

## **GDD: e-ducation for the underprivileged**



Gyantantra Digital Dost or GDD, the self-paced learning software developed by Literacy India (LI) empowers underprivileged children and women. Up to now, it has positively impacted the lives of around 1,20,000 homeless children in India.

When Literacy India started working with homeless children, they found that many of them were addicted to drugs; their attention span was not more than 15 minutes; they played truant at school if at all they had been admitted into one; they were as far from the mainstream as could be. GDD was developed to inspire such homeless, underprivileged uneducated children to want to gain skills and knowledge that would put them on par with their peers who came from a more privileged background. Apart from academics, GDD teaches life skills to help these children stand up to child abuse, and health problems including HIV-positive symptoms

GDD is Literacy India's biggest focus, because of its excellent scope for scaling. For example, a small intervention as part of the Haryana government's Saksham schooling programme led to the state showing much interest in adopting GDD modules in all the schools across Haryana. Literacy India's idea is to empower government schools across India, to create the next generation of leaders.

GDD uses Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Digital Learning to address challenges associated with the quality of education available to homeless street children in India. GDD Multimedia Content Design incorporates friendly, animated cartoons in human and animal forms, to act as virtual teachers. Animated short stories, puzzles and songs are woven into the learning module to make interactive learning more fun. In a typical GDD Digi classroom, a virtual teacher explains difficult concepts in a simple manner and improves the cognitive skills of the child.

Deepak, the son of a migrant is an example of a child whose life changed post-intervention by Literacy India and GDD. His nomadic life kept him away from attending school and his knowledge and learning was far below that of his peers. At 12, his knowledge was that of a 5-year-old! However, in just six months of handwork and intervention, he was able to score 52.5% in the curriculum chosen for him. He could write three-letter words in English, solve problems in Maths and understand grammar.

Muskaan, another child who was adopted by the project also showed marked improvement after she was exposed to the GDD way of learning. From a score of 4 out of 30 in English during the pre-tests, she scored 15.5 out of 30 in mid-term assessments.

GDD assesses each child according to her/ his learning ability and customizes the syllabus accordingly. Individual assistance is provided to each child. The unique virtual teacher can hasten the learning process and settle the child in an age-appropriate grade at the end of the intervention period. The positive outcomes post GDD has changed the entire outlook on life and possibilities for these children.

Up to now, GDD has achieved a 70% increase in learning levels in primary education, a 60% increase in retention levels in government schools and LI learning centres, and a 100% reduction in school dropouts. Currently, it runs in 1,121 LI centres, 106 Government schools across 6 states, and 12 partner NGOs. 10,000 school children have been enrolled after successfully completing GDD.

GDD's target group is diverse and scattered across India. It includes children of migrant labourers and other marginalized communities, first-generation learners with weak assimilation capabilities across age groups ranging from 5 years to 17 years.

In a pre-test assessment conducted in 2018, around 92% of children scored poorly. 8% had an above-average score. In the post-mid test, 95% of children scored above average and achieved academic proficiency. Rapid learning was seen in word recognition, simple mathematical operations, addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, logical analysis, identification of colours, shapes, sentence formation, writing simple essays etc. Apart from the day to day curriculum, students learned values and beliefs and demonstrated confidence, self-awareness, and growth in personality.

In 2018:

- 105 centres were covered under direct reach out and 21 under outreach
- 8 other NGO collaborations
- 12 states covered
- 16402 direct and 12859 indirect beneficiaries
- 2856 certificates distributed across India on successful completion of GDD
- 15 donors
- 67 registration for online GDD software download

Future plans include providing an infrastructure for 'each one to teach one' and 'earn while you learn'; spreading GDD to other NGOs across India and encouraging volunteering by corporate as part of their CSR program. This will go a long way in ensuring that underprivileged children get their entitlement to education.