



Sangath

iHEAR

Initiative For Health Equity, Advocacy
and Research

Newsletter

Reflecting on our 2025

Take a look back on 2025 with us—how our projects were shaped by and co-created with our communities; how we have been making a difference in disability & LGBTQIA+ mental health, advocacy and research; and the people leading the work at iHEAR.

Dear Friends of iHEAR,

2025 has come to an end and 2026 begins, bringing a new year of hope for iHEAR.

2025 was not an easy year for iHEAR. After four years of growth in people and projects, last year our team shrank to its lowest numbers in both. Behind these numbers, we faced a larger setback: a pullback in global health funding, especially related to health equity, with cascading impacts.

It was also difficult as another much more personal and individual tragedy struck iHEAR. A beloved colleague and friend, Bhakti, passed away after a prolonged struggle with cancer. Some of us were able to see her before she left us, some of us saw her family after, and a lot of us came together in her memory.

Finally, there was a wave of burnout across iHEAR—linked to relentless work over the last four years, combined with personal loss, mental health crises, relationship struggles, funding uncertainties, loss of opportunities, disability and health issues.

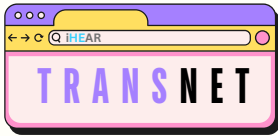
What has kept us going has been some rays of hope. Thanks to a kind feminist donor, we have received core funding, under the Anchoring iHEAR project—to reflect, rest and plan what iHEAR can look like in the coming future. In partnership with colleagues from Sangath Delhi, we embarked on a new project, YouthLEARN, taking us in a new direction. YouthLEARN looks at participation and lived experience leadership in the context of youth with mental health problems. Our work with the Gates Foundation has been extended for another year. And thanks to these projects, what was even better were the new colleagues who have now joined us. They have added new flavour, renewed enthusiasm, and energy into the team—much needed for many of us. Along with them, in a new composition, iHEAR looks at 2026 as its fifth year of existence with hope—as a year that would help us consolidate our learning and gains so far, reconcile our losses and strategise for the near future.

If you have been part of our work or have been following our work—enough to read this newsletter—we would love to hear your ideas on how we have been doing and what we could do differently. We have always benefited from the insights shared by all of you. You can write to us at ihear@sangath.in

Wish you a wonderful 2026!

hari, on behalf of the iHEAR team

Projects Concluded In 2025



The **TransNET Project** explored how intersectional identities shape experiences of transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals (TNBGD) in India facing technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV); and how we respond to the violence. This project was funded by the Feminist Internet Research Network, part of the Association for Progressive Communications.

We published the summary of our findings on GenderIT.org titled- **“iHEAR TransNet: Intersectional experiences of TFGBV among the trans, non-binary and gender diverse communities in India”**



Our researchers also wrote about the complexities in navigating their roles as researchers while also being counsellors and peers in their community- **“Liminalities of researcher positionality: Blurring roles as researchers, counsellors and peers”**



The full research paper and toolkit will be published in early 2026.

We presented the preliminary findings from the TransNET project at a **symposium on Queer-Trans Mental Health**. This was co-organised by TISS Mumbai, NIMHANS Bengaluru, SAATHII, IIT Palakkad & iHEAR-Sangath Bhopal.



“Care in Practice and Policy: Dialogues in Queer-Trans Mental Health” | Bangalore

26 TNBGD people joined us at a **co-design workshop & community consultation** to reflect on the findings of the project and share their inputs to co-design a toolkit to navigate online violence.



“Transforming the Tech” | Bangalore



Commission on the Status of Women 69 | United Nations, New York



PRIA Workshop | Delhi



Connector's Workshop | Bangalore



“Whose Bodies, Whose Data? Accountability in the Politics of Gendered and Queer Data” | Digital Citizen Summit, Hyderabad

Projects Concluded In 2025

The Mahei x iHEAR Project

The Mahei x iHEAR Project centered around mental health support, craft preservation & income generation through workshops. The workshops were held in collaboration with Mahei Centre- a women, queer & trans* led free skill-building collective based in Moirang, Manipur. Funded by the Direct Aid Programme in Kolkata.

“Joining this training has been not just a learning journey, but also mentally beneficial through the gatherings and collective sharings. **The space has been a resting place for transwomen like me. I hope bigger opportunities come in the future.**” - Kh. Machaton, trainee



The Mahei team’s exposure visit to **Solidarity Foundation at Bangalore, Karnataka.**



The Mahei team’s exposure visit to **Akam Foundation at Dibrugarh, Assam**



Handloom Weaving Workshop | Moirang



Makeup Workshop | Moirang



Advanced Tailoring Workshop | Moirang



Potloi Workshop | Moirang



Mental Health Workshop | Moirang



Mental Health Workshop | Moirang

Projects Concluded In 2025



Access Matters is an action-research project that trained people with disabilities to become Field Investigators (FIs) to conduct accessibility audits of public hospitals in Goa & Madhya Pradesh. Funded by the Azim Premji University.

Our work was **extensively highlighted across local newspapers**. Here are a few features:



Dissemination Training | Bhopal

At the **conclave**, we shared our findings & challenges with 50+ participants from disability rights orgs and created plans for advocacy at state & local levels.

The **Bhopal training** was held in collaboration with the National Health Mission in Bhopal where the iHEAR team held a half-day training for 130+ civil engineers.



Disability Conclave | Bhopal

We collaborated with the Disability Commissioner's office for our **Goa training**. The event included a sensitisation session from people with disabilities, research findings, a gallery view of site photos, and co-creating action plans with disability community members.



Dissemination Training | Goa



District Level Dissemination | MP



Dissemination Training | Goa



District Level Dissemination | MP

Led by our Field Investigators, the **district level meetings** typically brought together key government stakeholders, including the Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO), Civil Surgeon, and NHM engineers. Discussions focused on future actionable steps based on the audit reports from the project.

Projects Concluded In 2025



AffirmCare worked towards promoting LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in medical education in Kerala. We conducted 8 workshops from 2024-2025 for medical educators & students, along with a community consultation. Supported by the Australian Consulate General, Chennai.

We published a **guide for medical educators** in Kerala on LGBTQIA+ Affirmative Care.

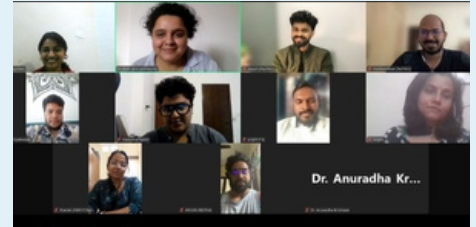


Ningalude Paricharanathile Nirabhedangal (Colours in Your Care) | June 2025

We also held a **virtual dissemination webinar** in June 2025, to share our experiences from the Affirmcare Project.



Faculty Workshop | Malabar Medical College, Ulliyeri



Consultation on LGBTQIA+ Healthcare Access in Kerala | Virtual



Session on Learning Methods by Dr. Khan Amir Maroof | AMCHSS, Trivandrum



Faculty Workshop | AMCHSS, Trivandrum



Faculty Workshop | Govt. Medical College, Calicut



Faculty Workshop | Dr Moopen's Medical College, Wayanad



Student Workshop | Govt. Medical College, Trivandrum



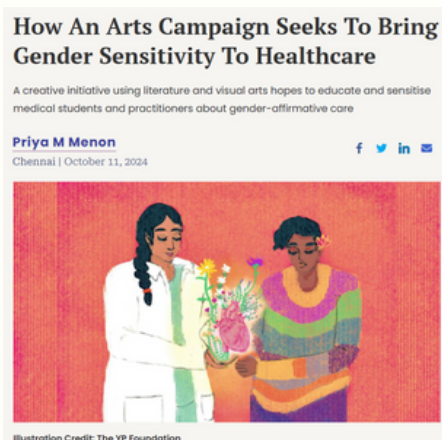
Student Workshop | Dr Moopen's Medical College, Wayanad

Projects Concluded In 2025



The **Queer Chronicles** project looked at collecting first-hand experiences of LGBTQIA+ persons across India within health and healthcare settings. Participants were mentored to develop their experiences into compelling narratives to be used by health professional educators to teach queer-affirmative competencies. Carried out in collaboration with KMC Manipal, UChicago, and UCMS Delhi. Funded by the Susan and Richard Kiphart Center for Global Health and Social Development.

Behan Box wrote an article highlighting the project and our efforts to make healthcare more inclusive.



After the symposium, the narratives were **uploaded to iHEAR's social media accounts**. The narratives are **currently being converted into a teaching guide as well as an online repository** that can be readily accessed by educators and trainers looking to incorporate them into their workshops and curricula.



Introductory Workshop | University College of Medical Sciences (UCMS), Delhi



Zine Making Workshop | Bhopal

Participants who were interested in sharing their experiences were then **mentored to develop narratives** over the course of several months to **create a pool of 18 first-person narratives**. Participants then exhibited their narratives and shared their experiences with medical educators and health professionals at UChicago, Delhi during the symposium.



Reflective Writing Workshop | Virtual



Behind the scenes of AV (audio-visual) shoot



"Advancing Queer and Disability Inclusion: iHEAR National Symposium on Health Humanities" | UChicago Delhi

New Projects

Anchoring iHEAR

iHEAR has received one year funding to reflect on our body of work and move towards a sustainable future. We will be focusing on creating and sharing accessible resources and research from all our projects. Our team will also get some much-needed support to rest, connect with each other, learn from other organisations, and chart our long-term plans.



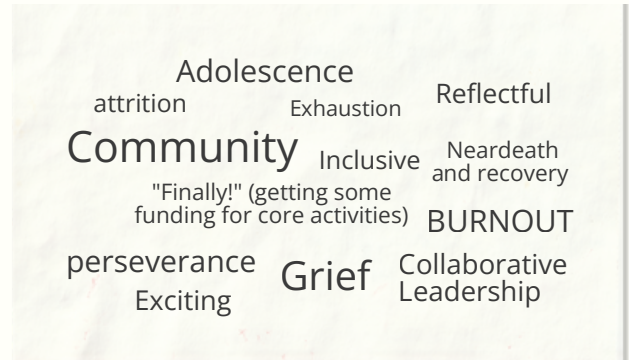
Youth-LEARN is an initiative by Sangath that brings together young people with lived experience of mental health issues and neurodivergence along with mental health researchers across India. The project focuses on building meaningful, ethical, and inclusive ways for youth with lived experiences to engage with and shape mental health research in India. Commissioned by the Wellcome Trust UK.



The EQUIP Project has been extended! This is a Sangath-BMGF initiative that looks at integrating considerations of ethics, equity, and community engagement in health research and programmes via workshops, consultations, and other resources.

From Our Team

What's **one word** for your **2025** at iHEAR?



What's something that **supported** you and something that made it **harder** in 2025?

1. people 2. people

Sangath's world class financial standards

- Support- team, friends, movies, music, coffee
- Harder- Grief, ADHD, fear
- Not being able to see people in person made it hard. But in person meetings that happened gave meaning.

People filling in payee registration and sending all their details on time somehow

Supported: Team, really appreciate cant be more grateful for a good team
Harder: Systemic Challenges,

- Starting therapy
- Working from home
- Being medicated
- Having weekly check-ins

Team members stepping in for so many things

Judiciary (supported)
Bureaucracy inaction (made it harder)

What supported me was having a team of passionate team players. What made things harder was taking up more work than I could manage

I started liking huddles from this year

Inter personal conflicts was hard but steps towards resolution helped

Task lists *Finance work*

Publications From iHEAR Projects

April | Gender IT

Liminalities of researcher positionality: Blurring roles as researchers, counsellors and peers

June | Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics

Building trust and equity in vaccine communication through community engagement

July | Indian Journal of Medical Ethics

Ethics in processing research participants' payments: navigating institutes' finance and administrative mandate

July | Medical Education

Unmasking the professional doctor archetype

October | Vaccines

Adapting the WHO BeSD COVID-19 Survey to Examine Behavioral and Social Drivers of Vaccine Uptake Among Transgender, Intersex, and Disability Communities in India.

November | GenderIT

iHEAR TransNet: Intersectional experiences of TFGBV among the trans, non-binary and gender diverse communities in India

Other Publications From Our Team

February | Indian Express

How India can become the Vishwaguru for transgender healthcare

April | Indian Journal of Medical Ethics

Assessment for inclusion: Promoting equity and justice in Disability Assessment Boards in India

June | Indian Express

Blanket ban on blood donation by trans people, sex workers: Ensuring blood safety is non-negotiable. But stigmatising policies is the wrong way to ensure it

July | International Journal of Mental Health Systems

Characterizing modifications to the mhGAP intervention guide during implementation in low- and middle-income countries using the FRAME

August | The Print

MBBS guidelines for students with disabilities reduce a life to a limb

October | Hindustan Times

Saving student lives with institutional interventions

October | PLOS Mental Health

Lived experience response to disinformation campaigns

November | PLOS Mental Health

Reparations not remuneration: Redefining the future of lived experience

December | The Journal of Inclusion and Disability

Beyond the Numbers: Reimagining Health through the Lens of Disability

December | Advances in Physiology Education

Bias in the basics: a multiloop framework for auditing foundational medical texts through an equity lens

December | ThePrint

Making doctors prove their disability all over again isn't how you curb fake certificates

December | The Wire

Re-Examined, Re-Verified: Maharashtra's Humiliation of Disabled Workers

Dr. Aqsa Shaikh & Dr. Satendra Singh also appeared in podcasts. Dr. Aqsa also gave a speech at a TEDx event.



Scan to view all publications and videos

Our Achievements & Recognitions



Sangath was accepted into the W.H.O. Disability Health Equity Network as a result of Sangath’s long-standing work with persons with disabilities. The iHEAR team applied on behalf of Sangath.



Dr. Satendra Singh received the W.H.O. SEARO Public Health Champion 2025 Award in the individual category for championing disability inclusion in health systems and medical education.



Dr. Anant Bhan & Dr. Harikeerthan Raghuram were invited to London School of Economics (LSE), UK to speak about “Co-Designing Inclusive Healthcare for LGBTQIA+ And Disability Communities in India- the iHEAR Initiative”



Dr. Aqsa Shaikh was appointed to the jury for The Pride Fund India. The Pride Fund India looks at providing consistent funding for grassroots level LGBTQIA+ organisations to create lasting impact.



Dr. Harikeerthan Raghuram was awarded the India Health Policy and Systems Research Fellowship. Their proposed research under this fellowship is on “Participatory Action Research to Develop Principles for Trans and Gender-Diverse-Inclusive Physical Infrastructure in Hospitals”.



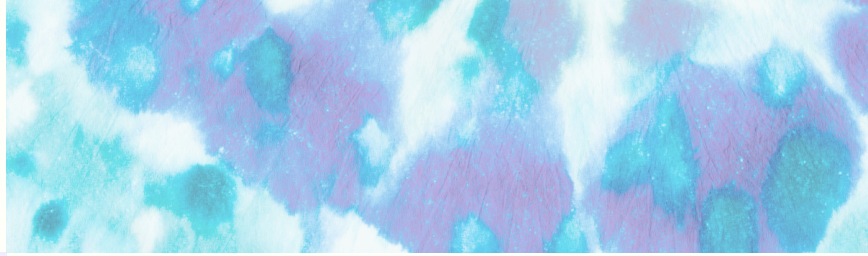
Dr. Aqsa Shaikh was appointed by the Supreme Court to the National Task Force on Mental Health of Students and Prevention of Suicides in Higher Education Institutions.



At the 7th Global Mental Health Summit, Parth Sharma co-presented their paper on “From Policy to Practice: Lived Experience Researchers Assess W.H.O’s Mental Health, Human Rights and Legislation: Guidance and Practice.” They were appointed the 1st Deputy Principal Coordinator for Movement for Global Mental Health, and moderated two research presentations.



In September 2025, iHEAR was among 30 non-binary and gender non-conforming activists from South and Southeast Asia who convened as the first cohort of a regional alliance to guide inclusive advocacy, and gender-expansive practices. From iHEAR— Joshua Mark George was on the organising committee and Sharin D’Souza attended the convening.



Welcoming Our New Joinees



Munira Electricwala | MSc.
Clinical Psychology



Angela Melanie Rego | PGDP
Dance Movement Therapy

Saying Goodbye To...



Fateh/ Anoushka Virk



Gazala Parveen



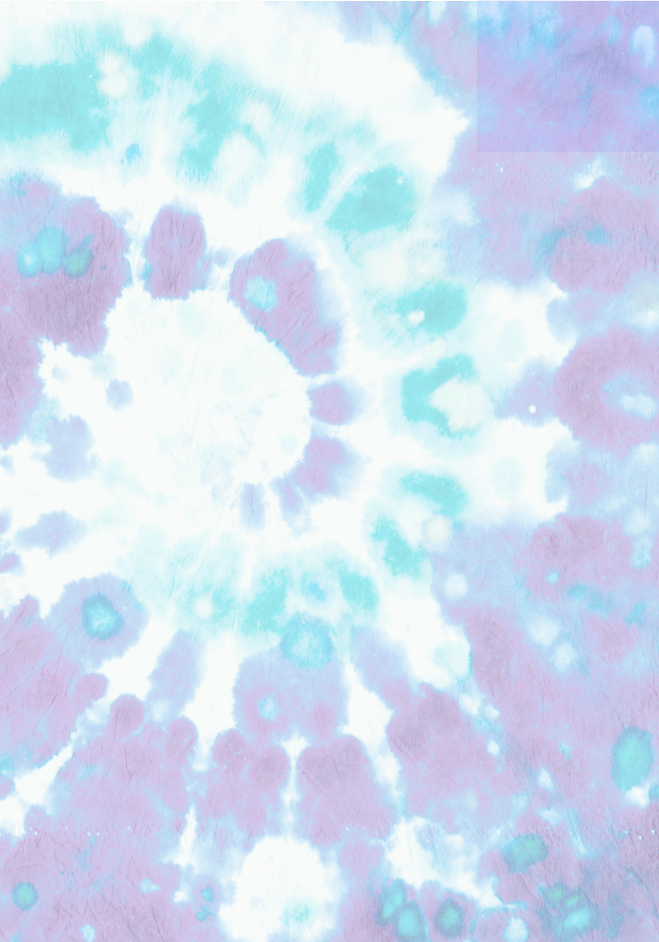
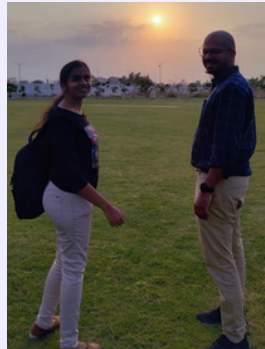
Moon/ Muskan



Rajan Negi



Shilpee Verma

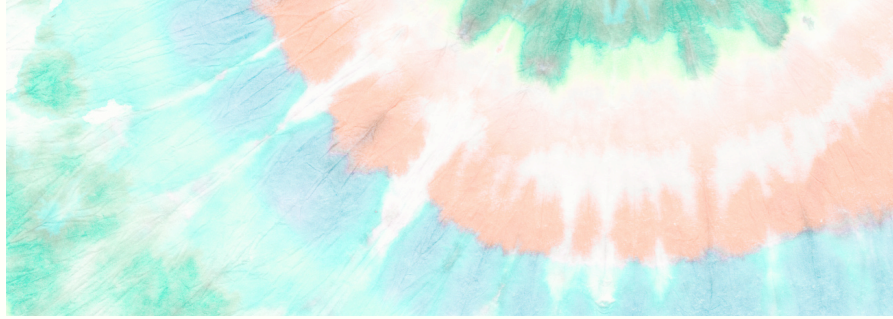


Remembering Bhakti Ghatole

Bhakti joined iHEAR in 2021 as a Research Assistant and worked across multiple projects such as VaccinEquity 1 & 2, and Access Matters. In 2025, Bhakti passed away after a prolonged struggle with cancer.

Bhakti - we love, miss and hold on to your wit, conviction, wisdom, and your incredible capacity for love. And what is grief, if not love persevering?

Snapshots From Our Year



The People Who Made iHEAR in 2025

Aanandh C Rajappan, Aashish Goyal, Abha Khetrapal, Abhijit Murugkar, Abhishek Kumar, Adithya Krishnamoorthy, Aindriya Barua, Aiswarya S, Akash Mohan, Akhilesh Gurjar, Akhilesh Mishra, Amit, Amita Prabhu Singh, Anand Malakar, Anamika, Anant Bhan, Ananya, Aneesh Basheer, Angela Melanie Rego, Anjali, Anshul Gondale, Anusuya Bhabhi, Anut, Anuradha, Anushka Banerjee, Aqsa Shaikh, Aradhna Tiwari, Arjun Geetha, Aritra Chatterjee, Arundhati Gupta, Aryan Somaiya, Bala, Bala Shanthi, Bhakti Ghatole, Bhavya Malhotra, Bidyalaxmi Naorem, Bittoo, Brian Callender, Busaina Shah, Celine, Chand, Chaitanya Likhite, Chayanika Shah, Chenjulakshmi PV, Chris, Daniella, Darshani, Debarati Das, Deepak Nema, Deepti Agrawal, Devnidhi Joshi, Diana Bichanga, Dheeraj Singh, Dhriti Mittal, Eesha Lavalekar, Faisal, Fateh/ Anoushka V, Gaurav Prateek, Gazala Parveen, Geet Sahu, Giriraj Singh, Gulnoza, Guru Pawaskar, Hameeda, Harikeerthan Raghuram, Harish, Harshawardhan Shrotri, Hayley MacGregor, Hemakshi, Hemam Puja Devi, Himanshu, Ishita Gupta, Jackson Wangkhem, Jade, Jamal, Janvin Cleetus, Jayakumar C, Jayasree, Jayesh, Jithesh, John Kennedy Tekcham, Joshua Mark George, Kadambari Patil, Kamlesh, Kapil Kumar, Kate Hopkins, Kavz, Keith, Khan Amir Maroof, Kinjal Designs, Kiran Patidar, Krishanu, KP, Kumam Davidson Singh, Khushboo, Laishram Inaobi Singh, Lalit Khatak, Lava, Mahadev Sawant, Manasa Veluvali, Manika Kapoor, Mario, Marshall Chin, Maya Sharma, Meenal Sawant, Meghajit Shijagurumayum, Meeteileima Khumukcham, Meredith Dockery, Midhun, Mimansa Khanduri, Mohammed Ali Khan/Momo, Mohd Faisal Nawaz, Moirangthem Rohana, Mona Sharma, Moon/Muskan Pradhan, Munira Electriwala, Namdeo Dongare, Naseema, Natasha Agarwal, Navjeevan Singh, Nikhil Nayyar, Nishant Bajpai, Omprakash Ahirvar, Owais, P. Rajasekharan, Pabitra Chowdhury, Padma Lakshmi, Parth Sharma, Pattie, Payal Bansal, Pawan, Pooja Nair, Prashant Verlekar, Pratima Singh, Priya Karekar, Priyanka Das, Prijith, Rachna Khare, Rajan Negi, Ram, Ramki, Rani, Rashid Shaikh, Ravindra Chauhan, Reonia, Reyansh, Riddhi Dastidar, Rishiraj Singh, Ritash, Ritu, Rob Anderson, Robb, Robinson Isaac, Rohit Mehra, Sabina Mirchandani, Sadam Hanjabam, Salik Ansari, Salma, Saloni Sidana, Samagata Foundation, Sandeep Rajak, Sandham Roji Devi, Sanghamitra Acharya, Sanjay Nema, Satendra Singh, Serene Lim, Shailesh, Shampa Sengupta, Sharin D'Souza, Shilpee Verma, Siddarth, Siddhi Kandolkar, Sivakami M, Smitha Sadasivan, Subhash Vashisht, Sudarshan R Kottai, Sunil Khatak, Sunil Menon, Sunil Pant, Sunita Sheel Bandewar, Suneeta Krishnan, Suraj, Suraj Bansal, Suresh Sharma, Swati Tiwari, Sweta Pal, Syamala Gidugu, Taha Haaziq, Tanvi Kanchan, Theresa Sommers, Thejaswini, Thoinao Heisnam, Tigist S. Hussen, Thomas, Uma Shankar, Upreet Dhaliwal, Urvashi, Uttanshi, Vaani, Vandita Morarka, Vijay Nallawala, Vijayarajamallika, Vinayak, Vishant Nagvekar, Yamini, Yatish Vernekar, Zainab Shaikh

We're sorry if we missed names of any of our friends, colleagues or collaborators.
Our thanks extends beyond this list and to all who have been part of our journey.



Reach Out to Us!

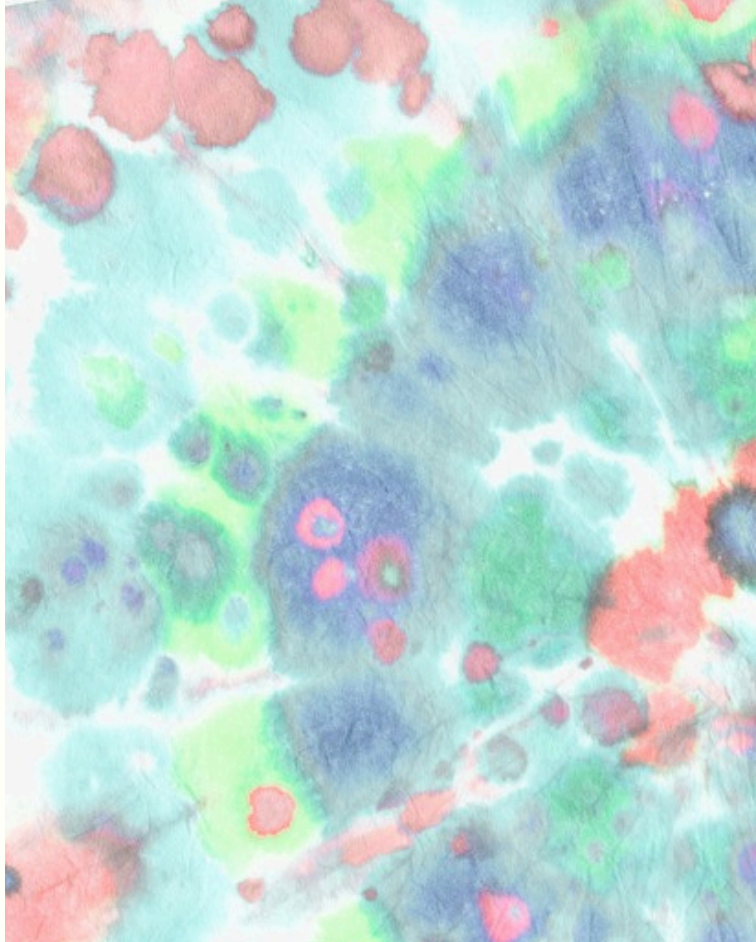
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**Thank you and hope you
have a great 2026!**