

(POWER OF YOUTH)

# JOY OF GIVING BACK

**FOR SOCIETY** With corporate firms inducting youths into their CSR projects, lives of many students have changed

Mou Chakraborty and Tanisha Bagchi  
✉ letters@businessinsider.com

Twenty-year old Kamal Kant Sharma is turning into a professional each day. He teaches boys and girls the basics of computer operation at a training centre in Kidderpore where he himself used to be a student a few months ago.

What is so great about it, one may ask. Well, Kamal and his students all come from families that cannot afford education or vocational training entailing high cost. It has only become possible because of a project run by cellular service provider Aircel under its CSR (corporate social responsibility) programme.

With more and more corporate giants taking up CSR projects, lives of many youth people such as Kamal have changed drastically.



"I benefited immensely from the Aircel centre and I wanted to do something for students who are not financially equipped to pursue higher studies. Teaching them in the evening gives me immense pleasure," says Kamal. It somehow became apparent that if CSR provides the business world with an opportunity to give back something to the society, beneficiaries of such CSR projects also get a chance to give back something in return.

Interestingly, even students from reputed educational institutions also take part in CSR projects and make their contribution. Recently, 15 students at XLRI Jamshedpur took part in Aarohan, a workshop on ecosystem development and capacity building for social enterprises. The project was aimed at improving the support infrastructure for social enterprises and social incubation initiatives. "There are also many social and regional inequalities that plague the socio-economic space. There is a need for a change in the traditional approaches taken by the social sector, non-profit organisations and public institutions," says Prof Madhukar Shukla, chairperson of Fr Arrupe Center for Ecology & Sustainability, XLRI.

A couple of months ago, the students and teachers from IISWBM observed "Energy Conservation Day" where business forums as well as students from several schools and colleges took part.

A higher secondary level quiz competition was also conducted and six schools from Bengal took part. Assembly of God Church secured the first position while DPS Ruby Park came second.

Initiated by Aircel in 2008, the 'Save Our Tigers' project is a key CSR ini-

tiative taken by the company. Aircel has collaborated with leading bodies such as WWF and Wildlife Trust of India to support their on ground research projects in tiger reserves across the country. Although tiger conservationists Mike Pandey, Shekar Dattatri, Valmik Thapar and others have come forward to spread the message, Aircel has successfully taken the help of school students in the 'Save Our Tigers' project.

However, Aircel's education programme, called a+, has benefited many urban youths. Ranjha Majhi (20) is now settled in life, thanks to the programme. "The faculty is excellent and I have learnt a lot. Now, I am working with Bajaj and I am really happy with my job. The centre opens up many avenues for students like us and I wholeheartedly support their cause," says Ranjha.

Bindra Malhotra, head of CSR, Aircel, feels that the company's initiatives have enriched the students a lot and made them aware of the world they are about to enter. "Aircel's Corporate responsibility strongly supports causes that have a societal and environmental impact. We pursue these through our a+ centres and Save Our Tigers campaign," says Malhotra.

Tata Chemicals Ltd happens to be one of those companies that believe in the power of youth. Alka Talwar, head of CSR, says, "We take interns from colleges from all over India as well as abroad. They stay with us for about two



months and participate in CSR activities. They bring a lot of energy into our CSR activity and the exposure helps them build their career. We feel that sensitising youngsters on needs of the society is crucial to the future of our country."

TATA Chemicals also runs eco clubs for school children in villages. Kids are introduced to various indigenous plants and are encouraged to set up bio-diversity gardens in their villages.

'Club Enerji', a CSR initiative by TATA Power, is an energy conservation club that reaches out to schools and make students aware of energy crisis and need for conservation. It

was launched in 2007 as part of a pilot project in just 12 schools in Mumbai. Encouraged by the response, the company has taken it to all parts of the country. "Today, Club Enerji has reached 400 schools across India, sensitised more than 5.2 million citizens and saved more than 8.7 million units of power. This is equivalent to 8,600 tons of CO2 and enough to light up 4,090 houses for one year. We are doing most of the work with the help of school children," says Anil Sardana, Tata Power MD.

The group's Tata Building India School Essay Competition aims at motivating the youth in nation build-

ing. It is India's largest national level school essay competition. The ongoing 2013-14 edition aims at reaching out to 3.5 million students across 7,000 schools in 185 cities. The Bengali edition has already been conducted at 400 schools.

Lifecare products major Amway is not left behind in CSR activities. "We mainly focus on education of blind children. We have set up computer centres at National Association for the Blind and Ramkrishna Mission Blind Boys Academy. We also organized a road traffic campaign on the White Cane Day," says Sarbani Bhattacharya for Amway India.