



The First three....

Uma Rawal (18 years), Puja Suyal (18 years) and Prema Bisht (19 years) are three happy girls. They have just cleared the tests and interviews conducted by B2R – a rural outsourcing company that operates in this area. This means a lot to them; training that will stand them in good stead for future jobs, learning new skills, meeting new people, an exposure to new opportunities... but most importantly - financial independence in an male dominated area where women have limited opportunities beyond working at home and on farm.

The three girls are part of the Kishori Skhikshan Kendra (KSK) program that Chirag organises for adolescent girls to teach them life skills that are relevant for them. This year, the program with support from the Nike Foundation was designed to focus on computer and English skills that Chirag felt would be of use to girls, given the increasing necessity of computer training in almost all office environments.



(Left to Right) Prema Bisht, Neomi Pal (Coordinator of Youth Programs at Chirag), Puja Suyal and Uma Rawal

This year, competition for entry into B2R was especially fierce. Almost 140 youth applied. Uma and Puja, though they come from Bageshwar, that is far from the B2R centre had heard that it would soon set up a unit in Bageshwar as well. Prema, from Kasiyalekh was familiar with B2R and had applied in the past but had not cleared the written test.

Interestingly, all three girls have spent some time teaching children in their village as *Balshikshaks*. Prema has had the most experience – having taught at the Chirag supported school at Gajar (Kasiyalekh) for 3 years. Both Puja and Uma have taught for a few months at their villages in Bageshwar. Another thing that they all share is that they all come from farming backgrounds.

Prema is the youngest of 3 children – her older brothers studied only till grade 8 because they were not that interested in studies, and currently take care of the farm at home. She herself has studied till 12th and plans to complete her BA through distance education. She says that the only reason why she continued studying is because she was good at it and her parents encouraged her. She applied for a position at B2R previously, but did not make it through the written test. This time, the previous experience and the fact that she was already at the Chirag camp and appeared after a months inputs helped she says.

Uma, from Bageshwar, considers herself lucky. She is 3rd in a line of 4 girls in her family and is now in her 1st year of BA through distance education. She says that though her older sisters were interested in studying, there was no school close to her village. In time, a school opened very close – just 15 minutes to her home – that she could attend. Her younger sister is following her footsteps and is now in the 10th class. The rest of her family takes care of the family farm.

Puja's father works in Ludhiana for most of the year while her family takes care of the farm in Bageshwar. Her older sister is studying in the third year of BA and a younger brother in class 7. Her mother was a bit unsure of sending her for the 45 day training program as it was far from her home. But after some convincing she agreed. Puja is completing her 1st year of BA and would like to major in history.

The girls seem to be enjoying their residential training program and are especially happy about the fact that they have this opportunity to stay away from home with other girls of their age from other parts of the region. When asked about how they felt, they unanimously declared that they are really happy and excited, since this was so unexpected. They thought they were coming to Chirag for a training program – not for getting a job. “This is definitely a bonus” they all agreed.