

Nurturing *Buddhivanthas*, the Don Bosco Way

Abstract

Bangalore Rural Educational and Development Society (BREADS), the development office of the Don Bosco's in Karnataka and Kerala with its Don Bosco partners work towards creating an education system that promotes not only high-quality academics, but also a true education in values, citizenship, and higher pursuits of excellence in any kind of profession including arts and sports. Our focus in Karnataka, are the underprivileged children rescued from situations of risk, and those children who can neither access nor afford high-quality education because of their geographical and socioeconomic circumstances.

Don Bosco Educative Philosophy

The Don Bosco system of education is known over the world as an effective means of drawing children from the margins of society into the mainstream, using reason and kindness within the personal spiritual/ethical framework of the student. Children are encouraged to enjoy their childhood through play, various sports and games. They are not treated as 'stupid' or 'dull' even if they are illiterate but as *buddhivanthas* who are in the process of learning different things through exploration and application. This strength or competence-based system makes a huge difference in the interest and ability of the child to pick up new learning and skills, also empowering the child to actively participate in their own learning journeys. There is much counselling and handholding in the initial years to help them overcome their struggles and develop a mindset that permits them to pursue formal education. Participation of the child at every stage is part of this education system and decisions are taken in a consultative manner.

Don Bosco Strategies for Education that Empowers

- Empower children with the awareness that they are already *Buddhivanthas* (intelligent beings) in the process of realising it through academics, life skills training, and other activities that help uncover their hidden talents.
- Create learning environments that promote curiosity and interest in education among disadvantaged rural children, especially in subjects such as Mathematics and Science, thereby enabling them to come up to par with competitive academic standards.
- Ensure children who were out of the education system because of their life circumstances are brought back into either mainstream schooling or non-formal education, and supported to achieve their desired levels of education.
- Create and support child rights clubs and student ambassadors, to safeguard and advocate for child rights inside and outside the school.
- Create a strong support network for children through capacitating teachers, School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs), other government stakeholders, and parents through regular meetings, family visits etc.

Don Bosco Educational Presence in Karnataka

The Don Bosco presence is spread across most of the districts of Karnataka, with the exception of a few districts in the Western part of the State. Because of their particular socioeconomic situations, the Districts of Kalyana Karnataka have long been our focus: Bidar, Kalaburagi, Raichur, Yadagiri, Bellary and Vijayanagara.

Besides the rescue and rehabilitation interventions of children at risk, the Don Bosco educative presence spans the following:

- 9 English-medium high schools- 5400+ children
- 1 Kannada-medium high school- 400+ children
- 150 evening activity centres for school children- 6000+ children
- 63 evening supplementary education & nutrition centres- 3041+ children
- 2 open school programmes- 92
- 3 colleges- 1000+children
- 4 formal technical schools -120+ children
- 9 non-formal skill training centres- 1608+children
- 5 Bridge Courses for out of school children – 200+ children
- School and Higher Education sponsorship programmes- 396
- Child Rights Education and Action Movement (CREAM)- 47687

The Don Bosco Network in Karnataka impacts the lives of more than 18,037 children **every year** through educational programmes alone. Several thousands of school children have been impacted through its child rights education and clubs. Thousands of children are impacted through rehabilitative services for the young at risk such as street presence, open shelters, counselling, family reunification and other services.

Don Bosco's Educative Interventions

1. Residential Bridge Courses:

BREADS and its Don Bosco partners work with children in situations of risk (orphans, rescued from the streets, child labour, or other problematic situations, economically poor children, especially girls). Often, these children are illiterate or very backward in academic learning because of their lack of schooling. Accompanied by counselling, these children are encouraged to start a learning journey, based on their age, interests, and literacy levels.

Those children wanting to join the formal school system are facilitated on their journey through a bridge course; a halfway stage between school and their home situations. These are residential courses where academic learning is tailored according to the child's ability, with plenty of creative activities, sports and games to nurture their talents into fruition; thus, making the journey to rejoin school, an enjoyable one. Children are then enrolled to formal schools at an appropriate grade for their abilities. Children are also specially coached to get admission into Morarji Desai residential schools, if eligible.

2. Formal Schools:

The Don Bosco network has started formal English-medium (one Kannada-medium as well) schools in the towns of North Karnataka, currently, Vijayanagara, Chitradurga, Yadagiri,

Kalaburagi, Devadurga and Bidar. We also have a school for children from low-income families in Bengaluru city.

These schools aim to provide high quality, relatively inexpensive education to children from rural and poor backgrounds, who otherwise could neither access nor afford such education, thereby creating equitable opportunities for progress through ensuring their right to quality education. Many children enjoy subsidised education in these schools through the promotion of education sponsorships for them.

3. Supplementary Education & Activity Centres:

Appreciating the practical challenges of first generation learners as well as those children who need help with their studies without recourse to educated adults for support, the Don Bosco institutions set up supplementary education centres, which operate in the evenings in local community spaces. These centres are very important both in preventing children from dropping out of school, as well as in recruiting dropouts back to school, in both the pre- and post-Covid situations. Some of these centres offer nutritive snacks to supplement the diet of the children who often suffer from malnutrition.

These centres all across Karnataka, also empower children with life skills and child rights trainings, enabling them to become aware of their rights and able to speak up against violations, becoming nerve centres for children's rights in local communities. Activity centres also serve a similar purpose in educating children through life skills and activities. Activity centres enables a child to face problems in a balanced manner that may confront during the schooling days. Besides, these centres will increase the soft skills of the students and make them excel in extracurricular activities as well.

4. Open School Programme:

Various factors contribute to children dropping out of school before completion of their school-leaving certification, which is fundamental to future education or skilling. This lack of certification is a major stumbling block, frustrating the young person's aspirations to a better future. Don Bosco Mysuru created an Open School programme which coaches and facilitates youngsters who wish to appear for the class 10 or 12 examinations. Curriculum is designed in such a way that it suits to the time table even of the working young people. Teachers are trained to teach such children and fears associated with schooling, examination are removed while they attend the open school classes. The students have to overcome various challenges, such as long gaps in their studies, personal and family difficulties, difficulty in maintaining motivation etc. Don Bosco Mysuru was recently commended for facilitating the highest marks in the KOS SSLC 2022-23 exams in Karnataka, when its student scored 85.15%.

5. Education Sponsorship:

Besides providing safe boarding homes for children from difficult family situations to continue their educations, the Don Bosco institutions also support children within their own homes as well. Children with parents who are chronically sick or single-mothers, semi-orphans and such, who can stay at home but struggle to continue their education, are helped with education sponsorships both at the school and college levels. These sponsorships make a huge difference not only to the child but to his/her family as well, in easing the load of already-burdened adults. Higher/professional education enables the child to earn better to lift the family out of survival mode.

6. Girl Children Education

Don Bosco's believe that educating a girl child is equal to educating the whole family. Girl children are also victims of abuses and child marriage. Often they are asked to stay back home and take care of their siblings and help in the household works. To bring in changes, Don Bosco educational institutions make it a point to give priority to girl children education and all efforts are put in like scholarship for the continuity of the education of the girl children.

7. Hostel Facilities

Don Bosco's have found out that a reason for children from rural setting not completing their studies up to 10th Grade or dropping out in between is due to the distance to the high school from their villages. There is hardly any transport facility for the poor children to attend the school from a distant place. As a matter of fact, children drop out of school. Don Bosco's have put up separate hostels near to the schools where children from the villages can stay overnight and facilities are provided for excelling in their studies and extracurricular activities. Special concessions are given in the hostel for the children who cannot afford to pay the hostel fees.

8. Child Rights Education and Promotion:

The Child Rights Education and Action Movement (CREAM) promotes child rights education and activism across 21 districts in Karnataka using child rights clubs in schools as platforms. Makkala Grama Sabhas and CHILDLINE have also been powerful instruments of children's participation in their own lives as well as means of protecting other children's rights. Advocacy and networking with community stakeholders and the government systems have strengthened awareness of child rights as well as the resolve to uphold them. Children's transformation as champions of child rights has made a tremendous impact on their own lives, schools and villages. Children stopped thousands of child marriages, prevented rights violations, advocated for more than 14,789 instances of infrastructure development in their schools and villages. The education to human rights and citizenship is one of the most enduring and empowering teachings we could ever impart to children.

9. Formal and Non-formal Skilling:

Some children and young people prefer to learn a skill instead of pursuing higher studies and they are encouraged to do so through the available formal and non-formal Don Bosco technical training institutions. Don Bosco institutions have developed a strong reputation across the world for their technical trainings for the young at risk, in which the environment is particularly conducive for them to learn and persevere in overcoming their life circumstances. Young people can choose long- and short-term trainings in a variety of domains. They are also encouraged to complete basic academic certifications that create foundations for further growth. Life skills training, communication and employability skills are always part of the training. Self-employment is also encouraged and supported while candidates are fully assisted to find employment as well. This education pathway equips youngsters to become independent more quickly in life and also contribute to their families, if possible.

Impact of Don Bosco's Educative Presence

The impact of the Don Bosco presences in various parts of Karnataka has been gratifying far-reaching and deep, both for children and adults.

- Children develop a keen interest in furthering their education, thereby ensuring greater prevalence of education in these regions.
- With modern equipment and curriculum, children from these underdeveloped regions get a chance to know about the world outside, thereby creating aspiration, and opening windows of opportunity otherwise denied to them.
- Don Bosco schools become catalysts of change in the region, raising the standards of education, inevitably facilitating public demand for better services from other local and government schools as well.
- With an increase in education, a gradual creation of better facilities locally such as colleges, hospitals, industries etc.
- Increase in the number of youth qualifying for various professions, including sustainable agriculture.
- Improvement in overall well-being with the promotion of scientific education in the current generations.
- Through the promotion of child rights education and activism through thousands of school child rights clubs, lakhs of children were made aware of their rights, becoming child rights ambassadors in their local communities.
- Child rights education and advocacy with local communities and government stakeholders, created structures and strengthened systems to promote and protect children's rights.
- Informed children and adults have prevented child marriages, rescued children from child labour, and enrolled thousands of children back to school.
- With the nurturing of a few generations of *buddhivanthas*, we can hope to see the transformation of these districts in Kalyana Karnataka, in terms of health, education, employment, income and human rights.

About BREADS- the Don Bosco Development Agency

Bangalore Rural Educational And Development Society (BREADS) is a registered charitable trust committed to the education and development of the marginalised communities in Karnataka and Kerala through its 48 Don Bosco partners. As the central development organisation of the Don Bosco network in Karnataka and Kerala, BREADS has maintained a stellar track record of conceiving and implementing 625 development initiatives over the past 30 years, in areas of education, child rights promotion, skilling, community development and livelihoods, disaster response and environment protection.

Prepared by,

George PS

Executive Director, BREADS

Don Bosco Bangalore

9448878291