

# Rescued from the alleys of misery

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**S**hishu Mandir, a centre for the liberation of children from oppression and injustice, is celebrating its silver jubilee on January 1. The organisation is a dream-come-true for Dr Hella Mundhra, a visionary and founder. On January 1, a Community College aimed at offering vocational courses for the socio-economically backward children of the society is also being inaugurated.

In the back alleys of the Silicon City of Bangalore, a world exists that has been untouched by progress and development. Here, children grow up in tiny shacks amidst open sewers and garbage piles.

They grow up experiencing poverty, alcoholism and abuse, scarred for life. To alleviate their agonising plight, the doctor couple Dwarka Das and Hella Mundhra, who had started a nursing home in Bangalore in the early '70s took up the humanitarian work of offering medical services to these people, especially children who suffered from chronic ailments. Often children needed several months of hospitalisation to recover. But what was heartbreaking was that they returned home only to face the same misery.

The Mundhras wanted a home for under-privileged children.

Working towards this vision, they began providing long-term treatment and care to those who were malnourished. Abandoned babies were placed in adoption.

The endeavour seemed to make a difference as frightened, shy and lethargic children metamorphosed into open, active and cheerful personalities, developing self-confidence and responsibility.

The Home, named as Shishu Mandir, was formally established in 1983 and was funded entirely by the nursing home run by



Founder Hella Mundhra.



Children of Shishu mandir.

the Mundhras. From 1990 onwards, private sponsors came forward and their financial help made it possible to cater to more children. Soon, the number grew to 30.

When the time came for their schooling, the children were admitted to pri-

vately-run schools in the vicinity of the Home, in Ulsoor. In 1993, a small school was started on 'an experimental basis' focussing on a child-oriented system. As the classes increased and the numbers went up steadily, efforts were put in to establish a separate school building. Shishu Mandir Education Centre, situated in the KR Puram outskirts, houses classrooms, laboratories and a library.

Music, art and sports, tailoring and carpentry and even swimming are as much a part of the children's learning experience as academics is.

The goal has been to successfully obtain a 10th standard certificate for every child thereby offering them the opportunity to further their learning, whether academic or vocational. The results have far

exceeded the expectations and two children have earned their Master's degrees and several are studying for Bachelor's degrees. Two children have so far chosen to train as nurses.

Shishu Mandir has started a village development scheme where deserving families of school children receive a sum of Rs 60,000 to build a small house.

With the family members providing the labour, 21 such houses have been constructed with more in the pipeline.

In one village, a Community Hall was built that is used as a kindergarten during the day and as evening study centre for school children to prevent them from dropping out of school.

Two more such Evening Study Centres have been created in the slum areas around.

## Shishu home

The Shishu Home was set up as a place that would offer a stable and secure home environment. Hella Mundhra worked to ensure that their basic rights to food, clothing and shelter were met and also a home. The age limit is eight years in order to have a reasonable amount of time to mould the child's basic values and outlook to life, a family income of Rs1,500 per month or lower qualifies the child to be considered for admission to the home.

The social worker and the Home Working Committee independently verify this along with determining additional possible sources of support, living conditions, debts and reasons for poverty.

Social conditions such as broken families, only one parent surviving, illiterate parents, handicapped or disabled parents etc. are taken into special consideration. Only one child in a family can be ad-

mitted into the Home in order to ensure that the support reaches many families.

## Shishu Mandir Education Centre

The bright, airy and cheerful building of the Shishu School overlooks the Kithiganur lake. What began as a single building to house the growing numbers at the Shishu School has now expanded to include a new wing and a Community College.

Silver Oak trees line the walks of the old school building and the children's art covers the walls. The school has a library, an art and craft room, a science laboratory and a computer lab.

Currently, the Shishu Mandir Education Centre is open to the children from Shishu Home and those from the villages of Kithiganur, Bhattarahalli, Anandapura, Priyankanagar, Janatha Colony, and Parvathinagar.

Typically, admission to the school is only through the Prep A class. If a vacancy arises in a higher class, children who prove to be eligible can be admitted up to the 5th standard. Children should have completed 4.5 years of age as of 31st May to be eligible for admission to Prep A of that academic year. Children are admitted only from the surrounding villages within walking distance.

From the applicants, the social workers select 50 of the most deserving students (in terms of socio-economic conditions) in accordance with the village authorities.

A team of at least three teachers conduct an aptitude test and around 30 students are selected to attend a week long test class. From this group, 22 students are finally selected for admission to our two Prep A classes.

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Hella interacts with children from the home.



New home as part of the Village development scheme.