

## **“I can see a new ME”**

*By Arti Manchanda Grover*

“The metamorphosis was beyond my expectations,” said Kanchan, a student from grade nine of government senior secondary school in village Bhandwada in district Alwar, Rajasthan. Kanchan was a toddler when she started attending the village school which has a current enrolment of 351 students—176 girls and 175 boys. Kanchan has seen the school improve somewhat over the years; however, the most recent transformation has been a special one. She said, “Attending school is always fun now. The new look is inspiring in many ways, and I am looking forward to be a part of digital literacy and life skills training that will be held after school hours.” Hope brings a shine to Kanchan’s eyes, as she says, “I can see a new ME!”

Bhandwada School is quite a topic of talk these days, and the schoolchildren feel proud to be a part of the conversation. The students and teachers are very happy to see their school buildings renovated and repaired. The school now has a rainwater-harvesting system, clean drinking water, separate toilets for boys and girls, sanitary kitchen facilities for meal preparation, and leveled school grounds with meeting areas, play equipment, and plantation. Hazam, a student of class nine recalls the former bad state of the toilets. “We had only one boy’s toilet, and it failed to meet the requirements of students. We now have different toilet blocks for girls and boys.”

According to the school principal, Mr. Mehtab Singh, “The transformation is like day and night. Earlier the school had the bare minimum in terms of infrastructure and facilities, and the success of all this is indicative as children are now staying longer at school.” Thanking Sehgal Foundation and the “philanthropic investors” from Minnesota who supported bringing the Transform Lives *one school at a time* project to the Bhandwada School, he adds, “We are like a family. The Sehgal Foundation project team invested great trust in us, and the students and teachers reciprocated and now feel that their school sets an example. Enrolment has risen along with attendance. Schoolchildren seem curious and have increased concentration levels. We all joined together and treated the school as our own, not just a government facility.”

### **A train not to be missed**

A wall painting on the theme of a metro rail that adorns Bhandwada School’s outer wall attracts many visitors these days. Mr. Singh says, “The theme is apt as Padisal railway station is just a kilometer away from the school. The painting of a metro train shows innovation, which can inspire future developments.” Students take turns posing for photos next to the compartment doors with a sense of pride.



### **Reaping fruits**

The Transform Lives *one school at a time* initiative, which started in 2016, creates positive change and secures a better future for schoolchildren in rural India with support from donors like those in Minnesota who adopted the Bhandwada School project. The school principal stresses, "We have increased responsibility now. The onus to maintain the secure, healthy, and stimulating learning environment created under the project, which now includes life skills education, digital literacy training, and good governance awareness. It is a privilege to affect lives of the schoolchildren, especially girls, who will now have tools for a better future.

Before launching any renovations to the school, the Sehgal Foundation team worked with the community and School Management Committee to gain their partnership and build their capacities to sustain the assets created under the project. In all the completed schools as part of the Transform Lives initiative, school management committees remain active and involved, student attendance has increased, girls stay in school longer and wait longer to marry, and students are more motivated and empowered. Students report that they are using their newly acquired knowledge in life skills education, digital literacy, and good governance to help their families and their communities.

The principal adds, "Our school has been made par excellence. We are all contributing to sustain the changes."

*(Arti Manchanda Grover is program leader, Communications, S M Sehgal Foundation)*