



# Changelooms With.in: Empowering Youth to Weave Stories of Inclusion



# Foreword

**D**FID is proud to have supported the Poorest Areas Civil Society Programme and through it, the Changelooms With.in initiative, which is supporting young leaders in challenging discrimination around them. This documentation of personal stories of young girls and boys is not only inspirational, it is also a reflection of the realities of the society we live in today.

Working on issues that concern youth is a priority for us at DFID. We will be supporting the Youth Summit as a prelude to the United Nations General Assembly when it meets to finalise and endorse the Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Pravah and ComMutiny – the Youth Collective. They are playing a stellar role in mentoring and supporting young people to take on a leadership role in their communities.

This book will go a long way in motivating young people and informing them about how to address social concerns that impact them and others.

I hope that aspiring leaders everywhere will read it, and put their ideas into action.

Ellen Wratten  
Head - DFID India

# A Note from Pravah/CYC

There are 4 spaces that young people legitimately occupy in society – family, education/career, leisure and friends. More often than not, the focus in these spaces is on getting young people to conform, rather than to take charge.

At Pravah and ComMutiny – The Youth Collective (CYC), we believe that society needs a 5th Space that is owned and co-led by young people, empowering and nurturing their agency to take ownership of their lives and the world around them.

The Changelooms learning and leadership journey is designed to be such a 5th Space where a cohort of young social entrepreneurs with youth-centric social change ideas and initiatives undertake a journey from ‘self’ to ‘society’ and in the process build their leadership capacities through continuous self refl-action.

We have been running the Changelooms initiative since 2005. Previously, the Changelooms cohort has involved a maximum of 25 young leaders per year. This year, with support from the Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) programme, funded by the UK government’s Department of International Development (DFID), we have been able to scale-up Changelooms to support 100 young leaders. We have also created regional hubs of Changelooms alumni who have taken up mentoring responsibilities. Thus, a whole new avatar of Changelooms, called Changelooms With.in, has been born.

I want to thank PACS and DFID for recognising the potential of our work with young leaders and for helping us to scale-up the Changelooms programme. With their support and

guidance we have been able to successfully incorporate some of their key strengths in the programme including:

- Specially focussing on socially excluded communities.
- Expanding the diversity of Changelooms projects to cover more themes such as domestic violence, child rights and caste-based discrimination.
- Offering deep exposure, learning and mentoring opportunities to explore how power, purity and privilege affect the dynamics of social exclusion.
- Co-creating powerful media and on-ground campaigns to help spread the message of social inclusion, especially the Bas! Stop mobile campaign on wheels.

On behalf of everyone at Pravah and CYC, I want to thank all our co-voyagers for making this avatar of Changelooms a grand success. Along with PACS and DFID, these include the inspiring Changeloomers, our regional hubs represented by Changelooms alumni from Diksha Foundation, Youth Alliance, Prantakatha, YES Foundation and Synergy Sansthan, the Board members, staff, volunteers and partner organisations.

The aim of Changelooms is to enable young people to live out their passions in a socially significant way. The result is here for you to see in these powerful impact stories. Each one shows how young people following their passions can be transformed, creating an inside-out ripple effect that renews society in an expanding circle of change.

Ashraf Patel

ComMutiny – The Youth Collective and Pravah

# Preface

**T**he Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) programme is an initiative of the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID). We work in 7 of India's poorest states to empower socially excluded communities to claim their rights and entitlements more effectively.

We believe that chronic poverty in India is, to a large extent, caused by social exclusion – the discrimination of people on the basis of group identity such as gender, caste, ethnicity, religion or disability. We also believe that civil society has a critical role to play in addressing social exclusion.

PACS is proud to have supported the Changelooms With.in programme. By funding these 100 projects that are being run by young people to address social exclusion, Changelooms has helped us to incubate, nurture and support the next generation of civil society leaders, empowering them to promote social inclusion from within their own communities.

The stories of change in this book show how passionate, zealous and energetic our Changeloomers are, brimming with ideas and enthusiasm to end social exclusion. It is

inspiring to see how many of them have been motivated by their own experiences of social exclusion and it is clear how this first-hand understanding has been harnessed, supported and nurtured as an extremely powerful tool for change.

I would like to extend my thanks to Pravah and ComMutiny – the Youth Collective for their expertise and mentorship in leading these young people on their Changelooms journeys.

I would also like to congratulate all of our Changeloomers for their hard work, dedication and commitment to ending social exclusion.

As Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said: "Socio-economic transformation in India requires a cultural revolution, one that will not only destroy the culture of the past but also build something of value in its place." You are a part of this cultural revolution and, through your Changelooms projects, you have been helping to build a stronger, more vibrant and more inclusive India. I encourage you to continue in your excellent works.

Anand Kumar  
Director of PACS



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## Introduction

# About Changelooms With.in

**C**hangelooms With.in has been a year-long leadership journey (October 2014 – September 2015) that has provided training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young change leaders (Changeloomers), who are leading social change initiatives to promote social inclusion within their communities.

The programme has been implemented by Community-The Youth Collective (CYC), Pravah and Pravah Learning Voyages Consulting Pvt. Ltd (PLVC) in association with the Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) programme, an initiative of UK government's Department for International Development (DFID).

### Profile of the Changeloomers

The Changeloomers are between 18–35 years old and come from the following 6 states: Bihar, Delhi, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

While some of them had already started their own social initiatives before joining the programme, the majority only had an innovative idea for social change. They have used this opportunity to start implementing their ideas on the ground.

The participants come from diverse backgrounds with 57% belonging to socially excluded groups, including 37 women, 1 transgender, 13 Scheduled Castes, 10 Scheduled Tribes, 7 Muslims and 4 people with disabilities.

### Journey Design

The Changelooms With.in programme has been designed as an inside-out learning journey during which the Changeloomers have been encouraged to take a deep dive in to the 'self' to recognise their own stereotypes, biases and fears. The underlying belief is that lasting social change can only take place when we change our own attitudes and behaviours in relation to the 'other'.

The main components of the journey were:

- **Windows to With.in:** a series of regional capacity building workshops for Changeloomers who were implementing new projects to strengthen their perspectives on development and social exclusion and to build their skills in proposal writing and project development.

- **Youthsav:** Celebrating Youth Leadership and Social Inclusion: a launch event to bring together all 100 Changeloomers for the first time and to put the spotlight on social inclusion while celebrating courage and creativity.
- **Development Centre for Startups:** a 5-day capacity building workshop on youth development, instructional design and facilitation, systems thinking, organisational development and deep self-awareness.
- **Mid Project Review and Learning Workshops:** an opportunity to review the projects - identifying challenges, seeking feedback and finding ways of strengthening them.
- **Regional Visibility Events:** a series of events held in Kolkata, Bhopal and Patna to showcase the Changeloomers and the impact of their work on social inclusion. It was also an opportunity to engage with local media to enhance the visibility of the programme and to advocate for youth development and social inclusion.
- **Bas!Stop Discrimination Right Now:** an innovative campaign on wheels, where citizens were invited to board a bus specially designed to promote social inclusion by engaging passengers in a dialogue and taking them to visit various social inclusion projects (including those run by Changeloomers) to interact with and learn about socially excluded groups.
- **End Project Reviews:** a time to look back, reflect and assess the impact of the programme on the individual Changeloomers, their organisations and on the communities with whom they have been working.
- **Youthsav:** the closure event to felicitate the Changeloomers and showcase the impact of their work to the world.

## A. Impact on the Changeloomers

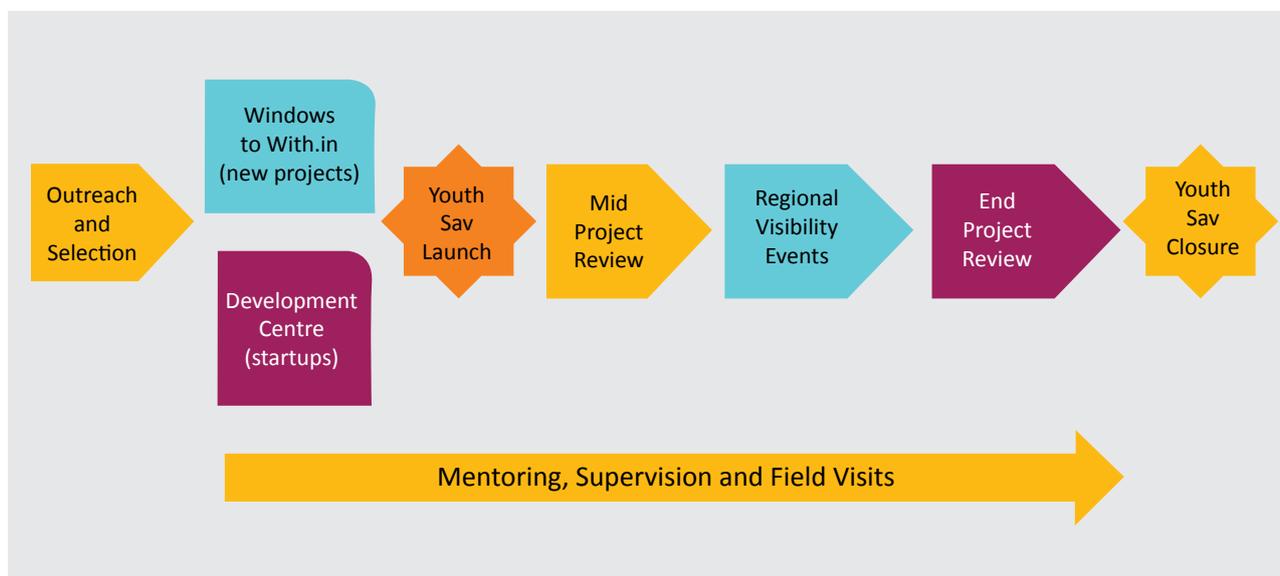
For many Changeloomers, the Changelooms With.in journey has been an opportunity to overcome their fear of failure and to demonstrate that they can make a difference through their ideas and projects. It has built their self-confidence and conviction that the path they have chosen is right.

The focus on the 'self' has helped them to reflect on their strengths, values, aspirations and fears and to get in touch with themselves – as individuals and as leaders. For example, Manika, who works with trafficked women, realised that she was bringing a lot of negative energy from work and needed to start loving herself and enjoying life. Shahina discovered that she was always trying to live up to other people's expectations, instead of doing what she most enjoys. Meanwhile, Devarchan shared that he had always been extremely results-oriented, which had taken a toll on his relationships with his family and his friends. Today he knows that he needs to be more forgiving of his own and others' mistakes.

Since many Changeloomers come from marginalised backgrounds, meeting like-minded people with similar experiences has enabled them to get over their feelings of insecurity and loneliness. They have discovered that they are able to share their emotions and personal conflicts and seek support. For all Changeloomers, the journey has helped them to meet people from other backgrounds and to deepen their understanding of social exclusion and ways of addressing it.

A key take-away for several Changeloomers has been the importance of empathy, listening to other perspectives and building consensus. Many others say they have stopped being so reactive and are now able to reflect before taking decisions.

### Change Looms With.in Journey



“Earlier I hesitated in opening up to others fearing humiliation, but not anymore.” Ranjit, Bihar

## B. Impact on the Changeloomers’ Projects and Organisations

Although those Changeloomers who had already started their own social initiatives were committed and passionate about social justice, they did not know how to go about implementing their projects in a systematic way. The learning workshops have helped them to bring clarity and focus to their work instead of trying to do multiple, different things in one go.

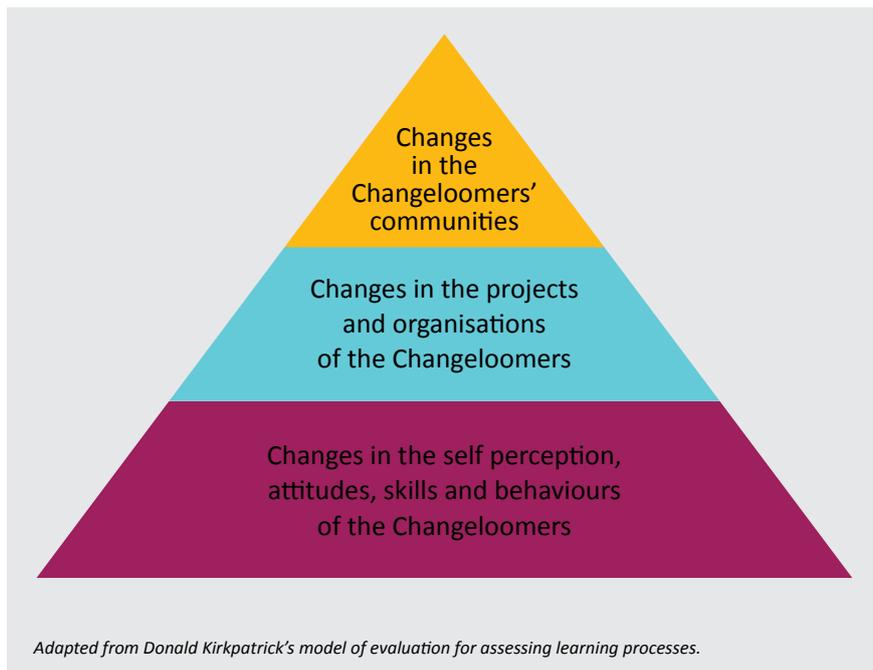
Many Changeloomers have started building the capacities of their teams and delegating responsibility so that they can increase their outreach and also develop greater ownership within the team for the project. Thanks to the inputs on youth development, instructional design and community facilitation, they have been able to engage with more young people, mobilising volunteers and giving them opportunities to take on leadership roles within their organisations.

The Changeloomers have also been successful in strengthening their initiatives by introducing systems and processes, such as reviews, planning, bookkeeping, accounts, documentation and reporting. They have also developed new partnerships with other organisations to complement and strengthen their work. Engagement with stakeholders has also increased as Changeloomers have reached out to and won the support of parents, teachers, doctors, local government representatives and other people who have been able to contribute to the success of their projects.

The focus on visibility has also pushed many Changeloomers to find innovative ways of telling others about their work, for example through print media, TV and social media. The enhanced visibility has drawn interest from several quarters and helped them to get further benefits for their communities.

“I used to be strong-headed and was reluctant to listen to others. The project taught me to create space for others, giving ownership, sharing responsibilities, and ensuring that everyone is able to meet their personal goals.” Girish, Chhindwara district, Madhya Pradesh

## Change Looms With.in has made an impact at 3 levels



“I learnt to trust my team members. They may do things differently, but perhaps their ideas are better than mine. Earlier I got both the credit and the blame. Now we are equally responsible and it is more fun and less pressure on me.” Shahina, Kolkata, West Bengal

## C. Impact on the Community

Together, the Changeloomers have reached out to approximately 80,000 people in the course of their journey. Of these, 9,667 have engaged in a deep and sustained manner with the projects.

The Changeloomers’ projects have focused on a wide range of social issues. These have included ensuring the rights of the homeless and migrant workers in urban slums, educating adolescent girls from Dalit, Muslim and tribal communities, providing support to young people who identify as Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual or Queer (LGBTQ), and building independent living skills for young people with disabilities. While all these issues may be different, they are united by their common experience of social exclusion and the effort of all these projects has been to enhance social inclusion and reduce discrimination against marginalised groups.

The Changeloomers’ work on the ground has not only provided valuable services to socially excluded groups, but has also empowered these groups to participate in decisions that impact their own lives and communities.

In addition, the Changeloomers have also been helping to raise awareness of social discrimination, enabling people to confront their biases and to gradually re-script stories



of purity that perpetuate discrimination and maintain the status quo.

### Enhancing Privileges for Socially Excluded Groups

The people that the Changeloomers have been working with are among the most marginalised communities in India, especially Dalit and tribal groups living in remote areas. These groups have little access to services and many of the Changeloomers’ initiatives have focused on making these services accessible and affordable.

For example, both Ranjit (who has been working with a Musahar community in Bihar) and Onkar (who has been working with the Behror primitive tribal group in Jharkhand) have opened learning centres and managed to enroll 80 children in formal schools. Meanwhile, Munna has used the Right to Information Act to get scholarships for 1200 Dalit students in Bihar and Sharad has ensured that beggars in Lucknow have been given ration cards so that they can purchase essential commodities at subsidised rates.

Financial inclusion and livelihoods are other critical areas for these excluded communities and Changeloomers have found different ways of building skills so that their communities can earn a better living.

For example, Mehrunissa and Chanda have both taught sewing and tailoring to Muslim women in low-income neighbourhoods of Lucknow so they can do home-based work and earn an income. Mehrunissa has even supported the women to open their own bank accounts so they can

start saving and control their own incomes. Meanwhile Tousif’s project in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh, has trained 100 Korku tribal people in various livelihood skills and 20 of them, including 12 women, have already set up their own businesses.

### Enhancing the Decision-Making Power of Socially Excluded Groups

Changeloomers have also been working to empower socially excluded groups, especially young girls, to make their own decisions. They have created opportunities for members of these groups to participate in decision-making processes that have impacted their communities.

For example, Jacinta, Bali, Shahina and Sneha have all created collectives of Dalit, Muslim and tribal adolescent girls where they can talk about their concerns, learn about their rights and form an opinion about issues, such as early marriage, sexual harassment and domestic violence. This knowledge has built the confidence of the girls and has helped them to negotiate many decisions in their life, such as decisions regarding marriage, education and careers.

Meanwhile, during his Changelooms journey, Firoj has stood for elections and has become the Sarpanch (Village Head) of Mukatpur village in Madhya Pradesh. In his capacity as Sarpanch, he has been able to ensure that a toilet is built in every household in his village and has tried to reform and modernise the Madrasa institutions where Muslim girls are taught.

## **Addressing Prejudice and Re-Scripting Stories of Purity**

Changeloomers have used various strategies to sensitise people about the lives of socially excluded communities so that they can confront their own prejudices and look at these communities in a new light. For example, assisted by a group of young volunteers, Debgoal from Birbhum in West Bengal has made a film on the LGBTQ community. In the process of making the film, the volunteers (who were both LGBTQ and heterosexual) got to know each other and overcame their biases towards people with different sexual orientations.

Meanwhile, using wheelchair rugby as a strategy, Nikhil has addressed the myth that people with disabilities are dependent on others and cannot do anything themselves. He has organised many public events with his wheelchair rugby team to help people to realise that wheelchair

users are, in fact, highly skilled, highly mobile and, given a chance, can achieve a lot.

## **Change is Looming**

It has been only a year since the beginning of the Changeloomers' journey and yet, their work has touched so many lives. For many Changeloomers, the journey has been transformative - they have deepened their understanding of social exclusion, strengthened their projects and built ownership for their work in the community. The bonds of friendship that have been forged during the programme will continue beyond its closure - while each Changeloomer is an inspiring leader, as a collective, their strength is even greater.

As anthropologist Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."



## Sarita's Story

# Living the DREAM

22 year-old Sarita Shukla was anxious. It was 28 April 2015 and she had no idea how to arrange the sum of 100,000 rupees for her younger brother's marriage, scheduled two days later. She consciously avoided bothering her parents, knowing it would make them nervous. However, Rasbhari – one of the people Sarita works with – sensed her concern. Putting 100,000 rupees of cash in Sarita's hand, Rasbhari cajoled her to smile and continue with the celebrations.

**R**asbhari is a middle-aged transgender, who acts as a guru (patron) to her transgender community. The unprecedented help to a non-transgender was the result of Sarita's selfless work and honest relationship with the community.

"Rasbhari argued that they share everything with me, so why should I suffer alone?" Tears roll down Sarita's face as she narrates the incident.

Sarita became involved with the transgender community during her work with a non-profit organisation called Karmath. "I observed a few men who behaved like women," Sarita recalls. "I was curious to know the reason behind their behaviour that I found strange."

Sarita's mother tried to explain and asked her to mix with them to get a better understanding.

In Delhi, where Sarita lives, transgender community members can be spotted in areas like Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) Road, Chawdi Bazar, Jama Masjid, Kapasheda, Mahipalpur, and Dhaula Kuan.

The good looking and talented transgenders gain money by dancing or singing. Others end up begging at traffic

lights, bus stations or indulge in sexual activities to earn an income. On being refused money, they often hex people.

Transgenders live in exclusion, humiliated by society, rejected by their families and harassed by the police, both physically and sexually.

One day when she was working in the JNU jungle, Sarita spotted a transgender. She started a gentle interaction with the transgender to understand her life, her reasons for leaving home and her hopes for the future. The transgender said she was trying to earn money so that she could do a MBA and prove her worth to her family.

The response moved Sarita.

"Suddenly, I wanted to be acquainted with their dreams and aspirations, the threats they face, the rules they follow and the life they live," Sarita recalls.

She felt a strong urge to learn everything about the community but the road to do this was not easy. "In the beginning, the community used foul language, slammed doors in our faces, even shooed stray dogs after us," she says.

The rejection failed to deter Sarita, who eventually won their hearts with her compassionate approach. To become



“We started with their voter ID cards, the significant part of which was that they were free to choose their sexuality – female, male, or other.”

closer to them she learnt their rituals, systems, rules, and their secret coded language.

Soon, she found them pouring out their fears. Identity and inclusion in society were their biggest concerns.

“We started with their voter ID cards, the significant part of which was that they were free to choose their sexuality – female, male, or other,” Sarita says.

What followed were 400 bank accounts. Ration Cards are next.

“To reach this level, we sensitised the police, local administration, banking officials, politicians and general public,” Sarita says.

The efforts softened the public perception and authorities’ attitude towards transgenders. The local community too now treats people with less malice.

An avid learner, Sarita incessantly continued to sharpen her knowledge and skills.

Her work and search for wisdom led her to interact with a former Changeloomer, Geetanjali, who works with the children of female sex workers.

“I was inspired by ‘Madame Geetanjali’ - the bold style of her working,” Sarita says. “I wanted to follow in her footsteps and do something different.”

Soon, Geetanjali was working as a guide and mentor to Sarita. She motivated her to apply for the Changelooms





With.in programme – a year-long fellowship, providing training, mentoring, and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

Sarita applied and her Changelooms project, *Wo Kaam Jo Karne Hain* ('Those Jobs That Need to be Done') was selected. The job she had set herself was to reconnect 20 transgenders with their families.

"Their biggest tussle is not with the police or society, but with their families who reject them," says Sarita with a mature understanding.

Rupasi, a transgender, is just one example – she left her home when she was 17. The reason was that her demeanour caused an embarrassment to the family. Today she is one of the transgenders associated with Sarita's Changelooms project.

The project, which started in March 2014, is in a nascent stage. However, Sarita's determination has grown high.

Convincing parents has been challenging. Approaching the task strategically, Sarita first identified those family members who were sensitive and ready to understand. With the help of a doctor, she counselled them.

The Changelooms programme has given an opportunity to Sarita to carve a niche for herself in the development

sector. She feels encouraged: "My work is being recognised. Earlier people knew the organisation, but now they know Sarita who is working with transgenders."

The training and mentoring have enabled Sarita to handle interviews deftly. She can now efficiently design workshops, conduct meetings, and plan her work. With the financial support, she has been able to conduct awareness workshops and surveys.

However, she considers networking with other Changeloomers as her biggest achievement. There are 5 other Changeloomers, who have linked up with Sarita's project to work with transgenders. They enjoy the comfort level as the community is open and cooperating.

The next task Sarita has set for herself is to link transgenders with livelihood activities for their inclusion in society. She has identified a few activities already, like fashion designing, selling street food, beauty therapy, and jewellery making.

Out of 10 transgenders identified for these activities, Rupasi's Momos kiosk will be the first to start soon at Delhi's South Extension.

"I do not want to see any transgender begging on roads," Sarita says. "My aim in life is to see them become doctors, bus drivers, teachers, MBAs... realising their dreams."



## Tousif's Story

# Preserving the HERITAGE

Rajendra received a loan of 1,000 rupees on the condition that he would repay at least some of it to help another person in setting up a business. He paid back 700, which helped Nundu Bhai to open a tea shop. Although Nandu Bhai could only return 300 rupees, this helped Rajesh in setting up his paan shop.

**T**his unique income generation model is the brainchild of 25-year-old Tousif Ali Shah from Khandwa town in Madhya Pradesh.

When Tousif's father remarried and shifted to Mumbai with his second wife, Tousif's mother (who was then a housewife) was forced to step out and work as a labourer.

"Living in abject poverty, I sensed the pain of jobless people," Tousif says. "I knew how people wandered in search of work, slept on pavements and were often cheated by contractors on a promise of employment."

Tousif was 11-years-old then. He started learning mechanic's work at his uncle's garage and took up odd jobs, such as selling vegetables, fixing cycle punctures and delivering newspapers to add to household income.

Meanwhile Tousif's sister, Nilofer, started working with a non-profit organisation. The turning point came when she asked him to assist her in carrying out a survey on nutrition because 50 children had died in a tribal area in a short span of time due to malnutrition.

Tousif accompanied her and was shocked to see the pathetic living conditions of the tribal people in those villages.

"Earlier, I used to pity my condition, but their sufferings dwarfed mine and altered my perception," he acknowledges.

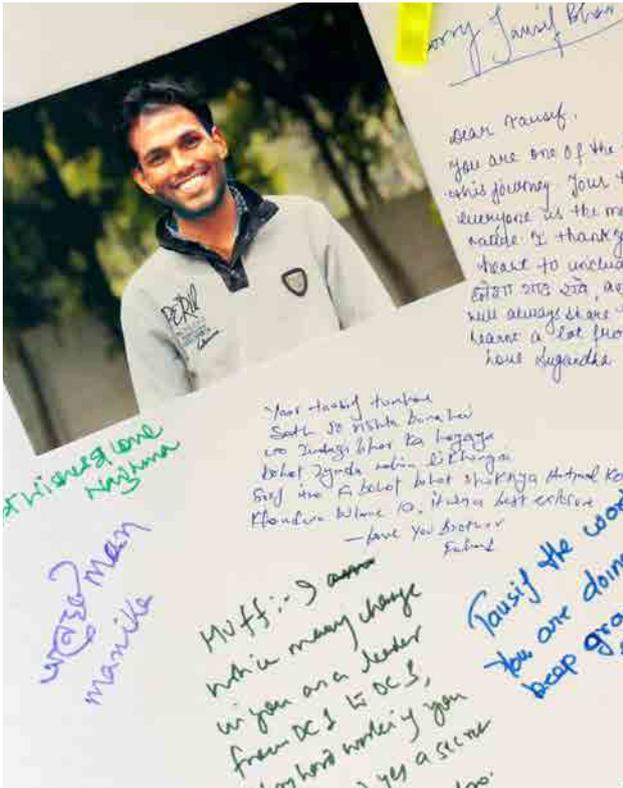
"I decided to work for such people and change their situation," says Tousif, who believed malnutrition could not be tackled unless livelihood issues were addressed.

Khandwa district has a considerable population of tribal people. Facing exclusion, they struggle to get even the bare minimum required for human survival.

Working with various organisations, Tousif enhanced his understanding but could not find contentment: "I did not see any future as I found the jobs mundane with no vision," says Tousif.

This district-level cricket player was eager to bring about real change. He gathered his team of friends and his sister. Supported by a local organisation, the group began working in 10 villages of Khalwa block with women and youth from the Korku tribe that is on the brink of extinction.

"We tried to explore the issues of tribal people before filling them with information about their rights," says Tousif. "Our primary objective was to check their migration



“There was a time when it was difficult for tribal people to get seats on a bus even though they had valid tickets. Not anymore! Now they demand what is rightfully theirs.”

and develop their skills by using local resources to uplift their social and economic status.”

However, things did not move as Tousif had planned: “At times we sensed failure or lack of confidence.”

During this struggle, Tousif met a former colleague, Shakti Rathi. He motivated Tousif to apply for the Changelooms With.in programme - a year-long fellowship that provides training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

“The programme’s focus on ‘self’ impressed me the most, as my tussle was also to find out who I was,” Tousif admits.

In October 2014, Tousif’s Changelooms project Mera Kaam Meri Pehchaan (‘My Work My Identity’) was accepted onto the programme. A month later, his organisation Musht – an Urdu word for ‘fist’, indicating solidarity - was registered.

A former Changeloomer, Ajay Pundit, started mentoring Musht.

“His first advice was to focus on a smaller number of villages and to try converting them into models,” Tousif says.

Musht identified 4 villages - Bhagpura, Chadida, Chabutra, and Mathni – where they conducted Hunar ki Paathshala (‘School of Skills’). Women and youngsters were trained to make cloth bags, foot mats, bamboo jewellery and furniture, along with cycle repairing and tea shop management.

With the financial assistance from Changelooms, they bought two sewing machines for training purposes, which improved the quality of training. They also purchased a camera to record testimonies and improve their reporting system.

“We had always been working hard but had nothing to show,” Tousif says as he elaborates the change. “Now our achievements are visible.”

“Earlier, we restricted our field visits due to limited resources. Now, these visits are frequent and involve a week or fortnight stays.”

In last 10 months, Musht has trained 100 people in various livelihood skills. 20 of them, including 12 women, have set up their own businesses.

“We have taught tribal people the tricks of the trade so that they can sell their products in a different way and improve sales,” says Tousif. “This improved their confidence.”

However, Tousif finds the development of his organisation and his ‘self’ as the most satisfying aspect of his Changelooms journey.



"I had never thought of working on the 'self' and never tried to analyse my capacities," he acknowledges. "We thought whatever we did was correct."

Now Tousif and his team conduct regular appraisals to analyse their mistakes and share the achievements.

The metamorphosis of his personality amazes him: "I used to be an under confident boy, scared of opening up in front of an audience," he says with a smile. "Today I can speak from any platform, as I have no qualms about my struggle."

Musht aims to continue working on the social and economic empowerment of tribal people for their inclusion in society.

"Our goal is to explore what they want to do rather than

forcing upon them what we feel is right for them," says Tousif, underlining the philosophy of his organisation.

In an attempt to restore the tribal heritage, the organisation has compiled a dictionary of Korku words. It will be published with the help of the community.

Tousif is glad that his project has helped change the situation in tribal villages. Now the residents raise their voices against their exploitation and exclusion.

"There was a time when it was difficult for tribal people to get seats on a bus even though they had valid tickets," Tousif says. "Not anymore! Now they demand what is rightfully theirs."





## Uma's Story

# Why Should Boys Have all the FUN?

As a child, Uma always liked to play with boys instead of girls of her age. Even though she was scolded by her mother and criticised by the community, she would sneak out from her home to be in boys' company.

“I loved the freedom and opportunities they enjoyed – to cycle and play outdoor games,” says Uma Singh, now a 30-year-old married woman, who still loves cycling. “I resented the restrictions and barriers we faced as girls.”

The mystery behind this gender disparity and the exclusion of girls, which always miffed Uma as a child, was unfolded whilst she was pursuing her Bachelor's degree.

During this time she attended a 3-day workshop on gender equality organised by an organisation called Thoughtshop Foundation.

“I learnt that the most important thing was to understand who I am and what I want to do with life,” recalls Uma. “The understanding changed my attitude towards life.”

Uma started raising her voice every time she saw injustice to women. She formed an informal group of 20 people, which included her friends, cousins and two sisters. The group started exploring if any of them had faced discrimination, violence or exclusion and found two cases.

“I wondered if there are two incidences in such a small group, how many would there be in society?” Uma says.

Uma lives in the Lake Garden area of Kolkata city in West Bengal. Her work area is the adjacent Gobindapur slum. The majority of residents here are rickshaw pullers or daily wage earners who frequent drinking and violence and face exclusion from society. Community members are looked down upon because of where they live.

Uma had been observing the community carefully over the years: “The youth here are frustrated as they have no direction in life. Their needs beyond food and schooling remain unaddressed. Their dreams are blurred.”

In 2008, Uma received a 10-day fellowship from the Thoughtshop Foundation. “It was a learning curve as I understood how to transfer my knowledge into action,” she says.

Soon after, a team was in place and a youth resource cell was formed. Finally, in 2014, her organisation named Nabadisha that, in English, means ‘New Direction’, was registered.

Meanwhile, the Thoughtshop Foundation introduced Uma to the Changelooms With.in programme – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring, and financial

support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

Uma also applied and became a Changeloomer in November 2014.

“The timing was appropriate,” says Uma, who has expanded her work to 3 more communities with the Changelooms support.

The vision of Nabadisha is to create a community where there is no violence or exclusion. It aims to empower young people with information and enable them to set their goals in life.

“We wanted to create a space where women can express their concerns and children can share their dreams,” explains Uma.

Thanks to Changelooms, Nabadisha began working with 150 adolescents, who work in 6 groups of 25 members each.

These youngsters act as facilitators, peer counsellors, service providers, skills trainers, and social investigators for promoting the inclusion and empowerment of other youth in the community.

During their weekly meetings, the young people convene sessions on story-telling, dancing, singing, painting, book-reading and English language learning.

One impact of the programme is that it has encouraged 100 adolescents to continue their studies with their parents’ support.

“Our main objective is to develop the skills and inculcate creativity in the youth through peer learning and adding value to their personality,” Uma elaborates.

Recently, Nabadisha also started selling sanitary napkins to community girls and women, raising their awareness on menstrual hygiene. The activity is one step in the direction of making the organisation financially sustainable.

“I want these activities to continue, with or without any support,” says Uma whose efforts are bringing dividends.

Children who used to keep quiet after facing violence now raise their voices against any such act and there has been no child marriage.

Parents now allow their children to go to activity camps, which was not the case earlier. Even the parents are keen to study and request Uma to organise dedicated sessions for them.

“Our main objective is to develop the skills and inculcate creativity in the youth through peer learning and adding value to their personality.”







## Girish's Story

# Building BRIDGES

Girish Mahale - a poet, scientist, and social researcher - quotes Sir Isaac Newton, to explain his work: "Men build too many walls but not enough bridges."

**29**-year-old Girish is from Pandhurna town in the Chhindwada district of Madhya Pradesh. Girish, who studied in government schools, has been striving to infuse quality and equality in government educational institutions.

"My father has always put education above everything else," he says.

After completing his Masters in Electronics Engineering, Girish started working with international computing firm IBM. His plan was to take a break after 2-3 years and pursue a doctorate, but destiny had something else planned.

His father, working with the Electricity Department, met with an accident. His right hand was amputated.

"Whilst looking after him in the hospital, I closely observed our system - I saw pain, deaths, and most importantly how people of certain caste and class face discrimination and exclusion," says Girish.

Girish was perplexed to see his father - educated and employed - feeling inferior in front of medical staff because they were better educated than him.

Deeply disturbed, Girish decided to change the philosophy of pedagogy: "My idea of education was that it should make a person empowered and confident."

In Pandhurna, people have a low opinion of government schools. Even the teachers of these schools consider their students a discarded lot. The town has 11 private schools that charge high fees and 6 government ones with nominal or no charges. More than 90% of children from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes go to public schools because their parents cannot afford the high fees in private schools.

"I observed that children going to government schools were studying for the sake of getting some work and supporting their families," explains Girish. "They had neither aspirations nor confidence."

Girish started visiting slums and tribal areas for better understanding: "I wanted to grasp the issue first, rather than pursuing the ideas floating in my mind."

He saw that in slums people at least owned small businesses, but tribal people had nothing.

"The disparity revealed the social and economic exclusion that marginalised people faced," he says.



“My idea of education was that it should make a person empowered and confident.”

Eager to change the situation, Girish left his 3-year-old plush job with IBM in August 2013.

He motivated 6 jobless engineering graduates to help study the status of higher secondary education in the area. Concentrating on educational pedagogy, they also studied the model of two organisations - Eklavya and Toys from Trash - both working on education.

In January 2014, Girish registered his organisation, Pratyay EduResearch Lab. The Hindi word Pratyay means 'suffix' – to add something – which most appropriately transmitted Girish's idea of supporting the existing system.

Girish and his team started working with 40 government schools and identified 7 engineering students with high levels of motivation to volunteer as teachers.

“Now we were looking for support to execute our idea at the ground level,” says Girish.

By chance, Girish met Sandip Mahato – his junior in the engineering college and a former Changeloomer. Sandip introduced Girish to the Changelooms With.in programme – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring, and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

“Changelooms familiarised me with a new word – ‘inclusion,’” acknowledges Girish, whose project Pathshala

Sahayta Kendra ('School Support Centre') was selected.

The project aims to build the capacities of local teachers associated with government middle schools and SC/ST (Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe) hostels. These hostels function as residential institutions for tribal students who come from remote areas.

The model works on activity-based teaching and project-based learning.

Pratyay have set up 'Innovation Labs' in 3 government-run schools and 3 SC/ST hostels. “These are fearless, non-discriminatory, and completely student-driven spaces,” explains Girish.

In these labs, Girish and his colleagues demonstrate an experiment. They then assign projects to students.

“Children learn by dismantling things, which they can do in these labs without any fear,” Girish says. “Students are the owners of these labs and teachers act as guides.”

So far, over 50% of students have been able to convert their learning into various projects, such as motor generators or automatic lights for cycles, which they have made using local resources. Mostly they use discarded or unused items, or trash.

The labs also focus on social issues and link them to the subject of social studies.

“We ask children to identify bad spaces, sad points, and issues that concern them. They can be alcoholism, school distance, or sanitation,” explains Girish. They are then encouraged to think of solutions.

“The process enables them to transfer theories into practice,” says Girish. “They also learn about accountability and responsibility.”

The local community has lapped up Girish's philosophy of education. As a token of appreciation, the community has given a laptop to one of the SC/ST hostels and has contributed towards setting up 3 small libraries in schools and hostels.

Since the start of the Changelooms project, Pratyay has been able to create a diverse pool of 21 volunteers from different castes, genders and abilities.

The organisation has also introduced a fellowship programme. The fellows will learn the philosophy of activity-based teaching and project-based learning. Later they can either become teachers or take a role in the organisation.

“The mentoring in the Changelooms project guided us towards leadership-building and peer-learning,” says Girish. “Students who are passing out from government schools are re-entering the same system, but this time to teach and lead.”



The organisation too has benefited in terms of technical sustainability, including better team handling and an improved documentation and feedback system.

Girish observes a metamorphosis of himself and admits: "I used to be strong-headed and was reluctant to listen to others. The project taught me to create

space for others, give ownership, share responsibilities, and ensure that everyone is able to meet their personal goals."

Girish dreams of converting his organisation into a pedagogy research centre, which will work on hand (skills), head (knowledge), and heart (values) as its base.



## Madhulika's Story

# The Lone RANGER

Coming from a traditional but orthodox Brahmin family from Varanasi, Madhulika Mishra always imagined herself as a television news anchor when she was growing up.

Unfortunately, she did not gain admission to a Mass Communications degree at Lucknow University but enrolled herself for a Masters in Social Work instead.

Soon after graduating she got a job as a Gender Coordinator with a local organisation - Vigyan Foundation - working in the urban slums of Lucknow City in Uttar Pradesh.

Her father, a government employee, was not in favour of her working in a NGO but conceded to her happiness. However, he took a hard line when Madhulika told him she would have to travel alone to another state – Bihar - for work. He asked her to leave the job.

“I had never travelled alone,” Madhulika says. “Even my sister, who is a scientist, was accompanied by our father if she had to go outside the city.”

Eventually Madhulika got his permission, but only after the organisation gave him a written assurance of her safety.

The incident resulted in a paradigm shift in her father's attitude, giving his daughters independence.

Madhulika was encouraged: “It was a big success as we talk about changing the world but often fail to change ourselves.”

For the next 4 years, Madhulika deepened her understanding of the issues that slum communities face and chiselled her communication skills to work effectively with them.

“I realised that the problems of slum dwellers were massive and needed serious attention,” says the 25-year-old.

Lucknow has nearly 800 slums, inhabited by daily wage-earning labourers, domestic helpers, ragpickers, sweepers, cleaners and beggars. They live in miniscule temporary dwellings made of bamboo poles and plastic sheets.

The majority of these slum dwellers do not have any proof of identity and therefore remain excluded from government welfare schemes.

Determined to change the situation, Madhulika volunteered with several other organisations but the thoughts boiling inside her head needed the fuel of proper guidance and support for flaring up.

One day, whilst searching for options on the internet, she stumbled across the Changelooms With.in fellowship - a year-long programme providing training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

She applied and, in November 2014, her project to help slum dwellers was chosen for the fellowship.

Underlining the genesis of the idea, Madhulika named her project Humse Hai Sheher that, in English, means 'The City is From Us'.

"Although the whole city depends on these workers living in slums, the city never gives them anything in return," she elaborates.

The project addresses the issues of their dignity and exclusion in the absence of any identity proof.

"My aim was to empower them with information and enable them to demand their rights," Madhulika says.

She started working in Vinayakpuram, one of the biggest slums in Lucknow, with more than 550 families.

The area has its challenges: when Madhulika called her first community meeting, only 5 people turned up. The reason was occupational and caste-based differences among slum dwellers she explains.

Treading carefully, she collaborated with the labour unions that helped her in getting identity cards for labourers. These cards entitle them to avail some facilities from the government. The benefits include free bicycles and 15,000 rupees of financial help on the birth of a girl for families who are listed in the Indian Constitution as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

"The slum has approximately 500 men and woman labourers and 100 have received their cards," Madhulika says with a sparkle in her eyes.



“ Although the whole city depends on these workers living in slums, the city never gives them anything in return. My aim was to empower them. ”





Two families have so far received cash on the birth of girl children and 5 labourers have received bicycles.

The tangible benefits have changed the behaviour of slum dwellers. Now they chase Madhulika and pester the labour unions with their demands. Now they are ready to run around and get their work done.

“I told them at the beginning that I was not there to give them anything but to educate them about their rights,” she explains. “Now they know that they have to strive if they want their dignity and identity.”

Madhulika, however, backs them and extends her handholding when they walk towards their goals.

Over time, even Madhulika’s perception of the community has changed: “Earlier, I used to blame communities for their living status as I believed they did not strive enough,” she frankly admits. “But the 3 steps of Changelooms – Power, Privilege, and Purity – changed my thinking.”

The 3 P’s indicate that the excluded communities can only become privileged if they have the power to speak for their rights and this can only be achieved by sharing their real stories of purity with the world.

A lone ranger, Madhulika has no office and no team either. Nevertheless, the Yeh Ek Soch (YES) organisation that is run by two former Changeloomers - Shariq and Zeeshan - has filled this void.

“They give me constant guidance and mentoring,” avers Madhulika. “I use their office space for my work and attend their knowledge sharing sessions.”

Madhulika has also been able to network with fellow Changeloomers Sharad and Ranjesh. Both work on issues surrounding the dignity and identity of beggars and rag pickers. They share ideas and experiences and help each other in working more effectively with their communities.

Now, Madhulika aims to set up a resource or employment centre for domestic workers.

“Though it sounds overambitious, it is my dream,” says Madhulika as she shares her vision. “The centre, to be run by domestic workers, will have their electronic database, complete with police verification, proper contract forms and wage cards.”

She believes this will get them suitable employment without exploitation.

Madhulika has been continuously striving for the inclusion of underprivileged communities. During this journey, her biggest personal achievement is her father’s change of heart.

“He had asked me to leave the job because it demanded me to travel alone,” she says laughing. “Today, he is supporting me to form an organisation which, he says, he will join after retirement.”



## Mehrunnisa's Story

# Hungry for Even MORE

Mehrunnisa has always been a bubbly girl with an insatiable hunger for learning. She took every obstacle in her stride to be where she wanted to be.

“My father was strict and didn't allow us to step out of the house alone,” says the 28-year-old.

Nevertheless, Mehrunnisa's persuasive nature forced her father to succumb to her wishes. She managed to study in a co-educational school, that too, in a different city.

During her studies, Mehrunnisa worked as a volunteer for several educational projects to earn a little money and to relieve the burden from her parents' shoulders. Alongside, she enhanced her learning.

After finishing school she yearned to get a Master's degree, but again her father tried to dissuade her. However, the hurdle was not alien to Mehrunnisa and therefore failed to dampen her spirits.

She managed to get a part-time job at a school run by the state labour department on a monthly salary of 1500 rupees. It was enough to pay for her studies and to look after the needs of her family who had started living with her in Lucknow.

“The school was exclusively for children who worked as labourers and rag pickers,” she elaborates. “My job was to

motivate such kids and encourage them to attend school.”

As she continued, dreams began to harbour deep inside her heart.

“There are many girls who face exclusion and remain deprived of any education,” she explains. “Their parents do not have enough finances to send their daughters to school.”

She knew she would have been in a similar position had she not succeeded in making her father understand her aspirations, defying the stereotypes prevalent in her community.

However, Mehrunnisa also knew that not all girls would be able to do the same. Most of them require support, and this is why she set up an organisation – the Muqaddas Foundation Society. Muqaddas - an Urdu word - means 'pious' as her intentions were.

One day, exploring the internet for any possible support for Muqaddas, she stumbled upon Changelooms With.in – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.



“There are many girls who face exclusion and remain deprived of any education. Their parents do not have enough finances to send their daughters to school.”

Mehrunnisa submitted her project Shiksha evam Rozgaar (‘Education and Vocation’), which was selected for Changelooms support.

The project focusses on the education of girls and the livelihood of parents in an urban slum in the Daliganj area of Lucknow.

The majority of the population in the slum are from the Muslim community. They work mainly as labourers, rag pickers and domestic workers.

“Most of the children here do not go to school as there is no government school in the area,” Mehrunnisa explains. “There are a few private schools that charge a high fee, making it unaffordable for a large number of residents.”

The situation is worse for girls who face discrimination and exclusion. They are expected to help their mothers in cooking and looking after their younger siblings.

Mehrunnisa’s project aims to educate 50 girls, up to 18 years of age, besides training at least 35 women in sewing.

“The goal was to prepare them so that they can go to mainstream schools and continue their studies,” says Mehrunnisa, whose efforts have had a visible impact.

Today, 50 girls are availing free education.

“Even the parents, who were earlier reluctant to send their children to school, have started saving money for their children’s uniforms,” says Mehrunnisa with pride.

Moreover, there are a few well-off families in the community who never thought of sending their offspring to a school but have since been inspired.

“They asked me to teach their children for which they were ready to pay as well,” says Mehrunnisa with a hearty laugh.

The demand resulted in a nursery school, which Mehrunnisa has named as Golden Wings Mission School. All the 30 students coming to this school pay a monthly fee of 75 rupees.

The school operates from the same training centre where the 50 children from poor communities are getting a free education. Even the livelihood aspect

“I aspire to see these girls, who have learnt to sew at my centre, graduating into resource persons.”

of her project has started bearing fruit. Out of the 35 women who are being trained in sewing, 10 have begun to accept proper tailoring jobs and are earning through it.

Salma, a mother of 4, is one such woman who cannot thank Mehrunnisa enough - one of Salma's daughters is getting a free education, and the other is learning to sew garments. "What I could not give to my children, she has given," explains Salma.

There are many others in the community, like Salma, who have similar testimonies to share.

Mehrunnisa confesses that though she set up Muqaddas, it was lifeless before her association with the Changelooms programme.

"We had no presence – no website, no Facebook page and no email id," she elaborates. She observes tremendous improvement in her personality, which is now that of a mature and sincere community worker.

"I used to talk a lot and never listened to others," recalls Mehrunnisa, laughing at her naivety. "Now, first, I give a patient ear to others before starting to put my point forward."

The training has helped her to evolve as a professional. She has learnt how to prepare a project and how to convene sessions.

"Although I had worked as a Master Trainer during my college days, various aspects were not clear," she accepts. "Now I know how to engage people to enable them to transfer their classroom learning into practice."

Her dedication has led her to collaborate with a local publisher to develop content for Hindi language and home science subject books for higher-secondary level schools.

A passionate person, Mehrunnisa wishes that all the girls associated with her today will stay connected forever. The inclusion of these underprivileged girls and women in society is her reward.

"I aspire to see these girls, who have learnt to sew at my centre, graduating into resource persons," she says. "I will consider my contribution worth it if least 10-15 children from my school go for higher studies."





## Manju's Story

# The Fight for Rights CLUB

3 years ago, Bhuri's husband remarried and abandoned her to live with his second wife. Bhuri is a tribal woman from Gopalpur village in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh.

**H**aving suffered in isolation with her two children, this meek woman amazed her community when recently she filed a police complaint against her husband. Bhuri could only muster the courage because of Manju Dhak – a petite but strong-willed girl who stood tall behind her.

"I was not always the same," says 28-year-old Manju, a resident of the same village.

Manju's parents work as farm labourers. Her father, an alcoholic, was not much interested in his 5 daughters' education or aspirations.

Manju's eldest sister got married when she was 15. Manju, who had completed her under-graduation from the village school, was next.

To escape the marriage, she wheedled her father into letting her pursue a Bachelor's degree at a college in Jhabua district: "I worked in agriculture fields during my holidays and shared his burden."

Notwithstanding her tender age, Manju grasped the importance of education and financial independence, especially for a woman.

After getting her degree, she got involved with various non-profit organisations and began working on issues relating to education and local governance – the latter being her subject in graduation. She grabbed every opportunity to satiate her hunger to learn more.

However, despite her protests, her parents ultimately tied her into a nuptial bond when she was 20.

There was no bliss in Manju's married life, but it acquainted her with other dynamics of women's issues. Harassment and restrictions by her husband's family forced the young girl to question their behaviour.

"If I am facing such tough times, even after getting an education, what must be the state of affairs with women who are illiterate?" she pondered.

Over 80% of the population in the area where Manju lives is from the Bheel and Patalia tribes. Migration is high due to a dearth of job opportunities. Besides, their low literacy level reduces their chances of employability.

Living in exclusion, they remain deprived of government welfare schemes. Almost every household carries heavy debts on its head. Child marriages and gender violence are common.



“The target of the project was to reach 20 women, but today we are training more than 75 of them.”

After analysing the situation, Manju decided to introduce women to income generation activities to aid their economic freedom and inclusion.

Meanwhile, working on a PACS-funded project for a tribal organisation, she participated in a training programme on the topic of gender.

During the event she came to know about Changelooms With.in – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring, and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

“There were at least 15 applicants from Jhabua, but I was the only one who was selected,” Manju says with pride.

Her project, Palayan-Mukt Samaj (‘Migration-Free Society’) aims to curtail the migration of women and to ensure their inclusion in society by raising awareness on their rights.

“I introduced some income generation activities, such as tailoring, organic farming, making organic compost and bangles,” Manju elaborates.

With the Changelooms support, Manju bought 3 used sewing machines to train tribal women in tailoring. She also arranged resource persons to teach women how to make organic compost and bangles.

“The target of the project was to reach 20 women, but today we are training more than 75 of them,” Manju says.

Out of the 20 women making bangles, 10 are selling them at local fairs and festivals. The other 10, who also learned to sew, have begun earning small amounts through tailoring.

37 women who were trained in organic composting have yet to start selling their product. However, “The good thing is that they are using the compost for growing vegetables for their consumption, which is healthy for them and their families,” says a wiser Manju.

Aiming for the holistic development and inclusion of tribal women, Manju focuses on the development of their ‘self’ as well.

Alongside livelihood activities, the project has a strong emphasis on educating women about their rights and government welfare schemes - Manju conducts sessions teaching women about their rights before and after their skills training.

Now women go together to seek legal or police help if any one of them faces any trouble from other community members. Bhuri is only one example of their motivation and awareness.

However, Manju’s success has not come without its challenges.

“Men in the community perceive me as a threat to their patriarchal ways of functioning,” says Manju, whose family faced violence after her support to Bhuri.

Unperturbed, Manju says such difficulties have made her stronger than before.

She has begun exploring ways to tackle such situations by using the relationship she has built with the police and local authorities during the Changelooms journey.

“I am also talking to another Changeloomer, Rajni, who teaches karate. I want her to train us in self-defence techniques,” Manju says, detailing her plan. “This will help women handle both their own as well as their family members’ physical harassment and violence.”

Looking back on her own upbringing she says: “No one ever asked me if I had any ideas or aspirations... there was no skill development.”

However, she feels that the Changelooms project has filled this gap as it has helped her to realise the worth of her existence.

“Earlier, I used to feel inferior to those having higher degrees and bigger positions in society,” she says. “I no more feel intimidated as I do not differentiate myself with others.”

“My life has been transformed because of Changelooms and I believe this group will change the lives of others like them, irrespective of whether I am there with them or not.”

Manju is now more bothered about evolving ways to market the organic compost that the community women

are making. Her other concern is how to introduce more income generation activities and how to involve more women in them. She also plans to form an organisation of these women, which she wishes to name the ‘Changeloomer Group’.

“My life has been transformed because of Changelooms and I believe this group will change the lives of others like them, irrespective of whether I am there with them or not,” says Manju underlining the sustainability of her efforts.





## Sharad's Story

# Beggars BELIEF

Sharad Patel is a sensitive man who is rooted to the ground. Yet his perceptive mind observes beyond the visible.

For his studies, Sharad frequently travelled from his hometown of Hardoi to Lucknow city in Uttar Pradesh. "I used to spot beggars doing drugs near the railway station and that picture got etched in my mind," says the 25-year-old.

One day, a beggar asked Sharad for money to buy food. Though he did not give money, he did feed the beggar.

"Those disturbing images and incidences forced me to think about the problems beggars face," Sharad explains.

It was 2010 and Sharad was pursuing his Bachelor's degree in science. He made up his mind to dedicate his life to social work.

"Being a farmer, my father always pushed me for a government job although he eventually relented to my passion," he says.

Knowing his inclination, Sharad's elder brother introduced him to Sandeep Pandey – a Lucknow-based social worker - and he has not looked back since. Sharad worked with Sandeep as a volunteer for 5 years.

"I learnt how to file applications under the Right to Information [RTI] Act, which later helped me in my own project," says Sharad.

In 2014, still concerned about beggars, Sharad filed a RTI application with the Government of Uttar Pradesh to understand its efforts for the welfare of beggars. The information he received claimed that there were 8 homes in 7 districts of the state that provided shelter and food to beggars.

Sharad investigated further and found that no beggar was living in these homes although the employees were getting their salaries. "The revelation compelled me to carry out a socio-economic study of beggars in Lucknow," he says.

Lucknow has around 3500 beggars who spend their lives on footpaths. The majority of them have no skills to generate any income. Even though some of them are educated they are either unable to work due to diseases and disabilities, or not considered for any job. Most of them have migrated from other cities because of family issues.

They are excluded from government welfare schemes because they do not possess any proof of identity. They struggle to get medical facilities due to discrimination.

Dignity is another issue as people give them money and food out of pity.

“I wanted to work for their identity, dignity, and inclusion, but had no support and no direction,” recalls Sharad.

At this juncture, one of his seniors from the university, Rishabh Shukla, informed him about the Changelooms With.in programme – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

Rishabh also introduced Sharad to the Yeh Ek Soch or YES Foundation being run in Lucknow by former Changeloomers Zeeshan and Shariq.

Sharad applied for the fellowship and his project Bhikshavratti Mukti Abhiyan (‘Begging-Free Movement’) was selected.

“I chose areas in the city that have a dense population of beggars,” details Sharad, whose idea was to work as a bridge between beggars and the government.

Building trust and establishing a rapport with the community was tough.

Sharad began with ration cards, which entitle poor people to buy wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene oil at subsidised rates from government shops.

“I negotiated with the authorities who agreed to make ration cards for 205 beggars even though they had no address proof, which is otherwise mandatory.”

The move infused a sense of belief in the beggars and the community has now started approaching Sharad for their cards. Today, at least 10 of the beggars work as volunteers and help Sharad in motivating others.

“This could have been possible only due to Changelooms,” admits Sharad.

The financial support received for the project has helped him in organising two outreach events to promote social inclusion and to discuss some of the problems the community faces. These events were

“I negotiated with the authorities who agreed to make ration cards for 205 beggars even though they had no address proof, which is otherwise mandatory. This could have been possible only due to Changelooms.”





attended by 60 and 100 beggars respectively, along with government officials.

“Sharing space and views with government officials and other dignitaries boosted their confidence and gave them a sense of acceptance,” says Sharad.

Sharad is now interacting with the local municipal corporation for their identity cards, which will help them in getting Adhaar Cards – a proof of identity issued by the Government of India.

Sharad feels even his own working style has changed after the Changelooms project. “Now I plan my schedule better and hence achieve more,” says Sharad, who gets advisory and technical support from YES Foundation as part of the programme.

He also networks with other Changeloomers, such as Madhulika Mishra who helps him in documentation and Ranjesh who helps in organising events.

For the next level of his project, Sharad is now working on the livelihood issues of beggars. He has realised that begging cannot be curtailed until the population involved in it has some source of income.

“They can be trained in various skills depending on their interests and aptitude,” explains Sharad, who is seeking the government support for this.

“I have submitted a charter of demands to the government, which specifically asks for a proper shelter home for at least 200 beggars in Lucknow,” he says. “I have asked for skills training, medical treatment, nutrition and sanitation facilities in this shelter home.”

Sharad says that working with beggars has humbled him. However, it has also scaled up his dreams: he wishes to convert Lucknow into a beggar-free city in the next five years.

A move has been made in this direction with another RTI application. Sharad has asked the Government of Uttar Pradesh along with 22 other state governments to detail their laws for the prevention of begging.

He firmly believes that to bring sustainable change in the lives of beggars it is essential to reform the related laws.

“I will expand my work to the whole state if it is successful in Lucknow,” says this young man of grit and determination, who is looking onwards and upwards.



## Ranjit's Story

# A Class ACT

Ranjit Kumar Bhuiyan was just 8-years-old when he left his parent's home in Rampur village in the Lakhisarai district of Bihar to stay with his uncle in Dhanbad city, Jharkhand, to pursue an education.

From that tender age, Ranjit spent his summer holidays teaching the village children whilst visiting his parents. "I saw them wandering and wasting their lives, so I decided to educate them," says Ranjit, who belongs to the Musahar community listed in the Indian Constitution under the Scheduled Castes (SC), commonly referred to as Dalits or "untouchables".

Rampur has about 200 Musahar families. Economically and socially oppressed, they face discrimination and exclusion in society. Musahar children are bullied in schools by other students and, due to harassment, they either drop-out of school or prefer not to attend despite their enrolment.

"People argue as to why Musahar children need to go to school when they eventually have to work as labourers," says Ranjit, citing people's attitude. "They also accuse Musahar children of attending school only to get scholarships and midday meals."

Such humiliation left deep scars in Ranjit's sensitive mind and generated an urge to change the situation: "It hurt me when I saw my community's children facing such accusations."

In 2004, Ranjit finally returned to stay with his parents. The only boy in the village with a High School certificate, his focus was on teaching the community children.

His endeavours, however, could not flourish due to the lack of guidance.

"My efforts were directionless and I had no definite goal," explains Ranjit who did not have a role model to follow either.

Ranjit approached his distant relative, Upendra Manjhi, who was working with the Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI).

"He asked me to fill out a form and mention exactly what I wanted to do," says Ranjit.

The form was for Changelooms With.in – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

Ranjit's project to educate Dalit children from 6-15 years of age was selected.

"I wanted to give them a bridge course so that drop-out

children could get admission in formal schools,” Ranjit elaborates. “The focus was also to raise awareness in the community to stop the harassment of these children in formal schools.”

The execution of the idea started with challenges.

“I had no support from the non-Musahar community, where awareness was needed the most,” acknowledges Ranjit. However, he received guidance from Upendra and mentoring from a member of the Youth Collective, Satya Bhai.

“I networked with local health workers who have access within the community,” he says. As a result, 30 women attended the first meeting that Ranjit held in the non-Musahar community.

“Soon, the inclination of the community was evident as one person agreed to spare a corner in his house for running the centre,” says Ranjit.

In March 2015, Ambedkar Shiksha Kendra (‘Ambedkar Education Centre’) began with 15 drop-out children and 10 children who were enrolled but not attending school.

Ranjit then motivated the members of Bihar Ambedkar Student Forum – a network of students – for their support.

Apart from Ranjit and his wife Sarita, two male and two female members of the forum began teaching.

Due to their efforts 40 drop-out children were admitted to formal schools.

The success motivated those who had not believed Ranjit initially. “Now many parents have been asking me to teach their children,” says Ranjit with a sense of contentment.

Regular meetings with parents and other community members have changed the attitude of people towards Musahar children.

“The cases of Musahar children dropping out or missing school are now rare and so are the incidences of their harassment by other community children,” says Ranjit.

However, he credits the Changelooms training and mentoring for his success.

“There was no spoon feeding, but the mentor always tried to sharpen my skills and bring out what was inside me,” says Ranjit with confidence.

He sees a noticeable change in his personality: “Earlier I hesitated in opening up to others fearing humiliation, but not anymore.”

**“I wanted to give them [Dalit children] a bridge course so that drop-out children could get admission in formal schools. The focus was also to raise awareness in the community to stop the harassment of these children in formal schools.”**





**“The cases of Musahar children dropping out or missing school are now rare and so are the incidences of their harassment by other community children.”**

Through Changelooms, he has also learnt how to make proposals and budgets.

And his learning continues... for example, once in over-enthusiasm, Ranjit announced that his centre would give free education to all drop-out children irrespective of their caste.

“Next day I was surrounded by children but had no space to accommodate them,” Ranjit recalls.

However, the novice announcement turned into an unplanned expansion. “At least 4 parents volunteered to provide space for additional centres,” says a humbled Ranjit.

Alongside the young children, Ranjit has also motivated at least 10 Dalit students -who had left their studies after class 9 - to complete High School.

The next level of his project is to link Dalit youth with income generation activities. For this, he has tied up with Dashrath Manjhi Kaushal Vikas – a skills training centre that started in Rampur in July 2015 under a Bihar government initiative.

Over 300 youths have applied, of which 80 have already started their training for the jobs of drivers and security guards. 20 of these trainees, including both boys and girls, are from the Musahar community. Even his teaching volunteers are undergoing this training.

“I cannot pay these volunteers, but the training will get them a daily stipend of 100 rupees along with a surety of job placement,” says Ranjit who does not want to restrict their growth.

After the training Ranjit expects his teaching volunteers to make their own decision as to whether they wish to return to teaching. If they do not, he is confident to get more volunteers from the Bihar Ambedkar Student Forum.

Moving forward, Ranjit has been selected for educating the women of a Self-Help Group that is functioning under a government scheme.

The work started in July 2015 and gets him 8000 rupees per month. Ranjit plans to use this money to expand his work: “My aspiration is not to earn money, but to work for the uplift of my community.”



Open  
your eyes,

take a look. Are you satisfied with the life

you're living?

## Debgopal's Story

# Directorial DEBUT

After watching the Bengali movie *Tahder Katha* ('Their Story'), a 12-year-old boy jumped to his father and said, "I want to become a film director!" The father lightly brushed aside his son's childish desire.

Two years later, the boy was again standing in front of his father with the same wish. This time, the father scolded him, asking him to concentrate on his studies and to find a "real job" in a bank or school.

12 years on, the same boy is an assistant film director, who has 49 tele-films, 11 short films and 3 feature films to his credit.

The boy is Debgopal Mondal, a resident of Uchpur village in the Birbhum district of West Bengal.

Debgopal is a small-framed, effeminate and softly-spoken young man, who survived his adolescence in humiliation and exclusion because of his sexual orientation. Being gay, he suffered many prejudices and retreated into his own world as a coping mechanism.

"Despite my father's strictness, I could not perform well in studies because the other boys mocked me, calling me derogatory names," says the 27-year-old. "I was admonished even at home for my interest in jewellery and makeup."

The bullying shattered his heart, but could not curtail his spirits.

"After completing High School, I gathered the courage to confront my parents with my decision to join the film industry," recalls Debgopal, who paved his own way with perseverance and diligence.

"I wrote film reviews to earn my living and knocked on every door hoping badly that someone would let me in."

The doors did open and two directors, DK Roy and Dipankar Bhattacharya, gave Debgopal a chance. They refused to pay but promised him food, which was enough for this zealous boy to clinch the opportunity.

Soon he was assisting them and the sensitive artist buried deep inside was finally given a chance to come out.

In 2013, while surfing Facebook, Debgopal came across a gender equality campaign - Must Bol ('Must Speak').

In West Bengal, the campaign was led by the organisation Prantakatha ('Voices from the Margins'). Soon, its office became a second home for Debgopal.

"The organisation's founder, Bappaditya Mukherjee, became my friend, philosopher and guide," says Debgopal, who, for the first time, was accepted for who he was.



“The background of the film was Vadu – a festival native to the Birbhum district that has been celebrated for 130 years. I hope it will demystify various misconceptions and address the stigma linked to LGBTQ.”

Bappaditya introduced him to Changelooms With.in – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

Debgopal’s Changelooms project aims to use the medium of film to raise awareness and convey the stories of mortification and exclusion that people with different sexual orientations face.

“The background of the film was Vadu – a festival native to the Birbhum district that has been celebrated for 130 years,” Debgopal explains.

The Vadu festival used to involve married and unmarried girls who would dance and sing songs of women’s empowerment. Slowly, over time, effeminate boys started entering the festivities although they faced humiliation by the community.

Over the years, Vadu has become a festival involving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) performers.

“The tradition confirms that LGBTQs existed centuries ago and that they have been facing discrimination and

exclusion ever since,” says Debgopal as tears well up in his eyes.

One of his friends from the LGBTQ community participated in the Vadu festival and, as a result, he was thrown out of school. Another incident that haunts Debgopal is the suicide of a friend from the LGBTQ community.

He has used these real life incidences as inspiration for his film and the Changelooms training has enabled him to convert the humiliation and sadness that was inside him into strength.

Since embarking on the project, Debgopal has perceived a change in his approach towards his own ‘self’. “If I cannot respect myself, how can I expect others to do the same?” he reflects.

Following the Changelooms training, Debgopal returned to his village as a confident man and shared the idea with his friends.

“I formed a Filmmakers’ Group of 10 youths aged between 18-20 years, which included LGBTQs and other boys,” he explains, narrating his Changelooms journey.

Initially, a few of the boys resented the presence of LGBTQs in the group but Debgoral cleared all misconceptions.

“With the help of the local theatre group, I trained these youths in the art of making films,” he says. Together, they worked to produce the film, entitled Nishidh Vrat Katha (‘Banned Rituals’).

The local community played a significant role in the making of the film, volunteering as actors, helpers and spot boys.

“I was surprised to see people opening the doors of their hearts and homes, schools and shops to facilitate the crew,” says a bewildered Debgoral.

“My biggest achievement was to see the boys, who used to humiliate me in school, working as volunteers during the shoot,” he laughs.

As well as screening the film in his village, Debgoral plans to screen it at a government theatre in Kolkata and to send it to a few Indian film festivals: “I hope it will demystify various misconceptions and address the stigma linked to LGBTQ.”

Indeed, the film is already having an impact.

Most notably, it has brought his community closer together.

“People have accepted their ignorance about the issue,” Debgoral says with excitement. “Even my family had derogatory views about LGBTQ Vadu participants – they felt that mixing with them was below their dignity. The film cleared my parents’ reservations.”

LGBTQs struggle to get livelihood options as people are often reluctant to offer them jobs. The film made under the Changelooms project has changed this perception: “Now they are getting professional assignments to perform Vadu songs and dances at various functions, which will bring them some earnings,” says Debgoral proudly.

His Filmmakers’ Group is also going from strength to strength - a few LGBTQs and many other boys have expressed their desire to join it.

In addition, 3 members of the Filmmakers’ Group have written their own scripts, which they will shoot under the guidance of Debgoral.

Having been ridiculed in his youth, Debgoral is now an inspiration to many. It just goes to show that childhood dreams can come true with a bit of grit, determination and courage!





## Aparna's Story

# Carrying the LEGACY

Aparna Sarder never met her father but has heard stories about him from other people.

“Everyone says he was a kind man who helped others even when his own children slept hungry,” says the 27-year-old, whose father died just months before she was born.

Her assiduous mother brought up her 5 children all alone and made sure that each one completed at least graduation.

Aparna – the youngest of all – believes that she has inherited the instinct of social work from her father and fortitude from her mother.

A resident of the South 24 Pargana district in West Bengal, this benevolent girl has dedicated her life to help those who are needy and to uplift the downtrodden.

After High School, she started tutoring children to earn some money: “I thought it was my turn to share my mother’s burden.”

Aparna was associated with Nehru Yuva Kendra (‘Nehru Youth Centre’) – an all India organisation promoting the social and educational development of youth.

“I participated in youth exchange programmes and adventure camps, which gave me a lot of exposure.”

Brilliant in studies, she received a scholarship from NYK to pursue her Masters in Local Governance from a Chennai-based college.

In 2014, towards the end of the course, Aparna had to work on a field project.

Searching the Internet, she came across Changelooms With.in – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

“I was surprised when I got a call for an interview,” admits Aparna who, after submitting her application, had forgotten all about it.

Her Changelooms project seeks to empower a Self-Help Group (SHG) of excluded women to support themselves economically through fisheries.

“I thought it over and concluded that fishery maintenance is an activity that women can do in their free time,” Aparna explains.

She identified the Mamudpur area in Mograhat Panchayat for her work.



“I concluded that fishery maintenance is an activity that women can do in their free time. With the Changelooms support, we got the lease of a pond in December 2014 and then prepared it for fish cultivation.”

The area has a large number of natural ponds. In the absence of education and job opportunities, people mostly work as farm labourers or domestic workers. Women are oppressed and are dependent on the male members of their families. Due to poverty, many families marry their daughters off at an early age. “Moreover, the area has a market for fisheries,” she says.

Mograhat block has 109 Self-Help Groups (SHGs), 5 of which are in the Mograhat Panchayat.

“None of these groups were active,” says Aparna who then held a meeting with the Block Development Officer and identified one dormant group in the Mamudpur area to work with.

An avid learner, Aparna enrolled herself in a fisheries training programme before starting to work with the women. Meanwhile, she utilised her time to establish a rapport with the community.

“All the 12 group members were present in the first meeting, which carried on for 3 hours,” she elaborates.

The women in the group were from mixed castes. The only one thing common among them was that they were all poor.

Initially, no one took her seriously.

“They wondered what this young girl would know about their issues and what she could possibly teach them,” Aparna laughs as she recalls the challenges.

Only two women from the group agreed to experiment and cooperate with Aparna. Within two months 3 more





joined and today all 12 women of the group are involved in fisheries work.

“They saw that the women who were involved in fisheries were getting opportunities to step out of their homes and were able to speak to men,” explains Aparna.

Their empowerment inspired others.

“With the Changelooms support, we got the lease of a pond in December 2014 and then prepared it for fish cultivation,” says Aparna. “In the following month we released 7 varieties of fingerlings [baby fish].”

Soon, the women observed that even their husbands were making time to help them in their work.

Encouraged, Aparna tried to link the women with other livelihood activities such as poultry farming, tailoring, joss stick making, and also as health workers administering polio drops.

She wants to set up an NGO so that more SHGs get involved in income generation activities and more ponds are in the possession of women. Most importantly she aims to enhance the understanding of these SHGs on budget savings and spendings as well as their rights.

“I am satisfied with the change that is happening in the community although the progress is a tad slow,” says the

fast-paced girl whose hands are full.

At the time when she had applied for the Changelooms project, Aparna had also put in an application for a job. She got both! Today, along with her Changelooms project, she also works with the Childline India Foundation.

“My job is my passion whereas the Changelooms project is my dream,” she elaborates.

It was the training from Changelooms that taught her the art of balancing a job and her project: “Earlier, I was hyper and wanted to do everything but in the training I learnt how to focus.”

She put the learning into practice and now she is getting better results. A talkative girl, Aparna has also observed a change in her own demeanour: “Now I listen to others and that gives me opportunities to learn from them.”

Despite being busy, Aparna’s aspirations to help those less fortunate than herself are as strong as ever.

“My job gives me financial independence to work more for others,” she says enthusiastically. “I want to use the money I am earning to help more and more people and the Changelooms project is helping me to bring about real change in the community.”



## Pranabesh's Story

# Growing Back to ROOTS

Pranabesh Maiti has a Masters in Linguistics from Kolkata University but it was a passion for the environment that brought Pranabesh back to his village of Kamalpur on the Sagar Islands of the Sunderbans in West Bengal.

“I was certain that I wanted to do something for my village involving agriculture, which is our background,” says Pranabesh. He explored different opportunities and worked with several organisations before finding his calling.

“I was always concerned about the changing patterns of cultivation, which were adversely affecting the biodiversity of the area,” explains Pranabesh who has a profound knowledge of the subject.

The Sunderbans area has a fragile mangrove eco-system. There are 159 islands on the Indian side – 54 have human settlements and 105 are uninhabited.

The majority of people living in the area belong to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. They face extreme exclusion, deprived of their basic rights such as electricity, roads, transport, medical and educational facilities.

For years, these people have relied on local resources that grow naturally in the mangroves for their livelihoods, such as honey, fish, watermelon, rice and kewra (a spice with a strong fragrance that is used in cooking).

In an initial exploratory study Pranabesh found that

mangrove forests had been destroyed on many of the populated islands and people had started the cultivation of other cash crops such as betel leaf.

However, the high requirement of harmful fertilisers and pesticides in betel leaf production had adversely affected the aquatic flora and fauna.

The absence of mangroves also makes these islands vulnerable to cyclonic activities. In 2009, Cyclone Aila caused maximum devastation to areas where mangrove forests had been ruined.

“I had the desire to educate people about the utilities of the mangroves and turn around the situation,” says Pranabesh.

A former Changeloomer and old friend, Sutapa Patra, introduced Pranabesh to Changelooms With.in – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

Pranabesh submitted a project proposal and it was accepted for Changelooms support. His project aims to plant 20,000 mangroves in 9 months alongside

re-generating livelihood activities surrounding the mangroves.

“People called me crazy when, with a few friends, I visited villages to collect the seeds for mangroves,” says Pranabesh as he recalls the challenges he faced. “They did not cooperate, rather they dissuaded me.”

Unphased, Pranabesh formed his organisation - Sunderbans Green Environment Association.

Closely linked to the community, Pranabesh soon had 75 youths working with him. They visited 5 schools in Gosaba block targeting 6-18-year-old children, raising their awareness on mangroves.

So far, over 15000 mangroves have been planted by these youths and children. To encourage and recognise individual efforts in mangrove plantation, and to inspire others, Pranabesh has even introduced a Sunderbans Award.

When planning his project, Pranabesh chose the variety of mangrove that is worshipped by local people. He hoped

that by using this variety it would dissuade people from destroying it.

Indeed, his plan has worked and the community elders’ have taken on the responsibility to protect the plants.

“The ownership has been amazing - everyone has got involved in the programme, even those who were against it in the beginning,” says Pranabesh.

Recently, one person from the community even offered Pranabesh a place in his house for setting up his office.

Pranabesh has succeeded in involving the local politicians as well. “We came to know that the Irrigation Department was constructing new dams,” elaborates Pranabesh. “We explained to the politicians that mangroves were doing exactly the same job naturally and hence they should support our efforts.”

Pranabesh even helped to organise a debate in a local school on the topic of ‘Concrete versus Soil Dams’. The debate concluded that soil dams are better, raising the

**“The ownership has been amazing - everyone has got involved in the programme, even those who were against it in the beginning. My vision is to create a generation that will understand the value of the mangrove forests in ecology.”**





awareness of local leaders and administration authorities on the subject.

An unassuming person with a high energy level, Pranabesh believes his achievements have been possible only due to Changelooms: “We had been working on many avenues, but the project helped us in focusing our activities.”

“Now we are trying to link the mangrove plantations to livelihood activities, such as goat or sheep rearing, fisheries, and the sale of kewra and honey,” he says.

All these livelihood activities work in harmony with the mangrove forests: the famous local breed of goat - the Black Bengal – gets its fodder from mangroves, bees come to the mangrove forests for the pollen of the pandanus or kewra flowers, and fish get natural food in the water surrounding the mangroves.

Using the financial support received under the Changelooms project, Pranabesh will buy 10 goats and will distribute them to 10 tribal women.

“After the cyclone 75-80% of people migrated to big cities in search of work and only women are left,” Pranabesh explains. “The goat rearing will give these women a source of income.”

Once these goats multiply, more goats will be given to another 10 women.

Pranabesh is networking with private and government veterinary practitioners to ensure the vaccination and healthcare of the livestock.

His organisation has also introduced saline resistant paddy on 11 acres of land in their work areas.

“This is not a high yielding variety but it is tastier and more nutritious,” avers Pranabesh. “More importantly it does not require fertilisers and pesticides. Also, this variety does not get damaged due to the high tide, so at least it will ensure food security to the community.”

On his Changelooms journey, Pranabesh has observed a shift in his personality. He finds clarity on issues now and feels confident in motivating the community for its involvement.

“I have learnt to streamline my ideas,” says Pranabesh, who now observes everything with a methodical and analytical thinking.

“My vision is to create a generation that will understand the value of the mangrove forests in ecology,” says the dreamer, who carries mangrove seeds in his pocket. “Anywhere I meet children I hand over these seeds to them so that every child in the area gets involved in mangrove plantation.”



## Manika's Story

# A Daring ACT

At the age of 13, Manika Sarkar was a married woman. By the time she was 20, she was a mother of two. However, the presence of two daughters did not go down well with her husband, who abandoned Manika and their daughters to live with another woman.

A person of grit and courage, Manika took the situation head on, bringing up her daughters and looking after her mother on her own.

She worked with various institutions and, after struggling for two years, Manika was able to set up her own organisation, Samuh Shramjivi Samiti ('Group Labour Committee'). Motivated by her own circumstances, she started working for the rights of women and children

Softly-spoken and gentle, Manika is a resident of North 24 Pargana – a district in West Bengal.

The area is adjacent to the Bangladesh border and is a haven for traffickers. They come from other states, such as Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, to take away adolescent boys and girls. These children are later sold to work as bonded labourers, house helps, sex workers and, in some cases, surrogate mothers.

Gullible parents are lured with rosy promises of high-income jobs and enviable offers of marriage for their sons and daughters. Others barter their children for cash due to poverty.

"One of my distant relatives lost their daughter to trafficking," Manika says as she walks down memory

lane. "Later they were told that their daughter was dead although the parents never saw the body."

"My family had been the victims," says the 35-year-old. "I did not wish to see others facing a similar situation."

Manika conducted a study covering just two panchayats and was shocked to find that 50 girls had gone missing in one year.

Through her research and social work, Manika met the Prant Katha ('The Story of the State') organisation and shared her endeavours with them.

They motivated her to apply for Changelooms With.in – a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

Manika's project, Against Child Trafficking (ACT), was selected.

"I want to raise awareness among women and children so that they do not get conned into trafficking," Manika explains. "I also want to work on advocacy with all the stakeholders, seeking their intervention to check unsafe migration and trafficking."



**“ My family had been the victims [of child trafficking]. I did not wish to see others facing a similar situation. ”**

She identified 3 blocks - Badudia, Bashirhaat and Swaroopnagar – in the poorest border areas. The residents are either marginal farmers or workers in the brickfields. Many others migrate to big cities.

Manika’s emphasis was to educate adolescents as a preventive measure. To do this she formed 20 groups, each comprising of at least 10 adolescent boys and girls who she recruited to work as volunteers.

“The job of these volunteers is to raise awareness amongst their peer groups in schools and colleges,” elaborates Manika.

So far, these peer educators have covered 35 schools. “Every time an event is held in a school, at least 400 children gather,” says Manika, underlining the far and wide reach of her efforts.

In addition to these school volunteers, there are 10 active volunteers in 10 villages as well.

“We work with all possible stakeholders, including police, health and sanitation workers,





**“The job of these volunteers is to raise awareness amongst their peer groups in schools and colleges.”**

politicians, local administration and also with the Border Security Force,” says Manika.

Thanks to her orientation and sensitisation work, the communities have become alert. People frequently use the Child Helpline or Women Helpline to pass on the information if they become aware of any case of either trafficking or child marriage.

Her indefatigable efforts have resulted in the rescue of 60 children and, with the help of her volunteers, she had been able to stop 35 child marriages from culminating. She has also so far filed over 100 cases against traffickers with the district administration.

Years of experience and a broad knowledge of the issue has helped Manika to understand the strong links between joblessness, poverty, trafficking and child marriage.

To tackle the situation, she has focused on educating people about their rights and entitlements under government schemes, such as girl child welfare and pensions for the elderly and for widows.

“We are also working on skills training for the youth and women in the area, such as computing, tailoring and

leadership development,” she says. Her organisation also helps in the rehabilitation of rescued children.

“We have a good rapport with the government as, after rescuing the trafficked children, we keep them in the government-run shelter homes while locating their parents,” she says.

Nevertheless, Manika’s achievements have not come through without challenges. The majority of traffickers are well connected with influential people who facilitate their nefarious activities and so it is not easy to confront them.

“I have received threats that my children will be abducted from school if I do not stop meddling in their affairs,” she says.

Another time a trafficker threatened to kill her whole family when she took legal action against him: “We had to take shelter in a friend’s home for a month.”

However, the situation has now changed since she became involved with the Changelooms project.

The funding has helped her to set up orientation programmes with stakeholders that have established strong networks with the police and judiciary. As a result, the flow of information and action against traffickers has become easier.

In addition, she feels her organisation has grown phenomenally.

“Now we have a website and a Facebook page, which helps our work to reach the world,” she acknowledges.

“The visibility has got me at least a dozen awards,” Manika says proudly. However, if the award involves money, Manika spends it on her work to rescue even more trafficked girls.

Notwithstanding her decade-long experience, Manika has been impressed with the energy that has flowed in the Changelooms training programmes: “I now try to infuse similar energy in my team and have started working on their confidence building.”

Manika is grateful to Changelooms for her own learning as well. “For the first time I learnt about the ‘self’ and understood the concept of our own growth,” she admits.

Working on the ‘self’, Manika has resumed her education, which was hindered because of her marriage.

“Currently, both my daughter and I are pursuing our Bachelor’s degree,” Manika says with a bashful smile.



## Sumit's Story

# Rebel with a CAUSE

An artist, a thinker, a poet, a college “knock out”, a teacher, a mentor and, above all, a rebel – 26-year-old Sumit Gunjan is all of these in one!

A resident of Ranchi district in Jharkhand, Sumit resented his parents when they did not carry forward the ancestral legacy of agriculture. He resented having to choose the traditional careers of either medicine or engineering. To defy the stereotype, he grew his hair long.

At a job interview during his MBA, which he was pursuing in Delhi, Sumit was questioned about his long hair. He retorted, “You see many flowers in the garden, do you ask each one why it looks the way it does?”

The company registered a complaint with Sumit's college and refused to accept its students in future.

Consequently, the college barred Sumit from taking his final year examination.

“That is the reason I call myself a college “knock-out”,” quips Sumit. However, the knock back did not phase him. Outside of his course he had been interacting with and teaching street children, not missing even a single opportunity to educate poor children.

Having been dismissed from college, he worked with various organisations in and around Delhi, visiting at least

50 slums to grasp the issues that children were facing. He also continued with his informal teaching work to gain experience and knowledge.

“During this time I studied a variety of subjects, such as yoga, meditation, techniques for teaching differently-abled children and child psychology. I also learnt to use music and art as therapy,” says Sumit.

“I was trying to understand and evolve a sustainable model of education,” he says.

Meanwhile, he was given some research work for the National Foundation of India in the remote village of Banta Hazam near Silli town in Jharkhand. Banta Hazam comprises two tribal villages - Banta and Hazam. Here, Sumit had to identify and make an inventory of herbs that are used by locals as medicine.

“The assignment came as a wake-up call for me and I thought I had been sent to this place for a purpose,” Sumit says.

He established a relationship with the residents who, in return, opened the doors of their homes for him. “They also shared their traditional knowledge with me,” he says.

Once the work was over, Sumit left Banta Hazam but before leaving, he promised the people that he would come back. 6 months later he returned to the village and this strengthened people's faith in him: "I knew I wanted to do something here."

Pursuing his first and foremost passion of teaching children, the first thing he did was to form a group of children aged 4-14 years of age.

One villager gave his house to run a school that Sumit started with 15 children. Presently, he has 25 students.

In Banta Hazam trafficking and child marriages are common as there is a dearth of opportunities for higher education and employment.

"I wished to induce some creativity in the children, especially in the adolescent girls so that they learned to express themselves," says Sumit. "I also wanted to introduce some income generation activities so that the girls could have more options in life other than just marriage."

He went to Gujarat to learn how to make incense sticks. "There I met Sulekha Ali who works with children and who insisted that I should apply for Changelooms With.in," he recalls.

Changelooms With.in is a year-long fellowship providing training, mentoring and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.

"Under the Changelooms project I started working on the idea of supporting young girls to become economically independent," says Sumit.

The process began with the formation of a group in Banta Hazam village, which was named Sakhi Parivar ('Family of Female Friends') involving 10 girls aged 14-18.

All the activities the group carry out relate to arts and crafts and Sumit stresses the importance of using local resources and local talent.

One of the village residents, Shiveshwar Singh Gunjo, knows the craft of weaving, and is fixing a broken, unused weaving frame that he has. Once it is done, he will train the girls how to weave. He has also donated one of his unused houses for setting up an office for Sakhi Parivar.

"Shiveshwar is also teaching the girls the art of making bamboo boxes," adds Sumit.

Using their inherent talent, the girls have been making rakhis – the colourful and decorative bands that sisters

**“I wished to induce some creativity in the children, especially in the adolescent girls so that they learned to express themselves. I also wanted to introduce some income generation activities so that the girls could have more options in life other than just marriage.”**





“I want to create awareness on the issue of child marriage and also inspire and motivate other girls to get involved in skills learning.”

tie on their brothers' wrists during the festival of Raksha Bandhan. Besides these, they have also been making earrings using paper, wooden and glass beads and plant seeds. Some of them who know crocheting have started making scarves and shawls. A few of them have taken the responsibility to sell the group's products in the local market and from stalls in the village.

Thanks to Changelooms, the girls have got exposure and it has boosted their confidence.

3 of the girls accompanied Sumit to a Changelooms event in Patna, and displayed their products there. Sumit has also tied up with a former Changeloomer, Sauvik Saha, who has agreed to an exhibition of the girls' products and will provide skills training to them too.

Sumit acknowledges that, in spite of having years of experience, Changelooms has taught him the art of networking.

As well as Sauvik, Sumit is planning to link up with another Changeloomer, Jacinta, who is a journalist. Her project is training tribal children in creative writing and he wants to get the girls' writings published in newspapers through her.

Thanks to the financial support received under the Changelooms programme Sumit will also be able to get the Sakhi Parivar formally registered.

Over the course of the project, Sumit has witnessed a complete transformation in the girls who have now taken ownership of their group. They maintain the activity records and make joint decisions on its membership.

Restricting his role to a mere facilitator, Sumit is collaborating with schools for displaying the art and crafts of Sakhi members.

“I want to create awareness on the issue of child marriage and also inspire and motivate other girls to get involved in skills learning,” says Sumit.

Sumit calls himself a critic whose duty it is to confront others, but the project has brought a change in his own self.

“Now I critique my own work and achievements,” says the rebel with a cause who wants to reach at least 5000 girls in nearby villages over the next 5 years. His dream is to see a Sakhi Parivar in every village in the area.



## Jacinta's Story

# Writing a new STORY

A disturbed childhood had turned Jacinta into a quiet girl. However, the feelings squirming inside her found another outlet. Whenever emotions filled her to the brink, she picked up a pen and transferred her thoughts onto a piece of paper. Before this adolescent girl was mature enough to realise what she was doing, she was writing beautiful poems that sensitively conveyed her innermost complex emotions.

**H**ailing from the Kurku tribe, Jacinta Kerketta is a resident of Khudpos – a village in the Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. Throughout her childhood she saw her alcoholic father indulging in physical violence. Jacinta and her two younger sisters faced discrimination as their father backed their two elder brothers, who had inherited their father's addiction habit.

"My hapless mother did everything in her capacity to fulfil our wish to study," Jacinta fondly recalls.

"She even mortgaged whatever ancestral land we had to pay for our education, although later she had to face the wrath of my father," says the 32-year-old.

"During my school days I had to work in the fields or in shops, or even go home to home giving tuition to children," Jacinta says as she remembers the hardships of not having enough money.

However, the fire burning inside her to gain an education brought her and her two young sisters to Ranchi – the state capital of Jharkhand - where they pursued their schooling.

By this time, Jacinta had started writing for a few newspapers and television channels: "I used this medium

to pour out my heart's agonies and dejections."

At a young age, she received the Indigenous Voice of Asia award from a Thailand-based organisation – Asia People's Indigenous Pact (AIPP) - and the Ravi Shankar Memorial Award from Banaras Hindu University India.

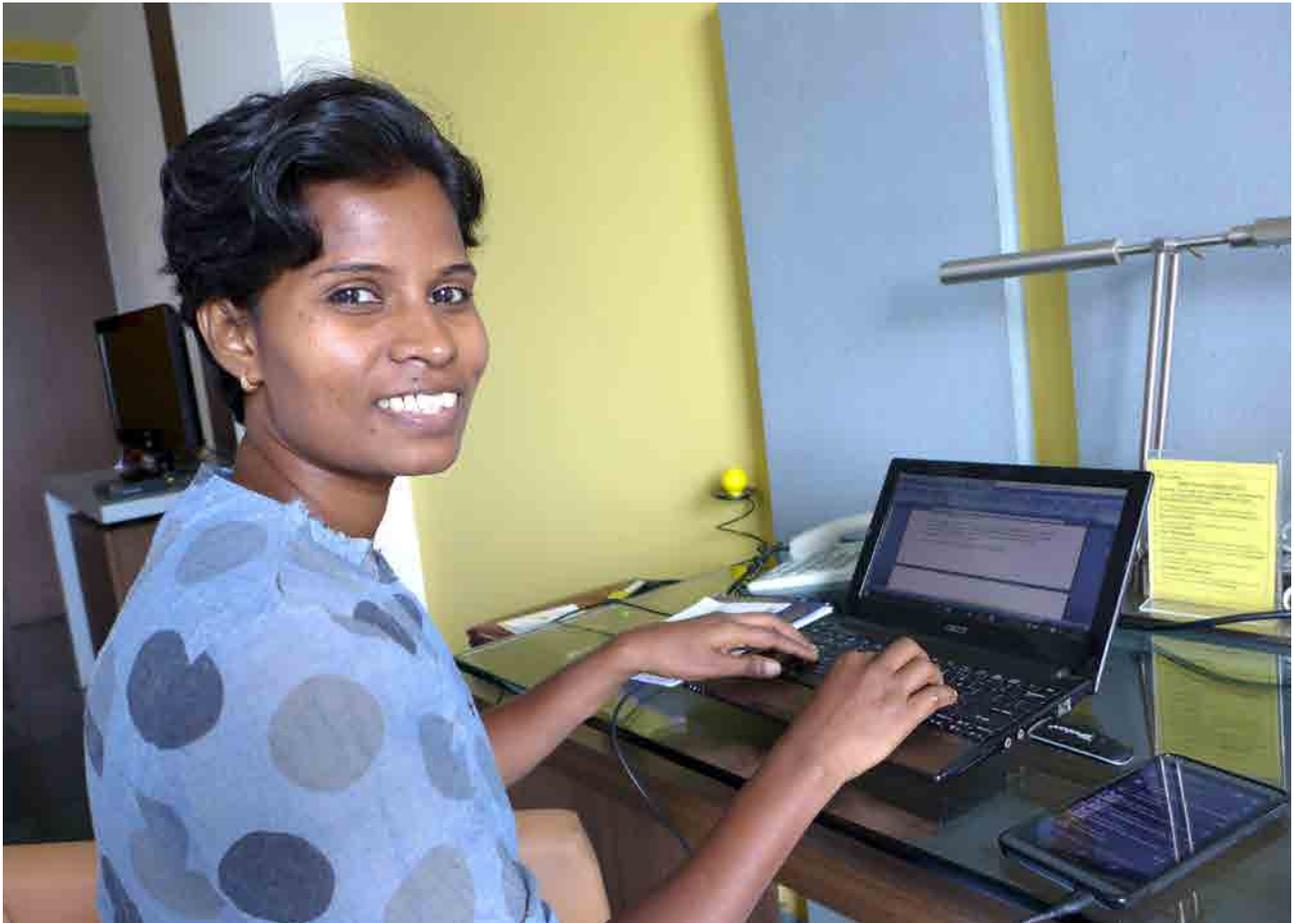
Passionate about creativity, Jacinta started promoting her writing work on Facebook and built up a network of professional writers to support her.

She then landed an opportunity to work as a research consultant in Jharkhand for a Delhi-based organisation, Feminist Approach through Technology (FAT).

What followed next was the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) fellowship, which gave her a chance to travel to communities and study their problems.

Seeing her interest in writing and community work, Jyoti Lakra - an old colleague from the UNDP fellowship programme - informed her about Changelooms With.in.

Changelooms With.in is a year-long fellowship that provides training, mentoring, and financial support to 100 young leaders wanting to address social exclusion within their communities.



**“I always dreamt that after becoming financially independent, I would help other girls like me. The idea was to create awareness through creativity and writing, and enable them to raise their voices against oppression.”**

“I always dreamt that after becoming financially independent, I would help other girls like me,” says Jacinta, whose dream was realised with support from Changelooms.

Her Changelooms project aims to train tribal girls in creative writing and photography and to develop leadership skills in these girls.

Jacinta started by identifying two tribal blocks - Samtoli and Rengarh - in the Simdega district where she would train 40 girls in creative writing. She chose one school in each block and decided to train 20 girls in each.

“The idea was to create awareness through creativity and writing, and enable them to raise their voices against oppression,” she says.

The area is home to Naxalites – native insurgents fighting for their rights – and poor farmers. Five dams have been constructed on land donated by the villages but people living there have neither electricity nor water for irrigation. There are not many opportunities for higher education or

employment. Living an excluded life, girls also face the threat of trafficking.

The main challenge was to prepare the girls for creative writing: “Initially they were hesitant to speak up and talk as they had many inhibitions.”

Realising that they also came from a similar socio-economic background to her, Jacinta began with sharing her own story to inspire them. Later she encouraged them to share theirs.

“I explained to them how agony and tears can be converted into literary expressions,” says Jacinta, the poet inside her speaking.

Slowly, the girls started to share their feelings with her and soon they began converting their feelings into stories and verses.

With the girls’ permission, Jacinta sent a few of their stories and poems to a local Hindi newspaper - Prabhat Khabar (‘Morning News’) - that published 4 of them. Another 15 are under consideration. Jacinta also posts her students’ work on Facebook.

“In their writing, the girls have raised issues like early marriage, disturbed childhoods, child labour and the exploitation of women, which they have witnessed in their communities.”

The second step was to push their imagination, which Jacinta realised was only possible if they got the chance to read good authors.

“I started a library in Rengarih by purchasing 45 books with the financial support I received under the Changelooms project,” says Jacinta. She has the promise of some more books from a Jawaharlal Nehru University professor and a Delhi-based research scholar.

“A German organisation, Adivasi Kooridnation (‘Tribal Coordination’), has also assured us support in publishing my students’ work,” says an excited Jacinta.

The schools where the project is being carried out have been encouraging all the other children to start expressing their feelings through creativity and writing and the news of change has reached the neighbouring villages too: “The

head of the Bagchakta Panchayat [village council] has asked me to initiate similar activities in his village.”

Twice, Jacinta has been invited on a national television channel to talk about her Changelooms project, which has brought a tremendous change in her as well.

“I observed a boost in my confidence and improvement in my communication skills,” says Jacinta, who also now inculcates flexibility in her day-to-day activities.

“The Changelooms training also helped me in grasping the philosophy behind the development of the ‘self,’” says Jacinta, who has resumed her studies and is currently pursuing her Masters.

Jacinta now aims to form an organisation and offers of help are pouring in from many different quarters.

“My desire is to create many national and international writers from the tribal community,” she says, sharing her dream. “This is the only way a true picture of the community can be presented before the world.”



## Short Summaries



**Aasif Anwar**  
Nalanda (Bihar)  
21 years

**A**asif belongs to a middle class family. He has a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and has always been interested in the education sector, wishing to bring about

significant changes to it.

Through his Changelooms project, Aasif has created a learning centre – a positive space where children from different socio-economic backgrounds can come together and learn without fear or anxiety. He has reinforced an education system that is uniform and accessible to all, cutting across the boundaries of gender and class. Aasif encourages the children to ask questions to build their critical thinking skills and promotes learning through play. The Changelooms journey has given Aasif a sense of direction and he has learnt to give the same importance to learning and processes as he gives to achievements and results.



**Kahkashan Rehman**  
Patna (Bihar)  
23 years

**K**ahkashan comes from a Muslim family in Patna. Through her own experience she believes that girls do not get equal opportunities in education or in developing the life skills required to be good leaders.

In her Changelooms project, Kahkashan has set up 12 adolescent Muslim girls' clubs. She encourages the members to discuss the challenges and issues that they face, including talking with them about the changes that happen to their bodies during puberty. She has developed the life skills of these girls by encouraging them to be curious and ask questions. 30 girls have started taking care of their personal hygiene and Kahkashan has helped some of the girls to become leaders who will take forward the work with more adolescent girls in the future. Through the Changelooms journey, Kahkashan has started looking at herself as a leader and has been able to control her anger.



**Manoj Kumar Nirala**  
Patna (Bihar)  
23 years

**M**anoj comes from a Dalit background. He has developed a deep understanding of social exclusion and is passionate about promoting social inclusion. He believes that

this is only possible through the wholesome development of Dalit youth. Through his Changelooms project, Manoj has developed 20 boys and 15 girls as community leaders. He has developed their understanding of political and legal processes, social schemes, rights and entitlements. 15 of them have also learnt basic computer skills. He has encouraged the young people to work for the upliftment of their communities and to bring about social inclusion. During the Changelooms journey, Manoj has been able to reflect on some of his strong personality traits and has realised what he wants to change within himself.



**Munna Kumar**  
Rohtas (Bihar)  
22 years

**M**unna is a community worker associated with grassroots organisation Jan Adhikar Kendra ('People's Rights Centre'). He is keen to work for the rights and education of Dalit youth as he understands the challenges they face.

Through his Changelooms project, Munna has developed Dalit Youth Committees in the 20 villages of Chenari block in Rohtas, Bihar. He has engaged 100 youth aged between 14-25 years and has built their leadership qualities through education, raising their awareness about their rights and thus empowering their communities. His efforts have resulted in 200 Dalit children getting access to schools and 1200 Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students getting government scholarships to study. Munna has always been an action-oriented worker but during the Changelooms journey he has realised the importance of proper planning to ensure better execution of his ideas.



**Pratima Kumari**  
Patna (Bihar)  
34 years

**P**ratima is a Dalit woman who was forced into an early marriage leading to a break in her education and severe health problems due to teenage pregnancy. The circumstances fuelled Pratima's determination to address

the issue of child marriage in her community.

Pratima's Changelooms project – Gaurav Gramin Vikas Manch ('Proud Rural Development Forum') – has involved her forming Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of adolescent girls and women, empowering them with information relating to health and education. She has also trained a group of young peer leaders comprising 15 Dalit girls and 10 Dalit women. While the girls have started training other adolescent girls on education, leadership and health, the women have represented their community at a state level forum. The Changelooms journey has helped Pratima to strengthen her organisation and to build a team, developing trust in others and love for herself.



**Siddharth Bhatia**  
West Champaran (Bihar)  
28 years

**S**iddharth is an adventurous person who believes in learning through exposure and life experience. Eager to take risks, he has learnt through trial and error. He works with villages as he feels passionate about finding solutions to the

problems that rural people face.

Siddharth's Changelooms project has been working with a backward community of 20 households in Khap Tola village, West Champaran district, to try and ensure arsenic-free clean drinking water. He has raised the awareness of the community about the negative health impacts of drinking and using arsenic-contaminated water, which they take from deep-bore hand pumps. As a sustainable solution to the problem, the community have revived unused wells and have started using water from these. During the Changelooms journey, Siddharth has learnt the importance of including communities in the decision-making process.



**Sneha Kumari**  
Punpun (Bihar)  
22 years

**S**neha comes from a Dalit family. Her education was hampered when she was married off at the age of 13. However, overcoming her struggles, Sneha completed her education after

marriage and now dreams of becoming a health trainer.

In her Changelooms project, Sneha has set up a centre where she has sensitised a group of 25 adolescent girls, along with their parents and community, on the adverse effects of child marriages on the health and education of adolescents. She has built the confidence of the girls by involving them in football games. At least 6 girls have improved their understanding of sexual and reproductive health and are focusing on personal hygiene. Another 5 drop-out girls are back in school after coming to the centre for remedial classes. The Changelooms journey has helped Sneha to gain a heightened sense of self-worth and she feels respected in the community where she is working.



**Sugandha Munshi**  
Patna (Bihar)  
28 years

**S**ugandha has vast experience in the development sector, especially in the area of education and gender. Her organisation Priyadarshini ('Appealing to Eyes') is working on

gender rights in Bihar.

In her Changelooms project, Sugandha has engaged with 20 low-income households in Patna to raise the awareness of parents on issues of gender and education. She has created a group of youth called 'Shapers' who organise campaigns and sensitise people on gender equity. Sugandha's Changelooms journey has brought about a huge change in her own perspective, helping her to better involve young people in her project. She has also been able to strike up collaborations and offer valuable support to fellow Changeloomers for knowledge and resource sharing.



**Uma Kumari**  
Patna (Bihar)  
22 years

Coming from a Dalit family, Uma faced many restrictions in her adolescence. However, these did not stop her from becoming the first educated girl in her village. Her own situation compelled her to ensure that other girls from her community are also able to become socially and economically

independent.

Under her Changelooms project, Uma has started sewing classes for 30 Dalit girls. She strongly believes that economic independence is the only way to counter their double exclusion – being both Dalit and female. About 20 girls have learnt tailoring and 3 have set up their own shops as sources of livelihood. She has reached out especially to those who were unable to pay for such training elsewhere, enabling them to start small-scale work from their homes. The classes have also provided a support system for the girls who have created strong bonds with each other. In addition, Uma has been engaging with other stakeholders to address the medical and other such needs of the girls. During the Changelooms journey, Uma's own sense of confidence has improved.



**Aditi Rao**  
Delhi  
29 years

Aditi has diverse experience in arts and communication. Her brilliant writing skills allow her to express her in-depth thoughts on social exclusion and the social norms that promote it.

Through her Changelooms project - Tassavur ('Imagination') - Aditi has been working with a group of 50 teenagers from different social identities and backgrounds. She has developed a sense of social responsibility in them through an intensive arts-based curriculum that had been co-created and co-led by these teenagers.



**Ajay Etikala**  
Delhi  
21 years

The owner of a happy disposition, Ajay is ready to make all efforts to enable others around him to be happy too.

Ajay's Changelooms project has helped marginal farmers

in the National Capital Region area of Delhi to sell vegetables directly to urban slum dwellers at an affordable price. Functioning as a bridge between the buyer and the seller, Ajay has helped farmers to receive incremental profits whilst, at the same time, ensuring good quality produce for slum dwellers, urban shelter homes and Non-Governmental Organisations. Through his interactions with community members, Ajay has broadened his understanding of social issues and has been sensitised to their concerns. The Changelooms journey has also enabled him to reflect on his strengths and capacities over a period of time, which has helped him to strategise his moves to ensure the best results.



**Ajay Shekhar**  
Delhi  
19 years

Ajay is an aspiring theatre artist from the marginalised, Artistic Kathputli Colony in Delhi. He is passionate about the issues that affect his colony and, whilst his dream is to become a civil servant, he wants use the powerful medium

of theatre to provide a voice for the voiceless.

In his Changelooms project, Ajay has developed a community theatre group who have used drama to raise awareness about the issues of women's rights. The project has succeeded in leaving a creative impression on the minds of the community. Initially, there were only boys in Ajay's theatre group but slowly, as the community has developed trust, they have started sending girls to the theatre group and the group now has 5 girl members. The Changelooms journey has helped Ajay to succeed in strengthening his relationships with family, friends and community members. He has also learnt to deal with any situation calmly and patiently.



**Anish Singh**  
Delhi  
29 years

Anish is a theatre teacher in Shiv Nadar School. He enjoys interacting with and learning from people who are from different backgrounds and different fields, adopting learnings from them as a part of his life.

'My Role' is Anish's Changelooms project. He has used theatre as a creative medium to ignite a dialogue with children and teenagers on their understanding of gender issues. Using drama he has built up an in-depth experiential understanding of how gender and gender roles create stereotypes and prejudices. Working closely with children linked to different Non-Governmental Organisations such as Action for Ability Development and Inclusion, he has involved them in the planning and execution of the project. The Changelooms journey has helped Anish to strike a balance between his personal and professional life and the project, which he thinks is his biggest achievement.



**Anoop Singh Rawat**  
Delhi  
20 years

Anoop believes that life is meaningless if one does not live it in a way that makes a positive imprint. He believes

that, for those with power or resources, this is especially important.

Anoop's Changelooms project - 'Take5' - is based on this philosophy. It has connected young volunteers from privileged backgrounds with those from socio-economically weaker sections of society. The children from low income communities have been inspired and mentored by the youth volunteers, whilst the volunteers have gained sensitivity and understanding around the difficulties and challenges of those who are less fortunate than themselves.



**Anurag Hoon**  
Delhi  
24 years

Coming from a Gujjar (Other Backward Caste) family, Anurag has witnessed a variety of stereotypes associated with caste and gender. These experiences have deeply

moved him and made him curious about the issues relating to exclusion in society.

Anurag's Changelooms project has involved forming a band of 13 talented musicians called the Manzil Mystics ('Destination Mystics'). The group members all come from different economical and social backgrounds and have been using music as a medium to spread a message of peace, equality and social inclusion. The group has organised music gatherings named 'Chai, Coffee and Music' and 'Street Music Mobs' to do this. Through the Changelooms journey Anurag has become more patient and has been able to build strong relationships with all stakeholders. He has also learnt to inculcate ownership in others.



**Divyaa Gupta**  
Delhi  
20 years

Divyaa is pursuing her graduation in economics from Delhi University. She believes that the most crucial aspect to promote change is to strengthen human relations, without

which nothing can be achieved.

Through her Changelooms project - Navjeevan ('New Life') - Divyaa has been working to empower sex workers on the GB Road by introducing them to alternative income choices. She has provided them with a platform where they are able to develop their skills as well as gain confidence and self respect. She has been able to establish a deep and lasting bond with the people and communities who have positively responded to her presence and now freely share the stories of their lives with her. The Changelooms journey has enabled Divyaa to look beyond the visible situations and perceive the human side of any issue.



**Fahad Khan**  
Delhi  
25 years

**F**ahad has worked with young people for many years and believes performing arts are a strong medium of expression that can help raise social issues and promote social action and change.

Through his Changelooms project – ‘Theatre for Change’ - Fahad has trained 100 young people in theatre arts. Each one of them has been able to perform in at least one theatre production, building their confidence and communication skills. 6 of these productions focused on social inclusion themes including disability, caste and gender. As a result, at least 10 of the performers have taken up other social action projects or volunteering opportunities to promote social inclusion. The Changelooms journey has allowed Fahad to enhance his own understanding of the issues that young people from different backgrounds face and to provide a space for them to discuss, share and reflect on these creatively.



**Gargie Sharma**  
Delhi  
24 years

**I**n her endeavour to find meaning in her Journalism studies, Gargie found that her passion lay in development communication. She pursued a post graduate certificate in this, exploring and working with various mediums of

grassroots and community media.

In her Changelooms project, Gargie has explored film as a medium for social change. She has used the technique of participatory filmmaking to empower communities to share their stories and to be able to speak about the issues that they face. She has established a Film Club, engaging with youth from diverse backgrounds, holding discussions that have brought out stories of exclusion and inclusion. The project has also helped community members to talk about other sensitive issues, such as dowries. The Changelooms journey has enabled Gargie to reflect on her own actions and now she feels free to seek support from others.



**Kamyra Dargan**  
Delhi  
29 years

**A**fter facing many years of turbulence within her family and surroundings, Kamyra has achieved a heightened level of consciousness. She wants to create a safe space for

children from lower income backgrounds where they can enjoy a nurturing learning environment.

Her Changelooms project - ‘My Room’ - has promoted and supported literacy and learning in children aged between 3-6 years from the Barola community. She has provided them with open access to information and ideas and an environment to nurture their aesthetic and creative expressions. With the project funds she has been able to set-up a library that is being used by members from different communities. The Changelooms journey has helped her to develop her own skills, such as setting goals, planning and learning, empathising with others and developing healthy relationships with all stakeholders.



**Kristin Braddock**  
Delhi  
29 years

**A**merican citizen Kristin became passionate about anti-sex trafficking when she was in college. She came to India 4 years ago and has since set-up an organisation -Sewing New

Futures (SNF) – to work for the economic empowerment of women in inter-generational forced prostitution in the Najafgarh area of Delhi.

Changelooms support has enabled Kristin to build a system of monitoring and evaluation for SNF, in collaboration with the women. These women now confidently take on leadership roles, including training and managing, in the absence of Kristin. She has also been able to train 20 women in designing and stitching handicrafts and has succeeded in ensuring sales worth 40,000 rupees. In addition, she has opened 18 bank accounts for the financial independence of these women.



**Mahesh Sagar**  
Delhi  
20 years

**M**ahesh is pursuing his Masters in Social Work from Delhi University and is also a youth facilitator. Being from a Scheduled Caste, he understands the state of social exclusion

in its most complex forms.

Through his Changelooms project, Mahesh has formed a group of 15 youth in the Majnu ka Tila community to enhance their sensitivity and understanding about social exclusion. Mahesh first conducted experience-sharing sessions with them, wherein the youth shared issues that they have encountered in the community. He then built their capacities and created an inter-group support system so that they could become strong enough to address their issues. The Changelooms journey has helped Mahesh to increase his own awareness about community dynamics and has improved his communication skills.



**Mayank Gandhi**  
Delhi  
26 years

**M**ayank is pursuing his Masters in Social Entrepreneurship from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. He likes travelling to communities to spend time with community members to try to better understand their identities and stories.

Through the Changelooms project, Mayank has worked with a group of youth on the outskirts of Delhi, encouraging them to identify both their common and individual interests and abilities, using this knowledge to form a unified identity. The idea behind this unified identity is to reduce the strong caste-based identities that exist in society and to bring people together for a common cause. Through the project, community members have discovered the real person behind each face when, normally, they would have pre-judged that person by his or her caste. The Changelooms journey has made Mayank more sensitive about multiple identities and he has become more empathetic towards others.



**Mohammad Faisal Nawaz**  
Delhi  
31 years

**T**hroughout his life, Faisal has suffered discrimination as both a Muslim and as a physically disabled person – he has scoliosis (an abnormal curvature of the spine). His struggle has inspired him to work to help others.

Faisal's Changelooms project has seen him set-up a vocational and advocacy centre for the socio-economic, physical and psychological empowerment of Muslim girls in his community. The centre offers many interesting activities such as photography, wall painting and book reading, helping to develop the girls' interests, independence and life purpose. Faisal has found the mentoring part of his Changelooms journey to be very helpful. His mentor linked him up with another organisation - Katha ('The Story') – who have organised a teacher training programme at his centre. Networking with others to improve his own work has been his biggest learning.



**Mona Yadav**  
Delhi  
25 years

**M**ona is a research scholar, psychologist and trained gender facilitator and is actively associated with various social initiatives on education, youth empowerment and

gender. She firmly believes that education must always be collaborated with practice.

Aspiring to work on an intervention to improve the reporting of gender-based violence, Mona's Changelooms project has involved an advocacy campaign named Pukar ('A Call'). Mona's campaign has involved 2000 young people, increasing the reporting of gender-based violence cases in Bhopal and Patna. She has been able to build strong relationships in the community where she conducted workshops on gender issues involving young people. The Changelooms journey has calmed her down and she has learnt to seek support from others to develop multiple lenses on gender issues.



**Nandan Singh Latwal**  
Delhi  
27 years

**N**andan is curious by nature, always eager to learn from his surroundings. He enjoys using videography as a tool to experience and understand different perspectives.

Through his Changelooms project, Nandan has created opportunities for young people to share their narratives around the subject of gender-based violence through the process of participatory video making. The narratives captured during the project will now be used as a tool for advocacy and outreach and the narrators have become the leaders of the process and owners of their stories. The process has been able to inculcate in people a sense of non-violence and the importance of being non-judgemental towards others. Nandan believes that during the Changelooms journey he has been able to improve his approach in partnership building and community outreach.



**Nikhil Kumar Gupta**  
Delhi  
28 years

**I**n 2008, Nikhil met with an accident that has left him paralysed from the waist-down. However, the Empowering Spinal Cord Injured Persons (ESCIP) trust introduced him to wheelchair rugby, improving his mobility and encouraging

him to regain his independence.

Yearning to help others like himself, Nikhil's Changelooms project has seen him use wheelchair rugby camps and online mentoring to train 15 ESCIP ambassadors who have mentored over 60 other wheelchair users in and around Delhi and Patna, helping them to learn independent living skills. He has encouraged them to create videos showing their own experiences, techniques and exercises, which he has uploaded on Youtube for others to use and learn from. During the Changelooms journey, Nikhil has worked on his leadership skills, realising that it was important to trust his team as a leader and to give them spaces to lead with complete trust.



**Ravi Sinha**  
Delhi  
24 years

**R**avi discovered his passion to explore how children learn when he volunteered for the National Service Scheme. A graduate from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ravi believes that technology should be used for making the world a better place.

As his Changelooms project, Ravi has set up 'Born2Blossom' - an initiative that offers experiential science teaching to children enrolled in the government school in Adchini. Ravi and his team have strengthened the current curriculum with activity-based learning content and have also prepared teacher's training materials, working with teachers to bring about a sustainable change in teaching methods. The project has brought together children belonging to mixed identities who have also been trained in life skills through the science workshops. During the Changelooms journey, Ravi has been able to give direction to his dream of becoming an entrepreneur. The project has helped him to build clarity around his initiative, which he can present at different forums.



**Rajnikanth Mishra**  
Delhi  
33 years

**A**sports enthusiast, Rajnikanth holds a Masters degree in Sports Management. He considers sport as an important medium for a person's holistic development.

Under his Changelooms project called 'Sportathon', Rajnikanth has designed and structured an age-appropriate and low-cost sports education programme for the holistic development of children. He has worked in schools in Delhi with 350 children from low-income groups. The programme has enabled teachers to inculcate physical development, healthy and hygienic habits and awareness about the benefit of sports in both children and the wider community. The intervention has maximised the participation of children in sports, helping them to develop life skills such as discipline, leadership, team spirit and sharing. The Changelooms journey has helped Rajnikanth in recognising the leadership qualities within himself and in improving his communication skills.



**Tasha Jaiswal**  
Delhi  
23 years

As a member of several theatre groups and the drama society at his college, Tasha has always enjoyed acting. However, it was only in preparing and performing a play on

Right to Information (RTI) with young rural villagers that he was inspired to use theatre as a medium for change.

Tasha's Changelooms project has involved the creation of a youth-led theatre group Mohalla Bol ('Locality Speak'). The group has provided young people with a space where they can engage with marginalised and excluded communities through the medium of theatre and conversation. The group has performed extensively in collaboration with the Bas!Stop Campaign (another social inclusion initiative between PACS, Pravah and CYC). He has also collaborated with the theatre society at Jawaharlal Nehru University who have performed 2 plays with strong messages on inclusion.



**Vijay Shekhar**  
Kathputli Colony (Delhi)  
24 years

Having a Bachelor's degree in Engineering, Vijay is one of the few people from his artistic community who has been formally educated. As a result he has always had a strong desire to share his knowledge with the children from his

community and to be a strong advocate for education.

Through his Changelooms project, Vijay has formed a youth group of about 50 youngsters who meet every week to brainstorm their way forward on social issues in their community. He has tried to raise awareness within his community about the importance of education, helping people to understand that, for their holistic development, it is necessary to pay equal attention to art and education. Under the project, he has created a pool of volunteers who have been nurtured and mentored to carry forward these efforts. The Changelooms journey has helped Vijay to network with others and he has played a vital role in raising the voice of his community against the demolition of their houses.



**Waqar Akhtar**  
Delhi  
28 years

Being a Muslim, Waqar has been challenged by the notions and perceptions that people have held about him based on his religious identity. He considers himself an artist, specifically a filmmaker, and he uses his art to express and

communicate his beliefs.

Waqar's Changelooms project - Ek Kadam ('A Step for Recognition') - has trained waste pickers, aged between 12-18 years, on how to handle a camera and make films about themselves and their lives. By screening these films in communities, at film festivals and on social media, he has drawn people's attention towards the importance of the role that waste pickers play in society. Through this project he has been able to increase the confidence of waste pickers, helping them to develop a positive outlook around their livelihood. Through the Changelooms journey, Waqar has changed his own attitude towards the issues of waste pickers and has been able to connect with the community deeply.



**Zeba Rizvi**  
Delhi  
28 years

Zeba has a professional degree in Social Work. She is a passionate believer in the transformatory potential of art and has always wanted to work with underprivileged

children, using art to help them.

Zeba's Changelooms project - 'Rainbow Town' - has engaged college-going young people to volunteer and become mentors to children from low-income households in urban slums in Delhi. 30 college students have been trained to design and facilitate sessions for children and 60 children have used arts, craft and theatre as a platform to express themselves in a creative way. With Changelooms support, Zeba has also been able to set up 3 community-run toy and book libraries. The Changelooms journey has helped Zeba to network and learn from other Changeloomers and to increase the visibility of her organisation, Arpan ('Dedicated').



**Anita Gadi**  
Ranchi (Jharkhand)  
30 years

In the tribal area where Anita lives, women have come to accept domestic violence as a normal part of married life. Having faced and stood up against domestic violence herself,

Anita is passionate about helping other women to stand up for themselves.

Anita's Changelooms project has brought tribal women together in groups, empowering them to participate in decision-making at various levels, from within their own families to speaking out at Gram Sabhas ('village meetings'). She has been able to nurture 20 women peer leaders to lead these groups in the 20 villages where she is currently working. These women leaders have been voicing their views and opinions on issues of women in their communities and the women in their groups are now actively participating in political discourses taking place in their villages.



**Jairam Hessa**  
Tundo (Jharkhand)  
23 years

Belonging to the Ho community (a Scheduled Tribe), Jairam feels very passionately about working for his own people by increasing their access to education in the Tundo district.

Through his Changelooms project, Jairam has set up a Learning Centre that functions as a school and provides quality education to tribal children. He has also activated a group of 20 tribal youth in 10 villages. These young activists have played a crucial role in advocating and initiating educational and social changes in their villages. Aiming at a systematic impact, Jairam has worked at different levels of the power structure – starting from students within the community, youth at village level and local residents at village council level. The Changelooms journey has helped Jairam to improve his confidence and sharpen his communication skills. He has succeeded in becoming an inclusive leader and his team of young people now have ownership of the project.



**Jyoti Lakra**  
Ranchi (Jharkhand)  
35 years

Jyoti belongs to the Oraon tribe and relates to the challenges and exclusion faced by the community. A poet by heart, she beautifully brings out the most serious issues through her verses.

In her Changelooms project, Jyoti has empowered 60 children, including child labourers, in the villages of Sukarhutu and Badhu in Ranchi district. She has taught them various arts like poetry, painting, games and reading. The children have started telling their stories and they feel confident in raising concerns with their parents. Jyoti has published a book of their stories that narrate the children's perspectives on gender issues. She has carried out her activities in collaboration with parents and 3 Social Mobilisation Coordinators. The Changelooms journey has built Jyoti's confidence and has changed her from a pessimistic person to a positive and optimistic one.



**Onkar Vishwakarma**  
Kodarma (Jharkhand)  
26 years

During his childhood, Onkar had to work as a labourer to help out his family. However, since coming into contact with the primitive and endangered Birhor tribe he has been motivated to help them due to the fact that they faced much

deeper exclusion and discrimination than he did.

Under his Changelooms project, Onkar has concentrated on 3 villages where he has been teaching 80 Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children to read, write and make decisions. He has also trained them in life skills. Onkar has been able to link 20 children with formal schools and 40 school-going children have strengthened their reading and writing skills. Onkar has also helped families to apply for 40 Adhaar cards (proof of ID and address), open 50 bank accounts, and he has formed a Kisan ('farming') club. The Changelooms journey has helped Onkar to establish himself as a development professional - the local government has made him solely in-charge of the development of the Birhor community.



**Sandeep Minj**  
Gadhwa (Jharkhand)  
32 years

**S**andeep comes from a Scheduled Tribe background. Hailing from a remote and excluded area of Jharkhand, he believes in empowering people to unite and demand their rights.

In his Changelooms project, Sandeep has engaged youth groups from the Oraon tribe in the villages of Parsawar and Bargad, teaching them about Panchayati Raj Institutions (the local governance system). He has empowered them to form collectives and, together, to demand their rights from village councils and various other platforms. These youth groups have successfully carried out a wall painting drive, in which communities participated with passion. The project has resulted in an increased attendance at village council meetings although Sandeep feels there is still a lot more to be done.



**Shadab Ansari**  
Dhanbad (Jharkhand)  
32 years

**S**hadab is an advocate practising in the Dhanbad Court and is associated with a few legal advocacy organisations including the Centre for Social Justice. He and his friend

provide free legal aid to marginalised and deprived sections of society.

Through his Changelooms project, Shadab has set up two learning centres – Prayas ('Effort') and Disha ('Direction') – in the Dhanbad district to fulfil the educational needs of children. He has focused on helping working children as they lag behind in mainstream schools due to their poor socio-economic circumstances. He has offered them after-school supplementary education and has started a library where students have a space to read. Some students participated in a local quiz competition, which was only possible due to the preparation and opportunity that the centre provided them.



**Archana Relan**  
Seoni (MP)  
31 years

**A**rchana is pursuing her Masters in Social Entrepreneurship from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai. Her entrepreneurial expertise is complemented by her field experience in agriculture and technology.

Archana's Changelooms project has been working with tribal women to help them to produce millet as a sustainable livelihood. 10 farmers have been supported to cultivate and sell millet at a fair price. The project has also been able to raise awareness about the nutritional benefits of millet amongst 880 people and has set up a millet production and marketing unit, led by tribal farmers.



**Bali Jagat**  
Bhopal (MP)  
22 years

**A**s a member of the Gond tribe, Bali feels strongly about the lack of freedom for women in her society. Her own bitter experiences have compelled her to work on the issue of violence against women.

Under her Changelooms project, Bali has brought 16 adolescent girls from her tribe together to form a support group. She has created a space where they can experience freedom and learn how to demand their rights, encouraging them to make informed choices about issues such as child marriage. 13 of the girls have been empowered to speak out in their families and the group has helped 18 girls in the community to take a stand against child marriage. Bali feels that the Changelooms journey has also brought about a change in herself - she has become more positive, learning to trust people and build meaningful relationships.



**Firoj Khan**  
Harda (MP)  
31 years

Coming from a Muslim background, Firoj knows that girls in his community are only sent to Madrasas – schools that run in mosques and mostly focus on teaching Urdu and religious books. Firoj feels that it is important to expand the

scope of what is taught within these spaces.

Under his Changelooms project, Firoj has encouraged and enabled interface between schools and Madaras, engaging support from 2 Muslim clerics and 50 parents in his effort to bring modern education to these religious schools. He has made efforts to create an interesting learning space within the Madaras, buying 150 Hindi books for Madarsa libraries, and he has motivated 25 girls to fill out the examination forms for formal schools. The Changelooms journey has also changed Firoj who has developed faith in people and has learnt the importance of keeping channels of communication open, even when there is conflict.



**Manohar Ranawat**  
Bhopal (MP)  
20 years

At the same time as pursuing his Bachelor's degree in Commerce, Manohar works with children and young people, trying to engage them actively through theatre, social campaigns and creative arts.

Under his Changelooms project, Manohar has created two youth groups – one for boys and one for girls. The groups have organised regular meetings on issues that matter to them, providing them with a space where they can develop their understanding of personal and social issues and work towards social, economic, political and behavioural change. The boys have created a band, writing composing and singing songs of leadership and other contemporary issues. The girls have started to challenge patriarchy. Manohar started his Changelooms journey thinking he would create a space for others. However, in the process, he has also found space for himself.



**Nandini Patidhar**  
Indore (MP)  
21 years

Whilst studying Engineering, Nandini volunteered for a year with the organisation Anhad Pravah ('Perpetual Flow') and developed an interest in youth development.

Through her Changelooms project – 'Feel the Gap' - Nandini has tried to reach out to young people, taking them on a journey from 'self to society'. By creating an inclusive space, she has helped them to understand themselves – their passions and identities – alongside understanding the issues around them. In total she has reached out to over 1000 students in Indore, compelling them to ponder the issue of discrimination and how it affects their lives and the lives of those around them. During the Changelooms journey, Nandini has discovered her own entrepreneurial urge. However, her biggest achievement has been the acceptance of her own self and her dreams.



**Niharika Pansoria**  
Bhopal (MP)  
18 years

Having been witness to a horrifying incidence of child rape, Niharika wants to enable children to understand their rights, encouraging them to be active participants in the process if their rights are violated.

Niharika's Changelooms project has created a Children's Collective involving 70 children. She has supported them to run the process of Bal Panchayat ('Children's Council'). Together they have organised 80 meetings (60 of which were organised by the children on their own) along with writing articles and holding community fairs to raise debates on different issues, including child rights. 20 children have participated in submitting an application to the town planner and local leaders that proposes child-friendly spaces in the city. The Changelooms journey has helped Niharika to explore her identity as a leader and to speak up about her concerns regarding child rights in her community.



**Nishtha Saudawat**  
Harda (MP)  
23 years

Since her college days, Nishtha has been working on the issue of gender equality. Coming from a community that holds conservative views about women, she feels passionately about freedom of expression for women,

especially in public platforms.

Through her Changelooms project, Nishtha has created spaces for girls to engage with the public. A group of 12 young people have organised an event against gender-based violence and at least 28 people have started raising their voices on the issue. Nishtha's project has brought together college-going youth and young people living in slums, helping them to break down biases between them. The Changelooms journey has helped Nishtha to learn how to plan and conduct sessions in a meeting and she has also realised the importance of delegating responsibilities and focusing on the learning of everyone in the team.



**Rajani Gour**  
Harda (MP)  
22 years

Self-defence trainer Rajani won a gold medal at the International Karate Championships. However, despite her international sporting success, Rajani comes from an impoverished background and had to fight great odds throughout her adolescent years to access education and

livelihood opportunities.

Rajani's Changelooms project has fulfilled an embedded desire in her to support other girls who are from a similar background. She has set up a centre where girls are taught the art of self-defence through karate. Today, 8 girls are well versed in martial arts. Rajani is now trying to create livelihood options for these girls and their mothers by training them in the art of bamboo jewellery making and 6 girls have already started earning by selling the jewellery. Rajani's centre also functions as a positive space where the girls can freely share and discuss other issues. Rajani's Changelooms journey has helped her to understand the importance of relationships and the emotional support they provide.



**Vikram Singh Ahake**  
Chhindwara (MP)  
25 years

Growing up, Vikram saw the impact of migration in his own family where women were exploited and children had no support. He is passionate about addressing the issue and its ill effects.

Vikram's Changelooms project has involved him starting up a Suchna Kendra ('Information Centre') that is run by the youth in his community. The centre functions as a connecting link between those who have migrated and those who have stayed back. It also serves the purpose of an information bank for those who want to migrate for work, providing them with information about working conditions, living options and various relevant government schemes. The project has so far stopped 2 families from migrating. The Changelooms journey has also helped Vikram in his personal life - he has realised how he was unknowingly letting gender discrimination perpetuate in his own family, which he has changed.



**Vishan Devda**  
Harda (MP)  
24 years

Vishan belongs to the Korku tribe and is the first educated person from his village. He understands first-hand about the exclusion that people from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes face.

In his Changelooms project, Vishan has been working with the youth of his area, organising them into 6 youth groups - one per village - and enabling them to develop their own skills and competencies to address local community issues. He has trained them how to safely intervene in cases of gender and caste-based violence. As a result, at least 30 young people have organised a public engagement event against caste-based discrimination. The Changelooms journey has brought immense changes to Vishan's work style. He has learnt the art of connecting with people first, letting them identify their issues rather than enforcing his own ideas on them.



**Vivek Rajput**  
Betul (MP)  
28 years

After securing his Masters in Social Work, Vivek started to work closely with tribal communities in Madhya Pradesh, specifically working on a project with Scheduled Tribe (ST)

youth regarding rights and entitlements.

Vivek's Changelooms project has focussed on building the leadership abilities of tribal youth. He has worked with 48 students in a ST hostel, organising meetings and sharing information materials about leadership and women's health, encouraging them to take action on these issues. As a result, some of the young people have challenged the college authorities to improve the infrastructure in the hostel. Vivek has also witnessed a change in himself during the Changelooms journey – he has seen a boost in his confidence and an improvement in his relationship with his family.



**Abhishek Balodi**  
Lucknow (UP)  
23 years

Abhishek is passionate about working on the issue of women's safety and is involved with a project – Safe Safar, Safe Street ('Safe Travel, Safe Street') - that aims to provide

safety to women in Lucknow city when they commute in auto rickshaws.

Under his Changelooms project, Abhishek has carried out a 'Safe Safar' campaign through which he has reached out to 500 auto drivers to work with them on issues of health, gender, dignity, lifestyle, income and communication. He has encouraged 40 auto drivers to raise their voices when they see any incidence of violence against women. He has empowered these 40 drivers by providing them with "Safe Auto" identity cards to distinguish them as women-friendly and he has also helped them to apply for life insurance.



**Arshi Khan**  
Farrukhabad (UP)  
22 years

A true inspiration to the girls in her community, Arshi comes from a family of weavers. She is one of the first people in her community to pursue her higher studies and is working to empower other girls.

Through her Changelooms project, Arshi has set up a Drop-In Centre where 25 girls have been educated and 9 have been linked into mainstream schools. She has also developed their leadership skills through life skills training and exposure visits, connecting them to experts from various fields. 30% of these girls have stood up against the gender-based violence that they were facing. These girls are now able to earn a livelihood and are respected in the community, inspiring others. The Changelooms journey has taught dreamer Arshi how to stay focused and to convert her ideas into reality. She is pleased to have been able to execute her plans.



**Chanda Begum**  
Lucknow (UP)  
33 years

Chanda spent her childhood in extreme poverty and was sent to a nearby Madrasa (school within a mosque) where she only studied Urdu and religious scriptures. Motivated by her mother, she was inspired to study after her marriage to complete her graduation and she wants to inspire other

young women to do the same.

Under her Changelooms project, Chanda has set up an Activity Centre for women aged between 14-30 years in her community. 35 children have come to study there and she has established a merchandise unit, involving women in stitching and embroidery to help them to become financially independent. 15 women have started using their skills to earn money. Chanda has also developed their understanding about reproductive health, family planning and has linked them to medical units for regular health check-ups. During the Changelooms journey, Chanda has realised her own worth - she has gained respect in her community and is now considered by her family as an independent and earning member.



**Ghufuran Siddiqui**  
Faizabad (UP)  
31 years

The events of 1992 shook Ghufuran deeply when a group of activists demolished a mosque in Ayodhya city, leading to communal riots across the country. He has been participating

in activities relating to peace and communal harmony ever since and has co-founded the Awadh Peoples Forum.

Through his Changelooms project, Ghufuran has worked with youth and migrant labourers as he believes that they face the brunt of incidents involving violence. He has created a group of 25 young people and sensitised them so that they can play an active role in working for the welfare of migrant labourers and strengthening communal harmony. For Ghufuran, his biggest achievement has been the creation of 10 stories written by these young people on the composite culture of the twin cities of Ayodhya and Faizabad. This is the first document of its kind that has ever been created in the region.

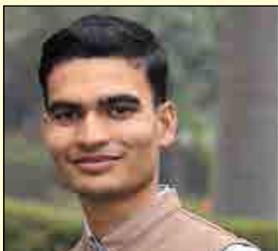


**Humaira Khan**  
Lucknow (UP)  
25 years

Humaira used to be afraid of blood, but she changed her opinion after a real-life incident made her realise its importance in saving one's life. She now works to promote blood donation.

Humaira's Changelooms project has involved setting up an

effective network of blood donors for marginalised sections of society, including unorganised labourers. She has created a group of people aged between 16-35 years who can donate blood in cases of emergency. She has shared the donors' data and information about blood banks and hospitals with community members. Now they directly reach out to donors in times of need and advocate for the importance of blood donation at their work places. Humaira has also organised camps to address the fears and myths associated with blood donation and has raised awareness about different blood groups. From a personal perspective, the Changelooms journey has increased Humaira's self-respect as it has involved her in meaningful work, which she has found to be a great source of energy.



**Mohammad Amir**  
Lucknow (UP)  
23 years

Amir belongs to a family that migrated and started living in one of Lucknow's slums. Energetic and passionate, he has always wished to work with the youth of his community and to help them experience a transformation of self.

Through his Changelooms project Amir has created a Bal Manch ('Children's Forum') for children living in urban slums, raising their awareness on the ill effects of drugs and substance abuse. He has rehabilitated children aged between 8-14 years by engaging them creatively and 3 have been sent to a formal school. The children educate the community on various issues through folk media, such as street plays. They have also created their own publication for which they work as reporters and write about the issues in the community. For Amir, the Changelooms journey has helped him to improve his own communication skills and to develop his confidence and self-respect.



**Mohammad Rizwan Siddiqui**  
Sitapur (UP)  
31 years

With a Masters in Mass Communication, Rizwan has been working with mass media for more than 8 years. The issues of gender stereotyping and discrimination in society

deeply concern him and his passion to address these issues has led him to take up advocacy in many forms with various grassroots communities.

Rizwan's Changelooms project has involved him initiating a media campaign named socialkhabar.com ('socialnews.com') to address the issue of women's and girls' safety in Sitapur. Through his project, he has built the capacities of 20 girls and boys in slums and rural areas by training them as community reporters. He has also imparted gender training to them. These youth are now well equipped to report cases of harassment against women and girls along with any other discrimination issues at the local level.



**Nadeem Siddiqui**  
Lucknow (UP)  
31 years

**N**adeem has a Masters in Social Work and has been a peer educator and social campaigner all his life. In 2013 he started 'Slum-Arise' - an initiative led and nurtured by a group of young volunteers to cater to the educational needs

of underprivileged women and children from urban slums in Lucknow.

Under his Changelooms project, Nadeem has tried to unite and strengthen the community by setting up the Pehchan Evam Adhikar Manch ('Identity and Rights Forum') so that they can address and claim their legal identity and basic needs on their own. 50 families have received their Aadhaar (identity) cards and voter identity cards. Nadeem has also supported them to get electricity connection and a drinking water facility. In addition, Nadeem has started a bridge school to help children of the slum who have dropped out of school to be re-admitted into formal education.



**Rahul Kumar**  
Varanasi (UP)  
23 years

**F**rom the age of 8 years, Rahul could sense the discrimination based on caste, which got clearer as he grew up. His experience of seeing the so-called 'lower castes' being discriminated by the

so-called 'upper castes' in society has led him to passionately work to remove the evils of the caste system.

Under his Changelooms project, Rahul has been working with the youth of Scheduled Caste communities to raise their awareness about the political process so that they become aware of their role and rights in society. He has educated them about the Panchayat ('local governance') system, ensuring that Dalit girls and boys are included in village councils. The Changelooms journey has benefited Rahul as an individual - he has become more open to listening to people and understanding their points of view and he has found a purpose in life and a direction for his work.



**Ranjesh Kumar**  
Lucknow (UP)  
26 years

**A**bandoned by his father in his childhood, Ranjesh had to pick up garbage and work as a domestic help to keep his family afloat. In spite of his circumstances, he had the zeal to move forward. He continued his studies and now works for

the rights and identity of rag pickers in Lucknow.

Ranjesh's Changelooms project has been working with the rag picking community in respect to their health rights. With the project funds he has provided gloves, masks and aprons to rag pickers and has ensured that this safety gear is also included in government schemes. 55 children from the community have been enrolled in primary school. He has also facilitated identity cards for 40 people and has got 2 toilets constructed in the slum. The Changelooms journey has changed his perspective on how to engage with people and he has been given the chance to identify some of his strengths and areas that he needs to improve upon.



**Shama Parveen**  
Varanasi (UP)  
22 years

**C**oming from a conservative Muslim family, Shama was denied her wish to pursue graduation and joined her mother in tailoring work. She has since been inspired by her sister who was the first woman in her community to do a

MBA and to work in a renowned organisation.

Under the Changelooms project, Shama has set up a Skill-cum-Literacy Centre for adolescent drop-out girls from Muslim and Scheduled Caste communities in the Chhittanpura slum of Varanasi. She has created a cadre of 'change agents' who are influencing the change process in the community. 15 girls have learnt tailoring at the centre and have set up their own shops. Shama's efforts have convinced many parents that she is a role model for their daughters. At the start of the Changelooms journey, Shama felt unsettled the moment she encountered a problem but slowly, with mentoring and training, she has learnt to face challenges with a positive approach.



**Shivani Srivastava**  
Lucknow (UP)  
23 years

Shivani has a Masters in Social Work and volunteers with the Yeh Ek Soch (YES) Foundation – an organisation being run in Lucknow by two former Changeloomers. This inspired

her work on gender-based violence.

As her Changelooms project, Shivani has started an initiative called 'Voice Up' - an online campaign to explore the realities of gender norms through short films, public actions, photography and social media campaigning. The campaign has invited young people to be active change anchors in such discourses. One short film and 100 videos have been made by the 52 youth involved in the programme. The Changelooms journey has helped Shivani in gaining confidence and she can now express herself better.



**Stuti Mishra**  
Lucknow (UP)  
23 years

A creative and passionate individual, Stuti has always wanted to do things differently. Coming from a protective family environment she has challenged the relationships

within her family and negotiated with them to explore her own learning opportunities.

Through her Changelooms project, Stuti has tried to reach out to 18 zari zardosi artisans (workers who are involved in a kind of embroidery with golden threads) in Lucknow. She has tried to project their talent to the masses and has helped them to achieve better market reach and value for their work. She has also worked to develop one leader amongst them to guide them. The Changelooms journey has benefited Stuti by helping her to be able to make informed and responsible decisions.



**Vasudev Bajpay**  
Lucknow (UP)  
23 years

Vasudev's mother passed away when he was in school, leading him to become severely depressed. This experience made him want to support the many people who face stress and depression but are not able to express it or get help.

Through his Changelooms project, Vasudev has created two 'Stress Anonymous' groups for youth aged between 24-32 years. These groups are spaces that promote good mental health and address stress and depression by encouraging attendees to tell stories, share experiences and express feelings. In some cases, Vasudev and his pool of mental health advisors have referred group members to medical professionals. The group has prepared 7 case studies of individuals who have benefited from this intervention. During the Changelooms journey, Vasudev has been able to let go of his ego and arrogance and has become an inclusive person.



**Vijay Bharat**  
Lucknow (UP)  
23 years

Vijay strongly feels the need to address the caste-based discrimination that exists in India. As a student of Social Work, he has been trying to create a space for youth to volunteer and advocate for a discrimination-free society.

Under his Changelooms programme - Marg ('Path') - Vijay has created spaces within 3 schools where he has trained 100 children in various life-skills and enabled them to talk and share their feelings with others. He has organised regular engagements with teachers, parents and students, and has succeeded in involving 10 parents in the initiative. Vijay has also given career-related information to young people from excluded groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims. The Changelooms journey has helped Vijay in changing his personality to become a more tolerant, accommodating and confident man.



**Virendra Kumar**  
Lucknow (UP)  
28 years

After pursuing his Bachelor of Technology and gaining a corporate job, Virendra decided to enter farming where his passion and interest lay. He realised he had not been well guided about his education and career choices and wanted to

do something to help ensure others did not make the same mistakes.

Virendra's Changelooms project has provided information to rural youth, especially Dalits, about their career choices. He has mobilised 25 rural youth to volunteer for a Rural Youth Resource Centre where they have been able to access computers to find out more about various government schemes and opportunities to help their communities. They have also built the political awareness of their communities. During the Changelooms journey, Virendra has been working to improve his patience and has also learnt to take failure as part of any process.



**Anjali Bin**  
Kolkata (West Bengal)  
24 years

Growing up, Anjali saw how boys got more opportunities than girls and how gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence were common occurrences in her community. This experience fuelled her commitment to work

on the issue of gender equality.

Anjali's Changelooms project – 'Boys Responding Against Violence on Women' - has provided institutional services and support to women and girls who face gender-based violence. Anjali has worked to create a team of 12 active volunteers who are able to help women to file police reports, provide basic legal support in court cases and seek medical assistance. These youth volunteers function as outreach workers and raise awareness in colleges and their communities. The Changelooms journey has provided Anjali with an opportunity to reflect on her own self. She has realised that she was dwelling too much in the past, and needed a fresh approach to build and strengthen her relationships.



**Bipuljit Basu**  
Kolkata (West Bengal)  
34 years

Bipuljit has a passion for writing and creating dhun ('tunes'). With his organisation – Bindubot - he creates new Bengali

songs that aim to reach out to and include marginalised people.

As his Changelooms project, Bipuljit has been working with a variety of different excluded communities including children from the Kalighat red light district area of Kolkata, survivors of trafficking and members of the LGBT community who have faced violence due to their sexuality. He has run music workshops with them, helping them to express their stories through song. They have then performed these songs in front of members of the general public, helping to raise awareness amongst mainstream society about the exclusion they face.



**Devarchan Banerjee**  
South 24 Parganas (West Bengal)  
21 years

Devarchan is the President of the Rotaract Club in his college. He and his group of friends have been involved in supporting social enterprises, exploring ways to contribute to the social service sector.

In his Changelooms project, Devarchan has used his entrepreneurial skills to help rural farmers to promote a native, organic variety of rice called Lilavati that is threatened. He has also taken a group of 25 young people on a 'meet the producer' exposure trip, encouraging them to live with farming communities and recognise the physical labour involved in their work. For Devarchan, the Changelooms journey has helped him to realise that it is important not only to be results-oriented - achievement focused on learning and process have equal importance.



**Koushik Hore**  
Kolkata (West Bengal)  
25 years

**A**s an adolescent, Koushik was ridiculed for being 'different'. As a result, he became one of the founding members of Queerlus (Queer Identity and Us) – a cross border youth campaign in Kolkata and Delhi that aims to break down

gender stereotypes and minimise the discrimination of those who identify as Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender or Queer (LGBTQ).

Koushik's Changelooms project has involved him forming a 'queer friendly network' of about 30 youths to discuss issues relating to gender and sexuality. They hold periodic addas ('meetings') in 5 colleges to promote better understanding on issues relating to LGBTQs. The group has also linked up with 11 doctors who are open to listening to and addressing the health concerns of LGBTQs. The Changelooms journey has given Koushik a chance to explore and recognise his leadership qualities and has also helped him in accepting his own identity.



**Rahool Goswami**  
Kolkata (West Bengal)  
26 years

**R**ahool has been passionate about writing, painting and music since his childhood. A few years ago, he formed a Bengal Music Band and tried to relate music to different social issues. He wants to create a strong voice that will reach

people in power and help to bring positive changes to society.

Rahool's Changelooms project – 'Youth-Led Media' – has built on his creative passions, setting up 3 strong groups where young people can share their experiences and express their thoughts through different art forms. He has worked to connect and include youth from different spaces of society in these groups, using writing and painting as a tool to allow them to tell their stories creatively. Over time, his project has taken the shape of a book of 12 stories from marginalised youth who have faced some form of violence. For Rahool, the Changelooms journey has allowed him to succeed in controlling his anger – he is now able to check his habit of 'reacting' instead of 'responding'.



**Riju Banerjee**  
Kolkata (West Bengal)  
20 years

**R**iju is a student of Mass Communication. He believes that film is a powerful tool to communicate and believes that it is important for every individual to understand who they

are, rather than to accept the gender stereotypes that are formed by society.

Riju's Changelooms project has involved him making a 15 minute film that explores gender stereotypes that are held by school and college students. He has used the film to initiate discussion with young people, challenging them to understand and recognise their own gender-based stereotypes. The Changelooms journey has helped Riju to accept reality and to grow as a mature and understanding person who respects and loves himself.



**Saikat Roy**  
Kolkata (West Bengal)  
28 years

**B**eing an artistic young man, Saikat believes that it is the right of every young person to dream. However, he knows that dreams are not a priority for those who

are economically and socially deprived. He believes the lack of positive engagement in society often leads these young people to move towards anti-social activities.

Saikat's Changelooms project has been working with 20 underprivileged and marginalised young people who are living beside railway tracks, to help them to merge into mainstream society by developing their talents for literature and art. He has created a youth centre for them, conducting meetings regularly. 2-3 of the youths have emerged as leaders, and now bear the responsibility of running the group's activities.



**Shahina Javed**  
Kolkata (West Bengal)  
27 years

Coming from an orthodox Muslim family, Shahina's youth passed in a struggle for her freedom. The restrictions she faced compelled her to do something for the next generation

to enable them to dream and set their goals in life.

Shahina's Changelooms project has involved the formation of a youth group of 150 adolescent girls named Roshni ('Light'). She has led workshops on self development, leadership and gender. 75% of the girls have developed career goals and 50% have enrolled themselves on courses to help them in pursuing their career aspirations. Shahina has also developed 16 peer leaders who are now in charge of taking forward the group's work. The Changelooms journey has helped Shahina to streamline her thoughts and she has also realised the value of sharing and handing over responsibilities.



**Siddhartha Sankar Talukdar**  
Kolkata (West Bengal)  
27 years

Passionate about art, Siddhartha believes that art can often help a person to communicate when words cannot. In his experience, art can also infuse a person with confidence and

can be used as a powerful tool for social change.

As part of his Changelooms project, Siddhartha has conducted art therapy sessions to help socially excluded children to use drawing and painting as a medium to communicate and share their thoughts and experiences. He has also encouraged the children to use other art forms, such as drama and dance, to express themselves. The Changelooms journey has helped Siddhartha to realise that he is not alone in his desire to bring about social change and he has received much encouragement from the camaraderie and support of those around him.



**Toriquel Hasan**  
Nadia (West Bengal)  
28 years

Being from the Muslim community, Toriqul knows the extent of exclusion that the community faces. In his experience, adolescent Muslim boys do not have adequate

access to the facilities of health, education or vocational and life skills training.

In his Changelooms project, Toriqul has set up a Youth Intervention Centre to build the capacities of 30 young people to help them to become agents of social change. He has enabled these youths to visualise change and to start thinking about their career aspirations, allowing them to dream about what they would like to do and to plan how this can become a reality. The Changelooms journey has helped Toriqul to enhance his own self-confidence and to share his ideas clearly in front of people without hesitation.



**Tumpa Adhikary**  
Kolkata (West Bengal)  
27 years

Tumpa grew up in the red-light area of Kolkata. She witnessed a lot of violence as a child and understands the silence of children who have been the victims of sexual assault.

Tumpa's Changelooms project has enabled 25 children from the Khidderpur slum and Munshigunje red light area to talk freely and fearlessly about their concerns regarding sexual abuse. She has used theatre and comic strip drawing to help them to express their stories in a fun and safe environment. The Changelooms journey has helped Tumpa to recognise that she was putting a lot of pressure on herself to be strong and it has enabled her to accept and respect both the strong and emotional sides of herself.









**PACS**  
(A DFID Programme) National Office  
CISRS House, 14, Jangpura B,  
Mathura Road, New Delhi - 110014. INDIA  
Website: [www.pacsindia.org](http://www.pacsindia.org)

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