

“Now, we look forward to going to school . . .”

Schoolchildren from nine government schools in district Alwar, Rajasthan, are excited to see their schools with an all-new look and to receive new skills and trainings that are engaging their minds and positively influencing them, their families, and even their communities. The newly renovated buildings and grounds and the brightly painted spaces provide a safe, comfortable, and inspiring learning environment. The Transform Lives *one school at a time* initiative, launched by Sehgal Foundation in late 2016, has already reached nine schools with completed renovations and the creation of training centers that are making a positive impact on the lives of more than 2,300 rural schoolchildren in India.

In this issue of *Connect*, the foundation team offers glimpses from some refreshing conversations with these transformed young lives. A conversation took place with student beneficiaries about the initiative and their visions for change.

What is Transform Lives *one school at a time*?

Kanchan, a class nine student from Bhandwada School responds, “Transform Lives is a school program that is helping us in several new areas. It has changed the way our school looks, and we now have drinking water at school and bathrooms for girls and boys. The school has wall paintings and lots of beautiful colors. We are learning how to use computer tablets to access the internet. We are learning what good governance is and about our rights and entitlements as citizens. For example, we can fight for our right to a good education. I feel more capable now in many areas. I am learning to have better self-confidence. I can tell my parents what I think about important things.

What changes do you see in your school?

Chetna Jangir from village Kalsada answers, “Girls in our village found every possible reason to skip school. Having no water or toilets created a lot of unease for all of us. Now we have water to drink, our school looks beautiful, and we have swings and plants to garden. Now I look forward to going to school.”

What have you learned in digital literacy training?

“We saw the tablet for the first time in the new digital literacy center. It felt like a privilege to hold a tablet and work on it. We learned many things including MS Office, internet surfing, how to book tickets online, and other things.”

Satyaprakash, from Indragarh School, says, “I have a greater sense of responsibility now. I want to contribute more to my family with my new skill and knowledge. I was so happy when I booked a train ticket online for

my father. Digital literacy is the need of the times, and these skills are going to help us in future.”

What has been the best change in your opinion?

Sachin, from Indragarh school, shared that cricket is his passion. He said that after the school beautification and leveling of the playground, “playing is much more fun. Even the play equipment is new.”

Monu, from the same school, adds, “I find the drawings and paintings on the walls very fascinating. Our school has an airplane theme painting that constantly gives us the message to soar high.”

Can you share an instance when governance knowledge has helped you?

Sukhiram Prajapat from village Kalsada, Alwar, said he used his digital knowledge to check his family’s Public Distribution System status online. Knowing about the gaps in service delivery, his efforts led his family to receive their full ration entitlement.

A group of girls did research that dispelled false myths about immunizations. Because many mothers feared that vaccinations lead to severe body pain and fever in infants, they did not have their infants immunized. The girls carried out a door-to-door immunization campaign along with the local health department. Seventeen infants were immunized that same day.

What are your aspirations for the future?

Several students said they feel they have more potential in life now. One student elaborates, “I know that the life skills education and digital literacy parts of the Transform Lives project are helping us build a strong foundation for the future. Coming to the centers, we can see the power of collective action. Many of us have successfully motivated our families and even our communities to try harder to be the change they wish to see in the world.”

“The future is here, and we are the future,” is an exclamation the interview team heard often from these smiling young heroes.

(Compiled by Communications team, S M Sehgal Foundation)