

COVID RESPONSE

SHEF



IMMEDIATE RESPONSE *Keeping connected*

Overview

Study Hall Educational Foundation (SHEF) is a non-profit organisation focused on providing quality education to underprivileged girls and youth in urban and rural India. Its interventions include community engagement to influence social norms, influencing government systems to be more equitable, and running a network of model schools and outreach programs in rural and urban India.

It runs a network of 6 schools and 4 outreach programs, has trained over 100,000 teachers and impacted over 5 million children over the last three decades.

SHEF's students were significantly impacted by the lockdown. Many of them face challenges in accessing digital devices or internet. Their families lost jobs and people were in a state of panic due to fear of the disease.

SHEF reached out to these families via phones, WhatsApp and postal letters. It built relationships with the students' parents to encourage their children to continue remote learning. The teachers had to be handheld to adapt to new teaching methods. They adopted creative solutions such as making videos of portions and sharing them with students.

The biggest challenge was to keep everyone's morale up and combat the fear triggered by the sudden lockdown and the pandemic. SHEF communicated incessantly with staff and students' families to safeguard their emotional wellbeing.

It helped connect people to government schemes for free ration and setup a kitchen, feeding and connecting 150 thousand people with ration supplies.



SHEF started a library and loaned books to students, urging them to teach 6 other students and study in open areas together. They also loaned devices for teachers and students to continue online education. As a result of these efforts, GyanSetu, SHEF's Community Education Centres in low-income communities and migrant labour colonies for out-of-school children, doubled during the first wave. GyanSetu centres have grown from 43 to 63 centres during the pandemic.

SHEF's efforts at being continuously connected and engaged with its students and their families resulted in 80% of students returning to schools when they opened after the lockdown.

With domestic violence cases expected to spike during the lockdown, SHEF urged its students, especially the boys, to take a stand against violence against women at home. They were given child helpline numbers to call on and assured support.

SHEF managed to keep all its teachers on, without any layoffs. It helped its fee paying students on as need basis. It managed to source emergency funds from existing donors and family & friends.

The Ashoka fellow's personal outreach also increased significantly with online channels. She conducted webinars for parents and teachers every 2 weeks, inviting external speakers and moderating the discussions. She gave over 30 talks to various schools and colleges.

LONG TERM SHIFTS

Digitising the future

The pandemic has made SHEF believe in the potential of technology for education, outreach and enabling underserved communities. It believes now it can move the 'children at school' model to a distributed one. With technology and connectivity, it can create many more community centres and deliver lessons online.

SHEF sees itself as a lab to try out new ideas and share the model with anyone else across the world. It will devote time and resources to contribute to collaborations to achieve its mission of quality education for all. The founder is also part of the Chief Minister's Advisory Council for education besides being part of other national and international collaboratives.



Conclusion

Moving to digital channels and adapting new ways to reach students, families and communities helped SHEF significantly increase its creativity, connectivity and outreach.

It has also strengthened the caring and creative quotient in the organisation, giving it hope that it can reach many more students and families.

