

October – December 2024



SHOOTING STARS
FOUNDATION

NEWSLETTER

Educate | Empower | Enable

Mission and Vision

At Shooting Stars Foundation, we envision a future where all young people have equal access to STEM knowledge and skills needed to achieve academic success, career success, upward mobility, and a lifetime of economic self-sufficiency for themselves, their families, and their communities.



QUARTER HIGHLIGHTS

We are thrilled to welcome Leila Pourhashemi to the Shooting Stars Foundation (SSF) Board!

With an impressive career spanning startups and major tech giants like Sun Microsystems, PayPal, eBay, Intuit, and Ancestry, Leila is a leader in technology program management, Agile at scale, and organizational transformation. She has successfully driven large-scale company transformations, streamlined operations, and empowered teams to scale innovation efficiently.

Leila shares our passion for education and impact, saying:

"I'm excited to join the SSF Board and contribute to scaling the global impact of this amazing team. I believe diversity of thought, skills, and experiences leads to better outcomes, and I'm thrilled to help underserved communities change their life trajectory through STEM education."

Marching Towards Our Vision

1215

STEM scholars funded

40,000

students attended our
hackathons since BOY 2021

New Board Member

Announcement



SHOOTING STARS
FOUNDATION

Welcomes

Leila Pourhashemi

Transformational Leader / CIO



Leila joins us as a successful business and technology leader, currently serving as CIO at Globalization Partners, where she leads all internal technology teams, cyber security and the company-wide Digital Transformation. She has a keen interest in women in tech, and has spoken on many panels and published multiple articles about reducing bias, and enabling women to both speak up and be heard. The Shooting Stars family looks forward to leveraging Leila's expertise and knowledge in advancing our mission of breaking the cycle of generational poverty through education and transforming lives.

Quarterly Highlights

Her strategic vision and expertise will play a key role in helping SSF expand its reach, leverage innovation, and break the cycle of generational poverty through education.

Welcome to the SSF family, Leila! We're excited for the journey ahead!

SSF FAMILY MEET'24

SSF Family Meet 2024 was a Day of Inspiration, Learning & Celebration!

On October 6, 2024, the SSF family—Scholars, Alumni, and their families—gathered in Chennai for a truly unforgettable annual event, filled with heartfelt connections, impactful conversations, and joyful celebration.

We were deeply honored to welcome Nalini Padmanabhan, Chartered Accountant, Director at Canara Bank, and Chairperson of Infinite Seva, as our Chief Guest. Her powerful story of purpose and perseverance left a lasting impression on everyone in the room.

We were equally privileged to have our Guests of Honour, Mr. Kathiravan (KT) Sadasivam and Mr. Masthan Babu Gundlapali, Directors at Cognizant, who inspired our scholars to dream big and embrace opportunities in engineering and beyond.

We had two Engaging Panel Discussions:

- Medicine – Residency, Fellowships & Work-Life Balance with expert doctors.
- Engineering – Skills for Success with industry leaders from Cognizant & Freshworks.

Throughout the day, the SSF spirit shone brightly—where dreams are nurtured, achievements are celebrated, and lasting relationships are built. From moving alumni stories of struggle and resilience, to vibrant cultural performances and meaningful peer interactions, every moment was a celebration of our growing community.

And of course, no SSF event is complete without a little fun! The day ended on a high with interactive games and a high-energy Bollywood dance workshop by Srinu Sir, bringing smiles and laughter all around.

A heartfelt thank you to our scholars, alumni, families, volunteers, and partners for making this event truly special. We're already counting down to the next SSF Family Meet—maybe in a new city!



The event also witnessed an engaging panel on 'Skills for Success in Engineering,' featuring Mr. Kumar Manoharan, AVP (left, up) and Ms. Tharani Devi, Director, Learning (right, down) - both from Cognizant



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SSF FAMILY MEET - 2024



Quarterly Highlights

FREMONT DONOR EVENT

On November 16, 2024, the SSF family came together in Fremont to celebrate our incredible donors, scholars, and partners. The evening was filled with gratitude, emotional stories, and joyful moments—truly a different kind of Thanksgiving.

Heartfelt speeches from leaders like Brian McCann, Kevin Lee, and Malai Muthu were complemented by inspiring donor reflections and partner participation from IBM, AMD, Netscout, EAH, and Eden Housing.



Elisa presented Presidential Service Awards to our top youth volunteers, while games and comedy kept the evening light and memorable.

One of the most unforgettable moments was scholar Harika's moving speech—her tearful journey from rural Siddipet to San Francisco brought the room to a standstill.

The event beautifully showcased the softer side of SSF—stories of perseverance, resilience, and transformation. From beedi rollers and migrant farmers to aspiring engineers and doctors, the scholars'



journeys reminded everyone that true potential knows no barriers when given the right support. The day was a night where every conversation, hug, and shared smile reinforced the power of community and purpose.

Amid the laughter and heartfelt moments, it was clear that SSF is more than an organization—it's a family. Each story shared was a powerful reminder of how far a little support can go in changing the course of a life.



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FREMONT DONOR EVENT



STEM Programs

IBM Z DATATHON - IBM'S FLAGSHIP ANNUAL TECH EVENT

On October 19-20, the IBM Z Datathon 2024 brought together 5,200+ participants from 37 countries for an intense 24-hour challenge, leveraging the IBM LinuxONE platform to develop solutions for real-world problems.

The event featured both virtual participation and in-person hacking at five prestigious institutions—Saveetha Engineering College (India), Global Academy of Technology (India), Imperial College London (UK), Tshwane University of Technology (South Africa), and Hochschule Mainz (Germany). IBM SMEs were present on-site to guide and mentor students throughout the competition.

With the theme Tech For Good, participants explored cutting-edge technologies in AI, security, and data science, focusing on solutions that drive positive impact.

The event saw an overwhelming 9,104 registrations, leading to 320 final project submissions from 2,790 participants.

Beyond cash prizes, winners received an exclusive opportunity to attend and speak at IBM Tech Exchange 2024, further amplifying their innovations on a global stage.

With the incredible support of IBM

experts and dedicated mentors, the IBM Z Datathon 2024 was a resounding success, showcasing how technology and collaboration can drive meaningful change worldwide!

"Through Career Panel and the datathon especially i got an opportunity to learn what ML actually is and much more infos etc ! i am looking forward to explore the fields of AI and ML and i am very willing to perform well in the upcoming events. I would like to thank all the organisers, for giving me and my team the opportunity in showcase our knowledge and giving us a chance to learn and improve"- Likith S A, Participant

"Although we didn't win but got very insightful points about how we can approach next hachathon and the winners talk was very helpful in knowing their strategies and their thought process that they followed during the hackathon"- Manya, Participant

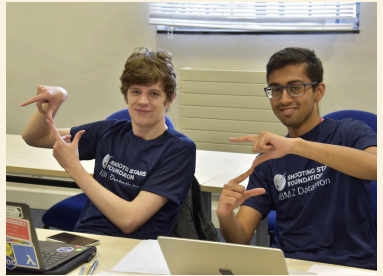
"The Datathon Helped me in improving my confidence, Build Connection with panellist, Understand the where the ML is going and helped me in much more ways"- Mohammad Saquib Daiyan, Participant



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IBM Z DATATHON

IN-PERSON EVENT AT SAVEETHA (CHENNAI) AND GAT (BANGALORE), GERMANY, LONDON, SOUTH AFRICA



STEM Programs

IBM Z DAY

Last quarter, Shooting Stars Foundation was proud to partner with IBM for IBM Z Day 2024, the biggest edition yet with over 30,000+ global registrations.

As part of this collaboration, Shooting Stars played a key role in driving 2000+ sign-ups last quarter and co-hosted exciting hands-on experiences for learners around the world.

One of the standout sessions featured Abhi Saxena in “Accelerate Your Next Level of Mainframe Skills Wizardry with IBM Z Xplore”, hosted by Shooting Stars Foundation.

Thanks to our speakers, This session guided attendees through IBM Z Xplore and gave an exclusive preview of the upcoming IBM Z Datathon—a global, skills-based competition hosted by Shooting Stars that encourages participants to grow, compete, and showcase their talents in enterprise computing.

//* IBM Z Day
//* open | on | secure

**IBM Z Skills
Acceleration**
1 OCT | 12:00 PM ET

**ACCELERATE YOUR NEXT LEVEL OF
MAINFRAME SKILLS WIZARDRY WITH IBM Z
XPLORE - HOSTED BY SHOOTING STARS**

**Abhi Saxena**
Founder
Clima Care

**Kendria Miller**
IBM Z Student
Ambassador
Kennesaw State
University, Georgia

**Justin Dhillon**
IBM Z Student
Ambassador
Western University

**Monica Siegel**
Technical Solution
Specialist
IBM

 **Register Now >> ibm.biz/ibmzday-2024**

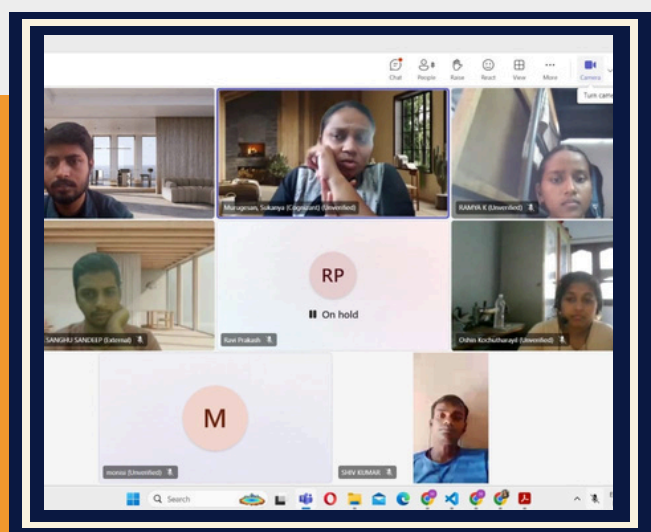
COGNIZANT INTERVIEW CLINIC PROGRAM

The Cognizant Interview Clinic Program successfully concluded this weekend, with a Closure Ceremony to thank the Cognizant team and hear from scholars about its impact.

Over 1.5 months, six virtual sessions prepared scholars for placement drives and job opportunities, with an impressive 84.3% attendance rate. Out of 32 participants, 29 successfully completed the program and will receive Certificates of Participation from Cognizant.

A dedicated team of 12 Cognizant volunteers mentored the scholars, while student volunteers Harsh, Giridharan, Deepak, Nagalakshmi, and Suvathi played a crucial role in supporting the program.

A heartfelt thank you to Rathi for her unwavering support and to Bala and the Cognizant team for their guidance and encouragement. Cognizant has invited our scholars to visit campuses across India for in-person sessions to deepen their learning and career readiness!



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Scholar Programming

vivo SCHOLARS MEET

Over 20 female STEM scholars, all Shooting Stars Foundation scholarship recipients, had an inspiring day at the vivo India office, gaining valuable professional insights and mentorship. The event focused on empowering women in technology, starting with a warm welcome and an interactive session led by the vivo HR team.



Scholars learned about vivo's core values, including benfen (doing the right thing), user orientation, and continuous learning—along with key recruiter expectations beyond technical skills, such as adaptability and personal growth.

A session on storytelling offered fresh insights on effectively communicating personal journeys and ideas. By exploring famous stories and their impact, scholars discovered how storytelling can be a powerful tool for professional success. Scholars learned about vivo's core values, including benfen (doing the right thing), user orientation, and continuous learning—

along with key recruiter expectations beyond technical skills, such as adaptability and personal growth.

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The highlight of the day? A felicitation ceremony, where vivo's senior management recognised and awarded scholars for their dedication and achievements.

It was a day of learning, recognition, and motivation, truly celebrating women in STEM. A huge thank you to vivo India for their unwavering support of SSF and our scholars!



**SHOOTING STARS
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Scholar Programming

IGNITE YOUR INNER POTENTIAL WITH MS. JAYASHREE !

On December 14th, the SSF Alumni family had the privilege of attending an inspiring Expert Session on Ignite Your Inner Potential by Ms. Jayashree, Senior Director - Engineering at Freshworks & SSF Board Member.

A true Eternal Optimist, TEDx Speaker, Women Wellness Champion, Coach, Mentor, Singer, Sports Enthusiast, and Mother, Ms. Jayashree brought her passion for people and personal growth to this engaging session.

Her insights on self-belief, resilience, and unlocking inner potential left our alumni motivated and ready to take on new challenges.

A huge thank you to Ms. Jayashree for sharing her wisdom and energy with the SSF family!



LUMINOUS SCHOLARS MEET

On 30th September, we had the pleasure of meeting the inspiring team at Luminous, along with two brilliant scholars supported by them. A heartfelt thank you to Aradhana (HR & CSR Head) and the CSR champions—Vileena, Ifrah, and Priyanka—for organizing such a thoughtful interaction.

What truly stood out was their quiet determination to make a meaningful, lasting impact—not just as sponsors, but as true allies and friends in the students' journey. Their heartfelt commitment to empowering these young minds with the future they deserve was truly inspiring.

We're grateful for partners like Luminous who believe in creating change with empathy and purpose.



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Spotlight

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

As part of our highlights from last quarter, we're pleased to spotlight Andrew Morrison for his outstanding contributions.

Andrew consistently demonstrates commitment, adaptability, and a strong sense of ownership in everything he takes on. Last quarter, he successfully led a complex and high-impact initiative for one of our key CSR customers.

What initially appeared to be a challenging task was handled with confidence and clarity, thanks to Andrew's expertise and proactive approach. His ability to engage with stakeholders, build trust quickly, and deliver results made a significant difference. We appreciate Andrew's dedication and are proud to have him on the team!



SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

From a humble agricultural background to stepping into a promising engineering career, Gayathri Narendra Giridhar has shown exceptional dedication and resilience throughout her academic journey.

Currently placed as a Graduate Engineer Trainee in Instrumentation at Adani, Gayathri supports the design, installation, maintenance, and troubleshooting of instrumentation systems across various Adani plants. Her work involves monitoring and controlling process parameters while ensuring safety and quality standards are maintained.

Coming from a family rooted in agriculture—with her father working as a farmer and her mother supporting both the farm and household—Gayathri faced financial challenges during her education.

The SSF scholarship enabled her to complete her studies and pursue her goals without compromise.

Gayathri's journey includes an impactful internship experience, a published research paper, and a consistent academic record—being the second topper in her department for two consecutive semesters. Her story is a testament to what focused effort and the right support can achieve.

We're incredibly proud of Gayathri and excited to see all that lies ahead in her professional journey.



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Placement Highlights



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“ PLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

ASHWINA S
SOFTWARE ENGINEER I,
DSL TECHNOLOGIES PRIVATE LIMITED

SSF and my donor, Uma Meyyappan, provided crucial financial support, allowing me to focus on my education and career preparation without financial stress. SSF's mentorship programs and my donor's guidance helped me build confidence and make informed decisions throughout my journey. They also provided access to valuable training programs and resources that enhanced my skills and career prospects.

— Computer Science and Engineering Student from Anna University Regional Campus Madurai



“ PLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

KALAIYARASI
GRADUATE ENGINEER TRAINEE,
LARSEN & TURBO

SSF and my donor provided crucial support by offering financial needs for my education, mentorship for leadership development and providing necessary skill set for my placement.

— EEE Student from Government College of Technology, Coimbatore



“ PLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

AYUSHMAN
SOFTWARE ENGINEER,
JUNIPER NETWORKS, BANGALORE

I sincerely thank SSF and my donor Nirat for their generous support in funding my education, which has been instrumental in my academic journey. Their kindness and belief in me gave me the opportunity to study without financial worries, allowing me to focus and excel in my field. I'm grateful beyond words, as their support has helped me secure a job, and I will always carry this gratitude forward in my career and life.

— Electrical Engineering Student from IIT Kanpur



“ PLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

SWETHA SINGH,
AI ENGINEER,
ACCENTURE

SSF provides me with the financial stability. They had provided me opportunity for the various trainings that helped me to improve my soft skills. They had also inspired me to do well in my career and contribute to the welfare of the society.

— Chemical Engineering Student from IIT Kharagpur, Kharagpur



***All scholar names are changed for privacy purposes**



STEM College Scholarship

We create a path for highly competent global scholars through college sponsorships, resources, training and mentorship to help them successfully graduate from top medical and engineering schools with a STEM degree.

[Learn more →](#)

Upcoming Events and Programs

Program	Participants	Location	Dates
All India Women ONLY Startathon	College Students	Online	January 16, 2025
Bangalore Alumni Meet	Our Scholars	Bangalore, India	February
Chennai Alumni Meet	Our Scholars	Chennai, India	March
Netscout All Girls Hackathon	SSF Donors and Board Members	Boston, MA	March 8, 2024



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