

IC3 Institute Case Study 1

Note: Student names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Children Came Alive

The below case study provides a deeper view of how career counselors from IC3 Institute are not only helping marginalized students achieve employment but building the foundations for resilient livelihoods and career development capabilities.



School: Gyan Peethika School, Ballia, Uttar Pradesh

Counselor Name: Reenu Sharma

Student Profile: First-generation learners, agriculture and local industries being the only source of livelihood for their families, belong to Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)

Ms. Reenu Sharma, a former psychologist, underwent training as a career counselor as part of the 5th cohort of the IC3 Institute's Flagship Program called Empower. The principal of Gyan Peethika School, recognizing the significance of career counseling, reached out to her with a

vision to establish career pathways for underprivileged learners. During the Empower cohort sessions, Reenu consistently highlighted how a bleak outlook on the future and a sense of hopelessness had dimmed the spark in the eyes of the young learners she worked with.

Upon commencing her practice at the school after completing Empower, Reenu swiftly established the Counseling Laboratory™ [1] pedagogy and a counseling department in her school. Her goal was to assist her students in staying in the village and developing resilient livelihoods through local opportunities. Through conversations with her students, she discovered that most of their fathers had to leave home to work as security guards and laborers in the city. The students were unwilling to leave their families behind to pursue careers outside the village. Since agriculture and local industries were the only options available, Reenu focused on counseling the students to reach their full potential while remaining in the village. She worked with 1200 young learners, of which approximately 70% belonged to Economically Weaker Sections.

Reenu adopted an approach centered around building connections with the local industry for her students. She fully understood the needs of her students and concentrated on employment opportunities. The local industry included diya (lamp) making, bindi making, pot making, and agriculture. Reenu decided to leverage the existing opportunities and equip her students with the necessary skills to excel in these fields, thereby increasing their household income. She facilitated their learning of sales, accounts, collaboration, and other essential skills related to their chosen vocations. Reenu bridged the gap between classroom learning and vocational skills required for local opportunities. She guided students to research local polytechnic centers, government-run vocational training programs, and MSME Incubators that were relevant to their skill-building endeavors.

Rather than providing direct solutions, Reenu aimed to empower students with research and learning skills. She prioritized building career awareness and fostering career development capabilities instead of applying band-aid solutions. She introduced students to key terms related to vocational skills, allowing them to explore and learn independently. This aspect of her training at the IC3 Institute was crucial. Reenu used simple language and relatable examples from their families' professions to make skill-building more accessible.

As a psychologist, Reenu understood that marginalized learners faced battles beyond employment, and hopelessness was a pervasive part of their lives. Most students were aware that they couldn't afford higher education and were resigned to continuing the same cycle of poverty that had plagued their families for generations. The fear of authority was deeply ingrained in the students due to their community's conditioning and sociocultural context. This fear resulted in their unresponsiveness towards counselors and teachers' questions. Reenu's approach to address this challenge involved high levels of empathy, being non-judgmental, giving them space and time to remain quiet, and speaking only when they felt comfortable. She emphasized the significance of using the "right words" to establish effective communication.

Reenu shared the story of a student named Aarif (name changed) who hailed from an economically weaker section (EWS) family. Aarif's father, like most people in the village, worked as a small farmer in Ballia. Aarif expressed that his father wanted him to follow in his footsteps, but upon further questioning, he revealed that he didn't feel pressured and sought Reenu's guidance to become a farmer. With the help of Aarif's teachers, Reenu discovered that his father worked in the city, and Aarif desired to stay with his family. Farming presented the best opportunity for Aarif to remain with his family while building a livelihood for himself. Reenu decided to support him and suggested that he learn more about agriculture, incorporating improved techniques and technology to enhance yield and increase family income. She took him to Kisi Vigyan Kendra and advised him to research the local Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (university). As Aarif delved deeper into his research and worked with Reenu to identify his strengths and weaknesses (an aspect of the IC3 Institute's counseling approach), he gained confidence in solving problems at his own level. Witnessing his efforts, his friends eagerly joined in to assist him in researching information and establishing connections between classroom learning and farming. Reenu also received support from teachers and the school principal in aiding Aarif's pursuit. She successfully convinced Aarif's family and many other families like his to allow their children to pursue vocational education, thereby improving their livelihoods and working towards sustainable employment with the help of teachers who facilitated better connections with the local community. Numerous success stories similar to Aarif's emerged, with students building resilient livelihoods through career counseling.

Reenu often speaks about the despair she observed in her students, reflected in their eyes due to the hopelessness of being trapped in the cycle of generational poverty. However, a few months into her practice, she witnessed a remarkable transformation. The students started responding to questions, conducting research on their own, supporting one another, and devising innovative ways to improve and expand local livelihood options. As she recounts her experiences, Reenu becomes teary-eyed. She describes how she saw a "glitter in the eyes of students" and how the tangible hope she observed was invaluable. "The children came alive," Reenu often exclaims, as they found ways to connect their classroom learning to their breadwinning endeavors in the local region through the Counseling Laboratory™ pedagogy [1].