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Nanhe Kalaam: Making India Self-Reliant through Education!



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📁 Socent Strategy / Social Entrepreneurship / Startup / Uncategorized

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It is said that education is the most powerful tool with which one can change the world. In a country like India which has around 400 million children this saying becomes all the more relevant. The importance of good quality education cannot be over-emphasized. Education has the power to prevent transmission of poverty across generations. It has also been documented to improve the health, nutrition and economic conditions of the society as a whole.

Surender Yadav, our fellow from June 2017 batch, and co-founder of **Self Reliant India** envisions a nation where every child irrespective of their economic and social condition has access to quality school education. Surender completed his engineering from Vellore Institute of Technology and was a Gandhi fellow from 2015-17. During his tenure as a Gandhi fellow he worked with the primary schools in Jhunjhunu district in Rajasthan, and it was during this time that he came up with the idea behind SRI.

SRI's vision is to train primary school students so that they can get admission to Jawahar Navodaya Vidhayala- a system of alternate government schools for talented children in India. SRI wants to emulate Super-30 of Bihar (which

tutors gifted children from marginalized background to crack IIT entrance exams) and trains 4th and 5th grade school children in Hindi, Maths & Reasoning to prepare them for Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Selection Test conducted annually for admissions into Navodaya schools.



SRI is currently working with 300 students in Rewari and Jhunjhunu districts in Haryana and Rajasthan respectively. They have tied up with the government schools to use their premises as learning centers after school-hours. They have a dedicated team of 30 volunteer teachers who work with the students to improve their arithmetic, hindi grammar and logical reasoning for 2-3 hours each day after school.

UnLtd Delhi team got a chance to visit Surender and his team in Rewari to see their work on the ground. We were invited to one of their learning centers in a small village called Jadra, on the outskirts of Rewari. It was a government school which also doubled up as a SRI learning center after the school hours. It had around 35 children when we reached there, almost all of them from an economically disadvantaged background. There were two separate classes going on, one for hindi grammar for 4th grade students and the other of maths for 5th graders where students were trying to solve HCF and LCM problems. Some of the children kept confusing the difference between the two and we watched their teacher Jyoti Ma'am patiently explain it to them using an example of traffic light and the time interval in which it changes its color.

Jyoti volunteers her time for SRI and is preparing for State Police exams while Manita teaches Hindi in the same school. Jyoti cheerfully told us how she also tutors class 11th and 12th students back in the city. “My father was a small-holding farmer with no regular income and it was difficult growing up, which is why I realize the importance of good education” she shared explaining that teaching at SRI also gives her a sense of purpose. The school



Primary Head Mr. Raveesh Kumar told us about his hopes for these students and how Surender’s intervention was a much-needed step to ensure that the children who can’t afford to go to good-quality schools, get a fair opportunity and training to atleast attempt to get into Navodaya schools which provide much better quality education.

Surender discussed with us how he and his team is aiming to get atleast 30 students to crack the entrance exam and get admission into the Navodaya schools. He also wants to improve the learning outcomes of students in maths and hindi by 30-50 percent. He shared with us the story of Ammu whose father had recently passed away and whose mother was a house-wife. With no steady income to support them anymore, getting admission into a Navodaya school- which bears all costs of living, boarding and education could be the defining factor which protects her from dropping out of school at an early age- a strong possibility owing to her circumstances.



“Our long term goal is to improve the quality of education in government schools specifically in the rural areas” says Surender. According to a survey by SRI which collected 8 years of data from 5 government schools in Jhunjhunu of academically gifted Grade 5 students – only 75% of these top students could finish their high school education and only 45% completed their graduation. Only 2-3% of these students completed their college from outside of Jhunjhunu. It was also found in their case-study that none of the

these students was found working in organized sector. These students were either currently unemployed or working at a job which was covering just their basic needs. Surrender shared that the larger aim is to cover this gap in the quality of education between rural education and urban education system. Providing children with skills to crack Navodaya school entrance exam is just the starting step in this direction.



As of now SRI is in the process of signing a Memorandum with the Rewari Administration Block which would formalize their relationship with the the government schools in the area. They are also trying to strengthen and incentivise their volunteer partnerships for better retention of volunteers. “I have high hopes for my students. We have been lucky so far and our volunteers are very dedicated. We hope that with continued support from the government we will get closer to fulfilling our mission”, Surrender says before signing off.

About Navodaya School System: Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) are a system of alternate schools for *gifted students* in *India*. They are run by *Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti*, New Delhi, an autonomous organization under the Department of School Education and Literacy, *Ministry of Human Resource Development*, Government of India. JNVs are fully residential and co-educational schools affiliated to *Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)*, *New Delhi*, with classes from *VI* to *XII standard*. JNVs are specifically tasked with finding talented children in rural areas of India and providing them with an education equivalent to the best residential school system, without regard to their family’s socio-economic condition. (Source: Wikipedia)

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