

1. Will the fellowship recipient be involved in community inclusion and improvement?

Yes, over the past few years we have deepened our engagement with the community. We have done this through tie ups with organisations which take up issues beyond education. E.g., We did a programme with Feminist Approach to Technology to raise awareness about the perils of Child Marriages. In a recent Eye camp held at our Patna centre by Lions Club, free eye-check up was done for the parents, and free spectacles were given to the parents. We organised a camp for Aadhar Card(government ID) registration for the community. We also did a project called Jagrik- Samvidhan Live on the theme of civic education, the public events of the project witnessed significant participation of the community members. The parents not only built their perspective on civic rights and responsibilities, but they also participated in fun filled games as a part of the event.

2. Will the fellowship recipient be involved in helping children in the area through RTE?

When we started our learning centre in Patna, one of the immediate steps we took were aligning the centre to the RTE Act. We have actively worked towards ensuring 100 percent enrollment of our students in government schools and low-cost private schools. Our work also aligns very well with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal No 4 - Quality Education For All. The RTE Act covers issues of access; it does not focus so much on the quality of education. My interest has been in school environment and culture so that children's education does not get confined to literacy measures alone. In my view, education should develop self-aware individuals who become responsible members of the society. We are in preliminary talks with UNICEF to implement Child-Friendly Schools Programme in 5 government schools of Nalanda district, Bihar. The idea is to not only cover the provisions mandated by RTE - like infrastructural requirements and admissions criteria but also to create a safe and happy environment for children to learn.

3. Will the fellowship recipient be implementing some innovative educational practices in their primary projects as well as other projects?

We have been experimenting with a couple of innovative practices in Diksha. We are trying out Index for Inclusion a manual developed by Prof Tony Booth, University of Cambridge, the index manual helps in creating an inclusive environment in schools and learning spaces so that each child gets to participate in the learning process wholly. The Index helps the teachers in becoming aware of various dimensions of inclusion, deepening their perspective on educational issues and understanding that different children have different needs and addressing the learning difficulties that can be identified using the questions/indicators specified in the manual. Children's Parliament is another innovative idea that we are trying out, it is a child led programme, the students elect their ministers and other office bearers who participate in the smooth running of the learning centre. The parliamentary process encourages ownership and develops leadership skills in the children; this initiative covers the civic aims of education as it aids the learners to practice democracy. The goal is to help the students become active citizens and develop a positive mindset towards political participation. We are also partners of Pravah & Commutiny Youth Collective, Delhi based youth developed organisations, with their help we are working on creating "Fifth Spaces", that is a learning community for young people and adolescents. The various activities and modules conducted in the fifth space programme encourage learners to express their views freely. Fifth space is a community space beyond family and schools that offer youngsters self-development opportunity through freedom and choice, space for self-reflection. Fifth space values include a joyful environment, openness and acceptance of others views and opportunities to overcome one's fears. I would be happy to implement/propagate these innovative ideas in government schools and other non-profit institutions.

4. Can the fellowship recipient review and help other Asha projects in their / other areas?

Yes, I am open to volunteer with other like minded institutions. Some of the skills that I can share with others include IT skills, in this, I can help with website development, management information systems and IT planning. Another area I can advise on is school improvement, I have worked with school management and mentored teachers in my past assignments. I can also contribute in bringing innovative concepts to schools serving low-income communities. I notice that it is a challenge for Asha team to carry out site visits, I will be happy to assist in monitoring & evaluation activities.

5. How will Gautam ensure that his fellowship work is outside of his coordinator role at Diksha?

I would like to share a bit about Diksha and my current role in the organisation. Diksha runs three learning centres one in Patna, one in Nalanda and one in Delhi. The foundation runs a school improvement programme in Bulandshahar and Ignite a creativity and innovation campaign in multiple districts of Bihar. Two years ago I took a break from Diksha to pursue higher studies in the field of education. In the interim period, the organisation was co-led by my colleagues Shyamlika Krishna and Surbhi Rani. Shyamlika led the Projects function while Surbhi led the communications and fund-raising function. The organisation performed very well under their leadership. When I moved back to Diksha last year, I moved into a new role of innovations and partnerships(as Shyamlika and Surbhi were now responsible for my previous role of projects and funding). The current position gives me an opportunity to try out and research new ideas. The innovation and partnership agenda is outward focused, so that different organisations and institutions may benefit from our work, but my overall work continues to be situated within Diksha.

6. After looking through the application, it seems that this is pretty demanding, and needs like 80% of Gautam's time. I get that this is external work from Diksha itself. Will his work in Diksha be affected?

I agree that the work will be demanding. As I mentioned in the previous answer, my role within Diksha has changed, and I hope to work on Diksha's next phase through support from Asha Fellowship. For some of the areas that I have mentioned in the fellowship application form like Ignite and our existing centres, we do have support from different partners. One of the challenges we face in Diksha is that though we have been able to raise resources for project costs like centre rent, books and stationery, teacher salary; we have not been able to raise resources to fund the core team. The Asha fellowship will cover my living costs thus easing the pressure on Diksha's meager resources coming in from individual donations. For some of the newer initiatives like Index for Inclusion, we plan to bring on board new partners. Our intention is to make Diksha a stable and sustainable institution, that can become a role-model in education innovation for the region. I am hopeful that I will be able to balance my existing responsibilities at Diksha with the new ideas I want to try out in collaboration with different institutions.