

BEYOND JUST SKILLS: FINDING RENEWED HOPE AT THE YES CENTRE



DURGA GUNDE (Nagpur)

When Durga Gunde walked into the Youth Employability Services (YES) Centre in Nagpur in 2018, it was a last-ditch effort. A migrant to Nagpur from the nearby town of Wardha in Maharashtra, Durga was living alone in hostels, trying to complete her graduation. Her parents worked house cleaning and caretaker jobs when possible, otherwise falling back on subsistence farming.

She was exhausted, having run from pillar to post trying to find a job. She'd faced severe adversity, even being taken advantage of by employment consultants and supposed well-wishers. So, it was with much scepticism that she took a chance on the YES centre.

What she found instead was a place of hope. The YES centre staff was different, she recalls. There was no requirement, they didn't ask for anything, they just helped.

The Nagpur YES Centre was set up under the direct supervision of United Nations Development Programme – a demonstration of a local level employment marketplace. It was a way to establish direct linkages between youth seeking apprenticeship and job opportunities, and the employers or industry associations. This centre was placed at the employment office of Nagpur, in collaboration with the skill department of Nagpur.

With an extensive grassroots awareness and mobilisation component, the centre supported the women through the entire journey until they landed a job. This started with counselling, understanding their aspirations and needs. The women were then put through a work readiness module, including basic

computer skills, communication, interview etiquette and practice. Finally, they were linked with local employers. Though a standard comprehensive module, the staff were also cooperative when students like Durga had to adjust their hours to meet their current commitments.

Durga's batch had about 20 young women, most of whom were also the first girls in their family to step out and seek paid employment. They may have been learning skills from a job perspective, but, as Durga discovered, these were useful in everyday life as well!

“For us coming from the villages,” says Durga, “there are a lot of little things we don't know. When we go to interviews, what kind of language to use, how to introduce ourselves, how to look professional. As they say, first impressions are last impressions. But for us, that was often negative.”

The training served her well. Her most memorable moment was when she landed a job with Future Supply Chain. It wasn't just about getting the job, but the self-confidence that came with acing the interview, honourably. “That positivity is something that will stay with me even in future interviews,” she reminisces. Unfortunately, she lost her job at Future Supply Chain in the wake of Covid-19. However, she did manage to get another job working security, which is currently paying the bills.

Her connections with the UNDP staff she met at YES Centre have endured and she still turns to them for advice. She has also recognised the value that the Centre has brought to her life.

“I've referred a lot of girls to YES centre. For those coming from the village, the need for a job is acute. There are a lot of people like me who get tired of just giving money to these agencies where nothing happens. I tell them, try YES centre. There's trust. There's quality.”