

The Promise Foundation Projects

Year 2001-02

1. Introduction

The most important objective for all The Promise Foundation's interventions is that they would have a *preventive* impact on urban poverty at the community level. With the long term perspective in mind, this is one of the reasons we have chosen to work with children and youth in the community.

Our research and research around the world has indicated that, people from socially and economically deprived backgrounds, have certain unique *mind sets* and *attitudes*, that cause them to remain caught in the cycle of poverty, generation after generation, in spite of various opportunities being made available to them.

Since our inception in 1987, we have attempted to focus our efforts on the psychological factors linked to development. We have found that lasting social and economic development, can occur only when the poor begin to move away the position of 'receiver', to a position of "*self motivated, self-sufficiency*". It is vital, that issues related to behaviour, attitudes and mind sets are addressed, if true development is to occur. Our programmes therefore, have a strong emphasis on emotional well-being and on the prevention of psychological and associated problems among children and adolescents living in especially difficult circumstances.

At the core, our programmes are designed to strengthen foundations, enhance self-efficacy and thus equip the child and the young person to effectively meet the demands of his or her future.

To this end, The Promise Foundation has been implementing three community-based programmes for the last 12 years.

2. Background

2.1. Stimulation Intervention Programmes (SIP)

Children, whose parents are poor, do not have the necessary exposure to stimulation activities in their early childhood. They most often accompany their parents to the work sites and are left unoccupied. The Promise Foundation's Stimulation Intervention Programme (SIP) addresses the stimulation needs of children in the age group of 3 to 6 years. SIP functions at two levels:

- First of all, The Promise Foundation runs a *Shishukendra* (a pre-school child care facility) for about 30 children.
- At the second level, The Promise Foundation conducts training programmes for other organisations who are interested in starting high quality pre-schools of their own.

2.2. Programmes for Assisted Learning (PAL)

Our research had indicated that poor performance leading to failure in school makes a significant contribution to the child dropping out of school. It is also well known that the out-of-school-child is a prime candidate to becoming a child labourer. The PAL intervention addresses the *learning skills needs* of children at the Primary-Middle School level. PAL uses techniques from research into literacy acquisition and learning disabilities to identify students who are at risk to fail and drop out of school. PAL provides these students with enriched inputs that help them attain the expected levels of performance and remain within the classroom.

2.3. Work Awareness and You (WAY)

Looking at the older age group studying in high schools, we have found that underemployment and unemployment in the person's adult years are closely linked to the manner in which the person's career development needs were resolved at the high school level. The lower socio-economic status groups show a strong tendency to enter the world of work as unskilled labourers after high school. Their unskilled status places them on a trajectory toward under / unemployment in the future. Our WAY programme is designed to deal with the career development and life skills needs of high school students in government and corporation schools.

3. New Developments

An important new development in The Promise Foundation's was a complete re-evaluation of the existing programmes in the light of the most current international research.

3.1. Upgradation of SIP Teacher Training Programme

We have upgraded the SIP teacher-training programme to reach a wider range of adults working with children. The SIP programme now offers training at various levels.

1. *Basic Training* is designed to reach adults who have no background in early childhood care and those who have a low level of literacy.
2. *Level 1* is offered to individuals who have some general training but require specialist inputs.
3. *Level 2* is a certificate course offered to individuals who could function at the level of supervisors, Community workers and Teacher Monitors.

These courses have emerged after a close scrutiny of the training needs of the various people who come to The Promise Foundation. Now the different levels of courses are offered as per level of the trainees.

3.2. Evaluation of the PAL Model

Networks were developed with schools that were experimenting with new teaching methods in other parts of Karnataka. The Promise Foundation's PAL project co-ordinators were deputed to visit these schools, spend time with teachers and examine the methods used. As part of the review process, the effectiveness of the PAL model was examined in the light of two government initiatives (Chinara Angala and Chaitanya).

3.2.1. Training in new assisted learning methods for the PAL Project

All PAL project leaders also underwent a refresher course in assisted learning methodology under Dr. Sonali Nag-Arulmani. Two highly experienced experts in remedial teaching, Ms. Janet Angus and Ms. Christine Morris (both from the United Kingdom), were invited to interact with the PAL staff members for exchange of ideas and for training. All team members were updated both for the latest trends in international research and were trained in new sets of skills.

3.2.2. A new PAL handbook

'*Sounds in Kannada*', is perhaps the most important outcome of this re-evaluation of the PAL programme. This is a new PAL teaching handbook that is strongly grounded in the relevant theory, research and our own past experience with the PAL methodology. In essence, the latest theories and findings from reading acquisition research, language teaching methods and the learning patterns of children from disadvantaged homes, were adapted to suit the Kannada environment. '*Sounds in Kannada*' has already begun to be applied in our regular PAL classes. The draft version of the handbook is also being reviewed by leading Kannada teachers and researchers. Reviewers' feedback so far has been highly

'*Sounds in Kannada*' has been acknowledged to be a teaching resource that could meet an urgently felt need in Indian classrooms. It is anticipated that The Promise Foundation will soon be in a position to publish this new and thoroughly trial tested teaching handbook for assisted learning teachers.

PAL now is a completely updated intervention and is based on the most current findings from international research. All PAL team members have been trained and their skills have been brought upto the highest levels expected.

3.3. Evaluation of the WAY Model

The existing WAY intervention was re-assessed in the light of some of the latest insights from career guidance research for the disadvantaged. All assessment devices such as aptitude tests and interest analysers were re-standardised based on data gleaned from our past experience.

3.3.1. Training in new careers intervention methods

All WAY project leaders under went a refresher course in new career guidance methods under Dr. Gideon Arulmani. Specific emphasis was brought to bear on the cognitive aspects of

careers choice behaviour amongst disadvantaged high schoolers. For example, WAY team members were re-oriented to the impact of strongly held career beliefs on the career decision making process. Similarly, the importance of self-efficacy training to enhance career preparation skills formed an important aspect of the training.

3.3.2. An updated WAY intervention

This re-evaluation of the WAY programme coupled with the refresher training of the WAY staff members led to the development of various new components in the WAY intervention. First of all the programme has a set of new norms based on which students' performance on our aptitude tests can be interpreted. We have a new and updated occupational list relevant to the needs of the target group. Most importantly, the WAY intervention now has activities that directly address students' negative beliefs about the career planning process and about themselves. The entire intervention has been translated into Kannada.

4. List of Schools in the PAL and WAY Programme

S.No	School	Location	No. of students
1	Corporation High School	Pit Colony, Srirampuram	42
2.	Corporation Girls' High School	Dayanand Nagara,	74
3.	R.Gopal Swamy Iyer High School	Srirampuram	75
4.	Corporation Girls High School,	Bannappa Park	98
5.	Government High School	Sampangiramnagar	45
6.	Corporation High School	Magadi Road	350
7.	Bapuji Residential High School	Magadi Road	121
8.	Corporation Girls High School	Padarayanapura	160
9.	Corporation High School	Chamrajpet	264
10.	Government High School,	New Fort, Kalisipalyam	260
11.	Government High School	Old Fort, Kalisipalyam	80
12.	Government Primary and High School	Wilson Garden, Hombegowda Nagar	300
13.	Corporation High School	Shanti Nagar	128
14.	Corporation High School	Ashok Nagar, Basavangudi	18
15.	Government Primary and High School	Audogodi	153
16.	Corporation Primary and High School	Byrasandra, Jayanagar	211

17.	Government Primary and High School	Madiwala	345
18.	Government Primary School	Venkatapura	159
19.	Vanivilas Government High School	V.V. Puram	197
20.	Koramangala Village School	Koramangala	166
<i>Total Number of Students</i>			3246

5. Feedback

Assessment of The Promise Foundation’s various interventions using our own pre-intervention and post-intervention measures indicated significant improvements in the students’ learning skills, career decision making and life skills. An effort was made to also collect feedback this time from headmasters and teachers. Headmasters and teachers were interviewed in a cross-section of schools. The overwhelming feedback was that the programme was very useful to the school, and that students showed marked improvements in studies. The most important feedback received was that students’ school attendance increased. It was also reported that students who were disruptive and unruly, became more controlled and attentive once their marks began to improve.

A sample of feedback received from the schools:

Government Kannada Primary School - Byrasandra

“This programme was very useful to us. After this programme started, children’s marks have improved. Their general behaviour has improved. Their interest in school and studies has increased. Absenteeism has decreased and attendance has increased. This programme must be offered to all children from 1st to 7th standard” – *Headmaster.*

Government Primary School – Madiwala

“The programme helped our children a lot. One drawback is that it is offered to too few children. The programme must be offered to at least 35 children in every class, at least 3 times a week.” – Headmaster

6. The Stimulation Intervention Programme (SIP) Training for Teachers

Over the last one year, The Promise Foundation's SIP training programme for teachers has become increasingly popular. Various other organisations that work with children send their workers to the SIP Training courses for learning the skills related to setting up pre-schools in their own slums areas and providing high quality stimulation to young children.

6.1. The high lights of the SIP training course:

- All training is participatory and highly focussed on helping participants acquire the skills for early childhood stimulation.
- The course offers a good blend of theory and practice.
- Simple, pictorial handouts are given out.
- Trainees learn to make their own teaching aids and take back a kit to their centers.
- Children from our shishukendra (pre-school) are often teachers! They provide the trainees with the opportunity for practical skills development.
- The SIP course gives unemployed women a skill, with which they could start their own pre-schools and begin to earn a livelihood.

6.2. The reach of the SIP training course

- This year, a total of 20 organisations sent their workers to The Promise Foundation for training.
- The Promise Foundation trained a total of 321 people in the SIP methodology.

7. PAL Summer Camps

7.1. Purpose

One of the difficulties encountered in the PAL Programme in the previous years, was a loss of effect of the intervention when the children were away during vacation time. Our teams had also felt the need to provide more sustained inputs to children who were at highest risk for failure. It was therefore decided that this year, two Learning Skills Summer camps would be held in the school premises. Most teachers were sceptical about children coming back to school during the vacation. However the camps were planned and children were invited to attend. Almost all the children in the regular classes chose to attend!

7.2. Objective

The summer camp was essentially a language immersion programme that used a variety of play activities and games to strengthen students' reading, writing and spelling skills. The PAL

methodology has identified 29 high frequency saralaksharas in the Kannada language that are the most essential building blocks of developing mastery over the language. Developing mastery over these saralaksharas was the target for Group 1 – the group with the lowest level of language skills. At the next level, the PAL methodology has identified gunithaksharas (consonants + vowel signs) that are essential. Group 2 - students who were at a higher level of skill development were provided with inputs at this level. Students gradually moved on to words and simple sentences using these alphabets.

7.3. PAL Summer Camp Activities:

The Promise Foundation’s PAL-WAY programmes use various ‘alternative methods’ such as flash cards, movement games and craft activities to ensure not only that students’ interest is sustained but also that effective learning occurs.

7.4. Outcomes

While boys and girls both attended the summer camp, the girl students were particularly targeted. A total of 36 students attended the camps of which 27 were girls. Assessment at the end of camp indicated that almost all students in Group 1 had mastered all the saralaksharas. The minimum number of alphabet mastered was 17 out of the 29. In Group 2 all students reached the expected targets. Importantly, other skills such as pencil grip and handwriting also improved significantly. Give below is a sample of a child’s progression through the summer camp.

Of further interest is the response of the community to the summer camps. The camps presented an opportunity for parents to interact with The Promise Foundation team and observe the classes in progress. Families showed a keen interest and even brought children from other homes to attend the programme!

8. The Promise Foundation’s intervention for Institutionalised Children and Youth

8.1. The Intervention

The Promise Foundation had been invited by the Department of Women and Child Welfare (Government of Karnataka) to implement the PAL and WAY programme in one of its Juvenile Homes for Boys in Bangalore. The students in these homes are abandoned by their parents, have run away from home, or are in conflict with the law. Students in the high school received intensive inputs from the PAL and WAY teams. Since all students were boarders, we had a great opportunity to provide more sustained inputs. Inputs provided were in the areas of study and learning skills, life skills training and career path planning. Initially a high degree of scepticism was prevalent among teachers. It was felt that particularly the oldest students would

not accept the programme and use it. At the outset, a significant amount of resistance was encountered from the students. Over time however, students began to realise the usefulness of the programme and gradually their motivation increased. Toward the middle of the programme, the entire group was totally involved and expressed a keen desire to utilise all the components of the programme.

8.2. Outcome

It was anticipated both by teachers that very few of the students would pass the higher secondary examination (the final public examination before college). Much scepticism was expressed regarding these young people's career preparation activities. The exam results however presented a pleasantly different picture. All but two students passed, with more than 50% of them securing first classes! Most importantly, these students had used the WAY methods to plan their career development after school. All students are on a specific career path with clear plans for their future. Students who failed the exam, have enrolled for the supplementary examination later this year. The most important development among these young people is a marked change in their beliefs about the 'establishment'. Initially their beliefs were negative and even hostile. But their success experiences within the 'system' seems to have impacted their attitudes in such a way that they are willing to try and build a life for themselves.

9. Conclusion

The Promise Foundation's programmes have reached a status today that allows us to reach a large number of children. The most important development however is that in addition to reaching children directly, we are now able to also reach adults and train them in the various programmes of The Promise Foundation. The most successful among our training programmes are the courses offered through SIP. Requests for training have begun to come in from all over the state of Karnataka. In the next few weeks it is anticipated that our SIP training programmes will also spread to Andhra Pradesh, a neighbouring state.

The highlight of the PAL and WAY programmes is that these methods are slowly beginning to be used in the mainstream classrooms as well. Teachers who two years ago were indifferent and even hostile now have accepted the PAL and WAY programmes. One mark of success is the increasing number of requests from teachers for training in the PAL and WAY methodology. We hope in the coming months to also begin teacher training in the PAL and WAY methods.