

The young changemakers of Sakras

By Sarah Berry

Giggles were the first sound that caught my attention, reminding me of two words: carefree and *bindass* (fearless). This group of animated girls, ages sixteen to twenty-one from a school in the village of Sakras, district Nuh, Haryana, talked to me candidly about an initiative whose accomplishment deeply motivated them. The girls conducted an immunization drive, going door-to-door, motivating parents to have their children immunized. These high-spirited girls are part of the digital literacy and life skills education program facilitated by S M Sehgal Foundation in association with Oracle. Putting their knowledge into practice, the girls tackled various myths related to immunization. They were able to bring seventeen children, whose parents were extremely apprehensive about immunization, back to the immunization process, and motivated another sixty-eight families to get their children immunized!



The digital literacy initiative launched by Sehgal Foundation in Nuh, Haryana, with Oracle has been a kind of a movement. The program, targeted at adolescents age fifteen and older, includes three major components: computer basics, life skills education, and good governance training. These three pillars inspire the aware, motivated, and enthusiastic participation of young people to use these tools to bring about positive change at the grassroots level. The training covers diverse topics including hardware components and software such as MS Office, nuances and usage of the internet, the use of digital devices in daily lives and village development, etc. In addition, trainees are made aware of government programs such as the Right to Education, Right to Information, the functioning of school management committees, the application of the internet to health and nutrition issues, how to avail pensions, and using social media for apps related to government schemes, e-commerce, and much more.

"I love the computer and the internet. They open up a plethora of learning opportunities for me. There is so much I can do and want to do. I want to be a doctor so I can tell people about how to live healthier, besides helping them when they are sick," says Humaira, age seventeen.

She can name the five most life-threatening diseases for which immunization is vital.

Varsha, age twenty, was one of her peers in the immunization drive carried out in the village, and she adds an important point: "Myths that surround immunization are galore, like frothing at the mouth, weakness, and loss of hair, among others. People were oblivious to the dangers of avoiding immunization, including death, so it is important to generate awareness. This drive helped me realize my own potential. Now I want to be a teacher so that I can help fight ignorance as much as I can."

The girls visited twenty families, painstakingly trying to eliminate the taboos surrounding immunization. Sixteen-year-old Nishratoon agrees that the initiative was challenging but also highlights the role that experience has played in developing her personality. Hailing from a family of nine brothers and sisters, she wants to bring about change at the highest level, which is why she wants to be an IAS officer. Her favorite subject is political science; no wonder she stresses the need for active citizen participation in good governance.

Kiranvati, another participant of the immunization drive, is set to pursue a master's degree. Says the twenty-one-year-old in a quiet voice, "The digital literacy and life skills education program served as a platform for us to put on our thinking caps, look at the world from a different perspective, understand who we are and what we want to be, and plan how we can bring about positive change. The components of life skills, good governance, and digital literacy are all very important."

The initiative is not only about enhancing awareness, encouraging participation, and mobilizing communities, but also about expanding one's horizons and developing one's personality. Rambati aptly encapsulates this: "Initially, I was disheartened about the reaction of people, especially since what I was telling them was for their own good. Gradually I understood the art of convincing, which helped boost my confidence manifold. I want to study to be a teacher, for I want to nourish young minds and, in the process, learn too."

The energy and determination these young people bring with them is palpable even over a phone call. They are definitely striving to be the change they want to see, which is the first step in bringing about a change that not only matters, but is also sustainable.

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