



## **Gramin Shiksha Kendra**

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***Uday Community School, Girirajpura***

**2020-2021**

**Report for-**

**Asha for Education (Austin Chapter)**

## Background

In line with CoViD-safety guidelines, our *Uday* Community Schools were closed during the national lockdown in March 2020 and were directed towards reopening this January, through a phased resumption of educational institutions in Rajasthan. Before the reclosure of schools in April 2021 (due to the second wave of the pandemic and the onset of Summer), the school was open for students of grades 6-8. To continue engaging with our younger students, two of five of the *dhaani-kendras* (hamlet learning centres) in the catchment area of *Uday Samudayik Pathshala- Girirajpura* were kept functional.

## Coping with the Pandemic

We realized that the longer children from under-resourced and disadvantaged communities are kept away from learning, the harder it would be to retain them when schooling resumes; they would be increasingly likely to drop out and engage in activities to support their families- financially or otherwise, or be married off. During the early phases of the lockdown, teachers would routinely call the families of their students to remain updated on their well-being. Additionally, a WhatsApp group was formed and about 60 students were regular recipients of study material/worksheets shared on the group. However, this was not a sustainable method to continue learning engagements, as not all households own phones and in the ones that do, children are often not given access. After certain relaxations were introduced, teachers initiated community and home visits, while taking all recommended precautionary measures- most students and parents were anxious for schools to reopen and wished for us to safely resume education, such that the children's time could be constructively utilized. There emerged a community-driven demand for learning spaces.

## Dhaani-Kendras

In July 2020, five locations for smaller yet accessible *dhaani-kendras* (learning centres) were identified across hamlets in the catchment area of the Uday Community School in Girirajpura, in collaboration with families. These were open spaces with sufficient light and ventilation, and located such that students and teachers didn't need to travel long distances and risk infection. Physical distancing, wearing of masks and washing of hands at regular intervals was being ensured.





*Glimpses of the learning centres set up in our programme area.*

Every teacher was assigned a group with which they worked on all subjects- Hindi, English, Social Science, Mathematics and Science. Subject teachers of the Uday Schools help fellow teachers with lesson planning for their respective subjects. Since the learning levels and educational needs of all students in a group are not the same, teachers used a multi-grade, multi-level pedagogy. The success of these learning centres in keeping children gainfully engaged during the pandemic also encouraged some government school students to enroll themselves here during this interim period.

## Sports

At the request of the community, we also opened up the school playgrounds in July; our sports teachers facilitated activities on the fields and reinforced the necessary CoViD-safety measures. Children from Uday Schools and our intervention schools are often seen competing at district, state and national levels, and our sports teams attend daily practice on the fields.

## Creative Writing

Students are encouraged to creatively express themselves in the form of reflections, poems, stories, essays and songs. We compile their work in the bi-monthly children's magazine- '*Morange*'. The importance of this effort had been enhanced during the pandemic as perhaps the only outlet the children had to share about their unique and often, quite difficult, circumstances. Read the CoViD-impact edition of *Morange* here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eKiTI8bXaRNQnTUR5k-GU1MFpqTziz7j/view?usp=sharing>

## Dhaani-Pustakalays

In response to the closing of schools halting children's access to library books, *dhaani-pustakalays* (community libraries) had been set up across the relevant catchment areas. These were self-run by students who managed distribution, kept records and co-ordinated with their teachers to replenish the books at regular intervals.



## Co-Scholastic Learning

GSK's promotion of creative expression and critical thinking are rooted in its commitment to quality child-centric education. It is, therefore, that along with classroom learning, students engage in learning through an array of co-curricular activities and clubs such as pottery, carpentry, arts, cooking, kitchen gardening, dance, reading, etc. However, with the pandemic impeding access to school set-ups and the significant reduction in hours of engagement with students at the learning centres, as compared to the schools, emphasis was on creating opportunities for self-exploration and self-learning. This was done through the introduction of enjoyable and innovative project work, such as designing the menu of your own restaurant, conducting a *baazaar* simulation, personalising identity cards, framing house rules for keeping CoViD away, etc. On an average, students completed 3 projects a month and new projects were designed based on feedback from both parents and students.

Computers have been introduced in the curriculum and the students at the *dhaani-kendras* in Girirajpura began with learning to use Microsoft Paint and Word on devices provided by GSK. We also conducted a Facebook Live-to showcase our morning assembly, that form an integral part of the day at Uday by providing students a platform for democratic decision-making and dialogue on issues that affect them, with an online viewership of thousands. Additionally, a small plantation drive, encouraged by the Forest Department, on the World Environment Day.



Who am I?: Students personalizing their identity cards.



Future Entrepreneurs: Students in a bazaar simulation, setting up their own shops.



Learning by Doing: Students running their own restaurants.







Census Survey: Learning about their community, and data collection, interpretation and presentation.



Collective 'गुंजन' or chanting is an integral part of the morning for our students and teachers to start the day feeling centred.



Students learning to hand-make masks from available cloth.

## Early Childhood Care

For children aged 3-5 years, teachers work closely with parents, especially mothers, to engage the young ones in activities that aid their motor and cognitive skills, and psycho-social development, through easy-to-comprehend assignments for parents to carry out with their children at home. Parents, whom our teachers also educate on the nutritional requirements of the children, monitor their growth using WHO-recommended growth charts that indicate the level of stunting and wasting among children.



Monthly weight checks are ensured to prevent and look out for symptoms of malnutrition.



Our teacher in conversation with care-givers about their wards' nutritional needs.

## Teachers' Capacity Building

**English Programme:** The crux of English teaching at Uday is a theme-based approach; contextually relevant themes are decided upon every month, and students' reading, speaking and writing are worked on based on the chosen theme. The resource teacher provides support to their peers, through assistance in lesson planning, execution and reflection. During mentorship sessions, teachers are given tasks to enhance their own capacity and are encouraged to take initiative.

**Online Training:** During the last academic year, teachers have attended a plethora of workshops online- training in life skills development, by an external resource person and in participatory, activities-based STEM teaching, in collaboration with Avishkaar. They have also been attending a life-skills training programme with the help of an external resource trainer Ms. Rashmi Sood.



**Enhancement of Basic Digital Skills:** The times demanded a shift to virtual modes of communication, with trainings and team-meetings taking place via video-call, and building and sharing of study material taking place digitally. This provided our teachers the opportunity to build their capacity when it comes to basic technical know-how.

## Reflections and Stories from the Field

Amidst the closure of educational institutions across the country, GSK's efforts to continually and gainfully engage children in learning meant mitigating the possibility of children dropping out. Find below testimonials from teachers and parents-

### ***Ankit's Success Story***

"Ankit is a student of Uday Community School, Girirajpura. His father is a farmer and his mother remains engaged in running the household. The land in front of Ankit's house was one of the identified dhaani-kendras that I was teaching at. However, in the initial days, whenever I would take a class, he would run away and disappear! Neither his mother, nor his classmates, were able to help me locate him or get him to attend the study sessions. One day, fortunately, I was able to get a hold of him- I tried to engage in friendly conversation, in an attempt to understand what was bothering him, and why he didn't want to learn and play with his friends. I tried my best to encourage him to come to class the next day. During that day's meeting with my colleagues, I shared my predicament with them and received some advice on how to move forward in such a situation. To my pleasant surprise, the next day, Ankit came to class! While he was still quite unresponsive and not participating actively, I was happy that at least he came. He came with a notebook and pencil, but after taking some time to evaluate his learning levels, I realized that more rudimentary, colourful and activity-based teaching-learning material (TLM) would be of greater use to him. Soon I noticed an enhancement in both his interest as well as performance in class! Even his father exclaimed to me one day, "I don't know what magic you've done, but now Ankit never wants to miss class! In fact, he refuses to go out with us anywhere, concerned that he might miss a study session and fall behind." Ankit's progress during this period is very close to my heart, and is testament to the fact that a lack of GSK continuing crucial efforts would have caused immense adverse impact to our children's education."

- Shailendra Singh, Teacher

### ***Increasing Awareness Among Our Parents' Communities Regarding the importance of Education***

"Would children forget important concepts necessary for further learning? Will they drop out due to a break from schooling? Will they lose interest in education? With the closure of schools in accordance with CoViD-safety guidelines, these were the questions causing us great concern. After conversations with members of the community, we noticed that they were plagued by the same! They provided us with solutions such as teaching small groups around the village or giving study material/worksheets to be completed at home. They were worried that children would while away their time and not do anything productive. After discussions at the organizational level, the community themselves made available appropriate and viable locations to set up *dhaani-kendras*. GSK's constant efforts to help reform the education ecosystem by making people more aware and conscious of the importance of education has paid off in the form of their enduring support for our work, even in the face of great adversity.

- Ashok Sharma, Teacher

GSK continually strives to keep the community at the centre of all its developmental efforts. An important indicator of success for us is the level of support and participation in a programme by the members of our local communities and our efforts to reinvent learning during the pandemic last year was greatly appreciated by them. Find below snippets of conversation our teachers had with parents during a recent community visit-

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HJe9E0OWmTon8VrOLPT7w5fdb1g-Ddaa/view?usp=sharing>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HN72ggoH1loo-bCgiVLXfsIUGohEWhpD/view?usp=sharing>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HPh1Xw-0eKRFJP2BbMUK-azNxwmeupe3/view?usp=sharing>

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