

Future Thinking Innovators Award 2021

Shortlisted Initiative

The British School New Delhi, India

Overview of the school:

We are a 57-year old not-for-profit, international school located in the heart of the diplomatic area of New Delhi. We offer high quality education to expatriate and local families by drawing on the best facets of a rich and culturally diverse community and the host culture. Our broad and balanced curriculum encourages students to be internationally-minded, principled and compassionate global citizens of the 21st century. Over 1,200 students from 66 countries thrive in a happy, stimulating and safe environment in the school. Our guiding statements are clearly visible in the curriculum framework, student demographic and open minded and welcoming ethos.

Summary of initiative:

The Book Drive project launched two years ago by a Year 11 student had a simple objective: Books read once can be shared with readers who don't have access to those books or libraries. The idea took shape into the form of a club under Enrichment with a team of students from Years 7-11. Wanting to become catalysts for change, they approached schools run by the government, which are usually under resourced and often inadequately funded, where students do not have access to libraries. Their mission was to empower students by creating a platform to gain and spread knowledge.

The first step was to request The British School (TBS) community for book donations through mailers, awareness drives and the intranet. Books came in large numbers as people donated generously to the cause. Next, they planned for strategic presence at major school events to sell the books collected and raise funds. Stalls were set up at parent teacher meetings, Diwali and Christmas fairs and all other major events to reach out to the community across the school.

They have not only sustained but developed and expanded the reach of the book drive over the last two years through effective decision making and strategic presence at major school events and similar opportunities outside the community, allowing for a surge in the number of books collected and the funds raised thereof.

As of today, they have impacted the lives of over 11,000 children by donating 10,700 books to various schools and libraries.

How the initiative has encouraged students in lateral thinking for a specific purpose:

The spread of the initiative has been seen at multiple levels throughout our school, as well as in the wider community. Within the school, it has influenced students from primary to secondary to empower children and young people by developing a love of reading in them, thereby creating curious minds. Our team of students worked with a solution focussed approach and demonstrated leadership skills of tomorrow's responsible citizens. The team amassed volunteers eager to donate books by encouraging students during morning registration and briefings, and through our intranet, bringing together both primary and secondary students for support.

A similar model was applied for other international schools. The team of student leaders participated in events held in the American Embassy School and the German School where they spread the word, educated their counterparts and sold books. This has helped them to not only raise funds but also to expand the reach of the project beyond our school and in building partnerships with peers and institutions in the wider community.

From a part of the collections of the used book sales, they also bought books to be distributed to the children of TBS support staff as a gift to thank them for their hard work, thereby widening the breadth of the book drive's reach.

How the initiative had impact on student learning with potential for longer-term development as a sustainable initiative for the school:

So far, our students have set up 16 libraries and supported over 80 classroom libraries. They have worked through the lockdown to build partnerships with organisations and foundations across the country, including a small village, to send over 2,900 books to those who needed them the most. The books came as a delightful surprise for children since all the schools were shut due to the pandemic.

The student who launched the initiative will be graduating in 2021 but has already collaborated with younger students to create a core group that will advance the initiative as a legacy project. The partnerships built during the pandemic will also be nurtured so that student development can take place as a sustained effort.

Each library of the government schools impacts 300 students and the impact has been far beyond academic. They have learnt better hygiene, habits and value systems. Teachers and heads of schools have reported not only improved behaviour and more confidence in students but also reduced cases of violence in school.

Learning inspiration in students was also felt at the government school level and as the social multiplier effect kicked in, each child that visited the library inspired more to come in, fuelling the hunger for knowledge.

How the initiative demonstrates student commitment and a rigorous process for effective learning:

The initiative was launched in 2018 by a single student but rapidly gained attention to expand within and beyond the school. As more students joined hands with the project, each of them became a leader. They explored the larger educational landscape around them and interacted with government school heads and teachers to understand the constraints within which they operated. They also interacted with the students to map their requirements, and through the process realised their role in bringing about positive learning experiences and student development.

They have demonstrated sensitivity and commitment while designing the initiative as a sustainable project and not a one-off activity. Through leadership and collaboration, they have also built and nurtured relationships with peers within and outside the community, as well as with institutions and foundations that are committed to the cause of promoting education and a love for reading in children and young people.

The initiative demonstrates sustained commitment from our students over a period of three years. They have built from tiny steps to a sustained drive that today reaches government school across India.

The success of the libraries also led to TBS adopting the Pustakalaya Project as a part of the Year 11 CAS programme.

How the initiative includes student voice and/or student action:

The drivers of the entire campaign have been, and continue to be, our students. Demonstrating a spirit of service and leadership, and compassion for the community, they have steadfastly built upon their work.

Along with a collaborative vision of spreading happiness through books, each student on the team had a clearly defined role and responsibility. The project is entirely student led with support from the school in the form of providing a platform to collect and sell books on a regular basis.

Our students have built successful real life partnerships with government schools and foundations, and undertaken independent interactions across all sections of the school community i.e. primary and secondary students, parents, teachers, leadership and support staff. They partnered with the New Delhi Municipal Council and Angelique Foundation as a starting point to setting up libraries in the schools and assessing the reading level of their students to determine which books would be most useful to them. They also spoke to the students to understand what kind of books they wanted so that their needs could be met. Armed with this knowledge and through the money raised, they restocked government school libraries encouraging their students to develop an active interest in reading. With access to newer and more relevant books, students in these schools discovered a newfound interest in reading books, both for curriculum and for leisure and curiosity.

Sharing beyond the school community:

The appeal of the initiative lies in its low reliance on funds or capital to start off. One does not need to invest in any equipment or create something to take the first step. All it needs is one driven individual to inspire people and gather support from the larger community.

The strategy our students employed was to start with a solution focussed approach and to rouse the community spirit through an emphasis on compassion and empathy. They displayed the spirit of service and innovated to find creative solutions to create vertical and lateral collaboration within and outside the school community.

Furthermore, they demonstrated how easy it was for everyone to become an agent of change by coming together in solidarity and playing their part in solving tomorrow's problems today. The entire school community contributed by donating books, buying books, raising money and becoming part of the revolution that has empowered children and young people in the larger community.