhi Session**





**Figure 3. A Bol Sakhi Session with Pourakarmikas**



**Figure 4. Police Training Session**

## Our Approach

At the Bembala center, our charter is straight forward. When a survivor of domestic violence walks in, she goes through a befriending session, gains emotional support as she talks, and over one or more sessions, is given referrals to partners who can further help her. We also help survivors with safety plans, which includes alerting them to keep all their documentation accessible, and a plan to leave in a hurry to a safer location if there is a need.

In addition to face-to-face befriending sessions, follow-ups over the phone have helped survivors feel more comfortable. A good rapport is built with the survivors at the first session and it naturally progresses to liaising with referral agencies and following up to ensure that the survivor gets what she needs.

As for the approach to Outreach, our strategy is two-pronged. We believe that creating awareness is critical to helping women confront their situations. Often, one is not cognizant of what constitutes abuse. Awareness about abuse and the help that is close at hand is very important to women being able to tackle their problems in the 'here and the now'. Additionally, our programs are geared toward long-term strategies to prevent violence. For example, sensitizing children in schools to gender equality concepts.

A key learning from conducting Bol Sakhi events was that women of the lower income groups related better to survivors from their own neighborhoods and situations in life. As our Bol Sakhi events included a segment during which a survivor shared her story, we explored bringing in women our audience could relate to. Eventually, we were able to recruit the help of two women from the working class to come assist in conducting Bol Sakhi events. They have been trained appropriately and have proven to be very engaging during these events.



**Figure 5. Panel Discussion with Referral Partners**

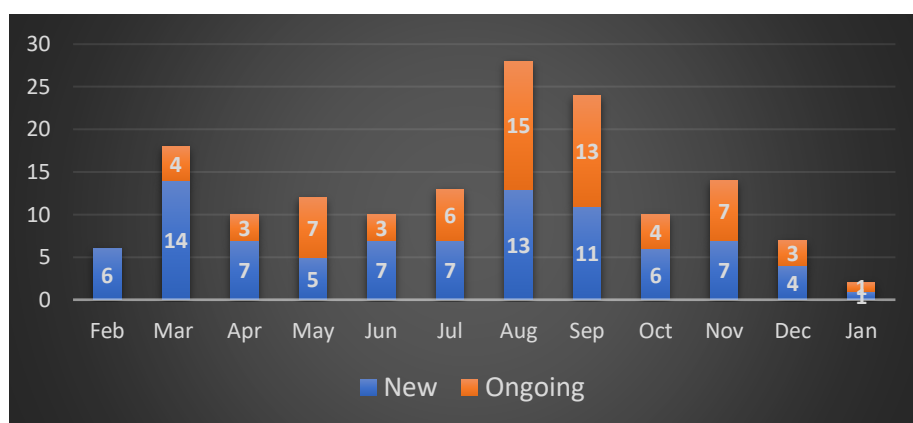
## Reach and Impact

- A.** This section reviews how many women and children were helped by Bembala in the past 12 months, the nature of abuse they have faced, causes that triggered the abuse, how survivors found out about us (hence our reach), and what action we took on their behalf. The section also includes referral data. Data representation in graphs is by month.

### Number of Cases

In the past 12 months, we had 92 people walk into the Bembala Center and receive help from us. Of these, 80 were women, 8 were children and 4 were men.

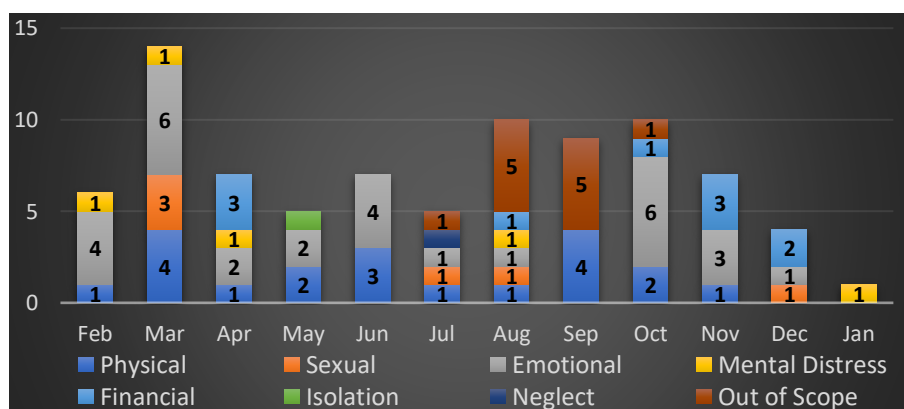
The following graph represents the number of cases Bembala has dealt with during the period from February 2019 to January 2020, by month. It illustrates how many were new or first time visits, and how many were ongoing cases. As on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2020, we had 12 ongoing cases and 80 closed ones.



**Figure 6. Number of survivor visits between Feb 2019 and Jan 2020**

### Nature of Abuse:

This section provides information on the nature of the cases that have come to Bembala. The categories are Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Mental Distress, Financial Issues, Isolation, Neglect and Out of Scope.

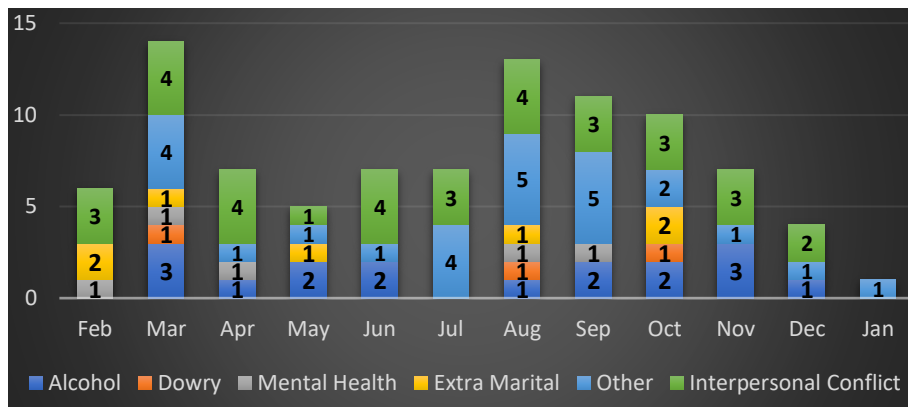


**Figure 7. Nature of Abuse Faced by Survivors Who Approached Bembala**



### Cause of Abuse:

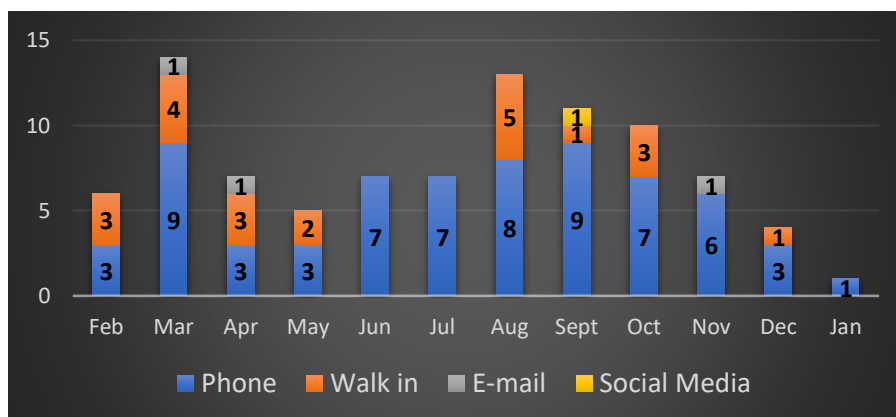
This section provides information on the causes underlying the cases, including alcoholism, and dowry-related, mental health-related, extra-marital, and interpersonal conflicts.



**Figure 8. Underlying Causes of Conflict Leading to Abuse**

### Reach

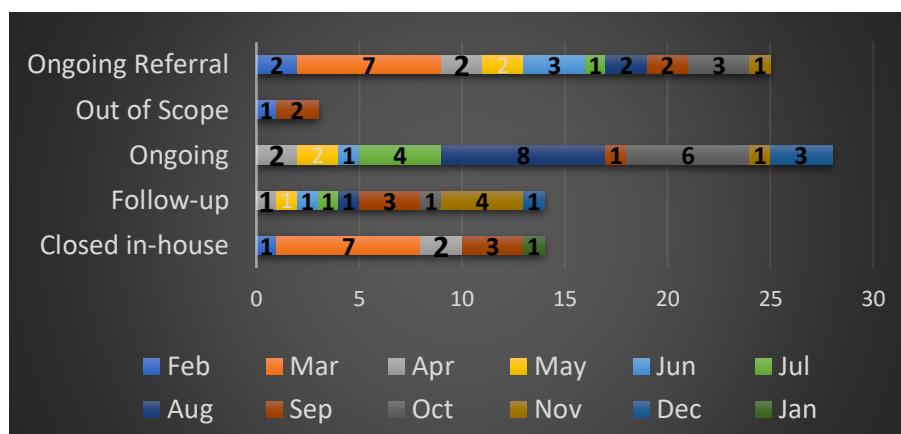
This section illustrates how people got in touch with Bembala. Categories include phone, walk-ins, email, and social media. Most of the survivors who came to Bembala were referred to us.



**Figure 9. Mode of Reach**

### Case Status:

We referred some survivors to other agencies and continued to provide befriending support (**Ongoing Referral**). Several other survivors continue to receive just befriending support (**Ongoing**). As part of our services, we **follow up** once a month, for a period of three months. The data below illustrates these 'action taken' categories. We have also '**closed**' several cases in-house.



**Figure 10. Types of Action Taken for Survivors**

### Referral Data:

The following table lists how many of our survivors had befriending sessions only, and how many were referred out for help to police, lawyers, doctors or other referral partners.

Type of Intervention	No. of Cases
Pure befriending	62
Legal	7
Medical	2
Medico-legal case registration	6
Police	12
NGOs	4
Counseling	3
Mediation	4
Out of scope	11

## **B. Successes and Challenges:**

This section discusses some of the cases handled by Bembala this past year.

**Case # 1-**Bembala's presence at Vydehi was valuable during a POCSO case. We helped a minor by guiding and preparing her mentally and emotionally during the process that followed the reporting of her pregnancy, and request for an abortion. In addition to emotional support, we ensured that all her needs were met, including receiving her meals on time.

**Case # 2 -**A lady who was unable to obtain a non-cognizable offence report (NCR) from the police and a medico-legal case report (MLC) from one of the Government hospitals, was able to do so with Bembala's help. She reported back saying that the lodging of the MLC had helped put an end to any assault, as her husband was afraid for his reputation. The woman has currently reconciled with the spouse after receiving couples' counselling.

**Case # 3-** A mother of two young kids, who had gone through severe physical, sexual and emotional abuse, had moved to Bangalore a year back with her kids and found a job as a domestic helper. Her husband wanted the kids to visit him during holidays, so she sent them to him. Later, he refused to send the kids back to her, insisting that the family reunite. She came to Bembala, seeking support and validation, in order to muster the courage to get her kids back. The woman successfully retrieved her children, and on a visit to the center 10 days later, informed us that both the emotional support provided by us, as well as help provided by an NGO near her village, had helped tremendously.

**Case # 4-** A lady was being physically abused by her alcoholic husband and had been thrown out of their house after a fight. She came to Bembala hoping that we could help her get her children admitted to a hostel so that she could get a better paying job to support them. One of our partners was contacted and the children have been successfully boarded at their shelter home. The survivor and her children are happy with the support and help they have received.

**Case # 5-**A survivor came to us looking for help to find her missing husband. She didn't want to go to the police as she feared that her husband had run away to escape creditors. We convinced her to lodge a complaint at the police station. However, without any contact details, they could not trace him. Later, she wanted us to support her financially. As that is against our policy, we offered to help her with a referral to a partner who did vocational training.

**Case # 6-** A survivor eloped with her boyfriend who had promised to marry her. Two years later, she coerced him into marrying her. Later, he ran away saying he does not want to live with her. She filed a police complaint and came to Bembala seeking our help to locate him and convince him to reunite with her. Emotional support was provided through three befriending sessions and options of shelter and vocational training were explored, Her family was insistent that she move back to her hometown but she kept reaching out to us asking us to find him. At Bembala, we gently told her that we would not be able to meet her expectations. She finally decided to relocate to another city.



## Events

Date	Event	Description
09-02-19 10-02-19	Volunteer Training	Training for the 2nd batch of Bembala volunteers
12-02-19	Advisory meeting	The first advisory meeting held at Vydehi Hospital.
13-02-19	Volunteer Training	Referral and Safety Planning
01-03-19	Training for Police	A two day training was conducted for the head constables of eight Whitefield Area Police Stations. at the Whitefield Police Station
11-03-19	Bol Sakhi	Event with BBMP Pourakarmikas, organised at the Whitefield Inner Circle park. A mix of 30 women attended.
16-03-19	Pop-up	Organised a pop-up at the Indus International School
23-03-19	Volunteer Training	A session was conducted by Enfold volunteers to train Bembala volunteers on handling Child Sexual Abuse
26-03-19	Bol Sakhi	Event organised at the Samruddhi Bridge School
10-04-19	Bol Sakhi	Event organised in Prestige Shantiniketan for the gardeners working in the community
10-05-19	Debate competition	Debate competition organised at the Samruddhi Bridge School for the students
9-06-19	Volunteer Training	Volunteers attended Suicide Gatekeeper Training run by Mitram volunteers
30-06-19	Bol Sakhi	Held at Brookefield Area Anganwadi, along with volunteers of Stree Jagriti Samhiti
26-06-19	Advisory meeting	Six month follow-up meeting held at Fern's Paradise.
25-08-19	Volunteer Day	Dr Radhika Jain facilitated a session for the neighbourhood women around Re-Store in Vijayanagara village, along with the volunteers.
21-09-19	Community awareness	Awareness outreach session at the Palm Meadows community for volunteer enrollment and fund raising
23-11-19	Community awareness	Stall set up for awareness with residents of Gopalan Splendour during the community's Diwali fest
24-11-19	Volunteer Training	Training for the 3rd batch of Bembala volunteers
24-11-19	Community awareness	Drum jam event with the Community Drumjam Foundation facilitated by Vasundhara Das to kickstart the international "16 Days of Activism against gender based violence"
6-12-19	Community awareness	Health camp for the mothers of the Ramagondanahalli Government school children, organised with the support of Whitefield Ready, the local Public Health Center, and Dr. Ramesh. A total of 45 women were covered and were spoken to about Bembala and our services

Date	Event	Description
12-01-20	Community awareness	Women's Health & Wellbeing interaction at the Ramagondanahalli Government school for the mothers of the students
18-01-20	Volunteer Training	Listening skills
1-02-20	Bembala's First Anniversary	Celebration attended by referral partners and well-wishers.

## Financials

Following is a summary of Bembala's financials from 30<sup>th</sup> January 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020.

Donations	<b>4,42,720 (in Indian Rupees)</b>
Operational Costs (Salary, Utilities, etc.)	<b>3,00,126 (in Indian Rupees)</b>



**Figure 11. Drum Jam Event with Community Drumjam Foundation**



**Figure 12. Drum Jam Event with Community Drumjam Foundation**





**Figure 13. Bembala's First Year Anniversary Celebration**



**Figure 14a. and 14b. Bembala's First Year Anniversary Celebration**

## Survivors Speak

From our Survivor who reached out to Bembala on a day that she wanted to end it all. Crying non-stop, scared and broken, she thought there was no way she could go on. Today, she is looking for work, going to interviews and has started working out again, realizing she has more in her life than she thought.

### Survivor's Words

"I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks and appreciation to BEMBALA. Before coming to BEMBALA, my life was in complete shatters. I was facing abuse and extreme domestic violence at the hands of my husband.

I did not know whom to ask for help and suddenly I remembered a message in a WhatsApp group regarding BEMBALA and decided to go and meet them.

I had never discussed my personal problems with anyone before, not even my friends. So going to BEMBALA and talking to them was a big decision for me, but it turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life.

When I reached the BEMBALA office in Vydehi hospital, I met the volunteers there and seeing them and just their presence made me strong, the very fact that I could reach out to someone for help was like some big blessing. They listened to all my problems patiently, gave me counseling and helped me get treatment, and if not for them I could have definitely gone into negative and self-destructive thought process because of the amount of abuse I was facing. They showed me the way forward when I was at my weakest.

They have always helped me whenever I have asked them, there have been days when I have felt lonely, bruised, shattered and talking to them or sharing my problems with them has helped me come out of the problems I have faced in the past 7/8 months. As women, we tend to show to the world that we are strong and everything is fine with us even when everything is falling apart, but that could harm us in the long way. We should never tolerate domestic violence, and it needs to be stopped immediately. Sometimes just sharing our problems with someone helps us handle things in the correct way, and BEMBALA is the exact place where you are given the care and love and support that is needed for victims of domestic violence. If not for BEMBALA, I would have gone into depression, but their support has helped me become stronger than before.

I would like more and more women, whoever is going through any kind of abuse or domestic violence to reach out to them.

They have all the resources and knowledge and support systems required in such cases. I cannot express in words how grateful I am to them and words fall short, but I just want to thank them from the deepest corner of my heart for making me realize my life's worth and helping me when no one was there. BEMBALA has been a blessing from some angel above and I am sure they are a blessing in many more lives."

## From our Network

The team at Enfold congratulates Bembala and wishes the best again - after reading through the Newsminute article. My colleague said she wishes there are more such centers that come up across Bangalore.

## From a person who referred a survivor

Someone I sent to Bembala caught up with me on my walk and said "Bembala was just amazing. They helped her with just what she needed. Giving her strength, right information, listening, guidance without being preachy. It was simply perfect. In her emotional state, she was ready to walk out but they have asked her to reflect and plan the exit better as she has a small child. She was suicidal earlier so they have assured her that on any day they will be there for her."

## Referral on Twitter





## Volunteers Speak

**Volunteer 1:** Such an amazing milestone... Bembala has completed a year! It has me reflecting upon all my learnings from the services provided by Team Bembala: Befriending (my core area of interest), counselling services, legal and medical help, community based outreach programs, tie-ups with Bembala, "checking" out shelter homes, and vocational training centers. With all these support services, another significant advantage for the survivor is the location of the center at Vydehi Hospital. My thanks to their generosity of giving this space for free and enabling anonymity for survivors.

An instantaneous emotion is that of a heart-warming gratitude that Bembala is touching so many lives and truly proving, slowly and surely, its role as a first stop center for emotional support. The demography of survivors is from different socio-economic strata and cultural backgrounds. This factor has also helped in honing our skills of empathy and humility.

My first befriending session evoked multiple emotions within, and was a challenge. The survivor was a qualified IT engineer from a corporate background. She was a young mother with a young child. She was scared, in tears, and expressed total helplessness and despair. Her situation covered most aspects of domestic violence including requiring immediate medical attention. Police intervention, counselling and legal support was also extended to her by us. I felt I was able to convey comfort and empathy, leading to her opening up a lot. During the session, our experienced center manager was always on hand for further information and support. This I must reiterate is a great confidence building booster for befrienders. Another constant is a gentle reminder/ pointer by her as to how one must stay focused on the survivor's feelings without bias and prejudices. The spirit and ethos of Bembala is steadily and surely evolving with every experience, and with feedback from survivors. We strive to work with honesty, transparency, simplicity and "from the heart". I definitely hope and pray that I grow with Bembala, and remain consistent and true to the Bembala values and philosophy.

**Volunteer 2:** My Experience on Bembala Day (also called Volunteer Day)

I met some women from disadvantaged sections of society today. The objective was to empower them with the use of drama techniques. In one of these, the women were asked to enact metaphors of storm, kite, and iron rod. Many of them associated the storm with their husbands. "How do you weather the storm," they were asked, "like a kite or like an iron rod"?

"Every woman here is an iron rod," proclaimed one woman. "We have all braved storms." Everyone nodded. "I have been a kite." said another. "I have flown with the wind and survived the storm." "I can be a kite with the husband but I must be the iron rod for the children's sake," a woman said.

As they shared stories, I was truly humbled. All the trials in six decades of my life paled in comparison. All my current fears seemed trivial. They were so matter of fact about the difficulties. "My man talks a lot of humbug." said one. "I just hear it with one ear and release it from the other. I do what I have to do."

Difficulties were part and parcel of life for them. To be dealt with before moving on. I met an uneducated woman who dealt with her drunkard husband's kidney failure, raising lakhs for treatment. She was frail, soft spoken yet undefeated. A matriarch who single handedly brought up eight children and settled them in life, exuded both power and compassion.

There was some sadness but there was also much joy in this meeting. We hugged and thanked each other at the end. The barriers between us dissolved; we truly connected in shared journeys of women. I was left feeling both humbled and enriched.

**Volunteer 3:** It all started in the month of June 2018. My younger son had just completed his 12th grade and the preparations for him leaving for college had already begun. That was the time when I was weighing my options along with a friend (who also works for Whitefield Rising) about what I could be doing next. She suggested that I should explore 'Bembala' - which was in the planning process and was going to start in the next few months.

Then came October and our training session started. The two-day training was revealing and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It almost felt like it was cut out for me - I made up my mind that this is what I would like to do. We went through a few more training sessions. Each one was very meaningful and of great learning value.

January 30th 2019 was the inauguration of our 'Bembala Center' at Vydehi hospital. In the beginning, I would come to the sessions with a lot of apprehension, not knowing what the day would be like, whether I would be able to help the survivors who would come in, etc. It is almost a year now since we started, and a lot has happened in these months. The apprehension is gone, and today I know I'll be able to help the survivors in some way or the other.

After meeting the survivors, I have learnt that each woman is different and each situation has to be handled differently. As I had never done any volunteering before and perhaps I had a very sheltered life - I didn't know the kind of problems people go through in their day to day lives. Earlier, I thought that domestic violence occurred mostly in a certain socioeconomic class but realized that it can happen all across. My perspective has changed.

I feel so fortunate for being in the midst of such positive and amazing people who have guided me through this journey. I now eagerly look forward to coming here and being a part of our 'Bembala family'.

**Volunteer 4:** I instantly liked Bembala's objective when I heard about its mission to provide emotional support to survivors of domestic violence and child abuse. While volunteering to provide emotional support is close to my heart, supporting these survivors who are subjected to "silent violence" within four walls is a more noble cause. By strengthening the survivors' will to fight the perpetrators, we go a long way to beat the patriarchal system, which is nothing but a game of power and control.

My experience with Bembala has been very good and I often feel blessed to be a part of this team. It helped me to improve my emotional intelligence, empathetic/befriending skills, kill my own biases, and be an advocate of spreading awareness against domestic violence.

I would like to see Bembala having many more centers across Bangalore and India, and having its own shelter home and vocational training center for women and children.



## Newspaper Articles

The work done by Bembala in 2019 was covered by four different newspaper publications. Following are the links to these articles:

- <https://www.deccanherald.com/city/life-in-bengaluru/bembala-an-asylum-for-domestic-abuse-victims-755117.html>
- <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/bengaluru-community-has-come-together-help-abused-women-and-children-106865>
- <http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2018/sep/05/whitefield-rises-for-victims-of-violence-1867535.html>
- <http://blogs.citizenmatters.in/whitefield-rising/bembala-act-against-violence-21867>

## Advisory Committee

Bembala's advisory board is comprised of some eminent citizens as well as some of our partner- representatives. We had our first complete advisory committee meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2019. Dr. N. Jagadeesh of Vydehi Hospital, Mr. Basanth Poddar, Ms. Malini Sridhar of Parivarthan, Dr. Corrine Kumar of Vimochana, Ms. Nitya Ramakrishnan of Whitefield Rising, and Dr. Sunita Maheshwari of Teleradiology Rx Dx, attended this meeting along with the Bembala Team, in Vydehi Hospital. Our second meeting took place on 26<sup>th</sup> May with the board members Dr. Jagadeesh, Dr. Sunita, Ms. Nitya and Dr. Corrine joining us over a Skype call.



**Figure 14. Advisory Committee**

### **Advisory Speak: Words of Dr. Jagadeesh**

My initial journey with Bembala started a year back, when a friend of mine floated an idea of befriending survivors of violence within the premises of Vydehi hospital. Once the like-minds met, necessary permissions gained momentum and our dream baby Bembala already started taking baby steps towards the goal envisioned. As cases trickled initially, volunteers gained confidence in befriending. Word of mouth spread such that we even got referrals beyond the neighborhood.

Today, we are turning one year and so is my role as trainer, advisor, well-wisher, activist, ..... and today visualizing myself as part of Bembala, I commit to engaging with survivors of violence in whatever way I can. Let Bembala stride forward in leaps and bounds, stronger, bigger, wider as a network, and reap dividends for the noble cause for which it took birth; and as well grow and mature into a mighty force committed for the benefit of needy women and children.



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