The Community Library Project

TCLP's Leadership Program:

Description of role, responsibilities and development of Member Leaders

"In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit , but as a limiting situation which they can transform."

— Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

"Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information."

— Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

What is Leadership Development?

Leadership Development is a long-running program of TCLP that continues evolving as our understanding of, and engagement with, the communities we work in grows. The most important objective of the Leadership Development Program is community ownership. If there is a library in a community and the community does not have the ownership of that library, then there is little chance of that library being successful; but when the community has ownership in that library, then the chances of the library being successful increases greatly.

In the Leadership Development Program, we create opportunities for library members who have been coming to the library for a long time to recognize their leadership skills and improve them, run the library with the librarian, and express their thoughts and voices on different platforms and in the library. We have an option for those under 18 to become Student Leaders and to learn leadership and organising skills at an age appropriate level. We also have short stint paid positions of 3 and 6 months for older leaders to develop as librarians and community organisers in which the leaders experience and learn how to work for educational, social and political change. Even after the organising position ends, those who participate in the program stay connected as leaders with the library in two ways: firstly, we find and create internships in other organisations for them. Secondly, we invite them to join TCLP's Core Team of young leaders. The Core Team is composed of library leaders who are over age 18 and ready for the responsibility of leading the library within the library movement. In time, some Student Leaders, Community Organisers and Core Team Members become Member Librarians and/or Library Movement Activists.

There are currently four groups in leadership development - *Student Leaders*, *Community Organiser Trainees* (paid short stint), *Core Team members* and *Member Librarians*.

Purpose of Leadership Development

Our most important goal and objective of leadership development is to transfer ownership to the community and to build support in the communities we work in for the right for all to read.

The Leadership Development Program has been designed in such a way that we recognize the leadership skills of our member leaders and help them to understand and learn them. In that we help them to learn:

- How to work with love (pyar se)
- How to work responsibly and dependably (zimmedari se)
- How to think critically and how to put their thinking to work (soche se)
- How to do the library's work thoughtfully in a way that builds both the library and the library movement

In Leadership Development, we do not just engage the member leaders in any one aspect of the work, but connect them with the entire organisation. They remain part of the organisation's work by staying involved in programs such as fundraising and finance, our online library, our leadership council and our safety committee. For every decision of the organisation it is necessary to have member leaders' thinking and voice. For this, two member representatives and two alternate representatives are elected from our leadership development program to serve on the organisation's Leadership Council, the decision making body or Board of the organisation. There they join Trustees, Steering Committee and Staff Representatives in a democratic process of running the library.

Objectives of Leadership Development

1. To grow into the role of librarians and library activists who provide members with access to books and opportunities to think, and who mobilise communities in support of their right to free libraries.
2. To explore and develop lenses/frameworks for socio-political analysis and critical thinking including class, caste and gender perspectives so that they can thoughtfully and effectively work to remove historical barriers to reading.
3. To develop individual and collective strength to stand in solidarity with their fellow leaders.
4. To become accountable individuals with the tools and skills that allow them to work to uphold democratic values.
5. To become a community defined by justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

Define pedagogical approach

1. **Critical pedagogy** - The work of creating access to books and reading stems from a long history of exclusion. Thus to understand librarianship in the Indian context, it is imperative to understand all concepts, structures and systems in the work of libraries within the context of caste and other socio-political frameworks that enable or disable access to books and readings, and validate or invalidate knowledge systems. The approach to training of leaders in the Leadership Development program is grounded in the belief that to the work of justice we need to build consciousness of the contradictions that define our social structures - the need for

inclusion arises from existing exclusion, power in the hands of a few is the result of disempowerment of people, the work of creating access is rooted in a history of inaccess.

2. **Dialogical approach** - We understand dialogue not merely as a conversation but a process based on a relationship of mutual trust, respect and equality. In this approach we are conscious of the imbalance in power dynamics, so we collectively create spaces where members can share their stories and life experiences, and we listen to each other's stories and experiences with openness and intent. Through dialogue we begin to reflect, question & deconstruct the power relationships, and initiate the process of their transformation.

3. **Experiential learning with analytical approach** - Experiential knowledge, which includes lived every-day experiences and social realities of the library members, informs our work and practices at the library generally, and within the Leadership Development program specifically. Members in the Leadership Development program learn how to use academic and theoretical tools to analyse these experiences and theorise them. This helps identify individual struggles as part of a collective struggle, and to build counter narratives.

4. **Problem solving** - Codifying individual problems as collective struggles gives the opportunity to collectively work to solve the problem and co-create knowledge. This approach pre-supposes that the relationship between a teacher (or librarian) and the students (or library members) is not based on hierarchies, but on mutual respect which creates opportunities for both to learn from each other and teach each other.

5. **Socio-constructivist** - All members in the library bring with them a strong cultural and community knowledge. Through support and mentorship from the librarians and other leaders in the library, and the experience of working in the library, they build on their existing knowledge.

Guiding Principles

1. **Justice:** To organise and build an organisation around the idea of injustice in our societies. Historically, in the communities where we work, too many people have been denied their constitutional and human rights, including the right to education and information and the right to read and think through books. These rights cannot be realised if we ignore injustice.

2. **Safe Space:** We know throughout history, members of our library and their families have been excluded and oppressed on the basis of caste, religion, gender and other social status. So we have to build an organisation which welcomes those experiences and talks about them vocally. We need to build a safe space for them to talk about their struggle. To express how they see this injustice.

3. **Community Ownership:** Library relationships are vital for community ownership. We can't be a community owned organisation if we don't reach out to the families of our members and talk about the exclusion and oppression for which we are building an organisation .

4. **Trust:** We trust all our members that they will take care of the library and the books. We trust them when they share their experiences and stories.

5. **Love (Pyaar Se):** To work with love (pyaar) does not just mean speaking with members with a smile and in a soft voice. It means speaking with each member with respect and dignity. It also means to acknowledge in all our work and conversations that we are part of a society which is structured on power imbalance and so through our work we will deconstruct these power structures.

6. **Recognising diverse knowledge systems and collective learning:** When education is institutionalised, the power to run these institutions, and to establish certain knowledge as valid and recognising other knowledge systems as invalid, remains in the hands of the people and groups that already have power and privilege. This becomes a tool of oppression to force communities of people out of the education system and all the opportunities that come with them. In libraries, we question the hegemonic hold of a few people on curriculum and knowledge, and we together acknowledge, recognise and create space for diverse knowledge systems.

7. **Solidarity**

Structure of Student Leadership:

We have student leaders in all three branches. Throughout the year, the librarians observe and identify members who demonstrate an interest in the library work and in taking on leadership responsibilities in the library, to nominate them to undergo the Leadership Development recruitment process. Interested members, who meet the age and other criteria, can also sign up for the recruitment process. All members who are either nominated or have signed up go through a six month recruitment process which includes an initial 3-month trial period where they determine if they would want to continue in the programme. If they decide to continue in the programme, they undergo a rigorous training over the next 3 months with the Leadership Development team, at the end of which they may become a Student Leader. The process is explained in detail in the curriculum outline. Student leaders' responsibilities include Circulation, cataloguing, Reading Curriculum, library programme reports and data analysis, technology, mobilisation, Digital library, Finance department, individual programmes and evaluating how the library is functioning. In every branch we have a librarian who works closely with student leaders to mentor them through their student leadership role.

Student leaders Criteria

1. Has been a member of a TCLP library for more than a year.

2. Should be at least in class 8th or 13+ age.

3. Should be enrolled in some kind of education programme (preferably should be enrolled in school).

4. Commit to be with us for a minimum of one year.

5. Commits 4 hours weekly in the library to do library work. Library work can include activities like circulation, readaloud, cleaning, cataloguing etc. It can also include activities related to self learning and lifelong learning in the library, for example through participation in workshops like YP, art etc.

6. Need to go through a formal training period of 3 months (plus 3 months of open

training).

7. A person willing to engage in the library's existing struggle to form their anti-caste thinking and to grow their idea of Justice.

8. Parents' permission and involvement is required.

Curriculum Outline:

The curriculum for student leadership program comprises of two modules - for student leader trainees (informal and formal) and for student leaders (ongoing).

Curriculum and Training Components Prior to becoming Student Leaders:

Members who sign up or are nominated for student leader training and recruitment, undergo this curriculum to determine their preparedness for joining the program, and to orient them to the leadership development program and to the library work.

i. **Student Leaders recruitment:** Every year TCLP begins training for the Student Leader Program in September by inviting members who show promise, including those who express interest in becoming a part of the Student Leaders. In the process, we look for the following qualities in prospective student leaders - they should be regular members of the library, they should be willing to challenge and deconstruct the existing power structures, they should be able to ask difficult questions, and they should be readers. We understand that a member may not demonstrate all of these attributes, but if they demonstrate at least two of them and are willing to acquire the other attributes, then we commit to work with them in their learning process. These members are then recruited for the open training period.

ii. **Open Training (during informal period):** Open training runs from September to December every year. The purpose of this training is to help members understand what it means to be a student leader, and for them to understand the work and the purpose of free libraries. The open training period is rather loosely structured, in that the trainees are not expected to commit to a fixed schedule or responsibilities. They are expected to come to the library for 2 to 3 hours each week with the intention to work with the librarians on some of the key day-to-day library tasks. These may include shelving of books, cleaning of books and bookshelves, exploring the library's book collection and understanding how they are categorised and organised, attending read-alouds, and spending time for independent reading. Each library branch has a librarian who has the responsibility to work with student leader trainees. In addition, the student leader trainees are paired up with existing student leaders. The librarian and existing student leaders, apart from supporting the trainees in their library tasks, also engage in frequent conversations with the trainees on the subject of free libraries and how TCLP libraries function. These conversations are an essential part of the open training period because these provide the opportunity for the trainees and the organisation to know each other better, at the same time

this provides the space to engage in dialogue on the organisational politics of being an anti-caste, anti-hate, feminist and inclusive space.

At the end of the open training period, all student leader trainees go through an evaluation process, to mutually determine if the trainee is prepared and willing to progress to the formal training. The evaluation criteria is as follows:

a) Are they interested and willing to become a student leader?
b) Were they regular during the training period?
c) Did they participate in all the activities?
d) Are they willing to commit to the student leadership program for at least one year?
e) Did they express openness to engage in and explore different perspectives on justice, power-relationships, caste, gender and other important socio-political ideas?

If after the evaluation process, we determine that the trainee is ready to join the formal training process, we speak to their parents to explain the leadership development program to them and to seek permission for their children to join the leadership development program.

iii. **Formal Training:** Members who complete the open training period, meet the evaluation criteria and whose parents give permission to join the leadership program, are invited to join a 3-month long formal training. This training runs from January to March. During this period, they commit to four-hours of duty per week. To help them manage their duty hours, they prepare their own timetable, with support from existing student leaders and librarians.

This training has two simultaneous tracks:

A) Understanding the core values that guide TCLP's work: Through modelling by librarians and student leaders, and through conversations, trainees learn about the following core values -
   a) Pyaar se/ With Love
   b) Responsibility
   c) Accountability
   d) Soch ke saath/ Thoughtfulness
   e) Reflection
   f) Time and work management
B) Understanding the library work and learning the skills required to perform it: We use an apprenticeship model for the trainees to learn about the library work and the skills required to perform it. Librarians and existing student leaders prepare a learning roster so the trainees can shadow student leaders as they perform different tasks in the library. Through this process, the trainees are exposed to and learn about the following:
   a) Koha Library Management Software, with a focus on book circulation and creating new member profiles.
   b) Welcoming members in the library
   c) Library programs like Art & Craft, Game Room, Cyber Project (digital program of the library)

d) Read-alouds

e) Building member relationships through Community Walks

Tools and Methods used in Formal Training

a) **Time-table -** Librarians and student leaders prepare a time-table for trainees, which is displayed on the notice board in the library. This helps the trainees manage their work hours and also helps them be accountable.

b) **Work roster -** The work roster breaks down the trainees' duty hours into smaller components to help utilise their training hours more efficiently, and to expose them to different library tasks.

c) **Work tracker -** This helps them track their work in the library by signing in and out in the student leaders notebook which then helps them to reflect how they are doing in their training.

d) **Observing Student Leader Meetings -** Student leaders meet every alternate month to celebrate the student leadership work among themselves and also to stop and reflect on the work they are doing and make plans for the future. The Trainees are invited to attend these meetings to observe and learn through the process.

e) **Apprenticeship -** Typically, each trainee is paired up with a student leader who supports them through their training period. The trainees shadow the student leaders as they read-aloud, conduct programs like Art & Craft or perform other tasks in the library, and take on smaller responsibilities themselves.

f) **Modelling -** Librarians and existing student leaders model all the core values to the trainees so that it can become a peer learning rather than being a lecture.

g) **Chat Groups -** All student leaders are added to a chat group in a messaging app. Chat groups help them to better give their accountability to not just TCLP but to the student leader group they are a part of. It helps leaders also to see how others are giving their accountability and taking responsibility. Chats groups also help student leaders to seek and give support to each other.

Induction into the Student Leadership Program: The formal training period provides another opportunity to all the trainees to determine if they are prepared to make a commitment of at least one year to join the student leadership program. The trainees who decide that they are not prepared or willing to join the program, or the trainees whom the Leadership Development team recognises as not being prepared for the program, are invited to try again next year. The remaining trainees are formally inducted into the Student Leadership Program, during a special library assembly. Parents of all the student leaders, including those newly inducted into the program, are invited to the assembly, allowing them to join in the celebrations while also celebrating their own commitment to support their children in their role as student leaders. The new student leaders are welcomed into the program and presented with their student leader badges in front of all library members, parents and library leaders. This is also the time when the old student leaders are given a certificate to acknowledge their one year commitment to the program, and graduating student leaders are given a farewell. So this assembly becomes a celebration of the student leadership program.

Training Components after becoming a Student Leader:

Welcoming Members in the Library:

Welcoming members means asking members to come inside the library and own their identities. Welcoming members is the first thing all good libraries must do. This is especially important in communities where many people have experienced exclusion based on their caste, religion and/or gender. At TCLP, *subhi ka swagat hai* is more than a slogan. Welcoming members requires all librarians, volunteers, and member leaders to learn and actively use a set of welcoming practices. Member leaders are trained in these library best practices. These include:

- *Welcoming members at library gates and doors:* Student leaders learn to welcome members with a smile, greeting and a kind word. Members need to know we are happy to see them.
- *Library orientation:* Student leaders learn how to give new member orientations. In new member orientations, members learn about library timings, programs, where to find different kinds of books, how to issue books and more. Orientation also includes a review of our safety policy and our policies around welcoming of *all* members. Members learn that we tolerate all kinds of ideas, but we do not tolerate behaviour or words that injure other library members. We are a safe and welcoming place. We explain that using this library is a right, but they must respect the rights of others to use it as well. Some tools used to teach library orientation includes shadowing experienced librarians and leaders doing orientation, and posters on Child Safety, All are Welcome and No Discrimination
- Child Safety Policy Training. An annual training is conducted in May with all student leaders to introduce them to TCLP's policy on child safety and to refresh those who are familiar with the policy
- All Are Welcome training. An annual training is conducted in May with all student leaders to familiarise them with TCLP's All are Welcome policy which also includes a No Discrimination policy
- *Regular Conversations:* Student leaders learn that welcoming members is an ongoing, active process. We can welcome members with small conversations anywhere in the library–at the circulation desk, during library programs, when members come to us with a question.
- *Community Walks:* Student leaders learn to go on community walks to invite community members to visit the library and to participate in library events. Free community libraries cannot be successful without actively reaching out to welcome members of the community. Please see the section on mobilisation regarding further details of this training component.

Reading Curriculum

Student leaders learn to participate in all aspects of our library curriculum. They learn through trainings, shadowing and observing librarians and by doing! Student leaders learn to lead and participate in many programs, including:

- *Read Alouds in the library:* Student leaders participate in a formal, daylong read aloud training in May and are mentored in how to do effective read alouds. They are expected to do at least one read aloud a week. The work tracker tool is used to track individual work on read alouds.

- *Self reading:* Student leaders are encouraged to read independently and to participate in book clubs. Student Leaders who have difficulty with reading are invited to participate in reading fluency classes.

Mobilisation

Student leaders learn to participate in mobilisations of members. In this process they learn how to build the library community and to advocate for free libraries for all. They also learn valuable skills that they may be able to apply later in life. Mobilisation activities include:

- *Community walks:* In addition to welcoming members, student leaders learn to use community walks as a way of bringing members of all ages together for activities such as poetry readings, talent shows and more.
- *Phone calls:* Student leaders learn to make phone calls to members to remind them to return their books, to inform them of library programs and more.
- *How to craft a message:* Student leaders learn that it is not enough to knock on a door, you have to have something to say that will invite the listener to own their issue around lack of access to books and community based on equality. This takes the form of sharing information and doing agitation and concludes with an invitation to action. The action may be as simple as attending a talent show and experiencing the equal community within the setting of the show and the library.

Experiential Learning in The Library: During their year-long tenure as a student leader, each leader participates in the below activities which utilises formal training previously delivered, including Koha software training, read aloud curriculum and library policy training, to deliver the following library duties. TCLP's Leadership Development model strongly emphasises learning leadership by doing leadership and building leadership by serving in leadership.

Circulation of Books and Cataloguing:

1. Check in and check out books on Koha Library Management software.

2. Honour Roll, maintaining book records of members.

3. Upload patrons' images on Koha.

4. Update members details on Koha.

5. Doing and assisting in new admission

6. Giving orientation of the library

7. Categorise books according to language and levels i.e., Fiction Easy, Fiction General and Picture Books.

8. Stick spine stickers on the books according to their category.

9. Enter book details on the Excel sheet.

10. Create book records on Koha.

11. Edit book records on Koha.

12. Remove worn out books from Koha and spreadsheets.

13. Create barcodes for books.

14. Work with librarians on the OPAC page

Reports and Data Analysis

1. Generating and analysing reports of day-to-day TCLP library's circulation and other programs.

2. Maintaining TCLP Library's weekly reports on Excel sheets as well as analysing reports and understanding how the library is building a relationship with members and what else we can do better in the library. This work is done more seriously at the higher level of leadership that belongs to Interns and Core Leaders, which is also part of TCLP Leadership Development and detailed elsewhere in a separate document concerning leadership for those over age 18.

3. Analysing TCLP reports and extracting data to better understand the effectiveness of the Library's work.

Technology

1. Gmail, Google drive (Sheets and Docs, etc.). Student leaders and interns work together to learn and understand many aspects of library systems, which have also been taught to them in formal trainings on G Suite and Canva

2. Student Leaders learn to make posters on Canva with more experienced student leaders and the finished product is key to mobilisation of members for library events

Digital Library (Duniya Sabki, Social Media and Cyber Project)

1. Taking more responsibility and ownership in Duniya Sabki, TCLP's Digital library

2. Improving and learning new skills related to Duniya Sabki.e.g, Video editing, audio recording, video shoot etc. Employing skills learned around messaging in this digital realm

3. Taking part in different aspects of Duniya Sabki like Whats app,Youtube,Telegram

4. Connecting Duniya Sabki (DS) to physical branches like creating DS corner, sharing live read aloud and sharing stories from the library on DS.

5. Increasing member representation on DS

6. Taking regular feedbacks from members about DS (during a read aloud, individual conversation or DS Corner)

7. Building members access on internet using Cyber Project

8. Creating skill based tutorial for members on Cyber Project

9. Giving Cyber Project Orientation to members and helping them to use Cyber Project

10. Implementing and creating Cyber Project curriculum in library

Calendar of experiential learning activities:

The annual calendar of events which serve as dialogical and experiential learning activities includes opportunities to learn to organise events and thus organise the library:

1. Induction of new student leaders organised by older ones in April
2. Passing out of graduating student leaders in April
3. Sunday Assembly every week
4. Dalit Pride Month in April of every year
5. Read Aloud and Library Policy Training Retreat in May
6. Celebrating Pride Month in the physical and digital library in June
7. Summer Library Talent Show in June/July
8. Pride March in November
9. Constitution Day in November
10. Christmas Talent Show
11. Annual picnic in January
12. Participate in organising library events happening such as the Free Library Festival, the Great Book Giveaway and other special events and fundraisers.

How does the above curricular content connect to our pedagogical approach which is detailed in the introduction but we need to go back to it here in summary or periodically in each item of curriculum, for egaxmpel in welcoming, circulation etc:

Action-Reflection-Action (Praxis):

Libraries are institutions that can enable social transformation and creation of a democratic society. Work of this magnitude, thus, cannot be limited in scope to the activities described above or the time span of a year or even a few years. It encompasses years of work, which includes a cyclic process of learning, action on the ground, reflection at the individual and organisational level, which produces more learning and opportunities for course correction leading to further action. Thus, each activity undertaken in the process of developing leadership in the library or as library leaders, is studied as a part of the larger vision of the library work - collectively creating a just society where every individual has the right to read and to think. To understand how this is brought to action, let's take an example.

When a leader learns how to manage the book circulation program at the library, they learn all the steps involved in the process. They also learn the significance of a member leading the program - the community taking charge of circulation and creation of knowledge - and the significance of the program itself. The book in the hands of members means that books leave the library and pass from

hand to hand and house to house, challenging the idea that the sanctity of a library lies in the physical space and the collection of books. It instead promotes the idea that power is transferred in the process of the transaction that happens between books and readers, and in the interactions between people, which leads to creation of ideas and knowledge. Initially, when a leader starts running the book circulation program, the focus is on performing all the steps correctly. Gradually, through dialogue, observation and reflection of their own experience of issuing a book, they begin to see the program as more than just a book exchange program. This creates an opportunity to reflect on the process with the aim to strengthen the action - perhaps, at this point the leader would attempt to converse with the member exchanging a book about their experience of reading it. As the process of action and reflection continues, the leader begins to learn that the circulation process doesn't end at the point of exchange of the book, but it continues when the member takes the book home, reads it with their siblings and parents, keeps it safely at home, brings it back to the library, discusses it with a friend or a librarian, exchanges it for another book, and the process continues. And through this learning the leader realises that the continuity and the strength of the circulation program lies in the many allied programs, practices and activities such as community walks and read-alouds.

This learning, however, happens when it is enabled through the many pedagogical practices that are undertaken as part of the Leadership Development program. Juxtaposing the experience of issuing a book with the lack of access to books and education creates the opportunity to talk about who is able to exercise the right to read and who is not. Through dialogue, the 'right' is studied within a power structure, which is then deconstructed within theoretical frameworks of caste and gender. Through a similar approach the student leaders learn to practise and analyse the different programs and activities in the library, and eventually librarianship and activism.