

Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

Volume 1 | Issue 05 | May 2010 | For Free Circulation only | A CSIM Product



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The Art of Giving

Jaynathi Karthikeyan along with 25 volunteers has been coordinating contributions of dal, oil and sugar from over 1500 individuals in Chennai since 1998, to provide nutritious food for the deprived.

From the Editor

Dear Readers,

When I met the octogenarian Krishnammal last week, I was amazed by her ability to handle risk. It made me realise that in the process of managing risks, one learns continuously, shares the

learning with others and disseminates the learning across stakeholders. Ultimately, one becomes capable of 'de-risking'. Not all of us have the ability to take risks and factor them right from the planning phase. By emulating this skill from these

daring social entrepreneurs, we could all be engaged in small yet powerful acts of kindness. The stories in this edition of Conversations emphasise this thought. Follow your dreams, take risks.

P.N. Devarajan

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The story of young
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Printed and published by:

Mr. P. N. Devarajan on behalf of
Centre for Social Initiative and
Management
391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar,
Alapakkam, Chennai - 600 116.
Phone: 24867565/7566
Website: www.csim.in

Road Safety Proposal

Radha Jagan gets public opinion on improving traffic conditions

Narayanan, a retired banker who closely observes the prevailing traffic scenario in Chennai emphatically says, "People obey rules, follow a system and become disciplined only when they are driven to do so. The Government does not need any budgetary allocation, will not face any manpower constraints to impose the rules strictly. Hefty fines have twin benefits. One – the road user will never dare to repeat the mistake and two, it serves as revenue to the Government to improve roads, install surveillance systems and what not. Two years ago, I was fined Rs. 1000 for over speeding at the ECR. Now I am very cautious about speeding. Many people cannot afford hefty fines. The Government should think of innovative ways to make them realise their folly. Detain them for an hour, make them do some



Thangavel with his fellow auto drivers



Narayanan

work for the public in a park, noon-meal centre or hospital. Conduct classes on road discipline and ensure that the erroneous drivers attend the classes. I don't remember the name of the country, where the road user who breaks a road rule is made to sing the National Anthem in the middle of the road. The psyche of the people is, when they undergo a punishment

once, they will hesitate to repeat it."

"I am not educated but from my experience I can suggest many changes to avert traffic snarls and jams," says Thangavel, an auto driver. "During peak hours, policemen should man signals where traffic snarls happen frequently. Our folks cannot be disciplined in following traffic signals but must

be compelled to do so. Roads should be widened and haphazard parking should not be permitted. Everybody thinks only about themselves and not about the other person on the road. In some roads where the flow of traffic is not equal on both sides during peak hours, the police can place temporary road dividers and make more space for easier movement of vehicles."

Mohammed chips in to say, "We have terrible problems with vehicles having political party flags. I wonder if all such vehicles belong to politicians. If they are on the road, we should be off their way. Else they honk and swear. And when we receive something unpleasant, we like to pass it on!"

"Everybody has to realise the mistakes they do and change their bit," says Raja. "Though the Government should be strict, we

should realise that we are also responsible." When Mohammed says two-wheeler riders err the most, Raja replies: "everybody breaks the rules on the road. Why point fingers at one category of vehicles?"

Thangavel says: "A collective is important; invite all auto and share auto drivers and educate them on road rules. Categorically state the disciplinary measures – seizure of vehicle, license cancellation, fine. However, all of us should vow that we would not pull strings to escape punishment. There was a time when people used to say that auto drivers meander into the smallest possible space on the road, today two-wheelers, cars, vans and even buses do that."

Let us start some active forums, blogs and sites on road safety

– Radha Jagan

ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A
TOUCH OF THE ORIENT AT **China Town**
A SIP OF SCINTILLATING SPAIN AT **Zara**
A TINGE OF EXOTIC THAILAND AT **Benjarong**
A MESMERISING SENSE OF NORTH INDIA
AT **COPPER CHIMNEY** A SPLASH OF COASTAL FRESHNESS
AT **Kokum** A MÉLANGE OF SPICES AT **ENTÉ KERALAM**
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Around 30 volunteers are associated with the education programme and in this five of them take turns to visit the village every week. Children are taught spoken English, sports and other extra-curricular activities



Madeena, Jai, Akshaya and Gowdhaman planning the sports event at Arunavayal



Saturday is busier than any weekday for Gowdhaman, who works as Systems Analyst at Royal Bank of Scotland. This is because he travels to Arunavayal village—about 42 kilometers from Chennai—to teach children spoken English and extra-curricular activities on every Saturday.

Gowdhaman is engaged in social work along with his former colleagues Madeena and Leelavathy for over three years. While he was working for William's Lea, it was an email that triggered the volunteering spirit in him. "We received an appeal to support the educational expenses of Arjun, the son of a housekeeping staff. We learnt that Arjun stood first in class and his family could not afford his educational expenses. I volunteered to mobilise support for him and collected Rs. 3000 from my fellow staff. The fee was remitted on time and a copy of the bill was shared with the donors via email. This was encouraged and I wanted to help more children and offer my services to the society."

"On another occasion, a visually impaired person wanted to pursue the teacher training course but could not afford Rs. 15,000 as fee. I mailed an appeal to my contacts in India as well as abroad and mobilised the funds. This incident made me realise that everyone wants to extend their support for a good cause, but do not know how. There were two sets of people – one who can only make a monetary contribution and the other who can volunteer his/her time and service," said Gowdhaman.

Madeena, Leelavathy and Gowdhaman helped the visually impaired students, by writing for them during their free time. Once Leelavathy helped a visually impaired student to write his examination at CSIM. She

Compassionate Corporate Corps

learnt about the courses that were offered and discussed with Ms. Latha Suresh about their volunteering efforts. She advised her to enrol in the short-term course and learn to effectively coordinate the social work activities.

"I shared this information with Gowdhaman and Madeena, and all three of us decided to enrol for the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme in July 2009. What was common amongst us was our intention to serve the society," said Leelavathy.

Gowdhaman says: "We wanted to register a trust for a very long time, but were not confident to start one until I enrolled at CSIM. I have registered a Trust named 'Compassion' during September 2009, for which I am the Founder and Managing Trustee.



Gowdhaman, Madeena and Leelavathy with other volunteers

Madeena and Leelavathy continue to volunteer their time to teach the children at Arunavayal. Compassion Trust has a policy to extend only 70 to 80% of the total financial support that has been requested for. The intention is to make the beneficiary participate and take ownership in the activity they engage in.

“Our objective is to extend educational support to the under-privileged children in rural areas who lack support from any other NGO”

At times, when the beneficiary expresses their inability to invest the remaining 20 to 30% of the funds that is necessary for the programme we refer them to other donors for support."

"Our objective is to extend educational support to the under-privileged children in rural areas who lack support from any other NGO. We mobilise funds from our friends and pay honorarium of Rs. 600 a month to Ms. Madhumitha, the teacher who manages the tuition centre at Arunavayal."

"Around 30 volunteers are associated with the education programme and in this five of them take turns to visit the village every week. Children are taught spoken English, sports and other extra-curricular activities. Activity based

learning method is used for teaching and children enjoy the word building games and sports. Those who were finding it difficult to read English can now write more than 200 words. Real-time inspiring stories are also narrated to the children. Weekend assignments are given and the children are encouraged to use the community library."

"English classes are conducted in the morning and games are organised in the evening. During examinations, children are advised on how to manage stress and plan their study. The children are good in sports and have the potential to excel at the district and state level. What they lack is proper guidance. Around 30 children attend the weekend classes regularly and more than 65 children participate in sports activities. All the program activities are recorded so that it will help the volunteers replicate the weekend program in other villages."

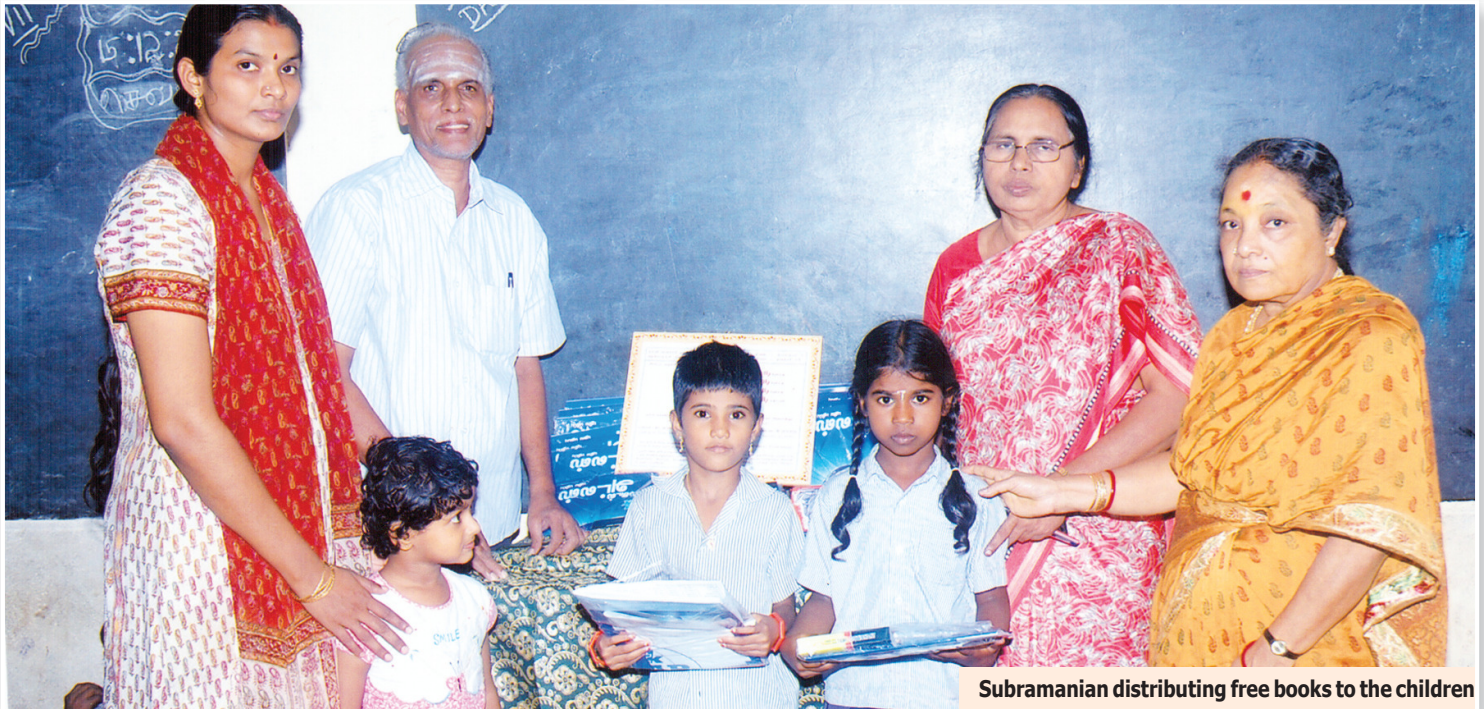
"When I attended an interview at Google, I was not selected as I was over qualified for the position. My aim is to see that the children in the rural areas are as competent as the urban children in education as well as communication skills."

—Marie Banu

If you wish to know more about Compassion Trust, please contact Gowdhaman at 9884056355 or email gowdhaman@gmail.com

City of Angels

A commitment to help poor children



Subramanian distributing free books to the children



Subramanian

Every month, N Subramanian spends a portion of his pension in buying textbooks for underprivileged school students.

On the last working day of the term at the Arumbakkam Chennai Corporation Middle School where poor children study, N Subramanian stepped in to make a difference. It was the platinum jubilee year of the school and Subramanian, with three of his former colleagues, presented 20 sets of TTK Tamil atlases, English-Tamil dictionaries and books on the Thirukkural to the first, second and third rankers from Class I to Class VIII. He presented dictionaries to the headmistress and the 20 teachers as well.

Ever since Subramanian, Office Superintendent in Southern Railway's Signal and Telecommunication Department took voluntary retirement in May 2001 after 37 years of service, he has had his attention focused on contributing to school education at the primary level. Every month, he spends a portion of his pension on "educational service". Initially, this Virugambakkam resident concentrated on helping school students in his native place, Vannakkambadi village, near Arni, and schools where he and his children had studied – Board High School, Polur, and Avichi Higher Secondary School and Chinmaya Vidyalaya in Virugambakkam. Gradually, he began encouraging poor students in other schools, gifting them

study material, Wren & Martin English grammar textbooks, atlases, dictionaries, the Thirukkural, and even mats to sit on. Classes I-X students of the Adi Dravidar Welfare Middle School in Virugambakkam benefited, as did Class I-V students of corporation schools in Virugambakkam and Koyambedu.

What really prompted Subramanian to gift poor children books for study? "When I was a child, I didn't have any books myself, not even chappals to walk the five

“Even after the tragedy in Kumbakonam, there are many panchayat union schools that do not have RCC roofs. Students sit on the floor”

miles to school. The situation is the same today in many places. Books are necessary for every primary school student, they are often referred and can be preserved forever," he says, adding, "I wonder how many people are aware about the sufferings of children in panchayat union schools and primary schools falling under the jurisdiction of the corporation and municipalities."

Subramanian is not for burdening teachers with work other than teaching.

"They need to concentrate on their teaching duties with all the seriousness and dedication it merits," he says. He is saddened by the lack of adequate infrastructure in many of the panchayat schools. "Even after the tragedy in Kumbakonam, there are many panchayat union schools that do not have RCC roofs. Students sit on the floor. Thanks to the activity-based learning system, they are provided mats. But, who replaces worn-out mats? Then, ventilation is poor, toilets are unhygienic. The suffering of girl students cannot be explained in words. And where are playgrounds?"

Subramanian is not despondent, though. He is confident that if one person in ten can contribute to the welfare of poor students, it will inspire others. "Everything is possible if education is given the priority it deserves and government spends enough money on it, or ensures that money allotted is well spent." Referring to his contribution as "a small service", Subramanian stresses that social work is best done alone, without mediators or NGOs. "My advice to those wish to reach out to poor children is: Just go to any corporation, municipality or panchayat union school. Contact the school head, make a note of the immediate requirements and contribute what you can. As long as God keeps me healthy, I will continue helping poor children."

— Sashi Nair

This article appeared in The Times of India

Children in Transit

India has the largest number of children employed in labour, in the world. According to the statistics provided by the Government of India, around 90 million out of 179 million children in the 6-14 age group do not go to school, and are forced to work

Eleven year old Ramyapriya will soon be attending eighth standard at the Government Higher Secondary School at Walajapet, in Vellore district. Her life was a different story just a year ago. Her parents make their living by making beedis and Ramyapriya was taught this skill at a young age. "Now Ramya will go to college and get a degree," says P Devi, a teacher at the Special School for the Rehabilitation of Child Labourers. "She has been with us for two years now." India has the largest number of children employed in labour, in the world. According to the statistics provided by the Government of India, around 90 million out of 179 million children in the 6 to 14 age group do not go to school, and are forced to work. This means that close to 50 per cent of children in India are deprived of their right to a free and happy childhood.

The National Child Labour Project (NCLP) in Tamil Nadu has functioned in more than twelve districts since 1988. One of the primary objectives of the Special Schools established under the NCLP is to mainstream as many children as possible into the formal school system. More than 20,000 children have been rehabilitated in these special schools, and Vellore has contributed admirably to the statistics with the rehabilitation of more than 3000 students. "They stay with us for two or



three years and then when they reach a level of around seventh standard, they are sent to Government schools," says R Porselvi, a teacher at the Special School in JJ Nagar, Walajapet. The children are usually identified by door to door surveys of homes, tea shops, factories, farms and industrial units and they are picked up and brought to one of the schools. "We talk to the parents and offer to look after and teach the child at the school," says S Ellapan, Supervisor. "We also deposit Rs 100 in the name of the child every month for the time he/she spends with us. This money can be used later to support the child's higher education."

This initiative as part of the NCLP was spearheaded by Dharmendra Prathap Yadav, the previous Collector of Vellore, and is now being run by the current Collector C. Rajendran. Vellore District also recently received an award for best performance in eradication of child labour at the Anti-Child Labour Day function held in Chennai. A seven member team raided around 89 factories checking for child labourers; and so far, they have rescued around 20,000 children from hazardous

"A seven member team raided around 89 factories checking for child labourers; and so far, they have rescued around 20,000 children from hazardous labour"

labour. "The factories and units where these children were found have been sealed," reveals S Ellapan. "Now there are 89 such special schools in Vellore district and roughly around 25 to 30 students per school." The students are split into three levels, and in about two to three years, the child is ready to face the real world. "After the third level they are put in class VIII in a local school and we keep a close watch on them till they finish plus +2 and sometimes, till they complete their degrees," says R Porselvi.

"Just like a regular school, all subjects like Maths, Science and English are taught here," says P Devi. "We also give the children

vocational training so that they can start their own business someday." There is usually a class teacher, a vocational teacher, a clerk and a cook in each school. "The mid-day meal scheme has been implemented here and on the collector's orders, the children are fed 250 grams of rice every day and three eggs per week," says Selvakumari, a clerk at the Special School. Monthly medical checkups are also conducted for the benefit of the students and PTA meetings are conducted to make the parents feel more involved.

The children in these special schools are usually below the age of thirteen and have been rescued from cotton, power loom, beedi making, brick kilns, weaving, silk thread making and other industries. "Our aim is to provide a non-exploitative, free environment for the children, and to prevent other children from entering into bonded labour," says S Ellapan. He also tells us that everyone involved in this project are volunteers who spend their free time helping these children. The teachers in these special schools are required to have completed class 12, and are given special teacher's training for a year, before they are allowed to teach at a rehabilitation centre. "The funding for the schools comes from the central government, and is routed through the collector's office," says Ellapan. "We hope that we will soon have more space than just one small room for all three levels."

"If a child is absent on any day, we go to the child's home and talk to the parents and make sure the child is all right," reveals Ellapan. "We believe that child labour in any form is unacceptable and if they are sent back into labour, we forcefully bring the child back to school." The Child Labour Project has been functioning in Vellore since 1996, and close to 1000 children have been mainstreamed into formal schools so far. Vellore continues to do an admirable job of eradicating the practice of child labour and this has had a great impact on the community.

—Aishwarya Shankar
Asian College of Journalism



Children at the special school in JJ Nagar, Walajapet

Art of Giving

Krishnamurthi (75), Chairman of Duraisamy Generous Social Educational Association (DGSEA), is one of the beneficiaries of the DOS programme. This trust was initiated in 1979 and is engaged in providing educational support for vulnerable children. Krishnamurthi travels from Madhuranthangam once in a month to collect the rations from the collection center at T Nagar, Chennai.

"We have received dal, oil and sugar regularly for the past ten years. We also receive rice, biscuits and clothes occasionally. This enables us to provide care and support to 125 orphaned children and 25 senior citizens. The trust also runs two balwadis (pre-school), and 50 children are served nutritious meal every day. The subsidy provided by the government is too little to meet the food expenses and the DOS programme is a boon for my organisation. I find it difficult to seek donations from my fellow villagers as the families living here are poor and cannot afford to contribute," he says.



Krishnamurthi

Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhini, a trust for promoting social consciousness amongst society was founded by P. N. Devarajan. He says, "Giving is sharing, and sharing is charity." Devarajan, a philanthropist, believes in arriving at simple solutions for social issues. After retirement, he visited many NGOs along with his friends Vasanth and Margabandhu to identify institutions for



P. N. Devarajan

support. He observed that it was easy for NGOs to obtain free rice but not dal, oil and sugar, which together constitute a nutritious diet. Emulating the concept of 'Pidi Arisi Thittam' or 'A fistful of rice scheme' to foster the concept of giving amongst families, Devarajan initiated the DOS (dal, oil and sugar) programme with an objective to influencing needful giving by

The Paramacharya of Kanchi Mutt, initiated a novel 'Pidi Arisi Thittam' or 'A fistful of rice scheme'. He requested every family to set aside a fistful of rice every day for charity. Volunteers from the Mutt collect the rice every week and feed the poor and needy in their area.

individuals. This programme depicts a model on volunteerism which revolves around families (donors) who wish to donate dal, oil and sugar, and individuals (volunteers) who collect and distribute them.

Families are encouraged to buy an additional kilo of dal, oil and sugar along with their monthly provisions. The volunteer visits each donor in his or her locality once in a month to collect the supplies. Some donors take the additional effort of delivering these goods to the collection center directly. There are over 10 collection centers, led by socially motivated women, located in different areas in Chennai. The NGOs who are identified for support collect their ration supplies from the collection centers at their own expense.

Devarajan says, "The idea was to create an institution which carries on by itself without any structure and is driven by the sole intention to give and share. I feel that the basic need of an NGO should be addressed, especially for those who manage kitchen units. The donors are encouraged to donate in kind instead of cash. DOS is a basic structure where the volunteers arrange to collect and distribute the rations in their respective areas every month. This becomes a habit amongst the family members and the information spreads



Jayanthi Karthikeyan

amongst their neighbors. At times when the donor donates funds instead of provisions, the DOS volunteer purchases the rations on their behalf. NGOs collect the rations allocated for them from the distribution centers directly, and therefore the cost of administration is next to nil. We initially started with sixty families and now have over one thousand and five hundred regular donors."

Devarajan's daughter Jayanthi Karthikeyan coordinates the entire DOS programme. She monitors the distribution process all over Chennai, besides organising the collection in and around T Nagar.

"It is the spirit of each volunteer that leads to the success of this program. In some areas, the collection centers function as distribution centers as well. There are a separate set of volunteers who coordinate the distribution process. My father identifies the institutions for support. He visits each organisation personally in order to ensure that they have proper store rooms, and the ration supply would benefit those who are housed in the institution."

"There is no permanent fund or corpus created for this programme. We believe that sustainability lies with the volunteers' efforts in mobilising regular donations. Till date, we have 10 volunteers and about 1500 families in Chennai. We have the commitment of providing the rations to 45 organisations in Chennai, Chengelpet and Madhuranthangam. We do not hold any stocks as we distribute the collected rations within a month's time. Even people who want to donate a minimum of Rs. 150 per month, are encouraged to do so."

"Tex Bio Sciences Pvt. Ltd. and White House Multimedia Pvt. Ltd. encourage their staff to participate in the DOS programme. Smaller distribution centers are directly linked with the identified NGOs in order to save time and collection effort. One such distribution center is located at Chromepet for which Subramaniam is the volunteer. He collects rations exclusively for Mahamere trust, an old age home. We provide only 40% of the requirement to NGOs, as we do not want them to solely depend on us for support. For the past five years, we have limited our reach to 45 organisations as we wish to sustain our 1500 donors. Some of my neighbours who are also donors help in collecting the rations on my behalf when I am away from home," says Jayanthi.

—Marie Banu



Margabandhu, a retired Accounts Officer from AGS office, along with his wife Sushila has been actively involved in social service after his retirement. An active volunteer at Siva Shakti Homes (an orphanage for mentally challenged children in Chennai), he was engaged in mobilising support from his friends and relatives and enabled donors to contribute cooked food for these children throughout the year.

"When Mr. Devarajan proposed the DOS programme, my wife and I volunteered to launch it at Alwarthirunagar. Initially we had only 30 donors, but now we have over 300 regular donors. Sivasakthi Homes serves as the collection as well as distribution center. I have developed a personal rapport with each of the donors. As a result these donors apart from contributing to the DOS programme, also donate to various other causes", says Margabandhu.



Vanjula Vasanth is the first volunteer for the DOS programme and coordinates the collection in Velacherry.

"I used to seek donations from families by visiting them personally between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. and from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. People refused to donate on Tuesday and Friday and after 6 p.m., as they considered it inauspicious to donate. I faced a lot of challenges and it was difficult to mobilise even 5 kg of rations. But now, I am able to collect 1000 kg of rations in a month."

"My daughter-in-law helps in the collection and my granddaughter who studies in Akshaya School mobilised 500 kg of ration during the Christmas season. IIT students coordinate collection from individual homes and deliver the ration to the collection center. Besides collection, I also visit the orphanages along with my husband periodically to monitor and assess their needs," says Vanjula.



Chandra Janakiraman

coordinates the collection at Gopalapuram. She spends her time visiting homes in person and also visits the NGOs who benefit from this programme.

"Dharmashala is a residential care facility for the poor cancer patients who undergo treatment at Adyar Cancer Institute. They are one of the beneficiaries of the DOS programme, and have been receiving a monthly supply of 90 kg of dal, 60 kg of oil and 75 kg of sugar for the past eight years. The cancer patients need nutritious food during their treatment phase. Dal is rich in protein and helps them to rejuvenate quickly. There are around 200 patients who are fed here every day and this programme is of immense help to them," says Chandra.



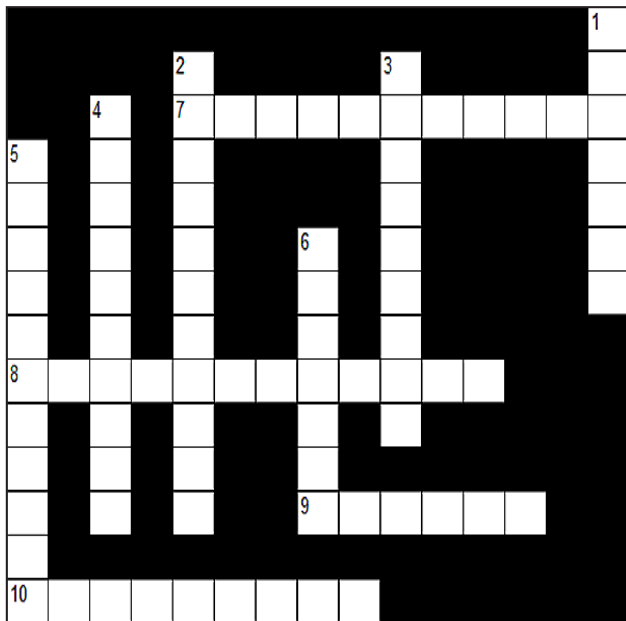
Distribution of DOS through Monday Chantry Club for their project - Undrukool

If you wish to be part of the DOS programme or launch a collection center in your area please call Jayanthi at 044-28341014



Food being served for cancer patients at Dharmashala

SOCIAL CROSSWORD - 052010



Hint: The answers to the crossword are words that describe the qualities of a social entrepreneur.

Please send the filled-in crossword by 25th May to csim.conversations@gmail.com. The first 3 correct entries would receive a cash award.

DOWN

- 1 Communicate with and within a group
2 Work together on a common enterprise of project
3 An elaborate and systematic planner
4 Being or producing something not created before
5 Causing a transformation
6 Conforming to accepted standards of social or professional behavior

ACROSS

- 7 Taking immediate advantage of any circumstance of possible benefit
8 Readiness to undertake new projects
9 A person who guides or inspires others
10 There was a danger he would do the wrong thing

Inspiring Conversations

Bhagwan Sri Ramana Maharishi held many conversations with his visitors and disciples. Here is a glimpse of one such conversation he held on pain.

V.: I have a toothache; is that only a thought?

B.: Yes.

V.: Then why can't I think that there is no toothache, and so cure myself?

B.: One does not feel the toothache when one is absorbed in other thoughts or when asleep.

V.: But still it remains.

B.: So strong is man's conviction of the reality of the world that it is not easily shaken off. But the world is no more real than the individual who sees it.

V.: But why should there be suffering now?

B.: If there were no suffering, how could the desire to be happy arise? If that desire did not arise, how could the quest of the Self arise?

V.: Then is all suffering good?

B.: Yes. What is happiness? Is it a healthy and handsome body, regular meals and so on? Even an emperor has endless troubles although he may be in good health. So all suffering is due to the false notion 'I am the body.' Getting rid of this is knowledge.

V.: There are great men and public workers who cannot solve the problem of suffering in the world.

B.: That is because they are based on the ego. If they remained in the Self it would be different. You are not told to shut your eyes to the world, but only to see yourself first and then see the whole world as the Self. If you consider yourself as the

body, the world appears to be external; if you are the Self, the world appears as Brahman manifested.

Excerpts from - "The Teachings of Ramana Maharishi in His own Words" by Arthur Osborne



AROUND THE WORLD IN 60 MINUTES

Savour the delicacies of vegetarian kitchens from across the globe right here in Chennai. Relish the crispy onion rings, **Lebanese** humus, **Russian** salad to **Mexican** quesadias and nachos dripping with cheese, **Italian** penne with tomato and basil or the traditional **Indian** signature bhattaras and the works! Drop in for a sumptuous global vegetarian cuisine this weekend!



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Cuisine for a Cause



When a woman is educated, a family is educated. When a woman is economically empowered, the family is empowered and a lot of social changes takes place.

This is what YRG Care's social entrepreneurial programs are all about. The objective of their programs is to improve the lives of the poor women who are socially challenged, those affected by HIV/AIDS, and victims of domestic violence. Their eco kitchen and Pi Bag projects are fine examples of empowering women.

YRG's eco kitchen is located at Injambakkam in the midst of a blooming garden. The huge white building has solar panels on its terrace. The kitchen is clean and free from dust. "This enterprise is environment friendly and cost-effective. Even the waste water from the kitchen is recycled and used for the garden," said Sethulakshmi, the manager.

The kitchen has a huge boiler and many

aluminium pipes that lead to 11 steel containers - four to cook sambhar, six for rice and one for milk. A pre-heating tank connected to the boiler generates steam with a bio-mass fuel called bricks made from corn husk, jute waste, mango kernels, and groundnut shells.

"It takes 40 minutes to make 600 litres of sambhar, 10 minutes to cook 400 kg of rice, and the milk boiler has the capacity to boil 60 litres of milk. To cook vegetables, idli and dosa, stoves are directly connected to the bricks. The cooked food is ready by 11.30 a.m and is transported in steel containers to 30 kiosks in Injambakkam, Thiruvanniyur, Guindy, Saidapet, Nanganallur and Alandur that are managed by women," says Sethulakshmi.

YRG gives priority to women who have someone in their family infected by HIV/AIDS and those who are economically challenged, abused by their spouse, ill treated by their family members, and above all are interested in earning their

livelihood. Training on food handling, hygiene and sales are provided and kiosks, ladles, plates, furniture, dustbins, gloves and uniform are provided free of cost to the women.

Earlier, micro-credit was offered to the women but due to non-repayment of loans, this was stalled. The women now pay Rs. 17 for the meals they consume, though it costs only Rs. 15. In this, one rupee is obtained to meet the transport cost and one rupee is set aside for health care. The women charge their customers up to Rs. 25 per meal depending on the location of the kiosk. YRG outreach teams visit the vendors and collect the sales amount on a daily basis.

The eco kitchen also supplies breakfast and meals to organizations such as Ajuba Solutions and the U.S. Consulate.

The kitchen unit houses a washroom, store room, cold storage and another room which women use to cut vegetables. The kitchen employs 35 staff, of which six men are engaged in cooking while two women cut vegetables and two women assist in cleaning. The remaining staff assists in the transport and administration. Around 16 cameras have been installed for security reasons and this modern unit is only six months' old.

Another project of YRG Care is Pi Project, which focuses on empowering women. Pi is the Tamil term for bag. This project was started in 2008 jointly by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of public health and YRG care. Women from

socially and economically weaker sections are given an opportunity to earn their livelihood by making bags.

The bag-making unit is located at Kilpauk and is housed in an apartment. Kumar manages this unit besides attending to the data entry work of the YRG Care's research unit. Orders for 3000 bags were placed by the organizers of the Global Health Conference, to be held in the United States.

Tamim Ansari conducts a one-month intensive training program in tailoring for the newcomers. The bags are made out of cotton and have bright prints on them. Different types of bags - shopping bags, shoulder bags, wine bags - are made to suit various purposes and are named as 'Lakshmi', 'Meenakshi' and such. Orders for wine bags were placed by a famous wine store in the United States. The bag-making unit functions in two shifts. Each shift last for four hours during which a woman can make about four bags and earn Rs. 200. When the bags are sold in the local market, the women earn a share in the profit as well. The Pi bags unit plans to expand its operation to include 250 women in the next three years.

YRG Foundation's Central Research Facility is located in Chetpet, Chennai. Social workers attached to this centre visit several areas in the city to identify HIV/AIDS infected people from the economically weaker section of the society. Pregnant women who are infected by HIV/AIDS are provided counseling and healthcare services. They are provided training to equip themselves and become economically independent.

YRG Care was started in 1993 at Taramani at the VHS premises which has a pharmacy and hospital unit meant exclusively to conduct HIV Test (voluntary test) and HIV test for pregnant women. This institution is led by Dr. Suniti Solomon, a pioneer in HIV prevention, care, training and research who documented the first case of HIV in India. The income earned from the pharmacy and laboratory is utilized for the social projects of YRG foundation.

—P Ambika

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Albinism occurs when one of several genetic defects make the body unable to produce or distribute melanin, a natural substance that gives color to the hair, skin, and iris of the eye. In India, there are over 50,000 people who are affected by albinism and Ezhilarasan is one. There is no organisation addressing this problem, and therefore he plans to form a support group for the Albinos in Chennai. Consanguineous marriages are a major cause for this genetic defect and Ezhil plans to spread awareness on this issue and conduct a research in this subject.



Shakila is the coordinator of Prince of Peace trust in Nagapattinam, where they run a school and a home for destitute children. She feels that if rural children were given access and training in computers and internet, it would make them more employable and create more livelihood opportunities thereby preventing migration. A leading bank has donated 10 computers to her trust and she is presently networking with few organisations to install e-learning modules for the school children.



Vijay, hails from Sankarankovil, a town noted for youth being involved in anti-social activities. He envisions changing this scenario in his hometown. Vijay observed that ignorance to various career options and guidance is the reason for this attitude amongst the youth. He plans to start a rural resource centre that would train youth in various competitive examinations. Career fairs and career awareness camps targeting the school students studying in standard 10 and 12 are also proposed to enable them hone their educational aspirations.

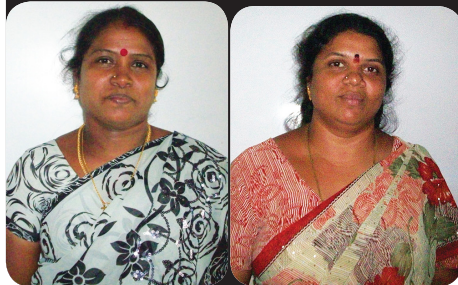
Launch pad for Social Entrepreneurs

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) enrolls prospective social entrepreneurs in its specialized courses on Social Entrepreneurship. The ninth batch of the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management culminated with the project presentation. Latha Suresh shares a gist of projects that each change agent wishes to launch.

Gajalakshmi, a tuition teacher for primary school children who are economically poor, plans to re-orient the concept of home tuitions. Her vision is to create children of substance, who would not only excel in studies but also have an exposure to life skills. She plans to strengthen their abilities in adaptive and positive behaviour and enable them meet the demands and challenges they face in everyday life.



Some women have entrepreneurial skills, but do not have the capital to start their own enterprises. Jebamalai and Vijaya, SHG leaders for over ten years having understood this need, plan to launch an NGO that spurs entrepreneurship amongst women. They aim to facilitate women entrepreneurs by initiating micro enterprises and introducing an innovative micro-credit cum savings model.



Kumudha & Gajalakshmi are beauticians by profession. They propose to start an innovative beauty treatment course that would focus equally on 'inner beauty' besides 'physical beauty'. They opine that every woman, regardless of class or caste has a right to be beautiful. They plan to offer this training to marginalized women and those who belong to the lower economic strata. After training, they would be offered placement in beauty parlours or encouraged to start their own parlour.



Selvakumari works at Aranvoyal village, which is famous for their effective children parliament. The children parliament revolutionizes the concept of children participation in the development of villages. She plans to take the concept a step ahead and create a three tier parliament system that focuses on Panchayat level interventions by children.



Kumudha is deeply troubled by the stigma faced by the children who are infected with HIV. She envisions an equitable world where all the children would be treated equal, irrespective of their health or physical condition. She proposes to run a summer camp for 30 children who are affected by varied issues - HIV infected & affected, disabled, dalits, besides normal children. She believes that this summer camp would create a special bonding amongst them. This camp would focus on developing their self esteem, enhancing communication skills and in creating children with a caring heart.



Sada, a transgender, is a very talented and creative person and plans to start a theatre group comprising of a mix of transgenders, men and women members. This diverse group would be a first step in addressing the issue of societal acceptance of transgenders. By staging various programs, Sadha intends to create awareness amongst society about the transgenders and reduce the stigma and discrimination they face.



Mahendran, a mobile shop owner, is a socially responsible entrepreneur. Understanding that the radiation through mobile phones creates a lot of environmental hazards, he has launched an NGO that focuses on providing a green cover for the earth. He plans to incubate plant nurseries in 100 villages and 50 colleges in a span of 3 years. The 15 lakh saplings nurtured would be planted along the roadsides and on vacant land throughout Tamil Nadu and this would be monitored by a group of volunteers.

If you wish to know more about the PGDSIM course offered by CSIM, please contact us at 044-24867565 / 24867566 else write to csimchennai@gmail.com

GROWING - Reflections for Deep Change

Fear – a roadblock to 'Growing'

We have explored 'learning' and 'introspection' in the last two 'Growing' series. For growing, one of the key restrictive values is 'Fear'. There is not a single one of us who has not experienced fear. Each one of us thinks we know fear but actually what we know is very little of what is hidden. After a lot of explorations to understand fear one of the simple, yet profound meanings was that given by The Mother - 'Fear attracts what you fear for'. This says it all. Each of our behavior is governed by the beliefs that we hold within us. Therefore, the fear within us governs our behavior that furthers our fear rather than allows us to get out of it. For example If we are afraid of making a mistake while addressing an audience, that fear itself will grip us, and make us



dysfunctional allowing further mistakes to happen.

Fear takes its own toll on any initiative which is different from the routine. Becoming a social entrepreneur is not an easy task. It is even more difficult when one wants to move away from the known to the unknown. As a social entrepreneur one could be confronted with a host of issues and the tendency of the mind is to run away. If one's ability to deal with fear is limited then they easily succumb and give in. At such times it is important to work with one's self and build the capacity to deal with

the fear within.

While it is easy to understand 'Fear', the tough part is to identify 'Fear'. Fear caused by external stimulus is easy. But Fear caused by the unknown emerging from the inner resistance to change from the routine is very difficult to identify and deal with. It creates a lot of defenses and is projected as constraints and roadblocks onto the outside world and does not allow action. The defenses make exploration even more tedious. That exploration requires at the minimum, a deep sense of accountability and acceptance of self.

To work with fear, we have to understand the nature of fear. Fear holds us from taking decisions; it limits our ability to think and at times paralyses the mind; it prevents us from exploring alternatives; Fear further limits the capacity of an individual's potential; it keeps us thinking about past experiences and future implications and not allowing us to be in the present and deal with it. Unless we are willing to work with 'self', Fear cannot be removed.

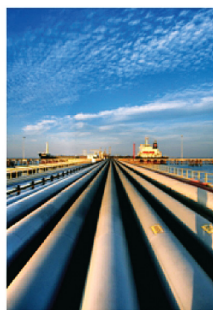
"According to an ancient Indian fable a mouse was in constant distress because of its fear of the cat. A magician took pity on it and turned it into a cat. But then it was scared of the dog. So the magician turned it into a panther whereupon it was full of fear of the hunter. At this point the magician gave up. He turned it into a mouse again saying, "Nothing I do for you is going to be of any help because you have the heart of a mouse" (Sampath. J.M. story 67 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

In life, stepping out for first time from the cocooned security of our jobs to become a social entrepreneur we are likely to experience fear. While meeting and interacting with several other social entrepreneurs, each of their struggles and past experiences can instill several doubts about the path that we choose to embark. This fear stems out of several uncertainties that we would encounter and are likely to encounter in this journey. At that time we will have to first learn to deal with one's fear. Identify the fear within us and accept it to be able to work with it. It is important to ask what are my beliefs about life, security, self worth and trust in my own consciousness.

Pointers for Reflection:

- What is the basis of my fear - my experiences or hearsay?
- How and when does my fear surface and what does it do to me?
- What causes fear in me?
- How do I deal with my fear?

— J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath



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Sensitive Frames

Arun Pandian talks to Marie Banu about how he uses media to bring about social change

The movie 'Angadi Theru' produced by Ayngaran International depicts the everyday struggles in the lives of salespersons in the city. It highlights the vulnerability of the rural folk and abuse at the workplace. Arun Pandian shares with Marie Banu the reason he chose to produce this film.

You started your career as an actor, and now have turned into being a producer. Do you have any intention of getting back to acting? I haven't started thinking about it. But I do not know when I will



change myself. I joined the Institute of Film Technology for an acting course but spent most of my time in the direction, processing and editing department. Although I started my career as an actor, I was also part of the production team. I even distributed my first film Oomai Vizhigal along with my good friend Abhavanam. Besides, I have even edited and directed movies. So, right from the beginning I have been involved in every phase of the film industry.

Are you happy being a producer now?

Yes. I love to give a social message in my movies like 'Angadi Theru'. At every stage a human being starts learning something. We cannot be good when we start, but we can understand what is good and bad at a later stage. What I was thinking about commercial films earlier has changed once I established my own production company. We are now thinking of bringing social reforms through our films.

When you entered the film industry, was there any resentment from your family?

My father was a colonel in the army and

my uncle was the Vice-Chancellor of Ramachandra Medical University. Another uncle was an engineer, the first Executive Director for BHEL in South India and my brother was in the shipping industry. Everyone in the family was in a different line of work and therefore they did not stop me from joining the film industry, although there was slight resentment. But slowly, they understood that I had made the right choice.

What was the first reaction when you heard the story line of 'Angadi Theru'?

I was amazed and impressed. The movie has projected abuse of both boys and girls at the workplace.

I have three daughters and I say that I am like a warden in my house. I know the value of women. I told the director that after seeing the movie, my wife should feel for the salespersons when she goes to the shop and every man should respect women.

When you wanted to produce the movie, did you think that it was a risk that you were taking?

Ofcourse yes! It is not a normal formula subject and you cannot find this kind of film made in the past. To be very frank, the director had narrated this subject to a lot of well-known producers in the industry. They had their own opinion, but my intention was different. I was a little hesitant about

the movie climax. On discussion with the director Mr. Vasantha Balan, we made it positive. He is a great director with a lot of calibre and lives with the film. I too live with my each and every production except for the big commercial films, which has no value addition to the society and has only the entertainment factor.

The movie depicts the life of salespersons in a shop in T Nagar. Did the shop owners object?

Bonded labour system and abuse of women is happening all over the world. This issue is common and the movie shows how the vulnerability of the poor people is abused. For a movie, we need to identify a certain place for people to picturize the issue and so we chose T Nagar. We did not mean to project any individual and that was not our intention.

Of the issues projected in the movie, which one are you are passionate about: poverty, disability, unemployment or abuse?

The worst is poverty and abuse. After watching the movie, Madam Kanimozhi M.P. said that she is proud to know that I am conscious of the issues in society.

Will you continue producing movies like 'Angadi Theru' or have a mix of commercial movies as well?

This film 'Angadi Theru' is also a commercial hit. This is what we want - good cinema. It is not whether it is a commercial or an art film. Once people develop a taste for good cinema, they will surely encourage such films in the future.

As a movie maker, do you aim for an award or is there anything else?

You are born to live and do something for the society. There are a lot of things that needs to be changed in and around us. Nobody is born perfect. For example, I have been cleaning my plate for the last four years. I do not give it to anybody either at home or in office. It really helps a servant who is working in my house to feel that whatever work she is doing, is not demeaning. This may be a small issue but it makes the people around me happy.

How do you think that media could be used as a tool to bring about social change?

Awareness on social issues should be created. Also, media should highlight the ill effects of Coke, Pepsi, etc. My second daughter has not drunk Coke, Pepsi or mineral water for the past ten years. Recently, I read an article about a 101-year-old lady working on the roadside. Issues such as these, when highlighted in the media, will influence social change.

Editorial

**Latha Suresh
Marie Banu
Radha Jagan**

Photo credit: nolgo

Printing Courtesy : The New Indian Express, Chennai