



ACORN FOUNDATION (INDIA)

IMPACT ASSESEMENT REPORT 2019-20

About us:

ACORN FOUNDATION & Dharavi Rocks

Acorn Foundation has been working in the Dharavi area of Mumbai since 2008, Dharavi being one of the largest workers colonies has a population of 7 - 8,00,000 people, it is also one of the largest hubs of recycling in India handling nearly handling 50 % of the dry waste generated by Mumbai. Acorn Foundation is a registered non-profit public trust founded by Adv.Vinod Shetty. The Dharavi Project is a initiative started by Acorn Foundation for the welfare of Rag pickers/waste collectors and their families in "Dharavi". One of the first projects undertaken by Acorn was producing a documentary on the lives of young recyclers/waste collectors in the Dharavi area. The film "WASTE" was directed by Parashar Barua and over the last 10 years screened in over 75 colleges schools & institutions of Mumbai and viewed by 100,000 people.

Having done its research and fieldwork Acorn then started a community centre in Dharavi with its own resources in 2009. The eleven year old Centre has now been relocated in the t-junction area on the Bandra , it acts as a office, recycling centre, library, studio, innovation laboratory and school for the community. **Acorn today collects & recycles dry waste from many schools and offices in Mumbai i.e The American School (ASB), The Dhirubhai Ambani School (DAS), The Oberoi International school , The German School (DSB) and office establishments i.e Bloomberg, Marsh Insurance, Amazon etc.**

Within a few years of its existence in Dharavi, along with welfare activities Acorn has

started an informal education project for the children and youth of the community. The boys and girls who attend Acorns classroom and participate in Acorns recreational activities numbering 150 are from different economic and social backgrounds. The kids belong to ages 10 to 25 and are from some of the most marginalized and underprivileged sections of society, many of these kids from a young age have had to work and become breadwinners for their families.

Acorns classroom activity is conducted by volunteers & Acorn staff every evening on weekdays at the Xavier's Technical College, Mahim (west). The classes are in the subjects of Geography, English, History, music, craft, dance and drama subject to the availability and expertise of the volunteer teachers. Acorn conducts Computer literacy classes for the kids in the Innovation lab set up at the community centre.

Acorn has started a football club for the kids which is trained by professionals in the sport, the Junior & Senior teams have been participating in city league matches.

Another successful initiative is the *Dharavi Rocks* band a music education project has been around since 2010. At any given time it consists of 30 to 35 kids from ages 14 to 25, as of today since the last 10 years more than 5000 boys and girls have received training in music from popular Indian & International musicians and bands. The kids in Dharavi Rocks have been fortunate to receive guidance and mentorship from some of the most popular musicians in India like Suneeta Rao, Shankar Mahadevan, Rajeev Raja and bands like Agnee and many International musicians visiting Mumbai and performing in Blue Frog (a jazz club) have worked with the kids and conducted workshops for the kids. Some of our kids have acted in movies and TV shows, many have recorded professionally in studios and done live acts with some of the top musicians.

The Band is very creative and has always had music teachers, volunteers and trainers and composed and recorded music for TV and films. The Percussion Junk Band plays their own compositions and other tunes in schools, colleges and public events on recycled Plastic drums and has performed more than 175 shows all over India and in 2017 have also travelled and performed at the Roundhouse London UK. They have been ambassadors for Acorns recycling campaign.

In 2017 Acorn Foundation has set up the Lab13 project which is an innovation Lab set up in collaboration with Dr Ben Parry, Dr Graham Jeffery and the late Tushar Joag &

Sharmila Samant academics from The University Of Bath Spa, University of Scotland and Shiv Nadar University as part of a project supported by the British Council . The Lab13 imparts state of the art knowledge and trains the Acorn kids and youth in cutting edge digital technology like 3D Printing, Robotics and Computer graphics along with humanities and Art a unique combination.

As part of its outreach program Acorn also plays host to many academics, researchers, artists, International students and volunteers from Universities and schools. Acorn has been the subject of many research projects and documentary film projects from all over the world. Acorn is also imparting training to the youth of Dharavi in various skills to prepare them for their future jobs and careers. As part of their skill training and livelihood project Dharavi Rock students have been training & mentoring students of the schools in Dharavi in music. Every year Acorn plays host to International students who volunteer in Acorn and work with our community.

Our Vision:

Acorn Foundation has been working in the Dharavi community since the last decade and leading social change, we are actively using our media, education and research strategies for various social advocacy campaigns and building the capacity of young people and providing livelihoods to women.

The change begins when Acorn starts working with children at a young age in their lives when they are moving from primary to secondary education. As they enter their higher school, we continue to support each child for 10 long years, during which each child is exposed to programs that support their intellectual growth and performance in schools. At the end of this 10-year relationship, we train our children in livelihood skills and ensure that they are qualified and confident to apply for the jobs in the market.

The three key areas of our interventions are improving learning outcomes, enhancing work-skills and targeting deep-rooted social norms. While we work with our children between the ages of 10 and 25 years, we are aware that bringing in a life change is challenging. Acorn is aware that we need to involve the kids families, peers and communities through our outreach activities at every stage.

Parents, Volunteers and Teachers are equal contributors in the design of our education activities. We provide them with various leadership skills and skill training avenues as educators which otherwise they would have never got access. This we believe will eventually benefit our children. Families, peers and communities are mobilised through various forums in schools where we create awareness about education and livelihood.

Our initiatives :-

To address the key areas of our interventions, we have mobilised all our initiatives within four key verticals-education, livelihood, soft-skills and nutrition.

Education:

Acorn children are first-generation learners. Through our programs, we aim to instill the value of education in the students & parents.

Through our class room learning courses, we are bringing the global language of commerce and arts and humanities much closer to the kids. We want to provide the same opportunities to the Dharavi children as any other in this increasingly digitized world. We have introduced digital education in Acorn. We have a hi-tech projector in the center by which we can educate the Acorn kids with the latest documentary films. Acorn also has a well stacked library for the kids in the center. We also provide them with training in 3D printing design, as we believe this is a technology often used in diverse occupations.

We are working towards improving knowledge retention among our children by bringing joy to their learning experience. We have introduced dance and music education through Dharavi Rocks and our partners and engaging our children in diverse activities, which they will experience for the first time ever.

Livelihood:

With a good education or basic skill development, we want to ensure that the Dharavi kids get employment in today's competitive job market. For this, we have introduced vocational skills and work-readiness training to our children during

their secondary education .

We would like to introduce vocational skills for every child and promoting their interests in various job functions or trade. In future each child is empowered to be productive through this skills-training education.

Acorns future plans include youth being given career counseling and livelihood training. Starting right from training them to be more confident, communicating, handling job-interviews and sustaining their jobs. At the end of this training, acorn will help them search for apprentice placements in various industries in the manufacturing and service sector.

Soft-skills:

As Acorn youth pursue their dreams in education and livelihood, they are often hindered by deep-rooted social norms and biases within a caste ridden society, which we want to target through our soft-skills initiatives.

Through our sports for development project we are bridging the social, caste, gender, economic disparity gap, providing more confidence among the children, helping them learn goal-setting. All these ensure that we enhance their self-efficacy. We are training the children in music, sports and dance, ensuring a platform for them to express their inner talents and aspirations.

They are also given platforms to perform these trained skills and show the world with confidence that they are no less than anyone. We will surely help them fulfill their dreams and hopes.

Health:

We are looking at our health initiatives as an enabler for our children to remain productive as they pursue their journey from education to livelihood. We have introduced regular meals after the end of all classes, introducing nutrition to their diets.

We have also intervened to build a sustainable environment for Acorn children, so they can have access to clean drinking water and hygienic sanitation

provisions, thru the efforts of our partner schools we have fitted the latest water filter machines in our community center, all the kids receive nutritious meals after each class. We also conduct regular camps for vision and provide free reading glasses to those who need them.

Our impact:

Since the launch of our interventions in Dharavi in 2009, we have grown in our scope & scale, requiring an evidence-based rigorous impact evaluation. We have designed our theory of change with the help of well proved international assessment studies and theories, to direct our impact evaluation, thus leading us closer to achieving our vision.

In the last five years, Acorn children have started to reap benefits through our initiatives, which has been captured through our impact evaluation conducted within our community.

We have conducted extensive interviews with the kids and their parents in terms of both quantitative and qualitative studies to analyse our impact and we have witnessed the following success stories:

Our Quantitative Success Stories:

Digital-learning @ LAB13:

Acorn children are the first ones to be exposed to the 3D printing technology and 3D modeling/digital design at the LAB13 innovation laboratory in the Dharavi area, The Acorn Center is today equipped with such training hardware/technology. Which includes internet services, film projection facilities, portable sound system, a large library, computers , music instruments, painting facilities, facilitators for workshops, teachers and volunteers. Various Artists are working with the kids to give them artistic knowledge to build their abilities in critical thinking.

Recycling Project:

Acorn women are in charge of the recycling and waste management training project . They are collaborating for several years with The American School(ASB) The Oberoi International School The Dhirubhai Ambani School(DSB) organizations like Bloomberg and Marsh . In March they have worked with Bloomberg in the square Mile event to make the entire event waste free , hiring 15 women and did the messaging and demonstrated on the site segregation and recycling of waste at the Jio Gardens.

Continuous Training:

Over the last one year, we have trained over 50 students in digital designing using computers. Further another 50 students have been trained to design 3D models like table lamps useful in the fields of architecture, engineering, health..

Acorn Children have reaped benefits from these courses by doubling their learning abilities and increasing their interest in pursuing computers as a future career choice. Many of the girls in our courses would like to take up further advance trainings. Through our 3D modelling courses, children have witnessed improvements in their critical reasoning.

Academic programme:

Our initial impact studies found that children who were refusing to go to school or were violent have stopped their anti-social behavior and are now interested to come to school and look forward to interacting with other kids.

Livelihood programme:

In the last two years we have trained almost 50 children in work-readiness skilling, with over 100 children trained in vocational skills.

Soft-skills programme:

Based on our initial impact reports, we have witnessed a decrease in gender and caste-based discrimination among our children in schools, which can be directly attributed to our interventions.

Our children show more confidence, increased problem-solving skills and goal-setting.

Our Qualitative impact :

Building Confidence through Spoken English:

Sheetal one of our star pupils belongs to a family of waste recyclers, her mother a second generation recycler sent Sheetal to school and educated her against all odds. In those adverse conditions bringing up her daughter as a single mother provided its challenges, in a male dominated patriarchal world. Laxmi had started her recycling business a small open shed below the bridge in Dharavi when we met her in 2008. Today with the help of a Acorn scholarship Laxmi has now sent her daughter to college. Sheetal is now a confident young woman who managed the entire Acorn team on their trip to London to perform with Emmy award winner Angelique Kidjo at the Roundhouse. She is confident enough by her training to manage the Dharavi Rocks team during their tours in the absence of the teachers and volunteers. Laxmi who now coordinates the activities of Acorn in Dharavi and runs the recycling project is proud of her daughters achievement and feels that she has broken the vicious cycle of all women in her family finding work only in the waste industry. Laxmi feels that Sheetal will one day buy a small flat in a building with a attached toilet and 24 hours water supply and take her mother to live there far away from the poverty .

Making imagination come alive through 3D Design Course:

Children are all creative as their imagination runs strong. Acorn children want to become future citizens and contribute to society, they want to step out of poverty and not take up the hazardous and risky jobs their parents had to do to educate them. Education will be their way forward. Acorn wants to provide their imagination new wings through our 3D Design course and digital printing.

Joy through learning @ Dharavi Rocks:

Acorn children have immense talent and they seek platforms to showcase them. With the help of our implementation partner we trained our children who are interested in Music , dancing and football We have provided them a platform to showcase their inner talent. With well-known names of the music field in attendance, our children got the attention they deserve and witnessed loud cheers from the audience. Acorn kids have also travelled all over the country and done more than 175 shows, in February they have visited Jaipur, before that they have visited Raipur, Hyderabad, Delhi , Bangalore etc and in 2017 they have travelled to London UK and performed at the Roundhouse.

Conclusion:

Our impact has gone beyond the estimate on basic outreach numbers; we are witnessing a change among our children that shows a positive motivation for learning and training. Our children now have a different outlook towards their journey of education to livelihood and have continued to pursue it with renewed confidence in themselves.

This impact has been recognized by our partners and Acorn children's achievements through our programs have been appreciated by all. We have won the hearts of the parents and people of Dharavi. We received major recognition by corporate and schools in the past few years and we look forward to moving ahead at the same speed with greater energy and hope.

We truly believe that we have opened the doors of opportunities for Acorn children and we aim to reach out to thousands of kids through our work.

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