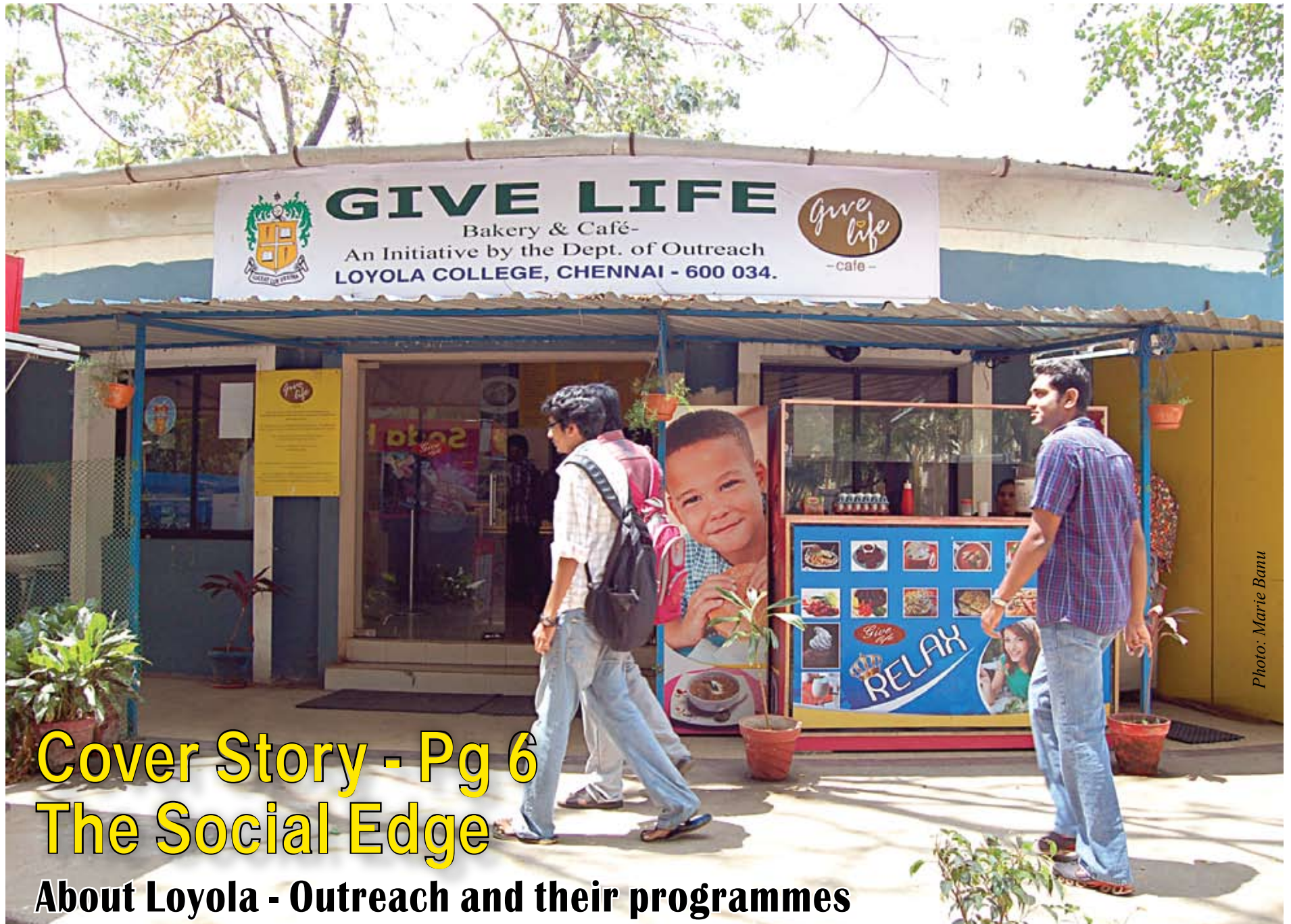


Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and social enterprises

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About Loyola - Outreach and their programmes



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am Actor Jai Shankar's son."**
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From the Editor

Dear Friend,

Social work is unlike working in an office. If a social worker makes a bad mistake, people's lives can be at stake. Social workers have to be consistently good at what they do.

The recent disaster at Uttarakhand illustrated the hard work of the army and the NGOs who engaged in rescue operations. While the army continued their operations till all the people were rescued from various locations in the flood-hit areas; relief organisations are now working towards rehabilitation of the affected families.

Conversations today admires these social workers and recognises that most of those who enter this profession are by definition deeply committed altruists. Each one of them has made a huge impact in the lives of many.

As responsible social citizens, we all need to make a difference to people's lives. Any time is the right time for social work. Begin your journey, Now!

Marie Banu

Keeping Your Axe Sharp



Once upon a time a very strong woodcutter asked for a job with a timber merchant, and he got it.

The salary was really good and so were the work conditions. For that reason, the woodcutter was determined to do his best. His boss gave him an axe and showed him the area where he was supposed to work. The first day, the woodcutter brought 18 trees "Congratulations," the boss said. "Go on that way!"

Very motivated by the boss' words, the woodcutter tried harder the next day, but could bring 15 trees only.

The third day he tried even harder, but could bring 10 trees only.

Day after day he was bringing less and less trees. "I must be losing my strength", the woodcutter thought.

He went to the boss and apologized, saying that he could not understand what was going on.

"When was the last time you sharpened your axe?" the boss asked. "Sharpen? I had no time to sharpen my axe. I have been very busy trying to cut trees..."

"Life will teach you the lessons. It is up to you to learn them."

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“I had low confidence levels and questioned my abilities, but on studying at CSIM, I realised that anyone can help others if they have a selfless and good heart.”

On A Journey To Inform

Motivated by an insatiable passion for teaching and an abundant love for children, A. Sethu Pathi aims to transform Villupuram district with his mission to educate. His brainchild, Cross Trust, works towards providing a holistic learning experience for drop-outs and children who are forced out of school to provide for the family.

When his 25-year tryst with teaching at the RC Middle School ended, his desire to transform the state of receiving quality education in the quaint villages of his district began. “I saw the interest to learn rapidly dwindle amongst the children of parents I had taught at the school. They wanted their children to earn quick money, and providing education is clearly a long-term investment, an idea that is conveniently discarded without thought,” he shares.

Sethu Pathi also laments on the complete lack of concern for the futures of these children, with parents completely abhorring the idea of a life outside rearing the family’s livestock and settling down to have children. “There’s so much ignorance. These children can grow up to become police officers, doctors, software engineers and teachers – the options are endless. But, it seems like everything has been decided for them already and as a result, they think education is not going to change their present state.”

He recounts the first few days of his starting the trust as getting drop-outs and unemployed youths who’d failed their

“The problem with some of the children, who fail their board exams, is that they think that their life or education abruptly ends. All they need to do is brush up on their knowledge of Science and Mathematics, and that’s it.”

10th standard board exams from their houses and driving them to school on his trusty bicycle. “I tell them time and again, that if they put their mind to something, they can truly achieve it. That they shouldn’t give up easily. The problem with some of the children, who fail their board exams, is that they think that their life or education abruptly ends. All they need to do is brush up on their knowledge of Science and Mathematics, and that’s it. They pass. That’s all there is to it.”

Is this lackadaisical attitude also generously coated with laziness? “Definitely, but I don’t think anyone is inherently lazy. Children who I dragged out of houses to study can work hard. Why not others?”

But what was the driving force behind taking up the issue as a social cause and setting up a trust?

“One can sit there and endlessly complain about various issues while filling their pockets. But, only few can take that money and concern and put it to good use by addressing that complaint they feel so dearly about. I wanted to be one of the few.”

Awarded the Ambedkar Fellowship in 2002, being a part of the relief teams that provided food and water to those stricken by the 2004 tsunami also spurred Sethu to take on social work on a full-time basis. The 2005 start-up has helped over 108 students between 5 to 14 years realise their dreams and has also brought about a holistic environment of learning. Teachers at the Trust’s five centres are paid Rs.1,000 and their water, electricity and transport expenses are taken care of by the Trust.

While the mornings of these children are jam-packed with school activities, Sethu decided to make their evenings fun yet educational by holding classes which instilled a sense of morals and values in them through games and enjoyable discussions.

“Apart from this, we also hold career counselling sessions for the brothers and sisters of the school children. We also encourage widows at the village to pursue further education and provide them an alternate means of employment on the side. We direct uniform orders to these women through the District Collector from

government schemes that provide school uniforms to children in Chennai.” Another unique initiative that is set to grow to a larger scale is their free AIDS counselling for couples. “The idea actually came about when we first started sticking these notices on AIDS at Vanalur which detailed the amount of stigma that patients had to go through. A couple then came to me and I explained to them that there was nothing to be ashamed of. Helping them with their treatment and employment, we gradually integrated them into society and now, you look at them and you wouldn’t even know they were affected by HIV.”

He counts CSIM to be of major help with his initiatives. “I had low confidence levels and questioned my abilities, but on studying at CSIM, I realised that anyone can help others if they have a selfless and good heart. Other valuable lessons like how an NGO should function and going about projects and proposals help me till date. One of my proudest moments was when I received my PG Diploma certificate.” Opening 5 more centres, working with government schools and considering the idea of tuition centres, Sethu Pathi’s cause to educate and empower is far from seeing its end.

“Until I see every child educated and employed and most of all, happy, I will not tire. And most of all, I will never give up on any child who wants to learn, no matter what his report card says.”

— Divya Karthikeyan

ATMs for the thirsty

In 2008, the Sarvajal project was initiated by Piramal Foundation, to provide villagers with pure, safe drinking water.

For Piramal Foundation, the inspiration was the money-dispensing ATM. If it can dispense money, why not water, especially in the rural areas where water is a premium commodity?

Water – the life-source on which all living beings survive.

And yet, today's reality is that many people do not have access to clean, potable water. In many places in the world people have no access to water – clean or unclear. In fact, providing safe drinking water is one of the United Nations' millennium development goals.

India, which was once considered the land of rivers, also has places where people face a similar plight. There remain several Indian villages where women walk many miles to fetch water which sadly is insufficient and often times, unhealthy. For Piramal Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Mumbai-based Piramal group, this was a reality check. When the foundation began its work in rural India to provide healthcare solutions, it found that water-borne diseases were most common.

"We provide primary health care services to villagers as well as address causes for health issues. We found that water-borne diseases were very common in the villages and this prompted us to provide clean drinking water," explains Paresh Parasnis, CEO, Piramal Foundation.



Finding a solution

Piramal Foundation runs a grassroots development laboratory at Bagar in Jhujhunu district, Rajasthan, to develop innovative solutions for India-centric problems. And in the course of interaction, it found that the villagers were suffering from several diseases to the bone and the teeth due to the high fluoride content in the water they used.



In 2008, the Sarvajal project was initiated by Piramal Foundation, to provide villagers with pure, safe drinking water. While there are some standardised processes like reverse osmosis and UV treatment of water, taking the same to the underserved rural areas which had no access to piped water was the first question that needed to be addressed.

Only 17 percent of the population in the country has access to water pipes; the remaining make do with bores, ponds, lakes and the like. Testing the quality of the water in these sources was also not possible. The organisation was faced with the challenge of decentralising the solution so that the last mile did not become a hurdle.

The development team came up with a filtration plant measuring 6x7 feet that could be set up within a week in a 10x10 room near any water source with access to power. This would address the need of small communities. However, it also knew from the experience of other players in this segment that there needs to be constant monitoring and maintenance to ensure the plant did not become dysfunctional. A remote sensing technology that works on RFID (radio frequency identification) accessed through cloud computing was enabled so that the technology team sitting in Ahmedabad or Mumbai could ascertain the health of the plant and provide maintenance solutions. This immediately also brought down the cost of maintenance

and the team is able to help franchises who run these plants remotely. This technology is awaiting a patent.

The last mile

The technology used by Sarvajal project has passed the proof of concept stage and 150 units are working well across Rajasthan, northern Gujarat, parts of Madhya Pradesh, western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. But Piramal Foundation noticed that women still had to walk some distance to access the plant and decided to address this issue.

Bank ATMs – standalone, modular, money-dispensing units, offered the solution, or rather the idea to spur the foundation to create a solution. Piramal

Foundation set up 18 water ATMs that run on solar power. The franchisees load a truck with water and fill overhead tanks after flushing out the old water, from which the villagers can take water after swiping a prepaid card. To ensure quality, a quality meter that cannot be rigged has also been affixed to the ATM.

The water from the plant is priced at 30 paise per litre and at the ATMs, at 50 paise per litre to cover the franchisees' transportation charge. By levying a fee, Piramal Foundation hopes to make the project self-sustaining and encourage franchisees to take it up as a business. The swipe card can be topped up through a mobile phone. The user punches in the required number of litres and swipes the card. This automation assures quality as well as avoids overpricing.

Now that the solution is ready to roll out, the organisation is looking to reach it to the rest of the country through any means that works well for the user community, the vendors and the Piramal Foundation. Taking the practical way, Paranis says, "We have some co-owned plants, many are through franchisees, all funded by Piramal Foundation, since they were only at the demonstration stage. But now having established the proof of concept, we would like to collaborate with communities, local businessman with reputation and a client base and other NGOs interested in taking safe water to the villages they are working in."

Piramal Foundation is also looking to work with a municipal corporation to put up 100 ATMs and two plants in a large slum so that they have access to water 24 by 7. It expects to work on a revenue sharing model, with a 20 per cent share to cover the maintenance costs.

Overcoming a mindset

Despite the crying need for such solutions, convincing the local beneficiaries is not a cakewalk, especially since there is a cost attached to it. Therefore, one of the activities Piramal Foundation undertakes is to create awareness and highlight the health benefits and the cost saved on treatment and other medical expenses. It also provides the card free for a month or so for the villagers to see the difference and buy it, if convinced.

"A limited study showed that a family spends Rs 2,300 a year on medical expenses. Of this, they can save a great portion if they drink safe water," points out Paranis. A glass of tea costs Rs 5, whereas they get 10 litres of water for the same amount. Such details are pointed out and over time, Piramal Foundation has seen the transformation happen.

Education, health, empowerment

Piramal Foundation's other core activities, besides running the Gopi Krishna Piramal Memorial Hospital in Lower Parel, Mumbai, and running health camps, mobile units and telemedicine



centres for the National Rural Health Mission, are education and empowerment of youth and woman. It has a 1,000 strong team, 90 of whom work in the laboratory.

It has also initiated a third party assessment of its projects to study the impact and fine-tune where needed to make its programmes more effective.

Its future plans include strengthening and scaling up in the areas of education, healthcare and empowerment through collaborations. "Only through scaling up can we make a large impact," Paranis points out. But with scaling up, sustainability will also be a focus Piramal

Foundation will find a way to make that happen. It will also continue to encourage others to give back to the society by helping people identify their areas of strength and interest and providing them with the requisite training and exposure.

At the heart of Piramal Foundation is the desire to not just do good, but do it in such a way that the change leaves a lasting impact.

—S. Meera

This article was first published in *The Smart CEO Magazine* (www.thesmartceo.in)



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The Social Edge

Loyola's Outreach programme is indeed a module that has gone from strength to strength, to become an element of the college's holistic approach to education.

The Loyola Outreach Programme (formally known by its abbreviation, LEARN) was a module that first began in Loyola College, in 2001, when a process of re-structuring began making its presence felt on an academic level. Incidentally, this was the year when the college began seeing the full potential of its autonomy — a status that it was granted back in 1978. Post-2001, syllabi saw a great deal of modification and modernization, even as teaching modules were also given a facelift. "It was around this time that the college felt that a lot needed to be achieved on the social front, as well," says Dr Bernard D'Sami, who is today, director of the Outreach department of Loyola College. "Until this time, our postgraduate students had a sense of social awareness thanks to their outreach module, LEAP," he continues, "But our UG students didn't exactly have this kind of exposure." It was then, not more than 12 years ago, that it was decided that undergraduate students of the institution also needed to be given a social edge to the kind of academic credentials they derived by way of an education at Loyola College.

Thus began a journey that is today, stronger than ever before. Loyola's Outreach programme is indeed a module that has gone from strength to strength, to become an element of the college's holistic approach to education. "What many of us felt was simply the fact that what the student



"I don't mind being suspended, Father. But let me complete my outreach hours." The boy explained how despite his suspension, his students at a Corporation school nearby would wait for him to arrive, twice every week.

learnt in class was for his head," says Dr D'Sami, "But they needed something more. In fact, they needed something for the heart."

Loyola's Outreach objectives are fairly simple. The aim was easier to comprehend. "Change the society around you," Dr D'Sami, "That's what we intended to do. With the aid of the Corporation and Slum Clearance Board. Loyola outreach worked closely with the State Resource Centre and many other government agencies. We identified close to four localities that were in need of our help. We began sending students to aid teachers of corporation schools in these areas; in due course we extended our help towards those deserving students in need of home tuitions." But that is not all. The Outreach programme even goes about doing its bit in the promotion of women's empowerment by way of rehabilitation of widows, and even in aiding day-care centres. The areas that are

selected include Choolaimedu, Chetpet, Kodambakkam and Nungambakkam. "We did not want to engage localities that were far from the college. We were conscious of possible travel constraints are students might face and thus decided to lend a helping hand in small way, in the areas that were around us," says D'Sami.

In all, the Outreach department has an eight-member faculty that oversees the running of the department throughout the college. This staff is aided by internal faculty in each department, who are entrusted with monitoring its respective department's participation in the day-to-day activities of the Outreach department. "Our structure has helped us achieve our goals and objectives," says D'Sami. These goals, of course, include social awareness and more importantly, the need to develop a sense of pride around this social awareness. "The students of Shift One go about their outreach activity after college hours, while our Shift Two students get to class once they finish their outreach programme," D'Sami explains. In fact, nearly 40 to 50 deserving students in benefactor schools are identified and provided help with regard to admission and scholarships in Loyola College.

Bernard D'Sami feels that the biggest achievement of the Outreach department, among its many achievements, is the attitudinal change that it has imbibed in its participants. "One day, our former principal Rev Dr Albert Muthumalai was overseeing a disciplinary committee hearing, after the committee had ordered the suspension of a few students over indiscipline," he recalls, "After calling for a meeting with the boys' parents, Father had ordered their suspensions one by one. At the end of this meeting, one student refused to leave his office and wore a sad look on his face. Father, quite impatiently, asked him why he hadn't left his presence yet. The student replied, 'I don't mind being suspended, Father. But let me complete my outreach hours.' The boy explained how despite his suspension, his students at a Corporation school nearby would wait for him to arrive, twice every week. He couldn't afford to fail them, his suspension notwithstanding. In fact, Father Muthumalai often recalled this incident while dwelling on the kind of attitudinal change that Outreach has brought to the college."

Interestingly enough, Rev Fr G. Joseph Antony Samy, the present Principal of Loyola College, has himself served as Director of the Department of Outreach for the last four years. He gave visibility and recognition to this programme, thus underlining the importance that the college has attached to the functioning of the department.

Perhaps the greatest story of the programme has been the great success that its flagship project, Give Life Café, has been met with. As part of an innovative and first-of-its-kind initiative, the Outreach department inaugurated a high-end cafeteria and bakery on campus, which



provided employment to deserving students before or after college hours. Chennai Mission, an NGO founded by Mr. M. Mahadevan of Hot Breads donated the machinery and infrastructure for this cafeteria and offered training to students in baking and confectionary making. In fact, the proceeds from business at Give Life Café went into funding education needs of children of widows who live in the slums nearby.

No surprises then, that when the Give Life cafeteria was inaugurated in 2008, the kind of reception that it got from the student community was nothing short of staggering. Cold coffees, burgers, Calzones and even flavour-filled milkshakes find pride of place on the menu. Even today, the patronage that Give Life enjoys, is an aspect of its functioning that truly deserves special mention.

On future plans of the Outreach department, D'Sami is hopeful of taking social service to the next level. "We've identified a few slums that require our help, and with them we've also identified numerous societal issues that call for our attention. Our aim of course, stays the same: to bring about a change in our environment," he says. Interestingly, another objective on the agenda is extending the Give Life initiative that the Outreach Department introduced in 2008, to an even bigger avatar." However, through it all, one factor has stayed the same: the need to give back to society, and in doing so, upholding the mission, vision and principles of Loyola College.



"The proceeds from business at Give Life Café went into funding education needs of children of widows who live in the slums nearby."



Social enterprises provide innovative products and services at affordable price points, create livelihoods, and also engage the economically disadvantaged as producers and clients.

India needs 'business as unusual' to solve its massive development problems

Nobel Prize laureate, Amartya Sen, makes an interesting point in a recent New York Times article. While praising India for its economic progress, he chides it for the shortcomings in providing basic public services, and explains why India trails China. Sen believes that India catching up with China's economic progress might remain a pipe-dream. He's spot on.

After pursuing a mixed economy for most of its existence, India broke those shackles in 1991, and opened up its economy. Things improved. The country upped literacy, reduced poverty, fed more children under five, curtailed the infant mortality rate and India was tipped to become the world's biggest economy by 2050.

Problems galore:

Even as our economic indicators went up, our social indicators have not shown the same improvement in key human development indices. According to 2010 World Bank estimates, India houses one third of the world's poor, with more than 400 million living on less than \$1.25 a day. That figure is up from 22 per cent in 1981. A shame considering, that its neighbor China, reduced its poverty rate from 43 percent in 1981 to 13 percent in 2010. Besides extreme poverty, India's other litany of woes, include inadequate healthcare, illiteracy, malnutrition, high infant mortality rate, energy deficiencies and millions unemployed or underemployed. To address all of this, what's needed perhaps is a business as unusual approach, which we shall get to later in this post.

India languishes at 136 out of 186 countries in the human development index (HDI) ranking. In 2012, India ranked 65th out of 79 countries, in the global hunger index (GHI), with 43.5 per cent of all children below 5 years remaining undernourished. Even as we fail our very



young, the country, in the next few decades, is expecting to reap the dividends of its large young population. That is increasingly looking like a false hope. The young population is either uneducated, undereducated or lacks employable skills. The government has launched a massive scheme to skill 500 million individuals by 2022, this ambitious program might just prove to be, too little too late.

There is also a lack of jobs. The Planning Commission estimates that there will be an additional 183 million job seekers who will enter the market soon, and the manufacturing sector will need to provide 70 million of those jobs. Alarming, the opposite seems to be happening, after suffering jobless growth, even during the boom GDP years, there are predictions of jobless de-growth. Between 2005 and 2010 the country shockingly lost 5 million jobs

in manufacturing and agriculture. Not addressing these problems could be a recipe for civil unrest.

Why hasn't India been able to address these issues?

The government spends a lot of money to deal with these problems and the country boasts of the largest number of non-profits in the world, doing their bit to combat these issues. It also receives plenty of external assistance; the World Bank for example, approved \$4.3 billion in aid in 2012.

But it isn't enough.

Post economic liberalization in 1991, and the spectacular GDP growth of the 2000s, observers opined that the rising tide would magically lift all boats. The trickle-down economic theory that Indian policy makers preached have borne fruit that have mostly benefited the rich and the middle class with income inequality doubling in

the past 20 years. The trickle-down theory states that with lower taxes and increased investment, the entire economy will grow, and benefit everybody, including those at the bottom. Not enough jobs have been created for the poor to take part in the growth story. Estimates suggest that there are 30 million unemployed currently. One reason could be that India has failed to transfer jobs from agriculture to manufacturing while China has moved 150 million jobs in the last 10 years.

Besides manufacturing, agriculture, which has been shedding jobs consistently, but still accounts for 49 per cent all jobs, needs a reboot. The World Bank has a bunch of suggestions on how this can be done. They include investments to boost farm productivity, creation of improved livelihood projects, increased farm credit, better irrigation, agricultural insurance and improved market access for farmers.

Social enterprise- one of the possible solutions

India's deep-seated and multifaceted problems need more than the intervention of government, non-profits and international agencies. This is where social enterprises, with a dual promise of financial and social returns (sometimes includes environmental benefits) leveraging the power of market forces, could do some of the heavy-lifting in combating India's crippling issues. Social enterprises provide innovative products and services at affordable price points, create livelihoods, and also engage the economically disadvantaged as producers and clients.

Note: Over the next few months we will be exploring life at the BoP, the enterprises serving these low-income populations, government's role and the different approaches to solving these issues.

—Nelson Moses

This article was first published at www.chilasa.org

Volunteering as a Catalyst

Most of us reading this story might know what it is to be a volunteer in a development organization. What is more onerous is the task of channelizing volunteers' energy and interests for the common good. In this story, we are going to learn about one of the country's largest youth volunteer NGO – BHUMI.

Bhumi was started in August 2006, by a group of young people who wanted to do something for the country. Working on multiple issues brought them to focus on the education of marginalized kids. When we have grey eminences and young blood alike, debating on the need to reform the present education system, here we have young volunteers striving to make the little difference they can in the quality of learning among underprivileged kids. The organization established its first chapter in Chennai (its largest till date) and today, works across the cities of Chennai, Mumbai, New Delhi, Tiruchirapalli, Pune, and Bangalore.

Bhumi is a team of just 4 employees, supported by a 1000+ volunteers, all of whom are below 30 years of age, reaching out to 8,000 children, in just a span of 7 years. "Volunteers are our strength. Their commitment and excitement reposes faith in what we are doing every day," says Dr Prahalathan, Founder, Bhumi. The organisation's mission is very clear. They work to bridge gaps in the quality of education received by these children, by providing a platform for the volunteers to work on bringing inclusiveness in the society. Interestingly, the team is at it – equality and inclusion can and must start only from here.

Volunteers at Bhumi are engaged in numerous projects. Besides, they are also involved in raising funds to the extent of 40 percent of the resources. Some of the projects needing a mention are Kanini (computer literacy programme), Speak Out, Lakshya, Little Einsteins, Nakshatra and Joy to the World. In the computer literacy programme, the children are taught basics of computing, and advanced concepts depending on their aptitude levels. Recognizing the need for sharp communication skills and the trend of marginalized kids not being able to communicate in English confidently, Bhumi introduced this project called 'Speak Out', which is an interactive English learning programme for kids who have little or no proficiency in the language.

As a naïve listener, I interrupt to know how children receive all this and the challenges they face in reaching the kids. "What we do is essentially a supplementary education model, taking away the children's play time. So, we got to make the content as interesting as possible, so that kids come to our



classes," explains Prahalathan.

Are the volunteers seen as regular teachers? He responds, "That is another challenge we face. By restricting the age limit of volunteers to 30 years, we were able to ensure a fraternal bonding between the children and the volunteers. Though this approach has also resulted in leadership creation for nation building among young people and has created a brand for Bhumi among youth, we feel we need to break this barrier sometime soon."

The most interesting of all the projects at Bhumi is Lakshya where every child is paired with a volunteer, who eventually learns to and ends up playing the role of a socially aware mentor. The child is helped with identifying his or her abilities and strengths. "Individual attention to every child is the key concern and the project allows us to do just that. It is very exciting to see how children develop a simple idea we mention during a casual conversation," says a volunteer from Bhumi. From simple ideas to simple gifts, Bhumi is aware of the sensibilities of under privileged kids. The project Joy to the World is an annual initiative where the children's wishes are fulfilled on the eve of New Year. More than 4,000 children benefitted from the programme this year.

Bhumi also has a project called Little Einsteins where Math and Science subjects are taught using live demonstrations and multimedia presentations. Working with so many children across different cities does

We want to make volunteerism a national habit. With our current model we hope to reach out to 50 more cities before the end of the decade.



present a case for get-together.

Nakshatra is an annual talent festival organized by Bhumi for children in orphanages, giving them a chance to exhibit their talent and explore their abilities in an atmosphere of healthy competition. "Over 5,000 children from 75 children's homes have benefitted across Chennai, Bengaluru, New Delhi, and Tiruchirapalli," quotes Prahalathan.

Numerous projects, all running from the volunteers' support typifies the trend among youngsters today. Recent reports illustrate students' interest in interning with a development organization before joining mainstream UG or PG courses.

So what does volunteering mean to them? "The reasons for volunteering are different with each volunteer. Some do it as their college requires them to do so; some do it to use their free time productively; while some get into volunteering only to know what it is like. Bhumi's passion and goals influence the new entrants to the extent that most of them stay beyond their planned

schedules. One of our volunteers who came to work here for 3 months is now into his second year. Some have also taken up organizational leadership roles. There are many who recently celebrated five years at Bhumi. All this only proves that Bhumi is achieving what it set out to among the volunteers—leadership and social awareness," he says with pride.

He admires the zeal with youngsters have taken up daunting tasks to make this country a better place. "Every year Bhumi gives awards recognizing best volunteers and the highest honour is the torch bearer award. When we gave out the 2012 awards, we realised that most of our previous awardees have chosen greater challenges. Currently, 7 out of 13 torchbearer awardees have quit their regular jobs to take up full time roles in the non-profit/education sector," he says with a sense of satisfaction.

Having said that, awards are not a surprise! Bhumi was recognized as one of 'Asia Pacific Emerging 100' youth social entrepreneurs by the FYSE in 2009. The NGO was also chosen as the 'BIG NGO initiative' at the 'BIG Chennaiite awards' held in December 2011. Bhumi's Ms. Vaishnavi Srinivasan won the 'Youth Volunteer of the year' award at the 'Apeejay India Volunteer Awards', 2011. "That's a long way from 15th 15th August 2006," agrees Prahalathan.

Where does one see Bhumi in the future? While interventions in education related issues were an expected reply, he has a surprise here too. "We want to make volunteerism a national habit. With our current model we hope to reach out to 50 more cities before the end of the decade. By then we would be a few thousands strong and would like to take up newer challenges as they come," he asserts and signs off.

Bhumi's reach and impact will definitely be a story to be reckoned by its team and our readers alike!

—Shanmuga Priya. T

To whom does God communicate?

To whom does God communicate? Are there special people? Are there special times?

All people are special, and all moments are golden. There is no person and here is no time one more special than another. Many people choose to believe that God communicates in special ways and only with special people. This removes the mass of the people from responsibility for hearing My message, much less receiving it (which is another matter), and allows them to take someone else's word for everything. You don't have to listen to Me, for you've already decided that others have heard from Me on every subject, and you have them to listen to.

By listening to what other people think they heard Me say, you don't have to think at all.

This is the biggest reason for most people turning from My messages on a personal level. If you acknowledge that you are receiving My messages directly, then you are responsible for interpreting them. It is far safer and much easier to accept the interpretation of others (even others who have lived 2000 years ago) than seek to interpret the message you may very well be receiving in this moment now. Yet I invite you to a new form of communication with God. A two-way communication. In truth, it is you who have invited Me. For I have come to you, in this form, right now, in answer to your call.

We should listen to God even when what's being said seems wrong?

Especially when it seems wrong. If you think you are right about everything, who needs to talk with God?

Go ahead and act on all that you know. But notice that you've all been doing that since time began. And look at what shape the world is in. clearly, you've missed something. Obviously, there is something you don't understand. That which you do understand must seem right to you, because "right" is a term you use to designate something with which you agree. What you've missed will, therefore, appear at first to be "wrong".

The only way to move forward on this is to ask yourself, "what would

happen if everything I thought was 'wrong' was actually 'right'?" Every great scientist knows about this. When what a scientist does is not working, a scientist sets aside all of the assumptions and starts over. All great discoveries have been made from a willingness, and ability, to not be right. And that's what's needed here.

You cannot know God until you've stopped telling yourself that you already know God. You cannot hear God until you stop thinking that you've already heard God.

I cannot tell you My Truth until you stop telling me yours.

—Excerpt from 'Conversations with God' by Neale Donald Walsch

Belongingness Dimensions – Performance appraisal

In a social organization what does performance mean? Usually, the question of performance has been treated as 'either' or 'situation. Most performance appraisal methodologies and formats are derived from the corporate world which again is sometimes a modification of the methodologies instituted from 1970's and 1980's. Hence the fitment to the social organizational realities, work and people orientation does not happen causing them to either adopt it or leave it totally. Also, viewing appraisal efforts as just a reward and recognition space has caused the largest limitation. Very few institutions and organizations view it as a culture building, personal growth and development, identification of potential, feedback, project review, vision-value alignment and clarity exercise. When the appraisal format is aligned to all these objectives and outcomes it becomes an annual alignment exercise, energizing and providing the required clarity and enhancing quality to move forward.

The social organization is guided by a purpose with varied timelines. Most of them require team work and there are hazy lines of distinction in terms of specific job responsibilities. The dynamic nature of work, resource constraints and time constraints can also make many of the employees do multiple activities making fixation of roles a tough task.

In the wake of this, the performance appraisal cannot be limited to appraisal of the activities. The following dimensions can be included to enhance the effort and outcome of the appraisal process:

1. Alignment with organizational vision and values: As discussed in the earlier article for sustenance, clarity and development of the organization the vision

and values have to be formulated and disseminated. In order to tap the level of integration, the understanding and application of the vision and values in every decision making effort of the individual members can be a part of the appraisal process. The higher the level of integration the higher is the alignment of decisions within the organization.

2. Alignment of personal and organizational vision and values:

To tap the person fit to the organization the usual practice is to match the job requirements and the competencies. But, it has to be checked with the extent of integration with the vision and values of the organization. There may be competence but the choice to use the competence in specific situations comes from the values the person holds. If the personal vision and values do not match with the organizational vision and values there would be internal conflicts leading to high level of disgruntlement and human issues with other team members. Appraisal process is a good space to tap the spaces of alignment and misalignment. Corrective actions can be planned if it is at the form level. If it is at the essence level tough decisions regarding the person fit have to be made.

3. Credibility index of the organization:

The appraisal process is also a good space to tap the gap between what people say and what people do. When the credibility and dependability of people is low, it automatically lowers the credibility and reliability of the organization. For this process the goals

need to be fixed clearly and the ability to achieve the goals has to be tapped. Social organizations are not manufacturing spaces where the extent of production can be tapped easily. The initiatives may show that the targeted beneficiaries have been reached but the impact of the program may be low. Therefore, whether the envisaged quality, reach-out, plans, promises and commitments made are achieved at a micro level is more important than numbers and figures.

4. Potential identification and personal development:

Appraisals many times get limited to previous year's performance. But the real value of appraisal process lies in identification of the potential competences and developing the same which will be of value for the person as well as the organization in future. When this component is included the appraisee also gets the required motivation to explore self and obtain feedback.

5. Two way feedback process:

Appraisal is both a feedback from the management to the employee and from the employee to the management. In a social organization where passion and purpose connect run high the two way feedback will enable shared vision and appropriate corrective action for chartering the movement of the initiatives toward the organizational vision.

6. Internal staff alignment – task and people processes: Appraisal discussions can bring out the team dynamics in achievement of task. The human issues that exist between people can be tapped

and its implication on the achievement of the tasks can be identified. When the appraisal process is at both individual and team level addressing team dynamics can be an outcome too.

7. Future plans and training need analysis:

The following year's plans and strategies have to be formulated before initiating the appraisal of the current year. Only then can the appraisal discussion can tap the gap in competency and develop training needs of the employees to carry on the initiatives of the following year.

8. Reward and recognition: Not the last or the least there is value in appreciating the efforts and contributions of the individuals and teams through the appraisal process. But the challenge in a social organization is due to high level of inter dependencies inter and intra team. Therefore the appraisal has to be self, peer reviewed and superior assessed to rule out any bias and allow the natural selection to take place.

Performance appraisal in a social organization hence becomes a very critical process and can be an organization feedback and development activity aligning the Vision and Values and evolving the organization.

Reflections:

1. What are the extent of clarity on organizational vision and the personal vision connect amongst the members of the organization?
2. To what extent does the appraisal become a value adding exercise for the individual and organization?
3. To what extent does the performance appraisal tap the credibility gap of the organization?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD



Ideas will follow intention

“Abandoned women find a safe haven at Sowharda, the home for deserted women, who are provided with food, clothing, shelter and vocational training to help in their independent sustenance.”



A career spanning 15 years with the public sector company BHEL did not satiate her. Though the next step was not clear, she was aware that she wanted to do something for the society. So sure that the urge to serve the society in some possible way forced her to take voluntary retirement while she was just 36 years old. This is Ms Susheelamma, Founder President, Sumangali Seva Ashrama (SSA), Bangalore. The two years post voluntary retirement helped her to experientially analyse the nature of social work that she was going to assiduously take to.

“Homelessness bothered me. Having nowhere to go to is a very vulnerable state when an individual caves in to any exploitative force, losing hope,” she explains as though recollecting from a personal anecdote. Providing shelter for destitute women and orphaned children was the path she chose to tread. Her intentions were not too strange to a neighbour who came forward to donate a piece of land at a nominal price to start the ashram. Thus was born Sumangali Seva Ashrama in the year 1975.

“The ashram hosts shelter facilities for children, women and the aged. Gradually, health initiatives were also initiated in the communities. What is interesting to observe is the manner in which the inmates and the management complement each other,” she says.

The ashram hosts a foster home called ‘Premananda Makkala Kuteera’ for orphaned girls above six years of age. The girls are provided with shelter, food, clothing, education in the primary and secondary schools within the ashram campus. “Above all, there is love and care everywhere. The family-like environment helps in the social and psychological well-being of the girls,” explains a staff at SSA. Presently, the foster home plays host to 106 girls.

Talking of education, the team reiterates the faith in an age old adage – teach not how to fill the bucket, teach how to open the tap. Education is seen as a crucial factor in the progress of these children, especially those from the Hakki Pikki community which is going to have the first generation of literates. The Basavananda

Higher Primary School and the SSA Girls High School together educate 396 girls, provide government mid-day meals cooked by the SSA staff and promote their holistic development by encouraging children to engage in extra-curricular activities like dance, music, yoga, etc.

The ashram established the non-formal school for kids from Hakki Pikki community. Living amidst rag picking parents, the children are exposed to unhygienic conditions and rendered vulnerable to substance abuse. “Anybody observing this community’s lifestyle would realize the need to instill social values, educate and then mainstream them in formal schools. This is what Amma sought to do,” says Geetha, staff at SSA.

SSA established a crèche in 1987 to take care of the children of parents working as

and other disadvantaged sections of the population in our society. Reproductive health issues, ecology/conservation, HIV/AIDS, legal rights are some of the subjects covered in these awareness programmes. SSA encourages entrepreneurship and has supported women ready to realize their financial independence. More than 100 self help groups have been supported, benefitting around 2,000 women.

The aged also share this nest. Punyakoti Vanaprastashrama, the Home for the Aged hosts around 16 women now, leaving no stone unturned in helping them live and die with dignity. Exercise sessions, healthy diet recommended by the doctors and the child cum aged friendly atmosphere makes their life simple and memorable here.

Regular health checkups for all the inmates and counseling are an integral part

Reaching remote villages that are inaccessible became a priority and we introduced the mobile clinic programme. Besides conducting Health Check-up Camps, the Mobile Clinic also provides villagers emergency services, delivers medicines and facilitates follow-up treatments.

Susheelamma’s story alongside SSA goes to illustrate need based community initiatives that pass the test of time, making a difference in the lives of down trodden. This integral model has won numerous awards and appreciation from the people and government departments. SSA has won the Karnataka State Award for Child Welfare in 1985, Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar Award in 1991, Rani Kittur Chennamma Award for Welfare of Women and Children by Department of Women and Child Welfare, Government of Karnataka, 1998, Rajyotsava Award for Social Work in 2000, Rajiv Gandhi Shiromani Award in 2001 and many many more.

Susheelamma beats her own organization in the number of awards won. Starting with the National Award for Child Welfare in 1985, she went on to win the Mysore Dasara Award for Rural and Women Development by Dept. of Women and Child, Government of Karnataka – 1994 and Janaki Devi Bajaj Puraskar for Outstanding Contribution towards Rural Entrepreneurship – 1994. Rising Personalities of India Award by International Penguin Publishing House, New Delhi – 2001, Grama Jyothi Award – 2005, Karnataka Padmabhushana – 2006, Samarapith Sadhvi Award – 2007 and Karnataka Best Social Service Award – 2008 are other feathers in her crown. She is also the recipient of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani Award for the year 2005.

Susheelamma started working for ‘some social cause’ with just Rs 15 in her hand. And today, what has evolved in the name of SSA is the canvas presenting stories of progress, independence, success, happiness and above all, fulfillment of purpose. Certainly, intention can do the magic. It can guide you to the idea that ignites all your energy!

—Shanmuga Priya. T



coolies, construction workers and house maids. The crèche has been highly successful in providing a clean, safe and healthy environment for underprivileged infants. Presently there are about 24 children in the Crèche, aged between 3 to 5 years.

Abandoned women find a safe haven at Sowharda, the home for deserted women, who are provided with food, clothing, shelter and vocational training to help in their independent sustenance. Besides rehabilitation, SSA organizes awareness programmes consistently to inform the inmates about rights of women, children

of all the projects administered in this campus. “Health care is a priority in our minds that started taking a concrete shape after about a decade of SSA’s establishment,” quotes Geetha. “Soon, the opportune moment came to serve the needy outside the ashram. SSA was entrusted with the management of a Primary Health Center (PHC) at Cholanayakanahalli, Bangalore. More than 76000 people benefit from this programme,” recollects Geetha from her orientation days.

Though the PHC was doing good work, its reach was a concern to Susheelamma.

Till today, I have a lot of people coming to me for cataract surgery just because I am Actor Jai Shankar's son

Dr. Vijay Shankar tells **Marie Banu** what motivated him to become an Ophthalmologist

Dr. Vijay Shankar is a well-known and popular Ophthalmologist having conducted thousands of eye surgeries. Dr. Vijay Shankar became an eye surgeon to fulfill his father's long cherished dream of becoming a successful eye practitioner.

Dr. Vijay Shankar has completed his MS in Ophthalmology from Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore. He has done his fellow ship and has been trained under various sub-specialties in Ophthalmology at Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai. He also carries out his father's philanthropic activities.

In an interview, Dr. Vijay Shankar tells Marie Banu about what motivated him to become an Ophthalmologist.

What motivated you to become an Ophthalmologist?

I was motivated by my father, the famous Tamil actor, Late Jai Shankar, who is also known as the James Bond of Tamil cinema.

He played the character of a blind man in his hundredth film 'Idhayam parakiradhu'. While acting in this film, he had the opportunity to interact with a lot of blind people, and it was then he aspired to make one of his children an eye surgeon. He thought that I would be the best as I was good in academics. I complied for my father's sake, in spite of receiving a lot of movie offers.

When I cleared the MS, he was the happiest person in the world. He said to me: "You should do a thousand surgeries, Vijay. That is what I want." Thanks to him! I have done many thousands of surgeries now.

About your clients?

About 70 to 75 percent of my clients are from the film industry. Thanks to my illustrious father! Till today, I have a lot of people coming to me for cataract surgery just because I am Actor Jai Shankar's son. They say, "Your dad has helped me so much. When I was a producer, I could not pay your father. Now, I have come to you for a surgery."

My practice began galloping since I was 27. My father has helped the film industry so much, that people thought they are repaying him by coming to me.

I am grateful to them for trusting me. I trust in quality and I believe that my clients should get the best. So, whatever best I can do in eye care, I do.

About your education? Were you allowed to mingle with the film fraternity while young?

I did my schooling at Don Bosco,



Photo: Marie Banu

Egmore, Chennai. I then studied at Kasturba Medical College at Manipal and also completed my MS degree here. I underwent two-year fellowship at Sankara Nethralaya and graduated as an eye surgeon. Now, I serve as a senior consultant at Apollo Hospitals and I do my private practice too.

I have a brother and a sister. While young, we were never allowed to visit a shooting spot. Parties used to happen at home, but we were not allowed to leave our rooms. In our home, education was of paramount importance. My father wanted to be a doctor, but he could not gain a seat in a medical college. Ultimately, he ended up in cinema.

Thanks to my mother! My sister is now a doctor in Apollo hospital and my brother is an engineer.

Which of the social issues are you passionate about?

One thing I am passionate about is eye donation. In India, there is a lot of need for eyes; children especially adolescents are in need of eyesight. This can be possible only if people can come forward to donate their eyes after their lifetime. So, I try my best to pitch in for the eye donation campaigns.

In fact, I conduct free eye camps for the

poor section of the film industry every year. We have completed four such camps for the Producers' council; Directors' Union; Actors' Union; Stunts' Union, where we conduct free surgeries and provide free medicines.

Can you tell us about the charitable activities that you coordinate?

There are so many social responsibilities around us. Each of us has a role to play in our society.

My father is a philanthropist and he has done a lot of social work. In fact, there was an organization called 'Mercy' at Kilpauk in Chennai which he took over and supported in a big way. He used to make sure that his co-stars celebrated their birthdays with the destitute people at Mercy home.

I run a charitable trust 'Jai Shankar Medical and Charitable Trust.' My wife is an ENT surgeon, and we mainly coordinate health camps related to eye care and ENT for the needy.

Don Bosco, Egmore, school's former Principal and Rector Rev. Fr. Sahayaraj requested me to conduct an eye camp for the poor students who study in the night school at Don Bosco and I readily agreed. We conducted a huge eye camp and also gave away free spectacles to the boys.

Even today, we are there for the Don Bosco students, whenever called.

Your advice for those who aspire to be ophthalmologists?

We have a lot of eye related problems in our country and we require more ophthalmologists. Even though there are many eye care centres coming up, it is still not enough. The number of eye diseases is increasing, due to technology, media, television, iPad, laptops, and everything. More and more doctors are welcome and we require people who can do quality work.

I welcome ophthalmologists. My advice for them is: "Do your job sincerely! It is extremely important that you are focused and be the perfect ophthalmologist."

Editorial

Latha Suresh
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