

Asha for Education

Fellowship Application Form

<i>SECTION I: Personal Contact Information</i>
Name: Gautam Gauri
Address: Road No 6C, (Near Nidan Clinic), Rajendra Nagar, Patna - 800016
Phone: +91 9204056412
Email: gautamgauri@dikshafoundation.org
Nominator: Gaurav Nanda/ Prason Diwakar
Have you applied to Asha Fellowship Program before? If yes, when? No
Do you or your organization receive or has received any other form of financial support from Asha? If yes, please give details Yes, Diksha Foundation is being supported by Asha for Education Purdue Chapter for the KHEL Learning Center since 2012 http://new.ashanet.org/project/?pid=1138

<i>SECTION II: Summary of Work</i>															
Name of Project (if any): Diksha															
Location: Village/City/District/State C1, Shanti Vihar Colony, Ambedkar Path, Patna, Bihar – 800014, India															
Which communities will your work serve? Children and youth from socially and economically deprived communities.															
Type of work (Select 3 maximum)															
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<i>SECTION II: Education</i>		
Degree, Certification or Training Year	Institution	Location
Masters of Philosophy in Education (2015-16)	University of Cambridge	Cambridge, United Kingdom
Masters of Business Administration – International Business (2005-2007)	Institute of Management Technology	Ghaziabad, India
Bachelors of Engineering - Computer	Birla Institute of	Ranchi, India

Science (1999-2003)	Technology	
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SECTION III: Experience

Please describe the top 3 most relevant experiences.

- In 2010, I left a lucrative corporate career to setup Diksha Foundation, the journey of setting up a non-profit enterprise has been a thrilling one. From an idea to its fruition, I have experienced diverse roles and responsibilities. The first was to develop and implement strategic plans of the organization alongside the governing body. I also raised funds and generated resources for our three learning centers, a library project, a rural school enrichment program and IGNITE a school creativity and innovation campaign. I have been responsible for overseeing project delivery, design and quality of Diksha's projects. I ensured that Diksha follows all legal compliances and other requirements. I have keenly developed partnerships and networks with different organizations working in the area of development in India. I find that it has been an important part of my role to communicate with various stakeholders – the communities Diksha works with, our funders and supporters, the team and other civil society organizations working in the same space.
- In 2010, I began work as Project Lead of Prarabdh a school improvement programme at SRB Alok School, a village school with 550 children. As my first initiative, I was able to convince Cognizant Technology Solutions, my ex-employer to provide support in setting up a computer lab and library facility at the school. My efforts resulted in addition of a 5KW solar power unit to the school. We also started Digital Study Hall classes, a Microsoft Research Project, which has recorded content of high quality teachers. The school became livelier and creative by addition of concepts of BALA (Building as Learning Aid) to the school campus under my stewardship.
- I have lead multiple educational projects including Knowledge Hub for Education and Learning (KHEL), an after school programme offering supplementary education to 400 children. The KHEL Centers in Patna, Nalanda and Delhi offer free education to children from marginalized communities. We engage learners towards enhancing their basic learning skills in reading, writing, arithmetic and computing. We also encourage them to develop life skills for their holistic development & growth. Apart from the after school supplementary education, we have developed an environment for creative learning, and our students engage in art and craft, dance, drama, quiz, theater and other such exciting creative activities. I have been involved in project designing and overseeing the project implementation activities end to end.

SECTION IV: Organizational Affiliations & Memberships

Organization	Your Role	Dates
Com-mutiny The Youth Collective	Board Member	May 2014- Till date

SECTION V: References

Name	Organization	Address/Phone/Email

Vikas Gupta	Institute of Management Technology	Address: Raj Nagar, Ghaziabad 201001, India Phone: +91 9212201149 Email: vgupta@imt.edu
Ravi Gulati	Manzil Welfare Society	J-3/71, 2nd Floor, Sujan Singh Park SQ, New Delhi - 110003. Phone - +91 9312210396 Email – ravi@manzil.in

SECTION Vi: Proposal

Please answer the following questions in the space provided. Please attach any additional documents for clarity and better understanding of your work.

Name of Project (if any): Diksha Foundation

Objective:

Since 2010, Diksha movement has been towards providing quality education, creating vibrant, violence-free learning spaces for children coming from the vulnerable backgrounds to help them realize their potential. The bedrock of our initiatives is inclusion and it reflects in the choice of locations and children we engage with. Our aim at Diksha is to be holistic and well rounded in our process of transformation. While, we work around understanding rights and exploring possibilities with children, core inner change is central to all our activities. It begins within, with a thought, a powerful question, an existing narrative, one's belief and engages with-out, with their parents, community, teachers, friends and comes back to focused reflection, of practice and actions, thus, completing the circle of sustainable change.

We believe education has potential to help children build their dreams and carve their own path. It is a powerful tool to change regressive and apathetic attitudes towards gender, environmental degradation, caste biases, etc. and create awareness to transform disenfranchised communities into empowered and inclusive communities. We, at Diksha view all of these as fundamental aims of education.

Clearly describe the need for your work:

The facilitators at Diksha made a door-to-door survey, identified and assessed the needs or "wants" of the local communities, their economic base, value patterns, social structure and educational plights. With the needs of the community, placed in front of us, we felt, with crises in plurality, education could be a game changer in the long run where children are deprived of their fundamental rights such as right to education, right to healthy living and right to get a decent job to sustain a reasonable living, Diksha decided to work with the children who go to government schools or low-cost private schools. The parents of these children are usually laborers. Many of them are daily-wage earners including rickshaw pullers, construction site workers, and household helps. Due to the constant stress of survival amidst insecurities, they are unable to spend quality time and focus on their children who are left at home to take care of themselves from a very

young age. Often, the older children have the responsibility of taking care of their younger siblings, adding the household chores like cooking and cleaning at home and are sometimes, forced to seek odd menial jobs to add to the meager income of the family.

These children are usually first generation learners, and their unschooled parents are unable to provide them the required support. Moreover, the schools that these children attend to are not up to the mark, therefore, they are unable to build the relevant skills in these children resulting in high dropout rates, especially amongst the girls. Such an environment creates uncertainty in the minds of these young people who due to lack of awareness of potential opportunities, feel helpless and the cycle continues.

The learning centers of Diksha work with these vulnerable children and youth between the age group of 5–18 years. The first priority is to give them free and equal opportunity to a safe space and vibrant fun and learning community. They are given access to the tech tools such as handling e-mails and browsing knowledge sites. Educating these learners directly benefits the communities as they can give back the opportunities, they learn at our centers. Our focus is to instill creative ability in the learners, to uphold the voices of the girls, their dreams and their plans alongside the boys; to give them all a meaningful life, where they see a purpose and not just exist.

Clearly describe your proposed approach/solution:

Our approach to a learning space closely subscribes to the Japanese Concept of Ba. Ba is a mutual space where knowledge is shared, created and utilized between actors. It can be either a physical, virtual or mental space, and it is both closed and open in the sense that it is characterized by certain boundaries but also by constant interaction with its environment. In addition to providing a space for knowledge processes, Ba also provides the actors with energy. We have created learning spaces where children co-create an environment, which encourages creativity and innovation.

In the first stage, we have developed three learning centers in India. In the next stage, we will be working on creating a network of collaborators who will take on this work with different government and other low-cost schools in India. Moreover, through our staff's contagious excitement we hope to accomplish these goals.

Strengthening “Ba”, are a host of tools, like Bal Sansad (children' parliament), student's monthly open house meetings, student leadership sessions, guest speaker engagement among others.

Clearly describe any background work done so far in the location of your work that will help towards your work.

Through Diksha Foundation, I have benefited from the opportunity of engaging at the grassroots to develop a foundational understanding around education and the ingredients that help provide excellent education, thereby forming active citizens and sensitive human beings. I have implemented my understanding, in the last six years, in bringing systemic reforms in the education system in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and New Delhi. Besides, I have consulted many start-ups and established non-profit institutions working to turn around state of access and quality of education to enhance student-learning outcomes.

What activities will be undertaken for your work?

KHEL, across three states, has now gained its presence and momentum to graduate to the next level where we will try to implement online learning resources like – Schoology or Edmodo. These are online platforms for classroom management, collaboration, quizzes, discussion forums and personalized learning. I am scheduled to implement a pilot project that will explore and test the utility of these two resources for the organization. Post-trials, one of the two applications will be adopted.

Our work is deeply rooted in the idea of social inclusion. To further pursue this goal we will be implementing a project on the “Index of Inclusion”. The index has been developed by Prof Tony Booth and helps schools self-evaluate their work in terms of inclusive values. The Index manual offers a set of questions around each value that helps teachers and students reflect on how values are being lived/enacted in their schools. This initiative will help the organization practice its’ democratic and inclusive ideals.

IGNITE – IGNITE is an annual program. It is a national competition to harness the creativity and innovation spirit of schoolchildren. Diksha has been conducting this campaign over the last four years in Bihar. Last year, we could reach out to 10000 children. However, with our extensive network and renewed goodwill, we will strengthen the engagement through in-depth workshop and sessions.

As the organization is growing, we are committed to use technology to improve our work. We have received software grants from Slack and Sales Force. We will be using slack to strengthen our internal communications. We plan to use Sales Force for managing donor relations and expanding our outreach to our stakeholders.

Clearly describe the expected impact of your work:

The expected impact of our work is to build well-rounded individuals who are empathetic and sensitive human beings and active citizens while they possess skills and training to seek dignified employment, helping them sustain respectable lives.

At Diksha, we realize that only resourceful individuals will not help sustain the planet. Economy has to join hands with ecology to help build meaningful existence for all forms of living. In addition, this reflects in the smallest of designs and activities at Diksha.

At KHEL centre, the students get time to work on computers for basic understanding and exposure. The new Learning Management System will enhance their interaction with their peers and help them collaborate. Simultaneously, the human centric design and activities that keep children in the centre of learning remains constant.

We have seen consistent growth in the level of our engagement with the students. For example, we had 148 students in our KHEL Patna Centre last year and this year we have 151 students. Our focus is not to make numeric impact but to be consistent while retaining the highest possible number of students. We are keeping alive dreams and long-term vision of each child, we are helping them sketch it and aiding them to be able to live it. Likewise, the retention rate at the centre was 87%. Our efforts are to push this further to 95%. Quality not only numbers, defines our motto. At an overall around 400 children are enrolled in our learning center, our current focus is on deepening the engagement with the learners so that the centers become role-models for others to emulate.

We see our children taking what they learn at our centers back to the community. Like, they learn to access digital information mechanism and one of our students may ensure that the PDS system does not selectively exploit the rights of their community. They may ensure its rightful delivery with the knowledge of appropriate authorities and complaint mechanisms in place.

The children, while they find dignified employment for themselves, can bring information and their procedural access to a host of government schemes aimed at the welfare of their community, their parents and other stakeholders.

Thus, we at Diksha, visualize a society where there is equal access and opportunity, free of discrimination of various kinds, offers dignity and respect to all its citizens. Most importantly, a society that is less unequal. In addition, we see our children with the knowledge, rights and appropriate training doing that, for a better and happy world.

Describe any innovative ideas & approach:

Innovation and creativity is the spine of Diksha's interventions. We treat creativity as equal to literacy and very often creativity acts as a vehicle to literacy. Innovation helps us in using interactive tools to expedite our processes and make it fun and engaging.

Please find below a few innovations, we have successfully implemented:

Bal Sansad: We are believers of democracy that is participative, self-regulated and open to dialogue. One such simulation of the same value is Bal Sansad or Children' Parliament where decisions are discussed and debated, dissent is shared and conflicts are resolved. Elections take place annually and elected representatives hold offices that are accountable to the student community. Democracy understood and practiced at an early stage would help in development of active citizens.

Peer Educator: Teachers at our centers are first friends and later gurus; still, children learn the most from peers. It encourages unrestricted sharing of thoughts without the fear of being judged. It is rotational, thereby, facilitating the group to learn from the gifts of each individual in the community. The peer educators act as volunteers in the Center, gradually taking on the role of change agents in their communities.

Culture of Inquiry: We encourage the culture of inquiry, to ask questions, to keep the quotient of curiosity high and acceptance of diverse worldviews. There are no bad questions and no fixed answers. The idea is to create a culture where opinions are not extreme and thoughts are not rigid. It helps children be open, accommodative and understanding and manage their struggles more valiantly.

Technology for social good: We love exploring and bringing technology into the classroom. All children at our Patna Learning Center know how to use tablets, computers and the internet. In our other projects, the children learn computers and frequently use peripherals like projectors. I intend to explore further, how technology can be leveraged to better the lives of children and the community. We feel this has the potential to revolutionize the lives of marginalized with proper training and support mechanisms.

Clearly describe why you will succeed:

Proven Initiatives: Diksha started with one initiative six years ago and has grown into three locations with three separately run initiatives on education. Each initiative caters to the needs of the specific community. Besides, we have worked on diverse projects like English language training, leadership training and development, incubation of early stage educational start-ups and more. Learning which poured in from each effort now collectively fuels the after school supplementary education and computer training programme.

Committed Team: Our team is dedicated and process oriented while keeping the human centric element central to all our programs. It has worked for us. Half of our team has stayed with us for more than two years, most people who have ventured into other spaces continue to support us, in various capacities, volunteering has poured in from many countries, which tells us the confidence people instate in the work, Diksha collectively does. We also have a vibrant board, which has alumni from leading institutions of the world; the board looks at the broad direction Diksha is heading towards.

Knowledge and Expertise- At an individual level, I have accumulated diverse experiences both in the corporate sector and the education sector. I am very qualified with two advanced Masters degrees in Education and Management. I recently completed a MPhil in Primary Education at the University of Cambridge. My academic research was focused on Diksha and it has helped me strengthen the ideas I plan to work upon.

How do you propose to track the impact of your work (data collection, interviews, etc)

KHEL –

Joy and Interest: The easiest way to track the impact of our work is to find how interested and joyful do the kids feel who participate in the classes? An individual learns the most, when he is happy and not stress-ridden. Our first priority is to see if we are able to provide a vibrant, welcoming and safe environment to our children. This can be gauged with the attendance and subsequent participation of the children. Children must own the centre and feel a sense of belongingness.

Awareness and Action: One of the key outcomes after a learning session is a deep sense of awareness followed by action. Inspiration, motivation or anger may fizzle out but, awareness at the core stays with you and translates itself into action at each opportunity. We will see if our children are more aware about their rights and responsibilities and possess high sensitivity and a sense of confidence to act on their awareness. This can be noticed from the kind of questions a child is asking inside and outside the classroom and whether he can consider multiple perspectives on an issue. Qualitative feedback regarding children will be used to track their progress.

Empowerment: How our students aid themselves with the tools they are exposed to will be a key factor to look at their engagement and how empowered they really are in the face of the problem. Reaction and response to a stuck situation and the corresponding skill of problem solving can be a good analysis to get an idea.

Numbers: Retention of students year after year. Count and participation of girls. Student Learning Outcomes, in terms of their reading and analytical skills, count of volunteers, number of exposure activities for children could be some of the ways to ensure our focus is not dwindling.

We will be producing reports on quarterly basis which would track the progress against the above mentioned parameters.

IGNITE

Since, Ignite is an event based program which exists for half a year, the parameters to track the impact will be slightly different from KHEL:

Outreach: Number of schools that we could reach out to and actual number of students who participated in the campaign.

Outcome: Eventually, how many ideas did pour in from across the state to register. In addition, if any student could bag an award under the campaign to receive it from the President of India.

What are the intermediate milestones:

KHEL

Next Gen Technology: I mentioned Schoology or Edmodo taking forward the integration and collaboration to the next level. It needs to be tested in a six months pilot project with a group of two teachers and twenty students at KHEL Patna Centre.

Impact Analysis: Since, most of our impact is qualitative and not very much about numbers, it becomes relevant for us to dedicate some time separately for impact understanding and assessment.

IGNITE –

Outreach: Expand outreach up to 12000 students this year including at least 100 government schools in Bihar.

Team: Forming a team that comprises good networkers and speakers to be able to reach out to a wide range of schools and encourage children to innovate, hence, increasing the chance of selection and eventually locating possible awardees for the national award.

What learning from this work can be applied elsewhere & where:

Systemic Reforms: The learning from the concept of Diksha can be selectively picked up to existing large scale set-ups including government schools and training institutes to inherit patterns that have worked for us to enhance efficiency and make learning more fun, interactive and engaging. Especially, models like Bal Sansad, Open House Meetings, practice of conflict resolution and inclusion of teaching learning tools like theatre, music and a host of other activities.

Advocacy: We can use the model of Diksha to advocate for quality of education and not just settle for attendance and grades. Diksha's model specializes in focus and delivery to each child and that can be something we can create a dialogue around. In my view, student-learning outcome has to be the benchmark on holistic development indicators.

Organizational Expansion: We can open more after school supplementary education cum

computer training centers to propagate our model. IGNITE can also be expanded intensively in Bihar and extensively in neighboring state of Jharkhand where we have worked on a project earlier.

List the current financial resources, including any other grants or fellowships, available for the project/work:

Diksha's receives project grants from Asha For Education, Alok Charitable Trust, Media Guru and National Innovation Foundation besides advisory and mentoring support pro-bono from many experts and organizations. We also get support from individual donors.

List any organizations, including universities, international agencies, NGOs, etc., involved in the work:

Asha For Education, Purdue Chapter
Media Guru
Alok Charitable Trust
National Innovation foundation
Communitny Youth Collective
Rotary Club, Darlington

What level of funding are you requesting from Asha for Education (stipend, project funds, etc.). Please give details about amount requested per month and duration.

I am looking at somewhere around Rs. 30,000 a month in the form of stipend for the next three years from Asha for Education to help me sustain and lead Diksha to newer heights.

SECTION VIII: Declaration

- I am 18 years of age or older.
- I am prepared to commit at least 80% of my working time to the proposed work
- I am prepared to commit to a minimum of 3 years to the proposed project starting 2016
- I am not proposing an academic research project.
- I am not a prior recipient of Asha for Education Fellowship Program funding.
- The proposed project/work is not affiliated with any religious or political organizations.
- The proposed project/work is an independent and autonomous project.
- The idea proposed is my original idea.
- I have attached a resume and other pertinent information to this application.

I certify that I have answered all questions truthfully. I understand that if I have misrepresented my proposed work, or I Asha for Education may disqualify my eligibility.

Signature:

Name: Gautam Gauri

Date: 10 January 2017