

OLCOTT
MEMORIAL
HIGHER
SECONDARY
SCHOOL

IMPACT REPORT 2018-21

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Summary

Over the last few decades, significant progress has been made in providing access to education for children across the country. However, there are several marginalized communities that still struggle with access to education. Children of migrant workers, street children, or those impacted by eviction drives in big cities are most vulnerable to dropping out of education. Over the last two decades, Wipro Cares (WC) has worked with many Civil Society Organizations to improve children's access to school education. The Olcott School is a key partner working to provide access to learning opportunities for vulnerable children from marginalized communities, essentially children at risk who are not able to access mainstream schools. WC has engaged with the Olcott School through volunteering employee time and contributing critical financial resources, for its ongoing work. Although the Olcott School has been a long-term partner with Wipro Cares (since 2015), this report will draw upon the work for the reporting period 2018-2021.

The 2015 grant, is a one-time grant, set up as an endowment fund, the interest of which is being utilized towards gradual enhancement of teacher salaries and meeting the gap in the overall expenditure on the operations. Wipro Cares 2018-2021 grant supports salaries for about 14-15 teachers. The objectives of the grant include supporting the school in improving teaching-learning practices through opportunities for experiential learning and access to education aids across all age groups, encouraging and promoting excellence in areas of sports, craft and other co-curricular activities and sustaining a holistic approach to child's well-being including health and hygiene.

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The impact of the Olcott School's work, over 2018-2021, can be understood in two key areas:

The school has enabled access to education for underserved communities through providing access to education to mostly first-generation learners, who come from the neighbouring low-income communities. The school and day care services have provided parents a safe and conducive learning environment where they can access basic nutrition, health care and education for their children. The school focuses on academic achievements and encourages its students to pursue higher education. Many alumni have been supported with course fees for college education through grants. They were provided nutritious meals, access to sports facilities, life skills training and a range of extracurricular activities. The teachers have ensured a safe and inclusive space that support children through challenges at school and in their personal lives. Drawing from their legacy of the Theosophical Society, known for its service orientation and humanitarian work, they have been able to build and sustain large base of long-term partnerships with corporates and individuals that have enabled teacher professional development, fund raising and access to quality education. The school leadership responded to the pandemic proactively in the academic year 2020-21 and used it as an opportunity to strengthen its systems and improve the quality of education provided to its students. Tablets were procured for higher grade students; senior teachers were given laptops and trainings to bring them up to speed with technology enabled learning. For lower grade students parents' smart phones were relied on to send worksheets, videos and activities.

The Olcott School has been able to empower multiple stakeholders, both students and teachers alike. The teachers themselves have experiences

of poverty and marginalization in their lives. The educators have become financially independent, furthered their formal education, and accessed capacity building programs to further their professional growth. Evidently, with clear academic focus over 95% of students have opted for college education in the last few years. The scholarships have ensured that they pursue higher studies. Many have started working in companies, started enterprises of their own and become role models for their own communities.

Insights into current challenges and opportunities for Olcott School provide key themes to deliberate on the way forward. The school leadership feel the need to build and nurture a second line of leadership. It requires support in building leadership capacities of a newly initiated dynamic group of teachers as its second line. In order to grow the school, they feel the need to develop a robust support function for fund raising, which will create clear plan of actions and reach out to more corporates, institutions and individuals. The school wants to create linkages for different career options for students and is always on the look-out for trainings on entrepreneurship, job readiness, and soft skills. It would also like spaces in which they could collaborate and design cross learning programs with other organizations.

This reflection and impact report provides the context and opportunity for The Olcott School and Wipro Cares to identify future strategies that will help enhance its transformative work on the ground.

Background

Over the last few decades, significant progress has been made in providing access to education for children across the country. The Government has worked concertedly to ensure that most communities have access to primary schools in their vicinity. Policies such as Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE) have made elementary education free and compulsory for children between ages 6 to 14.

However, there are several marginalized communities that still struggle with access to education. While RTE mandates education for every child, its implementation on ground often leaves many marginalized children out of formal education system. Children belonging to low-income communities in urban settlements have not had access to education over generations and the current generation remains most vulnerable to dropping out of education. The lack of stability in their family life and income are big barriers to their access to education. They often experience abuse, violence, crime and are exposed to addiction very early in life. Against this back drop attending school on a regular basis becomes a challenge.

Wipro Cares has worked with many Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to improve children's access to school education. These organizations work to

bridge a critical gap in the system, ensuring that a sizeable cohort of children from underserved communities receive access to formal education. Wipro employees have connected with and contributed to these partner organizations. Their engagement has included volunteering as well as contributing financially to the initiatives. Today, Wipro Cares works with 22 CSOs that focus on improving access to education for marginalized children. The Olcott School is a key partner working to provide access to learning opportunities for vulnerable children, essentially children at risk who are not able to access mainstream schools.

About Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School

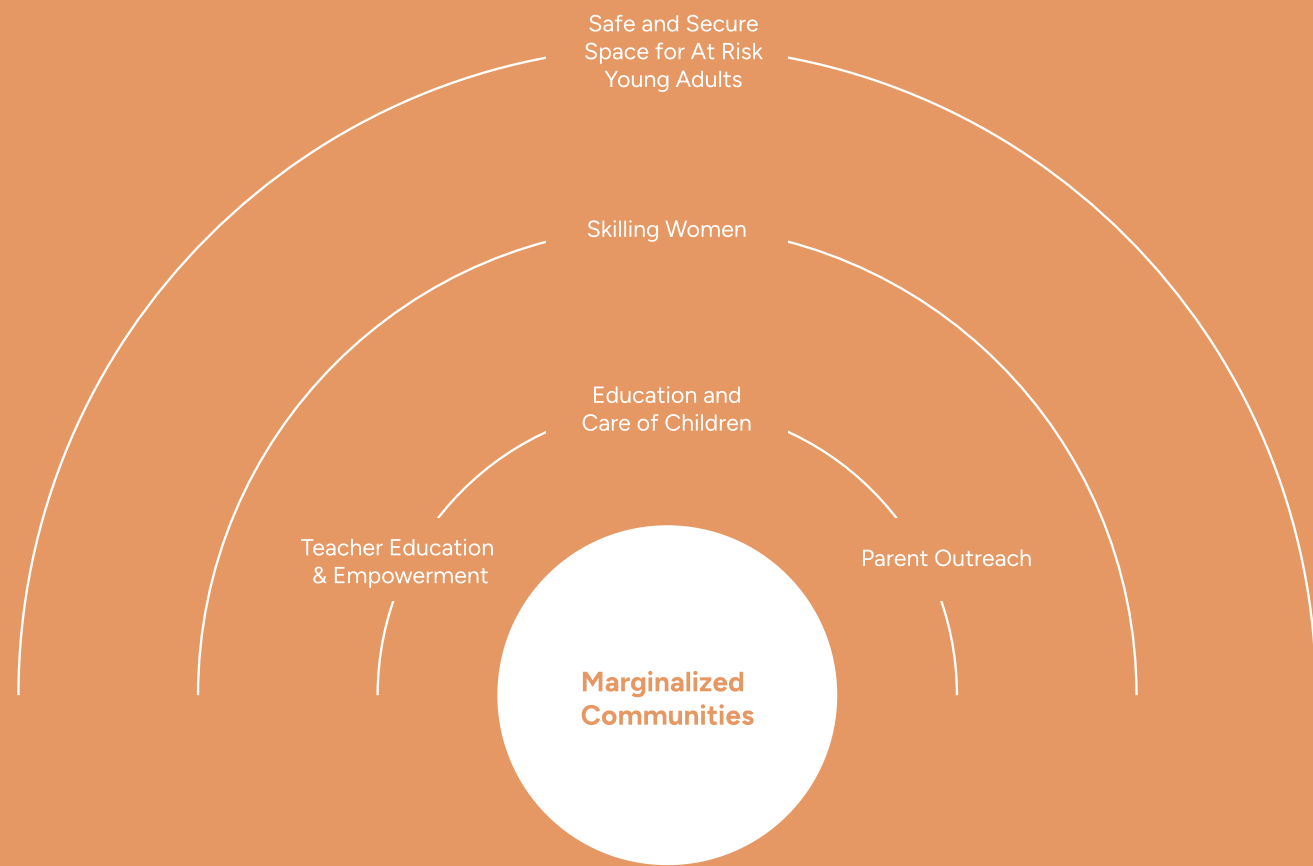
Olcott Education Society (OES) was founded in 1894 as the Olcott Panchanama Free School for children from marginalized and disadvantaged communities. OES was started by Colonel H.S. Olcott, who was the Co-founder of Theosophical Society (TS) along with Helena Blavatsky, in 1875. OES was registered in 1905, and is an integral part of TS, located in its campus and headquarters in Adyar, Chennai. OES has four distinct units- the Olcott School, the social welfare centre, the vocational units and the hostel. All the units together carry forward the legacy of humanism and service to society, long followed by the Theosophical Society.

OES through the Olcott School provides free education, textbooks and uniforms, and nutritious meals to children. The students are mostly first-generation learners, who come from the neighbouring low-income communities. Their parents are mainly engaged in fishing, work as daily wage labourers, push cart vendors and so on. Many students are from single parent families where the mothers work as domestic help in nearby areas. The parents struggle to provide their children a conducive environment for education. Most parents have basic primary education, very few have secondary or high school education. The children and youth are also socially at risk due to a high incidence of violence, crime, addiction and abuse in the community. Against this backdrop, the school focuses on academic achievements and encourages its students to pursue higher education after graduating from the school. Many alumni are supported with course fees for college education through grants from OES or external donors. However, many choose to pursue vocational courses as soon as they leave school.

OES ensures free basic education to these at-risk children from marginalized communities. It also supports the community through its Social Welfare Centre (SWC). The SWC runs a 'Balwadi' that provides access to day care for over 100 children in the age group of 2-5 years, allowing their parents to pursue their jobs without worrying about child care. The children are provided education, health care, timely nutritious meals and play materials.

OES also hosts a vocational training centre, for skilling over 25 women, which offers a year-long free diploma course for learning weaving, tailoring and embroidery. The aim is to help them find commensurate jobs or become self-employed.

OES additionally provides a hostel facility for over 30 boys that enables them to continue their education in the Olcott School or other schools in Chennai.



Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School
 Social Welfare Centre: Balwadi
 Vocational Training Unit for Women
 Boys' Hostel for Youth

Figure 1: Olcott Education Society's focus areas and current programs

| NUMBER | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Students | 470 | 430 | 474 |
| Teachers | 37 | 37 | 40 |
| Online | 10 | 10 | 10 |

Table 1: Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School Reach



Engagement with Wipro Cares

| TIME PERIOD | 2018-19 | 2019-20 |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 2016 | Endowment Fund | Rs 3.5 Crores |
| 2018 - 2021 | Second Grant | 1.08 Crores (32.7 lakhs, 35.97 lakhs, 39.56 lakhs) |

Table 2: Wipro Cares' Grants to Olcott School (relevant to Project Period 2018-2021)

The objectives of the grant are to:

- Sustain and improve the teaching-learning processes through opportunities for experiential learning and access to education aids across all age groups at the school
- Encourage and promote excellence in the areas of sports, craft and other co-curricular activities
- Sustain a holistic approach to child's well-being including health and hygiene

Given that the Olcott School transitioned to an English medium school in 2018, spoken English emerged as a key challenge for both teachers and students. Wipro Cares 2018-2021 grant supports salaries for about 14-15 teachers. Over the last few years workshops and training sessions were organized to help teachers and students to better their language skills. OES tapped into its extensive network and many NGOs, corporates, individuals to volunteer their time and resources to facilitate spoken English and communication programs.

Wipro Cares' engagement started with OES in 2015. At that time there were several issues which were affecting the Olcott School. The teacher salaries were below par to similar private schools. Most teachers did not have the requisite qualifications and were not equipped to teach all classes. A one-time grant of Rs 3.5 Crores was given in 2016 to be set up as an endowment fund, the interest of which was to be utilized towards gradual enhancement of teacher salaries and meeting the gap in the overall expenditure on the operations.



02

02 Impact

impact
impact

ENABLING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

Providing access to education for first generation learners

All children who attend the Olcott School or day care belong to local fishing communities. Their parents work as daily laborers, street vendors and domestic helpers. Many children also belong to single parent households, headed by mothers. Most parents have basic primary education, very few have secondary or high school education. The school and day care services have provided these parents a safe and conducive learning environment where they can access basic nutrition, health care and education for their children.

Initially, the services of the day care centre allow parents to pursue their jobs without worrying about child care. It also becomes a habit, dropping and picking children from the day care, cleaning them, making them wear uniforms, packing their bags and making them presentable for school and more. Over the years, going to school doesn't remain a matter of negotiation. While most parents have not been able to complete education themselves, they now make it a priority to ensure that the child goes to school. They believe in education being a social enabler, unlocking various possibilities for their children's future.

The Olcott School provides free education for children from disadvantaged communities. Education is supplemented with nutritious meals, uniforms, access to sports facilities, life skills, and an array of extra-curricular activities. Their aim is to create a conducive learning environment and a holistic well-rounded experience of education for these first-generation learners. The school is notably supported by a large pool of volunteers, NGOs and corporates that both OES and TS have created and garnered over the years. The list of supporters is truly encouraging.

The school leadership also responded to the pandemic proactively in the academic year 2020-21 and used it as an opportunity to strengthen its systems and improve the quality of education provided to its students. Tablets were procured for all students from Grade 9 to 12 through donations and the teaching staff and students up-skilled themselves for the online mode of learning. Laptops were arranged for senior teachers through donations which helped in bringing them up to speed with technology enabled teaching. Primary and middle school teachers relied on WhatsApp to share worksheets, video links and activities to reach out to students who had access to smart phones.



Ensuring a safe and inclusive space

Majority of the students come from extremely difficult circumstances, typically from low-income neighborhoods mired in poverty, crime, conflict and abuse. Positive role models in the community are limited. Their families can rarely afford access to good quality education. There are significant barriers for the children to complete their education. It is common for young adults to pick up the first job that provides them a steady income because the financial situation at home is dire. The Olcott School is a sanctuary for children with its sprawling grounds, large old trees and a conducive learning environment created by teachers and staff alike. Children discover a safe and inclusive space that they belong to and participate in many activities that allow them to flourish – academics, sports, arts and more. The mentors and teachers provide the much-needed safety net that support the children through challenges at school and in their personal lives. Additionally, there is hostel facility at the campus for young boys who may be at risk and don't have the secure environment needed to live, study and prepare for life.

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Building and sustaining partnerships

The Olcott School draws from the legacy of the Theosophical Society which is well known for its service orientation and humanitarian work. They have a large pool of corporates and volunteers who support its endeavors, on a regular basis. The teacher professional development was one such area that drew immense volunteer support. Corporate volunteers organized workshops and programs on communication, spoken English, technology and cyber security. This has empowered the teachers with knowledge and skills to be relevant, informed and empathetic problem solvers at work.

The Olcott School is a credible institution that attracts sufficient funding and support from local corporate entities. Its board has highly skilled professionals from education and corporate backgrounds. Together with the leadership at the Olcott School, they are able to leverage multiple donor relationships to benefit both the school and its students. It also has a large number of individual donors who give funds for stand-alone events, college sponsorships, basic infrastructure, learning aids and equipment and more. Over the years it has built and sustained both institutional and individual partnerships that enable it to provide access to quality education.

Providing access to learning during Covid-19

The school leadership also responded to the pandemic proactively in the academic year 2020-21 and used it as an opportunity to strengthen its systems and improve the quality of education provided to its students. Tablets were procured for all students from Grade 9 to 12 through donations and the teaching staff and students up-skilled themselves for the online mode of learning. Laptops were arranged for senior teachers through donations which helped in bringing them up to speed with technology enabled teaching. Primary and middle school teachers relied on WhatsApp to share worksheets, video links and activities to reach out to students who had access to smart phones.

EMPOWERING MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

Transforming lives of teachers

Several teachers at the Olcott School belong to the same local communities as the children. They themselves have experienced poverty, marginalization and exclusion in different walks of life. They have deep empathy for the children and are fully vested in their success. They help older students apply to colleges, access scholarships and complete their education. The school encourages these teachers to better equip themselves, study further and stay the course in education, much like their own investment in the children, for a better future. Most have successfully finished their graduate and post-graduate courses with the support of the school.

The teachers are offered a range of workshops and trainings. Every teacher is encouraged to attend a minimum of 6 workshops annually. Apart from the Wipro Cares' trainings the teachers have attended trainings by other collaborators such as KPMG, Zenlp Academy, Tamil Nadu Govt, Putri, Anugrah Counselling and Psychotherapy Institute, Occupationalist, Smart Sensory Kids Centre, Prakramika institute, ClassleSkillnet and more.

The topics range from virtual classroom programme, cyber security and bullying, adolescent learning methodologies, cognitive therapy to understanding emotional intelligence and building resilience amongst children. The leadership at the Olcott School is able to garner every available support for its faculty. The teachers in turn are exposed to new concepts and possibilities of application in their classrooms. Wipro Cares' trainings coupled with other trainings form a rich pipeline of continued support for the teachers. The teachers over the years have also received training in life skills, subject teaching, teaching methodologies, technology, child psychology and more.

The teachers at the Olcott School claim that they live an inspired life. They inspire children and also feel deeply motivated by them. The teachers in senior classes take great pains to coach and counsel the students as and when required. Some teachers stay in touch with students years after they have finished school. They occasionally reach out to the alumni for support needed at school.

“In my career I saw many teachers, who have only studied till 12th. When they come to Olcott, they study and get a degree and do B Ed. courses. The school helps and encourages the teachers for doing these courses.”

Teacher, Olcott School

“Last year, a few students completed their 12th standard and started working in shops during their holidays, and they got about Rs 9000-10,000 per month. The shopkeepers brainwash the students. But we don't let the students go. One such student was working on the beach on the weekend and he would get Rs 500 per day. I heard the news and I made him understand that this is temporary enjoyment and they are brainwashing you. This is not your permanent life and he dropped out of the job and got 94% in the commerce subject. Now he is going to college.”

Teacher, Olcott School

“I’m in 12th standard. I have a younger sister who also studies in this school. I have taken commerce with computer application. I want to be a collector and my sister wants to be a nurse. My father is a fisherman and my mother has a toy stall on the beach. My father feels that I can become a collector. A collector’s job is one of service - to resolve water problems, take care of roads, help schools etc.”

High School Student, Olcott School

Transforming lives of students

The number of students who appear for the 10th grade board exam has steadily increased over the last seven years. Earlier less than fifty percent of them would clear the exams. In the recent years almost all students have cleared the exams. Over 95% students have opted for college education in the last few years. Some of them have made it to the top city college. Many students are supported to continue their college education and have received the annual scholarship from OES. The scholarships are largely individual donations routed through OES, to support the students. In the last few years students have joined a wide range of courses-pure science, commerce, engineering and fashion design.

Students have been exposed to sessions on range of relevant topics from sustainability, waste management, career counselling to addiction and substance abuse. The school encourages sports, showcases student talent and organizes other celebratory events to inculcate a spirit of ownership. Annual days, Sports days, Independence and

Republic days are occasions where the entire school community get together and celebrate. The school has a student council and actively encourages students to take on leadership roles.

These young adults have extremely challenging lives. Many of them take up odd jobs to supplement family incomes. Working as delivery boys for food apps or sales jobs in nearby stores are most popular with this age group. Balancing the demands of work and school pose a challenge. The supportive ecosystem at the school and the individual mentoring they receive from the teachers helps students navigate these challenges. Many of them go onto working in companies, start enterprises of their own and evidently become the role models for young adults in their communities. Most alumni remain connected to the school and contribute in various ways – donations towards notebooks, school repairs, and events. Some contribute time and labour towards work in the campus. Some deliver inspiring talks about their life experiences, from school days and beyond.

“Students who have graduated from this school still keep in touch with us. In case I need money for the school (Rs 5000 or 15000), I reach out to them and they support. When the current students appear for their exams, the alumni of the school provide the stationery for them. Vessels and utensils for current students are also provided by the alumni. When trees had fallen during rains, it was the old students who helped in clearing the area. I can ask them for any help. The ‘93 batch had contributed Rs. 1 lakh, the previous year.”

Headmistress, Olcott School



03

03 Way Forward

Way
forward

Way forward



The Olcott School provides learning opportunities to vulnerable children, essentially children at risk who are not able to access mainstream schools. This is largely due to the dire livelihood situations of the families from the local communities. The Olcott School has been working with a long-term vision, believing that education unlocks opportunities to achieve better quality of life for families. It has worked with children who have not completed education themselves but as they became parents, they ensured that their children got educated. Many come back to the school to educate their children. The Olcott School has approached the problem of education in a fundamental way, building its education models around strengthening basics.

It has a well-defined approach, rooted in its own practice and experience based on basic tenets of education. All children are encouraged to sit and clear mainstream examinations and pursue further studies. It wishes to reach out to at least a 100 more children from such marginalized communities.

The Olcott School, now, seeks specific opportunities for growth and enhancement. These needs have emerged from their own experiences and evolving needs of student community. They require a range of support to fulfil their needs. They believe that partners like the Wipro Cares who have collaborated successfully in the past can offer their support for fulfilling these emergent needs.

Leadership Development

The Olcott School has strong seasoned leadership who are driven by values and have a purpose to fulfill. They want children to receive adequate education without any discrimination. They own the concern and are determined to solve it for the betterment of the children. They have maintained open communication channels with parents and communities, enabling regular discussions about children's progress and barriers to accessing education. They have strong community outreach. In the last 5 years Olcott has managed a

remarkable turnaround and not only enhanced the school systems and teaching and learning standards but also infused fresh vigor and a sense of pride amongst the school community. The impact is evident in the investment the teachers make and the improved academic results. The school leadership feel it is the right time to build and nurture a second line of leadership. Sustained investment towards capacity building and greater delegation to young and dynamic teachers within the school has been initiated. It requires support in building leadership capacities in this newly initiated second line of leadership.

Concerted Fundraising Efforts

OES has been successful in getting the required funds from a pool of donors- corporates, institutions, individuals etc. They are yet to develop a robust support function on fund raising. This, they feel, is critical to grow the school. OES has not had a dedicated fundraising team that actively looks out for funding opportunities. They need the fundraising function to be better organized, involving other significant stakeholders in the process and systematically reaching out to more corporates. They hope to initiate a biannual process with the board, school leadership and the senior staff to create a robust plan of action for funding. OES now seeks more help in developing its fundraising function.

Linkages to Employment

Many students that graduate are not always interested in pursuing college education. Some are interested in pursuing specific vocations. The school is scouting for such possibilities and wishes to create and connect with vocational training opportunities. It wants to create linkages for different career options and is always on the look-out for trainings on entrepreneurship, job readiness, and soft skills. It now actively looks out for internship possibilities with other NGOs and corporates.

Cross-learning Programs

The school looks forward to creating multiple learning opportunities for its teachers. They currently collaborate with several institutions, schools, NGOs, corporates on accessing training for their teachers to upgrade themselves. Going forward they wish to collaborate on developing cross learning programs with other institutions.

05. Conclusion

In the last 7 years, Wipro Cares has played a significant role in the journey of the school. It has provided important funding to the school to enable working with vulnerable children for providing access to formal education. It has further strengthened its work by building domain perspectives, requisite skills, and team capacities. Wipro Cares has created a learning environment for the Olcott School with multiple trainings. The school staff finds Wipro Cares' focus on understanding their needs and building organizational capacities respectful and genuine.

The Olcott School plays a critical role in filling an existing gap in the mainstream system. If it were not for them, large cohorts of children would go without any access to meaningful education. The school has demonstrated staying power against all odds and has a wealth of knowledge through practice. It has strong relationships with multiple stakeholders- the parents, the community members, donors, corporates, NGOs and others. With its strong leadership, teams and multi-stakeholder approach to education, it serves as inspiration to other such initiatives.

06. Annexure

Methodology

PRIMARY RESEARCH

To arrive at insights on OES's model of work and it's on ground impact, we conducted in-depth interviews with the OES Leadership (Trustee, Academic Director, Headmistress and Staff). All these were conducted in person and on site at the Theosophical Society Campus in Adyar, Chennai. We also conducted in-depth interviews with 4 beneficiaries- parents and students of OES.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

We conducted a desk review of reports shared by OES and Wipro Cares in addition to other organization collaterals and website of OES. We also referred to external articles and reports.

Note: We have relied on OES for access to beneficiaries and this could result in a small degree of bias in choice of sample.

wipro: foundation

