

Deepam

A BITSian initiative readying youngsters for the information age of tomorrow.

Meera Sivakumar, 2000A7PS013

Clay P. Bedford famously said, "You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he will continue the learning process as long as he lives."

Deepam, a non profit organization with the goal of bridging the divide between literacy and education among the lesser privileged children of Chennai, was started by Karthikeyan Vijayakumar, BITS Batch of 2000, and a few friends, in April 2008. It was conceived to instill in a child the curiosity to learn and to give him the "keys"



to the greatest pool of knowledge out there, the Internet, by suitably augmenting school curriculum. Along with it was born *BridgeTheDivide* - a group to unite people who are keen on 'Lighting the spark and leveling the playing field' for these children.

Deepam was officially rolled out in the summer of 2008 when a group of volunteers, mostly fresh graduates and working professionals in Chennai, with a couple of their own laptops, started teaching at Nalamdana (a self help group) in Perungudi, Chennai. Nalamdana had a mix of bubbly, reserved, bright, boisterous and quiet kids; but with clear and big dreams for the future. During the course of the next few weeks, the children were taught how to handle laptops, introduced to the Windows operating system

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and other tools like Microsoft Paint and Microsoft Office. The summer session lasted a few weeks was a great experience for volunteers and for the children too, going by their enthusiasm and performance in the informal end-of-session hands on tests. Over the last one year, Deepam has expanded to four centers (one school and 3 community centers) in Besant Nagar area of Chennai. Children are taught for 2 hours every weekend. We currently now reach out to about 120 children through our weekend classes, with plans of further expansion in the near future.

Though we started off teaching computers, we realized with time, that in order to fully appreciate what the internet has to offer, the children needed to hone their reading comprehension & basic communication skills in English. We therefore streamlined our curriculum and now focus on four pillars - each complimenting the other - English, Computers, General Awareness and Personality Development. This, we felt, would be a great way to sustain and enhance the intellectual curiosity of the kids while also putting them on the track of the information explosion. And finally, what good is any information or idea if it isn't communicated effectively? Soft skills and interpersonal skills are as important as any of the 'hard' skills. We try to encourage the kids to be forthcoming, bold and speak without fear in front of the class. We also discuss famous achievers in several fields, and qualities one could imbibe from their lives. We constantly tweak and improvise our lessons based on active feedback from volunteers.

With a dedicated bunch, we are now onto our second year at Deepam. Our aim is to reach 1000 kids by 2015. Volunteers have been our biggest strength in our journey so far. One can contribute to Deepam in many ways - volunteer to teach at any of our centers, work on the curriculum or raise

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funds. We also welcome college students interested in community service to intern with us during their breaks.

donating laptops, money or material or getting to know us better, please write to us:

If you are interested in volunteering,

Karthikeyan – kk@deepam.in (BITS Batch of 2000)



Meera –
meera.sivakumar@deepam.in (BITS Batch of 2000)
bridgethedivide@googlegroups.com



BITS.aid – The origin and evolution...

BITS.aid -- An initiative that channels the strength within the hearts of a BITSian volunteer.

Nishi Gaddam, Sudip Dutta (95A4PS241)

BITS.aid was founded in 2005 to help bridge the gap between socially responsible initiatives and the BITSian volunteering community. Since inception, BITS.aid has served as a platform for BITSians volunteers and social entrepreneurs alike to seamlessly work together across boundaries towards a common goal – a better tomorrow for the world we live in. By teaming up enthusiastic BITSian volunteers with BITS.aid registered projects, volunteers were able to directly impact the quality of life of thousands of recipients. BITSian social entrepreneurs were able to leverage resources and execution support offered by BITS.aid.

It is every man's obligation to put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it.

- Albert Einstein

Over the years, BITS.aid has been successful in taking up a number of initiatives in the fields of education and community development under its umbrella. Over 120 volunteers got together and contributed towards 12 projects spread across India and US. Some of the early registered BITS.aid initiatives such as Gyanbodh, MyIndia and Lend-A-Hand are still immensely popular among the current BITS.aid volunteers. Gyanodyaya, operating from Chennai and Bangalore, sponsors deserving students in government schools and colleges by providing textbooks and stationery while volunteers conduct weekly classes. MyIndia, was setup by students at BITS Pilani with the objective of improving literacy levels and to provide quality and value based education to the underprivileged.

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

<http://sandpaper.bitsaa.org>

- Winston Churchill

After the huge success of the program since



its inception, BITS.aid was re-launched this year with the vision of providing a truly global platform for BITSians to make a lasting impact on socially responsible initiatives. BITS.aid is the first of its kind amongst any Indian institutions and alumni bodies. Drawing upon its uniqueness and the altruism within the BITSian community, a new core working group of alumni and current students was formed to make it a truly global operating platform and to execute on its mission to

- bring BITSians across the globe together and provide a forum for exchanging ideas to make society better
- establish new frontiers for BITSians to connect to the global volunteering community
- support socially responsible endeavors by means of

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opportunities, resources and execution support

The core group has also embarked upon recruiting additional projects under various operating themes such as education, rural development, youth empowerment and sustainable environmental practices. Grouped into tactical functions of project management, marketing & strategy and fund raising, the diverse global team is defining and executing on a plan to transform various BITSAA communities around the globe into agents of change to tackle social and environmental needs. The team is currently managing active projects such as

- "Plan100, Lend-A-Hand" - equips youth in India's rural areas with job and life skills, -
- "Nirmaan" - works towards poverty free, knowledge and livelihood opportunities for underprivileged people,
- "Small Steps Foundation" - focuses on education of underprivileged girls,
- "Gyonodhaya" - imparts basic education to the physically challenged meritorious children

If every American donated five hours a week, it would equal the labor of 20 million full-time volunteers
- **Whoopi Goldberg**

Nomination:

Sudip Dutta, the founder of BITS.aid was nominated for Heroes for Humanity by veteran social worker and BITSian alumni, **Anuradha Gupta**. Heroes for Humanity is an Art of Living event to be held this November where stalwarts in social work are honored. We wish Sudip the very best in his endeavors and nomination.

All of these projects were either founded or headed by a BITSian and BITS.aid helps these projects by raising funds, recruiting volunteers and conducting events. Some of the prominent events conducted by BITS.aid in the past include **Run for a Cause**, aimed at raising funds for various community volunteering activities and **Young Stars**, a platform for children from under-privileged backgrounds to showcase their talents.

If you can't feed a hundred people, then just feed one.
- **Mother Teresa**

During the course of the year, BITS.aid plans on organizing several events during the **Joy Of Giving Week** with the objective of getting people from all walks of life together to engage in acts of giving - money, time, skills or simple acts of kindness towards activities identified by GiveIndia. The BITS.aid team is also in the process of spelling out details for **Donate-a-Dollar-a-week** and **Sponsor an event** drives where donors can contribute to programs of their choice.

BITS.aid would like to hear from the BITSAA community of any social causes that they are passionate about and would like to see them taken up under its mandate.

Reach out to us! Together, we can make a difference...
- **The BITS.aid team**

