

TTM! CONNECT



"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song."

- Maya Angelou

I hear from you, time and time again, that TTM! holds a very special space in your hearts. It is a space of loving, it is a space of giving, and it is a space of caring. TTM! sings, because it has a song!

A day will dawn, when your mentees will look back at the years they spent with you. They may not be able to identify the subtle changes you have wrought in their very being. They may not remember the exact lessons you taught them.

But they will always remember how you cradled them when they were low, celebrated each achievement with joy, and inspired them to march ahead confidently to the beat of their own drum. They will remember your song... the generosity of your spirit, your warmth, your wisdom, and your compassion. For you have touched their soul.

So, my dear, dear friends, my TTM! family, keep singing from wherever you are...NCR, Chandigarh, Kanpur, Kolkata, Patna, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Indore, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Dubai, Muscat, Kenya, London, USA, Australia. Sing joyously, sing in harmony...and let us continue to soar!

Malavika Sharma

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." - Maya Angelou

THE TTM! STORY as told by Debika Lahiri

Let's start at the very beginning – a very good place to start...

I'm going to tell you a little bit about our beginnings five years ago. On the Wednesday in the 3rd week of April 2016, I got a call from an unknown number. I picked up the phone and the unknown voice at the other end introduced herself as Mala, my close friend Kanika's sister. Kanika was well acquainted with my twin passions, teaching kids and the English language.

Mala and I chatted for a while and she told me about her (then!) radical idea of teaching kids English over the phone. At the end of the conversation she asked when we could meet. I proposed meeting the following week. Mala asked me for my address and she said she was sending me her car RIGHT away.

An hour later I found myself in Mala's basement, where she was telling me all about her idea of Talk to Me! Her enthusiasm, energy and excitement were and are contagious and I was thrilled to be asked to join the journey. The next day Mala took me to the NIIT centre in Begumpur, where we recruited our very first mentees from among the kids Mala was already teaching and I began to teach from that day onwards. By that very first weekend, Mala had inducted Neelam, Renuka, and Madhur to our fold and by early the following week, Aruna and Ninu (Kiran) were on board.

I spoke to absolutely everyone I knew who I knew would be interested and some of our steadfast mentors originate from those early days. A few days later Mala had formed a WhatsApp group and messages and ideas were flying back and forth, fast and furiously. The excitement was palpable and we were all blown away by Mala's brainchild. Talk to Me! was born.

Malavika Sharma goes on to add:



When Debika and I first spoke, the structure of TTM! was completely hazy in my mind. I had this notion that we should teach, but I had given no thought at all to how or what we would teach. Debika picked up on the most vital ingredient... lesson plans! She ran home, enthused and excited, and started to churn out this vast body of material that is the cornerstone of all of our efforts. Her lesson plans were the first and THE most important step towards becoming both credible and professional!

PATTACHITRA

The Art of Storytelling

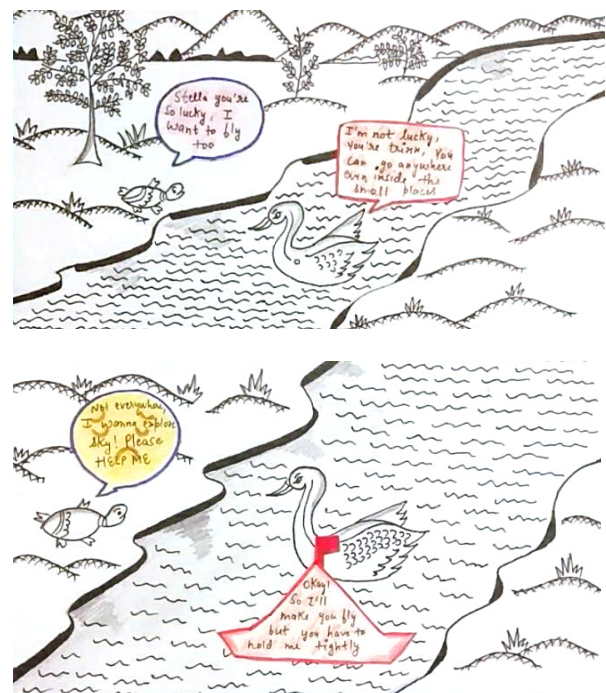
From June 21st - 25th, some especially artistically talented mentees had the opportunity of attending a workshop on “Animal comics and Pattachitra”.

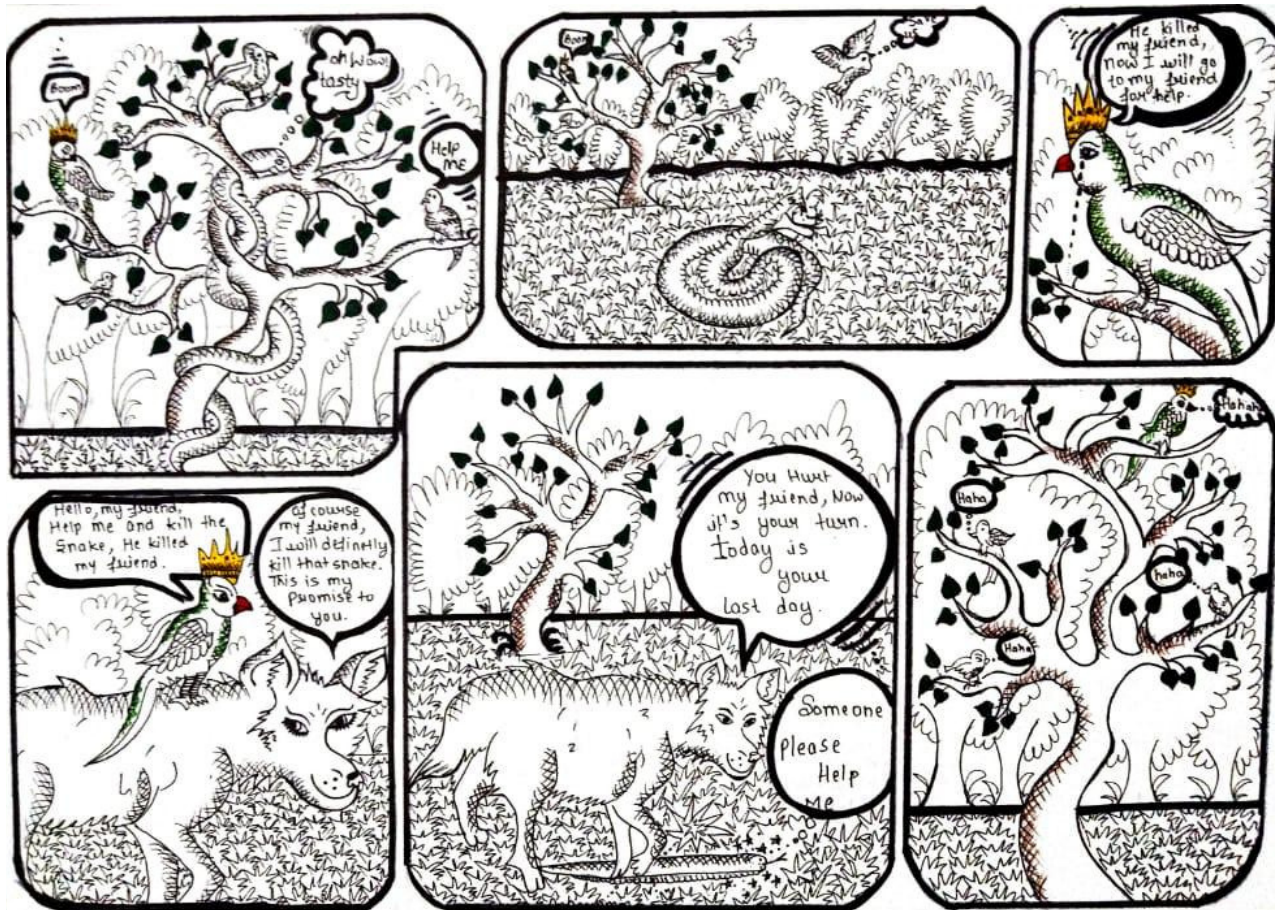
Pattachitra is a traditional art form from Odisha and something totally new for the children to experience. The facilitators and the master artist himself, needless to say, were fantastic at what they did, not just the art but in transferring that specific knowledge to the children. There were fears about how successful this workshop would be using an online medium. However, the children left us spellbound with their curiosity and eagerness to explore this new avenue, interest and willingness to learn (despite the constraints), and dedication and hard work. Thus the workshop resulted in some fabulous art produced solely by our talented mentees which took our breath away. The most amazing thing was how (in the words of the facilitator) they saw the children bloom and blossom and saw a marked difference from day 1 to 5.

The mentees opened up and spoke and shared their drawings and stories. Their animal sketches were not only beautiful, but full of meaning and love. As they shared with us how much they enjoyed the workshop and how much it meant to them, we sat flabbergasted at the immense talent we had seen. We hope TTM! will continue to be ‘the wind beneath the wings’ of these most deserving mentees, and continue to uncover their immense talent.

Amita Saluja, Group Head and Organizer

We are very grateful to Prachi Dalal, an educator who has worked closely with artisans from the village of Raghurajpur, Orissa, Mr. Maharana, the master artist, and our very own Amita Saluja for providing this wonderful opportunity for experiential learning.





MULTIPLICATION

That's the Name of the Game



At the end of April 2021, TTM! JEET Tutorial, one of our partner institutions, extended help in Maths to our Class X mentees. Indrajeet Kumar who runs JT, personally holds group sessions for one hour, thrice a week, for 10 eager learners. From feedback received, mentees are benefiting from these sessions which are held on Google Meet.

The 'Joy of Giving' is certainly infectious! Indrajeet Kumar, himself a professional Maths instructor with a B. Tech and M. Stat, willingly volunteered to teach our mentees - despite being extremely busy with his own tutorial classes where he teaches Science stream students from Class IX-Graduation. How much we have to be grateful for!

ACADEMIC SKILLS WORKSHOP

Dr. Vasudha Agarwal, a Child Psychologist conducted a 10 module workshop on Academic Skills for Class 9-12 TTM! mentees. The sessions were moderated by Surita Banerjee. The workshop started on 7th May and concluded on 15th July, with around 20 mentees benefitting from this exercise. The aim of the workshop was to develop skills on improving concentration, time management, memory techniques, goal setting, sleep hygiene, identifying personal learning styles and managing test anxiety. The ten sessions were interactive, and encouraged group discussions. At the end of the sessions, each child was given a certificate of participation, designed by Priya. We received a lot of positive feedback. Here are some highlights:

Rohini Sen, mentee and participant

I was really glad to be a part of the "academic skills workshop ". I got to know about myself. Before that I didn't know that who am I? What am I best suited with? I got to know about my learning style, how to concentrate and focus better. Before that I knew that if we take less sleep and utilise that time for study then we will score better, but I was wrong, good sleep is needed for better performance. I got to know about the importance of sleep. I learned about time management. I was really poor in this matter, but now I manage my time like a professional. Thanks to the Talk to Me! family for giving me a chance to be a part of these wonderful sessions. And special thanks to Vasudha Ma'am and Surita Ma'am. They are really friendly, they made those conversations really interactive. Thanks a lot to everyone behind this. I would like to thank my mentor also, Mr. Siddhartha Srivastava. In my weekly classes he teaches me English and general knowledge also. He teaches those lessons interestingly, he links other things with that too so that I could learn beyond English. He gives me some role-plays so that my public speaking improves. So grateful and honored to have Siddhartha Sir as my mentor.

Tanu Priya, Group Head

Congratulations Surita and Vasudha for this amazing session. I am sure the students have gained a lot and will also pass their knowledge to their siblings and peers. This chain will continue and pass on to many, many more! What a wonderful thought of a repeat session Surita. Thank you Priya for the lovely certificates. This really encourages the students.

Certificate of Excellent Participation

talk
to
me!

Be it known that

Sakshi Shukla

Having satisfied the requirements of
'The Academic Skills Workshop'

Conducted by Dr. Vasudha Agarwal,

Has meritoriously won the

Active Participation Certificate

on the fifteenth day of July,

In the year two thousand and twenty-one

(15 July, 2021)

Surita Banerji, moderator

It's been absolutely delightful to interact with all the mentees. Vasudha can't stop praising our bright, enthusiastic mentees." Vasudha went on to add: "I was very happy with the mentee interaction. Before the talk I had received twenty questions and even after the talk many mentees came up with questions. One could feel the mind working towards career thought.



We are thankful to Dr. Vasudha Agarwal for providing our mentees with this workshop. With a doctorate in Psychology and training in Rapid Emotive Behavior Therapy, Dr. Agarwal now works as a freelance counselor. She is also associated with an NGO working with MENSA students from EWS backgrounds.

TTM! PARTNERSHIPS

It's heartening to see how our outreach is increasing; we now have 17 partnerships on board!

I'm sharing with you a message that Neelam has received from Dilruba Kalsi, the Director of the Vidya Schools. It is SUCH a heartening endorsement of Neelam's extraordinary commitment and management of this relationship. Congratulations Neelam!

"I look forward to a continuum with TTM! It's been such an impactful programme. I would like to extend it to our primary school, Bal Vihar in Panchsheel and the SDMC schools in Sarvpriya Vihar, Hauz Khas and the Police Training School with whom we have a public private partnership."

Here's what Malavika had to say:

This message takes me down memory lane, to the early days of TTM! where some combination of Debika, Bridget, and I, would pound the streets with a dream and a begging bowl, hunting for institutions to believe in us.

In those early days, we were often greeted with skepticism and even disdain.

The situation has turned around so completely now. We have not made a single "sales" call in years! Our work speaks for us. And we are inundated with requests for help. I want to thank each one of you for your whole hearted commitment to a dream that we dream together, and for infusing it with life. We are an extraordinary family!

And when Kavleen, who not only mentors three students, but is also the Group Head for a new partnership in Sangrur, shared these comments from one of her mentees, we know our amazing mentors must be doing it right!



Today during class Sakshi said something which just touched my soul. Wanted to share with you all. She said, "Ma'am, when I grow up once I am settled I would like to join TTM! and teach someone like you are teaching me. It would be my way of repaying back." God bless her.

CBSE CLASSES

Speaking to Anushree Mahajan after she's taken one of her weekly CBSE classes is uplifting and energizing, to say the least. Her enthusiasm and excitement are infectious! She reminds me of champagne - bubbly and with something special - she simply makes me smile. Anushree has been with TTM! for the past four years. During this time, she's moved from mentoring, to being Group Head, to taking up the challenge of the weekly CBSE classes. Being a trained teacher, she happily jumped into the fray - taking on 21 students who had opted for the Class 10 CBSE programme. A mix of 14 girls and 7 boys, she observed that while the girls tend to be much more proactive and confident, the boys often have to be encouraged to come out of their shell. While staying on track with the CBSE syllabus, Anushree encourages her students to think outside the box. Here's a broad overview of the seven additional tools she pulls out of her resources:



General Knowledge: keeping abreast with the world around us whether it is space tourism or the cyclone and even the Tokyo Olympics.



Learning Abbreviations: e.g. FOMO - Fear of missing out, JOMO - Joy of missing out, ASAP - As soon as possible, FYI - For your information, and many more.



Value Based Studies: to build a good character as even the easiest of poems have a message. Engaging the thought process and what you can take from it. Teaching empathy – Each One Teach One!



Sharing the Joy of Cooking: boys too are encouraged to break the stereotype.



Mental Fitness: to be strong and courageous, including practicing yoga and pranayama during COVID times.



Last, but by no means least: Awareness of Indian Heritage and Culture, and encouraging national pride.



Developing Hobbies: like gardening and growing vegetables in drums and other handy pots around the home.

NB: This year there will be 2 Board exams (not 1). The December exams will be based on the Term 1 syllabus, and the March exams will be based on the Term 2 syllabus.

CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER...

Neelam Kapur's mentee, Hari Kishan Yadav has scored 96% overall, with 93% in English in the CBSE Class 12 Board Exams. Here's what Neelam had to say: "I am completely overwhelmed. Hari Kishan was quivering with excitement, and kept asking me if I was happy with the news! He brought tears to my eyes."

Deepika Mago's mentee, Nandini Chauhan, scored 91% in English in the CBSE Class 12 Board Exams. On learning of Nandini's achievement, this is what Deepika had to say: "So thrilled for her. Thanks to the entire TTM! family for this opportunity."

Manoj More, a mentee in Ratna's Salaam Baalak Mumbai group, graduated with a CGPA of 7.443 from Savitribai Phule Pune University's Indapur College of Architecture. The oldest of the Mumbai mentees, Manoj has set the perfect example for others.

Vaseema's two mentees also performed well in the CBSE Class 12 Board Exams. Kashish Chetwal scored 99% in English and 90.6% overall and Vishal scored 95% in English and 95% overall. Vaseema's total commitment to these boys over the past couple of years is truly amazing and their performance is testimony to this.

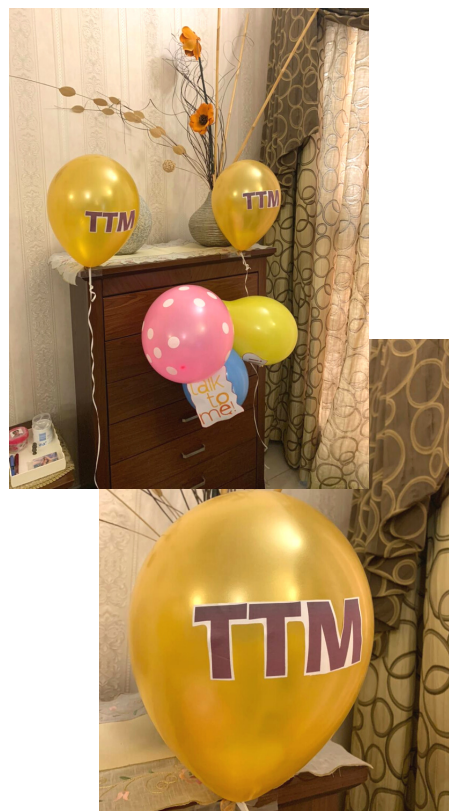
MENTOR / MENTEE ROUNDUP

It's truly commendable how creative our Group Heads are while working with their various teams. Following are a couple of examples of these round-ups with the players involved:

Rashmi Jain, Group C

I am happy to share that we had a Mentor Mentee meet of Group G, named Huddle and Cuddle on Zoom! The TTM! jingle was playing in the background as the participants were making their entry and the others were waiting. That set the mood.

The subject was "How I helped out and how I was helped by someone during the pandemic!" The ease with which the interaction took place was amazing! Guess what both the mentors and mentees found most helpful during the pandemic? TTM!



Rajini Saxena, Udyam Trust

Had a wonderful group meeting yesterday to give mentees a chance to speak in front of a selected audience. It was very encouraging to see their preparation, enthusiasm and confidence. The mentors' involvement was evident. It was decided that henceforth in every meeting, one of the mentors from the group will give useful tips to the mentees on a relevant topic. This time, Rajat Ray shared useful tips on public speaking.

PS Following the success of Rajat's successful session on public speaking, he has now agreed to do an introductory talk to all mentees from Grade 9-12. The talk will air on Zoom and Youtube on August 29th at 11:30 am.

Priya Suri Dhawan, Rishikesh MENSA

We recently completed the first TTM! Rishikesh Mensa group meeting. The following invite went out to the mentors and mentees:

Dear TTM! Rishikesh team members , A warm hello! The purpose of the meeting is to have Fun. You don't have to prepare anything. All you have to do is sit back, relax and enjoy the session. A part of the agenda is a surprise. However, the non-surprise part I will share with you. I am sending below the link to the TTM! jingle with the lyrics which we all will sing (hoping with great gusto and pride). Therefore you have a choice in advance to hear the jingle and read the lyrics. During the session we will be playing a fun game called Tambola or Bingo. Details of which I will be sending you shortly.

As one of the mentors observed, **“That was such a FUN evening with the music and Bingo, and the beautiful backdrop and such a lively set of mentors.”**

Iqbal Judge, K2 Group

The K2 group had a discussion on the topic of Body Image. Each mentee had selected a particular aspect after discussion with their mentor. They then prepared their speeches over some days. The youngest member of the group, 13 year old Rukmani, was given the opportunity to be the MC, which was a huge challenge for her especially as she has just started lessons with TTM! However, with her mentor, Sangeeta's help, she managed very well. All the mentees were applauded for their efforts, and were awarded virtual certificates.

Anonymous, Mentor

About four years ago, I went into a deep depression. At a marriage function, I met a relative with whom I shared my story. She introduced me to Neelam Kapur who encouraged me to join TTM! At first, I was apprehensive because I had no professional experience. Under Neelam's guidance I tried to perfect myself. Today, I am back to my old self. For this, I profoundly thank TTM! They not only help mentees, but mentors too.

Anonymous, Mentor

Two years ago I lost both my parents in a span of a few months. TTM! came into my life like a ray of sunshine and engulfed me in its warmth. Mentoring gave me a new purpose in life.

MENTORS' CORNER



Debika Lahiri

We were out and about distributing ice cream to celebrate Joya's* 20th birthday. When we came home from our expedition, a bansuriwala was waiting for us. One of my fellow mentors on TTM! knew of Joya's interest in the urban soundscape, and bansuriwalas in particular, so she sent one our way with some money for an autorickshaw. The bansuriwala regaled us with three songs. We asked him how he learnt to play the flute so beautifully. He used to work in a dhaba apparently, and jobless during the lockdown, he taught himself how to play the flute from YouTube videos! He was on his way home to Gorakhpur for his daughter's wedding. We gave him a present of some money. As he was leaving, he gave Joya a carefully chosen flute from his collection!

**And here's a sequel to the story above that proves the adage –
"What goes around, comes around!"**

There is a tempo driver we have used over the years to transport furniture we were donating, etc. Joya was distributing rations for Feeding India and Nasim transported the rations and took videos of the distribution. He was singing the whole time. He had no work at all, and I would give him rations and a 1,000 rupees from time to time, although he never asked for it. This past Eid, I thought of Nasim, and sent him a thousand rupees. He rang my doorbell and said he wanted his little boys to meet me. They brought a box of kalakand and a large bag of namkeen for me! That's the last thing I was expecting and I was touched beyond words. I gave his son the bansuri that the bansuriwala had given Joya! The story just came full circle! I couldn't get over Nasim's generosity. Such a good man with such a cheerful spirit.

**Joya mentored our star mentee, Rafi, five summers ago.*

CHICKEN SOUP STORY

Neelam Kapoor

Krishan was 16 years old when I first met him. He had just entered grade XI. He was small for his age, clearly malnourished, and caught every bug that went around. I mentored him twice a week, and he always wore the same red shirt, perhaps the only one he owned. His father was an impoverished, illiterate auto driver, and the entire family lived in a small hovel in a dark, dank alley in Malviya Nagar. His name is Krishan (Name changed for confidentiality.)

The first thing that struck me about him, was his value systems. He had a very strong sense of right and wrong. He quoted often from the Gita, or from Gandhi's writings. He would not play with other children because they were not 'good'; they used bad language. He would not participate in any class parties because they served unhealthy foods like Coca Cola, chips, and deep-fried samosas. He would spend a large part of the evening praying at the local temple. He was a misfit in the rough and tumble world of teenagers. Even more so because of the socio-economic disparity between him and the others. He was very alone.

Here I was, with this brilliant, but reticent, stubborn, supercilious but courteous young lad who would never look up; he spoke little, and when he did, he was barely audible. My primary focus initially, was just to get him to speak to me and trust me with his feelings. I worked hard to help him understand the reasons for his isolation, so that he could be better adjusted to his environment. Slowly he started to accept that stereotyping people was a limiting attitude, flexibility was necessary, friends provided a support system, sports added to a feel-good factor, and, most of all, that he was not always right!

Gradually he thawed, he spoke with more confidence, and made a few friends. He improved steadily until the lock down in March 2020. Economic compulsions forced the family to move to their hometown in Uttar Pradesh. We stayed in touch on the telephone whenever he had access to a network. My biggest challenge was to continue working on his personality development via pep talks on the phone.

Lockdown eased and Krishan was back in Delhi. When I called his number, his mother, most distressed, told me that Krishan was not willing to take his board exams. When I spoke to him, he was depressed and tearful. He had been in his village in Jaunpur without his new textbooks, with negligible access to the internet and was just not prepared for the exams. An otherwise academically bright and diligent student had lost his confidence completely.

I would call him almost daily, prodding him to make up for lost time because he had extraordinary retention and grasping power. He had to believe in himself! I took it upon myself to be the voice that would remind him of his worth. It was a daunting task for both of us, these times test faith. Then there was a miracle. The exams got postponed! He got more time to prepare! This time he had all his books and I could hear him smile on the cell phone. It warmed my heart.

It has been an incredible journey for him, from loneliness to acceptance; from the depth of despair to a determination to succeed; from a forced break in his studies, to incredible hard work. From almost certain failure to a grand finale, a CBSE score of 96%! He was deliriously happy and asked if I was happy, too. Ofcourse I am! I have shed many tears of joy!

He tells me constantly, that mine was the voice in the dark that encouraged him, gave him hope and finally pulled him out of the pit he had fallen into. Walking this path with Krishan has been an invaluable learning for both of us. There is no substitute for hard work and perseverance, but in testing times, one's faith in the Supreme and belief in oneself is the anchor that holds us!



If you have any chicken soup stories to tell, please share them with us so we can include them in the next newsletter.

Thank you!

NEWSLETTER TEAM

Bridget Era Ganguly
Virat Mehta
Debika Lahiri
Kimaya Singh

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Rajat Ray

SPECIAL THANKS

Priya Suri Dhawan for reviving our jingle and for giving the TTM! family a song to sing.