

Describe your proposal (Feel free to provide external links to your detailed proposal). *

Students in India today increasingly have access to a school structure. However, the education in a typical school available to poor and rural children is rigid, based on facts and memorization, and does not foster the child's natural curiosity and creativity. Furthermore, a changing culture, clashes between traditional and modern cultures, exposure to new life styles and habits, and competition has created confusion and introduced new challenges for poor children that the standard school does not address.

We run three holistic education centers in Madurai that addresses these issues. Over the last 20 years we have consistently shown dramatically reduced dropout rates, vastly improved learning levels, and skills to better able to handle life's challenges.

One distinguishing feature of these centers is that, they are run by youth in the community. In addition to helping the children in the community the centers provide a way to nurture and motivate youth to help the community. Over the years, students who have used the center as children become youth volunteers when they complete school, in turn helping others.

The second distinguishing feature is the emphasis on realizing the true joy of learning and 'learning how to learn.' Through various activities, focused on understanding concepts and relating those concepts to the world around them, we stir the innate joy in learning that children naturally have but lose in the unimaginative school system. Once they realize the pleasure in learning, children more easily learn how to make use of the resources and learn for themselves. That is, they learn how to ask questions, how to find answers, in short they 'learn how to learn.'

Key characteristics of the holistic education centers:

1. They are learning centers with resources such as books, periodicals, newspapers, computers, audio-visual aids and other materials.
2. They supplement inadequate teaching in schools with evening and weekend classes.
3. They offer a variety of extra-curricular programs, such as dance workshops, music workshops, sports clubs, Science clubs, art clubs, educational field trips to nearby places, talks by a variety of individuals from various walks of life, discussions groups on books, politics, and contemporary events. This is the most important aspect of the centers, and through these activities they encourage deep and intense discussions on a variety of topics, which are highly interactive sessions.
4. They provide counseling and guidance on degree, diploma and certificate programs after school.
5. They provide guidance and support during difficult family situations like abusive and alcoholic fathers, marriage plans for girls at age 15, and so on.
6. They provide guidance and support on nutrition and health issues.

In this proposal, we plan to try to replicate our success by creating holistic education centers in five villages in the rural area around Madurai. If successful, we will have a model for replication across other regions of India.

Successes we have achieved at the holistic education centers in Madurai:

1. Move the marriage age of girls from 15 to 22-23.
2. Close to 100% girls from the centers go on to college.
3. Upward career trajectories in the workplace, building on the improved learning levels, confidence, self-esteem, and critical thinking that is developed during their years at the center. Some examples (note that all of them are first in their family to complete high school):

- a. A former student was hired as a back office worker at a five star hotel, but moved to front office receptionist within 2 months after recognition of her excellent communication skills.
- b. A Bio-physics graduate now earns over Rs. 70,000 a month leading a department in a large hospital.
- c. A former student went on to get a Ph.D. and is now earning Rs. 75,000 a month as a post-doctoral researcher at a top university.
- d. A former student started as secretarial staff and is now assistant to the managing director of a top hospital in the city.
- e. When a former student married, her in-laws asked her to quit her job. However, within a short time, she was able to convince her in-laws (with logical arguments) to let her go to work, bringing much needed income into her family and enabling her to realize her potential.
- f. A former student was hired to work as a middle school teacher and was rapidly promoted to being an English teacher at the high school.
- g. Six former students now work as government school teachers.

We are proud of the accomplishment that we are able to help our students become successful in their careers, and move their families from poverty in one generation. In our experience, many educational initiatives are successful in helping students climb one step of the economic ladder, very few are able to move them into middle class and enable them to be successful and productive citizens of the country.

What is your proposed budget? Please provide a detailed breakdown (Again, links to external documents are welcome). *

Holistic Education Center Setup Costs (per center)

Books	Rs. 20,000
Some desks, chairs, cupboards	Rs. 20,000

Computer equipment and projector Rs. 1,00,000

Educational materials Rs. 10,000

Total Rs. 1,50,000

Holistic Education Center Running Costs (per center per month)

Rent Rs. 1,500

Travel allowance Rs. 2,500

Field trip and activities Rs. 3,000

Total (per month) Rs. 7,000

Total (per year per center) Rs. 84,000

Setup costs for 5 centers Rs. 1,50,000 * 5 = Rs. 7,50,000

Running costs for 5 centers Rs. 84,000 * 5 = Rs. 4,20,000

Cleaning and sprucing up the rented space will be done by volunteers.

Please provide a detailed timeline of the project implementation and evaluation (External links are welcome). *

We have identified 5 villages where we plan to implement holistic education centers.

1. Rural

a. Veerapanjan

b. Anaiyur

c. Kalmedu (residence of the nomadic group Narikuravas)

2. Tribal

a. Peraiyur hill (Paliyar tribe)

b. Natham hill (Kattu nayak tribe)

3 months: Connect with youth groups and the local administrative council in these villages. We will need the support of the local administrators. We have chosen villages where we have some leads to connect with these groups.

3 months:

1. Establish a center: Rent a space, cleanup, setup with books, basic furniture, and if possible three computers and a projector.
2. Establish rapport with the youth group, and coordinate visits to the current functioning centers of SEED PLAN in Madurai.

3 months:

Start fun activities at the center: Music and dance workshops, games, simple and fun Science experiments, book readings.

Start helping with school material. Train youth to look over the lesson teachers at school taught on that day and see how much the child has understood. We will strive to maintain a ratio where a youth works with no more than 8-10 children.

Establish morning and evening classes.

Towards the end of the first year, we can measure success by seeing how many children visit the center regularly.

We will work with the local youth group in every step of this plan. The youth get engaged and come to understand the essence of an holistic education center.

What is the problem this proposal is trying to address? *

Education in a typical school available to poor and rural children is rigid, based on memorization, and does not foster the child's natural curiosity and creativity. It produces graduates who are unemployable, and barely know much more than basic reading and writing. This is a low-cost intervention to empower youth groups to complement school education and have a major impact on the trajectories of the lives of these children.

What are the existing solutions for the problem? *

The answer to many educational challenges is to build a good school. This is a good solution, but expensive. Another challenge is rural projects try to use high salaries to lure quality teachers from urban areas. This is expensive. Instead, we want to empower local youth. This is low cost, youth have a real sense of ownership of the project, and it also transforms the life of the youth.

Another existing solution is to create coaching centers. However, they focus on pass rates and marks, not on holistic development.

How is your proposed solution better from the existing solutions? *

A key aspect of our success has been the involvement of youth. Having grown up in that community, from similar impoverished backgrounds, the youth have an intimate understanding of the day-to-day challenges the children face. They volunteer their time for a nominal stipend (given to college students to help cover college costs) and this work improves their self-worth, teaches them to work as a team, and shows them how society can be changed. Many youth continue some kind of social work even after they leave the area for jobs or for some other reason.

Because of the involvement of youth on a volunteer basis, the cost of running the centers is low.

Our focus in the holistic education centers on understanding concepts, realizing the joy of learning, and learning how to learn has led to very successful career prospects for our graduates. In our experience we have not seen this kind of success in many other projects.

To summarize, our innovative approach is to (1) involve youth from the community, and (2) focus on the end goal of learning how to learn.

Why is your proposed solution innovative? *

In every village or slum there are youth eager to do something to help community, but lacking the guidance and vision to translate that eagerness into action. Other initiatives ignore this valuable resource and look outside for people and ideas to help a community. We want to focus on the rich human resources available within the community, and work with them to change the education outcomes in their community.

A holistic education center channels the interest and energy of these youth into action that helps the community. The youth work mornings, evenings and weekends at the center. They bond together and form team, working towards a greater purpose. It provides them an alternate path to high-risk behaviors such as drug abuse, smoking, school/college dropouts, crime, and abuse.

How can your solution be easily and cost-effectively scaled to other geographic regions? *

Every village and slum and impoverished area in India has a youth population. And everywhere we see that the youth are eager to do something. It is easy to light the spark in the minds of these youth, to create in them a

desire to be part of a solution that transforms the community. In our experience, creating this spark has been easy. Once the youth are engaged, a lot of activities can be put in place.

Youth work as volunteers (except for incidental costs and college tuition help), so the overall cost is low.

The critical component is the first step of identifying the youth in a village. We believe that once we are successful in a group of villages, the nearby villages will hear of it, and the youth from those villages will reach out to us. So this can transform into a kind of youth movement, building on the template of successfully creating a holistic education center.

Define the metrics that will be used to gauge or quantify the impact of your solution. *

The long term impact of the holistic education centers is measured by:

- (1) Number of students from the center who complete class X and class XII (we aim for 100%, that is, no dropouts)
- (2) Number of students from the center who go on to college (we aim for 100%)
- (3) Number of girls from the center who go on to college (we aim for 100%)
- (4) Evaluation of job placements based on career growth options and salaries.

Please provide a detail breakdown of how you plan to measure the impact of your solution (e.g. increase in the no. of students enrolled / graduated / placed in jobs etc.). *

In two years, our metrics are as follows:

- (1) Measure the success of establishing youth owned holistic education centers. Is the center running regularly? How many youth are

involved? What is the nature of support from the community and the local school?

- (2) Measure the number of students who come regularly to the centers.
- (3) Measure the number of girl students who come regularly to the centers.

Reduction in drop-outs, measuring the number of students going to college, evaluating job placement, etc. are part of longer-term impact assessment. It will take longer than two years to see and evaluate this impact. Our goal is to achieve the metrics we have achieved in our Madurai centers (described above).

SUBMIT

Approved budget (by the Innovative and Scalable Projects (ISP) Group):

3 Centers

Start up costs: $1,50,000 * 3 = \text{INR } 4,50,000$

Running costs per year: $84,000 * 3 = \text{INR } 2,52,000$

For two years: $2,52,000 * 2 = \text{INR } 5,04,000$

Total grant amount: INR 4,50,000 (one time costs)

INR 5,04,000 (running costs for two years)

TOTAL: INR 9,54,000

November 2020: Request for funds allocation for October 2020 to March 2021

Holistic Education Center Setup Costs (per center)

Books and Educational Materials Rs. 20,000

Some desks, chairs, cupboards Rs. 20,000

Computer equipment and projector Rs. 80,000

Total (per center) Rs. 1,20,000

Total (for 3 centers) Rs. 3,60,000

Holistic Education Center Running Costs (per center per month)

Rent Rs. 2,000 * 6 = Rs.12,000

Total rent (for 3 centers) Rs. 12,000 * 3 = Rs. 36,000

Honorarium (for coordinator + volunteers: Rs. 5000 + (3 * Rs. 1000) = Rs. 8000

One coordinator: Rs 5,000/month

Two volunteers each per center: Rs. 500/month)

Total honorarium Rs. 8000 * 6 = Rs. 48,000

(for 3 centers for six months)

Total running costs (for 6 months) Rs. 36,000 + Rs. 48,000 = Rs. 84,000

**Total to be sent in November 2020: Rs. 3,60,000 + Rs. 84,000
= Rs. 4,44,000**