

Project Title

Educating for Life

'Sambhavami' / I M Possible

Think Globally, Act Locally

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (Project brief)

'Educating for Life' is a project of The Gnostic Centre for 3 to 14 year olds from under-privileged backgrounds. The target group comprises of children residing in and around the Gnostic Centre (Delhi).

A FEW FACTS ABOUT THE RECENT SITUATION in India which throws light on School Enrolment and Drop out rates, Child labour, Child marriage, Gender and Caste bias, Health issues and Juvenile Delinquency – all inter-related:

- Every sixth child in the world lives in India. Children constitute over one-third of India's population of 1.21 billion people, which means India is home to 400 million children.
- India has 10.12 million **child labourers** aged between 5 to 14 years. Roughly 50% of all working children are girls. (One in every 11 children in India is working.¹)
- The Net **Enrollment Ratio** (NER) at the Upper Primary Elementary Level in government schools in India is only 58.3%.
- **School dropout rate** amongst adolescent girls in India is as high as 63.5%.
- Nearly 45% **girls In India get married** before the age of eighteen years.
- The **Under-5 Mortality Rate** (U5MR) in India is 88.1% for Schedule Caste and 95.7% for Schedule Tribe children, against the national average of

¹ Source for the statement in parenthesis:
<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/ZPALzgwvOLhyMfxWsobcHM/10-alarming-statistics-on-child-labour-in-India.html>



59.2%. In India about 55% of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes children under 3 years of age are underweight compared to about 37% of children from the general population of 400 million children.²

- There has been a 300% increase in the number of **children committing heinous crimes** in the past three years.³

It is a fact that while the children from sound socio-economic backgrounds have ample access to education, the children from the under-privileged strata, even though living with their parents who have migrated to the cities, do not often have access to even basic education. The situation is worse for those coming from Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Castes. Even amongst these, the girls are the worst sufferers as they are retained at home to do housework or to look after younger siblings, and then married off at an early age, soon to become mothers while still unprepared for these responsibilities psychologically and physically.

Therefore, at the Centre, we have been encouraging and supporting the education of the under-privileged children, especially of the girls. Presently we have 24 such children ranging from the ages of 3 years to 14 years, who reside on our campus. We have helped some of these children gain access into schools, and are also financially supporting the education of the girl child. However, some children are still out of school. We intend to facilitate their enrolment as well into nearby schools. All these children are either from Scheduled Caste or from Other Backward Caste categories. Most of them are or would be first-generation learners. The Centre's approach is to work hands-on with small groups, so that the reach can be immediate and the work can be in-depth.

Just enrolling the children into schools is not enough. Being first generation learners, most of them lack the skills, confidence and know-how that would help them integrate into an urban school – socially, psychologically, emotionally and academically. Therefore, through 'Educating for Life', our intention is to create

² Statistics till here sourced from: <http://www.cry.org/rights-to-know/statistics-on-children-in-india.html>

³ The Times of India, June 18, 2015:
http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Juvenile_delinquency_in_India



the learning environment for kids to have the opportunity to understand the basic form of education, to make them independent and creative and to equip them with the tools to survive and thrive constructively in the urban environment.

'Educating for Life' addresses the problems of illiteracy, of blinkered and narrow education, of delinquency and unemployment, of gender bias, child labour and child marriage. The approach it takes is to start locally with a small pilot group of 24 children – in keeping with the adage, 'Think Globally, Act Locally'. The project would directly impact the lives of these 24 children and their families in its first phase. In the subsequent years, it would expand to include more children from within the campus as well as the neighbourhood.

2. ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The Gnostic Centre (not-for-profit trust, 1996, Delhi) primarily focuses on 'growth of consciousness' – through diverse means and in diverse fields. Over the years it has worked in the fields of Self-development, Facilitation of Change, Education, Ecological and Organic practices, Health and Fitness, Integral Yoga and Psychology. The Centre has worked with ages ranging from 2 years and upwards – through its preschool, workshops and courses for children and youth, postgraduate programs, teacher education, corporate training, meditation and self-development retreats. It is also involved in creating learning resources in its areas of work (in print and audiovisual formats).

A key area of The Gnostic Centre's work has been Education. Integral Education, i.e. an education that takes into its scope the outer as well as the inner aspects of the human being, is a core competence of the Centre. Having worked with all age groups, right from 18 months to 70 years, we understand the importance of starting early, i.e. enhancing the reach and quality of children's education.

For this reason, in 2001, we set up an **Integral Education research oriented preschool**, L'avenir (the future), with the aim of developing new formats of education and to evolve an integral curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation system that could serve as a model for others.



A unique feature of L'avenir is that its core team consists of women from under-privileged backgrounds or from small towns, who have pursued a path of self-empowerment. They are given **on-the-job teacher training** and supported in their work at L'avenir through various inputs. Several of those trained by the Centre have found well-paid jobs in reputed schools on the strength of their association with and training at the Centre, and some have even founded their own preschool based on the same principles.

Having successfully worked with children from economically strong backgrounds, L'avenir is now expanding its reach to under-privileged children, to create strong psychological foundations in them and to nurture their innate abilities.

The Centre holds **Classes and Camps for children, adolescents and youth** who are studying in mainstream schools (not based on a holistic approach to learning) and enriching their lives, learning and growth through inputs in self-reflection, values, teamwork, leadership qualities, building up the mental faculties of concentration, reasoning and imagination, physical adventure, scientific temperament, creativity, ecological living, organic gardening, etc.

Since the Centre's inception, it has held several **Teacher Education** programs for in-service as well as pre-service teachers – both at the school and University levels. The Centre is on the board of Delhi University and holds training for the undergrad University teacher-students in Education and Self-development. The Centre runs an onsite Teacher Education program, 'Scripting Pathways of Change', based on the integral approach every year.

Through the Centre's **training programs for young women** (some not having been employed earlier, others lacking confidence due to the long hiatus from their professional life due to marriage and kids) have helped them regain confidence, as well as acquire the know-how and skills for educating their own children and also teaching in schools. The Centre also holds Classes and Workshops in several other areas such as Meditation, Parenting, Organic Gardening, Pottery, Calligraphy, Baking, etc. to aid in these processes.



Since 1998, the Centre has been running **University level Onsite Certificate Courses** such as 'The Science of Living', 'Power of Attitude', 'Foundations in Facilitation', 'How to Bring up a Child', 'The Art of Healthy Living' – some of these certified by Homerton College, University of Cambridge, UK.

Since 2009, the Centre has been running **Postgraduate Online Degree Programs** in the areas of Psychology of Human Development, Integral Education, New Creation of the Society and Self, Flowering of Management, Vedic and Upanishadic Studies. Some of these have been certified by India's largest Open University, IGNOU.

Presently, the Centre is in the process of **setting up an Academy of the Future – a University** based on a Consciousness approach. The mission of the University is to integrate Lifeskills along with Academics, and to offer courses and programs that develop a unitary consciousness instead of an egoic and divisive approach which is at the root of most social ills. This University will have a holistic curriculum and will use both subjective and objective approaches to learning/teaching and evaluation. It will provide Higher Education facilities to the children not only from L'avenir and other programs run by the Centre, but also to children from under-privileged backgrounds.

The Centre has been encouraging and supporting **education of the under-privileged children** in its immediate circles. It has sponsored several children and helped them get admission in good schools and even paid for their board and lodging (in case of a hostel). It has also held support classes for some of these children to help them integrate better in the schools. It has helped place those ready and willing in Vocational Training programs to facilitate their career path.

The Centre is launching a **Community Education program** in a Himalayan village in the near future, in proximity to its campus in the Himalayas – to work with the local women, girls and children in general and empower them in the areas of health, English language skills, and education.



The Centre's work in the field of education has not only created a new space in terms of content and transaction of education, it has also redefined the aims of education and has spread the reach of the qualitative change in education.

The Gnostic Centre has a **core group of teachers and volunteers** some of whom are housed within the Centre which enables it to provide morning school and afternoon/evening courses from time to time. For the Centre to expand to afternoon school and provide continuous courses for under-privileged children as well as young women, it would require a number of teachers/facilitators and resource persons to support this new endeavour.

Note: The Gnostic Centre is a **registered not-for-profit public charitable Trust** and its accounts are audited by an independent agency, and taxes paid. The Centre has an **80-G tax exemption** for donations.

3. BACKGROUND (The need and context)

The resident population at the Gnostic Centre and the larger campus it is housed in (a Stud Farm) comprises of migrants from other states of India (Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal) who work as grooms, guards, gardeners, cooks, housekeeping staff, etc. at the Farm or the Centre. Most of them are either illiterate or semi-literate, not having gone to school at all or only for the initial years. Some have their families with them. While a few send their children (not necessarily all of their children) to school, quite a few do not.

The children, who do not go to the school, are mostly unsupervised while their parents are away at work. They play in unhygienic conditions the entire day. As soon as they are able to (and at times much before) the girls take on the housework, while the boys, left to their own means, are vulnerable to harmful company and influences from a young age. Their potential remains unnoticed and un-tapped. At best, they join the ranks of unskilled labour.

The children who do go to the school are primarily first-generation learners and have no support structure at home for their education. The parents have no comprehension of what the school demands and no confidence or know-how to interact with the school teachers or administration. Proximity and low school fee are what determine the choice of school. Most often the children are left to



their own means even there (teacher absenteeism) or there are problems of social and cultural integration of the child in a school attracting 2nd generation learners as well. While helping the child with literacy, quite often the school itself becomes an instrument of alienation between the child's growing desires and aspirations, and his/her parents and home milieu. There is no support system to help the child deal with living in two different worlds and integrating these, or to help the parents grow along with the child.

Complicating the above scenario are several biases based on gender, caste, culture, etc. which trap the parents, and hence the children as well, and are mindlessly continued through generations. For instance, most families prefer sending their sons to school, if at all, over their daughters. Added to that are the invasive and disturbing messages by media exposing the children to glitz and glamour of a world far away from their own, or to depravity, violence, crime etc. unnoticed and/or unchecked by their parents.

In such a scenario, the children drop out of school after class 3 or 5 or at best 8. Even those who continue, have no direction as regards what to do with that education. This results in even these children joining the ranks of unskilled labour as their school education does not train them in professional skills, nor does it take them far enough to gain access to clerical work. Additionally, in the absence of aesthetic and cultural refinement, moral discernment, and a larger world-view, these partially educated youth are soft targets for a life of crime.

Ironically, the children who do continue in schools, have a tendency to start looking down upon their parents and their own socio-economic background, leading to their alienation from and denial of their own roots – resulting in mal-adjusted personalities and unhappy family life. This again makes them vulnerable to undesirable influences from the peer group.

Providing education in such a scenario is not just about literacy (actually, it never is). It requires bridging of several elements that are woven in the children's lives (their lives in the village they originally are from, their lives in the city that they are now living in, their lives in the school if there is one), and helping them acquire a sound psychological basis to process different influences, to develop discernment, to channelize their energies constructively,



to learn to communicate clearly and beautifully, to discover their abilities and potential, to make choices, to reflect upon – evaluate – organize the different experiences they have... and so much more, as it emerges from the children themselves, once they are in a safe and supportive environment.

Literacy, basics of health and hygiene, dealing with school work and homework – these too form a part of needs-based education, but the context and the scope are much wider, and therefore, so is the education that is needed. For the older children, a component of computer skills, and later on vocational training, is required as they need to be economically self-reliant at a much younger age than children from economically sound backgrounds. Aesthetics – an eye for beauty and its appreciation (in thoughts, emotions, actions and surroundings) – this too needs to be woven into the fabric of the program, to enhance the children’s psychological and moral strength.

Such an education requires teachers with empathy and discernment; it requires teachers who are creative and can engage the children in a ‘learning by doing’ approach, and mentor them towards making constructive life and work choices. The project therefore needs to have an in-built ongoing teacher-preparation and support component, to sustain the endeavour long term and to enhance its reach.

4. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Educating for Life project would have the aspects detailed below. These have been worked out after doing a Needs analysis through meeting the children and their families, as well as visiting the schools the school-going children are enrolled in.

- i. **Enrol Children who are out of school, into nearby schools** so that they acquire a base in Literacy, Numeracy, Language skills and General Knowledge, as well as form a peer group and friendships outside the farm, and thus enhance their social circle, and gain self-confidence and independence.

Presently not in School (to be enrolled for 2016-17 year)



S.no.	Age	Gender
1	12	Female
2	10	Female
3	10	Female
4	09	Female
5	07	Female
6	06	Male
7	05	Female
8	05	Male
9	04	Female
10	04	Female
11	03	Male
12	03	Male
13	03	Male
14	03	Male

- ii. **Provide Support Classes in the Afternoon to all the children** (3 to 14 year olds) who reside on campus, a total of 24 children. Besides the above 14, the other 10 who are already enrolled in schools are:

S.no.	In Standard	Age	Gender
1	III	14	Male
2	IV	12	Male
3	III	10	Female
4	III	11	Male
5	II	08	Female
6	I	10	Male
7	I	09	Female
8	I	06	Female
9	I	06	Female
10	UKG	04	Male

These classes would consist of helping the children de-code the school learning (lessons, homework), to practise English speaking (as that is increasingly a necessity in the urban society) and communication, and to



learn social skills. As computers become a necessity in the older classes, access to computers and the skills to operate them too would be integrated.

The proximity and regular interaction with the children would naturally bring insights into their other needs – health, creative skills, vocational skills, physical education, etc. These aspects would be built into the project during the later stages and as the team expands.

- iii. **Provide educational sponsorship to 5 Girls each year.** Starting in 2016-17 with 5 girls, the project would benefit 5 additional girls each year, thus adding to the total number of girls being benefitted from the project each year (5 to 10 to 15 to 20 and so on).
- iv. **Provide educational scholarship to 2 children every year** – This would entail board and lodging charges too, if placed in long distance schools. Starting in 2017-18 with 2 children, the project would benefit 2 additional children each year, thus adding to the total number of children benefitted from the project each year (2 to 4 to 6 to 8 and so on).
- v. **Ongoing Teacher Training** & Support, including Mentoring for those providing inputs to the children, so that other aspects of holistic education, such as value building, developing discrimination and decision-making skills, etc. can be built into the program gradually.
- vi. **Ongoing Parent Counselling** so that the parents of these children are not alienated from the process and they too learn the skills of interacting with the school administration, and can be partners in their child's growth curve.
- vii. **Creating a Corpus** to make the project self-sustaining, with scope and reach enhancement built in, as well as the capacity to deal with contingencies (such as, medical aid), and additional training programs.

The MAIN STEPS would be as follows, some of which will be concurrent:

- Form a team of teachers and resource persons to be part of the project.



- Orient the team along with some training inputs.
- Enrol the out-of-school children into schools starting April 2016.
- Identify 5 girls (each year) for educational sponsorship, starting from first year.
- Understand the syllabus demands of the school for each class (as per the children enrolled) to fine-tune our understanding of the challenges the children might be facing.
- Fine tune the program for the Afternoon classes (primarily building up language and number skills, communication and social skills, helping with the homework and difficulties faced in understanding the classwork).
- Start the Afternoon classes (initially for 90min in the afternoon – post-lunch, after all children return from their school).
- Periodic visits to the schools to dialogue with the teachers and the school head, in order to create bridges of understanding and support. This would also help to gauge if any child needs to be moved to another school so that greater justice can be done to his/her abilities.
- Ongoing training and support for the project team.
- Identify 2 children (each year) for educational scholarship, starting from second year. This would include doing the admission formalities.
- In the entire process, an ongoing interaction and trust-building with the children's parents would also be needed, so that they too understand and appreciate the value of this endeavor and do not withdraw their children from schools or this program at the first hint of any problem or social pressure in their personal lives.

As other classes (creative skills, vocational skills, computers etc.) are introduced, more teachers/resource persons, infrastructure and resources would be needed. For the time being, taking a minimalistic approach, the project would begin with using the existing infrastructure of L'avenir preschool, though a modicum of resources will be needed in the beginning itself. Training inputs to the team would be provided through L'avenir teacher education program.

AIMS

1. To ensure that all children go to school
2. To ensure that the children do not drop out of school



3. To help the children bridge their school life and their home life, respecting the value of each in its own place
4. To enable the children to deepen and widen their comprehension of concepts from school syllabus in a holistic manner, with linkages to their own life and environment (and thereby integrate better in the school and with their peer group)
5. To facilitate clear and confident communication in Hindi as well as in English in the children
6. To inculcate hygiene, cleanliness and healthy practices in the children
7. To generate self-awareness in all children about their emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and potential
8. To lay the foundations in the children for processing different influences in their life and environment and the ability to evaluate these with discernment, and make conscious choices
9. To widen the children's perspective on themselves, life and society
10. To prevent child-marriages
11. To provide educational sponsorship to Girls
12. To provide educational scholarship to promising children
13. To enable the parents to be part of their child's learning and growth curve, with a greater empowerment in dealing with the school administration
14. To build up a team of dedicated and empathetic teachers trained in achieving all the above

APPROACH

The program would encourage facilitators to take an approach that is light-hearted, fun, empathetic and empowering; rooted in the children's own context, and focused on constructive possibilities and future. Special care would be taken to encourage independence (also from the facilitators) and creative solutions in the children. An atmosphere of Beauty, Joy, Love and Progress would be created.

The program would also make use of resources that are easily accessible to children in their environment. It will be designed on principles of resource conservation – reduce, re-use, re-cycle.

PROJECT TEAM



- Project Coordinator (will put together the project team and necessary resources, will organize the training for the project team, will interact with the parents, will interact with the schools, will coordinate all aspects of the program).
- Two Teachers (one for the younger group, one for the older group) – besides educational support, they would also be the emotional anchors for the children.

INFRASTRUCTURE & RESOURCES

The effort would be to utilize natural resources available in the environment wherever possible, and also to use simple resources (such as, slate and chalk wherever possible, writing with sticks in the soil before moving on to pencils and notebooks).

1. Classrooms – 2 (each equipped to accommodate 10 children)
2. Office – 1
3. Internet (Wi-fi)
4. Stationery/Learning materials, such as blackboard, slates and chalks, notebooks, drawing books, pencils-sharpeners-erasers, colours-crayons-brushes, as well as computers for children.
5. Office equipment and stationery – computer-printer, ink cartridges-paper, pin board, filing cabinet-files, basic office stationery (stapler, staples, clips, pins, etc.)

Existing facilities at L'avenir and the Gnostic Centre will be utilized for Items 1, 2 & 3. Items 4 and 5 would need to be procured.



EVALUATION

The teachers will record each child's starting levels of literacy, language and math competencies, other skills and abilities, as well as observations on their physical fitness, hygiene, health, interests, strengths, etc. This will form the basis for developing an individualized program of learning and growth for each child within the overall collective framework.

The children's performance in their school tests would provide a continuous check on the project team's success with the children's learning. In cases where the school tests do not do justice to the greater abilities of the children (as the tests focus only on memory based learning), the teachers will engage the children in interesting assignments to evaluate their growth and learning as per this project's aims.

The teachers will also record their observations of the child's growth over the month and indicate the next steps to be taken up in the coming month(s).

Other tools such as periodic video documentation of the classes, starting from the early days, and presentations by the children to a larger group outside of the project, including their parents, will also be employed to enhance the visual record of the progress in the children as individuals and as a group. This would also enable the parents' integration into the learning and growth process, and go towards building trust and self-esteem.

Feedback would also be collected from the school and the family of the child. Self-evaluation and peer evaluation too would be built in.

In addition, the teachers too would carry out a self-evaluation on a monthly basis, and will also evaluate the project individually and collectively, to improve it further.

All the above records would serve towards the evaluation of the Project as well.



5. PROJECT TIMELINE

- a) The work of Needs analysis has already been completed. A little more work needs to be done as regards interaction with the schools.
 - b) Putting together of the Team too is under process.
 - c) April 2016:
 - Set up the Project office.
 - Set up the Corpus Funds.
 - Procure necessary resources for the classes.
 - Orient, sensitize and train the team (1st level).
 - Enrol the out-of-school children into schools.
 - Start the educational sponsorship for 5 Girls.
 - d) April & May: Understand the school syllabus.
 - e) May:
 - Fine-tune the afternoon classes program.
 - Start afternoon classes (will be ongoing thereafter).
 - Record each child's starting level, competencies, areas of need.
 - f) June:
 - Interact with the parents (to be an ongoing process thereafter).
 - Monthly self-evaluation (by teachers) and children's report (to be ongoing thereafter).
 - g) July: Interact with the schools once they re-open after the summer vacation (to be an ongoing process thereafter).
 - h) September: Get first of the quarterly feedbacks from the schools regarding the children's progress and any changes noticed due to the project (to be repeated in December and March).
 - i) October/November: Selection of 2 children for educational scholarship, followed by enrolment in schools of choice (will be synchronized with the admission timeline of schools so that the children can be enrolled for the new session which starts in April 2017).
 - j) October (autumn break): Training inputs for the team (these will be repeated in the winter break and thereafter in the summer break) – ongoing basis.
 - k) October/November: Assess if there is a need to place any of the children in different schools, and if the need exists, then to take action on the same.
 - l) December: Quarterly feedback from the schools.
 - m) March 2017: Quarterly feedback from the schools.
- The above cycle would be repeated every year.