

Moving Closer to her Dream of Joining the Army: The Story of Laxmipriya Acharya

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[Pro Sport Development's](#) (PSD) [Community Sports Program](#) (CSP) aims to build leadership capacity, teach children to communicate effectively by working well in teams, and mutually respect teammates, opponents and members of the opposite gender. The CSP was started in the schools of Bhubaneswar in September 2015, catering to children from low-income families. Since its inception, the CSP has impacted 2,445 children, 44% of them being girls. One such example is of Laxmipriya Acharya, a class 9 student of Vivekananda School of Integral Education in Bhubaneswar, Odisha where the CSP was initiated in July 2019.

The 13-year old Laxmipriya has always been keen in sports and joined the program in her school to be able to participate in different sporting activities. She expressed, *"I joined the program because it lets us participate equally with boys in sports. This program has given girls a platform to engage in sports."* She further expressed, *"I have never seen such unity amongst girls and boys as during the Community Sports Program in the school. The boys and girls play together without being susceptible to gender-based discrimination and has increased mutual respect and understanding amongst us."*

Under the CSP, PSD organises various mixed-gender tournaments to enhance the participants' self-confidence, self-esteem and mutual understanding between the members of the opposite gender, while aiding their emotional and physical health and wellbeing. Laxmipriya felt more confident about herself than before participating in the program. She expressed, *"I have participated in various mixed-gender tournaments organised by PSD which boosted my self-confidence to play before an audience and my classmates."* Talking about the Mixed-Gender Netball Tournament she shared her favourite memory. She said, *"When the netball tournament was over, our chief guest for the event gave an inspirational speech where he said that we should be humble with our achievements and not lose hope at our failures. We need to be courageous and move on."* The CSP aims to aid in the social development of the participants by fostering interaction between them on and off field. *"Through the tournament, I was able to put forth my views and interact easily with my teammates. During the practice sessions and the match, I made new friends and realised that we all are the same despite our physical differences."* said Laxmipriya.

Additionally, the CSP aims to strengthen the cognitive skills of the participants. The program has benefited Laxmipriya in her academic performance. *"Participating in sports has improved my attention span due to which I'm able to concentrate and retain more information in my head. My marks have also improved. I scored 79% marks in my half-yearly examinations this year. Last year I had scored 73% in my finals,"* said Laxmipriya. She further expressed, *"I want to become an Army Officer when I grow up. Therefore, the program is extremely helpful to keep me physically and mentally fit. My parents also support my dream and interest in sports."*



Laxmipriya's mother is happy with her daughter's remarkable improvement in studies and behaviour at school and home. *"I have seen a tremendous change in Laxmi's behaviour since she joined the CSP in her school. She has been more attentive and has started self-studying at home to improve her academic performance and scored well in her half-yearly examinations. She has also become more disciplined at home and school."* expressed Laxmipriya's mother. She further said, *"I believe that Sports and the CSP in particular will be able to help her achieve her goal of becoming an Army Officer. She has already become disciplined, scores well in her examinations and has become self-confident and physically fit. She is moving in the right direction to pursue her dream."*

Laxmipriya's teacher, Minakshi Das said, *"Laxmipriya has become more active, courageous and confident after participating in the CSP."* PSD Coach Swagatika Khatei has seen a marked change in Laxmipriya's behaviour since her active participation in the CSP. She said, *"Laxmipriya's attitude has changed towards her friends and boys. Since she participated in the mixed-gender games, she has become more sensitive and understanding of the opposite gender, her peers and friends too."* The CSP sessions have encouraged Laxmipriya to boost her confidence, hone her communication skills, and socialize well with her teammates and classmates. Sports have given her a platform to understand and express herself. She is both studying hard as well as playing regularly and engaging in physical activity. By participating in sports, Laxmipriya says she is breaking gender stereotypes in her community.