

# छोटे Pankh Badi उड़ान



## Introduction

At the Centre for Nurturing Future Leaders (CNFL), Piramal School of Leadership, we believe that leadership is not defined by authority, but by empathy, courage, and the will to serve. Our conviction is that sustainable change begins from within people and communities, and leadership must be cultivated with purpose, reflection, and action.

CNFL is a Center of Excellence dedicated to designing and institutionalizing leadership development processes for youth and women. Our programs are contextual, future-oriented, and rooted in the realities of India's development landscape.

**Gandhi Fellowship (GF):** A 23-month journey for young graduates to immerse in India's public education system. Fellows build self-awareness, practice system leadership, and strengthen education governance and climate sustainability, working closely with schools, communities, and government functionaries.

**Karuna Fellowship (KF):** Designed for women from underserved communities, many of whom have faced exclusion. Through collective platforms like Sanghas, fellows rebuild confidence, reclaim dignity, and emerge as community leaders driving change across families, villages, and schools.

**Karmayogi Saarthi (KS):** In partnership with the Capacity Building Commission, KS as young professionals get deployed to work with Ministries, Departments, and Organizations (MDOs), focusing on institutional strengthening and large-scale capacity building. By enhancing both systems and officers, KS supports government delivery with empathy, accountability, and impact.

**MITRA Young Professionals (YP):** CNFL with MITRA nurtures a cadre of skilled, empathetic professionals who act as a bridge between policy and practice. Rooted in sewa bhav, they bring fresh perspectives and data-driven insights to strengthen governance and ensure policies create real impact on the ground

This Coffee Table Book brings together personal transformation stories of youth and women across India through Gandhi Fellowship, Karuna Fellowship, Karmayogi Saarthi, and MITRA Young Professionals. It showcases how leadership journeys are not just about skills, but about reclaiming dignity, building resilience, and shaping a nation from within.



## Weaving Magic Through Stories



**Anupama Lakra**  
Karuna Fellow

I am Anupama Lakra, a Karuna Fellow from Jharkhand. Life was never easy as I lost my father when I was only six months old. My mother raised me by doing stitching work and faced constant social pressure to stop my education. Her hard work and courage inspired me to prove that women can rise above circumstances and lead their own path.

During the fellowship, I always wanted to create a fear-free environment where children could grow, take leadership of their own lives, and realise their potential in a supportive atmosphere. Therefore, I chose to work on the Project-Based Learning initiative, through which I had the opportunity to engage with government school students. I started a project called Kahaniyo Ka Rahasya where children explored stories, created their own, and filled our small library with imagination and voices from their lives.

This journey taught me that leadership is not only about building capacity but also about building confidence in many ways. It is about taking a stand for oneself and for others and about creating space for people to grow.



## From Challenge to Change

I am Rupali, a Karuna Fellow from Chhindwara, a small part of India. Balancing motherhood and my role as a changemaker have been challenging yet deeply rewarding. I dreamed of creating a space where children could learn freely and joyfully, and that dream slowly took shape with the fellowship.

During my journey of working with government schools, I got an opportunity to support a KGBV Vidyalaya and make it more conducive for learning. With this vision, I transformed a small room in the girls' hostel into a vibrant Student Learning Centre. At its heart is the Aesthetic Literacy Corner, where children sing, play, and explore their emotions through stories, poetry, and art.

Through this journey, I have built empathy, patience, and collaboration as a leader. For me, leadership means building agency, overcoming societal stigmas, and nurturing the next generation to be empathetic to self and others.

**Rupali Sahu**  
 Karuna Fellow



## A Community Project in Laham

I am the first Karuna Fellow from my community, where patriarchal norms are strong and women's roles are often confined to home, family, and agriculture. Growing up in this environment, I held a deep belief that education could change lives. This inspired me to dream of working with communities and improving the position of women and girls.

During the first year of my fellowship, I began a project with Anganwadi children, but the classrooms were empty even though the registers were full. Parents did not see value in early learning. I visited homes, spoke with families, and slowly, children began to attend. Yet girls were still left behind. With support from Anganwadi workers, I organised gender equality sessions that encouraged women to reflect and question old norms.

This journey taught me that with the right intentions and skills, any challenge can be addressed.

**Taniya Bhau**

Karuna Fellow



## The Leap of Purpose: My Journey Through the Gandhi Fellowship

Leaving behind a stable job at Amazon was not easy. I had comfort, financial security, and a predictable life, yet something felt incomplete. I longed for meaning and real impact. That search led me to the Gandhi Fellowship, where I traded corporate corridors for school verandahs in rural India.

The transition was overwhelming. New dialects, rigid systems, and students too shy to speak up made my work in Project-Based Learning feel stuck. I began to question myself and wondered if I was truly making a difference.

Gradually, small moments appeared. A girl confidently led a Community Mapping session. A composting project evolved into a student-led movement, transforming plastic waste into planters, wall art, and even furniture.

The most significant changes occurred in quiet conversations about consent, listening, and personal boundaries. “No began to mean something. Students stood a little taller.” In seeking impact, I discovered transformation within myself.

**Kaberi Nag**  
Gandhi Fellow



## A Small Spark of Change

When I arrived in the village for my Community Immersion, I knew I would face challenges such as adjusting to a new way of life, building relationships, and understanding the struggles of the people around me. Yet the biggest challenge turned out to be inside the very home where I was living. My uncle, Rajendra Kumar, was addicted to alcohol and smoking, and the house was often filled with smoke from his bidi. My aunt tried to stop him many times, but nothing changed.

During this time, I organised a street play at the local school on “Nasha Mukti.” My uncle was in the crowd, watching silently. That evening, I told him, “Uncle, how can I talk about addiction outside when it is happening inside my own home?” The very next day, he stopped smoking inside the house.

This experience taught me an important lesson that the real change is not forced through pressure but nurtured through care and the courage to speak with honesty. It showed me that leadership begins at home, with small steps that build trust and inspire transformation.

**Aparna Pathak**  
Gandhi Fellow



## Rooting Leadership in Soil and Self

I walked into the Gandhi Fellowship with a heart full of hope and a mind buzzing with ideas. When I arrived in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, I was excited but also unsure about where to begin. I attended many trainings and workshops, yet I still felt something was missing. I wanted to make a difference but struggled to connect my personal growth with real impact.

My turning point came when I discovered Project-Based Learning. It was not just theory; it was about doing. I worked with students on projects like kitchen gardens and changemaker labs. I also recognised the need for safe sanitation and supported the community in building a toilet. These experiences taught me to connect with people, practice empathy, and lead through action.

Through Nonviolent Communication framework, I learned to lead with patience, values, and respect. My confidence grew, and I realised that change begins step by step, with consistent effort and empathy.

**Kanahya**

Gandhi Fellow



## From Hesitation to Confidence: Journey through SEEL Learning

When I stepped into the classrooms of Jammu as a Gandhi Fellow, I was not only navigating a new place but also carrying the invisible weight of being a first-generation learner. The classrooms, which should have been full of joy and curiosity, felt intimidating. I lacked confidence, struggled to understand the culture and education system, and often felt vulnerable while interacting with teachers and school leaders.

I realised my hesitation came from not knowing much about Social Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEEL), which I was associated with during my fellowship journey. So, I completed the SEEL 101 course and explored resources like Listening with Empathy and Emotional Intelligence. These helped me reflect on myself and better understand the emotions present in classrooms. With this learning, I also began practicing Nonviolent Communication and influencing others without authority during my school visits.

Over time, the classrooms stopped feeling overwhelming. I grew more confident, started building genuine relationships, and discovered that leadership is about empathy, respect, and connection.

**Santosh**  
Gandhi Fellow



## Journey of Transformation



**Maryanka Singh**  
Karma Yogi Sarathi

Moving from being a law professor to becoming a Karmayogi Saarthi was not just a change in work, it was a change in purpose. I wanted to make an impact beyond the classroom, and here I found a space where empathy could meet governance and policies could truly reach people. This journey has been deeply transforming for me.

What made it special was working together with ministries instead of planning alone. Every collaboration, whether in designing interventions or leading trainings, opened my mind to new ways of thinking. Becoming a Master Trainer and taking behavioural sessions across departments was a big milestone that helped me discover my creative and reflective side.

What keeps me grounded is the inspiring leadership I work under. Their belief in people and in human-centered change makes this role feel like a calling. Every day I feel I am contributing to something meaningful and lasting.



## Influencing Without Authority

**Vishwaja**

**Karma Yogi Sarathi**

Over the past year, my journey as a Karmayogi Saarthi has been one of growth, challenge, and quiet victories. One of the most fulfilling experiences was leading the Ministry's first-ever implementation of Annual Capacity Building Plans (Lite) guidelines. Convincing them to take it up was not easy, but persistence helped me influence without authority.

Once we began, the road was far from smooth. With tight deadlines and unclear processes, I had to create simple templates, set clear timelines, and build trust through regular check-ins. I conducted orientation sessions with institutions such as the Indian Forest Service Academy (IGNFA) and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Each session helped me grow more confident in public speaking and facilitation.

Today, five organizations have completed their plans, and twenty more are nearly there. This journey has transformed me, not just as a professional but as someone who now believes in the power of persistence, empathy, and structured action to lead meaningful change in complex systems.



## Overcoming Barriers and Embracing Growth

**Apoorv Rayamane**  
MITRA YP

Joining the Maharashtra Institution for Transformation as a Young Professional, I was full of enthusiasm but soon realized the complexities of working within the government system. Coordinating across departments and navigating bureaucracy was overwhelming, and I often doubted my ability to make an impact.

The turning point came when I decided to move from hesitation to proactive learning. I began understanding policies, project workflows, and stakeholder needs. I built relationships, asked questions, and communicated with clarity and purpose.

Over time, I started leading coordination efforts, resolving gaps, and helping projects progress smoothly.

This journey has shown me that transformation is not an instant process but one that is built through consistent effort, collaboration, and reflection.

I am still learning and evolving every day, and I remain committed to driving meaningful change for Maharashtra's development.



## My Transformational Journey

I was passionate about using technology for social impact, but as a fresher from the private sector, I doubted if my ideas would be taken seriously. I felt nervous sharing IT solutions during team meetings on statewide tech integration and was unsure how to fit into MITRA's structured government setup.

The turning point came during capacity-building trainings by the Piramal Foundation. The team's guidance helped me understand the larger purpose of our work and how government systems shape lives in Maharashtra. I learned to align my IT skills with program goals and overcame my fear of starting small.

Through challenges and small wins, leading discussions, and contributing to plans, I began to grow. I now understand that impact begins by showing up, learning, and improving every day. This journey has been deeply transformational, and I am grateful to the Piramal Foundation for empowering me with clarity, confidence, and a sense of purpose to drive meaningful change.

**Rita Jadhav**

MITRA YP



Our Fellowships spark solutions for a new India and the world, empowering great leaders to cultivate more leaders, not just followers.

