

# MITHRA FOUNDATION

290 / 7 Venketaramiah Lay out - II cross • Banaswadi, Bangalore 560043

TEL: 091-080-25450687 • EMAIL: MITHRA95@GMAIL.COM

## EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN

The Mithra School for the underprivileged, founded in 2000, needs partners to help meet its running costs.



Mithra Foundation was registered with the Indian Government under the Indian Trust Act in 1995. Mithra is also registered under the Home Ministry and has obtained permanent registration to receive foreign funds. Similarly it is registered under income tax act and is in possession of 80G tax exemption certificate.

## GENESIS OF THE MITHRA SCHOOL

Mithra Foundation was started in 1992 by Dr. Joe Rosario (clinical psychologist, doctorate on children's education). He worked with the poor children living in Srirampuram slums. He witnessed that these underprivileged children are denied their basic rights and are susceptible to all forms of abuse to the detriment of their developmental process and their learning ability. Hence, Dr. Rosario, along with others, started Mithra Foundation in 1992 to work for needy and marginalized children. For poor children who could not pursue their education, Mithra initiated a program called "cognitive skills stimulation." Through this the children are trained to acquire the fundamental skills to cope with demands of life and become active partakers of their own development including their early education. Gradually Mithra developed more and more programs for the slum children, youth and women:

- Supplementary education for school going children
- Relief and rehabilitation for the disabled
- Elimination of child labour
- Formation of women's groups with awareness training and saving/micro-credit schemes
- Vocational skills trainings for youth
- Human Rights education in high schools of Karnataka.

Especially the supplementary education classes showed up the weaknesses of the present education system which leads to high drop-out rates and a high prevalence of child labour.

Mithra began a consultation process with persons running different models of alternative education. This led to the decision to start an alternative school to provide better education for poorer children and help them to find better jobs in society and so break out of the vicious circle of poverty.

The school was founded in the year 2000 and in the beginning used existing premises that Mithra had acquired for its field work (e.g., pre-schools, supplementary education, women's self-help groups). It began with a first class of 17 children and each following year a new class was added. This phase of the school was financed primarily by Susila Dharma Britain with the help of a grant from the development department of the British Government DFID. In the year 2003, Mithra received official approval to run a primary school. It soon became apparent that the premises were too small for their needs and could not cater to more than 5 classes of 20 to 25 children each. In the year 2004, Susila Dharma Germany successfully presented a project proposal to the German Government (BMZ) to build a larger school using land that already belonged to Mithra. In 2005, the school moved into its new premises.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE MITHRA SCHOOL

The purpose of the school is to make a quality education accessible to underprivileged children of lower castes and thereby enable them to break the barriers of poverty and regain better socio-economic status. The particular target group are high-risk children from the migrant population living in the slums of north-eastern Bangalore City.

**Specific aims are:**

- To impart the basic knowledge in essential subjects (e.g. good English, mathematics, environmental education, social studies, geography and the regional languages) and the basic livelihood skills to enable them to choose an appropriate profession
- To inculcate within them the right values and attitudes to lead a healthy life
- To educate them on the basic principles of our country namely democracy, secularism and equality and to give them the sense of pride to be a good citizen of our country

In addition to its academic program the Mithra School aims to:

- Improve the physical and overall health of the children
- Develop the self-confidence and self-esteem of the children to enable them to stand on their own legs
- Develop the appropriate values to help the children to participate in their family and community in a responsible way and not to become anti-social elements
- Give the children pre-vocational training and thereby expand their ability to find a suitable profession

Mithra aims to offer the children an education that is active, interesting and enjoyable within an atmosphere where the children feel safe and secure.

There are specific conditions operating in the slums that place particular requirements of the curriculum. Some of these are:

- Experience of violence in the home especially of men towards women and girls
- The value attributed to gender: higher if male than female
- Little or no interactive play with other children
- Little or no language stimulus or experiences that develop language both regarding vocabulary and syntax in their own mother-tongue
- A lack of basic personal and social skills normal for this age-group
- Children are trapped in a fairly barren environment within the slum enclosure.

## ACTIVITIES TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES

The school runs classes from 1st to 8th grade and 2 kindergarten classes with class teachers, subject teachers and a language specialist according to the annual plan. The classes are run from 8.30 am to 2.30 pm on five days a week and from 8 am to 12 noon on Saturdays.

The school has 15 class rooms, five halls for major activities, library, computers rooms, art room, compound wall with gardens, 20 toilets, play grounds, auditorium and storerooms all of which need constant cleaning and maintenance. Mithra school's support staffs attend to this on a regular basis.

The school currently limits the number of children in a class to a maximum of 25 per class to afford a good foundation to these first generation learners, some of whom have considerable learning gaps.

In the school year 2007/2008 had 204 pupils in the school and 30 in the 2 kindergarten classes.

### **The Annual Plan**

The staff prepare well in advance the annual plan for all the school activities. It correlates with the seasons of the year, examination schedules, festivals in India, climatic situation and the government's demands.

The school follows the state school syllabus but the methodology is adapted to the style of the Mithra school system. The curriculum coverage is very wide and apart from Indian culture it also covers political education. It is translated into a text book curriculum by the Directorate of Text Books in Bangalore. The subjects are planned as per the syllabus in the text book and the built in exercises. Then comes the unit plan wherein the class teacher incorporates all the subjects and prepares the schedule for the class. The planning process and some of the aspects of pupil management take up a considerable amount of time.

The students of the higher classes are taught environmental studies, mathematics, English, Kannada, the state language, Hindi as the third language, social studies, science, computers and value education.

Further aspects of the curriculum are:

- Focus on human values, respect and dignity
- Yoga for concentration
- Language development
- Numeracy
- Gross and fine motor skill development
- Physical education mainly through dance and action songs
- Live projects.

### **Regular Monitoring of Progress**

Students are constantly accompanied in their journey of learning. Teachers not only teach them the lessons but also make sure they are well grasped. This is regularly assessed by tests, class work and home work. Every month tests are conducted according to the needs and progress of the classes. Twice a year major examinations take place. Progress reports are prepared to inform the parents about the positive progress the child has made in his/her overall development.

The teachers also submit the weekly notes of lesson registers wherein they explain their activity and the pupil's activity, educational materials prepared, resources referred, etc.

Each class teacher also makes a monthly report on each child. These consists of the child's academic progress, family situation, social skills, behavioral problems, emotional assessment, remedial package if need be, health status, etc. Case study presentation and discussion on one or two students during the teachers' Saturday meetings is helpful for the new teachers, helping them to understand the child in totality.

In addition to the regular files kept for each class such as attendance records, mark registers, admission records, progress cards, teacher-parent communication records, diaries, etc., an increasing number of files are maintained as per the government's rules. They are usually attended to during holidays.

### **Value Education**

Value education addresses the issues of caste, injustice and inequality in the personal and social lives of these slum people. A human rights program is an integral part of this education.

The children also learn basic civic sense and are encouraged to put this into practice in their community. Special importance is given to looking after the environment.

### **Library, Laboratories, Sport Facilities**

The library is equipped with text books, reference books, journals and reading books in three languages. It is continually updated and is utilized by both the students and teachers. A part-time librarian is responsible for looking after the books and also the furniture, shelves and racks. At present, the Mithra library is equipped with 4,000 books in English, Kannada and Hindi.

Similarly, Mithra has laboratories for chemistry, physics, biology and mathematics. The teachers of the respective subjects are responsible for their maintenance.

Mithra has instructors for physical training, yoga and music, etc. They are responsible for the maintenance and proper use of the respective items required.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

Extracurricular activities such as dancing, music, art, computing, yoga, martial art, gardening and tailoring are regular features of the school. Mostly they are done after 2:30 pm.

Seven special educators have been hired to run these activities.

### **Parent's Meetings, Education, and Community Involvement**

Every three months the parents are invited to meet and talk to the teachers. This has proved to be a major source of strength and clarity. They work together to guide the child in her/his overall development. The involvement and motivation of the parents play a vital role in getting the children educated and preventing school drop outs. Parental education is also an important part of the community development that emphasizes the importance of education for children and particularly for girl children. Parents, especially the mothers, and the community leaders, are invited for meetings that decide on various school matters such as:

- Admissions
- Annual and special events
- Major live projects
- Fees and other financial matters
- Curriculum preparation.

Through social awareness programs such as campaign for school enrollment and elimination of child labour, the community leaders and the Dalit families are involved in Mithra's work.

Street play and community programs on human rights sensitize them towards the needs of the weaker sections of their own community. Many of the school's programs are undertaken by both the staff and the parents of the students. For example, the mothers take responsibility for the children when they are taken out for educational trips, cultural events and celebrations. Community members help the staff of Mithra to prepare educational materials and aids.

### **Teachers' Training**

Teachers' training is provided by the Mithra resource team on Saturdays. Here they learn how to handle the children and how to teach poor and first generation learners. Emphasis is given to active learning methods, which involve the learners holistically. Creative methods help to build the self-esteem that is necessary in view of the children's background. The teamwork on Saturdays enables the teachers to learn from each other and helps new teachers to learn from the more experienced and competent teachers, some of whom are highly competent and possess a high degree of confidence and creativity. A child psychologist and special educator provide them with some understanding of child psychology.

Four times a year, 3-day trainings are run with specialist educators. The training topics are methods of teaching, maintenance of records, resource mobilization for class, preparation of educational aides, curriculum preparation, child's psychology, language development and creating alternative frameworks/approaches to education.

### **Nutrition and Health-related Activities**

Each child is given a food ball at the end of the day as supplementary nutrition. As soon as the necessary funds are available, Mithra plans to give one small meal daily to the students.

There is a medical checkup twice a year during which a team of doctors and nurses camp in the school for a week. This has proved very useful to the children and their parents.

### **Celebrations and Special Events**

The monotony of routine classes is broken by organizing quite a number of celebrations or events such as teachers' day, children's day, human rights day, and women's day, Christmas celebration, Ayutha Pooja, Ramzan, service of interfaith, school annual day, and sports day. Every event requires a lot of planning, preparation and implementation and the process of such events are very useful for the teachers and the students. They create opportunities to discover one's talents, strengths and weaknesses and, very importantly, for the development of social skills.

### **Children with Special Needs**

Children with special needs require the teachers' constant attention and additional psycho-social support and close follow up. The behavioral and emotional problems they face, in particular the teenagers, are a considerable challenge for Mithra. Psychologists and other counselors help the teachers in this task.

### **Pre-vocational Skills Training**

Mithra gives pre-vocational skills training in tailoring, gardening, clay work, and book binding. This helps the children to discover their own aptitudes.

### **Scholarships for Dalit Children**

A scholarship scheme to help Dalit children has been introduced. At present 35 such children are being given full support to pursue their education in an undisturbed.

### **Personnel**

The school is run by a well qualified head teacher with 23 years of experience together with 14 full time teachers and 7 part time special educators. Teachers have a bachelor or master degree in education. They are further supported by visiting professionals in the field of education and psychology. The overall direction is ensured by the advisory board and Mithra's chief executive Mrs. Bella Rosario (Master in Social Administration).

The teachers are very committed, enthusiastic, hard-working and sensitive to the real needs of Mithra's children.

### **Networking**

Mithra is constantly developing alliances, collaborations and networks at all levels:

- Mithra is a member of a network of early education initiatives.
- Mithra is an active member of model schools of alternative education of similar organizations involved in innovative education system, which is a major platform of learning and sharing. The network members meet regularly and share their experiences.
- Collaboration with local NGOs on issue-based activities. For example:
  - Elimination of child labour
  - Land rights for slum dwellers
  - Forum for women's rights
  - Dalits federation of women
  - Human Rights education network
- Mithra works with 200 schools in Karnataka in the field of Human Rights education thereby sensitizing the wider community about Human Rights.

## **FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS**

Until the year 2007, the Mithra School has been financed by donations from small NGOs (Susila Dharma organizations) and private persons together with the grants from DFID and BMZ.

These donations have only been given for a limited period of time. For this reason, Mithra is seeking partners from reputable humanitarian organizations to help them meet their running costs.

For a school that caters for the very poor it is not possible to meet the running costs solely with the help of schools fees. (*Table of yearly costs on next page.*)

## YEARLY RUNNING COSTS IN INDIAN RUPEES (INR)

<b>Capital costs</b>	<b>RS (INR)</b>
Educational material	120,000
Maintenance	150,000
Cooking utensils	50,000
Library books	50,000
Office equipment	80,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>450,000</b>
<b>Salary Costs</b>	
Head teacher1	132,000
Teachers (13)	663,000
Sp. Educator (4)	120,000
Extra curricular training (2)	30,000
Driver (1)	72,000
Accounts officer (1)	36,000
Secretary (1)	36,000
Office Asst (1)	30,000
Chief Executive (1)	24,000
Gardener (1)	30,000
Watchman (1)	90,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>1,263,000</b>
<b>Running Costs</b>	
Fuel	150,000
Vehicle maintenance	50,000
Postage	50,000
Stationary	75,000
Phone / Fax	85,000
Periodicals	35,000
Office Upkeep	60,000
Educ. and promotional material	160,000
Training costs for staff	150,000
Meetings and PRO	120,000
Health	100,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>1,035,000</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>2,748,000</b>
<b>Euros (€ 1 = RS 64)</b>	<b>€ 42,938</b>
<b>USD (\$ 1 = RS 43)</b>	<b>\$ 63,907</b>