

# Chenu's Dream- UMEED School

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Go home, turn on your television, switch to the news channel and keep watching it for at least one hour. Next, pick up the newspaper skim through the headlines and read the main stories on current affairs. If the feeling that the world is falling apart and we are all doomed does not hit you, then you are in need of serious help. We live in a world where every day we are bombarded by negative news through all the major mass media outlets. In light of this, we crave for a story that might make us believe in good again. Fortunately, last week I came across one such story, an individual who in his right is no less than a super hero; last week, during my visit to District of Umerkot in Sindh, I met 'Chenu'.

On the fringes of Umerkot city, at the junction of the Barrage and Desert, is a small village spreading out on more than 3 Kilometers with around 200 households. These are families that have migrated from different parts of the Tharparkar desert to settle here. Almost a 1000 people live in this village and among them is an individual who left school in 5th Grade and who, now, sells items of daily use from his stand at the road side. 'Chenu' (pronounced with a sound of 'Shh' in the beginning) left school because he had to make a living to support himself and his family but the love for education never left him. With his shabby clothing and 'ordinary' physical appearance none of us would spare a second look towards Chenu if were to see him on the street on any given day. But little would we know that what Chenu has achieved is what most of us would hardly ever achieve in our life time. For you see Chenu had a dream, and his dream was that he wanted every child from his village to be able to go to School one day. With the village at a distance of more than 10 kilometers from the nearest school, within the Umerkot City, it was not possible for any of the children to travel that distance each day and hence none of the children were school going. All of the inhabitants of this village are 'Harees', farmers, and therefore it is safe to say that there was an extreme lack of financial resources and hence the idea of developing a school that the society would support itself was out of the question. Also, with none of the people in the village being able to read or write, applying for a grant from a government or private institution was also a great challenge. But none of these were going to stop 'Chenu' in what he had set out to achieve.

Great things can happen if you are true to what you believe in and it is rightly said that God works in mysterious ways. It was during this very time that British Council decided to expand its *Take A Child to School* project to the district of Umerkot. Under the project a nationwide enrollment campaign is being run in around 60 districts and efforts are made to increase enrolment in the remotest of areas through a network of local organizations and volunteers. During a field visit, Banshi Malhi (project Coordinator at a local organization and working on the TACs project) stopped at the roadside stand of Chenu to inquire about the status of enrollment in his village, Chenu shared his dream with Banshi. Banshi Malhi, a man driven by passion and dedication to work towards the development of his community began lobbying for people with the financial resources who would be willing to support the development of the School in the village. During this time Banshi approached Tayyab Arifar to provide the financial assistance and proposed pitching the Sindh Education fund for a public Private partnership. Together Tayyab and Banshi applied at the Sindh Education Fund for a partnership and exactly 1 month later their application was approved by SEF; what started out as a dream was finally about to be become a reality.

With the initial investment by Mr. Tayyab a structure of 5 classrooms and 1 staffroom was developed on a small piece of land donated by Chenu. The furniture, Stationary (for the School and the Children) and Books were procured by the initial investment made by Mr. Tayyab. Finally the day arrived and on 7th of April, 2016 Chenu's dream became a reality and the School was officially inaugurated. So far, around 306 Children have been enrolled, all under the *Take a Child to School* Program. Chenu, who is now working as an ILMMASSADOR ( a volunteer under the TACS project) along with Habib Ullah (another ILMMBASSADOR) went from door to door each day to convince parents to send their children to School and it is because of their efforts around 306 children have already been enrolled since the inception of the school. The Banner on the school building reads 'The UMEED SCHOOL', a name proposed by Chenu himself, and it is safe to say that the name it is befitting to what the School symbolizes.

In a country where around 25 million children are out of School, it is important that such stories are highlighted as they symbolize hope. There is no denying the fact that there is still much work to be done before a day can finally arrive until every child in this country gets an opportunity to go to school but as long as there are dreamers like Chenu, I am hopeful.

