



Education as a Tool to Raise a Generation of Confident, High Achievers - Cosmo Foundation

Cosmo Films is a leading producer of BOPP and thermal lamination films with customers across the globe. At Cosmo Films, business and social responsibilities go hand in hand. It starts with our business practices by ensuring innovation, flexibility and the highest standard of integrity, transparency and accountability. We have set up an optimum level of global ethics and values. From ethical business practices to the development of our human resources, there is an equal concern for the upliftment of our neighbouring communities.

We believe we can make a difference in the lives of people. Holding firmly to this belief, our Company, through Cosmo Foundation, which was established in 2008, has been carrying out several initiatives like running a dispensary, providing educational scholarships, and so on. Our goal is to assist underprivileged children and youth to realise their potential. We are committed to creating supplementary educational programmes for enhancing skills to promote gainful employment.

We work closely with the lesser-developed communities at Karjan block of Vadodara District, Gujarat, and Gangapur block of Aurangabad District, Maharashtra, with several development programmes. Our objective is to impart basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills to primary government school students to build a foundation to strengthen their future learning in mainstream education. We are focused on teaching Basic English to primary school students to create comfort for the language, opportunity for higher education and increase employability. With technology taking centre stage in education, we are focused on imparting basic computer literacy to the students of government



Ashok Jaipuria

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primary and grant-in-aid schools to enable them to pursue higher education and future employability. Propping up life skills such as health and hygiene, creativity, study skills and critical thinking, promoting value-based education, joyful learning and community solidarity, strengthening self-confidence, self-esteem, communication and leadership skills to bring a positive attitudinal and behavioural change among young students is what we intend to accomplish. We continue to work in instilling upon the children and youth a sense of responsibility and respect towards their country and the environment by getting them involved in missions like Swachh Bharat. We continue to daily improve the environment and cleanliness in government schools and villages.

Rationale

India has the largest number of uneducated children in the world, two-thirds of whom are girls. The All India Education Survey 2002 indicates that 35 million children between 6-14 years do not attend school. Official information further indicates that just a little over one-third of all children who enrol in Grade I reach Grade VIII. Our determination became stronger when the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2011 came out with some shocking revelations. In its key



findings, while the student enrolment in rural India has seen a rise of 96.7 per cent in 2011, there has been a decline in students' basic reading, arithmetic and academic levels.

Subsequently, we conducted a need assessment in the neighbouring villages of Cosmo Films manufacturing units in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Findings revealed that computer education was absent in government schools, children in Class V to VIII lacked basic reading and writing skills in their native language, numeric skills, and the majority of students do not pursue higher and technical education due to lack of IT and English skills. A majority of these

children come from low-income, farming backgrounds and are first-generation learners. Due to poor education, lack of exposure and awareness, hygiene and health issues are poor. Lack of sanitation facilities at government schools was also an area of concern.

Considering these gaps, Cosmo Foundation launched the following educational programmes.

Computer Literacy

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accessible and affordable for most of the government school children. Seeing the need, we introduced the Computer Literacy Programme. We impart basic computer operation skills to rural children and the youth. We have designed a curriculum, an assessment system for teachers and students, award laptops to the best-performing students during the summer holidays and conduct training on digital transactions, net banking, internet and networking. We also train the local youth and engage them as computer teachers. 6000 students benefit from this programme every year.

Cosmo Gyan Vihar Kendra

The major challenge faced by the Computer Literacy Programme was the lack of reading and writing skills among many students. Several types of research suggested that children lack these skills which subsequently hurts their overall learning. To address this, Cosmo Gyan Vihar Kendra was set up to strengthen these skills as well as to teach students to explore, experiment and express their thoughts and emotions effectively. The programme focuses on building concepts and basic literacy skills which enable children to participate and cope up with mainstream education. It is

implemented in the mother tongue, promotes activity-based learning and makes the educational process joyful. We design curriculum and activity-based learning modules, focus on school readiness, teach basic Gujarati/ Marathi/ Urdu languages, Mathematics, engage parents and the community in the teaching-learning process and train local women as Balmitras (Teachers for Children). This programme runs out of school timings. Apart from government school premises, it also runs at Panchayat buildings, Madrassas of the Islamic Trust and Indira Awas of the Government for below-poverty line



Open Doors

Jeenita Patel

Nurse Intern at Sterling Hospital, Vadodara

I am from a middle-class family of Kandari village, Taluka Karjan, Vadodara district, Gujarat. My father works as a security guard in a private company and my mother is a housewife. She also does some tailoring work at home to contribute to the family income.

I received computer training from Cosmo Foundation at J. K. Patel Public School at my village when I was in Std VIII. This course allowed me to learn about computers and acquire basic operation skills. It opened the door for me to gain knowledge and I started to familiarise myself with global information. My enthusiasm about learning computer has made me eligible for the Cosmo Computer



A Whole New World

Dinesh Rathwa

Photo/Videographer and DJ

I am from a remote tribal village called Ranada, Chhotaudepur, Gujarat. Because of acute poverty, I was sent to an ashram shala at Shri Harikrupa Ashram School, a residential school for tribals in Karjan. I completed my high school from there. I received an opportunity to learn computers, which was not possible to think or even dream for an ashram school student like me had it not been for the Cosmo Foundation. The computer training raised my curiosity to learn more about digital technology. I did very well in the computer field and also learned digital music (DJ). It became my source of income for a while. I now have my digital photography studio. I am very grateful for the opportunity and knowledge I received. I wish to do something special in this field. I have my own business now, and for that, I will always be grateful to Cosmo Foundation. They have blessed me with skills which have generated employment for me.

families. 2000 rural children benefit across Gujarat and Maharashtra every year.

Basic English Learning

This programme is inspired by a severe dearth of English teachers and a persistent demand from students and teachers to make arrangements to teach English. We impart basic English language lessons for beginners. Our focus is on phonetics and common reading patterns, active listening and pronunciation skills, oral communication and comprehension, cursive patterns through AVs and activity-based learning. We also

conduct basic English learning course during the summer holidays with a special focus on conversation practice and personality development. We facilitate academic performance, higher education and employment opportunities. 1000 students in Gujarat benefit every year.

Life Skill Education

This programme facilitates a child to be a sensitive individual and an independent thinker. It also helps promote personal hygiene and healthy living practices; promote creativity and critical thinking through non-conventional activities and games,

focus on imparting study skills and critical thinking among the young children by building a positive attitude, enhancing social skills, interpersonal relations and communication through various exercises among the young children of Cosmo Gyan Vihar Kendra. We have designed five modules and trained Balmitras to implement it. 1500 students are beneficiaries of this programme.

Environment and Cleanliness

We lay great emphasis on the Three R's i.e. Reuse, Refurbish, Recycle. We use refurbished computers, used waste

Award. I was awarded a laptop. The teachers and experts at Cosmo Foundation also taught me various life skills like personality development, respect, manners, behaviour, self-confidence and oratory skills. Career counselling training and information imparted about various professional courses has guided me to choose the right stream as per my interest. I had always wanted to pursue Science but my family's dire financial situation prevented me from doing so. Cosmo Foundation came to my rescue. I have now completed my 12th Science Course. During career counselling, I was very much influenced by Nursing so I went for B.Sc. Nursing at Bharuch. Computer knowledge and life skills which I received from Cosmo proved to be very useful. I topped the class and in extra-curricular activities. I received a

laptop as an award and decided to use it for a good purpose by helping my mother and younger brother learn computers. I also help my mother get new dress designs for her tailoring business from the internet. My brother is now more aware of the future. I am studying away from home, but if I need some document urgently, my mother would email them to me immediately. I want to give back to society the way Cosmo did to me and scores others. I am now giving computer training to five children in my neighbourhood. I am very thankful to Cosmo Foundation for being instrumental in developing my personality, for directing and pointing the way to the future. This has helped build my confidence, opened doors for me to present my thoughts before experts and dignitaries. I am presently doing my internship at Sterling Hospital, Vadodara.

papers and recycled material. We have made consistent efforts for behaviour change to protect the environment and strengthen personal hygiene and cleanliness. Various awareness programmes including Swachh School Competitions and traditional folk performances are organised at regular intervals. Membership Badges of Swachta Samitis are also given. Children as best performers are rewarded with soaps, handkerchiefs etc. Eco-friendly idols and visarjans are some of the practices which imbibe care for the environment in the minds of children.

Swachh Bharat, Swachh Vidyalaya Abhiyan

Clean India campaign is a priority agenda for all Indians. Our Swachha Vidhyarthi Swatchha Varga Khand campaign and the Swachhata Committee formed at various schools oversees the maintenance of hygiene charts in primary schools, distribution of hygiene kits to students and distribution of cleanliness kits to all 34 government schools in Gujarat and Maharashtra which are affiliated to our Foundation.

Sanitation Blocks for Students

Considering the need, we have constructed sanitation blocks for girls in 12 schools and three schools for boys in Karjan, benefiting 2047 students.

Water Tanks for Students

We have constructed water tanks in four rural schools in the drought-affected area of Aurangabad. This has benefited the schools' preparation for cooking mid-day meals as well as for 3200 students who can now avail clean drinking water.

Sanitary Pad Bank

To take the stigma off menstruation and create awareness that this is a normal event in every girl's journey into adulthood and also provide access to a safe and secure sanitation, which is



one of the basic rights for every human, we have set up a sanitary pad bank for girls in nine government schools in Karjan, benefiting 900 girl students. This will also prevent drop-out of girls from school when they reach puberty.

Plantation and Green Space Creation

To preserve the aesthetics of the city and enhance the green cover, we have been involved in developing and maintaining the beautiful gardens at the Aurangabad airport since 2006 and the garden under the flyover of National Highway No.8 at Karjan. We have also increased the green cover in government school backyards, municipality land and public places.

Waste Bin Installation

We have installed 205 waste bins across schools and villages to help maintain cleanliness and facilitate habit formation for proper waste disposal.

Community Awareness Programmes

Recognising parents as the key pillars of effective education of young children, we organise 'faliya' meetings with them. The major focus is on creating awareness on the importance of primary education and the role of

parents in promoting the overall development of children. Parents are engaged in various creative activities and given messages of effective parenting for building a children-friendly society. Local village leaders and institutions viz. Gram Panchayats, Dairy Cooperatives, banks etc are engaged in awareness programmes and service delivery.

Our community-based teachers, the Balmitras, women and girls in our areas of operation are engaged in regular awareness talks on nutrition, menstrual and reproductive health, hygiene, oral hygiene and dental check-ups. Festivals of all faiths and national days are celebrated to promote positive values, respect for diversity and building a community spirit. We also plan periodic visits of selected high school students to our manufacturing units to build exposure to technology, products and instil in them the importance of education.

Outreach, Outcome and Impact

In the last eleven years, 30,000 students from 34 government schools and villages have benefitted through our programmes. We have helped reduce child labour, chronic absenteeism in schools, orientation and better use of technology, improvement in



We are in the process of a systematic intervention with parents to make them understand about the future of their children versus immediate gains



academics and rebuilding their lives. We have been blessed to have had a hand in providing access to health facilities and transforming and improving quality of life by taking correct decisions.

Challenges and Solutions

Getting Trained Quality Teachers in Rural Areas – There is a dearth of committed, skilled teachers. Mere qualification does not work. Professionals from urban areas lack the readiness to travel to rural areas. We have engaged the rural youth and women who are passionate to work with children of their community, trained them systematically and recruit them as teachers.

Highlighting the Importance of Quality Education - We have developed a model of education with systematic planning, curriculum and monitoring; documenting success stories to motivate the students as well as the community.

Engaging the Community in the Educational Processes - A majority of the parents in the areas we operate are farm labourers with little or no idea how to guide their children, who are first-generation learners. We solved the issue through parents meetings, computer awards, engaging the school management committees comprising of parents and village leaders into the educational processes.

Our Outreach Across Gujarat and Maharashtra	
Initiatives	Beneficiaries
Educational Programmes:	
• Student beneficiaries from 87 villages	30,000 Students
• Government Schools	34
Gram Panchayats Benefiting from Educational and Environment Programmes	23
Sanitation Blocks for Girls	12 Schools/1426 Students
Sanitation Blocks for Boys	3 Schools/621 Students
Sanitary Pad Bank	9 Schools/900 Girls
Waste Bins Installed Across Schools and Panchayats	230
Tree Plantation at Public Places	375
Tree-guards	200
Maintenance of Public Gardens	2
Water Tanks in Schools of Drought-affected Villages of Aurangabad	4/3200 Students

Rampant Child Labour - Children are engaged in plucking cotton, flowers and other farm work, catering during the marriage season and taking care of younger siblings thus hampering their education. We are in the process of a systematic intervention with parents to make them understand about the future of their children versus immediate gains. Secondly, we have also incorporated creative activity-based learning methods and reading material to draw children towards education. A shift in attitude is now noticed in the villages where we have been operating for several years where children are now enrolled in schools and are helping their parents with various kinds of work mentioned above only during the holidays.

Improving Accessibility for IT Resources and Electricity for Education and Development - Electricity and internet connectivity is an area of concern. We have set up generators, wifi connectivity and systematically trained students on IT in education. Students do online registrations, web surfing for assignments, work on Whatsapp groups created for students and teachers for knowledge-sharing.

Way Forward Our major focus is to build the concepts and fundamentals of education. This helps build the interest and confidence of the students in education, build aspirations and skills to pursue higher education and provide exposure to widen their horizon for career choices. The backbone of the programme is subject experts, professionals as coordinators and local teachers. We are in the process of building organisational leadership with local talents we have helped create and have replicated the programmes in more villages with their support. Secondly, we are producing video-recorded sessions to learn English which will be implemented across the State for students, teachers and young entrepreneurs to learn effective English communication. Regarding the environment and cleanliness, the most challenging part is behavioural change. We are planning to train students as ambassadors to sustain and nurture the environment and be responsible for cleanliness in their area. ■

Ashok Jaipuria is the Managing Director, Cosmo Films, and Founder and Trustee, Cosmo Foundation.