

DREAM TEAM

Maitreyee Kumar & Sabu Joseph, Founders of Dream School Foundation talk about the evolution of Dream School Foundation, a Bangalore based organization working to ensure the child's right to quality education.

Three years after the launch of the Dream School Foundation, we are on course to initiate our second Education & Development (E&D) centre and add a couple of more government schools to our portfolio. Looking back, in life and in work, we realize the need for great partnerships to accomplish results. It was not a mere coincidence, that we (Maitreyee and Sabu) met while I was moving out of a reputed Child Rights organization to start my dream organization and Sabu came in to the organization to replace me. Our initial interactions revealed that both of us shared the same passion for primary education and children. The public education system baffled both of us. Our strong belief that education is the only sustainable instrument for India's development and our desire to provide hope and options to millions who cannot afford quality education offered by elite schools, has kept us together over the years.

Dream School Foundation was officially born on April 15th 2005 after a couple of years of work by a group of passionate people with government schools in Bangalore. Surprisingly, our combined development experience and work with reputed NGOs did not help too much in managing the new challenges posed

each day when working with the government education system. We started with a completely volunteer driven model but soon realized the need for some permanent staff to manage our programmes. From this realization emerged a model which pairs the passion and skills of volunteers with the sustained effort of qualified staff. The two groups work together to impact the lives of children and create best practices for Government schools. Another important asset of our organization today is the belief our core group has in the cause. All of us, irrespective of geographical movement and other limitations, work in our own way to advocate the right to education and other rights of children.

One of our primary challenges has been gaining acceptance into the school system. We overcame this by applying the distinction not to term anyone "wrong" but to emphasize "what's missing" which has allowed us to work with the system rather than against it. Another challenge has been getting the right people for the right job - a constant problem faced by all and even more pronounced in the case of non-profits.

Up to now we have let our work speak for us rather than make a deliberate attempt to build a brand. Our commitment to the cause and genuine desire to bring about a change has been our "forte" that has helped us forge strong partnerships with individuals and corporate groups to promote and support our initiatives.

Changing scenarios like economic growth and new policies in public education pose new threats and opportunities. To create possibilities for children and our community we need to focus on having a say in policy changes and involves aligning with advocacy groups. Such efforts are an integral part of our organization.

If the last three years is anything to go by, 2009 looks very optimistic for DSF and its programmes. But what it means for the education scenario for the underprivileged in India, whether we can expect the resurrection of the dying giant of the public education system or whether we have to look for other parallel options for our 'choice less' population is the baffling question.

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