

Giving something back

While Anand Kumar, Chartered FCSI, has a successful career in the City of London, he is improving life for poorer people thousands of miles away. **Lora Benson** reports



Anand Kumar

ANAND KUMAR IS delivering a brighter future for the rural community in India where he grew up. With the support of his family, he runs the Kusum Trust Foundation. Based in the north-eastern state

of Bihar, it provides vocational education for underprivileged students. The charity, founded in 2008, has built a knowledge centre that serves the village of Katesar and the surrounding district. It accommodates about 150 students between the ages of 16 and 30 and offers free courses in computer skills, accounting, handicrafts and spoken English. The charity also supports other nearby learning centres. Anand achieves great satisfaction from running a charity in his homeland. "Those who are privileged must do something to lift people out of poverty," he says. "I believe that imparting education to those who cannot afford it is the antidote to poverty." Anand fits his community work around his job as Adviser, Strategic Initiatives, at the European headquarters of India's Bank of Baroda in London. During a 30-year career in financial services, Anand has worked in India, Singapore and the UK for employers including Bank of India, ICICI Bank and ICICI Lombard, always remaining close to his roots. He was inspired to set up the charity after learning that the primary school he attended as a boy in Katesar was struggling to accommodate its rapidly growing number of pupils. Anand paid for the school to construct an extra building – allowing it to cater for more than 600 children – and also took time to get to know some of its students. "To my dismay, I discovered their computer literacy was abysmally low," he says. "I asked one student to forward me his CV, only to find that he didn't know how to write an email address. It was the turning point that spurred me to launch the foundation."

Preparing for employment

The Katesar knowledge centre is equipped with 13 computers, 15 sewing machines and a weaving machine. Anand visits two or three times a year, overseeing its funding,

and has seen it bring real benefits to the area. "The knowledge the students are gaining is making them more self-confident and independent," he says. "They study for a qualification – in IT, for example, it is a Diploma in Computer Application – and more than 600 people have passed courses. About ten IT students have so far secured a job. For instance, one has become a teacher and another works for the Central Reserve Police Force. Almost all who take vocational courses in sewing, weaving and similar skills are women and many now work from home in these areas. "I'm in touch with many large retailers in India and Government organisations to find placements for students. The foundation is also looking at overseas markets for products produced by students, including woven baskets."

Future development

Last August, the foundation began a Sunday health camp at a nominal charge to patients that meets the cost of medicine and a doctor's administrative costs. About 1,000 patients have already attended the camp. "I'm thinking of launching mobile phone repair training, sweater knitting, doll making and photography facilities," Anand says. "These

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skills will enhance the community's prospects for employability and prosperity." The Trust employs six local people: three IT teachers, two in handicrafts and one administrator. "We're also keen to hear from volunteers who would like to support our work," says Anand. "Eventually, I want the foundation to become involved in Africa, where there is a great need for education. In addition, my wife, Sangita, and I dream of opening an orphanage in Chapra, Bihar, for children who have either lost or been abandoned by their parents."

Anand feels his life philosophy is best summed up by the words of Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi and US writer John Andrew Holmes. "Gandhi advised that 'the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others', while Holmes said 'there is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up'."

Further information: kusumfoundation.org



Anand Kumar, third from left, shows two Government ministers baskets being sold at a market by women who were helped by the Kusum Trust Foundation