Margadharshini – Empowering Ambitions, Prakasam (Andhra Pradesh)

Innovation (District)

Inspired by the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, the District Administration has taken up an initiative to set the aspiration for the New India right from the schools. By systematic introduction of goal setting process and the right choice of exposure to the upcoming career opportunities, students from poor socio-economic backgrounds are being nurtured to face future challenges.

Prakasam is one of the most backward districts in Andhra Pradesh with 32 out of 38 drought-prone mandals with 90% agrarian rural Population. It has one of the highest SC and ST population in the state. The information asymmetry and poor aspiration levels in poor students are leading to serious lack of ambition for higher-level jobs and careers. During 'Palle Nidra', a night stay program in Social welfare hostels, it was clearly noticed that every government school confirms to the above and expressed lack of standard study material and poor knowledge of the faculty in career guidance. Majority of Parents with

poor economic and social back ground are having limited exposure to guide and advice their wards. in such a scenario, a need-based innovation is 'MARGADARSHINI'.

Objectives

- Informed decision-making by the students with a slogan, *'no child leaves the school without a goal'.*

- Exposure to all spectrums of career and employment opportunities of present and future.

- Assisted assessment of individual capabilities and skills to choose suitable education path.

- Encouraging students and preparing them to get admissions in reputed academic institutions.

- Sustain the program without any external assistance or financial dependence.

- Handholding of girl children due to high prevalence of school dropout and child marriages.

Strategy

- Streamlining and institutionalization of career guidance through a standardized study material called '*Prakasam Career Digest*'.

- Capacity building of the teachers through rigorous training modules.

- Determined community participation by involving parents and teachers.

- Capsulized predesigned sessions modulated along with a year-long academic plan.

- Digital intervention for easy information access, establishing feedback loop, effective session monitoring, continuous module updation, and student career tracking has been established. Simple tools like Telegram and YouTube are being utilized for the above purpose.

- Self-help peer groups having similar aspirations are established with the supervision of mentor teachers who have volunteered for this program.

- Promoting inclusivity through a special focus on girls, divyang jan, people from socially, economically and educational backward classes.

- Overall development of the child by emphasis on ignored aspects like mental health, stress, and anxiety emanating from pressures in career advancement.

- To curb the menace of child marriage which is prevalent in the district.

Sustainable and Custom-made Process

- Prakasam career digest prepared by a group of experts related to the field.

- 39 topics were divided into 22 modules to be explained by a trained mentor every Friday in schools, intermediate colleges, hostels of welfare institutions etc.

- Assessment and counseling sessions are being planned at the end of these 22 sessions to channelise the interest and aid students in specific goal setting.

- The 38 Mandal level Academic Monitoring Team (AMT), with 3 expert teachers have been set up to guide the teachers with pedagogical methodologies.

- This Project provides for incentivizing mentors in order to encourage best performers from the evaluation of AMTs.

- Plan for midterm evaluation by chosen subject matter experts in the month of November to assess the effectiveness of the program.

- 'Coffee with Collector' is another innovative program where the students from government institutions will be hosted by District Collector every Saturday for an informal chitchat to get the feedback from the students.

- A Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) at district level with three expert faculties was established to collect feedback.

- A district-level committee has been formed with 7 HODs pertaining to the education, welfare, employment, skill development for community mobilization, and continuous monitoring of the project.

- The school management would overview the working of the project and making necessary changes to keep the project in line with the changing needs.

- Involvement of teachers on a voluntary basis rather than compulsion which has ensured committed and enthusiastic teachers' participation in the scheme. A total of 576 mentors were roped in.

- Parents are made stakeholders by their involvement through the parents committee wherein they would provide their inputs and suggest improvisation in the project.

- The sessions delivered by the expert mentor are being recorded and posted on YouTube for future reference. Provision of additional information through online links provided in the reference material, external websites, reference books based on the curiosity of the students to further their interest is being done.

- Direct monitoring by District Administration with all stakeholders through Telegram App, has ensured prompt adherence to the schedule and targeted communication, timely follow-up, and resolution of issues faced by the stakeholders.

- The program also has a student career tracking facility to ensure that the students are pursuing the right career path while the parents are kept in loop to arrive at a shared goal path.
- Awareness generation through multiple channels like use of Grama Ward Sachivalayams, social media handles and sensitization during Parents meetings.
- Digital platforms have been used as a means to facilitate the project:
  a) Telegram has been used as Cloud for material Sharing.
  b) A closed user group was created for all the mentors in Telegram.
  c) Google Form has been created for monthly feedback both from students and teachers.
  d) Digital Libraries are established with Computer Lab.
  e) School attendance app to ensure attendance of the students and Notcam app is being used to post pictures with geo-tagging.

Perceptible and Verifiable Impacts

Short-Term Impacts: A sample Survey was conducted after 8 sessions of Margadarshini in 28 schools and found that more than 90% of children from the top minds recall more than 5 career options; 80% of the students could explain 7 options and 68% of the students could mention 9 options of career from the knowledge they gathered during the Margadarshini sessions.

Medium Term Impacts: Number of students who are going to opt for their career according to their academic performance and the career choice opted from the sessions.

Long Term Impacts: Number of students who have opted for mentor career counselling, actually settled in their careers and have started contributing to the economy and society.

- The target beneficiaries are school students studying in 9th grade and 10th

grade in high schools and +1 and +2 in Junior colleges. Around 75,000 students in 563 government educational institutions benefitted through this program.

- The students' understanding about the future educational prospects is expanded multifold.

- Community participation by involvement of parents has increased parent's understanding of the requirements of their ward.

- Awareness generated on different scholarships which could be availed going forward helped in reduced economic dent for higher education.

- Margadarshini acted as a platform to provide tailor-made guidance programs to students with specialized needs.

- It also includes exposing students to 'real-life' role models like senior ranking police officers, super specialty medical professionals, professors, engineers, business managers, entrepreneurs etc.

- Special emphasis is given on girls, differently abled children, students from poor socio-economic backgrounds to ensure inclusivity.

Path Ahead

- Replication of 'real life role models' at schools wherein the role models would visit the schools to meet the students.

- NRIs from this district as well as interested people are also to be made part of the program to inspire the students.

- The benefitted students would in turn act as mentors to the then student thus creating a virtuous cycle making it sustainable.

Finally, this program is essentially setting a new trend in early intervention with a right set of aspirations as well as career decisions before it is too late when the students enter into higher education with limited opportunities. This initiative needs support from the educational institutions too for setting the right academic courses as per the aspiration and market requirements.