

When opportunity comes knocking

The Parikrma Centre for Learning is working to provide quality education to children from impoverished families.

NITYA RAO

The sudden burst of colour and the unmistakable chatter of children draw your attention to a cheerful looking building in Sahakarnagar, whose facade is covered with wall paintings of bright sunflowers.

Welcome to Parikrma Centre for Learning, whose schools in Sahakarnagar, Koramangala and Jayanagar are responsible for imparting high quality education to scores of children from impoverished families. "All the children come from neighbouring slums where each household has at least five members and the average household income is less than Rs. 700," says Vivek Raju, who heads the marketing division of the school.

That these intelligent, talkative kids come from the most desolate end of our social milieu evokes more hope than sympathy, for today the school spells encouragement and opportunity not only for the children, but for their parents as well. "The focal principle on which the school operates is to ensure equal opportunity for all, creating a level playing field for every single child to create opportunities for herself.

We are not just an NGO, but a high quality educational institution," says Shukla Bose, Founder and CEO, Parikrma Humanity Foundation. The school follows the ICSE syllabus and its performance and professionalism gained recognition last year when the ICSE board awarded it with the Derozio Award -2003, for excellence in the field of education. What is impressive is that the fledgling school was competing on the same platform as mainstream ICSE schools all over India.

A look inside the Sahakarnagar's school premises reveals a large play ground where several children are being coached in football, a well-stocked library, and six spacious classrooms where the walls are adorned with art work. What's more, the school also has a bamboo tree house that the children helped construct themselves. "The tree house was part of a 5th grade math project designed to help the kids relate better to concepts in geometry, shapes and measurements of area and perimeter," says Nikhil Rao who teaches co-curricular activities at the schools. More surprising, is the revelation that the entire facade was painted by the children themselves! The Jayanagar campus sports an exterior that depicts the solar system, an idea that was born after the kids were taken on a field trip to the planetarium.

A typical day's work includes workshops in poetry, music, dance, art and craft. What makes the place special is the philosophy of experiential learning which forms the crux of the teaching process.

A lesson on animals, for instance, includes an excursion to Bannerghatta National Park. Special attention is also given to the nutritional needs of the children with breakfast, lunch and a malt drink ensuring that they remain healthy and active.

That the school is nurturing hopes and dreams in these 7-12 year olds is without doubt. Pao Sonlal, a 12 year old orphan, the star of the football team says that writing poetry is one of his favourite pastimes. Mahesh, a 7 year old is more politically aware than most children his age. When he grows up he wants to be chief minister. Nine months in school has taught little Jancy, who lost her entire family to AIDS, how to read, write and speak fluently in English.

"As a society we have failed these kids," says Shukla as she tends to a child who runs to her showing off his fallen tooth. More than playing tooth fairy, Parikrma has given these kids the exposure they will need to build principled lives on a rock solid foundation - helping them to live up to their motto - Love. Explore. Excel.

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