

**GOVERNMENT OF MEGHALAYA, OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MINISTER  
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**IN A RAY OF HOPE FOR THE TRIBAL YOUTH, ASPIRE MEGHALAYA  
LAUNCHES IN THE STATE AMIDST A PANDEMIC**

Since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic early this year and the entire country put under nationwide lockdown, cases of depression have been on the rise as levels of fear, uncertainty and despair are at an all-time high, particularly amongst the youth population of the country. As per the National Mental Health Survey 2015-16, conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences (NIMHANS), 9.8 million teenagers in the age group 13-17 years suffer depression and other mental health disorders and are “in need of active intervention”.

Aggravated by the pandemic that number will be much higher now. The Government of Meghalaya is spearheading a unique intervention aimed at empowering the youth of the State with confidence, soft skills, life coaching, cultural awareness and talent identification opportunities to help them break away from the chains of mental and emotional lockdown that the pandemic has instigated.

The State Government has identified major gaps that hinder youth development in areas spanning communication, clarity of thought, wellbeing, aspiration levels and talent discovery. In a bid to help provide the tribal youth of the State with a much-needed breakthrough and nudge them towards the right path, Aspire Meghalaya was launched in 2019, sponsored by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, through the Department of Arts & Culture, Government of Meghalaya. The project is implemented by Meghalaya-based Avenues, Northeast India’s pioneering Life Coaching Social Enterprise.

The programme experienced massive success in its first year of implementation, having impacted 5,229 youth across 21 campuses in 8 districts.

- 99.85% of all participants had identified a clear set of values.
- 100% of all participants had identified a personal strength.
- 88.76% felt better placed to express their emotions.
- The number of students willing to participate actively in their classrooms improved by 300%.
- 76.87% had identified a major life goal.
- Over 144 career aspirations were identified by participants across the State.
- 4,445 boys and girls had discovered a talent they could be proud of.

The inaugural programme under Aspire Meghalaya 2020-21 was launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020 by Swapnil Tembe (IAS), Deputy Commissioner, East Garo Hills District, at an inaugural function held at Loyola College, Williamnagar, where he said that at the heart of youth development programmes and interventions like Aspire Meghalaya is the mission to instill

confidence in young people to chase their dreams. “Confidence comes when you are able to express yourself freely without fear. Do not allow negativity ruin your chances of achieving success,” he added.



**Batch photo of the participants at the launch programme at Loyola College, Williamnagar**

In its second year of implementation, it is the hope of the State Government that Aspire Meghalaya will bring about a huge transformation amongst the youth communities of the State. While speaking at the West Garo Hills District commencement programme at Mount Dura Academy, Dakopgre in Tura, Ram Singh (IAS), Deputy Commissioner, West Garo Hills District lauded the efforts of the implementation partner and the visible impact of the programme in the previous year. He further stated that the State Government is focused on building the aspirations and potential of youth and programmes like Aspire go a long way in building the collective aspirations of the youth of the districts. “This is the first time that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs is conducting such a programme across the country,” he added as he expressed how fortunate the State is to be blessed with such a rare opportunity under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister, Conrad K. Sangma, who is spearheading a consultation for a new youth policy for the State. He further emphasized on the need to equip young people with communication skills and the courage to express their opinions and ideas.

Meghalaya Chief Minister, Conrad K. Sangma, believes in the collective power of youth action and active citizenship and is working towards institutionalising a radical youth policy that

focuses on skills and passion for young people. He believes that Aspire Meghalaya is a model of change that can be replicated across the country through the support of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. In his virtual address for this year's edition he said, "The modules impart soft skills needed to build meaningful lives and careers with passion and self-belief. I urge our students to take this wonderful opportunity during these difficult times to discover their strengths and prepare for the future."

Mark Laitflang Stone, Founder and CEO of Avenues, the State implementation partner for the venture has been running similar programmes across the region for the last 17 years. Speaking at the inaugural programme in Williamnagar, he stressed the importance of holistic wellbeing to achieve success and reminded the students that, "Unless you have a strong base of human values – kindness, hard work, discipline, joy, love – you will be heading towards life and a world of careers without any clarity or direction. That's what we're here to do – to ensure that you are equipped with the skills and the mindset to achieve what you aspire for."

Besides instilling the tribal youth of the State with communication skills, confidence and courage to achieve their aspirations, a huge part of the initiative this year is to provide a platform for the youth to showcase their talents across music, singing, performance arts, literary arts, cultural and indigenous practices along with unique opportunities to help propel their aspirations and open up alternative careers. The programme also aims to build cultural awareness within the youth and awaken strong emotions of respect and pride so that they may not hide behind their roots but rather use them as a catalyst for their growth and development in all spheres of life – at home, within their communities and beyond. While speaking at last year's graduation programme in Ri-Bhoi District, A. L. Hek, Minister of Arts & Culture, Government of Meghalaya, stressed the importance of such a programme that emanates from indigenous knowledge. "In Khasi, we call this 'Ka Jingsneng Tymmen' (Teachings of our Elders). Avenues has created a beautiful platform through Aspire Meghalaya for our youth to inculcate values and confidence."

Over the last two weeks, Aspire Meghalaya has kicked off in 4 districts – East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills and South West Khasi Hills - and will span across select districts of the State till the end of March 2021. Owing to the current pandemic, this year's edition is deploying a blended approach of virtual and onsite programmes with strict hygiene and social distancing protocols put in place. The modules covering themes like Curiosity, Confidence, Wellbeing, Communication and Human Values, are designed keeping in mind the youth aspirations of the State, the current restrictions for onsite sessions and the resources required for online and virtual training. A key objective of the curriculum is to empower young tribal boys and girls with the confidence and clarity needed to create meaningful lives driven by values, self-motivation, passion and a collective sense of purpose.

The network of campuses is chosen based on their reach to students from all income groups, the availability of space to hold classes with adequate social distancing and the ability to hold the programme in the long term. Over the last two weeks, Aspire Meghalaya 2020-21 has touched ground at Loyola College, Williamnagar in West Garo Hills, Khadsawphra College, Mairang in West Khasi Hills, Hynriew Shnong HS School and Jakrem Presbyterian HS School in Mawkyrwat, South West Khasi Hills and Mount Dura Academy, Dakopgre, Tura in West Garo Hills.

Speaking at the District Commencement programme on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020 in Mairang, T. Lyngwa (IAS), Deputy Commissioner of West Khasi Hills District, urged the participants to take advantage of this unique opportunity. “As future voters you should know your rights and the skills that this programme will equip you with will help you exercise those rights and improve your wellbeing in all spheres of life,” he said.

Till date, Aspire Meghalaya has over 1000 registered students across 4 districts and is expected to impact over 4000 tribal youth beneficiaries in this edition across select districts of the State by the end of March 2021.



**Shri Ram Singh IAS, Deputy Commissioner, West Garo Hills District being felicitated by Mr. Mark Laitflang Stone, Founder, Avenues at the launch of Aspire Meghalaya at Mt. Dura Academy, Tura**