

# BIRLA FELLOWS UPDATE

A Newsletter of the GP Birla Fellowship for Women Leaders

The GP Birla Fellowship for Women Leaders is a unique programme that helps young women from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities begin their leadership journey. It is different in that besides helping women connect with their core values, it also intends to create a network of Fellows to act as a growth ecosystem for each other. The programme also has a strong mentorship component.

| FEATURED |

## Guarding the guardian angels in the time of pandemic

**T. Mekhla's Guardian of Dreams works to strengthen Child Care Institutes during the pandemic**



Childhoods are made at home. More than 20 million orphans in India will never know this. Almost 5000 children per urban district live out their formative years in Child Care Institutes (CCIs) which often score more on intent than infrastructure and expertise. T. Mekhla was intent on changing this for the better which how her social venture "Guardian of Dreams" came to be.

"Guardian of Dreams" works on strengthening these CCIs through multiple initiatives. During the pandemic it doubled-down to make sure that the children within didn't want for care and protection just because they did not have a biological family.

When the 2nd Covid wave hit in April 2021, Guardians of Dreams conducted a rapid assessment in the three districts that it worked in to understand its impact on 136 children's homes. It found that almost a fifth had covid positive children and more than half needed support to either help the children fight the virus or protect them against it. Additionally, the pandemic also saw people donating less making it difficult to bring these vulnerable children into the blanket of care.

To enable the CCIs, to keep cope with the pandemic and its aftermath, Guardians of Dreams launched the Childcare Covid Relief program to support 148 children's homes reeling under pressure. It used a three-pronged approach of providing home care kits, facilitating testing and treatment and raising funds for the institutes.

<p><b>HOME CARE KIT</b></p> <p>Delivery of essential first-aid items to keep children infection-free and healthy</p>	<p><b>TESTING &amp; TREATMENT</b></p> <p>Cover costs of COVID-19 tests &amp; treatment</p>	<p><b>FINANCIAL AID</b></p> <p>Emergency financial aid to sustain the quality of care in homes facing financial distress</p>
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The home care kits consisted of items such as masks, sanitizers, face shield and other protective equipment needed to prevent the disease. At homes where covid cases were detected, the organisation stepped in and covered the cost of RT-PCR tests, doctor consultation fees, prescription medicines and other treatment costs. A control room was also set up to offer 24x7 help to calls for help from different homes. This initiative has now expanded to cover the costs of vaccinations for eligible staff and 18+ young adults at the homes.

Guardians of Dreams also stepped in to help CCIs in cash and kind. Financial aid was extended to 60 children's homes under extreme financial pressure to ensure that 1,449 children in these homes received quality care. The organization also stepped in to help with groceries, utility bills and rent. In order to be able to do this, they coordinated with funding agencies, corporates and HNIs to mobilize 1.75 Crore+ worth of support; 100 percent of which was directed to support CCIs.

Finally, it is the people and their determination that makes an organization. The Guardian of Dreams team wore multiple 'hats' and along with volunteers ensured that the children did not lack a guardian angel.

## Too little too late?

**Vasanthi Veluri's "Peoli" that works with the women of Uttarakhand to revive indigenous crafts is now feeling the effects of climate change**



Vasanthi Veluri (G.P. Birla Fellow Batch 2) runs a design studio, Peoli Design in Almora, Uttarakhand. The studio trains women artisans of the region in various indigenous textile crafts and also engages in the research, archiving and development of local craft traditions using eco-friendly methods like solar heating, rain water harvesting and manual skills. Through its marketing efforts, it is able to provide a global platform for premium, zero waste products produced through sustainable methods. Peoli Design has been recognized for its efforts at different venues and has been awarded the AIACA's first Craft Kutumb Shilp Udyam Samman award and a grant prize for the Best Green enterprise.



Over the past seven years, the Peoli team has noticed a significant increase in erratic weather patterns in Uttarakhand. Since the studio's work is dependent on natural factors like rain and sunlight, the changes were more acutely felt by the team. The changes ranged from acute shortage of water to delayed but extremely heavy monsoons, where the incessant downpour made water retention impossible for the soil. Incessant construction, mindless use of natural resources, an ever-increasing population, construction of roads and deforestation are some of the major causes for this situation. This raises the question how viable it is to work closely with natural forces, when the same forces are now beyond being predictable? Has society reached a point of no return where models working in the industrial tech-bubble seems like the only solution left? These are certain questions we need to grapple with and find answers to, as Peoli is trying to do, one experience at a time. In the meanwhile, it plods on, firm in its belief that the only way to work is with the environment, come hail or storm. Which is probably why it has been named as one amongst 20 of India's changemakers in the field of Climate Change by the United Nations India and the Purpose group for their #weForTheChangeNOW campaign. An appropriate balance between technology and indigenous knowledge systems to protect what is left of the mountains seems to be the way forward.

## Enjoying the spoils of technology

**Nidhi Pant's "Science for Society" Technologies helps people from the low-income, climate-threatened communities sell produce dismissed as spoil**



"It's important to empower our scientists and researchers from universities to take their solutions to market. We must create incentive based ecosystems to shorten their Go-To-Market and work on building their understanding of supply chain while improving their access to finance."

**NIDHI PANT**  
INNOVATION AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

WE the change **GOALS** **UN**

For all the perfectly shaped fruits and vegetables that find their way to greengrocers, there are thousands left to rot simply because they do not meet the aesthetic criteria of the market. These are otherwise perfect, nutrient packed produce which can pull their weight in any meal.

Nidhi Pant, one of the founders of the Mumbai-based food-tech innovator Science 4 Society (S4S) Technologies has been working to cut down on this waste by promoting solar dehydration as a way to preserve such produce.

Nidhi and her co-founders have, through S4S technologies, empowered 2,700 women farmers and 200 micro-entrepreneurs near Aurangabad by training them in dehydration of natural produce. They do this through the patented Solar Conduction Dryer (SCD), a portable solar-powered machine that dries vegetables and spices while retaining nutrients. The organization gives women a cutting machine, a primary processing dryer and solar conduction dryer in our package. The equipment is non-electrical and very simple to use. The dehydrator helps to maintain moisture, colour and aroma, and completes the process in six to seven hours, to minimise microbial growth.

Four machines with a capacity of 200 kilograms output, cost around ₹1,40,000. Purchasing the equipment isn't mandatory, as it can also be hired by farmers through financial assistance.

The company has a twin-pronged business model. It works with both growers and women processors in villages, procuring the rejected produce from one and supplying to the other. They then buy back the produce from the farmers and use it for their own natural snack brand DesiVdesi, besides supplying dried raw material like garlic, ginger, onion, turmeric, coriander to big players like Nestle, Sodexo, Marico, IRTCT, Taj Stats and Capital Foods.

The technology won S4S the 2020 Ashden Award for Energy and Livelihoods, supported by the Waterloo Foundation, UK. It has been installed in 1,200 sites and is used in France, Jamaica, Nepal, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Bangladesh, besides India.

| OTHERS IN THE NEWS |



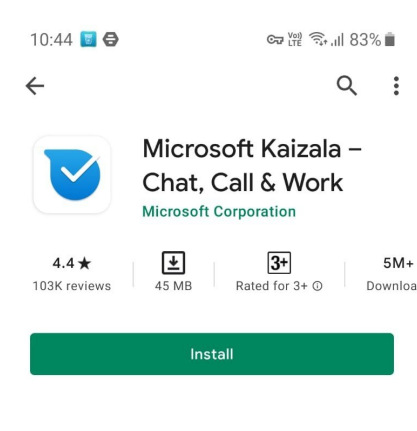
**MONICA PESSWANI** is an engineer turned liberal arts major. She co-founded The Apprentice Project (TAP) - India's leading nonprofit working to end educational inequity through 21st-century skills-based curricula. Her work in 20 schools, with over 10,000 students has resulted in 32% increased attendance and the creation of over 500 projects for school and community development. The Apprentice Project (TAP) was awarded the Grand Prize at the President's Innovation Challenge, Harvard Innovation Lab. This is the biggest competition at Harvard University across 13 Harvard schools. TAP received this award for its innovative covid-19 online learning model.



**POOJA RAI's** Anthill Creations emerged as the winner of a nationwide competition organized by Vadodara Smart City under the initiative Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge. The project aims to create a mobile play van for the young children of Vadodara who lack access to play and to ensure child-friendly neighbourhoods. This project will be implemented and tested in pilot neighbourhoods around the city of Vadodara.



**SHRITI PANDEY's** Strawture Eco is building a 50 Bed Covid Hospital in Dimapur, Nagaland for the Principal Scientific Advisor, Govt of India and C-CAMP (a CSR Foundation). Shriti was also one of the speakers in [Tedx Countdown](#) for climate change. She has been recognized as one of the Climate Leadership Young Changemaker by United Nations India and Purpose.



**SHAHEENA ATTARWALA**, a Design Leader at Microsoft, heads the research & design team for M365 products in emerging markets and fosters innovation aiming to solve the unmet and unstated needs of the Next Billion Users. Her team recently launched the Microsoft Kaizala messenger app on the play store. Her research cuts across geographies and currently her research is focusing on the consumers in the villages of India where she is looking to bridge the digital divide.