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DREAM

THRIVING

STORIES OF SUCCESS REDEFINED

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This report is a result of our work with young people who continue to inspire us to be the life skills champions that the education sector needs. We hope that through the insights shared in this report results in the creation of a movement that looks at thriving from a lens based not only academic or professional success, but from the lens of the ability of a young person to make choices.

All great minds do not work in solitude. Thanks to Suchetha Bhat and Vishal Talreja for bringing in new perspectives and insights to this report.

Thanks also to Varsha Pillai and Anusha Raichur from the Communication team for designing the report.



PREFACE

Founded in 1999, Dream a Dream has been working towards empowering young people from vulnerable backgrounds to overcome adversity and prepare them to flourish in a fast-changing world. Over the years, we have impacted the lives of over 1 million children through our creative life skills approach. In this report, we have highlighted the impact of our After-School Life Skills Programme, the Career Connect Programme and the Teacher Development Programme for the year 2018-19.

Our Career Connect Centre acts more than a typical vocational training centre. It bridges the gap between the aspirations of young people and available job opportunities, while equipping them with required skills. Started in 2010, the Career Connect programme uses the Personal Computer (PC) as a medium to help students develop essential life skills and set a strong foundation that will enable them to tap competitive opportunities. Until today, the programme has helped 5,000 youth every year to get jobs by equipping them with relevant life skills. It is one of the four key programmes designed to create the best possible world for the youth.

Dream a Dream works with young people from vulnerable backgrounds who experience extreme adversity in their daily lives. Adversity affects their ability to engage with the world, make healthy life choices and thrive. Life skills then becomes a critical ingredient to help young people navigate challenges and flourish. Over the years of experience, we ask ourselves a fundamental question. Are we enabling our young adults to thrive in life?

Thriving for us is beyond resilience, where the individual is not simply bouncing back from problems but also taking advantage of new life opportunities, finding meaning in life, reconstructing their self and even engaging in meaningful activities.

This report provides glimpse of life experiences and unique journey that some of our young adults who we believe is thriving well.

This report provides us with strong evidence that the life skills approach enables young people to thrive in their lives.

Suchetha Bhat

CEO – Dream a Dream

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dream a Dream as an organization has been consistently working with a mission to empower the marginalized and vulnerable population with a special focus on transforming their lives. Young people from vulnerable backgrounds come from various experiences of adversity. Adversity affects their ability to engage with the world, make healthy life choices and their ability to thrive in the fast-moving world. At Dream a Dream, we believe that 21st-century skills provide an excellent opportunity for young people from vulnerable backgrounds. Young people can adapt to this new, fast-changing world through life skills and thus achieve positive outcomes in life.

Career Connect Programme (CCP) is an innovation lab which equips 14-23-year-olds with information, skills and access to opportunities to make a healthy transition to adulthood. CCP conducts career awareness workshops, run short-term modules in Computers, English, Communication Skills, Career Guidance and provide access to internships, scholarships, vocational training and jobs. The programmes are delivered with a high impact life skills approach that develops the resilience, confidence and adaptability of young people to respond to the fast-change of pace in the world around them. The programmes are conducted in two learning centres, based in Bangalore.

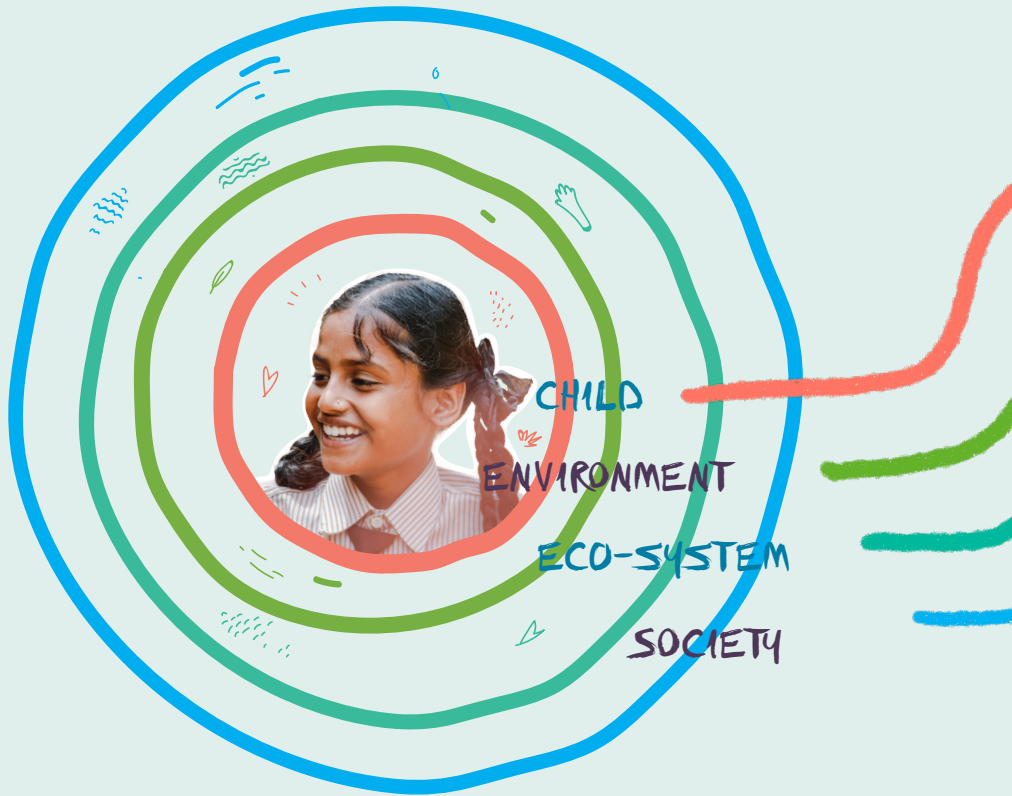
Every year we work with more than 5000 young adults from various background and it's always a pleasure for me to declare that 97.6% of the participants were meaningfully engaged through our programs.

We are on a mission to reimagine education and we strongly believe that thriving in life should be considered as the indicator of success. Thriving, in short, is finding meaning in oneself and exploring meaningful engagement in life.

This report is an attempt to bring out the stories of our young adults whose unique journeys are inspiring and motivating for us. These stories made us realize how young adults thrive and succeed despite the adversities that they face through their lives.

Our programme proves that life skills is an evidence-based intervention for children from adversity and contribute to thriving.

Pavithra KL
Associate Director- Innovation Hub



Dream a Dream is a registered, charitable trust empowering children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds to overcome adversity and flourish in the 21st century using a creative life skills approach.

OUR APPROACH

At the centre of Dream a Dream's approach is the child. We believe that every child has the potential to overcome adversity and develop life skills.

Next, their closest influencers. A caring and compassionate adult. It could be a teacher, a parent, a facilitator, a mentor, or a volunteer.

Then, the ecosystem. This includes a supportive community of practitioners who are working towards education reform such as the government, policy-makers, administrators, and other such stakeholders.

And eventually, the society that the young person will inhabit.

Society

We create framework changes in society by influencing policy, changing education paradigms, and by reimagining learning and redefining the purpose of education for young people to thrive in the 21st century.

Eco-System

We invest in building evidence of the impact of our life skills programmes through quality research. The research helps us build a voice around the criticality and urgency to integrate life skills within learning outcomes. We also build a supportive community of practitioners, organisations, governments, and key stakeholders who help integrate life skills into education reform through strategic partnerships.

Environment

We enable teachers, educators, school leaders, and youth workers to empower young people with life skills through our award-winning creative life skills approach.

Child

We work directly with 10000 young people each year through our two innovation labs - After School Life Skills Programme and Career Connect Programme. In these innovation labs, new approaches to life skills development are introduced, demonstrated, documented and fed back into the larger framework to reimagine learning for young people in India.

FOCUS ON SYSTEMS

FOCUS ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Conceptualizing thriving

Thriving is a multifaceted complex process and psychologists try to define it in different ways. The concept of thriving draws from the field of positive psychology which emphasizes on the need to build a scientific understanding of positive human functioning and initiate effective interventions which can enable individuals, families and communities to thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Brown et al. (2017) discovered two recurring themes in their review of definitions of thriving – development and success. They argue that while the developmental aspect of thriving refers to physical, psychological or social growth and enhancement of individuals, the attainment of certain outcomes aligns with the success of individuals. Accordingly, Brown et al. (2017) define thriving, a multifaceted state of being as “the joint experience of development and success” (p.168).

As widely recognized in the positive youth development literature, the development of five Cs – competence, confidence, character, connection and caring are integral to the process of thriving (Lerner et al., 2010). Scholars have also highlighted the bidirectional nature of thriving and pointed out that development of both the person and context is integral to the process. Lerner (2004) argues that adolescents can thrive by developing their individual strengths and capacities and developing strengths in their own contexts such as families, schools and communities. Benson and Scales (2009) consider ‘sparks’ to be an integral component while describing thriving in adolescence. They describe sparks as “a passion for a self-identified interest, skill, or capacity that metaphorically lights a fire in an adolescent’s life, providing energy, joy, purpose, and direction” (Scales et al., 2011, p.264). Therefore, the action taken by young people and others to develop and enhance those sparks contribute to the process of thriving. Furthermore, Brown et al. (2017) in their review of the thriving literature have identified personal enablers as positive perspective, religiosity and spirituality, proactive personality, motivation, knowledge and learning, psychological resilience and possessing social competencies and contextual enablers as challenge environment, attachment and trust, family support, and colleague/ employer support. Most studies on thriving have been conducted in Western contexts. Research on thriving in non-Western contexts (developing countries) is scarce. Dream A Dream, in our work over the past 20 years have realised that extreme poverty and failure to thrive are intrinsically linked and further leads to a wide range of long-term mental health and developmental issues among adolescents (Kennedy et al., 2014; Pearson et al., 2020). In response to this crisis, we have initiated life-skills interventions and developed the Life Skills Assessment Scale (LSAS) to measure the reliability and validity of these interventions (Kennedy et al., 2014). We recognize the imperative need to develop a holistic understanding of thriving in developing contexts. This report furthers our efforts in this direction.

Career Connect Programme

What happens to children and youth that drop-out or do not continue education? In most cases, they either stay at home or join the unorganized labour markets and lose livelihood opportunities and thereby fail to improve their quality of life.

The alternative to academic education is vocational training which begins only at 17 or 18 years. There is no continuous engagement in learning between 14-17 years if they drop out of school or do not continue education. This is a huge potential loss of labour force for the country. Through the Career Connect Programme, we at Dream A Dream are aiming to bridge this learning gap. The world today is changing at a frantic pace and young people require myriad skills to survive and succeed in this fast-changing, complex world. The next generation needs to be equipped with the confidence and adaptive skills to effectively tackle social, economic and environmental challenges.

To enable this, Dream A Dream delivers 3-hour career awareness workshop in schools and colleges for Grade 9 and Grade 10 (14- 16-year-old). It aims at creating a powerful experience for young people to understand not only academic career opportunities but also non-traditional career paths that are usually not explored or encouraged. Recognizing the existing gaps and opportunities, we set up the Career Connect Program through a centre-based model, a learning and technology space for young people in the 14-23-year age category to continue to engage in learning and develop critical life skills. We run two centres in under-resourced neighborhoods where programmes in Computer Education, Spoken English, Communication Skills, Money Management and Workplace Readiness is integrated with a high-impact life skills approach that develops the resilience, confidence and adaptability of young people to respond to the fast-changing world and prepare them for the new job market. Young people have the flexibility to choose among the varied programmes. The high impact life skill modules are

delivered using different mediums using experiential learning as a core principle; this is a 25-day intensive programme that explores aspects like understanding the self and others, understanding emotions and building empathy, dealing with parents and adults – how to communicate effectively in crises, understanding the strength in communication, how to have healthy relationships, understanding the notion of gender and its intricacy, visualizing one's future thus enabling positive life choices. The programme creates a platform for young people to explore different skill development opportunities that are usually co-created by young people themselves. The skill development program encourages peer-learning in young people to reimagine how skills can be learnt and used in gaining employment or exploring business ventures.

Finally, the programme also provides long term support to young people through placement opportunities, scholarship support and entrepreneurship building once they complete the programme and their growth is tracked rigorously over the years.

The Career Connect Programme is designed to be a long-term engagement program with young people and facilitates the unique journeys and development of life skills of young people which enable them to make healthy life choices. It focuses on co-creating learning opportunities to unlock each individual's potential and being.



The ethos of the Career Connect Program that enables young people to thrive:

CENTRE SPACE:

The physical and symbolic space of the centre is inviting and has the best facilities that a community centre should have. This space creates an atmosphere that is creative, fun and facilitates growth. It acts as a stable environment for the young person in an unstable world. Over time we realized for young adults this centre space is considered as a “safe space”. A safe space where they can come together, engage in activities related to their diverse needs and interests, participate in decision-making processes and freely express themselves.

TRUST:

We consider Trust as a core value in the Career Connect programme. When young people come from a broken system and have had several incidents in life where trust is lost, it is important that we invest in re-building the trust in young people to believe in themselves and society to move forward towards their aspirations in life. We want young people to know that they matter - their thoughts, feelings and desires are important to us. Trust in them also means allowing them to have the opportunity to solve problems on their own and work through issues using dialogue and input from peers and mentors alike.

ACCEPTANCE:

In the Career Connect Programme, young people are accepted for who they are without any judgement or restriction. This is usually a completely different experience for young people who have always been judged and restricted throughout their lives. Acceptance is an attitude for us which generates recognition, acceptance and social inclusion in marginalized youth.

HOLDING SPACE:

We believe that one of the main factors that enabled thriving in young people was that the facilitator held space for them. Holding space includes allowing young people to try something new, having the patience to listen and not jump into advice mode, giving young people the freedom to fail, being a conscious role model and allowing them to bring their authentic self forward. It also involves creating a space for reflection on one's behaviour and role and having the right attitude to move forward.

CARING AND COMPASSIONATE ADULT:

Developmental research shows that having one or more caring adults in a child's life increases the likelihood that they will flourish, and become productive adults themselves. A stable adult who is available for young people while they go through series of ups and downs in life to enable young people to build strong belief system within themselves to thrive in the world that keeps changing.

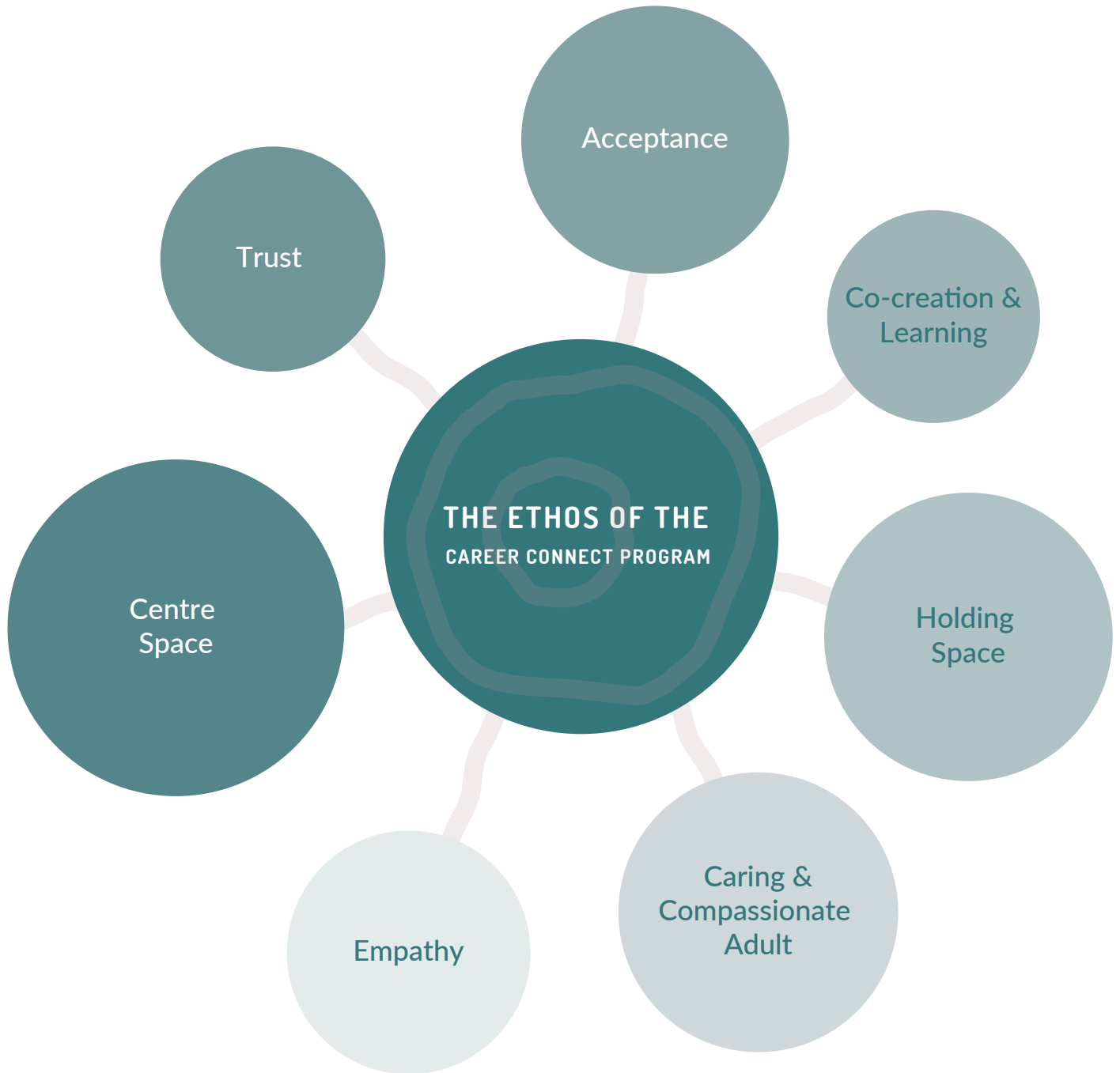
EMPATHY:

Career Connect helps young people understand themselves better and be empathic to the needs, emotions and feelings of those around them. Career Connect helps young people accept their reality but not allow it to define their journey ahead. We encourage young people to follow their passion and help them understand that every job is dignified to be celebrated.

CO-CREATION OF LEARNING:

Most of the programs at the centre are centered around the needs and demands of the young people. We create different skill development programmes based on the needs of young people. Many of our curriculums are co-created and co-owned by young people. We realized that adopting a collaborative learning approach could help young adults inculcate life skills and critical thinking skills. Co-creating the curriculum promotes authentic learning and engages all the senses, allowing students to create a meaningful, useful, shared outcome. They are real-life tasks or simulated tasks that provide the learner with opportunities to connect directly with the real world.

THE ETHOS OF THE CAREER CONNECT PROGRAM THAT ENABLES YOUNG PEOPLE TO THRIVE:

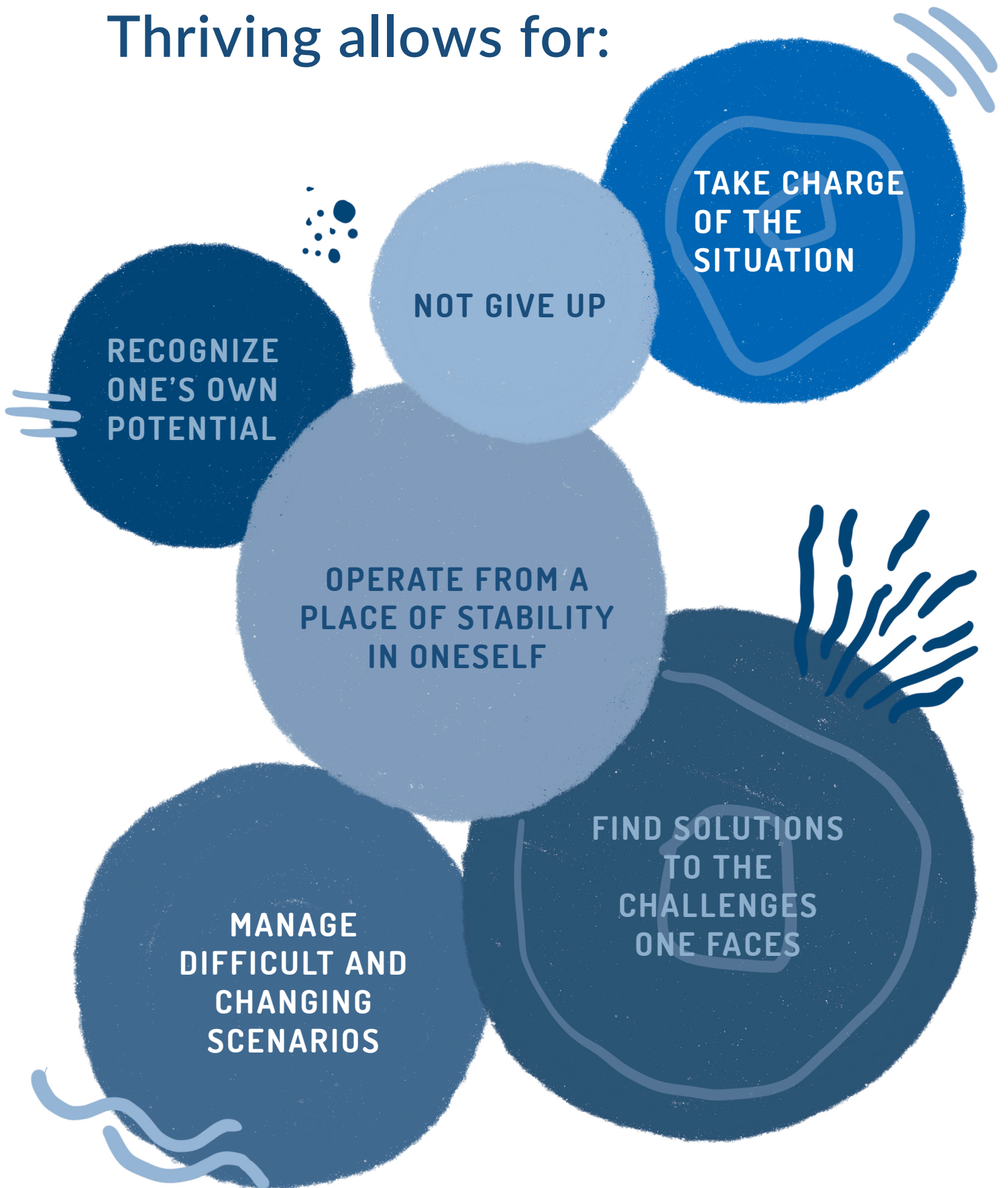


THRIVING IN THE 21ST CENTURY – WHAT DOES THRIVING LOOK LIKE IN YOUNG PEOPLE WHO COME FROM ADVERSE BACKGROUNDS:

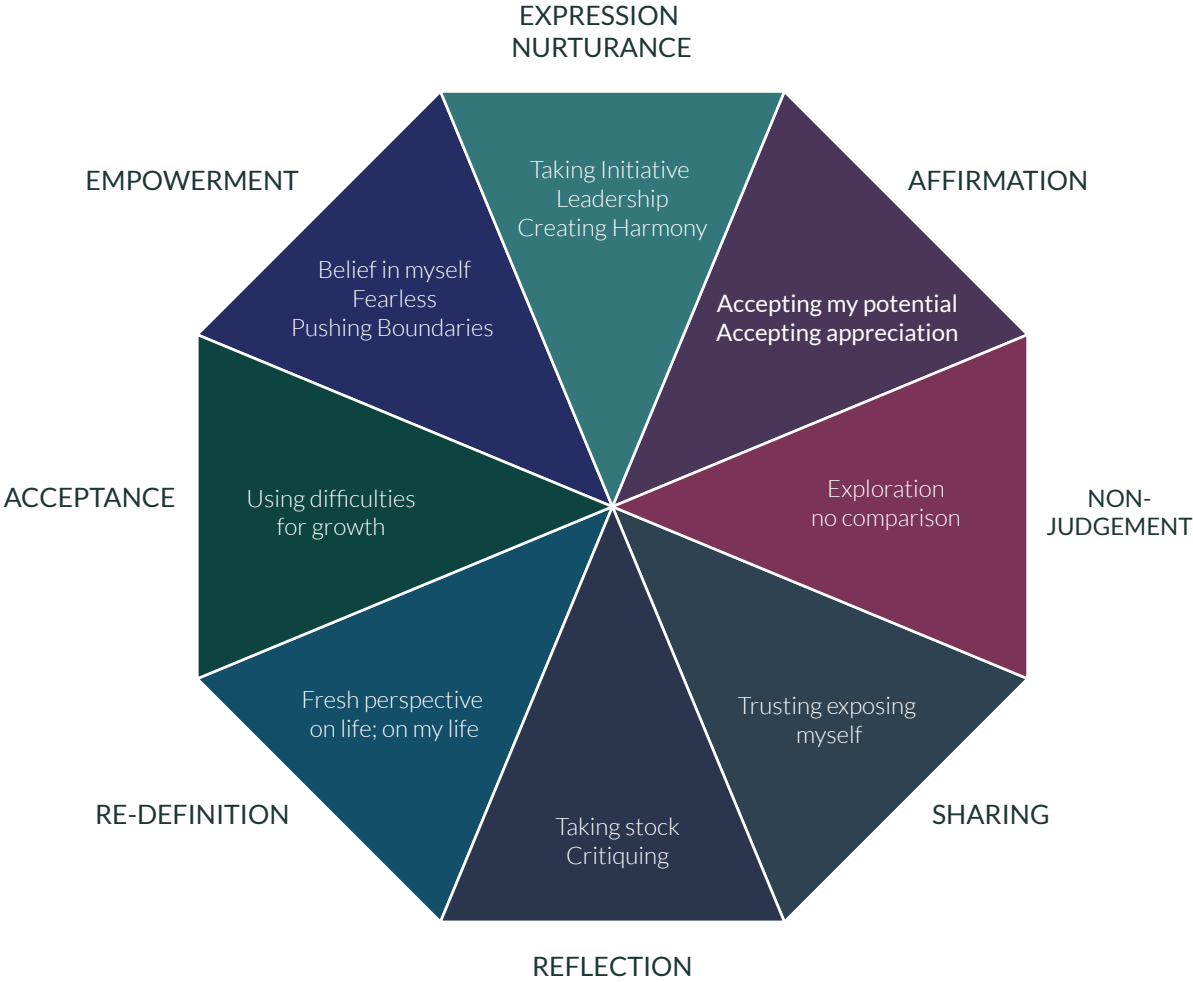
At Dream A Dream, we have been pondering over - What does 'thriving' look like among young people? How does it manifest specifically in the context of adversity? To explore this further, we commissioned an ethnographic research study in 2018¹. The findings of this study highlighted the fact that human beings have an inherent drive for self-improvement and growth. Thriving is a condition beyond mere survival, implying growth and positive development. It is a state where people experience positive emotions, positive psychological functioning, and positive social functioning, most of the time, living within an optimal range of human functioning.

¹ Project Thrive; A research study by Quantum Consumer Solutions Pvt. Ltd for Dream a Dream to explore the nuances of thriving among young people from adverse backgrounds.

Thriving allows for:



WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE NUANCES OF THRIVING THROUGH A THE MAP OF THRIVING GIVEN BELOW. EACH FACET ON THIS MAP IS INDICATIVE OF A SHIFT FROM FRAGMENTATION TOWARDS WHOLENESS.



The existing thriving literature, findings of the Quantum study and our experience working with adolescents has informed our understanding of what constitutes thriving for young people. For us, thriving children are resilient, responsible, and happy. Thriving is a process where in we enable individuals to develop the inner strength required to overcome adversities, experience a sense of personal and social development, and become the best version of themselves.

Thriving children are resilient, responsible and happy:



Resilient

Have the inner strength and grit to overcome adversity



Responsible

Can make responsible decisions for themselves and the world



Happy

Feel they are living the best version of their life

Here we present the unique journey of young people for whom we have facilitated and built life skills to thrive in the 21st Century.

BASED ON THE 8 FACETS IDENTIFIED FROM THE CASE STUDIES DONE BY QUANTUM, WE PRESENT STORIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE THRIVING IN THEIR OWN CAPACITY. THESE STORIES EXEMPLIFY WHAT THRIVING LOOKS LIKE IN YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE A STRONG BELIEF SYSTEM, FEEL SAFE TO SHARE THEIR FEELINGS AND PROBLEMS AND HAVE THE POSITIVE AND REFLECTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS LIFE.

Ambika gave up her parent's dream of holding a white collar job and pursued her passion of being a chef.



Ambika comes from a family where she is the first-generation learner and is the first girl in her family to attend college. Her father is a vegetable vendor and had dreams of giving his daughter the education he never had.

Like most traditional families, Ambika's family also believed that excelling in academics and holding a white-collar job is the only way one could succeed; while Ambika knew that academics were not her biggest strength and her strength lay elsewhere.

"I was never interested in studies and yearly my father spent so much on education and I took the difficult decision of going against my family and not continuing my studies. While the rest of my friends pursued their degree but I never regretted my decision, all I had in my mind was that I wanted to work and support my family. The only skill I had was cooking, the program helped me convert that skill/passion for cooking to make a meaningful choice. I was given a basket of opportunity to choose from and I chose to attend a 6 month paid internship at Ritz Carlton as an assistant chef in the Baking and Dessert department, I learnt a lot during this internship it was the best decision I

have made. My long-term goal is to open a bakery of my own and name it after Dream a Dream".

The deep reflection that Ambika had about her strengths and the affirmation she received from the facilitators enabled her to choose her true strength as her career path which was cooking. Ambika was able to build skills to negotiate with the traditional mindset of her parents and make a career out of the strengths she was so passionate about

At present, Ambika works as a full-time assistant chef in the Baking and Dessert Department at Ritz Carlton and has become a role model to many young people who believe in their skills and want to work towards their passion and make it a career.

"I took the less travelled road in my community"

AMBIKA IS A FULL-TIME ASSISTANT CHEF IN THE PASTRY AND DESSERT DEPARTMENT

Jayashree is a homemaker and an entrepreneur who supports her family by selling handmade decor.



Jayashree, a bright energetic 20-year-old with a 1-year old child, got married at a tender age of 18. While most of Jayashree's friends were getting an education and taking on careers, Jayashree had started a family.

Jayashree could have accepted defeat and given up on her dreams of being an entrepreneur but she chooses to stay positive.

"While I was getting ready for marriage, I reflected that it was not an end to my learning process instead I learnt to work with my husband, his family and my family to negotiate the space that I always needed. If I hadn't been a part of the program, it would've been difficult to be what I'm today. I got married when I was just 18 within a year of getting married, I got pregnant and was expecting a child while my friends pursued their higher education or had started working. I never saw my status of being a homemaker as a hindrance to my growth. I invested a lot of time during my pregnancy in building my creativity and making beautiful household items or decoration out of minimal items."

Jayashree facilitates skill development sessions to young people of her age. She has never compared her journey to those of her friends

and feels that if she had, she would not have been able to explore what she wanted to do in life and would have followed the traditional path that everyone would normally take. We encourage young people, like Jayashree to find themselves and explore unconventional paths that they feel happy about and have ownership towards their decision.

**"Being a homemaker is not a fullstop
but just the beginning"**

Bharath transformed from being a gangster and reflected on how he can lead a respectable life. Today, he is a team lead at Swiggy.



Bharath is a 23-year-old who was actively involved in anti-social activities. Theft, gang violence and weapons were a part of his daily life and intoxicating himself with different kind of drugs had become a routine. Bharath stayed aloof from his family and his studies, his gang of friends with whom he used to partake in anti-social activities with were his focus.

He used to come to the Centre be part of the program, but he always threatened friends and picked fights with the facilitator. He was often sarcastic and made jokes all the time. His journey continued this way.

One incident changed his life *“I had met in a terrible accident I was battling between life and death. When I was in the hospital nobody came to visit me, it was just my mother. My father didn’t enter the hospital and the friends that I had spent the most time with didn’t bother to come and see me. For the first time, I was able to reflect on my actions and how it affected the people that cared for me this is when I decided I want to change myself but didn’t know how”.*

Bharath had been a part of Career Connect in the past and had stopped coming to the centre when he started pursuing his anti-social activities. After recovering from the accident, Bharath came to the centre and poured his heart out to one of the facilitators that he wanted to change and did not know how.

“I would come to the centre every day just because I had somebody who was caring, loving, non-

judgemental. I felt accepted, I felt seen and heard and I wasn’t labelled this was a missing piece in my life. My friends and family had given up on me but people at the Centre showed hope and believed in me”.

Today, Bharath works at Swiggy as a team lead and manages a team of 60 delivery personals and is proud of the life he leads.

In the programmes that take place at the centre, we ensure to spend a lot of time with young people to build self-reflective practices in them to evaluate their choices in life and how they affect the people around them, hold safe space for them to share their feelings without being judged and being the caring compassionate adult that is empathic to their needs. All these factors enable young people to make healthy life choices and not curb into negative peer pressure.

“From wanting to be a gangster to being a team lead”

Rajeshwari has trained 100+ young people in basic beautician course and has inspired many young people to follow non-traditional career paths. She currently works in a beauty parlour and provides home-based beautician services.



Rajeshwari used to work as a housemaid to support her family and education. At this time, she had completed her Senior Secondary and was wondering how her life journey would turn out as academics was never her interest. She started exploring a lot of skill development courses not knowing what she wanted to do and found that her passion laid in wanting to be a beautician.

"I still remember the day I mastered my confidence and it was just a whisper of my opinion to a friend so that she can share it in the big group and the journey started from thereon. Today the program has helped build in me abilities to explore different opportunities at the centre. I was able to find my passion to become a beautician and I started taking small steps towards my dream. I applied for a scholarship and brought beautician materials to start providing home services which would strengthen my skill and help save money for advance courses. A lot of my friends started to look up to me as it supported them to make some of the decisions that they were reluctant to otherwise make in life, this is was a celebrity moment for me.

I have facilitated 4 beautician classes to date and have trained over 100 girls at the Centre. I hope and dream to transform all young people I train".

Not only did Rajeshwari empower herself to be the strong and successful woman she is today. She has inspired and nurtured the journey of many young girls to take on careers as tailors, fashion designers, jewellery designers etc. Today, as life continues to throw new challenges towards her, she continues to build empathy and support in her inner and outer circle. The programs at the centre encourage young people to be change-makers and influencers in their community.

"Today a role model for 100+ young people"

SHE DREAMS OF BECOMING A MAKEUP ARTIST.

Rajesh is an analyst at Metro. He started an NGO that looks at empowering young people to make the right choices and providing them with adult role models.



Rajesh is a 23-year-old who has been a part of the Career Connect Programme for more than 4 years. Rajesh was selected to go for a 1-year exchange program in the US during which he was exposed to a lot of volunteering activities and community service programmes. This created a burning desire in him to come back to India and bring about changes in the community in which he had grown up.

“The community in which I grew up as a child had children who at a tender age of 8 were smoking beedi (Indian cigarettes) and never participated actively in schoolwork. These children did not have adult role models and felt that a wayward life is a part and parcel from where they came from, I was one of these kids. I had started smoking when I was just 8 but unlike other children, there was an adult in my life who was able to bring me out of that atmosphere and help me understand this is not the life I was meant to live and gave me a purpose”.

“During my exchange program at the US when I was volunteering and being a part of the community service activities, my past kept haunting me and the problem of the community which I grew up in kept coming to my mind. I was lucky to move out of that community, but many children still followed a meaningless lifestyle with no purpose I wanted to change that”.

Rajesh finished his exchange program and returned to India and the first thing he did once he settled down was to go back to his

village and visit his community to see if things remained the same. *“I went back to my village and saw that the situation remained the same and came back to Bangalore and started sharing with my friends about the situation in my village and the fact that I wanted to do something to make a change but my friends laughed at me and ask me how can one person make a difference”.*

Rajesh went back to his village and tried to set up a learning space for children with the money he had saved during the exchange programme. The intention of the learning space was to create a space where they can explore different activities. Initially no one came so Rajesh started reaching out to these children on a one-on-one basis. He would share his story of change with the children, reflecting on how he was once just like them and how he has transformed. After listening to his story, 3 to 4 children started coming to learn drawing, and participated in maths activities and sports.

The programme encourages young people to be socially aware of the problems that surround them and take initiative to create supportive strong communities around them that enable them to grow and thrive.

**“Your beliefs become
your thoughts and
thoughts turn into action”**

Rashmi lost her mother to liver failure which led to her becoming responsible at a very young age. Instead of dropping out of college she became resilient and managed the household, took tuitions to earn a living and pursued her engineering degree.



Rashmi is an 18-year-old pursuing her BE in Electronics at Oxford Engineering College. Her Father is a tailor in a garment's factory and her sister, having dropped out of education, works at Pizza Corner.

"Dream A Dream has helped me when my mother was sick and admitted in different hospitals. At that time, my father was unable to talk to any of the doctors. I had to step in and talk to the doctors. I had to make decisions on behalf of my father for the treatment of my mother and I had to stay strong through the whole process. This is when most of the things I learnt during my sessions helped me. I was able to approach doctors without fear, I was able to make decisions on time and I was able to reach out to other people for help which had been my weakness at the beginning."

"Last year my family had been through a lot, I lost my mother due to liver failure and my father is under a lot of debt because for her treatment we had borrowed money from a lot of people. There was a time wherein I thought of dropping out of education like my sister and start supporting my father in the house. I was forced to take on a lot of responsibility at an early age for the functioning of my family. I had to take my mother's place of maintaining the house as my father knew nothing

and was out most of the time. My dreams of becoming an engineer were almost over but I did not give up, I challenged myself and took on odd jobs to support my family like tailoring, attending event promotions and even took up tuitions for children while balancing my studies and household work."

Rashmi was able to overcome the challenges in her life with a positive attitude of accepting the crisis around her family and having a stronghold of not giving up her studies despite all the curve balls life threw at her.

"Grief does not change you, it reveals the true you"

RASHMI IS IN HER FINAL YEAR OF ENGINEERING.

Apsara* was able to come out of a toxic relationship and respect her self-worth.

Apsara (name changed), an exceptional young woman who, through the help of an empathetic adult at the Centre, has made some difficult choices in life, taking her one step closer to thriving. She is 18 years old, pursuing her first year of high school. Her Father is a Lorry Driver and Mother is a Flower Vendor. A friend told her about the Career Connect Centre which led to her participating in, both, the Life Skill and Skill Development Programmes.

Hemalatha (Facilitator of Apsara):

"In one of the Life Skills sessions, called 'Healthy Relationships', I remember Apsara proudly shared that she has a boyfriend. I observed that as the life skill activity progressed, she became sad. During the reflection circle, she remained silent and seemed very disturbed. Apsara approached me, having gained trust in me, and shared her personal story. She narrated that she was in a relationship with a boy for the past 6 years and during the reflection circle of the session, she understood that she was in a highly unhealthy relationship. Her boyfriend used to take drugs. When she tried to advise him against it, he would pretend to listen to her but once he was under the influence of these drugs, he would behave disrespectfully towards her. Through the activity, 'Take a Stand', she realised that she was choosing a wrong life partner and decided to take a stand for herself as this was slowly beginning to affect her focus on her education and her goals.

During the sessions, when she would share what she was going through with me, I held space for her to talk about her feelings. By her sharing her struggles with her boyfriend, she began to process how his behavior towards her was unacceptable and how it was making her feel helpless. With great courage, Apsara decided to make a positive change in her life and ended her relationship.

Today, Apsara is a strong young woman, who has shown a significant change in her attitude and behavior, making bold life decisions not only for herself but for her family.

Young people like Apsara are facilitated to understand how important sharing one's feelings is to a caring compassionate adult to self-reflect and find solutions to problems."

"To let go or not let go!!!"

SHE IS CURRENTLY EMPLOYED AND LIVING AN INDEPENDENT LIFE

Mahesh was struggling with depression and was abusing alcohol. He transformed his life by attending 20+ skill development sessions and acquiring critical life skills.



“When I joined the Career Connect Centre in 2013 it’s been a 6-year journey for me, I felt that I was a big zero in everything, with no general knowledge and was always in my own world. Joining the Basic Computers course, my mind began to change slightly, my thinking power increased, and I began to believe that I had a lot of potential inside me. I soon signed up for the Retail Marketing Skill Development Programme, this is when my girlfriend decided to break up with me. She had found herself another boy, which broke my heart. I was left in a state of emotional turmoil, more so because she was also part of the same programme and I had to face her daily until it ended. Being confused, hurt and angry, I began to resort to drinking alcohol. Despite coming in an inebriated state, I actively participated in the sessions.”

Mahesh came to the sessions intoxicated and we knew he was looking for something and anything to take his mind off the pain he was feeling. If we turned him away or punished him, we knew that he had nowhere else to go but back to the alcohol. Hence, we made a conscious decision to not say anything. Instead, we held space for him.

“I just needed something to take the edge off and soon, over multiple conversations with the facilitators who were mentoring me, I began to accept the situation at hand. Having acknowledged that I couldn’t change what had happened, I began to think about ways to

move forward. What immediately laid in front of me were the different skill development programmes at the centre every time I enrolled myself for a new course, the sessions helped me build my confidence, courage and reflect on my uniqueness. Finding myself empowered by these sessions, I didn’t need to get intoxicated anymore. Today, I have completed close to 20 skill development programmes and have even facilitated one myself!”

The programme helps young people overcome difficult situations, which under normal circumstances would have brought them down. The empathy and safe space that was created for Mahesh helped him re-define himself into the person he is today.

Mahesh has put his time and heart into going back to college, taking up three different jobs, like driving an auto, electronic and mobile repair, to keep himself busy. In this time, he began refraining from substance abuse. After being part of 20 skill development programmes, he started thinking about how he could give back to the community and help other young people like himself. He mentors young people like him and facilitates sessions at the centre and has trained 30 young people.

“Twenty and proud”

HE IS MULTIFACETED. HE IS CURRENTLY PURSUING HIS FINAL YEAR B.COM, DRIVES AN AUTO, REPAIRS MOBILES, AC AND WASHING MACHINE AND IS A FANTASTIC ARTIST.

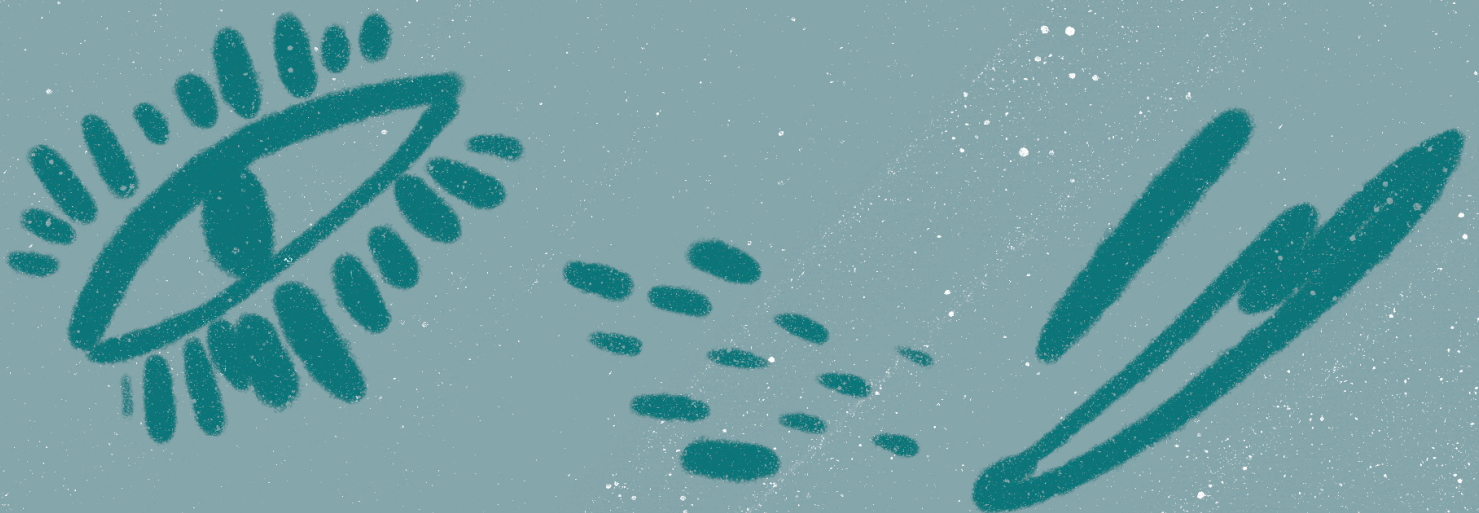
KEY INSIGHTS

- Adversities can serve as opportunities for young people to develop inner strength, happiness, and resilience.
- Life-skills programmes are instrumental in equipping young adults with the skills to understand themselves better, deal with challenges, meaningfully engage in their life and make responsible life choices.
- The presence of an adult who is caring, empathic and non-judgmental increases the likelihood that young adults will flourish and become productive adults themselves.
- Adopting a collaborative learning approach where young adults share with and learn from each other helps them to inculcate critical life skills for dealing with diverse challenges.
- The better way to build social and emotional skills among young adults is to co-create curriculum. This provides them with the opportunities to partake in decision-making, ensures their full and active participation in programmes and leads to powerful learning experiences.
- Physical spaces like the Career Connect Centre are a safe space for young adults and provides them a platform to build skills and create tangible opportunities thereby preparing them for life.
- Overcoming personal challenges provides an impetus to young adults to take leadership in their communities and social contexts to challenge existing norms and create an impact in the society.

SUMMARY

The Career Connect Programme, through its continuous engagement, has enabled young people to change the scripts of their lives and has created a space that enables young people to thrive in the 21st century. The Career Connect Centre can be considered a best practice under meaningful community engagement for empowering young adults who are faced with adversities. Our centre has been instrumental for over 5000 young adults every year in making meaningful choices that they are happy about. Our mission is to help young adults make meaning from adversity, thrive in life and redefine success, not in terms of grades but by reconstructing their self, knowing that they made the effort to do their best, to become the best that they are capable of becoming.

The next five-year strategic plan of Dream A Dream is to create opportunities for young people to thrive using life-skill interventions. We will aim at building consensus among key stakeholders on the conceptual understanding of thriving and the key processes that underpin it.



These stories reflect how young people who have a strong belief system, feel safe to share their feelings and problems and have a positive and reflective attitude towards life can thrive.



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