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Sky is not the limit

Parikrma has given children from the slums a purpose to live, writes **Chethana Dinesh**

Suresh is a budding poet. He loves to pen on anything and everything that catches his fancy. He takes great pains to see that his poems rhyme well. But, he is no dreamer. He has his feet firmly planted in the reality around him. He wants to write poems and stories, get them published, and make money...

Radha loves animation, even as she admits *Lion King* is the only animation film she has seen for real. She is fascinated by the enormity of possibilities animation has to offer. She wants to make a career out of animation, she declares....

Simple dreams that don't seem far-fetched. But the journey leading to their dreams has not been easy. For, these children are not from normal households where love and care comes without strings attached. This world is home to hundreds of Sureshs and Radhas who are either homeless or from broken homes. Where even a thought of a decent meal is considered a luxury, while education is unheard of.

Driven by the passion to offer such children developmental opportunities was Parikrma born. In the three years since its inception, Parikrma is 750-plus strong and has spread the force of self-confidence among each and every child. Under its wings, Parikrma has not only lent them the impetus to dream big, but has also instilled in them a sense of belonging to the world.

"Children who were earlier shy to even mention their names now spell it out boldly, as if to tell the world that they too have an identity," says Vivek Raju, Head-Marketing, Parikrma.

Setting up Parikrma was no easy task as volunteers had to literally knock on every door in the slum to identify children who needed attention. The result-Parikrma today has four Centres for Learning that care for 740 children coming from 25 slum communities and three shelters/orphanages. At all their schools, located in Jayanagar, Sahakaranagar, Nandini layout and Koramangala, stress is on the overall development of children, so that they are well equipped with the necessary tools to compete with children from regular schools.

"Independent thinking and the ability to ask questions is what we encourage in children," says Ms Shukla Bose, Founder-CEO, Parikrma.

And, Ms Shukla wasn't exaggerating. Every child in Parikrma just keeps shooting and doesn't rest till his/her curiosity is satiated. If Deepika wants to know what it takes to become an astronaut, Vani wants to know how news is sourced for the newspaper. Varied, as they may be, these wide-eyed quires only speak for the children's thirst for knowledge.

Parikrma, in its endeavors to enable children to develop an identity of their own, focuses on all aspects of their lives-home, nutrition, health care and education & development. Apart from providing with nutritious food, care is also taken to ensure that children get regular medical check-up. This is not all. A good environment at home is equally important for a child's well-being, hence Parikrma leaves no stone unturned to ensure that they have a good environment. Be it rehabilitating an alcoholic parent or finding an older sibling a job, Parikrma shows the way.

But isn't absenteeism a problem? What about the drop-out rates? "None," says Mr Vivek Raju, "because these children love attending school." Parents are happy too, since they see a noticeable change in their wards who have learnt to speak good English, adds Vivek.

Apart from the fact that these children are given all the freedom they can ever ask for, Parikrma also encourages them to participate in co-curricular activities like art, theater, games and so on. As a feather to its cap Parikrma children won 9 medals in the recent inter-school athletic meet.

"It gives us immense pleasure to see our children so happy after winning the medals. While children from other schools wore sophisticated sports gear for various competitions, our children ran the races barefoot and managed to win," says an exuberant Ms Shukla Bose.

The love, affection and encouragement these children receive is quite evident all over the place. For, the walls of Parikrma bear children's handprints in bright hued paints and also the classes, named by the children themselves, after the planets in our solar system.

Parikrma has its goal well defined. Their concern doesn't end with getting children to school. "We will ensure that every child completes school and undertakes what it takes to earn a living-be it special vocational training or higher college education," says Ms Shukla.

Going by the enthusiasm of volunteers and the eagerness of children at Parikrma to reach for the stars, the goal doesn't seem too distant.

For more details log on to www.parikrmafoundation.org
(Some names in the article have been changed to protect identity)

