

Meet Earth Warriors, combining early education with environmental awareness and activism

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Shweta Bahri and Keya Lamba, cofounders of Earth Warriors about combining early years education with environmental awareness and activism, evolving the business to meet schools' needs and global expansion.

What was the catalyst for launching Earth Warriors?

[Keya] Shweta and I met in 2017, working for sister non-profit organisations in London. We slowly became good friends and would often talk about starting something of our own down the line. We found our working styles were compatible and we've always had a lot of respect and empathy for each other, as well as a strong friendship.

We had many conversations about how difficult it is to change adult behaviour, and as a former teacher I've seen how easily young children absorb new habits. Shweta and I talked about how powerful it would be if we could instil

environmentally-aware habits and behaviour from a very young age.

[Shweta] We did some research and couldn't believe something like Earth Warriors didn't already exist – something that combined early childhood education with environmental awareness and activism. Climate change is taking a huge mental health toll on children. With eco-anxiety on the rise, we wanted to give children the tools they needed to feel empowered in the fight against climate change.

We won a grant from the Harvard Mittal Institute with the idea for Earth Warriors, and that made us realise other people believed in our idea too. It gave us the push we needed to get started.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

[Shweta] Earth Warriors is a global edtech company delivering climate education resources to young children around the world. At its heart, we are a purpose-driven enterprise. We believe in the immense potential of climate education to help the next generation understand the climate crisis and take action.

Our lessons and resources have been developed by teachers for teachers – we're the first to provide a comprehensive global curriculum for 3-to-11-year-olds on climate and sustainability issues.

[Keya] We decided to build two business strands for Earth Warriors – one to sell our products to schools, and one to engage sponsors so we can bring Earth Warriors to any school who wants it, regardless of whether or not they can afford to pay for it.

Our subscription model includes teacher training, the curriculum materials and access to our global community events. We have also designed Earth Warriors resources in a way that they can be scaled at low cost and implemented globally to ensure as many teachers and children as possible can access our resources. We've already implemented our curriculum in schools in Botswana, Zambia, India, the UK and the US.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

[Keya] We launched Earth Warriors in October 2020 – in the middle of the pandemic! One of the biggest challenges in launching was that schools were shut down and teaching virtually. It made it very difficult to test our lessons. So, we decided to use that time to continue developing our product. We identified the learning standards we wanted to include and had those elements of the curriculum peer reviewed. We spoke to teachers to understand what their barriers were to educating their kids about climate change. In hindsight, that time was so valuable – it made our curriculum that much stronger.

Since then, we've continued evolving to meet our schools' needs. We now have four versions of our curriculum for each age group, and we've built a teacher training programme that extends beyond the Earth Warriors curriculum, so teachers feel comfortable teaching all climate-related curriculums, not just our own. We're also continuing to grow our global community of Earth Warriors teachers, students and parents around the world and engaging them through our community events.

How are you funded?

[Shweta] So far we've funded the business through a mix of grants, founder capital, sales revenue and investor capital. It's also a big part of our mission to bring Earth Warriors to all schools who want to use it – whether or not they can afford to purchase it. So we also work with CSR and philanthropic funds to support that area of the business.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

[Shweta] Keya and I had never run a business before, so that was a steep learning curve. There have been a lot of small challenges along the way, many small mistakes we've had to learn and grow from. We also came across certain challenges as two young women starting a business. We were dismissed from the outset by a lot of people. Someone came back to us much later and said, 'I didn't think you guys were gonna last'.

[Keya] Starting the business during the pandemic was quite challenging, but it taught us how to pivot and respond to what's happening around you. We're confident in our base content, we know what we have. But we've learned to be

very adaptive in how we package that content – we originally developed Earth Warriors as a full year curriculum. Now we’re hearing from some schools and teachers that they want only one term, or a half term, or an after school club. So we’ve learned how to pivot, how to alter what we have to answer our schools’ needs.

How does Earth Warriors answer an unmet need?

[Shweta] Young people all over the world are desperate to understand the climate crisis. Studies show 77% of children today worry about climate change more than anything else. But parents and educators often don’t have the knowledge or resources to educate their children on the subject without exacerbating this anxiety.

During our research phase we came across a lot of single lesson plans and resources on climate education for kids – for example, a lesson on recycling or greenhouse gases or whatever it might be. But those weren’t necessarily a series of lessons that built on themselves week after week, year after year. It wasn’t comprehensive.

[Keya] When we founded Earth Warriors, we initially designed a curriculum for 3-7 year-olds only. But then Shweta and I visited some of the schools that were piloting the programme and we spoke to the students. The seven year olds asked us what they were going to do in Earth Warriors next year and said how they were so excited to continue learning about the environment – that’s when we realised we had to expand our curriculum to encompass all of the primary school years.

What’s in store for the future?

[Shweta] This will be an exciting year ahead for Earth Warriors! We’re expanding into new countries including Zambia and Botswana, and we’re also looking at ways to branch out to other products – things that parents have mentioned they want for their kids, educational products that are designed for them as the end-consumer. We’re considering a lot of different possibilities at this stage – it’s exciting.

In the longer term, we want Earth Warriors to become the go-to platform for climate education for young children. We see it as a global brand – in five years’ time we want to have a strong presence in the UK and India, and a fast-growing network of schools in other countries around the world.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

[Shweta] Business is a male-dominated world, and the finance world is also largely controlled by men. As a female entrepreneur, when you're starting a business and approaching investors it's important to be confident. Know what you want, what you deserve, and go for it.

[Keya] You have to ride the waves, because starting and running a business is not a straightforward journey. There are some months where you feel like everything's at a standstill, and then other months where everything's happening and you're elated. If you get too demotivated in the low times and too excited in the high, you will be on an emotional rollercoaster – and you'll likely burn out. As an entrepreneur you have to stay steady, and take the waves as they come.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

[Keya] My husband and I cook dinner together every night and it's a nice time for us to switch off from work and check in with each other. I also try to go for a long walk each day to get my steps in and clear my head – usually while talking to Shweta or one of my family members!

[Shweta] My day usually starts with a workout in the morning, which is something I try and make time for no matter what – it just sets the right tone for the day. Then my work is spread throughout the day – we work slightly odd hours being in different timezones (I'm in Delhi and Keya is in the UK), but both of us try to set time limits where we mute our work chat. Then watching my (current) favourite show before bed is my ideal way to round off the day!

Shweta Bahri and Keya Lamba are cofounders of *Earth Warriors*.