

OUR JOURNEY SO FAR..

It's been almost two years since we started our work in Bir, Himachal Pradesh. Back then, we were not only new to this place, but were also new to the alternative education space that we had chosen to work on. We started our journey by doing various experiments with kids in different formats. We mostly worked after school hours, but, at times, also took the opportunity to work with local schools to conduct one/two/seven day's long workshops. The content of our sessions initially focused more on academics, and eventually shifted to life-skills, values and Enquiry based topics. The experiments gradually taught us to focus more on connecting students with their surroundings, especially villages, and facilitate them to work on projects that would not only make them think, or develop their life skills, but would also enhance their knowledge of local ecosystem.

In addition to our community experiments, we give equal credit to the organizations that we visited in past two years ([SIDH](#) in Mussoorie, [Purkal](#) In Dehradun, [Adharshila Learning Centre](#) in Madhya Pradesh, [Anand Niketan](#) Democratic School and [Eklavya](#) in Bhopal) for helping us improve our understanding of Education and refine our teaching pedagogy to what it is today.

Our effort is to build learning spaces wherein:

- ⇒ kids are motivated to learn out of love, not out of fear.
- ⇒ kids are free to learn whatever they wish to learn; their willingness is our priority.
- ⇒ all cultures, including our traditional ones, are equally respected, and western culture is not followed blindly.
- ⇒ all languages are equally respected, and *Hindi/Pahari* is used when it comes to learning from the communities.
- ⇒ due importance is given to local knowledge systems.

SWA- NIRMAAN SHIVIR, JULY 2015

In July, we organized our second summer camp better known as Swa-Nirmaan Shivir. A total of 18 kids joined us for a journey that lasted eight days. The shivir focused on addressing harmony among Head, heart and Hand by encouraging kids to participate in our well designed projects on cultivating Enquiry, Lifeskills and Values! The prime highlight of the shivir was to understand 'Entrepreneurship and its local context'! Follow [this link](#) here to find more details on the time we had.



'SAHAJ JEEWANSHAALA'- AN AFTER SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE LEARNING CENTER

Presently, we are running a learning Center in our community wherein kids (Age 10-14) come after school hours to learn from various available resources. We have tried to build a space in which kids are free to spend their time the way they wish to. They may choose to read books, or play chess, or write stories of their own, or sing songs, or draw pictures, or learn Maths, or simply sit with their own selves in silence. As of now, we have a total of 33 kids registered for the learning center, out of which around 22-25 choose to visit us on daily basis. And we keep the space running five days a week, 2 hours a day.

We also choose to float group projects so as to motivate kids understand their community better and learn from the experience of their elders. At present, our kids are busy surveying community members with an aim to understand their mindset on various issues ranging from lifestyle to money.

The space that we all have created stands on the spirit of sharing whatever little we all have. We share our footballs, and we share our walnuts. We have created a culture where kids are not the receivers and we are not the givers. Instead, we all are contributors and we all are beneficiaries.

The overall idea is to facilitate kids think independently and realize how important it is to be happy and to make choices in life that comes from the Heart.





‘प्रश्न विकास का’- A 2- MONTHS LONG INTENSIVE PROGRAMME ON DEVELOPING ENQUIRY AND LIFESKILLS

Our first two month long program has already started in Aryan Public School (a low income private school) where 12 kids from grade 6 to 11 have joined us to design a new village (imaginary) where we can implement the bests of modern and tradition world. In the course, our job is to first understand the pros and cons of various alternatives available in Housing, Agriculture, Healthcare, Entertainment, Business, Infrastructure, Technology, Transportation etc. and then eventually choose the options that best suit our environment. In the entire process, students would end up developing their own understanding of the mainstream and traditional offerings, which will eventually help them lead their life independently in future.

In past few weeks, we have taken our efforts to the next level. We have now begun floating special courses on ‘Nurturing Enquiry’, ‘Developing Life skills’ and ‘Inculcating Values’ among students in our local schools.



A SHIFT FROM ‘OPENING A NEW SCHOOL’ TO ‘TRANSFORMING EXISTING SCHOOLS’

In our first year of community operations, we were very eager to move towards starting a school of our own wherein we could nurture kids as per our own understanding of Education. But, in due course of time, we realized that it would be too early to have a formal space of our own. We found that we were not really prepared to handle routine activities and institutional requirements that come along with the benefit of owning a school. Instead, we realized that it would be better to further refine our teaching methodology and enhance our reach of programs with the help of already existing schools. So we thought to join hands with the local govt. and private schools to experiment further and try transforming the same for the betterment of kids and the community. However, in future, as the calling comes, we would be open to build an ashram of our own that can serve as a model of our work and philosophy.

A MONTH LONG PERSONALISED RETREAT ON ‘SILENCING THE MIND’

Very recently, we hosted a month long retreat program for Ajay Chaurasia who came from Mumbai to find more clarity on how to lead his life further.

Ajay came from a middle class family in Mumbai and was stuck with an agitated mind. His one side wanted to make him end his life and other side wanted him to do something for the society, if not for himself. Being not able to decide how to proceed further, he joined us for a month long program, in which we facilitated him to understand his mind better and silence it with the help of meditation, nature walks and KarmaYoga. Doing some well designed community tasks were also a part of the program that helped him to understand his life journey better.



EFFORTS FOR SELF-GROWTH

In past few months, we got different opportunities to grow ourselves in the form of [Indian Buddhist Retreat](#) and [Yoga](#) retreat in [Deer Park](#) and Natural Farming workshop at [Save Farm](#) in Gujarat.

The retreats at Deer Park took us on an inner journey to dig deeper into our hearts and minds. In Yoga retreat led by [Ritambhara](#), we understood the world of Yoga and the yogic way of living.

The Natural Farming workshop in Gujarat was a true delight. Many people with unconventional professions joined the workshop so as to learn from the farming experiences of Bhaskar Save, better known as Gandhi of Farming in India. This helped us understand how deeply farming and spirituality are connected to each other.

IN FUTURE...

- 1. Leadership and Entrepreneurship Course for Youth**– Our intention is to first help the local youth improve their personality and self-confidence, and, thereafter, nurture their thinking towards crafting their own career paths by starting enterprises in the Himalayan region instead of heading towards industrialized states for employment. In future, they may also help us in taking our mission of redefining Education to the next level.
- 2. Peaceful Living Retreat, Nov 20-22, Dec 18-20, Deer Park Institute, Bir**- The purpose of the retreat is to reflect & go within and understand the emotional and spiritual needs of ourselves which are beyond material offerings of the world. A series of sessions on meditation, community interactions and sharing of reflections shall come handy to achieve the objective. For more details, explore [here](#)