

HCI NEWSLETTER

December 2025

The Hugging Club Of India
It's Okay To Be Not Always Okay!



When I think about 2025, it doesn't feel like a year to neatly sum up. It feels like a year that kept asking us to slow down and feel more.

At HCI, this year reminded us of something we already know but often forget: mental health work can't be rushed. People don't open up on timelines, and healing doesn't follow calendars either.

Soul Space was one of those moments that stayed with me. It wasn't about doing something big or impressive. It was about creating a room where people didn't have to perform, explain, or pretend to be okay. Watching people sit with their emotions—without judgement – quietly reinforced why spaces like these matter so much.

This year also marked 8 years of The Hugging Club of India. Saying that still feels unreal. Eight years of conversations, silences, trust, and simply showing up – again and again. We didn't celebrate it loudly. We paused, reflected, and felt grateful for how far honesty has carried us.

Being invited by Deloitte this year was another meaningful moment. Speaking about mental health and psychological safety in a corporate space felt like a quiet shift. A reminder that conversations once avoided are now being welcomed and that real change often happens without noise.

What stayed with me most in 2025 weren't events or milestones.

People spoke about things we usually keep hidden:

- how some mornings it feels impossible to get out of bed because of depression and anxiety
- the loneliness of losing parents, carrying anger, and feeling disconnected
- the fear of the future—of rent, salaries, and survival
- journeys through self-harm, childhood trauma, and body image struggles
- the difficult but necessary work of managing medication, reducing alcohol, and choosing better coping mechanisms

These weren't stories shared for sympathy. They were shared for honesty.

We spoke openly about mental illness, medication, healing, harmony in society, and how hope can exist even in difficult moments. What stood out wasn't advice – it was listening. We weren't just hearing words; we were truly hearing one another.

The presence of Manvendra Singh Gohil, Rajiv Dua, and many others added depth to the conversation. And one of the most moving moments came from Meenakshi, the owner of Roots Café, who not only offered warm hospitality and food, but also shared her own mental health journey. Her café stands as a space of inclusivity and dignity, where women and trans persons work unapologetically while honouring their mental health.

Another deeply inspiring moment this year was a heart-to-heart conversation with Gurvinder, who openly shared his journey of overcoming chemsex addiction. His courage, honesty, and commitment to helping others navigate similar struggles was a powerful reminder that recovery is possible and that lived experience can become a lifeline for someone else.

I also want to take a moment to thank Team HCI. This work isn't easy. It takes consistency, empathy, and a lot of emotional labour. Your hard work and commitment to creating real change may not always show up in numbers—but it shows up in lives. And that matters deeply.

Special thanks to our Directors Dipen and Nayeem, our CEO Bhavana, our in-house therapists Archana and Shilpa, and our volunteers Tariq, Kabir, Hemant, Aparijita, Vidhi, Kalindi, Arya, Sumit and Aniket.

And of course, heartfelt gratitude to our donors, psychiatrists, therapists, and counsellors for their continued support. Special thanks to Neha from Amaha and Kunal from Piroja for generously offering their spaces and believing in the work we do.

As we step into 2026, I feel thankful.

For the trust people place in us. For the team that shows up every day.

And for the reminder that healing doesn't need fixing - it needs space.

With warmth,

Umang



HCI NEWSLETTER

happy
happenings

December 2025



Happy Happenings

December reaffirmed that HCI is more than a calendar of events – it is a living, breathing community. A space where vulnerability is met with respect, where learning is shared, where joy and healing coexist, and where no one is expected to be “fixed” to belong.

As we step into a new year, HCI carries forward the same intention:

to listen deeply, include consciously, and continue holding space – together..

Month in Review

December was not just the end of a year for The Hugging Club of India – it was a month that reflected everything HCI stands for. Across conversations, learning spaces, nature outings, healing circles, and celebrations, the community continued to show up with honesty, courage, and care.

The month began with members coming together to reflect on the year gone by – sharing personal journeys of anxiety, growth, setbacks, acceptance, and resilience. These conversations reminded us that while experiences differ, the emotions behind them are often shared. Members spoke of finding their voice, learning to stop comparing, making peace with where they are in life, and slowly becoming more authentic. The collective listening and empathy reinforced what many expressed later – that HCI remains a rare space where people feel seen without being judged.



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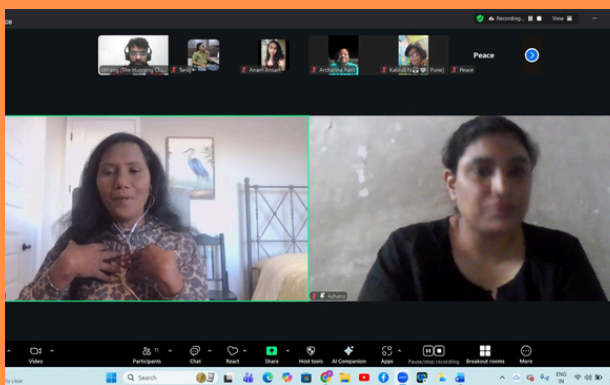


Meet-up @ McD, Bandra

Sharing Highs & Lows of 2025

Our December journey began with one of the most honest circles of the year. Members gathered to reflect on 2025 – not as a highlight reel, but as it truly was.

HCI is committed to removing the stigma around mental health and providing a safe space where people learn, accept, and grow. HCI is grateful to support individuals across the world by bringing mental health experts to them, creating enabling environments for recovery, and offering financial assistance for therapy and psychiatric medication to those in need.



Guest Ashana Sayed interacting with an HCI member, Shree Portnovo.

Guests of the Month



10th December
Inside a Child's World
By Ashana Sayed,
Psychologist



14th December
Mental Health and
Physical Health
By Rucha Shrikhade,
Psychologist



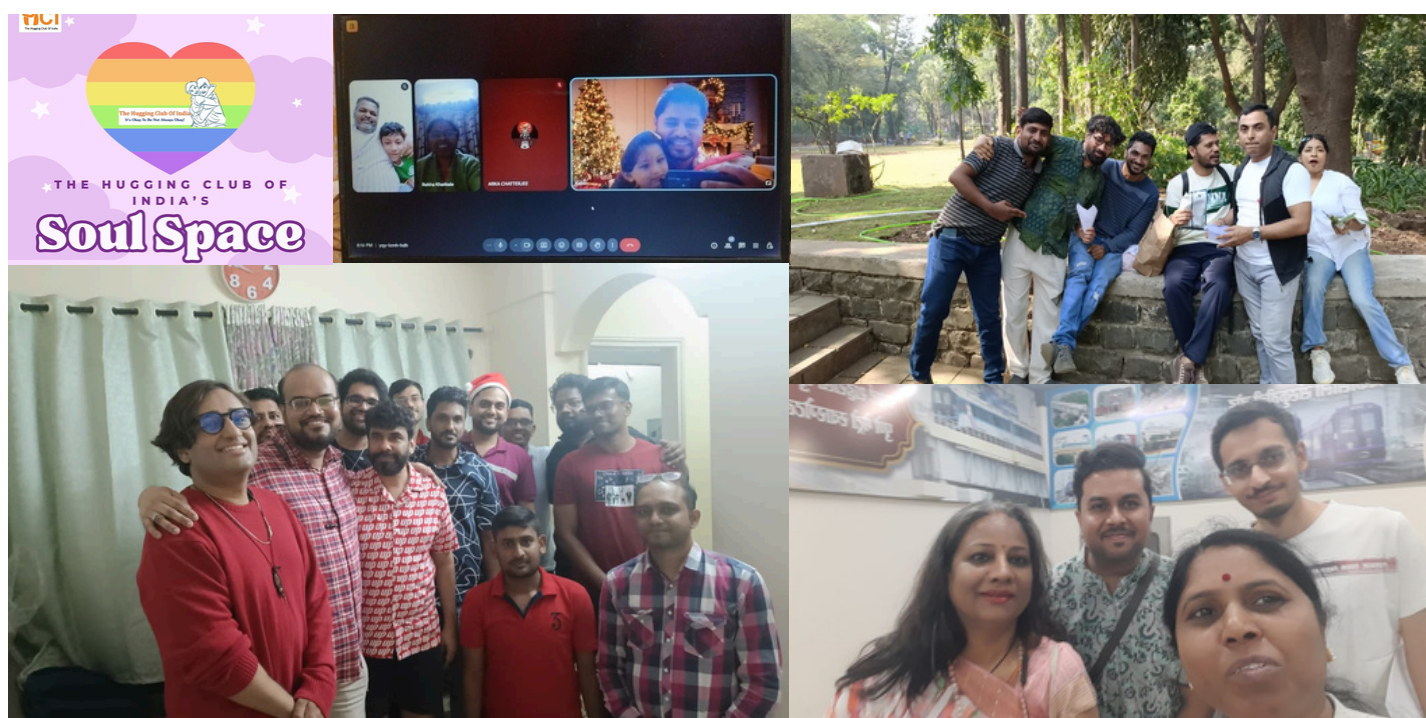
17th December
Living Life with Mental
illness
By Shilpa Jahagirdar, Life
Coach and Mental Health
Facilitator



As the month progressed, the focus expanded beyond conversation into connection and learning. A peaceful picnic amidst nature offered members time to unwind, laugh, and bond, creating memories rooted in simplicity and togetherness. Educational and mental health sessions explored how early life experiences shape adult emotional patterns, how stress and anxiety manifest physically, and how happiness can coexist with mental illness – not as perfection, but as compassion and presence. Members shared appreciation for these sessions being grounded, relatable, and deeply human rather than clinical or preachy.

December also marked the beginning of HCI Soul Space, a new mental health initiative aimed at creating gentle, accessible healing circles in public spaces. The response was heartfelt. Members spent an entire day together – listening, sharing, sitting in silence, and simply being present for one another. Many expressed that being heard without advice or judgement was healing in itself.

The month closed on a lighter, celebratory note with a post-Christmas potluck that captured the spirit of chosen family – full of laughter, games, playful drama, food, and warmth. It was a reminder that joy, too, is an important part of mental well-being.



Deloitte Impact Day: Colours of Inclusion



A defining highlight of December was HCI's collaboration with Deloitte for their Impact Day, a significant milestone for the organisation. The interactive session brought together HCI members and Deloitte employees to explore Mental Health and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion through art, dialogue, and storytelling.

The day unfolded with thoughtful structure and collaboration, allowing participants to engage meaningfully rather than passively. Through creative expression and shared stories, conversations around inclusion, allyship, lived experiences, and mental health emerged organically. Members appreciated the safe, respectful environment and the sincerity with which Deloitte employees participated.

What stood out most was the sense of mutual learning – where corporate professionals and community members connected as equals, listening to each other with openness and empathy. The session concluded on a reflective note, reinforcing the idea that inclusion is not a policy alone, but a practice rooted in everyday awareness and human connection.



Testimonials & New Year Greetings from members



I am grateful to be a part of the HCI community. HCI has been a source of learning, encouragement, and positive connection, helping members grow both personally and professionally. I truly appreciate the values and support shared within this platform. Wishing HCI and all its members a joyful, successful, and blessed New Year ahead. May the coming year bring growth, unity, and new opportunities for everyone.

Rowland Roy Talang, Student, Meghalya



HCI is a gentle and compassionate space where people feel safe to open their hearts and share their pain, especially in virtual settings. In moments of vulnerability, conversations become a source of strength, bringing calm, comfort, and the reassuring feeling that no one is alone.

I have personally seen the impact of HCI when someone I referred, who was struggling to find support, received a free psychiatry consultation through the platform. Beyond online connections, HCI also brings people together at a city level—particularly in Mumbai—where individuals meet, connect, and share their mental health journeys with honesty and courage. With two online sessions every week featuring experienced professionals and individuals who have walked through and overcome their own challenges, HCI continues to guide, support, and inspire.

As we step into 2026, I wish HCI continued growth and the strength to reach many more lives with empathy, hope, and healing.

Warm regards,

Ajeet Gulati

IT Project Manager, *Hyderabad



Impacts

HCI continued to provide vital support to its members:

- **Psychiatrist Consultations:**
5 people in recovery
- **Therapy/Counselling:**
10 lives touched
- **Medicine Support: 4 people aided**
- **Saved from suicide: 1 life saved**
- **20 people joined our support group**

Behind every number is a name. A story. A second chance.



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Members also celebrated personal wins – from sobriety achievements to new jobs, emotional breakthroughs, and courageous steps toward authenticity. Gratitude poured in for Archana Rani and Umang, whose compassion continues to hold the community together.

Here's to more healing and connection ahead.

