

On December 4th and 5th, UnLtd India hosted its Third Annual Conference on Social Entrepreneurship in Dakshinachitra, Chennai. Twenty-one of this year's Venturers and team members plus eight Venturers from last year traveled together from Mumbai to participate. The bonds they forged and the inspiration they gained made this a valuable and unforgettable experience.



Youth Venturer conference attendees

## FROM THE ORGANIZERS

*"A massive thank you from Richard, myself and the rest of the UnLtd India team for speaking at our event, bringing your dynamic young contingent along with you and taking care of our investees! From all the feedback that we have received from the delegates, I know that everyone was really inspired by all the Venturers' personal stories. So thank you so much for your time, inputs and incredible energy!"*

-Pooja, Director of UnLtd India

## TRAIN TO CHENNAI

The journey began two days before the conference. Twenty-nine Venturers and four Youth Venture staff boarded a sleeper train from central Mumbai. Before leaving, the Venturers had been given responsibility for different aspects of the trip, ranging from bringing food to sparking dialog with their peers.

A large, energetic group can do a lot on a twenty-six hour train ride. Venturers sang entire Bollywood soundtracks, had political debates, and shared stories about their Teams with each other.

Daniel Vargas took the opportunity to lead an hour-long session on income generation and Venture sustainability. The discussion ranged from theory to concrete steps necessary for creating a social business. It was enlightening, particularly for those working to strike the balance between career and Venture.



Discussion on the train

## THE CONFERENCE

More than 175 attendees came from across the world to collaborate through workshops and panels focused on innovative social change. Speakers and facilitators from all sectors engaged participants in myriad debates and discussions.

For Venturers, the conference provided a powerful platform to learn and connect. Here is some of what they gained:

- Inspiration from speaking to social entrepreneurs who are leading incredible systemic change
- Expertise from a variety of workshop sessions and panels. Topics included scaling/replication, financial management, and governance
- Confidence from sharing their own personal stories with high-profile social and business leaders
- The experience of leading "open space" sessions. Rupesh led a discussion on career management and social change; Prabal created a session on media's role in social entrepreneurship. Both sessions were well-attended and received.
- Encouragement to remain dedicated. Three Venturers - Ashok, Sumeet, and Manisha - received funding and awards from UnLtd during the conference celebration. Such recognition from an external organization motivated other Venturers to continue their excellent work.



Rupesh



Prabal

## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

In addition to mingling with other attendees, Venturers had the valuable opportunity to connect to two Ashoka Fellows, Vishal Talreja and Anshu Gupta. Vishal founded Dream a Dream, an empowerment organization for youth living in slums and on the streets. Anshu created Goonj to channel excess resources - food, clothing, technology, money - to impoverished rural communities for disaster management and relief.

Each Fellow spent an hour with the Venturers; both described the ways in which launching a social enterprise has influenced their life paths. They delved into concerns shared by many of the Venturers, answering their questions with knowledge gained from real-world experience. Venturers left these discussions energized and confident.

*"The conference focused on the future, but discussions with Fellows gave me insight into their past. These people are ten, fifteen years into the lifecycle of their social venture and their guidance was amazing. They've overcome challenges that I'll face and now I feel more prepared,"* says Kushboo, a Venturer working with girls in shelters.



Ashoka Fellow Anshu Gupta talks to YV

## OUTSIDE THE CONFERENCE

Before the second day of workshops began, Venturers took a trip to Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, a herpetology center operated by Ashoka Fellow Romulus Whitaker. The Bank is home to thousands of crocodiles, alligators, and other reptiles. Not only did Venturers get a private tour and up-close look at the animals, they gained direct insight into a social venture that has become a livelihood.

On the final night in Chennai, Youth Venture came together for a debrief session on the beach that lasted until midnight. Venturers discussed the experience both from an individual and community perspective.

Many were thankful for the opportunity to connect to and learn from people working towards similar goals. Pranay, a Venturer, described a conversation he initiated with Himanshu Vyas from Dasra about financial management; he was excited about implementing the advice.

The fact that most of the conference was in English motivated Venturers who primarily speak Hindi or Marathi to strengthen their language skills.

More important, though, was the sense of community that everyone had gained in a matter of days. People discussed the connection they now felt to one another. The bonds forged between the Venturers on this trip have become community pillars. It is exciting to envision the progress the experience will foster.



Crocodile Bank and Late-Night Beach Debrief