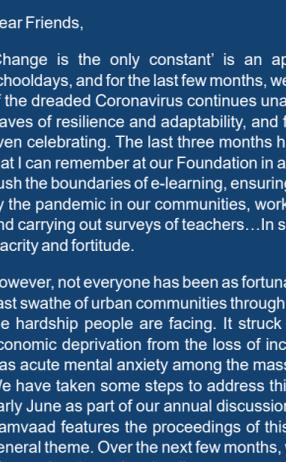




Samvaad

Issue III

KEYNOTE



CHETAN KAPOOR

Chief Operating Officer
Tech Mahindra Foundation

Dear Friends,

'Change is the only constant' is an aphorism we have been hearing since our schooldays, and for the last few months, we have been living it as well. Even as the wrath of the dreaded Coronavirus continues unabated, many of us have managed to ride the waves of resilience and adaptability, and found new ways of working, connecting, and even celebrating. The last three months have perhaps been the most energetic phase that I can remember at our Foundation in a long time – we have been trying new ways to push the boundaries of e-learning, ensuring provision of relief to those who are impacted by the pandemic in our communities, working on an innovative tech-platform, planning and carrying out surveys of teachers... In short, we have embraced the new normal with alacrity and fortitude.

However, not everyone has been as fortunate. In May and June, we had reached out to a vast swathe of urban communities through our NGO partners, and realized the gravity of the hardship people are facing. It struck us that this distress was not just about the economic deprivation from the loss of income and livelihoods, but more poignantly, it was acute mental anxiety among the masses emerging as almost a parallel pandemic. We have taken some steps to address this onerous issue – starting with a Webinar in early June as part of our annual discussion series called Saajhi Samajh. This edition of Samvaad features the proceedings of this webinar, which had Mental Wellness as its general theme. Over the next few months, we hope to strengthen our efforts in the arena of mental and emotional wellness.

In this issue, we also give you a number of heartwarming stories from our field - stories of resilience, courage, and hope. One such story is of a Persons with Disabilities, who I have always maintained are People with True Ability. Another story is of a teacher from the North Delhi Municipal Corporation who has shown amazing creativity and adaptability in these tumultuous times. I do hope these stories will resonate with you and help you find a sense of meaning.

This piece will be incomplete if I fail to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of all my colleagues at the Foundation, as well as of our extended family of implementation partners. They have stretched their limits to ensure that we stay connected with our beneficiary segments, that we keep innovating even as we go about routine implementation, and that we stay a step ahead of the curve in order to emerge stronger and more empowered at the end of the COVID crisis. Of that, I am confident, we will.

With best wishes of peace & well-being for each one of us.

SAAJHI SAMAJH

A SEMINAR SERIES BY TECH MAHINDRA FOUNDATION

On 3 June 2020, Tech Mahindra Foundation organised a webinar as part of its annual seminar series titled Saajhi Samajh (Shared Understanding). The theme for this year was 'Unlocking Minds: Key to the Locker Room'. The dialogue aimed at understanding the limitations in our education system on adequately addressing the psychological and emotional needs of the children as they transition into adulthood, the role of parenting and peer influence during this phase, and suggesting ways to improve these essential segments of our society. The 2-hour event was divided into three segments.



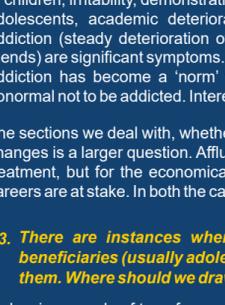
Mr. Manish Sisodia, Deputy Chief Minister, Government of NCT Delhi, delivered the Keynote address for the event. He shared Delhi Government's vision and initiatives catering to this social issue. In the second segment of the webinar, selected students from Delhi and Mumbai candidly shared their definition of adolescence, experiences and curiosity about the opposite gender during adolescence.

In the last segment, experts from various fields and key stakeholders in the matter shared their views on how educational institutes, social media, peer groups, society, and family expectations have a bearing on the overall mental well-being of the adolescents.

The webinar was concluded by Mr Chetan Kapoor, Chief Operating Officer at the Foundation. He summarised the discussions and recommendations from the two panel discussions. A detailed report of the webinar is available at

<https://techmahindrafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SAAJHI-SAMAJH-REPORT-e-book-PDF-v1.pdf>

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR SAYANDIP GHOSH ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



DR SAYANDIP GHOSH

Psychiatrist Consultant, Kolkata

The pandemic has impacted people across the board. Not just a public health issue but a humanitarian crisis, we have witnessed the psychological support gap deepening and broadening. Finding inner resource and resilience is paramount and with the intent to shift the focus from illness to wellness, we reached out to Dr Sayandip Ghosh, an eminent practicing psychiatrist in Kolkata. Dr Ghosh regularly contributes articles and talks in the print media and electronic media.

1. What can organizations such as TMF and other CSRs do to improve awareness and access to mental wellness? How do we make the concept a mainstream idea? (At one level it seems to have an elitist connotation)

There is no health without mental health. Presently world over people are affected by mental health issues, stress, uncertainty and panic attacks. In your case, dealing with a section of society who may not have access to basic healthcare, mental health becomes a bit of a luxury, hence awareness needs to be incorporated as part of the organizational ethos, and integrated into the teaching strategy and facilitation process. In fact, increased discourse, seminars and workshops would be useful.

Mental health is never an elitist idea, it is being made into an elitist idea, if I may be permitted to say, by a section of the media. Suicide is increasing and so is depression, as per WHO statistics, largely stemming from mental health issues. As a CSR organization having reach in different cities, and among a huge cross-section, a large part of which is certainly non-elitist, increased awareness generation is the key.

Health systems, educational institutions should be able to spread awareness. Teachers and facilitators should be aware and equipped to spread awareness among students. In a few years mental health issues may be the number one cause of morbidity world over and we certainly do not want it to become an important cause of mortality.

2. How can we identify early signs of depression and concealed depression, to put in place an early warning system?

Sensitivity and mindfulness would reveal the signs (poor concentration, lack of appetite, disturbed sleep, feelings of guilt, low self-worth). Aches, pains, digestive problems without clear physical cause could be symptoms too. Students are probably waiting to 'blurt' it out, since they do not have the access or opportunity to talk about it at home.

In children, irritability, demonstrations of anger, sudden behaviour change are signs. In adolescents, academic deterioration, change in family circumstances, reports of the project (steady deterioration of health, increased demand for pocket money, new friends) are significant symptoms. Here it would be pertinent to add that across sections, addiction has become a 'norm' where it is considered normal to be addicted, and abnormal not to be addicted. Interestingly, addiction among girls have become common.

The sections we deal with, whether parents would be mindful to be able to notice these changes is a larger question. Affluent families still have the means to provide access to treatment, but for the economically disadvantaged, rehabilitation is difficult and their careers are at stake. In the both the cases depression, usually, is a fallout.

3. There are instances when we get involved in the lives of our student beneficiaries (usually adolescents and adults) and become possessive about them. Where should we draw a line and how?

A classic example of transference and counter-transference. Transference is faced by teachers, facilitators, when students may find a paternal or maternal figure in them and there is transference of the feelings towards that figure on the teacher, and the student may become over dependent, which could be a problem. Identification on the teacher's part and certain guidelines from the organization are necessary to regulate this. A facilitator-student relationship becoming too personal may do more harm than good.

In counter transference, the facilitator tries to identify a figure in the student and the feelings get projected on the student. The facilitator has to be careful and objective, and the moment counter-transference happens, it has to be terminated by him or his superior.

4. How would a self-motivated, workaholic, prevent himself from taking stress of work and maintain work-life balance?

Just like students appearing for board exams, one has to make a realistic routine for the day, with proper planning. Presently with underlying anxiety, time for relaxation is necessary. Interaction with family members, music, physical activities are equally important. Constantly being with office work may impact productivity.

5. At a time when students are home and we have limited access, what should be our message to maintain a positive mind-frame?

Presently, with prevailing anxiety and fear it is okay if the students learn a little less! In a forty-minute class, the first ten minutes could be devoted to general discussion. We ought to prepare them for adversities, to withstand frustration, possible failure, re-orientation of career choices and being adaptive to change. 'It doesn't matter if the children learn a little less, just see that they are happy and participating...' to quote a project principal. Festivals, cultural events could be celebrated virtually. For them, online class could be the most memorable event of the day, we have to be able to make the experience meaningful and enjoyable.

6. Mental well-being is different from having a mental issue like depression or bi-polar disorder. How can we differentiate between the two?

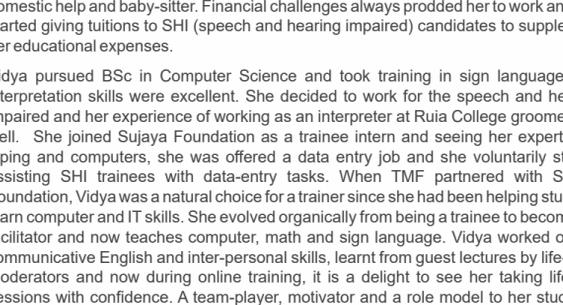
Depression and bi-polar disorders are both mood issues. Depression is sadness and loss of pleasure or interest in previously pleasurable activities. Additionally, there can be sleep issues, loss of appetite and suicidal thoughts. Bi-polar disorder is associated with episodes of mood swings, ranging from depressive lows to manic highs. These are two poles one of which is depression, the other being 'mania', characterized by excessive talkativeness, hyperactivity and disorganised behaviour. Both are serious entities and need treatment.

7. In the context of work-from-home how can corporates or CSRs ensure the mental well-being of their associates?

Messages of reassurance and security from senior management, investing in good collaboration tools, giving collective tasks, creating virtual platforms for sharing, access to counsellor, virtual sessions on diet, work-life balance, facilitating ventilation and preventing feelings of isolation and loneliness may help well-being of associates.

FROM DESPAIR TO DETERMINATION

Disability is a cutting-across theme in the work that the Foundation does in the areas of education and employability. This is a story from the skill-training project in Mumbai where youth with disabilities get trained in experiential learnings.



Vidya Patil (28 years) is a facilitator, partially speech and hearing impaired, an exceptionally bright student who topped school exams under Persons with Disabilities (PwD) candidates. Her father lost his job as a book-binder and mother worked as a domestic help and baby-sitter. Financial challenges always prodded her to work and she started giving tuitions to SHI (speech and hearing impaired) candidates to supplement her educational expenses.

Vidya pursued BSc in Computer Science and took training in sign language. Her interday skills were excellent. She decided to work for the speech and hearing impaired and her experience of working as an interpreter at Ruia College groomed her well. She joined Sujaya Foundation as a trainee intern and seeing her expertise in typing and computers, she was offered a data entry job and she voluntarily started assisting SHI trainees with data-entry tasks. When TMF partnered with Sujaya Foundation, Vidya was a natural choice for a trainer since she had been helping students learn computer and IT skills. She evolved organically from being a trainee to becoming a facilitator and now teaches computer, math and sign language. Vidya worked on her communicative English and inter-personal skills, learnt from guest lectures by life-skills moderators and now during online training, it is a delight to see her taking life-skill sessions with confidence. A team-player, motivator and a role model to her students, Vidya's story is one of personal triumph over adversity.

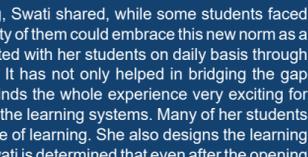
NO STUDENT LEFT BEHIND

During the pandemic with nationwide closures of schools that impacted around 340 million student population, teachers across the board also needed to adapt to the new normal of online teaching overnight. Here is one such teacher's story from North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) schools.

Swati Verma is Social Studies group coordinator for the mentor-teaching under the NDMC's initiative of online teaching learning program. Swati's journey started in 2019 with the In-Service Teacher Education Institute (ITEI) where she was part of the first batch of teachers with whom capacity building programs were initiated.

Talking about the impact of online teaching, Swati shared, while some students faced challenges related to connectivity but majority of them could embrace this new norm as a transparent way of learning. She is connected with her students on daily basis through WhatsApp, online worksheets and videos. It has not only helped in bridging the gap between first and back benchers but she finds the whole experience very exciting for students that allows testing the flexibility of the learning systems. Many of her students have shared positive feedback for this mode of learning. She also designs the learning tools and keeps the students connected. Swati is determined that even after the opening of schools, she will keep students connected through technology.

She expressed her gratitude to the TMF team towards improving the overall design and content of the e-learning resources and also thanked the Director of Education, NDMC, Ms. Ira Singhal for her guidance and leadership. This collaboration with NDMC and TMF is positively impacting 700 schools and 3.5 lakh students and providing 8,000 teachers with e-resources on a daily basis.



GOING THAT EXTRA MILE

With India crossing the 14-lakh mark in the coronavirus case count and given the medical, economic and social dimension of the pandemic, social work initiatives at the macro and micro levels to extend the Foundation's circle of influence to the most vulnerable has become imperative. The team at Foundation is continuously trying to address the humungous need for reaching out to those affected by the crisis across India.

Mumbai has been one of the worst hit cities, with the Dharavi slum alone reporting over 2,500 cases. A major concern here are the unhygienic pay-and-use community toilets, each used by approximately 200 people daily. The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai has instructed that these be made available free of cost. This initiated the project 'Flush the Virus' by UNICEF, under its WASH program, aiming at cleaning up community toilets at regular intervals to break the infection chain. Toilets close to the hotspot areas and near containment zones were identified and a cleaning protocol put in place. The Foundation has collaborated with UNICEF to provide clean, sanitized toilets to the multitudes who access them every day. This initiative has benefitted over 255,000 people till date.

In Hyderabad also, the healthcare infrastructure faced unprecedented pressure. Ancillary services such as availability of trained personnel to carry out the last rites of those dying due to COVID-19 have been impacted because the certified ones are choosing to stay away, out of fear. Volunteers and family members are compelled to undertake the burial by themselves and remain susceptible to infection in the absence of protective gears. The Foundation has been working with a city-based NGO, Safa Society in identifying and supporting the frontline volunteers with necessary safety equipments such as PPE kits, face masks, bio-medical waste bags, sanitizers, gloves, gum boots, so that in giving the deceased a respectable send-off their own safety and security is not compromised.

The mechanism of combatting the virus has to be reoriented and our responses repurposed, and towards this collective objective, the Foundation reaffirms its commitment.



ACCOLADE



The team at the Foundation is humbled to receive the FICCI CSR Award under the 'Skill Development & Livelihood Category'. The skill development program at the Foundation – Skills for Market Training (SMART), trains 20,000 youngsters every year across 64 domains including Healthcare, IT-enabled services, BPO and digital technologies, among others. It is a timely recognition to the dedicated efforts of the Foundation team, and that of the implementing partners as well as a welcome reminder to constantly strive to achieve the best even in the face of adversity.

Experiencing a virtual award ceremony for the first time, the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Rakesh Soni and Chief Operating Officer, Mr Chetan Kapoor from TMF received the award from Mr. Anurag Thakur, Hon'ble Minister of State for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Government of India on 27 July 2020.

Samvaad is a quarterly e-newsletter. You can participate by writing an article or sharing your project experiences with us. If you have ideas on what you would like to see included in our newsletter, then we are all ears!

Please e-mail us your thoughts and ideas at samvaad@techmahindrafoundation.org

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