



GURUJI EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Quarterly Report

July - September 2024

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ABOUT GEF

Guruji Education Foundation (GEF) is a registered trust, which works with underprivileged students to enable their holistic education, and thus provide them with a more equitable access to opportunities and success. As part of its mission of “Education for All”, GEF provides support for holistic education of underprivileged students, based on the principles of:

- Inclusivity
- Quality over quantity
- Cycle of giving
- Customized career planning
- Holistic development
- Collaboration

GEF runs 2 broad flagship programs:

i) Holistic Higher Education (HHE), where high-potential college students from underprivileged sections are identified to catalyze their all-round development by providing them with resources that they may need. The resources could include interest-free loans (to be paid after they start earning), personal mentoring, career counselling and more

ii) Adolescent Development Program (ADP), which aims at enabling schools, especially those catering to underprivileged children, to provide holistic education spanning physical literacy, psychological strength, intellectual prowess, life skills, and entrepreneurial thinking

GEF accords special attention towards education of students from a distressed backgrounds including orphans, single parent families, and families impacted by cancer, covid etc. More than academic brilliance, the emphasis is on providing these students an education that is appropriate to their abilities and can help them in getting meaningful employment.

THE QUARTER IN A NUTSHELL

It is a pleasure to share with you our report for July–August–September 2024 quarter.

It has been an action-packed quarter with quite a few new activities being piloted and more schools being added to our Adolescent Development Program (ADP) network. Chess was piloted as a new medium for developing thinking skills, thus adding a new dimension to our AKTIV (Amit Khare Training for Indian Villages) program. Sessions for developing financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills were conducted as part of our efforts to provide holistic education to our students. The quarter also witnessed enthusiastic participation in Scratch Festival 2024, which culminated with the flawlessly executed Scratch Day.

On the Holistic Higher Education (HHE) front, while our students and alumni continued to make us proud, the crowning glory was provided by Omkar Mane, who became the first Chartered Accountant in our GEF family. We are equally proud of our students who have earned admission to reputed institutes and secured jobs aligned with their career aspirations. News of our alumni doing well in their respective fields is always a matter of joy.

Our Adolescent Development Program (ADP) program continues to grow, and the count of schools being supported has now reached 48, with over 8800 student beneficiaries.

As we continue to grow, we continuously remind ourselves of our principle of “Quality over Quantity”, and strive to take proactive measures to ensure preparedness for the increasing scale of operations.

Executive Committee
Guruji Education Found

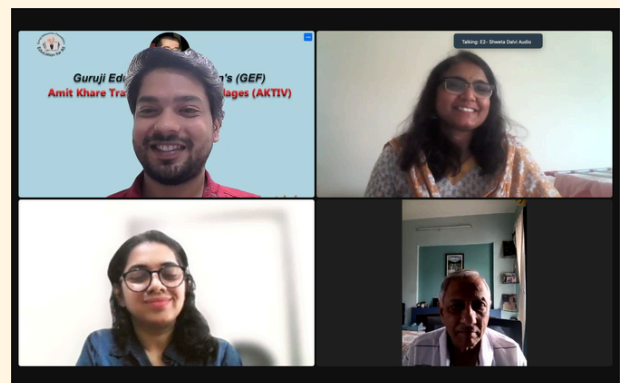
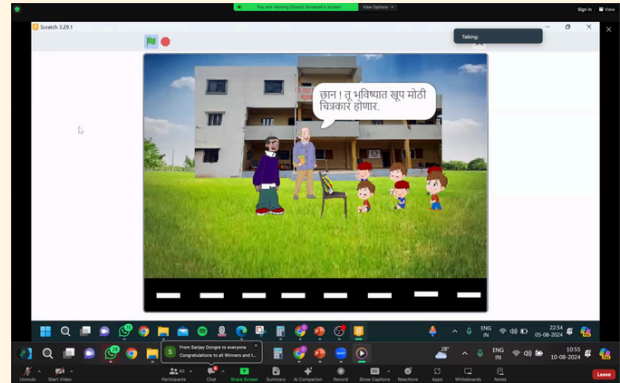
HIGHLIGHTS

Grand Finale of Scratch Festival 2024

Scratch Festival 2024 concluded with the 3rd Scratch Day held on 10 August, 2024, marking a grand finale commensurate to the scale and vision of the Festival.

Leading to the Scratch Day, GEF had organized the Scratch Festival 2024, featuring a variety of events. The highlight was the Scratch Projects competition, showcasing projects developed by beneficiary students. Other notable events included a Hackathon, where students coded a mini project based on a given topic within a set timeframe, and a Scratch Quiz for newly enrolled schools. To enhance interpersonal skills, a Debate Competition was also held.

The Scratch Day event was conducted online via Zoom, with a live broadcast on YouTube. The Chief Guest for the program was Dr. Anand Nadkarni, a renowned psychiatrist, thinker, dramatist, musician, poet, sketch artist, and senior social worker. The event included the final round of the debate competition, screening of the award-winning projects, and announcement of the winners. A recording of the final day of the Scratch Festival can be viewed at [Scratch Festival 2024 Recording](#).



Some screenshots from the online Scratch Day Event

HIGHLIGHTS

Teacher Workshop to drive Math Literacy in schools

Vipula Abhyankar and Dr Lalita Deshpande from GEF conducted a 2-day Math workshop, which was specifically organized for Maths teachers from 8 schools run by the Koregaon Education Society. The objective of the workshop was to demonstrate simple, creative and practical methods for teaching Math at schools, which could make it easier for the students to understand Math fundamentals, and to retain and use the knowledge effectively. Various concepts such as Numbers and Operations, Positive & Negative Numbers, Fractions, Algebraic Expressions etc were covered.

Competency in Mathematics, at conceptual levels, is a critical requirement for any successful STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) career. GEF efforts towards designing more effective content and exercises for Math, were triggered by the findings from our interactions with schools and students, especially those from rural areas, over the last many years. Similar findings were also highlighted in the Pratham ASER Report 2022, which reported that 80% of Class 5 could NOT do Subtraction, and 62% of Class 8 students could NOT do Division.



HIGHLIGHTS

Session on Developing an Entrepreneurial Mindset

Developing an Entrepreneurial Mindset is a vital component of our Adolescent Development Program framework which seeks to provide holistic education to school children.

A session aimed at this objective was organized for the students of Yadav Dagdu Patil School at Tandulwadi. The session was conducted by Prof.N. Venkataramani from IIT Bombay. In addition to speaking about entrepreneurship and the attributes needed for entrepreneurship, Prof. Venkataramani interacted with the students on a wide range of topics including

conversational English, and various new technologies & tools such as AI, chatbots, Bhashini, etc.

As this coverage in the Marathi newspaper Divya Bharati aptly captures – the students were highly enthused by this learning feast provided to them at their own school – an opportunity that they would have otherwise struggled to get, even if they were to visit a city.



चाळीसगाव 18-07-2024

आयआयटीयन डॉ.एन.त्यंकटरमणींचा तांदुळवाडीत विद्यार्थ्यांशी मुक्त संवाद

आयआयटी पवईच्या प्राध्यापकांनी यादव दगडू पाटील शाळेस दिल्ली भेट

प्रतिनिधी | चाळीसगाव

कै.यादव दगडू पाटील माध्यमिक व उच्च माध्यमिक विद्यालय तांदुळवाडी येथे दोन दिवसीय चर्चासत्र आयोजित करण्यात आले होते. आय.आय.टी. पवई येथील डॉ. एन व्यंकटरमणी यांनी उद्योजक होताना व्यक्तीच्या अंगी कोणते गुण व कौशल्ये हवीत याची माहिती दिली. त्यांनी विद्यार्थ्यांना सांगितले की, इंग्रजी भाषेला न घाबरता इंग्रजीतून संभाषण कसे करावे, याबाबत मार्गदर्शन केले. एआय टूल्स, जेमिनी, चॅट बोट, मेटा यांच्या वापरविषयी माहिती सांगितली. भाषिणी अॅपच्या माध्यमातून कोणत्याही भाषेचे भाषांतर आपल्याला हव्या त्या भाषेत करता येते याबाबत प्रात्यक्षिकासह विद्यार्थ्यांना मार्गदर्शन केले. डॉ.एन. व्यंकटरमणी सध्या



विद्यार्थ्यांशी चर्चासत्राद्वारे संवाद साधताना प्रा.डॉ.एन.व्यंकटरमणी.

आय.आय.टी.पवई मुंबई येथे कार्यरत असून, त्यांनी बी.टेक. केमिकल व एम.ई.केमिकल इंजिनिअरिंग तसेच डॉक्टरेट मटेरियल सायन्स मधून शिक्षण घेतले असून त्यांनी मटेरियल सायन्स विद्यापीठाचे डीन म्हणून ही काम केले आहे. तांदुळवाडी सारख्या छोट्याशा गावातील विद्यार्थ्यांना भावी काळातील संघी व गरजा यावर मार्गदर्शन मिळणे ही एक मेजवानीच मिळाली. गुरुजी

फाउंडेशन मुंबईचे प्रदीप वायचळ यांच्या माध्यमातून व संस्थेचे सचिव डॉ.आर.डी. निकम यांच्या प्रयत्नांमुळे आज डॉ.एन. व्यंकटरमणी विद्यालयात आले होते. प्राचार्य स्वप्निल निकम, जी.जी.वराडे यांनी डॉ.व्यंकटरमणी यांचे स्वागत केले. ग्रामीण भागातील ज्या विद्यार्थ्यांना महानगरात जाऊन जी माहिती घेता येत नाही, ती माहिती शाळेतच मिळाल्यामुळे विद्यार्थ्यांमध्ये उत्साह होता.



HIGHLIGHTS

On-boarding of new schools for AKTIV

With the introduction of our AKTIV (Amit Khare Training for Indian Villages) program at schools in Satefal, Vadner, Nigadi, Borgaon and Achara, our count of schools, hostels and community centres on the AKTIV list has reached 48, and Wardha has become the 17th in the list of districts with AKTIV schools and institutions.

Dr. Pradeep Waychal, accompanied by Pavan Mahajan and Krishna Patil, both student trainers from Tandulwadi school, trained 20 student trainers each over 4 days at Satefal & Vadner schools to enable them to start training other students of the schools. At Nogadi and Borgaon too, 20 student trainers were trained over 4 days by Mrs. Dnyanada Wagh, while Omkar Rasal initiated 6 student trainers at Achara.

In addition to the 5 new schools above, follow-up sessions for student trainers were conducted at the Trimbak and Ramgad schools,



Memories from Satefal, Vadner, Nigdi and Borgaon



Special call out for Omkar Rasal (right corner) for becoming the first student-trainer to onboard a school single-handedly

HIGHLIGHTS

New Initiative: Developing Thinking & Teaming Skills Using Chess

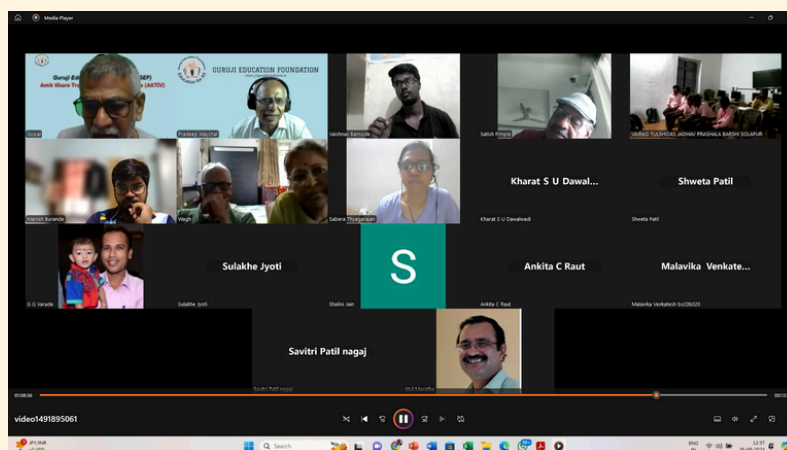
After successfully scaling our initiative of using Scratch for developing thinking and teaming skills across 43 schools, hostels and community centres, we have taken a step forward by introducing Chess as another medium for developing these skills among school students.

Vijay Khare, sponsor of GEF's AKTIV (Amit Khare Training for Indian Villages) program, and a key force behind our Thinking and Training Lab, launched the pilot effort by conducting Chess training sessions for 25 students from 4th and 5th standards at Dnyanamandir High School, Ghatkopar.



Ensuring readiness to scale Scratch training

With continuing growth in the demand for Scratch teachers, we are focusing attention towards building a larger pool of Scratch teachers. As part of this effort, an online Orientation program for prospective Scratch teachers was conducted on 24 - 25 August, 2024.



HIGHLIGHTS

Towards enabling Financial Literacy

As part of our efforts to develop financial literacy among our students, 2 online sessions were conducted during this quarter.

The first such session was NSDL's "Market Ka Eklavya" program, specifically conducted for GEF, thanks to Mr.Jigar Shah, CTO, NSDL, who took the lead in organizing the program and was also the faculty. The program, which had 100 participants, covered various aspects of creating personal wealth, expense management, and investing avenues such as Mutual Funds and Stocks.

The second session, titled "Empowering Your Financial Future", was conducted by Mrs.Aarti Rathi of Aarvia Fintech Advisors, and covered various aspects related to Financial planning, Investment options, and Long-term growth for a secure financial future.



Mrs. Aarti Rathi

GEF Student Leadership Team (GSLT) Meet

GEF Student Leadership Team's first meeting for the year 2024-25 was held on 11th August at Pune, and was attended by alumni, students and mentors from all over Maharashtra.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Pradeep Waychal outlined the objectives of GSLT and how these relate to the GEF Principles. This was followed by various ice-breaking activities conducted by Dr. Lalita Deshpande, which set the stage for open discussions and constructive dialogue among the participants. Discussions covered a vast range of topics such as Challenges faced by students, Strengthening mentor-mentee relationship, Feedback on Monthly Thinking Exercise, Role of GSLT, etc. and resulted in very useful feedback and suggestions.



HIGHLIGHTS

Visit to SSGMMS, Vadakkur

Mr. Venkatesh Kuppuswamy, Chennai GEF Centre Head, visited Sri Sri Gnan Mandir Matriculation School (SSGMMS) at Vadakkur in Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu, to meet and congratulate the Scratch Day winners from the school.

Venkatesh also carried out a pilot evaluation for the Spoken English program, to test the reading, listening, speaking and writing skills of the students. He also had discussions with the school management to identify solutions for infrastructural problems.



HIGHLIGHTS

Malavika Venkatesh selected as United Nations Millennium Fellow

Malavika Venkatesh, a student of Biosciences at IIT Madras and one of our dedicated supporters, has been selected as a United Nations Millennium Fellow. She is one among the 4000 selected out of 50000 applicants globally.

As part of this fellowship, Malavika plans to introduce Scratch programming to villages in Tamil Nadu, aiming to equip students with essential digital and critical thinking skills. We look forward to seeing the outcomes of her initiative.



Mrs. Sharayu Ghadi awarded the Nation Builder Award

Mrs. Sharayu Ghadi, a long time GEF supporter was awarded the Nation Builder Award 2024-25 by the Rotary Cub of Millenium City, Navi Mumbai in recognition of her outstanding dedication to social work, children's education, and supporting children with special needs.

Principal Swapnil Nikam awarded "Rotary Deepstambh"

GEF supporter, Principal Swapnil Nikam was among the model Principals and Headmasters recognized by the Rotary Cub of Chalisgaon, and honoured with the "Rotary Deepstambh" award in recognition of his contribution and services in the field of education.



HIGHLIGHTS

Student-Mentor Meet at Pune

The first meeting of GEF Pune Center was held on 28th of July 2024, at the Club House, Kumar Parisar Society, Pune was a great success with 20 students and 8 mentors wholeheartedly participating in the meeting.

The Meet started with an icebreaking session to help the attendees relax and also get to know each other better. This was followed by a chat session with Amrut Deshmukh, popularly known as the “Booklet Guy”. Amrut’s name is almost synonymous with book summaries in India, as he shares 20-minute book summaries in text and audio formats, every week, via his Booklet app. The chat session was high interactive, with great audience participation and Amrut candidly answering all questions. All the attendees, especially the students, were deeply influenced and motivated by Amrut’s views on reading and books. The Meet ended with a group activity where the students shared and discussed thoughts and ideas on topics such as Importance of Mentors, Difficulties faced while Studying etc. The students found this immensely useful as it helped them in getting different perspectives on such relevant and important topics.



Breaking Ice ... with balloons!



A mesmerized audience listening to “Booklet Guy” Amrut Deshmukh

HIGHLIGHTS

Get-together at Mumbai

Our Mumbai centre get-together was held on 25th August, and was attended by 32 students, alumni and mentors.

Like at Pune, the highlight of the get-together was an exhilarating and deeply inspiring chat session with the “Booklet Guy”, Amrut Deshmukh. The audience was totally mesmerised with Amrut’s engaging narration of his life story – from his introduction at an early age to the fascinating world of books, thanks to his brother – to someone who is now on a mission to “Make India Read”:. While the main focus of the chat was about kindling the habit of reading, there were multiple bonus learnings as well! His candid discussion covering the multiple setbacks in his life, overcoming them, finding his purpose in life, dealing with technical challenges etc. were masterclasses in resilience, persistence and problem-solving. The session was moderated by Meghana Karlekar, a GEF alumna and Manaswi Shirke, a current GEF student.

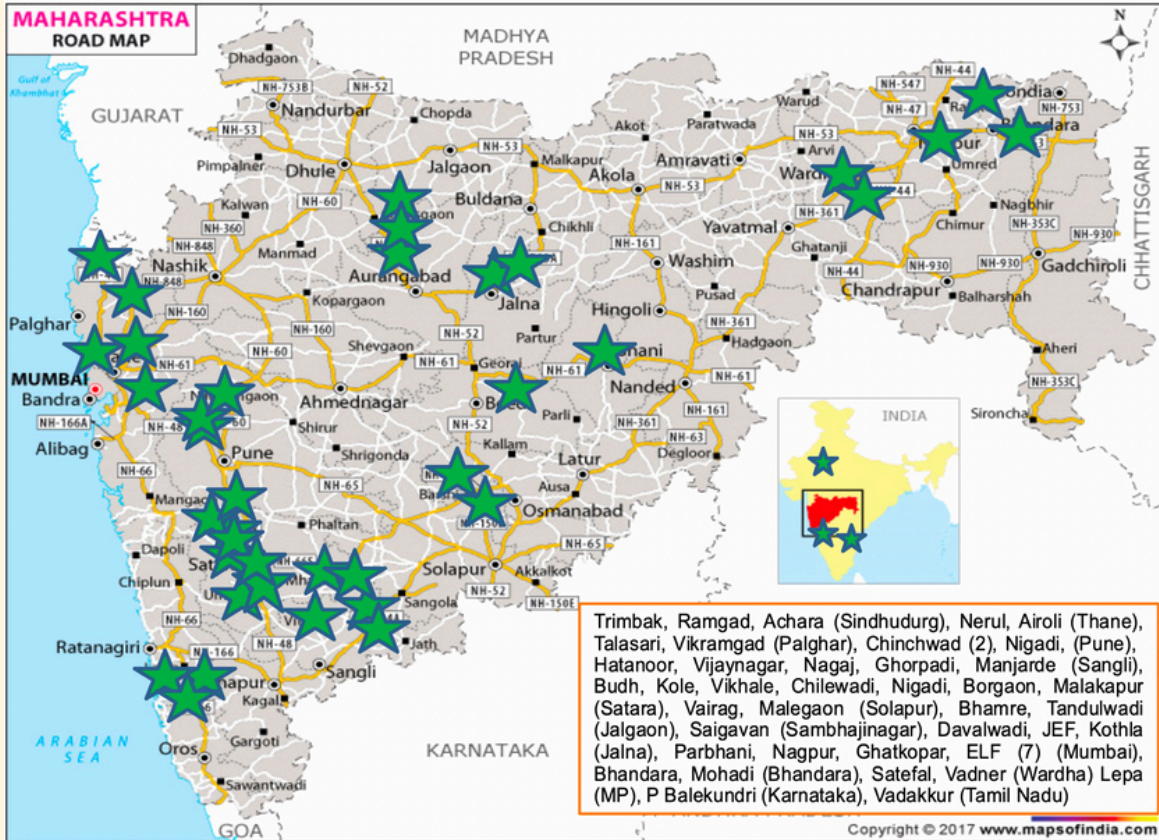
The get-together started with an ice-breaking session, superbly conducted by Archana Rohane. The event ended with a few impromptu performances by Amruta Raut, Vishwa Shetty, and Archana Rohane.



One for the albums

ADP UPDATES

Growing Spread



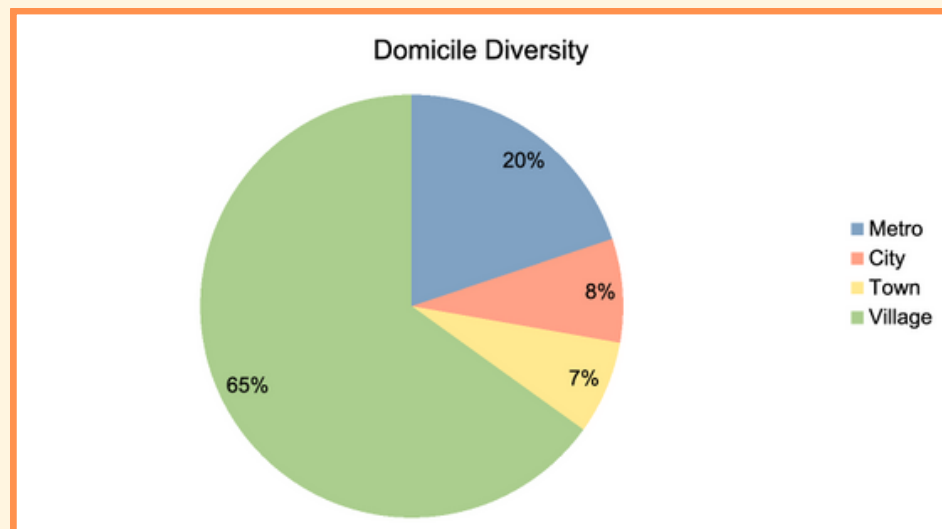
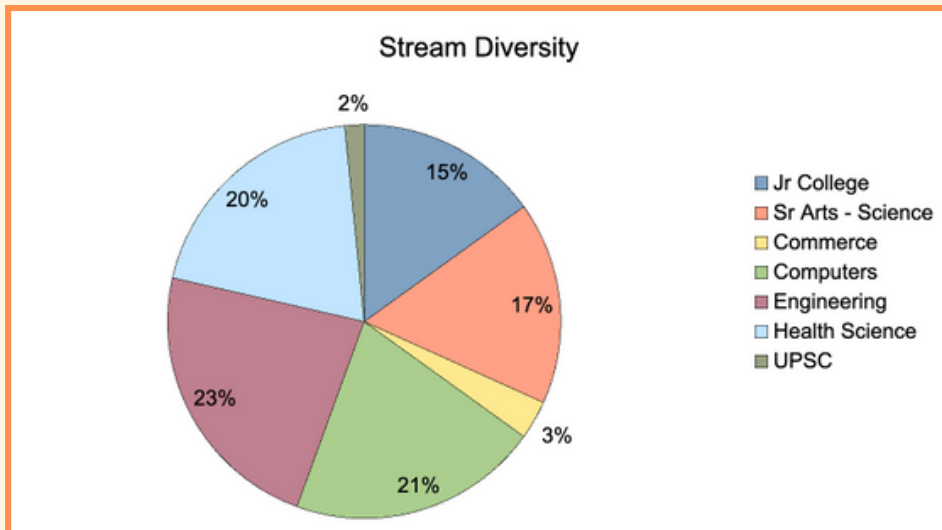
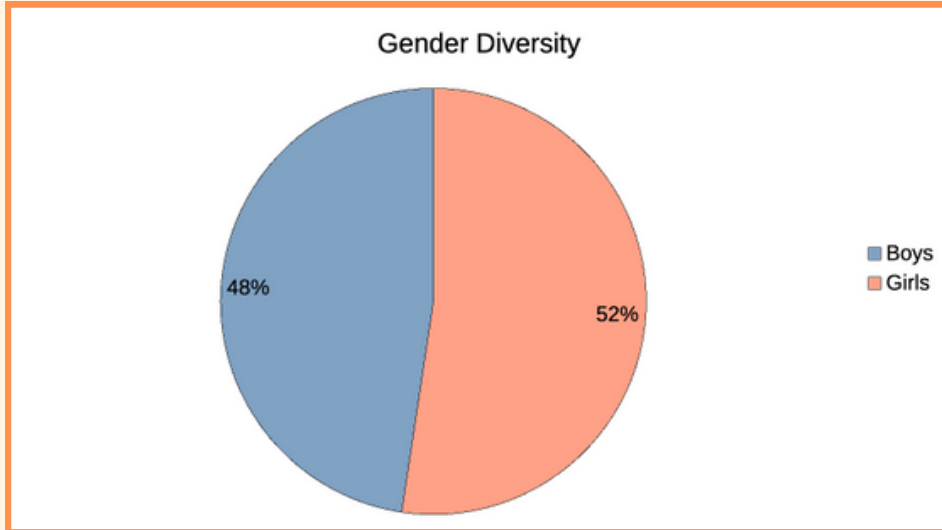
Over **8800 beneficiaries** across **48 schools** (including **29 rural**)

"Education is the foundation upon which we build our future, shaping minds and molding destinies."

~ Anonymous

HHE UPDATES

Catering to a Diverse Demographic Spread





STUDENT STARS



Omkar Mane has the distinction of becoming the first student from our GEF family to become a Chartered Accountant.

Omkar is now working as Assistenat Manager - Internal Controls, with Holcim, a Switzerland-based group.

Sakshi Barangule has secured a seat for pursuing post-graduation at the prestigious National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER, Raebareli). Around 70,000 B.Pharm graduates from all over the country appear for the qualification exam for around 1000 seats across 7 NIPERs.

Sakshi has a B.Pharm from Savitribai Phule Pune University.



Samiksha Indalkar has secured placement with SoftTech upon successful completion of internship in the same organization.

Samiksha has done her B.Tech (IT) from SGGSI&T, Nanded.

Shreya Gawli completed her MCA from PES Modern College of Engineering, Pune, topping her batch with a CGPA of 9.2.

Shreya has also secured placement at SoftTech, after successfully completing her internship in the same company.



Ravindra Rathod, who is currently doing his post-graduation from NIPER, has been selected for a project internship in Analytical Development at Sun Pharma, Vadodara



STUDENT STARS



Sanskruti Jadhav has joined Tata AutoComp - Gotion, Pune as Quality Engineer. She has completed her B.Tech (Electronics & Communication) from Shri Guru Gobind Singhji Institute of Engineering & Technology (SGGSIE&T), Nanded, and had earlier done an internship at Krishna Electronics, Pune.

Kapil Patil who has completed his B.Tech (IT) from Shri Guru Gobind Singhji Institute of Engineering & Technology (SGGSIE&T), Nanded, has received a placement offer from Lloyds Technology Centre, Hyderabad.



Komal Chavan has joined Tata AutoComp - Gotion, Pune as Quality Engineer. She has completed her B.Tech (Electronics & Communication) from Shri Guru Gobind Singhji Institute of Engineering & Technology (SGGSIE&T), Nanded,

Payal Latelwar who is currently pursuing BA in Social Work in Rural Development, successfully completed her internship with Eklavya Foundation and was awarded a certificate for her achievement as a "First Generation Learner". She was also the leader of her fieldwork team.



Sukanya Vyavhare who recently completed her B.Pharm from Savitribai Phule Pune University, has been selected as a Chemist in the Quality Control Department of Omni Protect Drugs Pvt Ltd, Pune.



STUDENT STARS



Harshal There has joined Global Logic, Noida on completion of his B.Tech (Information Technology) from Yeshwantrao Chavan College of Engineering, Nagpur.

Sayali Kelkar has joined Blueberry Semiconductors Pvt Ltd as a Validation Engineer. Sayali has done B.Tech (ETC) from Yeshwantrao Chavan College of Engineering, Nagpur.



Prashant Sapkal has joined Haqdarshak, after completing his Master's in Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Tuljapur.

Shrutika Kambale has started working at NEPRA Foundation, Ahmedabad, upon completion of her M.Sc in Social Sciences (Sustainable Livelihood & Natural Resources Governance) from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Tuljapur.



Mohit Yadav has started working with UHP Technology, Bangalore after completing his B.Tech in Chemical Engineering from Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Technological University, Lonere.



STUDENT STARS

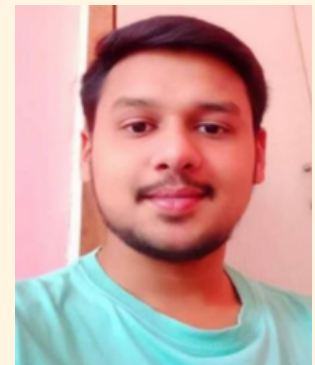


Saloni Gharpende has been selected as Vice President of Chemical Engineering Students Association (ChESA). She also won the 3rd position at the DWSIM Software Workshop, conducted as a part of the National Conference on Recent Trends in Chemical Engineering (REACT 2024) held at Laxminarayan Innovation Technology University, Nagpur.

Saloni is currently pursuing B.Tech (Chemical Engineering) from SGGSI&T, Nanded.

Harsh Bhadange has been selected for the Anant Fellowship in Sustainability and Built Environment Program at Anant National University, Ahmedabad. He is among 17 fellows selected out of more than 350 applicants worldwide.

Harsh has a PG Diploma in Water Science & Policy from Shiv Nadar University, and is currently also preparing for UPSC exams.



Nikita Dhuppe has joined Chipspirit, a VLSI product and services company, and will be working in the area of Design Verification.

Nikita has completed her B.Tech (Electrical Engineering) from Shri Guru Gobind Singhji Institute of Engineering & Technology (SGGSIE&T), Nanded,

Gopal KG has joined TVS after completing his MA in Community Organization and Development Practice from TISS, Mumbai





STUDENT STARS



Shubham Kale has joined Ground Zero Research Consultancy, after completion of his MA in Public Policy & Governance from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Hyderabad.

Gaurav Majare has joined Development Alternatives, Delhi-upon completion of his MA in Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Tuljapur.



Sharvari Halmare has received 2 offers - as a Software Engineer at Persistent Systems, Pune, and as a Analyst Trainee at Deloitte, Hyderabad. She has completed her B.Tech (Information Technology) from Yeshwantrao Chavan College of Engineering, Nagpur.

Aaryan Daiv has started working in Clod4C, Hyderabad. He has a B.Tech in Computer Science from Kolhapur Institute of Technology's College of Engineering.





ALUMNI



STARS



Rahul Patil who is working as a Senior Engineer with L&T Technology Services, was selected as the Star of the Month in recognition of his outstanding performance. Rahul is currently deputed to Offenburg, Germany

Pratiksha Vaidya who completed her Civil Engineering in 2022 and was preparing for Government recruitment exams, successfully cleared Government of Maharashtra's Water Resources Department Direct Recruitment Exam 2023. She is now working as an Assistant Civil Engineer in the Bhima Canal Circle of the Water Resources Department.



Amruta Raut who had taken a break from her engineering career to pursue her passion for dance, has resumed her technical career and is now working as a Senior Instrumentation Engineering with Tecnimont Pvt Ltd, Mumbai.

In parallel, she continues to keep her passion for dance alive by performing with reputed troupes and has also started her own dance classes

Dr. Pooja Lokhande who had completed her MBBS in 2023, has cleared the NEET exam with a All India rank of 4897. She is currently participating in the counselling process for seeking admission to post-graduate studies



WAY FORWARD

As we continue to grow, we are deeply conscious of the need to gear up for supporting the increasing scale of our operations. We see the growth happening along multiple dimensions:

- Increasing number of students being supported under HHE
- Increasing number of schools being supported under ADP
- Widening geographical spread of students and schools
- New initiatives and projects getting added to our portfolio
- Increasing number of supporters and volunteers

In keeping with our principle of “Quality over Quantity”, we are taking multiple steps to ensure that we continue to deliver the highest quality of holistic education and mentorship to our students, and that there is no compromise in the service experience provided to all our stakeholders including students, supporters, volunteers and partners.

With the above objective in mind, we have initiated action on multiple fronts, and plan to continue working on these in the coming quarter. Some of these steps include:

- Drive to build our pool of mentors and volunteers
- Providing proper orientation to mentors to ensure highest quality of mentoring
- Focused efforts towards attracting more funding, from individuals as well as corporates
- Replicating the student-trainer model, which has delivered good results
- Identifying and implementing technology solutions for better administration and operations
- Adding a small number of paid staff to ensure better administration and operations

We hope to keep you updated on the progress as we move ahead.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Dropouts in Indian higher education institutes

Sanket & Pradeep

Students require academic, financial, and social capital to turn themselves into successful professionals. The financial capital, at least for IIT students, is not an issue and will not be discussed in this article. While I have some views regarding the academic capital of all the students, I will limit this article to the discussion of the academic capital of underprivileged students. I believe that the IIT entrance examinations are of a high quality, not prone to any manipulation, and are reasonably good indicators of students' ability to complete the degree program.

Some time ago, I met an alumnus of our college of engineering Pune - COEP. The first question that one naturally asks an unknown alumnus is about his batch. With a sense of pride, he said that he belonged to multiple batches as he had completed his four-year degree program in eight years. At COEP, we had no early or abnormal exits that I can recall.

While most used to graduate in 4 years, everyone used to graduate sooner or later. I did my post-graduation at an IIT and recall a number of people who had early or abnormal exits, that is - dropouts. As per the latest report, the number of early exits in IIT Bombay is about 30 out of 1,000 students which is 3 percent. While studying the US engineering education system, I found out that they have almost 40 percent of students dropping out in the first year and only 56 percent graduating in four years.

Since the US education system does not have any quota for underprivileged students, their exit data of the underprivileged students cannot be compared with ours. It is worth noting though that while the black population in the US is more than 12 percent, the number of black engineering students is just 4 percent. The US educators are exploring ways to increase the number of black engineers without resorting to a quota system but are not very concerned about the exit numbers. They perhaps feel that the exit statistics indicate a better quality of engineering graduates. In India, the problem is, such exits and delays can yield similar results but are highly stigmatized.

So, we may conclude that the overall problem of dropouts at IIT Bombay, which appeared in the media, is not all that serious. The corresponding exits in underprivileged categories is higher and needs analysis or discussion. Though, the category exit numbers also tend to be much smaller compared to the general numbers of the US universities.

Students require academic, financial, and social capital to turn themselves into successful professionals. The financial capital, at least for IIT students, is not an issue and will not be discussed in this article. While I have some views regarding the academic capital of all the students, I will limit this article to the discussion of the academic capital of underprivileged students. I believe that the IIT entrance examinations are of a high quality, not prone to any manipulation, and are reasonably good indicators of students' ability to complete the degree program. The cutoffs for underprivileged categories are far smaller than open categories, which means that there is obviously a difference between the academic capitals of the two categories at the start of the program. That difference is naturally going to make the academic life of the underprivileged students difficult, resulting in higher abnormal exits.

To counter the situation, IIT Bombay, I understand, has been taking steps of reducing the academic load of students, who have poor academic performance, organizing English classes, and having better performing roommates to poor performing students, which, unfortunately, translates to underprivileged students.

Reducing the academic load is a reactive step and does not help in building students' self-esteem. Partnering with academically superior students may also influence the self-esteem of these students as they continue to struggle, while watching their roommates excelling. The English classes segregate them socially and take their own toll. And this brings us to what I consider is the most important point behind this story - the lack of social capital of these students. They already have low social capital and setbacks in academics reduce the possibility of increasing it. They tend to live in the system as second-class citizens. That doesn't help anyone.

At this stage, I must point out that in IITs, or for that matter almost any educational institute, a common student gives academic and social respect to others based solely on academic and social performances and does not consider the background of the concerned individuals. They,

though, do not ponder on reasons for the poor performances on either front.

The US system has a parallel to our situation. They have black students as underprivileged students. They also have historically black colleges and universities - called HBCU institutions - where the majority of students are black. In the case of STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, 25 percent of black graduates come from HBCU universities, which constitute only three percent of all American universities. Overall, the HBCUs enroll 10 percent of black students and produce 20 percent of black graduates. Therefore, we would like to make a case for separate institutes for underprivileged students which will take care of their social capital deficiency which could in turn help in overcoming academic deficiency. We understand that the Indian dynamics could be different and we cannot follow a system of another country blindly. We, therefore, suggest a rigorous debate on this possibility among all stakeholders. Of course, this solution will not solve the problem completely and we have to look at the mainstream education system to develop academic and social capitals of all underprivileged students.

We believe that every student has certain talents and they should be nurtured by the systems with the help of proper mentoring and social support programs. Of course, one must highlight that it is not so much the details of what the successful programs do than the care with which they do it. This underlines the role and importance of the teaching staff in mentoring and supporting underprivileged students. This is important, as I am not sure if IIT faculty have the time and inclination to work on this aspect while they are busy developing their own careers, which has different yardsticks. To develop academic capital, it may help to start the admission process of underprivileged students early and conduct bridge programs for them before they enter the system. The system can also use technology-based learning which offers flexibility of the pace of learning depending on students' level up competence in that particular area or subject.

Let us now come to a problem at a different level of the story. There is a huge hype in our society about engineering in general and IITs in particular. This hype creates huge parental, societal and peer pressures. Many students blindly choose these career paths without assessing their potential to perform in them.

It will help to take all students - especially the underprivileged ones - through an assessment process to help them (On page 24)

In this article published in "Unheard Voices", GEF Alumnus Sanket Bhojar and Dr. Pradeep Waychal analyze the issue of dropouts in higher education. They identify a few of the challenges that confront underprivileged students, and propose a few interventions that merit wider discussion.

Here is a link to the article <https://socialstudiesfoundation.org/unheard-voices/uv-2024/>

Dropouts in Indian Higher Education

(From page 22) understand if they have the required aptitude and attitude to succeed in these programs. If we consider yet another level of our story, we face more questions: Are our underprivileged students developed holistically in their adolescent days? Are we developing their physical literacy, which positively impacts cognitive abilities? Are we building their psychological attributes such as gratitude, resilience, achievement orientation, positivity, emotional intelligence, and knowledge orientation in the school systems? Are we sharpening their intellectual abilities by using various programs such as Scratch, book reading and critical thinking exercises? Shouldn't we impart life skills such as spoken English communication and collaboration, time management, presentation skills, etc. during school days instead of leaving

them to colleges and IITs?

Overall, I wouldn't think that the situation is a great cause of concern. However, I would appeal following some of the suggestions discussed above to improve the situation. We are aware that underprivileged students face somewhat similar problems in other branches of education, more pronounced for scheduled tribe students whose dropout rate stands at more than 12 percent while their population is around 8 percent. Some of the solutions discussed above may be helpful for those branches, too. All these solutions could help the underprivileged students, their families, the society, and our nation.

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