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# Empowering Rural Teachers for Digital Literacy and Lifelong Learning: Insights from Cosmo Foundation's Yamini Jaipuria

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Cosmo Foundation empowers rural teachers through digital skills integration and lifelong learning programs.

 by **INDIA CSR** — 3 months ago in **Interviews** Reading Time: 8 mins read



Yamini Jaipuria, Managing Trustee of Cosmo Foundation. India CSR

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In this exclusive interview, **India CSR' Rusen Kumar** speaks with Ms. **Yamini Jaipuria, Managing Trustee of Cosmo Foundation**, about the foundation's remarkable efforts in empowering rural educators. With a focus on integrating digital skills and fostering lifelong learning, the Cosmo Foundation has been at the forefront of educational transformation in rural India. Ms. Jaipuria sheds light on the foundation's initiatives, including teacher training programs, the Balmitra initiative, and the impact of computer literacy and digital skill-building programs. Her insights reveal how the Cosmo Foundation is shaping the future of rural education by building resilient educators and empowering communities.

*Excerpts of an Interview:*

## **How is the Cosmo Foundation empowering rural teachers to integrate digital skills and foster lifelong learning among students?**

The significance of educators in shaping the future is more evident than ever. In the face of rapid innovation and technological advancement, the role of teachers extends beyond the classroom—they are the pillars of resilience and sustainability in the education system. Teachers who work today build the future of tomorrow. They are the ones who brings out best in students and ignite the love for a lifelong learning. They not only impart knowledge but also inspire and mould future leaders.

Recognizing this critical role, Cosmo Foundation since its inception in 2008 focused on strengthening quality education in rural government schools in neighbouring villages of the manufacturing units of Cosmo First in Gujarat and Maharashtra. The organization is focused to build Foundational Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills, Digital Skills and English communication skills.

Cosmo Foundation has developed programs that address both immediate needs and long-term sustainability in education for both teachers and students. In last 16 years we have impacted 52 rural govt schools and 68,000 rural students and 2,50,000 people by engaging 100+ community-based educators. University interns and senior employees of Cosmo First join as mentors and educators to strengthen and support the education system.

## **Can you tell us about the specific teacher training programs at Cosmo Foundation, particularly how you train and empower them to become effective educators and community leaders?**

We at Cosmo Foundation strongly believe that skill-based quality education builds future leaders, and aware citizens and facilitates social, and economic transformation. With a view to creating a sustainable force of educators, Cosmo Foundation has built and sustained local talent and promoted local employability. We engage rural women and youth as educators, train, groom, nurture and mentor them and build them as robust local educators fondly known as – “Balmitras”.

We continued our efforts even during the COVID-19 lockdown and created opportunities for teachers to upgrade their skills and relentlessly they worked on multiple areas like COVID-19 prevention awareness, education on virtual platforms, mental wellness and counselling, relief and rehabilitation and education in new normal.



## What is the Balmitra initiative?

Cosmo Foundation has robust strategies to build educators through comprehensive programs designed to enhance their skills and build their resilience. Our mission is to foster an environment where Balmitras (Community-based educators) are empowered to thrive and create lasting, positive change. Our Balmitras who are residents of the village have a strong rapport with children and parents.

Balmitras are the educators, agents of change and link between the education system and the community. They provide supportive education including reading, writing, arithmetic skills in native language, Basic English language literacy, communication skills and so on as per the New Education Policy. They are the ones who promote health-hygiene, creativity, interpersonal relationships, exposure of the outer world, knowledge on current affairs and digital skills.

We train the Balmitras for English language & IT skills to impart basic literacy and build capacity at an individual level. We provide them with a multi-faceted exposure that encompasses training from internal faculties & external subject experts, conduct online webinars, visits to other institutes & weekly introspection meetings, and send daily inputs on the WhatsApp group. We help them become the best versions of themselves.



Yamini Jaipuria Managing Trustee Cosmo Foundation, India CSR

## **Can you share some success stories of Balmitras/testimonials who have made significant impacts in their communities??**

"I, a mother of two children, a passionate learner and a college dropout got my mission at Cosmo Foundation. My husband was an alcoholic, and I was in need to take care of my family. I met Cosmo in a parents' meeting. Looking at my dedication and thirst for learning I got an offer to join Balmitra. In the past 12 years I have been trained on early childcare education, New Education Policy, developmental needs of children, teaching basic maths and Gujarati, life skills, community mobilization and organization and now also teaching English to Primary school students. I am a digital warrior where I take online classes, conduct parent meetings on virtual mode. My soul-satisfying work is I am conducting literacy classes in Madrassa of the village and engaged 100 children in mainstream education. I am privileged to be a Cosmo Balmitra" - Kashi Beldar, village- Choranda, Karjan.

## **Can you share more about Cosmo Foundation's 'Computer Literacy and Digital Skill Building' program and how it has empowered local youth to become digital educators and community leaders in rural areas?**

Our flagship program- "computer literacy and Digital Skill Building" reaches out to children, youth and women in the remotest villages. Getting a trained and technologically sound teacher in rural areas is a distanced dream. Cosmo Foundation engaged professionals to train local youth and engaged them as computer teachers.

These local teachers every year train around 7,000 students across rural Gujarat and Maharashtra on basic computer operations, graphic design, digital art, AI tools, Advance Excel, digital payments, social media, e-commerce and so on. Our educators work in alignment with digital India and Skill India where we have created digital access and operation at the doorstep.

During Covid, Cosmo educators equipped rural community with cashless transactions and key persons with essential digital skills and empowered them. Our educators have set up E-service centres where rural community can learn free of cost from our trained educators.

## **Any other initiatives by Cosmo Foundation that are targeted to help teachers?**

Cosmo English Tutor exemplifies our dedication to empowering educators by building them as confident English teachers. Launched as a resource for teachers, this YouTube channel offers prerecorded videos to enhance capacity of English teachers of Gujarati and Marathi medium schools enhance English proficiency and introduce innovative teaching techniques.

By strengthening language skills and modern pedagogical methods, we ensure that educators can deliver engaging and effective lessons, fostering resilience in the face of educational challenges and apprehension towards international language. In last one year we have trained 500 educators.

## **Kindly share a story/testimonial from a teacher who has benefitted from this support**

"I belong to the remotest village, 67 kms from Vadodara and was brought up in a Rajput family. I completed my diploma in computer engineering and joined Cosmo Foundation as a Computer teacher. With this, I could pursue my passion for technology. The organization facilitated my skill upgradation, and I became a proficient digital skill trainer. I acquired English Language Proficiency through Cosmo English tutor- A YouTube channel. At present I am engaged to train computer and English teachers, organizing English communication courses for women and youth on virtual platform, provide specialized training on graphic design, handle social media and documentation of Cosmo Foundation. I am no lesser than my counterparts from urban cities and universities." Mrunali Raj- English Teacher, Cosmo Foundation.

## **How does Cosmo Foundation's soft skills training for teachers and rural girls help create a self-sufficient society, and what impact have you observed from these initiatives?**

We at Cosmo Foundation also emphasize on soft skills training for teachers and rural girls, ensuring that education goes beyond just academics. By equipping teachers with skills in leadership, teamwork, communication, and emotional intelligence, Cosmo Foundation empowers them to better guide their students, creating a positive ripple effect in society. In Delhi, Cosmo extended support to Vidya- a school for underprivileged children by organizing capacity-building programs for teachers focused on soft skills, activity-based teaching, and inspiring children through a multidisciplinary approach.

We believe in creating a self-sufficient society through capacity building. We organize trainings, workshops, exposure visits, webinars, and virtual courses for our teachers on concepts, teaching methods, educational resources, education policy, classroom environment, use of technology for imparting education, production of content, assessment and monitoring.

We have designed our own curriculum and implementation model, which is simple, scientific and user-friendly for the teachers and students from vernacular medium. Substantial content is digitised and disseminated through our YouTube channel, Cosmo Digishala – a platform for virtual learning, WhatsApp groups, webcast, social media. We strengthen & develop natural abilities, innate behavioural patterns, knowledge, and technological and language skills of the educators associated with us so that they can further empower large number of children, youth, girls and society at large.

## How is Cosmo Foundation ensuring that educators remain resilient and empowered to inspire future generations, especially as catalysts for social change?

As we celebrate Teacher's Day, the resilience and sustainability of our educational system depend on the continued support and empowerment of our educators. At Cosmo Foundation, we have made consistent investment to train and develop more educators, a catalyst for social change.

We are committed to nurturing this resilience through our targeted initiatives and ensuring that our educators are equipped to inspire and lead with confidence, ensuring a brighter future for all. We acknowledge and celebrate the incredible work of educators who, through their spirit and dedication, shape the future of our nation.



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## How does Cosmo Foundation ensure the sustainability and long-term impact of its educational programs?

Along with our dedicated team, we work towards identifying areas of concern at the grassroots level and providing strategic solutions to improve upon them, while also spearheading social transformation by prioritising resources.

And to ensure that the programs are well-run, we collaborate with local communities to understand their needs, identify the challenges and work together to find solutions, creating a sense of ownership among them to drive the change. This method of working has helped Cosmo Foundation to create an impact and have a positive effect on the society.

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