

“Even Small Interactions Can Be Catalysts For Big Change”

At just 16, education reformist **SAMARA CHAUHAN** is reshaping how young India learns and connects. Through her initiative LEAP, she's bridging public and private school students via peer learning and cultural exposure
By Team BW

What inspired you to start LEAP during the pandemic, and how did your early experiences shape the programme's focus on educational equity?

I started LEAP in January 2022 after witnessing the stark differences in the quality of education in public schools compared to private schools. During the pandemic, while volunteering virtually, I interacted with public school students and was struck by how many of them - students my own age - lacked the resources and opportunities I took for granted, from innovative learning methods to participation in national and global events. I felt compelled to change that.

After a lot of brainstorming with friends and peers, and guidance from mentors and school teachers, I decided to bridge this gap by creating a platform that connects public and private school students. That idea became the 'Buddy Programme', the core of LEAP, where students exchange ideas, tips, and perspectives through themed Discussion Boards that range from academics and hobbies to future goals and wellness. The web app makes it easy for public school students to access these spaces without needing a mobile device.

Since then, LEAP has connected 250 public schools and 250 private

schools, reaching thousands of students and fostering collaboration and peer learning.

With LEAP reaching over 15,000 students across 500 schools, what has been the most rewarding outcome of the Buddy Programme?

The most rewarding outcome of the Buddy Programme has been seeing how quickly students form genuine connections and learn from one another, despite coming from very different backgrounds. Many public school students, who initially hesitated to participate, have grown confident enough to lead discussions, share ideas, and even mentor their peers. On the other hand, private school students have gained empathy, perspective, and a deeper understanding of the challenges their peers face.

It has been reassuring to see students collaborating on projects, exchanging tips, and supporting each other beyond academics, proving that the programme isn't just about learning; it's about building trust, confidence, and a sense of shared purpose. Witnessing these transformations reaffirmed that even small interactions can become catalysts, empowering students to dream bigger and progress farther.

Can you share your vision behind the Open Museum for All initiative, and how exposure to museums and exhibitions transforms learning for children from low-income communities?

The vision behind the 'Open Museum for All' initiative is to make learning inclusive by giving every child, regardless of background, access to the



tial learning to children who would otherwise be excluded. In Delhi, for example, we visited the National Science Museum and National Craft Museum, both of which students were excited to see. It was fun exploring the different exhibits and displays, such as the Pre-Historic Life Gallery, which showcases 35 extinct species from Giant Scorpions to Dinosaurs and Neanderthals, set in realistic environments with special light and sound effects and the Science & Technology Heritage Gallery that featured information on the invention of zero, an early understanding of planetary movements, and the foundations of Ayurvedic medicine.

What are your key goals for LEAP and Open Museum for All?

LEAP aims to reach 5,000 schools in the next two years, connecting students from diverse backgrounds and opening doors to peer learning, mentorship, and skill-building. Through Open Museum for All, we plan to engage 50,000 students over the next three years, giving them access to museums and cultural spaces that foster curiosity, broaden perspectives, and inspire new ideas. To scale these initiatives, we are building strong partnerships with schools, local organisations, and mentors, while leveraging technology to reach students even in resource-limited areas. Alongside this, we provide access to internships, volunteering, and competitions, enabling students to participate in national and global platforms and secure scholarships to pursue higher education—chances they might never have had. **BW**

same opportunities to explore, imagine, and discover. The idea stems from the disparities in education in our country. India currently has an estimated 3.22 crore out-of-school children (ages 6–17), while millions more enrolled in schools lack access to quality education and enrichment opportunities.

Less than 20 per cent of children from low-income families have exposure to cultural spaces like museums, art galleries, or science centres. UNESCO's 2024 State of the Education Report for India emphasises the transformative importance of culture and arts education in promoting creativity, holistic growth, and equity. In Delhi in particular, over 7 lakh children live in urban slums or low-income households, most of whom have little or no access to cultural or scientific institutions.

The initiative aims to bridge the opportunity gap by offering experien-