

When we started Guftagu two years ago in Jan-Feb 2021, right from what we call ourselves to the kind of work we wanted to do, we knew that we wanted relationality to be the focus. Both of us, Aryan and Sadaf are margnialized, either by religion, sexuality or gender, so we understand intersectionality, but we also understand the need for depth. Relationality is not the same as empathy or agreeing with our clients - relationality is more nuanced. It is about building a safe enough relationship, but also, using that safe and stable space for gentle and tough challenges because if we are only agreeing with our clients, we are doing them a disservice. They don't need Yes Men. They need a relationship where they are truly understood so that, with the natural defenses being lower - they can together with the therapist, look at their own shadow sides and blindspots. We believe that relationality is what allows us to be fully human, because we consider it NORMAL that we challenge the people we love and we disappoint them. And so, if therapist and client cannot disappoint each other, if there are no ruptures, is it a real relationship? A real relationship would be that where ruptures can be repaired together and that is what clients do not get developmentally, which they can get in the relationship with us - rather than both the client and the therapist always tiptoeing around the real wounds.





Therapeutic Lenses/Modalities

Depth psychotherapy: We believe in the role of the unconscious in guiding some of our patterns and behaviors, and we feel that dreams, behaviours that we repeat unconcsiously, transference and counter-transference are the window to understanding the mind. Neuroscience supports this finding as can be seen in the award winning work of Dr. Daniel Kahneman as illustrated by him in his book, "Thinking, Fast and Slow". While we use tools from approaches like Narrative Therapy, Queer Affirmative Approaches, Cognitive Therapies, Acceptance Therapies and Arts Based Therapies, we feel

that it is the relationship that heals, and this healing is slow, nuanced and takes the person towards wholeness and therefore, takes time.

Attachment theory: Attachment theory is framework that looks at at attachment with primary caregivers not just as a social need of the child, but a survival need too. This means that attachment isn't just fluffy stuff but quite important to how we see ourselves, the world and the relational patterns we repeat which then creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since we take our attachments everywhere, they will come in the therapeutic relationship too - with clients struggling to take up space or breakdown in front of therapists, if they've had to do it elsewhere, but also other less likeable aspects like testing the therapist with cancelations, late shows, no shows, less engagement and so on. While we have to see if there are organic or logistical reasons for any of this, we also have to keep an eye out for attachment based reasons. Once we confirm it is related to attachment, it is important not to chastise the person, but rather to hold what is coming up in the relationship patiently, and gently challenge it.

Interpersonal neurobiology: Newer findings confirm that we regulate with people and not by ourselves, so this "individual as an island" idea is pretty unscientific, and so, our healing has to be relational and within community. Clients/patients need to have many social resources and not just the therapist. Another finding of neurobiology that we hold dear is that the brain exists in layers - our oldest brain checking for safety, the middle layer checking for connection and only the most recent layer is able to understand language - therefore, the top down approach of talking does not always work - we have to involve therapeutic presence, body, the arts, breath and many other tools in order to go beyond cognition and verbal problem solving.



Our thoughts on various crucial stakeholders



We view each stakeholder in our work equation as equally important: Client/patient, therapist, founders/leaders, trainees and collaborators, admin and social media team.

Clients/Patients: We feel that clients/patients have both the lived experience to know the best about their lives, the agency to choose AND certain patterns and blindspots coming in from their pasts which we can help with. We don't need to rescue or coddle clients but we don't need to leave them without handholding either. Sometimes, a directive approach is needed and we don't shy away from it, but we do limit it so as to not stop the person's growth.

Therapists: They come from their own wounds and traumas into this field, and self work and community support of other therapists is crucial to do this work healthily. Its easy to become preoccupied and sacrificial or coming in from a pedestalized position. This has to be actively checked. Its also important to get out from the therapist self ad experience life, do things in the physical world, be messy, make mistakes and be a regular person, all in all, outside the therapy room.

Leaders and Founders: In the last two years, we have understood the power and freedom of having no one above you to answer to, but we have also seen how omnipotence is projected on leaders, employees expecting you to read their minds at times or regular behaviours being misinterpreted as judgements or rejections can happen quite easily. We have strived to manage this with being more transparent, setting better boundaries, taking 350 degree feedback and knowing our limits.

Trainees and collaborators: We are always overjoyed whenever we are invited to train, to do a podcast or write an article with others because we believe the true growth of all of us is via give and take, not just of information and perspective, but by an exchange of energies. We are glad that these invitations help us to keep in check some outdated or abstract ideas and ensures we don't function in some intellectual silos but are in touch with ground realities and other peoples' point of views.

Admin and social media team: Often these team members are considered the most replaceable in organizations, which is quite sad because they are often the foundations on which the whole structure is built. For us, our admin is the voice that the client meets first, and unfortunately, some clients do berate them because "he's not the doctor, just the peon" ideology. Admin has had to take a lot of unrealistic requests, projections and even misbehaviour from some clients which makes us really sorrowful. However, we are glad that we have given them the leeway to operate in a way to guard their self esteem and mental health and deliver in the best way possible. Our social media team is responsible for our cute and relatable posts that make people laugh and take mental health perspectives in without it becoming too heavy and technical. They help those who cannot come to therapy - by democratizing the message of Guftagu, and we are thankful to them.



Services: Therapy and Supervision



Therapy Services

We've been operational for 2 years now: Feb 2021-Feb 2023

- No. of sessions a month: 150-350 depending on team size at a given time.
 - 510 people reached out to us and we could serve 356, so we have an onboarding rate of 63%
- Why were people referred or put on waitlist? The time of the preferred therapist did not match. Or the wait was too long.
 - Sometimes, we did not have the requisite expertise.
- Type of sessions and duration: Around 95% are individual sessions, 2% family, 3% couples sessions
 - Anywhere between 60-90% are retained (among various therapists), sessions range from 6-10 sessions on the lower end to 40+ sessions on the higher end.
- **Common issues:** Family and childhood attachment trauma, work stress, relationships, anxiety, depression, self esteem.

Metric	Percentage/numeric marker	Description
Still in therapy?	85% of the clients who filled our feedback form are still in therapy	Dropouts happened due to therapist and time/slot match issues or clients having to go back to work from office
How many sessions?	69.3% had 1-10 sessions, 30.85% had 20-40 sessions or more	Typically sessions that got continued had themes of deep childhood attachment trauma that needed longer to process.
Quality feedback?	4/5 or 5/5	Most of the participants gave ratings of 4 on 5 or 5 on 5 with regards to administrative aspects of being connected to the therapist, booking system; as well as for therapist fit (feeling understood, safe, gently challenged and so on) and therapeutic results (self-understanding, identifying hidden patterns, behaviour change).

Some testimonials:

"She (Seerat) is full of positivity and helps me become the same"

"I like that Nijora is very non-judgemental and listens to my problems. Although its couple therapy, both me and my partner feel like she is on both our sides and understands both our perspectives. Which I exceptionally admire."

"The therapeutic relationship was established very smoothly between us. She understood all my concerns. It was saddening to know that she needs to leave Guftagu. But I am super glad to got assigned to Rhea Bajaj as she was available back then and the rapport got established instantly. I met the goals with which I've initiated to avail therapy".

"Guftagu is the best as it actually gave me the safe space to pour my heart out. I highly recommend it to anyone who is willing to take therapy."

"Nijora is extremely helpful. She listens to everything we have to say very patiently without judgement and gives very valuable inputs when necessary. We already see a lot of improvements after very few sessions."

"I am grateful that I was so lucky with my therapist in the first go. Sadaf's approach and knowledge is something I admire so much. She has always been accommodating even for the brief periods of a month or two, that I had to discontinue therapy. She has provided me an extremely safe space, without judgements.

She (Namisha) is extremely patient and understands it well whenever I am confused

"The counselor Simran understood my problems and helped me get better"

"Made me feel comfortable and helped me open up"

"It's just been a couple of sessions but it's been a good experience so far. Looking forward to continuing with my therapist for long".

Supervision sessions and trainings for our therapists:

In order to help our therapists work in a balanced way and help the clients in the best possible manner, we do team supervision, once in two weeks. Relevant readings or videos are shared in responses to therapists sharing the cases they need support with. All the therapists, including the founders ask questions to help the therapist reflect and share their own points of view. We also make a point to share milestones and successes and play some team games in order to make the supervision an accepting space.

Supervision Services

Sadaf also provides supervision to individual mental health professionals outside Guftagu, and as of now also to counselors in the organization Nazariya QRFG. Her supervision has received a feedback rating of 4 or 5 out of 5 on question of supervision support and help in the growth of the therapist. Some of the participants have written the following:

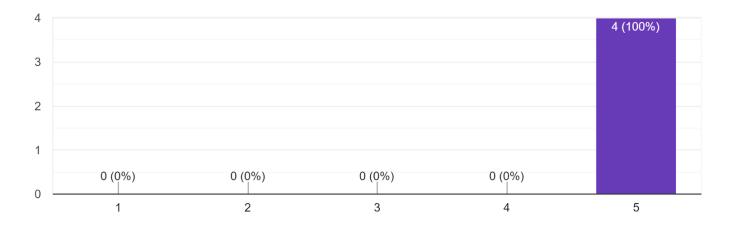
"I really enjoy my rapport with Sadaf, she is warm and yet challenges me to introspect and hone my abilities where I need to. I am grateful to have found someone whose style resonates with mine."

"Thank you for all the insightful sessions we've had so far. Hope to continue working with you and find a balance between our schedules."

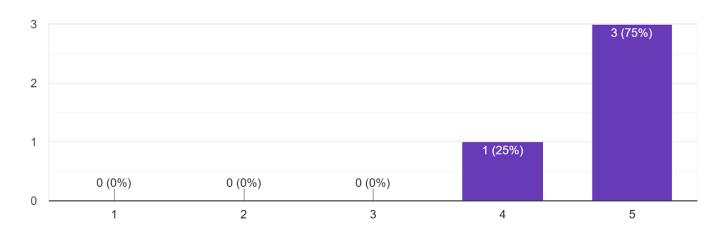
Below are some quantitative responses:

The supervisor was able to provide insights in a helpful way

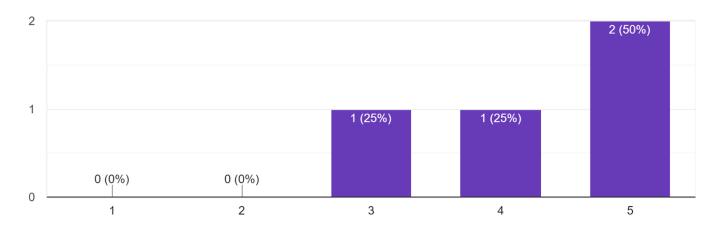
4 responses



My supervisor shared accessible resources and got me excited for learning 4 responses



My supervisor helped me feel confident in my skills at the same time being open to learning ⁴ responses





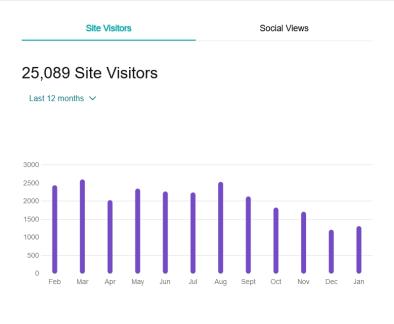
Website metrics and pointers

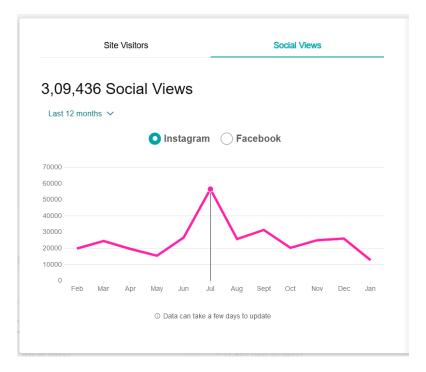


Website Visits

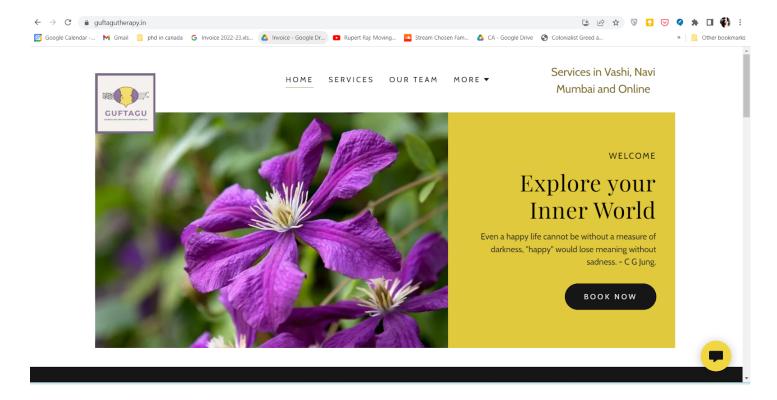
Our business is entirely through word of mouth and we do not spend on ads. In working for startups, Sadaf, our founder understood that mental health cannot scale like other businesses nor can it be advertised that way. What works for us is to write, share and talk about relatable ideas and work with existing clients well in therapy, which in turn helps other clients to turn up via referral. These our website visits and instagram visits via the website:

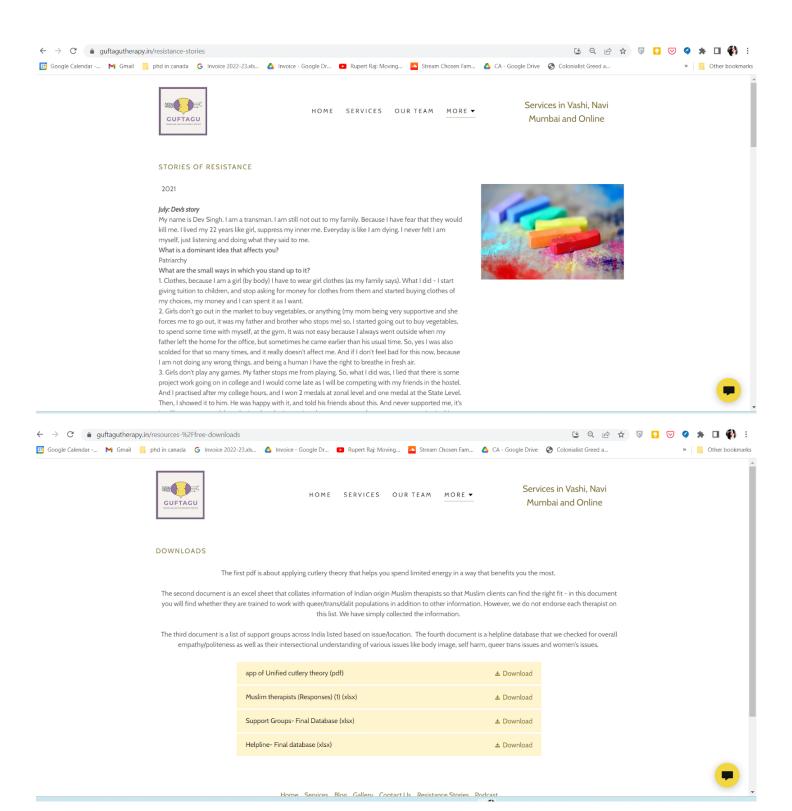


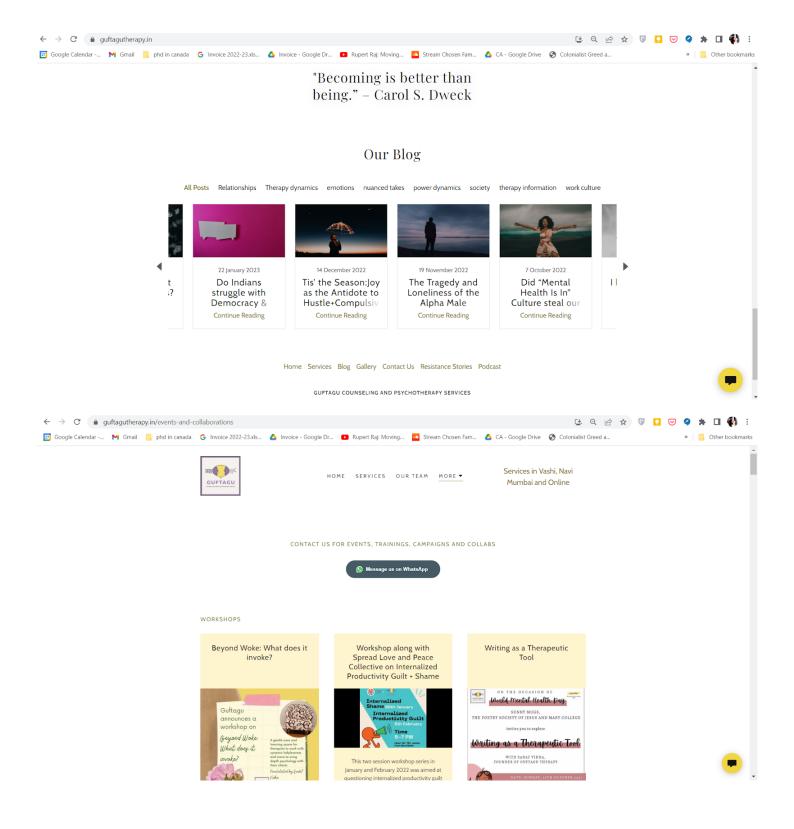




Some interesting sections on our website are: the free resources page, the stories of resistance page, the events page and the blog. Throughout the website we also use a lot of quotes and descriptions in simple language to help people understand our work.







According to Godaddy.com, where we have built our website, our website has a score of 99/100 when it comes to gaining traffic and sustaining visitors, compared to websites of similar fields/services.



Social Media, Blog, Newsletter and Podcast



With our social media, we aim for ease of understanding, relatability and fun, rather than quick diagnostic checklists. This ensures that people feel safe and welcome to try out our therapy services. Participative campaigns like translation tuesdays and therapy thursdays help people feel empowered to co-create with us. We want people to know how mental health and emotional landscapes look like in the everyday, rather than some abstract idea out there.

Followers	Impact/Visibility	Stats on best performing posts
Instagram - 1815, twitter - 160, Linkedin - 248 (organic)	Instagram: 3589 people reached in the last 30 days, and all time 12.1 k people reached. Out of these 2338 reached in the last 30 days are our followers and from the all time 12.1k, 1268 are our followers.	Instagram: Reels (over 10 k views), Posts (3098 views), stories (886), Vidoes (91).
Demographics (instagram)	Increase (instagram)	Linkedin
Top cities: Mumbai, Delhi,		

Blog, newsletter and podcast

Blog:

Once a month

Themes like democracy and therapy, what one's anxiety is trying to say, and so on.

Average click through rate - 57%

Newsletter: (Margins ki baat)

Once a month

Subscribers - 477

Average open rate: 30% (industry avg around 15-20%)

Highest - 89% ("quitting as a survival skill for 2022")

Podcast: (guftagu ki gutargoo)

7 big episodes, 1 small episode.

Maximum listens on any one episode: 89 (Episode - Does everyone want to heal?)

It was heard in India, UK, US, UAE, Italy.

In October we had 372% more listeners than the average. This was the month of "Pyar Deewana Hota hai - how childhood attachment wounds show up in adult romantic and other relationships" episode.

According to spotify, we are in the top 25% most followed podcasts. It was one of the 15% most shared podcasts globally



Trainings, workshops, invitations and nuanced projects



Trainings

We have done the following trainings over the last two years:

Type of training	Organizations	Topic	Date(s)
Recurring	Manntalks, Rubaroo, The Plane Jar, Guftagu, Nazariya	Queer and Trans Affirmative Work/Therapy	-
One time	COSAS	Termination	June 2021
One time	Unbottle emotions	Imperfect Allyship	June 2021
One time	Mann Talks	Body Image	December 2021
One time	Mann Talks	Substance use	December 2021, July 2022
One time	MindClan and WeTheYoung	7 day training on Mental health and gen z	May 2021
One time	Seeds of Awareness	Abuse Prevention	August 2021
One time	Group of South African Working Women	Decolonising mental health	2021
One time	Dance for Mental Health (Therapist Team)	Working with Indian context	2021
One time	Family Planning Association of India	Burnout and Queer and Trans issues	August 2022
Recurring	Stand We Speak, Akanksha Foundation	Working with queer and trans folx	Nov 2022, Jan 2023
One Time	TheMindClan.com x Guftagu	Mental Health is Political	August - September 2022

Workshops

Type of training	Organization	Topic	Dates
One time	Guftagu	The Shit series: an arts based workshop to process difficult feelings around the pandemic, productivity and procrastination	8, 15, 22nd August 2021
One time	Spread love and peace	Internalized productivity guilt and shame	29th January, 2022 and 5th February
One time	Guftagu	Beyond woke, what does it invoke: to help therapists deal with the helplessness they feel while working with clients from marginalized communities	14th May 2022
One time	Sunny Mugs	Writing as a therapeutic tool	10th October 2021
One time	Guftagu	Making sense of bizarre behaviours	2021
One time	Guftagu/Sadaf	Use of reflections and metaphors in therapy	2021

One time	ACCELERATE program	Aryan was invited to conduct a workshop as a consultant for a project focused on creating novel treatment models of HIV testing, prevention, treatment and care among trans populations.	2022
One time	Guftagu and Mind Clan	Mental health is political	2022

Support groups

Type of group	Organizations	Topic	Frequency
---------------	---------------	-------	-----------

One time	Xavier's College, Mumbai	Expressive arts therapy program	Thrice a week
One time	Spread love and peace	Collaboration with Spread Love and Peace to provide support groups and trainings to those whose intimate lives, personal space and gender/sexual expression spaced have been stifled by the pandemic	Once in two weeks
One time	Guftagu	Transmasculine	Once in two weeks
One time	Guftagu	Neurodivergence	Once in two weeks

Panels/conferences/Invitations

Organization	Topic	Dates

Colgate Palmolive	Difference in mental health struggles for LGBTQ+ people	10th October 2021
BALM and JMC	Inequality in mental health and using writing as a therapeutic tool	10th October 2021
A Room to Read and the Chhattisgarh Government Education Department	Aryan's consult on curriculum development on Gender for children 12- 15 years of age	October 2021
Rubaroo Foundation	Panel discussion for child safety from various lens	20th November 2021
Belongg	Co-founders part of a round table to understand how mental health can be more accessible for those on the margins	Feb 2022
Samavesh Chamber of Commerce	Impact of COVID-19 on LGBTQ+ businesses	29th January 2022
BBC's World program "Work-life India"	Impact of Bulli Baii on survivors of such bullying and harrassment	Jan 2021
Rachna Restore Awards	Rachna Restore Award for "Mental health beyond boundary"	December 2022
Suno India's Podcast	Co-founders featured on a podcast episode on "How queer affirmative counseling is transforming therapy for queer people"	Aug 2022

Article authored by September 2022 Tarshi's PlainSpeak employees "Why Play by the Rules" Feature in an article, "Is Oct 2022 therapy inherently Swaddle casteist" Class on "Beyond Trans 2022-2023 Affirmative Therapy" (Aryan); "Neurodivergence" TISS (Sadaf); Community Mental Health (Sadaf and Aryan) Class on Community September 2022 Mental Health; Psycho-**Xaviers** oncology

Nuanced Projects

Title	Frequency	Description
Titte		2 30 31 15 21 31 1

Kafila Internship program	One time (January 2023)	An internship program focused on culture, trends and community psychology.
Therapy Thursday	Weekly	Memes based on therapy using bollywood songs
Translation Tuesday	Weekly	Hindi phrases to highlight various understandings that exist of one phrase
Campaign on Survivors of CBT	One time	CBT has been the most well known therapeutic orientation of the modern world but its downsides are not highlighted in the empirical research shared. This was a way to bring peoples', clients' voices into the narrative.
Campaign on Therapy Evaluation	One time	The mystical secret of not understanding how effective therapy is for folks gets frustrating. This was a way to encourage more understanding of their therapy relationships.
Muslim Therapists database	One time	Database of Muslim therapists for the community to have easier access to therapists with lived experience
Database for helplines and support groups	One time	There is difficulty finding helplines that are empathetic and helpful, same for support groups. We personally tested and

did the research to collate

these lists.

Newsletter "Margins ki

Baat"

Monthly Highlight queer stories and

literature by marginalised

groups.

Podcast "Guftagu ki

Gutargoo"

Monthly

Podcast on topis related to

emotions, relationships and

mental health

"Mental Health for all" campaign for World Mental Health Day 2022

One time Aim was to make mental

health a dinner table

conversation and speak to people from different social and economic sectors of

society.

One time

Nuance in Mental Health, 12 month program

We brought voices from various careers, sectors and themes to highlight the

nuances from where we can approach mental health



We practice what we preach

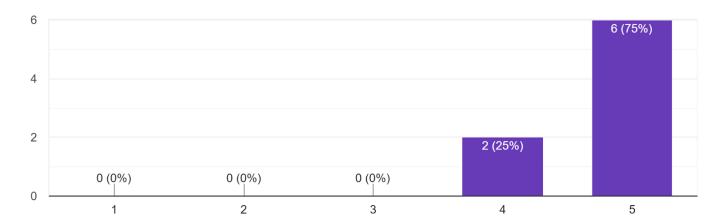


Team feedback

The team at Guftagu aren't just our therapists, interns or social media managers. They are an important part of the fabric of who we are. On that note, we try to check in with the team every 6 months/1 year if they have the requisite freedom, work life balance, guidance and satisfaction while working here. We check with them about client work, supervision, trainings and so on Here are some of their responses:

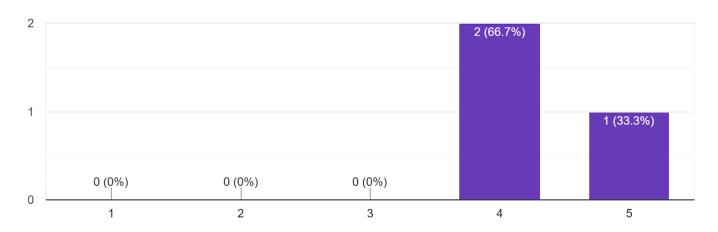
Do you feel respected and belonged in the organization?

8 responses



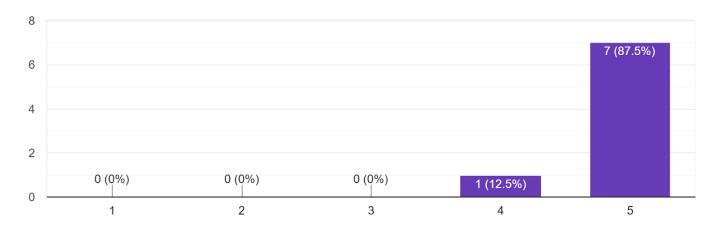
Do you feel adequately guided by the leadership provided?

3 responses

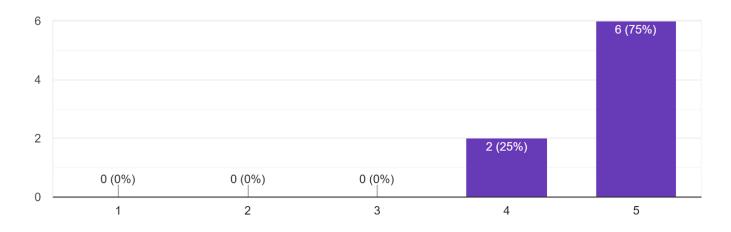


Do you have the creative freedom or work related freedom you need? i.e., not feeling micromanaged

8 responses



Do you have the freedom to reschedule your hours and take leaves? 8 responses



Adequate training and guidance

There is a month long training and hand holding process to help therapists answer their questions in the first few months of joining. We have a detailed contract and documents on joining and starting protocols. Additionally, as founders we always have an open door policy for doubts, concerns and requests of support. Mock calls within the team help them to get to know each other and break the ice.

Healthy, Fun Workplace

WORK LIFE BALANCE

We ensure that work conversations are limited to 11 am to 6 pm, which are our operational hours. We also ensure that no therapist is having more than 12 - 15 sessions a week because beyond this can cause burnout. We routinely plan game nights, office gatherings and small gifts for secret santa and diwali. Our leave policy is flexible and therapists are encouraged to take the leaves they need for self-care.

FUN TIMES WITH THE TEAM

When we plan our hangout calls or farewells, we have some fun elements like supervision bingo, or popular card games like "Where Should We Begin" or "Cards against Humanity". We also use arts based modalities like painting or music to create a healthy atmosphere.

Supervision pains and joys!

"Nothing is workingggg"	GOT TOTALLY DISTANCED FROM CLIENT (CAN'T RELATE)	ZONED OUT WHILE SOMEONE IS TALKING	STRUGGLED TO KEEP TABS ON CHAT COMMENTS
THEY GHOSTED ME:(:(:(HAD AN ANNOYING CLIENT	GOT FASCINATED BY A NEW CONCEPT	"MAYBE THEY ARE BETTER OF WITHOUT ME"
GOT TOTALLY IDENTIFIED WITH CLIENT	IMPOSTER SYNDROME	"AM I EVEN HELPING"	TOOK TIME GETTING USED TO A TEAM MEMBER AFTER MOCK CALL
HAD A "HAN, BUT" FEELING TO PEOPLES' RESPONSES	SHARED THE PAINS OF COUPLE THERAPY WITH ANOTHER THERAPIST	DREADED HAVING TO READ ANYTHING NEW	BOWLED OVER BY RUSHALI'S FEEDBACK

myfreebingocards.com

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

We provide a mental health allowance of Rs. 1000 per month for each team member as well as a health insurance cover of 1.5 lac for each team member. We hope that this helps the team feel safe and aligned with our vision of equal care for therapists as for our clients. Moreover, the leave policy, adequate breaks and limiting the amount of sessions also contributes to the wellbeing of the team.

SAFETY OF OUR TEAM WITH UNSUITABLE CIENTS

Sometimes we get clients who are not ready for therapy or who are unsuited to online work or who may downright be unsafe to our therapists either due to prejudiced attitudes, or what they want to work on is too close to the therapist's own wounds. We have a fixed slot system which brings in a stability to the work and therefore, clients who are not ready for deep work automatically get dropped

out. We see scheduling challenges as communication and we train our therapists to bring these up with clients in session. This leads to either a deeper bond and working through discomfort or it leads to a drop out - which is a good outcome because going beyond this stage would require a certain readiness for the client as a lot of wounds do come up. However, when its an absolute safety issue, we have a clear policy of referral and termination. Based on a case to case basis, we decide if they individual therapist should not see them (so they can be sent to others in the team) or is the client unsuited for a trust-based alliance altogether, in which case we terminate and give them resources to support them in their journey.





























To know more about us, visit our website, www.guftagutherapy.in or write to us at collabs@guftagutherapy.in (for collaborations, funding leads and working together) and guftagutherapy@gmail.com for service queries.

We are on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, with the name of Guftagu Therapy/Guftagu Counselling and Psychotherapy Services.

If you feel we are doing good work, please help us connect to ethical funding agencies as we would like to serve more marginalized folx and pay our therapists better. If you are someone in the media, do consider writing about our work.