

TTM! CONNECT



TALK TO ME!

A MANIFESTATION OF GRACE

Talk To Me! has its roots in the Begumpur slum in Delhi where I started working in 2005. Along with two friends, I started a remedial education programme, and then, a computer centre. When I looked back after ten years, I knew that our efforts had shaped our students into grounded, motivated youngsters, and significantly enhanced their academic performance. However, we could not bring their English to the level where they could use the language confidently in a work environment. This was a gaping hole in our achievements!

English, at many levels, is an irrational language. These students did not have the advantage of hearing English fall on their ears, so they found it excruciatingly difficult to grasp the complexities of the language. It was a huge challenge to teach English effectively in a group setting. I wish we had given them individual attention.

Sidestep into another part of my life...I was blessed to find my Guru, Swami Satyasangananda, in a hamlet called Rikhia in Jharkhand. The essence of her teachings and her life's mission is distilled into three words: SERVE LOVE GIVE. She knew of my work in Begumpur, but constantly urged me to do more, much more.

On one of my trips back from her ashram, I sat on the train, returning from an oasis of simplicity and serenity to a frenetic and urbane Delhi. As I sat looking past the dappled swathes of green that rushed by, an idea brushed aside my reverie. Was it my idea, or was it a mandate? Let me call it a mandate.

The cardinal points of the mandate were crystal clear: I was going to start a programme to mentor children from underserved backgrounds, mentorship was to be one-on-one, not part of a group programme; we would help our mentees to converse confidently in the English language; interactions would be conducted on WhatsApp; and, most importantly, there would be no monetary transactions. Our mentors would give freely of themselves!

Almost immediately after I reached home, my sister asked me to meet her friend Debika Lahiri, who was interested in working with me in Begumpur. Little did I know that Debika was the instrument who would shape the mandate into reality. In walked Debika, and instead of telling her about the work I was doing, I shared with her the skeletal idea that had manifested on my journey home.

Debika was hooked! She was determined to be part of this new journey! She started talking enthusiastically about developing lesson plans. Lesson plans? I had not gotten beyond thinking about the four cardinal points that had been planted in my mind on my return journey. And here was Debika talking about lesson plans!

Debika knew what she was talking about as she is a grammarian, with decades of experience in teaching English! Off she went on an exuberant cloud and was back in a few days grasping a sheaf of papers that held a set of brilliant lesson plans. And TTM! was born! Debika became our first mentor, our first Group Head, and the author of every single one of our lesson plans.

After that, all the pieces fell into place rapidly. For it was ordained! Kiran Singh, Madhur Bhargav and Neelam Kapur were the first to buy into our vision. Shortly thereafter, Aruna Mehta and Renuka Mahajan joined the merry band. In an act of faith, these five, along with Debika, became our earliest mentors. Each one of our founding mothers went on to become powerful Group Heads and played a major role in defining our trajectory. Over time, they became the guiding light and the inspiration for those that followed.

Aruna took over the task of assessing all potential mentees to ensure that they have the language skills to absorb our lesson plans. Kiran and Aruna organized our early events. Madhur became our mentee co-ordinator and runs many of our workshops. Neelam does every single one of our Group Head orientations.

As we grew, we needed systems. Renuka stepped up to the plate. She is a genius at managing data. She put together the framework for creating a database of mentors and mentees. She also computerized our system for maintaining attendance. Bhaskar Joshi walked into the Begumpur Computer Centre looking to help; we discovered that he worked at the cutting edge of web design. He created our website.

Till that point, all our mentees were drawn from Begumpur. Many came into our fold, sipped thirstily from the fount of love that we gave them, and left as their circumstances changed. Then Nai Disha came on board. As we worked with them, we realized that our future lay in developing long-term partnerships with educational institutions. Bridget Ganguly jumped in and

started to pound the pavements to convince educational institutions to allow us to mentor their EWS students. Balvantray Mehta School was the first of her many success stories. She then shaped our brand identity: our tagline, and our elegant logo; she also took over the responsibility for all our external communications and for our publications.

The TTM! family expanded as mentors and mentees started to flow into our lives. Like mentees, some mentors also came into our fold, gave abundantly of themselves, and moved on as circumstances dictated. A special mention here of Tara Kripalani; her voice breathed life and excitement into the CBSE lessons that we teach. Her excellent videos are on the TTM! video channel.

Today, we have an impassioned family of two hundred and twenty mentors, across India and across continents, serving mentees from eighteen institutions. As we grew, I needed support to manage TTM! I dipped into a generation younger than mine; we now have Surita Banerjee and Tanu Priya Puri to manage and imagine our future. Together, they have been an invaluable asset, and have led TTM! confidently into fresh pastures.

It's hard to capture the ethos of our extraordinary TTM! family. Our mentors are passionate and compassionate, deeply committed, loving, and unbelievably supportive of one another. They are dream makers. They give our mentees the confidence to dream and then guide them to realize those dreams.

We work with a wish and a prayer...and a generous dollop of faith! Whenever there was an urgent need, a solution presented itself. At each crossroad, there has been guidance from another source. A seed was sown, its destiny was to bear fruit! And so, TTM! continues to SERVE LOVE GIVE!

I thank you, my TTM! family, with every fibre of my being, for your loving support as we continue to walk on this journey of giving. You have made TTM! what it is today. Look up at the skies. You are TTM! and TTM! is you.

~ Malavika Sharma

New partnerships

Our latest partnership is with Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar situated in Kalkaji, New Delhi. It is an all girls school affiliated to CBSE, with many students from the EWS segment of society. Pincha Singh from TTM! is the Group Head. Pincha has visited the school and met the principal and the 2 co-ordinators appointed by the school to oversee the TTM! programme. The school is very enthusiastic about the programme and is actively assisting in its implementation. We look forward to a mutually rewarding partnership and will strive to have a beneficial impact on these young lives.

Here's what Dilruba, an educationist and director at Sai has to say:

"The Talk To Me! programme is an ingenious way of enhancing the linguistic ability of the students in a structured, fun filled manner. I have experienced the implementation of the programme in a couple of institutions, and the impact on the communication skills of the beneficiaries has been impressive."



Conquering the “bogey” of Final Exams!

Three years ago, Amrita orchestrated the development of a completely new TTM! initiative. This was designed to help students of Class IX and X to overcome the challenge of understanding the English lessons on the CBSE curriculum. We familiarized them with several alien environments and concepts, using simple explanations and videos. Thus, we provided them a context within which they could understand the lessons.

These special sessions were also offered to non-mentees from partner institutions, to benefit the maximum number of children. The group classes were taken by Amrita for Class X, and by Vaseema for Class IX. Some mentors also opted to take these classes on a one-on-one basis with their mentees. Preparations are on now to start the classes for the 2023-24 academic year. Anushree has already started taking classes for Class XII; sessions for Class X and IX will commence in May.

Kavleen organized an orientation session, conducted by Amrita, for mentors who have shown interest in helping mentees understand the CBSE English syllabus.

Wrapping up this excellent initiative, the following are excerpts from what Mala had to say:

“It is always so joyous to be part of TTM! initiatives! They come together seamlessly because of the extraordinary commitment and teamwork within our family. Amrita was very sick with the flu. Yet she worked incredibly hard to put together a very detailed presentation for our mentors who have shown interest in teaching the CBSE syllabus. She was on air for an hour and a half and was clearly getting worse as the session progressed, but she soldiered on bravely till she completed her presentation. Bravo Amrita! You are truly inspiring. And then there was Anushree who is always on a high, and her enthusiasm is contagious! Thank you so much for jumping in and sharing your enthusiasm with all of us.

Last, but never least... Kavleen, who is always proactive and bursting with new ideas. It was Kavleen's idea and entirely her initiative that brought this orientation session into being. Thank you all. You make the TTM! family what it is today. Truly extraordinary!"

While encouraging the mentors to use the resources available on the TTM! website and YouTube, Mala cautioned them against the use of other websites where the quality of language used was questionable.

Anushree, who has been actively involved with TTM! in various capacities over five years, said these special CBSE sessions had been one of the most "fantastic experiences" of her lifetime. She went on to remind the participants that they were mentors, not teachers! What made the TTM! mentors different was that they brought innovation and research to the table. She cited the examples of Nelson Mandela and Anne Frank, and suggested that mentors research topics before each class to provide context for mentees who have had little exposure to the world outside India. This will help mentees gain a better understanding of the topics and make them more engaging and interesting. She urged mentors not to be daunted, but to get involved with this special initiative that had given her so much satisfaction over the years.



Mentor talk

My Journey to TTM!

Years and years of corporate life have left me harbouring some clichés in the garb of wisdom. 'Working with women is difficult' 'Only women colleagues' was somehow antithetical to creating and fostering a healthy and supportive work space' ... 'Most of social work is a brilliant excuse to have bloated egos ..' I had just gone past 50 years of existence, had just stopped working and was seeing changes in myself I didn't quite know, if and how to appreciate.

While I was towing all this baggage, I got to know about TTM! for the first time....a group of highly dedicated and compassionate women who mentored underprivileged students of different age groups to speak better in English. My baggage, remember? So, I dropped the idea of exploring it.

Amidst my travel and bike rides, I realised that I still had time to do something more. On the spur of the moment, I messaged TTM! amongst a couple of other places.

I got a call from TTM! in a couple of days. To my surprise, the person on the other end was neither too friendly to make me wary, nor too matter of fact for me to be dismissive. In my head, teaching and teaching on the phone translated to 'No experience, so not workable', only women and mostly older women as colleagues translated to 'definitely not workable' and something on the lines of giving back to the society translated to 'not sure if I want to get there and have a oversized ego' plus I realised with young kids I cannot experiment and see if it 'works for me'. I listened, asked a few questions, requested sometime to revert and stowed it away in a dark corner in my head.

A month or two later, Tara from TTM! reached out to me. We talked some more this time. I thought age was making me soft in my head, as I agreed to take it forward. I thought I will bow out if it gets to be too 'not doable' for me. This was July of 2020.

It's April of 2023, and here I am, continuing my journey with TTM! with my clichés blurred and baggage set aside. I still find it hard to believe that there is this place with such wonderful, giving, and genuinely caring people who are also so creative and full of excitement and zeal. It has been an eye-opening and humbling journey of three years for me at TTM!



PADMA RAO

Group Head, Him Jyoti Dehra Dun

BBB DAV PUBLIC SCHOOL MOONAK

I have 25 mentees in my group.

Most of the TTM! Mentees scored over 90 % in English. A big thank you to Vaseema for taking a group class to cover the Class 9 CBSE English syllabus with them.

A special thanks to two earnest mentors, Rama and Reena, who in the last few weeks before exams, took group classes in Science and Social Studies. This helped mentees to clear their doubts and the results were phenomenal!



KAVLEEN

Group Head, BBDAV Moonak

Centering your mentees

When mentees come to their TTM! sessions, they are often pressured and distracted. Here is a suggestion, not a mandate. You might find it useful to invest a few moments in helping them get centered. Here is a very simple exercise you can use. Have them fold their hands and shut their eyes. Request them to focus their awareness on their in-breath and then their out-breath. Help them become aware of the breath as it enters the nostrils and then leaves the nostrils. Start with a count of just 10 breaths. You may build up the number of breaths gradually over several sessions as they begin to relate to this practice.

We hope you will find that this exercise improves the ability of your mentees to relax and concentrate. If they find this useful, you might want to encourage them to add this practice to their daily routines.



Mentee talk

Tanya Yadav is a Mensa mentee, mentored by Swati Bajaj. Here's what Swati has to say about her, "Over the past four years, Tanya's growth in confidence has been commendable. From a shy, introverted teenager to a 'grown up young lady' (almost), Tanya is a good singer, a budding artist (her work was shared in earlier newsletters), a Korean YouTube watcher and a keen Astronomy 'fan'. All-in-one! Very proud of her." Following are some interesting astronomical events in 2023 that Tanya wanted to share:

January 6 - Full Moon. The Moon will be located on the opposite side of the Earth as the Sun and its face will be fully illuminated. This phase occurs at 23:09 UTC.

February 20 - New Moon. The Moon will be located on the same side of the Earth as the Sun and will not be visible in the night sky.

March 20 - March Equinox. The March equinox occurs at 21:17 UTC. The Sun will shine directly on the equator and there will be nearly equal amounts of day and night throughout the world.

April 20 - Hybrid Solar Eclipse. A hybrid solar eclipse occurs when the Moon is almost too close to the Earth to completely block the Sun. This type of eclipse will appear as a total eclipse to some parts of the world and will appear annular to others.



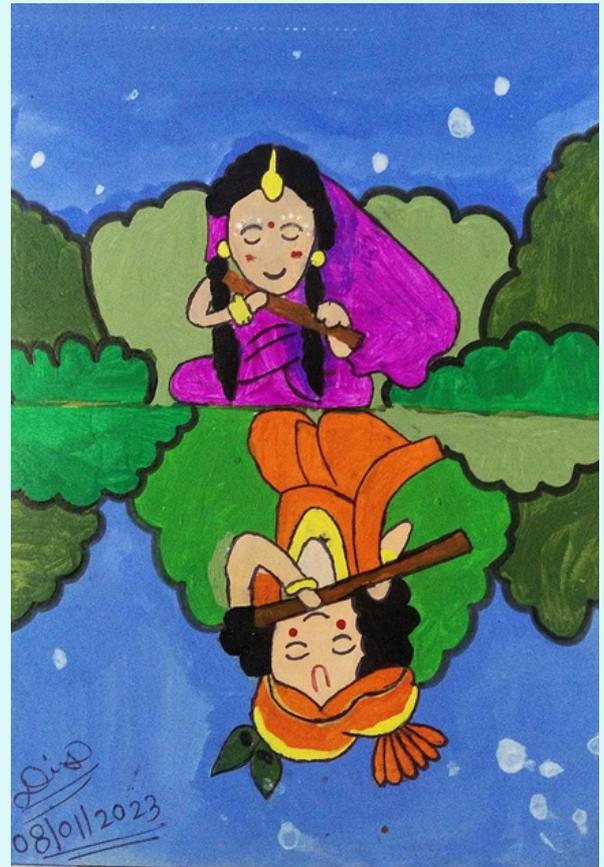
~TANYA YADAV

Mensa Rishikesh

The boy (Harry Potter) has taught me many things in his epic adventure; the boy wrapped in scarlet-red and gold-colored robes (symbolizing bravery, courage and chivalry), a lightning scar on his forehead and blinking through the generous-green eyes that were like Lily Potter, his mother. He was orphaned at the age of one, and tortured by the Dursleys. But Dumbledore taught him, "It matters not what someone is born to, but what they grow to be." Harry also learned a lesson from his godfather that "the people who love us, never really leave us; we can always find them in our hearts."

I have learnt from Harry that no man is defeated who has friends; friends who could stand up to speak for you and sit down to listen too.





WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR - Rabindranath Tagore

This poem was written by Rabindranath Tagore during pre-independence days, when India was a colony of the British. The theme of the poem is absolute freedom; where he imagines a country wherein people live without any sort of fear but with pure dignity...they are not suppressed by any authority. The idea of democracy seems well represented here.

A country where education is accessible to all irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and so on. One education for all, without discrimination.

He appeals for a united India where people remain free from superstitions and try to achieve perfection in their skill sets. The world is not broken into fragments.

ISHA PANWAR

Mensa Rishikesh



Congratulations !!!

Mensa Rishikesh - Ashutosh

Swati's mentee Ashutosh from Mensa Rishikesh stood first in his class and scored 99/100 in English .

Wow!! Swati kudos to you and Ashutosh!! Congratulations !!

Saraswati - Khushi and Kashish

Congratulations to Khushi and Kashish from Saraswati for winning 2nd and 3rd prizes respectively in the poster making competition run by Student Vision.



Khushi



Kashish

Chicken Soup - Sushma's story

It all began in April 2015, when Kiran and Sushma connected through an outreach programme in the Begumpur area of Delhi, which further blossomed under TTM! At the time, Sushma was undergoing computer training at NIIT while working with a company as an accountant.

As expected, over the years, Sushma married, moved to Patiala and had a little boy, Himanshu, who is now 4 years old. Undaunted by distance, time and other commitments, this special mentor/mentee relationship with Kiran continued. Sushma simultaneously pursued her education through the Delhi University School of Correspondence and Continuing Education.

Fast forward to April 2023. After years of hard work and commitment by Sushma, with encouragement from her mentor, she earned her BA degree from Delhi University. What is commendable is that she graduated with a first division, despite having homemaking responsibilities and looking after a child! She is now feeling so motivated that she is looking at options to earn her B.Ed degree.

Congratulations to Sushma - who not only did her own family and Kiran proud, but the entire TTM! family is happy to celebrate with her. She has certainly proved the adage "Where there's a will, there's a way!" All the best to her as she continues to follow her dreams.



Editorial team signing off

Isn't it amazing how the universe has conspired to connect all of us who are part of the TTM! family? Each one of us is uniquely different. However, there is a thread that connects us. Starting with Mala's editorial to the "Chicken Soup" story for this quarter, we all have something to talk about! So, please tell us more - the editorial team is all ears...

Enjoy your travels and the joy and blessings of family and friends.

Until the next newsletter - stay happy and healthy.

Bridget Ganguly

Rajat Ray



"We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men; and among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects." - Herman Melville