

Our Journey

The LSF story starts with a friendship and bond that developed in 2002. A friendship that our founder Nitin Orayan developed with children of Savroli village which is on the outskirts of Mumbai. Nitin had taken a two-and-a-half-month sabbatical to spend some time writing his book in solitude amongst nature in a farmhouse away from the city. One day while writing a few pages by the riverside, a few children from the village befriended him. This soon transformed into an open classroom by the river every evening for one hour as a ritual for Nitin. He engaged the children with spellbound stories while also helping them complete their homework. The time spent with these children was etched in Nitin's mind and even when we returned to his city life these moments lingered on. A deep calling to support village children's education developed for Nitin.

Two years later, in September 2004, Nitin decided to leave behind the city and plunge into village life to do something that had touched a deep chord within him. With a change in circumstances, he could not go back to the same village and decided to live at Ganeshpuri, a village well known for its hot springs and as the abode of Saint Nityananda.

Once at Ganeshpuri, he naturally started connecting with the children there and getting to know the community. In April 2005, he met a senior Western couple, Tino and Kathrina, who used to spend 4-5 months a year in Ganeshpuri running a Public Trust. The couple offered Nitin to run a one month course for young undergraduates of the village, teaching them English in order to imbibe confidence and inculcate a positive perception of the western world. Nitin helped about 30 youngsters in this one month and by the end of the course had some of them join him to start a social service project to help school children learn English.

Nitin, led by some of his young teacher colleagues, bicycled down to nearby primary and middle-level schools in the vicinity to gain support from school teachers to send their students to the programme. With immense support from different areas, the 'Learning Space' centre was inaugurated on August 15, 2005. And by the end of 2005 about 75 children had enrolled in the programme.

After the demise of Mr. Robert Dias, Co-Trustee, in 2008, Mr. Jamshed Banaji, a renowned architect in Mumbai, was approached to enter the Trust as a Co-Trustee. Mr. Banaji appreciated the work being done at Learning Space and joined the Trust.

By then, Learning Space Foundation had penetrated Zilla Parishad schools establishing the need for creative and participative methods of English learning among primary school children. Word started to spread about the change Learning Space was trying to bring about and schools from neighboring villages of Bhiwandi taluka invited Learning Space teachers to help with English subject component and this marked the outreach of Learning Space.

By 2010-11, the outreach took a formal shape and with written permissions and Teacher Training programmes, Learning Space molded from being a supplementary programme to a large format mainstream support programme.

At the end of year 2011, the originator of an English learning project named 'Eteach English', Mr. Astad Parakh, a prominent Rotarian from Mumbai, approached Nitin Orayan with the idea of using the electronic medium in the form of pre-recorded DVDs, with enjoyable animated English learning content, in village schools associated with LSF.

As English learning in primary schools was the frontrunner programme for LSF since inception, the E-teach grew in size and scale every year, covering more schools and students, with events for advocating the electronic medium.

Alongside, in 2013-14, LSF identified a need to improve learning for village preschool children between the age 3-6 in Anganwadis around LSF centre and this initiative began to take a small informal shape starting with 10 Anganwadis. The project was called Early Learners Development Programme (ELDP) and over the last 4 years has developed into a formidable structure and outcomes established with preschool learners. Around the ELDP, much thinking and research were done at LSF to renovate and rejuvenate the Anganwadi buildings, to offer the village children a bright and friendly school building which promotes learning and development. Along with the infrastructure, the overall development of methodology of teaching at Anganwadis is the prime focus for ELDP.

Over this course of time, LSF has established a strong base and able networking with government schools and communities of Thane and Palghar districts. This has fostered the growth of many infrastructure and student empowerment projects along with the primary movement.