

Manjushree Reddy
Relationships Manager
Learning Links Foundation
www.learninglinksindia.org
E-mail: manjushree.reddy@learninglinksindia.org
Mob: +91 9999662910

Sub Theme: 'Community Development- Innovative Pathways to Knowledge Society'

Linking corporate to community technology centers

ABSTRACT

Learning Links Foundation (LLF), a Delhi based not-for-profit organisation tries to provide a bridge between leading corporate houses and rural community technology centers. Since its inception in 2002, the foundation has successfully linked over 500 community technology centers with various corporate houses. The key strength of the Foundation lies in bringing international experience to solving local issues across geographical boundaries.

The Foundation sees the community technology as a national movement that sprung up around the country based on need and has now coalesced into a unified movement. The Foundation's Community Development Initiatives cover a broad spectrum of activities across communities-children and professionals, through models that address critical issues affecting quality of life and the future of adolescents, children and adults. The focus is on developing an environment that will address the need continuum across - educational, social, life skills, recreational and workplace readiness for children, adults and communities. The community development initiatives are propagated through a community based environment outside the formal school setting and include learner curriculum and structured training for community centre staff.

Since 2004, the Foundation has been implementing programs for development of technology skills in children from the heart of rural India, extending learning opportunities beyond the classroom. The focus is on developing interest and helping the learners make connections with their own communities through technology driven projects. Over the past three years, the Foundation has trained more than 90,000 learners across 23 States and 4 Union Territories throughout India in partnerships models.

The vision of LLF's programs is to foster partnerships between underserved communities and students in order to support holistic care. Over the past year, our team has been working to implement this for the several community groups in India and other parts of Asia. At the same time it has created opportunities for students from various disciplines to work and collaborate amongst each other in order to effectively advocate for vulnerable populations. This offers a unique opportunity for students to engage in learning and community education, tenets that help showing innovative pathways to the knowledge society.

We will share some case study based innovative ways of community outreach and development experiences which have been facilitated by LLF having close corporate linkages with some leading corporate

houses like Intel, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, etc. We'll also discuss a variety of community technology programs, the many different ways they are funded and the creative ways they reach out to the community.

Learning Links Foundation (LLF) is a New Delhi based not-for-profit organization representing the finest managerial capacity in the development sector, specifically in the areas of education and community development and. Established in 2002, the aim of Learning Links Foundation is progress and quality education for all. Spread over 40 cities across 22 States in India and having a presence in Sri Lanka and Malaysia, LLF's core competencies include developing ICT models for Education, working with State Departments of Education on ICT policies, Professional Development activities, ICT in Education deployment models, content deployment, training and capacity building- both at school and higher education level. Learning Links Foundation works with Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development to support and implement community development programs across the country, works with Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti on providing market-oriented employability skills, primarily interpersonal and technology literacy skills to youth across 22 states in India. Since 2004, the Foundation has been working with Kerala

State Information Technology Mission, focusing on skill development for youth to enable them to apply higher levels of thinking skills to solve problems and find solutions to diverse situations, in addition to developing digital literacy skills.

The Foundation's, Community Development Initiatives cover a broad spectrum of activities across communities- children and professionals, through models that address critical issues affecting quality of life and the future of adolescents, children and adults.

The focus is on developing an environment that will address the need continuum across - educational, social, life skills, recreational and workplace readiness for children, adults and communities.

The community development initiatives are propagated through a community based environment outside the formal school setting and include learner curriculum and structured training for community centre staff.

Intel® Learn-

Since 2004, the Foundation has been implementing programs for development of technology skills in children from the heart of rural India, extending learning opportunities beyond the classroom. The Intel® Learn Program is being implemented in collaboration with Intel, Learning Links Foundation, Kerala State Information Technology Mission, Navodyaya Vidyalaya Schools under the Ministry of Human

Resources and Development and with the Department of IT and Directorate of Public Instruction (Schools), Chandigarh administration. The curriculum is specially designed to help young children between 8 – 16 years to learn technology skills using an engaging project-based curriculum. The focus is on developing interest and helping the learners make connections with their own communities through technology driven projects.

The programs implemented by Learning Links Foundation encourage children to look within and tap their creative interests for identifying problems within their communities. The children work as a team to search for and present solutions to their peers. The children are also encouraged to involve the voices of community members, parents, teachers and other stakeholders in their project for a robust, sustainable solution. Simultaneously, efforts are undertaken to encourage the community to develop socially responsible children who understand community challenges through various community mobilization strategies.

An after-school, community-based program designed to provide technology literacy, problem solving and collaboration skills- the Intel Learn[®] Program constitutes some of the essential skills required by students to be successful in today's knowledge economy. The curriculum uses an engaging project-based approach and is delivered through community technology centers.

The program was launched in 2004 in Malappuram in Kerala, and to date has reached out to more than 1, 25,000 learners across 22 states and 5 Union Territories.

The primary goals and impacts of the Intel[®] Learn program are –

- Technology literacy for children from communities with little or no access to technology
- Critical thinking skills for problem solving
- Collaboration skills to be able work as a team in an increasingly global workforce



The program links community children to community technology centres, thus addressing access and availability issues. Children use technology tools in appropriate and creative ways, explore new tools, and develop their skills in each technology area. From technology education, the program moves ahead towards a blended approach with resources that help in developing and delivering some education solutions for

developing 21st century learning skills, problem solving, and other forms of critical thinking, through technology driven projects. Students also make connections between Intel® Learn activities and other aspects of their lives and communities. Not only do they participate in group activities, but also they share goals, strategies, and ideas, review the work of their group, resolve problems and demonstrate sustained engagement. In the process, they establish connections between Intel® Learn activities and other aspects of their lives and communities. Learners complete the Intel® Learn program, gaining significant skills in technology, planning, designing, problem-solving, and collaborating, while at the same time, being highly engaged and motivated.

E-learning programs like Intel® Learn Program, Learn English, Arabic Tutor, Internet for Masses, Medical Transcription, e-Vidhya, etc are already introduced and are implemented by a number of community technology centres named as “Akshaya Centers” in Kerala and Chandigarh. The response from the public is generally encouraging. About 17 job oriented course packages developed with the support of DOEACC, IGNOU are ready for rollout. E-Krishi, Industry Web Portal, UNESCO Project for developing community portal, etc are also being implemented in different districts.



Shahana K T is an Akshaya Centre entrepreneur from Mallapuram in Kerala. Shahana has impacted at least 1600 children, girl children in particular while providing training in Intel Learn. She has empowered girls in her community with technology skills, paving the way for them to use technology to spread awareness and solve community problems. Shahana has become a role model for every young woman in her region. Her success has inspired many girls in her community to take up jobs and come out of four walls of their homes to the outside world and be independent and confident women.

'In the initial stage, I used to come home late at night, which was unimaginable in a small place like Malappuram. People did feel a little awkward by my late hours, but with my new found communication skills and confidence that I learnt through the Program, no one could openly oppose my training. Gradually when they came to know about the work I have been doing, everyone has accepted me with open heart'.

Shahana is now a successful woman entrepreneur of the district. She has dropped her plan of shifting to the Gulf for better opportunities and wants to continue working in her village.

AKSHAYA has conducted one of the world's largest computer literacy drives, reaching over 600,000 households, representing more than 3.6 million people. Through the AKSHAYA Program in Kerala and Chandigarh, entrepreneurs with social attitude and altitude are encouraged to start small ICT enterprises at the grassroots level; thereby promoting ICT understanding and usage, generating income and creating an environment of developmental opportunities for the local youth. Another distinct feature of the AKSHAYA is, continuous capacity building of stakeholders namely community members, entrepreneurs, youth, students and representatives of the local governing bodies. Highlighted amongst the various offerings of AKSHAYA is the Intel® Learn Program with its ability to impact youth and school children in an after-school and community based setting.

The success of the AKSHAYA Project is being attributed for its ability to involve the Private stakeholders to address digital inclusion and creation of ICT Access Points. After its successful implementation in Malappuram district, KSITM has initiated a State wide launch; to cover every Panchayat

for equal, digitally inclusive and holistic development. The AKSHAYA project has become one of the most successful 'ICT for development' models, which has been able to provide equal access and address community issues. The outcome of the project is an environment of *Equal access and Social Inclusion*.

While Intel® Learn Program's community drive approach creates a self-interested incentive among Akshaya owners to keep maintaining their practices, the project-based learning approach addresses social and community level problems basing on sharing and collaboration. Today, there is comparatively more student turn-out annually for the program in most of the centres than other programs and there is more income through the nominal course fee that is charged per curriculum module. There is improved technological literacy. There are local champions and innovators who help motivating other to adopt. There is more interaction between children and parents, strengthened bonds between schools and students from different socio-economic strata.

IBM-

Learning Links Foundation does extensive work with IBM to build in Indian Youth relevant skills required to succeed in the workforce. Almost 85,000 students have been given a chance to work on technology

driven socially relevant projects that aimed at not only addressing common community problems, but also provided a chance for participants to get employed with IBM and its partners.

SCIMA Digital Enhancement Project

As the gap between rich and poor continues to grow, the ability to benefit from the opportunities delivered through computers and the Internet can help a generation of young people move out of poverty. With this objective the **Learning Links Foundation SCIMA Digital Enhancement Project** was launched with Support from **DELL YOUTHCONNECT** in June 03, 2009 in Chennai.

The project is an effort to enhance Science and Maths learning among school students through the effective use of ICT and to provide digital literacy skills in a 21st Century learning environment to students between 5 -17 years. Through this project 10 year old students are aimed to get the privilege of going through Science and Math through technology and Learning Links Foundation is responsible for this.

The project that Learning Links Foundation and Dell have accelerated is considered as the stepping milestone for imparting a holistic approach to the learning methodologies as apart of which, for the first time in the Government school students are going to learn concepts with far greater

understanding with the help of digital content.



Digital opportunity for kids is the equity issue of the 21st century and Dell & Learning Links Foundation have long been committed to ensuring that the opportunities of digital technology benefit all children and families.

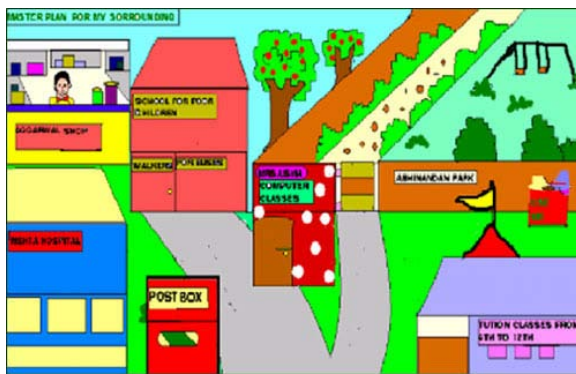
To ensure that children reap the benefits of technology and that its practical applications benefit children's lives in measurable way **Learning Links Foundation implemented the 'Explore@myworld.com'** curriculum series program, at Chiranjiv Bharati School, Gurgaon, Delhi, for the under privileged children of the community.

The Learning Links Foundation Explore@myworld.com is set of curriculum series which covers key essential concepts like digital literacy, 21st century skills, health, etc.

Spread over 12 days of training sessions, the program run as an after-school, community education program to provide in a fun, engaging learning environment, a

basic introduction to technology and other 21st century skills while also promoting a sense of involvement with the environment around them. About 120 children took part in the program with an almost equal number of boys and girls.

All sessions focused on acquiring basic technology skills like Paint, Graphics, Word Processing, Spreadsheet, and Internet Explorer along with motivating in the children, 21st century skills namely digital literacy, community consciousness, collaboration, leadership qualities and a sense of belonging to the environment.



Master Plan for an Ideal Community

The children were asked to role play as members of the Community Development Task Force and develop on the computer ways of improving their community. Very enthusiastically, they came out with products like 'Master Plan for an Ideal Community, Poster to Manage Wastes and a Presentation on Prevention of Malaria & Dengue'.

The Take Home activities encouraged them to assess the problems prevailing in their

community and suggest measures to overcome those.

A Show & Tell session on the last day saw the children excitedly sharing the products and their experiences of working together with the audience of friends and parents, through skits, songs and dances. They also shared their experiences on how the program had helped them become responsible citizens and take care of their surroundings.

The program has resulted in bringing about a social change and shaping the children's perceptions of the world they live in. It has also brought about a lot of goodwill and visibility for the Dell Youth Connect & LLF Initiative.

The above community development projects, amongst the other 'ICT for development' models, provide the blueprints for possible replication and/or scaling up, allowing for the potential that technology holds for human development to be realized. The government's IT Task Force has recommended that the best out of some of the above like the Akshaya community technology centres should be replicated across India. While there are some overarching issues including financing issues remain unaddressed, the focus is always on how to scale and replicate such projects by connecting such community technology centres to the private sector and different corporate houses.

#

**Paper submitted by
Learning Links Foundation
Rajendra Place
New Delhi**

www.learninglinksindia.org