



REDEFINING SUCCESS MOVEMENT

INSIGHTS 2023-24



HAPPINESS, FREEDOM, LOVE



01

The Need to Redefine Success

At Dream a Dream, we have constantly evolved our understanding of the context of our young people. Field [research](#) has shown that our life skills programme graduates have the social-emotional competencies and aspirations to overcome adversity and thrive in an increasingly complex world. Yet in 2018, one of our brilliant young girls, selected for a one-year exchange programme to a community college in USA was locked up by her family, her passport taken away so she could not step out of her boundaries. Equipping young people with life skills was addressing only part of the challenge, as the pervasive systemic barriers continued to dictate their life choices. Amarnath, another Dream a Dream graduate, faced financial crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic when his parents, both tailors in a garment factory, were pushed into unemployment. Responding to the unprecedented need, he learnt to stitch masks and PPE kits and sold them to supplement family income. He was able to adapt, evolve and thrive while facing an uncertain future, even as the system was failing him.

These experiences showed us that thriving is not dependent on young people alone; rather calls for a systemic shift to enable thriving. In addition to developing life skills, we are now working to break the deep-rooted structural inequities in our society. We are working with decision makers — parents, teachers, school leaders, employers, policy makers among others, to understand their contexts and revisit their narratives of success in a changing and challenging world, to reframe the core purpose of education to work for young people inclusively.

02

Our Young People

While amplifying the stories of our young people through our #UnmutewithDreamaDream podcast and Instagram conversations, we noticed that even though our young people are defining success in unique ways, there are not too many diverse narratives of success which are visible in the education ecosystem. Let's look at how some of our young people have defined success for themselves!

“ **Success is the constant striving to achieve more.**

Praveen was part of Dream a Dream's Thriving Centre programme. He self-financed his education and is interested in stock trading. For him, the lack of economic support did not dissuade him from following his dreams.

“ **When one accepts ups and downs as part of life, success follows.**

Divyashree N aspires to serve the nation. She used to think that success is something that happens to people at a certain age and time. After completing an exchange programme under the United States Department of Community College Initiative, she thinks success is learning.

“ **Success is being in a position I dream of, while change is also success.**

Sheetal Sharma from our After School Life Skills Programme learnt to shape peaceful and inclusive communities through sports. She wants to be an entrepreneur.

“ **When we see failure, then it becomes easier to see success.**

Raj Shekhar from Thriving Centre, Bangalore is interested in journalism and wants to start his own production house. For him collaboration is success.

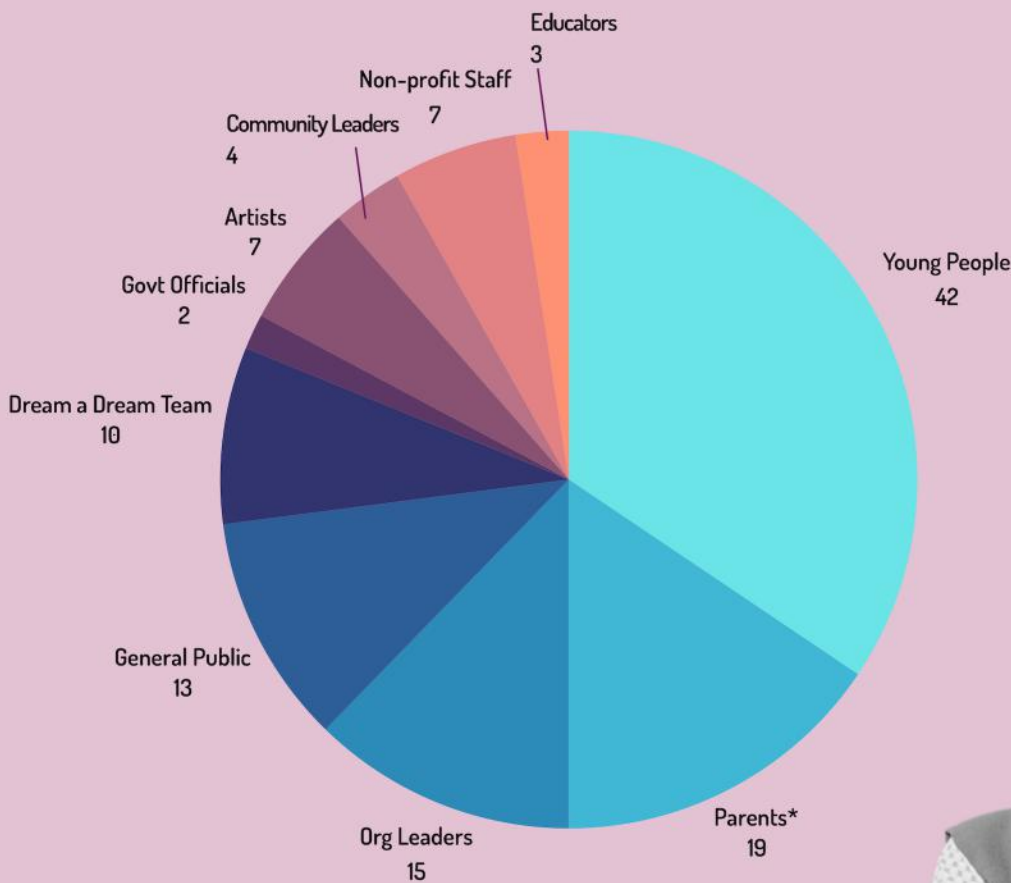


03

Listening to the Ecosystem

Despite the unique and diverse ways in which young people were looking at success, the dominant narrative within the education system continued to be narrow and linear, with its emphasis on marks, grades and a predefined path to success.

New narratives cannot be created in an echo chamber, thus, over the last six months, we engaged with the ecosystem. We facilitated a brief pause to listen to each other, articulate our own understanding of success and reflect on dominant definitions of 'failure' and 'success', and its impact on young people, especially those facing adversity. We listened to 122 people from diverse backgrounds:



Narratives shift when we listen and feel compelled to move.



*of Young People in Dream a Dream programmes

04

Listening through Conversations

We engaged with the ecosystem to listen to how people have defined success for themselves.



AGE

14-65 YEARS



3 Facilitated group conversations
(in Bangalore and Kohima)



25 In-person Interviews
(in Bangalore, Ranchi, Dehradun and Kohima)

42

61



LIVE

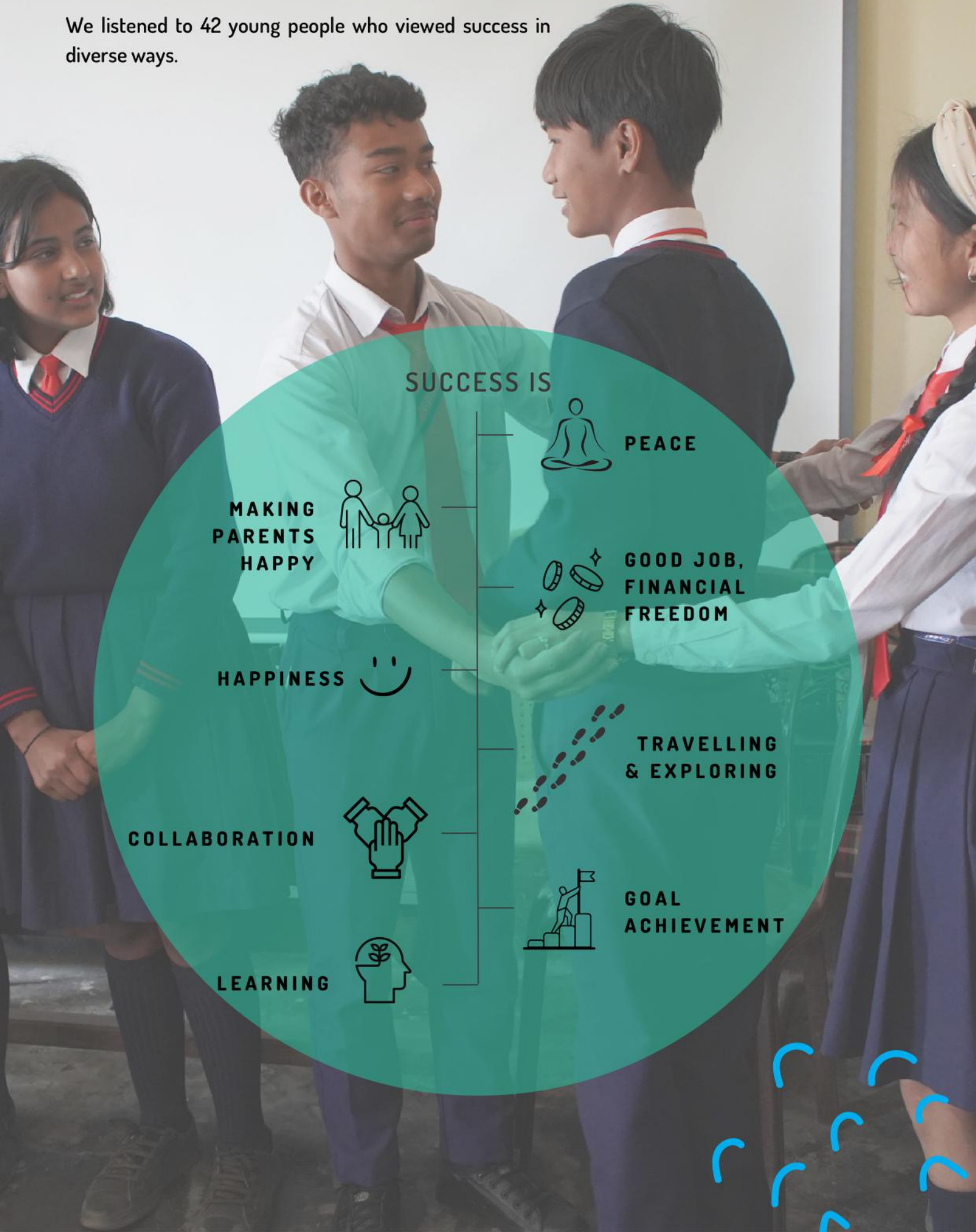
38 Instagram Conversations



Vox Populi
(Church Street, Bangalore)

What is Success for Young People?

We listened to 42 young people who viewed success in diverse ways.



SUCCESS IS

-  **PEACE**
-  **MAKING PARENTS HAPPY**
-  **HAPPINESS**
-  **COLLABORATION**
-  **LEARNING**
-  **GOOD JOB, FINANCIAL FREEDOM**
-  **TRAVELLING & EXPLORING**
-  **GOAL ACHIEVEMENT**



What is Success?

Success to many meant being happy, a sense of belonging to a community and wellbeing.

Happiness

16% respondents associated success with personal happiness and the happiness of loved ones/ family. Happiness is described as feelings of contentment, satisfaction and productivity. Most of these respondents are over the age of 25 years. More female than male respondents equate success with happiness.



I do like it when I get good marks but life is not just about a marksheet. Success is happiness.

- Anoushka Jolly, Student & Founder, Anti-bullying Squad

Sense of Belonging to a Community

18% respondents associated success with having social value- feeling of belonging with others, being useful to society and inspiring community development.



In the beginning, I felt success is materialistic acquisitions but after living 2/3rd of my life, I realise that success is how useful I am to society.

- Sudhir Kumar Pal, Founder and Managing Trustee, Manthan Yuva Sansthan

Wellbeing

16% respondents associated success with wellbeing. Most of these respondents are over the age of 25 years. There are no significant gender related differences among respondents thinking of success as wellbeing. Most respondents associated wellbeing with acquiring life skills like self-awareness, self acceptance, resilience and empathy.



Whatever gives you 6-8 hours of good sleep without an alarm clock is success.

- Vikram Sridhar, Storyteller

What is Success?

The prominent ideas of success focused on:

Financial Security

13% respondents associated success with financial security- creating assets and enough wealth to meet needs of self and family.



People who come from adversity never really have the time to be successful. I've never felt successful, except when I am in the presence of God.

- Parent of a Young Person, Thriving Centre, Bommanahalli

Sense of Agency

16% respondents associated success with having a sense of agency, freedom of choices, learning and growth. More males than females equated success with having a sense of agency to lead life on their own terms. Female respondents felt agency was being able to access learning for self growth.



Success is being able to critically question things around me to grow and improve.

- Bao, Artist

Having a Purpose

7% respondents associated success with having and achieving goal/s. A majority of these respondents are below the age of 25 years.



Success is lighting hope in the hearts of others. It is collective, not individual.

- Shubha Chacko, Solidarity Foundation

Success is young people taking ownership and giving back to the community.

- Dr Shashi Rao, Founder Ananya Trust



Our Learning

As we embarked upon this movement to listen in to diverse views around success, we also had to pause and reflect on our own definitions. It took immense effort and time for us to acknowledge that we too had been conditioned to view success in line with the dominant narratives around academic achievements and material wealth. Our own personal ideas of success seemed to be largely shaped by our life experiences, assigned or assumed roles and purpose. Listening then became a core tool for us to unravel just how difficult the process of meaning making for the self is, especially when one is questioning deeply ingrained ideas. We share our key insights below:

There never was a space to pause and reflect over what success truly is, or understand how narrow, linear definitions of success impact young people, especially those facing adversity.



“Success for the system is where every student has a fair chance to succeed and those who need extra support are able to access it.” - Dr Karen Edge, Reader, UCL Institute of Education, England

“Success is the journey of holding space for myself and others. Success and failure are similar, you can always pivot and change.”

- Manshvi Palan, Manager, National Partnerships, Dream a Dream

Quite a few view success as defined by their vocation, financial and professional status. However, those who have attained such status, often realise that it does not feel like 'success'.



“After 14 years of work experience, I decided this is not what I want to do and success should make me feel happier or complete.”

- Participant of Vox Populi at Church Street, Bangalore

Many could not articulate what success meant for them, because even pausing to reflect was a luxury. For many who face adversity, success is financial security for their family and ensuring good education for their children to secure a job and gain financial independence.



“Success is when I'm able to fulfil my children's desires, feed my family and be together.”

- Parent of a Young Person, Thriving Centre, Bommanahalli

Our Learning

Even as this movement is only a few months old, overwhelmingly, it is becoming clear to us that success is not static, linear or uniform, nor an end goal or destination. Success is ever evolving, deeply personal and subjective and it is a continuous journey.



“Success is a journey, there is no specific end point.”- Hruthik, Young Person, Dream a Dream

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“Success is not having a definite destination but enjoying the journey.”-

Harini Nagendra, Director, Research Centre, Azim Premji University, Ecologist and Author

The process of understanding how we define success for ourselves and for young people seemed to be an uncomfortable process for stakeholders who work closely within the educational ecosystem, like school leaders and government officials. However, most shared the need to reframe and reimagine education with a focus on holistic development of all young people.

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“The definition of success has to be redefined across elementary, middle and higher educational institutes so that we can get to the true core of success. If marks do not define success, then what does? This understanding has to be built across all systems for all students.”

- Dr Avinav Kumar, State Incharge -Quality and Inclusive Education, Jharkhand Education Project Council, Government of Jharkhand, India

For a few facing adversity, success is not material wealth but the ability to help others and the community.

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“If my sons are able to contribute meaningfully to the society, I'll be successful.”

- Parent of a Young Person, Thriving Centre, K R Puram



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Photo Courtesy -
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