

Site Visit to Ananya Trust

A Report

by

Usha V. Subramanian

&

P.S. Krishnakumar

Introduction

On October 8, 2001, we visited Ananya Trust, housed in Shibumi, Anjanapura Layout, Bangalore, India.

Ananya is a place where underprivileged children get recognition of their existence. Ananya promises to offer a future for children who otherwise would not have known that a dog lives in a kennel while a pig's home is called a pigsty.

Ananya was started three years back with just 2 children in Ms. Shashi Rao's house. Ms. Shashi Rao and Ms. Priya Tiwari provide the backbone for the school. It was their cherished dream to provide education to children from the lower strata of the society. Today their dream is a reality with Ananya providing learning to 42 children.

Our Visit

We reached Ananya at 1:15 pm. We spent 4 hours with the students. It was an amazing experience to be amongst them and be a witness to their learning process. During our stay with the students and staff for 4 hours, we observed the teachings imparted to the students, the fun-filled students' adaptation to knowledge acquisition and the bonding between the students and the staff.

We left Ananya Trust at 4:20 pm with a feeling of comfort and satisfaction. The knowledge that 8 devoted and enthusiastic staff members are taking care of the students, guiding them towards a brighter future, touched us deeply.

The students of Ananya feel Ananya is their home and find immense happiness. Ananya is a home and learning center for 42 willing and abiding students.

We give below our evaluation of what Ananya is today and what it strives to be tomorrow.

Staff of Ananya

Ananya's staff comprises of 5 teachers, 1 cook and a young couple who take care of the children who reside in the hostel, within the school premises. Ananya has provided a home for an abandoned woman, Shivamma. Shivamma cooks deliciously and with a lot of care for the staff and students of Ananya.

The school runs on five days of the week. The five teachers, Shashi, Priya, Poonam, Neeraja and Bhavani, schedule their classes such that they visit the school three times a week. They reach the school in the morning and stay on until the school gets over at 3:00 pm. The teachers have their lunch, cooked by Shivamma.

The dedication of the staff is appreciable. While Shivamma and the couple (George and Suman) reside with the students within the school premises, the teachers travel from their homes to the school. Shibumi, where the school resides, is about 18 kms. from central Bangalore. The commitment from teachers is discernible as they travel 40 odd kilometers on each of their visit days.

George and Suman take care of the students as if they are their own. They inculcate in students the habits of cleanliness, regular exercising and punctuality.

The Students

They are the life that Ananya breathes. We found students from 6 to 16 studying in this school. There are 14 day scholars and 28 hostel residents. The day scholars live in and around the school premises. The other 28 reside in the hostel from Monday to Friday. They come from other parts of Bangalore. They leave the hostel on Friday evenings and get back to school on Monday mornings. The children are picked up on Monday mornings in a van by the teachers.

"I don't like going back home on Friday evenings. I enjoy being here". This echoes the sentiments of the 27 other hostel residents.

The students are very warm, affectionate and friendly. They act as perfect hosts and take care of the visitors to the school very well.

A Different School

Ananya's way of functioning is out of the usual run of things. There is no compartmentalization. A student does not belong to 1st grade, 2nd grade and so on. They are not categorized according to age. Instead, the students are groups every year based on a theme. The theme last year was "colors". The theme for the current academic year is "seasons". The students are split into 5 groups and each group is named after a season. The groups are Vasantha (Spring), Grishma (Summer), Varsha (Rain), Sharad (Autumn) and Hemantha (Winter). Students belonging to a group, consisting of children of varied age groups, study a subject together. The students are regrouped every year, with each group containing a different set of students.

Policy of inclusion is the motto of the school. No student is wronged for the mistakes they commit while learning. Instead, the teachers strive to put self-learning and self-assessing in place for the students.

We were witness to an on going class. It was a mathematics class where the students were being taught how to add. Each student in the group was asked whether they desired to perform a simple or difficult addition. The replies were "difficult", "very difficult" and "very very difficult". The students were then given two square cards, each which displayed a single digit number. They performed addition of those two single digit numbers and were ready with an answer in a jiffy. The teacher queried each student, in turn, for the answer. Some answers were correct and some were incorrect. The students were then passed on circular coins. Each student arranged his/her set of circular coins in two rows, the number in each row corresponding to the single digit numbers on the square cards. They then added the total number of coins. Few who had earlier erred in addition realized their mistakes while others confirmed that their answers were indeed right. We did not hear the teacher say, "You are wrong". Through the process of self-learning and self-assessment, the students learned the process of addition. Done in the form of a game, this process is repeated a few times for the children to understand the importance of the concept being taught.

The teachers do not use textbooks. According to Shashi, "Textbooks are limiting. It limits the teacher's view as well as the student's"! Through a process of vocabulary building and cognitive learning, the students learn the essence of each subject. Through one such cognitive learning process, the students are able to differentiate the names of homes of different animals.

During lunch, a few students got together and used clay to build the digestive system of a human being. It is so evident that the teaching imparted in Ananya has immensely helped these otherwise society-shunned children.

Ananya has been the cause of transformation of a student named Nisar, who has been with the school for the last 3 years. Nisar was a beggar and drug addict. Today, he is able to converse in English, do difficult multiplications such as 2367×1239 with ease and is standing with his head held high among his peers. He is the oldest student of the school.

The school conducts periodic parent-teachers meeting.

Goals of Ananya

Ananya's goals are simple, yet far reaching. Ananya hopes that every student is able to pass the 10th grade examination. To ensure that the students are economically independent, one of the other objectives is to find the aptitude of the students, their interests and gear them towards that. For instance, if a student is found to be having interest in gardening, Ananya plans to harness the interest into a vocation for the student.

Points to Note:

The school is one kind of alternate education where value-based education is imparted. However our concerns are the following. The school is located in a very isolated place in Bangalore whereby the total population of such under-privileged children is always likely to be a small number. In other words, the school would not have more than 50 or 100 students any point in time. The roads are in a bad shape and there is absolutely no possibility of anyone to walk on the roads after twilight. There are no streetlamps and the place looks deserted the whole day. There is however a local bus but its frequency is real bad. In that sense its not a scalable and replicable model, except from the point of view that these children will grow up into good citizens.

Also the system of education is non-formal. It is difficult for the kids to rank up to the current systems of education. The system is so flexible that there is no guarantee that no two kids get the same type of education. How they will measure up to the real world is still a question.

Overall, there are lots of good things to be said about this place. Yes, they deserve the funding that's accorded to them at this moment.