

# THE BUSINESS OF LIFE

HUMAN RESOURCES

## Initiative that speaks for itself

■ Dunia training programme helps blue-collar staff at Dubai Outsource Zone learn English, maths and computers

DUBAI **Reena Amos Dyes**

"My life has changed for the better. I feel like a new man now. I was a very shy person earlier, but I am more confident now in my dealings with others. I have hope for the future and I feel now I will be able to make progress in my career."

These are the words of 22-year-old Himanshu Rawat, a cook by profession who works at a restaurant in the Dubai Outsourced Zone (DOZ). Rawat was too shy to talk to his colleagues and other people because he was not fluent in English, which is required to communicate in a country like the UAE which is a melting pot of different nationalities.

But things changed when he became part of an education initiative launched by dunia, a Dubai-based a holistic financial services provider.

The initiative titled Speak Easy, which was launched on the insistence of Mariam Elsamny, Head of Marketing and Product, dunia, changed Rawat's life and that of 30 others like him for the better.

The programme, which is specifically focused on blue-collar employees working in Dubai Outsource Zone, is aimed at empowering office helpers, security guards, drivers and messengers with basic skills in English, mathematics and computers.

Mariam Elsamny told **Emirates Business**: "The idea came up because when I interacted with many people either at the dunia office or at the cafés in the Dubai Outsource Zone or the security guards at the gate, I realised that many of them did not understand or speak English fluently. Also, many of the helpers in our office were keen to learn more English, maths, computer skills and Arabic and did not have the opportunity to do this anywhere. Firstly, they had no time off and secondly they did not have the means. After speaking to some of them I felt that there could be a wider need within the DOZ community and that we could help.

"Since its inception, dunia has designed a special programme called 'dunia cares' wherein employees and customers volunteer to serve the needs of the community. 'Dunia cares' focuses on education, wellness, social enhancement and environmental sustainability. So as education is a key pillar or theme that dunia and its staff focus on, this was a perfect way to give back to the community.



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Mariam Elsamny, dunia

"So we sent out a communication to all the companies in the DOZ to see if they were interested in sending their staff for these classes. It was important to get the support of the management of these companies so that they would ensure that their employees attended the classes for the entire duration of the three-month programme. We received a great response from the companies, which indicated that many of their staff were interested. Each company then sent us their nominations for the programme and that is how it started."

Rawat told **Emirates Business**:

"We were told about this initiative by our head chef. I was immediately interested as I used to have a lot of difficulty in speaking to my colleagues at the restaurant as they came from different parts of the world and the only language that unites us is English. Plus my company has a rule that we cannot converse in our native languages and have to speak English. So this used to give me nightmares as I was not very fluent in English having studied from a school where the medium of education was Hindi. And because of this I used to be painfully shy and could not even converse

with my manager who is from Africa. Also when I was asked to train other people I used to face problem as I could hardly converse with them. So when this opportunity came I grabbed it and today I can speak English with confidence and hold entire conversations in English without faltering."

Elsamny said: "We held a meeting with the people who had come forward to participate in the programme and introduced them to the company and the programme. As a team we agreed to start with the conversational English programme first as that was most critical for the majority of the team.

"We began with an assessment test and based on that we split the students into two groups – Beginner English Level One and Moderate English Level Two."

The initiative is run by 11 volunteers from the dunia staff. While, Mariam Elsamny and Deepti Ahluwalia, who is the Training Head at dunia, run the programme jointly in terms of class scheduling and preparing the material and teaching the level one class on a weekly basis, Gauri Sawant and Veena Viswanathan run the level two class. Sandeep Sudhakaran focuses on material preparation for

the classes and also assists in running the classes. Apart from these people several other dunia staff members join the classes and assist in activities. The staff are multilingual and hence can explain key things during the break out practice sessions to the students in their own language as the students come from different parts of the world such as the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The students are taught at the Dunia Training Center twice a week for one hour. While level one students are given coaching on Sundays and Tuesdays, level two students are taught on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Elsamny said: "We have started by teaching them English but the plan is to evolve and over time offer other programmes that will help them in their work. So we teach them the basics of the language and focus more on conversation so that they can benefit the most. We have prepared class books for each of them using professional English courses but have simplified it to match their level. We also do lots of role plays to get them to speak and practice. Our first batch of students has just graduated and we are planning to roll out the next soon."