



EWOK

Enabling Women of Kamand



Newsletter

May 2017

EWOKing a better quality of life

We have completed a year and are pleased to report a lot of exciting developments EWOKing a better quality of life for our women friends from the valley!

Edition Spotlight:

This March, we were proud to felicitate Ms. Jhulekha and Ms. Hemalata on International Women's Day. We presented them the EWOK Personal Advancement in Education Award and a cash prize of Rs. 2500 each. They are both residents of the nearby village Neri, and are employed as housekeeping staff in IIT Mandi. They received their matriculation from National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

Jhulekha is a single mother of 3 school going boys and manages a small dairy business in addition to her day job at IIT Mandi. She had pursued her education only till 5th grade and had to drop out due to middle school being too far from her home. Despite all odds, she made the time and resolve to complete her matriculation and is now enrolled with NIOS to complete senior secondary (12th grade).

Hemlata is a working mother of 2 girls and a boy. Her husband works as a security guard. She too had discontinued schooling after her primary education as middle school was too far from home. Her own resolve as well as the staunch support of her husband enabled Hemlata to attain her matriculation.

About EWOK

EWOK is an initiative to bring opportunities to the hardworking women of Kamand valley, enabling them to develop employable and marketable skills and access relevant information.

Lend us a hand

If you wish to donate or know more, please contact us at

ewok@iitmandi.ac.in

Fundraising



₹

₹ 5L





Shakeela's Boutique

Shakeela's Boutique is the first shop to be owned and managed by a woman in the village of Salgi! Ms. Shakeela is a resident of Salgi village and has been stitching for her family and neighbors for many years. However she sees the new campus coming up very close to her home and wishes to be able to cater to the crowd and increase her business and income.

With the guidance of EWOK mentors Dr. Priscilla Gonsalves and Mrs. Hema Oruganti, Shakeela's Boutique was set up in Feb 2017 and aims to grow and learn in order to fulfill this dream.

Mushroom Cultivation

We learnt during our very first greet & meet session that mushroom cultivation was a popular venture that many of the agri-based families of Kamand valley wished to learn about. Ms. Girja Devi & her husband were one such keen family. The EWOK mentor team of Dr. Jaspreet Kaur & Ms. Susmeeta Pattanayak joined hands with them to seek more information on how to proceed.

They learnt from the local block development office that mushrooms can be legally cultivated only after undergoing necessary training and certification from the competent authority to do so. The state government provides free trainings from time to time for local Himachal villagers! This was a classic example of the residents of this valley not being aware of the various public schemes available to them. One of the founding reasons of EWOK is to improve the access to information.

Since April 2017, the couple have set up their mushroom 'farm' in a small shed which has the necessary environment to grow these humidity-sensitive mushrooms. The campus residents and customers in Mandi



market have been able to treat themselves to fresh from the farm mushrooms even after the official mushroom season ended in March! All thanks to our local mushroom vendors. With the help of Girja Devi and her husband we hope to inspire more families.

Urmila's Tiffin Services

In March 2017, Ms. Urmila Devi started her business, Urmila's Tiffin Services (UTS), delivering wholesome home cooked lunch to customers on the IIT Mandi campus. She loves cooking and hopes to use the income earned as additional support for the higher education of her children.

To reduce her starting costs, EWOK purchased lunch carriers on behalf of the customers. This and other logistical support from EWOK, gave her the courage to kick-off UTS. She ensured good food quality and prompt delivery. There were initial hiccups as in every business. With the encouragement of her customers, EWOK mentors and her family, she was able to smoothen the operations.

The road ahead is not easy though. UTS faces stiff competition from the multiple campus canteens that offer a lunch variety at a much lower cost. Also, due to health reasons, Ms. Urmila Devi has handed over UTS to Ms. Guddi Devi. The UTS team along with EWOK mentors, Col. Naik, Prof. Paul and Dr. Ramna, is working on finding innovative strategies to move ahead.

Looking ahead

Recently IIT Mandi needed to hire gardeners to landscape the two campuses. EWOK reached out to the local women and guided three women to apply for a contract for a part of the gardening work. The three women successfully bid for the work and are now managing teams with a total of seventeen



women. This project was effected easily and tapped into the skills learned by all local women at home.

The ease of the success of the mushroom cultivation and gardening contracting initiatives made us realize that we had been too urban in our vision. We are now looking to help the villagers switch to products and businesses which require their agricultural skills.

One of the exciting projects ahead is the tulsi tea cultivation. Dr. Shyam Masakapalli & the IIT Mandi Botany Lab has partnered as an EWOK mentor to train and assist interested women in cultivating and marketing herbal tea for commercial purposes. Other projects which we are hoping to develop include introducing organic farming and growing more exotic vegetables for the urban market.



Tulsi Tea Cultivation Training Site

We also continue to work on building an information portal that will help the women in networking and marketing their skills. We hope to tie this in to our first computer kiosk where we can offer training in computing, and access to marketing, health, agricultural, government and educational sites.

It has been a year since EWOK was established. We continue to constantly reinvent ourselves as we learn, to help the women better! We are very grateful for your continued support.