

## GOING BEYOND SKILLS

When the going gets tough, youth like Prashanth Uppar rely on short-term courses like DFP to leverage their existing skill sets

*“DFP helped me step out of my difficult world for a brief time and focus only on myself.”*

In 2015, all bets were on India to become one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world.<sup>(1)</sup> Fast forward to two years, and the country continues to be mired in old challenges. Multiple factors, including a poorly-skilled workforce, have held India back from attaining that title. According to a report released by FICCI in 2015, the dual challenge in India includes severe paucity of highly-trained, quality labor, as well as non-employability of large sections of the educated workforce that possess little or no job skills.<sup>(2)</sup>

Against this backdrop is a growing number of youth in India from rural areas whose ambitions are weighed down by obstacles. “With an MSW degree, I was only able to land a job that earned me Rs 5000 a month as a counsellor at a state-run boys home,” says Prashanth Uppar. Uppar belongs to a large family of nine in Haveri district, North Karnataka. With a retired father, the family relied on the financial income of the sons and Prashanth felt the pinch quite strongly. “My father was opposed to the idea of further studies as that would mean an end to my contributions.” Prashanth, however, was certain that a degree from DET would only accelerate his career growth. Soon enough, with some convincing, his parents were on board too. “I had friends who had undergone the training and I had seen for myself the change in their personality, communication skills and overall attitude towards work,” says Prashanth.

**The DET Value: Focus on self in the pursuit of professionalism**

Prashanth enrolled for the eight-month DFP at Deshpande Foundation. Describing the experience as an “eye opener”, Prashanth is all praises for the program. “DFP helped me step out of my difficult world for a brief time and focus only on myself,” he says. The academic rigour trained him to be more disciplined, focused and

1) The Guardian 2) Skill Development in India, FICCI

*“When my son told me that he was planning to join the Deshpande Fellowship Program, I was strongly against the idea. I told him a salary of INR 5000 was good enough for the family and that would only increase with time. He explained to me that would have to go out the village to gain deeper understanding of the development sector. Now that he is at a salary of INR 35,000 and has so many people working under him, I encourage him to work harder and study as much as he wants.”*

- Prashanth's father

### WHAT WORKED FOR PRASHANTH

- Engaging with community
- Marketing
- People management
- Motivating subordinates



**PRASHANTH UPPAR** | Deshpande Fellowship Program (Social Entrepreneurship) Alumnus, 2012

Now when I look back, I feel I should have joined DET right after college. This place has **taught me so much.**

hard working. Classes would begin at 6 am and end at 11 pm, and every student was expected to put their best foot forward. Team work was emphasized and Prashanth learnt a lot from that experience.

A distinct feature of the DFP course is the activity-based project that encourages students to step out of their comfort zone and tap into their inner potential for solutions to real-world challenges. Activities like ‘Move Marketing’ and the ‘5k Challenge’ require students to come up with creative business strategies in order to maximize returns on a fixed amount of money within a week. “My group decided to cater food to hostel students, but we ended up also selling clothes and tea near bus stands and hospitals. In the end, we were able to convert Rs 5000 to Rs 6500!” he adds.

Through exposure visits, he met marginalized families, learnt about their struggles and the role of NGOs in helping to uplift them. It broadened his perspective beyond anything he had experienced in his village. By the end of the short-term program, Prashanth was able to see a noticeable difference – he felt job-ready.

### Productive careers: Operational excellence in the social sector

Prashanth, who graduated from DET in 2012, found a lucrative job at Save a Mother Foundation as Program Manager. He was immediately entrusted with expanding operations to other districts in Karnataka, allowing him to apply several key operational strategies that he had learnt at DET. Within a few years, he was promoted to a higher position – handling operations across two states and earning more than double his initial salary. He currently oversees the implementation of maternal healthcare projects in 170 villages in Karnataka and in a 100 villages in Telangana with over 30 employees reporting to him. “I am in charge of making sure operations across all these locations are smooth,” he adds.

Today, Prashanth is a dedicated professional in the social sector. He has fond memories of his eight months at DET, where he found a family in his batchmates, overcame his shyness and brought pride to his father. Prashanth closes by saying, “I am what I am because of DET.”

### STUDENT PROFILE AND IMPACT POST-DET

Educational qualification	MSW
First generation learner	Yes
Pre-DET monthly household income	Rs. 7,000
Sector of employment	Project Management
Hailing from	Randemnur
Working in	Gadak

Salary Increment (INR):

