

Dream Works Inc.

[Neha Bhayana](#) | May 14, 2011



TRANSFORMED: From a shy 'Class 12-pass' girl to the family breadwinner, Kiran Chandor has come a long way.

A clutch of NGOs across the country are doing what schools don't do - prepare underprivileged youth for the world of work. With short-term training in spoken English, computer applications and even sex education, they are armed well for the workplace

Would you like your cappuccino with cream or chocolate sauce, sir? Or maybe you would prefer cookies on the side?" A cheery female voice seeks the attention of a blond-haired man devouring a novel at a corner table in a Café Coffee Day outlet.

When he declines the offer for accompaniments in heavily-accented English, the young woman, dressed in a crisp black shirt and trousers with a red cap, promptly informs him the order will be served in "just five minutes". She disappears behind the counter where she rustles up a steaming cappuccino.

It's hard to imagine that a year ago the café attendant, Kiran Chandor, 23, had never heard of cappuccino, let alone tasted it, and could not speak a sentence in English without fumbling. She had never dressed in anything but salwar kurtis or conversed with men, apart from those in her family.

But today, when she steps out of her two-room house in Johripur, a low-income colony in east Delhi, clad in her uniform, neighbours look at her with awe. Most men in the area do odd jobs, working as carpenters and tailors. Her father was a vegetable vendor till he joined a factory - he now cuts iron-six months ago.

Chandor, who joined the café in September 2010, earns Rs 7, 000 per month - not much in today's world, but a lot for her family. Her father brings home just Rs 5, 500 per month, barely sufficient for a household comprising his wife and five children; Chandor is the eldest.

With Chandor's contribution, her family's life is cruising like never before. "We are able to save money now. It is my dream that we should have our own home...of at least 25 to 50 yards," she says. "Houses in this area cost around Rs 3 to 4 lakh. I think I should be in the position to buy in two or three years."

The shy, "Class 12-pass" girl made the journey from the dusty lanes of the suburb to the glitzy mall and started earning with the help of a unique vocational training course imparted by a Delhi-based non-profit organisation, ETASHA (Enabling and Training Adolescents for Successful and Healthy Adulthood), for a nominal fee.

The course helps underprivileged youth, mostly just 10th or 12th pass, become employable and get jobs in the organised sector - retail, hospitality, business process outsourcing and accounting- by providing market-oriented vocational training.

More than 500 young men and women from low-income colonies in Delhi have completed the course at three ETASHA centres; the first was set up at Madanpur Khadar extension, a slum resettlement colony on the Delhi-Faridabad border, in 2008. Most trainees get jobs within weeks of completing the course. "Last year, we managed to get jobs for 80 per cent of our trainees," says Meenakshi Nayar, an IIM-A alumna who gave up a flourishing career in human resources to set up the organisation.

ETASHA is not alone. In Ahmedabad, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has placed 3, 500 youth - children of women who roll beedis and agarbattis for a living - in reputed companies with a similar training programme. Two other NGOs, Action et Aid and CAP Foundation, both funded by foreign organisations, have provided 'employability skills training' to more than three lakh youth in rural and semi-urban areas across the country since they debuted in 2005 and 1996, respectively. "In Delhi and other metros, trainees are landing jobs with starting salaries ranging between Rs 6, 000 to 9, 000," says LS Murali from Aid et Action.

LIVING, LEARNING

Though one keeps reading about the high rate of unemployment, even among graduates and qualified youth, these NGOs say it is "fairly easy" to find jobs for their semi-literate trainees, even the Class 8 dropouts. Every trainee who completes the course at CAP foundation gets at least "three job offers" to choose from. "There is no shortage of jobs, especially in growing sectors like retail and hospitality. Besides, one does not need degrees for entry-level jobs in these sectors," says Kapil Marwaha, whose agency 'Munsar Services' has placed 800 youngsters from slums across India in reputed companies.

He adds that the job market is only poised to grow further. The retail sector alone is expected to create around 10 to 15 million jobs in the next few years, according to estimates.

Despite the availability of jobs in huge numbers in certain sectors, say experts, the unemployment rate is escalating due to a gap between industry requirements and suitability of skill sets in school and college passouts. Nayar points out that while the Indian government has substantially increased the number of "first-generation literates" with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, it has failed to equip students, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged sections, for the fastmoving world beyond the school gates. "The education is sub-standard and there is either no career guidance in schools or it is outdated. The teens somehow manage to get past the dreaded Class 10 or 12 exam but they are clueless about what to do next," says Nayar.

"Not all can afford higher education or wait to complete college to start earning. What they need are livelihood opportunities." Ravi T, project director of CAP Foundation, agrees: "There should be a link between learning and livelihood, but government schemes miss it. We are trying to fill the gap."

CONFIDENCE BUILDING

The courses run by these NGOs usually last up to four months and cover spoken English, computer usage and specific job-related skills training such as customer service and selling techniques. Facilitators at ETASHA also familiarise trainees with the 'world of work', be it office terminology, hierarchies or the art of writing resumes. Going a step further, Nayar has included a module on sex education to prepare trainees for the professional world where men and women mingle more freely than they do in the world they are familiar with.

Most trainees consider lessons in spoken English the most important part of the course because even though they study the language (as a second language) at school, they are unable to communicate fluently in it. Chandor is one of them. "I could read and write English, but I used to panic if I was required to speak. The training made me less hesitant," she says. Even now Chandor is confident only in using the rehearsed oneliners at work. If one tries to converse with her in English, she starts stuttering: "I can not," she says.

What makes the teaching more effective than the one at school? "We don't teach," says Nayar. Before one wonders, she explains: "We help the trainees develop skills, we don't provide knowledge. Knowledge is incidental." Somya Kapoor, a trainer at ETASHA, points out that during English class, for instance, they don't have any grammar lessons. "We don't correct the trainees unless the mistake is really big. We just encourage them to speak in English and focus on vocabulary that is needed in every day life," she says.

The courses also familiarise trainees with the world beyond the slums and villages where they reside. While Aid et Action invites experts from the industry to give guest lectures, ETASHA takes them on field trips to fastfood joints and malls so they can get a feel of the places and see how customers are dealt with.

"I was overwhelmed when we went to a mall in Noida. I had never seen Noida. I did not know the metro goes till there, and I could not have imagined such tall buildings full of big shops," gushes Chandor.

BETTER DEALS

The white-collar work profiles help these trainees get deals better than their parents ever got. Asha Parmar, for instance, earns Rs 4, 500 plus tips every month manning a petrol pump in Satellite, Ahmedabad. This sum is three times more than what her mother gets for rolling incense sticks. The 29-year-old, too, was earning a meagre Rs 1, 500 per month at an agarbatti making unit till she was trained at a SEWA centre.

"My husband earns Rs 3, 500, which is not sufficient for the six of us. My salary has enabled us to put two decent meals on our plates," says Asha, one of the 20 women groomed by SEWA to manage petrol pumps.

Vipin Sahu, the son of an autorickshaw driver, who earns Rs 12, 000 working in the human resource department of a small firm in south Delhi, has managed to provide his family comforts they never dreamt of. He recently bought a television and a PC worth Rs 47, 000. "I want to get a washing machine next so my mother does not have to wash so many clothes," says the 20-year-old, who lives in Jaitpur in Delhi.

The trainees are also able to fund further studies thanks to their earnings. Sahu, who is pursuing BA through correspondence, plans to enroll for an MBA.

HAPPY TO HIRE

When Nayar first approached companies to find jobs for her trainees in 2006, a well-known retail chain dismissed her saying they were not interested because they had "graduates queuing up" outside their offices.

But most companies in sunshine sectors like retail, hospitality, tourism are only too happy to hire underprivileged youth who have received vocational training. "Young men and women from low-socio economic strata are more sincere and stable than those from middle class families. They desire to make a career out of the job, so they stick around," says Ruby Jha, talent acquisition head at NetAmbit, a Noida-based tele-sales company that has hired 15 ETASHA trainees.

LS Murali from Aid et Action says many companies, including multinational banks like Citibank and HDFC, willingly recruit even candidates who have not completed Class 10 for data entry jobs provided they have basic computer knowledge.

With inputs from Radha Sharma in Ahmedabad

WHY VOCATIONAL TRAINING

40 million Indians are unemployed and interested in working, according to the labour ministry's 2010 survey. In 2007-8, the unemployment rate in India stood at 2.8 per cent. It is expected to rise to 30 per cent by 2020. In 26 per cent of households in rural areas and 8 per cent in urban areas, not a single member aged 15 years or above could read and write a simple message. The government runs around 5, 500 Industrial Training Institutes to provide vocational training to youth who have not completed their graduation. But they focus primarily on blue collar trades such as electrical and mechanical repair work. Of the 29 crore Indians aged 15 to 29, only 60 lakh were 'technically trained' for various professions in 2006. Moreover, two-thirds of trained persons had received training through non-formal means, with no help from the education system. And nearly 18 per cent of the technically trained youth were unemployed (source: National Sample Survey Organisation report 2006).