PROJECT MOKSHA

Moksha is a Sanskrit word which refers to various forms of emancipation and liberation from samsara (the cycle of rebirth). Attending our private, international school surrounded by government-run village schools reminded us of the cyclical nature of poverty, stemming from inequal education. Keeping this in mind, we created Project Moksha- a youth-focused initiative that aims to instil the soft skills necessary for employment in students from government-run schools across rural Haryana.

Without yet knowing what our project would be based on, we extensively researched issues in the villages around us and concluded that education would be the place we could make the most impact. In this process, we learned many things about the community.

These learnings combined with our knowledge of our own skills convinced us that pursuing a project within Goals 4 and 10 of the UNSDGs would be the best path forward. We specifically looked at Targets 4.4, 4.7 and 10.2. Overall, these targets encompass vocational skills for employment, the knowledge to promote sustainable living and reduced inequalities.

Learnings about the Community:

1. An increased comprehension of the **education gap** between ourselves and the students we were working with
2. Understanding of what **life after school** looks like for students in the villages around us: many of them do not have clarity about higher education nor do they know what needs to be done to pursue their dream careers
3. A glimpse into **school life at a government school**; the student-teacher relationship, disciplinary requirements

Our **understanding and knowledge of the SDGs** improved greatly as we applied theoretical knowledge practically. **Bringing quality to the student's education** was a key element of our project. Through the modules, we helped them build the confidence to speak out in front of larger groups and to work effectively and communicate with one another using their own email IDs. All our planning and work throughout this project was also intended towards reducing inequalities in our society. So, the idea of choosing these two SDGs specifically to focus on for this project was to showcase how quality education in multiple aspects is the key to sustainability and bridging the inequalities.

Some quantitative impacts we noticed:

68
Total students impacted

30
Emails made

120
3 surveys with 120 students

★★★★☆
Average workshop rating
From participant feedback

470+
People reached through social media

Some qualitative impacts may include:

Even though, prior to the project, many students had undermined the importance of planning for college and jobs at such an early stage in their lives, we were glad to see this gradually transform over the course of the project.

As more and more people in Teekli Village start pursuing higher education and get better jobs, it will motivate others in their community to do the same. Contributing towards a ripple effect, we would be successful in playing our part as responsible global citizens to help break the cyclical nature of poverty and the large inequality that unfortunately exists today.

During our project, we refined many of our existing skills and were able to apply them outside of an academic context. For instance, our **time-management** skills were put to the test as we scheduled sessions that took into consideration our own exams, the village school exams (which were at different times), as well as events at both schools. We also created a social media timeline and broke down each module into 15-minute activity blocks.

We also developed our skills of **spontaneity** due to unforeseeable circumstances. Once, we arrived at the school to conduct a session and the teachers had forgotten we were going that day! We had to consolidate a 90-minute session into 45 minutes, while still conveying important information and bonding with the students. Another instance involved the delayed arrival of a professional for our Career Day event (see video for more details). We had to entertain the students for upwards of an hour and chose to take a quick quiz on skills we had taught them and engage in team-building activities. Sometimes, they did not understand the importance of these activities, so we had to come up with **real-life examples** they could relate to on the spot.

Other skills we developed were our own skills of **organization and communication.**

1. We planned our lessons weeks in advance, scheduling enough time to get feedback from Ms. Supriya Narula, a certified SDG educator
2. After a few chaotic meetings, we scheduled weekly meetings and lunch updates (we later moved these online) to keep up with our workload
3. Our formal communication skills improved as we communicated with principals and coordinators at both our own school and the village school.

Our Plans for the Future:

We were thrilled with the impact our project made on the community and are therefore happy to be working with a team of shadows who will take the project forward in the years to come. Some of these shadows have been working on the project for almost as long as we have, participating in the planning stages as much as in the execution. We hoped this would give them exposure to our process and prevent them from making the same mistakes we did.

We are now actively working with our shadows on next year's plan- redesigning our modules to be more focused. Reflecting on our past sessions and shortcomings, we identified areas that were more constructive than others. A keyway in which we did this was by surveying students at regular intervals (details of which you can find above).

Next year, apart from broadening the project to include more schools, we will heighten emphasis on Career Day and interactions with professionals. It was our most successful session this year.

We're considering alternating between soft-skill sessions and interactions with professionals so the students can explore multiple career paths over the course of the year. We are also looking to work with younger students (Grade 9) so they have time to change their academic focus according to the career path they choose.

Number of students that interacted with each professional

Soldier: 61   Doctor: 34

Lawyer: 28   Artist: 8

Finally, we are conscious that some of the professions we introduced to them were unachievable (for example, they cannot pursue medicine with the subjects they currently have) Medical tuition is also incredibly high. Keeping this in mind, we are developing a network of professionals that could introduce them to jobs that do not require higher education, as well as professionals who will encourage the pursuit of higher education. We look forward to working with our new tam to make project moksha the best we can be.

> *"I learned so much from this session – what I want to do in the future and be. I want to make something of myself."*
>
> **Rachna, Grade 11 student from the Teekli School**

> *"This project opened my eyes to the importance of soft skills and showed me how far character development goes"*
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> **Vatsal Kabra, Grade 9, shadow of team moksha**