

## Raintree Foundation Established A First-of-its-kind Rural Counselling Center in Velhe Taluka



Girija Oak Godbole, a well-known Marathi actress, inaugurated Raintree Foundation's Manosarathi Mental Health Counselling Centre on November 23rd established within the premises of the Foundation field office in Sakhar village in the presence of members of the Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, Village Development Committee, and Asha workers. The Counselling centre will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the first and third Saturday of each month, as well as the second and fourth Tuesday of each month

Raintree Foundation's Sustainable Landscape Management program aims at building a thriving and resilient community from an environmental, economical and a well-being perspective. The Community Mental Health thematic is integral to meeting this aim and looks at mental health from a development lens, with the understanding that determinants like gender, education, income levels, migration patterns, and physical health affect an individual's disposition to mental health issues.

Raintree Director Abha Dandekar was in attendance for the inauguration. "The main goal of establishing Raintree Foundation is to bring about development for the welfare of man and nature," she said while interacting with the guests. We examine the issue of mental health through the development lens. Income, gender, and physical health are all social factors that influence mental health. Developing a community-based mental health model is a critical step toward accomplishing this goal. The goal of establishing Manosarathi is to provide people with the right to a safe and confidential space where they can freely express themselves and receive the assistance they require. Manosarathi Samupadshan Kendra has been established to assist people, and people should take advantage of a free service that has been established in your own village and will be of great assistance to the people of the village."

Manosarathi counseling center is free for all. **8448440267** is the helpline number of the counseling center.

## Farm ponds: A first of its kind initiative in Velhe Taluka

A total of 17 farmers from 9 villages of Velhe taluka participated in the farm pond project. The project was initiated with the aim of augmenting incomes and access to water for paddy cultivation during the lean summer months.

We also introduced farm ponds based livelihoods such as fruit and vegetable cultivation. Farmers have set up fruit orchards of Mango, Guava and Jamun as well as begun cultivation of vegetables such as Cluster beans, Okra, Tomato and Brinjal.

Additionally, we also introduced Farm pond based fisheries on a pilot basis with 9 farmers. These farmers are provided technical assistance and guidance by Jaljeevika and Raintree Foundation.





# Through MSRLM, Raintree Foundation and Bank of Maharashtra Launch 'Bank Sakhi' to Promote Financial Inclusion in Rural Maharashtra

## 9 Villages in Velhe Taluka Benefit from 'Bank Sakhi' Initiative for Financial Inclusion



Despite the push towards financial digitization, many rural areas still rely heavily on the cash economy. Factors such as the shortage of banks, understaffed facilities, and lack of digital transaction knowledge are hindering progress. To address these challenges, Raintree Foundation has partnered with Bank of Maharashtra and Bartronics India Limited to launch the "Bank Sakhi" scheme in Velhe Taluka, Maharashtra. The initiative aims to provide easier access to banking services and financial assistance, particularly for rural women.

This move is aimed at promoting financial digitization in rural areas and breaking down the barriers preventing communities from embracing this change. The "Bank Sakhi" scheme is expected to play a significant role in bridging the gap between urban and rural areas in terms of access to banking services. The partnership between Raintree Foundation, Bank of Maharashtra, and Bartronics India Limited represents a significant step towards financial inclusion and digital empowerment for rural populations.

On Friday, December 9th, 2022, the Bank Sakhi scheme was officially inaugurated with its first service center in the rural village of Sakhar. Mrs. Swati Kumhar was selected from the village to serve as the Bank Sakhi, tasked with handling bank transactions for the community. This scheme, launched under the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Mission, aims to generate employment opportunities for women in rural areas, as well as provide financial assistance to the local community.

Speaking about this initiative Leena Dandekar, founder of Raintree Foundation said, "We talk about Digital India but forget about 'Digital Bharat'. Even today there are no bank branches in rural areas. There is no awareness in rural areas about bank transactions. Bank Sakhi has been started to solve their problem, to provide them with banking services at their doorsteps in their own villages. Also, more importantly, this has created an opportunity for employment generation in the village itself".

Sonali Awchat, District Manager of MSRLM, expressed her support for the initiative, saying, "Bank Sakhi is a self-help group woman who is appointed to handle bank transactions. On behalf of the bank, she provides various facilities to villagers and helps with bank transactions. I am confident that this Bank Sakhi Customer Service Center in Sakhar village will greatly benefit the local community." "Bank Sakhi will not only provide comfort to the people in the village but also create employment for women," commented Ankesh Rai, Branch Manager, Bank of Maharashtra.

Bank Sakhi Swati Kumbhar shared her excitement about the opportunity, saying, "When I returned to the village after Covid, I faced a major problem with livelihood. But Bank Sakhi has given me the chance to be self-employed and serve my community by providing easy access to banking services. I am sure this will greatly benefit many people in the village."

## Raintree Foundation marks International Day of Persons with Disabilities



On December 3rd, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities was celebrated with a series of programs organized by the Raintree Foundation and its partner organization, Bapu Trust. These programs were held in the 9 villages of Velhe Taluka with the aim of creating awareness about disability and mental health issues. One of the main events was a rally through the Sakhar village where employees from Raintree and Bapu Trust, along with village schools and students, spread awareness about disabilities. The rally was a powerful demonstration of the commitment of both organizations to improving the lives of people with disabilities.

In addition to the rally, Raintree's Community Resource Person (CRP) and Bapu Trust jointly presented a street play on the theme of "rights of disabled persons." Raintree Foundation is actively working in Velhe Taluka to integrate people with disabilities into mainstream society and ensure they are able to live with dignity and have access to their rights. This celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities was a significant step forward in raising awareness and promoting inclusion for all.



## Raintree Foundation empower farmers with poultry and dairy farming study session



Raintree Foundation and Vigyan Ashram joined forces to host a comprehensive study session for farmers in all 9 villages from 17th to 18th October. The purpose of this session was to provide farmers with updated information and to encourage discussion about current practices, challenges, and new technologies in poultry and dairy farming. The farmers participated with enthusiasm and showed a willingness to embrace new information and technologies.

During the session, various topics were covered, including business opportunities in different professions, poultry and dairy farming, and the production of dairy products such as eggs, paneer, curd, cheese, and khawa. Ganesh Pingle and Yogesh Omkar, experts from the Vigyan Ashram Institute, offered their expertise and willingness to guide farmers who were interested in starting a business in these fields. They emphasized the importance of shed management, fodder management, disease control, and building market chains.

It was evident that the farmers were eager to learn and grow their businesses. The Raintree Foundation plans to continue working in these areas and provide farmers with more information and support in the future. The study session was a huge success and provided farmers with valuable knowledge that they can put into practice to enhance their livelihoods.

## Entrepreneurship visit to dream LED Pvt Ltd



Raintree Foundation aims to empower women through training and support in starting new businesses. In November, the Foundation organized a visit to Dream LED Pvt Ltd, a company established by women, to inspire and inform women from 9 villages about entrepreneurship. 22 women participated in the visit and learned about the work and process of starting a business from the successful women entrepreneurs of Khopi village.

The women of Khopi village shared their experiences and insights on starting a business, providing the visitors with valuable information and expanding their understanding of entrepreneurship.

## Expert Guidance



Mrs. Bharti Shantijit Randive is a dedicated Community Resource Person from the Khopi Taluka Bhor in the district of Pune. She has been working in this role since 2015 and has made a significant impact in the lives of women in her village. There are 23 self-help groups in the village, and Mrs. Randive was instrumental in the formation of one of these groups, "Swapnapurti Mahila Gram Sangh," which was established on 23rd July 2017. This work is part of the Maharashtra Rural Jeevannoti Abhiyan, and Mrs. Randive has helped 250 families in the village to join the campaign. In addition to her work as a Community Resource Person, Mrs. Randive is also the Director of Dream LED Private Limited Company, making her a successful entrepreneur and a role model for women in the village.

Q – Tell us about the Dream LED service you started?

Answer - Our company name is Dream LEDs Pvt. Ltd. Our products mainly include all kinds of LED bulbs.

- 1) Manufacturing bulbs up to 9, 12, 15 and 18 watts
- 2) Street Light LED Bulbs, LED Decoration Material, Solar Light etc.

Q - What was the purpose behind starting this company?

Ans - The establishment of Dream LED Private Limited Company was driven by a noble intention to provide employment opportunities to the women of the village of Khopi. Recognizing the need for work among the smart and capable women in the community, the founders of the company envisioned a solution that would allow these women to earn their rightful income without having to travel far from their homes. The company was established with the goal of providing employment opportunities within the village, thereby empowering the women of the community and improving their economic well-being.

Q - What did you do to get women involved and how did you bring them together?

Ans - In the initial stages, the women of the village were gathered for meetings to inform them about the new business opportunity. The response was overwhelming, with many women expressing interest. Eventually, a group of five women stepped forward to lead the charge and establish the company. Over the next six months, they underwent training and spent their time repairing dead bulbs and streetlights. These five determined women did all the planning and within a year, they had successfully grown the company from a small operation to a thriving business with a revenue of 11 lakhs.

Question - What has changed in the society or village because of this company?

Ans - The formation of this company has not only improved the economic status of these women but has also helped change the attitudes of others in the community towards women. The success of the company has given these women the confidence and belief that they are capable of running a successful business. The village now boasts of many small and large women-led businesses, all running through the cooperative society. By the end of 2022, the bank link of all the groups had increased to three crores, further highlighting the positive impact that this company has had on the village and its residents.



# Building capacity to protect Biodiversity

## 10-day certificate course in Sakhar village, Pune

A 10-day certificate course on People Biodiversity Register and the Bio-diversity Act-2002 was successfully conducted in Sakhar village of Velhe taluka, Pune. The course was organized by a collaborative effort between Raintree Foundation, Srishti Sanvardhan Sanstha, and the Maharashtra State Biodiversity Board saw the participation of 9 personnel including 4 from Fergusson College and 5 CRPs from the Raintree Foundation project area.



The primary objective of the program was to equip local youth with the skills and knowledge required to identify and engage with knowledgeable individuals in the field of biodiversity. Participants learned about traditional knowledge acquisition techniques and information recording methods, as well as the importance of detailing bioresources at the village level and coordinating between block level and village level committees.

The youth were trained in the implementation of ABS (Access) and on how to develop People's Biodiversity Register at the Gram Panchayat level. This register, as per the Maharashtra Biodiversity Rules 2008, will include comprehensive information on local biological resources, their availability, uses (medicinal and otherwise), and traditional knowledge regarding their utilization. This certificate course represents a significant step forward in helping local youth to better understand and preserve biodiversity in their region. It will also assist in the specification of biological resources at the village level, coordination between the taluka level and village level Biodiversity Management Committee, and the development of further strategies for People's Biodiversity Register (PBR) development. The primary responsibility of the Biodiversity Management Committee is to prepare the People's Biodiversity Register in accordance with the Maharashtra Biodiversity Rules 2008. This register serves as a comprehensive database of local biological resources and contains valuable information on their availability,

uses (medicinal and otherwise), and traditional knowledge regarding their utilization. By having a thorough understanding of the biological resources in their area, the Biodiversity Management Committee can also explore potential financial benefits that could be derived from these resources. The People's Biodiversity Register serves as an important tool for not only preserving biodiversity, but also for ensuring that the benefits of these resources are fairly distributed and sustained for future generations.

Benefits to Village, People, Local Self-Government (Gram Panchayats) from implementation of provisions of Biodiversity Act 2002 -

- The People's Biodiversity Register will help to know the status of available biodiversity in the village
- If a species is on the verge of extinction, measures can be taken to conserve that species
- Local level bodies will be empowered to manage biodiversity in their area, grant or deny permission to use biological resources, and levy collection fee if permission is granted
- Apart from biological resources, knowledge related to biodiversity will be managed through People's Biodiversity Register
- A substantial benefit or 95% of the benefit from the user from the commercial use of the biological resources and associated knowledge will accrue to the relevant Biodiversity Management Committee
- The Biodiversity Management Committee can provide its own funds. For that, the transaction can be done by opening an account in the bank

## Celebrating Bird Week: A Study Tour on Migratory Birds in Velhe Taluka



Maharashtra annually commemorates Bird Week from 5th to 12th November, in honor of India's renowned ornithologist, the late Dr. Salim Ali. To observe this day, the Raintree Foundation, in partnership with Tata Motors and Srishti Conservation Foundation, arranged a field trip focusing on Migratory Birds in the Velhe Taluka. During the trip, students were exposed to the diverse biodiversity and the different types of birds found in the region.

The students were educated on various topics related to migratory birds, including where they come from, how they survive, how to identify them, the significance of these birds, rare bird species, and their respective seasonal appearance. The students were also instructed on the specific periods in which these birds tend to arrive.

The youth of today will become the responsible citizens of tomorrow. It is crucial to instill a love for nature and the environment in these children so that they can protect it in the future. The Raintree Foundation has consistently worked towards strengthening the bond between humanity and the environment. For the past three years, the foundation has been collaborating with schools in villages to educate people on their local environment and familiarize them with the flora, fauna, and wildlife. Through various initiatives, the foundation aims to raise awareness and bring people closer to nature.



The Raintree Foundation celebrated Children's Day on November 14 with a festive gathering of kids. During the celebration, the Foundation interacted with students in local schools, taking the opportunity to learn about their dreams and aspirations. A fun-filled fancy dress competition was organized, with enthusiastic participation from nine different villages. Some students dressed as famous historical figures like Savitri Bai Phule and Mahatma Gandhi, while others dreamt of becoming police officers or teachers. As members of society, it is our responsibility to listen to the dreams of children and offer guidance and support to help them become responsible and successful citizens of tomorrow.



## Exploring the World of Business: A Study Tour for Women's Self-Help Groups

Raintree Foundation recently organized a study tour for 19 women from local self-help groups to the Santa-Krupa factory in Ambegaon, Pune. The tour was aimed at providing hands-on experience and education on the functioning of a factory and the process of selling goods. The women were guided by Vishal Jadhav of the company who explained the workings of the factory, including product manufacturing, packaging, and storage. The group then visited the Santkripa outlet at Season Mall in Pune, where they were able to observe how goods are sold, stored, and the general sales volume. The tour proved to be a huge success as the samples of Sabudana Chakli, Kheche Papad, Potato Chips, and Potato Kees made by the women of the village were passed by Santkripa. These products will soon be sold through the Santkripa outlet. The necessary training and preparation have already begun, empowering the women with entrepreneurial skills and helping them take their first steps towards financial independence.





Wishing You a Green  
and Joyful New Year:  
Protect Our Planet and  
Celebrate Sustainably



Workshops and Events  
during Feb - Apr

Livelihood -

Visit to Department of Fisheries  
Training women entrepreneurs on  
clean energy  
Beginning of Poultry Farming  
BC Sakhi Residential Training  
Begins

Environment -

People's Biodiversity Register  
Information Collection- Meravane  
Gram Panchayat  
Biodiversity Festival  
Forest Department Workshop on  
Wildfire Management

Watershed -

Programs in schools to celebrate  
World Water Day

Mental Health -

Training of ASHA workers and  
Anganwadi sevaks on mental  
health counselling



Inspiring Story of Determination: Sonali  
Dixit's Journey with Raintree Foundation



Sonali Dixit is a shining example of determination and hard work. She joined the Raintree Foundation as a Community Resource Person (CRP) 18 months ago and has since made significant progress in her career. Despite facing difficult circumstances in her personal life, including having to drop out of education due to family responsibilities and a disabled sibling, Sonali's love for learning and determination to succeed led her to join Raintree Foundation.

Today, Sonali is a well-rounded CRP who manages several important tasks within the organization. She is in charge of 5 women's groups, 1 village association, 1 farmer group, 6 farm ponds, and 7 biodigesters. Her contributions to the foundation are far-reaching, as she conducts village-to-village meetings on gender and mental health and is able to effectively communicate with people of all ages. Sonali's dedication to her work and her natural ability to learn new skills sets her apart from others. While working in watershed ecology, she has become a specialist. She knows how to control the oxygen levels in water, which she has mastered in a short period of time. This is just one example of the many new things she has learned while working at Raintree. The foundation has provided her with expert guidance and opportunities to further her education and grow in her role.

Sonali's success story serves as an inspiration to many women in the village. Despite facing challenges and obstacles, she has overcome them and is now standing on her own feet, taking care of her family and making the most of the opportunities available to her. She is a true hero and a shining example of how hard work and determination can lead to great things. The Raintree Foundation wishes Sonali all the best in her future endeavors.



COMMUNITY COUNSELING CENTRE

**MANOSARTHI**

FIRST AND THIRD SATURDAY  
SECOND AND FORTH TUESDAY  
PLACE - RAINTREE SAKHAR OFFICE  
TIME - 9AM - 5PM  
HELPLINE NUMBER - 8448440267



Raintree Foundation Field Office Address - Raintree Office, Sakhar-Wajeghar Road, Near Zilla Parishad School. Sakhar, Velhe Taluka, Pune.  
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Visit the office to inquire about any of Raintree Foundation's activities.