

# **Better Education, Lifestyle and Environment Foundation (BELIEF)**



**Annual Report  
2024-25**

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## **WE, THE BELIEVERS: MESSAGE FROM THE LEADERSHIP TEAM**

The year **2024–25** has been a deeply meaningful chapter in BELIEF's journey. As we reflect on our work, we do so with humility and gratitude—for the opportunities we've had, the communities we've engaged with, and the trust placed in us by our partners and stakeholders.

This year, we were happy to expand our flagship project, **SHAKTI**, into the tribal regions of Nashik with the support of **BOSCH India Foundation** and **Praj Foundation**. This step allowed us to reach children and families who have long been underserved, and to bring early childhood education (ECE) interventions that are both thoughtful and rooted in local realities. We also take this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge **Wipro Foundation**, whose unwavering support over the past five years—through fellowship and grant support, and capacity-building initiatives—has been instrumental in sustaining and strengthening the SHAKTI project in Pune. Their belief in our mission has helped us build a resilient foundation for meaningful change. This year, we were happy to expand our flagship project, **SHAKTI**, into the tribal regions of Nashik with the support of BOSCH India Foundation and Praj Foundation. This step allowed us to reach children and families who have long been underserved, and to bring early childhood education (ECE) interventions that are both thoughtful and rooted in local realities.

We also saw the realization of a long-held dream: the launch of **KITABGHAR** in Nashik for children with challenging childhoods. This initiative, aimed at creating a safe, brave, and non-judgmental space for children, was made possible through the generosity of multiple supporters and the incredible commitment of our team.

Throughout the year, we remained focused on strengthening our internal capacities. Our team grew, underwent extensive training, and adapted to the unique needs of the communities we serve. We were heartened by the responsiveness of the ICDS department in Pune and Nashik, which granted us training permissions and signed an MoU that enabled smooth collaboration.

While we celebrate these milestones, we are also mindful of the challenges that remain. We know that meaningful change takes time, patience, and collective effort. Our vision, mission and principles guide us, and we remain committed to walking this path with integrity and care.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who has journeyed with us this year. To our donors and supporters, your steadfast belief in our mission continues to propel us forward. To the Anganwadi Workers, Helpers, and Parents—you are the heartbeat of our interventions. To the children—your boundless curiosity and joy remind us daily of why we do this work. To the child care institutions and Government officers—thank you for your trust and collaboration, which make our shared vision possible. And to our internal team members and consultants, your dedication, resilience, and spirit of service are the pillars on which we stand. We are deeply grateful to everyone who

has journeyed with us this year. Together, we are building something meaningful—step by step, with hope and purpose.

As we move forward, we remain anchored in our mission: to improve learning opportunities for 20,000 elementary-grade students by 2026–27. We believe that change is possible when we work together—with integrity, creativity, and a shared vision for dignity and equity

**Mukta Navrekar and Atul Gaikwad, BELIEF**



## **ABOUT US**

Better Education Lifestyle and Environment Foundation (BELIEF) is a not-for-profit organization started by young professionals who passionately want to work for the underprivileged communities. We are committed to transforming early childhood education by working closely with Anganwadi Workers, Helpers, Parents, and the Government System—particularly through collaboration with the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Department. We also run an active library program for the children with challenging childhoods.

## **OUR VISION**

A society where each individual is leading a dignified life.

## **MISSION**

To improve learning opportunities for 20,000 elementary-grade students by 2026–27 through capacity building of teachers, parents, and education officers.

## **OUR PHILOSOPHY**

We believe that lasting change can be achieved by partnering with government systems and empowering stakeholders with small and steady steps. Our approach is to institutionalize change—recognizing that it requires persistent, multi-level engagement.

In the realm of ECE, we advocate for a shared understanding across all levels—from Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs) to parents. Without this collective orientation, implementing a quality ECE program at scale remains a challenge.

## **OUR CORE AREAS OF WORK INCLUDE:**

- Training for Anganwadi Teachers and Helpers
- On-site classroom support and activity demonstrations
- Development of ECE content and Teaching-Learning Material (TLM)
- Library sessions for children
- Development of teaching and learning materials.

As an NGO, we embrace the slow and deliberate nature of societal transformation. Change does not happen overnight—it unfolds gradually through trust-building, consistent dialogue, and sustained collaboration with communities and institutions. By remaining rooted in the field and responsive to local realities, we help nurture environments where meaningful progress can take root and flourish over time.



## **PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES**

### **4.1 SHAKTI: STRENGTHENING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ANGANWADIS**

In 2024–25, Project SHAKTI continues to be a transformative initiative for Early Childhood Education (ECE) Anganwadis. Aligned to the AKAR curriculum developed by the Government of Maharashtra, SHAKTI addresses long-standing challenges in curriculum implementation, including limited contextualization, inconsistent academic support, and inadequate mentoring for Anganwadi workers.

Through sustained collaboration with the ICDS department, SHAKTI has evolved into a dynamic and responsive program that empowers Anganwadi teachers and helpers to deliver quality early education with confidence and clarity.

#### **New Frontiers: Tribal Expansion**

This year marks a significant milestone: we launched SHAKTI in two entirely new tribal locations within the Trimbakeshwar block of Nashik district in the clusters of Take Devgaon, Samundi, and Thanapada.

These regions bring unique contexts, prompting us to introduce new dimensions to SHAKTI.

#### **What We Do**

##### **A) CAPABILITY BUILDING OF ANGANWADI WORKERS AND HELPERS**

In 2024–25, our capacity-building efforts are more refined and impactful than ever:

- Training of Anganwadi workers
- A Total of 9 two-day trainings for Anganwadi workers were conducted in Pune and Nashik. These trainings were aligned to the AKAR curriculum, designed to deepen understanding and practical application. In our training, we also focus on the creation of Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) for the Angawadis. For this, we provide time, space and materials during the training. In some of the trainings, we also distributed the TLM and children's literature to the Anganwadis.





## **B) ON-SITE ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

Our trained Field Coordinators provide consistent, hands-on mentoring and classroom support to ensure that training translates into effective practice. This ongoing engagement helps educators contextualize the curriculum to their local needs and fosters a culture of continuous learning. Archana Kulkarni, our trainer, routinely visits the Anganwadis for Expert on-site support, along with our team of Field Coordinators. She provides feedback and support to our team members concerning their role as a Field Coordinator.





#### **4.2 PARENT AS TEACHER (GHAROGHARI BALVIKAS)**

We recognize and value the role that parents play in the overall development of their children. Therefore, we engage with parents to strengthen them in providing a positive and conducive environment of love and support for their children's development. This is done by conducting home visits to distribute and explain Gharoghari Bal Vikas (a book published by us). This book contains activities that can be easily conducted at home with the materials available at home. We also provide a Teaching Learning Material (TLM) set to be used with the book. The book is colorful and filled with illustrations to make it simple and easy to use for even uneducated parents. This is done with the hopes of deepening the impact of our intervention



#### **4.3 KITABGHAR- AN ACTIVE LIBRARY PROGRAM**

BELIEF has initiated an active library program, KITABGHAR, for children with challenging childhoods, aiming at creating a safe, brave, and non-judgmental space through the library. We implemented this program in the orphanage in Nashik and conducted around 150 library sessions for all the children staying in the institute. Curated, vibrant children's literature is made available in KITABGHAR. Along with that, a trained facilitator communicates with children through read-aloud sessions, book talks, book displays, character alive, library games, etc. We are trying to create a rich reading culture through frequent sessions, interactions, and library activities. The activities in the project are planned in such a way that they will not just engage with library books

but also respond to the books and share their thoughts and experiences. We are also hoping to create a culture of reading among children from challenging backgrounds.

#### **4.4 SUPPORT TO OTHER NGOS**

BELIEF collaborates with other NGOs to strengthen their capacities. In the year 2024-25, we worked with Sondara Gurukulam in Beed district in Maharashtra. At Gurukul, students begin their journey in the semi-English medium from Grade 5. These children come from diverse educational backgrounds—some have studied in Marathi medium, others in English, and a few have transitioned from English to Marathi due to comprehension challenges in early grades. This mix of media, coupled with the lack of structured literacy instruction in early education, results in many students facing difficulties in reading and writing in both Marathi and English. Weak language foundations and inconsistent math instruction also hinder the development of numerical understanding. This pattern is observed year after year.

Upon entry into Grade 5, Gurukul faced a dilemma: should the focus be on completing the curriculum or on addressing the foundational gaps in students' learning? Choosing the latter, Gurukul experimented for a couple of years with remedial efforts. While there were some gains, the progress was slower than expected, and students took considerable time to reach grade-level competencies. Practical challenges also emerged during implementation.

In response, Gurukul and BELIEF collaboratively designed a long-term program focused on strengthening language and math learning. This initiative is not a separate curriculum but a capacity-based approach that integrates textbooks and other resources to meet students where they are.

#### **KEY FEATURES OF THE PROGRAM**

- No separate curriculum; emphasis on grade-wise competencies
- Integrated use of textbooks and supplementary materials
- Mixed-level teaching within the same classroom
- Multilevel classroom planning when needed
- Flexible planning for teachers, not a rigid framework
- Competency-based assessments
- Contextual academic planning tailored to classroom realities
- Collaborative work involving teachers, assistants, and mentors

## **IMPLEMENTATION IN THE PAST ACADEMIC YEAR**

The program was initiated with Grade 5 only, allowing gradual expansion to avoid straining Gurukul's systems and to provide room for course correction if needed.

### **CAPACITY-BUILDING SESSIONS**

- Discussions on educational policy with Gurukul teachers
- Understanding competency-based education
- Foundations of literacy and numeracy
- Designing effective assessments
- Number sense and basic operations
- Reading and writing across literary genres

### **DEMONSTRATIONS**

- Conducting student assessments
- Reaching every child through multilevel teaching
- Teaching news as a literary form
- Maintaining running records

### **COLLABORATIVE WORK**

- Understanding the curriculum
- Monthly academic planning
- Designing assessments
- Creating rubrics

### **OBSERVATIONS**

- How Marathi and Math assessments are conducted

### **MENTORSHIP SUPPORT**

- Identifying areas where teachers need help
- Reviewing academic systems and practices







### **WORKSHOP/SESSIONS**

A session on effective use of the library was conducted in the Anganwadi workers' training at Avishkar Shikshan Sanstha, Nashik. Another session on leadership was conducted for the students of Smruti Surekh Foundation at Nashik.



## **5. IMPACT**

### **1. ANGANWADI WORKERS:**

We have conducted 8 trainings of the Anganwadi workers in the last year, and have made 300 field visits to provide intensive on-site support to the Anganwadi workers to implement the learning from the training in their classrooms. As a result of this intervention, we could see the rise in the understanding of the Anganwadi workers about the curriculum. They are taking efforts to overcome the challenges in their Anganwadis and taking every step to make the children school-ready by the age of 6. A routine of ECE activities has been set in the classroom, and the effective use of TLM and children's literature is notably seen in the Anganwadis.

### **2. PARENTS:**

In order to take the active involvement of parents in the Early Childhood Education (as also suggested in NEP) we develop and deliver the content to the parents which is aligned to the AKAR curriculum. We have distributed over 400 Gharoghari Balvikas books and TLM kits to the parents. We encourage them to conduct those activities at home through follow up visits. Many parents send us the feedback about the usefulness of the content and also ask us to send more such activities! The awareness about the importance of early years of the child is also getting developed among them. Children are enjoying the activities in the book.

### **3. CHILDREN (KITABGHAR PROGRAM)**

- For children in the Balwadi group, sitting in one place to listen to a story, looking at pictures in books, and participating in activities were all new experiences. Initially, managing their sessions was a big challenge. However, with consistent efforts and regular sessions, the children have now begun to enjoy reading books. They listen to stories with full attention, look for themselves in the book's illustrations, and relate the stories to their own experiences. Their understanding of books has also improved. They now take special care not to tear the books.
- Children from grades 1 & 2 are now able to interpret the pictures in books nicely and make logical guesses. They can identify their names on the attendance sheet and have started writing their names. Earlier, they hardly took part in group activities, but now they love participating in them.
- Grade 3 and 4 children enjoy participating in activities based on book reading. Book puzzles and book-themed Damsheraaj are their favorite games. One child, Sarthak (name changed), read ten small books in a single day. He used to avoid books earlier, but now he enjoys them and even helps in conducting the sessions.



- At the organizational level, the caretakers (Tai) now attend the sessions regularly. They listen to the stories and happily share their feedback when they like something.



## 6. NURTURING GROWTH: LEARNING & TOGETHERNESS AT BELIEF

At BELIEF, we believe that learning is a lifelong process, and we're committed to walking that path together. Our culture places a high value on skill-building and knowledge enhancement, offering team members opportunities to pursue courses, gain exposure, and grow both personally and professionally.

In 2024–25, we supported learning through curated programs in:

- Early Childhood Education (ECE) course conducted by Gram Mangal, Maharashtra
- Library Se Dosti course conducted by Eklavya Foundation, Madhya Pradesh
- Spoken English course conducted by Speak n Flash Academy, Maharashtra
- Working towards Well-being (Part 2) – Thriving Teams and Organizations by Viridus, Karnataka.
- Wipro Partner's Forum at Azim Premji University, Karnataka

But growth at BELIEF isn't limited to classrooms and courses. This year, we also came together for a rejuvenating retreat in Lonavala, where learning took a more personal and collective form. Amidst nature's calm, we shared our life journeys, reflecting on experiences and aspirations, took a trail to the lake, reconnecting with ourselves and each other, played team games, sparking laughter, trust, and camaraderie

The retreat was more than a break—it was a celebration of our shared purpose. We returned recharged, with deeper bonds and renewed energy to serve with heart and intentio





## **TEAM AND GOVERNANCE**

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

#### **Mukta Navrekar, Founder Director & CEO**



A graduate in Sociology and post-graduate in Rural Development, Mukta leads BELIEF as CEO, overseeing implementation and compliance. She brings deep-rooted experience in the development sector, having worked on environmental sanitation, menstrual health research, and waste up-cycling through her social enterprise, Sakav. A third-generation changemaker, she has also served as a State Master Trainer under the 14th Finance Commission and PESA. Mukta is the connecting thread across BELIEF's team, partners, and donors.

#### **Dr. Amol Gaikwad, Founder Director**



A seasoned public health expert, Amol currently serves as a health consultant with Tata Trusts. With over 12 years of experience, he has led impactful programs in cancer prevention, NCD management, and rural health systems across Maharashtra. His work blends research, teaching, and field implementation, with a strong focus on action-based strategies for underserved communities.

#### **Ashwin Bhondave, Founder Director**



An IT engineer turned educationist, Ashwin holds an M.A. in Elementary Education from TISS, Mumbai. He manages programs at Sonadara Gurukulam and facilitates teacher training with VOPA. With over 8 years in the development sector, Ashwin has contributed to tech-enabled learning, volunteer training, and large-scale rural education initiatives, benefiting thousands of children across Maharashtra.

## PROGRAM TEAM



### 1. Atul Gaikwad, Academic Lead

M.A. (Elementary Education) from Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai. B.E (IT) GEC Aurangabad. He has over 14 years of experience in the development sector. Currently working with BELIEF, he is a Language pedagogy expert. He loves working with children and training teachers. Previously worked as a Senior Academic Officer in Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST) for 5 1/2 years on different projects of quality education with government schools and Ashram Schools where he designed and managed various projects and conducted several teacher trainings. He has also worked as an associate software developer in SEARCH, Gadchiroli. He has been working with BELIEF since 2018.

### 2. Archana Kulkarni

Archana Tai has been working with BELIEF since 2019. M.BA Finance but a hard-core teacher trainer. She loves working with children. She has 17 years of experience in the field of quality education. Previous to her current role, she worked as a Senior Manager of academics at Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST) for 12 years. She has also worked in some educational films. She co-authors 'Maze Ganit' (My Math), a series of books on mathematics for elementary education. Archana tai endorses the saying "Age is just a number". Her lively energy and enthusiasm are akin to the young children that she works with and works for.

**3. Nisha Kumari- Project Officer** We call her the engine of the project. An Indian School of Development and Management (ISDM) pass-out, Nisha is a dedicated and kind project officer. She leads the team of Field Coordinators with peace and promptness. She is committed to the

values of BELIEF and works tirelessly to ensure that the program runs smoothly. Her ability to manage multiple tasks and deadlines simultaneously is a testament to her organizational skills. She is an excellent communicator and has good people skills.

#### **4. Damini Nimbarte, Field Coordinator**

Damini has completed D.Ed. and graduated in vocal art, and possesses a unique blend of creativity and hard work. Her creativity is not limited to art projects alone but also extends to solving complex problems related to her work. Damini holds her work in high esteem and is truly dedicated to making a positive difference in people's lives. Her contributions are of immense value to our team, and we are fortunate to have her on board.

#### **5. Rohan Gandhale, Field coordinator**

Rohan has completed his Master's in Social Work (MSW). He works with BELIEF as a field coordinator and is known amongst the team for his calm and cool attitude. He is very passionate about working with young children. He has a go-getter attitude and uses logic and reasoning in his work. Rohan is eager to try new things and is a quick learner. His presence is an asset to our team.

#### **6. Yogita Gangurde, Field coordinator**

Yogita, a Master of Social Work (MSW) graduate, has been implementing the Shakti Project with remarkable dedication in Harsul—a remote region of Nashik. Each day, she travels over two hours by motorcycle, navigating challenging terrain with unwavering commitment. Her work is not only physically demanding but deeply relational. Yogita has built strong, respectful connections with Anganwadi workers, helpers, and stakeholders across the system, becoming a trusted presence in the community.

#### **7. Manisha Gangode, Library Educator**

Manisha, who holds a Master's degree in Sociology, leads BELIEF's library initiative with heartfelt dedication. Her deep bond with children, coupled with the sensitivity required to work in this space, makes her an invaluable part of the program. She has successfully anchored the Kitabghar project, bringing stories and learning to life for young readers. Though new to this domain, Manisha is quickly mastering the nuances of library-based engagement, blending empathy with emerging expertise. Her work reflects BELIEF's commitment to nurturing curiosity, connection, and lifelong learning.

**7. Nitin Patil, Field Coordinator** Nitin has completed his Master's in Social Work (MSW). He successfully implemented the Shakti Project in Trymbkeshwar, Nashik, single-handedly. His sense of humor and tendency to say the unexpected always bring laughter to any meeting. Nitin is always ready to work in any situation.

## HONOURING EVERY HAND THAT BUILDS BELIEF

We are deeply grateful for the financial support extended by Wipro Foundation, Bosch India Foundation, Praj Foundation, Shandar Interiors, and numerous individual donors.

Our heartfelt thanks to the Integrated Child Development Scheme in Nashik and Pune, as well as to all Anganwadi workers, helpers, parents, and children who have been integral to our journey.

We sincerely acknowledge the dedicated efforts of all team members at Aadhar Ashram Sanstha.

And finally, we extend our gratitude to the countless visible and invisible well-wishers whose quiet support continues to uplift our work



## STEPPING INTO TOMORROW

### STRATEGIC GOALS FOR 2025–26

- **DEEPEN FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING:** Expand the language and numeracy program across more grades, ensuring every child builds strong learning foundations.
- **STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:** Collaborate more closely with Anganwadi workers, parents, and NGOs, Govt. departments to co-create nurturing learning environments.
- **INVEST IN TEAM GROWTH:** Facilitate more workshops and learning circles that support professional development and collective reflection.
- **BUILD INCLUSIVE SYSTEMS:** Develop tools and processes that make BELIEF's work more participatory and responsive to the needs of children and communities.

## YOUR HANDS, OUR HOPE

BELIEF thrives on collective effort. Whether you're a donor, educator, parent, or well-wisher, your support helps us nurture brighter beginnings.

- **DONATE:** Your contribution helps us reach more children with meaningful learning experiences.
- **VOLUNTEER:** Share your time, skills, or stories—every gesture counts.
- **PARTNER:** Collaborate with us to build resilient, joyful learning ecosystems.

## CONNECT

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