

## My NSS Experience – Yash Sanghvi

I was tempted to write something like “Words will fall short if I attempt to describe my experience with NSS”. But this would have been the easy and lazy way. The more appropriate alternative, which is extremely difficult, is to choose my best words and arrange them in the most beautiful way possible. NSS is definitely worth an attempt!

My memories with NSS are countless, and I can’t highlight one without offending the others. So I’d rather discuss something more intimate: what made me continue with NSS for as long as I did.

I’ve often given people various reasons to join and stay in NSS. To the freshies and external volunteers, I’d describe NSS as a place to change lives through the simplest of actions, as a place to perform magic in their own little ways. To AAs, I’d describe NSS as a canvas to paint their dreams, as a place to unleash their creativity, as a place to ideate wildly and fearlessly, as there are always people watching their backs. To Heads, I’d describe working with NSS as solving an optimization problem of maximizing the impact and the happiness and well-being of our volunteers, AAs and beneficiaries, under constrained resources, complex team dynamics and other limitations, some sporadic and some perpetual. When talking to OCs, I’d shift the narrative to leadership, purpose, outreach, continuity, vision, the flow of enthu, direction and proactiveness.

While I stand by all these versions of NSS, none of them describe why I continued with NSS. Perhaps I myself did not understand that for a long time. For a person who never learnt how to make long-lasting friends, NSS provided the perfect escape. I don’t remember how the loop started, whether I kept myself busy because of lack of friends, or whether I lacked friends because I was always busy, but the fact was that being busy was somehow essential to me. It helped! It provided a healthy distraction from all the negative thoughts which flood the mind if left idle. NSS was my first distraction which actually calmed down those negative thoughts, which provided peace even during the idle times. Perhaps when you are solving others’ problems, spreading smiles, your own problems don’t seem to bother you that much. My optimism was crossing all the previous thresholds, my creativity was galloping, and being in the team (or in the classroom as a volunteer) gave a continuous sense of belonging. I realized much later that I loved NSS not because of what NSS was, but because of who I was when I was in NSS. Having said this, it shouldn’t be a surprise that I readily took up whatever role NSS wanted me to take up. To the world, it would have appeared as if I was pushing my limits, but in reality all I was doing was selfishly buying more time to spend in NSS. But alas, it came to an end, like all things do!

Looking back, I don’t know whether I was good for NSS or not. Perhaps this is best answered by my successors and time. But NSS was definitely a boon to me, and I can’t thank it enough for the memories, the lessons, the exceptional seniors, colleagues and juniors (all of whom taught me so much), the maturity and the overall transformation in my personality that it brought about.