

## NOT LIKE THE OTHER GIRLS

DET's courses are stepping stones to myriad of development opportunities for young women including providing valuable access to leadership skills and digital literacy. Laxmi's story illustrates the transformative power of such access.

*"As a woman I've had so many people tell me I cannot do things. At DET I learnt that I could do anything I set my mind to."*

The eldest of three siblings, Laxmi has been at the receiving end of the usual gender discrimination rampant in her village community. "Our neighbours always ask my parents why they are not getting me married," she says. She is, however, fortunate enough that her parents choose to motivate her to study and work. Laxmi's eyes light up as she talks about her father, her biggest inspiration. "He has always told me not to think like other girls who get married as soon as they finish 12th grade," she says. "After I completed my MSW, he would tell me that I should think about how I can stand on my own feet."

Regardless of the support from her family, Laxmi struggled to get a job. She was painfully aware of her lack of essential skills, such as digital literacy. Laxmi's experience ties in to what millions of women experience around the world. Research has shown how young women struggle for access to digital skills, while young men have the chance to experiment with computers, and access the internet with their peers in spaces like tea shops or cyber cafes.<sup>1)</sup> For young women, a formal skills training program is sometimes the only way to gain access to these skills.

### The DET Value: What college doesn't teach you

At DET, Laxmi went from being someone who had never touched a computer, to someone who could expertly navigate the web and work with MS Office. She also discovered her innate potential for leadership and management in the social sector. Recalling a module on self help group formation which she found especially impactful, she remembers how the class was given practical insights into setting up self help groups and training them to apply for business loans.

1) IREX, 2016

*"I have always told my daughter not to think like other girls who get married as soon as they finish class 12. I wanted her to stand up on her own feet first. My relatives would often ask me why I was supporting her education even though she would have to get married and would have to only take care of her family in the future. After gaining so much confidence from the course she did at Deshpande Foundation, she wants to join the police force and I will support her in whatever decisions she takes in life."*

- Laxmi's father

### WHAT WORKED FOR LAXMI

- Marketing
- Self-help group formation
- Introspection
- Time management



**LAXMI SURESHRAO** | Deshpande Fellowship Program (Social Entrepreneurship), Alumna, 2016

I'm a post-graduate and I have studied in school and college. But **nothing compares to** what **DET offers.** It is something **unique.**

Another module on Marketing was equally valuable. Students were given Rs 2500 and asked to use the money to set up an enterprise. Laxmi decided to sell T-shirts and leggings and earned Rs 10,000. "It was a very proud moment for me," she says happily.

Young rural women who join DET are often surprised when they realize how they have internalized the gender stereotypes and barriers. Laxmi recalls how in her village, girls and boys were never allowed to talk to each other. At DET, however, most assignments had teams with both boys and girls – enabling students to confront and overcome any preconceptions about gender they may have struggled with.

### Productive Careers: Another goal to conquer

On graduating, Laxmi was placed as a Program Associate with the HR department at Deshpande Foundation. Her responsibilities include advocating DET's courses in various colleges. She feels she is the best advocate for the efficacy of DET as she has her own transformative

DET experience to draw from. "Whatever I learnt at DET is what I am applying now at my job," says Laxmi. "The public speaking skills we picked up are especially valuable because I need to speak in front of a crowd of people at least 5 times in one day." Laxmi also believes that the habit of self reflection that she developed during the course has significantly changed her life. "We were always asked to reflect and think about what we were learning and doing on a daily basis. That has made me much clearer about my decisions and actions."

On her way to greater heights, Laxmi shares her next goal. "I want to become a police officer," she says. True to her DET training, she has decided to approach this goal with steady determination and hard work – studying daily in preparation for the necessary exams. DET's focus on building young leaders who become catalysts of change in the social sector and contribute to nation-building is best showcased through examples like Laxmi's.

### STUDENT PROFILE AND IMPACT POST-DET

Educational qualification	MSW
First generation learner	Yes
Pre-DET monthly household income	Rs. 10,000
Sector of employment	Human Resources
Hailing from	Methimelkunda, Bedar
Working in	Hubballi

### Salary Increment (INR):

