

BY PRASHANT MOHAN ('94 MATH-EEE)

The *diljales* make a difference

The *diljale* wing's experiences with identifying and helping with meaningful social causes.

The Maths-Eco-Instru wing of the '94 batch, we call ourselves – the *diljales*. Why *diljale*, you ask. Well, that's another matter and not quite relevant to this article. In 2004, we felt the urge to do something significant as a group to make a difference in the lives of others. But, we knew that none of us had the time to give it our undivided attention. The best way to do some community work was to find a suitable organization and help them with their financial needs. We had to evaluate the various organizations and the causes for which they worked; we had met people from an organization that helped to educate children in slums. We evaluated another organization that worked for gay and lesbian rights in India – we decided there were much more burning issues in India right now! Finally, we zeroed in on a blind school – the Shri Ramana Maharishi academy for the blind.

Shri Ramana Maharishi academy for the blind in Bangalore is one of the premier blind schools in the country. They are involved in training and educating three hundred visually challenged students every year besides a lot of work in the rural side where they rehabilitate leprosy patients as well.

To test the authenticity of the organization, I volunteered as a reader in the blind school. It started as a small step of just spending a couple of hours

every weekend in the school reading out lessons to blind students studying their B.Sc or B.A.

Besides the funding part for the school, we also searched for information pertaining to education of the visually impaired. We went through some of the course work for the school and analyzed the gaps between teaching aids available internationally and what could be used in this school within the budgetary constraints. We looked up on the Internet and found some useful but small steps that could be used to improve the lives of these students. The principal and founder of the school, Shri T V Srinivasan, was very open-minded and always encouraged me to talk to the children and enthuse them into vocational education so that they could survive in the external world on their own. All wingies from Bangalore visited the school to study where our donations could be best used. We narrowed down our search to the use of Braille slates that the Principal also recommended as a worthy tool. Within a month's time, we were able to collect around fifty thousand rupees that was enough to buy Braille slates for every student in the school. We also contacted a friend in



Visually impaired children with their teacher

Dehradun to contact the National Academy for the Blind and send in some map aids for the students.

A year later, we visited the school to check the utility of our donation. It was extremely satisfying to see our funding being put to such good use. The kids were happily punching into their Braille slates; their innocence so overwhelming.

The greatest lesson we've learnt from this exercise is that the poor and disabled people of our country don't need our sympathy – they need self-respect – we can create that equitable society for them by just providing them with the tools they can use to achieve this goal.

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Prashant can be reached at prashant.mohan@gmail.com