

Diamond Harbor Case Study

Sewing and Software



The women squeal as the computer screen suddenly turns a dark green color. They huddle around a single desktop computer, leaning over each other, straining to see. Practicing using the computer's mouse by creating designs on the computer's Paint application, the woman in control had accidentally clicked outside the shape she drew and filled in the entire Paint canvas! One of the other women in the class places a guiding hand over the one already moving the mouse, attempting to help fix the mistake. This is the women's second computer class ever.

There are eighteen women enrolled in the Diamond Harbor tailoring training class. Almost all of them are married and the majority of them have only completed education through grades 5 to 8. They have each received the permission of their husbands and paid 1000 Rupees to be a part of the three-month tailoring class. In addition to learning tailoring, these women have agreed to come an additional hour and a half earlier and have begun basic

Diamond Harbor is a small town about 60 kilometers south of Kolkata, located where the Hooghly River meets the Bay of Bengal. Because of its location on the water, fishing is an important form of livelihood for the people of Diamond Harbor. The DREAM tailoring training center is hosted in a four-story, Pepto-Bismol-pink building, a short 5-minute walk from the central railway station. The training takes place in a third-floor room: the space belongs to the NGO Jagaran, partnered with the DREAM program. The women remove their shoes as they enter the open room and sit on the tile floor.

The class is held in the afternoon five days a week. The trainer, Rita Haldear, sits on a grey plastic chair at a desk in the front of the room, a whiteboard hung on the wall behind her. On the whiteboard, she sketches a pattern of a frock, including sample measurements of the neck,



The women gather around the computer as they practice moving the computer mouse and drawing using the Paint application

shoulders, waist, chest, etc. The women, their colorful sarees flowing around them, carefully copy the image into their own notebook. Every once in a while, one of the women will call out “Didi,” the Bengali term of respect literally meaning “elder sister,” and then pose a clarifying question to the trainer.

After they have checked their work with Rita, they then copy the design onto newspaper, cut it out, and hand stitch it together. Finally, they can move to cloth, tracing the design in chalk, cutting it out, and moving to one of the four sewing machines lining the back wall of the room to sew the pieces together. The DREAM program has hired the trainer and provided all of the supplies: the sewing machines, cloth, scissors, measuring tapes, etc.

Most of the women have never touched a computer before in their lives. Some of them hesitantly linger at the back of the group around the computer, but their peers do not let them avoid their turn! They are playfully pushed to the chair in front of the machine. As they slowly and shakily trace a picture onto the screen, the other women laugh at the valiant attempts, knowing they can do no better.

By the end of the three months, the women will form their own tailoring cooperatives. They will know both how to create articles of clothing as well how to operate a computer and perform basic functions to help in their everyday business processes. The women in the class may break into two or three groups, depending on how the logistics work out, and enter the business market. DREAM will assist the women in the initiation of their enterprise by loaning them sewing machines and supplies



The IT trainer explains why the screen turned dark green as the women clicked the mouse