

Let's Make a Difference Savera Youth Conference Jamshedpur, October 7 – 9, 2011

The eighth annual Residential Conference - Savera for school children in the age group of 14 - 17 was held from the 7th to 9th of October 2011 at Kerala Public School, Kadma, Jamshedpur under the aegis of MRA- Initiatives of Change (MRA- IofC), Let's make a Difference and Kerala Public School Trust. This three days character building workshop with an aim to instil value based behaviour was attended by 140 participants from 15 Schools and 15 facilitators.

The Conference was set to start with the inauguration at 4.30 pm in the open air school assembly area. The devotional lamp was lit and Mrs Shanta Vaidyanathan proposed the welcome address. Thunderous rains followed as if the heavens opened up to bless the inauguration. Quick thinking enabled alternative arrangements, dispersing everyone and gathering them again in the enclosed foyer to continue with the inaugural session. Mr. Biplab Mahato, one of the youth coordinators introduced Initiatives of Change and shared the positive transformations he experienced under the influence of MRA. The chief guest Mr. Biren Bhutta (Chief, Corporate Sustainability Services, Tata Steel) inspired the audience with his story of how he courageously kept changing careers until he found his calling. He stressed on the importance of asking oneself "Am I doing the right thing?" Mr Rajiv Agarwal (Regional Coordinator-MRA-IofC) proposed the vote of thanks and with that the Conference proceedings officially began.



The participants were introduced to ice breaking games to get them comfortable and into the spirit of the workshop. The first session of the day was the ABC of MRA which familiarized the audience with the absolute standards which form the basis of MRA I of C - Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness and Love. The session showed the students how knowing and following these values can start positive change in themselves. The

participants were then assigned into family groups. After dinner they got into their family groups and spent time getting to know their group members better.

The second day of the Conference saw the students bright and ready at 5.30 am. The students began the day with the group prayer and breathing exercises. The first Quiet Time session was introduced to the participants. This session took the participants down the road of being quiet and introspect on one's life using the four values as guidelines. This is the genuine essence of the conference. They were encouraged to sit quietly and write their thoughts down. They initially took some time to understand but eventually they were able to focus and write their thoughts down in their diaries. This was followed by simple and deep sharing by the participants.

One participant from KPS School, Kadma shared "During my first quiet time itself I realized my major mistake in my life. My dad passed away when I was 3 yrs old. From that age my mother has brought me up alone. She has been both my mom and dad for me. Despite everything she has done for me, I am very aggressive with her. I have always shown my anger towards her. After realizing this I will go back and hug her and tell her I am sorry for behaving so rudely with her.

Another participant highlighted "The Quiet Time helped me focus on my priorities in life. I was able to sort out my goals in life and get motivated about my direction."

Inner development - This was the next session which was conducted by Mrs Shraddha Agarwal (Regional Coordinator) where she used the Flower Jar Exercise and everyday analogies to describe how automatically people allow their experiences, good or bad to shape them. She explained how engaging in quiet time and being honest with ourselves, one can become aware of how we have lived our life till now. She showed how some bad experiences may have negatively influenced one to engage in bad habits. She explained how by courageously taking steps to change; everyone can indeed become better human beings. After this session they were sent back into their groups and encouraged to introspect based on the exercise. The participants were asked to compare their life against the four standards and write down about each standard separately in their diaries.



MRA - I of C in Action involved sharing experiences of MRA's outreach in terms of reconciliation building trust between different communities, enabling self-sufficiency through training and building skills of villagers and conducting workshops for youth and adults. The session showcased the work of Mr Viral Mazumdar (Youth Director, Let's make a difference, MRA - IofC) and Mr Navendu Shirali (Senior Coordinator) for the Outreach conducted in Ranchi and Jamshedpur in the month of August, 2011. The videos and slides highlighted how the team came from Delhi and along with team from Jamshedpur visited schools and villages spreading the word of MRA-IofC. The session also had Representatives from Malaysia, Korea and Odisha, who shared MRA's presence and activities in their respective countries and states.



The afternoon was spent in team building activities and games conducted by Mr Tony Castleton (Senior MRA Friend), Mr Shekhar (Games Coordinator, Savera) and Mr Lalan Sharma (Senior Teacher, KSMS School and Senior Coordinator) which kindled the creativity of the participants and at the same time were thoroughly enjoyed by all of them and helped them build further rapport amongst themselves. The next session - RoadMelters was an interesting one with slides and visual simulations through which the participants gained a greater appreciation and know-how of how to be safe on the road.

The Cultural evening gave us an opportunity to show case our talents and was a total fun time for the students with skits, songs, dances and quiz. The highlight of the show was however a special performance by the Bal Yog Mitra Mandal that included young children who were mentally and physically differently abled yet through their perseverance and dedicated training had become international performers. The audience were simply captivated by their splendid performance.

The final day of the Conference began at 6.00am with a multi faith prayer. The conference participants had prayers from different religions and this helped everyone appreciate the universality of God and pray for the well-being of all. Quiet time followed with the focused questions on family and relationships, which was conducted by Mrs Shanta Vaidyanathan (Principal, KPS NML), Mr Rajiv Agarwal and Mr Biplab Mahato. The

focus of the session was to help the participants identify themselves, their relationships with their family and how to resolve any issues that they may face in order to gain greater peace, inner strength and conviction to build better relationships and pursue their goals faithfully.



One coordinator shared "During my college days, due to the influence of some bad company which I had gotten into, I had a couple of extremely bad habits. I was into pornography and drinking with my friends. When I attended one of the conferences at Asia Plateau, I realized how my bad habits were affecting me and my life. I gathered courage and confessed to my father. Thankfully my father was extremely supportive and with his help and guidance I was able to remove these habits from my life. "

One rural participant shared her story "I come from an extremely poor family. This poverty and the fact that I was a girl child so an added burden to my family really frustrated me. I had suicidal tendencies and really depressive thoughts all the time. When I met the idea of MRA-Initiatives of Change, my outlook towards my life changed totally. I have learnt to accept the harsh realities in life and now I work as a domestic help in 3-4 families and help out with the family income. One day I am sure I will be able to turn the future of my family around. "

One girl participant shared "I am missing my father who passed away couple of years back. Listening to all the broken family relationships around me, I am glad I have my mother with whom I share an excellent relationship with. My prayers are with all the people here who are trying to heal their broken relationships with their families. "

One participant shared "This conference helped me in gaining confidence and controlling my quick temper. Quiet Time taught me how I can control my irritation towards my family and not lose my temper so easily. "

This was followed by a Time management session using Golf Balls by Mrs Shraddha Agarwal who talked about the importance of prioritizing our tasks and doing the most important ones first followed by the less and the least important ones. The exercise consisted of balls of decreasing order which illustrated how we should allocate time to our most important tasks and then deal with lesser important and non-important tasks. This was demonstrated with an interesting and jar experiment with sand, pebbles and balls.



The last session of the day was the India I Care session which is a movement started by Initiatives of Change. India I Care aims at sensitizing people about their responsibilities towards our country. Throughout the three days many inspiring and thought provoking songs from the coordinators added colour to the Conference at the same time left behind an indelible mark in the minds of the participants.



