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This LSR student's initiative ensures that tribal students don't drop out of education due to COVID



Arpita Chowdhury launched #EducationForAll, an initiative where student volunteers teach Class XII tribal students to help them prepare for the Board exams

In the summer of 2019, Arpita Chowdhury was volunteering with the NGO Rajendra Ashram in New Delhi. At the time, she had started her classes at Lady Shri Ram College for Women and she would teach English to the tribal children of Classes IX and X that the NGO supported. Shortly after completing her volunteering stint, she decided to launch her own initiative – Jazbaat Foundation. "I was operating it in collaboration with the NGO and I was able to offer career counselling as well as arts and crafts workshops to these students," says Arpita. But all this changed in 2020, when the lockdown was imposed.

Narrating the experience, Arpita says, "When the pandemic hit, the students were asked to return home to their villages in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand. There were five students who had just appeared for their Board exams, but they didn't have the means to continue their education from their villages." Arpita decided to bring these students back to Delhi and help them resume their education. "I consulted with my mother and uncle, who were also involved with the NGO, and they helped me bring them back. So many children were forced to drop out of their studies due to the lockdown as not everyone had access to the technology required," states Arpita. She didn't want these students to face the same. "When I was teaching them, I realised that they were enthusiastic to learn and wanted to improve their livelihood," she recalls.

So, Arpita decided to launch #EducationForAll, an initiative where she took the responsibility of ensuring that these five students didn't suffer from learning loss and were given the opportunity to study. "We found them housing in Delhi, installed an internet connection and arranged for a second-hand laptop," says Arpita. But that's not all. Arpita soon realised that online classes at school were not enough to help these students. "They couldn't understand a lot of things that were being taught online," she recalls. It was around this time that Arpita decided to continue coaching them in English. She asked a few of her classmates to help and then the word spread to other colleges in Delhi. "Students with various educational backgrounds, studying at different colleges under Delhi University, wanted to volunteer and help these students learn. Soon, we formed a team of 30 volunteers that even went beyond colleges in Delhi," says Arpita.

Arpita and the team of volunteers conduct classes online since a few of the volunteers are from outside Delhi. "We also wanted to ensure that the students remain safe and so do our volunteers. The volunteers teach these students for one hour every Monday to Friday. The students now get one-on-one attention and they can understand what's being taught in class. They are now in Class XII and will appear for their Board exams in 2022," says Arpita, who adds that these students study at government schools in Delhi. "They scored really well in their Class X Board exams and we are hopeful that they will score well in their Class XII exams too," she adds.

But #EducationForAll is not just about the coaching classes. When these students had to come back, Arpita and her friends started a social media campaign seeking donations. "A lot of people donated books and stationery for these students. Someone even sponsored the internet connection at their residence," says Arpita. One of the students who is preparing for JEE received books from a student who's now in an IIT. "Some of the volunteers, who are not teaching the children anymore, still continue to help in whatever way they can – from clearing doubts to providing mentorship to even extracurricular activities," adds Arpita.